

**WASHINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
WORKSHOP MEETING
April 11, 2016**

The Washington County Planning Commission held a workshop meeting on Monday, April 11, 2016 at 3:00 p.m. at the Washington County Administration Building, 100 West Washington Street, Room 255, 2nd Floor, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Commission members present were: Chairman Terry Reiber, Vice Chairman Clint Wiley, Andrew Bowen, and Dennis Reeder. Staff members present were: Washington County Department of Planning & Zoning - Stephen Goodrich, Director; Jill Baker, Chief Planner; and Debra Eckard, Administrative Assistant; and Washington County Department of Business Development – Kassie Lewis, Director.

CALL TO ORDER

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

WORKSHOP

Comprehensive Plan Update

Ms. Baker introduced Ms. Kassie Lewis, Director of the Washington County Department of Business Development. Ms. Lewis gave a brief overview of the Department of Business Development (DBD), which is advised by the Economic Development Commission (EDC). She explained that the EDC is concerned with generating and facilitating a good, healthy economic climate for the community, which is achieved by building and diversifying the business base specifically for medium and small size businesses in our area. This concept involves partnerships with various organizations throughout the County. One new project that has been developed is the establishment of a manufacturing business roundtable. There have been discussions with manufacturers regarding the lack of a skilled labor workforce in our County and what can be done to fill these positions. Ms. Lewis also discussed ways the County is working to attract new businesses to the area.

Mr. Wiley asked what is being done to help the businesses that are already here. Ms. Lewis stated that the top priority of the DBD is the expansion and retention of existing businesses. A few ways that the County is helping businesses is through the establishment of the manufacturing roundtable, changes in customer service relations through the County's Department of Permitting, development of alternative workforce solutions, mediation with regulatory agencies, and business visitation program. Ms. Lewis discussed the "Washington County Loves My Business" initiative.

Ms. Lewis further discussed the need for a skilled labor workforce and good work ethics. The County Department of Business Development and EDC are looking for ways to encourage young people to learn a trade to fill the void of tradespeople in our area. There is a career fair being planned in June to introduce students to different trades that are available.

Mr. Reiber asked if the County has adequate vacant buildings or property available for the type of development we expect to see in the future. Ms. Lewis expressed her opinion that we will not have enough land available if we don't take action now. She believes that the majority of large tracts of land that could be developed for commercial or industrial uses are owned by just a few individuals who will only lease the property instead of selling it. She suggested that one solution would be land banking through an organization such as CHIEF. There was a brief discussion on ways to get a land banking program started in the County. Ms. Baker believes this is an issue that could be discussed in the Comprehensive Plan.

Another area that could be explored in the Comp Plan are the private/public partnerships. There was a brief discussion regarding re-development and re-use of buildings in the downtown area using the private/public partnerships. Ms. Lewis suggested that a recommendation be made in the Comp Plan to encourage the examination of regulations relative to the re-development of blighted properties in the downtown area. Ms. Lewis suggested that the EDC and the Planning Commission meet once or twice throughout the year to discuss the goals and objectives of the EDC and how the two Commissions can work together to accomplish these goals and objectives.

There was a brief discussion with regard to the water and sewer capacity in the County and the types of businesses we want in the County that would conserve water and sewer capacity but provide better employment opportunities for citizens.

Ms. Lewis recommended that the business zoning classifications in the Zoning Ordinance allow for trade schools. Mr. Goodrich asked if current zoning is an obstacle for the business community. He also asked if the infrastructure (water and sewer, transportation, etc.) is an obstacle or a benefit for businesses. Ms. Lewis stated the concern they hear about the most is the congestion on I-81, but zoning has not been an issue. She stated her opinion that the Zoning Ordinance is flexible enough to encourage all kinds of business development.

Ms. Baker stated that she has had discussions with Mr. Ridenour, Director of the Hagerstown Regional Airport, regarding aviation support businesses that could locate close to the Airport. She asked if there are other land use issues that should be considered in this area. Ms. Lewis stated that bringing in

support businesses would enhance and encourage the use of the Airport. She believes that hotels and eateries would encourage other passenger airlines to use the Airport.

Ms. Baker stated there are currently more people commuting into our County than commuting out. She noted that people commuting out of the area shows that we have a regional economy and not just a local economy.

Ms. Lewis briefly discussed the re-development of Fort Ritchie and noted there is currently a prospective buyer. She believes the zoning of Fort Ritchie would be compatible with the business that this prospective buyer would be bringing to the area. One area of concern would be the road network.

Ms. Baker announced that Julie Pippel, Director of the Washington County Division of Environmental Management, will be present at the May 23rd Workshop meeting. She asked that questions be forwarded to the planning staff as soon as possible. Mr. Reiber stated that one question he has is "How competitive are our sewer rates with other counties in the area and how do we overcome that obstacle?"

ADJOURNMENT

The Chairman adjourned the workshop meeting at 4:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Clint Wiley, Vice-Chairman