

**CITY OF GRIFFIN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORKSHOP  
ONE GRIFFIN CENTER, W. ELMER GEORGE MUNICIPAL HALL  
TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2015**

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Chairperson Doug Hollberg presided, calling the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. City Commissioners attending included Cynthia Reid-Ward, Cora Flowers, Ryan McLemore, Dick Morrow and Rodney McCord. Absent was Commissioner Joanne Todd who recently had surgery.

Representing the City of Griffin Planning and Zoning Board for this joint meeting were: Chairperson Jim Hill, Roger Miller, David Brock, David Castille, and Greg McLarin.

Also present were City Manager Kenny L. Smith, City Attorney Andrew J. Whalen, III, City Solicitor Jessica O'Connor and Teresa Watson to record minutes.

<b>REGULAR AGENDA</b>
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- 1) Joint meeting between Griffin Board of Commissioners and the City Planning and Zoning Board to discuss future land use plans and zoning goals. *Development Services Director Toussaint Kirk will facilitate.*

Mr. Kirk advised the Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Board requested this joint workshop to discuss future land use plans, zoning goals and the scope of each board. P&Z has expressed that they feel a disconnect between the two boards relative to zoning decisions and the overall goals of each entity.

Jim Hill, P&Z Chairperson, provided an overview of the purpose for requesting this joint workshop. He felt that perhaps it would be beneficial for the two boards to ensure they are both on the same page. There are about 45 years' service between himself and David Castille. While he felt the two Boards differed on some issues, perhaps they could discuss and enlighten.

David Castille said he initially brought up the prospect of a joint workshop for the reason stated by Mr. Hill. In the past, his opinion has been that any tenant was better than an empty building, but he has realized the Board of Commissioners does not share that philosophy. He has wondered if their meeting minutes were read by the City Commission, or if they needed to review them.

Commissioners McLemore and Morrow agreed it was sometimes beneficial to meet and collaborate on an overall vision. They assured Mr. Castille and others that the P&Z Board minutes provided to the City Commission were read and digested prior to acting on any application. Commissioner Morrow noted that he agreed with the recommendations of P&Z probably 90% of the time, but sometimes there is a divergence, such as with adult day care in the downtown overlay area designed to promote arts and entertainment and to make a more attractive, enticing downtown district.

Commissioner McCord noted that P&Z board members were appointed, whereas City Commissioners are elected by those they serve. He further noted that when the City Commission deals with an application, there are usually constituents from the affected area in attendance looking for answers and explanations. As a whole, the City Commission may be more fully swayed by those who appear before them in person at meetings. While the two boards may agree, sometimes they get to their respective positions differently.

City Attorney Drew Whalen advised the roles of the two entities differ in that: 1) P&Z deals with objective criteria, guided by the Planning and Development Director, to make a recommendation to the City Commission as an advisory board, and 2) The City Board of Commissioners is composed of elected officials who must make legislative decisions, often in the face of opposition from surrounding neighbors or applicants. One board is advisory and the other legislative.

Mr. Hill noted that when P&Z recommended approval of the adult day care application, they did so based on established criteria and in accordance with staff recommendation. He likes to use the analogy of doing a "front run" for the Board of Commissioners since their analysis is usually a factor in the City Commission's decision. While City Commissioner Tom Perdue advocated that P&Z be allowed to make zoning decisions, he understood that was not possible legislatively.

Mr. Castille said that in the past P&Z members had attended training seminars in Athens which were very helpful, but there have been none offered in recent memory. While P&Z members do not desire a stipend for their service, additional training would be very beneficial.

Chairman Hollberg stated that he himself has changed directions 180° in his thinking about zoning and building standards. While he used to advocate for affordable housing without much regard for

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quality and longevity, i.e. infill or subdivision regulations with lowered expectations, he has come to understand that to replace substandard with lower quality housing that will itself become substandard housing in the not too distant future, makes little sense for a long-term vision for this community. We need to look comprehensively at improving Griffin -- not just to get by, but to make a positive difference. We cannot continue to build "whatever."

Commissioner Morrow said he did not want to see an over-emphasis on any disagreement with regard to recommendations, such as the adult day care owner, who ultimately located in a more suitable area on Old Atlanta Road.

Mr. McLarin felt it would be helpful to schedule a joint workshop between P&Z and the City Commission periodically. He realized differences between the two are really quite few, and there needs to be open lines of communication and an alignment of objectives to be on the same page.

Chairman Hollberg and Commissioner Morrow introduced Kristen Miller, who is the Archway Partnership professional, and briefly detailed how she could help the different governmental entities and boards/commissions. That group can help identify ways to replace the blighted areas being torn down without resorting to allowing a rebuild of substandard housing.

Chairman Hollberg advised there is a book called "Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, and How to Reverse It" by Robert Lupton, which reveals how toxic charity can sometimes be upon the very people it is meant to help. There can exist the problem of being too generous for too long a period of time. The book addresses helping, not sabotaging, those whom they desire to serve in a way that will lead to lasting, real-world change.

