

Minutes

Northampton County Planning Commission

Work Session

August 15, 2012

This was a recessed meeting of the Northampton County Planning Commission held on Wednesday, August 15, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. in the upstairs conference room located at 16404 Courthouse Road in Eastville, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to continue review of the comp plan vision statement and public comments.

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

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

The meeting was called to order and a quorum established.

Motion to accept the agenda by adding one item to allow discussion of the Board of Supervisors work session under Item 6, was made by Commissioner Kellam. Second was made by Commissioner Miller and the motion carried unanimously 6 to 0.

Discussion of questions received from the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) was held. Commissioners Miller, Coker and Ward had provided written responses that were distributed. However, Commissioner Kellam questioned the need to respond at all as it was her opinion that the questions were not particularly helpful and seemed political, leading and were basically assumptions related to the local economic situation and uncontrolled growth since there are no benchmarks or criteria standard connected to the questions. She voiced her concern about responding in writing as a public body, especially since review of all data is not completed and because of potential future litigation. After expressing her concerns Commissioner Kellam stated that she would discuss the questions but would not respond in writing at this time.

When asked, Mrs. Thornton explained that Peter Lawrence, a member of CPAC, had submitted the questions at the CPAC's directive. The intent was to obtain insight on how the commission viewed the economic section of the comp plan.

When asked by Commissioner Leatherbury, Mrs. Thornton defined the duties delegated to the CPAC by the Board of Supervisors as being: (1) develop the economic plan that was never accomplished as called for in the implementation strategy of the existing plan; (2) review draft comp plan updates being formulated by the commission; (3) review the existing zoning

ordinance and provide feedback on its compliance with the existing comp plan; (4) look at the Town Edge District to see if it comports with individual town zoning and visions; (5) review the existing zoning map to see if any expansion is warranted related to existing industrial/commercial districts; and (6) make recommendations about any new potential industrial/commercial zoning district areas. She added that the CPAC has only received the draft vision to date from the commission.

Commissioner Kellam stated that it was her understanding that CPAC was to provide its economic research data to the commission.

The Chair stated that the commission had submitted information and questions to the CPAC which were never specifically answered. It was her understanding that the planning commission and the CPAC were to work together for the common good of the county and its residents in order to specifically address the realities of the local economy and to make specific recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

Mrs. Thornton then noted that Mr. Pat Coady, a member of CPAC, was present and asked if he would care to respond to the Chair about why CPAC had sent its questionnaire to the commission.

Mr. Coady stated that he would respond in a personal context only and not officially for CPAC. It was somewhat troublesome to him that CPAC's first submittal to the commission was not seriously considered as was stated by some other public groups as well. There was some confusion at the time as it appeared that two different goals were trying to be accomplished.

Commissioner Kellam stated that the commission had given CPAC data gleaned from public comment meetings for its review but what was received back from CPAC did not actually reference or address that data in the commission's assessment. She noted that the draft vision statement submitted for comment was only 4 sentences long. The second document submitted for review was a summary of public comments and data that serve as a small portion of the entire plan.

Mrs. Thornton explained also that part of the process was to verify that the summarized public comments correctly reflected public comments made at those meetings.

Mr. Coady stated that CPAC had looked at the draft vision and supporting documentation with the assumption that it was to reflect what the CPAC and the citizens' groups had submitted. It was his opinion that the questions resulted from a large degree of miscommunication perhaps and that the process seems somewhat backwards.

The Chair stated that data analysis has not been finished which will influence a large portion of how the plan will be developed.

Commissioner Kellam agreed with Mr. Coady that the review process has been somewhat incoherent in her opinion.

Mr. Coady suggested that at some timely point in the update process the commission and CPAC should conduct a joint roundtable work session after enough data is gathered. He noted that CPAC is charged with the preparation of a county economic development plan that was never developed even though it was stipulated in the current plan. The CPAC is to also identify anything within the current plan that impedes economic development and to make a recommendation. To explain how CPAC developed its questionnaire, question 3 related to Route 13 as a dangerous highway was used an example. As part of their data gathering the regional director of the DOT provided very detailed statistics and other information. The VDOT data notes that real accident statistics are not that high except for one stretch of roadway and that half of the accidents occur on secondary roads as well. Therefore, there is a need to determine if that data should prohibit all development on Route 13 or is there possible solution that would alleviate problems reflected in the statistics. Therefore, question 3 posed by CPAC was gleaned from real data. He stressed that the questionnaire was formulated using real data with the intended goal of finding out how the commission views those specific issues from a conceptual viewpoint.

As a point of information, the Chair noted that Supervisor Randall has expressed his opinion that the greatest impediment to economic development is the lack of county infrastructure.

Commissioner Kellam stated that the county has no authority over the U. S. 13 access plan and that the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is the ultimate authority. Recent small scale economic development has been impeded by the high cost of installing mandated highway entrances. However, Mrs. Thornton noted that the county does have authority to some extent related to the highway corridor regulations.

Mr. Coady agreed and noted that these kinds of issues must be addressed in terms of highway development improvement plus utilities like water and sewer which are viable parts of economic development. However, it needs to be determined what is smart development and what is not. VDOT does enforce highway regulations which are based on guidance given by the county. For instance, a special highway district could be adopted or perhaps funds or loans can be developed by the county to pay for highway entrance improvements if local businesses wish to locate along certain areas of the highway.

The Chair noted that the CPAC questionnaire could be construed as somewhat inflammatory in her opinion.

