

AT A MEETING OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION ON AUGUST 12, 2020 IN THE BOARD ROOM, SECOND FLOOR, COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER, CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA:

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Foster called the meeting to order at 7:00.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Mr. Workman called the roll to determine a quorum.

Present: Bill Foster, Chair
Trey Wolz, Vice-Chair
Adam Workman, Secretary
Bryan Katz
Scott Kroll
Robert Miller
Bryan Rice
Sara Bohn, Board of Supervisors Liaison

Absent: Coy Allen
Will Bulloss

Staff: Emily Gibson, Director of Planning & GIS Services
Brea Hopkins, Development Planner
Justin Sanders, Development Planner

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

On a motion by Mr. Miller, and seconded by Mr. Katz, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the agenda as presented.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

July 15, 2020 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

On a motion by Mr. Rice, and seconded by Mr. Workman, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the consent agenda as presented, with noted corrections to the July 15, 2020 meeting minutes.

PUBLIC ADDRESS

Chair Foster opened this portion of the meeting at 7:03 PM. Having no speakers, the public address session was closed.

OLD BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

WORK SESSION

- a. **ZA-2020-04: Draft Text Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to Address Updates on Telecommunication Facilities**

Mr. Sanders introduced several proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance concerning updates to regulation of telecommunications facilities throughout the County. He detailed legislation passed in 2017 and 2018 by the General Assembly regarding micro-wireless and small-cell telecommunications facilities, which requires localities to remove Special Use Permit restrictions on the co-location of these facilities on existing structures.

Mr. Sanders outlined the review process undertaken by staff in drafting the proposed amendments, which included reviewing the actions by the General Assembly, a comprehensive review of existing regulation in the Zoning Ordinance, and review the Development Subcommittee. Mr. Sanders noted that staff is also in the process of reviewing administrative procedures and fee structures relating to telecommunications facilities are part of this review.

Mr. Sanders then outlined existing definitions and references to telecommunications facilities throughout the Zoning Ordinance. His overview included a description of the Zoning Ordinances distinction between attached and freestanding telecommunications towers. Mr. Sanders noted that the definition for attached telecommunications towers included the placement of an antenna on any existing building, telecommunication tower, billboards, silos, etc. He also shared that these attached towers are permitted by right in all zoning districts, while freestanding towers were permitted in most zoning districts by Special Use Permit.

Mr. Sanders then shared the proposed amendments of the Zoning Ordinance to align with the changes to State Code. He shared that staff proposes adding definitions for the terms "co-locate," "micro-wireless," and "small cell" to Section 10-61. These definitions mirror language in State Code regarding these facilities. He also noted the proposed amendment of the existing definition of "telecommunications tower, attached" to include co-location of small cell and micro-wireless facilities. Mr. Sanders stated that the inclusion of this verbiage would meet the intent of State Code for allowing these facilities, as attached towers are already permitted by right in all respective zoning districts.

Mr. Sanders also shared that staff proposes adding free standing small cell and micro-wireless facilities as uses permitted by Special Use Permit in all districts which currently allow free standing telecommunications facilities by SUP. He also noted other proposed additions of freestanding small cell and micro wireless facilities to the existing list of structures permitted in required yards and additional regulations for freestanding towers approved by SUP.

Mr. Sanders then shared a proposal to permit certain freestanding towers by right, in an effort to facilitate the implementation of new wireless technologies, broadband, and other services throughout the County. These towers would be limited in height and would be regulated with standards consistent with those found throughout the Zoning Ordinance regarding setbacks, color/reflectivity, and screening of equipment. Mr. Sanders also noted that action taken in 2013 permitted amateur radio towers in most Zoning Districts as a use permitted by right, up to a height of 75 feet. He noted that the Commission could consider that height restriction when discussing a proposed height for freestanding towers permitted by right. Mr. Sanders also noted that the Commission had expressed consistency in a 40 foot height restriction for high rise signs and other structures.

Mr. Sanders concluded his presentation and asked members of the Commission for their feedback on the proposed amendments and their opinions on a maximum height for proposed freestanding towers permitted by right.

