

The following are the minutes from the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting held on February 29, 2024, in Abita Springs Town Hall. The meeting convened at 6:01 P.M.

Commission Chairman John Pierce called the meeting to order. All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioners in attendance included John Pierce, Mike Lanaux, and Chad Hall. Commissioner Lex Leblanc was absent. Kristin Tortorich, Mark Fancey, Alex Carter, Attorney Adam Davis, and Heather Hockman were also present.

Alex Carter introduced herself as a Planner that will be supporting the Town through the Master Plan process. Mark Fancey announced that he was back out of retirement to also help with the Master Plan process.

Agenda Modifications

There were no agenda modifications.

Acceptance of Minutes

The minutes from the January 25, 2024, meeting were emailed ahead of the meeting and presented to the Commission at the meeting. **Commissioner Hall motioned to accept the minutes as submitted. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Mike Lanaux nominated John Pierce for Chairman and Chad Hall for Vice Chairman. Commissioner Lanaux motioned to accept the nominations. Commissioner Chad Hall seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

PLANNING:

Discussion of Master Plan and related regulations

Alex Carter explained master plans are meant to be vision documents to guide development decisions in the long term, but specific standards for the map and appendices are in conflict with the standards in the Code of Ordinances. Ms. Carter explained the Commission could pull the vision and approve it without the appendices and without ordinances and the map. Ms. Carter went on to say there could then be a period for more public input on such matters as the zoning districts, overlays, and how to change the Code.

Chairman Pierce said that much of the public concern about the plan stems from the conceptual imagery presented, however the contents of the plan were created from thorough public input. Chairman Pierce also said the new zoning map is difficult to implement, and the timeline is a concern. Chairman Pierce stated the information contained ahead of the appendices is good work.

Alex Carter stated the engagement period section could be listed at either the beginning or the end of the document. Ms. Carter also said the goals and objectives contained in the appendices regarding development are very good, but there are many little decisions that need to be made about them.

Commissioner Hall said he was concerned with Appendix D, and he has more questions on Appendix C as to how it relates to what we have currently. Commissioner Hall stated Appendix C, which is for PUDs, doesn't correspond at all with the current document. Miss Carter explained there needs to be a marriage between the current ordinance and the Appendix relating to PUDs.

Commissioner Pierce clarified Appendix A, the public engagement section, could be moved to the front of the document. Alex Carter said yes, the public engagement information could be moved to the front, followed by

the outcome of the public engagement to help people first see what people were saying before getting into the conceptual part.

Commissioner Pierce suggested removing Appendix B and Appendix C. Commissioner Hall pointed out Appendix D is presented as though it is a new zoning map and not recommended like the other appendices, which could be an issue. Commissioner Hall stated taking out appendices B, C, and D made sense to him. Commissioner Lanaux asked what the thinking was behind removing Appendix C. Commissioner Hall said removing Appendix C would eliminate confusion because of the potential contention with the discrepancies between the appendix and the current ordinances.

Alex Carter stated unless you are certain you want all the standards in the appendices enacted, you're putting yourself in a vulnerable position due to the need for consistency with the comprehensive plan.

Commissioners Hall and Lanaux said they were all for getting rid of Appendix D. Commission Chairman Pierce said we're challenging the zoning map, and this is only the first iteration of it; there will likely be more iterations before the final map is completed. Alex Carter said we're not scrapping the map; we just need to refine it. Ms. Carter recommended getting a draft copy to the Commission before the vote to adopt the Master Plan.

Commissioner Hall motioned for staff to make the changes of moving appendix A to the main body and to remove appendices B, C, and D for consideration for approval at the next meeting. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Commissioner Hall motioned to open public comment on the Master Plan. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Regan Contois asked if the map would be part of a different section later to be adopted or if it could be renamed as a land use map and added to the Master Plan. Alex Carter said land use maps tend to allow for more general zoning categories to allow for a simpler map. Ms. Carter stated when adopting a map as part of a comprehensive plan, you should allow a public engagement period to allow for a question-and-answer session that allows residents to see how the zoning impacts their properties, and the timeline may not allow for that prior to adoption of the Master Plan and would need to come later. Regan Contois said she felt that the map was a good final product of the public engagement and would be a shame not to include a map with the plan.

