

TOWN OF SEABROOK ISLAND

Town Council & Planning Commission Joint Meeting

April 11, 2018 – 2:30 PM

Town Hall, Council Chambers
2001 Seabrook Island Road



MINUTES

Town Council Members Present: Mayor Ron Ciancio, John Gregg (Mayor Pro-Tem), John Wells and Jeri Finke

Planning Commissioners Present: Robert Driscoll (Chair), Lori Leary (Vice-Chair), Ken Otstot and Cathy Patterson

Town Staff Present: Joe Cronin (Town Administrator)

Mayor Ciancio called the meeting to order at 2:30 pm and welcomed everyone in attendance. Mayor Ciancio gave a brief overview of the comprehensive planning process and noted that, pursuant to state law, the town must adopt a 10-year update to its comprehensive plan by 2019. He added that the town was planning to sign an intergovernmental agreement with Charleston County, and that staff from the county's planning department would assist the planning commission in their development of a new comprehensive plan. Mayor Ciancio then stated that the purpose of this meeting was for council members and planning commissioners to discuss issues with the current plan, as well as topics which should be addressed in the upcoming comprehensive plan update.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio stated that the current comprehensive plan is "bare bones" and does not appear to meet the minimum requirements of state law. He added that the comprehensive plan should be a more "robust" document, with information that members of council, the planning commission and the public would find useful.

Mayor Ciancio stated that Charleston County staff had also assisted the Town of Kiawah Island with a re-write of their 10-year update. He noted that the Kiawah Island plan was much more professionally done than the current Seabrook Island plan, and he encouraged council members and planning commissioners to review the Kiawah Island plan prior to beginning our comprehensive plan update.

Mayor Ciancio stated that the town's current plan was adopted in July of 2009 and, therefore, will need to be completed (ie. receive second reading) no later than July of 2019. Based on earlier discussions with county staff, it is anticipated that a draft of the new comprehensive plan would be ready by the end of 2018 or early 2019, with final reading scheduled for around May of 2019. The Mayor also reminded everyone of the importance of having public input in the planning process.

Mr. Wells: Mr. Wells stated that he was on the planning commission when the last comprehensive plan update was completed. He added that there was little interest from town council members at the time of the last update. He stressed that the process will need buy in from town council this time around.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio noted that the last update was only a 5-year update. At that time, there were no significant changes to the plan, other than the inclusion of updated data. The remainder of the plan was verbatim the same as was adopted in 2009.

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Gregg noted the difficulty of obtaining data as part of the 5-year update, since that update was completed between the 2010 and 2020 censuses. He stressed the need to have reliable data as part of the 2019 comprehensive plan update.

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll stated that the planning commission's involvement in the 5-year update was minimal in 2015.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio responded to Chairman Driscoll's comment by saying that the full 10-year update will be the planning commission's document. The planning commission will take the lead in preparing and recommending the plan, while council's role will be to review and adopt it.

VISION STATEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio began a review of the current document by asking members to look at the vision statement on page 2 of the current comprehensive plan. The Mayor stated that the vision statement will set the tone for the entire document. He pointed out that the current vision statement says that the town will limit commercial development, and added that this is not the approach we should go. He added that other comprehensive plans have not only a vision statement, but also the steps required to implement the vision. He recommended that the planning commission revisit the vision statement, and update as necessary.

HISTORY & OVERVIEW

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio then moved to page 3 of the current comprehensive plan. He recommended using available documents (including the book he authored) to expand this history of the town section, adding that history is a good segue to the plan itself. He also recommended adding information about the structure of the town; functions of mayor and council; committees; and sources and use of funds.

Ms. Finke: Ms. Finke recommended adding information to differentiate the role of the town from the SIPOA and Seabrook Island Club. She stated that this arrangement makes Seabrook Island different from other municipalities.

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll asked whether town revenue should be addressed in this section or within the Economic Development element.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin noted that the Economic Development section is generally tied to commercial and economic development, but as part of the plan update, it would be beneficial to consider how current and future land uses will affect local revenue streams, such as business license fees.

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll asked whether the planning commission should look at the “third rail” of local politics, namely, whether the town should have a millage rate.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio noted that property taxes would likely be viewed as a tool for disaster response, particularly to retire any debt which may be issued as part of a clean up effort.

