

APPROVED

**MUNICIPALITY OF MT. LEBANON
PLANNING BOARD MINUTES**

DATE: Tuesday, May 22, 2018

TIME: 7 p.m.

PLACE: Mt. Lebanon Municipality – Commission Chambers

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Suzanne Sieber, Dennis Pittman, James Cannon, Andrew George

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Municipal Planner Ian McMeans

Ms. Sieber said *G&B Consulting Partners requested that the Residences at Poplar Lot Consolidation Plan and Land Development Plan be removed from the agenda in order to take additional time to address the comments received in the engineer's review letter dated May 17, 2018.*

1. Minutes

- a. April 24, 2018, meeting. Mr. Cannon moved and Mr. Pittman seconded to approve the minutes of the April 24, 2018, Planning Board Meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Old Business

- a. None

3. New Business

- a. Discussion of a Zoning Ordinance Amendment. In November 2017 the Economic Development Council and Mt. Lebanon Partnership conducted a joint meeting. At that meeting, a joint recommendation was made to consider an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to encourage an increase in retail in the central business district by changing the zoning designation of offices and medical clinics/facilities. The planning board will discuss the potential changes to the zoning ordinance.
 - i. Mara Dowdy, Mt. Lebanon Partnership board, and an economic development officer by profession, gave a presentation. She said the Partnership works to make the central business district (CBD) more vibrant, and to better serve the community. She gave statistics that within 30 miles of downtown Pittsburgh there are 97 downtown-based communities; within 40 miles there are 114, and within 50 miles there are 124. Those communities have an average of 80 street-level storefronts, with approximately 9,920 within the 50-mile radius. This translates to 124 communities competing to fill approximately 10,000 storefronts. She described the downtown vibrancy index which is designed to show how vibrant the CBD is, and if it is meeting the needs of the community, which is the goal of the Partnership. She said the CBD has about 97 street-

- level storefronts, with 23%–retail, 22%–office, 21%–food/drink, and 18%–personal services. When compared to other vibrant business districts in other communities, Mt. Lebanon has the highest professional services at 22%. In a typical vibrant business district 80% of the street-level storefronts should be retail, food/drink, entertainment and personal services; Mt. Lebanon is at 68%. Professional office space should be at 20%. Mt. Lebanon would need 11 more non-professional businesses to be at 80%. Several communities such as Beaver and Shadyside have changed their zoning ordinances to reflect what the Partnership is suggesting tonight, with the results being very vibrant business districts. Currently there is only one storefront that is available for new business; therefore there is nowhere for the needed 11 businesses to go. In order to increase the vibrancy of the CBD the Partnership suggests promoting available properties, converting vacant properties to available properties, and adopt progressive zoning to make space for new desired businesses. In a survey recently conducted residents were asked what would encourage them to visit the CBD. The No. 1 answer was “a greater variety of retail shops.” A vibrant business district also improves the overall home value, especially in the nearby neighborhoods where there is easy access to the CBD.
- ii. Municipal Planner, Ian McMeans, summarized the ordinance options. He said one of the objectives spelled out in the 2013 Mt. Lebanon Comprehensive Plan was to encourage strengthening the vitality of the business district. Mt. Lebanon Municipality, Mt. Lebanon Partnership and the Mt. Lebanon Economic Development Council completed the strategic plan for Uptown and Beverly Road, in response to the comprehensive plan. He explained in the zoning ordinance there are three to four different use codes: 1) Use by Right –authorizes a use to occupy a location; 2) Conditional Use – allows for occupancy of a location provided a tenant comes through the Planning Board and Commission, and through the public hearing process to obtains a conditional use subject to the conditions that are laid out in Section 1000 in Chapter XX; 3) Use by Special Exception – the applicant goes to the zoning hearing board; there are conditions use to judge special exceptions; 4) omit the use; currently both offices and medical facilities are listed as Uses by Right in the zoning ordinance. In the municipal ordinance, only those uses listed are permitted; if it is not listed, it is not permitted. The Planning Board would need to change the wording not allowing offices on first floors similar to the designation for apartments. The wording would spell out where offices are permitted, but leave out first floors as a permitted location. He said his objective is to come to a consensus to give to the solicitor so he may draft a formal ordinance that could be presented to the Planning Board in June.
- iii. Public comment on ordinance options.
- Betsy Benson, 324 Sleepy Hollow, is on the Mt. Lebanon Partnership board, and is excited about opportunities to focus on building a community-serving business district. The Partnership has focused on this issue as a key goal and objective. She feels these changes will help businesses, building owners, and homeowners. The better the business district the more valuable the surrounding real estate.

Lee Heckman, 1086 Lakemont Drive, owns property on Beverly Road, and fully supports this ordinance change. He gets excited when a new business with high traffic count opens in the district. Current business/property owners are grandfathered in, so those business and property owners would not be required to move.

Bill Callahan, 609 Oxford Boulevard, president of Mt. Lebanon Partnership, said he works professionally to make older, smaller business districts viable and this type of zoning change will help maintain the vitality of the business district and will make it more viable in the future.

