

Aiken City Council MinutesWORK SESSION

March 13, 2017

Present: Mayor Osbon, Councilmembers Dewar, Diggs, Ebner, Homoki, and Price.

Absent: Councilman Merry

Others Present: John Klimm, Stuart Bedenbaugh, Gary Smith, Ryan Bland, Tim O'Briant, John McMichael, Sara Ridout, Jessica Campbell, Members of Recreation Commission, Liz Stewart, Ann Dicks, Phil Winsor, Michael Smith of the Aiken Standard, and about 10 citizens.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Osbon called the work session to order at 5:49 P.M. and stated Council had two items to discuss at the work session--tobacco-free parks and Comprehensive Plan elements 1 and 2.

TOBACCO-FREE PARKSParks, Recreation & Tourism Department

Ms. Jessica Campbell, Parks, Recreation & Tourism Director, stated the City of Aiken PRT Department, with the support from the Recreation Commission, is recommending the adoption of a tobacco-free policy for our outdoor recreation facilities, including city-owned parks, playgrounds and youth athletic fields. The adoption of this policy will protect the health and welfare of those using these facilities.

She noted that from reports by the Surgeon General, the Environmental Protection Agency, The South Carolina Clean Indoor Act, and the Federal Pro-Children Act, tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke are hazardous to the health of human beings. The goal of the proposed policy is to provide a 100% tobacco-free, smoke-free environment for all park patrons.

Ms. Campbell noted that in 2016 the National Recreation and Park Association put out a position statement to encourage all parks and recreation agencies to ban tobacco in our parks and recreation facilities in order to protect the health of our workforce, visitors and the environment. She pointed out the number of agencies across the country that have already deemed their facilities tobacco-free and pointed out the research that general public support of a smoking ban in public places has increased from 39% in 2001 to 58% in 2015.

Ms. Campbell reviewed the South Carolina Tobacco-free Collaborative, which speaks about the use of tobacco and how secondhand smoke affects our middle and high school youth. It points out that coaches and recreational leaders have a powerful influence on our youth and can help promote tobacco-free lifestyles and policies.

Ms. Campbell pointed out some smoke-free or tobacco-free campuses, including the Aiken County Government (in 2006 they initiated tobacco-free parks), Aiken County Historical Museum, Aiken County School District, Aiken Regional Medical Centers, Aiken Technical College and USC-Aiken. There is currently no state law on tobacco use outdoors; the power is delegated to local government.

Ms. Campbell pointed out the current City of Aiken ordinance regarding smoking regulations applies to indoor areas, but there is a provision that an owner, operator, manager, or other person in control of an establishment, facility, or outdoor area may declare that entire establishment, facility, or outdoor area as a nonsmoking place. Smoking also shall be prohibited in any place in which a "No Smoking" sign is posted.

She pointed out this gives businesses an opportunity to have smoke free areas outside by posting “No Smoking” signs.

Ms. Campbell pointed out towns in South Carolina which have adopted some form of smoke or tobacco free park ban.

Ms. Campbell stated with support of the Recreation Commission, staff was asked to do a survey of citizens in the community through the spring sport registration which took place January 30 – February 16, 2017, and those who visited the Weeks Center for their feelings on banning smoking in recreation parks. Out of 1,352 surveys 88% were in support of a tobacco-free park initiative, 7% were opposed, and 1% recommended a designated smoking area which we currently have and 2% provided no response.

Ms. Campbell reviewed the benefits of tobacco-free public parks, including a healthier recreational environment, less tobacco use and initiation among children and adult visitors, more public awareness about the dangers of tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure, and cleaner parks that contribute to a high quality recreation experience.

Ms. Campbell stated in regards to enforcing a smoking ban, PRT is recommending that the smoking ban be a department policy. She pointed out that they would address that as any other policy in place and inform the individuals that there is a smoking ban in place and ask them to stop. She pointed out that the department would post signs noting No Smoking and tobacco usage. The public would be informed through handouts, news articles, social media, and rulebooks or policy statements distributed to parents, coaches, officials, etc. She pointed out some examples of signage used to relay the message of no smoking. Ms. Campbell pointed out the park locations which would be included in the no smoking ban, including Charleston Street playground, Citizens Park, Crosland Park, Eustis Park, Governor Aiken Neighborhood Park, Gyles Park, Hammond/Williams Park, Kalmia Hill Park, Kennedy Kolony Park, Library Park, Osbon Park, Perry Memorial Park, Smith-Hazel Park, and Virginia Acres Park.

