

**CITY COUNCIL and PLANNING COMMISSION
JOINT MEETING**

5:30 p.m., Thursday, April 30, 2015

A Joint Meeting of City Council and the Planning Commission was held at 5:30 p.m., Thursday, April 30, 2015 in Council Chambers of City Hall, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmembers Bettelli, Buckhannon, S. Ferencz, Loftus and Ward, Mayor Cronin, City Administrator Tucker, Assistant Administrator Dziuban and Planning Commission members Ballow, Denton, DiGangi, R. Ferencz, Mills, Safford, Scott, Planning Director Kerr, and City Clerk Copeland.

1. Mayor Cronin called the meeting to order and acknowledged that the press and public had been duly notified of the meeting in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

2. **Purpose**

Review of the Updated Comprehensive Plan

Mayor Cronin provided attendees with the “Comprehensive Planning Guide for Local Governments” generated by the Municipal Association of South Carolina; these guidelines follow the State requirements. The Mayor noted that a municipality must develop the Land Use element of the comprehensive plan before adopting any zoning ordinances; the Land Use element also generates a zoning map and is influenced by all previously described plan elements. If the City is challenged on its zoning regulations, staff looks to the Land Use elements of the Comprehensive Plan for its justification. According to state law, a comprehensive plan must be updated every five (5) years, and the Planning Commission has been working on this update for some time.

When Director Kerr began his review, he indicated that he would concentrate on the changes that have been made to the plan in this update; he noted that issues of concern to Council or the Planning Commission could be brought forth and discussed even if not changed in this draft. In preparation for the update, the Director stated that he had reviewed State law and the information provided by the Municipal Association to find a basic description of what the plan should be; the best description he found was in the introduction to the City’s plan that states the following:

“This Comprehensive Plan is intended to document the history of development on the Isle of Palms, identify the community’s problems and needs, and articulate a vision for its future. The Plan is also intended to help guide future decision-making matters affecting the physical, social and economic growth, development and redevelopment of the community. This Plan is not a final product; it is a part of a continuing planning process and should be updated and revised as new information becomes available or as new problems and needs arise.”

The Director stated that this update was the fifth version of the Comprehensive Plan that was originally adopted in 1997 and updated in 1998, 2004, 2009 and 2015.

The first major change comes as a result of the 2010 census becoming available; the first item of interest was that the number of housing units on the island has increased by ten percent (10%)

from the 2000 census to four thousand two hundred seventy four (4,274) units. During that same period, the number of owner-occupied units decreased by six percent (6%) to one thousand eight hundred twenty-eight (1,828) units, and the number of units rented on a short-term basis and second homes increased by twenty-six percent (26%) to two thousand four hundred forty-six (2,446) units. The Director attributed the increase in short-term rental units to the number of condominiums built and the Villages.

In the Director's view, previous versions have tried to be "in the middle of the road" on many issues, and erosion was one of those issues. A strategy has never been included, and a goal was never stated relative to erosion; this is the first version of the Plan to establish a goal of being pro-nourishment. The Vision Statement has been modified to acknowledge that the island is subject to erosion.

In the Natural Resources element of the Plan, the simple statement was included that island beaches "are generally accreting, but the shoreline has cyclical erosional episodes." In the Goals listed on page 27, Strategy 3.3.2 states "Support efforts to minimize the impact of erosion on the ends of the island including beach nourishment projects."

The second major change to the Plan comes in the Housing element with the mention of the Biggert-Waters Act as follows:

"One of the provisions of the Act is expected to result in the increase of flood insurance rates to reflect the true flood risk. This provision could significantly increase the cost of flood insurance for the older houses on the island that area not elevated."

Director Kerr noted that the provisions have been delayed a bit, but the Act remains on the horizon. He stated that, when it appeared to be much more imminent, the impact on the saleability of the older homes on the island was a question; he voiced the opinion that the Act was a true point of concern and that it was appropriate to include in the Plan.

A third change relates to an appendix of traffic counts in previous versions of the Plan; the City ran into an issue in getting the most recent traffic counts which alerted the Planning Commission to the fact that the most recent counts had not been reliable. The Commission decided that the most prudent action would be to remove the index for this version so that, when they have more reliable data in the future, the index will be added back to the Plan. In its place, on page 55 of the Transportation Element are more general graphs showing the average traffic counts by month and total inbound traffic by month; with more accurate traffic data for 2014, Director Kerr expects it to be included on the graph.

Since Mayor Carmen R. Bunch Park is new to the City since the last version of the Plan, it will be added to the Community Facilities element on page 37 of the Plan.

Mention has been made that the City has many good reports from OCRM on the ocean quality monitoring; the Planning Commission thought that the City would find it useful to keep those results in an additional appendix for the Plan and decided to add it.

