

MEETING OF THE DARLINGTON CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

TUESDAY, July 19, 2022 – 9 A.M.

Attending were Planning Commission members Mr. Sprott, Ms. Boakye, Ms. Page, and Mr. Harris; staff, Mrs. Bailey, planning and economic development director; Mrs. Privette, Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments; Historic Landmark Commission members Mr. Abbott and Ms. Pruitt; and several guests, Genifer & Tony Hayes, Timquasha Sanchious, Kye Owens, Brandon Smith, and Dr. Iris Arnold.

Call to Order: Ms. Rock called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. upon the arrival of the fourth commission member to constitute a quorum.

Zoning Requests: Dr. Arnold, acting executive director for the Darlington County Cultural Realism Complex and daughter of Mrs. Wilhelmenia Johnson, addressed the Commission to request a zoning change to part of the CRC's property at the corner of Orange and Sycamore Streets. Currently, the back 2/3 of the property are in the St. John's Historic District and are zoned R-10, Low Density Residential. The front 1/3 of the property that faces Pearl Street is zoned GC, General Commercial. The CRC approached the Commission and City Council last year to attempt to change the property to all one zoning district. In 2021, the Commission agreed with that plan; however, City Council denied the change due to some unrest with the neighborhood. Dr. Arnold came to request the back 2/3 as OR, Office & Residential. A metal building sits at 203 Orange St. at this time. She said the CRC's goal would be to subdivide the property and sell that portion to a nonprofit agency that would either create a pediatric speech pathology clinic, providing parenting services, an offshoot of Easter Seals, or something in line with the mission of the CRC. The field behind the CRC would remain part of the CRC, but the proceeds of the sale would fund renovations and revitalize the Center.

Mrs. Bailey clarified that the zoning designation change is required to carve that small of a lot from the larger lot.

Mrs. Hayes, who lives across the street from the Center, said she has lived there since she was 5 years old and always enjoyed the CRC and its activities. Her main concerns were that she didn't want a gas station or big franchise, that she wanted to keep the neighborhood quiet, and that she and others were scared not knowing the plans for the property. She added that knowing the plans helps but said she feels the building in its current condition is a health hazard. Dr. Arnold admitted that the CRC should have reached out to the neighborhood, but she said she would appreciate some ownership from the neighbors who are welcome to come over and come in when the Open sign is posted. Mr. Owens, who lives at the corner of Orange and Sycamore Streets, said he just purchased the house across from the empty lot and said he wasn't aware of this before. He said hearing Dr. Arnold's intentions sheds light on the situation. His concern is traffic, as Orange Street already seems quite busy. He said he didn't want to see it become commercial property, maybe some kind of guarantee. Dr. Arnold said that whatever entity purchases it would have to fall in line with the mission of CRC and be ok with Mrs.

Johnson, especially since they aim to re-open the Center. She said the board is not looking to sell the property to build houses, nor has she had any gas stations or franchises express interest in the property. She said my mother poured all her life savings into the Center, and we're trying to diversify the property to keep it going. Ms. Pruitt said that, due to the historic overlay district, residents have expectations that it will be in keeping with the residential design. Once you sell it, it's out of your control. Why not just ask for a variance? She said a variance would be appropriate and supported. Mrs. Bailey said she did not think this would qualify for a variance based on the guidelines in the zoning ordinance. Additionally, it would require payment of yet another fee to make an appeal to the Board of Zoning Appeals. Dr. Arnold added that the CRC does not intend to sell the corner at Orange and Sycamore and that Mr. Todd Hardee suggested using it as park named in honor of Mrs. Johnson.

Mrs. Bailey said the OR designation would create a buffer between the residential uses on Orange Street and the commercial uses on Pearl Street and said she thought this was a compromise she believed everyone could live with based on the debate last year. Members of the audience disagreed, saying they were not part of that debate.

Ms. Boakye made a motion to give Dr. Arnold the opportunity to do research on a variance and deed restrictions and return to the Commission. Ms. Page made the second.

The motion failed due to a tie with Mr. Harris and Mr. Sprott voting against the motion, and Ms. Page and Ms. Boakye voting in favor of the motion. Mrs. Bailey said she would present these details to City Council for consideration.

Approval of the Minutes for the meeting of March 15, 2022: Mr. Sprott made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Ms. Boakye made the second. The motion carried unanimously.

Comprehensive Plan Update: Mrs. Privette presented the final draft to the Commission. The results of the surveys are incorporated into the appendix. The last piece, an executive summary would be added to the beginning pulling all the goals from the different sections to the forefront. Ms. Page made a motion to recommend City Council adopt the Comprehensive Plan 2035. Mr. Sprott made the second. The motion carried unanimously.

New Business: Mrs. Bailey included a packet about zoning for specific businesses, such as sexually-orientes, tobacco and vape shops, and tattoo shops. She said this was purely for review.

Mrs. Bailey provided a one-page survey to be integrated into the Downtown Master Plan that would come to the Commission soon. The survey has appeared online and would be put in the August water bill and should be returned by September 1.

The meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m.