Minutes of the Town of Huntersville Planning Board

The Town of Huntersville Planning Board met at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 1, 2023.

Call to Order/Roll Call
Chairman Sny called the special meeting to order at 6:00 pm.
Present: J. Sny, F. Gammon, S. Swanick, S. Hensley, C. Boyd, J. Wright, T. Loomis, J. Henson, & G. Baber (arrived at 6:12 p.m.)

Approval of Minutes
No minutes to approve

Public Comments
Gatewood Campbell, 104 Interlaken Place encouraged the Planning Board to vote yes to the Downtown Plan. She indicated she was a member of the Downtown Plan Steering Committee. She commented on the unanimous vote of the Steering Committee to the plan presented before them, the 15 meetings and 3 public forums that the Steering Committee attended in addition to the research and homework that went into a complete due diligence of what is presented to the Planning Board. She thanked the Downtown Plan members and Planning Staff.

Elaine Kerns, 301 Hillcrest Drive was also a member of the Downtown Plan Steering Committee. She commented that this is a good plan and when the Committee began there were members interested in low/medium density and other members that wanted a medium/high density. The draft plan represents a medium density which was also what most of the public forum comments were in support of consisting of 3-4 story buildings to fit in a village concept with more density in the immediate downtown area and then spreading out. All members knew that big change would be needed, and all members were open to that. She expressed her desire to see the Planning Board lend their support to the Downtown Plan with their vote.

Lee Hallman, 100 Cambridge Road was Vice-Chair of the Downtown Plan Steering Committee. He opened with comments regarding the proposed amendment related to shopfront/mixed-use commercial and non-residential percentages. He commented on the recently approved project that resulted in 22% of commercial which led to the proposed amendment to address the definition. He stated that since commercial is what we need the most the proposed percentage was to give us a buffer so that when it came to conditional rezoning it would provide more leeway. He stated that he does not think we want to allow the market forces to dictate the need for commercial real estate in our downtown, this is the purpose of regulation through the community plan and appointed Boards.

Lee continued regarding the Downtown Plan stating that the Board chose the Steering Committee from local area residents and members of the business community which allowed the Committee to consider the issues in full context, the pros, and cons and which led to the decision that was reached to support this level of the plan. Once the members of the Committee understood the process and role of the Committee, they were able to identify that the medium density plan was the best plan that came together over the 13 months that the Committee met. Some areas of contention were the East-West connector, which was proposed prior to the traffic study, was not a traffic solution but to give the

Downtown the matrix needed to work it out. It was to back end a street system that was developed 50-75 years ago. On the East-West connector no 'side' wanted to see that developed. Sarah McAulay made a motion against it. The East-West connector idea leads you to ask what is east, what is west, what is the line of demarcation. If this is the railroad tracks and crossing those tracks is not part of the proposed connection, then it is not helping traffic east to west. A regional traffic study was encouraged to do a study of traffic coming through Town. He then made himself available to answer any questions the Board may have related to the Downtown Plan.

F. Gammon asked if the Board is allowed to ask members of the Downtown Plan questions. J. Glass, Town Attorney indicated questions should be directed to staff.

Action Agenda

Item 4A: Discuss 2023 Downtown Master Plan https://www.letsplanhuntersville.org/downtown-plan-project-details

Chairman Sny thanked the Downtown Plan Steering Committee and staff for all of their hard work on this plan. He then commented that the areas and priority of discussion for this meeting are based on the topics for concern submitted by each Board member.

The first area of concern for discussion is Gilead Road widening.

S. Swanick commented that if the Planning Board wants to strongly encourage that this not happen perhaps wording should be included in the motion to call this item out. Staff confirmed that the Plan currently states not to widen Gilead Road to a 6-lane road.

F. Gammon commented that he agrees with the Steering Committee's recommendation. A 6-lane road would not be pedestrian and bike-friendly for crossing. Chairman Sny agreed.

G. Baber commented that all concerns expressed to the Board around Town are related to traffic so while he is not in favor of the Gilead widening, he is hesitant to simply walk away from the funds. Alternatively, he would propose considering option C to work with NCDOT to not lose the funds and repurpose them in other areas that may ultimately provide impact on Gilead without requiring the currently proposed widening.

The second area of concern was the East-West connector.

F. Gammon commented that the Downtown Plan is a guide, not a concrete solution. He does not have a problem with how the Steering Committee chose to present the East-West connector in the Plan. The only question he has is if the proposed connector would affect private landholders/homeowners. Staff confirmed that the East-West connector is part of the plan with contingencies.

