Christiansburg Planning Commission
Minutes of August 29, 2011

Present: Barry Akers
Mark M. Caldwell, III
Ann H. Carter
M. H. Dorsett, AICP
Craig Moore, Chairperson
Joe Powers
Jennifer D. Sowers
Jim Vanhoozier
Randy S. Wingfield, Secretary Non-Voting

Absent: Kevin Conner, Vice-Chairperson

Staff/Visitors: Nichole Hair, staff
Kali Casper, staff
Carol Lindstrom
Ray Alcorn
Bob Poff
Tacy Newell-Foutz

Chairperson Moore called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Christiansburg Town Hall at 100 E. Main Street, Christiansburg, Virginia to discuss the following items:

Public Comment.

Chairperson Moore opened the floor for public comment. Ms. Lindstrom addressed the Planning Commission regarding stormwater management in Christiansburg after the Town was spared damage from an earthquake and Hurricane Irene.

Approval of meetings minutes for August 8, 2011.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Commissioner Vanhoozier made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for August 8, 2011. Commissioner Carter seconded the motion which passed 4-0 with Chairperson Moore and Commissioners Sowers, Akers and Caldwell abstaining from voting due to their absence from the August 8, 2011 meeting.

Public input regarding the consideration of the adoption of a Downtown Historic District.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Commissioner Dorsett indicated without a Historic District for the Downtown area, property owners would only be eligible to apply for a couple of grants to rehabilitate their properties. Commissioner Dorsett indicated with the designation, property owners are able to apply for numerous grants. Commissioner Dorsett indicated that the downtown area has been a hot topic in the Comprehensive Plan surveys.

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Public input regarding the consideration of the adoption of a Downtown Historic District – (continued).

Commissioner Dorsett added even if the Town never added regulations to the Historic District, revitalization would be possible and beneficial. Commissioner Vanhoozier wanted to clarify the Town is just looking at the honorary designation of a Downtown Historic District on the Registers at this time. Commissioner Dorsett indicated this is correct and the designation would not restrict a property owner from using the building the way they would like. Commissioner Dorsett added the tax incentives for commercial buildings in a Historic District are approximately 25%. Commissioner Vanhoozier inquired if property owners can do exterior work also and Commissioner Dorsett indicated this is correct. Commissioner Dorsett stated she voluntarily designated the Depot as a historic structure and in that designation she had the use restricted.

Mr. Bob Poff stated he has interest in his two buildings in the downtown area. Mr. Poff indicated he wanted clarification about why some buildings were left off due to modifications when if the exterior of the building is removed, the regular building materials would be there. Mr. Wingfield stated the DHR representative provided guidance for the drawing of the district lines. Mr. Wingfield added the representative was provided with the year built dates of the buildings downtown. Commissioner Dorsett suggested adjusting the boundary line of the district to Commerce Street.

Mr. Ray Alcorn inquired about literature of what the designation entails. Mr. Wingfield stated Planning Commission is just discussing the possibility of adding the district. Mr. Wingfield suggested Mr. Alcorn visit the Department of Historic Resources website for additional information. Commissioner Dorsett indicated the DHR website has information about the designation and benefits of being designated. Mr. Alcorn inquired about restrictions. Commissioner Dorsett stated there are no restrictions on a property that is designated. Commissioner Dorsett indicated it would be up to the Town to adopt restrictions. Mr. Alcorn indicated the designation would need to come first. Mr. Wingfield stated the Town can adopt a separate zoning designation and include regulations. Mr. Wingfield added the Town's zoning designation does not need to meet the Registers' Historic designation. Commissioner Powers stated the first step is the Preliminary Information Form and the second step would be a formal application. Commissioner Powers inquired about the cost for a private consultant to assist and Ms. Hair indicated it is approximately $4,000.

Ms. Newell-Foutz stated there is some incentive to the Town for property evaluations. Ms. Newell-Foutz stated she has made investments in the building that will last. Ms. Newell-Foutz stated maps are available at the Courthouse and Montgomery County Museum and she would like to see the Historic District map be based on the original tax parcels. Ms. Newell-Foutz stated interior renovations have nothing to do with this designation. Ms. Newell-Foutz stated she does not think the Town is going to put regulations in place right away.

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Public input regarding the consideration of the adoption of a Downtown Historic District – (continued).

Commissioner Powers stated the Development Subcommittee has discussed the issue of parking and how to meet parking requirements in the downtown and possibly more flexible for parking requirements in the zoning ordinance. Mr. Alcorn stated the parking restrictions downtown are not appropriate for what is on the ground. Mr. Alcorn stated the grandfather clause that is in place is somewhat ambiguous when it comes to adding onto buildings is a challenge. Mr. Poff added the requirement of two parking spaces per residential unit is not able to be met downtown. Mr. Poff stated he had been contacted by a developer regarding developing loft type apartments but the parking cannot be met. Mr. Poff added other localities are less restrictive requiring 1 or no parking spaces. Mr. Poff stated that in order to do residential and commercial in his building, there is no way to meet the requirements. Commissioner Dorsett added the Cambria Historic District has even less parking for commercial properties. Ms. Newell-Foutz stated the Town missed an opportunity with the parking deck at the new Montgomery County Courthouse and could have seen a 3rd level to the parking deck. Ms. Newell-Foutz stated the parking garage will barely accommodate the Courthouse staff and persons utilizing the Courthouse. Ms. Newell-Foutz indicated with her building she has enough parking for the commercial use but to add additional residential there would not be enough parking spaces available. Ms. Newell-Foutz stated customers utilize on-street parking and are willing to walk one or maybe two blocks but not more. Ms. Newell-Foutz added the parking requirements are a deterrent for mixed use development.

