

**Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 20, 2017**

ATTENDANCE: Pete Reich, George Jack, Ray Ryan, Henry Barrett, Tina Young, Brian Williams, and Planning & Zoning Director Dianna Battaglia.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Without objection the minutes for the February 27, 2017 Planning Commission meeting were approved as written by quorum of attending members.

NEW BUSINESS:

MDP Annual Report: The State of Maryland entrusts local jurisdictions with land use planning authority to guide growth and development through the Land Use Article of the Maryland Annotated Code.

Ms. Battaglia explained Maryland Department of Planning requires all municipalities to send in their annual report. They have created the format to help facilitate each local jurisdiction's annual report information as required by the General Assembly under Land Use Article. This format makes it easier to compile all the information that is submitted. There was one new dwelling permit on Cecil Avenue. This number is low and typical since the economic downturn, the collapse of the home building industry. There have been Zoning Certificates issued for accessory structures, additions, and renovations to properties, homes purchased, renovated and sold. There has been a lot of that type activity but no new construction. We do have a small builder looking for infill lots and we're hoping he continues. The Magraw property is still going through the process and I do have a phone call this week for an update on their status. We can talk about this under general discussion but back to the report, this is a standard report that will be sent out tomorrow, Mayor and Commissioners will receive a copy of the report, as one of the requirements but it is also a requirement that the Planning Commission review and approve. Number 3 talks about any growth related changes, we didn't have a lot of land use changes or new schools, or water and sewer however we did do changes to the Zoning Ordinance and comment was added that these changes were adopted in order to promote and support economic growth activity and encourage revitalization in Town so they will know about those changes. Once they receive the report if they request a summary of the changes that can be provided.

Mr. Ryan commented I just want to thank staff again for the work they do to get this done every year. I was ecstatic that we actually did one house this year and it's a rarity for the six years I've been on the board. To me it's a start, one is better than none and hoping it changes at this point. This board has commented on that, passed it to the Commissioners and what we looked at to help us with those changes, especially the infill lot ideas that staff has worked really hard to get across to us and help us to understand.

Ms. Battaglia explained the purpose of the report is so the State has some kind of way to see all jurisdictions and reporting as required under the Land Use Article. By standardizing the format they have the same information to compare and keep track.

Mr. Reich stated we've been to a number of Planning Commission conferences and one of the important things they keep talking about is growth in the right areas. They want to get away from building condominiums on farms out in the middle of nowhere; they want to get growth in the growth areas. This is one of the ways to track it, to make sure everyone is doing what the State wants us to do.

Ms. Battaglia commented no more sprawl. For many years builders constructed homes everywhere and it didn't matter if there was no public water and sewer, you drilled wells and septic fields were put in, and before you knew it you're so spread out and then as the fire stations know now you have even more people out there that they have to get access to in case of an emergency. Now the State is trying to pull back to stop that, the tier maps that all jurisdictions had to do to keep some open land, and there's always good and bad sides, however for the Town with our growth areas and infill we are working towards meeting their goals. When we build it's on Town water and sewer and that's important right now.

Mr. Ryan stated it also helps with funding, when it comes time for upgrades to the water and sewer plants, if we show that we're working within the parameter set down that can help us with funding. We're trying to push to become a 'Main Street' and all that and it helps out.

Motion made by Mr. Ryan and seconded by Mr. Williams to approve the MDP Annual Report as submitted. **All in Favor. Motion Carried.**

General Discussion:

Mr. Reich stated as a discussion topic, while I was recently at Woody's I was wondering how did North East get all their businesses, and the only thing I could come up with was the State park and all the traffic that goes down there, hundreds of cars, boats, swimmers, campers and lots of out of state people. A lot of people who camp for a week don't always want to eat every night at the campsite. Perryville used to have a lot of stuff, the explosion took out buildings and almost lost the church but where we used to have mom and pop stores all over the place, the news shop, a bank, attorney office, we had a restaurant here that used to be the Island Inn and it was also a liquor store. The new restaurant doesn't seem to do a lot of business, Ercole's pizza seems to be busy, the sushi place is packed, not only the parking lot was filled but one side of the driveway was filled with cars from end to end where it was hard to get in. I know we're trying to do a lot with downtown but I can't see what we have in town that would drive us to get more business. I really think that Perryville is a bedroom community, for Baltimore, for DC, for Philadelphia to some degree, Wilmington or the county for people who live here work in the county too. We've talked a lot about this but I can't figure out what we can do. You can say we're business friendly and I think we are to some degree and I personally don't want to see a Las Vegas down Aiken Avenue or Broad Street.

