

CITY OF JOHNSTOWN PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, August 6, 2025

CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, ROLL CALL:

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The following members of Planning Commission were present for roll call:

Chairman Carthew, and Commissioners Huchel, White, Casals, Grandinetti and Shirt.

Commissioner Donald Buday was absent.

In addition, Economic Development Director John Rutledge and City Manager Art Martynuska were present.

PUBLIC COMMENT (AGENDA ITEMS)

John DeBartola, 1197 Bedford Street, expressed displeasure over the Central Park and Main Street Projects. He stated the project will damage Johnstown and create a ghost town. He also questioned the bid process for Central Park.

Mr. DeBartola commented on the old business agenda item regarding Housing Rehab and Stabilization. He opposed the Commission appointing Jill Cashdollar and Robert Forcey to the Commission's Committee to oversee housing.

Mr. DeBartola also stated he should be allowed to speak for five minutes, not three minutes as stated on the Agenda.

Dustin Greene, 316 Chestnut Street, explained Central Park means a lot to him and showed a video of himself as a child. He did not approve of the Central Park project. He noted his displeasure with the bidding process for the Central Park project. He also questioned how the bid would be paid. He suggested the Commission should reevaluate the project. He added the park could be renovated without being completely demolished.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Ms. Huchel motioned to approve the Minutes of the July 2, 2025 Planning Commission meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. White. A roll call vote was taken:

Planning Commission:

Lauren Huchel- YES
Tomas Casals- YES
Ian Shirt- YES
Michael Grandinetti- YES
James White – YES
James Carthew – Chairman – YES
The motion passed unanimously.

ACTION ITEMS: No Formal Action Items

OLD BUSINESS:

CENTRAL PARK AND MAIN STREET UPDATE

Chairman Carthew questioned whether the City had any updates for the Commission regarding the Central Park project.

Art Martynuska, City Manager, stated there was supposed to be a City Council meeting on August 6, 2025. Due to a glitch with posting the meeting to the website, the meeting was postponed to August 13, 2025. Mr. Martynuska added the City was moving forward with value engineering on the project due to the postponement.

Mr. Martynuska shared the Main Street project is moving at a different pace and schedule compared to Central Park. He added Main Street is still under design. He further stated the two projects cannot co-mingle, so the Central Park project needs to be near completion before the Main Street project can begin.

Mr. Martynuska asked if the Planning Commission had any questions for the City.

Ms. Huchel stated, for the benefit of the public, for the first time in a while, the Planning Commission has not been tasked with reviewing the plan for the park or with providing a recommendation to City Council regarding the Central Park. She noted the comments were well taken and appreciated, but the Commission has no vote on the matter.

Chairman Carthew noted the meeting was an opportunity for the Commission to understand what was going on with the projects in their design and various states of development.

Mr. Casals noted the Commission has no authority to discuss the bidding practices of the City.

CDBG PROGRAM SUBMISSION UPDATE

John Rutledge, Economic Development Director, stated the annual action plan was approved by Council at its last meeting. He noted a public hearing was held for the substantial amendments 19, 23, and 24; no comments were made. The budget remained similar to the

past CDBG Program submittals with an increase in the amount for owner occupied residents for rehab. Mr. Rutledge noted the plan was a draft.

HOUSING REHAB AND STABILIZATION PLANNING OPPORTUNITIES DISCUSSION

Mr. Rutledge stated the committee was reviewing all the owner-occupied applications. He noted considering neighborhood initiatives as part of the comprehensive plan work with consultants. The consultants are developing a second stage of survey information. Mr. Rutledge added the next round of survey information will be from 640 residents. The goal is to distribute the information to the public by November or December 2025.

Chairman Carthew confirmed the broad data received is leaning towards housing and stabilization of neighborhoods as priorities. Mr. Rutledge noted the last round of surveys also had a lot of youth participation. He added sending out flyers, stopping at the school before it closed for the summer, and going to community meetings helped with survey participation.

Mr. Rutledge reiterated the goal for completion of all tasks by the end of the year. Chairman Carthew agreed, stating the plan from the beginning of the RFP was to have good implementable programs and plans by the end of 2025.

REPORTS:

DCED REPORT- JOHN RUTLEDGE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Mr. Rutledge reported on Dave Williams work with Hildebrand GIS to build the GIS software platform for the codes department. He noted gathering as much data as possible for the platform. Chairman Carthew asked that the Commission be kept updated on how it can help as the platform will help in the future with zoning.

Ms. Huchel asked if there were other GID layers being worked on, such as tax sale properties. Mr. Rutledge replied, once the codes department are added, he would go through all of the departments.

Mr. Casals noted prior discussion to input data for utilities. He reported on recent conversations with legislators in Maine about the impact of mapping utility data for stimulating local development.

Chairman Carthew stated having information mapped like hydrants, water lines and flow tests would be useful. Mr. Martynuska noted the information has already been collected; it just needs to be input into the database.

Mr. Rutledge noted there is a lot of data available that will need to be inputted into the database. He reiterated the need to develop the software with the codes department before inputting additional data.

Mr. Grandinetti asked what Mr. Rutledge meant by codes. Mr. Rutledge replied considering such issues as code violations, rental properties, and vacant properties. Mr. Casals asked if the violations would only be available to the City or if it would be published as public information. Mr. Rutledge confirmed certain matters will be held to the City only. The information to be made available to the public will be determined as the matters proceed.

Ms. Huchel noted the database will help create a higher quality zoning map. Chairman Carthew added it will be a key bullet item for the comprehensive plan. He noted revising the zoning map will be much more efficient.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Grandinetti noted his concern about the now-vacant Penelec property on Broad Street. He understood the owners of the building are now in bankruptcy. He encouraged community leaders and politicians to come together to make sure the three-acre property does not fall into disrepair.

Mr. Casals expressed concern about the upkeep of the property if the owners are going through bankruptcy. He wondered if the City would have any ability to check to make sure the building is stabilized, particularly for the winter months.

Mr. Martynuska noted being in contact with owner's representatives regarding future potential for the building, whether it is private or the City.

Chairman Carthew noted his concern for the Mayer Building on Locust Street. He asked if there was any way to contact the owner to have the roof stabilized. Mr. Martynuska spoke to the county about using one of their drones to take a look at the roof. He would like to see what the condition is in order to make an informed decision. Chairman Carthew toured the building two years ago. At the time, the building was in sound shape with the exception of a missing skylight on the roof.

Mr. Casals had some knowledge about the building. He noted the tax bill had been paid since the building was last sold. From his understanding, the building has been in basically the same shape for the last decade. He noted it needs some rehab but does not appear to be degrading. His understanding was the owners are very forthcoming and engaged, but the issue is the money for the rehab. He stated the rehab would cost in the neighborhood of \$3 million just to do the basics needed.

PUBLIC COMMENT - NON-AGENDA ITEMS:

John DeBartola noted he struggled at times during the meeting to hear what was being said. He read through previous minutes and had concerns about replacing parking meters through the City. He stated the possible installation of kiosks would hurt the business economy in the City.

Mr. DeBartola also noted his concerns with the City considering a buildout at the property on Broad Street. He did not support the idea of potentially moving the public safety building. He again expressed his concerns regarding the Central Park project.

Dustin Greene expressed concern about saving properties while allowing others to become blighted. He wanted to see buildings saved, such as the public safety building. He added preserving architectural buildings is important. He encouraged the Commission to reach out to the board for the State Theatre to ask how they were working to save the building. He encouraged the Commission to help with the preservation of the State Theatre.

RECESS/ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 5:43 P.M.