

MINUTES
PLANNING BOARD
BOROUGH OF NEW PROVIDENCE
TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2015

- A. CALL TO ORDER 8:03 p.m. Vice Chairman Keane chaired the meeting in the absence of Chairman Lesnewich.
- B. PUBLIC NOTICE: This is a Public Meeting of the Planning Board of the Borough of New Providence, County of Union, and State of New Jersey. Adequate notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with Public Law 1975, Chapter 231, in that an Annual Notice or Revision was made in conformance with Section 13 of the Act.
- C. ROLL CALL: Present: Matt Cumiskey Dan Henn, William Hoefling, Gary Kapner, John Keane, Mayor Al Morgan and Robert Sartorius. Absent: Gene Castagna and Robert Lesnewich. Also present: Steve Warner, Board Attorney; Fred Heyer, Borough Planner; Keith Lynch, Director of Planning & Development; and, Margaret Koontz, Secretary.
- D. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
- E. DRAFT DOWNTOWN CONCEPT PLAN

Fred Heyer, the Borough Planner, introduced the discussion of the Draft Downtown Concept Plan. The Economic Development Committee commissioned his firm, Heyer, Gruel & Associates, to prepare the plan which is conceptual and illustrative, not binding, of things that could be done in the downtown area to create a lively downtown that would serve as residents' third home after their residence and work. New Providence has a lot going for it that would attract new economic investment including the schools and solid housing stock: New Providence is a "rock solid" community. The plan presents concepts designed to improve the aesthetics of the Central Commercial District (CCD) and its functionality and to create a lively downtown. The big issue is parking. The downtown area is pretty small – 40 acres - and has 400,000 SF of building space, 300,000 SF of which is retail space, and 1,300 parking spaces. The parking doesn't work as it is. Existing parking is close to capacity now even if all the parking spaces were accessible and usable and can't support new development.

Downtown is a mix of "Main Street" and suburban mall (Village Shopping Center). Development is currently limited by ordinance to two-story buildings not to exceed 30' in

height. In addition, no residential development is permitted and the parking ratios are high with an inefficient use of parking and use of potential spaces for dumpsters.

The Downtown Concept Plan identifies opportunities for conceivable development including infill sites that can support new development without displacing existing buildings such as along South Street next to the former Colorado Ski and Skate shop; development of properties that are underutilized; changing uses; and, walkable connections, plazas and public spaces. While downtown is mostly accessed by automobile, and will continue to be accessed by automobile, there are ways to make it more walkable. The plan identified 350 parking spaces that can be created by closing existing curb cuts on the street and re-grouping/merging existing parking lots to increase efficiency. Recommendations in the plan include wider sidewalks, more outdoor dining, an entertainment venue and changes to the zoning ordinance to permit three-story buildings and mixed use.

A lot of things are going on in New Providence that will change the dynamics of downtown such as Lantern Hill, the continuing care retirement community, and BAC Center of Excellence, the aquatic center. The Board believes a plan is a good thing to have so that zoning decisions can be based on the plan rather than on one-off decisions by the Board(s). Changes have been made piecemeal in the past but a long-term plan for downtown is better. The plan will take considerable cooperation but elements of the plan can be achieved if property and business owners work together.

Carl Lomauro, Colonial Appliance, is a fan of change and agreed that downtown needs work. Mr. Lomauro's business is in one of the demolition/renovation areas and asked how his business would survive and how demolition/renovation would be funded. Mr. Kapner responded that the private sector/businesses would fund development. Mr. Heyer added that the intent of the plan is to remove regulatory obstacles and create regulations that would allow development to occur. Private sector development can occur with the Borough establishing regulatory redevelopment areas to facilitate the revitalization/development of properties and providing developers with tax abatements and financial incentives.

The current parking ratio is one space for 300 SF of floor area and assumes all the spaces are equally accessible. This is a fairly low ratio. While there are currently 1,300 parking spaces, the ideal number of accessible parking spaces is 1,500 to 1,600 spaces. An additional 350 spaces can be added as noted earlier. The Concept Plan has recommendations for parking including shared parking so customers/visitors only have to park once. Mr. Heyer stated that there are many ways to approach parking but the supply has to be managed by a single entity which could be a parking authority.

Don Burkitt, 161 Mountain Avenue, asked about the amount of parking that would be required downtown to support future development/redevelopment. Mr. Heyer responded that 3.5 to 4 "good" parking spaces per 1,000 SF of building space would work if the spaces are

appropriately managed. Increasing the connectivity between the parking areas helps because it permits multiple “trips” with one parking space. Downtown currently has 2.5 “good” parking spaces for 1,000 SF of building space.

