

**Heather Hanover**  
*Chair*

**James Eshelman**  
*Vice-Chair*

**Commissioners**

**Scott Dzurka**, *Mayor*  
**Eric Hufnagel**, *Commissioner*  
**Mark Holden**  
**Melvin Renfrow**  
**Wendy Ward**  
**Eric Harger**  
**Brian Mills**



**CITY OF ST. JOHNS  
PLANNING COMMISSION**

**SEPTEMBER 13, 2023  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting of the St. Johns Planning Commission was called to order by Chair Hanover at 5:32 p.m.

Members Present: Heather Hanover, Scott Dzurka, Mark Holden, Wendy Ward, Brian Mills, Eric Harger  
Members Absent: James Eshelman, Melvin Renfrow, Eric Hufnagel  
Staff Present: Chad Gamble, City Manager; Mindy Seavey, City Clerk; Chris Khorey, McKenna; David Kirk, Police Chief

**2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Mills to approve the agenda as presented.

YEA: Hanover, Dzurka, Holden, Ward, Mills, Harger

NAY: None

Motion carried.

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – AUGUST 9, 2023 MEETING**

Motion by Commissioner Ward seconded by Commissioner Holden to approve the minutes as presented.

YEA: Hanover, Dzurka, Holden, Ward, Mills, Harger

NAY: None

Motion carried.

**4. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

Mark Mercer, was present. He said he is trying to get his information back from Mike Homier. He said he had to come to city offices and he made numerous phone calls to retrieve it. He said it is about a property dispute and he can't remember what he actually had in it.

City Manager Gamble said Mr. Mercer dropped off a packet of information, no cover letter, with documents pertaining to his property (legal docs, surveys, pictures) and it said Mike Homier (our city attorney) on it. He said we were unclear what we were supposed to do with that and we gave it to Foster Swift. We did not know until several weeks after that Mr. Mercer requested the documents back. We are in the process of getting them back from Grand Rapids.

Mr. Mercer said it is hard to have the city attorney out of town. He discussed the package of violations he put together with issues that he has (not putting trash in plastic bags in trash bins, light trespass, etc.) and handed a packet to the city manager.

Mr. Gamble said to place your complaints in writing. He asked if there was a cover letter on the packet of violations that he handed to him. He said he is happy to take the information. He said as he has requested before, if you can give us a specific complaint. He listed the information that was included in the packet that was handed to him. He said we want to make sure we address your concerns. He said he will send Mr. Mercer a written response and we will have the packet that Mike Homier has mailed back to Mr. Mercer.

## **5. PUBLIC HEARINGS - NONE**

## **6. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Downtown Parking Minimums**

Chris Khorey, McKenna, said we have now gone through two conditional rezoning processes for residential developments on the edge of downtown. The developer wanted more residences than R-3 zone would allow and planning commissioners were amenable to that, but the only way to get it was to amend to CBD. With CBD, there is a full exemption of parking requirements. He recommended they have a discussion on how to create a more permanent and efficient system for parking on the edge of downtown. He discussed: the current zoning map; what happens when you get off of Clinton Avenue block; creating a parking exempt zone and parking reduction zone; the 5<sup>th</sup> block of Clinton Avenue; on-street parking and whether it should be allowed to count towards parking spaces. He said he is interested in the planning commission's ideas on how this would work going forward. We need something that can be automatic. If we do make a change, pre-existing conditions would be legal. He said it would be if a building changed use, expanded, or for a new building.

There was a discussion of:

- Being proactive.
- Not having to negotiate each time.
- Don't think they should have zero parking requirements.
- The downtown zoning map.
- Addressing private, off-site parking.
- Over 40 apartments have been created in the downtown in the past 10 years.
- On-street parking being utilized as a spot that a private developer gets credit for.
  - Legal concerns raised by our attorney.
  - Count them when installed as part of the development.
- Set them at a higher standard, knowing that you can come back.
  - Possible range of 1.15 to 1.25.
- Don't want to turn downtown into a parking lot.
- Option if you put in public parking as part of your development, but it becomes part of the city.
- Payment in lieu of parking.
  - Goes into a fund to build or maintain parking.
  - Possible automatic reductions for things like bike racks, curbside parking spaces, etc.
    - Objective reduction system.
  - It wouldn't apply to the core 3 blocks.
  - Pricing it a higher level, and only allowing a certain percentage.
- What do we do down the road when we need to have charging stations for vehicles.
- Zoning Map
  - Vision for mixed use zones.
  - Current parking requirements for businesses.

