



## City of Buena Vista Planning Commission

### Minutes of April 11<sup>th</sup> 2017

CITY OF BUENA  
VISTA  
Office of Planning and  
Zoning  
2039 Sycamore Avenue  
Buena Vista VA 24416

Members of the Buena Vista Planning Commission met in Council Chambers, 2039 Sycamore Avenue, at 7:00 p.m. on April 11th 2017. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Hawes. Mr. Roberts called roll. A quorum was established.

#### **Members Present:**

Dennis Hawes, Chairman  
Michael Ohleger, Vice-Chairman  
Tyson Cooper  
Lucy Ferrebee  
Wayne Flint  
Melvin Henson, City Council Representative  
Simone McKelvey

#### **Members Absent:**

Bill Braddy  
Jay Scudder, Ex Officio member

#### **Staff Present:**

Tom Roberts, City Planner

#### **Public Comment**

None.

#### **Review and Adoption of Minutes**

Mr. Roberts noted that the meeting date printed at the top of the minutes was incorrect, reading January 10<sup>th</sup> rather than February 14<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Ohleger made a motion to approve the minutes; Mr. Flint seconded; Mr. Cooper abstained because he had been absent. All voted to approve.

#### **New Business**

Chairman Hawes asked if anyone objected to him changing the agenda to hear the presentation from Melissa Branin Wheeler on the proposed mural.

Mr. Roberts introduced Ms. Wheeler, who is the artist for a proposed mural on the building at 131 W. 21<sup>st</sup> Street, and explained that included in the Commission's packet was a mock-up of the proposed mural. Ms. Wheeler explained that she would assemble a team of artists to paint the mural, which would be about 10' x 15', on the side of the wall overlooking the grassy site of the former Foot of the Mountain café on Magnolia Avenue. She took the podium and explained that the mock-up was the general idea, but that specific images, colors, and designs were not yet firm.

The commission discussed some specific aspects of the design. The high school mascot was discussed from a design perspective (a cartoon character vs. photo image) and whether it was polarizing. Ms. Wheeler pointed out that she is striving for a neutral, non-political mural, while admitting that it is impossible to make everyone happy and not offend anyone. Ms. Wheeler stressed that this mock-up is not intended to be public because she wants to have a surprise “unveiling” at the Labor Day festival. Also, she would like to avoid unnecessary public debate about the specific images used.

Mr. Hawes asked about funding for the mural. Ms. Wheeler and Mr. Roberts explained that some funding is coming from the City with a matching grant from the Virginia Commission for the Arts. The total budget is approximately \$6,000. Ms. Wheeler explained that she sought to keep the cost as low as possible to facilitate future mural projects to benefit the city. Mr. Ohleger asked about the intellectual property of the mural. Ms. Wheeler responded that she would pursue official copyright of the image.

The Commission expressed their support for the project.

## **Report of Secretary**

### Code Enforcement Update

Mr. Roberts explained that in the spring he has joined the Building Inspector and the Sheriff’s department in conducting code enforcement. Mr. Roberts is focusing on derelict property, inappropriate household appliances or furniture, and trash/debris.

### Sign Code Workshop

Mr. Roberts recently attended a workshop in Richmond about the legal and regulatory aspects of sign enforcement. He reviewed that he has identified some legal and enforcement issues in Buena Vista’s sign code, and the Commission has discussed updates and worked on a draft previously, and asked the Commission how important the issue is to them at this time to clarify priorities.

Mr. Hawes responded that the Commission had a completed draft update to the sign code that was ready to go to public hearing, but they had not yet found a time to hold the hearing and move forward. Mr. Roberts responded that he had reviewed the most recent draft update that he had, from October 2015, and that he had identified a number of issues in that version which needed to be addressed. He identified housekeeping issues, such as duplicate definitions and unclear wording, as well as portions that do not conform to current understanding sign regulation law.

Mr. Hawes asked Mr. Roberts to prepare a summary of his edits. Mr. Roberts will prepare and annotated version. Mr. Hawes indicated that he would like the process to move forward and get the code updated.

Mr. Henson asked if they would need to have separate public hearings at the Planning Commission and City Council levels. Mr. Hawes responded that yes, he believed they would need to have separate hearings because it is a significant change and there may be debate.

### GIS Update

Mr. Roberts reported that he has received the first iteration of the parcel layer from the consultant, and explained again the value and importance of the parcel layer to his work.

### **Report of Standing Committees**

None.