Mr. Poff stated he was serving on the Planning Commission when the Town Code was changed to allow residential use as a by-right use downtown on the second floor. Mr. Poff stated there was not forward thinking regarding the parking requirements.

Ms. Newell-Foutz stated with more thoughts to bike use or trail systems she is providing area for tenants in apartments to hang bikes to encourage cycling. Ms. Newell-Foutz stated parking will continue to be an issue. Ms. Lindstrom stated businesses are dependent on people coming downtown and even with a one bedroom apartment, it can consist of two adults with two vehicles that need to go to different locations for employment.

Commissioner Powers stated there is potential for parking on College Street and in the churches' parking areas during the week. Commissioner Powers added people do not want to walk very far. Commissioner Powers stated pedestrian improvements made to Main Street could be extended to Hickok Street and College Street to tie it all in.

Mr. Wingfield stated the Development Subcommittee has met on the parking issue and is studying what's available in the area in parking lots and on the street. Commissioner Caldwell inquired if the Town ever thought of getting into the parking garage business and Mr. Wingfield stated not too seriously. Mr. Wingfield added Montgomery County has purchased additional property for more parking in conjunction with the Courthouse project.

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Public input regarding the consideration of the adoption of a Downtown Historic District – (continued).

Commissioner Caldwell inquired if properties with a historic designation are exempt from ADA regulations. Commissioner Dorsett stated there are some exemptions from ADA and building code. Commissioner Dorsett added buildings must be on the historic registry in to order to be exempt from the State Building Code. Mr. Alcorn stated the new ADA regulations go into effect March 1, 2012. Mr. Alcorn added he cannot market a property that is not ADA compliant.

Commissioner Powers inquired from the property owners in the area if there are any other specific challenges the Planning Commission should be aware of. Mr. Alcorn stated there are title issues including right-of-ways and easements. Mr. Alcorn added the Town helped a lot to cleanup most of the titles with the Main Street sidewalk project.

Ms. Newell-Foutz stated the topography and stormwater management need to be considered. Ms. Newell-Foutz added during a significant rain event, a manhole comes up on Hickok Street which directs running water onto an adjoining property. Ms. Newell-Foutz suggested looking at solar easements and restriction of properties that could block solar access. Mr. Alcorn stated the Corps of Engineers has provided approval for the stream below the old Stafford building to be piped.

Commissioner Vanhoozier suggested the Planning Commission look at the original footprint of the Town compared to what is designated here. Mr. Wingfield stated the Town has seen multiple boundary line adjustments. Commissioner Powers stated the area being considered for the Historic District should be looked at. Mr. Poff stated the oldest map of Christiansburg is in the Montgomery County Book. Commissioner Vanhoozier suggested using what is published and available. Commissioner Powers added the Town can do the district in phases. Commissioner Dorsett added buildings can be individually designated.

Consideration of Council's intention to adopt an ordinance amending Chapter 30 "Zoning" of the Christiansburg Town Code in regards to provisions for urban agriculture including the keeping of chicken hens, chicks, and beehive stands and provisions for agriculture and forestry uses in the R-1A Rural Residential District including the keeping of horses. The public hearing was held August 16, 2011.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Mr. Wingfield stated no comments were received at the public hearing. Commissioner Dorsett stated Ms. Lindstrom's stuffed friend did make comments. Mr. Wingfield stated this is correct and Henrietta Cluckinski spoke regarding stormwater.

Commissioner Carter stated she had an article from USA Today involving salmonella originating from chicken coops. Commissioner Dorsett stated she is not sure there is need for these provisions to accommodate two people wanting chickens.

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Consideration of Council's intention to adopt an ordinance amending Chapter 30 "Zoning" of the Christiansburg Town Code in regards to provisions for urban agriculture including the keeping of chicken hens, chicks, and beehive stands and provisions for agriculture and forestry uses in the R-1A Rural Residential District including the keeping of horses – (continued).

