

New Hope Borough
Planning Commission
September 18, 2023 / 6:30 PM

The New Hope Borough Planning Commission met on Monday, September 18, 2023 at the Borough Hall community meeting room.

Present: PC Chairman Keith Voss (KV), PC members Lou Bellafronte (LB), Lawrence Greenberg (LG), Kelly Whitman (KW) and Peter Meyer (PM). Also in attendance were Mary Stover (MS), CKS Engineers and Lisa Littlefield (LL), Zoning Officer.

Not present: PC member Nick Gilias

Call to Order: Keith Voss called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

Public Comment: Victoria Short (audience) stated that she served on the Planning Commission during the last Comprehensive Plan.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes of the July 17, 2023 were approved 5-0. The PC did not meet during the month of August.

I. PC Vacancy

KV informed that Nick Gilias has resigned from the Planning Commission. There will need to be a new appointee to the PC.

II. Comprehensive Plan Discussion

Discussion on the comprehensive plan as well as the RFP continued. Focus turned towards a committee to oversee the comprehensive plan. KV said that a committee will guide the PC on mailings, meetings, etc. The hope is to get a group that will be focused on New Hope's goals and size of community. Although New Hope is a Borough, there are many factors unique to the Borough.

PC has been requested to make a recommendation to request for draft RFP that needs to be approved by Council. PM says that PC would only make the recommendation to Council as they are an advisory body. The language within the RFP states that the PC is the steering committee. KW asked if the RFP has to be approved at a workshop or at a council meeting. PM said that it has to be approved at a council meeting.

Jay Freeo (audience) asked if the draft RFP take the past comprehensive plan into account. The answer is that the RFP states that the past comprehensive plan needs to be accounted for in looking at a new comprehensive plan.

KW said that floodplain, historic town, size of town are important for a consulting agency to consider during the comprehensive plan process.

It was suggested by LB that he could chair a future committee for the comprehensive plan.

- *PC approved 5-0 to recommend the RFP for Council's consideration.*

III. Zoning Hearing Board Application Discussion

Discussion was raised during the meeting regarding the review process of new Zoning Hearing Board applications. Presently, all submitted ZHB applications go to Borough Council prior to scheduling with the ZHB. Should all ZHB applications go through PC, Council and then to the ZHB. Or should all ZHB applications go through PC and then to the ZHB.

KV asked what type of ZHB applications should go to the PC. A change of use or only a change of use that requires a variance. KV does not believe ZHB is looking at the Borough as a whole when they are deciding on the approval of a variance request. A question was raised regarding a new review process as far as the boundaries of a potential motion to recommend to Council. LG believes a new review request for PC involvement should be incorporated into the comprehensive plan.

LB stated that at his prior municipality, a plan went to the Zoning Officer and the Municipal Engineer first to determine if a ZHB application should go to the PC or not. Victoria Short (audience) said that past applications went to PC first. She wondered when the shift happened where ZHB applications now go to Council.

KV brought up that a past ZHB decision affected allowable impervious coverage on W Mechanic St, and that he has concerns regarding stormwater runoff onto Old Mill Rd as a result.

Another possibility discussed is sending ZHB applications to the PC in the event the application is deemed to have a community impact.

Suggestions arose as to how PC would hear and decide on ZHB applications. Would there be a second meeting night to handle applications, would they meet on an as needed basis, etc. MS said that all PC meetings would need to be advertised before the start of the year. PC could cancel a meeting if there is no pending business or if they decide that they do not need to discuss a submitted ZHB application.

LG asked the possibility of having the second meeting via Zoom. MS says one of her municipalities has two meetings a month for PC and the governing body to handle ZHB applications.

Stacy Endress (audience) commented if PC needs quorum or if applications could slip through the cracks. Stacy also asked if additional HARB approval would be required. A separate resident recommended to include specific citation of the comprehensive plan as to why the ZHB application is being recommended for support.

- *PC approved 5-0 requesting Borough Council to recommend sending ZHB applications to PC.*

IV. RB1/RB2 Ordinance Discussion

At the prior Borough Council meeting, the adoption of the proposed RB1/RB2 Ordinance was tabled and it was suggested to bring back to PC for discussion.

PM started by saying that he does not see a need for substantive changes to the proposed Ordinance.

There was discussion regarding calculating footprint in the Ordinance. KV said that he cares more about what the house will look like from the street view, not too concerned with overall footprint.

Jay Freeo (audience) asked if there should be representatives from either PC or BCPC to explain the Ordinance at a future Borough Council meeting.

There was discussion about what parties are objecting to the Ordinance adoption. LB feels that the people objecting to the adoption are developers and Borough residents looking to maximize value of their property.

Past questions have been raised if the Ordinance is legally sound. PM said that a specialized attorney reviewed the proposed Ordinance to answer that question and they determined that it is legal.

There was discussion on regulating building height. The Zoning Ordinance states height is limited to 35 feet.

Jeff Cohen (audience) stated that he lives in the Borough and that he has a property on Waterloo St where he is looking to build a new house. He said that he does not think that it is fair that the property would need to comply with the height requirements of the proposed Ordinance. He does not believe it is fair to exclude large outliers as it could affect other properties in the future. PM believes it is fair to modify Ordinance to accommodate Jeff's comments.

It was discussed that if a property is in the floodplain and if there is an issue with building height, such as needing to raise the structure to comply with floodplain regulations, perhaps they may need other variances. KW said that an applicant always has the option to seek variances from the Zoning Ordinance.

KV suggested setting a new height restriction, such as set a number based on 20 feet + FEMA required height. Perhaps this could be achieved via conditional use approval. KW stated that perhaps there could be special consideration for meeting specific criteria if neighboring buildings have not been raised out of the floodplain.

There was discussion that perhaps Borough Council could invite members of the PC to discuss the Ordinance at a future Council workshop meeting. PM volunteered to be appointee of PC at a Council workshop meeting, collect various e-mails, documents, etc., and coordinate with PC.

Adjourn: 9:00 pm.