Ms. Campbell then reviewed the proposal as to how the policy would read for Tobacco-Free Parks Policy.

Policy Statement

The City of Aiken is committed to the quality of life for all citizens, therefore, we believe that:

1. Tobacco product use in the proximity of children, youth and adults engaging in or watching recreational activities is unhealthy and detrimental to the health of others.
2. Tobacco products consumed in public spaces are often discarded on the ground, which can cause environmental degradation and thus pose a health risk to children and animals.
3. As parents, leaders, coaches, and officials we are thought of as role models, and the use of tobacco products around youth has a negative effect on their lifestyle choices.

Tobacco-Free Parks

No person shall use tobacco products in city-owned parks or outside the immediate entrance to these facilities.

Compliance Procedures

The emphasis on enforcing the Tobacco-Free park policy is through voluntary compliance:

1. Signs will be posted within appropriate city-owned parks.
2. City staff will make periodic observations of activity sites to monitor compliance.
3. The community, especially facility users, will be notified of this policy through various communication channels.

Ms. Campbell stated if the policy is adopted they would like to implement the policy on April 1. The league sports begin to play after the spring holidays. This would give time to communicate to the public the policy on no smoking in the parks.

Council then discussed the proposed smoking and tobacco-free use policy in the recreation parks. Councilmembers were supportive of the proposed policy, but felt it would not stop all smoking in the outdoor parks. Councilman Ebner pointed out that the current ordinance in Section 22-70 gives the City Manager the authority to adopt the smoking ban in the recreation parks. It was felt that this does not have to be adopted by City Council as it is already in Section 22-70. Ms. Campbell pointed out she was not proposing that there be an ordinance change, but that the proposal be adopted as a policy of the PRT Department. However, she wanted Council to be aware of the policy proposed to be adopted by the PRT Department.

Councilman Ebner pointed out that he does feel that the city ordinance needs to be revised to include vaping. Many people think there is not a problem with the vaping since there is no smoke coming out, but there are chemicals being ingested in the body. He suggested that staff propose an amendment to the smoking ban ordinance to include vaping, or tobacco alternates, as the ordinance presently states tobacco. It was noted that the proposed policy is only for the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department parks.

Ms. Campbell pointed out that Hopelands Gardens was not included in the list of parks for no smoking outdoors. She asked how Council felt about not including Hopelands in the smoking ban outdoors. It was felt that all recreation parks should be included in the ban. It was suggested that the Friends of Hopelands and Rye Patch be asked about including the facility in the smoking ban. There was concern as to whether a no smoking ban outdoors would negatively affect tournaments being held in Aiken. Ms. Campbell pointed out that many other parks around the state have a smoking ban and people are aware of this in many places.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Review

Mr. Ryan Bland, Planning Director, pointed out that at the February 27, 2017, work session he reviewed the Natural Resources and Cultural Resources Elements and Council provided some direction to staff.

At this work session, Mr. Bland stated he would present and solicit specific input regarding the Population and Housing Elements. He noted that staff had received comments from Council regarding these elements of the draft Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Bland reviewed what a Comprehensive Plan is. The plan analyzes and projects data, captures results of citizens input, and forms general policy for long-term decision making to implement the community vision with a particular focus on land use and development. He pointed out that the State of South Carolina requires nine elements to consider in analyzing the plan. The Comprehensive Plan Study area was the entire water service area of the city. The Comprehensive Plan strategies took the data plus public input to determine vision and needs. From there vision/needs became guiding principles and then within guiding principles strategy elements were added.

Mr. Bland pointed out that the guiding principles are: growth, connectivity, transformation, consistency, balance, and investment.

Population Element One

Mr. Bland pointed out that he had received some Council comments and suggestions for the Population Element.

One concern was the population projection of 3% appears to be too high based on data over the past 5 years. Response: Staff would recommend against a more conservative projected growth rate than the 3% included in the plan. While population growth has declined to 2% as recent as 2014, it has been as high as 17% in the last 10 years.

Accounting for Aiken's declining growth rate trend, the chosen 3% can still be seen as a conservative compromise in light of the peak over the past 10 years. Additionally, due to infrastructure capacity concerns found in this plan development, particularly in stormwater and transportation, the Planning Commission decided it would be prudent to plan for the modest 3% rate of growth. With regard to current permitting trends, new residential building permits have shown an increase of 27% when compared to this point last year (93 vs. 67 permits through January).

