

Minutes
February 15, 2018
Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee

Present

Robert Foster
Councilor Adrian Dowling
Caroline Hendry
Peter Stanton
Barry Lucier
Melanie Wiker
Councilor Sue Henderson
Jeff Collins
Stephanie Collins
Rick Knowland
Tom Falby

Staff and Guests

Tex Haeuser
Hannah Holmes, Chair, AHPC

1. Welcome

Acting Chairperson Peter Stanton welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The following documents were provided:

- Minutes from the 10/19/2017 meeting and the agenda for tonight
- Knightville/Mill Creek – Downtown South Portland Community Design Workshop Final Report (2005)
- Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan (2005)
- A portion of the Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 6 (2012)
- A zoning map and portion of Chapter 27 from the City’s Code of Ordinances (Section 27-710 through 27-579)

2. Adoption of the Minutes

Bob Foster motioned to adopt the **October 19, 2017, minutes. Barry Lucier** seconded. **Unanimous approval.**

3. Knightville Planning Scope and Process

Review of Past Knightville Planning and Current Zoning

Tex introduced the item. He stated that after the South Portland Housing proposal for Martin’s Point, City Council asked them to look at Knightville for some sort of a Master Plan, update, or zoning revision. The history of planning and policy development in the area is important to review. There has been no other part of the City with this amount of attention paid to it. It is

permissible to change outstanding policy but it should be done consciously, so they need a foundation and understanding of what came before.

He began reviewing the Growth Plan from the 1980's. This paid some attention to Knightville, noting it was once the primary shopping district until Mill Creek happened. The policy stated that zoning should be examined and noted obstacles to redevelopment.

The 1992 Comprehensive Plan was reviewed, in which they were getting ready for the new bridge. This plan stated that many stores in the area are destination-oriented and will have to be this way once the bridge is finished with little to no drive-by traffic. This is an opportune time to reinstate two-way streets in some or all of the area. It mentioned a public parking lot. There was intent to improve the area's destination draw for the benefit of existing and future merchants without jeopardizing the residential neighborhood.

He reviewed the 1995 Neighborhood Plan, stating it was more traffic-oriented than anything else. There was a fear that Knightville would die. They are now benefitting from the foresight and hard work from the 1970's and 80's to shift commuting traffic out of the neighborhood. Work and recommendations of the advisory committee were documented. Words like "pedestrian friendly," "highly livable," and "mixed use" were used to describe the area. Mill Creek was secure as a community retail center and Knightville was described as an urban village with a mixture of residential and business. As a result of this, they received the roundabout, a ramp to the new bridge, and Thomas Knight Park. The zoning read as highly livable but nonconformity was an obstacle.

He then reviewed the May 25, 2005, Knightville/Mill Creek – Downtown South Portland Community Design Workshop Final Report. He reviewed the teams' Assets & Liabilities. The most important positive qualities to build on included: abundance of parks and open space; critical mass of civic buildings; traditional mixed-use character and scale of the downtown; traditional residential neighborhood pattern and scale; and connection to the waterfront. The most serious problems to overcome included: Broadway creates a barrier between the civic access and isolates Knightville from adjacent neighborhoods; the Mill Creek "box" commercial development is unattractive, hostile to pedestrians, and does not link well to Knightville; the green spaces are not well linked to each other; key parcels are underutilized or should be used for a greater public purpose; and access to and development of the waterfront is hampered. Emerging urban design principles included: bridge to the Broadway barrier, link open spaces, integrate Mill Creek, strengthen civic identity, preserve and enhance Knightville's downtown character, and capitalize on the waterfront location. Lastly, he reviewed ideas for each design principle. Pedestrian friendly and pedestrian links were important ideas, along with attractive and designed streetscapes and ideas for roads and parking.

The next piece was the October 2005 Knightville Mill Creek Neighborhood Master Plan. He reviewed the Vision Statement, which included ideas about living comfortably without a car, easy access to shops, services, and amenities and a variety of parks, open space, and trails, and a place where history is recovered, preserved, and enhanced. It also spoke to parking solutions, multi-level structures, and taller and denser commercial and residential developments.

