

Minutes  
Northampton County Planning Commission  
Recessed Meeting/Joint Work Session  
April 11, 2012

This was a recessed meeting of the Northampton County Planning Commission held on Tuesday, April 11, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. in the Social Services training room located at 5265 The Hornes in Eastville, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to continue review of the comprehensive plan, specifically, the draft revised vision statement and to hold a joint work session with the Northampton County Board of Supervisors.

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

Also attending were Sandra G. Benson, Director of Planning & Zoning; Peter Stith, Long Range Planner; and Kay Downing, Administrative Assistant.

The Chair called the commission meeting to order at 6:05 p. m., and established a quorum.

The agenda was reviewed and unanimously accepted 8 to 0 upon motion by Commissioner Kellam and second by Commissioner Leatherbury.

Ms. Benson explained how she had tried to streamline the existing vision statement by editing to incorporate those issues gleaned from public workshops and to delete issues that no longer appear relevant today. She noted that a few commissioners had submitted their own comments as well that were considered in this first draft.

Commissioner Ward arrived at 6:06 p.m.; Commissioner Wescoat at 6:08 p.m.; and Commissioner Miller at 6:12 p.m.

Commissioner Kellam thanked Ms. Benson for her efforts and stated that she was comfortable with the length of this vision given the anticipated scrutiny that will come from the community.

Commissioner Leatherbury expressed his opinion that the vision should be a more concise statement supported by other material. It was his view that the draft seems to include goals and on page 2 statements of fact. However, Ms. Benson clarified that the bullet points on page 2 are not statements yet, but actually what is envisioned as future statements of fact. Commissioner Leatherbury stated that he would prefer a very brief summary that can be remembered simply as a county vision statement.

Commissioner Kellam expressed her opinion that a short slogan type vision sounds like a marketing tool.

Commissioner Miller voiced her concern that a too general vision could be used to justify anything.

Commissioner Wescoat suggested implementation of an executive summary with overall vision followed by a set of goals.

The Chair submitted a draft using the vision statement of San Bernardino as a format. She suggested that perhaps an executive summary could be used with some sort of vision statement in addition to the language she submitted.

Commissioner Fauber suggested using the first line of major bullet points in Section 1.3.1. could be used as the vision.

Commissioner Kellam also suggested that the National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) definition of "coastal zone" be used for consistency.

Debate was held on whether to keep the word "primarily" in Section 1.3.1. Commissioner Miller expressed her opinion that the word "primarily" is too "equivocating". Other commissioners felt that it should remain. No consensus was reached at this point.

Commissioner Ward questioned the structure of the draft vision. He also expressed his concern about consistency between the vision and the rest of the plan. Ms. Benson explained that the draft takes both public comments and conditions into account. She noted that the final public hearing draft will reflect what the public wants versus what might actually be feasible given actual conditions of the data.

Commissioner Kellam stated that a New York community did not entertain public meetings until after data had been analyzed so people were reacting to the data first.

Commissioner Carpenter expressed his concern that continuing to use the phrase, "preserving traditional development pattern" would be construed as business as usual or keeping businesses out. Ms. Benson noted that the phrase refers to physical development patterns of keeping growth in and around the towns, etc., and is not intended to imply that development of any type is to be discouraged.

Discussion was halted at 7:00 p.m. in order to conduct a joint meeting with Board of Supervisors.

Those Supervisors present were Chair Oliver H. Bennett, Vice-Chair Willie C. Randall, Richard L. Hubbard and Larry Lemond. Absent from the meeting was Laurence J. Trala.

Also attending were Katie Nunez, County Administrator; and Janice Williams, Assistant to the County Administrator.

The Board reviewed the Planning Commission's Work Plan for 2011 and the summary information as to which tasks have been completed and which tasks remain. It was the consensus of the Board that the on-going Comprehensive Plan review and update was the top priority for the Commission.

When asked by the Planning Commission what the Board's top priority was, Mr. LeMond replied that the Board "was all about business and jobs". He said that it seems that the existing Comprehensive Plan "locks things down too much." He said that he was interested in seeing a Comprehensive Plan that was business-friendly and is very interested in seeing the recommendations that will come from the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee.

Mr. Hubbard stated that it was imperative to have land already zoned commercial which contain a reasonable number of commercial uses allowed by right. Water and sewer capability is also important.

Mr. Randall advised that the Planning Commission needs to start with the Board's basic goals and objectives that were developed during its Strategic Planning Retreat last month; these will "set the tone" for the Comprehensive Plan. He said that Northampton County has the reputation for being "a tough community to do business in", and that we need to change this perception. The feared population explosion has not occurred.