### **Report of Special Committees**

#### Comprehensive Plan Update Committee

Mr. Hawes noted, reviewing the Comprehensive Plan Update Project Plan, that he was surprised at how long it would take. Mr. Roberts outlined the purpose of each of the meeting and that he planned to go over two chapters per meeting, but he was not sure how much discussion there would be at each meeting. Mr. Roberts explained that he is scheduling the first meeting right now. Mr. Roberts stated that it is tricky for him to know exactly how much to update, wanting to strike the right balance between retaining the valuable parts of the existing plan and not expend unnecessary energy, while not missing the opportunity to incorporate new ideas or include important features not in the plan five years ago.

### **Old Business**

None.

### **Additional Items**

#### Chessie Trail Connection Grants

Mr. Hawes asked the length of the proposed ramp under Route 60 in the grant, which Mr. Roberts answered is about 200' as specified in the budget. Mr. Hawes asked for the project cost and breakdown of the grants, especially the TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program) grant. Mr. Roberts answered that the total project cost budgeted is \$231,619 and the city's contribution is about \$52,000-\$53,000. He noted that all but a few thousand of the City's contribution will come from the disbursement of funds from the regional Industrial Development Authority, rather than the City's general fund. Lexington and Rockbridge County are also using their funds for improvements and grant matching for other Chessie Trail improvement projects.

Mr. Hawes asked, by way of clarification, if the regional IDA funds were money that the City had contributed that it was now getting back, making the point that ultimately the funds were taxpayer dollars. Mr. Roberts responded that he did not know the details of the sources of the IDA funds. [Editor's note: the regional IDA funds in question were collected as a surtax on businesses in the industrial park.]

Mr. Hawes further asked what the justification for this financial outlay is, and how it will benefit the City. Mr. Roberts explained that the benefit to improving the Chessie Trail access to the city is that it will make the city more appealing to residents and visitors. It will make access actually easier, and it will improve the perception of access also. Mr. Hawes asked how many people will ask the trail. Mr. Roberts explained that the only data he has is 36 people per day, but that he does not know the source or details on that number. He is in discussion with Edie Kretsch, Park Director, about performing user counts on the trail. Mr. Roberts continued that the payback on

the trail connection will be indirect, but that the future of Buena Vista is in tourism and outdoor recreation, and this project moves us toward that. He noted the extreme difference between the two grant applications for this project—the \$231,000 TAP grant versus the \$10,000 gravel-and-volunteer version—but that the TAP grant had to be that large because it had to meet VDOT standards.

Mr. Henson pointed out that City Council had discussed the importance of trail connections to the River Walk and the Chessie and the Appalachian Trail. Mr. Henson also mentioned the upcoming Chessie Trail half-marathon, and that in the future such races could come into Buena Vista. Mr. Hawes agreed that there would be benefit, but that he questioned the cost.

Mr. Hawes also pointed out that the project was located outside the City’s boundaries. Mr. Roberts responded that while the project is outside the City, it will most directly benefit the City. Also, it is using regional funds which is appropriate for a project with regional impact and benefit. Mr. Roberts noted that the City must work regionally on almost everything, and that things in Rockbridge benefit Buena Vista, and that economies are regional and do not respect political boundaries.

Mr. Cooper added that he and Mr. Roberts had been part of a marketing focus group hosted by the tourism office which had discussed what attracted the Millennial age group to places to visit and live. The focus group had consensus that the outdoor recreation was very important. Mr. Cooper also related his personal experience that he had been frustrated by the lack of trail connections when he had been running long distances to train for a half marathon. He also noted the connection between outdoor recreation as a draw and the net population of Buena Vista. He also noted that there is a closer connection between Buena Vista’s River Walk and the city’s downtown business in contrast to Lexington, where Jordan’s Point is not very accessible to the downtown businesses.

Mr. Roberts explained that it is possible, though difficult, to calculate the economic impact of a trail. He noted that the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission recently completed a study of the economic benefit of bicycling in the Shenandoah Valley. Finally, he reiterated that he understood and acknowledged the open question of whether the cost of the Route 60 bridge connection was worth the future economic impact of the access. He stated that he did not know what the regional IDA funds could be spent on if they were not spent on the TAP grant.

Mr. Ohleger asked to confirm that if the lower-cost, volunteer option for route improvement were constructed, it would not be handicap accessible. Mr. Roberts replied that was correct, and noted that ADA compliance is easier for bikes as well as pedestrians.

## **Adjournment**

Chairman Hawes adjourned the meeting at 8:05 PM.

## **Approval**

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Chairman

Date