

Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting

Minutes, March 20, 2024

A meeting of the Pocomoke City Planning and Zoning Commission was held in the Council Chambers at City Hall on Wednesday, March 20, 2024. The meeting was called to order at 5:01 PM.

Present: Commissioners: Steven Mills, Nola Tullar, Anne Copeland,
Jessmin Duryea
Director of Planning: Dan Brandewie
City Attorney: Erica Witz

Nola Tullar, Chairwoman, opened the meeting at 5:00PM. She read the following statement regarding a closed meeting held at the February meeting of the Planning Commission.

“On February 21, 2024 at 5 pm the Planning Commission met at City Hall. The Planning Commission voted unanimously in favor to close the session for the purpose of consulting with counsel to obtain legal advice. During the closed session, the Planning Commission discussed the status of the Sandy Field subdivision and next steps forward in the approval process of the final plat. Present during the closed session were the Planning Commission members Nola Tullar, Steven Miller, Jessmin Duryea, and Anne Copeland. Also present was Planning Director Dan Brandewie, Town Clerk Michelle Beckett-El Soloh and Erica Witz, attorney to the Planning Commission.”

New Business: Site Plan Review: Construction of an 80,000 square foot manufacturing building to be built in phases for the following property: 1947 Clarke Avenue, Parcel 733, Tax Account 01-027247, filed by Hardwire Properties, LLC

Mr. Brandewie circulated to the members a basic drawing of the building provided by Hardwire that accompanied the site plan. He also gave copies of two emails received by his office. One email was from Chip Choquette and another from Adam Leonard. He reviewed his staff report including the existing conditions on the site and applicable zoning standards. Hardwire owners are asking for preliminary site plan approval from the Planning Commission and variances from the BZA to both side and front yard setbacks as it relates to the new building. The Board of Zoning Appeals is meeting tomorrow to consider the application.

Hardwire is proposing to expand its existing manufacturing operation with the construction of an 80,000 square foot building on its present site located on Clarke Avenue fronting the Pocomoke River. It is likely to be built in two phases according to the owners. The manufacturing process appears to involve heating metal/steel products and bending them to provide improved armor plating for the military. It is estimated that 20 new jobs could be created. This is at the very early design stage but time is of the essence according to the owners.

The site consists of 9.46 acres containing an existing 62,000 sq. ft. manufacturing building with offices. The property is zoned M-1 Industrial. The property is adjacent to a cemetery to the west (outside of City limits) and an active City groundwater well housed within a small building (inside City limits). There are

residential uses to the south across the street on Clarke Avenue. Industrial land uses, including an additional Hardwire building and a former transformer site owned by Delmarva Power are located to the east of the property.

Truck traffic and deliveries enter the property off Clarke Avenue with one or two loading dock facilities serving the existing building. Parking consists of approximately 52 spaces onsite. Truck traffic circulation patterns are not expected to change. The building appears to be served by a 6" water line and an 8" sanitary sewer line. Fire hydrants appear to be present along Clarke Avenue. The proposed building is located within a regulated flood plain (Zone AE, Elevation 5) and must meet flood plain development standards. The area where the proposed building is to be situated is presently used for storage. The site is secured with a fencing. There appears to be some storm water management ponds or filter strips on site; however final stormwater plans have not been finalized.

The proposed use of the new building appears to be consistent with permitted uses. The proposed building would be located approximately 15 ft. from the City's groundwater pump station property located off William Street. A 30 ft. setback is required as the City's property is also zoned M-1. The front yard setback is required to be 50' from the property line fronting Clarke Avenue. The site plan shows a 25 ft. setback from Clarke Avenue. Therefore, a 15 and a 25-foot variance is requested of the Board of Appeals.

Mr. Brandewie stated there appeared to be sufficient parking and loading docks on site but the applicant will need to clarify how the expansion will address these issues. He stated that the overall site is constrained from development due to the presence of a cemetery to the west, the Pocomoke River fronting the property to the north and a utility owned property to the east. These conditions present unusual conditions that limits expansion of the buildings. Staff also recommends that both the Planning Commission and the Board of Appeals require that a site plan be resubmitted to both boards for final review that will also address landscaping and stormwater management.

George Tunis and Tim Keller with Hardwire were attendance. Mr. Tunis, owner of the company, stated that this new building, consisting of 80,000 square feet will likely be built in two phases but they need variance relief from the setbacks to the front and side property lines in order to better accommodate truck turning movements and stormwater design. They are being considered for major defense contracts for their product involving metal armor plates for the military. The grant awards would help with equipment inside the building. They are committed to improving the site conditions of the site with landscaping in the front of the building, and removal or relocation of the fencing that was on the site when they purchased it. Areas that are used for storage will be cleaned up. There will be no external impacts such as noise, light pollution or odors from the industrial process. There will be a small increase in truck traffic with traffic entering the site at the east entrance. They have adequate parking on-site to accommodate potentially 20 new positions over time. They will not need new loading docks as flat bed trucks will be able to pull in the building to deliver products. There are concerns with stormwater run-off entering the site at the southeast corner of the property and their stormwater design has to take that into consideration. He expressed hope that there will be improvements to housing conditions along this corridor and for better trash removal along McMichael Avenue. This is the route that is used by the majority of visitors to the company. The building's appearance will be similar to the current building and incorporate light into the structure, which will also be a secure facility. They have had opportunities to move the operation but they are committed to staying in Pocomoke City.

The Board members asked about the flexibility of moving the building further away from the street and about parking. Mr. Tunis stated he would try and design around what the Board will consider but at the building's proposed location, the courtyard area between the existing and proposed buildings will better accommodate truck deliveries.

Mr. Brandewie noted that the two emails expressed concerns about the appearance of the property as it faces Clarke Avenue, sidewalk conditions, existing fencing and the need for landscaping. Other concerns included impacts from noise, hours of operation, light pollution, compatibility with the scenic environment along the river, the need for better fencing standards to improve the appearance; widened sidewalks, the need for dedicated bike lane, and off-street parking that can also be used by residents across the street.

There were no further questions. There were no one else in attendance at the meeting.

Jessmin Duryea made a motion to approve preliminary plan with the further recommendation that a final site plan be brought back to the Planning Commission. Seconded by Anne Copeland. Motion carried by a vote of 4 in favor, with no opposition.

Old Business

Review of Draft Rules of Procedures for Planning Commission. Mr. Brandewie handed out a copy of a draft set of Rules and Procedures and reviewed some highlights of the content. He asked the members to review for consideration at the next month's meeting.

Comprehensive Plan update. Mr. Brandewie handed out notebooks to the members containing the 2014 Comprehensive Plan and supporting material. He asked the members to review the first chapter for discussion at the next meeting.

Review of Design Guidelines-Discussion. Mr. Brandewie noted that the City Council is exploring the creation of a local historic district and regulations and had a first reading of an ordinance at their meeting on Monday, March 18 to establish historic district boundaries. His early suggestion to consider design guidelines on a city-wide basis is somewhat on hold at the moment.

Approval of Minutes: There were no minutes made available from the City Clerk needed for September 27, November 11, 2023, January 11, 2024, February 21, 2024 as well as past minutes.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:30PM.

Respectfully submitted



Daniel L. Brandewie,
Planning Director