



Minutes - Final

Community and Economic Development Committee

Wednesday, September 13, 2023

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Roll Call: Chair Mota, Napoli, Affa

Present: 1 - Cynthia Mota

[15-6049](#)

Bill 70

Amending the Zoning Map and Zoning Ordinance of the City of Allentown by rezoning certain parcels at 51 N. Front St. and 115 Riverside Dr to B-5 Urban Commercial District, and by adding adds a text Amendment that provides additional requirements for B-5 properties, provides for a repealer clause, a severability clause, and an effective date.

Attachments: [Bill 70 Riverside Drive from BLI to B5](#)

[Letter from Urban Residential Properties regarding Rezonign Request](#)

[Petition - Riverside Drive](#)

[Bill Riverside Drive from BLI to B5](#)

[Letter from Jennifer Gomez in Planning regarding Bill #70 51 N. Front Street and 115 Riverside Drive](#)

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that he is pleased to report that they worked very closely with Mr. Palumbo to craft this. This addresses all the administrations previous concerns about the Zoning Text Amendment that was passed previously. The most important thing he thinks this does is that it provides for the protection of the views of the waterfront. When this property is developed, whether it is Mr. Palumbo or another developer, they can't put up a street wall that blocks the view of the river. They are very pleased of where this came out and it was a good process for them to work through with Mr. Palumbo.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that she is glad that they worked together to solve the concerns. She asked if there were any questions from the dais regarding Bill 70.

Ms. Candida Affa asked if Mr. Hartney was satisfied.

Mr. Mark Hartney gave kudos to Jenn Gomez, the Planning Director. She is actually listening here. She is at training at the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission. He stated that they would not have been able to do this without her. She has just a great way about her and how she works with people and the city is really, really lucky to have someone in Jenn's caliber

working for us here.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she echoes everything Mark said and more. She has been delightful to work with on the city side, but the developers will say the same thing.

Mr. John Palumbo stated that he agrees. He stated that Jenn is incredible, and he appreciates Jenn, Vicky, Mark and the whole team. He looks forward to continuing a long-term relationship. He is grateful for them working with him and their expertise is top notch professionalism.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that is great to hear.

Mr. Santo Napoli thanked everyone and Mr. Palumbo for working hand and hand with the city administration and investing in our city. He stated that they appreciate it.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated definitely.

Mr. John Palumbo stated that he appreciates it and thanked them.

Ms. Cynthia Mota asked if there were any questions from the public.

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated that just for the record, Tawanna mailed out 98 notices, and nobody showed up.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that is good to know.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that the public was well informed on the meeting. She thinks the public is in full support of the project.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks asked Mr. Palumbo what is the expedited completion date for the project down there.

Mr. John Palumbo stated that there are several projects. What project are you talking about?

Mr. Mark Hartney asked Mr. Hendricks if he is talking about Neuweiler.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated yes, the Neuweiler building. That is the main building that is being reconstructed.

Mr. John Palumbo stated that the Neuweiler Brewery they are working on closing out the financing now. They anticipate completion of that project. They are looking at May or June of 2025.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks thanked Mr. Palumbo.

Ms. Cynthia Mota asked if there are any other questions or concerns from the dais.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that they are going to move it to full Council and have a public meeting on October 4th at 6:15 PM.

