



PLANNING COMMISSION

Special Meeting

Town Hall

July 29, 2013

At approximately 6:00 p.m. in the Town Hall, Chairman Dennis McCoy, having established a quorum, called to order the Special Meeting of the Planning Commission. In attendance were Commissioners Joan Natali, Sandra Salopek, Bill Stramm and Mike Strub. Commissioners Andy Buchholz and Dan Burke were not in attendance. Also present were Town Planner Rob Testerman and Town Clerk Libby Hume. There were no members of the public in attendance.

Dennis McCoy stated that the order of business was to discuss future meeting structure.

Rob Testerman stated that this would be an informal discussion to get an idea of how the Commissioners saw their roles on the Commission, their experience in how the meetings were run in the past and how they would like future meetings to run. Rob Testerman stated that he would also describe how the Accomack County Planning Commission meetings were run.

Dennis McCoy asked Rob Testerman to explain his past experience with the Accomack County Planning Commission.

Rob Testerman stated that staff reported on the information and the Planning Commission led the discussion. Mike Strub interjected that as part of the homework for the Certified Planning Commissioner's Class, he attended an Accomack County Planning Commission meeting and the Commissioners sat on a raised dais and staff sat below in the audience. Mike Strub added that he felt uncomfortable with this setup. Rob Testerman stated that this was due more to the facility vs. the Commissioners preference. Some meetings were held in other locations where staff did sit at the table with the Commissioners.

Rob Testerman went on to explain that staff kept the discussion on task. They also displayed certain information on screen using a PowerPoint presentation and asked if the Commissioners would like to have some of the information displayed on the screen. The Commissioners felt that as long as the same information was also included in the agenda packets, having some of the pertinent information displayed on screen as discussion points would be fine.

Bill Stramm asked how the agenda was formatted. Rob Testerman stated that the Commission had a work plan for the year, but things did come up occasionally that needed review by the Planning Commission. In those cases, staff would contact the Chair to see if it should be added to the next agenda.

Bill Stramm asked about the process for a conditional use permit. Rob Testerman stated that once staff had determined that the conditional use permit application was complete, the Chair would be contacted. Staff would prepare the preliminary staff report for review by the Commissioners at the next meeting when a public hearing would be scheduled. The detailed information was provided at the public hearing when the Commissioners would hear any public comment and be able to ask any questions, etc. The Accomack County Planning Director was hesitant about providing all the details prior to the public hearing in order to avoid any citizen misconceptions of illegal meetings being held, etc. There was much discussion regarding this issue and the general consensus was that the Commissioners wanted as much information as possible prior to any public hearing so they had the opportunity to ask questions to ensure their understanding of what was being proposed and any legal issues, etc.

Joan Natali asked about the number of individuals on the Accomack County Planning Commission and the number of staff in the Planning Department. Rob Testerman stated that there were nine Commissioners and five staff, three of which were involved in the Planning Commission. The other two staff members were the E&S administrator and the GIS coordinator.

Bill Stramm stated that he learned at the Planning Commission Class that the Planning Commission worked for the Council and staff was to support the Commission. Joan Natali added that the Commission relied on staff to provide all the facts related to a project. The Commissioners would review the information, listen to public comments and weigh the comments against the facts in order to make their decision.

Bill Stramm went on to state that he liked the idea of having a work plan, especially with the Comprehensive Plan update coming up. Bill Stramm added that he learned that the Planning Commission was supposed to submit an annual report to the Town Council each year and be involved in the Capital Improvement Plan.

Discussion continued about other localities, their population and whether they had full-time planners on staff. Some towns larger than Cape Charles did not have a full-time planner. Libby Hume pointed out that even though Rob Testerman was a full-time employee, he was also the E&S administrator, involved in zoning, GIS mapping, etc. Joan Natali added that Rob Testerman's role for the Planning Commission was part-time and he was also involved in the Historic District Review Board and the other Town boards.

Libby Hume went on to state that staff acted as facilitators for the Commission and Boards, providing the necessary information and facts, answering any questions, and ensuring the discussion stayed on track.

Joan Natali stated that she liked the casual interaction with the Planner. She felt free to ask questions to ensure her understanding regarding any issues or items. If the Planner did not know that answer, he would research and get back to the Commissioners.

Bill Stramm went on to state that he felt the Cape Charles Planning Commission should have a good working relationship with the Northampton County Planning Commission. They should ask our Commission for input regarding projects that would affect the Town. Bill Stramm added that he did not think the Town's current Comprehensive Plan contained any hard data regarding the population, etc. and all Comprehensive Plans were now required to have sections pertaining to affordable housing and transportation.

Mike Strub stated that several years ago, the Town and County Planning Commission held a joint meeting which was very positive and more joint meetings could possibly be planned to discuss areas of interest to both the Town and County. Rob Testerman added that he had contacted Peter Stith of Northampton County regarding a joint meeting and received a response agreeing to a joint meeting. He would get back to the Commissioners regarding possible dates.

There was some discussion regarding the process for the Sign Ordinance review. Dennis McCoy stated that the Commissioners would review the ordinance a section at a time, make their comments and suggestions. Staff would update the ordinance per the discussion at the meeting and provide it for review at the next meeting. Rob Testerman stated that this was basically the same process that was used in Accomack County.

Joan Natali noted that staff would get notifications regarding changes to the law affecting the Town and provide that information to the Commission for review and possible modifications to the Town's ordinances.

There was some discussion regarding being reactive vs. proactive and the Commissioners agreed that it would be in everyone's best interest for the Commissioners to play a more proactive role in the process. Joan Natali added that the Planning Commission was directed by the Town Council and staff was here to provide support to the Commission.

Bill Stramm, with agreement from Sandra Salopek, stated that from his perspective as a new Commissioner, the former Planner ran the entire meeting and the Commissioners just sat there and agreed. Their first few meetings had them wondering what their purpose was on the Commission. After the first several months, they attended the Certified Planning Commissioner Class and got some education regarding their roles. Bill Stramm added that there should be a happy medium where the Planner worked with the Chair to organize the agenda, gave his report with options and allowed the Commissioners to discuss the issue to make their decision.

In summary, it was decided that the Planner would support the Commission providing the necessary facts and information related to a project and perform any needed research regarding any questions the Commission might have. The Chair would run the meeting. If the Commissioners had any questions regarding an agenda item, they would call the Chair to discuss the issue.

Mike Strub noted that the September meeting was scheduled for the day after Labor Day and asked the Commissioners whether they would mind changing the date to the following Tuesday, September 10, 2013. All were in agreement to changing the September meeting date. Libby Hume would email Andy Buchholz and Dan Burke, who were not in attendance, to notify them of the date change.

Dennis McCoy suggested that discussion regarding the development of a work plan would be part of the August agenda. Bill Stramm added that the Capital Improvement Plan should also be reviewed.

Motion made by Mike Strub, seconded by Bill Stramm, to adjourn the Planning Commission Special Meeting. The motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Chairman Dennis McCoy

Town Clerk