



Summary of Actions
Mount Rainier Mixed-Use Town Center Design Review Committee
February 13, 2019

APPROVED MARCH 13, 2019

The Mount Rainier Mixed-Use Town Center (MUTC) Design Review Committee held its regularly scheduled hearing on February 13, 2018 in the Mount Rainier City Hall, 1 Municipal Place, Mount Rainier, MD 20712.

A. CALL TO ORDER

Robin Bliss called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

Committee Members Present: Robin Bliss, Brent Bolin, Justin Bost, Nathan Burtch, Nathan Cederoth, Mario Cisneros, Anthony Lee

Committee Members Absent: None

Staff Present:

CITY OF MOUNT RAINIER
Bryan Knedler, Ward 2 Council Member
Ronald Hopkins, Economic Development Director
Mark Davis, Director of Code Enforcement
Angelia Boddie, Code Enforcement Officer
Alma Ferrufino, Admin. Assistant, Code Enforcement
Rocio Latorre, Admin. Assistant, Tree Commission Liaison

M-NCPPC
Daniel Sams, Mount Rainier M-U-TC Staff Liaison

B. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Robin Bliss asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

Motion: Mr. Bolin moved to approve the agenda.

Second: Mr. Bost seconded the motion.

The motion passed in a vote of 7-0.

C. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Motion: Ms. Bliss nominated herself to serve as chairman for a three-month period.

Second: Mr. Bolin seconded the motion.

The motion passed in a vote of 6-0-1, Ms. Bliss abstaining.

Motion: Chair Bliss nominated Mr. Bolin to serve as vice chairman for a three-month period.

Second: Mr. Cederoth seconded the motion.

The motion passed in a vote of 6-0-1, Mr. Bolin abstaining.

D. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

1. Introductions

Chair Bliss led the committee members in introducing themselves to each other and city and M-NCPPC staff.

2. Code Enforcement Issues

Council Member Knedler led the informal discussion, relating that there were many unpermitted business signs of temporary nature and fabrication throughout the zone. He explained his belief that part of the reason was due to the length and complication of the approval process. He asked for help from the committee members and city staff in identifying unpermitted signs.

Mr. Hopkins introduced himself as the city's Director of Economic Development, replacing Samantha Olatunji. Mr. Davis, Director of Code Enforcement, Ms. Boddie, Code Enforcement Officer, Ms. Ferrufino, Administrative Assistant, Code Enforcement, and Ms. Latorre, Administrative Assistant and Tree Commission Liaison introduced themselves.

A discussion ensued regarding the regulations for obtaining a city sign permit and county sign permit, as well as the roles of the agencies involved (DPIE and M-NCPPC).

Mr. Davis asked that all work together to devise a list of unpermitted signs. He and Mr. Knedler acknowledged that although the development plan provides for the six-month approval of temporary signs by the committee [see page 101], temporary signs are not permitted by the county and are considered a violation.

Mr. Cederoth stated he was willing to be a point of contact in this effort.

Chair Bliss expressed concern that records did not exist that could be used to identify what had been approved by the committee.

Mr. Sams stated that he had collated all the available data in M-NCPPC's archives and organized it in an Excel spreadsheet which he had send to Mr. Knedler. [The spreadsheet lists 173 applications over 18 years (2000-2018) and identified three extant signs (Anchor

Nationwide, 3200 Otis Street; Alife Dollar Food Market, 3847 34th Street; Nu Nails and Spa, 3215 Rhode Island Avenue) that were presented to the committee but never received a recommendation for approval nor obtained a sign permit.] Other signs, such as that for the Mediterranean Café (3235 Rhode Island Avenue) received a recommendation for approval from the committee but never obtained a county sign permit and thus are in violation. He stated that if the committee and city staff are able to compile a list of signs they believe are in violation, he can check them in DAMS (the Development Activity Monitoring System) to determine if there is a county sign violation, and can also notify DPIE.

Mr. Knedler asked when city business licenses had to be renewed, identifying this date as an opportunity to work with business owners on potential sign violations. Mr. Davis stated it was February 28, 2019.

Mr. Cisneros asked if there was some kind of informational package that could be prepared and distributed to landlords and commercial tenants about code enforcement and compliance.

Chair Bliss stated that Mr. Hopkins had been working with commercial landlords and new businesses.