Commissioner Hall asked if a map could just be added as an addendum to the Master Plan after time to hold a public engagement period. Mark Fancey explained the Master Plan adoption as a two-phase process and state phase one is currently being finished, while phase two will be the Code and map adoption.

Sandra Slifer suggested calling the map a guide.

Commissioner Pierce said, even without the appendices, it's all in there, just not drawn on a map.

Stewart Eastman said he thought the plan would destroy the town as we know it. He said he thought the master planners are used to transforming ugly towns. He said he thinks the town will lose its entire character with more density. Mr. Eastman said the plan allows for the fruit and vegetable stand to be bulldozed and replaced with a two-story building and for Rosie's green space to become a two-story building if ordinances change. Mr. Eastman stated his concerns about parking and the ability for businesses to survive and the possibility of looking like Covington, not Abita. Chairman Pierce said Stewart made some good points, but keep in mind the pictures are only one artist's rendering, but they were guided by goals created in a collaborative process with the public.

Chairman Pierce said someone could obtain the fruit stand now and build a two-story building if they wanted to today. The plan won't change our density but sets a vision that could allow for development that is more or less dense in some areas that will be addressed when the zoning is discussed.

Alex Carter stated nothing in the bulk of the plan will bring about those issues. Ms. Carter went on to say the Master Plan would create a clear vision the Town can use to make sure that we set those restrictions where we need to prevent issues such as building construction, height, and number of floors.

Stewart Eastman said he felt the plan allows for increased density and that there wasn't much public input. He stated the master planners would ask for one word from residents to describe what they wanted or to have residents place dots between different images from other areas that were most appealing to them.

Commissioner Hall reminded everyone that the changes in the Master Plan don't happen without private money. Property owners are not being forced to change their properties. Commissioner Hall said unless a property owner sells to someone wishing to build and open a large commercial business, it won't happen, and if there isn't the demand for such a business, it doesn't make economical sense for that to even take place.

Commissioner Pierce said the dense storefronts just don't currently make sense, but the growth is coming, so the vision shows what it could be.

Regan Contois said the last plan was probably 50 years ago, so it is time for a new plan.

Commissioner Hall motioned to close the public comment period related to the Master Plan. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Kristin Tortorich stated the *Renewal of a Resolution on the Resubdivision of Land consisting of more than ten lots in the corporate limits of the Town of Abita Springs* was renewed until April 1, 2024, at the last meeting. Ms. Tortorich said the Commission needed to review and make changes to the Subdivision Regulations.

Alex Carter stated we have outdated Subdivision Regulations, and they need to be updated due to upcoming development. We need to update items that are most critical to approve what we can prior to the April 1, 2024, deadline. Ms. Carter proposed a two-step process to update the regulations; update the most pressing items to lift the moratorium, then keep working over the next six months or so to refine the regulations.

Mark Fancey stated there are good working subdivision regulations at present, because they address things like sewage, sidewalks, and street width, but that he agrees to make the changes to lift the moratorium and then hammer out the more substantive details in the coming months.

Commission Chairman Pierce stated the definition of a major subdivision is missing from the definitions section. Commissioner Hall said it states a minor subdivision is five or less, so he assumed more than five is major, but because there is the mention of ten lots, it is unclear. Alex Carter stated acreage is often used as a determining factor in the definition of a subdivision, and that is an item that needs to be decided.

Commission Chairman Pierce asked what was intended for this item at the next meeting. Kristin Tortorich said she saw there being two options: the Commission could vote on amendments next month or they could vote on extending the moratorium.

Commissioner Hall said his issues were with minor subdivisions being required to complete a laundry list of things intended for a major subdivision. Alex Carter stated that is why determining sizes and requirements for each size

is so important. Kristin Tortorich said she thought adding lot line adjustments to the definitions and language would be helpful. Commissioner Hall said it would be a huge burden on someone doing something as simple as combining three lots. Alex Carter stated having administrative subdivisions when there is no change to infrastructure is an option and reserve public hearings for subdivisions where development is getting bigger, and the public can weigh in.

