**NEWTOWN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**April 7, 2014**

In attendance were members Mark Craig, Sue Bannon, David Bryk, Warren Woldorf and Borough Council Liaison, Larry Auerweck.

Also present: Maureen Wheatley and Lynn Bush from the Bucks County Planning Commission, and Julia Woldorf.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Craig called the meeting to order at 7:07 P.M. Mr. Craig announced that Paul Salvatore has resigned from the Commission.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Municipal Economic Development Initiative**

Mr. Craig noted that a visit from the BCPC was first discussed in October, at which time he had asked the Borough if the Planning Commission could be the focal point for the Bucks County Municipal Economic Development Initiative (MEDI).

Ms. Bush distributed the MEDI 2014 Progress Report, and explained that the initiative had come from work done in 2009-2010 focusing on economic development. She noted that there were a number of organizations involved in economic development and that the BCPC had been charged with conducting a year-long study to see where things stood. Ms. Bush said that they surveyed and collected data from 27,000 businesses, and noted that the study had concluded that 96% of the businesses had never used or had any contact with an economic development organization, and that economic development varied by municipality. Ms. Bush said that there had been a lack of sensitivity by organizations to the particular and unique character of municipalities.

Ms. Bush said that the goal of the initiative is to work with municipal partners and share resources; the project has strong backing from the Bucks County Commissioners. She said that they have worked with 28 municipalities to date, including Yardley Borough and New Hope Borough. They began the process by meeting with municipalities to see what they would like to do and how MEDI could help; their services are available at no cost. Ms. Bush said that the Borough's concerns would fit well into what they are doing with municipalities. She said that a more ground level approach, "getting real," would follow visioning.

Mr. Woldorf said that the Borough has measures in place to manage changes and development, but a town wide interest in development hasn't been evident. He asked how interest could be increased. Mr. Craig said that large groups of people in the community had been involved in visioning. Mr. Woldorf said that continued interest in the issue was needed and that, since opportunities for development was limited, the Borough needed to monitor re-development. Mr. Craig said that previous visioning was probably still relevant, and that the Commission needed to think of ways to utilize the BCPC. He said that there have been changes in the business district, and that it would be useful to look at zoning with regard to future development/re-development.

Mr. Woldorf said he had no issues with SALDO, but was concerned with some Zoning Ordinance limitations, which may not currently make sense. He said he would like to be proactive rather than reactive in response to changes in the business climate and population in the Borough. Mr. Craig said that he would like the Borough to keep what it has, and develop without disrupting its special characteristics.

Mr. Craig asked what could be done to maintain a vital downtown. Ms. Bush noted that, when Sycamore Street was developed, the township was eager to connect the street with the downtown Borough area. She said that reexamining zoning could be useful, with a focus on seeing what might be vague, restrictive or out of touch with the times. Mr. Craig noted that there had been no development on North State Street since the Zoning Ordinance was updated. He said that the need for required parking had been addressed as an accommodation to the residents, but that recently residents had expressed objection to a parking lot in the residential area, in reference to the recent re-development proposal for 139 N. State Street. Mr. Woldorf noted that this proposal involved the retention or relocation of a barn and the possible conversion of the barn to a single dwelling. He said it would go to the Zoning Hearing Board; he was unclear as to whether this would be allowed or a special exception.

Mr. Bryk asked if there was any information about business retention, and if the Borough could do anything to help or was doing anything to hinder it. Ms. Bush said she would look into the issue. She said that economic cycles can impact business, and that sometimes they hear complaints of a difficult permit process or signage or parking issues; some municipalities have cut permit fees. Ms. Bush said that the topic of business retention would be a good focus, especially with an eye to what other municipalities are doing. She said they have gathered market analysis for business districts, which business people appreciate, and which sometimes results in zoning changes. Mr. Craig suggesting looking at the Zoning Ordinance to see what may encourage or discourage business in the Borough. Ms. Bush noted that there is always tension between commercial and residential concerns. Ms. Bush noted that Newtown Township is forming an Economic Development Commission and that the business park has the Newtown Business Commons Association.

Mr. Craig summarized the 3 issues to be addressed: a look at the Zoning Ordinance to determine any modifications to encourage business, business retention, and market analysis of the business district. Mr. Woldorf suggested that the cost of renting in the business district be discussed as well. Ms. Bush said she would work on the 3 topics, and next time would also bring updated information on financial incentives. She said that she has sent the letter of agreement for Mr. Walker/the Borough; they like to have official Borough approval before proceeding. Upon approval, they usually have a meeting to discuss the goals of the collaboration. Ms. Bush will define the project with the Borough in writing, describing what has been discussed and how they plan to proceed. She said she would look into the 3 identified issues and get back to the Planning Commission. Mr. Craig said it will be useful to reevaluate commercial and resident issues and development.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Letter from Engineer on Planning Commission Review of Borough 537 Plan**

Mr. Craig distributed a letter dated March 31, 2014 from Gannett Fleming, which was sent in response to comments of the Planning Commission with regard to the Borough 537 Plan. He noted that the letter was received after the 537 Plan was adopted, but that he wanted to pass along the letter to Commission members.

**Parking**

Mr. Woldorf said that he has sent two memos to Borough Council regarding the parking issue, which has arisen with several projects recently. He said that the issue needs immediate attention. He noted that parking is an issue with respect to impervious surface restrictions at 139 N. State Street; a reduction of parking space size would put the proposed impervious surface area under the maximum allowed. He noted that at Steeple View a reduction of parking space sizes would result in an increase in the number of spaces allowed. Mr. Woldorf said that the issue of parking space sizes needed to be settled, and that the ordinances should be reviewed for inconsistencies in the size of the spaces.

Mr. Craig said that there is no consensus on parking space sizes among other municipalities. Mr. Bryk said he did not like the idea of really small spaces, which could result in more vehicles in an area – an increase in visible pollution. He said that large parking spaces would give a more spacious feel in the Borough. Ms. Bannon agreed that parking space specifications should be consistent throughout the Borough ordinances. Mr. Bryk said that limiting the number of parking spaces could only be done with larger spaces. Mr. Craig said he thought that Council would not want to decrease the number of parking spaces in the Borough. He said that the Planning Commission could make a recommendation to Council if they wished. Mr. Craig suggested that the issue be discussed at the next Commission meeting, when more members were present.

**Miscellaneous**

Mr. Woldorf said he would like to investigate a possible loophole in residential conversion restrictions; he will send a note to Mr. Craig. Mr. Craig said he would ask Council about the issue.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the last PC meeting were not voted on, as most of the members present were not present at the last Commission meeting.

**PUBLIC COMMENT –** There was no public comment.

**ADJOURNMENT**

*On a motion from Mr. Woldorf, seconded by Ms. Bannon, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.*

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 5, 2014 at 7:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie P. Dunleavy

Recording Secretary