

MEETING NOTES

York 2040 Committee

Wednesday, May 5, 2021 – 5:00 p.m.

Senior Center of York

5314 George Washington Memorial Highway, Yorktown, Virginia

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

Staff Present: Neil Morgan, County Administrator; 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; Jeanne Sgroi, Management Analyst Intern; James Noel, Director of Economic Development

Members Absent: Vivian McGettigan, R. Anderson Moberg

Call to Order

Chair King called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 p.m. He welcomed everyone and stated that he is glad to be able to hold in-person meetings again. He acknowledged and welcomed Chris Davidson, who was in attendance as an interested citizen.

Chair King stated that at the Board of Supervisors’ work session the night before, he, Mr. Jons, Mr. Green, and Mr. Cross had presented a progress report on the Comprehensive Plan review and update.

Approval of February 3, 2021 Meeting Notes

On motion of Ms. Myers, the February 3, 2021, meeting notes were approved unanimously.

Presentation

Chair King recognized Neil Morgan, County Administrator, for a special presentation. Mr. Morgan stated that in recognition of Mr. Rizzio’s service as the Youth Commission representative on the Committee, he was receiving a special 2021 York County Outstanding Youth Award for Engagement in Local Government. He presented Mr. Rizzio with a resolution of congratulations adopted by the Board at the previous night’s meeting and stated that the award includes a scholarship. Mr. Rizzio expressed his gratitude, stating that the experience has been educational and rewarding and that he appreciates all of the support he has received from the County and his fellow Committee members. In response to a question about his college plans, he stated that he will be attending the University of Virginia in the fall.

Committee Discussion of Draft Economic Development Element

Chair King stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the draft Economic Development element, which was distributed to the Committee members last week. He stated that he would like to go through the document section by section and see what comments people have. Mr. Cross added that Jim Noel, Economic Development Director for York County, had provided significant input into the draft document and was in attendance to help address Committee members’ questions and comments.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Mr. Myer suggested that a statement be added at the beginning of the Existing Conditions section noting that much of the economic data is skewed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Seiter stated that the statistical data in the Existing Conditions section confirms that the County is doing well and on the right track. He said York County is essentially a bedroom community that offers a high quality of life that people enjoy.

Ms. Myers asked if the discussion of economic development programs should include some mention of the number of program participants. Mr. Noel responded that the data is available and can be provided but that the numbers are constantly changing and would only represent a snapshot in time. He explained that the intent of that section was basically to give an overview of the many programs that are available to new and existing businesses. Mr. Spencer asked Mr. Noel if these programs are adequately funded. Mr. Noel responded that he is pleased with the financial support provided by the Board and added that the Economic Development Authority (EDA) also has other sources of funding.

Mr. Green commended Mr. Noel and his office on their success at attracting the Beale's East Brewpub to a formerly blighted site that the EDA had purchased and cleared as part of its Route 17 Property Acquisition Program. He added that this was all accomplished in the middle of a global pandemic, which he said was an impressive feat.

Mr. Seiter commented that one thing that attracts businesses to a community is a good school system, and he asked Mr. Noel if that has been the case in York County. Mr. Noel responded that the County's schools are an extremely attractive feature for businesses, noting that they like to have access to a well-educated work force.

Mr. Jons suggested adding language linking the building permit data for additions and alterations to the discussion of the growing emphasis on redevelopment and adaptive reuse. He also commented on the County's status as a bedroom community and asked if that is by design or by circumstance. He stated that the Comprehensive Plan should reflect what we want our community to be.

Mr. Spencer stated that he has long felt that the County should try to do something about the salvage yards on Route 17, and he asked Mr. Noel if anything is in the works. Mr. Noel responded that the County has been approached by a company interested in acquiring and making improvements to modernize the salvage yards.

PLANNING ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

Mr. Myer asked about the term "knowledge-based workers" and suggested that a definition and/or examples be provided. Following discussion, it was agreed that the language should be clarified.

Mr. Spencer stressed the importance of keeping younger people in the County, which he said his company was trying to accomplish with the Fenton Mill rezoning, which encountered significant citizen opposition and was ultimately defeated. He stated that sometimes things that are in the County's long-term best interest are not politically popular, and he asked how the conflict can be reconciled. Chair King responded that he believes the Fenton Mill rezoning failed mainly because it was seen as not being consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's guidance for the Skimino area. Mr. Spencer commented that with the limited amount of developable vacant land available, the Plan needs to address the need to use that land in a way that will encourage younger people to remain in the County. Ms. Myers commented that most of the vacant land is in the upper County and that there is a tension between the desire to preserve green space and the need for tax revenues for the fiscal health of the County. She said there needs to be a middle ground and a balance between competing interests.

Mr. Jons stated that he does not feel this Committee is the appropriate venue to revisit the Fenton Mill rezoning application, which he said was thoroughly vetted and ultimately denied by the Board of Supervisors. Mr. Spencer responded that without regard to the Fenton Mill application, the larger issue that he is speaking of is the housing shortage on the Peninsula. Chair King noted that the draft document addresses this issue, and Mr. Cross added that Strategy 2 under Objective 4 is to provide for a range of housing options as a means of achieving the objective of attracting and retaining younger workers and entrepreneurs.

