

## Minutes

### Northampton County Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC)

March 8, 2012

This was a regular meeting of the Northampton County Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee held on Thursday, March 8, 2012, in Conference Room 115 located at 16404 Courthouse Road in Eastville, Virginia.

Those present were Chair Bill Parr, Dick Drury, Pat Coady, Charles Bell, Peter Lawrence, Butch Bailey and Billy Moore. Bill Payne arrived around 10:30. Absent from the meeting was David Long.

Also in attendance was Mary Rae Carter, Deputy Secretary for Rural Economic Development, , Peter Stith, Long Range Planner for Northampton County, Sandra Benson, Director of Planning and Zoning and Board of Supervisors Rick Hubbard and Larry LeMond.

The meeting was called to order at 9:04 and a quorum was established. Mr. Parr suggested moving the minutes to the end of the meeting in order to begin discussion with guest Mary Rae Carter. Ms. Carter was introduced by Mr. Parr and she told the Committee she has worked with many localities to help improve their tax base. She said there are a number of agencies under Commerce and Trade, including Housing and Community Development, Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) and the Virginia Resource Authority. She said these agencies are very eager to help the community. She also mentioned the Virginia Tourism Commission and that a liaison has been appointed specifically to the Eastern Shore by the Governor. She said the Committee needs to look at ways to improve what the County already has; identify assets. She said the Committee needs to look at perceived assets and challenges and properly identify them.

Bill Parr explained the purpose of the Committee to Ms. Carter, stating the Board has charged the Committee with a number of priorities, one of which is to develop an Economic Development Plan to present to the Board and Planning Commission. He said the Committee will be reviewing the entire Comp Plan and currently the Committee is on a fact finding mission. He stated they recently had the Zoning Administrator for the County, Bob Panek from the PSA and will have Delegate Lyn Lewis who will talk about issues relating to the state's budget and the perspective from the General Assembly. Mr. Parr indicated the Committee wants to be educated on available resources so they can get started on an Economic Plan. He stated an Economic Development Plan will chart a course for economic success and whatever resources Ms. Carter has in Richmond will get the Committee closer.

Ms. Carter said it is important to look at the regulations and see if they are cumbersome to businesses. She said to make sure when you recruit businesses/industries that the County is "Johnny-on-the-spot" and make it as business-friendly as possible. Regulations are important. Ms. Carter discussed a recent

situation where a business wanted to locate in Northern Virginia and wanted to employ 500 people. The business could not find a suitable location and indicated it would take forever to get through the regulations and get a permit. Ms. Carter said they were able to locate them in Martinsville, Virginia. She said the advantage of being rural allows you to get it done quicker. Mr. Parr indicated the County does not have an economic director, and the County Administrator sort of acts as one. Ms. Benson stated for the past year or so several staff has met with potential businesses to find out what they are looking for and explain the requirements. She stated the key thing is too have economic development staff.

Ms. Benson asked Ms. Carter if at their Richmond meeting if they could meet with representatives from environmental agencies like DEQ, since conservation on the Eastern Shore is an interest. Ms. Carter mentioned Rick Weeks from DEQ, and mentioned another example where a project was held up due to environmental regulations. Mr. Parr stated the Committee should look at the time they have available in Richmond and meet with the people who can help with economic development. He stated the County has terrific tourism but the tourists do not have enough places to spend money. He stated the County has done well with conservation and he mentioned the state park, wildlife refuge, Nature Conservancy owned land as well as Ag-Forest Districts that protect farmland. Ms. Benson stated she was not suggesting doing more conservation but there is an ongoing interest at the state level to conserve more. Mr. Parr said the Committee should bring DEQ people here and meet in Richmond with the Economic Development people.

Pat Coady asked who has the conservation interest for the state. Ms. Carter stated the Natural Resources. Mr. Coady said over 20% of the County is preserved, and that only includes the highland, not the marsh. He said if you include the AFDs, it is even higher. He said this does not include all of the Nature Conservancy land because some of their land can be sold, but they usually apply strict covenants that restrict development. He stated the Conservancy is a huge landowner in both counties. He stated 20-30% of developable land is off the rolls and he wonders what a reasonable limit for a county is. He indicated the rest of the land has to be very development friendly. Mr. Coady indicated the County needs more destinations for tourists – that there are not enough and the ones we do have are not visible from the highway.

Rick Hubbard asked how important water and sewer and zoning are for perspective businesses. Ms. Carter said it is absolutely key and successful localities have invested in themselves, they do what they have to do to bring business. Mr. Hubbard asked if there are any localities without water and sewer. Ms. Carter stated there are some and she actually lives in one. She stated in order to be competitive; you must have water and sewer. Larry LeMond stated Accomack does not have economic development staff and he asked for feelings on an Economic Development Committee on a regional level and if grants, or funding is available for that. Ms. Carter indicated there is a push for regionalism and grants could be applied for through the regional entity. Mr. LeMond asked if zoning in both counties would have to coincide and Ms. Carter said no. Mr. Parr said it would come down to by-right things and where a business could save on development costs.

Mr. Hubbard asked if it was imperative to wave incentives in front of potential businesses, commercial or industrial. Ms. Carter stated they are starting to find this is more important for localities. Mr. Parr stated the County should be hotel friendly. He said the County is already strong in tourism and natural resources and what kind of incentives should the County offer to be really hotel friendly. Ms. Carter asked why the County does not have hotels already. Mr. Parr stated because of utilities, lack of by-right uses and the cumbersome process to get permits. He stated the County does have an Enterprise Zone. He stated maybe a hotel district should be created that allows certain heights and square footage by right. Ms. Carter stated some of the things Mr. Parr suggested are good incentives. There was discussion about the County's Enterprise Zone and where it was located. Ms. Carter stated Enterprise Zones are usually in industrial parks.

Ms. Carter mentioned Bill Shelton and the Department of Housing and Community Development as a resource. She stated the Main Street program is a good program for revitalizing downtown areas. Mr. Lawrence asked if there is anyone at the state level that has done or will do an economic analysis for Northampton County. Ms. Carter said if asked, they will do it for the County, but they have to be invited. She stated Bill Shelton's group is great at facilitating meetings and strategizing. She said the state can and will help but will not tell the County what to do. Mr. Parr said the Committee has to ask the right questions and make the right request to the state. He stated the Committee can assist the Board in making the right request.

Mr. Coady began a discussion about recent small projects that have run into road blocks at the state level with VDOT, VHD, DEQ or VMRC. He asked what can be done to remove other road blocks that are out of the County's hands. Peter Lawrence said due to the County's unique geographic situation when you try and do things, it involves many more state agencies. He said there needs to be a special task force to include all the agencies. Mr. Coady stated a full time economic development staff would have all of this. Mr. Coady explained the issues the Broadband authority had over 2 ½ years working in the state right of way and how every time a resident or manager changed, so did the fees and regulations. He stated there needs to be a standard set of policies for guidance.

Mr. Parr stated the Committee should focus on what they can do locally and make the County more business friendly. Mr. Coady agreed and also added an economic development plan should consider an economic development director or organization to work with other impediments like state agencies. He suggested staying away from tax relief because it can result in zero net gain.

Mr. Moore stated the red carpet can be rolled out but the other state agencies are hurdles for businesses. Charles Bell asked if there are agencies that will assist people with highway improvements. Ms. Carter stated the Department of Transportation is massive, but she has worked with the m on some issues. She indicated the committee should talk to their delegate about these issues. She said the delegate could get the attention of the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Transportation in Richmond. Mr. Coady stated significant highway improvements should be the Commonwealth's responsibility. Mr. Moore gave an example in Accomack County where someone wanted to change a rental house into a real estate office and would have to do \$55,000 worth of improvements which prevented them from changing it to a business.

