

AT A MEETING OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION ON DECEMBER 11, 2013 IN THE BOARD ROOM, SECOND FLOOR, COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER, CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA:

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Rice, Chair, called the meeting to order.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:

Ms. Disney established the presence of a quorum.

Present: Bryan Rice, Chair
Joel Donahue, Vice-Chair
Cindy W. Disney, Secretary
Coy Allen, Member
Sonia Hirt, Member
Scott Kroll, Member
Frank Lau, Member
Chris Tuck, Board of Supervisors Liaison
Brea Hopkins, Development Planner
Dari Jenkins, Planning & Zoning Administrator
Erin Puckett, Senior Program Assistant
Steven Sandy, Planning Director

Absent: Bryan Katz, Member

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

On a motion by Mr. Donahue, and seconded by Ms. Disney and unanimously carried the agenda was approved.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA:

On a motion by Mr. Donahue, and seconded by Ms. Disney, and unanimously carried the consent agenda was approved.

PUBLIC ADDRESS:

Mr. Rice opened the public address. However, there being no comments the public address was closed.

DELEGATION:

Virginia Tech Environmental Studio Class Presentation

Mr. Sandy introduced the Virginia Tech studio class, and explained that they worked on a project regarding the Southgate connector parkway. He stated that they were here tonight to present the final report to the Commission, and added that Commissioners should feel free to ask them questions.

Jess Martin, appointed speaker for the studio class, introduced the five students involved in the studio. She then introduced the Southgate Parkway project, explaining that the intersection will eventually be moving south towards the Corporate Research Center (CRC). Out of several initial plans, VDOT selected the final plan a few years ago. The need for such a parkway was in part due to the traffic on Prices Fork Road, which is almost at maximum capacity.

Ms. Martin explained that any future development will be limited by the existing environment. Both the Town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County will have an influence on this development, and how it preserves or disrupts the environment. The county's Village Plan identifies preservation as being of major importance. This includes goals to protect water quality and preserve rural character. Mixed use development in this area could help meet these goals by sustaining population growth and allowing for more open space.

Ms. Martin further explained how the class used GIS to analyze environmental factors including land cover, slope, and other potential limits to developability. From there, they developed a recommended build out scenario, which includes some commercial, civic, and residential areas as well as green space. A strategy to further support this is to encourage private landowners to preserve biodiversity and green space. Passive conservation, such as expansion of Agriculture and Forestal Districts may also help preserve green space. Water management should also be a concern, especially as the New River is the second most impaired river in the US. There should also be a focus on maintaining the rural character and natural heritage of this area.

Ms. Hirt asked for clarification on what was meant by low-impact development, a term used several times in the presentation.

Ms. Martin explained that the studio group felt that this overlapped with cluster development. In other words, this development would have a reduced area of impervious surface, clustered development, communal green space, etc.

Mr. Rice asked where Stroubles Creek originates.

One of the students answered that it originates in Blacksburg. Ms. Martin added that it is mostly channeled under the Virginia Tech campus.

Mr. Tuck asked if the class looked into how close the parkway will come to the proposed Harvey Lee Price Park.

Ms. Martin indicated that they were not aware of this park.

Mr. Tuck explained that it is a proposed 45 acre park off of Thomas Lane along Stroubles Mill. At one time a private group wanted to give the land to the county but was turned down; there are now plans for a private park.

Mr. Rice asked why the county turned it down.

Mr. Tuck explained that some citizens didn't want a park there because of a potential increase in traffic, as well as concerns about teens loitering and drinking there.

Ms. Martin asked if Mr. Tuck thought that citizens would dislike the trail proposed in this presentation for the same reason.

Mr. Tuck said that he knew there were some people against a park; many had signed a petition previously.

Mr. Rice added that this is an issue of public perception.

Mr. Tuck further stated that many of these concerns came from past bad experiences, such as problems in Plum Creek with vandalism in a park.

Ms. Martin suggested that trails, as they are more of a linear park, may be perceived somewhat differently.

Mr. Donahue commented that the adjacent neighborhood is a cul-de-sac neighborhood, so additional traffic coming to the park may still be an issue.

Mr. Lau asked if this was an area owned by Virginia Tech.

Mr. Tuck confirmed that yes, the area around it is owned by Tech.

Mr. Rice commented that any proposed park would probably run into similar situations elsewhere. People want parks and walking trails, but not in their neighborhood.

Ms. Martin concluded that the studio group will send their finalized report next week.

Mr. Rice and the Commission thanked the students for their work.

OLD BUSINESS:

None presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

Election of Officers (Nominating Committee)

Mr. Rice asked Mr. Lau for the Committee's recommendations.

Mr. Lau said that the committee suggested asking Mr. Rice to continue on as Chairman until his second term expires in June 2014. Mr. Lau noted that the Vice Chair could then take over as Chair, or the Commission could hold an interim election. The committee recommended asking Ms. Disney to continue as Secretary. Finally, Mr. Lau said that the committee recommended either Mr. Donahue or Mr. Lau as Vice Chair.

Mr. Rice said that he would be happy to continue on as Chair until June if the Commission voted that way.

A motion was made by Mr. Lau, and seconded by Mr. Kroll to reappoint Mr. Rice as Chair of the Planning Commission.

Ayes: Allen, Disney, Donahue, Hirt, Kroll, Lau, Rice

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Mr. Lau reiterated that the committee nominated Mr. Donahue and himself as Vice Chair, until June.

Mr. Donahue commented that his first term is up in June so he will need to be reappointed by the Board.

A motion was made by Ms. Disney, and seconded by Ms. Hirt to appoint Mr. Lau as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission.

