Minutes of Town Council Meeting Held on March 5, 2024

As reviewed, approved, and accepted by the Town Council on April 9, 2024.

There being a quorum, Mayor Charles Hendricks called the regular meeting of the Town Council to order at 7:31 p.m. The meeting was held using video conferencing. Council Members Charles Bradsher, Tom Burke, Amy Koval, and Christina Pellegrino were present. The Treasurer, Town Clerk, Assistant Clerks, Planning Commission Chair, Historic District Commission Chair, and approximately 4 residents and guests were also present.

Minutes:

The minutes of the Town Council meeting held February 6, 2024, were approved as submitted.

Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer Angela Hoffman reported that there were 4 main items of income for the month of

January: property taxes came in at $59,109; highway user funds came in $5,869; income tax produced $5,660; and, as interest rates have been going up, we received $3,100 in interest that month. She stated that the three top items of expenditures were waste collection, for which two payments were made, payroll at $5,037, and legal bills of $2,250. So that brought us to a total net income of $52,375 for the month of January.

Council Member Pellegrino made a motion to approve the Treasurer’s Report as presented, subject to audit. Council Member Burke seconded the motion. ***Unanimously approved.***

Historic District Commission Report

Jennifer Sizemore, Historic District Commission (HDC) Chair, said that the HDC held its first work session to establish the coming year’s goals. She stated that the first goal is to review its section of the zoning ordinance and to clear up outdated references. She explained that the HDC is looking to update the Historic District Work Permit application form to include email addresses and to make it a fillable pdf format. She reported that at the regular HDC meeting Dan Wolf’s barn repair application was approved, as was the Citgo station’s application to asphalt the graveled area on the station’s lot.

Planning Commission Report

Eric Wenger, Planning Commission Chair, reported that the Planning Commission met on February 29 and discussed the proposed amended moratorium on commercial development. The next Planning Commission meeting will be on March 28, 2024, and the public comment period on the Comprehensive Plan remains open until the end of March.

Council Member Burke asked how the modifications to the new Comprehensive Plan will be published and if running changes will be known. Chair Wenger responded that the Planning Commission is looking for comments from the public now, and once the Comprehensive Plan is restructured, then the Town Council will get it for review, hopefully well prior to a public hearing. He stated that all Planning Commission meetings are public, so anyone can tune in to any meeting to see the running changes.

Unfinished Business:

Stop Signs

Mayor Hendricks stated that Council Member Bradsher had observed the lack of a stop sign at the corner of 1st Street and Sunset Drive in his safety inspection report. Mayor Hendricks said he had consulted with the town’s insurance provider, LGIT, which recommended installing a stop sign at the end of 1st Street. Since there is already a street sign there, placing a stop sign there should be easy.

Planning Commission Member Brian Kline brought up that there may not be a stop sign at Howard and South Montgomery Streets. Council members expressed support for installing stop signs at both of these locations, and Mayor Hendricks said he would go ahead and have that done.

New Business

Town Election, May 6, 2024

Town Clerk Mary Burke read the Notice of Election for an election on Monday, May 6, 2024, at which two Council members will be elected for two-year terms. The filing deadline for candidates is on Friday, March 22. This announcement has been posted publicly. She also reported that two of the three election judges needed for this election have been identified.

Town Parade, May 18, 2024

Assistant Clerk Jackson stated that a Lions Club parade committee meeting was held last Wednesday, and Mike Greaney is chairing the committee. The parade is set for May 18, 2024, at the usual time. She noted that the parade committee was very appreciative of ARPA funds being used for the last two years. The next Parade meeting is on March 27th at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall.

Approval of Lindsey and Associates as Town Auditor for Current Fiscal Year

Mayor Hendricks stated that this firm has audited the town for ten or twelve years, and they will charge $10,500 to serve as town auditors this year. He suggested that the town continue to use this firm. No council member disagreed.

Approval of Goshen Enterprises’ Proposals for Cleaning at Miller Park and Installing a Bike Rack at Town Hall

Mayor Hendricks reported on two contract proposals from Goshen Enterprises. The first is to clean the benches, sign, and fences at Miller Park for $1,750. The contract is to install the town’s bike rack at Town Hall for $560. He asked if there was any objection to his approving these contracts, and there was none.

Council Member Pellegrino observed that the four Welcome to Laytonsville signs may also need cleaning, and she asked if Goshen Enterprises could take a look at these signs as well. Council Member Burke commented that the town welcome sign in the roundabout could possibly use a little touch-up painting this summer. Former Mayor Jim Ruspi mentioned that the sign in front of Town Hall needs to be cleaned periodically.

