CITY OF PALATKA
PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
October 1, 2013

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Carl Stewart at 4:00 pm. **Other members present:** Earl Wallace, Vice-Chairman Daniel Sheffield, Anthony Harwell, George DeLoach and Joe Petrucci (late arrival). **Members absent:** Lavinia Moody, Judith Gooding and Joe Pickens. **Also present**: Planning Director Thad Crowe and Recording Secretary Pam Sprouse.

Motion was made by Mr. Sheffield and seconded by Mr. DeLoach to approve the minutes for September 3, 2013 meeting. All present voted affirmative, motion carried.

Chairman Stewart read the appeal procedures and requested that disclosure of any ex parte communication be made prior to each case.

OLD BUSINESS – none

NEW BUSINESS

Case 13-44: Conditional Use to develop a hotel in a Downtown Riverfront zoning district.

Mr. Crowe stated that the proposed request is allowed by a conditional use consideration. He reviewed a site plan sketch and proposed elevation plan. He explained the site for this 70 room hotel is where the old Frank George apartments were located on Memorial Parkway. The City is the applicant because it still owns the property and is acting on behalf of the developer. Mr. Crowe added that staff believes that this request is in keeping with the Comprehensive Plan regarding policies set to encourage compact development, infill development and mixed use development. Staff feels that moving the hotel to Memorial Parkway and preserving retail frontage along St. Johns Avenue encourages sustained compatibility and continuity for future retail uses. He said that Staff believes that a hotel is a complimentary use to the downtown retail corridor and explained that Staff has worked with the contract purchaser to ensure that the building is architecturally compatible with Downtown. The developer will use materials in keeping with downtown, such as the use of brick on the first floor, extensive windows, and the massing and height of the building. The City has planned for this for quite some time through the Riverfront Master Plan process, going back several years. The concept plan for this plan was developed through an ongoing series of charrettes and public meetings going back to 2009. The plan included a hotel for this site. Mr. Crowe added that advertising requirements were met and notices were sent out to surrounding property owner, only one inquiry was received from the new business owner of the Bingo Palace, who had some reservations with the river view being blocked. He recommended approval of the request subject conditions listed in the staff report and to the site plan and building elevations submitted.

Mr. Stewart asked if the hotel entrance was in the rear.

Jonathan Griffith explained that it will be oriented along Memorial Parkway, with a pedestrian entrance on that street and the primary vehicle and lobby entrance facing S. 2nd Street. The majority of the traffic will come from Reid Street via N. 2nd St. The secondary vehicle entrance/exit is located at Memorial Parkway and is basically there for fire safety and traffic circulation reasons.

Mr. Sheffield asked if the businesses on S. 2nd Street had any input or concerns with the main entrance on 2nd Street versus St. Johns Ave.

Mr. Griffith replied that they understand the redevelopment process and want to see more traffic downtown.

Mr. Harwell asked how this would be architecturally compatible with the rest of the historical integrity of the area.

Mr. Griffith explained that what Staff did in their efforts with the architect and the developer was to find a common language with what they were proposing and what we see in the district. Per the Secretary of Interior Standards, the last thing you want to do is mimic what was there, instead Staff used some photos of that block from 1911 for inspiration. He added that because the building is large, they will use fenestration, and building recessions and projections, and a pronounced cornice on the building. He added that it was very important to incorporate brick into the façade to relate to other downtown buildings and to help bring this large mass down to pedestrian scale. Staff asked the developer to eliminate window muntons and there will be some window lentils on the first and top floor. The City is looking for the secondary entrance to have a storefront kind of setting with cut stone and a flat awning protruding over it. The building is screened somewhat, with canopy trees along the front of the building on Memorial Parkway, and eventually when the trees mature less will be seen of the upper building and more of the ground floor facade with the brick, windows, and foundation plantings.

Mr. Harwell said that in a historic district he would guess that the redevelopment goal is to go back to the old character, and in his opinion, a lot of the old stuff has more architectural integrity than what is being built today. He does not see that old character in this proposal.

Mr. Griffith stated that it is not a historic district and Staff's approach, per the Secretary of Interior's Standards is to not mimic history.

Mr. Crowe added that the Preservation Board is bound by the Secretary of Interior's Standards, if this was in a Historic District, they are compelled specifically not to mimic older architecture - but at the same time not to provide a jarring, contrasting appearance that would detract from the historic ambiance of the area. There is a middle ground, in his opinion, that the Secretary of the Interior's Standards anticipates which, is a building that is similar in massing and scale, that makes use of similar material, but doesn't try to copy what is there. He added that there were many negotiations that ended with compromises. He added that staff believes that this design will not detract from the surrounding area.

Mr. Wallace stated that he would like to see the landscape/site plan reflect what is illustrated in the elevation drawing that was presented. Mr. Griffith added that the landscape plan is reflective of the minimum requirements just to be able to move the request forward.

Mr. Crowe advised that the Board can ask for more trees, but should their motion include architectural changes, the changes should be specific, as this would have to go back to the developer with those recommendations.

Mr. Czymbor explained that the city has looked at different development proposals over the years and that the City has to become a partner with whoever develops downtown. The true picture is not what the property sold for, we cannot go back and un-ring the bell for what the City paid for that property, the big picture is to look at job creation, tax base, commerce and tourism, in the end these things are worth a lot more than the selling price.

When dealing with corporate entities, there are some compromises that can occur but there are certain standards that cannot be deviated from. He said that over the entire process the City was fairly successful in negotiating some of those features that the City wanted and he believes that some sort of hotel development in this location is important. He added that the City has retained the St. Johns section of that parcel for retail and the Century Block development is moving forward. He believes that the river and the redevelopment of downtown is the cornerstone of the revitalization of this community. It may not be exactly what would be preferred in a perfect world, yes there can be more landscaping, but for years everyone has said as per the Master Plan, getting some type of hotel complex to spur additional redevelopment of that corridor and take advantage of the river. He said he doesn't believe we could have done much better than we have. So if the Board has specific suggestions relating to aesthetics, architecture or landscaping we are willing to go back and do our best in re-negotiating with the developer.

Mr. Stewart stated that you drive a deal as far as you can, and you can drive the party away. He was curious to get a feel for how much the developer wants to come in and how much more he would be willing to do in the way of changes, or is the developer possibly sitting on the fence.

Mr. Czymbor stated that the developer has six other hotels and that the city vetted him in the other communities that he has worked in. He has been a partner and has been willing to compromise this is between a three and five million dollar project. We may get a little more compromise out of him, he was not sure.

Mr. Sheffield stated the he believes that Staff has done an excellent job negotiating with the developer and the developer has made some concessions. He has stayed in many a Hampton Inn and can see where there are differences and some compromises have been made. He asked if Memorial Pkwy. would be reopened to two-way traffic, and would there be parallel parking directly in front of the hotel and who would own the future commercial restaurant/retail property.

Mr. Griffith replied that Memorial Pkwy. would have two lanes of traffic and there would be parallel parking along that street. The Developer would have two years from the completion of the hotel to develop that property, or it would revert back to the City for the same purchase price.

Mr. Petrucci stated he was concerned that the patrons of the hotel might only shop at the future developed shops and not venture further down St. Johns to the existing businesses. Mr. Crowe explained that more restaurants and shops the more it will draw people in, which goes back to the critical mass concept.

Mr. DeLoach stated that as a former retail business owner of Babcock's Furniture on St. Johns Ave. he saw a great increase of customer traffic when McKinnon's moved across the street. He thought it was great to have the competition.

Discussion continued regarding the desire for additional architectural design, and Mr. Harwell offered to work further with staff to come up with some alternate design features.

Motion made by Mr. Sheffield to accept staff recommendations to approve the request. Discussion: Mr. Wallace stated that he would like to see the landscape plan resemble the elevation plan. He believes that Palatka deserves better than this, he compared our Wal-Mart to other communities that have developed stores with beautiful brick and lush landscaping and look what we ended up with. Mr. Harwell commented architecturally he does not believe that there is anything much that can be done to give it the architectural integrity it is lacking. Nothing feels right about the whole layout of the site, placement of the buildings, the parking the entrances, just an educated gut feeling it just feels wrong. He agreed with Mr. Wallace that Palatka deserves more than that. He believes that you need to start out with a diamond. Mr. Crowe stated that the City is in the process of proposing a downtown overlay zoning which includes design standards. He said that he is not getting a very specific direction from the Board, just some vague comments regarding not liking the proposed and would love to have Mr. Harwell, who is an accomplished architect, give us some suggestions

other than rejecting the plan that Staff has worked very hard to come up with over the past six months. He added that it is one thing to reject it outright it is another thing to get in there to help us figure it out. Motion died for a lack of a second.

Motion made by Mr. DeLoach and seconded by Mr. Sheffield to approve the request subject to staff recommendations with a minimum of the landscaping as shown on the elevation sketch plan submitted and additionally that staff will work further with the developer to modify the design to improve its architecture. Motion carried with 5 yays and 1 nay (Mr. Harwell). Motion carried.

With no further business, meeting adjourned.