He reviewed Zoning, where the vision was, "to maintain and improve Knightville as an amenity-rich, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly urban village with a balance between residential and business uses such that businesses have a built-in base of customers and residents are able to find a satisfying range of goods and services within walking distance." He explained the period of

time, beginning in the 90's, where they incrementally adjusted zoning. In 1997, the Knightville Design District was created. He reviewed the Emerging Urban Design Principles and subsequent workshop ideas. The last part of the document included Strategies for Improvement, which included: 1- Improve pedestrian flow and enable alternative transportation, 2- Enrich the area's aesthetics, 3- Amend zoning provisions, 4- Establish a downtown Tax Increment Financing district, 5- Ensure parking capacity meets projected needs, 6- Create a more dynamic civic core, and 7- Capitalize on waterfront opportunities.

The final document was the current 2012 Comprehensive Plan. He reviewed page 6-3, Key Land Use Policy Areas, 1. Knightville/Mill Creek, and noted that there is a section within the Plan that says this Plan supersedes all plans before it.

Sue asked about the first and second sentences under B. Land Use, The Knightville residential neighborhood (the letter streets) (page 6-4), particularly the part that states, "The zoning should be revised to maintain the existing scale and character of neighborhood *except as part of an approved redevelopment plan.*" **Tex** said that over the years, some people in the letter streets have expressed interest in selling property for redevelopment. Two or three properties could be put together and made a into a small brownstone-style development. This may be allowed, but needs to meet design standards. He understands if people are concerned about that. They would have to go for a zone change, and would be a significant process. This is to say the Plan wouldn't completely rule out the possibility but made it a high hurdle.

He reviewed the existing zoning and map handout. The map shows that Ocean is the "spine" of the VC district, along with the parcel that is 100 Waterman. He explained that VR is similar to the G zone. VE is more recent. He expressed to the Committee that there are encouraging signs coming from the Shaw's property owner. Two different architects who the owner has asked to put together a plan for them to consider has spoken with Tex.

He reviewed each district: Village Commercial, Village Extension, and Village Residential, focusing on Space and Bulk. He noted that the Planning Board is starting to receive projects that need to meet design standards and explained how they use a third-party peer review engineer.

Caroline asked if a historical plaque will be put in Big Babe's for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. **Tex** said he and Mr. Puleo are encouraging them to do so.

He explained that for decades, the policy has been that Knightville is a place for the City—a downtown, village center—as well as a place for a local neighborhood. Liberalized zoning has enabled some redevelopment while using various regulatory schemes to limit impacts. From staff's recent experience with zoning, it seems that existing zoning is deficient in that given the size of lots left, the only redevelopment that will occur is if they do a few number of residential units and units that are expensive. It doesn't seem possible to get affordable housing. It's difficult to get redevelopment—they haven't seen any live/work spaces with residential on the ground floor behind work spaces. Parking is a constraint for redevelopment.

The Arts & Historic Preservation Committee would like to survey Knightville property owners for an interest in becoming part of a historic district. The Committee began discussion and is looking to learn more. More recently is the the Climate Action and Resiliency Plan from Julie Rosenbach. This is a plan jointly with Portland that has to do with climate-related planning in waterfront areas and looking at impacts from sea level rise. This is something you get into trying

to develop open space along shorefront in parks. He spoke about flooding around Mill Creek Park.

Peter asked about history between Mill Creek and Knightville. When they looked at Mill Creek, VE was based on what's already in place in Knightville—it was used as a model. He asked if these types of buildings are still an effective way to go. **Tex** said they're here to talk about this because: 1- the neighborhood is tired of having to fight development proposals and would like to get to a point where there's confidence that zoning will be followed and buildings that conform will provide good services and be beneficial and 2- There is the economics of the lots that are left. Bigger lots were done earlier. Once they cut parking in half for non-residential uses, there were a couple places that were able to develop into apartments or condos with parking tucked underneath or in the back. Now, they are left with smaller lots. One would like to see redevelopment occur but the economics are becoming hard.

Sue mentioned Robert Whyte's comment at the short term rental Council meeting about the neighborhood versus economic value of land. This is the driving issue here because the land could, if developed for economic value, make megabucks. There's pressure to change zoning to build high and residents are just in the way. This is how she perceives the problem. It started out as a blue collar neighborhood. Now, people would like to stay in their homes and don't want a four-story behind them. There will be voracious developers—not that development shouldn't happen—but is the economic value of their land the best value? Are they going to allow people who aren't rich to live in South Portland?