Ayes: Allen, Disney, Hirt, Lau, Rice

Nayes: Kroll

Abstain: Donahue

A motion was made by Mr. Lau, and seconded by Mr. Kroll to reappoint Ms. Disney as Secretary of the Planning Commission.

Ayes: Allen, Disney, Donahue, Hirt, Kroll, Lau, Rice

Nayes: None

Abstain: None

2014 Work Program Discussion

Mr. Sandy reminded the Commission of the major projects for 2014 that were discussed at the previous meeting. These included: continuing to work on LDO, working with the schools to administer the Safe Routes to School grants for Auburn and Belview, finishing the transportation chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, continuing work on the 911 address consolidation project, and continuing other regional activities and AFD reviews, among other items. He further noted that the work program is a fluid document and can change in the future.

Mr. Kroll asked if Mr. Sandy had any updates on the status of filling the Planning Director position, as the new director may have some input into the Work Program.

Mr. Sandy said that mid to late January will probably be the earliest that someone new is brought on board. He understands that there have been approximately 28 applicants, and interviews should be held shortly.

Mr. Lau commented that as far as ongoing projects go, Prices Fork should be of major concern, especially as contentious situations with student housing continue to develop.

Mr. Kroll agreed and mentioned that he would like to discuss that in more detail during the transportation plan work session.

Mr. Sandy commented that the Prices Fork Village Plan is a high Work Program priority for this reason. He added that he still hopes a joint meeting with the Blacksburg Planning Commission will become possible in the next few months.

Mr. Lau said that as some of these projects will be coming soon, within the next year, that there is not a lot of time for discussion or to make changes.

Mr. Kroll asked to what extent the transportation chapter of the Comprehensive Plan deals with land use in the Prices Fork area. He added that we need to think about student housing and other development before finalizing the chapter.

Mr. Sandy agreed, but added that we have to send the plan to VDOT for review, which can take up to 90 days. Then, we will still need to hold a public hearing. We can wait until after the joint meeting to submit the plan to VDOT, if the Commission prefers.

Mr. Kroll asked if the future land use map was included in this section.

Mr. Sandy said that it is in a different section.

Mr. Kroll said that he agrees with moving forward with the transportation chapter, and as Mr. Sandy suggests, the review period can be used to discuss some of these Prices Fork issues. He commented that the joint meeting should be a priority, and asked if we can get something on the calendar as soon as possible to begin some of these discussions. He suggested offering some dates in January and February and seeing how they respond.

Mr. Sandy supported this and suggested offering January 14th or 15th, or February 18th or 19th as possible dates. He said that he could look into meeting at Blacksburg High School or Prices Fork Elementary School.

Mr. Sandy also commented that it may be possible to work with the MPO to perform a Prices Fork corridor study.

Mr. Kroll asked if money was available for this.

Mr. Sandy said yes, there is funding each year for studies.

WORK SESSION:

On a motion by Mr. Donahue and seconded by Ms. Disney and unanimously carried, the Commission entered into the work session.

Comprehensive Plan Transportation Chapter Update

Mr. Sandy stated that Ms. Puckett has worked on putting together and organizing the draft transportation chapter. He added that crash data was just provided by VDOT this week so it is not included in the document yet.

Mr. Kroll suggested identifying high crash intersections as well as percent increase in the number of crashes to identify trends.

Mr. Sandy agreed that this was a good idea, adding that VDOT sometimes has money available for safety improvements, so it would be beneficial to know where improvements are needed.

Mr. Kroll added that in some places, this may be accomplished with sight distance improvements or similar small projects. He further inquired as to whether the change in functional classification to Route 11/460 discussed during the recent Elliston-Lafayette rezoning has been done yet, or if there are any other expected changes in the county.

Mr. Sandy answered that he does not know of any other functional classification changes pending. As for the pending change for Route 11/460, there is no known date as to when VDOT will adopt it. If that occurs before the chapter is finalized, it can be included. Mr. Sandy added that if all members are in favor, staff can move forward with submitting the plan to VDOT. Any comments will then be given to the Commission, and they can take as long as needed to discuss, hold a public hearing, etc.

On a motion by Mr. Donahue and seconded by Ms. Disney and unanimously approved, the Commission came out of work session.

LIAISON REPORTS:

- Board of Supervisors – Mr. Tuck reported that there should be a contract within two (2) weeks for the former Price Fork Elementary School site. The Board is also encouraging Blacksburg to assist in the sale of the old Blacksburg Middle School property. Additionally, it has been proposed that Elliott Creek Road be abandoned and given back to landowners.
- Agriculture & Forestal District – No report.
- Blacksburg Planning Commission – No report.
- Christiansburg Planning Commission – No report.
- Economic Development Committee – Mr. Rice reported that Mr. Morris gave an update on the second phase of the CRC which included Rack Space and a jet propulsion lab.
- Public Service Authority – Mr. Donahue reported that there was a proposed tie between Town and County water lines in the Merrimac area. Warm Hearth will now connect to water in this area instead of connecting Town water. There is a new water treatment facility out near the arsenal.
- Parks & Recreation – Mr. Kroll was unable to attend the meeting but was able to obtain notes from the Director. He reported that there are concerns about the proposed spur trail from Huckleberry Ridge to the Huckleberry Trail, as the grade is causing safety concerns. The Board also received a recommendation from Parks and Recreation to change the designation of an AEP parcel to make it more marketable for the county to sell.

Mr. Tuck said that Ms. Perkins has promised her district that this property will be a park, but there is not much support currently.

- Radford Planning Commission –No report.
- School Board – No report.
- Tourism Council – Vacant
- Planning Director's Report – Mr. Sandy reminded the Commissioners of the Certified Planning Commissioner program coming up in January for those who have not yet attended.

Mr. Kroll commented that he will attend.

MEETING ADJOURNED:

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Chairman

Secretary