

MINUTES

**HARRISBURG PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
February 5, 2020
THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CITY GOVERNMENT CENTER
PUBLIC SAFETY ANNEX, ROOM 213**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Joseph Alsberry, Chair
Shaun E. O'Toole
Jamesetta Reed
Anne Marek
Zac Monnier

MEMBERS ABSENT: Vern McKissick, Vice Chair
Ausha Green

STAFF PRESENT: Geoffrey Knight, Planning Director
Neil Grover, City Solicitor

OTHERS PRESENT: See Sign-In Sheet

CALL TO ORDER: 6:31 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Reed seconded the motion, to approve the minutes from the January 8th meeting without corrections; the motion was adopted by a unanimous (5-0) vote.

OLD BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

1 Special Exception Applications for 3200 North 3rd Street, zoned Residential Medium-Density (RM), filed by Keshet Israel Synagogue, to request approval to expand an existing, non-conforming use ("Place of Worship") and to request relief from the off-street parking requirements in Section 7-327.6 of the Zoning Code.

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval with Conditions; the conditions were that:

1. The Applicant will coordinate with the City Arborist on the planting of trees on-site if they ultimately choose to incorporate new landscaping.

The case was represented by Quincy Rogers with Custom Woodwork (a congregant and board member), 933 Willcliff Drive, Mechanicsburg, PA 17050; and Stephen Nudel (the legal counsel), 219 Pine Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101 (aka "the Applicants").

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; the Applicant responded that they were. Commissioner Alsberry noted that the Applicants had provided distributed additional documentation to the commissioners asked whether the Applicants had anything to add to the case report. They noted that current building provided seating for 150 congregants and that the new congregation required seating for 115 individuals. They also noted that many of the congregants lived in the neighborhood and that they wouldn't be driving to services. They noted that the new owners would not expand the number of congregants and thus not have impacts in that manner.

The Applicants stated that they had spoken with some of the surrounding property owners and that the neighbor immediately to the north was supportive of the proposal to expand the building. They noted that the intention was to have all the main facilities on one level, which was the reason they were expanding the one portion of their building. They noted that as the building was currently constructed, any handicapped or elderly congregants would need to leave the main building and walk along the sidewalks to the basement entrance. He noted that he had also spoken with members of the United Methodist Church that had previously owned the building, and that they were relieved to know that the property would be maintained as a place of worship and would not remain vacant.

Commissioner Monnier also noted that he appreciated that Keshet Israel was one of the groups that had not left the city since the 1960s and that he was happy to help the congregation thrive moving forward.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; there were no comments.

Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Marek seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff Conditions. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0).

2 Variance & Special Exception Applications for 1829 Briggs Street, zoned Residential Medium-Density (RM), filed by Michael Holmes, to convert an existing single-family home into two units, which necessitates Variances for relief from the Specific Criteria regulations in Section 7-309.2(v)(1) and from the density regulations in Section 7-307.3, and Special Exceptions to establish a "Multifamily Dwelling" and to request relief from the off-street parking requirements.

Mr. Knight gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Denial.

The case was represented by Mitchell Holmes (the property owner), 425 North Broadway #487, Jericho, NY 11753 (the property owner)(aka "the Applicant").

Commissioner Alsberry noted that the Planning Bureau had recommended denial and asked whether the Applicant had a response to that recommendation; the Applicant stated that he rented to individuals with special needs and that he had been connected with his current tenant through an organization called RAISE [note: this acronym was not fully defined] which connected individuals transitioning from jail or rehabilitation facilities with affordable housing. He stated

that he anticipated up to four individuals living in the unit at a time, and that one of the reasons he wanted to establish a second unit was so that he could live in the downstairs unit. The Applicant also stated that he owned a separate property in Pennsylvania and that whenever he was traveling to the state, he currently had to live in hotels, which was expensive.

Commissioner Alsberry stated that he had an issue with the request for relief from off-street parking, because he was familiar with the area and on-street parking was difficult. He noted that the Applicant would likely drive to the property when he was in town, which would create additional demand. Commissioner Alsberry stated that he was thinking about a future property owner, and that a new owner who was there full-time would increase the demand for on-street parking. The Applicant stated that there were two empty lots on the other side of his neighbor's property [note: there are actually four adjacent parcels] and that any time he had visited the property, there was parking available on the street. He noted that he had provided photos documenting the availability of on-street parking in front of these lots, and that his next-door neighbor had given approval to use those on-street spaces.

Commissioner Marek stated that her biggest concern was the Variance request, and she didn't see how the existing property created a hardship for the Applicant since it was operating legally as a single-family unit. The Applicant noted that he would better be able to maintain the unit and pay for utilities if an additional unit was added. He said that with the kinds of tenants he rented to, he often had to pick up trash around the property and make repairs in the building. Commissioner Marek noted that the Applicant was choosing to rent the property instead of living there himself. The Applicant confirmed that he currently worked in New York and that he traveled back-and-forth among his various properties.

Commissioner Monnier noted that cities historically developed duplex homes to address the living arrangement the Applicant was proposing, and that the current structure was in fact one half of a duplex building. He asked whether he had approached his neighbor about buying his property and operating them together as he had proposed for the subject property. Commissioner Monnier noted that the commissioners would be establishing a precedent for future reviews of similar cases, which was something they constantly struggled against. He stated that Harrisburg was currently a car-centric city which meant that the City had to deal with the density of people and their vehicles. He again suggested the Applicant consider purchasing the adjacent property and also noted that the Applicant could consider buying the adjacent lots to build new units, which the commissioners would support. He noted that there were other areas of the city in which the Applicant's proposal may be more viable and referred that discussion to Mr. Knight; the Applicant stated that he understood their position. Commissioner Monnier stated that the commissioners wanted to see more people living in the city and to help property owners thrive.

Commissioner O'Toole noted that the commissioners were not singling out the Applicant, and stated that the Planning Commission rarely granted such requests; he noted that the Applicant had not proven a hardship to justify the Variance request. He noted that the Planning Commission had recently approved the establishment of three units in a former funeral home, which had been granted because the building was too large to be reasonably used as a single-family home, and that without the approval, the applicant in that case could not afford to rehabilitate the property and it would have remained vacant.

Commissioner Monnier asked whether an Airbnb use would be a potential use for the building; Mr. Knight referred the question to the City Solicitor, Neil Grover, who noted that that specific use was not currently covered in the Zoning Code and that legal precedents concerning such uses were constantly changing, making it difficult to draft regulations. Mr. Grover stated that the City Council was interested in developing regulations for such a use. Commissioner Monnier noted that it might be an option for the Applicant; Mr. Grover stated that the use wasn't prohibited.

Commissioner Marek concurred with the potential for an Airbnb use, and noted that the current request to formally split the property into two units was the basis for the Planning Commission's concerns.

Mr. Monnier asked whether the Applicant would need to seek zoning relief if he intended on adding a half-bath to the upper floors. Mr. Knight noted that simply adding a bathroom would not require Planning Commission review, but that establishing a second unit would, as it would essentially be the same application currently being reviewed by the commissioners.

Mr. Grover noted that City Council was currently considering an affordable housing ordinance, but that he wasn't sure how it would be applied across the city. He noted that the Applicant may be able to resubmit the current proposal after City Council had developed and adopted formal legislation.

The Applicant inquired as to whether the property was zoned to permit a "Rooming House" use; Commissioner Marek stated that it would be a separate type of use that would require a different application. Commissioner O'Toole asked whether that use was permissible in the RM zoning district; Mr. Knight noted that a "Rooming House" use would at least require Special Exception approval for the use and noted that there were other Specific Criteria such as ADA accessibility and owner occupancy, and if the Applicant could not meet those requirements, they'd need to receive Variance approvals for relief from those aspects. Commissioner Monnier noted that it might be a harder sell, particularly since the concerns about parking would still be applicable.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; there were no comments.

Commissioner Marek moved, and Commissioner Monnier seconded the motion, to Deny the request. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0). Mr. Knight noted that the decision was a recommendation from the Planning Commission and noted that the Applicant could still choose to attend the Zoning Hearing Board meeting and present his case, and noted that they would likely have similar questions and concerns. He also noted that the Applicant could choose to withdraw his request and stated that it would then be removed from the Zoning Hearing Board meeting agenda.

