

**WASHINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
WORKSHOP MEETING  
March 11, 2024**

The Washington County Planning Commission held a workshop meeting on Monday, March 11, 2024 at 4:30 p.m. at the Washington County Administrative Complex, 100 W. Washington Street, Room 2000, Hagerstown, MD.

**CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

In the absence of the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Goetz called the meeting to order at 4:45 p.m.

Planning Commission members present were: BJ Goetz, Denny Reeder, Terrie Shank and Jeff Semler. 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 reminded members that during the last workshop meeting, discussions focused on general topics recognized from comments received through the public comment process. Staff has categorized comments into generalized topics: Growth Areas, Rural Areas, Special Planning Areas and individual amendments to the Land Use Plan.

- **Growth Areas** – Ms. Baker noted that comments received from the Greater Hagerstown Committee and the City of Hagerstown were very detailed and will have a significant impact on the County’s discussions. She reminded members that whatever decisions are made relative to the Urban Growth Areas will also impact the Town Growth Areas. Every town has its own zoning authority and Comprehensive Plan authority. There are currently four towns that have their own individual growth areas that the County drew around the municipal boundaries to include for growth: Hancock, Clear Spring, Boonsboro and Smithsburg. Some of these areas have also been designated by the Towns as possible annexation areas. These Towns provide their own water and sewer services and must approve development for such services. Ms. Baker noted that the Town of Hancock’s state of sewer is currently in limbo; the Town of Smithsburg has a shared relationship with the County for its sewer services whereby the Town owns and maintains the collection lines and the County owns and maintains the treatment plant.

Members began discussions regarding growth projections and whether residential density should be increased or not. Ms. Baker noted that growth projections are based on historic timelines and trends that have occurred in the past. The County must also consider a higher growth scenario to determine if more growth can occur and how we can handle that growth. The County’s philosophy in the past has been to encourage growth in the urban growth areas where infrastructure can accommodate the growth while accepting there will continue to be some growth in the towns and rural areas. The Planning Commission has already decided to shrink the Urban Growth Area to help alleviate issues dealing with water, sewer and schools.

Ms. Baker provided members with a summary of the comments received regarding the urban growth area as well as a chart delineating the County’s densities versus the City’s densities. Both the City of Hagerstown and the Greater Hagerstown Committee commented that the County needs to better define its land uses. The chart provided by staff follows.

Residential Land Use	Density in current text	Proposed	Housing Types	Zoning’s Currently Achieving	Comparison with City
Low	2-4/acre	4-6/acre	SF, 2FAM, Tri, Quad	RT, RS	3-5/acre
Medium	4-6/acre	6-8/acre	SF, 2FAM, Tri, Quad, TH	RS, RU	5-10/acre
High		8+/acre	2FAM, Tri, Quad, TH, MF	RM	10+/acre

Ms. Baker noted in the high-density residential land use category, staff is proposing no single-family housing. Staff’s proposal would promote denser development using townhomes, quads, etc. Mr. Goetz stated that in other jurisdictions single-family housing with sidewalks between the

houses and a very minimal yard is a popular concept at this time. Members believe the County needs the high-density residential land use to help meet affordable housing needs.

Mr. Goetz asked how the high-density land use would affect Forest Conservation requirements. Ms. Baker stated that all development must comply with Forest Conservation requirements; the Planning Commission may require alternative methods for compliance if on-site forest planting or retention cannot be accomplished. Members discussed other requirements, such as parking and storm water management, that can take away from the number of units allowed on a smaller parcel of land; thereby preventing developers from realizing the maximum number of units allowed by the zoning.

**Consensus:** Add single-family homes to the high-density residential land use types.

Staff will amend the land use map, include recommendations in the land use element that when the zoning gets implemented, there will be more dense zoning districts, and change recommendations in the water resources element, community facilities and housing.

Ms. Baker noted that the Town of Boonsboro has annexed most of the properties surrounding its growth area. Therefore, staff believes that the zoning around that area should remain RT with a low-density residential land use because the Town has a lot of vacant land within its boundary where development could occur.

The Town of Smithsburg is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan. Staff will work with the Town to compare its planned zoning and land use for the growth area. It was noted that properties on the north side of the Town are in a planned annexation area. Ms. Baker explained that Holiday Acres along Route 64 will stay in the growth area because it is a higher density residential development than in the rural areas. There is also a significant number of septic failures in that area.

Ms. Baker stated that one of the recommendations from the Greater Hagerstown Committee is to set a higher goal of 85 to 90% of growth occurring in the UGA and TGAs. Currently, the goal in the Comp Plan is 80%. After reviewing annual reports for the County over the last several years, our average growth has been in the mid-80 percentage.

**Consensus:** Members decided we should raise the goal to 85% of growth in the growth areas.

Ms. Baker noted there was very few comments made regarding commercial development in the County with the exception of individual comments citing no more warehouses or truck stops. There was a specific comment made by the D.M. Bowman Corporation regarding more flexibility in commercial and industrial zoning districts.

**Consensus:** Members believe there is enough flexibility within the non-residential zoning categories.

At the next Workshop meeting, we will begin discussions regarding comments received concerning the rural areas. Following those discussions, we will talk about the three Special Planning Areas that include the Beaver Creek Watershed, the Edgemont Reserve, and the Appalachian Trail. Special Planning Areas are areas designated based on environmental resources that we want to protect and that require additional regulation. The last step will be to review individual requests for land use changes. Staff will then prepare a final draft following direction given by the Planning Commission.

Mr. Goetz asked if the Summary of Comments that was provided at the beginning of the meeting could be sent to the members who are not present at this evening's meeting and ask for their comments prior to the next meeting. It was also suggested that the recording of the meeting be sent to them as well so they can hear the discussions of members that were present.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Shank made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:10 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. Semler and so ordered by Mr. Goetz.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Robert Goetz, Jr.