Mr. Hopkins stated that, in many cases, landlords' primary interest is in renting his or her property; often they claim ignorance of any regulations. He noted that he attends meetings of the Mount Rainier Business Association and had been providing resources, including information on the availability of grant money for commercial landlords and tenants.

Mr. Cederoth stated that he understood many of the city's business were opened by first-time business owners and there was a steep learning curve.

Mr. Bolin stated that he believed the city had created as many as four information packets over the years and suggested the landlords were not an appropriate target and suggested the Mount Rainier Business Association. He stated his belief that working with landlords is very important and he noted the lack of property investment by landlords over the years.

Ms. Bliss asked how much of this problem could be attributed to a language barrier. Mr. Davis stated that all their materials were available in both English and Spanish.

A discussion of the City of Mount Rainier's website ensued.

Mr. Cisneros noted how many empty buildings and storefronts could be observed.

Mr. Hopkins said that in many instances he is able to find funding for upgrades to commercial businesses. He will be hosting an open house/roundtable for developers and landlords in April, and had met with David Ianucci, President and CEO of the Prince George's Economic Development Corporation.

Mr. Davis said the mindset of business owners in the city that leads to neglect and violations had to change, noting that aside from signs, they were finding many health and safety violations.

Mr. Cederoth spoke strongly about the need for enforcement.

Council Member Knedler noted that the city is charging a much higher tax rate on abandoned dwellings that is resulting in their being rehabilitated and sold or rented and said that the council is considering raising the tax for abandoned/vacant commercial properties as well. He reminded those present that zoning issues must be enforced by the county. He noted that city ordinance prohibits flashing business signs/lights, but their removal has been difficult to enforce.

3. City Grants for Façade Improvements and Signs

Mr. Hopkins stated that it appeared some businesses had been promised as much as \$150,000 but in fact were limited to \$50,000 and noted that the city's incentives program is being rewritten. There is a \$1 million fund gleaned from city taxes that is available for forgivable micro-loans.

A discussion of funding sources ensued. Mr. Sams reminded those present that M-NCPPC's funding sources included grants of up to \$50,000 for capital and non-capital projects administered by the Historic Preservation Commission and the same amount from Community Planning's PAMC (Planning Assistance to Municipalities and Communities) program.

A discussion of the types of businesses in the city and their patronage ensued. Mr. Bolin said that he believed a wayfinding program was needed to directed visitors to stores and parking. Mr. Sams stated that the city could apply to the PAMC program for non-capital funds to create a wayfinding program, included designs for signage.

4. Introduction to the MUTC Zone and Committee Member and Staff Responsibilities

Mr. Sams led a discussion on his and the committee's roles, stressing the importance of transparent process, defensible decision making and careful record keeping. He distributed a bound except from the development plan containing just the development standards for the committee's use in reviewing applications.

A discussion ensued regarding the "shalls" and "shoulds" in the development plan and the city's non-regulatory Design Review Board, as well as the county permits and violations. Mr. Bolin commented on the aspirational character of the plan. Mr. Knedler commented on all the positive outcomes of the committee's work over the years.

A discussion regarding other outreach efforts and the city's bilingual newsletter ensued.

A discussion of the potential location of the inked approval stamp used to certify the committee's actions ensued. Mr. Hopkins stated that it could not be located, and may have disappeared during the recent city staff transitions.

5. Memorial Park Redesign Consultation

Chair Bliss stated that this would be placed on the March agenda.

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JUNE 13, 2018

Chair Bliss asked for a motion to approve the meeting summary.

Motion: Mr. Lee moved to approve the meeting summary.

Discussion: Chair Bliss led a discussion regarding the recommendation for approval of Pennyroyal Station Café's signage [Application 2018-02]. She stated she believed the approval was conditioned on the applicant's returning to the committee for further approval. She asked that the minutes not be approved until this was ascertained.

Withdrawal of Motion: Mr. Lee withdrew the motion.

Mr. Sams agreed to contact the application to ask if they were returning to the committee for any other aspects of their application.

E. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

The committee agreed to hold the next meeting on March 13, 2019. On the agenda would be a continuing discussion of code enforcement issues and a pre-application for Memorial Park.

F. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business Chair Bliss asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion: Chair Bliss moved to adjourn the meeting.

Second: Mr. Lee seconded the motion.

The motion passed in a vote of 7-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 9:17 p.m.

Submitted by Daniel Sams, M-NCPPC Staff Liaison