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**Denton Planning Commission & Denton Town Council
Joint Working Session Minutes
March 11, 2025**

Attendance

Planning Commission Members: William Quick, Chairperson, David Burroughs, Vice Chairperson, Kevin Waterman, Dona Source and James Guay.

Denton Town Council: Mayor Abigail McNinch, Councilmen Dallas Lister, Lester Branson, Frank Taylor, and Walter Keith Johnson attended virtually.

Town Planner Consultant: Peter Johnston, Town Planner

Town Staff: Scott Getchell, Town Administrator, George Bacorn, Chief of Police, and Donna Todd, Director of Planning & Codes

Working Session Call to Order:

The Planning Commission Joint Working Session was called to order by Chairperson Quick at 6:00 p.m., on March 11, 2025, at the Wharves of Choptank Visitor and Heritage Center. Chairperson Quick led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

This meeting was made available to the public via Zoom Video Conferencing, and access to the meeting was made available on the Town website.

Draft Zoning Ordinance Discussion:

Peter Johnston, Town Planner, led the discussion regarding the Draft Zoning Ordinance recommended by the Planning Commission. Mr. Johnston's PowerPoint presentation provided updates to the current Zoning Ordinance. The meeting highlighted several factors prompting the revision, including amendments to State legislation, the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan recommendations, and the resolution of concerns and conflicts identified in the current Town Code. The primary objectives include promoting affordable housing, streamline the development review process, and revise the Zoning Map.

Additionally, the implications of House Bill 538 and House Bill 233 were addressed on zoning authority and Critical Area programs. The significance of efficient land use was highlighted and the necessity to balance development with preserving the Town's character. Other challenges of reducing costs and impact fees, and the need to compromise on lot sizes and setbacks to encourage development were emphasized. The potential for increasing housing units without significantly reducing yard space was noted. Amendments to the Zoning Code include encompassing the introduction of a new Urban Residential District, the elimination of the Redevelopment District, and the establishment of the Infill and Redevelopment Overlay District. Amendments include reducing height and bulk standards for residential districts and lowering the lot size so new developments get more units per acre.

Mayor McNinch asked how they retrieved the data to support the reduction in lot sizes.

Mr. Johnston stated technology such as GIS has provided the data to identify existing conditions on the ground today.

Vice Mayor Lister emphasized the necessity of incorporating fire safety measures into the new district, specifically the utilization of sprinkler systems.

Mr. Johnston explained the necessity of incorporating a provision within the Code that permits deviations from the minimum fence standards for public projects that the Planning Commission can review.

Providing audio briefings (podcasts) and briefing documents to the public will facilitate public comprehension of the amendments to the Code.

Mayor McNinch questioned the reasoning for the size reduction of public buildings.

Mr. Johnston clarified the reason for reducing the height of public buildings from 75 feet to 60 feet is to keep the Town in harmony and prevent overly tall buildings.

Vice Mayor Lister expressed concern regarding the absence of incentives for commercial or industrial development within the current process.

Mr. Johnston explained there would not be much change in the Draft Zoning Ordinance besides placing all design guidelines in one place for reference. This makes it easier to navigate per type of zone. The complexities of implementing prescriptive architectural guidelines for townhouses, particularly in replicating Victorian elements, were discussed. Treating the Pattern Book as a guiding principle rather than a strict requirement is a consideration for the context and affordability of the project.

Vice Mayor Lister explains the significance of constructing high-quality, aesthetically pleasing housing that retains its value over time rather than prioritizing cost reduction alone.

Commissioner Waterman discussed the balance between allowing higher-density development and preserving aesthetic standards, as well as the potential legal consequences of enforcing stringent design regulations.

Chairperson Quick recommends integrating the Town's Pattern Book into newly proposed development plans.

The Council emphasized the necessity of codified building standards to guarantee the quality of materials utilized in construction and emphasized the significance of employing qualified inspectors to enforce these standards. They also brought forth the requirement for licensing contractors that is already in place. The discussion concluded with the recommendation that the International Building Code should be sufficient for addressing material standards, possibly with some local amendments.

Councilman Taylor voiced his concerns regarding developers selling unfinished developments and changing original plans that the Planning Commission approved.

The Town Council deliberated the significance of integrating the Town's Pattern Book into newly proposed development plans. While they concur developers should interpret the alignment of their designs with the Pattern Book when submitting proposals, they engaged in a discussion regarding whether this should be mandated or merely a recommendation. The Council's objective is to foster aesthetically pleasing and community-oriented architecture while maintaining a balanced approach. Consequently, they resolve to incorporate a provision into the application to address the alignment of their proposed architecture with the design guidelines at the onset of the development process. Additionally, the Council acknowledges the necessity of establishing a

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mechanism to review modifications made to developments upon changes in ownership during the project lifecycle.

Mr. Johnston recommends incorporating a provision into the application checklist that requires developers to address how the proposed architecture addresses the design features in the Design Guidelines at the beginning of the development process.

Mr. Johnston stated there will be a Public Information Meeting on April 8, 2025, and he will adjust the Draft regarding the Council's concerns.

Chairperson Quick asked Mr. Johnston for a summary of changes prior to the meeting for review.

The Joint Working Session was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Donna Todd,
Director of Planning & Codes*