

MINUTES OF THE ISLE OF PALMS
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
January 9, 2008

The Isle of Palms Planning Commission met in the Recreation Center on January 9, 2008, at 5:30PM. Members attending included Barbara Bergwerf, Pat Campbell, Ron Denton, Michael Loftus, Sandy Stone, David Stevens and Dick Watson; also the Director of Planning, Douglas Kerr was present. Bob Hooper was absent. The press had been notified of the meeting and the agenda for the meeting was posted in City Hall and the Building Department to comply with the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Denton welcomed the newest member of the Commission, Mr. Dick Watson.

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Denton explained that the first order of business was to elect officers and he asked for nominations for Chairman. Mr. Campbell nominated Mr. Denton for Chairman and Ms. Bergwerf seconded the motion. With no other nominations, the vote was unanimous to elect Mr. Denton Chairman.

Mr. Denton asked for nominations for Vice Chairman. Mr. Stevens nominated Mr. Campbell and Ms. Bergwerf seconded the nomination. With no other nominations, the vote was unanimous to elect Mr. Campbell Vice Chairman.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The next item on the agenda was the review of the minutes of the December 12th, 2007 meeting. Mr Campbell made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and the vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

DISCUSSION OF COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

Mr. Denton welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming and asked Mr. Kerr to give some background information to the audience. Mr. Kerr explained that the Commission had been looking into the commercial area for over two years. He explained that the Commission perceived a problem with maintaining a commercial district with the high price of real estate and the short season for commercial activity. He added that a consulting firm was hired to help analyze the problem and suggest changes to the zoning code. Mr. Watson asked for Mr. Kerr to show the areas being discussed on the zoning map, which Mr. Kerr did.

Mr. Denton asked for comments. Mr. Bill Casey addressed the Commission and asked for Mr. Kerr to describe the boundaries of the GC3 zoning district, which he did. Mr. Jimmy Carroll asked if the condominiums that are on the ocean are

nonconforming structures. Mr. Kerr answered, yes, they were legal nonconforming.

Mr. Chris Brown explained that there was a parking problem on Carolina Boulevard, which he felt was caused by a lack of parking in the commercial area and the residential areas are getting the spill-over from the commercial area. Mr. Brown added that the City routinely states that it cannot control the parking because the roads are owned by the State of South Carolina, but the City code specifies that City Council can control the areas where parking is allowed. Mr. Denton answered that the even though it may be addressed in the City Code, the City still could not do anything that the SCDOT does not authorize. Mr. Brown added that in the City of Charleston property owners were given stickers to display in their windshields and that they were the only ones allowed to park in residential districts for an extended period. He stated that he felt this would be a good policy for the Isle of Palms.

Mr. John Ghindea explained that he lived in the Sea Cabins and he felt that the City needed to maintain a healthy commercial district to assist in maintaining a solid tax base and to provide a core for the community.

Mr. Jeff Evans addressed the Commission and explained that the community is changing that it would be nice if the commercial district provided people with something to do other than just go to the beach and park. He explained that he believed that the Beach Company was the biggest property owner in the district and therefore they should be a key player. He added that they did a very nice commercial development at Kiawah. He added that the community of Mountain View, CA was faced with the similar problems and they came up with a strategy to attract restaurants, which the Planning Commission might want to research. He added that the commercial district does not have a desirable mix of uses. Mr. Campbell responded that there were at least five good restaurants now and he feels that there is a good mix.

Ms. Jan Shriver asked if the Beach Company owns the entire commercial district. Mr. Kerr responded that they do own the two major shopping centers and the Pavilion Shops near the beach. He added that the City owned the two surface lots and Charleston County owns the public park. She stated that all of this exercise depends on the Beach Company's willingness to participate. She added that the commercial district used to have more service businesses that were geared towards providing the residents with services.

Mr. David Somers stated that he had moved away from the area for 15 years and that he has recently returned and that he was astonished by the increase of

commercialism that has occurred during the period he was gone. He stated that he felt that the commercial district should have uses that are oriented towards providing services to the residents and not uses oriented towards the day visitors. Mr. Ghindea responded that he believes that the visitors to the island are critical to keep taxes down. Mr. Somers responded that it is a myth that tourism keeps taxes down and to the contrary he believes that providing all of the services to the tourists actually costs the residents.

Mr. Crosby explained that he would like to see the visitors encouraged to use the public parking lots. He added that the diagonal parking on Ocean Boulevard was problematic and that people to stop in traffic to wait for spaces to open up, which creates huge backups. He added that visitors walk all over the private properties in the district and they should be better funneled to the beach with fencing or boundaries of some type.

Ms. Beverly Ballow asked if a study had ever been conducted to determine how much it would cost to take over the ownership of the SCDOT roads. Mr. Kerr answer no, he did not believe any studies on this issue have been conducted. Ms. Ballow asked why Ocean Boulevard was no parking and other streets allowed parking. Mr. Kerr responded that it was his understanding that this was because the shoulder of the road was much sandier and it caused cars to get stuck.

Mr. Paul Boehm explained that he liked the idea presented earlier of limiting the parking in the residential district to residents. He added that the City of Charleston creates a huge amount of revenue with parking fines. He added that from a real estate standpoint commercial property is not nearly as valuable as residential property on the Isle of Palms. He stated that his office was in the district, but it really did not make financial sense for a commercial property owner to develop commercial property under the current set of circumstances.

Mr. John Ratliff explained that he believed that it was critical for the community to preserve what commercial areas it has. He added that he felt that the commercial uses in the district should be those that serve the residents and not be solely aimed at visitors. He also stated that he felt that the parking in the area needed to be addressed.

Ms. Jan Rivers addressed the Commission and explained that she felt that nothing should be done that would encourage additional traffic to the area. Mr. Watson asked how this could be achieved. Ms. Rivers responded that a trolley or bus could be use.

Mr. Jeff Evans explained that everybody was a day tripper to some part of the area, maybe downtown Charleston for dinner or somewhere else, so he felt that it was unreasonable to expect to stop day trippers.

Ms. Ballow stated that she also believed that it was unreasonable to stop day trippers, but that she knew that communities in the north collected fees from everybody coming to the beach.

Mr. Stone stated that he felt that it was the consensus of the group that residential areas should have parking that is limited to island residents. He added that this would have consequences including the City's Beach Management Plan.

Ms. Jane McMackin explained that she supported the idea of making the front beach area more physically attractive, with things like fountains, and she felt like it would be great to make it an attraction for the residents.

Mr. Somers explained that he felt that the fact that the beach on the northern end of the island is not open to the public also adds to the congestion on the rest of the island.

Mr. Evans stated that the City may want to investigate the possibility of giving incentives for people to shop at the local establishments through giving free or reduced cost parking with a purchase.

Mr. Russ Stemke addressed the Commission and explained that he felt that the district should be considered as two different entities with one being aimed at the day trippers going to the beach during the high season and a second aimed at providing year round services to the residents. He added that he believed that the commercial district should be enlarged to include those properties along Palm Boulevard all the way to the curve in 21st Avenue. He also stated that he supported the idea of restricting parking in the residential areas to residents.

Mr. Denton thanked everybody for coming and explained that the Commission would resume discussions on the topic at their next meeting in February.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Mr. Kerr explained that typically in the beginning of each year the City Attorney would give a briefing to the Commission and asked if the Commission was in favor of having this happen at the next meeting. All members were in agreement.

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He added that the issue of the curve at 21st Avenue would be discussed at the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no more business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m..
Respectfully submitted, Ron Denton, Chairman.