Commissioner Miller stated that it was obvious to her the people who formulated the CPAC questionnaire were inexperienced with developing a comp plan. She noted that CPAC may not have valid data and that both the commission and CPAC should have the same information before a joint meeting is scheduled.

Commissioner Miller also stated that VDOT will not be offering any highway improvements and has cut the Six-Year Plan.

Commissioner Ward noted that he had responded to CPAC questions since one commissioner's response should not be construed as the sole view of the commission. Personally, he did not

find the questions inflammatory or out of line but believed that some lines of communication are not open. He was just made aware that the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission (ANPDC) was writing an economic strategic plan as well.

Commissioner Miller suggested that the ANPDC plan be provided to both the commission and CPAC for information purposes.

Commissioner Ward stated that a recent real estate appraisal had contained a reference to the June 15th news article that inferred there was a conflict between the commission and CPAC in developing the comp plan. He added that this reference had impacted the appraisal as well.

Commissioner Kellam once again expressed her concern about the public misconception that the commission is not fulfilling its responsibilities due to erroneous news reporting. She also agreed that a joint meeting with CPAC members is warranted. It is imperative that personal opinions not be incorporated into this comp plan update on any level including answering the CPAC questionnaire from a personal viewpoint.

Commissioner Miller noted that both the commission and CPAC must have the same information before a meeting is scheduled. She also noted that any comp plan update must recognize the fiscal restraints of the county.

Mr. Coady expressed his personal opinion that the Board may have set up this scenario for potential conflict when authorizing the CPAC to report directly to the Board. He acknowledged that the commission is specifically charged with drafting the comp plan and not CPAC. He agreed that a joint roundtable discussion may be beneficial. In answer to Commissioner Miller's statement about fiscal restraints, he noted that CPAC positively considers costs in its discussions.

Commissioner Ward suggested that checks and balances can be a productive process when challenging or reviewing a draft update of the comp plan. Such endeavors will ultimately make the comp plan easier to defend. He also noted that ultimately the Board of Supervisors will "own" the plan once adopted.

Mrs. Thornton expressed concern about the process of information sharing between the two groups.

Mr. Coady noted that the ANPDC is mandated to conduct its own economic study every 5 years and that the Federal government recognizes the ANPDC as the official economic development agency for the Eastern Shore.

By consensus it was decided that written responses to the CPAC questionnaire presented tonight be considered as a working document only and Mrs. Thornton is to issue a cover memo to that affect. Copies were provided to Mr. Coady for his information.

The Chair noted that there is a need to determine each group's status in its data analysis.

Mrs. Thornton expressed concern that trying to coordinate data and analysis will get cumbersome and is in conflict with the original concept how the CPAC and commission would operate.

Commissioner Wescoat failed to see how answering questions from CPAC was productive and should not be debated between the two groups. If a joint meeting is held then an agenda should be established with each group's chair reporting on progress to date then perhaps proceed with an outline of how to advance the process.

Commissioner Kellam noted that the joint meeting would be a good opportunity for the commission to fully explain the goals and vision segments of the comp plan so that there is no more confusion.

A doodle poll will be conducted in order to determine a date for a joint round table discussion in the near future.

The commission continued review of the latest version of the vision statement as drafted and reformatted by Mrs. Thornton.

The following revisions were made to the draft revised vision dated 8-14-12.

1. The vision should be located front and center of the document and not buried in the text.
2. Graphics and/or photographs should be incorporated to enhance public perception
3. List and renumber Section 1.3.1 first then follow with Section 1.3, followed by themes, data, etc.
4. Include direct quotes from the public in the Appendices
5. Incorporate the executive summary right after the Vision
6. Provide data files electronically on the county's website
7. Strategies should come first after the introductory section
8. Eliminate all incorporated towns' comprehensive plans from the Appendices
9. Page 3, Community Facilities and Utilities, third bullet, delete the first "the" and change the second "the" to "all"
10. Page 3, Community Facilities and Utilities, add a new bullet to address transportation
11. Page 4, Natural Environment, third bullet in this section, should read, "Implement actions to mitigate the impact on ground and surface water of storm water run-off from agricultural uses, commercial uses and developed areas."
12. Page 4, change the title of Section 1.3 from "Vision for Northampton County" to "The Planning Process"

Under other comp plan update items, the Chair will consult with Jeff Walker about a definition for "clean water" discussed at a stakeholders' group meeting.

Under public input themes, a regulatory environment under commercial and economic development should be encouraged.

Commissioner Miller suggested that providing ways to sell local products should be included such as a farmers market.

When suggested by Commissioner Miller, Mrs. Thornton stated that the words “where appropriate” are not needed since the plan itself will flesh out areas best suited for infrastructure. She noted that the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) will depict those areas once the update is finalized.

Mrs. Thornton noted that a draft report related to a local phone survey conducted through the auspices of CPAC is now available and a presentation will be held during at the Board’s August 27th work session at 5:00 p.m.

Commissioner Miller requested that phone survey questions, raw data, process and methodology be forwarded to the commission for information purposes.

Prior to adjourning Commissioner Wescoat encouraged commissioners to give no credence to erroneous, misleading and misquoted newspaper articles in the future as was the case in the June 15th edition of *The Eastern Shore Post*.

Mrs. Thornton distributed a memo from Andrew Barbour related to agri-tourism issues for the commission’s information.

Adjourn:

At 9:25 p.m., motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Kellam, seconded by Commissioner Miller and carried unanimously.

Chair

Secretary