Mr. Seiter said he does not agree with the statement that the Peninsula is at a competitive disadvantage with Richmond and Norfolk in terms of air transportation. He said Newport News-Williamsburg International Airport has been hurt in recent years by the discontinuation of AirTran service, poor management decisions under the previous leadership, and the pandemic, but that he still finds it to be a better, more convenient way to fly than either Richmond International or Norfolk International and that he considers the airport to be an asset for the County. Chair King stated that he agrees that the airport is an asset but that the problem is its inability to compete with larger airports nearby. He suggested that the language be reworded in a more positive way. Mr. Noel agreed that the airport is an asset but that it suffers from its proximity to other airports that offer significantly more direct flights. He added that the new Executive Director of the airport is working hard to turn things around. Mr. Green suggested that the Executive Director be invited to a future meeting to discuss the future plans for the airport. Chair King asked the staff to arrange it. He also spoke about the new multi-modal high-speed and intercity passenger rail station that is being built in the vicinity of Bland Boulevard near the airport, which will address the need for transit service to and from the airport.

Mr. Rizzio suggested adding some language to the discussion of e-commerce relative to the impacts on the transportation network and particularly onsite access and circulation for fulfillment centers and businesses that offer order pickup for online purchases. Mr. Jons commented that he sees more and more Amazon drop-off and pickup locations, which are basically micro-fulfillment centers that generate traffic.

Ms. Myers stated that the section on reuse, redevelopment, and revitalization is well done and on-point. Mr. Brooks commented that the information applies not just to old, blighted sites. He said he expects to see a lot of newer commercial buildings go vacant because of the pandemic. Mr. Jons stated that in his comments to the Board at last night's meeting, he noted that redevelopment and adaptive reuse will constitute 90% of development in the future. Mr. Spencer stated that the problem with adaptive reuse is that it can be very costly to bring older buildings up to today's code requirements. Mr. Noel agreed, stating that the draft document is correct in stating that the County needs more zoning flexibility to encourage redevelopment and adaptive reuse. He added that there are not as many commercial vacancies as some people think, noting that the County's commercial vacancy rate is actually lower than the Peninsula average. Lastly, he stated that in addition to the regulatory issue, the County needs better broadband service to attract businesses.

Mr. Jons asked Mr. Noel what the biggest challenge is to filling the space recently vacated by Kmart in the Kingsgate Green shopping center at the corner of Mooretown Road and Waller Mill Road. Mr. Noel responded that he is pleased to say that two-thirds of the building has recently been leased and will be occupied by an Ollie's Bargain Outlet and an Ashley/Trivett's furniture store, and he added that the EDA worked hard to make those deals happen.

Mr. Rizzio stated that he thinks the section on placemaking is well-written and that he supports everything in the section. Mr. Houghland added that the efforts of York County, James City County, and the City of Williamsburg to promote and market the Edge District are a good example of regional cooperation. Mr. Jons noted the many universities in the area and said young people should be engaged in these sorts of placemaking efforts. He added that he hopes Mr. Rizzio will stay involved in the County after he goes to college, and he said he would like to have more youth representation in the next Comprehensive Plan

update. Mr. Green commented that local universities are a valuable resource for the County and suggested that the Plan include language recognizing their importance. Mr. King noted that he began his planning career as an intern for the County in the former Department of Community Development, and Mr. Rizzio noted his suggestion at a previous meeting about encouraging youth participation in County functions through internships, mentorships, and membership on boards and commissions. Mr. Cross pointed out that the Comprehensive Plan recommendations need to be within the scope of the Plan, which is the long-range physical development of the County. He said that while the ideas being discussed could probably be worked into the Plan somewhere, he cautioned against including goals and objectives that do not relate specifically to the County's physical development.

With regard to the discussion of home-based business, Mr. Brooks stated that a major stumbling block is homeowners' associations, many of which have covenants or bylaws that prohibit people from operating businesses out of their homes. Mr. Seiter agreed, stating that he is the president of his homeowners' association and that in his neighborhood, the general rule is that as long as home-based businesses have no construction equipment parked in the front yard or other external impacts that disrupt the neighborhood, there are no concerns. Mr. Noel stated that working with home-based businesses has been a major focus of the Office of Economic Development, and he spoke about various programs managed by the office to support these businesses and help them to succeed and grow. In addition, he stated that Melissa Davidson, Assistant Director of Economic Development for York County, has become a nationally recognized subject matter expert on the topic of home-based businesses. He stressed the importance of this sector of York County's economy and the need to support it. Mr. Seiter commented that the County is very good about working with homeowners' association and fostering a good relationship with them.

GOAL, OBJECTIVES, AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Mr. Spencer stated that he likes the idea of regional stormwater ponds, stating that Newport News has used them successfully. Ms. Kassel noted that the County is constructing such a pond on property behind Dodd RV on Route 17.

Mr. Rizzio asked if it would be appropriate to consider the former industrial property in the Goodwin Neck/Waterview area for mixed-use development and not just industrial use. He noted its waterfront location, which would appear to make it a good site for mixed-use. Mr. Cross responded that the intent of this strategy is to take advantage of the vast infrastructure in place to support heavy industrial development. Mr. Noel added that this area, which is uniquely suited for industrial development, is an under-utilized asset that would be lost forever if developed residentially and could not be replicated anywhere else in the County.

Closing Remarks

Chair King asked the Committee members to email additional comments, if they have any, to Mr. Cross.

Mr. Cross stated that this would be the last meeting for Ms. Linsinbigler, who recently accepted a position in the County Attorney's office; Mr. Atkins, who is leaving the County Attorney's office, and Ms. McGettigan, who is retiring from her position with the County. He also introduced Jeanne Sgroi, who recently joined the Planning Division as a Management Analyst Intern.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 p.m.