

PLANNING BOARD MINUTES MAY 24th, 2023

The meeting of the Planning Board of the Borough of Somerville was called to order by Chairman Bernard Navatto at 7:00 PM and stated that adequate notice of this meeting had been provided in accordance with the “Open Public Meetings Act”.

Board Members Present: Bernard Navatto, Mayor Dennis Sullivan, Councilman Roger Vroom, Andrea Adair, Arthur Akins, Jason Kraska, Larry Cleveland, Christopher Adickes, Lisa Werner

Board Members Absent: Al Kerestes, Deidre Rosinski

Professional Present: Kara Kaczynski, Esq. Board Attorney and Michael Cole, Board Planner and Engineer

Approval Minutes

Chairman Bernie Navatto opened questions and comments up to the board for the minutes detailed. Christopher Adickes provided commentary that correction to his name appearing in roll call should be amended due to the fact he was absent for the meeting on May 10th, 2023.

No additional comments or questions were provided.

Upon a motion by Larry Cleveland, seconded by Jason Kraska, the minutes with corrections of May 10th, 2023, were approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Bernard Navatto, Mayor Dennis Sullivan, Councilman Roger Vroom, Andrea Adair, Arthur Akins, Jason Kraska, Larry Cleveland, Christopher Adickes, Lisa Werner

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Resolutions

Upon a motion by Andrea Adair, seconded by Arthur Akins, Planning Board Resolution 2023-003P, 130-136 East Main Street B64 L11.01 was approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Bernard Navatto, Mayor Dennis Sullivan, Councilman Roger Vroom, Andrea Adair, Arthur Akins, Jason Kraska, Larry Cleveland, Christopher Adickes

Nay: None

Abstain: Lisa Werner

Land Use

Ord 2709 -23 – 0515

Rescinding ordinance #2695-23-0221 and adopting the amendment to the redevelopment plan for the Kirby Avenue Redevelopment Area, specifically applicable to Block 50, Lots 2, (50 James Street) and 2.01, (82 Fairview Avenue) Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 ET SEQ

Chairman Navatto provided context to the technical correction of this ordinance and why it was being presented to the board for review. The Chairman opened up to the board for questions - Jason Kraska asked for clarification on what was being changed from the original. Chairman Bernie Navatto clarified changes to include a piece of property that was not originally included. Attorney for the board Kara Kaczynski confirmed that the ordinance was consistent with the Master Plan and supplemental bulk use details were provided by Michael Cole, Board Planner and Engineer.

Chairman Navatto and Mayor Sullivan provided additional commentary on the historical use of the land and their excitement to see it redeveloped.

Chairman Navatto opened for the public for comment – no additional comment or questions were provided, and the public session was closed.

Upon a motion by Jason Kraska, seconded by Andrea Adair, Ordinance number 2709 -23 – 0515 was approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Bernard Navatto, Mayor Dennis Sullivan, Councilman Roger Vroom, Andrea Adair, Arthur Akins, Jason Kraska, Larry Cleveland, Christopher Adickes, Lisa Werner

Nay: None

Abstain: None

See Transcript.

Recommendation that Borough Council amend chapter 102-104 of the borough code, “Land Use and Development” to revise the requirements applicable to the “PO-R” Professional Office – Residential Zone District to permit two (2) family residences in the professional office-residential zone district.

Chairman Navatto stated that the planning board has had lengthy discussions on this particular topic a couple of years ago and that his personal position was that the recommendation makes sense and that the market has changed from when the PO-R Zone was established 30 years ago and although it has served its purpose for the past 30 years as well as currently that this would allow additional flexibility within the zone and does not see a down side to it. Mr. Christopher Adickes posed the question of commercial spaces becoming two family homes and how the bulk standards would apply in those instances. Michael Cole, Board Planner and Engineer advised

that if there was a change in use, they would need to meet the bulk standards/ If it complied that no action would be taken and if it did not comply, they may need to apply for a variance. Chairman Navatto confirmed that if the impervious coverage was over, they would either remove it or go to the board of adjustment.

Chairman Navatto noted that he would also like to add to the recommendation to allow single-family residential, two-family residential, and mixed-use nonresidential and residential regardless of what floor they are located on. Michael Cole, Board Planner and Engineer confirmed that this was consistent with the master plan as it was included to allow flexibility. Currently there is a footnote in schedule A stating that apartments have to be on upper floors – the recommendation would be to remove that footnote to allow any floor.

Chairman Navatto opened for public comment.

