

Public Meeting February 16, 2009

The public meeting of Mount Pleasant Borough Council was called to order by President Tabita at 6:10pm in Council Chambers at 1 Etze Avenue, Mount Pleasant, PA 15666. The Pledge of Allegiance was said and there was a moment of silence for our deployed troops. President Tabita directed Borough Manager Jeff Landy to take roll. Councilmen Beranek, Crivella, and Councilwomen Stevenson and Ruszkowski were present. Mayor Lucia and Solicitor Toohey and Zoning Board Solicitor Klimchock were present. President Tabita stated we have a quorum. Councilman Bauer arrived at 6:27pm.

President Tabita said that the reason for this public meeting is to discuss proposed Zoning Ordinance #621 that will be voted on at the regular meeting which begins at 7:00pm. This ordinance adds an R1-A Zone to the zoning map. R1-A is very similar to R-1 with the exceptions of the setbacks which are in line with R-2. The permitted uses are identical to R-1. President Tabita said Council will hear public comment but reminded participants that the 3-minute rule applies which gives everyone the chance to speak.

Public Comment:

Johanna Shigle, 341 Washington Street, Mount Pleasant stated that she is a landlord in Mount Pleasant and owns two properties. She is against someone telling her how she may use property that she owns. Mrs. Shigle said that is important to raise the population of the Borough and it may become necessary for senior citizens in the Borough to convert their homes for extra income with the economy being so bad. Mrs. Shigle said she lives in an R-2 Zone and was proposing to make her upper floor into an apartment in the spring for extra income. Mrs. Shigle would like Council to listen to the people of Mount Pleasant. She feels this ordinance will not be a good thing for the Borough.

Gerard Rendine, owner of property at 1361 State Route 31, Mount Pleasant asked Council for the main reason behind the rezoning. President Tabita said that the reason for the rezoning is to preserve and enhance the single family dwellings in the Borough. Earned Income Taxes and Real Estate Taxes account for 70% to 75% of the income for the Borough and Council is trying to increase and stop the decrease of this revenue. Council hopes to bring in more young families with two incomes that will increase over time and also improve property values. Council has been working to improve Main Street and the recreation facilities in the Borough which ties into the overall plan. Mr. Rendine said that the Borough will get more taxes from multiple family dwellings than single family because every time you add a kitchen to a property taxes increase.

Bill Steiner, 133 Center Avenue, Mount Pleasant is a member of the Mount Pleasant Zoning Board and asked if it would be possible for the Zoning Hearing Board to grant a variance from R1-A to R2. Solicitor Klimchock said that the Zoning Hearing Board can always consider a request but there is a difficult standard that must be met.

Charles Nitterright, Slope Hill Road, Mount Pleasant commented that he feels young people with two incomes do not want to live in the Borough and don't want to spend the time and money it would take to recondition the large older homes. Mr. Nitterright said that the new regulations are chasing away investors. He feels that homes will end up being boarded up and left that way.

David Coles, 412 Warden Avenue, Mount Pleasant asked what tax increases would apply to the property owners under this new zoning and if any studies have been done regarding the income changes the Borough can expect. Mr. Cole would like to know what the setbacks would be in the R1-A zone. President Tabita said an experienced consulting firm was hired by the Borough to review the present zoning and propose an area for R1-A. The consulting firm felt that the rezoning would preserve the value of properties in the Borough. There will not be a re-assessment of properties in the R1-A zone by the Borough. The setbacks are identical to the R2 zone.

Bill Steiner asked if Council knows the percentage of properties in the proposed R1-A zone that are currently duplexes and if these duplexes would be grandfathered. President Tabita said that properties would not be forced to change what currently exist. But if the property is ever converted back to a single family home in the future that would be deemed an abandonment of the grandfathering.

Mr. Nitterright asked if any studies were done to see if this rezoning would bring young families into the Borough and wonders what it would take with the economy being so bad. President Tabita said we used the municipal planning expertise of Mullin and Lonergan along with the feelings of Council. President Tabita said Council believes a lot of young people would like to live in a green community with it's own police force, a local ambulance service and hospital along with a good school system. Available water and sewage is another advantage to living in the Borough.

Solicitor Klimchock said that the majority of properties in the proposed R1-A zone are currently single family dwellings so this ordinance will have little effect on the current properties.

Mr. Rendine asked if Council knows what resulted in other communities who rezoned 10 or more years ago. President Tabita said that is why Council relied on the expertise of Mullin and Lonergan. President Tabita said he feels that Mount Pleasant is a better community since zoning was originally established. Mullin and Lonergan were very impressed with the housing stock in the Borough. Mr. Rendine said he stills sees a deterioration of property in the Borough.

Darrell Holts, 543 Pine Street, Mount Pleasant said he is originally from Philadelphia and is happy living in Mount Pleasant. He feels that to bring young people to Mount Pleasant and keep them here new businesses must flourish so they can find employment.

President Tabita said that Phase II of the Main Street Street-Scape Project will be completed soon and should boost the appeal of businesses on Main Street. Phase I brought over one million dollars of investment to the Borough and increased the pride of residents. Over \$700,000 was invested in Veterans Park. Very little of taxpayers money was used on either of these projects. Money from the gas wells will be used to improve recreation and entertainment. There is an active BDA in the Borough and will soon be a new Main Street Manager to market and promote Mount Pleasant. A grant for a Regional Main Street Manager will be applied for.

Gerald Rendine asked if LERTA could be extended to homeowners for improvements. President Tabita said that is an interesting concept. The Borough has the right to do that but needs agreement from the School District. LERTA offers tax relief for property purchased and improved. The appraised value remains the same as the pre-improved rate for five years.

Russ Bjune, 215 S Hitchman Street, Mount Pleasant said he and his wife are very pleased to live in Mount Pleasant and appreciate what is being done.

Mrs. Shigle asked whether the Community Block Grant comes into play with some of the run down properties in the Borough. President Tabita said it is another county project and not CDBG. The Borough is currently working with them to demolish the DiNicola property. Mrs. Shigle would like to see people more educated about monies available to help them improve their properties.

Councilman Bauer stated that the 2000 Census showed that only 25% of the population of Mount Pleasant are over the age of 65. Councilman Bauer also feels that homes are being sold in the Borough. Especially the homes priced under \$100,000.

Gerald Rendine said that the Westmoreland Housing Organization is the organization who will help property owners insulate their home, install new furnaces and hot water tanks etc.

Patience Barnes, 4 Vine Street, Mount Pleasant asked what can be done to entice people to come to Mount Pleasant. She would also like to know if the study that was conducted showed what the impact on taxes would be. Also what Council means by the "complexion" of the neighborhoods. President Tabita said he feels the way to bring people into the Borough is to make it clean and safe, offer more services and keep Main Street active. Council is in the process of advertising and marketing of Mount Pleasant as a place to come and shop as well as live and invest in. Improving the ordinance and services and keeping taxes low are the goal. Council did not pay to get a cost analysis of taxes. The rezoning simply makes economic sense. Ms. Barnes said that the Glass and Ethnic Festival draws a lot of people to the Borough each year.

A motion was made by Councilman Bauer to adjourn the public meeting. Motion seconded by Councilman Crivella. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned 7:00pm.