The group talked about gentrification and how many houses in the area have sold for high prices and/or have been done over. They also spoke about the highest economic value being in higher buildings. **Tex** mentioned that staff is not pushing for work on this area—the Martin's Point situation brought them here.

Peter asked the group to consider what happened in Munjoy Hill to be a cautionary tale, or if it's desirable economic growth.

Melanie said she's concerned for Munjoy Hill as she is Knightville. People are struggling—working three or four jobs to stay in the neighborhood. There's been so much change; they can handle it sometimes, but they can't handle a lot of it.

Peter said the flip side is if you bought a house and it becomes worth something, it is helpful to you when you're retired. At some point you sell it and it funds something. As a neighborhood, do you want to constrain that potential so that your investment isn't worth as much because you have restrictive zoning? How do you balance it?

Jeff said that home prices will rise, but if there are plans in place so people don't buy to build a huge building, there's some limit. He hopes they can maintain the character of the neighborhood.

Sue is afraid that they could be creating a cycle and that non-wealthy people deserve to live here.

Peter said part of creating affordable housing is four stories—maybe more—but they dealt with this in Mill Creek where they created opportunities for more stories and intentionally ramped it down towards Knightville.

Caroline said no one is against affordable housing. Six stories was the problem.

Tex said one way to go with this project is a Master Plan route to look at some properties like Martin's Point or ones next to the Griffin Club and get a designer for sketches to see what would be an acceptable scale and appearance. They would also go through economics. This could give a sense of things and help get more refined in figuring out the problem. Or is it that the group isn't interested in additional development and want a moratorium?

Peter said they're getting pubs and coffee and shops. Things are opening over time. **Tex** said zoning has worked for some. **Caroline** said that CIA has made a huge difference and is probably one of the engines but it causes parking problems. There's plenty of parking but it's not always convenient.

Tex said they're keeping track and are making Big Babe's do a study for sufficient parking. He also mentioned the possibility of having the Urban Land Institute (ULI) do a technical assistance panel. It's \$5000 from the City, but they send in experts and look at properties to see alternative developments.

Sue mentioned Thornton Heights and traffic. If they want diversity, how do they do it?

Tex said in Portland, they have mandatory inclusionary zoning with a housing trust fund. When developers choose to make a cash payment, those funds are used to pull down the cost of market rate units to create more affordable housing. They could amend the downtown TIF district for a similar purpose.

Sue asked about traffic. **Tex** said that a car going by every 60 seconds is what you get out of 60 units. There is less traffic from these kinds of projects. **Sue** agreed, but the perception of a house and a yard should be peaceful and quiet but it's not.

Tex said the way the West End Master Plan developed was cool because it was project-specific. Maybe they don't go comprehensively with zoning but focus on the Martin's Point lot. It will turn into something—what would the neighborhood want?

Melanie thinks they should look at more than just that parcel. **Caroline** asked how many are left and **Tex** said maybe six along Ocean Street. **Peter** noted that some could be revitalized.

Tex mentioned form-based code like Portland and India St.

Most serious problems to be addressed; objectives

Martin's Point and other parcels with potential

It's constricted. Would it make sense to move the line so it follows the properties? **Tex** said abutting residents would want solid buffering requirements. The group talked about effects of tall buildings near homes.

Affordable housing couldn't work for the Martin's Point property because the building needed to be taller and parking was an issue, but why hasn't someone put in a three-story building with offices? **Rick** said it's because someone spent money with a building that doesn't work. People want retail and upper story residential. That site is an existing building. He thinks prototype development may be a good in this area along with other properties to serve as a model. Looking at the area, Martin's Point sticks out as one that needs attention. There may be a few other lots.

Adrian thinks that they should look at the top three properties with the most potential and most importance.

Tex said they are considering going halves with people up to a certain amount on mini-Master Plans.

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Peter said they came to Knightville based on developers reaching out. Are residents concerned development isn't fast enough, or is it too fast?

Caroline would like seeing Martin's Point. **Melanie** asked why they can't still have something like Martin's Point there. **Jeff** said he feels that people felt appropriate development was fine within certain limits. For example, if it didn't change the character and had enough parking.