Chair Foster then opened the floor for discussion on the proposed amendments. Mr. Wolz stated that broadband and cellular service are a necessity in today's society, and facilitating the expansion is in the best interest of the County and Commission. Mr. Miller expressed agreement, noting that

considerations should be made for those residents in the County who don't have access and how the Commission can work to fill those gaps in service.

Ms. Gibson noted that the County is seeing an interest from providers for transmission poles under the 40' requirement, and noted that the proposed change aligns with the types of projects the County sees most often.

Chair Foster expressed his agreement that a 40 foot height restriction for freestanding poles would be acceptable and would align with other height restrictions imposed throughout the Zoning Ordinance. He also noted that when siting these facilities that line of sight considerations should be taken into account to ensure that the technologies work effectively without the need for more transmission poles.

Mr. Kroll asked if there was merit in considering a stepped approach to height considerations, providing additional review to poles over 40 feet in height, but less than 75 feet in height. He reasoned that the flexibility might be beneficial to applicants in avoiding Special Use Permits, but still allowing discretion by the Planning Commission and staff.

Mr. Katz asked for more information concerning the fee structure for towers, noting that the fees for shorter towers may be cost prohibitive. Ms. Gibson noted that staff would be reviewing the fee structure for permitting various tower heights.

Ms. Gibson then addressed the issue of tower placement in areas designed at Agricultural and Forestal Districts. She noted that these districts exist in areas of the County experiencing gaps in service for cellular and broadband service. She asked members of the Commission for their feedback on balancing these needs for access with the stated goals of the AFDs to preserve the rural character and natural assets of the County.

Chair Foster felt that it was best for staff and the Board of Supervisors to be proactive in addressing telecommunications facilities in the AFDs. He noted that as technologies continue to evolve, the need for large towers will become less pressing. He shared that flexibility in these areas, like that provided by the proposal for smaller towers, may be a good solution to access issues in these areas.

After more discussion, Chair Foster asked if members of the Commission felt comfortable with the proposed amendments. He noted that there seemed to be a consensus on a 40 foot height limit on poles by right throughout the various zoning districts. Mr. Kroll agreed that the proposal would address his earlier concern of balancing the needs of the applicants and the necessary review by staff. Hearing no further objection, Chair Foster asked staff to continue the process of bringing the amendments forth for consideration by the Planning Commission at a future meeting.

WORK SESSION

a. Long Range Planning Update-Village Land Use Designations

Ms. Hopkins provided the Commission with an update on the development of the Village Land Use Designations Guide and provided copies of the graphics produced by the New River Valley Regional Commission for the designations. Ms. Hopkins noted the selected color scheme for the graphics for each designation, and noted that this color pallet would be used throughout the updated Village Plans for continuity. She also shared how each information sheet provided an overview of density requirements, permitted housing types, and other land use items. Ms. Hopkins also shared graphic representations of road cross sections produced by the Commission that will be used in each Village Plan. Ms. Hopkins stated that the work on developing these elements for the Price's Fork Village Plan took more time as staff was utilizing these design and formatting elements as a template for future

Village Plans. She noted that having this template would make the compilation of the future Village Plans that much faster and more efficient.

b. Long Range Planning Update- Prices Fork Village Planning

Ms. Hopkins then shared information with the Commission regarding the development of the Price's Fork Village Plan. She provided the Commission with demographic data for the Village, including population, income, and housing data. Ms. Hopkins then shared information that was shared by community members at the public input sessions held in the Village regarding their favorite things about the Village and important issues they felt were impacting the future development of Price's Fork. Ms. Hopkins then shared information about population, income, and housing projections for the future of the Village. She noted key concepts from the public input sessions that were guiding the Village Plan development, including transportation improvements, preservation of the historic and natural resources of the Village, and high quality compatible growth.

Chair Foster then opened the floor for discussion on the presented materials. Mr. Rice asked Ms. Hopkins about Price's Fork residents' opinions on future growth. Ms. Hopkins noted that residents had expressed that they did, in fact, want to see growth and development in the Village. She shared that residents had stated that this growth should be carefully managed to respect the Village's character.

