

**CITY OF NEWARK
DELAWARE
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMISSION MINUTES**

April 26, 2022

MEETING CONVENED: 7:04 p.m. Microsoft Teams

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sasha Aber, Marihelen Barrett, Blaine Hackett, Jacob Higgins

MEMBERS ABSENT: Annalisa Ekbladh, Tamesha Garnett, Patrick McCloskey

STAFF: Tara Schiano, Director of Legislative Services
Renee Bensley, Deputy Director of Planning and Development
Mike Fortner, Planner II

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Blaine Hackett, at 7:04 pm.

1. MOMENT OF SILENCE:

The Chair offered a moment of silence.

2. ROLL CALL

In attendance were Sasha Aber, Marihelen Barrett, Blaine Hackett, and Jacob Higgins.

3. APPROVAL OF MARCH 29, 2022 MINUTES

MOTION BY MR. HACKETT, SECONDED BY MS. ABER: TO ACCEPT THE MARCH 29, 2022 MINUTES AS RECEIVED.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 4 to 0.

Aye – Aber, Barrett, Hackett, Higgins.

Nay – 0.

Absent – Ekbladh, Garnett, McCloskey

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION BY MR. HACKETT, SECONDED BY MR. HIGGINS: TO APPROVE THE APRIL 26, 2022 AGENDA.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 4 to 0.

Aye – Aber, Barrett, Hackett, Higgins.

Nay – 0.

Absent – Ekbladh, Garnett, McCloskey.

5. DISCUSSION: OLD/NEW BUSINESS

1. Comprehensive Development Plan V 2.0 Discussion

Mr. Hackett introduced Mike Fortner who was present to discuss the Comprehensive Development Plan V 2.0 and how it relates to the work done by the to the Commission. Mr. Fortner stated that the plan went through a review process. He explained that there are two different types of processes:

- Update – considered a major overhaul of the plan which is done every 10 years
- Review – is a significant overhaul of the plan done every 5 years as a reevaluation of the plan for corrections to errors and/or clarification

Mr. Fortner stated that the Steering Commission's changes were noted in blue. He used an analogy of how a review would be similar to when a cell phone has uploads to renew the data and an update would be the equivalent of getting a new cell phone. The Planning Commission appointed a Steering Commission which had a diverse group of people who worked for a year having public events and community outreach to obtain community input.

Mr. Fortner outlined an abridged version of the Comprehensive Development Plan to highlight the portions he felt would be the most interesting to the commission. He added that the entire plan is available online.

Mr. Fortner stated that per the state code detail the components of the Comprehensive Plan which is defined as a document adopted by City and put forward in words, maps, illustrations, tables, goals, aspirations, policies, and guidelines intended to serve as a blueprint to achieve its vision, address short- and long-term planning concerns, and provide a rational basis for local land use decisions. It is to coordinate many aspects of the City into land use which corresponds with transportation, housing, parks and open spaces and environmental quality. Many of these are issues that directly impact this commission. It is understood that the commission is involved with housing where housing policies are part of the Comprehensive Development Plan.

Environmental quality is also a big concern. Mr. Fortner said that sometimes environmental policies do not take into consideration the needs of low to moderate income families. In some instances, developments that are averse to the environment can impact low- and moderate-income neighborhoods more than wealthier neighborhoods. Environmental quality is something that impacts a quality and human rights in our communities as well as jobs and transportation access.

Mr. Fortner presented a slide which showed the vision of the first Comprehensive Development Plan V. This version established the vision for land use which was developed into three elements. The first is to have the City be a community of health, activity, sustainability, and inclusive. He provided an example of a healthy and active community would be to have bike ability and walkability. When there is access to transit, safe biking and walking then it helps to make a community open to transportation choices for people who do not have car or are unable to drive a car. These sustainable options also improve the air quality for the community.

The next slide outlined how the Planning Commission created a plan for how the Steering Committee could conducted public outreach and schedule. The purpose of plan to conduct the 5-year review to update the action items, demographics, statistics and tables.

Mr. Fortner educated the commission on the update of the community profile by using the American Community Survey. It shows the demographics collected by the census. This helps the identify trends occurring within the community population. Newark is made up of 14% of foreign-born residents. The City of Newark is one the more diverse communities in the State of Delaware.

