

**Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 18, 2015**

ATTENDANCE: Pete Reich, Commissioner Ray Ryan, Robert Ashby, George Jack, Brian Williams, Henry Barrett, Director of Planning & Zoning Mary Ann Skilling, and Planning & Zoning Coordinator Dianna Battaglia.

Meeting called to Order at 6:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Without objection the minutes for the April 20, 2015 Planning Commission meeting were approved as written by quorum of attending members.

CP2015-01 Concept Plan – Town Hall Municipal Complex:

Ms. Skilling indicated right now you're looking at the total site. The Commissioners have been working with the Little League, Cecil County Department of Public Works, Town Engineer Ralph Ryan, and Arro Engineering on storm water possibilities to be able to develop the municipal complex. The site comprises the reconfiguration of the little league field, playground, basketball court, police facility and new town hall with parking to accommodate some MARC commuters. Storm water plans have been submitted to Cecil County DPW for concept review. Due to poor drainage and an inadequate storm outfall at the site, an adequate outfall had to be found to accommodate the site development. the engineers are proposing a connection from the site to the north side of Otsego Street, west under the Norfolk Southern tracks, north to Aleta Lane that ultimately outfalls to a stream at Ice House Park. Once the storm water plans are approved by Cecil County DPW, Phase 1 that includes the police facility and new entrance off Otsego Street with a roundabout can move forward. Phase 2 includes reconfiguration of the ball field and Phase 3 a new town hall with designated parking, walkways and landscaping.

Discussion continued regarding the site. Some bio-retention areas will be incorporated within the project, ESDs (environmental sensitive designs), but most storm water will have to be handled off site. There are a lot of issues here with the train tracks acting as a levy and blocking water flows. Soil borings have been done throughout the property to determine enough area for construction foundations. This design was chosen as the easiest to achieve and may fix some other water problems in the area.

Mr. Jack asked has anyone considered moving town hall up near where the police facility is rather than having it split so it's like a facility, when you come in you either go to the Police station or to Town Hall. Keep the buildings separated but I was looking at it as driving into a business area and then have the playground and ball field.

Mr. Ryan commented the recommendations that were coming through from the architect and engineers and town staff, trying to take all that into consideration, the best use of the property was to do it this way. This way the playground separates town hall from the police station. I like the separation and I'm concerned about the safety of our employees. It keeps operations separate. The chief is responsible for his facility and the separation achieves that. If we're too close we'll have our hands in too much.

Discussion continued regarding the number of police officers and Town population. The Chief was asked to look at it long term for the future, allow room for growth. Total police force is eleven officers, plus the Chief. At the most you have three officers there at one time with some shift overlaps to have twenty-four/seven coverage. Other possibilities for town hall location were discussed but the police station will remain located where planned. Mr. Ryan stated his personal opinion that I don't want a police station in town hall. I like that security where they are separate. I don't want town staff to have to worry, even though there would be a wall in between to separate the two sides I don't like that concept. I'm concerned about the safety of our employees and things happening. If something happened at the police station we would still be able to remain in operation. The Chief needs to be able to take care of things and if we were too close we could get involved with too much.

Mr. Ryan indicated we received notification today that we are now a Sustainable Community. That allows us to ask for assistance and opportunity for growth potential. And that's what we want to do, we want to grow, especially growth in business and if we don't get water and sewer hookups we're going to be dealing with water and sewer fund issues for a while.

Ms. Skilling commented we have a lot of land potential for development: Happy Valley 112 acres for residential, Cedar Corner 81 single family homes and Woodlands could add several hundred units so there is a lot of potential growth here. It's just bringing back the economy. Cecil County itself is not growing either.

Discussion continued regarding recent studies indicating the high tolls hurting this area and hopefully that will change July 1st. They don't seem to be affecting Elkton or Chesapeake City but it does impact Port Deposit and Perryville and to a small extent, North East. People aren't going to pay the toll amount to come visit. And we need to have something here as a reason to visit. They were talking about the failing businesses in Port Deposit, the casino not making the money they predicted in the beginning and for whatever reason they tied that to the tolls. Some of it may be unjustly tied to the tolls but others are probably justified in a way.