3 Variance & Special Exception Applications for 651 Alricks Street, zoned Industrial (IND), filed by Consolidating Holdings International, LLC and I-Deal Cars Holdings, LLC, to subdivide the existing property, which requires: four Variances to permit buildings on Lot 2 to encroach into the front yard setback, to permit Lot 2 to not abut a public street, to permit

impervious surface coverage on Lot 1 in excess of the maximum allowable in the IND district, and to permit off-street parking in the rear-yard setback on Lot 1; and a Special Exception for Lot 2 for relief from the off-street parking requirements in Section 7-327.6 of the Zoning Code.

Mr. Knight noted that the proposal would effectively be reversing a previous action of the Planning Commission in which three lots and a vacated right-of-way were consolidated as part of a Land Development Plan submitted for a former owner, Meridian Recycling. He gave a synopsis of the report, recommending Approval with Conditions; the conditions were that:

1. The Applicant will mark formal parking spaces for employees and customers at the western end of the site, between the building and the fences on-site; this area provides direct access to the interior of the building and is thus the most likely parking area for employees and visitors, and is the most visible area of the site from Alricks Street.
2. The Applicant will install plant screenings along the southern boundary of the site, east of the building on-site to screen the vehicle storage area from the residential uses to the south and to reduce potential light spillover from headlights into the residential dwellings.
3. The Applicant will file a Mercantile Permit application with the City's Tax & Enforcement Office, and coordinate with the Department of Public Works regarding refuse collection, to ensure that all necessary departments approve the operations on-site.
4. The Applicant will provide a signed Easement Agreement granting the owner of the property to be addressed as 3243 Pennwood Street permission to utilize the driveway running across 651 Alricks Street, which is required for access to the site.

The case was represented by Esch McCombie with McNees, Wallace & Nurick (the legal counsel), 100 Pine Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101; and Marc Kurowski with K&W Engineers, 2201 North Front Street, Suite 200, Harrisburg, PA 17110 (the project engineer)(aka "the Applicants"). They introduced other individuals in attendance including: Ken McDermott (legal counsel for I-Deal Cars Holdings, LLC); Mr. Modic and Dari Masic (owners of I-Deal Cars Holdings, LLC).

Commissioner Alsberry asked the Applicants whether the conditions in the case report were acceptable; they stated that the conditions were acceptable except for the condition that required on-site parking be located near the entrance to the site at the front of the building. They stated that the current use on-site did not have a need for a significant amount of parking, that there was sufficient on-street parking along Alricks Street, and that there was a nearby bus stop a couple of blocks away. They stated that these conditions justified the request to not have parking on-site.

Commissioner Alsberry referred the Applicant's comments to Mr. Knight; he stated that the Applicants had noted that the property was used to store automobiles that they sold at retail locations around the region, and thus that there were no permanent employees and no customers. Mr. Knight stated, however, that there should be some sort of parking in the event that employees eventually ended up on-site or the property became an auto dealership itself. He stated that the reason the Planning Bureau recommended the spaces be near the entrance to the site was because that was where the main entrance to the building was located and because this area was most visible to the residential neighbors to the south, and thus he wanted to ensure it was not filled with unowned vehicles waiting to be sold. Mr. Knight also noted that reserving this area for parking would allow more turning movements into and out of the site for trucks loading and unloading

vehicles. He also noted that the Applicants' description of the business did imply that there would not be daily visitation by employees or customers.

The Applicants noted that if there were parking spaces in front of the building, there would not be access into the building itself, and that it might restrict movement onto and off the site.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether permission to not construct parking on-site would negatively affect the neighborhood. The Applicants noted that the property was set back from the street and that Lot #1, which separated the parcel on which the active use was located from the street, had a surface parking lot on it.

Commissioner Alsberry asked the owners to provide more information on the specific nature of the business and operations on-site. The property owners stated that the plan was to operate a repair facility on-site so that they could repair and restore vehicles to then sell at their retail locations in the region. Commissioner Alsberry again inquired as to whether any employees would be on-site to operate the use. The Applicants stated that vehicles would be picked up and dropped off.

