

**PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES**

August 3, 2016

On the above date at the Port Republic City Hall, 143 Main Street, Port Republic, New Jersey, Planning Board Vice Chairperson Gail Haviland called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and made a statement in compliance with Sunshine Law.

Virginia Laird was sworn in.

Roll Call

Members Present: Mayor Gary Giberson, Gail Haviland, Robert Haviland, Barry Horas, Virginia Laird, and Council Representative Donna Riegel.

Board Attorney: Mike Fitzgerald

Board Secretary Vicki Cantell

Absent: John Fallucca, Brad Hooper and the Building Official.

It was noted that Steve Allgeyer is now serving on City Council and Brad Hooper has been appointed as his replacement.

Minutes - On the motion of Mr. Horas, second of Mayor Giberson and carried unanimously to accept the minutes of May 9, 2016.

City Council Report – Mrs. Riegel noted that Atlantic County has set up the Community of Champions wherein the bank is registered as the owner of the foreclosed property and must maintain said property. Further, a city can ask for and will be provided with the information on any property listed. Port Store is now on this list. There is a fee for the bank but not for the city.

OLD BUSINESS

Solar Field – Mayor Giberson informed the Board the city gravel site does not qualify for designation as a solar farm as the gravel was saleable.

Redevelopment of Port Store Area Public Meeting – The properties under consideration are Block 18, Lot 1, the Port Store area consisting of ½ acre and City owned property Block 6, Lot 51 about 4.3 acres. The Mayor provided history of the city's receiving a redevelopment grant.

Attorney Fitzgerald stated that the first step toward redevelopment is for City Council to request that the Planning Board do a study to determine if there is a need for the area to be redeveloped.

The second step would be for the Board to make a recommendation to Council that the city should proceed with the redevelopment designation.

The third step would be to develop a plan/vision of what is needed for the area. Tiffany Cuvillo, Planner, noted that part of the process is to note what problems exists, how traffic flow safety can be improved, and uses for the area.

The possibility of Condemnation was raised. It would first need to be determined during the introductory phase if the area is in need of redevelopment. State statutes determine the criteria. Does the area cause a blight on the city? The area seems to meet four of the criteria:

- C. General building condition is deteriorating
- D. Land is owned by the city
- E. Condition is obsolete/unsanitary
- F. Lack of utilization

Ms. CuvIELLO provided the history of Port Store which appears to have been built around 1950 with additions made over the years but existing unchanged since the 50s. It is now owned by Acquired Capital and is presently only used by the Post Office with the store being closed. The conditions include asbestos siding which is falling off in places, there is roof damage, a staircase that is unsafe, not meeting standards and there have been no improvements made. There is a history of environmental issues. The underground storage tanks have been removed but incomplete. Soil, water and septic test would need to be done if property were to be considered for use. At present, area is considered unhealthy and a blight.

The city owned property was obtained in 1994 through a foreclosure tax lien. All building on the site were removed years ago. This property meets the criteria of unused for ten years or more.

Road improvements are needed to eliminate the negative impact. The parking of cars on the grass triangle was cited as an example of unsafe site line issues.

Mayor Giberson noted that the 4.3 acres of the city property does not include the County right-of-way. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that the County has expressed a willingness to work with the city.

The property is deteriorated and under-sized to function properly. The city did not and does not have any responsibility for maintenance of Port Store. It is the sole responsibility of the owner.

If, as suspected, the soil on this site is contaminated the remediation would need to be completed before it could be used. If it were to become open space it could be left as is. If there is a problem, redevelopment could aid in the sites clean up.

Public Comment: The meeting was opened to the public.

Jim Schroeder stated that the vision for the area appears good but expressed his concerns with having the public sector be involved. Ms. CuvIELLO stated that the private sector involvement would be ideal but that the existing store has many hurdles such as septic, containments and the size of the lot, for an individual to overcome. She further stated that redevelopment with private sector involvement has historically worked well.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that the purpose of the redevelopment designation is so that the city can provide guidance rather than selling the properties outright with little control.

Mr. Schroeder asked if the city had a time frame and if there was a danger of losing the Post Office. He was informed that the Post Office would remain with it agreeing to bring in a temporary trailer if necessary. The city has offered the area by City Hall should it be needed.

The city is hoping for a 30 – 60 day time frame to get through the process of redevelopment approval and then a Developed interested in the site would negotiate with the city for the actual building.

Dave Applett stated that he is the person who is interested in reopening Port Store. He was, in fact under contract, but thought it was prudent to withdraw due to the property issues. He stated that the declining sales of the site would require low overhead and the needed repairs would make it difficult to recoup the expenses. He said the well was tested and was ok. He further stated that the septic tank had been replaced.

Mr. Fitzgerald reiterated that the only issue of this meeting was whether or not the area needs redevelopment. The city wants a plan that works.

Closed to the public.

Mr. Horas asked if the Board has the right to eliminate the possibility of a private individual opening Port Store.

Again, Mr. Fitzgerald stressed that the issue of the meeting is to decide if the area is in need of redevelopment. City Council decides what happens, not the Board. They can choose to include or exclude Port Store.

The possibility of rehabbing Port Store is not off the table – it could and should be discussed in Step 2. The goal of redevelopment is to make any development easier.

A motion was made to recommend to City Council that this area is in need of redevelopment. Motion was carried by unanimous roll call vote.

Honey & Sweets – Steve Allgeyer was in attendance to present his findings regarding possible parking solutions at the farm market. Mr. Van Daley was not at the site when he visited. He provided a picture of a sign similar to the one proposed at Honey & Sweets noting the it had space to have cars drive around it. There is 26.6 feet available from the road to the edge of the stand with 46' 6" road frontage with parking for 10 cars. There does not appear to be an ideal solution to avoid cars backing onto the road.

NEW BUSINESS - none

CORRESPONDENCE

Letter received regarding the City's Master Plan and need for the city to change its definition of forestry to coincide with Pinelands. Mr. Fitzgerald to check into the matter and make a recommendation to City Council on wording.

Letter of Interpretation Request for Marionski, Block 29 Lot 2 received.

BILLS – On the motion of Mayor Giberson, second of Mr. Horas and carried by unanimous role call vote to pay the secretary.

ADJOURNMENT – On the motion of Mayor Giberson, second of Ms. Reigel and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:43 PM.

Respectively submitted,

Vicki L. Cantell
Board Secretary