

The following are the minutes from the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting held on March 11, 2024, in Abita Springs Town Hall. The meeting convened at 3:09 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, Chad Hall, and Lex Leblanc. Aldermen Pat Patterson, Stephen Saussy, Regan Contois, and E.J. Boudreaux were present. Alderman Eric Templet was absent. Kristin Tortorich, Mark Fancey, Alex Carter, Attorney Edward Deano, and Heather Hockman were also present.

Agenda Modifications

There were no agenda modifications.

DISCUSSION

MASTER PLAN

Commission Chairman Pierce summarized the update on the Master Plan from the last Planning & Zoning Commission meeting. Chairman Pierce said the Commission decided to move Appendix A and remove the other appendices. Kristin Tortorich explained the new copy of the Master Plan shows the updated draft with Appendix A moved to the very beginning; appendices B, C, and D removed; and a revised index. Chairman Pierce clarified Appendix B contained the draft ordinance changes, Appendix B contained PUD regulations, and Appendix D contains a new zoning map, all of which require much deliberation.

Commissioner LeBlanc said he thinks the Master Plan tends to want to increase the population density which has him concerned about the infrastructure, so he looked at the plan with a priority list. Sewer, water, sidewalks, interconnect ability, green spaces are all priorities for him. Commissioner LeBlanc said he felt that the sections of the Master Plan should be adopted by priority.

Alderman Boudreaux said he agrees that high priority items need to be addressed and said that these infrastructure items are costly, while also saying the town doesn't have a large enough tax base to cover the improvements needed.

Alderman Contois said she was in favor of cutting out the regulatory part and adopting the vision of the Master Plan to help us to move forward.

Alderman Saussy asked if it is possible to adopt parts of the Master Plan versus all of it.

Alex Carter introduced herself as a certified planner who is assisting the Planning Department with the process. Ms. Carter provided context about the Master Plan process. Ms. Carter explained that a master plan's purpose is to plan for growth over a long period of time, so growth can happen with you instead of to you. Alex Carter went on to say that it should be broad, and is not meant to be regulatory with ordinances or capital improvement plans, rather a vision document for goals such as prioritizing sewer, streets, etc. Ms. Carter explained when a development comes to apply, the Town can see if it fits with the Master Plan. Ms. Carter said the Master Plan can always be revised or updated, and grant program managers will want to see that you have the goals for improvements laid out in a Master Plan/Comprehensive Plan to aid in funding these major improvement projects. Ms. Carter reminded everyone that you have to think about the plan in a long-range manner.

Alderman Patterson clarified that the Board of Alderman and Planning & Zoning Commission are being asked to look at the Master Plan from a 10,000-foot view and hit on the main topics. Alex Carter confirmed the plan helps to guide what minutiae gets focused on. Alex Carter stated the concerns should be for goals and objectives that are missing in the plan, however there are goals and objectives for sewer included.

Commissioner Lanaux stated drainage is a huge concern for him, but he knows it is in the Master Plan, so he knows it will be addressed.

Commissioner Hall stated projects can't just be jumped into; there is a process for everything. Commissioner Hall said just like the sewer plant and the Master Plan, they take time and money, and a growing tax base can help with that. He stated the Master Plan gives a path forward, but until the zoning and other things are changed, it doesn't happen.

Alderman Boudreaux agreed the growing tax base is necessary. He suggested commercial growth should not just be focused on the downtown area, but on the periphery.

Alderman Contois stated the focus on zoning is the next step. Alex Carter confirmed and said a future land use map is often adopted with a Master Plan, but contains only about five broad categories for use, not specific, detailed zoning. Ms. Carter said the zoning map is going to require more public engagement, so her recommendation is to adopt the vision of the Master Plan, then move forward to work on the zoning map, which can be done with some areas rather than the whole town at once.

Commissioner LeBlanc spoke about his experience about a master plan in the private sector which includes timing for implementation. Alex Carter responded that most plans include implementation tables that lay out short, medium, and long-range actions. Ms. Carter explained often times those are 1-, 3-, and 5-year goals, and said that an implementation table could be added if we want.