Commissioner Marek inquired as to the specific use of the subject property; Mr. Knight confirmed that it was essentially an "Automobile Auction and/or Automobile Parking or Storage Compound" use. Commissioner Marek inquired as to what the off-street parking requirements were for that use. Mr. Knight noted that it was one off-street parking space per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area; he noted that the Zoning Code likely anticipated an interior storage use and that the building footprint was fairly small, which resulted in only six required off-street parking spaces. The Applicants stated that the Zoning Code likely envisioned a car auction taking place, but that in the instance of the current use, that would not be occurring.

Mr. Knight noted that when he conducted the site visit to post the property during the work day, the gate way open and he had access to the entire property, but there were no staff on-site.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether they had any security on-site to oversee the property; the Applicants stated that they had staff come back at the end of the day to lock up the entrance gates.

The Applicants stated that they were currently renting a repair facility a few blocks from the subject property, but that eventually they would move all of their repair operations to the subject property. Commissioner Marek noted that the Applicants would then have employees on-site; the Applicants stated that the repair operations would be a "future use" and that the "current use" of the property did not have employees and thus did not require parking.

The Applicants asked whether they would need to get a new zoning permit in the future if the use changed. Mr. Knight stated that the business owners would need to file a new Mercantile Permit for an "Auto Body Shop and/or Repair Garage" use, which was permitted by right in the IND district. He stated that if there would eventually be employees on-site, he thought it was reasonable to establish parking spaces now so that the Applicants wouldn't have to request zoning relief later. Mr. Knight stated that the uses likely had different off-street parking requirements. The Applicants stated that they felt it was appropriate to wait until they finalized the decision to move additional

operations to the site, and that if more parking was required in the future, then requiring two off-street parking spaces now may still result in a need to seek zoning relief in the future.

Commissioner Alsberry reiterated that he didn't understand how a business wouldn't have staff or employees on-site to ensure the security of the property and the vehicles. He stated that he was still concerned about the request for relief from all the required parking. Commissioner Monnier noted that a site plan accompanying the application indicated a parking lot on Lot #1. The Applicants clarified that the request for relief from off-street parking only involved Lot #2. They stated that the previous uses since the 1960s had not provided parking on site.

Mr. Knight noted that the request involved both lots due to the proposal necessitating relief from the Development Standards on both lots, but that the request for relief from off-street parking only involved Lot #1 because it was the only one with a proposed use. He noted that the accessory parking area on Lot #1 was constructed as a condition of approval for the former Land Development Plan, which involved a use that generated tractor trailer traffic along Alricks Street, which necessitated the removal of on-street parking from the south side of the street. Mr. Knight noted that trucks were no longer running along Alricks Street since the business had closed, and that the City had removed the "No Parking" signs, and residents of the neighborhood were thus permitted to park on the street.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether Mr. Knight was reversing his recommendation in the report to include off-street parking spaces. Mr. Knight stated that he still believed it was in the Applicant's best interest to have a determination on parking made during the current review instead of having to submit an application later. He suggested that it might be possible for the owners of Lot #1 to grant a lease to the owners of Lot #2 for parking in the accessory lot, as a way of meeting their off-street parking requirements. The Applicants stated that they would be willing to consider that approach. Mr. Knight noted that Lot #1 would likely be able to provide off-street parking for any future use given the development of the site; he noted that there was a larger weigh scale and truck turnaround area on-site.

Commissioner Reed asked whether the Applicants owned both lots; Mr. Knight noted that the application indicated ownership by two separate entities, but that he wasn't sure whether they were related in any way. The Applicants confirmed the owners were not related.

Commissioner O'Toole asked whether the Applicants were required to have six spaces; Mr. Knight confirmed that was correct. Commissioner Monnier noted there were approximately 16 spaces in the parking area on Lot #1.

The Applicants noted that they were asking for a Special Exception for relief from the off-street parking requirements, and that the Zoning Code allowed the Zoning Hearing Board to grant relief when there were sufficient on-street spaces available and nearby mass transit stops; they noted that both of these conditions were met regarding the subject property should there ever be employees at a business on Lot #2.