POPULATION ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio then turned to the first of the 9 elements: population. He stated that he would like to see the plan address challenges associated with the aging of the town’s population, as well as an increase of number of children now living on the island. He also recommended including data on the number of full-time vs. part-time residents, educational attainment, income ranges, and other household data.

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Gregg noted that the town sees an influx of rental guests, particularly during the summer months. He suggested that the plan should include some information about the variation in population over the course of the year, as well as information about the types of people who visit the island. Mr. Gregg also asked what types of data sources would be used to collect demographic data.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin responded to Mr. Gregg’s question, stating that a number of sources would be used, including: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, BCD COG and other sources. SIPOA and the Seabrook Island Club would also be good sources for information related to visitor data, club members vs. non-members, and other relevant information.

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll asked Town Administrator Cronin how involved town staff would be in the process.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin responded that he had personally been involved in several comprehensive plan updates, and it was his intent to be very involved in the process.

Mayor Ciancio: In regards to potential data sources, Mayor Ciancio stated that it will be essential to involve outside partners, particularly SIPOA, the club, and the real estate office.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio then turned to the Economic Development element on pages 8-9. He stated that he would like to see this section expanded to include specific data on tourism (including visitor data and the impact on Accommodations Tax revenue). He added that it would be beneficial

to see data on business licensing trends and employment data within the town (including the SIPOA, club, marina, contractors, etc.), rather than solely relying on countywide data. He further referenced an economic impact study performed by the Citadel a couple years ago, stating that it included useful information.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin noted that the most recent plan he had worked on included a “retail leakage analysis” which identified the types of goods and services that residents typically leave the town to purchase. He stated that this information could be useful in terms of identifying unmet needs, as well as targeting specific types of businesses in the future. He also recommended including data on the town’s workforce, including what percentage worked outside the home, where those individuals worked, what percentage were retired, etc.

Ms. Finke: Ms. Finke offered a comment related to the “Natural Environment as an Economic Asset” section. She asked what would happen if someone (resident or visitor) questioned the public’s limited access to what is considered a public beach, particularly future residents who may live outside the SIPOA security gate. She also stated that there is a limit on how many non-residents may have membership in the Seabrook Island Club.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio responded that the beach is in fact public, but the roads that provide access to the beach are private. He noted that the SIPOA has extended access to residents outside the gate in the past. He also recommended that this issue should be looked at in the comprehensive plan. Mayor Ciancio also noted that the economic development strategy listed in the current comprehensive plan recommends “confining commercial and resort development.” He recommended that this strategy should be amended.

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll agreed with the Mayor, and recommended that the focus of the economic development section should be on identifying and expanding revenue sources.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin stated that if the town wants to be more welcoming to commercial and economic development, it will be important to identify these locations in the Future Land Use element as well.

NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio then turned to the Natural Resources element on pages 10-12. He stated that he would like to see current and future preservation strategies added to the comprehensive plan, including beach preservation, wildlife management, changes to state jurisdictional and setback lines, marsh buffers, and volunteer activities and programs (such as the Greenspace Conservancy, dolphin monitors, turtle patrol, Seabrook Island Birders, etc.). He also indicated that the comprehensive plan should address concerns related to sea level rise and the impact that it will have on the built environment.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin noted the pending changes to the FEMA flood maps, and recommended that the planning commission may want to evaluate whether the 2’ freeboard requirement is sufficient to protect public safety. He also recommended including language regarding stormwater management, beach management plans, intermittent relocation of

the Captain Sams inlet, and the town's opposition to offshore drilling. Given the growing number of rezonings to the conservation zoning district, he also recommended including language regarding the town's conservation strategy.

CULTURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: In regards to the Cultural Resources element on page 13, Mayor Ciancio recommended inclusion of Camp St. Christopher as a cultural facility.

Mr. Otstot: Mr. Otstot asked whether the camp was subject to Accommodations Tax.

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Gregg responded that Accommodations Taxes are not collected directly by the town, but by the state and county. Therefore, the state and county would be best equipped to answer this question.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio noted several other community activities and groups which are active in the town, including the natural history group, photography club, and art guild. He added that several events are sponsored by the town, SIPOA and the club on an annual basis. He stated that this section should include available facilities within the town, such as the lake house. Lastly, he recommended including language about the spirit of volunteerism which exists among town residents.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin stated that this section would be a good location to list the types of activities that do not exist today, but that we may want to see in the future. Though it is not located in the town limits, Freshfields Village was also noted as a location for cultural events and activities. He also recommended highlighting the town's use of Accommodations Tax funds to promote town events and activities, such as the Fourth of July celebration, symphony concerts, fishing tournaments, etc.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: Moving on to the Community Facilities element on pages 14-20, the Mayor drew attention to the language in the current plan which states that "no further commitments for wastewater services can be made." He stated that the Utility Commission's capacity is currently being reviewed by SCDHEC, and the new numbers should be referenced in the updated plan.

