

GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
October 14, 2014

The following are the minutes of the Growth & Redevelopment Committee Meeting, which was held on Tuesday, October 14, 2014, at 6:30 p.m., in the Lawrence Township Municipal Building, Lower Level Conference Room.

Statement of Proper Notice

Adequate notice of the regular meeting of the Lawrence Township Growth & Redevelopment Committee has been provided by filing an annual meeting schedule with the Municipal Clerk, and by filing the agenda with the Municipal Clerk, posting prominently in the Municipal Building, and mailing to the Trenton Times, the Trentonian and the Lawrence Ledger.

The roll was called as follows at 6:31 p.m.:

Present: Christopher Bobbitt, Ryan Kennedy, Lovette Love-Stevens, Charles Lavine, John Conroy, John Schloesser, Max Ramos, Donald Addison

Excused Absence: Kevin Ralph, Susan Snook, Secretary

Absent: Tushar Patel, Jags Vazirani, Karen Vincent, Danielle Delprato, Howard Nelson, Boynton Weekes, Andrew Bedryk, Jude Martin-Cianfano, Mid-Jersey Chamber

Also Present: Cathleen Lewis, Mayor, J. Andrew Link, Principal Planner/Business Advocate, James F. Parvesse, Municipal Engineer/Zoning Officer

Approval of Minutes:

The September 9, 2014 minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comment:

None

Sign Ordinance:

Chairperson Bobbitt introduced Mr. Parvesse, Municipal Engineer and Zoning Officer to explain the sign ordinance and issues and/or violations that come up.

Mr. Parvesse asked if there were certain issues that the Board wanted to discuss; however, Mr. Weekes was not at the meeting and had issues at the Lawrence Shopping Center. Mr. Conroy stated it was small temporary signage like a sandwich board or a grand opening sign, or one balloon.

Mr. Lavine stated that stores owners put up banners, pennants, balloons, grand opening signs and then the Township tells them they have to take them down. Mr. Parvesse stated the way the ordinance is structured for a grand opening, you are only allowed one banner equal in size to your existing façade sign and if the façade sign is roughly five percent of your store area so you have a 100 sf area, you take five percent that is your façade sign and then when you have your grand opening you are allowed a banner or a free standing sign equal to that size. It is very limiting compared to what people want to put up for a grand opening.

Mayor Lewis asked do we notify, as a new business is coming in, and they are going through their permitting process, is there a letter we send them or information about the signage that we give them as they are going through this to say, here is what our sign ordinance tells you about advertising your grand opening.

GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

October 14, 2014

Page 2

Mr. Parvesse stated we do not do that. Mayor Lewis stated it will not solve the problem with people wanting more signage; it would solve the problem of business owners putting up these signs. Mr. Parvesse stated that every business has to come into his office for a business occupancy form, we have that opportunity to hand them the information on the signage ordinance.

The Board members stated that is one of the complaints they hear about are grand opening signs and the small pop shops for special events. Mr. Parvesse stated most of the complaints are with a business that has been there for 20 years and they want to have a sale. They want to have a Labor Day sale, discounted sale and ask to put up another banner and there is nothing in the ordinance that allows that type of extra signage. Once you have gone past your grand opening, the only thing allowed is your window signs about 25% of window space.

Mr. Conroy asked how often does Mr. Parvesse go out and check the signs. Mr. Parvesse stated we try not to issue a lot of summons. We send our inspector, Joe, out and he will talk to the business owner, before even a letter is sent out, explain the sign ordinance and what the violation is, give them a couple of days to address it and keep a log of it and if they do it again, they will get a letter, if they do it again they get a summons.

Mr. Conroy stated if the complaints are coming in, and is being witnessed, is it harming something. There are a lot of smaller places that put out a sandwich board that are not intrusive or harming anybody, we are trying to figure out where this is to see if we can make recommendations to Council on how can we improve this so zoning can get fewer calls and people will stay in business.

Mr. Parvesse stated in the NC zone you can have sandwich board signs (The Village) are permitted. But in the Lawrence shopping Center they become a problem. The Board was talking about the Hillier sign on the side of the building of the old Huber furniture store. Mr. Conroy stated the store owners are complaining in the Lawrence Shopping Center about putting out a sandwich board to get some customers and they are not permitted. Mr. Parvesse stated the sandwich boards at the Lawrence Shopping Center would not be problematic.

The Board members spoke about Mrs. G's and worldwide signage. Mr. Addison stated that the Township has a lot more ordinances than surrounding Townships. Mayor Lewis stated the reason our sign ordinance is as comprehensive as it is because the Township had a law suit regarding the "Rat" and because the Town wanted to make sure that every piece was within the constitution. The changes need to be specific.

Mr. Parvesse stated the basic standards, which are not an issue, the free standing signs; they did not change much that is standard the five percent or how large a free standing sign can be. The details of the ordinance were changed to make it pass constitutional muster. The issue is that of the temporary signs. The only thing that might of changed was you were allowed 50% of window space and now it is 25% and was not specific that it had to be on the outside and now it has to be on the inside of the window.