Another concern was the Comp Plan does not accurately reflect locational diversity in education, income, and poverty throughout the community. Response: The initial draft of the Comp Plan characterized the City as a whole. Staff will present the following data at the work session to consider for inclusion in the document.

1. Map – Median Income by Census Tract;
2. Map – Poverty Rate by Census Tract;
3. Map – Educational Attainment by Census Tract.

If incorporated into the document, each would also contain text to describe the results of the data analysis. Additionally, the proposed Guiding Principles included language to promote "Balance" and "Consistency" of policy through the community.

Mr. Bland presented a slide showing the Population Growth Rate since 1950 with a population of 7,083 in 1950. In the 1960's the change in population was 59%. We have grown as much as 17% over the last 10 to 15 years and the change has declined in the last five years to about 2% over the last couple of years. We have seen a little spike this year in new housing with permits pulled through the end of January. The Planning Commission reviewed that and picked a 3% growth for their figure. He showed a slide showing the growth in 10 year increments with a 3% growth rate.

Mr. Bland stated comments had been received on the data used. A lot of the data was collected by the Census on 10 year cycles. It has been noted that by surveying a certain number of people you can get a representative idea of the characteristics of a group. Every year 1 in 38 people in the city, which is roughly 800, are surveyed by the American Community Survey based on the characteristics. That can be done over 3 or 5 year periods. He said the city chose the 5 year period because of more data integrity and larger sample size even though it covered a broader period of time, it was felt that was fairly representative of the city. He said the data covers a sample size between the years 2010 and 2015. He pointed out that as the population gets larger the proportion of those moving in annually has not been proportionally larger, but steady.

Councilman Ebner pointed out that from 2010 to 2015 the city grew about 218 people per year. To make the number of 3% the next five years the growth would have to be 930 new residents per year. He felt that would be high. Mr. Bland stated they looked at several sources to try to project the population growth and settled on the more linear projection of 3% based on the last 10 years of growth.

Councilman Dewar wanted to know how this relates to what we do in the future and how we operate the city. Mr. Bland stated we take the population projection or Comprehensive Plan in general. He said you take into account the provision of infrastructure and the capacity to serve a certain number of people. He pointed out that in the Community Facilities Element there is a basic common analysis that there is X capacity within our various services such as water or sewer, etc. He said the decision making is at what point you think the growth in the next 10 years and where you make investments will outpace the capacity and where you want to grow. He noted that some areas are more conducive than others because we already have pipe in the ground and treatment facilities. If the area does not have that capacity, then the policy decision is how do we get to that point.

Councilman Dewar was concerned that we may not have the capacity in some areas to take care of what we already have. He wondered if that would be addressed in the plan. Mr. Bland responded that would be considered in the Community Facilities Element. He

noted that some data has been updated through the Public Works Innovyze System where we can pinpoint where we are running a deficit in the current system before being able to expand. He said we have to have a balance when expanding and the maintenance cost. Councilman Dewar wondered if it could be translated for a certain level of staff needed in a department to provide support for the city. Mr. Bland pointed out there are the guiding principles that talk about balance and connectivity, and then there are specific statements under each and if Council is not comfortable with those being specific enough in some cases perhaps additional detail could be added.

Mr. Bland then reviewed Population Density. He noted the city is pretty much a mixed city density. He reviewed the Age Distribution pointing out the city is above the state in the 18 to 24 age group, below the state in the 25 to 44 age group, about state level in the 45 to 64 age group, and above the state level for the 65+ age group. In Educational Attainment the city is higher than state level in bachelor degrees and graduate degrees. Overall the City has a fairly highly educated population compared to the County and the State. He showed a map noting the areas with resident with a bachelor's degree or higher. He pointed out that about 44% of the residents of Aiken have a bachelor's degree or better compared to the State with 25% with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Mr. Bland reviewed the Income, Poverty and Unemployment statistics. In general the City has seen increases in median household income comparative to the State and County. The poverty rate over the last five years increased to about 18% from 14% in 2000 to 17% in 2014. Unemployment in the City was 3.9% in 2000 and 4.5% in 2014 with the change being 15.4%. He then presented a map showing the median income for areas of the city. He also presented a map showing the poverty rate for sections of the city. He noted that the analysis he was showing was additional analysis that was done based upon suggestions that were made by Council in the first discussion of the Comprehensive Plan. It was noted that 20% of the population on the northside was below the poverty rate. He reviewed the Household Characteristics. The total number of households has increased in the last four years about 20%. Household size is decreasing, family size is increasing. Overall there is a little over 2 people per residence in Aiken.

