

# LANCASTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

## Minutes

November 17, 2011

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Lancaster County Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Board meeting room of the Lancaster County Administration Building, Lancaster, Virginia.

Present were David Jones, Chairman, Tara Booth, Steve Sorensen, Ty Brent, David Chupp and Glenn Pinn.

Also present were Butch Jenkins, Board of Supervisors Representative, Don Gill, Planning/Land Use Director, Audrey Thomasson, Rappahannock Record, Rich Steensma, Virginia Department of Forestry, Nick Ferriter, Charles Costello and others.

Mr. Jones asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes of the September 15, 2011 regular meeting.

Mr. Jones moved to approve the September 15, 2011 minutes as submitted.

**VOTE: 6-0.**

### DISCUSSION ITEM #1

#### UPDATE TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Mr. Jones asked Mr. Gill to present the issue.

Mr. Gill stated that the Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2230 requires that the Planning Commission review the Comprehensive Plan at least once every five years and the current Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on September 27, 2007. Mr. Gill stated that given the fact that the economy has been stagnant at best since that adoption, staff feels that many of the issues raised during the last update are still applicable today and an exhaustive revision is not necessary at this time. He further stated that staff also feels that there is no need to employ an outside firm, as has been done in years past, to accomplish a minor review and overhaul of the current Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Gill stated that he envisioned this meeting's discussion to be a "work session" to edit and suggest corrections to the Introduction and Chapter One of the Comprehensive Plan and that subsequent chapters will follow. He stated that in previous years, the

chapters were tweaked individually and sent to public hearing individually prior to being forwarded to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

Mr. Jones stated that reviewing the chapters one by one seemed to work well last time.

Mr. Gill stated that the fifth year will not start until 2012, but he is looking for some input from the Commission and the public to get the review started.

Mr. Jones referred to page 1-5 and stated that more emphasis needed to be made on public access to the water and the fact that nothing had been done about it since the last review of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Gill agreed.

Mr. Jones referred to page 1-6, which talks about the menhaden industry being a mainstay since the early 1900's and remains important today and he stated that he thought that was very important to keep in the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Jones referred to page 1-7 and in the last paragraph it talks about the Lancashire Nursing Home, Rappahannock General Hospital and the Rappahannock Community College being established in the 1960's and 1970's and he stated that a branch of the Rappahannock Community College will be completed in Lancaster County by the time the review of the Comprehensive Plan is adopted.

Mr. Jones referred to page 1-8, under section C and stated that the first sentence needs to be adjusted to state that land development has been stagnant since 2008, but there are proactive steps being taken. He stated that the last sentence of the page, which says "development will also include a significant commercial area" should be removed.

Mr. Jones referred to page 1-9 and asked Mr. Gill if all of the numbers will be updated to reflect the current racial make-up of the County.

Mr. Gill replied yes.

Mr. Jones referred to page 1-10 and stated that the census figures would also need to be updated.

Mr. Costello stated that the construction of the new County courthouse should be included.

Mr. Gill stated that the introduction will need to be rewritten and that he would work on that.

Mr. Gill referred to page three and asked if there are any themes that needed to be added or deleted.

Mr. Jones stated that the themes looked fine to him.

Mr. Gill referred to the fifth theme about a mix of housing and stated that Mercer Place should be included in the updated Plan. He further stated that the zoning ordinance has been revised with the R-4 District to encourage affordable housing.

Mr. Chupp referred to the seventh theme, which speaks of higher paying jobs and suggested that the wording be changed to jobs in general, considering the economic climate.

Mr. Gill asked Mr. Jones about any suggestions for the vision statement.

Mr. Jones replied that he likes it the way it is.

Mr. Gill stated that the General Assembly passed legislation last year, which requires all counties to incorporate a coastal resource management plan in their Comprehensive Plans by 2013. He further stated that the plan would be developed by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). He stated that Chapter Four would be the place for this in the County's Comprehensive Plan, but it would not be required until the next update in 2017.

Mr. Gill asked the Commission if there was any other group that they would like to be involved in the review of the Comprehensive Plan to act as "another set of eyes." He stated that in 2006, a farmland preservation committee provided input on Chapter Two and the SAIF Water Wells, Inc. had provided input on Chapter Three.

Mr. Jones replied that nothing has drastically changed as far as the strategies and goals and he thought it would just be more informational changes.

Mr. Costello asked about the possibility of new schools.

Mr. Gill replied that that would fall under Chapter Six.

Mr. Jones stated that as they get to the individual chapters, the matters that they deal with would be addressed.

