



**CITY OF SOUTHPORT
PLANNING BOARD
December 19, 2024
6:00 PM**

Minutes

Members Present: Sue Hodgins, Will Hewett, Fred Fiss, Kevin Locklin

Staff Present: Maureen Meehan, Planning Services Director
Wendell Biddle, City Planner
Noah Saldo, City Clerk
Tori Deviney, Deputy City Clerk

A. Chair Hodgins called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

B. Mr. Hewett gave the invocation.

C. Chair Hodgins led the Pledge of Allegiance.

D. Approval of Agenda

Vice Chair Hewett motioned to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Fiss. ***Unanimous vote; Motion carried.***

E. Approval of Minutes

1. October 17th, 2024 Planning Board Minutes

Chair Hodgins highlighted two revisions to the October 17, 2024, Planning Board Minutes.

The first correction involved consolidating the two motion references on page 3 during the Cades Cove discussion into a single motion reflected at the end of the paragraph.

The second correction updated the term "battleship" to "USS Battleship, North Carolina in Wilmington."

Following this, Mr. Hewett motioned to approve the agenda, with Mr. Locklin seconding the motion ***Unanimous vote; Motion carried.***

F. Public Comment

None

G. New Business

1. Southport 2050 Comprehensive Plan Presentation

Ms. Meehan introduced the consultants, Andrea Radford and Jake Petrosky from Stewart Consulting, who have been collaborating on the comprehensive plan for the past year. Ms. Meehan stated that a draft of the plan is complete and the next steps involve collecting feedback from the boards as well as public input. The plan will then be submitted to the Division of Coastal Management for review prior to formal adoption. Ms. Radford was invited to begin the presentation on the draft.

Ms. Radford, representing Stewart Engineering and Planning Firm alongside Mr. Petrosky, began by providing an update on the Southport 2050 Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Radford recapped the extensive public engagement process undertaken over the past year, which included a “Name the Plan” survey, stakeholder interviews with six groups, a community survey with 536 responses, and various public meetings, walking tours, and listening sessions. A steering committee composed of members from different advisory boards was actively involved throughout the process. The draft plan was rolled out at a public meeting in October.

Ms. Radford summarized recurring themes identified through public input. Key concerns included affordability, parking in the downtown area, walkability, growth management, environmental preservation, historic preservation, and downtown and Yacht Basin improvements. Residents expressed strong appreciation for Southport's small-town feel, coastal charm, friendly environment, and historical significance. Survey responses indicated top concerns as managing development, slowing population growth, maintaining infrastructure, preserving the natural environment, and sustaining a vibrant downtown. Priority areas for the next 5-15 years included protection of marshes and wetlands, water quality improvement, historic preservation, quality utility services, support for local businesses, and stormwater management. When discussing development preferences, residents favored small-scale, non-residential developments, including medical facilities and entertainment options, as well as extended operating hours for existing businesses. Ms. Radford also shared details of a photo contest held as part of the plan, which highlighted Southport's natural, historical, and community assets.

Ms. Radford presented the draft vision and goals, which remained largely unchanged since the last public meeting. Goals addressed topics such as land use, housing, water quality, public access, historic preservation, yacht basin, infrastructure, transportation, and economic development. The future land use map was discussed, highlighting residential character areas and their distinct characteristics. These areas included the Historic Neighborhood, Traditional Neighborhood, Low to Medium Density, and Low-Density Conservation Design areas, with varying residential types, densities, and design considerations.

Non-residential character areas were outlined, including Office Institutional, Industrial, Highway Commercial, Downtown, Midtown, Gateway, Neighborhood Commercial, Waterfront Commercial, and Parks and Open Space. She outlined various character areas in Southport and their intended uses. Residential areas may include design elements like alley-loaded layouts, while non-residential areas such as offices, churches, and government buildings are primarily daytime or early evening uses.

Industrial areas near the Duke Energy nuclear plant are designated for industrial and research uses. Highway commercial zones along Highway 211 accommodate larger-scale retail and services. The downtown area features historic small-scale buildings (up to 35 feet) with active storefronts. Midtown includes boutique shops, restaurants, and occasional live-work units.

The gateway area at the 87 intersection is planned as a welcoming entrance with medium-scale retail, offices, and design enhancements like landscaping. Neighborhood commercial zones on North Howe Street include small-scale businesses with occasional second-floor residences. Waterfront areas focus on retail, marinas, and low-rise structures matching existing heights. Parks and open spaces prioritize environmentally sensitive uses such as trails, kayak launches, and docks.