Another addition to the Comprehensive Plan would be the City's participation in the Charleston County Consolidated Dispatch System; this subject would also become a part of the Community Facilities element.

For the Economics section beginning on page 18 of the draft, the degree to which the tourist-related industries on the island supplement the expenses of the City has been "glossed over;" the Planning Commission would like to add a statement to convey the idea that, without second homes and other tourist-related revenues, the City's annual budget would be significantly impacted.

For Director Kerr, some of the challenges with this updated version of the Plan and the four (4) prior versions has been that there is a fine balance in the amount of detail, and, in his opinion, the first two (2) versions of the plan were very detail-oriented. In reviewing them, the Planning Commission found that they quickly became dated. An issue may be important today and those things have traditionally found their way into the Comprehensive Plan, and, upon reflection five (5) years later, the same issue has become dated and was removed. In this version, the Planning Commission has tried to find the balance between being germane and relevant, but at the same time, not having so many data points that it would become dated in a short period of time. With this in mind, the updated Comprehensive Plan might seem to be generic in nature, and it was intentionally done in hopes of find the proper balance.

Councilmember Loftus referenced the Housing element, beginning of Page 44, where septic systems were discussed; he asked whether the upgrade to the sewer systems on 41st Avenue would have the additional capability and eliminate the need to put new houses on septic systems.

Director Kerr responded negatively; he commented that the subject of septic systems has been a "hot button" issue for the City, but the City has traditionally backed off the policy of requiring new homes to be on the sewer systems. The City Code and the Comprehensive Plan reflect a position that, if a septic systems meets the requirements of the Health Department, its use is acceptable.

Mayor Cronin indicated that, although the work on 41st Avenue was a replacement and not an increase to capacity, the system is modular and capacity could be added in the future. The Mayor also pointed out that many lots on the island do not percolate; the island has something over one hundred (100) grinder pump septic systems currently.

The Mayor referred to the use of the words "*per capita* income – median" on page 15 and "household income – mean" on page 16; he voiced the opinion that there should be consistency. It was generally agreed that median is a weighted average.

Administrator Tucker asked if there would be any problem with listing both the mean and the median; she noted that grant applications typically ask for "median household income" as the standard.

Councilmember Ferencz questioned the removal of the census data relative to age; the Director responded that, as shown on page 13, the information would be removed and no corresponding data would be added. She continued that she posed the question because, on page 16 under

"Key Issues," two (2) of them involve age factors. The Administrator agreed that the age information was important since City services and handicap accessibility were affected. Director Kerr agreed that there appeared to be "a disconnect" and that the Commission would look at that section again to determine what should be added.

Quoting information from the census website for the Isle of Palms, Councilmember Ferencz reported the following:

60-85 years of age	35.3%
18 and under	18.6%
20-45 years of age	37.0 %

Although the twenty to forty-five (20-45) age bracket was the largest population group on the island, this version of the Plan did not address them as well.

Councilmember Ferencz recalled that the March minutes indicated that the Comprehensive Plan would have a mission statement, but no such statement is in the version distributed to Council.

Director Kerr noted that the Vision Statement had been revised.

Councilmember then quoted the minutes as saying "including a mission statement as well as a vision statement; the mission statement might include some of the challenges the City faces."

Director Kerr stated that he thought that was a deliberation between keeping the vision statement having purely "rosy" language and adding a mission statement or just including challenges in the vision statement; the Planning Commission opted to add the challenges to the vision statement.

Mayor Cronin commented that he did not think the Biggert-Waters Act had been dealt with enough; the Mayor said that he thought changes had been made to it since the Commission had completed its work on the Comprehensive Plan. He thought that possibly the information could be bolded to indicate the seriousness of the matter.

Administrator Tucker noted that she has heard informal dialogue about changing parking requirements in some of the commercial districts; she remembered reading something about the parking requirements in Plan where the language sounded rigid. She thought that the language should be made more flexible to avoid the Planning Commission and Council having to amend the Plan if the Planning Commission and Council were amenable to do.

Director Kerr referred the group to page 50, paragraph 6; the statement was "Parking for commercial uses should be accommodated on-site or in designated areas in close proximity to the business." If a change were to be contemplated, the Administrator offered "other considerations may be made under special circumstances" or something along that line. The Administrator noted that the Plan also stated "On-street parking in areas not designated for parking is not a satisfactory solution."

The Mayor suggested that this might have been language from an earlier version, possibly before the City had a GC3 zoning district.

Director Kerr commented that the Planning Commission would be discussing parking in the GC3 zoning district at its next meeting.

A copy of the draft version of the updated Comprehensive Plan is attached to the historical record of the meeting.

3. Adjourn

Mayor Cronin closed the meeting at 6:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk