

MEETING NOTES
York 2040 Committee

Wednesday, November 6, 2019 – 5:00 p.m.
Public Works Multi-Purpose Room
105 Service Drive, Yorktown, Virginia

Members Present: Mark Bellamy, Gregory “Skip” Brooks, Chad Green, Montgoussaint “Montee” E. Jons, Michael S. King, Vivian McGettigan, R. Anderson Moberg, Richard Myer, Sheila L. Myers, Jacob Rizzio, Eugene Seiter, and Cowles “Buddy” Spencer

Staff Present: Susan Kassel, Director of Planning and Development Services; Timothy Cross, AICP, Deputy Director of Planning and Development Services; Earl Anderson, AICP Senior Planner; Amy Parker, Senior Planner; Daria Linsinbigler, Planning Assistant; Justin Atkins, Assistant County Attorney; Gail Whittaker, Public Information Officer

Member Absent: Leigh Houghland

Call to Order

Chairman King called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 p.m. at which time he welcomed everyone and asked that those who were present for the first time to introduce themselves. Brian Fuller, Director of Community Services; Abbitt Woodall, Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Manager; Maria Kattman, Real Estate Assessor; and Lynn Underwood, Building Official; introduced themselves.

Approval of October 2, 2019 Meeting Notes

The October 2, 2019 meeting notes were approved unanimously with minor revisions.

Presentation: York County Housing Trends

Timothy Cross, Deputy Director of Planning and Development Services, gave a presentation on housing trends in York County. He stated that single-family detached homes represent about two-thirds of the County’s housing stock – more than in most neighboring localities, the region, and the state. He said that residential development makes up 19% of the County’s existing land use. He reported that that military land constitutes the largest share of land use, limited industrial and mixed use land represent the smallest shares. Mr. Cross noted that home construction in the County is on the rise since the Great Recession but is still running well below previous decades’ levels. He reported that most new homes built since 2008 have been townhouses, apartments, and condominiums and that approximately two-thirds of the homes are located in the lower portion of the County.

Mr. Cross stated that currently there are about 3,700 future housing units in the development pipeline, almost half of have not proceeded to the subdivision or site plan review stage yet. He added that unlike the existing housing stock, most of the future housing units in the pipeline are multi-family or townhouse units and are located in the upper County. He added that a large proportion of apartments in the pipeline – more than 40% – are age-restricted senior housing units. Mr. Cross closed by saying that when these “pipeline projects” are accounted for, the

remaining amount of vacant land available for residential development is extremely limited, and he pointed out these areas on a map, noting that many of them have environmental constraints.

Ms. Myers asked how long it takes for development plans to go through the review process. Susan Kassel answered that if an application is submitted for the pre-application process, the Development Services Division will give a response within fifteen business days, whereas other plans typically take about sixty days for the staff to review and respond to the developer. She noted that project delays can occur if the engineer and the County have to correspond back and forth. She noted that there is no extra fee for going through the pre-application process. Mr. Spencer added that different agencies involved in the review process can also affect the length of time a plan is under review.

Presentation: York County Housing Market Study/Future Needs Analysis

Dr. Tom Hall, Associate Professor of Finance and Economics at the Joseph W. Luter III School of Business at Christopher Newport University, gave a joint presentation with Dr. Sarah L. Stafford, Chair of the Department of Economics at The College of William and Mary, on an assessment of housing needs in York County that they had recently conducted. Dr. Hall stated that the residential real estate market is robust and active with sales at many price points but that the lack of affordable housing is a challenge, especially for renters.

He noted that the data collected was based on a blend of REIN (Real Estate Information Network) and the Williamsburg Multiple Listing Service from 2010 through 2018 and supplemented by the Census Bureau's ACS (American Consumer Survey) data. He said that single-family detached constitute the largest proportion of the County's housing stock is at 65%. He stated that home sales have been on the rise over the past several years and that closing prices have been fairly stable during that period. Dr. Hall added that the average sale value of homes has not reached pre-recession sales figures. He noted that since 2010, the average sale price per square foot has been higher in the lower County than in the upper County. He said that sales of homes built since the year 2000 represented 30% of the closed transactions from 2010 through 2018 while older properties had substantially lower sales performance.

Dr. Stafford presented data specifically related to housing affordability, explaining that the standard definition of affordable housing is based on the general rule that no one should have to spend more than 30% of his or her income on housing. She said that homeowners have more affordable housing choices than renters and that the highest percentage of cost-burdened households in the County is in the Census Tract that includes Lackey, while the lowest proportions of such households are in Seaford and Tabb. She reported that the supply of affordable housing is not sufficient to meet demand, especially for renters and for households with incomes below \$35,000.

Ms. McGettigan asked if the 30% rule is based on gross or net (after-tax) income, and Dr. Stafford responded that it is based on gross income. Mr. Seiter pointed out that different income levels show who can afford to live in the County. Mr. Myer added that more so-called "workforce housing" is needed for residents with careers in a median salary range, such as school teachers, firefighters, and deputies.