Chairman Pierce said Section 2.1 sets the stage for the regulations. He said “comprehensive plan” seems to refer to the Master Plan, but that language may need to be cleaned up. Chairman Pierce also noted the street standards don’t allow for permeable surfaces where the Master Plan encourages it if possible, and there are other things that conflict with the Master Plan such as frontage. Chairman Pierce suggested adding language for how to address the situation if it conflicts with the Master Plan. He recommended adding a catch-all phrase or an option for a variance for items like permeable road surface, etc. Mark Fancey stated that would be a change for the longer-term changes, but something to look at.

Commissioner Hall said he was concerned about the opening paragraph of **SECTION 3.3 GUARANTEE IN LIEU OF COMPLETED IMPROVEMENTS**, which ends with either, but there are 5 things listed.

Commissioner Hall also stated he felt the big one to address is **3.6 SEWERAGE**, specifically 3.601, which says a subdivision must connect to Town sewer if under 300 feet from the sewer line, but also states a subdivision *can* connect to the nearest sewer connection if more than 300 feet, leaving the option to connect with the subdivision. Commissioner Hall suggested getting the Town engineers to weigh in on Section 3.6. Commissioner Hall said section 3.605. discusses where to connect which then pulls in the engineers. Kristin Tortorich said there will be some language added that addresses capacity and engineer involvement and approval.

Renewal of a Moratorium on the Zoning of Any Lands as Planned Unit Development

Alex Carter said there are replications in the plan that may not be able to allow a short-term fix and there may be a need to extend the moratorium.

Commissioner Hall stated he is unaware of any PUDs that met the requirements of 10% commercial, green space, and 2.2 residential units per acre. Alex Carter said PUDs are frequently seen in Texas where a developer buys a 300-acre lot and develops multi use communities and is able to meet those standards due to the large space and basically starting from scratch.

Kristin Tortorich said the moratorium extends six months from the Town Council meeting that was held the week prior to this meeting. Ms. Tortorich reminded the Commission that they submit their recommendation to the Town Council, but the Aldermen have the final say. Ms. Tortorich said the Commission has more time for the PUD ordinance than the then the subdivision regulations to make changes.

Commissioner Pierce clarified the Commission has the option of working out the details for changes or making a recommendation to Town Council to extend the moratorium but showed concern about just extending the moratorium without a clear path forward. Alex Carter said she would use the commissioners’ feedback to work on changes based on their concerns. Chairman Pierce stated he felt the bigger concern about the PUD ordinance is determining in which zoning district(s) a PUD could be developed.

Mark Fancey said he is not used to seeing a PUD specific zone in his career as a Planner. Mr. Fancey explained he is used to seeing it as an overlay in a residential zone, and that a PUD is a subdivision with a Master Plan that is based on the scale of the property.

Alex Carter said working on the PUD ordinance and the Subdivision Regulations at the same time is wise, because they are similar tools. Ms. Carter cautioned a developer can say, if I can't develop a subdivision, I'll develop a PUD, so it is good to make sure we pay attention to the details of both.

Commissioner Pierce asked about the ability to remove PUD as an option. Alex Carter said, yes, it is an option to repeal PUDs if you feel that type of development is not beneficial for Abita. Commissioner Pierce said we could refine the Subdivision Regulations to allow for development flexibility and carefully merge PUDs and Subdivision Regulations. Alex Carter agreed that is an option.

Mark Fancey stated PUDs help with an area that floods so building can happen with a higher density in the area that makes sense to build on and you can assure the commercial development goes where you want it which is along the highway.

Commissioner Hall noted making sure details about engineering were clear.
Commissioner Pierce suggested emailing thoughts over the next few months so a draft can be put together.