Commissioner Vanhoozier made a motion to recommend Town Council to not implement an ordinance to allow chickens in Christiansburg. Commissioner Dorsett seconded the motion. Commissioner Powers stated he would be voting in opposition of the motion as he would like to give those an opportunity to have chickens. The motion passed 5-3 with Chairperson Moore and Commissioners Powers and Akers voting against the motion

A Conditional Use Permit request by Lenzkes Clamping Tools, Inc. for a commercial garage at 845 Radford Street (tax parcels 525 – ((A)) – 41, 42, and 43) in the I-1 Limited Industrial District. The public hearing is set for September 6, 2011.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Commissioner Vanhoozier inquired about the location and what was there previously. Mr. Wingfield stated it is the former Custom Coach Bus location. Commissioner Caldwell stated there appears to be doing work going on now. Mr. Wingfield stated they may be doing work but they do not have approval. Commissioner Powers stated the applicant is only talking about that one portion of the property and inquired if the description can indicate it is limited to that one portion. Mr. Wingfield stated it is designated by the address and tax parcels on the application. Mr. Wingfield stated the applicant designated the entire property and assumes it is to allow for parking on the remaining property.

Commissioner Dorsett inquired as to what percent of the property was greenspace and Mr. Wingfield stated approximately ten percent. Commissioner Dorsett inquired if the Planning Commission can require additional greenspace and Mr. Wingfield stated this can be a condition. Commissioner Dorsett stated she would like to condition that they meet the minimum lot requirements for landscaping and greenspace and meet the minimum stormwater standards. Mr. Wingfield stated he will ask the Engineering Department to look at the stormwater. Commissioner Dorsett stated rain gardens are a possibility. Commissioner Carter inquired why a tool business is asking for a commercial garage. Mr. Wingfield stated Lenzkes Tools is the property owner but Blackburn Automotive is who will be operating the garage. Commissioner Dorsett inquired about the setbacks. Mr. Wingfield stated the building setback is 30 feet from the street right-of-way with a 15-foot parking setback. Commissioner Powers inquired if they were doing this as new construction, all the parking spaces along the front would be set back 15 feet from the right-of-way and Mr. Wingfield stated that is correct. Mr. Wingfield added sidewalks would not be required since they are not required in the Industrial District. Commissioner Powers requested the Building Department see if the building has been reviewed for this use.

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Review of a Conditional Use Permit request by Jason Blackburn (acting as agent for property owner John W. Eanes, Jr.) for a commercial garage at 1020 Radford Street (tax parcel 525 – ((A)) – 11) in the B-3 General Business District. The public hearing was held August 3, 2010 and approval given on August 17, 2010.

Chairperson Moore introduced the review. Mr. Wingfield stated a site plan was not provided as required by the CUP. Mr. Wingfield added Mr. Eanes has stated he does not intend to bring the property into compliance or use it for a commercial garage. Mr. Wingfield stated the Blackburn's have vacated the property and Mr. Eanes has stated he will give up the CUP. Mr. Wingfield stated he will revoke the CUP for noncompliance. Planning Commission is in agreement with this decision.

Discussion of Planning Commission attendance.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Mr. Wingfield stated the Town Council commented that only three Planning Commissioners attended the last public hearing. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated he brought up attendance regarding the absences and how the By-laws are set up requiring regular attendance. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated if the Planning Commission has members that cannot attend meetings, then they need to let staff know. Commissioner Dorsett stated one of the issues is going to be if the Planning Commission has three formal meetings a month and may or may not come to a public hearing is because there is not interaction during the public hearing. Commissioner Dorsett stated Montgomery County and Blacksburg only do two Planning Commission meetings a month and one of those is the public hearing.

Ms. Lindstrom stated if there is an issue of Planning Commission members not hearing the public comments during the public hearing, all of the Planning Commission members have internet access and can review videos and meeting minutes. Commissioner Dorsett stated the public hearing is currently meant for the Town Council review. Commissioner Dorsett added the Planning Commission is typically more technical and doing all the leg work.

Chairperson Moore stated if the Planning Commission were to hold a separate public hearing, there could be issues of less participation by the public to attend two public hearings.

Commissioner Dorsett inquired if the By-laws need to be amended to provide a separate public hearing. Mr. Wingfield indicated he did not believe the By-laws would need amendment for that change. Mr. Wingfield added if there is going to be two separate public hearings, then he would want to make Town Council aware. Mr. Wingfield added there may be some opposition for holding an additional meeting. Ms. Lindstrom stated staff can change the way Town Council is informed by including meeting minutes in Town Council packets. Mr. Wingfield stated that the Mayor had indicated that the Planning Commission can move its meetings days and times as they deem appropriate and can meet during the day if they desire. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated that changing the regular meeting days would require amending the By-laws.

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Discussion of Planning Commission attendance – (continued).

Mr. Wingfield stated the Planning Commission meetings in September will be September 12th and 26th. Commissioner Caldwell inquired if the Planning Commission is supposed to be here for the Town Council meetings. Mr. Wingfield stated it is at the request of the Town Council that Planning Commission attend public hearings. Mr. Wingfield stated the next public hearing is September 6th.

Other Business.

Commissioner Dorsett indicated the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee will be providing a survey presentation to the Planning Commission and Town Council. Ms. Casper stated the Planning Commission presentation will be on September 12th and the Town Council presentation will be on September 20th. Commissioner Dorsett indicated public workshops for the Comprehensive Plan update will be September 18th and 19th.

There being no more business Chairperson Moore adjourned the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

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Craig Moore, Chairperson Randy S. Wingfield, Secretary Non-Voting

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