

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION

North East Town Hall Meeting Room
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Tuesday, July 5, 2016
7:00 PM

Chairman Mark Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:01 P.M. Present included Commissioner Eric Braley, Valerie Combs, Michael Nair and Judy Duffy. Also present were Melissa Cook-Mackenzie, Town Administrator, and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant. Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning was absent due to vacation.

-MINUTES-

June 7, 2016

The Planning Commission accepted the minutes, as presented.

-COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC-

None.

-NEW BUSINESS-

1. Case A-2016-02-SE Special Exception application from Emily Gillis, Esquire, 144 Elk River Lane, North East, MD 21901 for a proposed professional Law office located at 22 North Main Street, Suite 1, North East, Maryland 21901, also found on Tax Map 400; Parcel 0088. Applicant proposes to provide attorney services. Property owner Dominick DiPatre. The North East Board of Appeals will render a decision following their Public Hearing.

Emily Gillis, Esquire, came to present her request for opening a law office in the "V-C" Village Commercial Zoning District at 22 North Main Street, North East, Maryland. Ms. Gillis stated that she has searched for an office location for a while and finding the right office has been "like finding a needle in a haystack". However, Ms. Gillis stated 22 North Main Street, North East, Maryland is the perfect location for her. This office building is currently handicap accessible with an existing handicap ramp in the front of the building. In addition, the layout of the offices within the building is conducive to maneuvering a wheelchair from room to room, and the existing bathroom is handicap accessible. Ms. Gillis reported that the property owner Mr. Dipatre, will be repairing the existing handicap ramp. Ms. Gillis stated that the handicap accessibility of this location benefits not only herself but other potential handicap clients.

Parking

Ms. Gillis stated the existing parking lot has a handicap parking spot in the front of the building allowing Ms. Gillis to park her handicap accessible van near the handicap ramp. Ms. Gillis stated this is an important advantage to her. Ms. Gillis stated she does not plan on making any changes to the exterior of the building other than

signage which she will contact the Town for permits at the appropriate time if approved for the Special Exception.

Services

Ms. Gillis stated she would be providing a service that is not currently offered in the Town of North East. Ms. Gillis added that she will be providing family law and criminal law services. Ms. Gillis clarified that the criminal law she will be practicing will be panel work which means she will be visiting clients at the penitentiary and those clients will not be visiting her office. Ms. Gillis stated there will only be one or two clients per hour at the most. Ms. Gillis stated she really likes this location, the office building and the Town and would like to have her law office in this location for years to come, pending approval. Ms. Gillis stated she has two part-time employees and family support.

Chairman Dobbins inquired if Ms. Gillis would be the only attorney in the office. Ms. Gillis concurred.

Mr. Nair inquired what the length of time the lease is for; how much square footage is being leased; how many parking spaces are available and what upgrades will be made to the existing ramp.

Ms. Gillis responded that she currently has a year to year lease for the 555 square feet office space. There are two parking spaces reserved for her office and the balance of the parking lot is open to customers of the hair salon and her potential law office. In addition, Mr. DiPatre was planning to patch the cement at the end of the ramp to make a smoother transition.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie inquired within the building where is the office to be located and if Ms. Gillis is familiar with the Village Commercial District operating hours for businesses. Ms. Gillis stated she is aware of the operating hours in this zoning district, these hours fit nicely with her type of business and reported that she will only operate within those hours.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie would like to enter into the record that the Planning Office has received a response from the Critical Area Commission and they have no comment in regards to this change in use as there is no increase in impervious surface.

Ms. Combs made a motion to recommend approval of the special exception to the Board of Appeals. Ms. Duffy seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-OLD BUSINESS-

None.

-REPORTS-

Cross Dock Facility at the North East Commons Property

Mrs. Cook- Mackenzie reported a firm has been hired by the property owner to do traffic study. The Town has not received any feedback, to date.

272 Bridge over Amtrak

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported that Mumford and Miller, the previous contractor for the project, was to have removed their equipment off the Towns property by June 30, 2016 and has done so. A bid is to be awarded by the State Highway Administration in October of this year for this project.

Mauldin Avenue Sidewalk Project

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported the project was stalled due to some design issues but should be completed soon.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

Special Exceptions

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported that a special exception is currently required in some zoning districts for some uses that should be permitted by right. Chairman Dobbins and the members of the Planning Commission concurred and requested that they review permitted uses and those requiring special exceptions.

Route 7 Bridge (between Main Street & North East Isles)

Commissioner Braley reported that he had discussed an idea with Mayor McKnight about the possibility of using a pedestrian traffic light for the Route 7 Bridge as a temporary solution to not having a safe route to cross the bridge. Commissioner Braley stated that funding may be available as this project would fall under the walking program. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie inquired if Commissioner Braley had researched the funding and asked if he was aware of any other pedestrian lights like the one proposed. Commissioner Braley stated that he had not researched the funding for this specific project and that he was not aware of any other lights which were used in pedestrians crossing a bridge. Commissioner Braley stated the idea came to him when thinking about the share the road bike project. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated we would have to research the traffic impact. Mr. Nair and Ms. Duffy concur and stated it may be a possible interim solution pending the effect on traffic.

-NEXT MEETING-

Chairman Dobbins cancelled the August meeting as there will not be quorum.

The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled September 6, 2016. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie would like to add the proposed Waterfront North East to the agenda.

-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Ms. Combs made a motion to adjourn at 7:50 p.m. Ms. Duffy seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully submitted:

Lisa Rhoades
Planning and Zoning Assistant

Attest:

Mark Dobbins
Chairman