

**BOROUGH OF GREEN TREE
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
OCTOBER 11, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Green Tree Planning Commission met on Wednesday, October 11, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in the Sycamore Room of the Green Tree Municipal Center, 10 West Manilla Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15220.

ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Cheryl Bakin, Chair

Al Erwin

Robert McWilliams

Jesse Robinson-Evans

Christine Short

Jessica Swiech

Nicholas Weirick

Also Present:

Kim Beck, Stenographer

HEARING OF THE CITIZENS

There was no one present who wished to be heard.

ADVISORY DISCUSSION

500 Mansfield Avenue – Conversion of Hotel to Multi-Family

Mr. Craig Falk was in attendance to represent 500 Mansfield Avenue.

Mr. Falk explained that the company he works for is the company that had previously converted the property located at 700 Mansfield Avenue into the Lofts at Terrain apartment complex. His company is interested in possibly converting the current Doubletree Hotel into an apartment complex. This complex would have 460 300 square-foot apartments. To move forward with this project, his company would need to apply for a variance because the Borough currently has a minimum of 600 square feet for apartment units. They would also need to apply for a height variance, as the building is eight stories, while the zoning code only allows for four-story multi-family residences. Mr. Falk stated that the current owner of the property is inevitably going to foreclose on the property, and they have been working to try and acquire this property before it goes to foreclosure.

Mr. Falk stated that if the Borough allows their company to move forward with this project, they would be investing around \$10 million into completely renovating the property before renting the units. They would also consider using part of the building for other taxable income, including a possible self-storage unit that would be open for public use.

Ms. Bakin stated that she believes some of the rooms in the hotel are smaller than 300 square feet, and asked if they would consider combining some of the rooms to create larger units. Mr. Falk stated that he does not know the exact layout of the building so he did not know if there would be any need to combine rooms to make them larger.

Mr. Robinson-Evans asked if the stairwell capacity and sprinkler systems would be up to code for an apartment complex. Mr. Falk explained that one of their biggest budget line items would be to make sure that the building was completely up to code before considering opening.

Mr. Robinson-Evans noted that he does not believe there is a bus route that runs through Mansfield Avenue. If this complex were to create workforce housing, it might be a 20-minute walk for residents to reach the

nearest bus stop. Mr. Falk stated that he does not have the specifics regarding a traffic study at this time, but that his company would be investigating this concern. Ms. Bakin said that if needed, the Borough could petition Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT) to run one of their buses through Mansfield Avenue in the morning and evening if residents needed easier bus access.

Mr. Robinson-Evans asked if they were considering offering any common spaces or amenities for the tenants of this proposed apartment complex. Mr. Falk stated that they would plan to keep the pool and gym open to tenants. Their company does not run restaurants but would be open to leasing space to a company if they were interested in opening a restaurant in the building. He said that since the property offers such a large amount of space, they would also be open to leasing part of the building to a self-storage company which would be open to the public. Ms. Bakin noted that if they were considering leasing space in the building, it would not be considered an accessory use and would require a separate application. Mr. Falk stated that they did not have any concrete plans for the space but might consider leasing part of the property.

Ms. Swiech asked what clientele they expected to rent the units to, and what the average cost per month would be for a unit. Mr. Falk said that he did not have this information but could speak from experience from the Lofts at Terrain Apartment. That apartment complex is rented mostly to young professionals and students but is much closer to a bus route. He stated that his company would be willing to give a portion of their complex to low-income housing if the Borough would want this as an option. Mr. Falk explained that he did not know what they would charge for rent but guessed that it would be somewhere around \$700-900 per month.

Ms. Swiech voiced her concerns about the property being kind of on its own in the Borough, and how that might affect the crime rate and police involvement. Mr. Falk stated that he does not work on the property management side of the company, but he knows that his company is extremely stringent when it comes to background checks. Ms. Bakin asked if a manager would be on-site 24 hours a day. Mr. Falk said that at most of their properties they have a manager on-call, but not at the property in the evenings. If it became an issue, they would consider hiring security for the property.

Ms. Short asked if they would keep the handicap-accessible rooms. Mr. Falk said that they would make sure to have at least the minimum requirement for handicap rooms, and that all the elevators would be up to code.

