



PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Monday, January 22, 2018 6:00 PM
Council Chambers, City Hall

MINUTES

Approved 2/12/2018

I. Roll Call

Present: David Putnam, James Short, Bruce Kolenda, Marlene Jordan, Charlene Lovett, Richard Wahrlich

Absent: William Greenrose, Marilyn Harris

City Staff: Michael McCrory, City Planner

II. Review of Minutes

- January 8, 2018

Motion: To accept the minutes of January 8, 2018

Made by: Mr. Short **Second:** Mayor Lovett

Discussion

Mayor Lovett said that the statement, “*There was no final resolution*” on page 2 was incorrect – that the Board had come to consensus about writing a letter to the City Council outlining the Board’s priorities for implementation in the Master Plan. Mr. Putnam agreed and thought that a draft letter was to have been composed for the Board to review at this meeting. It was agreed to strike the sentence.

Vote: Unanimous with the amendment

III. Public Hearing

- **Master Plan**

This public hearing was for the Board to take public comment on the final draft of the Master Plan. The Planning Board has reviewed each chapter upon their completion over the past year and a half. The chapters have been posted online for public viewing. Hard copies have also been available. Mr. McCrory said that rather than get into each of the chapters at this hearing, he wanted to emphasize the amount of input that was received from the public – starting with the public forum in March 2016 that was attended by close to 100 people; followed by a public survey (online and on paper) that was completed by 250 people. There followed hundreds of hours of volunteer time by the steering committee and all of the subcommittees. This was a substantial public effort.

Mr. Wahrlich asked for questions from the Board. Board members preferred to hear from the public first.

Mr. Wahrlich opened the public hearing and invited those present to speak. No one chose to speak, so Mr. Wahrlich closed the hearing and turned the discussion back to the Board.

Mayor Lovett said the Opera House - really the entire building - needs a sprinkler system installed. Mr. Putnam asked if this wasn't already in the current CIP. No one could remember. Mayor Lovett said her concern was that sometimes the Plan refers to "City Hall" or "City Hall/Opera House complex" and because of that inconsistency there is opportunity for people to forget about the Opera House as part of City Hall and the challenges that they face that inhibit their ability to promote performances and expand their operations. She said the Plan should be comprehensive. Future challenges should list future challenges of the City Hall as well as those of the Opera House. Future challenges that the Mayor felt should be added to the discussion on page 2-13 include the lack of a sprinkler system; the need for climate control in the atrium (lack of climate control in the atrium makes it almost unusable); and restoration of the stained glasses (there are holes in them cause increased energy costs) to make the Plan comprehensive.

Mr. Putnam asked if these challenges should be cross-referenced in the goals of the Historic Resources chapter. Mayor Lovett said yes and that the Opera House is identified in three chapters – Community Facilities, Economic Development, and Historic Resources. She said it is not consistently identified as the City Hall/Opera House complex across these chapters. Sometimes it is listed only as City Hall. The City Hall is a very different use of the building than the Opera House.

Mr. Wahrlich said he thinks of it as the same building whether it is referred to as the Opera House or City Hall.

Mr. McCrory suggested that those issues be added to the Plan. He added that discussion about adding sprinklers are more about life safety and fire code issues than about putting in a sprinkler system (because life safety/code issues can be addressed in ways other than sprinklers). He suggested changing the wording – heating and ventilation, mechanical systems, life safety and code compliance for the complex. Staff can look through the rest of the document to make sure that any reference to City Hall is appropriate for the context and if it is needed, the wording can be changed to the City Hall complex, which would be defined as City Hall/Opera House/Police Station.

Mayor Lovett said there's a stand-alone for the Police Department and for City Hall, but not the Opera House.

Mr. Putnam agreed with Mr. McCrory's categorization of life safety, but said because of opportunities for grant applications, if, under life safety issues, the words "such as"

could be used and include the word “sprinkler” and any other specifics – then, when the City applies for grants, that wording is in the Master Plan.

Mayor Lovett said on page 5-13 it refers to “Claremont City Hall” and how it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Putnam said it would be helpful in the development of the CIP if the Board were to approve the Plan at this meeting. With that in mind, in light of the proposed editorial changes (discussed above), he asked if the specific word changes should be agreed to at this meeting (as part of the approval of the Plan). Mr. McCrory said there would likely be other grammatical changes that will be needed for the final draft and as long as the Board trusts the staff to have the changes as necessary to meet the intentions – they would be wrapped into the final edits. Mr. Putnam accepted that with the knowledge that the discussions would be contained in the minutes.

Mayor Lovett referred to page 2-10, Sewer Division Future Challenges – it specifically identifies the Main Street sewer reconstruction as a challenge, but not the Pleasant Street area.

Mr. Putnam said that Pleasant Street had undergone a serious reconstruction about 12 years ago and asked if it had included the underground portion. No one knew, but the Mayor said there are certainly issues now and downtown revitalization is a priority. Mr. Koloski said that the list of projects had originated with the DPW Director. Mr. McCrory said that the events that had recently taken place were probably not known at the time the chapter was written. He didn’t see any problem with adding it to the list now. The Board members agreed.

