

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission

Work Session Summary Minutes

March 1, 2021

Virtual Meeting

Approved

April 5, 2021

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Sam Spencer (Chairperson), Keba Samuel (Vice Chairperson), John Fryday, Phillip Gussman, Douglas Welton, Cozzie Watkins, Victoria Nwasike, Erin Barbee, Peter Kelly, Andrew Blumenthal, Astrid Chirinos, and Courtney Rhodes

Commissioner Elizabeth McMillan arrived at 12:09 pm

Commissioner John Ham arrived at 12:18 pm

Planning Staff Present: Taiwo Jaiyeoba (*Planning Director*), Alyson Craig (*Deputy Planning Director*), Candice Rorie, Shavon Davis, Alysia Osborne, Kathy Cornett, Laura Harmon, Kristi Harpst, Alan Goodwin, and Sandra Montgomery

Call to Order & Introductions

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 12:00 pm, welcomed those present and went over the protocols of the virtual meeting.

Minutes and Reports

Approval of February 1, 2021 Work Session Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Barbee and seconded by Commissioner Blumenthal to approve the February 1, 2021 minutes. The vote was unanimous to approve the minutes.

New Business

Unified Development Ordinance Update Comprehensive

Ms. Laura Harmon advised the commission that she would be giving a brief overview on the neighborhood zoning districts but will focus on the special overlay districts. Presenting along with Ms. Harmon was Ms. Kristi Harpst, Program Manager for the Historic District and Arista Strungys, Lead Consultant from Camiros. Ms. Harmon shared a slide presentation and told the commission that she looks forward to the discussion and feedback.

Chairperson Spencer commented there is a perception that neighborhood conservation districts make it harder to deliver affordable units or market rates units within a community. He asked Ms. Harmon to address that and wanted to know more about the thought that has gone into this. Ms. Harmon explained the character of a neighborhood can be viewed from different perspectives for example, a neighborhood character with smaller homes that are being torn down and replaced with larger homes that are not in character; you could argue that possibly, you are making it less affordable. Ms. Harpst added that it is not about the use but all about the box that the new unit fits in, so there is a menu of options. If a neighborhood is concerned about the character of the height or setbacks, they look into that.

Commissioner Kelly thinks RIO (Residential Infill Overlay) is important as it allows you to go in and set a limit to the size and square footage of the unit in a neighborhood. He questioned how does it get applied and how far along does a neighborhood have to be before it is too late.

Ms. Harmon described the difference between community character and RIO. She explained that the RIO could be applied a little more broadly because those are to base standards that would be available for incoming neighborhoods.

Commissioner Gussman commented that he is excited that we have neighborhood character overlay in our city and questioned how close RIO is to the neighborhood character overlay. He asked which would we use first in the progression of an evolution of a neighborhood and are there any examples of where this would be successfully applied. Ms. Harmon replied that RIO can go anywhere within Rte. 4 which is about four miles within the center of town. Both will be based upon council moving forward or the community requesting these. The difference between RIO and the community character overlay is community character overlay is more tailored to what is on the ground and you can look at a number of items; RIO is a more standardized and limited tool that looks at height and building size. She went on to explain the process of both community character overlay and residential infill overlay.

Commissioner Fryday asked if there is a character overlay, who decides that a project meets those overlays so that they can move forward. Ms. Harmon replied that will be alternative zoning standards that planning would review as they do now. Commissioner Fryday said they have an overall goal that they talked about with the UDO that would increase the number of units and provide the diversity of housing in neighborhood one, with the NCOD and the RIO. He asked will they encourage components that would allow that additional number of units. Ms. Harmon answered yes, and the RIO has been written with the intent to make sure that you can still build a duplex or triplex by having a minimum unit size; the goal was to find the balance for more diversity. Ms. Strungys added that RIO does not control the uses. You do have more flexibility and a minimum that you can get for multi-unit buildings and in community character, you are looking at the standards that you are going to tailor for the neighborhood to make sure that you are not purposely doing something that makes it difficult to build a duplex or triplex in those N1 districts.

Commissioner Fryday voiced his concern about the standards, for example a duplex of 3,500 sq ft. units and said that they have to be careful in how the ordinance is written that they get the diversity of housing stock and not the duplication of the current housing stock.

Vice Chairperson Samuel said that it seems like they may be leaving a little too much on the table for interpretation. She asked if the Comprehensive Plan were to be adopted today, when would a neighborhood be able to come forward to initiate the request for the neighborhood character overlay and what should a neighborhood expect in terms of the process. Ms. Harmon anticipates they would not initiate this process until the UDO was in place and implemented. She went on to say that it would probably be about a year process for the community character overlay and developing the plan all the way through adoption, but the question is what kind of demand would they have. Ms. Harpst said the timing would depend on what the neighborhood wants because it is neighborhood dependent and a lot of the process is driven by the neighborhood.

Commissioner McMillan asked how are the neighborhoods defined, and are they defined by certain boundaries of the neighborhoods. Ms. Harmon referred back to the slide which showed the

Neighborhood Character Overlay District eligibility and stated that it is defined as long as the requirements are met.

Attendance and Commission Feedback

Introductions were not taken at the beginning of the meeting so Chairperson Spencer used this opportunity to allow each commissioner to share a sentence or two on what they like most about the Comprehensive Plan and what they would change about the Comprehensive Plan. Each Commissioner provided their feedback about the Comprehensive Plan.

Charlotte Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update and Comment Review

Ms. Alysia Osborne briefed the commission on where they are in the Comprehensive Plan adoption process, advised of the various methods used for community engagement and focused on some of the comments around the neighborhood diversity inclusion goal via a slide presentation.

Commissioner Chirinos asked if there was a way to articulate what the UDO is because it can be confusing and some people do not know the difference between the Comp plan and the UDO. She thinks there needs to be more emphasis on what the UDO is so that people would understand. She also wanted to know if the video would be translated in other languages. Ms. Osborne advised they are working on the translations and captions for the video.

Chairperson Spencer changed the focus to the comment review. He said that they would continue the discussion at the March 23rd Planning Committee meeting. He asked Ms. Osborne in terms of comment review, would it be more useful to present comments that she or staff wants to talk about or should members of the Planning Commission propose comments that they really want to advocate for. Ms. Osborne replied that she thinks it would be helpful if the commission presents the comments that they want to discuss because she is receiving comments in writing and also through follow-up meetings.

Commissioner Kelly expressed that it is important for people to understand the difference between density and affordability. In referencing this, he believes it is critical for people to understand how this could affect their neighborhoods; particularly those that are suffering from gentrification. He also thinks the metrics need to be strengthened because it would be difficult with the metrics that are in there today to measure progress a year from now. Ms. Osborne was open to hear any suggestions or specific language that Commissioner Kelly would like to include that could help differentiate or clarify the difference between density and affordability. Commissioner Kelly went on to explain how it would be helpful to articulate how this planning process could potentially mitigate the impact of gentrification and complete changes in neighborhoods.

Commissioner Fryday commented that they have talked about access to housing opportunity and he is not sure that the average person understands why we must have a diversity of housing stock and is it stated clearly enough in the plan so the reader really gets it.

Commissioner Watkins commented one of the things that they have talked a lot about is gentrification and a lot of people whom she talked to sees this as stealing, taking away from them, or disenfranchisement. She does not think that people understand the connection of gentrification

to what Charlotte is going to look like in moving forward. She thinks they need to remove the vilification of the term because Charlotte will continue to be gentrified but people need to understand the necessity of that, and most people see that as a penalty.

Chairperson Spencer said this is a good time to chime in about why the Comprehensive Plan has a focus on the word displacement and not gentrification. He said that he has heard gentrification come up a lot and he thinks in the planning community that is a word that means a lot of things to a lot of people. He asked why are they focusing on displacement more and how could they evangelize on the importance of that term.

Ms. Osborne replied that she has a personal disconnect around the word gentrification for those reasons; there are a lot of emotion and sometimes a negative connotation to the phenomenon around rapid change. She went on to say what is bad about gentrification is displacement; that the change happens so rapidly that people, places, and cultures are displaced as a result of it. The plan talks about identifying those areas of particular populations vulnerable to displacement and being very focused about how to address those because a lot of what happens with gentrification is market driven and it is hard for a policy document to say how it is going to control or mitigate market forces. Lastly, she said they can think to be more intentional around how they mitigate or plan for potential displacement, particularly within this plan around major investments in areas that they know might experience change through the market readiness or those major investments in our communities. She went on to explain how they will apply those metrics to how we grow in the future.

Commissioner Blumenthal commented that one of the things that he appreciates about the plan is the constant attention to the fact that the Comprehensive Plan is a living document. When you are looking at a 20-year plan and as quickly as the city is growing and different dynamics are shifting the general awareness is that five years from now, things could look a lot different than they do today. He said that he wanted to draw attention to creating more language as to how members of the public could continue to engage and provide feedback even once the final draft is published. He thinks for people to be able to continue to engage and have a little more clearer pathway to do that will be really important; a way that people can continue to provide input and contribute to the living document will be very important as well as strategic benchmarks.

Chairperson Spencer encouraged the commissioners to please submit their comments as soon as possible. If a comment was made during today's meeting but they have not formally submitted that as a comment, do not assume that everything you wanted to address on that point is going to go in. He reminded them that it appears they will be going over comments and putting together a draft of the Planning Commission's official recommendations that they would like to see in the plan at the March 23rd Planning Committee meeting. He added any member of the commission is free to join the March 23rd meeting.

Vice Chairperson Samuel wanted to add clarity to her earlier comment around metrics in Appendix C. She would appreciate that they consider the possibility of adding a baseline because in her thought process if we do not know where we are today in writing, in print, in document that cannot be changed, tweaked, or manipulated, then how do we know that we have made progress or not.

She asked has this been considered and in terms of the dashboard, she would like to see this go on the website today. She thinks one of the uses of the dashboard can be to track change requests or updates for the next time it is revisited by staff.

Ms. Osborne liked the comment about adding a comment track feature to the dashboard. She explained on page 176 it talks about how they plan to track their progress and creating a dashboard. Right now, they are in the process of developing that not just for the equity metrics but for all of the other metrics that are within the plan. With that, they will be able to track and provide an annual report every year. Being transparent in sharing data within the plan increases their accountability internally and externally.

Vice Chairperson Samuel thinks being able to sort the data that is in the dashboard would make it more valuable; for example tracking by zip code, a defined geographic area, or council district. She feels that would add a certain level of transparency that this body of government has not seen before and it definitely adds accountability.

Chairperson Spencer commented it is important to have a true definition of equity in the plan. He loves the graphic, and as the vice chair has said equity weaves in and out of the document but definitions of equity changes. He thinks it is a word that does not evoke negatives, it evokes more positive emotions; it could mean different things to a diverse group of people. It is important, as much as they can, to get a consensus on equity.

Other Business

Chairperson Spencer acknowledged a question in the chat asking if there was going to be an additional meeting and answered as of right now the only other meeting will be the Planning Committee meeting on the 23rd. He said they really want to come out of that meeting with the comments that they think are worth them advancing to the Planning Department and to City Council that they want to endorse as a commission. Lastly, he exclaimed they will be lifting up comments that he thinks will define and improve the document and he is hoping that they will be able to come out of that meeting knowing the comments that they want from the Planning Committee meeting and then they could have a full vote and adopt in the April meeting after a full discussion.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:17 pm.