I. CALL TO ORDER 5:00 PM

Philip Cromer, Mayor


Absent: Michael McFee.

II. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Development Code updates.

Curt Freese, Community and Economic Development Director started off by saying that they have gone through a few hundred pages of the Development Code and two thirds of them have been presented to the Planning Commission. He stated that they will continue to maintain a spreadsheet of Development Code amendments/edits. These will be reviewed on a yearly basis. He then gave a recap of some of the discussions that have taken place over the last year. He talked about their statuses and outcomes.

He stated that the Planning Commission must make recommendations on any Development Code amendments. They have held several worksessions to go over the major historic preservation changes. He mentioned that they voted unanimously to approve the recommended changes during their June 17, 2024, meeting. These will now be reviewed by legal and brought back to Council in the form of ordinances for approval and adoption.

Councilman Scallate stated that if the Historic District Review Board has not been a part of the conversations regarding demolition, they should be included. He would like to include them when the item comes back in front of Council.

Mr. Freese then proposed the question of whether the city should develop a Conservation Subdivision. This would require a majority of the property to be set aside and dedicated for open space. 75 to 80 percent of the land. They would have ecologically sensitive development patterns for all development, meaning the development would be sensitive to the land around it. Is this an opportunity for the city to create a district that could incentivize someone to develop and gain open space tax funds on that 75 to 80 percent and still have a portion that could be developed. He sees a community wide goal for more open space.

Mayor Cromer inquired if there would be a minimum in terms of acreage that this would apply. Mr. Freese responded by saying we would have to come up with those terms. He stated that in Colorado this is how they handled their open space program.

Councilman Mitchell asked Mr. Freese how they generated the money to incentivize the program.
Councilman Lipsitz likes the idea but feels that the County would need to be involved.

Councilman Scallate asked if this would be available to someone that owns property in the city already. If that were the case, the County would not need to be involved. Mr. Freese indicated you could do Conservation Subdivisions as an overlay or create a Conservation Subdivision District. Regarding the minimum acreage question brought up by Mayor Cromer, Councilman Scallate stated that Anderson, South Carolina passed a similar ordinance in 2021. He went over some of the language from their ordinance. The city could follow something similar. Mr. Freese said that we would have to look at other places. Land that is available here is very unique. We would have to think about this on a much lower scale.

The concept is definitely worth pursuing and worthy of another conversation.

Mr. Freese brought up the topic of design guidelines. He stated that right now the form-based code has prescriptive design requirements. However, they are somewhat general. They allow for variations, which allows creativity. He has heard concerns that Beaufort has a lot of vernacular architecture. He would like to provide a non-prescriptive set of simple guidelines that would include pictures and graphics of desired architecture. An Architect would need to be included in the development. This could be an addendum to the Beaufort Code and Comprehensive Plan.

Should this be defined for non-residential development. Should single-family homes be exempt. Mr. Freese said that maybe single-family homes should be included. Perhaps we develop multiple plan options that are already pre-approved to build whether it be for a commercial building, multi-family complex, or single-family home. This would be different from historic preservation.

Scott Marshall, City Manager, stated that this would be great for predictability. The other side is to be sure that if we do something like this, that the Commissions do not think these are the only designs that can be approved. We would not want to be too restrictive.

There was discussion about opening this up to multiple architects to submit designs based on all the criteria provided. Want multiple options instead of just one design.

Was mentioned that design guidelines and pre-approved plans are two separate things.

Councilman Scallate inquired if the discussion about design guidelines and pre-approved plans are separate issues. Mr. Freese said they were separate. Councilman Scallate feels the discussion seems to have been more about pre-approved plans. He is more in favor of pre-approved designs that will add predictability. He feels we would benefit more from having pre-approved designs that somebody could come in and select from.

Councilman Mitchell does not want us to end up having a cookie cutter look that some places seem to have.

B. Transportation Sales Tax Referendum.

Scott Marshall, City Manager, started off by saying that County Council had on their agenda for third reading the Transportation and Sales Tax Referendum. He said that they changed it during the meeting to second reading and changed the parameters of the referendum in a pretty significant way. They reduced the amount to be collected from $1.625 billion over a 15-year period to $950 million in a 10-year period. They also amended the scope of projects that were already identified in the previous version, as well as some of the dollar amounts to
be distributed to the municipalities. The third and final reading is slated for Monday, June 24, 2024.

Councilman Lipsitz thinks any plans for Ribaut Road should be off the table. They have not told us what they want to do. He stated that we need to act on a third crossing onto Lady’s Island as it is desperately needed. This should be a priority.

Councilman Mitchell questioned why the reductions were made. What led them to make those decisions. He feels that the County should push this back to first reading.

Mayor Cromer stated that they probably scaled it back to make it more palatable to the voters. He does not think there is enough specificity as to where the money is going to be spent. There is also no explanation as to how $30 million is to be split between the unincorporated areas, the City of Beaufort and Town of Port Royal.

Councilman Scallate feels that the municipalities have not been afforded the opportunity to weigh in on these decisions. We need to be assured that there will be funding that comes to us. He questioned the estimates on the costs of the projects to be funded and is unsure how accurate they are. He feels that the money is not going to go as far as they say. He would like to see the County set up a Traffic Authority. This would put the responsibility into the hands of the citizens to determine the priority of the projects.

Scott Marshall, City Manager, shared some concerns that were sent in by Mayor Pro Tem, McFee. This revision was made to reduce the amount of the taxes collected and to reduce the number of projects. He said that these were done without consulting the Transportation Advisory Committee which was appointed by County Council. He feels there was not enough consultation with the municipalities.

Mayor Cromer will reach out to Kevin Phillips, the Mayor of Port Royal, to draft a message to Beaufort County Council that will address these issues and ask them to delay the third reading.

The following interacted with Council on the topics discussed:

Jeremiah Smith, 1107 West Street.
Lise Sundrla, Historic Beaufort Foundation.
Cynthia Jenkins, Historic Beaufort Foundation.
Grant McClure, Coastal Conservation League.
Merritt Patterson, 317 Laurens Street.

III. ADJOURN 6:33 PM

Disclaimer: This document is a summary. All City Council Worksessions and Regular Meetings are recorded. Live stream can be found on the City’s website at www.cityofbeaufort.org (Agenda section). Any questions, please contact the City Clerk, Traci Guldner at 843-525-7024 or by email at tguldner@cityofbeaufort.org.

In accordance with South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80 (a)(d)(e), as amended, notification of regular meetings was given at the beginning of the calendar year. A copy of the agenda was posted on the City’s bulletin board and website www.cityofbeaufort.org twenty-four hours prior to the meeting. A copy of the agenda was given to the local news media and requested public on file.