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Gregg noted that the capacity numbers are based on the capacity of the current facility. He asked whether the system should be expanded, and if so, by how much.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio recommended including club and SIPOA facilities within this section. He also recommended that the town and SIPOA should consider building a new, modern facility to jointly house town hall and SIPOA offices, adding that "Kiawah's [town hall] is a palace, and Seabrook's is a hot dog stand."

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll commented that the current comprehensive plan references town ownership of the utility system. While the town does own the facility, he stated that the town

does not control the system due to how the utility commission was set up. In his opinion, the town should control the utility system. He stated that this arrangement was established by ordinance, and should be able to be dissolved by ordinance.

Mr. Otstot: Mr. Otstot asked who the Utility Commission reports to.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio responded that the Utility Commission is elected by town residents and reports to council; however, aside from approving the issuance of debt, council cannot interfere with their day-to-day operations.

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll expressed concern that the Utility Commission has the ability to extend service without any input or approval from the town.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin stated that most cities are able to use their utility systems to control growth on the periphery of their municipal boundaries, either by controlling access to water and sewer services, or by requiring annexation to receive such services. Under the current situation, the town does not possess this control. This is one of the reasons that areas adjacent to the town limits were able to annex into Kiawah Island rather than Seabrook Island.

Mr. Wells: Mr. Wells opined that the current utility set up is a “black ops operation.”

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll recommended that the Town Attorney should provide input as to whether the utility commission can be dissolved and placed under the control of the town as part of the comprehensive plan update.

Mr. Wells: Mr. Wells recommended that members of the planning commission should request and review copies of the Utility Commission’s existing contracts and service agreements as part of the comprehensive plan update.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin noted that other types of public facilities and infrastructure are also included in this section. While there are no schools or county facilities on Seabrook Island, the town does include fire, electric and telecommunications facilities and infrastructure. He also stated that the current comprehensive plan simply lists what services are available today, and does not really address what may be needed or desired in the future.

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll recommended adding SIPOA security to the law enforcement section.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin recommended that beach patrol and code enforcement may also be added.

Ms. Finke: Ms. Finke stated that the lack of nearby medical facilities is a concern.

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Gregg noted that the town now has a contract with AirMedCare for emergency medical air transport services.

HOUSING ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: In regards to the Housing element on pages 21-24, Mayor Ciancio recommended updating the existing data, but also including new data such as: real estate sales trends; average sale prices; the ratio of homes vs. villas; the ratio of owner-occupied units vs. part-time or renter occupied units; what current zoning districts allow vs. what they should allow; ARB activities; permitting activities; availability of lots; projected buildout; community rating system; and the impact of the new flood maps on housing. He added that this element should also include options and strategies for addressing the town's aging housing stock.

Ms. Finke: Ms. Finke noted that there is likely to be a growing number of teardowns and rebuilds. She recommended looking at existing obstacles within the ordinance, and revisiting those issues, if necessary.

LAND USE ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: Moving on to the Land Use element on pages 25-27, Mayor Ciancio stated that the comprehensive plan should anticipate future annexations of land use outside the SIPOA security gate.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin stated that the Land Use element will likely be one of the biggest changes to the comprehensive plan. He noted that the current future land use plan only contains the town's existing zoning map. This is the opposite of how a comprehensive plan is typically structured, where future land uses are defined in the comprehensive plan, and then implemented through the zoning map and zoning ordinance. He added that the current plan only looks at the current town limits. He recommended that the new comprehensive plan should look outside current town limits, particularly in areas which may be targeted for future annexation. He also stressed the need to coordinate future land uses with neighboring Charleston County and Kiawah Island. He also stated that the comprehensive plan should not focus as much on what we are doing today, but what we envision in terms of future land uses, including areas of potential redevelopment.

Ms. Finke: Ms. Finke stated that one of the primary focuses of the land use element should be on how to enhance future town revenues.

Mr. Wells: Mr. Wells recommended that the town should seek to annex the remaining parcels on Seabrook Island Road which are not already located within Seabrook Island or Kiawah Island.

