

City Planning Commission

Erie, Pennsylvania

October 18, 2016

-Minutes-

MEMBERS OF THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION:

The regular meeting of the City Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, October 18, 2016 at **1:00 pm** in Room 500, Municipal Building, 626 State Street.

1. *Roll Call*

Members Present: Thomas Dworzanski, Don Marinelli and Richard Speicher

Members Absent: Gary Antalek and Mark Kloecker

2. On a motion by **Mr. Marinelli**, seconded by **Mr. Dworzanski**, the August 16, 2016, meeting minutes were approved unanimously as received.
3. *The Planning Commission continued their reviewed regulations, or the lack thereof, within the City concerning urban agriculture or crop farming, and to make a recommendation to the City Council for any appropriate amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to permit such land uses with proper safeguards and restrictions.*

Under the current zoning ordinance, agriculture, as a whole, meets the definition of ‘light manufacturing’ on a vacant lot. Gardens are considered an accessory use and are permitted when there is a dwelling on the lot. The selling of crops on a lot that is in an ‘R’ district is not permitted in the zoning ordinance.

The Planning Commission reviewed a rough draft of the ‘Alternative Landscape Ordinance’ which would amend the Codified Ordinances of Erie Pennsylvania. With this proposed amendment, enforcement actions would be taken under the property maintenance code. The Planning Commission had some concerns with the rough draft. Specifically, the language of the proposed ordinance was vague and did not seem to address urban agriculture or crop farming. The Commission was also concerned with amending the property maintenance code over the zoning ordinance.

Mr. Speicher asked about the potential of requiring a permit and a bond for any lots being used for urban agriculture in the City of Erie. The rationale behind this is to prevent people from walking away from failed crops and leaving vacant lots which the City must then address and maintain.

Other issues with the proposed ordinance were in regards to a potential conflict between the property maintenance code and the zoning ordinance. Furthermore, the proposed ordinance may be used to circumvent the existing zoning ordinance by permitting commercial urban agriculture in residential areas. There is the potential for large tracts of residential areas to become industrial this way. The proposed ordinance also does not make any distinctions between personal and commercial agriculture.

There was also discussion on the procedural differences between enforcing and amending the zoning ordinance versus the alternative landscape ordinance. The zoning ordinance amendment process is subject to the PA Municipalities Planning Code(?) guidelines which are very rigid; the landscape ordinance is governed by the rules and regulations under the third class city code and are easier to adopt and amend. All violations of the zoning ordinance carry civil penalties while violations of the property maintenance code, under the codified ordinance, carry criminal penalties.

At this time, the Planning Commission did not make a motion regarding the proposed ordinance. It was agreed that additional research is needed to decide whether the alternative landscape ordinance is a viable option to amending the zoning ordinance to accommodate urban farming activities.

4. *With all business completed, the Commission adjourned at 2:30 PM.*