

Morristown/Morrisville Planning Council
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Meeting Minutes of Tuesday 26 March 2024

Council Members present: Etienne Hancock (Chair), John Meyer, Jamie Morris, Joshua Goldstein, and Wally Reeve

Council Members absent:

Council Guests: Selectboard Chair Member Don McDowell, Conservation Commission Chair Ron Stancliff, Tom Cloutier, Julia Compagna, Hannah Farda, Kaitlyn Bennett, Tony Cote, Sheila Tarbox, Laura & Martin Green

Staff: Planning Director Todd Thomas

Call to Order: Chair Hancock called the meeting to order in the Community Meeting Room of the old Tegu Theatre, 43 Portland Street, in Morrisville at 5:00 P.M.

Meeting Minutes: Member Goldstein moved to approve the as-revised March 12th meeting minutes. A vote of 5-0 affirmed the motion.

Discuss: Exempt lighting of architectural elements on Contributing Structures within Morrisville's 1983 Historic District from §490 of the Zoning Bylaws

Mr. Thomas proposed a very limited lighting exemption within §490 of the Zoning Bylaws meant to allow the illumination of architectural elements (cornices, brackets, etc.) on “contributing structures” within Morrisville’s 1983 Historic District. The Council, by consensus, was amenable to proposal. However, they asked Mr. Thomas to tighten up the language so any new up-lighting could only emanate from the building facade and not from the ground, and to also ensure that these lights could not shine into adjacent properties. Mr. Thomas said he would make these changes as directed.

Discuss: Proposed S.100 “homes for everyone” zoning edits

a. Discuss: Review Town-Wide Building Height Reduction: The Planning Council reviewed Town Counsel’s written opinion regarding the changes made to the Zoning Bylaws’ definition of Building Height due to the S.100 HOMES Act. The definition change, decreasing maximum building heights from 35 feet to 30 feet for residential structures, from 50 feet to 40 feet commercial structures, and requiring a Fire Chief sign-off for new developments, was deemed to not prohibit the HOMES Act allowance for affordable housing developments to violate the Town’s maximum building heights by up to 1-story. The Council accordingly agreed that it was best to lower maximum building heights by 1-story townwide as proposed so the Town could avoid being in the unenviable situation of having to buy a new \$1.5M+ ladder truck for a proposed affordable housing development that the Town’s existing firefighting apparatus could not guarantee life-safety for.

2b. Discuss: §206 Design Criteria Edits for Missing Middle Housing: The Planning Council reviewed proposed edits made to Section 206 of the Zoning Bylaws by Mr. Thomas, as recommended by the book Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond

to Today's Housing Crisis. Said Section 206 edits included (1) Allowing “cottage court” development, (2) Prohibiting road facing garages, (3) Prohibiting tuck-under parking that faces a street, (4) Prohibiting the front of townhouses from backing-up to the rear of other townhouses unless they were separated by a street or parking lot, (5) Creating a maximum building width of 60 feet, and (6) creating a maximum building depth of no more than 50% of the depth of the larger of the 2 adjacent dwellings. The Council agreed to adopt these Missing Middle zoning enhancements to facilitate the S.100 HOMES Act Zoning Bylaws changes but asked Mr. Thomas to move the maximum building size provision from Section 206.1 to Section 206.2 of the Zoning Bylaws. The Council also asked Mr. Thomas to run the two under construction apartment buildings on South Street through these proposed rules and to report these findings at the next Council meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 PM. Minutes submitted by Todd Thomas.