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: Addressing the topic of Transportation on pages 28-29 that Mayor stated that he would like to see historic traffic volumes on Seabrook Island Road, Betsy Kerrison Parkway and Bohicket Road, as well as traffic coming and going through the SIPOA security gate on an annual basis. From the perspective of public safety, he also recommended including accident data, as well as response times from police, fire and emergency medical services.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin recommended the inclusion of planned (and recently completed) projects from the Charleston County transportation sales tax program, SCDOT, and CHATS.

Ms. Finke: Ms. Finke stated that one of the plan's major goals should involve the town pushing the state and county for future road improvements on Johns Island.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin stated that the Transportation element should not focus solely on roads, but should also include alternate modes of transportation. This could include recommendations for future bike and pedestrian facilities, as well as enhancing the trail network along Seabrook Island Road.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio noted that there is significant variation in seasonal travel, and it would be beneficial to see comparisons between peak and non-peak travel data.

Ms. Finke: Ms. Finke noted that Seabrook Island Road can back up significantly at peak travel times, and recommended that the comprehensive plan look at the possible expansion of travel lanes at the SIPOA gatehouse.

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio highlighted the importance of transportation infrastructure in emergency evacuation. He stated that it would be beneficial for the comprehensive plan to look at potential evacuation challenges, including what would happen if the town was cut off from Johns Island. Specifically, he noted challenges on Betsy Kerrison Parkway, Bohicket Road, Main Road and Maybank Road, as well as a lack of viable public transportation options.

PRIORITY INVESTMENT ELEMENT

Mayor Ciancio: Mayor Ciancio then turned to the priority investment element on page 30.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin stated that the priority investment element could be handled at the staff level. Based on the goals, objectives and action items included in other elements in the plan, staff would review and provide recommendations on project costs, funding sources, etc. for the planning commission's review and recommendation.

OTHER ITEMS

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin noted that council and the planning commission may include additional elements in the comprehensive plan beyond the 9 elements required by state law. Public health, energy, sustainability and emergency preparedness are examples of topics which have been included in other jurisdictions' plans.

Mr. Gregg: Mr. Gregg stated that town residents were currently looking at the concept of energy independence, including options such as capturing methane for power generation, solar, wind, etc.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin discussed a draft timeline for the comprehensive plan update. He stated that he had spoken with county staff in advance of the meeting and, pending approval of the intergovernmental agreement, it was anticipated that the project would kick off in June of 2018. The planning commission would likely hold monthly workshops to review 2-3 elements per month. The draft timeline assumed that staff would hold stakeholder meetings on the front end. A community survey would also be used to solicit feedback from residents on the front end. Residents would have an opportunity to review and comment on the plan before it was endorsed by the planning commission in late 2018 or early 2019. As was stated earlier in the meeting, the targeted completion is expected to be in May of 2019.

Ms. Patterson: Ms. Patterson asked how we would reach out to residents who do not live on the island full-time and those who leave at certain times during the year.

Ms. Finke: Ms. Finke suggested that the community survey should be as convenient as possible, and recommended an online surveying tool such as Survey Monkey.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin stated that he had used Survey Monkey in the past as part of a community outreach strategy, and that the town would plan to use that, or a similar tool, as part of our public outreach efforts.

Ms. Leary: Ms. Leary asked if it would be beneficial to meet with Kiawah Island to discuss lessons learned from their comprehensive plan update.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin responded that state law requires local governments to coordinate on their comprehensive plans. It was his intent that the town would include Kiawah Island and other local governments during the stakeholder meetings.

Ms. Patterson: Ms. Patterson stated that most residents don't know what a comprehensive plan is, so it will be important to include an educational component as part of our outreach strategy.

Ms. Leary: Ms. Leary asked what the next steps were for the planning commission.

Town Administrator Cronin: Town Administrator Cronin responded that the first step will be council approval of the intergovernmental agreement with the Charleston County. Once that is done, the planning commission will hold a kick-off meeting with town and county staff to discuss the process and timeline. In the meantime, the planning commission should begin thinking about the names of potential stakeholders. Planning commissioners were also advised to review the town's current comprehensive plan, as well as those from Kiawah Island and Charleston County.

Chairman Driscoll: Chairman Driscoll thanked council members for agreeing to meet with the planning commission, and for providing input and feedback to planning commission members in advance of the comprehensive plan update.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.