Commissioner Reed asked Mr. Knight where he parked during his site visit; Mr. Knight confirmed that he parked on Alricks Street.

Commissioner Alsberry asked whether there was anyone from the public that was for or against the project; there were no comments.

Commissioner Monnier asked whether they could modify Condition #1 in the case report related to the provision of parking on-site. Commissioner O'Toole asked how he intended to modify the condition. Commissioner Monnier stated that they might be able to change it to require the Applicant to secure six off-street parking spaces in the parking area on Lot #1; Mr. Grover noted that the commissioners could not apply such a condition in which they compelled them to make an agreement with a third party.

Commissioner Marek noted that the issue was complicated because they were splitting up a single lot into two separate lots with two different owners. Commissioner Monnier asked whether the lot line could be redrawn to including the accessory parking lot in Lot #2. The Applicants stated that the property had already been sold.

The Applicants stated that they were returning the properties to the configuration they had had since the 1960s; Commissioner Monnier stated that he didn't think the City should be going back to that era, that the City had changed a lot in the last 60 years, and that he wasn't enthusiastic about maintaining the status quo. He noted that the proposal would reactivate a property that might otherwise remain vacant and that there seemed to be sufficient parking in the immediate area; he stated that he was open to approving the request for relief from off-street parking.

Commissioner O'Toole stated that he was open to considering a reduction in the off-street parking requirements but that he didn't support relief from all the required spaces. Commissioner Marek concurred.

Commissioner Marek noted that there were two residences within the overall project site footprint; Mr. Knight noted that the owner of Lot #1 also owned one of those properties. Commissioner Marek asked whether they were operating as residential units; Mr. Knight directed the inquiry to the Applicants. The Applicants stated that they were unsure of the occupancy and use of both properties, but confirmed that the easternmost one [note: this is 650 Alricks Street] was owned by the owner of Lot #1, and that he had initially intended to expand the primary use onto that property. They introduced Mr. Bill Gladstone, the realtor for the owner of Lot #1, and noted that he had spoken with neighbors of the surrounding properties, who had not expressed concerns about parking or the aspects in the current zoning relief application.

The Applicants stated that the use on the subject property was "ongoing," that there were no new uses or development as part of the proposal, and that the primary consideration was related to the re-establishment of the former lot line. They stated that after the Subdivision, to be filed subsequent to the Zoning Hearing Board's decision, is filed, there will be no noticeable changes to the properties.

Commissioner O'Toole asked where the Planning Bureau anticipated that the six parking spaces would be located on-site; Mr. Knight stated that he hadn't made a recommendation for any specific number, just that he felt some formal parking spaces should be provided on-site. He also stated that he wasn't aware that the property owners would be moving auto repair operations to the

property when he developed the case report; he noted that he assumed there would be future uses on site that would need off-street parking as an aspect of their business operations and that he felt it was prudent to reserve spaces now for prospective uses to obviate future zoning relief requests.

The Applicants stated that the request was tied to the current operations on-site and that it didn't require parking spaces on-site; they noted that if the conditions or uses of the property changed in the future, that would be the time to address the off-street parking issue. They stated that they didn't feel it was appropriate to require parking for a future use that *may* be established on-site. Mr. Grover asked the property owners whether there was a plan to move the auto repair operations to Lot #2; the property owners stated their lease at the other property ran out in August 2020, and that they had already decided to move their auto repair operations to Lot #2.

Commissioner Monnier noted that the Applicants had stated that the location of parking recommended by the Planning Bureau was not appropriate for their operations, and that loading/unloading operations may be affected. He asked if the Planning Commission was willing to not specify a particular location. Mr. Knight stated that it might be possible for the Applicants to provide the recommended spaces along the fence on the western boundary in a parallel configuration, and that the depth of those spaces may be protected from vehicle turning movements by the entrance fence/gate. The Applicants asked whether parking spaces along that property line would require screening since it abutted an adjacent parking lot; Mr. Knight noted that it wasn't abutting a residential use so that they would not be required to have screening.

Commissioner Marek stated that she wasn't willing to grant a full relief from the off-street parking requirements.

The Applicant conferred amongst themselves and the representatives for the property owners.