Mr. Jack indicated you can't compare apples and oranges. You have to realize the town was booming when the railroad was in town, the fire house was down here, the railroad was down here, people were in and out down here. It's different now, there's nothing down there and they all left because nothing was flowing through town and still nothing is flowing through town. The real asset we have that we don't utilize is the water. You talk about North East, they have at least 15 bass tournaments up there in the summer, or more, out of Anchor Marina which draws a few people in to spend money. Those kinds of things are what we don't have and we'll never have that in Perryville unless there is an area we want to develop that would take on some kind of atmosphere to draw people in. What's to draw people downtown, there's nothing here. We have some eating places and they all need supporting, there's Subworks, all these little places are functioning well or they wouldn't be in business. We've seen that at

the Island Inn; when they don't make it they're gone. I don't know what the answer is, you can always say what isn't the answer but it is the flow through town.

Ms. Battaglia responded when we did the revisions to the Zoning Ordinance a lot of those changes were to add some uses in this area that in the past were not permitted. It seems people wanted this town to be a bedroom community the way the rules and regulations were designated for the uses down here was more for light commercial, office type. No bakeries, not a lot of business such as furniture building, so big business couldn't locate here. There aren't many places that a big place could go but it seems when the condos were built on the water it was made to have a nice home to live. We do have our park and now have Lower Ferry park, planning events for that area, trying to get more events down there, the Farmer's Market is every week, trying to create the interest. Because somebody may bring a friend who is looking for a bike rental space, or knows someone who is looking for space. All it takes is one person to see the positives and then they can go back and start working on that idea. It's trying to find those people, how to you get people to come down here and see. The first thing is by having events. We have the band shell now and I believe someone has rented that band shell for a concert. I don't know the specifics. We are trying to utilize that area down there to create a destination for people to come. Once they're here they may tell people about how great it is here, for an insurance office or small business. Any time someone stops in to find out about a property or has questions, we take the time to talk with them about what they're trying to do, maybe suggest other properties, other uses.

Mr. Williams commented parking in town is another problem. With the sports bar up here there's not a lot of parking and I think that may be part of the reason why the other restaurant didn't succeed very well because of lack of parking. If you get a large event down here at the band shell at Lower Ferry Park where's everyone going to park.

Ms. Battaglia replied I think they have those plans worked out. Roundhouse Drive could be closed between Broad Street and Smith Lane because residents can still access their homes by going around. I know it was talked about when having an event you need to know how many people are expected to be there, where will you park the cars, do the police need to be involved, there are a lot of things to consider when someone is coming in for an event. You can't just have them fill out a form, that process has been defined for those details.

Discussion continued regarding the shortage of parking. As small as the ice cream store is, in the middle of the summer, in the evenings, try to find a place to park to get an ice cream. Where do people park who go in support of those businesses. The thing that scares me is some people come down here, go to some kind of concert, whether it be classical music or rock and roll or whatever, and then they want to get something to eat, other than go to the pizza shop or a sub or something, maybe sushi if they like that. There are other places on 40, the big brick place, the old hair dresser, that would be a great place for a restaurant but who do you get in there who would do a study, it's up for lease or for sale. Parking would be a good problem to have. We have an area where parking is a problem and that is the railroad station but they all seem to park and they all seem to walk to get there. So parking would be a good thing to have. The railroad station would be a good place to have a coffee shop and maybe a newspaper stand inside the building but I don't know that Amtrak or whoever owns that would allow that. That was tried some time ago, there was a little coffee shop in there, got permission to use the space and he was there a few months but I don't think he gave it enough time. I don't know what the reasons were as far as the business, whether he was making money or not, but he wasn't there long. Sometimes it takes people awhile before they remember to get their coffee there and create new habits. And he was only there in the mornings.

Discussion continued the Town is working on an incentive program for businesses to be offered to get them to locate here so we're working on that. The outlets were located in a great spot right off of I-95 and they didn't survive. Tolls are also an issue with travel across the river, we're the only county people

have to pay to come into. People who live in Havre de Grace don't typically cross the bridge because there's nothing here. From here traveling west only a mile or two and there are many good restaurants to choose from. Most people have EZPass now but they have to have a reason to come here.

Mr. Williams stated he's heard the same thing from McGregor's who handle the fire house catering, people in Harford County don't want to pay the toll to have to come over here to have a function in the hall because they have to pay to cross the bridge. We don't have hotels over here, the more upscale hotels.