Commissioner McCord said he had a problem with saying we are too generous. He doesn't condemn those in need and there, but by the grace of God, go any of us. He also does not buy into the mindset that the people needing assistance will do dishonest things or deceive.

Commissioner Flowers said this was a debate that was not going to be resolved, and she suggested the two boards stick to the issues of zoning.

Mr. Castille relayed he had heard it said that while it was a sin not to help those in need, it was also a sin to continue helping beyond the need.

Commissioner Reid-Ward asked about the initial purpose for Impact Ministries, which was as a thrift store with no soup kitchen component. Mr. Kirk advised that when they relocated to the present Solomon Street site, there was also no mention of it being a shelter or having food service. They relocated with the same permit as was initially issued to them.

Mr. Hill noted that Griffin was unique and viewed differently, which was a diverse challenge not common to many of our neighboring cities. He wondered if the City Commission wanted to provide any direction to P&Z beyond their established guidelines. Money doesn't need to factor into the equation, but perhaps there are some areas in which we can get ahead, such as with the movie/film industry. Chairman Hollberg shared that it may be possible that a movie production company would be locating in Griffin soon.

Chairman Morrow said after the decline of the textile industry, there was a desperate mentality in the city that resulted in poor quality housing and construction. That has changed some in the recent past with higher expectations and a desire for quality and excellence that will be long lasting.

Commissioner Flowers was concerned that zoning may not be consistent throughout the City, and Chairman Hollberg mentioned that the ongoing Meriwether development was making strides at requiring a higher level of quality as they replace blighted or substandard areas. Commissioner Flowers said she wondered if that same quality is required everywhere. Mr. Kirk said we are trying to ensure greater control in previously blighted areas. There is not a secret double standard.

Mr. Castille pointed out that the local media could help publicize how the film industry is beneficial to the area economically to offset the negativity of having traffic disrupted for brief periods. To alert citizens to filming dates and locations, they could help divert traffic.

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Commissioner Reid-Ward noted there have been great strides made on blight, but the City still needs to address issues on the north side of town across the tracks. The disparity in how residential areas are maintained within the City is evident on neighborhood ride-throughs.

Mr. Hill said most felt it was time to revisit the thought processes of 10 to 15 years ago and perhaps realign some thinking. He felt there was a general lack of planning and development knowledge during those years. Commissioner Morrow agreed, saying that during this period the City allowed blighted areas to develop, although unintentionally, with inferior housing.

Commissioner Reid-Ward noted she has seen families who could have afforded to live in Zone 1 leave because of the area. She continued that it is difficult to displace those who are living in substandard housing if that is all they can afford.

Mr. Hill asked if there was anything more that P & Z could do to facilitate better communication and to ensure quality growth. Commissioners McCord and McLemore left the meeting.

Commissioners Flowers and Morrow agreed that P&Z simply needed to continue operating within established guidelines and keep the lines of communication open. They told P&Z they were appreciated and assured them that the Board of Commissioners did pay close attention to their minutes, analyses and recommendations.

Mr. Kirk noted that, on a positive note, as he travels for training conferences around the state many ask about programs and regulations in Griffin. Some have modeled Griffin's lead in planning and development, and he stated that situations were better now than when he previously left City employment in 2013. So, progress is being made and he was proud of our efforts.

Commissioner Morrow stated that bad businesses downtown can actually run away good businesses and keep prospects from wanting to locate here, as well. While the adult day care that has been discussed is an admirable enterprise and much needed, it was not well suited for the downtown district in an arts and entertainment overlay area. It simply did not fit the plan for the downtown area, much the same as storefront churches do not. These type activities are important, but in the suitable settings so as not to deter foot traffic and interfere with other businesses.

P&Z members felt it should not be another decade before they and the Board of Commissioners met to discuss mutual points of interest, and they thanked the Board for its responsiveness. Both boards can take away from this meeting the desire for better communications. Mr. Castille added that he has altered his thinking to reflect that any tenant is not always better than no tenant or the right kind of tenant. He has learned that some businesses can go from being corporate citizens to neighborhood nuisances when positioned in the wrong area. He reiterated that training for P&Z board members would be very beneficial and greatly appreciated.

Commissioner Reid-Ward noted that the Board of Commissioners should not take P&Z members for granted as they provide a very valued service. She hoped we could get them the training they desire. She concluded by saying the Board of Commissioners appreciates their hard work.

David Brock agreed that training tops his list, as well. All the P&Z board members desire to do a good job and work hard on their analyses and recommendations for the Board of Commissioners. He, too, felt it might be time to revisit the old regulations established some 10-15 years ago. He thanked the Board of Commissioners for this opportunity to meet and share thoughts.

<b>ADJOURN</b>
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*Motion/second to adjourn at 10:10 a.m. carried 6-0.*

Respectfully Submitted,

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Kenny L. Smith, City Manager/Secretary

Accepted:

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Douglas S. Hollberg, Chairperson