

Minutes  
Northampton County Planning Commission  
April 20, 2016  
7:00p.m.

This was a recessed meeting of the Northampton County Planning Commission held on Tuesday April 20, 2015 in the main conference room in the County Administration Building located at 16404 Courthouse Road in Eastville, Virginia. The purpose of this meeting was to continue review of the comprehensive plan.

Those present – Chair Jacqueline Chatmon, Vice Chair Dixon Leatherbury, Mark Freeze, Michael Ward, and David Fauber

Absent – Kay Downing, and Sylvia Stanley

Also in attendance was Peter Stith, Long Range Planner, and Theresa Adkins, Recording Secretary

The meeting was called to order and a quorum was established.

The agenda was reviewed and accepted as presented.

The Commission discussed the draft Comprehensive Plan and made the edits as follows:

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As its name suggest, a Comprehensive Plan is a Commonwealth mandated policy document to guide the future development of a county. Its objective is to provide a framework for public officials which elevates daily and yearly decisions from an ad hoc process which focuses on short term considerations of individual projects and policies by creating a context that incorporates a long term perspective on a broad range of interconnected issues that could affect the health, safety and welfare of the county and its residents. Recognizing the limitations of trying to plan for 20 to 30 years into the future and the inevitability of unforeseen changes, the Comprehensive Plan is merely a template of issues and potential consequences to be considered in the decision making process, and not a law which dictates or requires adherence in individual cases. To keep the Plan current, it is to be reviewed every 5 years, which enables the community to evaluate its impact and update, modify or completely rewrite it as deemed necessary and appropriate.

Since 2000, the Board of Supervisors has adopted 2 comprehensive plans, one in 2001 and a second was completed in 2009, ~~which is sufficient time to evaluate the impact and relevance of these plans.~~

~~As noted in the introduction to the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, land and home values escalated during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which temporarily increased property tax revenues, but resulted in a substantial decrease in state aid to schools. Since the adoption of the 2009 plan, housing prices have declined. Between 2009 and 2014, property values decreased 20.26%, falling from a median value of \$211,700 to \$168,800. Higher housing costs have made it more difficult for working class and low income households to find affordable housing, and higher taxes imposed increased burdens on the poor and those on fixed incomes.~~ As noted in the introduction to the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, land and home values escalated during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, rising from a median value of \$78,700 in 2000 to \$211,700 in 2009, amounting to an increase of 168.99%. While this ~~for an which temporarily~~ increased property tax revenues, ~~but resulted in a substantial decrease in~~ it substantially decreased state aid to schools. Since the adoption of the 2009 plan, housing prices have declined. Between 2009 and 2014, property values decreased ~~20.26%~~ 23.24%, falling from a median value of \$211,700 to ~~\$168,800.~~ \$162,500. With the median household income increasing by 22.56% between 2000 and 2014, higher housing costs have made it more difficult for working class and low income households to find affordable housing, and higher property taxes imposed increased burdens on the poor and those on fixed incomes.

~~Meanwhile,~~ The property tax rate increased 38.87% between FY10 and FY16 and can only be expected to increase, given the need for new infrastructure and repairs to and possible replacement of existing educational facilities. With a decline in revenues from the sales tax, which fell by 19% between 2006 and 2014, the county has become more dependent upon the property tax, resulting in a 15% increase as a source of local revenues.

As property taxes and housing costs have increased, the median household income, in terms of constant dollars, has decreased, falling by 7.4% between 2000 and 2010. And between 2007 and 2013, the poverty rate increased 33%, rising from 18% of the population to 24%. **According to the GENI index in 2013, (most recent data available), Northampton County had the highest level of household income inequality in Virginia.**

~~Contrary to the projections of recent comprehensive plans,~~ The population of Northampton County has declined, decreasing by 7.39% between 2000 and 2014, and projections from the Census Bureau and the Weldon-Cooper Center expect this trend to continue.

With the decline in population has come a decline in the number of jobs in the county, which decreased by 10% between 2000-2011 and by 20.7% between 1999 and 2014. With an estimated loss of between 600 and 700 jobs as a result of the relocation of the hospital, the overall job loss in Northampton is expected to be over 30% in a 15 year period. Increasingly, residents are leaving the county to find work, or working in neighboring counties. In 1999, 918 residents lived in Northampton County and worked elsewhere, but by 2014, the number of county residents working outside the county increased to 4,202, while the number of residents living and working in the county declined from 3,953 to only 1,882.