Mr. Grover reiterated that the Zoning Code required the Applicants to have six off-street parking spaces, and that they were requesting to have none on-site. Commissioner Marek noted that the Planning Bureau did not have a recommendation on a specific number of spaces to be provided. Mr. Knight noted that if the Applicants were intending to establish an "Auto Body Shop and/or Repair Garage" on-site, the Zoning Code required them to have one off-street parking space per service bay and one parking space per employee; he noted that there was a single service bay and that, depending on the number of employees, they may have less off-street parking requirements under a future use than they did under the current use.

The Applicants stated that they had discussed the issue with the property owners, who had indicated they would provide the required six off-street parking spaces if they were able to determine where they went on-site. Commissioner Alsberry stated that he would be agreeable to that, but asked Planning Bureau staff why they recommended the spaces be located near the front entrance. Mr. Knight noted that the property was largely occupied by vehicles, and that he assumed it would be difficult to locate parking amongst parked vehicles due to access issues; he also noted that the main building entrance was on the western façade and thus it made sense to located any off-street parking in this area. The Applicants stated that they wanted to leave that area open and that they would simply find space to store five or six less vehicles on-site to make room for the off-street parking spaces. Commissioner Alsberry stated he wouldn't have a problem with that.

Commissioner Marek noted that the Planning Commission could remove Condition #1; the Applicants stated that they would simply withdraw that request from the application.

Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Monnier seconded the motion, to Approve the request with Staff & Additional Conditions; the additional condition was that the Applicant would withdraw the Special Exception request for relief from off-street parking requirements. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0).

OTHER BUSINESS:

1 Community Development update: Friends of Midtown

Mr. Knight noted that the discussion with neighborhood/community groups was an effort to better connect the Planning Commission to planning and community engagement efforts being undertaken in the community by various groups, and had begun with the January presentation by Tri-County Community Action. He introduced Mrs. Annie Hughes, the President of Friends of Midtown (FOM) neighborhood association.

Mrs. Hughes provided background on the neighborhood group, including the geographic scope of the group, and noted that they were a 501(c)(3) volunteer organization. She noted that FOM's goals were to work with residents and businesses to create a safe community in which to live, work, and play. She gave some background on FOM's seven committees: beautification; safety; business; recreation (dog park); events; and two other "operational" committees. She noted that event committee was focused on providing more free, family-friendly events throughout the year.

Mrs. Hughes stated that FOM was engaged with Rep. Patty Kim's office on a pilot program to generate and grow social capital in the neighborhood. She stated that goal was to increase connections between business, groups, and residents to help the community grow. Mrs. Hughes stated that they were hoping to grow their membership through a new enrollment model. She stated that the Board members were volunteer and not elected and thus were not "representative" in nature. She noted that the group did not collect a lot of data from the community, due to the cost of collecting representative data.

Mrs. Hughes stated that she had been approached by developers requesting help in gathering data on community needs and wants. She stated that FOM had hosted general informational forums, but that they did not promote specific entities or projects. She also noted that FOM had hosted City Council debates and that their goal was to serve the community by providing access to information. She inquired as to what type of data from the community the Planning Commission was expecting in presentations from project applicants, noting that FOM was sometimes asked to "represent" the neighborhood, which was not within the group's scope or resources.

Commissioner Alsberry referred the question to Planning Bureau staff. Mr. Knight noted that requests from developers may be unique to each application, whether it's public support for a zoning amendment or a new residential development, and thus that the information representative of community thoughts might be different. He noted that the commissioners usually asked applicants whether they discussed a proposal with the local community group, and that applicants

often only sent out the required letters. Mr. Knight stated that having the commissioners identify what type of coordination and the result, whether support or opposition, might help better guide communication efforts with the community.

Mrs. Hughes stated that FOM sometimes received inquiries from developers as to whether they could represent Midtown and she stated that they couldn't because they don't collect data from the residents. Commissioner Alsberry noted that the Planning Commission solicited input from the community, which differed from the Zoning Hearing Board, which made decisions based on strict interpretation of the Zoning Code. He noted that there were about 15 neighborhood associations in the city, and that the commissioners mainly want to hear from the community regarding the qualitative impacts of proposed projects, such as a bar locating near a school. Mrs. Hughes stated that it sounded as though the commissioners were looking for areas of concern, and that FOM did not collect such information. Commissioner Alsberry stated that he wasn't sure that was required and Mrs. Hughes stated that that was how data should be collected.