Mr. Bland noted that from the data the previous guiding principles were listed, but there were some specific ones noted. One was the growth principle. "Prepare and implement an annexation plan with the goal of incorporating all "donut holes" and immediately adjacent neighborhoods and commercial areas into the city, with a priority focus on areas that are connected to municipal utility services." He also noted the Balance principle and strategies.

Housing Element Two

Mr. Bland noted the Housing Unit Characteristics. He noted that in housing units we have increased about 24% between 2000 and 2010 in total units. Occupied units has increase overall but not as high a rate as total units, with 21%. There has also been an increase in vacant units as a percentage, but the actual amount of vacant units was around 10% in 2000 and around 8.7% in 2010. The basic vacancy rate across the community has gone down. Median house price has gone up fairly significantly over a 10 year period as well as median gross rent.

Councilman Dewar wondered if there may be more current data on the housing unit characteristics perhaps from the realtors. He felt there should be more current data than 2010.

Mr. Bland then reviewed slides of occupancy rate regarding vacant units and occupied units. He had a slide showing the distribution of vacancy housing in areas of the city. He showed a slide regarding Home Ownership Rate and stated the percentages were on par with North Augusta, Aiken County, the State, and the US as a whole. He presented a slide showing Tenure for owner-occupancy in areas of the city. In Unit Types he noted that Aiken is predominately a single-family housing market. For Age of Housing the City is fairly well comparable with Aiken County, North Augusta, South Carolina, and United States. Housing Values in Aiken in 2014 were \$174,000, \$152,800 in North

Augusta, \$126,900 in Aiken County. The value for Aiken is close to the national median of \$175,700. He pointed out a new analysis done for Housing Values for areas of the city.

Mr. Bland reviewed Residential Construction noting that since 2008 the housing construction has had an up and down pattern. He pointed out that we are beginning to see a little uptick this year. He noted that Housing Projections are based upon average household size and the projection of 3% in population growth for the number of housing units that would need to be available in the city to meet the population growth. He pointed out that presently we are at 14,094 and would potentially add 10,000 housing units in 10 years.

Mr. Bland reviewed the Proposed Housing Policies for Transformation and Balance for the Housing Element.

Councilman Dewar asked if there was a definition of "downtown" and if there should be one in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Bland stated the City does have a downtown plan that is an appendence to the existing Comprehensive Plan. It was noted that as we talk about the future of the downtown, people think about different things. Many think of downtown as being Laurens, Richland and Newberry, but in talking about housing the downtown area is much larger. Mr. Bland pointed out that the City has existing plans for a downtown area and Union Street that have been added as appendences to the existing plan that were carried forward. As time and resources permit those will be revisited to make sure they are accurate.

Ms. Liz Stewart, Chair of the Planning Commission, noted that the Planning Commission made a decision to not redo the Union Street plan and the Old Aiken Overlay and those plans done fairly recently as part of the Comprehensive Plan because nothing had changed, and we had not implemented the plans. Those were just carried forward as part of the Comprehensive Plan. They are still valid plans, and we still plan on using them.

Councilman Dewar noted that he had looked at North Augusta's Comprehensive Plan which they are reviewing. He said he was impressed with North Augusta's Comprehensive Plan. He noted that it has data that we don't have in our draft Comprehensive Plan. It is formatted in a way that it is far more specific than ours. He noted that he was looking at the housing data which is 2015 data. Copies of the North Augusta Comprehensive Plan were distributed to the Councilmembers. Councilman Dewar stated he liked the idea of having specific goals for the downtown. He pointed out having a downtown master plan and a small area plan for other investment areas. He pointed out that North Augusta has 10 specific goals that will guide them in the future. He said he liked parts of the North Augusta plan, and there are parts of our plan that are better than North Augusta, but he felt it was worth looking at.

Mr. Bland pointed out that Aiken is a community that cares more about building on what we are and how we like ourselves in Aiken and want to be different from North Augusta. Councilman Dewar pointed out that Aiken has an education challenge that North Augusta does not have. He felt we have far too many people with less than a high school education. He said he does not know how that translates into the plan and defining our downtown area. He pointed out that we have USC-Aiken that we want to integrate more into our downtown; we have the challenge of the bike paths. He noted the great bike paths that North Augusta has.

ADJOURNMENT

The work session adjourned at 6:55 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk