

**WASHINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
WORKSHOP MEETING  
March 21, 2016**

The Washington County Planning Commission held a workshop meeting on Monday, March 21, 2016 at 7:00 p.m. at the Washington County Administration Building, 100 West Washington Street, Room 255, 2nd Floor, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Commission members present were: Vice Chairman Clint Wiley, Andrew Bowen, Jeremiah Weddle, Dennis Reeder and David Kline. Staff members present were: Washington County Department of Planning & Zoning - Stephen Goodrich, Director; Jill Baker, Chief Planner; Eric Seifarth, Rural Preservation Administrator; and Debra Eckard, Administrative Assistant.

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Vice-Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**WORKSHOP**

**Comprehensive Plan Update**

Mr. Goodrich began the meeting with a discussion regarding questions that were raised during the last workshop meeting relative to agriculture, priority preservation areas and funding for agricultural programs. He introduced the County's Land Preservation Administrator Eric Seifarth.

Ms. Baker addressed the topic of Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs), which are the result of the Agricultural Stewardship Act of 2006. The purpose of this Act is to ensure that certified agricultural land preservation programs across the State of Maryland were purchasing permanent easements in the most cost-effective manner possible. The program was voluntary; however, any county that did not adopt PPAs would not receive State certification and would lose about 47% of its share of the agricultural transfer tax. Our county currently receives 75%; if we did not participate in adopting PPAs our funding would be cut to 33%. Ms. Baker reviewed the criteria and methodology used to establish the PPAs in Washington County as dictated by the State, which are essentially the same as the MALPP program. She presented a map showing the areas of protected lands around the County. Washington County has a goal of preserving 50,000 acres of land.

Ms. Baker briefly discussed the septic tiers law. She noted that property owners in the rural areas are currently restricted to the development of 7 lots because the County Commissioners have not adopted a septic tiers map. If the Commissioners would adopt a map in the future and there are tier 3 areas in the rural area, property owners would be permitted to have major subdivisions above the 7 lot limit. However, parcels in the PPAs would not be eligible for major subdivisions and the 7 lot limit would apply. Priority preservation areas do not allow solar energy generating systems.

**Discussion:** Mr. Weddle asked if solar energy generating systems (SEGS) are currently recognized as an agricultural use. Ms. Baker stated that they are not. Mr. Weddle expressed his opinion that if agricultural land is being used for SEGS or any other non-agricultural use, he believes that the tax collected on these properties could be earmarked and put in the MALPP program to preserve more agricultural land. Ms. Baker stated this could be discussed in the Comp Plan as alternative funding mechanisms for agricultural land. However, the County Commissioners would be the governing body to establish a program of this type. Mr. Goodrich believes that legal advice from the County Attorney's office is needed. Mr. Seifarth volunteered to begin researching the issue of using solar taxes for agricultural easements. He will contact the Assessments office, representatives statewide to see how other counties handle this, and the County Attorney's office.

Mr. Seifarth discussed the various programs available in the County for the protection of agricultural land and the sources of funding for these programs. He explained the MALPP funding and how it is split between the County and the State. Mr. Weddle expressed his concern and other farmers' frustrations that Washington County is not contributing additional money into land preservation programs. There was a brief discussion regarding how other counties are getting more funding and how many farmers are waiting for easements. It was noted that preservation of agricultural land and support of the agricultural economy are major goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Baker distributed a handout "Economic Development Summary – 2015" to members. This handout was prepared by the Department of Business Development and gives a snapshot of the economy of Washington County. Ms. Baker briefly reviewed some of the goals for economic development discussed during the last workshop meeting. She reviewed data that has been collected showing the current and projected jobs in Washington County. The Bureau of Economic Analysis breaks down employment by wage and salary or proprietorship. Ms. Baker began a discussion regarding the labor force, salaries and vacant and undeveloped parcels in Washington County.

Ms. Baker reported that the City of Hagerstown is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan. As part of that process, they are reviewing the Medium Range Growth Area boundaries (MRGA). The MRGA delineates the area the City believes it can accommodate with infrastructure services. Three changes to the MRGA are currently being discussed and include the following: inclusion of Sharpsburg Pike area down to the new Walmart; expand services in the area of the Friendship Technology Park

along Downsville Pike (Maryland Route 632); and retract the boundary in the area of the Hopewell Valley North.

Kassie Lewis, the Director of the Washington County Department of Business Development will be present at the April 11<sup>th</sup> workshop meeting to discuss the EDC priorities. Ms. Baker asked Commission members for questions or topics they would like to discuss during that meeting. The following were suggested:

- What do they need from us?
- What can the Planning Commission do to help?
- Are businesses looking for new land or buildings to renovate?
- Is there enough land zoned for business development?
- What can we do to make the County more attractive for business?
- Could we develop and adopt zoning overlays that bring more business development to the area?
- Is the availability of water and sewer services an issue in bringing development to the area?

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Vice-Chairman adjourned the workshop meeting at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Clint Wiley, Vice-Chairman