Commissioner Alsberry notes that if any attendees of a monthly meeting did not, for example, want a bar in the neighborhood, then FOM could testify that they did not support such a proposal. Mr. Knight noted that FOM may not hold monthly meetings with their membership. Mrs. Hughes confirmed that was the case. Commissioner Marek noted that many of the neighborhood groups had procedures for meeting with the community and soliciting public feedback when a new project was coming in, or conversely, an applicant may request a presentation to a community group at their regularly scheduled meeting. She asked whether FOM was able to be an organizer of community input regarding such proposals. Ms. Hughes stated that FOM could create forums to have the public meet applicants and learn about projects, but that they did not organize petitions for specific proposals or entities.

Commissioner O'Toole noted that FOM could also engage in the process by inviting members via social media to attend regularly schedule Planning Commission meetings to support or oppose projects. Mrs. Hughes noted that FOM could do that. Commissioner Marek stated that it was important to the commissioners to get feedback because they weren't out in every single neighborhood; she noted that it sounded as though FOM did not want to engage in that process. Mrs. Hughes confirmed that it was not in their by-laws to do that.

Commissioner Marek asked how the Planning Commissioners could know what the residents of Midtown wanted; Mrs. Hughes stated that someone would have to do statistically valid research. Commissioner Marek asked what that looked like; Mrs. Hughes stated that it would have to be done through statistically-significant and valid survey methods.

Commissioner Reed asked if there were different neighborhood associations throughout Midtown. Mr. Knight noted that the Midtown Action Council was one such group, and that there were other informal neighborhoods like Engleton; he noted that other neighborhoods may be well known, but may not have formal associations or groups. He noted that one of FOM's challenges was that they covered such a large area and thus it was difficult to organize a comprehensive sample of the area. He noted that Tri-County Community Action similarly covered a large area, but they had codified the community vision through a formal planning process, the Heart of the Hill planning document,

which expressed their goals and visions. He stated that a similar document did not exist for Midtown Harrisburg.

Mr. Grover stated that the discussion was becoming more involved than was necessary for the type of public engagement and feedback that the commissioners were seeking. He stated that the Planning Commissioners were not necessarily tasked with applying data to decisions, but in democratizing the review process. He stated that there should be a formal list of neighborhood organizations that received agendas of upcoming meetings that they could distribute to their membership, and that if projects were important enough, the public would come out if their aware of the project. Mr. Grover stated that Planning Commission decisions were often the “best guesses” of what the community might want based on whatever feedback they received, whether it was petitions or attendance at meetings.

Mrs. Hughes inquired as to what specific feedback the Planning Commission wanted, noting that some developers asked for statements or demonstration of support, or help in gathering data on neighborhood support. Mr. Grover noted that a solid developer should have their own processes and methods for presenting proposals to the public and securing feedback. Commissioner Marek stated that the commissioners didn’t want FOM to provide them specific data for specific projects. Mr. Knight noted that there was some confusion in how community support or opposition was being presented, noting that the commissioners were only seeking information on the general attitude of attendees at a forum that FOM might hold.

Commissioner Alsberry inquired as to the purpose of FOM; Mrs. Hughes stated that the two pillars were community building and economic development, but that their focus was the former. Commissioner Alsberry asked how FOM was formed; Mrs. Hughes noted that a group of approximately ten individuals had decided to form the organization in 2004.

Commissioner Alsberry stated that if FOM had statistical survey data regarding projects, the Planning Commission would consider that in their reviews, but that they would also appreciate a next-door neighbor of a potential use coming in to provide feedback as well. Mr. Grover referenced a case several years ago in which a use was proposing to locate in a vacant downtown building, but that upon reviewing the signatories of the petition of support, it was determined that many did not live nearby. He noted that if nearby residents of a project were willing to attend meetings and speak in support of or opposition to a project, then that would provide insight into how the community views a use that might not be permitted or supported otherwise.

