

**Athens City Planning Commission
Minutes of Regular Meeting
Thursday, July 15, 2021, 12:00 p.m.**

The regular meeting of the Athens City Planning Commission was held in City Council Chambers, third floor of City Hall, on July 15, 2021.

Attendees: Chris Fahl, Keith Chapman, Alan Swank, Mary Abel

1. Call to Order

Nancy Bain called the regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 12:20 p.m. and administered the oath to those in attendance wishing to speak before the commission. Quorum was established with three members present.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS:

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| Steve Patterson, Chair | Absent |
| Nancy Bain, Vice Chair | Present |
| John Kotowski | Present |
| Austin Phillips | Present |
| Tom Pyle, Interim Service-Safety Director | Absent |

STAFF:

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| Paul Logue, City Planner | Present |
| David Riggs, Code Enforcement Director | Present |

2. Disposition of Minutes

Nancy Bain tabled the approval of the July 1, 2021 minutes, due to lack of members that were present at the July 1, 2021 meeting.

3. Cases

Case #21-03 City Council Resolution R-10-21: Request to consider amending Athens City Code Title 23, Zoning Code, Off-Street Parking, and Table B, Off-Street Parking Requirements

Chris Fahl, Athens City Council/Overview of Request

- The city has been working on parking via the Comprehensive Plan in the past few years, including changes to neighborhood parking requirements, on-street parking, and updates to the parking garage. Last piece of the puzzle is updates to off-street parking.
- Off-street parking is a barrier to age-in-place, affordable housing, R-1, R-2, R-3 districts. Issues have come to light since the pandemic.
- Parking requirements create more expensive rentals.
- Many communities have looked at parking to guide development, to encourage development that helps everybody, not just car owners.

- “Right-Sizing” parking is what these changes are doing. Three ways that change: size of parking spaces, # spaces/unit, minimum number of spaces.
- The comprehensive plan process brought to light that parking is a big issue for many people.
- The major change is in flexibility for the city to work with developers, to require the right amount of parking in the right space for the right reason. The old Follett’s building is an example of being very restrictive for developers right now. Donkey Coffee is an example of a business that requires a lot of parking that mostly goes unused. Emphasis is on shared parking (like with churches) which is more efficient.
- The move to a “transit-oriented district model”.
- Exemptions include DRD’s, SOD’s, other zones, infill or rental conversion, PUD’s, Uptown Business zones. These are called out in the housing plan. Incentivize people to come in.

Commission Questions/Comments followed by Chris Fahl’s responses

- John K. asked what the requirement would be for Follett’s under the proposed plan.
 - *A restaurant would have to have parking but there would be relief for apartments (1-2 BR units 75% of the parking abated).*
 - Keith Chapman commented that if it is on a bus route the number could be zero.
- John K. expressed concern if the number could be zero. What happens when tenants take metered spaces. Zero is extreme, whether the clause states “may” or not.
 - *Students are trained as freshman and sophomores to go without parking. This reorients from a car focus to a ped/bike focus, it is in line with the complete street policy.*
- Nancy B. asked what the complete street policy is.
 - *Where you allow all forms of access and transportation.*
 - Paul L. noted that City Council approved the Complete Street policy last year.
- Nancy B. commented that 1500 ft., ¼ mile, from a bus line is a long way, especially for some people. What will the city look like if we reimagine development in those areas? What about streets (like Columbia Avenue) that are very narrow without shoulders or sidewalks?
 - *The 1,500 ft. figure was taken from best management practices in the industry. Not much development will go up in areas around Columbia Avenue, looking more at urban areas.*
 - Paul L. noted that a lot of solid research has gone into the industry best management practices.

Attendee Questions/Comments

Keith Chapman

- Asked why there wouldn’t be infill building in that area (Columbia) and wouldn’t it encourage homeowners to build on to their garages.
 - Chris F. noted that setbacks etc. still apply. This incentivizes people to use transit.
- Commented on the conversion from rental to residential.

- David R. noted that there are many rental units. In this case 2 spaces/unit and this would drop down to one space, and if within 1500 ft. can go to 0.
- Commented that parking is prohibitive to development. Main point to improve on face value, but making it more difficult along the way. For developers there are a lot of unknowns and it is confusing. Arbitrary numbers. You want efficiency, but by giving priority to 1-2 BR units and not 3-4 BR units, which are more efficient, you in fact aren't being efficient. The document needs work.

Alan Swank/140 Townsend

- Commented that Athens does not have a parking problem, it has a space management problem. This is something he wrote in 2002 and it still applies.
- Regarding joint-use parking agreements, who will administer and keep track? Will the shared use idea apply to all situations? Then there are the exemptions like parking "may" not be required if within 1500 ft. of a transit line.
- On the far east side there are about 20 buildable vacant lots, some are within 1500 ft. of a transit line so they wouldn't be required to provide parking which will force them to park on the street. People need cars. Need to look at firm #'s – talk to landlords and find out what the average # of renters have cars.
- What does "may" mean?
- Some facts that have been stated are wrong, like teaching the students to be without cars as freshman and sophomores. Students are allowed to have cars.
- Would like the Planning Commission to convene a public hearing after August 15th.

John K. asked Alan S. about the scenario he described on the far east side, and if he seriously thought someone would build a house without a driveway/garage and rely on street parking.

Mary Abel/48 Strathmore

- If residents are within 1,500 ft. and still need a car will they be able to find parking?
- ¼ mile schlepping groceries or managing kids is a long distance, who benefits?
- How many more rentals does Athens need? Most of the population is made up of students, it is difficult to figure out how many FT residents there are. The highest number of rentals was in 2015-16. In 2019 it declined by 4%.
- Main business of Athens is OU and students.
- "Infilling", "rental conversion"– what do these terms mean? Please add definitions to the terms used in the document.
- Fairgrounds parking for OU students available?
- Will this really lower the cost of rental housing? Have the landlords been asked?
 - John K. commented that he didn't think it would reduce the cost of rent after talking with some landlords. Rent is based on many factors. Parking requirements have not driven up the cost of rentals in his opinion

- Would like more of a discussion on this because people are unaware and the resolution will have an impact. People are on vacation, and City Council is on break. Please provide additional information and do more fact finding.

John Kotowski moved to table Case #21-03 and hold a public hearing. Austin Phillips seconded. All present voted aye, motion passed 3:0. Paul Logue noted that a vote to table wasn't required. The response timeline will be extended from 60 days to 90 days. The public hearing is required to be advertised for a minimum of 30 days. Possible dates and locations were discussed. It was suggested to hold the public hearing at the Community Center. It was suggested to hold the public hearing after the summer break, late August or early September.

4. **Communications**

None

5. **Report from City Planner and Director of Code Enforcement**

Paul Logue

- Historic Preservation Commission has undertaken several design reviews recently, including the Pilcher House, Bagel Street Deli, and 65-57 S. Court St.
- The HPC has established an award program, the "JoAnn Prisley" award. The 1st award is going to the First Presbyterian Church and will be presented at an August 22 ribbon cutting.

David Riggs

- Staff working on abandoned swimming pools.
- Pollinator yard program approved, however, no applicants yet.
- Met with the Commission on Disabilities last week to help with accessibility concerns.

6. **Opportunity for Citizens to Speak**

No comments.

7. **Announcements & Other Business**

No announcements.

8. **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:31 p.m.

Nancy Bain, Planning Commission

Patricia Witmer, City of Athens