

Northumberland County Planning Commission
May 16, 2024
Minutes

The regular monthly meeting of the Northumberland County Planning Commission was held on May 16, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in person at the Northumberland Courts Building and using Zoom (telephonic meeting) with the following attendance:

Chris Cralle	Present	Roger McKinley	Present
Vivian Diggs	Present	Patrick O'Brien	Present
Allen Garland	Present	Garfield Parker	Present
Ed King	Absent	Heidi Wilkins-Corey	Present
John Kost	Absent	Charles Williams	Present
Richard Haynie	Absent		

Others in attendance:
Stuart McKenzie

RE: CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Parker.

Mr. Williams gave the invocation, and Mr. O'Brien led the commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

RE: AGENDA

Mr. O'Brien made a motion to accept the agenda and Mr. McKinley seconded the motion. All voted in favor of approving the agenda.

RE: MINUTES- April 18, 2024

Mr. O'Brien made a motion to accept the April 18, 2024 meeting minutes, and Mrs. Wilkins-Corey seconded the motion. All voted in favor of accepting the minutes.

RE: COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Mr. O'Brien welcomed Mr. Allen Garland to the Planning Commission, as it was his first meeting in attendance.

RE: STAFF MEMBERS' COMMENTS

Staff did not have any comments.

RE: CITIZENS' COMMENTS

There were no citizens comments.

RE: PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were no public hearings scheduled.

RE: WORK SESSION ITEMS

Chairman Parker asked Mr. McKenzie to begin the work session. Mr. McKenzie noted that he has worked on the first map of the Comprehensive Plan, the Existing Development Map. Mr. McKenzie noted that he had been working with the Anti-Litter Committee, and on GIS and had not accomplished much more than completing the first map and editing a few pages at the beginning of Chapter 1. Mr. McKenzie then explained the process he used to create the Existing Development Map. Mr. McKenzie stated he categorized on the NAME field in the E911 address point database to determine the use of the structure and tagged each address point into either Residential, Semi-Public, Public, Business or Vacant categories. Mr. McKenzie stated that Residential is pretty self-explanatory, that Semi-Public are structures used by hunt clubs, churches, civic organizations such as the Moose and the Freemasons as well as subdivision community clubhouses, and pavilions. Staff continued, explaining that the Public building category is basically government buildings, either local, state or federal. Examples of public buildings include schools, VMRC and VDOT buildings, and US Post Offices. The business structure category was for any structure with a business name in the E911 database. Mr. McKenzie noted that the last iteration of the Comprehensive Plan was done by the NNPDC, and only relied on the E911 database, and not the county land records. Mr. McKenzie stated that there are many speculation houses built by local building contractors, and when they apply for an E911 address, they have not sold the house, so the name on the E911 address is the building contractor names. Staff noted that this time, if there was a known contractor in the E911 name for an E911 address, staff would then search the current real estate database for that address and if the owner was an individual, then the point would be categorized as a residential property, rather than a business property. Mr. McKenzie noted that the procedures used for this Existing Development Map, in his opinion, offers a much more realistic snapshot of existing development than the previous comprehensive plan map. Mr. McKenzie shows screenshots of draft maps showing the total number of E911 addresses as 10,954. Of the total, 9,925 of the structures were classified as Residential structures. 105 of those structures were classed as Semi-Public, and 38 structures were classed as Public. To round out the classification, there were 412 structures classed as Businesses and 172 classed as Vacant (either from the name field, aerial photos, or local knowledge).

Mr. McKenzie then transitioned from talking about the map to the actual revised draft of Chapter 1. Mr. McKenzie stated that the E911 structure total number and individual categories from the 2016 map were much higher than the current number of E911 structures. Mr. McKenzie stated he had to ponder, what has changed with the E911 structures since 2016? Mr. McKenzie explained that in 2017, Northumberland County received a grant from the Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA) to ready our E911 data to the Next Generation 911 (NG911) data standards. Staff explained the county hired a contractor to modify the data to NG911 standards and correct any errors found. Mr. McKenzie further explained that the old E911 structure data had an address point for

every phone line an addressed building had. Therefore, a business, back in the day, usually had at least two phone lines, one a voice line and the other a fax machine line. In addition, large businesses or for example, the county administration building, could have as many as 16 to 20 phone lines, which would mean 16 to 20 address points, stacked on top of each other. Mr. McKenzie summarized that the NG911 standards allow only one address point and will not support multiple points with the same address. Therefore the contractor hired by Northumberland County with the VITA grant money deleted all duplicate address points, which has led to a lower number of address points.

Mr. McKenzie added that he did not think we “lost” a lot of structures, or lost public, semi-public, businesses or residences, we only lost land line phones, which makes sense as almost everyone has a wireless cell phone these days. Most new households in the county forgo installation of land line phone lines, and instead rely on voice over IP via broadband or cell phone for phone service.

Chairman Parker asked staff if the 412 businesses identified in the E911 Structure Existing Development Map that just created is an accurate representation of the businesses that operate in Northumberland County. Mr. McKenzie stated that this was a desktop exercise and he does not believe that his count is an accurate count of the businesses, rather a quick and dirty estimation of the number of businesses. Mr. McKenzie hypothesized that there likely many more entrepreneurs with businesses that do not show their business names on the E911 address points. Chairman Parker suggested the county should consider requiring business licenses. Mr. Parker stated that doing anything that might help attract businesses to the county would be good, because if the county had more businesses, that might help lower real estate taxes. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey asked whether this business data would help businesses in the county. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey asked what is the mechanism for the Planning Commission to look into a business license requirement for the county. Mr. McKenzie stated that the Planning Commission could send a memo to the Board of Supervisors requesting permission to perform an analysis of the benefits and drawbacks of a business license. Mr. McKenzie stated he would like the Commission to formulate a draft that all could agree on so that the memo language captures the Commissions wishes.

Chris Cralle volunteered that he has an office in Westmoreland County and they charge \$35 a year for a business license. Mr. Cralle stated that with the postage and correspondence, he is not sure that the county is making any money from the business license fee. Mr. McKinley stated that if the county had a really accurate business database, then people that are thinking of creating a new business could examine the data to see how many, for example, dentists or car care businesses there were in the county. Mr. McKinley added that that information would inform them of their possible customer base, and also potentially help them locate their business away from their competitors. Mr. Garland stated that today, there are many people working online from home, that are not actually creating a physical product, but rather information. Chairman Parker agreed, stating there are many people making good money working online from home. Mr. O’Brien stated that there is a government business classification system and there is data for every county available. Mr. McKinley added that there are a lot of people in Northumberland County that work from home for larger companies. Members stated that those people (who work from home for an out of county employer) would not need a

business license in Northumberland County unless the corporate headquarters were located here. Mrs. Wilkins stated she thought that looking into requiring business license would be of value to the county. Chairman Parker agreed, stating there are a whole bunch of people generating income in the county, but everyone says we don't have many businesses in the county. Mr. McKenzie added that most economic development is not attracting the big employer, say, a call or data center, rather it is the slow expansion of smaller businesses into bigger businesses that drives the majority of business growth in the United States. Mr. McKenzie continued, if the county had a list of businesses, then the Economic Development Commission could use the information in that business list to target outreach activities to help brainstorm ways the county could assist in the growth of that segment of business in the county. Mr. Parker stated that the Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce hosts a chamber night monthly, for business leaders to attend and to network on ideas and gain contacts that may be mutually beneficial.

Mr. O'Brien stated that if we were interested in economic data collection, that can be done without requiring a business license. Mr. Parker stated that he thinks the Board of Supervisors would want to know how many and what types of businesses are located in Northumberland County. Mr. Garland stated it would be nice to compile a database of businesses, type of business, number of employees, and annual revenues. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey stated that there are two discussions going on here. She stated that we started talking about investigating a business license requirement for the county, and now we are talking about building a database with business characteristics. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey said all she proposed was looking at a business license ordinance, and the pros and cons of instituting a requirement for business licenses in the county, and then give a report to the Board of Supervisors on a recommendation to go forward or not. Mr. O'Brien was not sure that we couldn't get data on Northumberland County businesses from existing state tax data, and that some businesses would not comply with a business license requirement. Mr. Parker stated that some entrepreneurs will not comply, because they do not want to have to report their income to be taxed. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey stated that those businesses will be the ones who do not comply. Mr. McKenzie stated that he was interested in how many counties in Virginia do not have a business license. Mr. O'Brien stated that there are likely a lot of rural counties that do not require them. Mr. O'Brien wondered how many existing businesses in the county would have located here if there was a business license requirement. Mr. McKinley made a motion for staff to put together a memo stating that the Planning Commission would like to explore the possibility of requiring a business license in Northumberland County. Mr. Parker seconded the motion and all voted aye, thus the motion passed.

Mr. Parker mentioned that the Board of Supervisors has been dealing with cargo containers in the county. Mr. Parker wondered if we need to look into that. Staff indicated that the Board did have a request to add a requirement in the zoning ordinance to paint the containers green. However, administrative staff reminded them that could be taken care of as a condition of the conditional use permit, as all cargo containers placed in the county require going through the conditional use process. Mr. McKenzie stated that he believes the existing cargo container restrictions are right where they need to be. Mr. Parker pondered, if you do have a cargo container, how would you dispose of it? Mr. O'Brien stated that numerous places recycle steel. Mr. Parker asked how exactly would you do that. Mr. O'Brien stated you would have to cut the steel container into small

enough pieces that you could carry and place on a truck or flat bed trailer to haul to the metal recycler.

Mrs. Wilkins-Corey referenced page 2:12 of Chapter 2 of the Comprehensive Plan, and asked staff if there are still nine (9) active mine permits in the county. Mr. McKenzie stated he would check with the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy to get the current number active mine permits in the county. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey asked if there are still three active pollution abatement permits in the county. Mr. McKenzie stated he would verify the number of pollution abatement permits with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey also added that on pages 2:10 and 2:11, there should be some mention of desalinization as a possibility for potable water, in case reservoirs won't work due to financial considerations. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey stated that desalinization technology has progressed so that it is another option for producing potable water in addition to reservoirs and the water table aquifer. Mr. McKinley added that the section should mention groundwater depletion and possible pollution in shallow wells. Mr. O'Brien queried why are reservoirs not possible? Mrs. Wilkins-Corey stated because of the cost of land and environmental permits, adding that innovative technology is getting water to churches in developing nations. Mr. Garland stated that is most likely missionaries going and digging wells in these developing nations. Mr. O'Brien noted that there are so many ravines in Northumberland County that some could surely be dammed up and made into a drinking water reservoir. Mr. McKenzie noted that most upland soils in Northumberland County have a large percentage of sand in them, and that makes the ground permeable to rain and water. Mr. McKenzie stated that if you were to dam up a ravine, you would likely need to line the ravine with clay to keep water from percolating downward into the soil after the reservoir was filled. Mr. Garland noted that on the island of Aruba, 100% of the water comes from desalinization. Mr. McKenzie added that cruise ships generate all of their potable water from the ocean, and they do not intake seawater from the ocean for desalinization until they are many miles away from the coastline, to reduce the chance of taking up contaminants from on shore pollution. Mr. O'Brien stated that there is a tidal wave of electricity supply in the coming years with the many solar energy facilities being developed in the state. Mr. Parker stated that the electric grid can't handle all the new power in Loudon County. Mr. O'Brien stated that the engineers didn't anticipate bit coin miners, and data centers, as these are uses not heard of before. Mr. O'Brien stated they are enhancing the electric grid at a rate of 2% per year, which is not keeping up with the 5% increase in energy creation. Mr. O'Brien stated that nuclear energy is coming online as well. Mr. O'Brien stated he felt we need a separate chapter in the Comprehensive Plan to address solar energy facilities in the county.

Mr. Garland mentioned he was not a member of the Planning Commission when they were researching solar energy, and asked if there was any consideration given to wildlife movements through solar energy facilities. Mr. Garland stated that in King William County, they had goats inside the solar facility to keep the vegetation in check. However, he added they are not there anymore, it seems that they would eat the vegetation away from the panels, but would not venture near or under the solar panels to eat the grass there. Mr. O'Brien stated that all solar panels leak energy, and animals can sense those electric fields and tend to avoid them. Mr. McKenzie explained to Mr. Garland that Northumberland County does not have high voltage transmission lines, therefore the

county electric grid cannot handle the power generated by large (50-100 Mw) solar energy facilities. Mr. McKenzie continued, from conversations with Dominion and Northern Neck Electric Co-Op, that in all likelihood, there is an approximate capacity of 20 Mw that the Northumberland County electric grid could support. That could take the form of two 10 MW solar energy facilities or four 5 Mw solar energy facilities or any combination that ends up around 20 Mw. Mr. McKenzie stated that since these smaller sized solar energy facilities will be 10 -20 acres at most, and the Planning Commission deemed these facilities small enough that most wildlife could detour around without too much trouble. Mr. McKenzie added that in Northumberland County, the largest capacity electric lines run down the main highways of the county, US 360 and SR 200.

Mr., McKenzie gave the Board of Supervisors report, summarizing the public hearings for the May 9, 2024 Board of Supervisors meeting. Mr. McKenzie had mentioned the public hearing for the commercial pier at Jayce's Vineyard was tabled by the BOS. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey asked if the conditional use for the commercial pier was tied to the owner, if they sold the property what would happen to the pier? Mr. McKenzie stated the new owners could re-apply for a conditional use permit for a commercial pier, or not apply and use the pier as a residential pier. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey noted that it was unclear whether the new owners would have to remove the commercial pier. Mr. McKenzie stated he did not think the county would require the new property owner to do that. Mr. McKinley, who represented Dr. Jayce at the BOS Public hearing stated that Dr. Jayce has sons as well as trustees, and that the vineyard and restaurant operation will continue into the foreseeable future.

Mr. Parker thanked the members for their time and lively discussion, stating this is what the Planning Commission does, they plan for the future.

RE: DISCUSSION ITEMS

There were no discussion items scheduled.

RE: PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments

RE: ADJOURNMENT

Mr. O'Brien made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. McKinley to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 pm. The adjournment vote was as follows:

Chris Cralle	Aye	Roger McKinley	Aye
Vivian Diggs	Aye	Patrick O'Brien	Aye
Allen Garland	Aye	Garfield Parker	Aye
Ed King	Absent	Heidi Wilkins-Corey	Aye
John Kost	Absent	Charles Williams	Aye
Richard Haynie	Absent		

The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned.