

1 **COLUMBUS PLANNING BOARD**
2 **Minutes of Special Meeting**
3 **Monday, March 6, 2017**
4

5 The Town of Columbus Planning Board met on Monday, March 6, 2017 at 4:00 p.m., at the
6 Columbus Town Hall, 95 Walker Street, Columbus, North Carolina.

7
8 **Roll Call** Kathleen Nowakowski
9 Jimmi Buell
10 Bevin Corbin
11 Joan Scoggins
12 Brent Jackson
13

14 **Staff Present** Monica Greene, Town Clerk
15 Tim Barth, Town Manager
16

17 The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. A roll call was taken and the Chairman acknowledged all
18 present with exception of Jimmi Buell.
19

20 **Public Comment**
21 There were no public comments
22

23 **Presentation of Proposed Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance**

24 Rick Flowe, Planner with NFocus Planning, introduced himself and stated that his company handles
25 planning and zoning issues for small towns.

26 Mr. Flowe then gave the following overview of the proposed amendments:

27 The presented text amendment to the zoning ordinance is to add two new zoning districts to address the
28 need to regulate development for the future. The proposed Mixed-Use (MU) district would allow
29 commercial areas that were previously developed and are now underused and struggling, to redevelop in
30 more flexible ways to utilize the properties. The Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) district
31 is mainly to allow residential areas close to mixed-use businesses, which allows residents to be close to
32 businesses they may use. Even though no properties will be zoned MU or TND at this time, it would
33 give the town a flexible tool to bridge the gap between residential districts and highway commercial
34 districts effectively for future growth.
35

36 Planning Board member Jimmi Buell arrived at 4:10 PM.
37

38 The proposed amendment to the Table of Uses adds two columns for the proposed MU and TND
39 districts with P for permitted uses and S to indicate that a special use permit would be required for those
40 uses within the districts. The addition of verbiage to include "Single Family Attached" buildings would
41 allow for residential units such as town homes, where the property owner owns the land the house sits
42 on, but the housing units are attached, which was not previously addressed in the ordinance.

43 The Multi-Family Residential district currently allows only one building, so the board may want to
44 consider being more detailed in specifics to allow a good way for apartment buildings to develop, rather
45 than limiting them to a singular building. For example, the ordinance could require each apartment
46 building to front a street so that they are included as a part of the neighborhood instead of creating an
47 enclave environment of an apartment complex, which is usually the biggest concern with allowing this
48 type of development.

49 Telecommunication facilities are important to allow because of the amount of wireless broadband that is
50 needed for higher density development districts. Concealed wireless tower or small access points
51 attached to telephone poles that service smaller areas are recommended. Incorporate technology into
52 projects to ensure broadband is available in new development areas.

53
54 Millennials have changed the housing market drastically with their belief that housing is an expense, not
55 an investment; making multi-family housing options essential for sustaining the younger generation.
56 Millennials are waiting longer to settle down and have children, so they are renting until later in life.
57 Once those millennials have children and look to own a home, they will want to move to smaller towns
58 and live close to business districts to sustain their current lifestyle while still having more room for their
59 families. This movement will create hubs of activity that should be walkable to the downtown business
60 district. Town leadership must respond to this demand with choices to attract that generation.

61 New development that is mixed use in nature is like creating a smaller town center with a number of
62 services available within walking distance, and may include single-family homes, townhomes,
63 retirement homes, grocery stores, and other retailers or community services that are well placed to
64 benefit the residents, the businesses, and the town.

65 By creating the TND district, the town has a flexible tool to negotiate with developers and create trade-
66 offs in design criteria to ensure the development is done in a way that fits together for the town. For
67 example, if the developer wants higher density development, the town can require pocket parks or extra
68 public trails in exchange for permission to build additional density. The proposed TND district is about
69 allowing for development within flexible parameters that can be customized on an individual basis to
70 benefit everyone, and there are four pages of TND criteria to guide the trade-offs between mixed use
71 density and quality for the town.

72 Both the MU and TND contain a variety of approved uses to provide flexibility, while allowing for
73 public safety and harmony in uses. There are more special uses provided for in the MU, to accommodate
74 existing uses as well as redevelopment, while the TND would be used more for existing raw land that
75 will house new development. Higher density development should require buildings to come forward on
76 lots while pushing car storage and parking further back to allow for emergency responders and public
77 safety advantages.

78
79 Mr. Flowe explained that the TND designation would be available for re-zoning requests, which would
80 allow the town and a developer to agree on the terms of a project in advance because builders will
81 generally give the town more in terms of quality through a development agreement, in accordance with
82 the law.

83 Mr. Flowe recommended that the board carefully pick building height requirements so they allow for
84 development needs. For example, a builder would need 40 feet for a 3-story building so that utilities can
85 be added on the roof with a parapet wall to enclose them.

86
87 Mr. Flowe stated that he will be assisting the town through the development agreement and technical
88 review of design plans for the pending development on the west end of town to ensure that the
89 development meets the requirements of the town and the intent of the zoning ordinance.

90
91 Ms. Buell asked for an example of smaller towns doing this kind of development.

92 Mr. Flowe stated that many small towns in North Carolina are including these new provisions to allow
93 for development, including Andrews, which is a town much smaller than Columbus in the far Western
94 corner of the state. Mr. Flowe stated that the driving forces behind this shift in development are
95 economic, which are voluntary, and financial, which are involuntary. Mr. Flowe stated that the financial
96 need is a result of the post-recession housing market crash where the market for larger, expensive homes
97 has not returned while property close to town with nearby existing infrastructure in small towns is very

98 appealing. Mr. Flowe stated that many small towns in North Carolina are using this mixed-use district as
99 a tool to grow and maintain residents and business investments in their towns. Mr. Flowe emphasized
100 that the return on investment is important in this case, because growth can help towns hold utility and
101 tax rates down by growing tax base without expensive infrastructure and service expansion.

102
103 Mr. Barth stated that Town Council will meet on March 16th to hold a public hearing and consider
104 adoption of this amendment. Mr. Barth stated that any questions or concerns from the planning board
105 need to be addressed this week, so the proposal can be voted upon next week to make a recommendation
106 to Council.

107 Ms. Nowakowski asked how these types of developments progress.

108 Mr. Flowe stated that more occupied residential units usually come before the town can attract more
109 businesses to service those units, so the residential portion would most likely develop prior to
110 businesses. Mr. Flowe noted that if development is not well thought out, the level of service on streets
111 and other public infrastructure can suffer. Mr. Corbin stated that this situation is currently problematic
112 because all commercial needs are located on Highway 108, so everyone must use the same stretch of
113 road for access to everything.

114
115 Mr. Flowe stated that the proposed amendments would get the town ahead of the game to allow for
116 development that is mutually beneficial. Mr. Flowe let the board know that he available to answer
117 questions and address concerns prior to the discussion and approval the following week.

118
119 There being no further business, Mr. Jackson made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Scoggins seconded, and the
120 meeting was unanimously adjourned at 5:45 PM.

121

122

123

124

Kathleen Nowakowski, Chairman

125

126

127

128

Monica Greene, Clerk