

Walterboro City Council
Work Session on the
Historic Overlay Ordinance
May 27, 2015
5:00 P.M.

Present were: Mayor Bill Young, Council Members Jimmy Syfrett, Paul Siegel, Tom Lohr, Bobby Bonds, James Broderick and Judy Bridge.

Also, Present were: City Manager Jeff Molinari, City Clerk Betty Hudson, Planning and Codes Director David Dodd, Chris Bickley, Chairman of the Planning Commission, Sherry Cawley, Chairman of the Historic Preservation Commission and various members from the Municipal Planning Commission and Historic Preservation Commission were present. (Total persons in the audience: 11 persons)

The purpose of the work session was to discuss the proposed changes to incorporate the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines in the Unified Development Ordinance.

The Mayor opened the meeting and recognized Mr. Chris Bickley of Lowcountry Council of Governments to provide a brief explanation of this agenda item.

Chris Bickley of Lowcountry Council of Governments told Council that he was here as Chairman of the Planning Commission, although he was not chairman of the Commission when this process was started. It had been going on for a number of years.

Mr. Bickley stated that the Planning Commission does recommend Council's approval of the Historic Overlay, and this is the second time this item has come from the Planning Commission to Council. Initially, this (the Historic Overlay) was removed from the overall U.D.O. document that was adopted by Council. Since then, the Planning Commission and the Historic Preservation Commission, as well as City staff, have worked on the Historic Overlay. He said, the overall approach has been to simplify requirements in administration, while at the same time recognizing that the historic area of Walterboro is its heart and a major part of its character, and it's one of the things that makes this City special. We think it is a major City asset and that it is worthy of special attention and extra effort. Mr. Bickley noted that a map outlining the proposed historic preservation overlay area is displayed at the meeting. He pointed out that this map includes both the National Historic District and the Downtown Improvement Districts, as well as a number of doughnut holes within those areas. It is a single, more easily definable area.

Mr. Bickley stated that the Planning Commission worked with the Historic Preservation Commission with the idea in mind that they would not get hung up on whether a person was in the Walterboro Historic District, the Hickory Valley Historic District or whatever, but that we were looking for one overlay that would identify the historic part of Walterboro and be easily identifiable. He said, if you gave a map and a marker to each member of the Planning Commission, each one of us would draw different boundaries. We are not going to say that one line should not be moved a

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little bit this way or a little bit that way. We are not going to argue specific lines, but overall, we believe that this map includes the area that most of us think of as the historic part of Walterboro. The guidelines apply uniformly within the overlay. They apply to both residential and commercial structures. Only residential structures are covered now, and having the guidelines for commercial structures is new. That is what's new.

Mr. Bickley pointed that the new guidelines apply to exteriors that are visible from the street. They don't apply to the interior at all, and they have no effect on uses. Cities have the authority to help approve permits in the Overlay area. It's the same as it is now. Basically, when colors and materials don't change, that can be done with the city staff instead of having to go before the Historic Preservation Commission.

Mr. Bickley noted that other permits must be reviewed and approved by the Historic Preservation Commission again, the same as it does now for residential structures in the Historic District. This can require some additional time and effort for an applicant, but I believe and the Planning Commission members believe, that it is worth the extra time and effort to preserve this historic part only. Again, the Planning Commission recommends approval and we stand ready to assist the Council any way we can, as you consider it for final approval and implementation here in the City.

Mayor Young thanked Mr. Bickley for his review and stated, we appreciate all the work that has gone into this. He then recognized Mr. David Dodd, Planning and Codes Director.

Mr. Dodd pointed out that the City's 2010 Comprehensive Plan calls for protecting and enhancing historic sites, structures and resources and fostering compatible new developments and protecting historically significant resources by creating an overlay. So, this is fulfilling part of the goals that were set when you adopted the Comp. Plan in 2010. Mr. Dodd also pointed out that the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) states that for a historic designation, a group of cultural resources may be designated if a majority of the property conveys a sense of historical or architectural cohesiveness. The area in general is associated with a historically significant period. By adding these donut holes in, so that it is all covered under one overlay, is giving more cohesiveness and protection to the area as a whole, so that you don't have unprotected pockets or spots.

Mr. Dodd stated that the ordinance provisions for the design guidelines for the commercial buildings are pretty much self-explanatory. It covers windows, doors, the facades, and the fronts. The introductory part is being added to the Unified Development Ordinance. It leads to the design

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guidelines. It talks about the purpose of the design guidelines and the goals of the guidelines are to preserve and enhance the aesthetic beauty, to protect themselves with heritage, to preserve and protect the older architectural features, to foster appropriate development, to maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment, promote heritage tourism and to use historic assets for economic development.

