CECIL COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CITIZEN OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
29 July 2009

Present: Bennett, John; Broomell, Diana; Bunnell, John; Butler, Eileen; Cairns, Ed; Clewer, Jeff; Colenda, Sarah; Derr, Dan; Doordan, B. Patrick; Folk, Patricia; Gell, Robert; Gilley, Paula; Jackson, Ann; Lane, Diane; Polite, Dan; Priapi, Vic; Rossetti, Rupert; Shaffer, Henry; Smyser, Chuck; Thorne, Owen; Walbeck, Carl; Bayer, Michael – ERM; Graham, Clive – ERM; Di Giacomo, Tony; Sennstrom, Eric

Absent: Buck, Walter; Day, Shawn; Deckard, Donna; Denver, John; Duckett, Vernon; Edwards, Sandra; Ellerton, Vaughan; Kilby, Phyllis; Pugh, Mike; Strause, Vicky; Snyder, Linda; Stewart, Gary; Tapley, Donna; Whitehurst, Dan; Whiteman, Will; Wiggins, Kennard

Call to Order: Dr. Lane called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Dr. Lane welcomed the audience to the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Oversight Committee's public forum on the concept plan. She introduced the members of the COC in attendance and thanked them for their dedication to service and for their hard work in getting to this point. Dr. Lane presented a summary of the COC's progress to date. Dr. Lane recognized the elected officials (Rebecca Demmler – Cecil County Commissioner; Robert Hodge - Cecil County Commissioner; James Mullin – Cecil County Commissioner; Wayne L. Tome, Sr. – Cecil County Commissioner; Joseph Fisona – Mayor of Elkton; Frank Hill – Mayor of Chesapeake City; Barbara Brown – Perryville Town Commissioner) in attendance and thanked them for attending. Dr. Lane described the organization of the COC into subcommittees and presented an overview of the COC timeline which will culminate in February 2010 with action by the Board of County Commissioners.

Clive Graham commenced a presentation on the contents of the concept plan. Mr. Graham began by explaining what a comprehensive plan is, what the concept plan intended to achieve, the key challenges the County faces, the land use map, economic development objectives, transportation objectives, water resources requirements, and environmentally sensitive areas. Michael Bayer presented an overview of the recommendations relative to housing, community facilities, future facility costs, implementation tools, and the methods for conveying comments on the draft plan to the COC.

Dr. Lane opened the meeting to public comment on the concept plan.

John Tosh thanked the COC for their hard work and stated that he is pleased that his farm is not being changed. Mr. Tosh stated that the value of the land is important and that his farm is his retirement. He stated that he hoped to one day turn the agricultural operation over to his children.

Denise Davis seconded Mr. Tosh's comments relative to the COC's hard work. She indicated that she had spoken with both ERM and the COC and found the process to be open. Ms. Davis presented

clarification on the library portion of the cost table and stated that while the costs are usually offset by state grants, the table should reflect the full cost as County funds.

Bud Felty thanked Dr. Lane and the COC for their work on this project. Mr. Felty presented his concerns with some items of the concept plan that appeared to be too onerous. He is not in favor of limiting building permits in the rural areas, he is not in favor of expanding non-tidal wetland buffers in the rural areas, and is not in favor of requiring de-nitrifying septic systems within 1,000 feet of streams. The preponderance of intermittent streams, especially in the north, would make it virtually impossible to develop property.

Norman Wehner stated that he appreciated the work of the COC. He feels the concept plan is too specific and problematic. Mr. Wehner said that the cost of de-nitrifying septic systems were prohibitive ($15,000) and the impacts were not acceptable nor were they
reasonable. The proposed wetland buffer expansion was also found by Mr. Wehner to be excessive. Mr. Wehner urged the COC to proceed with caution.

George Kaplan thanked the COC for their hard work. Mr. Kaplan was troubled by the significant increase in build-out and by the lack of an economic analysis of the projected growth. Mr. Kaplan found it difficult to evaluate the concept plan without a map indicating the increase in growth in certain areas and an assessment of the operational costs to support growth.

Mary Scheeler thanked the COC for their work. She also conveyed her concerns regarding the maintenance of the value of agricultural land.

