

A meeting of the Myerstown Borough Planning Commission was held on Monday, July 27, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. in Room 3 of the Myerstown Community Center at 101 South Railroad St, Mayor Gloria R. Ebling being in the Chair, and the Secretary being present.

Present were: Commission Chair Mayor Gloria R. Ebling, Commission Vice-Chair Michael D. Behm, Commission Secretary Ronald L. Ream, Commission Members Vince Podolski and Carl A. Weaver, Solicitor Thomas Harlan, and Manager Michael R. McKenna.

The Chair opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Sam Meckley, Community Development Specialist from RETTEW, was in attendance to present a proposed amendment to the Borough's Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Façade Overlay District, which included design standards and a design review process for the new district.

Manager McKenna explained that the Borough received a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development to fund a "Façade Improvement Program" for the town center area of the Borough to meet the following objectives:

- Stimulate private investment.
- Preserve and restore historic architecture.
- Enhance the visual appeal of businesses.
- Reduce or eliminate vacancies.
- Promote the adaptive reuse of commercial businesses.

Mr. McKenna said that the DCED grant provided \$100,000 in funds to the Borough to hire a consultant to set up a Façade Improvement Program, and to provide "Façade Improvement Grants" to property owners. He said the funds must be spent by June 30, 2021.

Documents were provided to the Planning Commission Members that included an article on Façade Improvement Programs from plannersweb.com, and documents from Façade Improvement Programs in Chambersburg Borough, Lansdale Borough, and the City of Reading.

Mr. Meckley took the floor and gave a summary of a public meeting that was held with downtown business owners about the façade improvement program. The purpose of the meeting was to get feedback and comments on what business owners wanted the downtown buildings to look like. The attendees concluded that the Bahney House and the Northwest Bank buildings were examples of what a "Myerstown Look" should be.

Mr. Meckley presented a document that would add a new chapter to the Zoning Ordinance establishing a Façade Overlay District. He went through the ordinance and provided a summary to the Planning Commission. This included:

- Boundaries of the district.
- The establishment of a review committee.
- Requirements for façade improvements.
- Procedures for façade improvements.

Concerns were raised by Mr. Ream about the requirements on residential property owners. His concern was that the cost of compliance is too high for many residents.

Mr. McKenna noted that the way the program is being proposed, the zoning regulations would affect all property owners, even those who do not use the grant program. The Planning Commission members all agreed that they did not want to impose these regulations on all property owners through the use of a zoning amendment. They would rather use the regulations as guidelines on a grant application, and only impose them on property owners who were applying for and receiving the grant. This would be using the strategy of incentivizing property owners to improve their property in accordance with design guidelines, as opposed to imposing requirements on all property owners who didn't ask for them.

Solicitor Harlan raised a concern about the onerous nature of the approval process, and the number of committees required to review the application. He stated that creating a new committee for application review, then requiring Planning Commission approval afterward, could add months to a simple home improvement project.

Mr. Behm asked if the grant money was distributed before or after the project was completed. Mr. McKenna explained that the money would be distributed after the project, once it was determined that the project was done in compliance with the regulations of the program. Mr. Behm also asked if there would be a time period for the projects to be complete. He expressed concern that the 5-year deadline in the proposed ordinance amendment was too long.

Mr. Ream reiterated that he thinks the requirements are fine, as long as they are only applied to property owners applying for grant funds. He also expressed concern that the extra requirements might delay the process and not allow for all funds to be spent by the June 30, 2021 deadline.

The Planning Commission generally agreed that Mr. Meckley should develop the regulations in the ordinance into guidelines for a grant program with an application similar to the grant programs in Chambersburg or Lansdale. Mr. Meckley said that he would update the guidelines for the next Planning Commission Meeting on August 24, 2020.

The Chair asked if there was any other business to come before the Planning Commission. Seeing none, she asked for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Behm moved and Mr. Ream seconded to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael R. McKenna, MPA  
Borough Manager/Secretary