

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION
STONE HARBOR PLANNING BOARD**

May 11, 2015

4:30 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Conrad, who stated that all requirements of the "Open Public Meetings Act of 1975" had been met with the Press of Atlantic City having been notified of the Board's schedule for 2015 on December 20, 2014, and the schedule having been posted on Stone Harbor's website and the Municipal Clerk's Bulletin Board.

ROLL CALL:

Members Present:

Mayor Suzanne M. Walters
Jill Gougher
Wayne Conrad, Vice-Chair
Robert D. Bickford, Jr.
Al Carusi
Perry Conte

Board Solicitor:

Andrew D. Catanese

Board Secretary:

Diane Frangiose

Alternates:

Lynne Dubler

Zoning Officer:

Joanne Mascia

Members Not Present:

Thomas Hand, Chairman
David Coskey, Jr.

Approval of April 13, 2015 Minutes

Motion by Mr. Carusi to admit the meeting minutes. Seconded by Mayor Walters. Affirmative votes: Mr. Bickford, Ms. Dubler and Mr. Conrad. Abstained from voting because they were not present at the last meeting: Mr. Conte, Mr. Coskey, Mrs. Gougher, and Mr. Hand.

Board Discussion

Mr. Conrad welcomed Stone Harbor Planning Consultants, Fred Heyer and Susan Gruel of Heyer Gruel & Associates. A discussion began regarding the Hotel/Motel District initiative. Mr. Conrad stated that previous discussions were held about the topic and it was agreed that it is very good to have an array of motels at various price points. Major issues surrounding the project are parking, height of the buildings and a concern of some residents being in the shadow of the buildings. Mr. Conrad asked if the Board should move ahead creating a special district if it is something that is not an immediate need but may be a need in the future. Mr. Carusi stated It would be nice to get the hotel owners perspective on where they stand now. Mr. Bickford said that his view is that the Planning Board's role is to create an environment that instills economic opportunity and the fact that the present owners may not be interested in doing something because of their own personal circumstance whatever that may be, doesn't mean that the project should be abandoned because that group doesn't want to do it; this is a long term proposition and if the environment is created, it stimulates a financial reaction.

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Board Discussion (continued)

Mr. Conte commented that the Planning Board should be cautious with what the Borough is giving away until it is clear what the owners needs are and things will be different five or ten years from now; if nothing happens for that period of time, and the Borough is giving a lot away, it may not be a good thing. Mr. Bickford asked, what is the Borough giving away and Mr. Conte responded height and parking. Mr. Bickford responded that he is not suggesting that the Board would create an environment that would be unattractive and didn't know if that was driven by a specific thought of an existing owner but perhaps it is driven by what would stimulate an economic investment. Mr. Conte said he didn't know if the Borough is in a position to figure that out, is it 3 stories, 5 stories, 8 stories, 10 units, or 100 units.

Ms. Gruel stated that she and Mr. Heyer agree with all of the comments of the Board because one of the things they recommended in terms of the first approach would be to talk to the hotel/motel owners. Ms. Gruel further stated that it is important to know what the owners envision from their perspective. Mr. Heyer stated there are reasons to move forward. The properties are very valuable that in some cases are large. Property owners are ultimately either going to sell their properties or improve their properties. They are either going to sell them for residential development or try to upgrade what they have by adding parking or adding by building up. How far up isn't very far because the properties are in the middle of neighborhoods. There could be some flexibility with parking. The question is whether the owners are going to stay there or will they tear them down and apply for variances because there may be an owner who is going to cash in and leave for their highest and best use from a real estate perspective. Ms. Gruel said it is a question of making sure that there is some value associated with ensuring the use of a motel continues.

