

Submitted April 6, 2022
Approved April 13, 2022

**MINUTES OF THE ROCKVILLE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING NO. 05-2022
Wednesday, March 9, 2022**

The City of Rockville Planning Commission convened in regular session
via WebEx at 7:00 p.m.
Wednesday, March 9, 2022

PRESENT

Suzan Pitman - Chair

Andrea Nuñez Sam Pearson
John Tyner, II

Present: Nicholas Dumais, Senior Assistant City Attorney
Jim Wasilak, Chief of Zoning
David Levy, Assistant Director, Community Planning and Development Services
Sheila Bashiri, Principal Planner

Chair Pitman opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m., noting that the meeting is being conducted virtually by WebEx due to the coronavirus pandemic. Rockville City Hall is closed until further notice to reduce the spread of the virus, based on guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and state and local officials.

I. RECOMMENDATION TO THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL

A. Sectional Map Amendment MAP2022-00124, to Rezone Property at 500 Great Falls Road from R-90 to R-90 (HD) to Place the Property in the Historic District Zone; Historic District Commission of Rockville, Applicant

Ms. Bashiri presented the subject application. She noted that the nomination was initiated by Peerless Rockville and added that the Zoning Ordinance allows for properties to be nominated for historic designation by anyone. Ms. Bashiri further detailed the history of the property and its unique features of a colonial revival style home and estate style lot. She indicated that the proposed home had been recently reviewed and approved for certain upgrades by the Historic District Commission (HDC). She continued that upon consideration of the subject proposal, the HDC voted to recommend historic designation of the property to the Mayor and Council, based on the finding that the property met three of the HDC's approved criteria. She further explained that the Planning Commission's role in historic designation is to evaluate the proposal on whether the designation will be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and whether the designation meets the purpose of the historic district zone. Ms. Bashiri further presented that the application was in compliance with the historic preservation element of the Comprehensive Plan, including maintaining the historic character of the historic districts and celebrating the rich history of Planning Area 4 for which the property is located.

Ms. Bashiri also detailed that the proposal was in compliance with the purposes laid out in the Zoning Ordinance, including safeguarding the heritage of the City, stabilizing and improving the property values of such site, fostering civic beauty, strengthening the local economy and promoting the preservation and the appreciation of such sites. Ms. Bashiri concluded by recommending that the Planning Commission find that the proposal, which would change the zoning of 500 Great Falls Road from R-90 to R-90 HD (Historic District), would be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and with the purposes of the historic zone in the Zoning Ordinance.

Nancy Pickard, Executive Director of Peerless Rockville, then provided testimony on the proposal. She detailed Peerless Rockville's support for the recommendation for historic designation of the subject property. She reiterated the comments of staff in how the property was in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and also met the purposes of the historic district zone as specified in the Zoning Ordinance. Ms. Pickard detailed that because of the property's unique features and the women who resided at the home, Peerless Rockville was compelled to request designation of this property to sufficiently preserve its history in the city. She further explained the notable contributions of the property's past residents, Dr. Claire Finley and her daughter, Bliss Finley. Ms. Pickard explained that Dr. Finley was a pioneering female physician who, among many other distinctive achievements both locally and nationally, played an important role in establishing and operating Montgomery County's early welfare services and addressed public health concerns, most notably at the Poor Farm and the Montgomery County fair, both located in Rockville. Ms. Pickard also detailed the life of Ms. Bliss Finley, noting that she was a prominent suffragist who participated in the efforts for women's voting rights, of which such efforts included correspondence with notable women's activist Alice Paul and Finley herself testifying before the United States Congress about an attack on the Maryland delegation during the suffrage movement.

Ms. Pickard concluded that due to both physical and cultural aspects of the subject property, the designation of 500 Great Falls Road would be in keeping with the vision and goals of the Comprehensive Plan and the purposes of the city's Zoning Ordinance, and she further recommended that the Planning Commission forward such findings and recommendations to the Mayor and Council.

As Hector Mora, the property owner, was absent from the meeting, Commissioner Nuñez requested if Mr. Mora had provided to staff a statement including his position on the proposed designation. Ms. Bashiri responded that staff had requested a statement from Mr. Mora but had not yet received one. She added that in conversations with Mr. Mora, he was made aware of the benefits and requirements of designation, including the fact that any exterior work proposed to the home would need to be approved by the Historic District Commission.

Commissioner Tyner inquired about the recent changes to the home and if such upgrades were made in consultation with the staff by the owner. Ms. Bashiri indicated that Mr. Mora had consulted with staff and the HDC to provide changes and upgrades to the home that would be in keeping with the character of the home's colonial style. She indicated that the owner was working with their architect to make such changes and would resubmit such changes at a later date.

Commissioner Tyner further commented on the thorough review of the subject application and commended the staff for their work on the review of this property.

Commissioner Nuñez further inquired about more details on Dr. Claire Finley and Ms. Bliss Finley and their connection and significance specifically to Rockville, given their numerous accomplishments at a national level. Ms. Bashiri and Ms. Pickard responded that Dr. Claire Finley was involved in groundbreaking public health efforts for the indigent at two of Rockville's landmark sites; one at Poor Farm, which once stood where the Montgomery County Detention Center stands on Seven Locks Road, and the other at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds, which is where Richard Montgomery High School stands now in downtown Rockville. Ms. Pickard noted that additional contributions of the Finleys were detailed in Peerless Rockville's submitted written testimony to the Commission.

Commissioner Tyner made a motion that the Planning Commission recommend to the Mayor and Council approval of Sectional Map Amendment MAP2022-00124, to rezone the property at 500 Great Falls Road from R-90 to R-90 (HD) to place the property in the Historic District Zone. Commissioner Nuñez seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously 4-0.

II. COMMISSION ITEMS

A. Staff Liaison Report – Mr. Wasilak reported that the next meeting would be on March 23 in which staff would like to present and have a discussion on a proposal for potential parkland dedication and how the city might achieve additional parkland through development. He added that the Mayor and Council has sought input from several of the Boards and Commissions and such input would be relayed back to the Mayor and Council for their consideration. Mr. Wasilak also previewed a potential Mandatory Referral application for changes to the Montgomery County Detention Center which may be coming before the Commission in the coming meetings. He explained that the Mandatory Referral process is the mechanism for government agencies to review public projects in order to review if the proposal is compliant with the local jurisdiction's master plan and considers the appropriateness of the project's location, character and extent. He added that the Planning Commission's review would be a recommendation rather than an approval action, unlike review of a site plan.

Mr. Wasilak also reported that the Mayor and Council approved the text amendment concerning regulations on trees per lot and he commended the Commission on its contribution. Mr. Wasilak also reported on ongoing efforts for the reopening of City Hall. He indicated that while City Hall would be reopening, future Boards and Commissions meetings would continue to be virtual until further notice.

B. Old Business – None.

C. New Business – None.

Minutes Approval– Chair Pitman asked if there were any changes needed to the draft minutes of the Commission’s February 9, 2022 meeting. Commissioner Pearson made the motion to approve the February 9, 2022 minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Tyner. The motion carried unanimously 4-0.

E. FYI/Correspondence –None.

III. ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Planning Commission, Commissioner Nuñez moved, seconded by Commissioner Pearson, that the meeting be adjourned at 7:48 p.m. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. James Wasulak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot above the 'i' in "James".

Commission Liaison