

A special meeting of Beaufort City Council was held on May 3, 2016 at 5:00 p.m. in the City Hall Planning Conference Room, 1911 Boundary Street. In attendance were Mayor Billy Keyserling and Councilmen Mike McFee, George O’Kelley, Stephen Murray, and Phil Cromer, Bill Prokop, city manager, and Lauren Kelly and Libby Anderson, city planners.

In accordance with the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d) as amended, all local media were duly notified of the time, date, place, and agenda of this meeting.

Mayor Keyserling called the special meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

OVERVIEW OF DRAFT BEAUFORT CODE

Mayor Keyserling said this was the first formal presentation of the code to council. Councilman O’Kelley and Councilman Cromer had sat on the technical review committee for the code as council representatives.

Ms. Kelly said this would not be a presentation of “specific details” about the code; that will first happen when the Metropolitan Planning Commission reviews it on May 16.

The zoning ordinance is being updated, Ms. Kelly said, because

- It’s good policy to update it every 10–15 years. The UDO is amended almost monthly. There are changes to standards over time, and this will make looking for information easier and more efficient.
- It will activate the vision set out in the Civic Master Plan. She described the synoptic survey, which gave “a really good picture of existing conditions in the city.” Then specific parcels and the specific plans that would work for those parcels were looked at. The next step was to “bring our regulatory framework up to speed.”
- The county and the Town of Port Royal have already adopted new development codes, Ms. Kelly said, and this will help with moving among the three jurisdictions, as all of the codes will “use common language.”

This is “not a complete overhaul of what we currently have,” Ms. Kelly said. There are places in the new code where possible changes from the current ordinance are shown, she said, but it’s not being “mandated.” This new code introduces new terminology and “a new way of thinking about zoning,” she said: The current zoning districts’ names tell what the districts are used for, while the new code’s language is more “concept-based” and uses “a little slice of the environment.”

Ms. Kelly described the transect zones, which vary from no intensity/density to very high intensity/density, among other things. T-1 is the oceans, marshes and rivers, while T-6 “is like Midtown Manhattan,” she said, so there is no T-6 in Beaufort. There are many contrasts between higher and lower transect zones. For example, in lower transect zones, “it’s less dense,” and you’re more likely to find livestock, Ms. Kelly said, while it’s denser in higher transect zones, and you’re more likely to find *domesticated* animals. T-2 is agricultural (e.g., St. Helena, Burton), and there’s no T-2 in the City of Beaufort, which she said is “mostly T-3 . . . the

core neighborhoods” (e.g., Mossy Oaks, Pigeon Point), which are mostly single-family residential. T-4 is mixed-use corridors and “most of the Historic District,” and T-5 is the “highest intensity” and most commercial areas (e.g., Bay and Boundary Streets and Ribaut Road).

The new code is more flexible than the old one, Ms. Kelly said, and it is “more about how a building behaves than what it is used for.” In less urban zones, the buildings’ “behavior” matters less than in more urban zones.

There are 6 transect-based zoning districts, Ms. Kelly said, which she described, as well as some of the properties that are not in the transect zones. She showed a conversion chart that is available on the city’s website.

Boundary Street has its own redevelopment district and its own zoning code, Ms. Kelly explained. The Starbucks on Boundary Street is a drive-thru, which is permitted in this redevelopment district with certain conditions. The building has a more urban than suburban feel, but it had “to be done in a certain way.”

Ms. Kelly said she would discuss the specific goals of the new code, but first she described what the new code is not meant to do:

- Eliminate the Historic District Review Board
- Minimize nonconforming uses or buildings
- Make development difficult
- Keep things the same

With this revision, redundancy within the code has been eliminated, Ms. Kelly said, and it’s been updated based on the information that is most commonly sought. The goal was to make the development process more streamlined and predictable. The new code offers more flexibility and the opportunity for staff to approve projects that meet the code’s intent. The decisions staff makes will be different than those the design review boards make.

There are still district development standards, which Ms. Kelly showed. Much of the use table is taken from the current ordinance, she said.

Another goal of the new code is to preserve historic, cultural, and natural resources, while promoting appropriate new development, especially infill development, Ms. Kelly said. There are currently guidelines for the Northwest Quadrant, for example, that describe how to rehab or add on to historic homes, but not how to do infill in the historic district.

A goal of the new code was to introduce more ability for staff to make decisions to help applicants through the process more easily, Ms. Kelly said, as long as their needs are “consistent with everything around” their project.