G. Baber stated that in his opinion the East-West connector priority primary contingency is not crossing the railroad, it is connecting Statesville and Old Statesville. If that is the consensus, then he does not see the need for the contingencies.

The Board had discussion regarding the contingencies as outlined, which segment triggers which segment, and recommended wording changes to identify Segment A more clearly as an independent street. Staff confirmed segment A is an independent road. Segment B can only happen if CMS approves, and segment C can only happen if Norfolk-Southern approves the railroad crossing. Staff indicated the language on the quadrant map is an abbreviated summary. On page 4 of the Plan the details related to the contingency are fully spelled out.

The Board had conversation about the importance of calling out specific items to prioritize in the Downtown Plan and/or create an action plan. Staff responded that the Steering Committee had similar concerns from day one the Plan would be implemented. Through the 13-month process certain topics rose to the top with the Committee. Within the Plan, the Potential Key Catalytic Projects highlights those topics on a schedule by year as prioritized by the discussion of the Steering Committee. Staff will then submit a budget request for the items identified for 2023-24 now and if approved could be funded as early as July 1, 2023. The Town Board ultimately will prioritize these projects based on all budget requests and the needs of the Town.

The Board had discussion regarding the proposed roads, priorities, what potential timeline these changes may require. Staff reviewed there are a vast number of events that would need to happen that will ultimately affect how these roads will or will not ultimately be prioritized and funded.

The third area of concern were pedestrian friendly regarding walkability, bike ability, and greenway access. The fourth area of concern were streetscapes, signage, parking, and possible traffic calming measures.

The Board agreed that the Plan addresses sidewalks, bike paths, references to the Greenway committee, signage at the roundabouts listed under Mobility covered these area concerns.

F. Gammon asked if Staff felt that on-street parking was recommended sufficiently within the Plan. Staff stated on-street parking is recommended in the Plan however it should be noted these recommendations are for NCDOT roads.

F. Gammon asked Staff to review the proposed parking recommendations and expressed concern regarding potential parking sprawl. Staff agreed that ideally there would be convenient shared parking and a parking deck would likely take a public/private partnership which is depicted in the plan.

Chairman Sny asked the Board if there were any other questions or topics, they would like to discuss related to the Downtown Plan.

T. Loomis asked if the building height would create any limitations on a possible hotel which may be a good fit. Staff responded that hotels are currently being approved at 3-4 stories and could work in the Town Center zoning.

F. Gammon asked if overhead versus buried lines needs to be addressed in the Plan. Staff stated it does not need necessarily need to be called out in the plan. It is the Town's policy to have lines transitioned to underground when it is redeveloped. The Town Board could also choose to prioritize that transition if they choose.

F. Gammon asked how the existing neighborhoods identified on the "Living Key Recommendations" within the plan should be called out for protection. Staff responded that not changing the zoning on those properties would be the protection. F. Gammon commented that since these neighborhoods would be the most severely impacted by the development of the quarter-mile area of Downtown it may be good to provide a level of protection to those specific neighborhoods. He provided Pottstown as an example.

F. Gammon asked how the proposed stormwater location in the southeast quadrant would work with the existing Huntersville Assisted Living Center. Staff responded that that is the geographical location based on topography but there would have to be a willing seller to make that happen. Staff will be submitting a budget request to do a regional stormwater pond study.

The Board continued their discussion with staff on various aspects of the plan and next steps.

Chairman Sny said he would like to take a straw poll of the Board to determine their interest in emphasizing the statements of the Steering Committee regarding not widening Gilead Road within the motion of the Planning Board.

S. Swanick said he would like to take a straw poll of the Board to determine their interest in reemphasizing East-West connector by showing the road in the plan with no contingencies.

S. Hensley commented that he is in favor of making a recommendation and prioritizing action items and expressed concern over having different recommendations then what is the plan now versus having participated in the Steering Committee from day one.

G. Baber asked what the purpose of the Planning Board is if their simply supposed to recommend or deny what they have been given. If the Planning Board just wants to say look at the East-West connector further in the motion that may be sufficient since it seems like the contingencies are not necessary.

Chairman Sny commented that the contingencies seem to be valuable since the East-West connector are hinged on large events and it is within the plan in the way the Steering Committee agreed to. S. Swanick commented that he would like to see the East-West connector return to the Downtown Plan as a planned road and for the Planning Board to take a vote for/against that change.

Chairman Sny requested the Board come prepared at the next Planning Board regarding the last items and to move forward with a motion.

Other Business
No other business.

Adjourn
Motion: C. Boyd made a Motion to Adjourn. S. Swanick seconded the motion.
Vote: The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

Approved this 28 day of FEBRUARY 2023.

Chairman or Vice Chairman

Board Secretary