Christiansburg Planning Commission
Minutes of November 28, 2011

Present: Barry Akers
Mark M. Caldwell, III
Ann H. Carter
M. H. Dorsett, AICP
Craig Moore, Chairperson
Joe Powers, Vice-Chairperson
Jennifer D. Sowers (arrived at 7:02 p.m.)
Jim Vanhoozier
Randy S. Wingfield, Secretary Non-Voting

Absent: none

Staff/Visitors: Nichole Hair, staff
Kali Casper, staff
Carol Lindstrom
Nate Glatkowski, Crimper's Climbing Gym
John Johnson, Crimper's Climbing Gym
Mrs. John Johnson
Harry Collins

Chairperson Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 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. There being no public comments, the public comment period was closed.

Approval of meeting minutes for November 7, 2011.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion.

Commissioner Caldwell made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for November 7, 2011. Commissioner Akers seconded the motion which passed 6-0 with Commissioner Vanhoozier abstaining due to missing the meeting. Commissioner Sowers entered.

A Conditional Use Permit request by Crimper's Climbing Gym (agent for property owner Epperly Elite Training Center, LLC) for a private recreational facility at 100 Central Avenue (tax parcel 467 – ((18)) – 1) in the B-3 General Business District. The public hearing is set for December 6, 2011.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Commissioner Dorsett requested a copy of the application and further staff analysis. Commissioner Dorsett indicated a CUP has been given at this property for a private school. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated he would like to recommend a condition to revoke the other CUP. Crimper's Climbing Gym's presentation to the Planning Commission included a video.

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A Conditional Use Permit request by Crimper's Climbing Gym (agent for property owner Epperly Elite Training Center, LLC) for a private recreational facility at 100 Central Avenue (tax parcel 467 – ((18)) – 1) in the B-3 General Business District – (continued).

The presentation included hours of operation being weekdays early afternoon to late evening. The gym expects 50 customers on a typical day with a peak of 10 to 30 expected at any given time, for about 2 hours, for 8-10 hours. The gym will operate on a membership basis as well as a day use pass. Mr. Glatkowski stated that there are plans to occasionally host tournaments which may have approximately 150 people in attendance and added there would be some birthday parties and team building groups. Mr. Glatkowski explained customers will need to pass criteria by certified instructor to advance in climbing experience. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated other than recreational purposes, the gym is helping competitors to train. Mr. Johnson stated climbing teams are a great way to get students active. Commissioner Vanhoozier inquired if there is enough parking for larger events. Mr. Wingfield stated be believed there are approximately 100 parking spaces on the property, but that he would verify the exact number. Mr. Johnson stated larger events will be rare. Commissioner Carter inquired about the number of certified instructors. Mr. Johnson indicated he is certified and Mr. Glatkowski will be too. Mr. Glatkowski stated the Climbing Wall Association is still developing standards for training. Commissioner Vanhoozier inquired if local persons would be trained to be instructors. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Glatkowski both agreed this is their intent. Mr. Glatkowski stated the Climbing Gym will be leasing the downstairs portion of the building, which is about 10,000 square feet. Commissioner Vanhoozier inquired if the Lighthouse Academy is aware of this change of use. Mr. Glatkowski stated he has been told by the property owner that the school will not be opening and that he thought offices were planned. Mr. Wingfield stated that the property owner had mentioned offices to him recently. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated this is further need to void the prior CUP. Vice-Chairperson Powers inquired about how larger events are regulated in the Town. Mr. Wingfield stated assembly permits are filled out by larger events and then forwarded to the Police Department.

Commissioner Akers inquired about how safety issues, such as anchors and equipment will be handled. Mr. Glatkowski stated climbing walls are being built by Leading Edge and the entire wall will be reviewed by an engineer and stamped, then work with the Town's Building Department to insure all regulations are being met. Mr. Johnson stated the climbing wall is being engineered to a higher standard. Mr. Johnson added there are standards for the equipment and will be regulated by staff. Mr. Glatkowski stated because climbing is a higher risk sport, standards are held for equipment. Commissioner Vanhoozier inquired about the 50 clients a day. Mr. Glatkowski stated this is the number expected on a given day. Mr. Johnson added that number of customers would be spread out. Commissioner Caldwell inquired if participants are expected to sign a liability release. Mr. Glatkowski stated there will be a one page liability form from their insurance company. Mr. Johnson added they are working with a local law firm to make sure everything is in place.

Chairperson Moore reviewed the drafted conditions:

1. Hours of operation shall be limited to between 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m.
2. There shall be no excessive noise between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.

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A Conditional Use Permit request by Crimper's Climbing Gym (agent for property owner Epperly Elite Training Center, LLC) for a private recreational facility at 100 Central Avenue (tax parcel 467 – ((18)) – 1) in the B-3 General Business District – (continued).