Mr. Ryan indicated I can address some of the issues I've heard so far but every single one of the concerns that you've brought up have been talked about in some way, shape or form in our meetings, including in here since I've been sitting on this board. The water, I agree, is a great asset for us, it's a great asset for Elkton, North East and Havre de Grace, the City of Baltimore all them. But early on we were nothing but residential and we're still pretty much residential downtown and any of the places that we open up in the future, I'll call it in the upper end of the downtown territory up past the condos, that's not big enough for someone to really want to come in there and do a large scale business like we're talking. Maybe we'll get a restaurant in there, a water-based restaurant but I'm not going to go down there and beg people to sell their property. Right now a lot of those properties are residential. We're going to be hurting even if the people do sell their properties to find something big enough for a restaurant to come in and do that. So our waterfront is pretty much used up with residential use and if I was the one living on the water I'd be happy about that. So then we have to look at what else can we do to bring people downtown. We have to get them across the bridge or from North East. The infill lots we have aren't big enough to put restaurants and parking all that stuff on them. So that's just the way things were, businesses were small back when Perryville was a booming little business town. Now all the businesses are large like Walmart, Home Depot, all like that and they need plenty of space. And our infill lots down here don't give them that space. So it's going to be rare to see anybody like that come to this town. So now we need to aim the business side of it towards Route 40, 222, and up towards 95. It doesn't help us downtown but it helps us as a whole if we can do that. So what are the incentives to get them here. We talked about Enterprise Zones, I've sent an email to Ms. Breder and board members asking that we consider. Right now our Enterprise Zone is basically what the county says, the county approves what we submit to them, the county says yes or no and they get the breaks based on the enterprise zone requirements. So I had suggested to the rest of the board and budget time is starting next week, we need to start having these discussions because it's best to have at budget time, why aren't we offering a Perryville enterprise zone. Here's the benefits we can give you: a tax break, whatever, for moving to our town. We did it for IKEA but that was because it was in an enterprise zone, a county enterprise zone and they got a tax break for ten years, I think it was. What are we doing to do that here? Another thing too is it has to be aimed towards 40, 222, 95 areas because that's where the space is for a business, getting people here goes hand in hand with that. They don't want to build if nobody comes here but they don't want to come here because there's nothing else here. So we have to fight that fight somewhere, get the incentives so we can fight to win. Once that's done the next hurdle now is when people come in here. The transportation letter just went out last week to the State, we're asking that they look at, get some kind of incentive program where the residents, remember when you first got the passes at 40, you had to prove you were a resident in the area then you would get the discounted price. Well we want to do something similar at 95. So people in this area can utilize I-95 as well as US40. How nice would it be to jump off I-95 at 155 or 22 in Aberdeen to go to a restaurant or something right up there or the Greene Turtle at the casino, so we need to look at how we can do that.

Mr. Reich indicated I actually sent a letter to the Governor asking why do the out-of-state people get the special price of \$20 a year at the Hatem Bridge when we don't get it in any other state. Because interstate commerce says it's unconstitutional if you don't give it to everybody.

Mr. Ryan responded we understand that but the \$20 you pay can get you a Hatem EZPass, it doesn't do anything if you're in Port Deposit, Baltimore City or anywhere else; it's only good for here. How can we include that, the Hatem bridge plan, up at I-95 for \$5 more or whatever. How can we get this to make it easier for people to want to travel here. If you tell someone in Baltimore City that he can get it for a discounted price they'd be grateful because then they'll come up and eat at our restaurants a couple times a year, it would be worth it and we would have that business coming in here. That was one of the biggest issues for the casino when they first opened when I was working there that's what we heard. They don't want to come here because the toll plaza is in the way. We had a study and started looking at all this, there've been a couple of studies that have proven the Port Deposit, Perryville area takes the hit because of those tolls. And that's why we keep pushing, over and over, in our transportation letters to do something to ease that for us, to ease that burden on us.

Discussion continued what you're saying is true about the businesses however it always comes back to what attracts people. It's one thing to have a business but we have only one thing that would draw a business, one thing that would have events that would draw business to come here and it's seasonal: the water. We have a pier down there that nobody can use. People come to bass tournaments, we have a park and we could do all kinds, parking of trailers, people could go out there and have a bass tournament. But there is no boat launch at the park and no one uses the pier.