Mrs. Hughes stated that she thought FOM was being asked to participate more in the planning process and had been confused about the intent of the presentation. Mr. Knight noted that he had intended to have Mrs. Hughes introduce herself as a representative of FOM, describe its nature and goals, and discuss how they can help engage in projects that were reviewed by the Planning Commission. He noted that connecting the Planning Commission with neighborhood groups gave them a different perspective on projects aside from the presentations of applicants or the review by the Planning Bureau. Mr. Grover noted that FOM might be able to engage in the process by hosting meetings regarding projects to bring credibility to the process without taking a position on a specific proposal.

Commissioner Monnier noted that there was a recent proposal they had heard during which the applicant had indicated that he had not coordinated with the local neighborhood group; he noted that the Planning Commission had asked him to go back to the community to get input, and when the project was presented again, it was improved from the input from the public. Mrs. Hughes stated that she understood it was a more qualitative representation from the community. Commissioner Marek noted that it may even be testimony from an FOM board member to confirm whether the public supported a proposal or not.

Mrs. Hughes asked whether the Planning Commissioners felt it was difficult for applicants to get community input; Commissioner O'Toole noted that if a project was controversial, the public would definitely show up to speak about it. Mrs. Hughes stated that she never hears about the Planning Commission meetings, and that FOM could certainly have value in disseminating information to a broad audience through their social media and email list.

Commissioner O'Toole asked Planning Bureau staff how the public was notified about prospective projects. Mr. Knight noted that he posted properties in day-glow orange sheets so they stood out and advertised zoning relief requests in the newspaper, and that applicants were required to mail notification letters to property owners within 100 feet. He noted that the Planning Bureau did not generally disseminate agendas electronically to community groups because they didn't have a current and active list of neighborhood groups and points of contact. He stated that he was willing to be more proactive on that front. Mr. Knight also stated that a goal of having neighborhood groups present to the commissioners was to strengthen those connections and better understand how to bring the public into the planning process.

Mr. Grover noted that the City had recently hired a consultant to redesign and manage the it's website and that these topics were priorities in how the public interface should be designed. Commissioner O'Toole noted that a recent residential project had brought out neighbors in opposition to the proposal, who had likely found out through the required notification letters from the applicant. Mr. Knight noted that the public often engaged when they were in opposition to a project and that a neighborhood group could help by getting a more complete picture of the public's feelings toward a project.

Commissioner Reed noted that FOM covered a much larger area than that groups they usually dealt with. Commissioner Alsberry noted that the neighborhood groups used to be more organized and that they had generally dissolved over time. Mr. Knight noted that social media resulted in organizing happening differently, and that information was shared in real time over the internet instead of in a meeting at specific times. Mrs. Hughes stated that one of FOM's goals was to increase access to information in a general sense and that she appreciated the opportunity to learn what kind of engagement the commissioners were hoping to see in the future.

Mr. Knight noted that it might be helpful for FOM to have a list of goals that they'd like to see in new projects, so that the Planning Commission would have a better idea of what to discuss in reviewing projects. Mrs. Hughes noted that FOM was considering disseminating an annual survey that could solicit the type of information and feedback the Planning Commission was seeking, but that they had to raise the necessary money to be able to afford the survey tool.

2 Comprehensive Plan update

Mr. Knight asked Mr. Grover whether the City had secured a final, formal approval of the indemnification agreement that had been developed over the preceding months. Mr. Grover confirmed that the consultant (Wallace Montgomery) had approved the agreement. Commissioner Marek noted in the weekly conference call with the consultant representative the previous Monday (February 3rd), she had not been aware that the agreement had been finalized. Mr. Grover noted that it had occurred that afternoon after the call. He stated that the City was indemnifying Wallace Montgomery to allow them to move forward on the copyediting work.

Mr. Knight stated that the next conference call on Monday (February 10th) they would discuss the timetable moving forward.

ADJOURNMENT: 8:10 PM

Commissioner O'Toole moved, and Commissioner Reed seconded the motion, to adjourn. The motion was adopted by a unanimous vote (5-0). The meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM.