

**WASHINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
WORKSHOP MEETING – April 15, 2009**

The Washington County Planning Commission held a workshop meeting on Wednesday, April 15, 2009, at 3:00 p.m. in the Washington County Administrative Annex, 80 West Baltimore Street, Hagerstown.

Members present were: Chairman George Anikis, Andrew Bowen, Terry Reiber, Linda Parrish, and Ex-Officio James F. Kercheval. Staff members present were: Planning Director Michael Thompson, Chief Planners Steve Goodrich and Tim Lung, Senior Planner Jill Baker, Planners Cody Shaw and Fred Nugent, Environmental Planner Bill Stachoviak, and Administrative Assistant Debra Eckard. Also present was Kathy Kroboth, Department of Permits & Inspections.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman George Anikis called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m.

DISCUSSION

- RZ-09-003 Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment

Ms. Baker began a detailed review of the proposed Text Amendment for off-street parking and loading area requirements presented at the public meeting of the Planning Commission held on March 16, 2009. The review began with a discussion of retail customer and visitor parking spaces. Ms. Baker noted that the average number of parking spaces is 4 to 5 spaces per 1,000-square feet. During the public meeting, Staff recommended using gross leasable area rather than the proposed gross floor area. Ms. Baker explained that gross floor area was proposed to simplify the calculation of required parking spaces for Staff as well as developers. She noted that national standards for retail businesses seem to be based on gross leasable area. Ms. Baker suggested that retail sales up to 200,000 square feet should require 4 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross leasable area and retail sales above 200,000 square feet should require 5 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross leasable area. Ms. Baker stated that Staff believes there is a need to reduce the number of parking spaces. She briefly explained the rationale of reducing the number of parking spaces from a planning perspective. She noted that by reducing the number of parking spaces there are environmental benefits and there are cost-saving benefits for the developer. Ms. Baker stated that storm water management regulations are changing. If parking requirements are not reduced, the storm water management ponds will get bigger, they will get deeper, and there will be more maintenance issues. Mr. Kercheval does not agree with Staff's proposal to reduce the number of required parking spaces. He believes that by leaving the required number of spaces at current levels, it will not change any storm water requirements. Mr. Reiber expressed his opinion that most retailers now have internet sales access, which reduces the personal visits by consumers to the stores. He believes that the County should slightly reduce (to 5 spaces per 1,000 square feet) the number of required parking spaces, which will help lower the cost to developers. Ms. Parrish expressed her opinion that some retail businesses could reduce their parking; however, other retailers need the larger parking areas. Mr. Goodrich pointed out that parking is site and community specific and is dependent upon community characteristics, socio-economic characteristics and other retail business in the area. Ms. Parrish stated that without more scientific or numerical data, she would recommend keeping the current required parking standards, which is 5.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross leasable area. Mr. Kercheval expressed his opinion that the required parking spaces should be "kept on the higher side".

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that commercial retail sales should require 5 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross leasable area.

There was a brief discussion regarding community centers, which are currently grouped with banquet halls, dance halls, etc. which require parking of 1 space per 50 square feet of gross floor area (GFA). These uses currently require 1 parking space per 400 square feet of GFA. Ms. Baker recommended separating the community centers out of the grouping and using the current parking standards for this use. Members discussed examples of different types of uses and the parking that would be required.

Ms. Parrish began a discussion regarding the parking area at the Hagerstown Regional Airport. Mr. Anikis stated he has spoken to Mr. Greg Larsen of the Airport who recommends a minimum of 100 required parking spaces. Ms. Baker stated she has researched parking for airports, which can be very specific. However, Staff did not believe that changes are necessary at this time since the Airport already exists and no major commercial expansion is anticipated at this time. Mr. Anikis expressed his concern regarding businesses currently located at the Airport and the spaces they are using for employee parking. Ms. Baker stated that a new category of employee parking has been added to the Ordinance. Mr. Anikis expressed concern regarding parking for students if the Airport would have a flight school in the future. Ms. Baker stated that a detailed parking analysis would be required as part of the site plan analysis; however, she believes that a school should provide separate parking. Mr. Kercheval asked if language could be added that states, "Airport parking, commercial, as determined by a detailed parking analysis. Private businesses inside the gates would be modeled after the rest of the chart."