Report on the Planning Commission’s Comments and Recommendations on the Draft Moratorium Ordinance

Planning Commission Chair Wenger reported on the Commission’s discussion of the draft text of the temporary moratorium on commercial development in Laytonsville at its February 29, 2024 meeting. He shared that he summarized the history of discussions regarding commercial zoning in Laytonsville, and his recollection was that the southern end of town with the shopping center, Stadler Nursery, and the bank building was thought to be the business end of town and thus was zoned as C1 Commercial. He stated that Planning Commission Member Brendan Deyo had a different perspective and focused more on a walkable community that included the historic commercial zone. Chair Wenger stated that he pointed out what he thought were the weaknesses of the draft moratorium ordinance as written. He reported that the Planning Commission then discussed what recommendations it might have for the Town Council to discuss as to what it might do to change the uses within the C1 zone, and maybe even for properties in the commercial historic zone and for non-conforming commercial properties that had been “downzoned.” He stated that Mayor Hendricks then asked the Planning Commission to make a recommendation regarding the Moratorium Ordinance. The Planning Commission had six members in attendance, including the alternate, and Eric asked each of them whether they were for or against the amended version of the draft Moratorium Ordinance. There were 4 votes that said they would support the Town Council adopting the draft moratorium ordinance, and there were 2 votes against it. The alternate, Tim Shortley, asked those who voted against it, Brian Kline and me, Eric Wenger, if we would give an explanation as to why we voted against it, and we both gave our reasoning behind that. Eric said that he filed a report of the meeting with the mayor and town clerk on Monday. Mayor Hendricks commented that he had forwarded that report to the Council members.

Public Comment on the Draft Moratorium Ordinance and the Amendment to it introduced on February 6, 2024

Town Clerk Burke read the public comments received by email supporting the moratorium ordinance from Sharif Hidayat, Cody Hidayat, and Julian Gaspar and opposing the ordinance from Jim Ruspi. All four are town residents. No additional comments were offered by attendees at the meeting.

Discussion on the Draft Moratorium Ordinance and Proposed Amendments

Mayor Hendricks reviewed the Town Charter and the approval process for the amendment he introduced on February 6 to the moratorium ordinance. Mayor Hendricks proposed an additional phrasing change and consolidated this and the earlier proposed changes into a single new amendment, which he had sent to all Town Council members. He asked if there was a second to his proposed amendment. Council Member Pellegrino seconded the amendment.

Mayor Hendricks suggested holding a special Town Council meeting on March 19, 2024, to discuss the wording of the draft moratorium ordinance. Discussion ensued, and the Town Council decided to schedule a closed meeting on March 19 to consult with the town attorney and to leave the public comment record open until that time.

Discussion of Scope of Work to Be Sought from a Planning Consultant

Mayor Hendricks reviewed the Town Council discussion from the previous meeting, and specifically asked what type of work the town expects from a planning consultant. He stated that there appear to be two basic types of work we could ask for: (1) A consultation that would explain how the town could update its zoning ordinance to better conform to its current needs and to its comprehensive plan, and (2) to ask what vision they might see as attractive to develop for the future of the commercial district and the historic districts in Laytonsville. He said that by asking for both of these the framework would be developed to move forward.

Council Member Burke said that he would welcome all the help we can get from a planner who has experience with this.

Council Member Koval said that our Planning Commission is on a timeline and would benefit from this consultation, and she recognized the importance of a vision for the future.

Planning Commission Chair Wenger said that he doesn’t want to discount that our town and citizens need to make decisions and have traditionally done very well with this. A consultant could help us as long as it doesn’t defer from the town’s vision. We should tell the consultant what the town wants, and they should make recommendations to help us get there.

Council Member Pellegrino said that it may be a two-part process. We may ask for one scope of work, and then either amend it or give them some more hours for a second scope of work saying this is what we need now.

Planning Commission Chair Wenger said that we may need to ask the state for an extension of time for submitting the new Comprehensive Plan.

Mayor Hendricks stated that we will need to have specific time frames for the work of a planning consultant. Mayor Hendricks will move forward with communicating with this potential consultant.

Resident’s Forum

Council Member Pellegrino suggested having a roadside cleanup day, maybe in April. She also said that town property near trails and parks needs cleanup.

Assistant Clerk Jackson said that the town always asks Montgomery County to do street sweeping prior to the parade in May.

Council Member Burke reported that the Laytonsville Historical Center has completed the mounting of the five wayside signs displaying a lot of historic information regarding the town.

Adjournment

Council Member Koval made a motion to adjourn at 9:39 p.m. Council Member Pellegrino seconded the motion. ***Unanimously approved.***

Respectfully submitted,

James Schneider, Assistant Clerk

Town of Laytonsville