Member of the public Greg Storms, DGM Management stated that he believes this was a good idea. That the PO-R Zone is a good buffer between Main Street and the residential area and as flex space becomes available, we don't want to see vacant offices on High Street therefore he is in support of the recommendations and believes it to be a good idea.

Member of the public Danny Tiplady, 15 Hamilton Street asked if this applied only to offices or retail as well. Chair Navatto confirmed that this was just offices and closed public session.

Upon a motion by Jason Kraska, seconded by Andrea Adair, Recommendation that Borough Council amend chapter 102-104 of the borough code, "Land Use and Development" to revise the requirements applicable to the "PO-R" Professional Office – Residential Zone District to permit two (2) family residences in the professional office-residential zone district. was approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Bernard Navatto, Mayor Dennis Sullivan, Councilman Roger Vroom, Andrea Adair, Arthur Akins, Jason Kraska, Larry Cleveland, Christopher Adickes, Lisa Werner

Nay: None

Abstain: None

See transcript.

Items not on the Agenda

Chairman Navatto informed the board members that the proposal for the flood hazard area mapping had been submitted by Michael Cole however they have not received a funding source at this time. Concern was raised as to the fact that the DEP maps have yet to be determined and that they may not be available for some time and that there should be some funding available for action to be taken based on our current resources of historical flood maps, elevations and delineated streams to determine if a property is within the flood hazard zone. Chairman stated that the board should approve this proposal pending certification of funds.

Upon a motion by Jason Kraska, seconded by Councilman Roger Vroom, the recommendation for the flood Hazard zone was approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Bernard Navatto, Mayor Dennis Sullivan, Councilman Roger Vroom, Deidre Rosinski, Andrea Adair, Arthur Akins, Jason Kraska, Larry Cleveland, Lisa Werner

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Chairman's Comments

No comments.

Meeting Open to the Public

Chairman Navatto opened for public comment and questions.

Member of the public Danny Tiplady, 15 Hamilton Street provided commentary regarding her personal 14 years of experience of flooding within the East Gateway Area where she resides and voiced concerns over a contract being awarded to develop within. She included that it was in her opinion dangerous to have high density residences within this flood zone area including concern for emergency services being able to get into these areas during flood conditions.

Chairman Navatto assured that when the application comes before the Planning Board that there are ways for medical personal to get in and out, and ways for residents to get in and out etc. and encourage her to come to the meetings when the application is file and that all of these concerns will be addressed.

Member of the Public Glenn Denys also wanted to talk about the Eastern Central Business District in a broader sense in regard to the 10-year-old development plan that feel needs to be revisited to reflect the current needs of Somerville as well as the environmental needs including flooding and heat island effects. Mr. Denys mentioned that he felt there was room for more reimagination with the redevelopment area other than apartment building and that the recent development should be taken into account when determining if more apartments are what the

town is in need of and how we can better meet the needs of the Somerville residents. There was concern that the plans that have been reviewed violated areas of the current redevelopment plan including block 65 lot 4 being reserved open space or parking, page 7 in regard to mitigate from flooding, page 6 to reduce the overcrowding on undersized lots and as well as providing affordable housing and that the planning board should be instrumental in communicated with the redevelopment committee to see where we need to go s as they are the experts on these topics.

The Board Thank the public for their comments and public session was formally closed.

Chairman Navatto open for questions or comments from the Planning Board.

Planning Board member Larry Cleveland his insight on why community members would be concerns and raise concern at council meetings and that historically there were concept review where all of these items would get hashed out providing more knowledge to the public and addressing real concerns. Chairman Navatto responded that Mr. Cleveland was correct and that typically see these concept plans but as a redevelopment the concept plans were submitted to council and that the Planning Board would ultimately see an application.

Councilman Roger Vroom provided context that the plans were first submitted to DEP prior to making their way to council and this is why they ended up delaying the voting until there was a presentation.

Planning Board Member Larry Cleveland also voiced concern about the recommendation from the Planning Board not being formally read into record and his request for it to be read into record while attending the meeting and that while he understands that they are not required to do anything with their recommendation he felt as through it should be respected and not overlooked.

See transcript.

Adjourn

Upon a motion by Jason Kraska, seconded by Andrea Adair, the adjournment of the planning board meeting of May 24th, 2023, was unanimously approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Bernard Navatto, Mayor Dennis Sullivan, Councilman Roger Vroom,
Deidre Rosinski, Andrea Adair, Arthur Akins, Jason Kraska, Larry Cleveland,
Lisa Werner

Nay: None

Abstain: None

The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.