

MINUTES
MOUNT VERNON PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
September 9, 2015

The Mount Vernon Planning and Zoning Commission met September 9, 2015 at Mount Vernon City Hall Council Chambers with the following members present: Truman Jordan, Joan Burge, Jenna Wischmeyer, Trude Elliott, Richard Peterson and Matthew Nelson. Also in attendance, Zoning Administrator, Matt Siders, John Harp and Mark Winder with Cornell College and Chief of Police, Doug Shannon. Absent: Rich Hileman. Meeting was called to order by Chairperson Truman Jordan at 6:32 p.m.

1. Approval of Agenda and July 8, 2015 minutes. These documents stand approved unless otherwise indicated by Commission members.
2. Open Forum: each citizen limited to 5 minutes per discussion item.
3. Discussion and possible action regarding rental properties and definition of family. Jordan said that this item was discussed at the last meeting and he wanted to bring everyone up to date on things that had happened since then. There was some discussion at the last meeting during the open forum about a house on Summit Avenue where there might have been more living there than what is defined in the Mount Vernon code as a “family” and since that time, the number of occupants increased for a short time. There was another property that was occupied by students who were engaged in unruly behavior as well and residents were upset. The City has no way of knowing who rents to whom because there are no rental laws. Jordan asked commission members to review a document provided by Peterson that contained Waverly’s rental housing code. Siders said that he had met with representatives from Cornell College and the Mount Vernon Police Department and he presented them with some of the concerns that residents had.

John Harp of Cornell College said that they expect their students to behave in the community but they do have limited jurisdiction of what they can do from the college’s perspective. Generally if the behavior of one student affects another student, that is when they get involved or when it interferes with the educational process of the college. There is also some general language written in the college policy that states the institution’s interest as an academic community when they are clearly involved. He stated that he could interpret that as the college’s reputation in town is an educational interest and gives them the privilege to engage students in conversation and enforce conduct codes off campus. The college can currently house all of their students but they allow a minimum 10% of the senior class to go through a lottery to live off campus. Jordan asked Harp what the process was if the college determined that someone’s behavior was disruptive to other people or the educational process. Harp stated that if a complaint was received they would use the school’s conduct process versus utilizing City resources, which is a written report by the Student Affairs office. Then the Dean of Students would determine how to proceed.

Chief Shannon explained that the Police Department experiences a lot of anonymous complaints from neighbors complaining about loud music, loud behavior, and walking down the streets being loud so they are sometimes hard to locate. These situations are addressed as they feel appropriate. These situations would be shared with campus safety and the Police Department is in direct communication with the college. In order for them to officially get into one of these homes to do anything, someone needs to fill out a statement and sign a complaint that their peace was disturbed. A crime report is also filed with the college documenting the activities experienced by the local police. A lot of times the students that live on campus will “move temporarily” off campus for the weekend to a house that has “activities” going on and will stay overnight, but they do not actually live there.

Wischmeyer said it sounded like there was a process in place for these types of activities and Peterson said the focus should be on rental properties as a whole and not just rental properties in which students live. Peterson then asked about the growth potential of the college and what the dependence would be on local rental properties. Harp said it was in the college’s strategic plan to add residence hall spaces as they grow but there may be years when they see 20-30 more students that would live off campus so that they can build in a year when they can fill the building. That would be the greatest dependence that he could see. Jordan asked how many houses the college rented. Harp said it was approximately 5-7 and the houses that were owned by the college were rented to faculty and staff. Jordan wondered if it would of interest to the college if the City adopted a rental ordinance that was similar to Waverly’s. Harp said they would certainly want to take a look at it.

Jordan said that once the Comprehensive Plan is complete, it will be the commission’s job to look at the Zoning Ordinance to see how it should change to comply with the new Comprehensive Plan, and that would be the perfect time to talk about this issue to see if we want to change what is currently in our Zoning Ordinance or adopt something new. Peterson felt that a new rental housing chapter was needed in the code and didn’t feel a need to wait. Nelson said that renter safety would be a more important topic to discuss then the issue of disturbances. Peterson said that a good rental housing ordinance would solve several issues, such as safety, tenant’s rights and disturbances. Siders said he supported a rental housing code. Discussion will continue at future meetings.

4. Zoning Administrator Report. None.
5. Old Business. None.
6. New Business. None.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marsha Dewell
Deputy Clerk