Chairman Pierce said the operating budget really is the determining factor in what goals can be accomplished, and that the Master Plan is only a guide.

Alderman Contois stated that the Master Plan is a document some think just sits on a shelf, but that it really is a tool as are the budget and capital improvement plans. Alderman Contois said she'd like to see the Council refer to the Master Plan when they discuss capital improvements to make sure they are staying on target of the goals.

Alex Carter said the downfall of an implementation table is the potential failure to meet the goals on the timeline listed due to budgetary constraints.

Commissioner LeBlanc suggested an annual guidance memo or similar document to be used to help guide the Town to stay on target with the goals and priorities.

Commissioner Hall stated the goals are included in the plan, but vaguely, listed as immediate, mid-term, and long-term goals. Commissioner LeBlanc insisted the Town list the priorities and suggested an additional column to the table to show the order of priorities. Chairman Pierce said that while most people would not agree on every single item on a priority list, the majority of people would likely agree on a top five and asked Ms. Carter if a prioritization statement or similar item could be added to the plan. Alex

Carter responded that an annual strategic implementation document could be presented by the Council as a resolution, or the Planning & Zoning Commission could adopt an appendix to the plan. She cautioned consistent scoring and clarity when translating goals into actions.

Chairman Pierce asked what benefit or impact there is if the steps are taken to list priorities. Alex Carter said from an outside funding source perspective, your methodology needs to be very clear, and it means you can potentially see more funding to help with improvements you need. Discussion ensued about prioritization of goals and the cost of the projects.

Chairman Pierce said an appendix could be adopted that could be revised frequently to lay out the prioritization of the goals. Alex Carter suggested having the Planning Commission make a motion, and the Council make a resolution that supports the plan that also lays out priorities for the next year, which would allow each body to look at what is in their purview. Attorney Edward Deano added that when the law is followed, the Master Plan comes off the shelf frequently to allow consistency between the legislative body and the Planning Commission. Attorney Deano shared that some municipalities have the Planning Commission look at capital improvement projects being considered by the legislative body to have collaboration and make sure the Master Plan is being followed.

Alderman Patterson said he liked the idea of having the Planning & Zoning Commission review capital improvement projects to have checks and balances.

SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS: *FOCUS ON PRIORITY TOPICS AND AREAS*

Kristin Tortorich explained the Resolution on the Re-subdivision of Land consisting of more than ten lots in the corporate limits of the Town of Abita Springs was renewed and extended the moratorium to April 1, 2024. Ms. Tortorich stated the Planning & Zoning Commission will hold a Public Hearing at the next meeting, which is why the Subdivision Regulations are being looked at and amendments considered. Commission Chairman Pierce explained the options are to do nothing and let the moratorium expire, extend the moratorium, or review and amend the Subdivision Regulations.

Alex Carter said the Town is working with the Town engineer to create a red line version that deals with the most problematic items to create a draft that could potentially be implemented before the moratorium expired, then continue to work on further details if there are other things that need to be addressed. Ms. Carter said the current regulations are based on an older Code which has not kept pace with engineering standards. Chairman Pierce explained the intent of the regulations are to hold developers accountable and make sure subdivisions are not detrimental to the Town. Chairman Pierce also said he felt the new regulations would be more substantial and the approval process would be more formal.

Alderman Boudreaux said he was concerned with minimum lot size and that he wanted to see larger lots. Alex Carter clarified that the subdivision regulations don't manage the lot size, and that they are determined by the zoning districts, unless it is a PUD. Chairman Pierce said the Master Plan encourages looking at the minimum lot size, because a lot size in one part of town may not make as much sense as that lot size in another part of town.

Alderman Contois asked how the contiguous lots of record would be handled. Alex Carter explained the subdivision regulations acknowledge the definition of a lot of record, but the minimum buildable lot size goes back to the ordinance to be determined. Alderman Contois identified this as a potential issue as

projects want to move forward. Ms. Carter encouraged the Council to reach out to the Planning Department for potential issues they see to have those issues looked at for possible amendments.