Mr. Parr stated Rt. 13 is an economic pipeline and previous Boards and Plans have prevented development on 13. He stated there was worry of a potential interstate running down the seaside so regulations were ratcheted down with limited highway commercial areas and a highway overlay district. He said there have been a couple of businesses in the last 10 years on the highway. He stated this needs to unwind a little to make it a more business friendly. He asked about a guiding policy the County gives to VDOT. Ms. Benson said there is an access management plan that was adopted regionally several years ago and there have been recent conversations about revisiting the plan to see where we are today. Mr. Bell asked if there is a prioritized list. Ms. Benson said there is a six year plan that focuses on road improvements.

Mr. Moore stated regulations are all in the name of safety and large firms are used to having to pay for improvements, but it is the mom and pop businesses that cannot and they are a big part of our economic development. Mr. Coady stated it is a balancing act, if Rt. 13 turns into Rt. 17, then we have lost it. If Rt. 13 becomes a burden for through traffic to Virginia Beach and the Outer Banks, we lose it. Development must be done in a smart way. He stated there are two towns in the County that have bypasses and now it is quicker to go through town.

Ms. Carter said from what she is hearing the Committee is very interested in developing Rt. 13, but not willy-nilly, smart and interest to the County and that VDOT is an impediment. Mr. Parr stated the biggest impediment is County regulations and then VDOT is second. Mr. Coady stated water and sewer is big, especially if the County wants to be hotel friendly.

Ms. Carter asked about the newly formed PSA and if it had any infrastructure. Mr. Parr stated the PSA has no land, no money and is currently applying for grants for two service areas. He stated they are working on looking at voluntary versus mandatory hookups and the ratio of grant to loan. He stated their next meeting in the 14<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Carter asked if the PSA was regional. Mr. Coady said it was originally but folded and Northampton has recently opened it back up. He said the northern part needs to be expanded and the southern part has a brand new system to tie into. Mr. Moore explained the situation for Exmore's two plants and the need for more sewage and expansion of these systems. There was discussion about the history of studies and planning efforts for water and sewer. Ms. Benson recalled one of the first meetings she attended on the Shore was in the early 90's and was about wastewater treatment. Ms. Carter encouraged the committee not to give up and that infrastructure is very important.

Mr. Parr asked Ms. Carter where the Committee should start in Richmond. Ms. Carter said there are three issues: PSA, Zoning and VDOT. She said when the Committee meets with VDOT they should have their case prioritized and they should be concise. There was discussion about how the meeting in Richmond should be organized and others who may be there.

Mr. Parr asked which county in Virginia is the most economically successful rural county. Ms. Carter stated the City of Martinsville and Henry County have been very successful. She said it took a long time, but these areas never stopped and they invested in themselves. There was discussion about other successful localities in the state. Mr. Coady said both counties are losing to counties in Maryland and

there is a long way to go to pull Class A office tenants. He brought up Heartwood and Tamarac and asked Ms. Carter if something like this would be good here. She stated it would be a wonderful concept on the Shore.

Mr. Hubbard asked the importance of management within the locality establishing a rapport with businesses and maintaining a dialogue with them. Ms. Carter said this is very important. She said it is also important to have someone dedicated to economic development and to also have a good rapport with Richmond.

Mr. Parr summarized the takeaways from the meeting, the need for a regulatory friendly environment, PSA, dedicated staff for economic development, and county leadership is in tune with local business and Richmond.

Ms. Carter summarized with a list of pointers she provided; have an advocate or spark plug, identify what is lacking and obstacles, sewer/ water, developable land, roads and transportation, current relationship with Accomack, economic development not just about commercial and infrastructure but it is a quality of life, affordable housing, package unique natural assets and look at cultivating regionalism. There was discussion about setting up the meeting in Richmond and about economic development in Accomac.

Ms. Carter did mention a potential project involving Eyre Baldwin and the PSA. Mr. Parr mentioned the meeting last week with Bob Panek the potential option of scaling back the southern node to just service commercial areas.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:15 am.