

Minutes
October 19, 2017
Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee

Present

Craig Piper, Chairperson
Robert Foster
Councilor Sue Henderson
Councilor Eben Rose
Barry Lucier
Barbara Psychos
Melaine Wiker
Gwen Hiatt
David Hiatt
Kathleen Egan
Quang Nguyen
Eric Flynn, Big Babe's
Jennifer Arps, Big Babe's
Matt Provencal, Big Babe's
Ginger Cote, Big Babe's

Staff and Guests

Tex Haeuser

1. Welcome

Chairperson Craig Piper welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The following documents were provided:

- Tonight's agenda and minutes from the July 20th meeting
- Initial Knightville Planning Considerations document
- City Council Workshop document dated June 12, 2017, from City Manager Scott Morelli
- An email from Peter Stanton (10-3-17)
- An email from Eben Rose (10-19-17)

2. Adoption of the Minutes

Bob Foster motioned to accept the July 20, 2017, minutes. Barry Lucier seconded; unanimous approval

3. Completing the West End Master Plan and Zoning

Tex explained that the meeting is open ended and a chance to step back and review. It's the beginning of a new cycle for the Committee. He went over the email from Councilor Rose with basic questions for the Committee. He also hopes to talk about Knightville tonight because the team from Big Babe's, who is looking to redevelop the Griffin Club, is in attendance.

Committee members reviewed the success of the West End Master Plan and zoning. He reviewed the process of choosing the team from GPCOG and their effective citizen engagement strategy.

Tex reviewed Councilor Rose's email. The Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2012 and the idea was that, unlike the previous plan, there would be an official committee that would oversee, guide, direct, and ensure implementation of recommendations in the Plan. He showed Chapter 8 with tables that lay out different recommendations and who should do what and when. Initially, the Committee was empowered by the Council. Councilors are appointed, but members of the committee are selected between Tex and the City Manager based on different factors. Over four years now, the aspect of different members representing different groups and parts in the City has slipped. The West End project encouraged people from that area to join. Similarly, there is adherence to the recommendations—they worked on Thornton Heights, Mill Creek, and the West End as recommended in the Comp Plan. In the beginning, they also worked on other aspects such as environmental regulations, but for the last couple years it has been work on Master Plans for different areas. He suggested that the Committee may need a Council Workshop in consideration of what they should do going forward. It has gotten flexible to meet the needs of projects and maybe it's gotten too flexible.

4. What's Next: Knightville – Scope of Development/5. A Current Knightville Project

Craig P. said the question now that the West End Master Plan is finished is what area to focus on next. Knightville is the area they may need to revisit because of the recent development proposal from the Housing Authority. He asked if there is something to address how the area relates to the Comp Plan. He mentioned the email from Peter about the Shipyard District, which he thinks is worthy of reviewing.

Tex explained that there was a Council Workshop on June 12th precipitated by the Housing Authority project and begged the question—the way it came forward and what was proposed, does something different need to be done to land use regulations in Knightville? He reviewed the “Possible Alternatives to Consider” on page 6 of the City Council Workshop, June 12th, document from City Manager Scott Morelli, stating that most Councilors chose #6: Have the Comp Plan Implementation Committee work on a master plan for the corridor. He is not sure if a literal master plan or planning is appropriate and is something to discuss. He mentioned to the City Manager that there are people on the Committee that are not convinced Knightville should be next. He has tried to suggest a range of things for Knightville and the first thing will be to figure out the scope. It could be a large project that requires a consulting firm or a shorter, less involved approach. He recalled that after the Housing Authority situation, there were people who told him that if they stuck within zoning, they probably would have been okay. He thinks they may want and need to do a major planning effort in Knightville.

Sue said that from the meeting, she understood that people like the 2005 plan and that has been incorporated into the 2012 plan. They were upset by Housing Authority having a neighborhood meeting and showing drawings that changed commercial and residential zoning and implying that was what developers wanted. Her take is that people like what's in Knightville—the height, the zoning, traffic is a concern, density gets people upset relating to traffic. She thinks there's a great fear that high developments will drive out small houses; that would be economically

profitable for developers and residents feel like they have an uphill battle. They're not against progress and development but they have a nice neighborhood and want to keep it.

Residents discussed the idea of wanting to play with what is there and to preserve. They described the area as a village.

Eben spoke about the impressiveness of the West End engagement strategy. The important lesson was that no engagement plan is perfect. Theirs was open ended and used different approaches; the goal was to keep trying different things and see what happens. They left the question open. This is a difference in approach between the Housing Authority and the West End master plan. The engagement idea behind comprehensive planning isn't yes or no. He suggested taking time to decide what an engagement plan would look like. He believes there is enough talent without hiring someone to do it for them. He spoke about how Knightville as a mix of commercial and residential and there may be competing interests. He spoke about stakeholders, inhabitants, and businesses. Identifying stakeholders creates selection of different groups and gives extra voice. The West End did something helpful—it didn't get into rigorous statistical weighting of votes. It had many mechanisms by which people could voice concerns.

Sue said it's always been residential and business and they've always been able to get along. In a community, it's critical to have win-win solutions. You don't want winners and losers—everyone can have everything they want. It's important to have all voices heard and considered. She spoke about the four story building on Waterman and how it was approved even though the limit was supposed to be three stories. She doesn't remember the Planning Board action but at the Council meeting, the room was filled with Knightville residents. Council put it through and it makes you wonder if the neighborhood has any say.

Craig P. asked what is wrong with what's there today.

Eben said it's because proposed changes came to the City; maybe there's nothing wrong but the talk of an engagement plan can be about what the process is for a developer who wants to do "x." If it's outside of zoning and the Comp Plan, it's an opportunity for the developer to engage the public.

Tex recapped the conversation so far and said the questions to answer are: Is the Comp Plan guideline for Knightville, in particular the Ocean Street corridor? Is the corridor recommendation adequate? Is it written in such a way that it makes clear that there's a high hurdle for a developer to try to obtain a zone change? How hard does the Comp Plan make it to come and have a zone change in Knightville? Is the existing zoning acceptable in Knightville? The basic recommendation is to keep the existing zoning.

Jennifer asked if they noticed a parking impairment due to the Griffin Club being open.

Melanie said there was only a handful of people. She worries if it's a big to-do. They put down 32 spaces on Waterman Drive for employees to park in, and no one parks there. It hurts the businesses. The problem is they don't think about the parking—it doesn't make sense for the amount of people coming in. It's helpful to have people park in the appropriate places.

Jennifer said they have been working on the business plan for Big Babe's. They won't open until lunch. The core group they anticipate are people already parked and working in the area; people at night are probably within walking distance. They don't anticipate a ton of people, but more of a "village feel." She believes there is an influx of residential without the influx of things like stores and restaurants. Residents have to drive away for those things. Their goal is to serve

the residents of Knightville. She explained the requirement for parking, which is 20 spaces and they only have ten. They checked within the 1500 foot area and cannot find ten additional spaces; Waterman Drive is too far away. This is a business that's the same overall usage and it's almost prohibited to get a new building that meets all requirements.

Eric added that you have to add residential and that adds parking requirements. **Jennifer** said the cost to rebuild just the club alone would be \$1.3 million and only worth about \$650,000 in the end.

Kathleen said there are stakeholders, inhabitants, and business holders, but there are two others: 1) developers and business owners who want in and 2) City government. Pressure comes in the form of Housing Authority—if they went to the City to ask for a zoning change, they are a stakeholder and that's pressure. Residents are happy with what they have—they want 2005 Master Plan development. You get all groups involved and ask what is no longer working, but residents don't necessarily know all of the requirements. They need to look at it as a group. There are businesses who want to be here and can't. She asked what the pressure to develop is—is it the City and the tax base? Where is the pressure coming from?

Tex said Knightville and Ferry Village were key focus areas from the 1970's on. There have been several cycles and revitalization efforts. This area used to be downtown South Portland. They shot themselves in the foot by letting the mall get built, so Knightville declined. Then a new bridge was needed; various people in the City worked to get the federal government to agree to a new bridge and double the length and cost by rerouting it. With that there was a feeling that the potential of Mill Creek and Knightville should be realized. It was to be a mixed-use neighborhood—more businesses would allow more people to live in the area. People would walk and enjoy the waterfront. There's been a basic assumption that you have the Ocean Street corridor of business and residential distinct from letter street, single-family with some multi-family residents. They are not looking to make money out of Knightville. Cities need to realize the potential of their downtowns. You are doing a disservice to tax payers if you're not trying to realize the basic potential. There's potential for better without bad impacts on residents; it's trying to find a balance.

Melanie said it's more basic. The engagement piece has been terrible. People in the neighborhood want to know what's going on and the Housing Authority was like a muscle using the City to gain their way in—there was no conversation.

Tex agrees with Melanie. That was the Housing Authority and not the City. Big Babe's doesn't have an application pending with the City and something doesn't become public until an application is pending. He felt that he could stretch that here by having their team in attendance tonight.

Eric said they've been attending community meetings and Knightville was specifically chosen for what they thought they could bring. Listening to this conversation, not all developers are the same. They want to communicate. **Jennifer** said this is to take the Griffin Club down and put up a new building that is up to code. Current code is four stories, and the firm made it three stories with the fourth story is set back. It's tastefully done.

Kathleen welcomes another business; a lively city has a balance. She said any business can walk into Planning and have a plan reviewed; as residents, you read newspapers and talk. She asked if a review would be done on a case by case basis with every business application or if it is time to

look at the Plan. Do they really need more cars and parking? There are places to park that aren't within 1500 feet.

Plans for Big Babe's were passed around. The Committee discussed the purpose of reviewing parking requirements. If they are servicing those who live in the area and a few from out of the area, is there a need for designated parking?

