

CHATHAM BOROUGH PLANNING BOARD
May 20, 2015 7:30 p.m.

Chairman Susan Favate called this Chatham Borough Planning Board meeting of May 20, 2015 to order at 7:35 p.m. in the Council Chambers, Chatham Municipal Building. Mrs. Favate announced that all legal notices have been posted for this meeting.

Names	Present	Absent
Mayor Bruce Harris	X	
Council Member Fife	X	
Janice Piccolo	X	
Chrmn. Susan Favate	X	
Matthew Wagner	X – arrived at 7:40 p.m.	
H.H. Montague	X	
John Bitar		X
James Mitchell	X	
Joseph Mikulewicz	X	
William Heap	X	
Wolfgang Robinson	X	
Vincent K. Loughlin, Esq.	X	
Dr. Susan Blickstein	X	

Public Comment

No one came forward.

Resolution #PB 15-15:

The meeting minutes of April 15, 2015 were approved as submitted. Mr. Mikulewicz abstained from voting because he was absent from that meeting.

New and Returning Applications

There were none.

Discussion

Potential Zoning Changes

Dr. Blickstein reported that she and the subcommittee had met and discussed some of the recommendations recently given by Peter Hoffman, Zoning Board of Adjustment Chair. She also stated that she has reviewed the Board of Adjustment's Annual Report. Dr. Blickstein and the subcommittee reached what they had believed was the first step in modifying the Borough's FAR regulations for residential districts.

Dr. Blickstein noted that Board members have received the draft of the subcommittee's recommendations for amending the FAR. The subcommittee recommends eliminating open porches and porticos from being included in FAR calculations. Also, eliminated would be accessory structures, including detached garages, which have met height and setback requirements or have received variance relief.

Dr. Blickstein reported that she and the subcommittee had looked at the maximum FAR ratio, in the table as shown currently in the Borough Code. She and the subcommittee have made modifications to the ratio to liberalize the permissible Floor Area in every incidence. Dr. Blickstein reviewed the second page of her draft in which she had converted the modified FARs to percentages.

Mr. Montague objected to the idea of porches and porticos being excluded from the FAR calculations. Dr. Blickstein explained that many homeowners are forced to come before the Zoning Board because of the FAR overage caused by porches and porticos. This particular modification is needed to remedy this situation.

Mayor Harris and Dr. Blickstein pointed out that lot coverage will remain as a control on proposed plans. Dr. Blickstein felt that the current FAR regulations are too restrictive. The current FAR regulations make it difficult on residents who want to make modest improvements to their homes, and remain in their homes in the years ahead. Mr. Montague still had concerns about what the allowable FAR would become.

Dr. Blickstein said she understood Mr. Montague's concerns; however, if the Borough had a more conventional set of bulk standards, the FAR would be more permissive. It would have to become more permissive, because the majority of the lots in some districts wouldn't comply.

Mr. Montague felt that a number of houses were already bulky looking.

Mr. Wagner stated that in a lot of cases residents can't built a porch or portico to break up a façade. As an architect himself, Mr. Wagner knows that other architects will not take on jobs in Chatham Borough because they don't want to deal with the Borough's FAR restrictions on porches and porticos. These restrictions make it difficult on an architect and homeowner trying to do a small amount of work on their house.

Mr. Wagner explained that the idea of breaking down by 1000 sq. ft. increments still gives the Borough a great deal control over the process, but also gives more allowances to residents to work on their home projects.

Mrs. Favate invited other Board members to offer their views.

Mr. Mikulewicz said he was okay with the new percentages. He would like to exclude garages in FAR calculations. Garages are not livable space. He believed that 50% of an open porch should be included in the FAR calculations. He felt that one hundred per cent of an enclosed porch should be included in the FAR, as it currently does.

Mrs. Favate felt there would not be an epidemic of huge porches being proposed if these new regulations were approved. For most of the year, porches are not livable spaces.

Mr. Wagner observed that when local couples, in smaller homes, have their third child they think about moving to a larger home. However, the present economy doesn't always allow such a

move. The couples then decide to enhance their current homes; however, the current FAR regulations make any proposals difficult.

Council Member Fife noted that she was so shocked when Dr. Blickstein had informed her, at a subcommittee meeting, that Chatham Borough has the most restrictive FAR regulations she has ever seen. Council Member Fife felt that most residents don't want to move out of Chatham Borough unless they absolutely have to. It's hard for a family to move upwards in Chatham Borough just to obtain an extra bedroom or second bathroom. It can be unaffordable for many families. Council Member Fife felt that it would be that residents could now add porches if the FAR restrictions were revised. Porches would improve the aesthetics of many local homes.

Dr. Blickstein reminded Board members that even with a revised FAR, designs of homes cannot be completely controlled.

Moving forward, Dr. Blickstein said she will clean up tonight's draft so it's no longer in track-change mode. She will then send it to the Borough Attorney. Attorney Lott could then put these amendments in resolution format for the Borough Council's consideration. If the Borough Council gave their approval of these amendments, the amendments would return to the Planning Board for a Master Plan consistency review.

Mrs. Favate said she would attend the Borough Council meeting when these amendments are discussed.

Mayor Harris pointed out that there are a number of pre-existing barns in the Borough. Many of these barns probably don't meet current height and setback requirements. Dr. Blickstein explained that if a homeowner wanted to add onto his house and had a pre-existing barn, well maintained, variance relief could be sought to remove the barn from the FAR calculations.

Mayor Harris knew of at least one instance when the homeowner had to reduce the size of a pre-existing accessory structure in order to add on to his home.

Dr. Blickstein suggested for a situation like that, the Borough could cap the total FAR of the accessory structure. Another option would be to exclude detached garages, which meets height setback, or have received FAR relief, from the FAR calculations.

The Board further discussed the issue of detached accessory garages and FAR.

A motion was made/seconded to approve the revisions as proposed and to direct Dr. Blickstein to send the revisions to Borough Attorney Lott for submission to the Borough Council for their consideration. A roll call vote was taken:

Mayor Harris	-	yes
Council Member Fife	-	yes
Mrs. Piccolo	-	yes
Mr. Wagner	-	yes
Mr. Montague	-	no

Mr. Mitchell	-	yes
Mr. Mikulewicz	-	yes
Mr. Heap	-	yes
Mr. Robinson	-	yes
Chrmn. Favate	-	yes

Chairman Favate thanked Dr. Blickstein and the subcommittee for all their work on they did on this project. Dr. Blickstein pointed out that Mr. Robinson organized an excellent lot analysis for the subcommittee.

Mr. Mikulewicz made a motion that the Board close the public portion of the meeting and go into Executive Session to discuss future action that the Planning Board must take. Mr. Mikulewicz seconded the motion.

At 8:15 the Planning Board went into Executive Session.

At 8:45 p.m. the Planning Board returned to Public Session.

Chairman Favate and the Board discussed what agenda items, if any, will be coming before them in June. Dr. Blickstein was not aware of any applications in the near future.

The Board decided to still hold both meetings in June – June 3, 2015 and June 17, 2015, 7:30 p.m., Council Chambers, Chatham Municipal Building.

At 8:48 p.m. the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Elizabeth Holler
Recording Secretary

Planning Board Members please note: Public notice was made on May 22, 2015 that the June 3, 2015 meeting was cancelled. The next Planning Board meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 17, 2015, 7:30 p.m., Council Chambers, Chatham Municipal Building.