Mr. Weirick asked if there would be a requirement for the maximum number of tenants and parking spaces per unit. Mr. Falk said that they would allow a maximum of two tenants per unit and a minimum of one and a half parking spaces per unit.

Mr. Weirick asked if Mr. Falk had crime statistics on other properties they own with a similar number of units. Mr. Falk said that he does not have this data but that his company would due their due diligence. Mr. Weirick asked if there have been any safety concerns at the Lofts at Terrain apartments. Mr. Falk explained that his company is no longer affiliated with that property; they had sold it a few years ago.

Ms. Bakin explained that they would need to apply for at least two variances with the Zoning Hearing Board before they could move forward with their process. They would need to apply for a variance to take the square-footage from the required 600 to their proposed 300. They would also need to apply for a variance to increase the number of stories from the current 4-story maximum to their proposed 8-stories. Ms. Bakin advised Mr. Falk that the Planning Commission will be considering possible zoning changes within the next year. She said that the Planning Commission could inform the Zoning Hearing Board that they were considering recommending these changes to Council.

Ms. Bakin stated that the Pittsburgh Plaza Hotel had come before the Zoning Hearing Board to try to convert their hotel into 200 square-foot apartments and was not willing to consider combining rooms to increase

the square-footage. They were denied their requested variances and were denied on their appeal. Ms. Bakin noted that their requested apartments were considerably smaller than what Mr. Falk's company is requesting.

If the Zoning Hearing Board approves the requested variances, the property owners would need to come before the Planning Commission with their actual plans for recommendation to Council. The Planning Commission would be interested in seeing drawings of the layout of the building and of the units.

Mr. Falk left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Weirick voiced his concerns about such a substantial increase in Borough population without any property taxes coming in. He said he would like to see detailed crime statistics before making any sort of decision. Ms. Bakin explained that this was just an advisory meeting; they would need to come back with more information before any decisions were made by the Planning Commission. Ms. Bakin stated that she is concerned about more of the hotels and office spaces sitting vacant and lowering the tax revenue for the Borough. The Planning Commission continued to discuss the proposed plan and what positive and negative impacts it could have on the community.

CHAIR REPORT – Ms. Bakin

1. Ms. Bakin stated that the Borough Manager had emailed her with information regarding an online continuing education meeting that is being held on Wednesday, November 1 at 6:30pm. She explained that the Borough would cover the cost for any member of the Planning Commission who wishes to attend this virtual meeting. After a brief discussion, the members of the Planning Commission agreed that this meeting would be beneficial, but several members would be unable to attend on November 1. Ms. Bakin said she would contact the person hosting the course to determine if other dates were available.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

September 27, 2023

Motion:

Ms. Short made a motion, seconded by Mr. Weirick, to approve the September 27, 2023 minutes with the following corrections:

1. Pg. 4 – Action #1.6 should have the following phone number included for the West End Drop-Off Center: **412-937-3054**.
2. Pg. 5 – The heading of Action #4.2 should be changed to read, "Implement further sidewalk improvements, subject to PennDOT's interchange **plans**."

Motion carried unanimously.

REVIEW OF UPDATES TO PERMITS AND PROJECTS IN THE BOROUGH

1. In Mr. Carter's absence there was no review of updates to permit and projects in the Borough at tonight's meeting.

CONTINUED REVIEW OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Planning Commission reviewed the second draft of the new Comprehensive Plan that was distributed prior to tonight's meeting.

After a brief discussion, the Planning Commission agreed that the blank pages of the appendix should be eliminated. The heading for each appendix should be added to the following page of information.

Ms. Bakin will collect census data to update the graphs on pages 10 – 17 of the updated Comprehensive Plan.

1. **Pg. 1 – Executive Summary**

The section “Green Tree Borough Comprehensive Plan” should be replaced with the document provided by Mr. Weirick at a previous meeting.

The section “Vision” should be kept after the document provided by Mr. Weirick.

The “Green Tree Vision” box should be left in the document.

The section “How to Use the Comprehensive Plan” should be eliminated in its entirety.

The section “The Community Development Objectives” should be eliminated in its entirety.

The section “Ordinance Updates” should be eliminated in its entirety.

The section “Annual Plan Review & Updates” should be eliminated in its entirety.

2. **Pg. 3 – Chapter One: Introduction**

In the fourth paragraph, the word “online” should be one word with no hyphen.

