

WASHINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

August 3, 2020

The Washington County Planning Commission held its regular monthly meeting on Monday, August 3, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. at 100 W. Washington Street, Room 2001, Hagerstown, MD. Due to current social meeting restrictions put in place by the Governor of Maryland because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the general public was not in attendance; however, the meeting could be viewed via Facebook live stream or on YouTube using the Washington County Commissioner's channel. Planning Commission members and staff could attend the meeting in person or virtually using Zoom software.

Planning Commission members present (in person) were: Clint Wiley and Ex-officio County Commissioner Randall Wagner. Staff members present (in person) were: Washington County Department of Planning & Zoning: Jill Baker, Director. Planning Commission members present (virtually) were: BJ Goetz, Dennis Reeder, Jeremiah Weddle and David Kline. Staff members present (virtually) were: Washington County Department of Planning & Zoning: Jennifer Kinzer, Deputy Director; Meghan Jenkins, GIS Analyst; and Debra Eckard, Administrative Assistant; Washington County Department of Plan Review & Permitting: Ashley Holloway, Director and Rebecca Calimer, Chief of Plan Review.

Other attendees included: Gordon Poffenberger, Fox & Associates, Inc. and Julie Greene, Herald Mail.

CALL TO ORDER

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

MINUTES

Motion and Vote: Mr. Kline made a motion to approve the minutes of the July 6, 2020 regular meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Goetz and unanimously approved with the following members voting in favor of the approval: Mr. Kline, Mr. Goetz, Mr. Reeder, Commissioner Wagner, and Mr. Weddle.

-NEW BUSINESS

SUBDIVISIONS

Elmwood Farms Lots A and A-1 [S-17-040]

Mr. Holloway presented for review and approval an extension request for Elmwood Farm Proposed Lot 1A. This request is made in accordance with Section 310 of the Washington County Subdivision Ordinance which states, "Upon written request from the developer, the Planning Commission, or its designee, the Planning Director, may extend the time for approval or disapproval of the preliminary plat for a period not to exceed two years. The granting of any subsequent extensions shall be at the sole discretion of the Planning Commission."

Discussion and Comments: Mr. Poffenberger, Fox & Associates, Inc., noted that the property would not pass perc tests run by the Health Department; therefore, public sewer has been extended to the Elmwood Farm Bed & Breakfast as well as to proposed Lot 1A.

Commission members briefly discussed the length of time to extend this project for completion with the consultant.

Motion and Vote: Commissioner Wagner made a motion to extend the project completion date until December 31, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kline and passed with Commissioner Wagner, Mr. Kline, Mr. Reeder and Mr. Weddle voting in favor of the motion. Mr. Goetz abstained from the vote.

SITE PLANS

Big Cork Winery Agricultural Building Expansion [SP-18-018]

Mr. Holloway presented for review and approval an extension request for the Big Cork Winery Agricultural Building Expansion project.

Discussion and Comment: Mr. Poffenberger stated that this project is awaiting approval from the Health Department which has asked for affluent testing on the site. The tests have been taken and given to the Health Department; however, due to the Health Department being fully closed for nearly 4 months and only partially reopened now due to COVID-19 there is a delay in the process.

Mr. Kline expressed his opinion that the developer should be given ample time to complete the project because these circumstances are out of their control.

Motion and Vote: Mr. Reeder made a motion to grant an extension until July 1, 2021 for this project to be completed. The motion was seconded by Mr. Weddle. Motion passed with Mr. Reeder, Mr. Weddle, Mr. Kline, Mr. Goetz and Commissioner Wagner voting in favor of the motion.

OTHER BUSINESS

Update of Staff Approvals

Mr. Holloway noted that Commission members received a full written report of all approvals prior to the meeting. During the month of July, the following plans were received; 7 standard grading plans, 3 site plans, 5 inspection and maintenance agreements and 3 Type 2 grading plans. Also, there were 3 utility permits, 22 entrance permits, and 19 grading permits issued.

Comprehensive Plan Update – Agricultural and Forest Resources Element

Ms. Baker noted that the Agricultural and Forest Resources Element is a new element within the Comp Plan. During public meetings, citizens voiced concerns regarding these vital resources in Washington County. The latest data (2017) in the Agricultural Resources Profile was collected from the US Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Statistics Service.

The element discusses the County's land preservation efforts and the many programs available, such as the Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Program (MALPP) which is the oldest preservation program in our County. Other programs include: Rural Legacy, Installment Payment Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and Next Generation Farmland. The County has made a lot of progress over the last several years in gaining easements and acreage each year. Ms. Baker referenced the chart showing the converted versus protected lands contained in the Plan.

The Plan describes efforts made to support agriculture through agri-tourism, grown local movements, and focusing on young farmers. The Plan also focuses on land management policies, such as comprehensive zoning, agricultural districts and Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs), which were adopted in 2009. The PPAs are required by the State of Maryland to allow a percentage of the ag transfer tax to be retained and used for land preservation programs.

The Plan also discusses the challenges that the County faces, such as de-facto farmland, alternative energy, and hybrid agricultural uses (uses that are becoming more commercial than agricultural). The Plan provides recommendations and guidance for dealing with these issues.

The County originally set a goal of 50,000 acres of active agricultural farmland. To date, approximately 34,000 acres of farmland has been preserved. An analysis of critical mass to determine at what point agricultural land conversion starts to impact the agricultural industry should be completed.

The forestry section of this element provides background data, the County's forest inventory, the importance of forest, the different types of forest, and the importance of trees for habitat, water quality, etc. Also discussed in this section are threats to a healthy forest, disease and animal grazing. Forest preservation and stewardship are discussed as well as the forest banking program and the payment in lieu program, which have helped to protect relevant forest throughout the County.


ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Wagner made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 p.m. The motion was seconded by Mr. Weddle and so ordered by the Chairman.

UPOMING MEETINGS

Monday, August 31, 2020, 7:00 p.m. – Washington County Planning Commission regular meeting.

Respectfully submitted,


Clint Wiley, Chairman