Mr. Bennett stated that he hears a lot of comments on the need for applications to be more user-friendly – the large amount of "red tape" involving a long and expensive process. He stated that Northampton County is business-friendly and that businesses are welcome in the County. Commissioner Kellam responded that reputable firms are accustomed to dealing with applications and the public process involved.

Ms. Benson noted that currently staff is analyzing the input received through the public information sessions and in response to Mr. Bennett's question, replied that staff is making every effort to guide customers through the application process.

Mr. Hubbard added that he also hears from visitors to the office that there is an "attitude" among staff that "it can't be done" in Northampton County. Ms. Benson suggested that perhaps this meeting is not the proper format for discussion of staff actions.

Mr. Randall questioned the planning staff as to whether any thought had been given to the creation of a commercial zone with many uses being allowed by right. Ms. Benson responded that the process is not evolved to that point at this time and that staff continues to analyze and develop data for the Planning Commission's review based on comments received at the public information sessions.

There was a brief discussion relative to the creation of a "shovel-ready" industrial park, which had been mentioned during the Board's Strategic Planning Retreat. Ms. Roberta Kellam of the

Planning Commission stated that such rezoning would eliminate the Board's ability to generate proffers for any proposed project.

Mr. LeMond noted that it "goes back to perception". In his 16 years here in the County, multiple companies have approached him (and the railroad) about locating in the County and nothing has materialized. He said that you have to "knock down those roadblocks" and get a successful project to locate here; i.e., you "need to grease the skids" and do "whatever it takes."

When Commissioner Coker asked the Board what they had heard was the main reason for businesses not locating in Northampton County, Mr. Randall replied lack of infrastructure.

Commissioner Ward stated that the Board is putting the Planning Commission in a position of having to make choices for areas of growth when there is no indication from the land owners that they are agreeable to same. As it relates to water and wastewater, it was noted that the Eastern Shore Public Service Authority (ESPSA) is mandated to follow the Comprehensive Plan as it relates to areas of future growth. When Commissioner Kellam stated that a presentation from the PSA would be helpful to the Commission, the Board directed the County Administrator to request same from the PSA.

When discussing relevant criteria for future economic growth, it was noted that railroad and highway access, as well as proximity to water and sewer capability, were crucial elements. Of course, the Future Land Use Map does indicate areas planned for commercial and industrial activity. Once those areas are plotted, the zoning and other ordinances can be aligned to it, as well as providing lists of allowed uses.

Commissioner Miller noted that there is an existing floating overlay district that may be helpful to the Board, calling it a "good marketing tool". However, Ms. Nunez explained that in order to implement a floating overlay district it, too, would require a zoning map amendment public hearing process.

One of the continuing work tasks noted was the completion of Town Edge Plans. It was noted that the Planning Commission has not been very successful in its attempts to work with the some of the towns, despite several overtures. Commissioner Kellam said that these relationships need to be improved. If the "town edge" concept survives the on-going Comprehensive Plan Review process, the County Administrator suggested that it be renamed "County Edge" as these areas are targeted to be the County's growth areas adjacent to the towns – not areas of expansion for the towns. She also stated that she feels that the County "has been held hostage by the towns' inability to come to the table" on the issue of the Town Edge Plans.

Mr. Hubbard continued his earlier comments by stating that he felt that three separate areas need to be planned: industrial, traditional commercial, and retail.

The Board reviewed the other work tasks remaining for 2011 as well as those planned for 2012. When questioned by Chairman Bennett, the County Administrator indicated that the

Commission's proposed work tasks for 2012 appear to be appropriate, although she noted that the Chesapeake Bay TMDL issue may need to be added, either under the Comprehensive Plan Review process or as a separate issue.

Mr. Hubbard left the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

The Board and Commission conducted a general discussion of a capital improvement plan and its role as an implementation tool of the Comprehensive Plan.

With the absences of Mr. Hubbard and Mr. Trala, the Board agreed to a continued review of the Planning Commission's Work Plan and will bring this item back for action at its April 23<sup>rd</sup> work session.

The Board recessed at 8:44 p.m.

**Recess:**

At 8:50 p.m. motion was made by Commissioner Miller, seconded by Commissioner Wescoat, that the commission meeting be recessed until 7:00 p.m., on Tuesday, April 17, 2012 in the downstairs front conference room of the County Administration Building. The motion carried 8 to 0.

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Chair

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Secretary