Jeff Grob, 240 Central Avenue, stated that residential use over commercial space will be good for the downtown area. Mr. Grob asked if it’s possible to forecast when a new level of parking would have to be considered if the downtown were developed/redeveloped/built to the maximum. Mr. Heyer responded that the growth potential in downtown is finite: Parking is the critical factor. The downtown can grow an additional 50,000 to 90,000 SF of building space, which takes into account upper levels and residential use, but after that structured parking, i.e., a two-level parking structure which would be as tall as a Cape Cod house, would be the next level. Mr. Heyer added that it’s important not to squander too much of the downtown area to get surface parking.

A general discussion ensued about how anything can be done in the downtown area if parking can’t be provided. Concern was expressed about the risk of soliciting development if parking is an issue. Mr. Heyer responded that the Borough needs to look at the big picture. The first step is for the Borough to decide if it likes the concept of three-story structures with mixed use in the downtown area. If so, then the Borough would need to look at parking and a development plan for downtown.

Donna Zane, a New Providence resident, shops locally and rides her bike downtown. She likes the new bike racks but is concerned about the impact additional on-street parking will have on bicyclists. She is not sure that New Providence can establish bike lanes and doesn’t want to lose her ability to bike downtown with the added on-street parking. Mr. Heyer stated that the numerous curb cuts on South Street would be closed to allow only one to two entrances which should be safer for bicyclists. In addition, parallel parking is generally considered a traffic calming device and shields pedestrians on the sidewalk. The plan needs to be considerate of bicyclists with more bikeways so cyclists can get around town without going on the road. The area behind Friendly’s extending to Prestige Diner is being considered for a river walk which would provide some connectivity.

Malathi Ana Krishnamurthy, 31 Dorr Road, asked if the Borough can limit the type of uses in the downtown area such as retail services and restaurants given the maximum number of parking spaces. The types of uses are generally market driven. A mix of businesses helps with parking because they have different parking requirements. Mr. Heyer suggested that it might be beneficial to add more dining opportunities at different levels and entertainment venues rather than adding all office space. A critical mass of solid retail business is needed to keep people’s interest.

Lisa Barfield, 39 Morehouse Place, asked if the scope of the Concept Plan goes beyond planning purposes stating that downtown has a lot of banks and hair salons but lacks

elements such as the river walk. The Concept Plan recommends marketing and promotional events to bring people downtown such as street fairs, etc. It also discusses expanding the role of the Downtown Improvement District (DID) and business recruitment.

Bill Ryan, 30 Hickson Drive, asked how many additional parking spaces could be added in the area behind South Street that backs up to the Village Shopping Center if the parking lots were consolidated. Approximately 40 to 50 additional spaces have been identified.

Don Burkitt, 161 Mountain Avenue, asked if the Borough wants to be strategic in determining what it wants in the downtown area such as retail sales and services and how the Borough can steer what comes to town. He would like to see more communal space. Mr. Heyer stated that there are ways to control uses within the downtown by creating subzones which would limit the types of business allowed such as a subzone for retail sales and restaurants but no retail services. Different uses have different parking demands which may steer where businesses locate.

Jeff Grob, 240 Central Avenue, asked if the plan sets out areas for specific types of businesses. The plan identifies areas where there can be additional parking but it doesn't designate areas for specific types of businesses.

The plan does not address the increase in traffic that would be generated by additional development downtown and the possible development on Elkwood Avenue with townhouses and three-story mixed use buildings. Mr. Henn noted that unlike Chatham, New Providence can re-direct traffic around the downtown area. Robert Robinson, Councilman, stated that South Street and Springfield Avenue are county roads, which can be a challenge, but New Providence has a good working relationship with the county.

Jim Madden, Councilman, believes that Central Avenue is another opportunity for development that is not included in the Downtown Concept Plan, and there is an opportunity to connect Central Avenue with the downtown area. It is important to think beyond the downtown area. New Providence is ripe with opportunities.

The Board concluded the discussion of the Concept Plan reiterating that it is a dynamic not linear plan. It provides an opportunity to change regulations that limit development and/or redevelopment in the downtown and is a useful tool to attract businesses. The idea is to use external as well as internal capital to create an environment that will be conducive to attracting new businesses and to encouraging existing businesses to redevelop or renovate.

The Board will hold at least two more meetings to discuss the Concept Plan before September. The plan is on the website where there is a place to comment. Mr. Keane encouraged the public to read the plan and spread the word about the upcoming meetings.

F. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business.

G. MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

No miscellaneous business.

H. MINUTES

Mayor Morgan moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Kapner seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

I. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Cumiskey moved and Mayor Morgan seconded the motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Margaret Koontz
Planning Board Secretary