Tim Steinouer, 185 Mayfair Drive, said he has lived in other communities, but Mt. Lebanon has the largest business district, but the lowest vibrancy. He views Uptown as having pocket businesses, meaning it is spotty as to what businesses are open at night. People are designated to certain zone, meaning when they come to the business district, they only visit the location they have come for. They do not walk around and explore other businesses. Therefore, it does not add to the vibrancy of foot traffic.

1. Planning Board discussion of ordinance options

Mr. George asked Ms. Dowdy how other communities, such as Carnegie Borough, deal with business moving out; do they lose their grandfathered status.

Ms. Dowdy said there are numerous ways this can be addressed. It is up to the community to decide how long to allow for an office space to be vacant, and it can be added into the language of the ordinance.

Mr. George asked what Beaver Borough does.

Ms. Dowdy said they allow about six months, and they have almost 100% occupancy.

Mr. Cannon asked if there are a lot of people looking for space.

Ms. Dowdy said yes, there are many retailers looking for space.

Eric Milliron, commercial districts manager, said some vacant spaces have legacy issues, but most of the vacancies are spoken for.

Mr. George asked what option Carnegie Borough chose.

Ms. Dowdy said Carnegie chose to not allow for office spaces in the front on the street level. Offices could be allowed in the rear of buildings, or on upper floors. Carnegie chose not to adopt Conditional Uses which takes the pressure off of the Planning Board.

Mr. Pittman said offices create synergy from their employees and their patrons. He asked how to equate use and benefit, and indicated many of the retail stores are closed in the evening.

Ms. Dowdy said offices to add to the vibrancy of the business district, and the office space is about 25%. The question becomes should there be more than that. Does having an office park feel benefit the business district.

Mr. Pittman asked if the supply and demand of businesses or retail dictate what would work best.

Ms. Dowdy said the Partnership exists to determine what the community wants in the business district, and the Partnership hears more retail is wanted.

Mr. Heckman said the Coffee Tree Roasters is the best thing that has happened on Beverly Road by bringing in more foot traffic.

Rick Sabeh, Seminole Drive, said his office off the main street, in another community. They are a service firm and might have only one person come to office in a day.

Mr. Milliron said available vertical space provides better opportunity and rental fees for non-retail businesses.

Mr. Pittman said he is concerned about having more retail spaces than can be supported and thereby creating more vacancies.

Ms. Dowdy said Beaver has a lower population and lower income bracket, but they have a vibrant business district.

Mr. George said he recently moved from Whitehall where they would have to go to Brentwood for shops. The people in the community want to walk to places, so we would like to provide a draw for them.

Ms. Sieber asked if there were particular types of businesses they would target, and what about hours of operation. Many of the businesses on Washington Road closed during the evening hours.

Ms. Dowdy said the 80% desired vibrancy includes all types of businesses such as arts, retail and restaurants. Mt. Lebanon typically has high-level restaurants, but perhaps they would try to target more arts. The Partnership is also in a position to help an owner fill a space after a tenant vacates.

Mr. Milliron said Mt. Lebanon is becoming more active; it is becoming a place to go. This encourages some shops to stay open, and they would encourage more to do so.

Mr. Heckman said the vibrancy index on Beverly is 90%.

Dorene Ciletti, 138 James Place, would like to see more retail that would give more choices during her daughter's appointments.

Mr. Pittman asked about second floor handicap accessibility.

Mr. Milliron said many are but some are not. When renovations are conducted 20% of the cost for the renovation needs to go to ADA compliance. The Partnership can explore ways to assist property owners.

Mr. Pittman asked if the municipality could help fund some of the renovations.

Mr. McMeans said funding from the municipality would need Commission authorization. The Partnership is a 501c3 organization can authorize other types of funding outside of the municipality.

Mr. McMeans said offices and medical facilities are a uses by right, and asked if the board has a preference to changing the ordinance.

Ms. Sieber said she would support changing the language of the ordinance, but would like to see some research in order to get the language right.

Mr. George also agreed with Ms. Sieber.

Mr. Pittman asked if Mr. McMeans could draft an ordinance and include comparative language to address 60 day, 90 day and six-month conversion.

Mr. McMeans asked if the Planning Board wants to see first floor offices eliminated, made a conditional use, or made a use by special exception

Mr. Cannon said he would like Mr. McMeans to come up with verbiage related to the items talked about. He would like to see changes, but does not feel this is an immediate need, and would like to take the time to do it right.

Mr. Pittman suggested looking at other communities to see what language they use.

Ms. Dowdy said the Partnership would help Mr. McMeans in whatever way they can.

Mr. McMeans said the definition of retail sales and services is very broad, and vague.

Mr. George asked if it would be better to have a conditional use be a soft roll-out, as opposed to special exception only.

Ms. Dowdy feels a conditional use may cause problems for the Planning Board, and does not recommend that option.

Ms. Sieber asked Mr. Milliron his opinion on a conditional use.

Mr. Milliron said he is eager to have this conversation, but will wait until the Economic Development Council makes a formal motion at their next meeting.

4. Citizen Comments

There were no additional citizen comments.

5. Next Meeting — The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Mt. Lebanon Planning Board is **Tuesday, June 26, 2018**, at 7:00 p.m.

6. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.