

The following minutes are of the Planning & Zoning Commission meeting on Thursday, March 31, 2022 in the Abita Springs Town Hall.

Commissioner Templet called the meeting to order at 6:16 p.m. Commissioners John Pierce, Bryan Gowland, Chad Hall, David Gruning, and Eric Templet were present. Kristin Tortorich and Mark Fancey were also present. All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the February 24, 2022, meeting. Commissioner Gruning noted two references to “applicant”, and he asked that the applicant’s name be used instead. Commissioner Gruning motioned to accept the minutes of the February 24, 2022 meeting as amended. Commissioner Templet seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor.

Planning Commission

Zoning Commission

PUBLIC HEARING:

Proposed commercial use – Midtown Cultural District: Game shop at 22107 Hwy. 36

The request is to allow a games store as a permitted use in the Midtown Cultural District.

Commissioner Templet opened the public hearing. Commissioner Gowland asked about the nature of the business. The business owner was not present, but Stewart Eastman, who visits the store, provided some information. He said the business is popular with high school and college students who can play various games at the store. The games are available for purchase.

Commissioner Gruning asked if approval of the games store would authorize sales of other items such as t-shirts. Discussion ensued regarding sales of ancillary items. Stewart Eastman said that the store sells books on gaming and also provides gaming paraphernalia such as costume accessories.

Commissioner Gowland motioned to close the public hearing. Commissioner Pierce seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor.

Commissioner Gowland motioned to approve the use. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. Commissioner Gruning suggested that the Commission frame the decision with conditions. Discussion ensued regarding sales of incidental items. Commissioner Pierce said the question before the Commission is whether a retail board game store is a permitted use. There are other permitted uses in the zone allowing sales such that the applicant would not need to return to the Commission for further review. He said he does not see the need for additional conditions as those are already in place.

Commissioner Gowland called for the question to be decided. Commissioner Templet called for the vote on the motion. All commissioners were in favor.

Discussion:

Proposed amendments to Town Code Sec. 9-306 – Jurisdiction

Town Code Sec. 9-306 grants the Historic Commission jurisdiction regarding the design of buildings constructed on properties along highway corridors entering Abita Springs-Hwy. 36, Hwy. 435, and Hwy. 59. The proposed amendments would extend the jurisdiction of the Historic Commission to include buildings constructed along Harrison Avenue.

Commissioner Gowland asked for clarification regarding the proposed amendments and the location of commercial zoning on Harrison Avenue. Mark Fancey said the amendments would not affect zoning on any properties but would extend the Historic Commission jurisdiction regarding review of proposed buildings.

Commissioner Gowland motioned to direct staff to schedule a public hearing to consider the proposed amendments. Commissioner Pierce seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor

Proposed amendments to Town Code Sec. 9-229 – Residential-Commercial Overlay District

The proposed amendments would allow cafes/restaurants as a permitted use in the Residential-Commercial Overlay District and would allow expanded hours of operation for all commercial uses. Currently commercial uses in this zone are allowed to operate from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm. The proposed amendments would expand hours of operation for commercial uses from 7:00 am to 9:00 pm.

Mark Fancey reviewed the zoning map showing the current locations of the Residential-Commercial Overlay District along Hwy. 435, Hwy. 59, Hwy. 36, and near the downtown.

Commissioner Gowland said the intent of the Residential-Commercial Overlay District is provide for neighborhood commercial businesses that don't disrupt residential neighborhoods. Discussion ensued regarding extending business hours for all the types of businesses allowed in the zone.

Commissioner Gowland motioned to direct staff to schedule a public hearing to consider the proposed amendments. Commissioner Gruning seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor

Public Comment

Robert Fos expressed concerns about flooding related to the proposed Dollar General Store on Hwy. 59 north of Southwind Subdivision. He said he is worried about flooding and said he is worried for homeowners on both sides of Hwy. 59. He suggested a stormwater retention pond be constructed as part of the development.

Lynne Congemi said she does not support extending the business hours in the Residential-Commercial Overlay District from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. She said much of the community is residential areas not a historic commercial district. She expressed her opposition to the proposed Dollar General store citing traffic concerns on Hwy 59. She said a center lane is needed on the highway.

Stewart Eastman expressed opposition to the proposed Dollar General store. He said the only way to stop development of the store is to change the permitted uses in the Commercial District. He provided the list of current permitted uses noting a dozen uses he considers obsolete and including a dozen new uses. He said in particular "variety stores" should be deleted as a permitted use. He said the town does not need any variety stores and if someone wants to site such a store, they can request approval for an exception or variance.

Monica Gomez expressed opposition to the proposed Dollar General Store. She cited a study by the Institute for Self-Reliance that concluded that such stores are a cause of distress and a threat to local grocers. She said such stores create food deserts selling food items high in calories and low in nutrition. She requested the Commission include this item on a future meeting.

Cheryl Wood is building a home on Bryan Street near the proposed Dollar General site and that is much too close for a store of that size. She said construction would begin in June and should be completed by October.

Commissioner Templet thanked all those who spoke. He urged citizens to communicate with the Town Aldermen.

Announcements

None.

Commissioner Pierce motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Gowland seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Kristin M. Tortorich, Planning Director

Date