The public meeting date should be changed to “**November** of 2021.”

3. **Pg. 9 – Bi-Annual Plan Review & Updates Rewritten to match pg. iv “Annual Plan Review & Updates.”**

The title of this section should be changed to read, “Bi-Annual Plan Review & Updates.”

4. **Pg. 10 – General Population Characteristics**

Ms. Bakin will work with Ms. Wendy Steffes to update the information in this section.

5. **Pg. 20 – Transportation Network**

There are various statistics on this page that will need to be updated with current information. Ms. Bakin will contact a representative of PennDOT to get this updated information.

6. **Pg. 22 - Sidewalks**

The fourth sentence of the second paragraph should be changed to read, “The project **was** completed in 2010.”

The fifth sentence, beginning, “The 2010 proposed Budget includes funding...” should be eliminated in its entirety.

The sixth sentence, beginning, “The Borough applied to grant funding...” should be eliminated in its entirety.

The following sentence should be added to the end of the second paragraph: “***The Borough regularly applies for grant funding through Allegheny County for further infrastructure improvements.***”

7. **Pg. 23 – Liquid Fuels Tax**

The second sentence, beginning, “In 2010, the Borough expects to receive...” should be eliminated in its entirety.

8. **Pg. 26 – Existing Land Use**

The information in the table will need to be updated. Mr. Robinson-Evans will gather the information needed to update this table.

9. **Pg. 30 – Double Tree by Hilton**

The second sentence should be changed to read “The hotel also offers a business center, on-site restaurant, **substantial** banquet and meeting space, a fitness center and indoor/outdoor pool, and a free airport shuttle.”

10. **Pg. 30 – Office Complex**

Ms. Bakin will contact the Finance Director for an approximate number of businesses located in the Borough.

11. **Pg. 34 – Churches**

Website URLs should be added for any of the churches that currently have websites.

12. **Pg. 39 – Rook Rail Yard**

The following should be eliminated: “(Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway Company Industrial Development Sites, pg. XXX).”

13. **Pg. 45 – Planning Commission**

The last sentence, “Add meeting dates?” should be eliminated in its entirety.

14. **Pg. 46 – Budget Pull from 2022 Budget**

Ms. Bakin will contact the Borough Manager and Finance Director to gather updated budget information to include in this section.

15. **Pg. 46 – Expenditures**

Ms. Bakin will contact the Borough Manager and Finance Director to determine what information should be included in the Capital Funds Projects table for 2023.

16. **Pg. 47 – Char-West Council of Governments (COG)**

Ms. Bakin will contact the Borough Manager to gather new examples to include in the plan.

17. **Pg. 47 – Fire Protection**

Mr. McWilliams will determine if the current numbers in this section are accurate.

18. **Pg. 50 – Recycling Services**

The third sentence of the third paragraph should be eliminated in its entirety.

The fourth sentence should be eliminated in its entirety.

The first sentence of the fourth paragraph should be changed to read, “**However**, the Borough began curbside recycling in 2019.”

The two sentences that make up the fourth paragraph should be combined and added to the end of the third paragraph.

19. **Pg. 50 – Utilities**

Ms. Bakin will contact the Borough Manager and Mr. Todd Carter to determine if the sewer line work has been completed. She will also gather current information to update the third paragraph of this section.

20. **Pg. 52 – Green Tree Athletic Association**

The first sentence should be changed to read, "...and soccer to approximately **250** children in the Borough between the ages of 5 through 18."

21. **Pg 55 – Sustainability**

The second paragraph should be eliminated in its entirety.

22. **Pg. 72 – Action #1.2**

Action #1.2 should be eliminated in its entirety.

23. **Pg. 87 – Action #2.1**

The description under the heading should be eliminated in its entirety.

24. **Pg. 90 – Action #6.1**

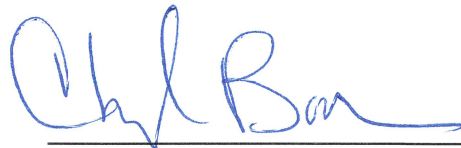
The heading for this action should be eliminated in its entirety.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

Ms. Swiech made a motion, seconded by Mr. Robinson-Evans, to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 pm.

Motion carried unanimously.



Cheryl Bakin, Chair



Jessica Swiech, Secretary