Mr. Conte commented there are two people when mentioning owners, one that owns 1 property and one that owns many properties. Mr. Carusi said he appreciates Mr. Bickford's comments that perhaps the owners don't want to do anything now but it is the Board's responsibility to lay the opportunities out to them. Mr. Heyer stated that the burden of proof is very high to anyone who would make an application to the Borough so the degree that the Board is comfortable in giving something in terms of lowering standards or expanding on what is allowed would go a long way to be an incentive to an owner. Mr. Bickford stated that he wasn't suggesting that the Board amend the zoning ordinance to make it more attractive but right now if to pick an example, the Colonial Lodge turned over, most likely it is not going to trade as a motel. Someone is going to knock it down and build condos or residential which clearly is the best and highest use. Mr. Conte said his concern in giving 3 stories opens the door for a zoning variance for 4 stories because it's closer. If the Borough approves 3 stories, it is a smaller step to go to 4 then if you go from 2 stories to 4. Mr. Catanese stated that height variances are tough and in Stone Harbor, new construction height variance is a difficult variance to get. Mrs. Mascia stated Stone Harbor was at 3 stories years ago and then went to 2. Mr. Conte said the properties that exist now do have 3 stories. Mrs. Mascia said parking is considered a story and then 2 stories above that is 3 stories. Mr. Bickford stated he thinks parking is a core element because an alternative parking solution as opposed to an onsite parking solution could allow greater density without increasing the height.

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Board Discussion (continued)

Mr. Carusi asked if the Board is saying it would like to see a continuance of units that are affordable by average folks rather than giving way to something more expensive where the Borough doesn't have something available to everyone. Mayor Walters stated that issue was talked about last month, and everyone agreed that the Borough needs variety. Mr. Conrad said that he thinks Stone Harbor is a desirable community and people will look at it as a place to make an investment so, as much as the Board can anticipate what the conditions are going to be and encourage what controls that kind of development, is what the Planning Board is all about.

Mr. Bickford stated if you create a circumstance where parking can be provided offsite and judged as satisfying the parking requirement, then you don't need as tall a building. Mr. Conrad said the Board has not spoken to the current owners of the properties but it is an important conversation to have and it should take place. Mr. Catanese stated there is an approved Ordinance, 560-31c, which allows a permitted business in any zone to have a parking lot in an adjacent residential zone. A motel or hotel in a new hotel zone or overlay zone, under the Ordinance, could create a situation where the parking lot could go into the residential zone next to it. Mr. Bickford said a more expansive thought would be to provide a parking permit and a valet parking service and generate revenue for the town; that the Borough doesn't want to dictate what someone chooses to build, but to create the possibility that it is something they can do with a vision for their property. Mr. Catanese said the only thing to keep in mind regarding offsite parking and valet service is that the way the Reeds is set up, as a condition to their approval, the parking lots are deed restricted to the main hotel site so those lots can never be lost to another use. The Board needs to keep in mind that if the Borough does not have that same requirement, the property owner could lose that offsite non-contiguous parking and at that point, what are they to do? It would place the Zoning Board in a very difficult position. Ms. Gruel stated there seems to be a unanimous decision that the Board does not want the properties converted into residential properties. Mr. Bickford agreed and said on the other hand, the Board can create viable possible incentives so that doesn't happen. Mr. Carusi stated to be able to attract people for 3 days to 5 days renting year after year is a good thing.

Mr. Conrad stated the Board should have a conversation with owners with the understanding that their opinions are not controlling in the Board's decision. Mrs. Gougher said it would be beneficial for the sub-committee to meet with the owners and then meet with Heyer, Gruel before coming back to the Board with their proposed suggestions. Mrs. Gougher stated she will reach out to sub-committee members (T. Hand, W. Conrad, J. Gougher) to begin the process of scheduling a meeting.

Old Business

Mr. Bickford asked about the Waterfront Business District. Mrs. Gougher stated that Mr. Catanese is going to meet with several council members on May 18th and after that, there should be an update on the initiative.

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Public Comment

No one spoke. Public Session Closed.

Adjournment

Having no further business at hand Mr. Conrad called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Bickford seconded the motion. All members present were in favor and stated aye.

APPROVED: July 13, 2015

ATTESTED: Diane Frangiose
Diane Frangiose, Secretary Stone Harbor Planning Board