At this point, Ms. Radford concluded her portion of the presentation and handed it over to Mr. Petrosky to continue the discussion, particularly regarding the height analysis and additional recommendations.

Mr. Petrosky provided an overview of the purpose and intent behind the proposed big-picture map, which is designed to guide future growth and development in Southport. He explained that the map serves as a tool to evaluate proposals, encouraging decisions that align with Southport's character and values. It operates on a broader scale than zoning, as a single character area might include multiple zoning districts. Mr. Petrosky emphasized that zoning codes should not remain static for decades but should evolve to reflect the city's goals related to walkability, housing, land use, and environmental priorities. While some recommendations in the plan can be implemented within the current zoning framework, others might require amendments to better support the city's vision.

Mr. Petrosky highlighted that the map is closely tied to the recommendations in the plan's elements, particularly regarding land use and housing. He stated the goal of promoting a development pattern that honors Southport's character while addressing survey feedback from residents. The top priorities identified in the survey included environmental preservation, such as protecting water quality and coastal habitats, as well as historic preservation. These priorities have informed the recommendations, which focus on managing growth pressures while respecting both the built and natural environments. Specific strategies include continuing efforts to limit density, refining building size and scale standards, and ensuring new development aligns with Southport's character.

Regarding building height and scale, Mr. Petrosky discussed the use of LIDAR data to analyze building heights across the city, particularly in the historic core. The data revealed that most buildings in this area are below 35 feet, aside from institutional structures like churches. This aligns with traditional town planning principles where institutional buildings are often the tallest. Mr. Petrosky underscored the importance of preserving the visual prominence of Southport's iconic live oak trees. Future development should be planned to ensure these trees remain a defining feature of the city's character.

Mr. Petrosky also addressed proposed updates to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). These updates include introducing performance-based standards and greater flexibility, particularly in areas like neighborhood commercial zones and gateways. Mixed-use development was recommended in certain areas, such as North Howe St, provided it is context-sensitive and maintains appropriate scale. Mr. Petrosky suggested allowing

flexibility in how second floors are utilized, potentially permitting live-work units or additional residential spaces to support walkability and reduce reliance on car travel.

Conditional zoning was another key topic. Mr. Petrosky noted that while the city currently allows conditional zoning for commercial uses, expanding this option to include mixed-use or residential projects could provide a valuable tool for achieving the city's goals. He acknowledged recent state-level legislative changes, such as Senate Bill 382, which impose some limits on local governments but confirmed that conditional zoning remains a viable option.

Mr. Petrosky emphasized that the affordability challenge is not unique to Southport but is a regional and national issue. He outlined various recommendations to address affordability, including allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) with performance standards to prevent negative impacts on neighboring properties, potentially limiting short-term rentals in ADUs, and encouraging long-term rentals for teachers or police officers. He suggested expanding allowable housing types in different districts and implementing targeted projects in collaboration with the county or nonprofits to provide affordable housing for specific groups, such as veterans, teachers, or seniors. He discussed the importance of maintaining a walkable, traditional village feel in new developments and emphasized coordination with Brunswick County on growth management in Southport's former ETJ, given zoning changes that could lead to more density and environmental impacts.

Mr. Petrosky also highlighted public preferences for preserving open space, ensuring compatibility of new developments with existing landscapes, and enhancing access to parks and greenways. He suggested tools such as conditional zoning and conservation subdivision designs to achieve these goals. He emphasized the importance of public access to parks and greenways, proposed feasibility studies for better connectivity, and suggested parking improvements in key areas like Keziah Park. He also discussed enhancing the East Coast Greenway through Southport to improve safety and connectivity.

Additionally, he recommended a master plan for Stevens Park and continuing historic preservation efforts. He stressed the importance of resilience planning by reducing vulnerabilities from flooding, utilizing low-impact development, and protecting Southport's wetlands, particularly given changes in wetland protection laws. Public preference leaned toward conservation subdivision designs with more open space. Mr. Petrosky also highlighted Southport's unique biodiversity and the need to balance development with environmental conservation.

Regarding the Yacht Basin, he suggested improving streets, pedestrian connectivity, and historical signage, while protecting long-term functionality. He emphasized the need for better water quality through stormwater management and incentives for wetland and shoreline preservation. Economic development was another key focus, with recommendations to balance tourism with support for residents and small businesses while encouraging good-wage jobs and opportunities for families. Transportation improvements, including enhanced walkability, biking infrastructure, and downtown parking management, were also discussed.

Mr. Petrosky highlighted findings from a parking study, including the need to formalize parking, add crosswalks, and manage shifts in parking demand throughout the day. While there are no immediate plans to implement metered parking, intermediate measures were

suggested, such as time-limited parking in certain areas, allowing parking on R-10 lots, and exploring long-term parking solutions in the Yacht Basin. Formalizing parking near the water tower was proposed, which may involve removing informal parking and compensating with new spaces on adjacent side streets. To ensure accessibility, pedestrian infrastructure improvements, such as crosswalks, were also recommended, particularly near Brown Street and other key areas.

The conversation highlighted the city's growing demands on infrastructure and services, driven by projected population increases and nearby development. It was noted that key services such as police, fire, water, and sewer will require additional resources to keep pace with this growth. Stormwater management was identified as a critical area for improvement, with plans to pursue grant funding and implement strategies to minimize the impact of new development on the existing system.

Mr. Petrosky brings Ms. Radford back to explain the complex steps required for approving the CAMA plan.

Ms. Radford provided an update on the planning process, noting that an update will be presented to the Board of Aldermen in January. She emphasized the importance of feedback from the Historic Preservation Commission to ensure priorities are reflected in the plan. Ms. Radford explained that after receiving input, the plan will be reviewed by DCM staff, who will conduct a thorough checklist evaluation, potentially taking up to 75 days. Following this, the plan will undergo state agency review, which includes a 30-day comment period. Any necessary revisions will be made before returning to Stewart for final adjustments. Ms. Radford assured that comments from the state agencies are typically minor.

Chair Hodgins expressed support for the strategic nature of the plan, highlighting its potential as a valuable planning tool for the city if actively utilized. She encouraged the inclusion of conditional zoning, citing its past challenges and its value as a management tool to facilitate positive outcomes for the city's growth. Chair Hodgins urged the board to provide comments promptly so that any feedback could be incorporated before the January update to the Aldermen.

Ms. Radford mentioned that pages after page 93 of the plan are still under review and editing, particularly the implementation section, in collaboration with staff.

Chair Hodgins noted ongoing discussions with the county to ensure cooperation, particularly regarding the gateway area. Mr. Petrosky confirmed that the county has access to the draft plan and has provided suggestions, fostering collaboration.

In closing, Ms. Radford confirmed that the plan is approximately 95% complete but acknowledged several reviews remain before it is finalized. Chair Hodgins remarked on the importance of monitoring potential changes from the General Assembly in January, which may necessitate further adjustments.

Mr. Locklin questioned whether any reviews had been conducted of the county's comprehensive plan, known as "Comprehensive Plan 2040." Ms. Meehan confirmed that Brunswick County recently adopted this comprehensive plan, which includes updates to the future land use map. These updates incorporated future land use classifications for areas previously within the city's ETJ. She stated that the city has reviewed these

classifications and will ensure that the county has the opportunity to provide comments on the city's own plan once it is distributed for public review. Additionally, Ms. Meehan mentioned upcoming public input sessions hosted by the county in the next month, which will offer further opportunities for collaboration and coordination.

Ms. Meehan confirmed that comments on the planning updates should be directed to her for submission to the Stewart company. Ms. Radford and Mr. Petrosky were thanked for their efforts and reminded of the importance of incorporating feedback before finalizing plans.

2. Yacht Basin Parking Overlay District

Ms. Meehan presented an update on the proposed Yacht Basin Parking Overlay District. The Board of Aldermen had tasked staff with bringing this overlay district to the Planning Board for consideration. The area in question encompasses the block between West Moore Street, South Caswell Street, West Bay Street, and Yacht Basin Drive, including adjacent waterfront parcels. Ms. Meehan described the Yacht Basin as a historically significant destination for both locals and visitors, but one that lacks formalized parking and pedestrian infrastructure, an issue that has grown more pronounced over the past five years, especially during the summer and festivals. Previous efforts to address these concerns, including a 2021 committee recommendation, failed to achieve consensus. However, a 2022 mobility study by the Cape Fear Council of Governments and other recent analyses underscored the need for parking improvements in the area.

Ms. Meehan explained that the overlay district would aim to formalize parking, improve safety, and provide uniform standards for surfacing, buffer yards, landscaping, and maintenance while maintaining the underlying zoning uses. Staff emphasized the importance of working collaboratively with property owners to ensure buy-in and noted that the overlay district would not mandate property owners to participate.

Mr. Fiss inquired about the zoning status of the residential R-10 lots within the area. Ms. Meehan confirmed that property owners preferred to retain the current zoning rather than rezoning to commercial. Chair Hodgkin noted that this was not the first attempt to address the Yacht Basin's parking challenges, referencing the former Mayor's vision for the overlay being the driver of the 2020-21 committee work. She stressed the importance of engaging property owners in the planning process to ensure consensus and avoid imposing unwanted measures. She also highlighted the need to preserve the area's historical significance and educate the public about its history beyond its current appeal as a destination for dining and sunsets.

Chair Hodgkin advocated for postponing the formation of a review committee until additional members are seated on the Planning Board to provide broader perspectives. Ms. Meehan agreed, stating that no immediate action was required, and the discussion could continue at a subsequent meeting once more board members are present.

Regarding previous design concepts, Chair Hodgkin inquired whether any of the prior committee's relevant drawings for the overlay had been located. Ms. Meehan stated she had found some information but could not confirm whether it was the exact material needed, and further follow-up would be required.

H. Other Business

1. Planning Project Updates (City Planner Wendell Biddell)

Mr. Biddle provided an update on recent construction projects within the city. These included the planned demolition and anticipated redevelopment of the former Thai Peppers restaurant at 115 East Moore Street, the transformation of the former Audio Glass Vehicle Service Station at 511 North Howe into Cape Side Brewery, the initiation of Phase 2 of Osprey Landing, and the demolition of the former Carr Insurance agency at 115 North Howe Street. Mr. Biddle emphasized that these developments, permitted by right, require only administrative review.

Chair Hodgkin inquired about providing the public with better access to information on these developments. Ms. Meehan confirmed that a search function on the city's website allows the public to view open building permits by address. However, Mr. Fiss raised concerns about the current process, suggesting that the Planning Board should be regularly updated on new developments to answer public inquiries and prevent misinformation. Ms. Meehan agreed and committed to including such updates in future meetings.

Chair Hodgkin also raised a question about outdoor seating allowances for businesses that had expanded during COVID. Ms. Meehan clarified that while outdoor seating is generally permitted, non-conforming elements such as seating in rights-of-way or safety hazards would need to be brought into compliance. A related issue was raised by Mr. Fiss regarding non-compliant benches outside a former business, which Ms. Meehan confirmed would be addressed.

I. **Announcements**

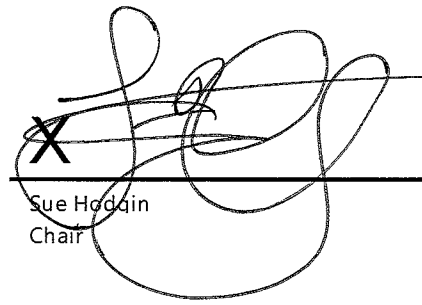
Chair Hodgkin noted that the board was awaiting new appointments to fill its vacant seats and recommendations have been forwarded to City Clerk Saldo.

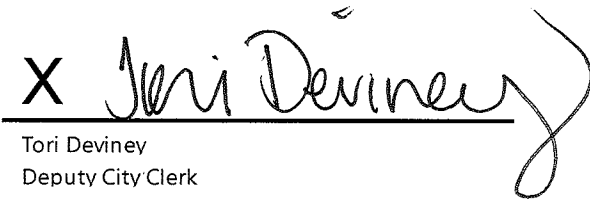
Ms. Meehan informed attendees about three public input sessions being held by Brunswick County's Planning Department in January to gather feedback on updates to the county's unified development ordinance. She emphasized the importance of collaboration between the city and county, particularly after the loss of the city's ETJ buffer, and expressed appreciation for the county's coordination on projects adjacent to city limits. Chair Hodgkin underscored the value of this collaboration and the potential for mutual learning and improvement.

J. **Adjourn**

Chair Hodgkin proposed a motion to adjourn, which was moved by Mr. Hewett and seconded by Mr. Locklin. ***Unanimous vote; Motion carried***

Adjourned at 7:28 p.m.


Sue Hoggan
Chair


Tori Deviney
Deputy City Clerk