Ms. Parrish began a discussion regarding church parking, which is 1 space per 5 seats provided in the main religious assembly auditorium. She pointed out that a lot of families do not ride together and there are more single people than in the past. As an example, Ms. Parrish cited problems with parking at the church she currently attends. Ms. Parrish expressed her opinion that the parking criteria for churches is

based on a past lifestyle and lifestyles are changing. The next issue she addressed was the maximum number of parking spaces and the use of pervious pavement for additional parking. She stated that the contractors in this area do not have the expertise to use pervious materials, which are also very expensive. Ms. Parrish expressed her opinion that the County needs to be able to supply developers and others with information and a list of contractors familiar with the permeable materials if they are going to make pervious pavement a requirement. Mr. Kercheval expressed his opinion that if the parking requirement for churches were to be changed, it should be no less than 1 space per 4 seats. He noted that the problem for churches exists only 1 day per week, whereas retail parking issues exist 6 or 7 days per week.

Ms. Baker stated that language is being added to the ordinance to encourage the sharing of parking areas with a written recorded easement. Mr. Kercheval supports that recommendation.

- **Consensus:** The Commission recommends changing the required parking for churches to 1 space per 4 seats and warrants additional discussion by the BOCC.

Mr. Anikis made an inquiry regarding the requirement for a detailed parking analysis and study. Ms. Baker stated that sharing of recreational facilities has become an issue. Mr. Anikis asked who is required to perform the detailed analysis. Ms. Baker stated that would be required of the developer.

Mr. Kercheval began a discussion regarding parking for restaurants, which is proposed for 1 space per 100 square feet of GFA. Mr. Kercheval recommended that the required parking should be 1 space per 75 square feet of GFA and should be the same for restaurants with a drive-thru.

Ms. Baker began a brief discussion regarding the maximum number of spaces. She gave a brief explanation of the proposed language. Mr. Bowen and Mr. Kercheval expressed their opposition to the proposed concept.

- **Consensus:** The Commission recommends eliminating the paragraph regarding the maximum number of spaces due to cost issues and contracting availability..

The Commission moved on to a review of the drive-up/drive-thru facilities. Ms. Baker noted there have been queuing issues in the past where back-ups occur onto the road or blocking of parking spaces. She stated that the County has tried in the past not to become too involved in internal flow issues. However, some issues have arisen over the years and Staff is proposing new language to address some of the problem issues and safety concerns. Discussions focused on car wash facilities. Mr. Kercheval and Ms. Parrish expressed their opinions that 4 on-site spaces per washing stations are not enough.

- **Consensus:** The Commission recommends 6 spaces per washing station for automatic carwashes and 3 spaces per washing station for self-serve bays.

The next issue discussed by the Commission was bicycle parking requirements. Ms. Baker noted that bicycle parking is required under Article 66B of the State of Maryland. Currently the County's Zoning Ordinance does not address bicycle parking. Ms. Baker briefly reviewed the proposed requirements and noted that the language was taken from Allegany County's Ordinance. She described several types of racks and lockers available for bicycle parking.

Ms. Baker reviewed recreational travel and recreational/off-road vehicle parking. She noted that # 2 and # 3 in this section are in the current Zoning Ordinance. Ms. Baker further explained that the County does not want these types of vehicles parked on private or public streets because it causes congestion and sight distance problems. Some developers provide parking areas within their developments or provisions within their covenants and restrictions for dealing with recreational vehicles. Mr. Kercheval asked why the County has language within the Zoning Ordinance requiring developers to provide parking areas for recreational vehicles. Ms. Baker stated that the requirements only apply to multi-family zoning districts (RM and PUD). She explained that two parking spaces are required within these zoning districts and does not allow extra space for residents to park recreational vehicles. Mr. Anikis expressed his opinion that developers should not be required to provide parking spaces for recreational vehicles. Mr. Reiber expressed his opinion that recreational vehicles are becoming a growing trend and there needs to be a place to park them. He believes that the HOAs or the developer should deal with the issue. Mr. Bowen suggested that the language be changed so that parking is not required, but should be considered by the developer. Ms. Baker stated that the text can be taken out of the Ordinance; however, another section of the Ordinance would also need to be amended.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission does not want to take any action on this issue at this time.

Ms. Baker noted that parking stall size requirements have not been changed. Parking stalls of 9' x 20' are required for regular parking and stalls of 9' x 22' are required for parallel parking. She noted that a modification has been added that the parking spaces can be reduced in length by two feet if they show an overhang. Ms. Baker stated that the access lane sizes have changed. Currently, aisle widths are determined by the angle of the parking spaces and vary from 14' to 24'. Staff is proposing changes in the aisle widths depending on one-way traffic or two-way traffic. Ms. Parrish made an inquiry regarding current parking aisle widths and the "grandfathering" of them if the number of parking spaces increases. Mr. Thompson stated that the State of Maryland considers the re-stripping of parking lots as a modification and therefore all new ADA requirements must be met. However, the County does not require a permit for re-stripping of parking lots and therefore, we are unaware until after the fact.

Ms. Baker continued a review of the proposed changes and briefly explained minor changes to the text. She noted that changes to the lighting section include the requirement for fully-shielded, downward directed lighting to avoid glare onto adjacent properties and street right-of-ways. Ms. Baker stated that other text amendments for lighting are currently being proposed by Staff and would be presented in the future. Mr. Anikis asked if the height could be limited. Ms. Baker explained that height has been a debate among staff because there are so many other issues to consider, such as how many more lights are needed to sufficiently light the area, how much more energy is needed, etc.

Ms. Baker noted that changes are proposed for the landscaping section including a minimum requirement of 10% of the total impervious area of the parking facility. She stated that if the developer uses storm water management bio-retention areas, sunken islands, rain gardens, etc. within the confines of the parking facility, the 10% requirement could be modified to 5%. This provides incentives for the developers to use improved storm water techniques. Mr. Kercheval questioned the proposed 10% requirement because he believes that the new storm water regulations require using these techniques in parking facilities. Ms. Baker stated she would check on the new storm water regulations.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that if the new storm water regulations are required for parking facilities, the minimum required in the Zoning Ordinance should be 5% of the impervious area.

Ms. Baker stated that shade trees are being proposed to be required as part of the landscaping requirement. This requirement will help to lessen the urban heat island effect and help improve air quality. Mr. Kercheval made an inquiry regarding the type of trees that can be used. Ms. Baker stated the only requirement for trees will be a minimum size requirement of a two (2) inch caliper at the time of planting. Mr. Bowen expressed concern regarding trees in parking areas citing issues with birds and damage to cars during storms. Ms. Parrish expressed her opinion that trees should be recommended at the option of the developer, but they should not be required. Mr. Reiber and Mr. Bowen agreed. Mr. Anikis expressed his opinion that trees should be required. Mr. Bowen inquired if street trees could be used as an incentive to get credit for other requirements.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission does not believe that street trees should be required, but should be recommended.

A brief discussion started regarding the requirement of landscaping islands after every 15 spaces. Ms. Parrish voiced her opposition to this requirement. Mr. Bowen expressed his concern that the developers would put their drainage outlets in the sunken islands instead of providing curbing. Ms. Parrish suggested that if the developer provides linear landscaping, the landscaping every 15 spaces should not be required.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that linear landscaping should be permitted in lieu of the landscaping islands every 15 spaces. If linear landscaping is not used, then the developer would be required to place landscaping islands every 15 spaces.

Ms. Baker began a review of the proposed language for screening. She noted that item (ii) states, "screening may be in the form of a solid fence, vegetative screening or both, from grade to the specified height as determined by the Planning Commission or its designee." Ms. Baker noted there is a modification for screening when there is a grade or slope differential between properties. Mr. Kercheval noted that item (ii) states that natural materials shall be used for fencing. He stated that the Planning Commission has been requiring vinyl fencing due to maintenance issues.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that on item (ii) the second sentence should read, "Fencing shall be construction of solid, low-maintenance materials....."

The Commission began a discussion regarding surfacing requirements and focused on item (vi). Ms. Baker stated that this is existing text in the Ordinance and is based on today's regulations.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that item (vi) be deleted from the Ordinance.

The Commission began a review of the proposed language for loading areas. Ms. Baker noted there is currently very little language in the Ordinance dealing with loading areas. The loading area dimensions have been revised based on the current size and type of delivery vehicles. There was a brief discussion regarding delivery times and providing parking spaces for delivery trucks. There was a brief discussion regarding loading areas and where they should be located and screening issues for them.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends deleting items (b) (c) and (d) (1). Add (d) (2) as another sentence under (a).

Ms. Baker stated that Section 22.14 (Non-Parking uses in Parking Facilities) is a proposed new section of the Ordinance. This section is intended to deal with seasonal sales in parking facilities (such as fireworks, tent sales, etc.). Ms. Baker briefly explained Staff's reasons for proposing this section of text and cited examples of problems that have been encountered in the past, such as storage containers permanently placed that are taking away from the number of required parking spaces.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that language should be included in this section that allows non-parking uses in parking facilities as long as the minimum number of parking spaces are not encroached upon. A zoning certification would be required.

Ms. Baker briefly reviewed the proposed definitions and noted that “gross leasable area” will need to be defined and added to this section. She noted that the definition for the Planning Business Center was modified due to the changes in size. Ms. Baker stated that a clause was added stating, “not more than 25% of the gross floor area may contain uses other than retail sales.” She stated this is due to recent problems with developers preparing sites plans for office space, which are approved, and then restaurants moving into these spaces. Parking then becomes an issue and Ms. Baker cited an example on Rosewood Drive. Definitions have also been added for retail sales and retail service uses. Ms. Baker noted that new definitions have been included for vehicles.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 6:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

George Anikis, Chairman