Mr. Dodd pointed out that the purpose of the design guidelines is not just to look at a specific element on a specific building. It is to do more for the whole picture, so it protects the character of the area, and to make things harmonious or compatible. It protects the store fronts, the exteriors. It does not at this point, change the use of the property at all. It does not affect how it is used. It's just so that the outward appearance will be protected, so that we maintain a harmonious character for the entire area, rather than having certain spots not protected. So, they work hand in hand with the design guidelines as well as the overlay. We already have residential design guidelines, but we have never had any real specific commercial design guidelines. So, this fulfills that gap, which covers all the Downtown Improvement District area, and some portions of both the National Historic Districts.

Mayor Young then opened the floor to receive any questions. Ms. Sherry Cawley, Chairman of the Historic Preservation Commission, asked to speak on the boundaries of the Historic Preservation Overlay. She said that in some places you could go on both sides of the streets, and some times you could go on another side of the street and not the other side of the street is covered, and that was crazy. So, we took the outside boundary to the property line on the opposite side of the street to get the boundary, so that both sides of the street are covered.

Ms. Cawley then stated, if you have a property in one of the National Districts and you wanted to do something inside the property (house or structure) with government money, then you would have to follow the guidelines that are set by the Department of the Interior, because those properties are on the National Historic properties register.

It was Council Member Broderick's opinion that the Planning Commission has done a great job.

Council Member Bonds, asked about the procedure on how this information would be acted upon. City Manager Molinari answered that Council is having the workshop today to give you a chance to digest it, and then if Council wishes, we can put this on the agenda in June for First Reading. It is a lot, and I just wanted to make sure that before we put anything on the agenda that you were comfortable with it.

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Council Member Bonds then gave the following scenario. This structure is Walterboro Family Practice and all of a sudden it burns down. So, then obviously that building is from the 50s or 60s. So, how does this affect them in terms of rebuilding? What are they going to have to do that's going to be different? My second question would be - let's say, the fire only got 1/3 of the building?

Mr. David Dodd responded, what's different for them that would happen for them being in the Historic Preservation Overlay as opposed to not being in it, is simply that they would have to get a Certificate of Appropriateness prior to starting the replacement of the entire building or the renovations to the 1/3 of the building. If the whole building burned down, and they are building another building back up, this is simply a new construction. With new construction, the design elements are not supposed to be mimicking other historic area structures. It can be a monument of its own, in its own period of time. But it needs to be harmonious in the mass, scale and rhythm of the other buildings surrounding it. With this example, the Walterboro Family Practice does not have any other buildings closely surrounding it because it sets in a block all by itself. The best example for mass, scale and rhythm would be like a building in the main street area on Washington, which would fall down or burn down and you have to rebuild or in-fill a blank spot there. You wouldn't want a four-story building amongst a row of one-story or two story buildings. You wouldn't want a 20-ft tall one story building next to a bunch of 12 ft. tall one story buildings. So, the mass and the scale need to be proportionately compatible. The rhythm would have to do with things like store front windows and doors. Mr. Dodd pointed out, with regard to the Walterboro Family Practice building burning down, when they come in for their permit to rebuild, the only thing they would have to do is, because they are in the Historic Preservation Overlay, is to come before the Historic Preservation Commission for a Certificate of Appropriateness to start with, showing what the exterior elevations that are visible from the streets. In that case, they would be all four elevations.

On a question raised by Council Member Bonds, Mr. Dodd gave further examples of the requirements that would need to be met by Walterboro Family Practice if that building burned down.

Mr. Bonds asked if an appeal arises from this Committee (The Historic Preservation Commission), then where does it go? Mr. Dodd answered that an appeal would go to Circuit Court. Further discussion was held on the Certificate of Appropriateness and when matters are to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Council Member Bonds pointed out a building that is across from the post office. He asked, as it stands right now, is that property in the Historic Overlay District? Mr. Dodd answered that this building is already in the Downtown Improvement District. He stated, they already have the

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responsibility of getting a Certificate of Appropriateness before they can get a building permit. The way it is currently set up, they would go to the Board of Zoning Appeals, because they are in the Downtown Improvement District, rather than the Historic Preservation Commission. So, that's one change you would see with the adoption of this, that all the certificates of appropriateness would go through the Historic Preservation Commission.

Ms. Sherry Cawley pointed out a vacant lot on Lucas Street. When some property owners came in years back, they wanted to put a Charleston house in there and we turned them down, because every other house on both sides of the street and one street over, would have been out of proportion to everything else. The lot is so small by state standards so they couldn't do it normally, I mean a regular house. They didn't have enough room. So, they wanted to put a house in there to rent, and we turned them down.

Mayor Young asked if there were any further questions or comments from the public. No comments or questions were received. There being no further business to discuss, a motion to adjourn was made by Council Member Bridge, seconded by Council Member Siegel and passed unanimously. The meeting concluded at 6:00 p.m. Notice of this meeting was distributed to all local media and posted on the City Hall bulletin board at least twenty-four hours prior to meeting time.

Submitted by,

Betty J. Hudson
City Clerk

APPROVED: June 24, 2014