OPEN COMMENTS

Stewart Eastman recommended extending the moratorium and is in favor of repealing the PUD ordinance. Mr. Eastman cautioned against allowing marshy areas to count as green space, rather focusing on usable green space, and recommended some sort of public referendum (if allowable in Louisiana) for matters such as large subdivisions and PUDs to make sure the public has more awareness and say in these types of developments.

Sandra Slifer said she was glad to see energy and desire to move forward with the Master Plan. Ms. Slifer said she felt we should be pushing our boundaries a little. She also said she doesn't think the voices of a small number of people should hold us back from the progress, as many people participated and provided the input for the Master Plan. Ms. Slifer also said we cannot afford only residential development and need commercial businesses to help with infrastructure costs.

Regan Contois said feels we need to modify the PUD zoning or scrap it, because the one we have is not working. Alderman Contois stated a PUD overlay might be an option and it would be scrutinize based on the base zoning.

Earl Carr asked how impact fees, utility connection fees and infrastructure capacity fees are going to be handled to make sure that the money is being paid up front and cover the cost incurred for a subdivision. Mr. Carr also stated his concern with sewer capacity as far as the EPA, DEQ, etc. getting involved when there are issues with finding feces in people's homes and overflows. Alex Carter responded that those are legitimate concerns across Louisiana, and not just in Abita Springs. Ms. Carter stated there is research on more sustainable systems and developments should pay for themselves. She explained the Master Plan puts you in a better position to increase your standards for infrastructure to try to prevent future infrastructure and drainage issues. Earl Carr said other states collect advance payment for lots in subdivisions. Alex Carter said that it is within a local government's authority to look out for their tax base, and she'll investigate the details.

Commissioner Pierce said the Master plan doesn't fix those issues, but the moratoriums address that to allow us time to fix the ordinances.

Mark Fancey explained the Master Plan name can be a little deceiving, as it seems it would be all encompassing. There are other master plans that address issues such as water, sewer, streets, and parks. Each area (water, sewer, streets, parks) has a master plan that looks at those items to determine how growth impacts them. Each plan provides a list of improvements and estimated costs, then an additional study is done to determine how the impact fees will be developed.

Earl Carr asked if those separate master plans should be incorporated in the Master Plan. Mark Fancey said, usually separate studies are done because there are different groups that specialize in each area and while each one is valuable in providing information about future growth and infrastructure needs, they are separate documents.

Earl Carl said we need to start collecting funds in advance from the developers. Mark Fancey confirmed the Town does collect impact fees and other fees and is actively working on an assessment of those fees.

Commissioner Hall asked about the single bid for the sewer rehab. Kristin Tortorich said it \$8.2 million so it will go back out for bid.

Stephanie Mobley said she moved here to enjoy the small town because there wasn't high density. Ms. Mobley is concerned about the development depicted in the images in the Master Plan. Ms. Mobley stated we are having trouble handling what we have now without adding more development and infrastructural issues.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sandra Slifer announced the Gumbo Cook-Off will be on Saturday, March 9th. Attorney Adam Davis will be cooking along with multiple other cooks. Proceeds benefit Keep Abita Beautiful and the Town of Abita Springs. It will be from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the Trailhead. The cost is \$10 and under 12 is free. Nine to ten teams will be providing gumbo.

Litter cleanup with Keep Abita Beautiful will be held Saturday, March 23rd from 8:30 AM till about noon Litter pick up will be Koop Drive, north to Marshall, and then return to Koop Drive. Fontainebleau High students asked for help with the cleanup. They will do about 1.5 miles each way. Another phase will be Marshall to the curve on 59 entering Abita. Sandra encouraged volunteers to come out and help.

Stewart Eastman reminded everyone Election Day is Saturday, March 23rd and encouraged everyone to get out and vote.

Kristin Tortorich announced Town events coming up this spring. We will have the Whole Town Garage Sale, Autism Awareness Day, and Busker Festival with all details available on the town's website.

Regan Contois announced Friends of the Park will be doing a 200 oak sapling giveaway at an upcoming Farmers Market. Stay tuned for details.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Hall motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 P.M.

Kristin Tortorich, Planning & Zoning Director

Date