Mr. Ryan stated right now the pier is in discussion, this will be the third month because we're waiting on some numbers, we're looking at two things, one right now it is a transient pier, if you want to cruise here and tie up, walk up to the ice cream shop you can, there's no cost there. Another option we're looking at is maybe half transient pier and the other half might actually be docks where you dock your boat and pay a rental fee just like you do at Owens Landing or Havre de Grace marinas. My concern there, why would you want to park your boat there if there's nothing downtown, and I have very little space to offer you downtown. There's no water, no electric on the pier and even though we have security cameras and they've been busted up two or three times already, then the question becomes do you allow them overnight, people stay on their boats overnight. There's a lot of issues we're trying to address. Even now we went to a different system down at the boat launch ramp, you can still get your yearly boat permit but we're also going to go to an honor system. Right now if you went down there and didn't stop here first to get a one-day pass and you parked down there you could get a ticket. So now we're going to do an honor system where you can go down there for one day and there's a place for you to make your payment, you'll get a stub to put in your car so the police will see that. Port Deposit uses a similar system. We're trying to generate even more use of the ramp and we want to stay competitive with what is around here. The one that gave us the most information was the Town of Port Deposit and how they run theirs. I think the box is already in place and I'm not sure if it's actually been put in service yet but it's very close. So we're doing these things to try to utilize the water. We have limited space on the water and nobody is going to build a restaurant where a rancher was sitting two months ago because it's not big enough for that plus parking. The bass tournament did not come back to North East last year, the biggest issue they told us for the reason they didn't return was because of the time of the year. They want the warmer water when the fish are up higher. All the warm tournaments are already taken care of for the warmer time of year, we're playing fill-ins now.

Mr. Reich commented they had too far to go to fish because the flats are dead so they had to go down river. About the transportation letter, the State is never going to allow us to pay coming into this county because Delegate Rudolph, we actually talked about this, I-95 from the Delaware line to the Baltimore tunnel is paid for by the tolls collected at that bridge. And that's the only place, other than the bridges themselves, and 95 south of Baltimore is paid for by the taxpayers. So if the issue here is we're getting burned because we as the taxpayers aren't paying for this for that part of the road.

Mr. Ryan indicated one of the things in the letter that came out maybe four months ago, the board has been asking at the 222 bridge over top 95, it needs to be worked on and made bigger. Because one of

the things we always heard was they couldn't expand the casino area because the highway at 222 would not be able to handle the traffic. The State wouldn't allow them to do anything up there. If I read this letter correctly now, all of a sudden there's a change of heart. The bridge can handle 50% more traffic than it currently does. We haven't done anything to the bridge and all of a sudden we can do more. A hotel was supposed to be the next thing but the holdup was the fact we couldn't increase the traffic.

Mr. Reich indicated another thing would be to stop semis across the Route 40 Bridge, make them all go down 95 and take the toll off of Route 40.

Mr. Ryan commented my understanding was the Route 40 toll pays for the Route 40 Bridge and that immediate area there and there's always maintenance and everything else. And my concern too with closing it down is using it for emergencies. I tried to travel up and down Route 40 yesterday from Perryville to North East a couple of different ways and times and it was backed up like crazy because there was a fatal accident at 195 in Elkton and everybody was getting off and getting on 40. In that case I could see where semis would be allowed to come over on 40 but who's going to monitor that all the time and catch them as they're coming down. We're addressing this as I can see. The best I came up with this time was trying to find a way to incentivize the businesses, the Town of Perryville doing the incentives and not waiting on the county or the State to do it. And that's why I sent my email out to the Mayor and Commissioners and Ms. Breder because it needs to be talked about, first can we do it because financially we have to see the time frame, and how does that affect our budget. Over the winter we've restructured the pricing for use of the pavilions at the park and for use of the band shell, to try to attract more use of those facilities. Any suggestions any of you have, please let us know because we're going to fight this through.

Mr. Reich stated please send something to Mr. Ryan, think outside of the box and come up with ideas to at least try, who does it really hurt.

Mr. Ryan indicated we've had two different people approach us about doing scenic cruises, as you're going up the river they'll give the history tour and one of the stops would be Havre de Grace and another would be here, and Port Deposit but neither one has ever come back and followed though. And I think one of the reasons why we don't see it is what we've been talking about here, they'll stop at the transit pier by Rodgers Tavern, they can tell them about Rodgers Tavern and tell them about the tracks and the railroad station, etc. but there's no place for them to get a bite to eat when they get off. There are dinner cruises, scenic tours, there was even talk for a while to get someone to open up the concession stand at the boat ramp, use that as a business and rent from the Town and it ran into a whole lot of problems, legal problems and I think we created some of our own problems.

Ms. Battaglia stated they are working through that and the other place is Rodgers Tavern, to have that open for light fare and drinks, in the basement which needs renovations to be able to get that use approved, inspected by the health department for food prep.

Adjournment:

Without objection the Planning Commission meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dianna M. Battaglia
Planning & Zoning Coordinator