Alderman Contois said a low-density zoning was created, but lots were never zoned with that distinction. Alderman Contois asked if the town is still protected if we have never used that zoning and the moratorium gets lifted. Kristin Tortorich explained the low-density zone was created mainly for a property that does not have access to a town sewer connection, but it was never applied. Ms. Tortorich said a property without a town sewer connection already cannot be less than two acres, so if you have five acres, you could only divide into two parcels. Ms. Tortorich said the low-density zone could be applied to an area with sewer with substandard roads.

Alex Carter said she felt the regulations were missing a trigger for when lots exceed a certain size, it triggers certain infrastructure improvements. Alderman Contois said she felt the Town needed to have its own trigger written into the regulations, so there was a consistent standard in the event that Louisiana Department of Health changed their requirements. Alex Carter said she would work with the Town engineer, but she will add the trigger to the Subdivision Regulations regarding two acres and above requiring infrastructure improvements.

Discussion ensued about cul-de-sacs versus gridded streets. Alex Carter recommended not outlawing cul-de-sacs but limiting their use to reap the benefits for emergency access and cost-effective measures on infrastructure. Alderman Contois recommended a minimum of two entry/exit points per subdivision. Alex Carter said the plan is to have the next draft with a cover sheet memo prior to the next meeting to be reviewed and provide feedback for a draft to be presented for the March Planning & Zoning Commission meeting.

Alderman Contois asked if there is a requirement in place for drainage plans and waterway plans since she has encountered those issues at the Parish, and they are a growing concern for southeastern Louisiana. Chairman Pierce and Kristin Tortorich said there are different requirements based on the type of the subdivision, but more work is needed to define administrative, minor, and major subdivisions and their requirements.

PUD ORDINANCE: DEVELOPMENT OF ORDINANCE IN ALIGNMENT WITH MASTER PLAN APPENDIX

Alex Carter stated a PUD has a lot of infrastructure, approved like a major subdivision, but also has its own zoning and land use classifications. PUDs are generally treated as a major subdivision, but you have to consider the zoning elements, whether it is a zoning district or an overlay. Kristin Tortorich said there would likely be another meeting like this joint meeting to discuss PUDs once the Subdivision Regulations are resolved and before the PUDs moratorium expires.

Discussion ensued over how PUD zoning comes about and whether the Town even wants a PUD. Alderman Contois mentioned the difficult, time-consuming process required to administrate a PUD application and development, especially for a small town. Alex Carter explained if PUDs were repealed, the existing PUDs would become legal nonconforming and cannot expand or change, but the sites could be rezoned if it doesn't create more nonconforming issues. Attorney Deano stated we'd need to look at the development agreement for more information. The consensus was that most of the Council and Commissioners want to investigate repealing PUDs.

OPEN COMMENTS

Brenda Lanier explained the process of the Town acquiring funding for a sewer project in the previous administration and asked the status of the project. Kristin Tortorich explained that the money was for sewer line repairs and that the project was completed. Ms. Lanier asked if the Town could go back to the state and request more funding for the sewer plant. Alderman Saussy, Alderman Contois, and Kristin Tortorich explained the money went as far as it could go and was spent on the sewer line repair project as intended and is not fully paid back yet. Alderman Saussy explained in addition to the loan, there is a \$5 million grant which is money that does not have to be paid back. Ms. Lanier then stated we must make rent payments to Utilities, Inc. to take our sewerage and she is concerned about the cost. Alderman Patterson explained the payment is for the sewage to be pumped there while the facility is shut down for repairs. Kristin Tortorich explained our sewage must go somewhere while the plant is emptied and fixed due to lack of maintenance for many years now requiring repairs. Ms. Lanier suggested raising the bills. Kristin Tortorich stated she believed a rate study is being done this year.

ADJOURNMENT

Alderman Saussy motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:04 P.M.

Kristin Tortorich, Planning & Zoning Director

Date