



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Planning Commission

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

James Mako, Chair
John Hicks, Vice Chair
Michael Greenberg
Sarah Pollyea
Thomas W. Shapaka
Michael Suriano
Michael Tamarkin

Sophia McGuire, Deputy Clerk of Council

Wednesday, October 23, 2024

7:00 PM

City Hall, Council Chambers

A. CALL MEETING TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ROLL CALL

Gahanna Planning Commission met in regular session on October 23, 2024. The agenda for this meeting was published on October 18, 2024. Chair James Mako called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Sarah Pollyea.

Present 5 - James Mako, Sarah Pollyea, Thomas W. Shapaka, Michael Suriano, and Michael Tamarkin

Absent 2 - Michael Greenberg, and John Hicks

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA - NONE

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

[2024-0200](#)

Planning Commission meeting minutes 9.25.2024

A motion was made by Pollyea, seconded by Shapaka, that the Minutes be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Mako, Pollyea, Shapaka, Suriano and Tamarkin

Absent: 2 - Greenberg and Hicks

D. SWEAR IN APPLICANTS & SPEAKERS

Assistant City Attorney Matt Roth administered an oath to those persons wishing to present testimony this evening.

E. APPLICATIONS - PUBLIC COMMENT

[CC-0002-2024](#)

To recommend approval to Council, amendments to Part Eleven - Zoning Code, Chapters: 1101, 1103, 1105, 1107, 1109, 1111, 1113, 1117, 1121, and 1123, of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna.

Director of Planning Michael Blackford recalled the zoning code rewrite that became effective May 1, 2024. He noted that tonight's proposed revisions were reflective of the department's opportunity to audit the code and processes after the new zoning code was implemented. Changes generally fall into one of two categories. They are either changes that were not carried over from the previous code or are new revisions. Director Blackford described the changes as straightforward.

He began with code sections that were in the previous zoning code that were not carried into the new zoning code.

In section 1103.08 - Medium Lot Residential, setbacks will be reduced from ten feet to five feet.

Several changes are also made to the parking code, which is 1109.01. First, parking must be on the same lot as the principal use. For the parking table, there are changes to the application of parking in industrial uses. The goal is to right-size the parking for the use. The parking section of code also lists landscaping requirements, specifying 3-inch plantings. This is consistent with the previous code and allows administrative flexibility to allow the City Forrester to make the determination of species planted. Last, there is a section regarding trailer parking, which is an issue dealt with by Code Enforcement. Omitted from the new code was the provision that not more than one trailer or inoperable vehicle may be permitted on a property. This was part of the previous code and is requested to be carried over.

Blackford shifted to the code section regarding structure placement. Accessory structures must be on the same lot as principal structure. Pools are subject to accessory structure setbacks rather than the main structure setbacks.

In the section regarding fences, there were code changes in 2021 that allowed fencing in the front of a corner lot, which is considered a second front yard. This language did not carry over in the new code. There was also language stating that the finished side must face outward.

Lighting standards apply to commercial projects rather than residential standards. This clarification is proposed.

There are a couple of changes within the signage section. One change is to not require a permit for temporary signs for properties zoned Conservation or Restricted Institutional District. These would include sites like the Gahanna Golf Course and religious and government buildings. Standards apply, but a permit is not required. Additionally, in spring of 2023 there were provisions for signage for tenants within a multi-tenant facility when there isn't an overall master sign plan covering all tenants. This allows tenants to quickly obtain their signage without waiting on the landlord.

Regarding floodplains, City Planner Maddie Capka found provisions that needed to be carried over. The floodplain section is primarily coming from FEMA guidelines, and the code will be updated to be consistent. Director Blackford stated that in his ten years with the department, he has never seen a variance request related to floodplains.

The next set of changes is revisions to the newly adopted code.

One change is to the definition of a through-lot. Director Blackford recalled a recent application in which a property's back yard abutted Johnstown Road, and it technically had two front yards. The new definition redefines the second front yard as a rear yard so that it can have a fence, pool, etc.

The use table includes changes to uses, which Director Blackford described mostly as minor. A proposed change is to allow all uses within the Innovation & Manufacturing District that were previously permitted under the Office, Commerce, & Technology. These include animal care facilities, daycares, general personal services, salons. The last change in the use table involves solar panels. The change permits solar panels in all zoning categories in the rear and side yards up to ten feet.

The design standard section included minor changes. As an example, Director Blackford said the minimum canopy height was removed. Additionally, the provision for multi family buildings to have at least 25% of the front façade being a glazed surface. It was intended for offices rather than residences. A more substantial change in this section is to allow metal as a primary building material. Metal was allowed in most zonings under the previous code. Survey feedback showed metal was not a desirable material; however, there have been requests submitted to the Planning Department in which metal was the primary material. Staff felt that it does not need to be on a limited materials if they are comfortable with the aesthetic of it.

There were additional changes to the variance language. The new code contains language about dimensional and non-dimensional variances. However, it did not include language to differentiate between these two types of variances. Therefore, the variance types will be combined. There is also a request to add to the variance approval language. Through research in other communities, there are two common provisions they would like to be added. They are: What is the minimum necessary to accomplish what is requested, and what is the practical difficulty.

There is a provision regarding small structures of less than 200 feet. With this update, an applicant does not have to go through the development plan process if their accessory structure is less than 200 feet. The appropriate building permit or zoning permit is still required; however, there is nothing gained by going through the minor development plan process. It costs more time and more money but does not provide any additional information. Director Blackford shared that the Minor Development Plan is a newer process that is administrative. Staff has a goal of making processes that are quicker and easier, and the goal of this update is to clarify that for projects so small, only the appropriate building permit or zoning certificate would be required.

Next, a provision was requested by Code Enforcement staff to add language. First, there is clarification requested, indicating that when the zoning code is enforced, that enforcement is being applied consistently. Blackford stated that while it currently is, it would be helpful to have language added to the code to support this. Additionally, regarding landscaping maintenance standards, a change to the language indicating that the standards apply to every district other than single- and two-family residences was requested. The code language currently indicates that the standards apply to commercial zoning.

The second to last change requested is regarding violations, which was suggested by the City Attorney's office. The changes aim to indicate that when Planning staff provides illustrative examples of uses or sizes, that they are not definitive.

Chair opened public comment at 7:22p.m.

Jay Bohman, 336 Vista Drive. Mr. Bohman recognized that his comments may have been more appropriate in a less public setting and shared directly with Planning staff. He expressed appreciation for the

change that allows accessory structures 200 square foot or less to avoid a minor development plan. He felt that other provisions needed more clarification. For example, section 1109.01(f)(2), he wondered what was included in the “alteration” of a parking lot, such as restriping or mill and overlay. Additionally, Mr. Bohman stated his opinion that 1109.05(e)(1)(d), regarding fence height, read as though a six-foot-high fence was required, rather than a six foot high maximum fence. Mr. Bohman expressed intrigue that in section 1111.06(e)(1), regarding signage sizes, that the length or width was specified as a percentage of the frontage, while height was specified as a definitive measurement. Lastly, Mr. Bohman spoke on code sections 1117.02(d)(4)(g) and (h), regarding conditions that are considered for variances. He felt that the language in section (g) did not fit with the rest of the list, and he expressed uncertainty for the intent of (h). He wondered if 1117.02(d)(4)(h) was missing the word “not.”

Director Blackford replied that the department wanted the language to be as clear as possible, but didn't feel that they could make an evaluation in the moment.

Chair closed public comment at 7:29 p.m.

Ms. Pollyea expressed her appreciation for staff's work on the revisions.

Mr. Suriano noted that in his profession as an architect, he regularly deals with parking dimensions and different types of parking. His firm's minimum requirement is 9 feet by 19 feet. He noted that 19 feet is a bit of an odd dimension relative to parking bays. He said there is typically a 9-foot by 18-foot space with a 24-foot drive aisle. He was curious about the rationale for the proposed standards. Director Blackford replied with his belief that the requirement was reduced because of the number of variances, and that it was recommended by the consultant that the department worked with years ago. He noted that larger parking spaces were permitted.

Mr. Tamarkin asked if a variance can be requested for an accessory structure in a floodplain. City Planner Maddie Capka replied that a variance can be requested for any floodplain regulation. However, there must be substantial evidence to grant the request, and the applicant may need to prove there was something incorrect on the floodplain mapping. Capka said there was almost a request for one about a year ago; however, due to the extensive evidence required, the application did not move forward. Director Blackford also noted that if approved, a variance for a floodplain can impact insurance rates for an entire district. There is an impact on the surrounding area, not just the individual making the

request. Mr. Tamarkin noted that sometimes people want to put an accessory structure right on the fence line, if the fence is on the property line. Director Blackford noted that permitting sheds closer to property lines was considered, but it was not well received when they obtained feedback. Mr. Tamarkin wondered if there was a difference between a fence or no fence, if the fence blocked the view. Director Blackford noted that when the setback was reduced in approximately 2023, there was opposition even to the five-foot requirement. He noted that it could be proposed with screening, but that it is ultimately a preference determined by the community. Mr. Tamarkin noted that sometimes a homeowner believes they can build up to the fence, although that may not be the case.

Chair Mako said that 1109.05, in the materials portion of the fences section, hardware cloth is mentioned. Mr. Mako wondered what hardware cloth is. Director Blackford stated that change was requested by City Council when changes were made to the code in 2021. There was a case in which there was an attempt to make a decorative fence opaque with cloth. The code was revised to clarify that this is not permitted. Chair Mako then asked about 1111.06, regarding master plans and wall signs. He wondered if this is only for areas that did not have a master sign plans. Director Blackford confirmed. He stated there are multi-tenant plazas without master sign plans. This process allows tenants to place signs without their landlord having to go through the application process with the Planning Department. Mr. Mako directed his next question to Mr. Roth. He wondered what an unclassified misdemeanor was, as listed in section 1121.06. Mr. Roth explained that an unclassified misdemeanor is a sort of catch-all for misdemeanors that do not fit into the traditional categories. Unclassified misdemeanors referenced in this case would have a higher fine than a minor misdemeanor. Rather than a maximum of \$150, he believed it was a maximum of \$500. However, it would not require any jail time as some of the other higher level misdemeanors would.

A motion was made by Tamarkin, seconded by Pollyea, that the Code Change be Recommended to Council for Approval.

Discussion on the motion:

Mr. Tamarkin appreciated the work by the City, noting that much time and effort goes into these revisions. Mr. Mako also commended Planning staff for their work.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Mako, Pollyea, Shapaka, Suriano and Tamarkin

Absent: 2 - Greenberg and Hicks

F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS - NONE

G. NEW BUSINESS - NONE**H. OFFICIAL REPORTS****Director of Planning**

Director of Planning: Director Blackford stated there will be three variance applications for the next meeting.

Council Liaison

Director Blackford noted it is budget season, and he will discuss the Planning Department's budget with City Council in November.

I. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS - NONE**J. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT**

Mr. Shapaka thanked Mr. Bohman for his feedback on the revisions, noting that code revisions are not always an easy read. He also reminded the Commission that the meeting schedule will change during November and December, and that meetings will take place on the first and third Wednesdays.

K. ADJOURNMENT

*There being no further business before the Planning Commission,
Chair Mako adjourned the meeting at 7:40 p.m.*

Sophia McGuire
Deputy Clerk of Council

*APPROVED by the Planning Commission, this
day of 2024.*

James Mako