

MINUTES OF THE ISLE OF PALMS
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
March 15, 2017

The Isle of Palms Planning Commission met in the City Hall Conference Room, 1207 Palm Boulevard on March 15, 2017 at 4:30 p.m. Members attending included Richard Ferencz, Lewis Gregory, Vince DiGangi, Ron Denton, Lisa Safford, Noel Scott and Bill Mills; the Director of Planning Douglas Kerr was present as well. The press had been notified of the meeting, and the agenda for the meeting was posted in City Hall and the Building Department to comply with the Freedom of Information Act.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jim Raih, 3904 Cameron Boulevard, addressed the Commission about a recent article published in the Wall Street Journal regarding how the real estate industry measures the square footage of houses and how many variations there are in house measuring. He stated that he would get the Commission members a copy of the article for their review.

He also asked what could be developed on Pine Island on the backside of Wild Dunes. Mr. Kerr responded that the islands off the back of Wild Dunes were in the Conservation Overlay Zone, which would allow a house to be built on any island having two (2) acres or more of high land. He stated that he thought that there were two (2) islands measuring more than two (2) acres that could be developed.

There were no other comments from the public.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Mills made a motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of February 17, 2017 as submitted, and Mr. Ferencz seconded the motion. The motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

DISCUSSION OF NEW FLOOD MAPS

Mr. Kerr recalled that the group generally agreed that imposing higher construction standards would create a lot of nonconforming houses and, thereby, limit them to the 50% rule; this would be too onerous to justify the potential 5% savings that could be achieved on flood insurance for the residents by improving the CRS rating. He stated that achieving the CRS savings was an initial goal, but that, if the Planning Commission did not see this as a worthwhile pursuit, maybe some other, less onerous provisions might be considered to ensure that houses are not built prone to damage in a flood. He suggested that the Commission consider establishing a minimum elevation on the island to roughly correlate to the floods experienced with Hurricane Hugo. The

Commission generally agreed with this strategy and asked that Mr. Kerr determine what Hugo's flood elevations were and report back to the Commission.

DISCUSSION OF SEPTIC SYSTEMS ON THE ISLAND

Mr. Kerr stated that, since the Commission's last meeting, the group had received some suggestions from the Isle of Palms Water and Sewer Commission (IOPWSC) regarding how to help the incremental expansion of the public gravity-operated sewer system. He explained that the IOPWSC staff had met with the Town of Summerville Commissioners of Public Works (CPW) regarding their fee structure. One of the items that the IOPWSC thought might be useful was requiring property owners that have sewer available, but choose not to connect, to pay a monthly sewer availability fee. He stated that, in Summerville, when an area has at least 50% of the residents committed to paying for the extension of a gravity sewer service, the Summerville CPW participates in funding the project and then offsets their cost by charging a monthly availability fee to those owners that choose not to tie into the system.

Mr. Kerr distributed maps showing the two (2) most recent sewer expansion projects that have taken place on the Isle of Palms and the cost, distance and number of new customers for both projects.

Mr. Gregory expressed concerns about one set of owners causing another set of owner's sewer bills to increase. He stated that he thought it would cause tension among neighbors.

Mr. Ferencz stated that he did not understand what the fee would be for the owners choosing not to tie in. Mr. Kerr thought that the total cost of the project would be evenly distributed among all the owners that would be able to tie into the system. Those owners that chose not to tie in initially would pay a monthly fee that would pay back the IOPWSC until they had paid off their *pro rata* cost of the line extension.

Mr. Ferencz asked how this would work if only one (1) owner wanted to extend the line, but was willing to pay 50% of the cost of the entire extension. Mr. Kerr opined that the IOPWSC would allow this, but they would expect the owner to identify which properties he was paying for, and then they would assess the fees to those owners that did not pay.

Mr. Denton stated that the project on Merritt Boulevard that cost \$98,000 and that made sewer available to six (6) properties would result in a *pro rata* cost of \$16,333 per owner, which if paid back in monthly payments over ten years with no interest would

equate to a \$136 per month charge being added to each owner that chose not to tie into the system.

Mr. Scott stated that, once the Commission tells an owner that he/she must pay even \$30 per month, he/she is not going to like it and will resist.

Ms. Safford stated that there is a cost to progress and a need to consider what is best for the community in the long term.

Mr. Gregory asked if, once an owner had paid the fees in their entirety, would he then get hooked up to sewer. Mr. Kerr assumed that they would still owe normal connection fees and would need to pay a plumber tie in their line, but otherwise he thought they should be entitled to tie in.

Mr. Ferencz stated that, possibly, an incentive could be added so that the cost to tie in at the time of construction was one (1) cost, but the cost to tie in later would be a higher cost. Mr. Kerr stated that he could ask the IOPWSC if this was possible, but he felt that all their rates were established by rate consultants on actual expenses and not think they could change those rates for an incentive.

Mr. Mills asked if the IOPWSC could enact such a policy without a City ordinance. Mr. Kerr thought they could establish their fees independently of the City, but that the Town of Summerville did pass an ordinance. The IOPWSC had expressed an interest in knowing if the City Council would support such a program.

Mr. Kerr sensed that the group was not willing to support the concept of requiring owners, building a new house within 300 feet of a gravity-operated sewer line, to extend the line based on the potential expense to that owner. Additionally, he felt that the group did not support the idea of charging owners that have sewer available, but choose not to tie in, the fees necessary to repay the pro rata cost of the sewer line extension since the typical monthly fee would exceed \$100 per month. He asked if the Planning Commission was interested in forwarding the assessment and its recommendations as proposed, excluding the requirement for new homes to tie in if the residence was within 300 feet of a sewer line.

Mr. Ferencz stated that he would be interested in reducing the distance of the mandatory tie from 300 feet to 100 or 200 feet. The Commission generally agreed to reduce the recommended distance for the mandatory tie in for a new house to 100 feet to see how this works over time and to monitor if an opportunity presented itself to increase that distance in the future.

Mr. Mills said that he could not reconcile the numbers in the September 19, 2016 data provided by the IOPWSC to the numbers in the assessment that has been drafted. He stated that the IOPWSC data showed 2,452 lots and structures without sewer, but the assessment stated that there were 1,400 dwellings without sewer. Additionally, the IOPWSC data showed that there were 3,778 residential water accounts and the assessment showed that there were 4,300 total residential units. Mr. Kerr stated that he had asked for clarification on these numbers from the IOPWSC and believed that the number of dwellings with septic systems might have been an error. He stated that he would go back to the IOPWSC to get further clarification.

Mr. Kerr asked if the consensus was to reduce the distance of the mandatory tie in for new houses, clean up the draft of the assessment and forward in on to Council or to wait to give the issue more thought.

The group agreed to review the draft one(1) more time at the April meeting and then forward a recommendation to City Council.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Mr. Mills asked if the Commission member's personal email addresses could be removed from the City's website. City Administrator Linda Tucker was in the audience and explained that the City is considering getting an iop.net address for each of the Commission members. Mr. Mills asked that, independent of a new address, the City remove their personal email addresses. Ms. Tucker answered that it could be done.

ADJOURNMENT

With there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Richard Ferencz, Chairman