Ms. Vicky Kistler thanked Mr. Palumbo. She stated that the Technical Assistance Request is on here twice. She skipped to the Housing Strategy and then turn it back to Council. The Housing Strategy is getting exciting. They are gathering comprehensive data. Mr. Hanlon attended and she is hoping that he is reporting to Council that the attendance has been good. They have developers, landlords, city staff, a consultant working very hard, the legal consultant has taken a list two feet long from our staff about challenges they have in enforcing our current ordinance and working diligently looking at public policy and changes. The team around the table is really trying to picture and to paint a really comprehensive granular picture of the housing status in the city. Hopefully, they can use that to base our decisions that they make more sense based on data then on bounces from one project to another project and they can channel efforts more cohesively. They are hoping that this will generate a working landlord group who will meet consistently with city staff and bring issues to the table as well as a developer group that would meet consistently to work on issues like affordable housing, and what works and what encourages development. She is pleased to report that they are on target to be able to bring Council a draft of a report by the first quarter of next year and they can keep flushing things further from there. She stated that she was not at the last Steering Committee meeting and asked Mark Hartney if he wanted to add something.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that it is still in a data collection Phase. What he is really encouraged by is some of the key partners like the Allentown Housing Authority being at the table, the Redevelopment Authority, and really coming up with a strategy that leverages everybody's resources so there is no duplication of effort. If you are not strategic with your resources, they always going to need more public subsidy to address this issue then you have. Unless you are really smart about public dollars that you have to invest in this issue, you can never get caught up or he does not know if they truly get ahead of it. It is a national issue. It is going really well and they are just really excited to get his moving. Hopefully, by the end of the first quarter, they will really have this wrapped up. They are going to start having focused group meetings coming up. The next Steering Committee meeting is mid to late August with all the stakeholders.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that is great to know. She asked if there were any questions.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that the budget updates and suggestions is an interesting one. She stated that this is probably the first year that she and Mark feels that they have a true handle on staffing needs, in the department. They are not adding any new positions, they are creating new positions out of old positions. They are eliminating two Electrical Inspectors positions. One of them is currently occupied, but the department will eliminate the two inspector positions so that they will end up with six fully staff combo inspector positions where they will be able to go out on plumbing, electrical, building inspections. One person can handle all of those. The department is advocating that those individuals get a slight pay increase because they are also adding Plan Review in the mix. If all six of these individuals get this reorg., the city will have six Plan Reviewers instead of one. They should be able to fast track people building a deck, people fixing a roof, people getting a water heater, or people building a huge complex because they will no longer have that bottleneck of all of the Plans that are stuck with one Plan Reviewer who has knocked it out of the park, but is one Plan Reviewer. She stated that the managers will be able to breathe, and God forbid one of the Plan Reviewer plans to take two weeks off or heaven forbid gets sick for an extended period of time. It will be ground to a halt. They will utilize those six people to then also review each other's work and work in tandem with each other so that when they need an immediate response, they have a six person team to pick from instead of a one person team to pick from. It actually generates a revenue savings of about \$122,000, if they can do this. Also built into this, they have the Permit Tech positions. Currently, they have four Permit Techs who process the permits. The goal is also to fund four Permit Tech Level II positions at a \$1 a piece. In the understanding that the Permit Techs go back and actually become Certified Permit Techs, they can move to a slightly higher paygrade, but they can actually issue full permits so that you can get your water heater permit right there on the spot. Instead of submitting your applications and waiting for your permit, they can actually issue those permits because they are Certified Permit Techs. A cost savings of \$122,000, but an extreme efficiency savings if it is approved. This will take them for their 120 person DCED team to 118,000 person DCED team. They feel that the efficiency there is magnified. It just makes tremendous sense. They are also supervised by Joe Franzone who is a Combo Inspector himself. They can also do systems of checks and balances, make sure that everybody looks at it the same way, systematize a bit, and it is one of the department's smartest cost saving ways to move forward in the budget.

Ms. Cynthia Mota asked how do you plan to do this when it comes to the training. How much money are you planning to use and for how long will be the training. She asked if they are planning to get all of them trained at the same time or two at a time.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that is the interesting part. The city has already paid for their training and certification in previous years. Some of them have chosen to remain single entity inspectors. By saying they want to remain in Plumbing, or want to remain in Electrical, that is where they have been. They are no longer going to have those positions if this goes through. They will have to be Combo Inspectors to stay with the department. They have one individual who needs additional training and that individual has a six month period to obtain those trainings, but has really worked in the field so long that they think will have any difficulty whatsoever getting their certification test. She stated that they are fortunate that right now they were able to recruit several fully trained Combo Inspectors and fill those positions that have been vacant forever. They have two individuals who will use the certifications they already gotten and one who will have to pass the test.

Ms. Cynthia asked how the employees feel about that and asked if they are having any issues when it comes to that. They do have the training, but they choose to be experts on just one thing.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that they tried to be open with them and until it gets approved, it is hard to say it is definitely happening. They are trying to create a culture here where they encourage professional development and for people to advance and by creating Combo Inspectors and calling them Building Code Professionals. The intent is to have tiers. There is this minimum tier where you have to do combo inspections and plan review, but as you get more certifications it gives them an opportunity to earn more money and move up. This will even trickle down to the Housing Inspectors are going to be required to get some certifications, but they can train.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that Council gave them that apprenticeship position. They can train into this.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that it is a whole career pathway for people who come into the city. He stated that he feels that it is well received. It is not like once you approve it, they have to have those certifications. They are going to be giving those six months to do that training, but they need the guys to do the professional development so they are staying on top of what the codes are and can provide better service to our city. The whole concept instead of having an apartment building, they would have to send three different inspectors and go and inspect every unit. Now, they can