Tex said they don't need to have a conversation every time. They have some ability in those regards—he spoke about the Knightville design district.

Ginger said there is something special about Knightville. She chose this area for a reason and wants to carry the spirit of the Griffin Club, but it needs to change. Structural engineers told her it was impossible to save the building, which was against what she originally wanted. She found the right architect. She cares about the neighborhood and loves it here. She would like a neighborhood bar with locally sourced food that's affordable.

The Big Babe's team clarified that there are enough parking spots for the residents, it is public parking they are looking for. The group talked about why public can't park on the street. Up until now, it's been in zoning that there has to be a number of off-street parking spaces required.

Sue said they need to talk about these things—with good dialog, ideas may come up.

Tex suggested having a professional facilitator come to a couple meetings to help positive discussion.

Barry said they've had good discussion and to regroup, it sounds like they've settled on the decision to stick with Knightville. Based on discussion, they will need to decide what the approach will be. He discussed two phases, a public engagement effort to determine the needs and examining the Comp Plan and last Master Plan for Knightville. It sounds like this is a really engaged community with a large turnout at public meetings and/or online, and that is a lot of work and effort to facilitate and analyze. He thinks a facilitator would probably be a good idea.

Craig P. said that's a good summary. He hesitates with what questions they're asking. It makes sense for Big Babe's but what makes sense across the street? The Village Commercial makes sense for that goal but if it doesn't fit with the business plan. The question he's always asked is what development fits on the lot with the current regulations. Having a current project with an issue highlighted is important to help know and understand what the issues in the area are.

Tex asked if the zoning was rigorous or light compared to other cities. **Eric** said it was in the middle.

David still hasn't heard "why Knightville." This is one business with one particular problem.

Tex asked if the Big Babe's team has a time frame to figure out the issues before they walk away. He also passed out information from the Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel. Potential for looking at an example of redevelopment is looking at Martin's Point. They could be brought in to look at what could be done on that site within existing zoning and if something could be done that would pencil out from a financial point of view.

Eric said they've done research financially, architecturally. They've hit the point of what makes it economically viable. As for timing—the condition is not getting any better, and it will get

worse unheated over the winter. It is unsafe to heat. There is also moisture damage to the structure. There is a timing concern; they cannot finance demolition without approval.

Jennifer said they need 20 spaces and are still looking for ten. They could do the restaurant and bar or residences but not both. Having residences only will take away the restaurant and the livelihood is gone. With just the club, the position is where it's \$1.3 million to build and only worth half. It's not economically feasible.

Eben spoke about form-based zoning, where the idea is similar to regular zoning but abstracts the goals of what residents/stakeholders want in their neighborhood. The question still is how to deal with parking—is there language to be tweaked in zoning that's not just number of cars but perhaps a distinction between daytime and nighttime parking that could help?

Sue said they should go to the Board for an easement for the ten cars and get started. They should talk about Knighville more generally—where can you find more parking? This is parking for restaurant, not residents.

Craig P. said Peter Stanton always mentions Portland, where you don't think about parking and walking far. Another place to review is their Mill Creek work and alternate plan development.

6. Comments from the Public

None

7. Round Robin

Tex thinks there will be other properties wanting to redevelop. They are trying to get to a place where they don't have to have a controversy every time and owners know the deal. Maybe they can achieve a balance.

Barry asked where things are with the metro corridor study. **Tex** said there have been two public Smart Corridor meetings and a third on Thursday November 2nd.

Eben thanked Dana for taking the notes and keeping a record of the meetings.

Kathleen said it's been interesting and it's clear the Knightville Master Plan needs to be looked at. It's wonderful to have citizens and businesses at the table.

Barbara agreed and thanked Big Babe's for coming in.

Melanie said it's a good dialog. Having the City, residents, and businesses together is helpful.

Sue thinks it's a good meeting. Having time to have things on the table makes for win-win solutions.

Quang said coming from the West End project, it's good to have voices heard and from a resident standpoint. It's good for developers to know what's wanted. The City is the bridge to connect.

Gwen said their curiosity has been satisfied as far as Big Babe's. She mentioned that parking for residents is separate from businesses.

David said he's looking forward to Big Babe's.

Eric said this is the first time he's worked in such a nice forum. It's a nice opportunity to share concerns.

Jennifer said she does the finances; it's great that they are open to options.

Matt said these discussions are key and what breeds success. Working in other towns, it's great to work in South Portland. They see this interaction more than in other towns. It makes for happy clients, developers, residents.

Ginger thanked Tex for the invite. Her mind is eased and it's good to talk to people. It's nice to sit here with Planning and the neighborhood and to share intentions. She will do her best to do right by the neighborhood.

Craig thanked everyone for coming. From this work, he is discovering each area in the City and their uniqueness.

8. Adjournment

Bob Foster motioned to adjourn. Barry Lucier seconded; unanimous approval.

Respectfully submitted,
Dana Bettez
10/22/17