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Melanie asked if they can look at what types of businesses they'd like in the area. **Tex** said yes, is possible to try to incentivize. They could amend the TIF to provide tax rebates or development for things they want.

Parking

The group discussed residential sticker parking.

Tex said an intermediate parking solution would be what they recommended for Cottage Road—striping out allowed spaces on Ocean and letter streets. In doing that, they would keep spaces back from driveways. Going to stickers is an abandonment of a village downtown policy.

The group discussed one hour parking and the need for management of that—hiring someone with a salary and benefits.

Melanie spoke about getting together with local businesses to incentivize employee parking on Waterman.

Sue said that some business owners said women didn't feel comfortable walking at night. Another issue is icy sidewalks in the winter.

Tex mentioned an LED lighting pilot coming to E Street. They will be testing color temperatures of different lights.

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Peter asked if 50' enough for economically viable development. **Tex** said it has to be. It should be and politically it's impossible to go higher.

The group talked about an article from Josh Reny about the idea that maybe you can't provide parking. They discussed housing for people who are okay with not having a car or a lot of space, such as millennials and seniors. Sue asked if the City could make a steep tax on second cars.

Direction: Prototypes and ULI Panel

Tex asked if the group wants him to explore looking at three properties and prototyping development. There is a cost to his, along with upfront work for him, but it's in a downtown TIF and he can find out if there's money available

Adrian asked if the ULI panel is worth it. **Tex** said it depends on who they get; they come for a day. Will the City be concerned about an out-of-stater giving advice?

Tex said that each prototype could have scenarios—one could be smaller units with restrictions relative to car ownership. What the group would get out of hiring someone from ULI would be gaining designs. They could also hire a local architect and designer/developer.

Cost

Peter asked the Councilors their thoughts on cost for this project.

Adrian assumed that a Knightville Master Plan would cost money. He thinks other members of Council would understand that. **Sue** looks at big picture and then pulls pieces together. She's not sure she's ready to commit to \$5000 tonight. She would like them to get more structured first. She likes the idea of three prototype properties and figuring out the problems.

Peter said other plans talked more than development on a few properties—things that the City can do. He hates to spend a lot of time and money and not consider that. Bike trails, waterfront access, flooding and sea level are things that interest him.

4. Round Robin

Each group member discussed a challenge and opportunity during their Round Robin.

Barry thinks parking is a problem and an opportunity will be the redevelopment of Martin's Point.

Sue spoke about developing a healthy community in line with the Comprehensive Plan versus the most buck that can be made as the opportunity and problem.

Bob thinks the problem will be overcoming mindsets in this community. There are a lot of people who have taken up the mindset of the way it used to be. An opportunity will be to get people in the area involved, including long-term residents.

Jeff agrees that the challenge is around parking and traffic. The opportunity will be to maintain residential character and create additions that are not going to have negative effects.

Stephanie thinks the problem will be trying to work with increasing density. She views Knightville as the hub. She spoke about the opportunity for more transportation options, walkability, and accessibility.

Adrian thinks growth will be a challenge. It can be appealing but people don't always anticipate the challenges of growth. He thinks it's true about understanding and working with cultural attitudes. An opportunity is community engagement. A challenge and opportunity is resiliency planning in terms of sea level rise.

Tex thinks the challenge and opportunity is that there are properties along Ocean for which it would be good to redevelop into something different to meet a variety of objectives. Current zoning won't enable it to happen based on economics of development.

Tom agrees with Bob and Sue. Gentrification is going to be a big challenge. There's a potential to leave people dissatisfied. As for opportunities, he is personally interested in climate change architecture. He spoke about potential niche manufacturing in the area—manufacturing onsite with small-scale retail and a larger online presence.

Melanie thinks there's incentive for businesses to have GWI throughout all of Knightville. She thinks they will need to be mindful in Knightville—just because a developer comes with cash doesn't mean they need to accept them. Getting community involved will be helpful.

Peter thinks neighborhood is fabulous. For Martin's Point, the economy derailed community for a long time. They needed to grow and go to Scarborough. There are interesting things happening organically—he feels that they need to allow it to go forward. He thinks they should protect the letter streets. These houses are being redone, which is positive. He doesn't know that they need to go crazy in order to keep that going.

5. Adjournment

Respectfully submitted,
Dana Bettez
2/16/2018