send one person and it is just way more efficient and they become much deeper where at times they had one Electrical Inspector and that Electrical Inspector goes out on a long-term leave. The city does not have anyone that can do that electrical inspection. Now, if someone goes out on a long-term leave, they have five other people that can help pick up that slack. It really helps them be more efficient and in some cases, it helps them when in some positions there are slow times. It allows them to be able to deploy resources to keep them busy.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that they have the computers now and able to track things easier.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that two of these positions will be moving out of the managerial team and into the union. It is a little unheard of. They are finally creating this professional class of people who understands that there are goals that they can achieve, and they can benefit from those goals. She thinks that it is actually setting an example that she is hoping that they can replicate. As people get certified and become more knowledgeable about the work that they do, they can also create demand for their positions. Also, because of some of this, she thinks that they have a really strong leg to stand on with Heidi's goal of going into the schools and encouraging people. Right now, there is a huge push to enter the trades. To enter the trades and become a master and to be able to be that master, but become a building code professional has a hierarchy. It has a plan. It is like getting your master's degree. It would be a different level of respect also because these individuals will be looking at your plan. Right now, the Plan Reviewer reviews the Plan. The inspector goes out and have to try to figure out what the Plan is. If they are taking the project from the very beginning from the very end, including the Plan Review then they are intimately involved in this Project. They should be able to spot difficulties and issues much quicker. They should be able to streamline process better.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that when Ms. Kistler came onboard with this, this was one of her goals to create this. She complimented them on this because this was a stick in our sides for so long that they could not get inspectors. It is taking so long, they can't. She remembered when she first came onboard this was one of her goals and she thought it was great from the beginning. Now, that she sees it come to surface here, it will be so great for the city and someone out of high school and they want to do this and the advancement and the money is a win/win all around. She complimented them both on their hard work and doing this. It is great.

Ms. Vicky Kistler thanked Ms. Affa and stated that they appreciate that, but has to say that the team members underneath them, the managerial team has really worked hard to improve the professionalism between Kelly and

Heidi and Joe Franzone and Mark Schwab who is on the team. They are really working hard on motivating folks. What she is really happy to see is the people that are coming into the department, especially in the housing inspector group, know there are expectations, the iPads and the cars on the system and everything else. They are attacking it full out. They are excited about attacking it and it is really rewarding to see.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that they are embracing the challenge.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that by leaps and bounds this department has come from here to here. That is in a year and a half. The other departments are running very well. This one needed help. She stated that she is sorry, it did. She stated that they brought it right up to the top. She knows it is just not them two, it is the whole department. She stated that the Kelly's, Heidi's and everyone else. She stated that being here for eight years, she sees what this department is now compared to what it was.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they are very pleased with the direction it is going, and they have a lot of work to do. They are still making mistakes. The computers still go dead every now and then. The staff still has its days, but she thinks they are headed in the right direction. She stated that Ms. Affa supported them in doing that. She stated thank you.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated thank you. He stated that he thinks that it is getting better and still having challenges leads them to the next thing on the item on the list which is a Letter of Intent for Peer Assistance through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and through their Government Center for Local Government Services. They offer mentors and peer assistance to municipalities for specific issues. He stated that they have been talking with them as Council knows they are in the process of rebuilding the grants team. The long-time Director moved on and they have some really good people in there that need some training, and the department needs some help and getting their process and procedures in place. They will be hearing in the future about a difficult audit that they had. This is in somewhat response to that to get this Peer Assistance. In order to apply for the Peer Assistance, they ask for a Letter of Intent and that Letter of Intent is expected to be blessed by Council. They just want to know that Council is aware that they are asking for this assistance and they discussed it at a public meeting.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that they need multiple levels of this assistance. They are asking for this Peer Assistance Program to help them come up with policies, procedures, standard operating forms, things that should have been in place, but are not in place. Rather than inventing and reinventing, they can use a seasoned professional who has access to

