



The Church at 209

*A New Christian Community of Worship and Service
being created by the Holy Spirit using the people of:
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church &
St. Mark's Episcopal Church*

12 October, 2016

City of Augusta Planning Board,

I am the Priest in Charge of St. Mark's Episcopal Church and the Pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, both located within the city of Augusta. I would like to offer several items for your consideration at the 18 October Planning Board Public Hearing:

- St. Mark's has never sought a zoning change for its property. We simply want to sell it to a buyer within the current zoning rules, as any homeowner or business would want for the sale of their property. The uncertainty of what those zoning rules might become, caused by the current moratorium, restricts our ability to sell our property and places a significant, ongoing financial and emotional burden upon our church.
- St. Mark's has yet to settle upon a specific buyer. In spite of rumors and assumptions, St. Mark's has never committed to Bread of Life Ministries or any other entity. It is unfortunate that no one has asked us and have continued to propose policy based on assumptions and rumor. To set the record straight, St. Mark's is committed to finding a buyer with the best offer. Period. For us, that would be a buyer with the best financial offer who could close on the property quickly. That would mean they had a use in mind that would not be restricted by the moratorium. In fact, the best way the city could control who owns that property and what is done with that property would be for the city to purchase the property. We would be happy to enter into that discussion with the city, as we are to enter into that discussion with any buyer.
- Setting aside the zoning changes directed at St. Mark's specifically and turning to the zoning changes directed at all religious organizations in the city, we would ask again that you abandon that effort. Defining churches as "small" and "large" and attempting to define what is worship and what is a so-called accessory use is beyond your purview and takes the city into potential Constitutional entanglements which will not benefit anyone.
- You also may want to review where the idea to define religious use in this mandate came from. Was that part of task mentioned in the public meeting of the City Council? When did that get added to your work and why might the Planning Board have been asked to address this controversial matter, which has clearly upset the entire religious community in the city?

Finally, I would ask you to consider; even if it was Constitutionally permitted and there is obviously great doubt about that, do you really want to restrict what religious organizations may or may not do in the future? Right now for example, a religious organization is the only entity providing homeless beds in our city. They do so without any city dollars whatsoever. Do you really want to tie the hands of all these potential community partners as they look to help you, at no cost to taxpayers, address the new and currently unforeseen needs of our city in the future?

Your Neighbor,

Rev. Erik Karas
Pastor/Priest - The Church at 209

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