The design guidelines have requirements for floor to ceiling heights; in a “less intense” district, like a T-3, the 9’ floor to ceiling height would not be required. The design standards are for

more intense zones, like a T-4 or T-5, Ms. Kelly said, and avoid “one size fits all” standards.

The new code has renewable resource provisions (e.g., solar energy – the city’s standards are comparable to Port Royal’s and the county’s).

Ms. Kelly showed photos of houses in different neighborhoods, and though they had substantially different price points, with the implementation of a few standards, they could all be integrated in different neighborhoods. The USCB dorms, she said, indicate that a use can be designed to fit into a neighborhood’s context.

The new code promotes economic development and supports public capital infrastructure investments. Ms. Kelly said the city wants to make the development process more predictable and user-friendly; they “worked on the transitions,” to make them “as gracious as they could be, given the geography.”

Ms. Kelly showed the new fire station. The Ribaut Road build-to lines are similar to what they will be in the code, and the fire station has the “strong presence on the street” that a civic building should have. One part of the fire station project was construction of a new road; they wanted to open up development of a parcel of private property behind the fire station.

The new code allows a diversity of building and housing types “in neighborhoods that are ripe for change,” Ms. Kelly said, particularly in T-3 neighborhoods, where 2- and 3-family houses are allowed. It also allows “infill planning solutions”: one is similar to cluster development, and a new one is “cottage courts,” which are detached houses, but with common ownership of the outside/lawn. Each new type of housing has “very specific design standards,” Ms. Kelly said, to make sure it “can seamlessly fit into the neighborhood.”

The final goal is to “encourage walkable urban places,” while discouraging drivable suburban development, Ms. Kelly said. They looked at every neighborhood in the city, and if one didn’t have a sidewalk, for example, they have created a “proposed street section” that could happen if they get a grant, for example (e.g., Allison Road). Every person in the city doesn’t need to live within walking distance of a grocery store, she said, but people should be able to walk places; the Spanish Moss Trail has helped with this, as well.

Ms. Kelly said this code wouldn’t do everything. In regard to vacant and abandoned housing, not every problem can be solved by the code, but there can be better coordination with the building codes department, for example. Of the review process, she said all of the changes that have been made can’t be shown in a practical way, but planning staff has produced “cheat sheets” that show specific changes that have been made. They have done this specifically for the Historic District, as well.

Ms. Kelly showed how to go the city’s website, choose “Projects,” and then “Beaufort Code.” There’s a schedule there and a way to publicly post comments. She said staff has received a lot of helpful comments in this way. There are other resources on there, too, such as a conversion

sheet from old zoning to new that will show what is the same and different in one's neighborhood, and if there is "anything special you should know."

Ms. Kelly described the technical review committee, which provided a peer review of the code after staff had worked on it for about a year and a half. It was in a "semi-finished state," she said, before they gave it to the technical review committee, which had 9 meetings and "generated over 200 comments on the code." That draft came out March 1. The committee's "goal was regulation but . . . with creativity in design." Ms. Kelly showed how they had tracked the process of getting the comments into what became that draft.

They then held 15 public meetings, and Ms. Kelly and Ms. Anderson met with neighborhoods and large property owners; through all of these meetings, 200 comments were generated. In April, they held four additional public meetings, from which they have received 80 comments, and she said they are still receiving some online.

Ms. Kelly discussed staff's responses to the comments, which ranged from "great changes," to "need more research," to "doesn't meet the code's intent." They have documented all of the comments, she said, and how many times they heard those that were repeated.

In April, staff received interesting requests, Ms. Kelly said: people showed vacant properties in their neighborhoods and asked how it could be developed under the new code, so staff did case studies. People also asked about other communities in the region that are doing code changes like this, so staff has provided interactive resources on the city's website.

Ms. Kelly showed one of the case studies: an infill scenario with under the new ordinance, in which the property owners could subdivide this property into four parcels; under the current UDO, they could only divide it into two parcels. In another case, someone had asked what could be done if the Burroughs School were torn down, so staff had done a comparison and analysis about possible creative ways to use that property. An important aspect of the new code is promoting "incremental infill opportunities" that don't change the character of the neighborhood, Ms. Kelly said.

A new draft is expected May 6, she said. May 16, the Metropolitan Planning Commission will have its first of two workshops to review the code, and then a meeting to create a resolution. Staff expects to come back to council with the code in mid-June.

Councilman Murray thanked staff for their work on this. Mayor Keyserling asked if council feels that the schedule "is sufficient for the process." There was no comment. There were no public comments.

There being no further business to come before council, the special work session adjourned at 5:57 p.m.