

A meeting of the Beaufort-Port Royal Metropolitan Planning Commission was held on **April 21, 2014 at 5:30 p.m.** in council chambers of the Beaufort Municipal Complex, 1911 Boundary Street. In attendance were Chairman Joe DeVito and Commissioners James Crower, Robert Semmler, Alice Howard, Bill Harris, Jennifer Bihl, and City Planner Libby Anderson.

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.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman DeVito called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES

Commissioner Crower made a motion, second by Commissioner Harris, to approve the minutes of March 17, 2014 as submitted. The motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Bihl abstained from voting because she was not present at the meeting.

REVIEW OF PROJECTS FOR THE CITY OF BEAUFORT

City of Beaufort – UDO Amendment

Revising Section 3.21.B, “Historic District Designation, Designation Process,” and Section 2.7.F, “Historic District Review Board; Powers and Duties,” to implement the Special Assessment for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties.

Popularly known as the Bailey Bill, Ms. Anderson said council had passed this on first reading. It would allow a substantial tax assessment freeze at the pre-rehab level for ten years. It would apply to all structures in the Historic District that are over 50 years old. There are thought to be 541 of these. The ordinance would apply to all structures outside the Historic District that are listed in the Historic Survey.

Council chose a substantial renovation to be more than 50% of the value of the structure. If your house were valued at \$100,000, you would have to invest at least \$50,000 to be eligible for the assessment freeze, Ms. Anderson said. The Historic District Review Board would have to approve the improvements.

This is a tool to help bring the vacant and abandoned structures back onto tax rolls, Ms. Anderson said. This is one incentive, because it would not be hard to meet the 50% level if you have a structure that’s been vacant or abandoned for 10 years. The incentive will help recoup the substantial investment the developer or owner would have to make.

The ordinance amends the city code, Ms. Anderson said, so the Metropolitan Planning Commission is not directly involved, but because structures outside the Historic District were added, they need to make some modifications to the ordinance. The houses outside the

Historic District must be designated as historic. There's a process in place, but the designation is said to be the same as a rezoning action, which Ms. Anderson said isn't correct. She went back to the original zoning ordinance and indicated this same section was in there but worded differently: "You go to Historic District Review Board for review and then to council for approval," she said.

The renovation must be done to historic standards. Since the structures outside the Historic District are being added, Ms. Anderson said, they want to amend a section that adds this to the Historic District Review Board's authorities: approving structures outside the Historic District for the tax assessment incentive.

Commissioner Harris said Ms. Anderson had said that there were 200 outside the district. She asked where they are. Ms. Anderson said a few are scattered, and you can look them up by street name on the city's web site. Some in the Dixon Neighborhood are considered historic, as are some of the structures across Ribaut Road on North and on Ribaut Road.

Chairman DeVito said they are using the 50-year mark, but he asked if there would be roll up for the 48-year-old houses; he wondered if they would be followed along for when they are eligible. Outside the Historic District, it has to be listed on the Survey, Ms. Anderson said. The state law is specific about the Historic District structures, but outside the Historic District, they have to be designated as historic.

Commissioner Semmler said the survey was 15 years ago, and he asked if some houses that weren't designated as historic then would be grandfathered in. Ms. Anderson said the survey was done according to precise criteria from the Department of the Interior; the group has to be approved by Archives and History. The date ends at 1950. If they did a new survey, they might be able to change the 'period of significance,' but even though the survey's dated, those that weren't historic then, don't become historic automatically. Commissioner Semmler said this isn't fair to everybody, and Ms. Anderson said that's true until the survey is updated. Ms. Anderson said there is a process for changing the survey, but it's a long process. She said they have talked about updating the survey, and **Lauren Kelly** has suggested applying for a grant to do so.

Commissioner Semmler said he agrees it's a great idea, but he is against it because it's not fair in terms of benefitting everyone it should. If the city came up with an appeals process, he could support it. Commissioner Harris said he thinks that with a number like 50 years old, it seems like that's the one threshold to pass, but it's not. There are still improvements to properties, so he doesn't see the drawback to 'just' it being 50 years old. Commissioner Harris said sees the point of an appeals process. A famous person could have lived in a house outside the Historic District and it could be on the register, even if it's not in the Historic District.

Commissioner Semmler said the process has been tested, but Beaufort could do something to make it better. Ms. Anderson said they can only do what the state allows the city to do, so she read the properties that would qualify:

- Listed on the National Register
- Historic property that is over 50 years old as designated by the City of Beaufort under criteria established by the county
- At least 50 years old and located in the Historic District

Commissioner Harris said a property owner could get their property listed on the National Register, which is a difficult process, but it can be done. Ms. Anderson agreed.

Commissioner Harris said it says a special tax assessment can be given for those structures that have completed a substantial renovation, and he asked what determined what a substantial renovation was; Ms. Anderson said those are guidelines that have been adopted: Milner, the Milner Supplement, and the Northwest Quadrant Design standards.

Commissioner Semmler said if a structure is not on the survey and is 50+ years old, and the owner has rehabbed his home, they will be considered eligible if they're in the Historic District but not in the survey. Ms. Anderson said yes, and they believe there are 18 of those. The Historic District Review Board will govern the design review process. Commissioner Semmler asked if it would go to Metropolitan Planning Commission before council for a homeowner in the Historic District. Chairman DeVito said it's an administrative process. Ms. Anderson described the process.

Commissioner Semmler asked what the definition of a substantial improvement is. Ms. Anderson said for a special assessment, the rehab has to be valued at over 50% of the value of the structure.

Commissioner Harris said 50% could trigger permitting issues, and Ms. Anderson said that's true; national flood insurance requirements, for example, could be triggered with substantial improvements. **John Dickerson**, Pigeon Point, buys historic cottages and renovates them. He said this gives owners of properties in the Historic District the opportunity to renovate buildings they have watched decay for decades and 'not be penalized for renovating it.' It encourages people to renovate up to a standard to let people live in it. The bad part is that it's such a small amount, Mr. Dickerson said, but it is a "carrot" for those who buy historic houses, renovate them, and make them a part of the community again. It's also a great benefit for houses that need significant renovation. The Dickersons put more than 100% of the purchase price into renovating a house, and this bill would have been a benefit to them without a jump in their taxes. So those who renovate important historic houses will know that something will be coming back to them. Mr. Dickerson would like to see this even broader and make it community-wide. There's a need for economic development and to save structures, 'and they

are just sitting there' unless there's a *huge* financial upside. He understands the reservations, but he feels this is important, and while he agrees it's not fair, Mr. Dickerson said he hopes they'll vote for it.

Commissioner Harris made a motion to recommend adoption as presented by Ms. Anderson. Commissioner Crower seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman DeVito said the Spanish Moss Trail is under construction, and he described where work is being done. The Albergotti Creek Bridge is 'extremely structurally sound,' so it will be a wood bridge crossing for the trail. They expect this section will be done in 45-50 days.

Commissioner Semmler said **David Tedder** had brought Community Development Code questions that he had brought to the Metropolitan Planning Commission, and the commission elected to delay their vote to allow staff to look at it.

Commissioner Harris asked the status of the Parker's service station. Chairman DeVito said the rumor is that it's dead. Ms. Anderson said they haven't withdrawn, but there hasn't been any movement. Commissioner Harris wondered about it in relation to the trail. Chairman DeVito said the Spanish Moss Trail is talking with the owners of the property, and Parkers never owned it; they had an option to buy if certain things happened. In regard to the trail, they are also talking about the section around Ribaut Road in Port Royal.

There was a Northern Regional Planning Commission meeting, Chairman DeVito said, and Commissioner Harris attended for Chairman DeVito, so Chairman DeVito thanked him. Commissioner Semmler said it was a presentation on the new AICUZ.

There being no further business to come before the commission, Chairman DeVito adjourned the meeting at 6:08 p.m.