Mr. Gill stated that he wanted to note that in reference to Chapter Three, which deals with the protection of the potable water supply, the Board of Supervisors recently approved the Northern Neck Regional Water Supply Plan, which was developed by the Northern Neck Planning District Commission and that should be listed as well.

Mr. Chupp asked about the racial make-up of the County and whether there were now more people of Spanish or Mexican descent since the last Comprehensive Plan was adopted.

Mr. Gill replied that the new figures state that the make-up is 70.1% for white, 28% for black and the other ethnic groups are 1.9%, with Hispanic being 1%.

Mr. Jenkins stated that people here under labor contracts do not show up as residents.

Rich Steensma, a local forest warden with the Virginia Department of Forestry, stated that the price of land in the area has jumped significantly and from a forest resource standpoint, where one is managing a forest as a crop, it is difficult to afford to hold the land for fifty years to harvest the crop and the cost of the land has exceeded the value of the crop that is coming off of it.

Mr. Steensma stated that conservation easements are one tool that could help with the situation as well as property tax relief. He stated that he would like to see this addressed and he said that forested land is a benefit in the tax base and doesn't add costs.

Mr. Jones asked about forested land getting a tax break for land use.

Mr. Gill replied that forested land does not currently qualify for land use taxation rates in Lancaster County.

Mr. Jenkins stated that current logging practices are destructive to smaller trees that are not being harvested. He stated that the term "clear cutting" is used and in the past, it has been politically hard to put forth something that is a tax advantage for what many people see as a scar on the forested land. Mr. Jenkins stated that he agreed with Mr. Steensma, but was just clarifying what had happened in the past.

Mr. Steensma stated that there is a science to the tree removal and clear cutting actually regenerates eighty percent of the tree species grown in this area, including the oaks, poplars and pines. He stated that most people think that because it looks ugly, it must be destructive. He stated that what is left becomes organic matter within five years and is really no different than mulch, but on a larger scale. He stated that the method of removal is designed for the species grown here. He further stated that the public needs to be made aware of the process.

Mr. Jenkins stated that he has heard many comments over the years by people who want to see a tree buffer covering up the clear cut land and he has tried to explain that the trees are part of a forest and are not strong without the forest behind them and in the event of an ice storm or hurricane, those same trees will be laying across the road.

Mr. Costello asked about the difference between Lancaster County and other counties that leave tree buffers.

Mr. Jenkins stated that he believes it is the owner's decision and not required by the County.

Mr. Jones stated that the state does not want a buffer left.

Mr. Steensma stated that forested land is a crop that is no different than corn or soybeans, but it is just harvested on a fifty-year rotation.

Mr. Ferriter stated that he was in favor of a tax break for the forested land, but if that owner clear cut his property and turned around and wanted the land rezoned to put houses on it, then he thought they should pay for that privilege and cover the tax break they had originally received.

Mr. Jenkins stated that that is already done with farmland.

Mr. Gill stated that he had had several calls over the years from timber acreage owners who have asked why Lancaster County doesn't offer land use tax rates for timberland. He stated that the largest timber acreage owners in the county are large corporations and perhaps the thinking has been that a tax break should not be given to a large corporation.

Mr. Gill stated that the topic of timberland would be covered in Chapter Two and invited Mr. Steensma to attend that meeting.

Mr. Jones stated that he had attended an auction last week and it was the timber that could be harvested from it that made it so much more valuable at foreclosure.

Mr. Gill stated that he would rewrite the introduction for the Comprehensive Plan and make the corrections in Chapter One and bring them back as a consideration item at the January meeting and put Chapter Two in the agenda as a discussion item for input from the public and the Commission.

Mr. Jones asked about the timeline to get the entire Comprehensive Plan reviewed.

Mr. Gill stated that he would expect that the revisions for the Introduction and Chapter 1 would be available for public hearing in February and each month a chapter or two would be reviewed until all chapters are complete.

Mr. Brent asked if there was anything scheduled for the future that might slow down the review process.

Mr. Gill replied that the Capital Improvement Budget update will begin at the February meeting and usually takes 2 to 3 months to complete prior to forwarding to the Board of Supervisors. He further stated that he was not aware of any potential rezonings at that time.

Mr. Costello asked about any changes to the maps in the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Gill replied that Stuart McKenzie from the Northern Neck Planning District Commission would be updating the maps ahead of time.

Mr. Jones stated that there would be no December meeting and he wanted to thank everyone for their work this year and wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The November 17, 2011 regular meeting of the Lancaster County Planning Commission was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.