Ms. Skilling commented if you want to read some of the reports done by Cecil County, the Sage Report on economic development you might want to look at it because it ties all the elements, it talks about why businesses don't want to come here. One of the things I found out that I didn't realize is that Cecil County and the Town of Perryville have a personal property tax which is over and beyond. I don't know of many towns on the Eastern shore that have personal property tax rate, and it's not typical of a lot of the Maryland municipalities and counties. That is a disincentive because why would you want to move somewhere with that tax on your inventory above and beyond the standard taxes. So Cecil County is looking at that too. This is a concept plan, and with phase 1 they've worked hard to get it done, the circulation is good for what we have and hopefully someday we'll get it all worked out. There is parking provided here for some MARC commuters but MARC wasn't too positive with giving money. Parking will continue to be available on the other side of the complex for the businesses and homes. Storm water will already be designed for the whole site, if this building goes away and becomes parking you're still going to be ok because it's still impervious.

Mr. Ryan indicated my gut feeling tells me if we would have the town hall somewhere else phase 1 gets done, phase 2 gets done, and the town hall part, I don't know what we'd do with that property. We also looked at the financial cost of doing the whole site and we're better off financially to do it as all one project for storm water than trying to do three separate phases.

Mr. Jack commented in defense of your town hall I would say as a resident you would be doing two things if you purchase that: you're diminishing the taxes of the businesses up there and you're buying in to another building that is old like this, where if you building for the future instead of just trying to make a savings this is a better proposal.

Discussion continued about alternate possibilities for town hall location. The clock tower building, we know it's really old in some parts but we know there had been a lot of upgrades with additions of the bank, the elevator, when the service station became part of a restaurant. We don't know for sure what happened to the apartments upstairs and all the upgrades, so one thing we're going to look at is yes, how much upgrades were done, and is it a better deal to just build for the future or buy that for the future, and how much space is available. That would take away the opportunity to bring other businesses to the town, or does this become an opportunity for businesses here? Some things that were talked about, do we turn it into an office building and rent it out, do we sell it, do we tear it down, and the concerns of buying more property and taking away the tax base.

Mr. Reich asked does anyone have any real objections to this concept plan. Does anybody see areas you think should be changed a little bit, or at least looked at for a change?

Discussion continued with an option to switch town hall with the playground because it presents itself as a town better. There have been several conversations about that. You can come in with a phasing process with a vacant lot in the middle because town hall would be phase 3 and parking in phase 2. Another option for a paved parking lot is to consider making it a grass parking lot as opposed to asphalt. There was talk of those kinds of things and questions coming up like what can we do as far as to make a better foundation under there, to put some kind of pavers underneath, because you're concern now is on grass, MARC commuters are going to park there no matter what the weather so how many cars get stuck and get pulled out or we have to go back and fix it. There is a way for that kind of installation but what is the cost for that verses the maintenance. We've worked with designers about how best to use this property and had very little input from the public.

(Mr. Barrett arrived at 7:13 pm.)

Mr. Reich commented if it was possible, that roundabout be fixed so that town hall is moved up and be south of that roundabout, in that area of the playground now, switching the two. So it's not exactly that they're in the same building. and what that does is it tends to move all the athletic stuff together and maybe even adds a little more parking for the little league.

Mr. Ryan stated I can take that to the Commissioners. The best thing right now is because we're only on phase 1 we can still do some changes if we have to. I would ask you to put that in a recommendation.

Motion was made by Mr. Jack and seconded by Mr. Williams to recommend consideration to switch the location of the town hall and the children's playground so that it conforms as a business type setting separate from the playground/athletic field. Mr. Ryan abstained. One against: Mr. Ashby voted nay; keep the separation for the reason stated earlier in case the police station is taken over town hall is still able to operate. **Three in Favor. Motion Carried.**

Chapter 84 Zoning Ordinance – proposed revisions:

The summary of proposed changes is attached. Ms. Battaglia indicated these are proposed changes right now and more will be addressed at the next meeting. No recommendation is needed at this meeting. If you have any problems or questions with these changes please let us know, but the time

for you to make a recommendation to the Mayor and Commissioners will be at the public hearing. If there are any other changes or you happen to notice something send an email or let us know. We'd like to get as many changes done at this time because of the amount of time necessary to get through the process. Next month we'll be reviewing the Table of Permissible Uses for some uses that should be allowed in TC-Town Center.

Discussion continued regarding the requirement for two public hearings and the high costs incurred for advertising. It is part of our code and not required by the State. That section will be reviewed for additional discussion at next month's meeting.

Adjournment:

Without objection the Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dianna M. Battaglia
Planning & Zoning Coordinator