Mr. Glatkowski stated that they may want a broader time frame for operating as people may want to come early in the morning before work or later at night. Mr. Glatkowski stated that people may want to get some coffee early or stop by Wal-Mart in the morning and he did not view his business situation much differently, particularly considering the location. Commissioner Vanhoozier recommended adding a condition to void the prior CUP. Vice-Chairperson Powers inquired how the Town will make sure the equipment is meeting standards. Mr. Wingfield stated the Building Official will be reviewing the climbing wall. Vice-Chairperson Powers stated the Town does not have anyone on staff to review the equipment. Chairperson Moore stated if there is an incident, the CUP can be revoked. Vice-Chairperson Powers inquired if someone is unhappy with their visit and logs a complaint, who would inspect the equipment. Commissioner Akers suggested staff contact the Rescue Squad to inspect items like rope/nylon and harnesses.

Commissioner Caldwell inquired if there should be any review and suggests a 6 month review. Commissioner Vanhoozier suggested a one year review. The Planning Commission agreed on a one year review to allow the gym to get up and running. Vice-Chairperson Powers suggested the Fire Chief and Rescue Squad Captain be part of the annual review.

Increase of fees for separate public hearings. The public hearing is set for December 6, 2011.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Mr. Wingfield stated he added the item to the agenda since the public hearing is coming up. Commissioner Dorsett inquired if the Planning Commission would want to use housing units as the criteria rather than acreage. Mr. Wingfield indicated the fees apply to commercial and industrial requests as well as residential requests. Commissioner Dorsett agreed with the way the ordinance is drafted.

Consideration of amendment of Planning Commission By-laws.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Mr. Wingfield stated the changes to the By-laws included a provision regarding approved leave of absence, the change to move the meeting dates and the addition of the leave of absence details. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated he was absent from the last meeting and wanted to discuss the leave of absence regarding public office. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated people run for public office but they do not take a leave of absence from their role as a Planning Commissioner or Town Council member. Chairperson Moore stated the Planning Commission is an appointed body and would like to continue to be an impartial body during the political process. Commissioner Dorsett stated this will assist in continuing to depoliticize the Planning Commission.

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Consideration of amendment of Planning Commission By-laws – (continued).

Commissioner Vanhoozier stated the Planning Commission has wanted to encourage people to be more involved and this seems to be more of a slap in the face. Vice-Chairperson Powers stated there could be a problem with being impartial in decision making. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated this could discourage participation. Commissioner Dorsett stated the Planning Commission is seen as a stepping stone to the Town Council. Commissioner Dorsett added the public perception of a commissioner is one of being political. Commissioner Carter stated she has heard for years the Planning Commission is a stepping stone and the position is used as a political role.

Chairperson Moore stated the Planning Commission all discussed whether or not the Town Council liaison should be a voting member. Mr. Wingfield stated staff polled other localities and Roanoke County, Roanoke City, and Salem City did not have a liaison. Mr. Wingfield stated the City of Radford and Town of Blacksburg's liaisons are voting members, while Montgomery County's liaison is not a voting member. Mr. Wingfield stated that none of these localities have provisions addressing leave of absence or seeking political office.

Commissioner Vanhoozier stated if a Planning Commissioner comes forward to request a leave of absence in order to campaign, which would be a good way to handle the leave of absence. Commissioner Dorsett suggested adding that under the leave of absence with the medical reasons and military leave (which would make it optional). Commissioner Caldwell inquired if the Planning Commission is a spring board to the Town Council, is that necessarily a bad thing. Commissioner Dorsett stated this is trying to change the public perception of the Planning Commission as a political body. Chairperson Moore stated this is not meant to discourage participation. Vice-Chairperson Powers stated the leave of absence is only from August-November every 2 years. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated he would rather it be added as a reason for leave of absence. Commissioner Caldwell stated the larger issue would be 3 or 4 Planning Commissioners running for some office. Vice-Chairperson Powers inquired if the Planning Commission should send the by-laws on to Town Council and get feedback. Commissioner Caldwell inquired if the Planning Commission can just edit the By-laws. Mr. Wingfield stated the voting rights of the Council representative would have to be referred to Town Council and stated that he thought the leave of absence should go to them as well, but was not sure about whether legally required.

Mr. Wingfield stated he has sent the drafted By-laws to the Town Attorney for review and he has also requested the Town Attorney's opinion regarding the definition of a quorum. Mr. Wingfield added under the Code of Virginia Section 15.2, a quorum is present and voting members. Commissioner Vanhoozier stated he would like to have the Attorney's opinion before moving forward. Commissioner Vanhoozier also inquired what Robert's Rules of Order state for meetings.

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Consideration of amendment of Planning Commission By-laws – (continued).

Commissioner Dorsett made a motion to table the amendment until the Attorney has reviewed it. Vice-Chairperson Powers stated he would like to move forward with the meeting date change.

Commissioner Dorsett amended her motion to adopt the meeting date change and separate public hearings be held and table the remainder for determination by the Town Attorney. Commissioner Vanhoozier seconded the motion which passed 8-0.

Other business.

Mr. Wingfield stated the announcement regarding the Planning Commission vacancy has been given in the Roanoke Times and on the Town's website. Vice-Chairperson Powers stated the Development Subcommittee will be meeting with local engineers to go over changes to the Zoning Ordinance. Ms. Casper stated the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee will continue to meet the first and third Thursday of each month and there will be a meeting this week. Mr. Wingfield stated the next Town Council meeting will be December 6th and the next Planning Commission meeting will be December 12th.

There being no more business Chairperson Moore adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

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

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