

Aiken City Council Minutes

September 16, 2002

WORKSESSION

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Cuning, Smith, Sprawls, and Vaughters

Absent: Councilmembers Clyburn and Price

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Ed Evans, Bill Huggins, Richard Pearce, Susan French, Sara Ridout, Josh Gelinis, Augusta Chronicle and 5 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 7:30 A.M. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to discuss some proposed alternatives to the city's current Historic Preservation Ordinance for other areas of the city.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCEAlternativesDowntownNorth Side

Mr. LeDuc stated several weeks ago he sent a memo to Council regarding some possible alternatives to the current Historic Preservation Ordinance. He said copies of the present Design Manual, which was recently updated and which governs any changes in the present historic districts and landmarks, are available for citizens. He said this manual governs everything presently designated. He said he was asking Council to consider some alternatives to the manual for other areas. He said some citizens have expressed concern about historic designation and all the layers of guidelines and regulations that would govern their property if they were to renovate their property. He said he had asked Susan French to try to find other alternatives. He pointed out the state regulations that guide this state that Council has control over how designations are to be made, what will be designated, the regulations for the properties, and how the regulations would be administered. He said the primary purpose of this meeting is to look at areas currently outside of the present historic overlay district that we might want to give some special historic designation. Examples of these could include the downtown area, northside neighborhoods, or individual structures which Council could designate as landmark locations.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the downtown area is totally undesignated. He said the Aiken Downtown Development Association has talked about the downtown area being undesignated for several years and expressed concern. He said they would like to preserve what we have, but they don't want to be under the control of the Historic Preservation Commission and all their regulations. Mr. LeDuc said an alternative could be a special committee for the downtown, or it could be under the Planning Department. He said it could be set up in many ways and with whatever regulations desired for the area.

Mr. LeDuc stated the memo provided to Council included a great deal of information. One document was from the City of Columbia and how they handle a lower socioeconomic housing area. Much of this documentation is in our new design review manual which currently regulates new constructions, renovations of structures, and fencing. Parts of this guideline could be used for areas such as the downtown or northside while not using other sections which might be too stringent for these areas. However, our manual may not cover all issues that could arise in this type of district. The Columbia document gives an example of how they dealt with this particular historic area by having guidelines which are less restrictive than currently used in other overlay districts in their city. Some of the current regulations that apply to our Historic Overlay District could be eliminated under a new policy and others added for the downtown and northside.

Information was also attached from other cities in the state which is used when designating new structures or overlay districts. He said City Council has the ability to modify the guidelines to cover some or all of the new construction in an area or just certain aspects of an area. It could also cover renovation or be limited to renovations over a certain size. Basically, Council can set up whatever guidelines they would like to use, which can then be administered by the Historic Preservation Commission or through the development of a separate design review committee or by the Planning Department. He said Council could take a unique approach in working with the downtown merchants, residents of the northside, or individual property owners. In each case Council could develop whatever type of guidelines or regulations they may want to implement for a particular area.

Mr. LeDuc stated he would like some guidance from Council as to what they would like to consider in the future and the type of approach which Council would like to use.

Ms. French stated the information she had from Columbia designated two areas. She said they worked for three years on these areas. She said the people in the community wanted the designation but the guidelines for other areas were too stringent for their area. She said the guidelines are more of a conservation area as opposed to an historic district. She said they used some items from their original manual and came up with a design manual for the particular area.

Mr. LeDuc stated this is a good time to look at some alternate guidelines, since the city is looking at the old Aiken area and the downtown area. He said, in meeting with the citizens on the old Aiken plan, this would be a good time to discuss what they might want in historic preservation for their area.

Council discussed the proposal at length and agreed it would be a good idea to have designations for other areas and guidelines to govern the particular areas. Council stated a key to the issue is for the people in an area to want the designation.

Councilwoman Vaughters suggested instead of adding the design standards to the duties of the present Historic Preservation Commission that possibly there could be a downtown district with ADDA representation. There could also be a district on the northside and there could be people from the northside on that committee. Instead of reinventing the wheel, parts of the current design manual and the Columbia manual could be used and then tailored to their community and what they want for their area. This would get more people involved.

Councilman Cunning stated he felt a key to other designations would be that the area wants the designation and they help set the guidelines for what they want for their area. He said he felt the city should start small and make sure the guidelines are clear. He felt the downtown would be a good area to start with. He felt a neighborhood organization would be a good idea to be sure it works for an area.

Councilman Smith asked if this would fit in with the Comprehensive Plan as far as design and review for new developments such as Planned Unit Commercial.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out that standards could be set up for new development as well and when plans come through the staff and Planning Commission as well as Council would have the authority to make sure the standards are met. There would not have to be another board or commission for new areas, but one could be set up if Council desires.

Mr. Ronny Bolton stated businesses are beginning to recognize that they have to blend more with the local community and settings rather than having a standard that they use in every community. He also stated the city is getting closer to the overlay for the Whiskey Road Corridor with Aiken County. He said he felt the overlay should be sought for other areas as well while the County is willing to work with the city on this issue.

Mr. LeDuc stated his understanding from the discussion is that Council is willing for the staff to go ahead and discuss with the downtown and the northside during meetings on the master plan the possibility of some type of historic design standards and guidelines

which they would help establish for their area. The areas could possibly have separate boards or committees for their areas.

It was felt that not all the merchants belong to the ADDA, so they should be made aware of the proposal. It was also felt that it should be explained up front and be sure they understand that design standards and guidelines could affect their property. It was felt there should be good participation so if standards are developed it would not be just a few people who make the decision, but it would be what the majority of the area wants.

Mr. LeDuc stated he also needed guidance from Council regarding the McGhee Mile Track. He said this needs to be brought to Council for a decision. He said if Council wants to do something for the McGhee Mile Track this would be the time as Council can set the criteria as to what is designated and how it is designated. He said the McGhee Mile Track can be discussed in a separate work session or in a work session with other items.

Mr. LeDuc stated he presently has about 10 items for work sessions for Council which include: commercial vehicles in residential areas, what to do with the blue house on Chesterfield Street which the city owns, Hitchcock Woods engineering report, naming of Camellia Trailer Park development, demolition of building on York and Richland, request of ADDA, closing of cut throughs in parkways, McGhee Mile Track, redistricting, other demolitions, update from Center of Arts, and sewer for Gem Lakes.

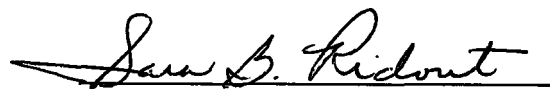
It was pointed out that the redistricting issue should be brought to Council soon as time is of essence.

Mayor Cavanaugh asked if Council could consider 3 or 4 of the items in a special work session with the McGhee Mile Track issue.

Council discussed the matters which Mr. LeDuc listed. Council felt staff should prioritize the issues and bring the items which need decisions to Council for action. It was felt that some of the items may not need a work session, but just be brought to Council for a decision and move on.

Council set a work session for October 7, 2002, at 7:30 A.M. for discussion of the McGhee Mile Track issue.

The meeting adjourned around 8:45 A.M.



Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk