

**Northumberland County Planning Commission**  
**January 16, 2024**  
**Minutes**

The regular monthly meeting of the Northumberland County Planning Commission was held on January 16, 2025 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	Absent
Vivian Diggs	Present	Patrick O'Brien	Present
Allen Garland	Present	Garfield Parker	Present
John Kost	Present	Heidi Wilkins-Corey	Present
Richard Haynie	Zoom	Charles Williams	Present

Others in attendance:

Stuart McKenzie (County Planner)

Philip Marston (Zoning Administrator)

**RE: CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Parker.

Mr. Parker led the commission in the invocation, as well as the Pledge of Allegiance.

**RE: ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Mr. Parker asked the commission members present for nominations for Chairman of the Planning Commission. Mr. O'Brien nominated Mr. Parker. Mr. Kost seconded the motion. Mr. Parker asked if there were any other nominations, there were none. All members present voted unanimously to make Mr. Parker the Chairman of the Commission for 2025.

Mr. Parker asked for nominations for the Vice Chairmanship. Mr. Cralle nominated Mr. Kost. Mrs. Diggs seconded the motion to nominate Mr. Kost. All members present voted to make Mr. Kost the Vice Chairman.

**RE: REVIEW OF THE BY-LAWS**

Mr. Kost made a motion to readopt the By-Laws as is. Mr. O'Brien seconded the motion. The commission members voted unanimously to readopt the Planning Commission By-Laws for 2025.

**RE: AGENDA**

Mr. McKenzie asked the commission to revise the agenda to add the Remote Participation Policy consideration to the agenda, and stated that Chairman Parker came

by the office and wanted staff to research the state of groundwater in Northumberland County, so he would like to add groundwater supply to the Discussion section of the Agenda

Mr. Kost made a motion to accept the revised agenda, and Mr. O’Brien seconded the motion. All voted in favor of accepting the agenda.

**RE: MINUTES - December 19, 2024**

Mr. O’Brien made a motion to accept the December 19, 2024 minutes, and Mr. Kost seconded the motion. All voted in favor of accepting the minutes from December 19, 2024.

**RE: REVIEW REMOTE PARTICIPATION POLICY**

Mr. McKenzie stated that the Planning Commission, if they choose, can renew the Remote Participation Policy that was used during COVID so that Planning Commission Members can participate remotely. Mr. McKenzie stated it was optional, but that it did provide some flexibility if one was sick or had a family emergency. Mr. McKenzie noted that at the end of the policy it notes that the Commission needs to vote to accept remote participation at the beginning of each meeting when a member wants to participate remotely. Mr. McKenzie also noted that it requires that the Commission has to have a quorum physically present together before the Commission can allow a member to participate remotely, which he said makes sense, as the Commission cannot take any action if there is not a quorum present, and voting on allowing a remote participant is an action. Mr. O’Brien stated he thought that this remote participation policy might make it harder to get a quorum, as he felt members might want to over use the remote participation, and he did not think it was a good idea.

Mr. Kost made a motion to renew the Remote Participation Policy document for the Planning Commission, which was seconded by Mr. Garland. The vote was as follows:

Chris Cralle	Aye	Roger McKinley	Absent
Vivian Diggs	Aye	Patrick O’Brien	Nay
Allen Garland	Aye	Garfield Parker	Aye
John Kost	Aye	Heidi Wilkins-Corey	Aye
Richard Haynie	n/a	Charles Williams	Aye

The motion passed 8 to 1.

**RE: COMMISSIONERS’ COMMENTS**

There were no commissioner’s comments.

**RE: STAFF MEMBERS’ COMMENTS**

There were no staff comments.

**RE: CITIZENS' COMMENTS**

There were no citizen comments.

**RE: PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Mr. Parker opened the public hearing at 7:16 pm. Mr. McKenzie stated that the public hearing tonight is a request by Westmoreland Players, Inc., owner, to modify a condition (limiting the size of a proposed sign) to a Conditional Use Permit on property zoned A-1, Agriculture. The property is shown as Tax Map Parcel #14-(1)-15-A and is located at 16217 Richmond Road.

Mr. McKenzie stated that he and Mr. Marston did not receive any written correspondence either for or against the project. Mr. McKenzie informed the Chairman that only one person signed up to speak at the public hearing. Mr. William "Bill" Armstrong stated he is on the Board of Governors of the Westmoreland Players and that the current sign is woefully inadequate to convey messages, such as show schedules, notice for auditions (which, by the way is open to all citizens), and to keep the multitude of volunteers and patron base informed. Mr. Armstrong stated that the new sign will be at the same location, two sided and face up and down Rt. 360. Mr. Armstrong noted that the closest occupied residence is 500 feet away from the sign, and the view of the sign is obscured by evergreen trees. Mr. Armstrong stated that the new sign is a necessary upgrade to our facility.

Mr. Kost asked Mr. Armstrong if the volume of light emitted will change. Mr. Armstrong stated that the old sign is a red dot LED sign, the new sign is consistent with other LED signs in the county. Mr. Armstrong noted that the new sign area will be taller, to allow for more lines of text to be displayed.