When the Planning Commission began its review of the Comprehensive Plan in January of 2012, the data from the 2010 census was not available and the data from the prior plan had not been updated. Nonetheless, the process began with a series of visioning sessions to obtain public input into the planning.

The review of the 2009 Northampton Comprehensive Plan began in 2012 by seeking public input through a series of 7 publically noticed visioning sessions held at various locations throughout the county. These meetings began with a brief introduction about the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan, which was followed by participants breaking into small groups to list the assets and liabilities of the county, and its opportunities and challenges, after which each group presented its conclusions to the entire group.

Attendance at these sessions totaled 284 ~~out of a County population of 12,389. of which 39~~ **Thirty-nine** attended more than one session, ~~with~~ 24 attending 2 meetings, 9 attending 3 meetings, 5 attending 4 meetings and 1 attending all 7. **A questionnaire was distributed and completed by 184 of the attendees. people either fully or partially completed the questionnaire.** ~~While public involvement is always appreciated and encouraged, attendance at multiple meetings by individuals skews the results.~~ Roughly 21% of the participants who filled out the questionnaire provided indicated they lived in a town, and 5% indicated they owned property or businesses in the county but lived elsewhere. ~~Additionally, holding the sessions in the evenings in January and February presented obstacles to many residents, especially those with school age children, people with two jobs and second home owners, who constitute almost one-third of tax paying property owners. Other groups noticeably underrepresented were young people, minorities, and property owner associations.~~

On **natural** resource issues, 81% of the respondents **to the questionnaire** rated groundwater recharge **as** important or very important, with 71% rating septic suitability, 68% rating wetlands protection, 65% rating protection of conservation areas, 63% rating historic sites and 62% rating floodplain **protection** as important or very important. ~~Attendees were not asked to rank the importance of these issues, but clearly consideration of natural resources was a major concern of the participants.~~

### **Chamber of Commerce Visioning Worksheet Responses**

~~In order to expand the public input, the Northampton County Chamber of Commerce was asked to circulate the visioning worksheet to its members. While encouraging support for existing industries, schools, the rural character, and the recreational opportunities, the opportunity for business expansion from the growing space industry, and the importance of environmental considerations, Chamber respondents expressed the need for access to health care, continuing educational opportunities, economic and business development, development along Route 13, more meaningful employment and the improvement of secondary roads. Of particular interest was that the Comprehensive Plan be "comprehensive", addressing all elements of a vibrant community, including schools, public institutions, cultural amenities, transportation, utilities, public services and other major elements typical to a well-planned, well-managed and well-maintained community, and warned that "Attempting to establish a check or control on the rate of growth is not useful."~~

### **Staff Summary of Public Visioning Sessions**

~~Of the 284 attendants to the visioning sessions, 184 responded to the questionnaire. A staff tabulation of the comments from the seven public input visioning sessions prepared by staff, reported that a majority of the respondents (73%) considered a population growth rate of 2% over the next 20 years to be reasonable, and that 53% supported a growth rate of 3% or more a year, as opposed to only 5% favoring a 0% growth rate and 22% favoring a 1% growth rate. Translating these percentages to actual numbers, a 1% growth rate over 20 years would equal a population of 15,038, a 2% growth rate would equal 18,678, and a 3% increase would total 23,150. A 2% growth rate over 20 years would equal the county's population in 1930, and a 3% growth rate would double the county's current population.~~

A majority of the respondents (66%) considered a balance between jobs and housing to be important and very important. The participants generally indicated the opinion that historic and natural resources need to be protected, with a significant recognition of the importance of preserving groundwater recharge capacity.

## **OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

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### **Public Comment Period Input**

Every month, the Planning Commission holds a public meeting at which there is a public comment period during which any citizen has 3 minutes to offer comments on any topic not on the agenda, which would include comments on the Comprehensive Plan. Since the Commission initiated its work on the Comprehensive Plan in January, 2012, there have been 34 meetings during which citizens could offer input regarding the plan. ~~During in that entire-time,~~ only 5 people have addressed issues specifically related to the Comprehensive Plan and the review process. The substance of 4 of these comments concerned what the speakers felt was a lack of public input, and 2 were concerned about the lack of studies.