Chair Foster asked that staff provide population and demographic information for the entire County in conjunction with the data shared for Prices Fork to provide context to the numbers.

Mr. Miller shared that he liked the format on the Village Plan and looks forward to the continuity between the various plans.

Mr. Kroll asked staff about the updating of other plans and integration of those plans and studies into the Village plans. Ms. Gibson noted that the intention was to integrate transportation related plans and other studies into the text of each Village and to clearly reference each related study or plan.

Chair Foster asked about the next steps in the Village Plan updates. Ms. Gibson noted that once staff completes the update of the Prices Fork Village Plan, they will move into the update for Riner. Ms. Gibson noted that staff may decide to move on to work on the full Comprehensive Plan, with new data coming available from the recently completed housing study, spearheaded by the Regional Commission. If the full Comprehensive Plan is not reviewed next, staff will proceed forward with the Shawsville, Elliston/Lafayette, and Plum Creek Village Plans.

LIAISON REPORTS

Board of Supervisors – Supervisor Bohn provided the Commission with an update on recent actions of the Board of Supervisors. She noted that the Board had recently approved the recent rezoning applications recommended for approval by the Planning Commission as well as the text amendments concerning high rise signs and travel centers. Supervisor Bohn stated that the Board had recognized members of the County's fire and rescue departments for 25 years of service at their recent meeting. She also noted that the Board had set a public hearing date for an upcoming decision to establish satellite offices for voting for the upcoming election.

She shared that the County had received another round of funding from the CARES Act and was working to establish how those funds would be used to assist in COVID-19 response throughout the County. Supervisor Bohn also noted that the Board had approved a lifetime dog license for pet owners. She noted the work of the Treasurer's office to provide this service to County residents.

She also shared an update on efforts to expand broadband access throughout the County, noting that the RFP process had concluded and a provider selected. She shared that the Board had worked to facilitate the addition of mobile internet hotspots to fill gaps in broadband coverage.

Supervisor Bohn also noted that the Board had recently met to discuss a number of capital projects including Creed Fields, a maintenance facility for General Services, and the Phlaegar Building/Magistrate's Office relocation.

Public Service Authority – No report.

Blacksburg Planning Commission – Ms. Gibson shared that the Planning Commission had recently reviewed a proposed change in height of the Midtown Development at the Old Blacksburg Middle School site. This requested change relates to the parking structure and Police Department facility being built as part of the redevelopment.

Christiansburg Planning Commission – Mr. Rice stated that the Planning Commission had recently recommended approval of a rezoning and conditional use permit for a new housing development off Vinnie Avenue.

Radford Planning Commission – No report.

Tourism Council – No Report.

Parks and Recreation – No report.

Planning Director's Report – Ms. Gibson shared that staff would be receiving training on a new software system for permitting and planning applications beginning the following week. She noted that one module of the new system was already active and allows County staff to input service requests. Ms. Gibson shared that the Regional Commission would be releasing the results of the housing study in September. She is hopeful the study will inform the housing section of the Comprehensive Plan update currently being worked on by staff. Ms. Gibson also noted that COVID continues to impact County operations, but that staff was working diligently to continue to provide services to the public while juggling the new responsibilities.

Ms. Gibson shared that the Agricultural and Forestral District Committee would meet on September 3 to discuss renewals and withdrawals. She also shared that staff was working to finalize the applications for Smart Scale with the assistance of a transportation consultant. Ms. Gibson also noted that RFPs will soon be released for a consultant for on-call transportation assistance. This partnership allows County staff to be proactive with transportation projects and supplements the time available for staff to dedicate to these projects.

Responding to an inquiry from Mr. Kroll about the recently approved travel center text amendment and potential applicants, Ms. Gibson noted that staff expects a concept plan to come soon from an interested developer.

ADJOURNMENT

With no additional business, Chair Foster adjourned the meeting at 9:15 p.m.