Mr. O'Brien asked Mr. Armstrong if they have ever considered renaming yourself the Northumberland Players? Mr. Armstrong stated yes, they have thought about doing it, but noted the problem is with their organization's charter document. Mr. Kost suggested that since Mr. O'Brien is a lawyer, perhaps he could help the Westmoreland Players with his expertise to help them modify their charter so they can change their name to the Northumberland Players.

Mr. Cralle stated that he received a call from one neighbor who was vehemently against the new sign. Mr. Cralle asked if he had tried to work with him. Mr. Cralle asked if it would be possible to dim the sign at night.?

Mr. Marston asked the Chairman if he could speak to shed some light on the existing sign and what the sign ordinance allows. Mr. Marston stated the existing sign is 28 square feet, with 50% of it illuminated. Mr. Marston continued, the sign ordinance allows up to 64 square feet, 50% illumination, which equals 32 square feet of illuminated area.

Mr. O'Brien made a motion to recommend to the Board of Supervisors to modify the condition as requested by the applicant and that this motion is made in due consideration of the public health and safety, the general welfare of the community, public necessity, convenience, and in the exercise of good zoning practices and in pursuant to the body's statutory authority. Mr. Kost seconded the motion. Mr. Cralle asked if we should add nighttime dimming as a recommendation? Hearing no response from commission members, Mr. Cralle asked if Mr. Armstrong would consider dimming the sign at night. Mr. Armstrong stated he would be ok with that if that is what other sign owners in the county are required to do. Mr. McKenzie stated that he is not aware of any other sign in the county that is dimmed at night. The commission voted on Mr. O'Brien's motion and the results are below:

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

The motion passed unanimously. The public hearing was closed at 7:28pm.

## **RE: WORK SESSION ITEMS**

Mr. McKenzie stated that next is the discussion for changes to Chapter 5 of the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. McKenzie asked the commission members if they all received Mr. Kost's email about his recommended changes to the chapter. All members stated they received Mr. Kost's email. Mr. McKenzie asked the Chairman if they would like to go through the proposed changes put forth by Mr. Kost, and they said yes.

Mr. McKenzie asked Mr. Kost to run through his changes, since he drafted them. Mr. Kost agreed, and stated that in Chapter 5, page 3, there were two instances (item c and d) where the word "shall" was used. Mr. Kost stated that shall has direct legal meaning that it must be done, so perhaps replacing the word with "should" would be more appropriate in this instance. The Commission and staff agreed. On page 9, Mr. Kost stated he thought that the section is concerning two goals water quality and water quantity, but that it doesn't actually say that. Mr. Kost also noted that there were inconsistencies with acronyms, VDH, VDEQ, etc. and that we should consistently use the acronym after the first instance of attributing the acronym to the agency. Mr. Kost then asked if we need to remove the reservoir section from Chapter 5, like we did in Chapter 3. Mr. McKenzie stated we need to keep the concept in the plan as a placeholder, but we need to recognize the financial challenges of constructing a public water system.

Mr. Kost stated that on page 18 bullet (b), there is a discussion regarding septic tanks and possible water quality problems from ill maintained septic systems. Mr. Kost asked what role short term rentals play in maintaining septic systems, noting that it must be taxing on septic system to have high occupancy and frequent use. Mr. McKenzie stated that there is a five year pumpout regulation for septic systems in Northumberland County, as required

by the Chesapeake Bay Act. Mr. McKenzie noted that, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) recently (in the last year or two) has taken over the septic tank five year pumpout notification and tracking. Mr. McKenzie added that the county has an enforcement mechanism for the five year septic pumpout requirement, that is, if you shut off the electricity at a dwelling for more than 6 months, you have to show proof of septic tank inspection/pumpout before the county will issue you an electric permit in order to be to reconnect the electric service to the dwelling. Mr. McKenzie stated that the county has regulations on how many persons can stay at a short term rental, and it is 2 persons per bedroom, with an extra 2 persons who can sleep in the living room on couches or pull out sofas. This regulation should reduce the chance of over taxing of the existing septic system, Mr. McKenzie said. Commission members asked where the septage that is pumped out of a septic tank go. Mr. McKenzie stated the last time he checked, the septic haulers take the septage to Gloucester County to the sewage treatment plant. Mr. McKenzie related that when he used to work at the NNPDC when Northumberland County was beginning to build the Callao sewage treatment plant, he asked Kenny Eades (then county administrator) to consider adding a septage tank to the plant to accept pumped septic tank effluent. Mr. Eades requested a quote from Resource International (the contractor designing the plant) for a septage tank and distribution into the plant. Mr. Eades informed Mr. McKenzie that adding a septage holding tank and the apparatus to slowly feed the septage into the treatment train would add approximately \$1 million to the project. Mr. Eades told Mr. McKenzie stated that the adding the septage holding tank was not financially feasible at that time. Mr. McKenzie added that at that time, there was scrutiny of a septic contractor on the Northern Neck that had several sewage lagoons where septage was stored. The problem with sewage lagoons in Virginia, is that our annual evaporation rate is roughly equal to the annual precipitation rate, meaning that once full, the sewage lagoon water level never goes down (unless there is a drought in Virginia). The Commission discussed not having a place to take septage in the Northumberland County, and Mr. McKenzie reminded them that the Northern Neck does not have a landfill to take trash either.

Mr. McKenzie stated he would make the changes suggested by Mr. Kost and bring the revisions back to the next Planning Commission meeting.

## **RE: DISCUSSION ITEMS**

Mr. McKenzie noted that Chairman Parker had asked him to do some research on the status of groundwater in Northumberland County. Chairman Parker asked what can we do regarding the continual drawdown of the aquifers in Northumberland County? Mr. McKenzie noted that he had called and talked to Mr. Robert Pickett, a resident of Northumberland County who retired from VDOT's Environmental Division, that is currently a member of the State's Eastern Virginia Groundwater Committee. In Mr. Pickett's words, he stated the groundwater levels in the coastal plain aquifer are still "dropping like a rock", even though the state instituted the Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Regulations several years ago. Mr. McKenzie briefed Mr. Pickett on the concerns of the Planning Commission regarding future water supply in the revision of the Comprehensive Plan and how to address the possibility of building reservoirs and a county public water system. Mr. Pickett stated that reservoirs may be needed in the not too distant future. Mr. Pickett added that the Virginia Department of Health is working on

rainwater harvesting regulations, so that will be a new option that people of Virginia will have, once the regulations are adopted.

Mr. McKenzie then transitioned to displaying the 2020 Virginia Water Supply Plan on the projection screen. Mr. McKenzie prefaced his discussion, explaining how the State had required localities to create individual county water supply plans (or regional water supply plans if so desired), and they were compiled into the 2020 Virginia Water Supply Plan. Mr. McKenzie went on to describe the aquifers in coastal Virginia as like layers of a cake that pinch out at the fall line, and the layers get progressively deeper as you go East. Mr. McKenzie further explained that we have many hundreds of feet of water bearing aquifers, while near the fall line, they have very narrow depth aquifers that have less capacity than the wider aquifers below Northumberland County. Mr. McKenzie started discussing the Virginia Coastal Plain computer model that projects current and projected use out fifty years (from the date the report was produced 2020), starting on page 86 of the 2020 Virginia Water Supply Plan. Mr. McKenzie explained that there are three computer simulation model scenarios presented; one for the uppermost aquifer, the Piney Point Aquifer, the middle Aquia aquifer and the deepest, the Potomac aquifer. Mr. McKenzie started to summarize the three groundwater model scenarios for each of the three aquifers, 1) simulated aquifer levels in 2070 using 2020 water supply demands, 2) simulated aquifer levels in 2070 using 2040 projected demands, and finally, 3) simulated aquifer levels in 2070 using 2040 projected demands with SWIFT Injection. Mr. McKenzie noted that SWIFT is an acronym for Hampton Roads Sanitation District's (HRSD), Sustainable Water Initiative for Tomorrow (SWIFT) Project where treated wastewater is injected into the Hampton Roads aquifers through DEQ permits to help recharge the aquifer and protect the aquifer from saltwater intrusion from the ocean and bay. Each of the computer simulations showed critical cells along the fall line counties in Virginia with the 2020 demands in 2070, with even more widespread critical cells with the 2040 demand in 2070, with slightly less critical cells from the 2040 demand with SWIFT Injection, as would be expected. The Aquia aquifer showed the most critical cells, followed by the Piney Point and Potomac aquifer.

Chairman Parker stated that Caroline County is beginning the process to source its water from the Rappahannock River, and that Spotsylvania County is working to source its water from the Potomac River, so what is Northumberland County is doing to prepare for future water supply? Mr. Kost mentioned that it is probably a good thing that they are turning to surface water for their potable water needs, as that will reduce the strain on our aquifers from their pumping. Mrs. Wilkins-Corey asked if the commission should add rainwater harvesting as a future strategy to add to the Comprehensive Plan, and the members agree.

Mr. Kost stated that he would like to re-order chapters in the Comprehensive Plan so as to make the document more readable. Mr. McKenzie stated that he was not in favor of doing that, as all charts, tables and maps for every chapter after Chapter 1 would have to be revised to reflect the new chapter number (after reordering the chapters). Mr. McKenzie stated the Comprehensive Plan has been under revision going on two years, and he would like to wrap the revision so he can focus on his other job duties. Mr. McKenzie stated, that whatever the Planning Commission decided, he would abide by. Mr. McKenzie stated that he thought the Board of Supervisors were also of a mind to

finish the Comprehensive Plan revision sooner than later, especially the solar energy facility section of the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. McKenzie suggested the Chairman ask Mr. Haynie on how much urgency the Board of Supervisors has regarding completing the Comprehensive Plan revision. Chairman Parker asked Mr. Haynie, and he stated he was not in that much of a hurry to get the Comprehensive Plan revision completed, but he was not sure how the other Board of Supervisor members felt. Mr. Haynie stated he would ask the other Board members how soon they wanted the Comprehensive Plan revision completed.

**RE: PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments.

**RE: ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. O'Brien made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Mr. Cralle and the meeting ended at 8:20 pm. The adjournment vote was as follows:

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