The analysis completed a housing inventory and assessment which looks at the different types of houses from multi-family to single family. It also measures how those building types differ over time. A housing needs assessment was also completed to see where the cost of housing has increases or decreases as well as the cost of rent. This data is compared to other jurisdictions in the State of Delaware and nationally. All housing assessment analysis are cited. An area of concern was raised where there has been a high demand for student housing. The high demand has priced out low- and moderate-income families from the City's rental housing market. Research continues to look for ways to increase the supply of housing to create more housing choices in the City and that more people, not just students, are able to find places to live.

Mr. Fortner believed that the commission would be interested in the transportation and having varied choices of transportation. Transportation is an important part of part of an inclusive community. Other items addressed in the transportation chapter are road safety, car mobility, bicycling, pedestrians, parking, and transit. Mr. Fortner added the one of the most innovative items being done in transportation is a "TID" (Transportation Improvement District). A TID focuses on the relationship between transportation and land use. The TID looks comprehensively, projecting twenty to thirty years into the future to look at land use projections and how the community trends are developing. Then use the projection model to create what the transportation needs would be as the community develops. This way all developers pay proportionally into the system rather than one developer at the end being affected more than another.

When talking about sustainability sometimes the needs of low- and moderate-income families and individuals are overlooked. Studies also show that global warming has been anticipated to impact low- and moderate-income families worse than wealthier families and in poor countries. One of the things that has been done with the Comprehensive Plan is to develop a sustainability plan for Newark which was a very big project. It responds to climate change which is green energy, the relationship between transportation and land use and how having a well-planned community can help people live a more sustainable lifestyle. This is created more denser environment than a typical suburban environment. Mr. Fortner added that having density is a good quality to have with mixed use as it allows people to live, work and walk in the same area. This includes making building green buildings, making them more energy efficient and preserving the natural environment.

The final slide highlights land development where land use is planned. Every parcel is designated a certain land use such as residential low density, residential high density, commercial, mixed use or industrial. Each must conform with the existing zoning as it allows the planning and projecting of how development will happen in Newark. Focus areas are created to help plan more proactively due to there being several rigid regulations around land use and land use designations. Transitioning neighborhoods fall within these focus areas. An example of a transitioning neighborhood when single family houses transition into higher density development or mixed-use developments. The City gives guidance to the developers on how the areas are developing, how it should develop and what type of things the City would be looking for when a developer might want a zoning change and a land use designation. This provides the developer with the criteria of what the City is looking for if a change is requested or necessary.

Mr. Fortner stated that the plan will go in front of Council in the next few months for public hearing. He encouraged the Commission to review the plan and decide how it may impact the Commission's work. He advised that each person could speak with their councilmember to become part of the process as it goes through Council's process to be adopted.

Mr. Hackett asked if this was the fifth-year review. Mr. Fortner stated yes that this is the fifth iteration of the plan. The plan has been in place since 1968. Mr. Hackett wanted clarification as to when some of the items would be implemented. Mr. Fortner answered in five years there would be an update which would be a more comprehensive update. The plan being presented at this meeting was adopted five years ago and is

being implemented now and is more of a mid-year look. Ms. Aber stated that Mr. Fortner was being humble about the revisions as there were hundreds of hours of work that had been used to do the revisions over the year. She added that some of the changes were different areas that are now developed but were not on the plan prior and other changes made were done by looking into the future as to how the city should look.

Mr. Hackett was interested in if traffic situations were taking into consideration, specifically the area of New London Road and Cleveland Avenue. He believed changes needed to be made in the area from Hillside Road to Cleveland Avenue intersecting at New London Road. Mr. Hackett is in the area Monday through Friday at all times of the day, and it is very difficult to get out of the parking lot even before all the construction in the area. Mr. Fortner explained that those types of situations are always being evaluated. The plan has a broader view which projects land use into the future. Mr. Hackett's concern would fall to the TID. Mr. Fortner stated that he was aware of the roads being congested by vehicles and pedestrians. The best way to solve the issue would be to have a bypass which had been an idea but may not be feasible any longer.

Mr. Hackett continued by asking about the Focus Area 1 New London Road. He wanted to know if there were plans to make the area denser with housing which would lead to more traffic since it is an already high traffic area. Mr. Fortner understood this to be a complicated issue and that density does create more of a walkable community. It is believed that new density in the area does need to be controlled however, since the streets are limited, the density could not go to a RA zoning. RA zoning would be high-rise zoning. Mr. Fortner said that The Grove which is in the process of being built will be targeting non-student. The plan is to have students to live closer to the campus.

Ms. Barrett wanted to comment that she would like for the commission to study the report more and focus on the environmental health implications for some of the low-income communities and how those implications are being addressed in terms of equity. She believed that there were issues and there were things the commission could recommend. Secondly, she was not happy with the removal of the mature trees along Casho Mill Road to make room for an apartment complex. She would like to review items around green space and maintaining trees in the community.

Ms. Aber stated that the City recently offered residents the opportunity to pick up two trees. Pick is scheduled for the 30th of April. There has also been discussion to continue the program as people may have to take down trees for various reasons. Mr. Fortner added that in Chapter Eight, the Parks and Recreation Department outlines items about the open space, buffer areas and flood plain regulations which are preserved to be natural environments.

Mr. Hackett wanted clarification that this process happens every 5 years. Mr. Fortner stated in another 5 years there would be more of a major overhaul. Mr. Hackett stated that it was interesting to see the racial mix and seeing the data reaching back to the 50's, 60's and 70's it was still 5%-6%. He knew the New London community was at least 98% black and now it is less than 6%.

Mr. Hackett thanked Mr. Fortner and suggested that the commission take a detailed look at the plan to have a more comprehensive conversation. He believed that Ms. Aber could be very instrumental to help the commission to understand the plan in its entirety. Ms. Aber stated that the plan had a lot of information and updates. Mr. Hackett added that this commission must understand how the plan affects the low to moderate income families.

Ms. Aber said that The Newark Partnership has a public series for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The final workshop is May 18th, 2022 from 12:00 pm to 1:30 pm. It is open to the public and can be attended online which can be accessed on the TNP website. This workshop would be the third in the series. The workshop will discuss understanding cultural awareness, intelligence, and competency. There will be a lot of interaction with people online and break-out groups.

Ms. Aber found it interesting that in the Comprehensive Development Plan, it gives specific guidance, recommendation and works with zoning. It is more a broad picture with subgroups working on different areas within the City.

Ms. Bensley, Deputy Director of Planning and Development explained that the plan is intended to be the guardrails for development within the City. The plan outlines the overall expected use for each parcel within the City. With the plan in place, it provides broader guidance which then is used with the zoning map and categories for land development in the plan. Ms. Bensley stated that this plan is to show the priorities of the City pertaining to development and health safety welfare aspects of the City. It is to make sure that when planning programs, budgeting for projects and developments staff is meeting the goals of the City and meeting the goals for the health of our citizens. The Comprehensive Plane is where the City would like to be as a city.

Ms. Bensley offered that an example of a project to help meet the needs and wants for low to moderate income houses comes as a recent amendment to the Comprehensive Plan made at the end of March and was related to the George Reed Village redevelopment that The Newark Housing Authority is conducting.

Ms. Bensley noted this is an opportunity for additional feedback from the community and other members of the public that can be passed along to Council for adoption. The currently timeline is present to the Conservation and Advisory Committee on May 10th, 2022, the first reading on the ordinance for adoption on May 23rd, 2022, and the second reading and public hearing for final adoption of the plan on June 27th, 2022. She asked that any feedback be provided prior to the June 27th, 2022, meeting.

Mr. Hackett asked if the purpose of all the focus areas was to find a way to have more land use. Ms. Bensley stated that the intention of the focus areas is to balance out rental housing properties versus owner occupied properties. Ms. Aber added that there was also discussion about how to connect bike paths throughout the City and it also brought in the census. There was verbiage added to address the pandemic. Ms. Bensley noted that some revisions and wording are in the plan to address the number of projects being reviewed and approved for student housing.

Ms. Bensley believed that Cherry Hill Manor was a good model to be used to show it can work in some areas of the City. Cherry Hill Manor has a mix of lower cost housing, a wide range of ethnic and racial backgrounds as well as different family sizes and age groups. She added some residents have resided there since the neighborhood was constructed and include graduate students, young families, and some of The Newark Housing Authority units.

Mr. Hackett said he was made a believer that the City has catered to the student population which and is lucrative for the City. He also felt that it also helps the University of Delaware off the hook from making sure to have proper housing for their students. Mr. Hackett asked if The Towers have been demolished yet. Ms. Bensley answered that the University of Delaware has not put forth what they have planned for the property yet.

Ms. Bensley added that the University of Delaware has tax exempt property in the City which means they do not pay into the taxes in the city. However, private development does pay into taxes and full utility revenue which helps to elevate the cost of services of other residents in the City.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

7. DISCUSSION OF DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

8. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

Tara Schiano
Director of Legislative Services/ City Secretary

/dmp