

9-13-07

Riverfront Committee Meeting

Public Citizen Laurie John's remarks with regard to Riverfront Action Alert email and proposed ordinance:

Laurie Johns: Thank you Lee. Councilman Lundell. I'm the person that sent out the ah, "misleading" email this morning. How many of you got it? Were you misled by it?

Audience Member: I don't know I came here to find out what's going on.

Laurie Johns: Good. Thank you. Um, I had some prepared remarks, but, um, considering what's gone before I'm gonna kind of wing it here. I'd like to thank Jim Zenah for his remarks which um (audience requested speaker move to microphone) I want to thank Jim Zenah for his remarks which essentially covered everything which was in my prepared remarks plus more and, um, also makes me feel more than a bit justified for the communication that was sent earlier today. Um, it's never my intention to mislead. I have sent out a follow-up email when I found out that my message was being taken that way promising that I would find out what information I presented that was, I prefer to use the term, mistaken. And I have had that pointed out to me. I disagree with what they have to say. Um, no permitted uses. That's not what I was referring to. You compare what we have now there is a list of ah, prohibited uses. You make a little table and you compare the new ordinance to the old ordinance and check what's included in the new ordinance against what was on the old ordinance and there's some things left out. Now, if I am mistaken in, um, understanding that then I need to be corrected. The items that were listed were what was left out. I'll be specific: uses that are prohibited in the current ordinance but which would be allowed by this one - and I say allowed, not in the sense that ... pointed out, nothing is allowed, but what would be allowed to be considered as an exception I suppose - are an extended stay motel, greenhouse or plant nursery, um, I put down put-put - I doubt they said that - but other outdoor amusement, multi floor dwellings not having ground floor commercial or office use, nursing home, personal care home for adults, restaurants with a drive through or carhop service, tattoo parlors, vehicle-mounted or tent-sheltered food sales or other retailing or wholesale stores. Maybe they, it was just an oversight that those did not get included on the, um permitted list. Um, standards and guidelines. We've got design standards and guidelines that are in here. They say, um, "these standards and guidelines are recommended but not necessarily mandatory." Therefore it means nothing. It means that everything is being left up to the discretion of the deciding body. I, um, would like to point out just a few things. This committee heard back in 2006 from, um, the man, I think his name was Bowen, um, from Chattanooga who was basically the architect of Chattanooga's riverfront development and, um, since, and also I know that several members of this committee as well as the Chamber of Commerce have traveled to Chattanooga to review what they have done and so as it seems that Chattanooga is somewhat of a standard for us I took a look at what they do. They have a 50-something page publication with standards that are mandatory and guidelines that are suggested that helps their review committee which, by the way, they have a review committee consisting of architects, landscape architects, contractors, realtors and some other people - you can check it out if you want to see the, um, makeup of their review committee. But this helps guide that committee - the decision makers in Chattanooga - about what they will and will not approve on their riverfront. It, the very first page starts out talking

about the vision that through a public visioning process they have arrived at for Chattanooga. They have a, Jim, I believe you mentioned that we're, we're not working towards a goal here. We have not decided what we want our riverfront to look like. We've done that for several different parts of town in specific plans that have been created but we haven't done that for this most-important asset of Tuscaloosa. We need to do that obviously before we can create a set of standards, but we haven't decided what we want and what we don't want with any specificity. I am, I could go on, I have examples as to what Portland, Oregon has done as far as set-backs from the river. They have, um, seen it appropriate to advise exactly how many trees should be maintained per feet of riverfront, shrubs, groundcover, these sorts of things because they have acknowledged that the most important thing is protecting the waterway itself. Our ordinance, in terms of trees? It says that your plan must identify all trees of a ten-inch caliper or greater and state whether or not they will be removed. I ask you, wh - why make them go through that exercise if it's that discretionary? I propose that we need something that is more protective of the riverfront. Um, I did not set out to offend you Councilman Garrison, or the Mayor and I understand he's upset with my communication this morning as well. Um, I fully believe that Walt Maddox is a green person as he has stated in his response. He has done some fabulous things for this city and what I intended to say in my prepared remarks was that this ordinance provides us a good framework with which to embellish. We need more to it. Take a look at Portland. Take a look at Chattanooga. Take a look at other places. It's just not finished. Thank you.