

**WASHINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
WORKSHOP MEETING
February 12, 2024**

The Washington County Planning Commission held a workshop meeting on Monday, February 12, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. at the Washington County Administrative Complex, 100 W. Washington Street, Room 2000, Hagerstown, MD.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

Planning Commission members present were: Clint Wiley, Chairman, Denny Reeder, David Kline and BJ Goetz. Staff members present were: Washington County Department of Planning & Zoning: Jill Baker, Director; Jennifer Kinzer, Deputy Director; Travis Allen, Senior Planner; Meghan Jenkins, GIS Coordinator; and Debra Eckard, Administrative Assistant.

Comprehensive Plan Update

Ms. Baker began discussions of the Comp Plan noting that more than 500 individual comments were received which included 496 comments from stakeholders as well 32 individual comments and 20 to 30 requests for land use map amendment changes. Approximately 40% of the comments received will require a change to the document. Over the last several months, staff has been reviewing and discussing the comments and their impacts to the Plan. This evening, staff will present the most common, broad and overarching comments for consideration. Any significant comments on individual chapters will be presented to the Planning Commission at the next workshop and individual changes to the land use map will be discussed later at a separate meeting.

- Inclusion of data beyond 2020 Census and comparable data from nearby jurisdictions.

Ms. Baker stated that several agencies believe that more current data through 2023 should be used. The Greater Hagerstown Committee (GHC) had the strongest comments regarding this issue. They believe that the latest increases in housing demand and projected population increases are not the same as the housing bubble seen in the early 2000s but more indicative of a continuing trend. She explained that staff is using the 2020 census data for housing and population projections. Most data is analyzed for long-term trends because it is more accurate. Staff believes that the slight difference of the past three years will not show a significant impact when evaluating long-term trends. Historically, the Comp Plan has used Census data in its projections.

Consensus: The Planning Commission agrees with using the 2020 Census data instead of more current data. This decision is based on the rationalization that data from more current trends would be skewed (due to COVID) and there is the potential for a higher margin of error. Using the 2020 Census data is consistent with the methodology used in past Comprehensive Plans.

GHC wants comparative data from other jurisdictions to be used when looking at housing and population projections. Ms. Baker explained that staff does look at data when working with other sections of the Comp Plan; however, not in the housing and population projections because we are looking at the long-term projections and the growth occurring within our own County. Other counties grow differently than Washington County due to different regulations, growth pressures and land use policies. The historic rate of growth used in previous Comp Plans has been 1% per year. Staff has used two growth scenarios to evaluate impacts from growth. The first scenario assumes historic growth rates of 1% per year. The other scenario assumes a higher growth rate of 1.5% per year. GHC wants another projection included increasing the growth rate to 2 or 2 ½% (similar to Frederick County). Staff believes using these rates would only exacerbate the issues we are already facing, such as the lack of water and overcrowding of schools.

Consensus: The Planning Commission agrees with Staff's assessment of using the 1 and 1½% growth rates.

- Water and wastewater limitations

Ms. Baker noted that one of the most prevalent comments received was regarding the limitations of water and wastewater services in the County. These limitations are having a significant impact on our ability to accommodate growth. Unfortunately, this not an issue that can be solved in the Comprehensive Plan. Several comments were received that this issue is not being aggressively addressed in the Plan. Some

believe that a more aggressive approach would be to move recommendations from the long-term goals to short-term goals or to explore additional alternatives to increase the availability of water.

Discussion: The limitation of water is the #1 inhibitor of development today in the county; however, the cost to upgrade the infrastructure is cost-prohibitive. Ms. Baker explained that currently, according to the City of Hagerstown, 15 million gallons of water per day can be used. Technically, per the State permit, the City could use up to 20 million gallons per day; however, the current infrastructure will not accommodate this amount. The City is currently considering performing upgrades to be able to accommodate 18 million gallons per day. The City is estimating the upgrade would cost approximately \$100 million. Funding for this project would primarily come from State and local resources.

Another point of discussion was the fact that the County has no water resources for the growth area except from the City of Hagerstown. The County has been exploring the establishment of a Regional Water Authority; however, the City has no interest.

Consensus: Move long-term goals to short-term goals to take a more aggressive approach to solving the water issues and emphasize the need to explore alternative options for water within the County growth areas.

- Housing – Density and Affordability

Ms. Baker stated that GHC is recommending an increase in density from the average of 1.3 dwelling units per acre to 3.5 dwelling units per acre. Recommendations for increasing density would include reducing lot sizes and allowing more multi-family and single-family attached units (townhouses) in districts where they are currently not allowed. This would make housing more affordable for families and more appealing for investors.

Consensus: Increase the average density from 1.3 dwelling units per acre to 3.5 dwelling units per acre in the County's growth areas.

- Schools

Ms. Baker explained that even if there was a re-districting and all capacity is considered and divided among the current schools, the elementary schools would still be above the state-rated capacity. Within the Urban Growth Area, there are three high schools that serve the area – South Hagerstown High, North Hagerstown High, and Williamsport High schools. Currently, South Hagerstown High school is grossly over capacity by 264 students, North Hagerstown High School is 24 students over capacity and Williamsport is 160 students below capacity. Within the new Capital Improvements Plan (CIP), the School Board, as part of its funding request, has asked for five new schools in the next 10 years. The first school would be the Downsville Pike school on the Board of Education's (BOE) campus. In addition, the BOE is proposing two additional elementary schools and two middle/senior schools. These new schools would be built to add capacity. Ms. Baker noted that currently the middle schools, with the exception of E. Russell Hicks Middle school, are under the state-rated capacity. Smithsburg and Boonsboro schools are well under capacity.

Ms. Baker talked briefly about the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) and related fees. She noted that the municipalities are not enforcing the APFO. Developers and homeowners are paying the excise tax. Staff is working on a presentation for the County Commissioners proposing to eliminate the APFO fee and raising the excise tax so the County will receive funds.

Consensus: Add more aggressive language about redistricting some of the schools.

Mr. Goetz expressed his opinion that that when the draft goes to the County Commissioners, staff needs to make it very clear that the recommendations discussed are being added to the Comp Plan at the direction of the Planning Commission.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Goetz made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:45 pm. The motion was seconded by Kline and so ordered by the Chairman.

Respectfully submitted,


Clint Wiley, Chairman