Mr. Putnam commented that there are three new pieces in this Master Plan – the Energy chapter, the Public Health chapter (the first in the state), and the Implementation chapter. He said it is a very serious document that took two years to complete.

Mr. Wahrlich thanked Mr. Putnam for chairing the steering committee throughout the process.

Mr. Putnam asked if anyone in the audience wanted to speak.

Kathleen O’Brian, new resident to Claremont, said that Claremont is a beautiful city and that it is easy to imagine it revitalized. She was very interested in the Public Health chapter and had spent time with Mr. McCrory learning about it earlier. She said she found the chapter “extremely well thought-out and informative”. She said she had a medical background and was looking forward to using it to help people in the community. She said she would like to get connected to some people to talk about it. The Board thanked her for her comments and welcomed her to Claremont.

Stan Woodward, sixteen-year resident, has been walking the City for the past ten years (having given up driving) and said he was concerned about the condition of Claremont's infrastructure – the roads, sidewalks and bridges. He said he believed a lot of them need repair or replacing. Some of the buildings in town “are not so well kept up” – some City-owned, some otherwise – they need to be repaired, replaced or demolished. He said he noticed that there are a lot of trees on City property that are beginning to die off and they need attention, too, by either replacing them or trimming them. He wanted the City to find a way to plant more flowers in the City. He said he had seen raised stone beds in use in the city of Chicago and thought they would work for Claremont, too. Some of the buildings on Main Street “need some major attention”. He said, “Let's have a true Main Street into and out of the City so people will be attracted to the City.” Some of the vacant lots on Main Street are growing up to bushes and shrubs. The City could use student or senior groups or homeless people to help beautify the City. He suggested contacting the churches and the Student Conservation Association. He said, “We must all work together to make this a great city to live and work in, and I say, after the city is spiffed up, let's have a major celebration with speakers, bands, flags and fireworks!”

Mr. Short said they were great comments and that he agreed with Mr. Woodward.

Mr. Putnam saw this as an opportunity for high school students to create senior projects (community service) for beautification or rehabilitation. He suggested that the Planning Board design some projects and send them to the principal.

Mr. McCrory said he really liked Mr. Woodward's comments and that what “hits home” for him is that this Master Plan addresses the points that Mr. Woodward had raised. The Plan talks about beautification, aesthetics, improving streetscapes and sidewalks, revitalizing the downtown and building partnerships with various groups to help achieve those goals.

Bonita Miles, resident of Ward 2, said she had spoken to a woman about a month ago who was looking for a home to rent in the Claremont area. When Ms. Miles suggested that the woman move to Claremont, the woman responded she didn't know because she thought there was crime in Claremont and undesirable neighborhoods. Ms. Miles wondered where this person was hearing this type of information. The woman's husband has a job in the upper valley, she didn't know anyone in Claremont, she lives in New Jersey, yet she was afraid to come to Claremont. Ms. Miles offered to spend some time with the woman and show her some of Claremont's best assets. She thought about how to direct the woman to Claremont along a route that would help her like Claremont, so she suggested the woman drive down Route 120 as it would bring her to the Visitor Center. She suggested this route instead of coming down I-91 which would lead her through Main Street which Ms. Miles did not see as very welcoming. The woman never called her back. Ms. Miles said that apparently there's a stigma associated with Claremont that the City needs to get rid of. She asked what could be done to make the entrance to the City one that will keep people interested in the City.

Mayor Lovett said that Main Street is scheduled to be reconstructed from Opera House Square to the Esersky Bridge. This will help somewhat, but she acknowledged that there is more work to do with some of the properties along the street. However, these issues are identified in the Plan.

Ms. Miles said this is about how people are thinking about Claremont.

Mr. Putnam said the Board did talk at length about Claremont's reputation, the stigma, its image and acknowledged the role of poverty in them. He said the Board solicited public input on the subject of poverty and the results helped the Board in writing some of the Plan's goals and objectives. By keeping the topic in the discussion, it helps promote Claremont and do something about its poverty.

Ms. Miles said she had read in the paper that there are 200 jobs available in Claremont. She asked if they were full or part time jobs. Mr. McCrory said he would look into it and get back to her. He also mentioned that this is mentioned in the Economic Development chapter.

Mayor Lovett said she has heard both during the School Board hearing and at a recent City Council meeting that the City also has to deal with its online presence. It is not always reflective of the community. She is hoping that at a joint meeting of the School Board and City Council that they will have a discussion about how they will mitigate that. She said it's one thing to know what our challenges are and to take actions to address them – it is quite another thing to be represented in such a way that may not be accurate online. She hoped addressing this will be a priority.