Harlan Williams thanked the COC for its efforts and recognized the various ideologies the members represented. Mr. Williams stated that it was important to carry over the 1990 plan's emphasis on clustering into this plan's language. Additionally, Mr. Williams stated that it is important to limit points of ingress and egress on U.S. Route 40 in order to maintain the flow of traffic and to avoid congestion as typified by Kirkwood Highway in New Castle County, Delaware. Mr. Williams reminded the COC that it is important to respect property rights and to involve farmers in the process.

Catherine Blansfield appeared and expressed concern that the future growth will lead to more traffic. She stated that she owns 52 acres along Frenchtown Road and would like to speak to someone about a connector road across her property from Chesapeake Boulevard to Frenchtown Road.

Jim Reynolds thanked the COC for their efforts and seconded Bud Felty's comments. Mr. Reynolds was troubled by the proposed expansion of the non-tidal wetland buffer, the requirement for de-nitrifying septic systems, and the impacts to smaller lots. He also noted that it was important to grandfather certain properties, and the need to respect landowner's rights.

Robert Gorman did not have specific comments but was vexed by the projected population increase. He was of the opinion that that would turn Cecil County into a suburb. The growth will lead to a building

explosion that will increase land values and drive farmers out of the County. Mr. Gorman stated that housing will overwhelm other uses and will eliminate affordable housing. Mr. Gorman felt that the quality of life would be negatively impacted.

Diana Broomell expressed concern about the draft plan and about future growth. She was fearful that future projected growth was too much and taxes would need to be increased.

Asmalah Aswalla asked for clarification on the differences between an adequate public facilities ordinance and a developer's rights and responsibilities agreement.

Bill Stritzinger noted that the de-nitrifying septic system requirement was too burdensome and excessive. The non-tidal wetland buffer too restrictive, and that a comparison of the current and future land use maps need to be done. He expressed his belief that the layers of regulation are stifling and that leads to higher housing costs.

Harlan Williams inquired if the PPA was intended to shut down development in the rural areas?

Dwight Thomey questioned the necessity of including Elk Neck in the PPA since much of it is either already developed or in state ownership. Additionally, he was perplexed by the inclusion of the Boy Scout properties in the northern portion of the County.

Nick Inglisa expressed concerns about nutrient caps relative to wastewater discharge. He was equally concerned about the state's ability to restrict GAP issuance.

Hank Passi noted that the future of agriculture needs to be looked at in light of the steadily decreasing profitability associated therewith.

Chris Diebold questioned the veracity of MDP's population projections and inquired as to the accuracy of past projections. He also noted that low densities don't make sense in the growth area and that farmers don't want lower densities.

Gaylord Moody questioned as to the difference between the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Preservation Parks & Recreation Plan. Additionally, he was baffled by the different terminology used by each to describe open space.

Natalie Ricci spoke relative to the draft PPA's and the vagueness inherent in the state's criteria. She was fearful of the negative impact to the agricultural community due to the nebulous nature of PPA's and lamented that it would kill off agriculture.

Harlan Williams inquired as to whom is requesting agricultural preservation dollars and noted that the PPA's would back the farmers into a tight spot.

Bill Mortimer noted that the current Comprehensive Plan has never been truly implemented due to the lack of water and sewer infrastructure in the growth area. He stated that he is a proponent of private property rights and that we need to proceed with caution when discussing strategies to preserve open space. Mr. Mortimer closed by saying that the development of the growth area with commercial and industrial entities would generate tax revenue and by noting that assuming maximum density at build out is not accurate since it is rarely achieved.

John Bolinski noted that changing density lowers property value. Lower density means a landowner can't sell their land and smaller land owners can't participate in land preservation programs. All they have left is to pay taxes.

Dr. Lane reminded the audience that comments will accepted until 12 August 2009 and urged those present to return any additional comments they may have so that the COC can peruse the information.

Adjournment: Dr. Lane adjourned the meeting at 7:57 p.m.

Next Meeting: 19 August 2009, 4:00 p.m., Room 208, Cecil College Technology Center

Respectfully submitted:

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Eric S. Sennstrom, AICP
Director – Planning & Zoning