### **Public Input online at the Department of Planning and Zoning website**

Since February 2012 the Planning and Zoning Department has provided an opportunity for citizens to submit input ~~in~~ to the planning process on-line. In that time, no comments have been received relative to the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Stakeholders Visioning Sessions**

To obtain the views of specific sectors of the County's population, the Planning Commission appointed a Stakeholders Advisory Committee, originally composed of 102 members selected to represent diverse business, industrial, social, and community organizations, geographical and religious interests. The Stakeholders Group met on May 9, 2012 to review a vision statement that had been drafted by the staff. The participants broke into 5 groups, and, after discussing the draft, each group submitted comments. ~~and certain members submitted more detailed comments. While generally supportive of the draft,~~ There were areas that some groups felt required more attention and consideration, specifically education and workforce training,

economic and community development, community facilities, and the use of best management practices to prevent storm water runoff.

~~Representing~~ ~~The Coalition for Community Pride, Progress and Planning, Rev. Debbie Lee Bryant~~ submitted a detailed reply covering multiple issues, including ~~concern about the County's high poverty rate, sustainability, utility and service upgrades, blight, speed limits, affordable housing, good jobs, adequate health facilities, education, pollution, street improvements, increased police presence and enforcement, bike lanes and protection of environmentally sensitive areas. A particular concern was expressed about~~ the preservation of African-American communities in terms of maintaining their residential character, limiting density, traffic and commercial development, reducing poverty and crime, and increasing safety, access to health care and community services, and conveniences and concentrating heavy commercial development along Route 13. The organization also favored preserving the middle school and using closed schools for Community Centers and parks.

~~The Vaucluse Shores Residents' submission addressed the disparity in taxes paid by home owners and agricultural, aquaculture and forestry interests, the need for more code enforcement and high speed internet, the use of inmates to clean up abandoned and derelict properties, the need for more practical courses at the schools, and a "definite need for more industry and small business".~~

~~One in his~~ individual ~~submission, Mr. John Coker~~ expressed concern about lot sizes and setbacks and encouraged grandfathering them to provide consistency. Because of the large number of unbuilt subdivisions, he encouraged vacating some of the lots less they create the impression of a failing community, which was also reinforced by the large number of derelict buildings. He favored the need for more public beaches, but was concerned about taxes.

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~~A former Supervisor's Spencer Murray's~~ statement provided some background economic information in support of more managed commercial growth, especially along Route 13. , and ~~expressed the opinion that explained that much of the 2004 Board of Supervisors' policy to reduce growth and density and development along Route 13 was driven by fear of becoming a bedroom community, and argued that~~ "We need to pop some of the myths on which our comprehensive plan is founded on in order to develop a plan that creates a positive net growth for the county."

**Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee Response to the Draft Visioning Statement**

In 2011, the Board of Supervisors established a 10 member Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) for the purpose of creating an economic development plan for the County, and, as a secondary goal, to serve in a review function of the whole Plan. The Committee met 33 times over an 11 month period, and involved hearing from the zoning staff, the PSA, state transportation and development officials, including Virginia Resource Authority, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Assistant Secretary of Commerce and Trade, the Department of Environmental Quality, Senator Lynwood Lewis, Public Service Authority, and representatives of various business interests.

The CPAC response stated, in part, that "Northampton County is at a crisis point in terms of economic development and tax base to sustain the current level of services."

"The 2007 [*sic* - 2009] Comprehensive Plan was designed to retard both residential and commercial development including restricting access and construction along Route 13."

~~"The desired reduction in development has overwhelmingly succeeded.~~ The county has experienced no significant economic growth and three key indicators of a community's economic health are lower: population, jobs, and median income."

"The present focus and the Vision Draft are correct in emphasizing aquaculture, agriculture and tourism as our current economic drivers. However, we need to develop both additional attractions and amenities to support a healthy tourism industry. It is also necessary to develop other job producing businesses and industry to have a healthy and vibrant community."

~~"Development cannot be restricted to traditional development patterns in a modern financial society. A decade's long history shows that approach just does not work.~~ A vibrant town or village is the result of a well-employed population choosing to spend their time and funds near home. Traditions of providing families with opportunities to grow and prosper must also be respected in order to protect the villages and towns from economic decline."

With no further business the Chairman asked for a motion to adjourn. A motion to adjourn until May 3, 2016 was made by Commissioner Freeze and seconded by Commissioner Leatherbury. The motion carried with all in favor (5-0).

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Chairman

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Secretary