Mr. Khorey said for their next meeting he will bring ordinance language with a map.

#### B. Dogs and Cats Ordinances

Chris Khorey, McKenna, said there are two components to this: kennel rule change to “more than 3” and a request to add a cat section to our existing animal ordinance.

There was a discussion of:

- Clinton County Animal Control.
  - The city doesn’t maintain a record of all dogs impounded.
  - When we get a complaint about a stray dog, we refer it to the county.
    - City police will assist animal control if they are not available.
- If the limit on number of dogs which would cue a kennel, put 4.
- Ask staff with regards to implementation what they have encountered as far as “annoying”.
- Cats
  - A collar with its name on it.
  - How do you identify feral cats vs. a cat roaming around the neighborhood.
  - Possibly strike everything but 92.34 in the cat ordinance.
    - Add cats to 92.26; discussed a section regarding not feeding cats.
  - Animal control won’t come out for cats.
  - Review for any state law regarding feral cats.
    - Food outside of the house is an attraction to feral cats.
      - Prohibit external food source.

#### C. Golf Cart Ordinance

Chris Khorey, McKenna, said he doesn’t have a backstory on why this has become an issue. Planning Commissioner Eshelman provided his thoughts in writing in the packet.

There was a discussion of:

- Owosso’s ordinance.
- They are not allowable by state law.
  - No crash rating, not intended to be collided with.
  - Speeds as low as 10 miles per hour have caused catastrophic injuries.
  - No way to secure kids on.
- During the Mint Festival, they have used golfcarts for mobility issues.
  - For events and a part of an event a permit could be entertained.
  - Golf cart support contained to the special event permit area.
  - At Mint Festival, observed multiple golfcarts with babies.
  - Limit to corridor of event.
- Ordinance issue or an enforcement issue.
- Scooters and electric bikes.
- Discussing this at a meeting that Planning Commissioner Eshelman is in attendance since he brought the issue up.
- With downtown, we try to bring people downtown and a lot of people go to communities that are open.
- Current enforcement practices.

Chairperson Hanover said to put this on the next agenda.

### **7. OLD BUSINESS - NONE**

## **8. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

Chairperson Hanover said we talked about in the past when places go up for sale, we could say they have to fix a sidewalk or redo driveways. She said there has always been a fight against that in St. Johns, but now it is very easy to sell houses. When buying a house, you could put that into the mortgage and would never notice that cost.

Mr. Khorey said we would want to check with our attorneys for a point-of-sale trigger vs. change of use trigger. He discussed communities should be walkable; there is a potential residential development on the edge of town and it was expressed to them they have to put sidewalks in; with paving driveways it opens up a few more moving parts since we have restrictions on how much pavement is allowed on a property.

Chairperson Hanover said gravel approaches cause more deterioration to the street.

Mayor Dzurka said we just passed a millage and there is a significant amount dedicated to sidewalk repair and improvement. We need to get clear on how those resources are going to get spent. He said he is familiar with communities that mandate sidewalks, but they were permitted to put them in up to the point of sale. He said some areas with frontage issues may need to be exempt.

Mr. Khorey said safe routes to school is a really good program. He said we can talk about a multi-pronged approach. He asked if we have good GIS on sidewalks.

City Manager Gamble said yes, we just completed it.

Chairperson Hanover said the city manager can make them fix it. We also give money if you put in brand new sidewalk.

Commissioner Mills said it makes sense to give property owners options for financing. He discussed we could put a lien on property when it transfers over.

City Manager Gamble discussed a programmatic approach to this. He said one might get grant funding and another may have to pay out of pocket. We are looking at gap closure. We can bring this back to a meeting.

## **9. ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Commissioner Ward seconded by Commissioner Dzurka that the Planning Commission adjourn the meeting.

YEA: Hanover, Dzurka, Holden, Ward, Mills, Harger

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:09 p.m.