

The following are minutes from the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting on Thursday, January 25, 2024, in Abita Springs Town Hall. The meeting convened at 6:05 P.M.

Commission Vice Chair Chad Hall called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioners in attendance included Chad Hall, Mike Lanaux, and Lex LeBlanc. John Pierce was absent. Kristin Tortorich and Angie Hahn were also present.

### **Agenda Modification**

Kristin Tortorich said three agenda modifications were being requested. The vote for Chair and Vice Chair should be postponed until the next meeting when everyone is present, the order of the agenda would need to be rearranged to have the Public Hearings before the Master Plan presentation, and in the first item under Public Hearings should say “renewal of a resolution” not renewal of moratorium.

**Commissioner Lanaux motioned to accept the modifications. Commissioner LeBlanc seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.**

### **Minutes**

**The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the November 30, 2023, meeting. Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to dispense with the reading of the minutes. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

### **ZONING:**

#### **Public Hearings:**

#### **Renewal of a Resolution on the Re-subdivision of Land consisting of more than ten lots in the corporate limits of the Town of Abita Springs**

Kristin Tortorich introduced the first item as the renewal of a resolution on the re-subdivision of land consisting of more than 10 lots and explained that anyone seeking approval to re-subdivide property to more than 10 lots would not be able to until the Master Plan is done. Commissioner Hall asked when the resolution would expire and Kristin Tortorich said next month, February 2024.

Commissioner Lanaux said it made sense to him with everything hinging on the Master Plan.

Commissioner LeBlanc asked for clarification on the zones affected by the resolution. Kristin Tortorich confirmed it was for all of Abita Springs and not any particular zone. Commissioner Hall mentioned the sewer issues and asked if the set of plans in the back of the room was for sewer work. Kristin Tortorich confirmed and said the project went out for bid today and that only one bid was received, and it was over budget. Commissioner LeBlanc asked if there was anyone currently applying for re-subdivision and Kristin Tortorich said she has not received any requests.

#### **Public Comments**

John D’Hemecourt asked how many times the moratorium had been renewed and stated that the town is essentially taking land because property owners can’t develop it. Kristin Tortorich said she believed this is the third renewal and would be for twelve months.

Stephen Saussy asked where the timeframe was on the resolution and why it was being done for twelve months. Kristin Tortorich explained the Master Plan is not finalized and that because of the sewer system issues, it doesn’t make sense to allow a subdivision of more than ten lots. He asked why the resolution applies to re-subdivisions on the north side of the river, as there is no town sewer on that

side of the river and stated he feels those residents are being penalized. He stated that he and John D'Hemecourt both are residents north of the river.

Commissioner Hall asked about the timeframe of the sewer plant work. Janet Dufrene said only one bid came in, and it was her understanding that because it is being funded by the DEQ Water Sector Program, it goes back to them to see if they will provide any additional funding and put it back out to bid or to determine what the options are. The connection is being paid for with town funds and the current DEQ loan, so the connection to Arrowwood will still be happening. The project that went to bid was for the new sewer plant.

Commissioner Hall stated that with the resolution expiring before the next meeting, it could be approved and modified at the next meeting.

Stephen Saussy asked why the Commission couldn't just make an amendment and vote on the amendment. Kristin Tortorich said another option was to approve the resolution and take some time to think about it and modify it at the next meeting. Commissioners asked if the amendment could be amended tonight and if the amendment could be amended tonight and modified at the next meeting after having more time to think about it. Kristin Tortorich confirmed those are all options.

Commissioner LeBlanc stated that although he understands the purpose of the Master Plan, he feels it is restrictive to property owners. Commissioner Lanaux said the Master Plan would impact how the re-subdivision can happen and not just the use of the property.

Stephen Saussy said he thought the areas not having zoning changes in the Master Plan should not be impacted by the moratorium. He said for instance, his property is zoned Commercial, and the Master Plan is proposing to keep his property as Commercial.

Bill Magee said the Master Planners have done a great job. He stated that he and his business partner looked at purchasing and developing a 100-acre lot east of the ballpark back in 2022, but during their due diligence, found that there was a moratorium on the property and they could not move forward with their plans. He stated they went outside of town and are currently developing property in the parish.

The Commissioners and Kristin Tortorich discussed the meeting and advertising schedule.

**Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to amend the resolution. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

**Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to approve the resolution with the amendment of an expiration date of April 1, 2024. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

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

Kristin Tortorich introduced the item and stated the Commission would be voting on a recommendation to submit to the Town Council. Ms. Tortorich stated that the current moratorium expires in early February and this moratorium is for a twelve-month period.

**Public Comments**

Adrienne Petrosini said she feels that the Master Plan should be completed, and the Commission should not chip away at it with exceptions. She recommended following the wisdom of whomever put forth the resolutions.

Commissioner Lanaux motioned to favorably recommend the moratorium to the Town Council. There was not a second. Commissioner LeBlanc stated he didn't agree to the twelve-month extension. He stated he understands that we need time to work on the Master Plan, but the town needs businesses to provide revenue to help with things like park improvements and sidewalks, and people need to be able to develop their land to do so.

**Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to amend the moratorium to a six-month extension. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

**Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to favorably recommend the moratorium with the six-month extension amendment to the Town Council. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

**Renewal of a Moratorium on the issuance of any permits whatsoever or uses allowed in the commercial district.**

Kristin Tortorich introduced the moratorium with the amendment to add:

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that an applicant may appeal to the Planning and Zoning Commission for an exception to this moratorium. The Commission shall consider criteria including the following in making their determination.

- Compatibility with the adjacent neighborhood
- Impact on existing infrastructure
- Adherence to the goals of the Town of Abita Springs, proposed or adopted Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Development Standards.

These documents can be found on the Town of Abita Springs website or in the Planning and Zoning Office at Town Hall.

Ms. Tortorich confirmed this would apply to the Commercial and Commercial-Historic Districts.

Janet Dufrene stated the intention of this moratorium with the amendment is to allow more development than currently allowed. The amendment would allow an applicant to seek approval by submitting a plan to Planning & Zoning with the proposed development standards. If they did not want to do that, they'd have to wait for the full adoption of the Master Plan, new zoning, and new ordinances. Applicants would be required to get with the engineers to make sure there are not infrastructure issues created by the development and the development standards are met.

**Public Comment**

Lovelle Blich said she thought the moratoriums are counter productive to the development and growth of the town.

John D'Hemecourt said the proposal has to meaningfully comply with the intent of the Master Plan, but the Master Plan has yet to have been passed. He asked who would make the determination of whether

the proposals comply. He stated the reason there are no applicants is because there are moratoriums in place.

Kirby Powell said he thinks this moratorium with amendment makes sense, to allow for development to the standards that we like while we work to get the Master Plan in effect.

Eric Templet said he agrees that the town needs growth. He said the Master Plan is great at creating a plan for development, but does not address drainage, traffic and sewer capacity. He said the Master Plan is looking ahead 5, 10, 15 years and seeing what the town may look like, not changing everything all at once. He clarified this amendment would allow for development where it makes sense, in order to start the growth the town needs, while looking out for those infrastructure concerns.

Commissioner Hall said it makes sense to him to allow for permitting while we work toward the Master Plan approval.

Commissioner LeBlanc stated his concern for the timeframe of the Master Plan process. Janet Dufrene said the Master Plan document would be adopted prior to the new zoning and ordinances.

Stephen Saussy said he thinks zoning is the first thing that needs to be addressed.

Commissioner Hall asked how the Master Plan would change the Commercial District. Kristin Tortorich said that she thinks there will be less restrictions and an expanded list of allowable uses. Ms. Tortorich said she thinks there will be more focus on the size and how the business fits into an area. She explained that there have been people coming to the town with ideas for commercial development and this is a way to consider their proposals without undermining all the work being done to make changes for the town. This amendment is a way for them to move forward.

**Commissioner Lanaux motioned to accept the renewal of the moratorium as written. Commissioner LeBlanc seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

**Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to close the Zoning portion of the meeting. Commissioner Lanaux seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

## **PLANNING**

### **Master Plan Presentation**

Jason King with Dover Kohl and Partners presented the Master Plan. Mr. King stated the plan is available for review at [engageabitasprings.com](http://engageabitasprings.com). He explained the Master Plan is made up of four parts: Vision, Commercial Design Guidelines, PV Guidelines, and Zoning Map. A portion of the plan or all of the plan may be adopted. Over 3,000 people have been involved in the plan development from meeting attendees and in-person conversations to website interaction.

Commissioner LeBlanc asked what Mr. King thinks Abita's biggest hurdle would be. Mr. King responded he thinks the time that it takes to implement the vision is likely the hardest part. He said having the Master Plan helps to secure funding and can accelerate improvements.

Commissioner Hall asked what level of coordination with governmental entities and the school board is necessary to implement the plan. Mr. King stated that the other agencies have to take the plan into account, but items like moving the school and DOTD projects are the hardest and most long-term changes.

Commissioner Hall asked for Mr. King to share the things people most wanted to change. Mr. King shared most people wanted to protect Abita, so the plan reflects protecting streets, green spaces, and wildlife corridors. Another thing people wanted is to enhance the downtown area by bringing in businesses that excite the residents. Parking solutions are necessary to bring people to the businesses that will have an economic impact on the town, so the plan also focuses on parking solutions.

Mr. King said the difficult conversations have already happened, so he doesn't think the plan will take years to adopt and said the town can submit their feedback, and he will incorporate the changes as he gets them.

Christy Becnel asked who would be responsible for paying for a parking lot to be relocated to the back of her business and mentioned that she was concerned about the impact of potential customers not seeing vehicles in front of the businesses. Mr. King said current property owners will not be required to change their properties to comply with the Master Plan unless there is a significant change to the property.

Kevin Tauzier said you could tell a lot of work went into the Master Plan, but he feels a flow chart and timeline of what is next would be helpful in understanding what is to come.

Mr. King explained in Louisiana, a Planning Commission adopts a plan, and in many places, the Aldermen then get the Plan to review. Zoning and ordinance changes come next, then applicants present their plans for developmental review.

Mr. King stated the Vision must first be adopted, then it moves on to the zoning changes, but there will be form based code with guidelines that can immediately be used to approve development.

**Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to close the Planning section of the meeting. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. All in favor.**

**OPEN COMMENTS**

None.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Kristin Tortorich announced the Pushmow Parade will be February 4<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM. The parade has a new route this year and can be found on the Town's Facebook page.

Kristin Tortorich also announced the Gumbo Cookoff details are available on the Facebook page and the Town's website, and the date for the Whole Town Garage Sale is set for March 30, 2024.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:29 P.M.

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Kristin Tortorich, Planning & Zoning Director

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Date