Mr. Lavine has no problem with 90% of the permanent signage and the Zoning Board grants variances for signage. It has been an on-going discussion and is there a timeframe for a grand opening and a time frame for smaller signs like a sandwich board. Mr. Parvesse stated it comes down to the desire of the Township and how much signage it wants to see at any given time. There are ways to certainly allow more temporary signage; you could always extend the grand opening from 30 days. The biggest complaint is there is no way for a business to have a sale, a certain number of times in a year. Mr. Parvesse stated that Robbinsville's ordinance has a clause for temporary signs for sales and events that were allowed for a certain number of times per year. Businesses are who are at their location for a long period of time cannot advertise.

GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

October 14, 2014

Page 3

Mr. Ramos asked if there is a permit process; Mr. Parvesse stated there is no way to advertise if you are having a 30-day sale. You can go to the Zoning Board to have a new sign added to the building. For a small business it can be very expensive and they don't want to do it. Mr. Conroy asked for a grand opening do they have to register? Mr. Parvesse stated we take them to the section of the code.

Route 1 is the bigger problem where we have to tell the businesses to remove their signs. Mr. Parvesse stated offering some option to get a sign is some way to help the business community in some way. It would be very difficult to be able to police these signs to see what ones that receive a permit and if they remove them in the approved time frame.

Vice Chairperson Kennedy asked about the sandwich boards. Mr. Parvesse stated it is allowed in the a lot of the commercial zones and they do not do a lot of good, only in the shopping center or the Mercer Mall. Mayor Lewis stated it is the larger stores that want to do more temporary signs, like along Route 1, however; we are looking at more of the smaller businesses, like the mom and pop stores, so they can compete with the larger businesses.

Mr. Parvesse stated the location next to Party City. Signage has always been the problem because it has only one street frontage and it is a small building that your allowable sign is five square feet and nobody can afford to go to the Zoning Board. So this is the struggle that a smaller business has. Mr. Conroy suggested changing it so every business has the same percentage for a sign.

Mr. Ramos asked if non-profits are treated differently. Mr. Parvesse stated we have a special permit and form for the non-profit organizations and there is a section in the code that does allow for signage. The issue is with the school is that everybody was putting up banners on the school fence and it turned into issue so we recommended no more than a certain number of banners on the fences. You are allowed to have a banner on the property where the function occurs (4 x 8) and you can have 8 to 10 smaller signs throughout the Township; however, not in the right-of-way.

Chairperson Bobbitt stated it is temporary signage that is the problem and we need to talk to some other Townships and see what their issues are and then make recommendations for changes (GEPNA, Main Street, Lawrence Shopping Center). Mr. Parvesse suggested asking the business community to see what they would suggest and what would benefit them, within reason. Chairperson Bobbitt stated it is not just you but it is also your competitors doing it also.

Mayor Lewis stated if the business next to yours puts up larger signs, then our roads or that location becomes a mess. Mr. Parvesse stated we try to be fair by enforcing it pretty strictly; however, and try to be consistent.

Awards Program Recap:

Chairperson Bobbitt stated Mr. Link received a thank you note from Kathy Saretsky. Chairperson Bobbitt asked the Board members about the space and how the day went. The board members stated very tight; well attended; a buffet is preferred; audio was not suitable for that size room; the space how fair back it went and there were no reserved tables. It felt like a Lawrence program and not a Mid-Chamber program. The sponsors worked out well and Mayor Lewis suggested that we start looking for a speaker now and recommended Squibb.

Chairperson Bobbitt asked the Board members what did they like about the ceremony. It was stated the citation from the Legislators was nice but a buffet would be preferred because you have more control which helps move the program. One suggestion was to start it at 8:00 am for next year instead of 8:30; however, it would cut into the net working time. Mr. Conroy stated that Asian Fusion would like to host it next year and suggested having a meeting there. Mayor Lewis stated we also have the new Worldwide and the Mrs. G's; but what about getting in food. The only problem with the Asian Fusion would be the sinkholes and the fence that surround it.

GROWTH & REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

October 14, 2014

Page 4

Chauncey Center, IBEW was mentioned and as well as Green Acres but the Board members stated it is very expensive. Chairperson Bobbitt asked do we want to have a sub-committee to look at the places; however, leave it with the Board members and discuss things with Jude Martin-Cianfano.

New Business Inventory:

Mr. Addison handed out Business Week pamphlets.

Other Business:

Marianna Rotisserie, 1279 Brunswick Avenue (Lanning Avenue) is a new business and their grand opening is between 12:00 and 2:00.

Mr. Link stated at the Awards Program Rima, Manager of First Constitution Bank, she offered the hall to us again to hold a meeting.

Adjournment:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Digital audio file of this meeting is available upon request.

The next meeting will be held on December 9, 2014.


Susan Snook, Secretary
Growth & Redevelopment Committee