Claire Lessard, Ward 1 and newly-elected City Councilor, said she had printed out the entire Plan and was reviewing a chapter every night. She said she had attended all of the public meetings about the Plan. She said she believes Claremont is improving. She said there are a lot of new stores and activity on Pleasant Street. She said progress is slow, but there have been a lot of things happening, such as the parking garage and the Common Man. She said she believed the new Council is going to get a lot of things done over the next two years. Mrs. Lessard's number one priority is to get a "first class, high class senior housing". She runs the Senior Center and sees a lot of widows who own nice houses and don't want to leave Claremont. She said she has the developer who doesn't want to do it because of the taxes, she has the land that the owner doesn't want to sell. She said she thinks this is what Claremont really needs and hopes that she can get it off the ground soon.

Motion: That we adopt and approve the full master plan that we completed in 2018 with the changes as discussed this evening and the editorial and grammar changes that the staff is currently working on.

Made by: Mr. Putnam **Second:** Mr. Short

Mr. McCrory said the bulk of the work was done in 2017 and asked that the motion be changed to 2017. Mr. Putnam agreed (after discussion).

Vote: Unanimous in favor with the amendment to 2017.

IV. Reports from Boards and Commissions

V. Other

Mr. Putnam said, “From one of the participants in our public comments, we heard interest in wanting us to stay on top of certain categories in the Master Plan. I think we need to talk about how we will do that – what kind of a schedule we’re going to keep not only for measuring progress, but helping to support and take a role in – for instance we talked about where the school system could be involved in some of the community work in providing cleaning and upgrading and some of our horticultural infrastructure. I think those are things we need to discuss here so we can approve, for instance, writing a letter to the high school principal suggesting that we have projects identified and we know that there’s a community service program at the high school for school students and senior projects ideas available. I think if it’s formally endorsed by the Planning Board that it helps them feel like there’s a collaboration – a partnership. Then as we look through other chapters what other things can we find that we want to reach out to the community and get the community engaged. One of my feelings is, this is the public hearing – this involves from a visionary perspective – the whole city of Claremont – and this is what we have for a turnout for the public hearing. It’s what I expected, but it’s disappointing. If this truly was a community blueprint for how we can work together, the community has to be involved. And I think it’s some of our responsibility to find a way to reach out to the community, different groups, i.e. the high school and their students. That’s where we can teach them the value of community service. And have it formally supported by the Planning Board and the Master Plan. So what else is in here that we can do with other groups?”

Mayor Lovett said, “There may be another approach. I think often times what incentivizes people to become a part of something is if they can also see progress. That this is a living document – not something that we have approved now and it sits on the shelf and maybe we take it out once in a while. But I think it would be beneficial for all of us if it was maybe on a semi-annual basis that we do a public forum and we say ‘these are some of the items that we’ve made progress on’. That might motivate or incentivize people to become part of getting other things done.”

Mr. Short thought that getting people involved may help get rid of the stigma and give Claremont a better name. This could turn things around – this is a starting point and it starts now.

Mr. Wahrlich asked if the Board should have a work session every few months to look at where we are with the Master Plan. He asked Mr. McCrory what he thought.

Mr. McCrory said there are two parts to this – the Board itself, keeping up to speed with how the Master Plan is being fulfilled; and then there is how the Master Plan is communicated to the community. Trying to wrap both of those into one event is not functional. He questioned how the Plan could be presented in the public forum. Are there certain events we can attend and have a Master Plan display – going to where people already are, rather than trying to gather them just for this purpose. On the Planning Board side, it

could be done every six months – it would help refresh what the Master Plan is and how it’s a priority. There is an immediate opportunity to implement the Master Plan through the CIP process currently underway. We can check back in June and see how things are.

Mrs. Lessard suggested publishing a flier that could indicate what parts of the Plan have already been done, what remains to be done, and the goals. Mrs. Lessard believes that a lot of people don’t even know what the Master Plan is or what it consists of.

Nick Koloski said that now that the Plan has been adopted, he said he views each chapter like a movie – a movie that involves the City. Movie posters are important if you want people to tune into your movie. Have foam board sheets that break down each chapter to give people the rundown of what we’re looking at and the road we’re traveling as a city. These would go to the events that are already populated. People are not going to seek out the 250-page document and read through it. You have moments to capture their attention. Even putting them on the wall in the Council Chambers or near Central Collections or the Opera House Atrium – any location where you can grab people’s attention. He said he had read previous plans and this so far is the best one.

Mr. Putnam acknowledged the large number of items to be done in the implementation section and that financially it is beyond the City’s capacity to pay for easily. But the point is that they are identified and it’s not just about completing them – it’s also about starting them. Some of them have long timelines and we don’t always know how they will turn out until we start them.

Ms. Jordan said she finds the Plan a very “thought-provoking document” that makes one aware of the needs of the City, but that it gives a plan for getting to where the City wants to be. She said this is the first time she had read or been involved in a Master Plan and she looks forward to seeing things happen.

VI. Correspondence

VII. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the meeting

Made by: Mr. Putnam **Second:** Mr. Short

Vote: Unanimous in favor

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
deForest Bearse