

## Minutes

### Northampton County Planning Commission

#### Work Session

March 21, 2012

This was a work session of the Northampton County Planning Commission held on Tuesday, March 21, 2012, in the Board chambers located at 16404 Courthouse Road in Eastville, Va. The purpose of the meeting to begin review of comments and summaries received at the county-wide comp plan public workshops.

Those present were Chair Martina Coker, Vice-Chair Michael Ward, Dixon Leatherbury, Roberta Kellam, Mary Miller and John Wescoat, Jr. Absent from the meeting were David Fauber and Severn Carpenter.

Also attending were Sandra G. Benson, Director of Planning & Zoning; and Kay Downing, Administrative Assistant.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:05 p. m., and established a quorum.

After she had reviewed comments taken from the visioning work sheet questionnaire as processed by staff, Ms. Benson suggested that this information be presented in a more comprehensive and meaningful way so that responses are categorized. The visioning questionnaire information would then be used to see how it either contrasts or agrees with the existing comp plan. It should also be noted exactly how many attendees were at each meeting even if those participating did not return a work sheet. Later it can be decided if any follow-up meetings are warranted. She also informed the commission that no responses have been received on-line and that only a five (5) responses have been received that were sent by other means. She noted that after a draft vision plan is prepared a public meeting will be held to discuss the draft and to receive additional public input.

Commissioner Ward arrived at 7:12 p.m.

Ms. Benson noted that when comparing the last review period more comments were made this time about public education and the need for jobs and adequate medical care. While some felt there was a lack of support for public schools most others felt that the public education system was performing ineffectually.

Commissioner Miller stated that she did not actually hear what Ms. Benson described. It was her observation that more comments were made this time about preserving natural resources, historical resources, etc., than before.

Commissioner Kellam noted that most groups she observed worked towards finding common ground to benefit the county as a whole. It was her opinion that many comments were also

made about the need for more diverse recreational opportunities, including neighborhood parks and playgrounds.

Commissioner Miller also noted that comments were made concerning reusing commercial structures in towns where infrastructure exists.

Discussion was then held on why so many comments were made about the public perception that the county is not business friendly and is there anything that can be done to address this issue.

Commissioner Ward used the Hampton Inn as an example of how the commission can make it more difficult for business to operate in the county using the Hampton Inn as an example. However, Commissioner Kellam replied that it is the commission's responsibility to try to mitigate any types of adverse impacts caused by potential development patterns such as the proposed Hampton Inn near Cape Charles.

Commissioner Miller noted that the county and the Northampton County Chamber of Commerce have developed a handbook and checklists for anyone wishing to start a business in the county. However, it was noted that contact information for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) was omitted. Also, mentioned was the option of having a full-time or at least a part-time economic development staff person while recognizing that potential business owners must be responsible in their own endeavors in researching their options and county regulations.

The Chair observed that jobs were at the forefront of public comments. However, Commissioner Miller disagreed noting that recently there were 148 unfilled positions available in the county according to the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). It was her opinion that jobs were not the issue as much as a disconnect between the lack of education and training that is needed to fill available employment opportunities.

Also discussed was loss of population with Commissioner Miller noting that the county has gained population in the middle age bracket (50 to 59 years old) that generally require less services but there is a general aging of the population. It was also her opinion that there has been no loss of population in the 0 to 40 years age bracket.

Ms. Benson stated that the article in *The Virginia Newsletter* addresses population location maps that show out-migration and aging of the population with the county being included in both categories. Commissioner Miller noted that all rural areas are losing population to urban areas throughout the state. Ms. Benson agreed but noted that it is more pronounced this census period.

The Chair stressed that a draft vision be completed very soon in order to provide that information to the Stakeholders Group before its next meeting sometime in April. Ms. Benson encouraged everyone to read the current vision in order to start in-depth discussion at the regular April meeting and added that the vision is defined by how the public sees it.

Commissioner Wescoat suggested that data compilation list the top 8 issues with consensus plus an additional 2 be included or considered by the commission that originate from staff's professional opinion.

Commissioner Kellam suggested that poverty rates be included in the background data as it is non-existent in the current plan. This statistical information reflects what actually exists and the type of employment that is needed besides seasonal ones. It was noted by Mrs. Downing that prior plans have included not only poverty data but also public health data such as infant mortality rates as part of the background data. It was her opinion that ignoring or omitting poverty rates is deceptive about who we are and what is actually occurring in the county. It was suggested that the plan could define where poverty areas are in order to see if there is an answer to the issue. Commissioner Kellam noted that poverty includes the working poor as well and not just the unemployed and the single-mother syndrome factor. She added that minimum wage jobs in most cases cannot elevate a family above the poverty level. Over 75 percent of children in the public school system now receive some sort of public assistance for meals and that is a significant part of population.

Commissioner Wescoat noted that the plan cannot change human nature and personal choices that lead to poverty. Commissioner Ward agreed but poverty and low-income data can help define what types of housing may be needed in the future.

Commissioner Wescoat added that the plan should try to implement conditions that encourage entrepreneurial opportunities.

Ms. Benson stated that the plan should articulate who or what is responsible for certain things happening as envisioned. Commissioner Kellam added that the commission should perhaps prioritize goals and timeframes as the last part of the plan.

Commissioner Kellam stated that when she moved to the county in 2001 she could not find a decent, affordable place to live and noted that there is a difference between Section 8 low-income housing and affordable decent housing.

Commissioner Wescoat used Wagner Acres Subdivision as an example of a successful affordable housing development.

Commissioner Miller noted that the county still has 7,000 building lots and no affordable housing is being constructed on those.

Mrs. Downing explained that a nearby duplex rental is never vacant proving that this type of multi-family housing is needed, but almost nonexistent since this type of affordable housing has been discouraged by the county in her opinion.

Commissioner Wescoat expressed his opinion that the commission has not promoted multi-family housing including apartments and condominiums such as was proposed in Oyster.

Commissioner Kellam noted that the limited amount of commercial waterfront acreage should not be used for residential purposes and took exception to his opinion as she for one is not

opposed to multi-family housing. Since this appears to be a contentious issue, Commissioner Leatherbury suggested that the subject of condominiums and different types multi-family housing be addressed by the commission in the future.

During discussion of the data some predominant responses received during the workshops were noted as follows: moderate growth; the jobs - housing balance generally seen as important; preserve rural character, agriculture land, small towns, water access, water quality, groundwater recharge; recognition that infrastructure is needed to support growth; concern about blight – derelict/abandoned buildings and trash/litter; workforce preparedness , education; tourism; medical care; jobs/business friendly/small business development; and preserve historic assets.

Prior to adjourning Commissioner Kellam noted that the Public Service Authority (PSA) never sought the recommendation of the commission concerning preferable areas to locate central water and sewer systems. Commissioner Miller stated that a PSA is an independent political entity and is not required to get input from a commission.

**Adjourn**

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Kellam and seconded by Commissioner Miller at 8:44 p.m. and carried unanimously 6 to 0.

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Chair

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Secretary