some of these from other jurisdictions that can help the city get a leg up. They are also going to be coming with a Professional Service Agreement eventually to bring a consultant in to assist them with some of their HUD challenges. That may not be for a while. They are trying to resolve some of them. They are learning that the system of accounting for the federal grants was an in-house system of accounting and not necessarily matched with the General Fund/General Ledger and those types of tracking systems. They really wants to get a parallel system to see how the city budget is tracked and is managed. They want to get a double set of books so that they have a system of checks and balances so when they are faced with an audit. This audit was particularly difficult. It was an audit for 2019 and 2020 and now none of the players that were involved with the decisions or programs are still here at the city. To have questions to why this decision was made and why was this funding done. They just fully recognized the need for excellent record keeping and for a system that is easy for the next person to pick up. They don't have that currently. They have long-term historical knowledge and unfortunately when that is all you have, it goes with the people who leave. They need something that lasts. She is not saying that they are done with Building Standards, but shifting their energy over to both the internal and the HUD related grants to try to clean up that process a bit so that whoever steps in after all these players are gone is a seamless transition.

Ms. Cynthia Mota asked if there were any other questions from the dais.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that he has a comment and will mimic what Ms. Affa said as one of the most vocal people regarding not using the tablets for a long-time. He commended her and her staff for doing just that. He stated that they mentioned about the inspectors not being able to issue permits. Are they going to be?

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that a Permit Techs being able to issue a permit. Right now, the Permit Techs take your application and your payment, and they enter it all. The actual permit gets generated through the system and approved by the inspectors. Right now, what they want is a Permit Tech to be able to hand you your permit on the spot and say, a roof, this is your requirement for a roof. You paid your requirement, and this is what you need to do, and this is when you need to come back. Not needing another person to navigate, but the Permit Techs be actively involved in that. And it is not a cumbersome process for them to be certified for them not to be able to do that. The city will offer that as an incentive. If they choose not to, they will work in the system that they have. If they want to do that, it will help even more fast track the process for those little small jobs to be able to fly through the system.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that the reason he asked and this was several years ago, his understanding at that time in Easton and a friend of his work there and said that he was able to issue permits on the spot from those tablets.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that is our goal.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated for roof repair. There is not a whole lot to a roof repair or replacing a hot water heater. That kind of stuff, you should be able to get your permit right away.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that in fact he had an inspector at a property that he jointly own and he needed to get one for the hot water heater. He had to come inside to get it.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that you can do it online now. You can do it on Intergov. They also have the issues that the systems of checks and balances have been skewed and the follow up has been skewed. The more people that they can get who can handle a process from beginning to end, the less things fall through the cracks. When she says that they have been skewed, she means that when you have a paper-base system, and you have five people doing something. There is five different pieces of paper going all over the place. Where they end up and how they end up, it is hard to time track and to figure out your strengths and your weaknesses. They had that big Gemba walk where they have two people that don't know anything about the process, right down every aspect of the process and they saw where the bottlenecks occurred. They occur in Plan Review. They occur in permits because they have to follow a process and you have to make sure that all the people who are applying for the permit are licensed to be able to do the work. They are seeing that bottleneck and trying to address those little bottlenecks to fast-track the process.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated good, thanked and commended them for the progress that has been made and please pass that along to the staff. He stated that Council is here to assist in any way that they can.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated thank you very much. They have learned a lot in the past year and a half and have a lot more to learn, but as they see the glaring errors, they are trying to go for them.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks stated that the city, needless to say is growing and will only get much more busy down the road with several developments coming our way. He stated thank you.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated thank you. She asked if they are going to vote on

the Technical Assistance or just needs to be vetted.

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated that his understanding is that Council has to do a Motion at a full Council meeting.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she thinks so too.

Mr. Mark Hartney stated that it doesn't need a Resolution. It just needs to be a Motion saying that you authorize them to submit this Letter of Intent for this technical assistance.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that it needs to be with the full Council.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated yes. You need to make a Motion to send it to Council.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that they should be able to do this now.

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated at the full Council. It will be on the next Council's agenda.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that they will do it next week. She asked if there was anything else from the dais or the public.

A motion was made by Santo Napoli, seconded by Candida Affa, that this Bill be forwarded to Council.