Dr. Stafford reported that rental prices are exceeding the rate of inflation. She said that owners may want to downsize from their large homes but the next group of buyers are not in place to purchase them. Chairman King noted that baby boomers looking to downsize may not be able to find affordable, smaller homes and they are forced to keep their larger homes and modify them instead.

Dr. Stafford spoke about the commuting patterns for people who live and/or work in the County. She said that most people who live in the County commute elsewhere, such as Newport News, Hampton, or James City County. In addition, she noted that while a plurality of people who work in the County also live in the County, most of them commute from other localities, especially Newport News.

Mr. Myer asked the source of the data and Dr. Stafford responded that it was obtained from the U.S. Department of Labor statistics and included multiple workers in the same household. Abbitt Woodall added that there are a lot of commuters coming into the County who cannot afford to live there. He noted as the large population of citizens are choosing to age in place, the workforce of health care workers needed to support them are not able to find affordable housing and have to commute from elsewhere.

Dr. Stafford concluded by saying that rentals used to be the choice a person made until they could afford to purchase a home but now rental units are being built to suit those choosing to rent.

Susan Gaston, Legislative Consultant for The Gaston Group, LLC. spoke on behalf of the Virginia Peninsula and Williamsburg Associations of REALTORS about the buying trend. She stated that according to the National Association of REALTORS, more people are buying smaller homes that require less maintenance. She said buyers prefer to live in walkable communities with amenities and green space and that these types of properties are highly sought after by both first-time buyers and retirees.

Mr. Green asked for suggestions for improving housing affordability in the County and Ms. Gaston responded that removing costly regulations cost can improve affordability. She added that the state code provides an opportunity for localities to adopt and "Affordable Dwelling Unit" ordinance, which allow for density bonuses in exchange for a commitment to provide housing at certain price points. Ms. Gaston noted that keeping the upfront costs of buying land to an affordable figure would offset the expenses of building a new home. Mr. Green commented that although the Board of Supervisors has some control over policy, it cannot control the price of land or housing.

Mr. Spencer noted that York County has a good quality of life with good schools, which drive up the cost of housing. Ms. Gaston added that another option for the County is to promote redevelopment opportunities to attract investors. She added that transit-oriented development systems are also desirable to ease road congestion.

Presentation: Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization

Abbitt Woodall, York County Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Manager for York County, stated that his six-person office administers programs in home repair, first-time homebuyer assistance, Section 8 housing choice vouchers, and neighborhood revitalization. He stated that

the Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Division leverages County funds with state and federal grant funds to assist low-income households with their housing needs. Specifically, he stated that the division assists eligible residents with home repair and rehabilitation projects, offers down payment and closing cost assistance to first-time homebuyers, and neighborhood revitalization projects. He stated that his office administers the Section 8 voucher program, which provides funds to cover the difference between what a tenant can afford and a private landlord is charging for rent. Mr. Woodall cited the division's many success stories, including the completion of 51 home repair projects in FY 2019 and the Carver Gardens revitalization project, through which 17 homes have been rehabilitated and another 3 demolished and rebuilt, with 22 more homes to be rehabilitated in the second phase. He stressed the importance of neighborhood revitalization programs, noting that by networking with groups and volunteers, funds are spread to cover the costs of more projects. Brian Fuller commended Mr. Woodall on his ability to obtain grants and raise funding to gain as many resources for the County as possible.

Committee Discussion

Ms. Myers asked how long the backlog is for Section 8 voucher applications, and Mr. Woodall responded that there is a significant waiting list, noting that people now being served had applied in 2012. He stated that a person does not have to live or work in the County to apply, but if they do, they are given a higher priority on the waiting list. Mr. Seiter asked why someone living outside of Virginia would apply for a Section 8 voucher in York County. Mr. Woodall responded that they most likely applied as a local resident and have since moved while remaining on the waiting list. Mr. Fuller added that once the applications are processed, many applicants no longer meet the required criteria.

Ms. Myers commented that she was not aware of such programs and was sincerely impressed. Mr. Jons commented that when people devote less of their income to housing, they have more funds to improve the quality of their lives. He noted the importance of investing in the existing stock of homes through revitalization projects that greatly impact the County in a positive. Chairman King agreed, adding that such projects also increase the value of neighboring properties.

Mr. Rizzio asked how the County can increase affordable housing options, and Mr. Woodall stressed that saving existing stock before it is too late is key. He noted that if a property is past the point of repair, an emergency voucher can be issued to bypass the waiting list. Mr. Woodall reiterated that there is not enough affordable housing to meet the demand.

Other Business

Mr. Cross stated that the next committee meeting will be on December 4th at 5 p.m. He said the main topic of the meeting will be public facilities, specifically County offices, fire and life safety, and utilities.

Citizen Comment Period

There were no citizen comments.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:13 p.m.