

Minutes
Northampton County Planning Commission
Work Session
July 17, 2013

This was a recessed meeting of the Northampton County Planning Commission held on Wednesday, July 17, 2013 in the main conference room in the County Administration Building located at 16404 Courthouse Road in Eastville, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to continue review of the comprehensive plan.

Those present were Chair Martina Coker, Vice-Chair Michael Ward, Dixon Leatherbury, Sylvia Stanley, Roberta Kellam and Jacqueline Chatmon, the latest appointee. Absent from the meeting was Severn Carpenter.

Also attending were Charles McSwain, Director of Economic Development; and Peter Stith, Long Range Planner.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. and a quorum established.

Review and acceptance of the agenda

The agenda was revised to include a report on the zoning code review process. Motion to accept as revised was made by Commissioner Kellam, seconded by Commissioner Leatherbury, and carried 6 to 0.

Comprehensive Plan Review

Discussion was held on the format style of Part I with various changes made. The Commission also discussed how content should be achieved; that data in Part II should not be reiterated; to include an explanation as to why each goal was chosen; and to include specific maps as required by Code.

Commissioner Kellam suggested that a checklist of all information required in a comp plan be submitted to the Commission for future reference.

By consensus the Commission agreed that staff should prepare the first reformatted draft of Economic Section Part I.

During discussion of the Economic Section, Commissioner Kellam noted her confusion that a good portion of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) Report had focused on raising tax revenue for the county. It was her opinion that other perspectives should be presented since a better economy brings benefits to the people. Economic development should emphasize innovative economic strategies according to her research. She added that the two perspectives are not mutually

exclusive and are connected to some extent. She also added that an attitude of allowing everything and anything as economic development may result in creating adverse impacts such as depressing property values.

Commissioner Chatmon disagreed that the CPAC report was mostly focused on producing tax revenue. It was her perspective that the idea is to bring jobs to all socio-economic levels represented in the county. However, consideration must be given to providing better work-force training and education in order to change the local economic growth of the county. County revenue and economic development cannot be separated.

Commissioner Kellam noted her opinion that county revenue is secondary.

Mr. McSwain noted that goals and tasks are related to achieving designated goals. Attracting new industry and businesses can be accomplished using various means such as offering incentives to get the kind of jobs desired and to reduce unemployment.

The Chair noted that the county should not open up zoning regulations simply to attract businesses that would create adverse impacts. Commissioner Kellam agreed noting that the Commission has broad sweeping considerations that investigate many different factors. The current zoning code allows the Commission to be involved in a great, great number of decision-making aspects. The Chair added that the county should be aware of unintended consequences that could result from permitting any type of economic development.

Mr. McSwain then gave a brief summary related to the zoning code review process being conducted by staff, the County Administrator and legal counsel as directed by the Board. The following information was provided:

- ◆ Very few changes are proposed to the county zoning map.
- ◆ The majority of changes are in the text.
- ◆ It is anticipated that the review and proposed amendments will be completed mid or late August at which time the draft will be sent to the Board for its review.
- ◆ The Board will submit proposed revisions to the Planning Commission for review and subsequent public hearing.
- ◆ Erosion & Sediment Control, Flood Plain regulations, Storm Water Management regulations, and Chesapeake Bay Act regulations will become stand-alone county codes.
- ◆ The review process has been determined to meet legal Code requirements since the Board is authorized to initiate zoning text amendments.

Referring to a power point presentation made to the Board by Mr. McSwain, Commissioner Kellam took issue with the misleading concept that environmental protection excludes economic and affordable housing development since the environment here enhances economic opportunities especially tourism.

Mr. McSwain noted that while all points are important decisions regarding priorities and options must be determined. He then used affordable housing as an example noting that site built homes are a better long-term investment than single-wide mobile homes. Both public and private affordable housing options should be investigated. The New Roads Community is a good model that provides different types of safe and affordable multi-family and single-family options. However, educating the public about this option is also a key factor.

Commissioner Kellam stated her opinion that environmental protection can be an equal priority.

Commissioner Chatmon expressed her opinion that balance is needed and regulations should help keep that balance intact.

Commissioner Ward asked how would encouraging a site built home versus a single-wide mobile home translate into the zoning code. Mr. McSwain answered that the county can educate the public about other affordable housing options even though it cannot prohibit the use of single-wide mobile homes.

Commissioner Chatmon noted that individual income has to be a consideration. The Chair added that low-incomes are typical in rural areas.

Mr. McSwain agreed but also stated that many residents now live in unsafe, substandard housing that needs to be replaced or removed. To strictly enforce a substandard housing code would immediately create a homeless situation for these citizens. One suggestion was that the county could move toward providing subsidized affordable housing alternatives by using either public funds, when available, or private investment incentives. However, at the present time he was not encouraged about public funding after having a long discussion with state representatives about subsidized housing options.

Prior to adjourning the chair asked what the basis was for the proposed zoning code review and revision. Mr. Stith replied that this was the Board's directive.

Commissioner Kellam stated that proposed amendments will be vetted against the existing comprehensive plan.

Commissioner Chatmon questioned how the zoning code could be modified before the review process of the comp plan is completed.

The Chair noted that proposed amendments are legal when initiated by the Board although logic of doing so before comprehensive plan approval is illogical.

Mr. Ward questioned how the Commission could simultaneously continue its review of the comp plan while reviewing proposed zoning code amendments from the Board.

Mr. McSwain noted that staff is proceeding with its review based on the criteria of the Board as presented by the County Administrator.

Based on comments made by Commissioner Ward, there is a public perception that real estate values will increase for subdivision purposes based upon speculation about proposed amendments that the Board will make to the zoning code. The Chair added that there are now 7,000 undeveloped subdivided lots resulting from past zoning regulations.

Commissioner Kellam stated that she may be able to provide a portion of the Environment and Natural Resources Section Part I for review at the August 6 meeting.

Mr. Stith stated that the Commission will be conducting several public hearings in August related to affordable housing, one being a single-wide home and the other site built.

When asked, the Chair noted that the CPAC Report will be discussed at a later time.

A copy of pertinent Code regulations and responsibilities related to the authority of a Planning Commission will be provided in the August agenda packet as compiled by the Chair.

Adjourn/Recess

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m. upon motion by Commissioner Chatmon and second by Commissioner Kellam.

Chair

Secretary