Yes: 3 - Cynthia Mota, Santo Napoli and Candida Affa

Updates:

Zoning Code

Nuisance Abatement Process

Disruptive Conduct Process

Hiring/Staffing

Technical Assistance Request

Housing Strategy

Budget Updates/Suggestions

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that the update on the Zoning Code is that it is coming along. We are at the point where consultants are really honing in on some of the specifics and they are hopefully going to be extending that contract. The city will then have public comment into the draft. They believe that they are on target and meeting our benchmarks for the rewrite as we reported to Council before. Today, she attended blue zones which is a national program. It has been featured on National Geographic. It identified places in the world where people live longer and have a longer life expectancy. LVHN is contemplating sponsoring a blue zone program

here and the city worked with blue zones that provided a comprehensive report. Some of these suggestions in the comprehensive report on how to use zoning to improve health are going to be passed on to the zoning consultants to be able to pull more of a realistic zoning plan. This plan will be heavily scrutinized by the public and hoping when that feedback comes into place that they can find something that everyone mutually agrees that will be beneficial for the city. She stated that Community and Economic Development should have something for them in the near future.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated interesting.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that the Nuisance Abatement process on the September 20th Agenda for Council that the mayor has four individuals to serve on the board. Whose name that they are bringing to Council for an appointment to the board. Once the individuals are approved, the city should have the Nuisance Abatement Board in place and should be able to implement. She stated that Carlin and Kelly are working very hard to track complaints with APD as well as the DCNR Complaints. They are hoping to be in place to be able to use Nuisance Abatement once they have a functioning board approved and on target.

Ms. Candida Affa asked when can Council expect to get the names to approve.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated at the next Council meeting.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that it is a really good group.

Ms. Vicky Kistler talked about the DCNR process and asked Ms. Affa if she is receiving the Reports from Carlin. The only issues with the DCNRs comes back to the Magistrates. Sometimes they are not upholding and they are saying this complaint was within a week of that complaint, throwing a complaint out and making them go for a fourth. It is going to connect to the Housing Strategy.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that they public is going to have to know this. The police are doing their job. There were 24 this time. It was less this month, but in July there were a lot. There are a lot of homeowners. She stated that Council passed the legislation and have the judges just letting them go is something that the public has to know about.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she agrees.

Mr. Santo Napoli asked if that comes down to the ordinance not being clear enough.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that the ordinance is crystal clear. The ordinance states three Disruptive Conduct Complaints in a one calendar year, one 12-month period. In a consecutive 12-month period is caused for an immediate eviction. She thinks that the magistrates have folks in front of them who will say, they got this noise complaint, and it was only three days later and their new sound mufflers or new whatever did not arrive yet. The magistrates cut them a break. When they cut them a break, that means they have to wait to get a fourth and sometimes waiting to get a fourth puts you in the next 12-month period and you get the opportunity for three more.

Ms. Candida Affa stated within 24 hours or so many hours. If you get two in 24 hours, you are not listening.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that is how everybody feels about it. She stated that when we tell you, you are making too much noise and give you a DCR, but come back five hours later and it is louder and everybody is still there and give a DCR and come back five hours later and give you another one. They are thrown out. It is very clear that you have no intent of following the ordinance. It is a challenge. She stated that hiring staffing, finally they have good news. They thanked Council for approving the Health Department's grant and the Community Housing Lead Grant. Those grants, the community housing, the department is in the process of interviewing the Project Manager and the Program Manager positions. The Health Department has filled the three positions. Those three positions have created two additional vacancies. Two of the individuals were recruited from inside DCED. Those four positions are vacant because of new grants, but they are in the process of filling them. She is extremely happy to report that they only have five additional vacancies in all of DCED. A Zoning officer, a Grants Accountant which they are in the process of interviewing, a Grants Administrator, and two Housing Inspectors. Short of that, their positions are filled with exception of the Electrical Inspectors. When they get down to the Budget update, this is the best staffing that they have had in the last 10 years. They are getting multiple candidates for each of these positions. It is not like they are deciding between two. Two of the clerical positions recently, the department had 88 applicants from the outside. There is tremendous interest to come and work for the city and fortunate they are able to hire. She is pleased to report the Clerical positions as well as several of the other positions have been filled with bilingual candidates. They are increasing the capacity to speak Spanish to the public. She is hoping by the next Council meeting they will be lucky and have fewer vacancies to report. A lot of training going on because they have a lot of new hires. It is going better than it has in quite a while in terms of building their staffing.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that which means that people want to come and work for the city. That is very positive.

Ms. Vicky Kistler stated that she does not know what Technical Assistance Request is.

[15-6229](#)

Technical Assistance Request
Housing Strategy

Attachments: [Technical Assistance](#)

[RF Allentown MVA Meeting 1 Final 2023 08 03](#)

Adjournment: 6:43 PM