

PLANNING AND ZONING MINUTES
MINUTES OF THE BENSON PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
March 8, 2016

1. CALL TO ORDER-Vice Chair Randy Robichaud called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.
2. PLEDGE-Vice Chair Randy Robichaud led the pledge.
3. ROLL CALL-Randy Robichaud, Barbara Thompson, Jim Thelander and Debbie Braatz were present. Andrew Abernathy and Cliff Deane were absent. A quorum was present.
4. CALL TO PUBLIC-There was no answer to the call.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

December 1, 2015

Commissioner Jim Thelander motioned to approve the minutes with a correction on page 7 regarding there being limited or no fencing. Commissioner Barbara Thompson seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

6. PUBLIC HEARING regarding the application for a Conditional Use Permit for parcel 123-23-086, the historic Arnold Hotel, to operate as an antique store, museum and plant nursery.

Vice Chair Randy Robichaud opened the public hearing at 7:04pm.

Patricia Rodgers introduced herself as a neighbor directly east of the property and across the street. She stated that she hopes to project comes to fruition and that she is in favor of it and is also in favor of any additional variances or exceptions the applicant may request. She stated that she had spoken with another neighbor, Mark Gibbs, who could not be present, but that he is also in favor of the project and the hotel rehabilitation. Ms. Rodgers noted that the project will improve the neighborhood and she hopes the Commission will grant the conditional use.

The public hearing closed at 7:07pm.

7. OLD BUSINESS-None

8. NEW BUSINESS

Conditional Use Permit for parcel 123-23-086, the historic Arnold Hotel, to operate as an antique store, museum and plant nursery

Applicant Cindy Allen introduced herself and described her desire to revamp the hotel and the entire block. She explained that she is interested in purchasing the entire block, contingent upon the granting of the conditional use permit to allow her to pursue her development goal. She stated that she didn't intend to reopen the hotel, but rather turn it into an antiques store and museum with a plant nursery, noting that several individuals who purchased the hotel's contents at auction several years ago were willing to donate and/or loan those items for display. She also noted that grant funds are available for museums.

Cindy Allen described her timeline, stating that the first year would be “grunt work,” cleaning up the property, removing debris and doing basic maintenance and repair to the structures such as painting. She noted the continuing work in succeeding years will depend on funding, stating that she and her husband want to maximize funding to improve the site and that living in Pomerene they will not be absentee owners.

Commissioner Barbara Thompson asked if a house would be fixed up for a caretaker. Cindy Allen responded that one house was in habitable condition and that she’d like to get it fixed up and rented for income purposes. Commissioner Barbara Thompson asked if that renter would be employed on the property to which Ms. Allen replied that it would depend on the person and if they were willing and able to work, that she would consider a caretaker arrangement. Commissioner Barbara Thompson stated it seemed natural for security purposes to have someone living on the property and asked when that may happen. Cindy Allen responded that the house addressed as 201 used to be rented and though it needs work she hopes to have that house fixed up and rented within several months.

Commissioner Jim Thelander noted it was a big job, but had no further comments. Commissioner Debbie Braatz commended Ms. Allen for her vision and stated that the project excited her. Cindy Allen responded that she had contacted the State Historic Preservation Office about her idea and they were also supportive, though she realizes it will realistically take 3-5 to complete.

Vice Chair Randy Robichaud asked if the parcel and hotel would be brought back to its former state, with furnishings and mailboxes. Cindy Allen responded that she has no intention of using the hotel as a hotel but that she has commitments to display some of the original hotel furnishings as part of the museum. When asked if she would lease out the individual hotel rooms for business activities, Ms. Allen responded they will not do that as she and her husband have plenty of their own inventory to sell through the proposed antiques store. She stated her hope to rebuild structures that had been torn down, particularly the carriage house, stables and apartments and possibly use those for outside vendors during events. She noted that the two houses located on the parcel may be rented out for small office activities. Vice Chair Randy Robichaud then asked about any deed restrictions on the property. Ms. Allen replied that she was aware of a 30 year conservation easement that was placed by the prior owner, William Deutsch. When asked about stabling horses on the property, Ms. Allen responded that if the Parks Department goal of having trails through town occurs, she would be willing to allow people to “park” their horses for a few hours while they shop or eat in town. She stated that animals would not be housed overnight, but for a few hours at most.

Commissioner Debbie Braatz motioned to approve the conditional use application for a period of 5 years. Commissioner Barbara Thompson seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Recommendation to Mayor and Council regarding the revised P&Z Bylaws

Planner Michelle Johnson explained that the City Attorney had requested revised bylaws. She noted that the revised version was similar to the existing bylaws (2005), but clarified some processes and clarified that four (4) members will be considered a quorum regardless of the number of Council-appointed members.

Commissioner Jim Thelander motioned to recommend approval of the bylaws to Mayor and Council. Commissioner Debbie Braatz seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Commissioner Jim Thelander motioned to adjourn. Barbara Thompson seconded. Motion passed 4-0 and meeting adjourned at 7:22pm.