The following are minutes from the Planning & Zoning Commission meeting on Thursday, September 24, 2026, in the Abita Springs Town Hall. The meeting began at 6:02 P.M.

Commission Chairman Hall called the meeting to order, and all stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioners in attendance included John Pierce, Chad Hall, and Sheldon Kerr. Commissioners Mike Lanaux and Claire Guidry were absent. Staff member Kristin Tortorich was also present.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS No modifications.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Commission Vice Chairman Kerr motioned to accept the minutes of the August 27, 2026, meeting. Commissioner Pierce seconded the motion. All present voted in favor.

PLANNING

No applications.

ZONING

No applications.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Newly Adopted Chapter 9 – Planning and Zoning Regulations

Discussion regarding vehicle storage classifications

Kristin Tortorich explained a question was posed by a property owner about allowing a tow yard or vehicle storage facility. The topic was presented for discussion only as the Commission was tasked with preliminarily determining if they thought such use could be allowed in an existing zoning district, and if so, which district would be appropriate. They are also considering if it should be permitted by right or if it should require conditional approval if they were to allow it, the potential impacts on nearby properties, and operational and development standards.

The presentation, found in the packet at townofabitasprings.com/planningzoning under the September 24, 2026, meeting, was reviewed and discussed.

Brandon Stein, applicant, explained to the Commission how a towing and storage facility differs from a vehicle salvage yard or a junkyard. Mr. Stein said as a State Police approved towing company, they are regulated by the Public Service Commission, and the regulations vary depending on if a vehicle is acquired consensually or non-consensually. Non-consensually towed vehicles are vehicles ordered to be towed by the police and not by individual owners. Mr. Stein then reviewed the timeline of the holding and notification process, including the different outcomes at the end of the holding period. Vice Chairman Kerr asked about the environmental impact of the vehicles towed that had been wrecked and Mr. Stein reviewed the protective measures taken in those situations and described the tow yard as a parking area where vehicles revolve in and out without staying forever.

Vice Chairman Kerr asked about the Historic approval process if the development is on a highway. Kristin Tortorich said a two-hundred-foot setback would not require Historic approval.

Chairman Hall asked about the towing company operating on Highway 36 and the issues there. Ms. Tortorich said that a conditional use permit was issued for that location and it was an example of when they do not go to plan. She explained code enforcement has to go out and lay out the timeline and action required for rectifying deficiencies. Mr. Stein said that the terms of the permit were that

they were allowed a maximum of three tow trucks and could not have any junk cars outside of the fence. He said for the last three years, they have only operated three trucks and that part of the problem is that there are two businesses in that space- a towing business and a mechanic shop. Mr. Stein said that to passersby, it became impossible to tell which vehicles belonged to which business. He expressed his desire to move the business to a location that is more "out of sight, out of mind." Ms. Tortorich explained that by moving the towing business, the mechanic shop can utilize the fenced area behind the business to conceal more of the vehicles.

The Commissioners reviewed the language regarding auto repairs and considered the Light Industrial and Commercial districts.

Kristin Tortorich reminded the Commission of the public notification process and involvement that a Conditional Use permit would allow, and rezoning a property would open that property to any allowable uses in that district.

Vice Chairman Kerr said he knew a change to allow a tow yard would require approval by the Board of Alderman(BOA) and asked if the rezoning process was limited to the Commission or also required approval by the BOA. Ms. Tortorich said the BOA would get final say on the Commission's recommendation.

Ms. Tortorich said the new zoning code allows for stronger enforcement when there are violations.

Chairman Hall entertained the idea of modifying motor vehicle repair and services or outdoor storage to include towing and temporary vehicle storage.

Vice Chairman Kerr suggested defining the towing storage by law enforcement requests (consensual) versus non-consensual requests. Mr. Stein recommended using the language "Louisiana Public Service approved company" in order to restrict lesser regulated towing companies. Commissioner Kerr asked if there were any hazmat regulations or certifications for towing companies, and Mr. Stein said the company does not require any because they are not storing hazardous materials in large quantities in large containers. Mr. Stein said he doesn't tow electric vehicles because the business insurance requirements are too costly and discussed fire risk issues. He also explained the containment measures taken when handling wrecked vehicles that could or are actively leaking fluids.

Chairman Hall read that a fence is a requirement by state law for this type of tow yard. He noted the importance of a buffer due to overnight calls. Ms. Tortorich said that the untouched buffer would be an area that could not be cleared in order to help block some of the sound to lessen impact on nearby properties and would be mostly on the sides of the property and the business would require a minimum of a 200-foot setback. Vice Chairman Kerr asked if the parking area would be in the front or rear of the building and Kristin Tortorich said that was up for discussion.

Commissioner Pierce said the environmental concerns could be addressed in the operational restrictions, such as requiring the use of membranes as described by Mr. Stein.

Ms. Tortorich asked if the business has any required inspections. Mr. Stein stated the facilities are inspected annually and include the fence, trucks, and office, as well as auditing a selection of tickets. Vice Chairman Kerr asked if the Town could do inspections and said that the environmental impact will likely be the biggest public concern. Kristin Tortorich said Town inspections could be looked into,

and she could reach out to Slidell since they have multiple tow yards there to see how they handle them.
Vice Chairman Kerr asked if anyone knew why the tow yards were excluded in the passed revision of the zoning code. Ms. Tortorich said she thought it may have been standard language that was used.
Commissioner Pierce discussed the difference in standards to be considered. He said the parking requirements could be less due to fewer customers going to the location and there could be some rules you may want to apply to a tow yard that you wouldn't necessarily apply to a mechanic shop.
Vice Chairman Kerr asked if Mr. Stein does any repossessions and Mr. Stein said he has gotten out of the repo business.
Vice Chairman Kerr stated concern for heavy equipment and 18-wheelers being stored, as the fence may not be adequate for them whereas a shorter fence would be fine for most passenger vehicles.
Commissioner Pierce stated the environmental concern was a valid point and likely a concern to be brought by the public in future meetings. He said the standards and enforcement should address them. Kristin Tortorich discussed the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and the benefit of a 200-foot buffer that helps to filter out some of the chemicals before reaching the ditch which would lessen the impacts.
It was noted that Mandeville also has a towing company and they also could be contacted to see what requirements they have in place.
Next steps: Ms. Tortorich said she would investigate what the options for modifications are and how the other local municipalities handle tow yards. An amendment could be drafted for discussion. She recommended using the time that it takes to get the amendment together to also address other identified issues with the code. She said that the short-term rentals need to be corrected as well when an amendment is made to the code due to them not being allowed in any zone in the new code.
Commissioner Pierce suggested changing the use tables to permitted in all zoning districts with the caveat that they are subject to the terms of the Short-Term Rental ordinance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS
No comments.

ANNOUNCEMENTS
Kristin Tortorich said the annual Halloween event will include fall festival activities beginning earlier in the day at the park followed by a haunted house and trick or treat.
Commissioner Pierce said there would be candidate forums coming up that will be held at the Town Hall prior to the November 3, 2026, election.
Vice Chairman Kerr noted Fall Fest coming up.

ADJOURNMENT
Commissioner Pierce motioned to adjourn. Vice Chairman Kerr seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:54 P.M.

_____ _____

Kristin M. Tortorich, Planning & Zoning, Director Date