

DORCHESTER COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING
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Planning & Zoning Commission
11-10-2020 Special Meeting
Meeting Minutes

The Dorchester County Board Planning and Zoning Commission conducted a special meeting about the 2020 Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan on Tuesday November 10, 2020 at 6pm in County Office Building Room 110, at 501 Court Lane, Cambridge.

Planning and Zoning Commission:

- Attending: Robert Hanson, Chair; Jerry Burroughs, Vice-Chair; Commissioners Ralph Lewis, and Mary Losty (by phone)
- Absent: Commissioners William Giese, William Windsor and Laura Layton

Also attending (in person):

Herve Hamon, Director of Planning & Zoning; Susan Webb, Assistant Director of Planning & Zoning; Brandon Vermillion, GIS Specialist

- 1- Chairman Hanson called the meeting to order at 6pm.
- 2- Presentation of the Comprehensive Plan status by Christopher Rogers, AECOM Consultant:
 - a. Mr. Rogers reminded everyone of the process of approval of the Plan, with this hearing followed by compiled comments presented to the Planning & Zoning Commission for a resolution and recommendation to Council, then a final hearing and adoption vote by the County Council. The comment period will be opened for another week from November 10, and posted on the website.
 - b. Mr. Rogers stated how important the aspect of control of land use was in the Comprehensive Plan, and subject to the most input when re-zoning. The rezoning does not however apply to any parcels located within municipalities boundaries
 - c. Mr. Rogers approached the topic of the Tier Map; expressing that the State recommends to place the Tier Map on the County website, as a draft, but not to be included in the core of the Comprehensive Plan document. Not having an adopted Tier Map at the time of adoption of the Plan by Council means that **no subdivisions larger than 7 houses** (on septic) are allowed in Dorchester County.
- 3- Chairman Hanson opened the meeting to public comments:
 - 1- Elizabeth Hill, executive director of the MD Forest Association:
 - o Ms. Hill has sent comments to Chris Rogers, they were presented previously to the Planning & Zoning Commission (on October 7, 2020) and will be integrated in the Comprehensive Plan
 - o Some recent comments about forestry have been edited by Susan Banks, Director of Economic Development for Dorchester County; they too will be included in the final document to be reviewed by the P&Z Commission
 - 2- Fred Pomeroy, representing DCPG (Dorchester Citizens for Planned Growth):
 - o Mr. Pomeroy requested that the Comp. Plan express clearly the need to preserve natural resources
 - o He would like to see language about keeping heavy industry out of the AC (Agricultural Conservation) and RCA (Resource Conservation Area) zones
 - o Mr. Pomeroy used the example of the chicken rendering plant in the Transquaking River Aquifer area, with excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus being released, impacting the water quality of a river that used to be a recreational asset to the immediate community
 - o He cited the example of Cambridge Comprehensive Plan, which defined a "green belt" working as a buffer between the city boundaries and the surrounding rural parcels; he proposed that the Comp. Plan looks at using agricultural easements as a tool to strengthen a similar green belt concept applied to the County.

- o Mr. Pomeroy stressed out the current issues with septic systems and the stringent MDE requirement on water quality, as they impact the oyster growing industry (with water quality deemed inadequate despite a large amount of septic systems upgrade); oyster growers are going out of business
 - o He concluded that the progressive inland penetration of salt water was an issue that required full exposure and understanding in Dorchester County, for farmers, foresters, oyster growers alike
- 3- Pat Camella, DCPG and league of Dorchester Women Voters:
- o Ms. Camella recalled some of Mr. Pomeroy's arguments about the Transquaking River and its water quality
- 4- Richard Ball:
- o Mr. Ball expressed that in his opinion, any subdivision on septic was a bad idea, and that all subdivisions should be directed to the nearest water treatment plant
 - o Mr. Hamon brought up the question of balance between providing more waste water treatment plants and their impact on the environment versus their benefits when compared to the impact of multiple septic systems. Mr. Rogers expressed that 75% of Dorchester was subject to an easement of sorts (conservation, forestation, water related...) and that the discussion would continue with the development of the Tier Map.
- 5- Barbara Hale, DCPG
- o Ms. Hale brought up the same points as above, but also asked that the County pay special attention to aquifers, and how they were managed. Mr. Hamon asked if there was a US Geological map showing boundaries of underground aquifers; the question was not answered.
- 6- James Harris, farmer and forester:
- o Mr. Harris brought up the issue of current zoning of small scale forestry operation. Considered Industrial in the Table of Use (Attachment 1 of the County Ordinance Chapter 155), it is prohibited in the AC zones. despite being low impact and a vital economic element to preserve the local market for soft wood shavings and other products. Chairman Hanson asked that Planning & Zoning consider a text amendment and a modification of the Table of Use with a specific description of the type of forestry operation qualifying for agricultural use (scale of business & production, number of employees... etc.).
- 7- Tom Bradshaw, DNR. Forest Development:
- o Mr. Bradshaw explained how the timber industry had lost so much ground in the last 30 years; with a going rate of \$450/1000 in the 80s to a \$60 to \$75/1000 price nowadays, bringing lumber to be cut to the few remaining saw mill is not financially viable. Keeping the production of timber (and associated wood products) local would re-energize local economy in the forest industry, granted that small scale saw mill be allowed in the Agricultural Districts. Mr. Hamon will work with DNR and the Forestry Association to implement zoning text amendment, while Mr. Rogers includes these comments into the Comprehensive Plan.

Chairman Hanson reminded everyone to place any additional comments on the website, or address then to Mr. Hamon.

Once the open period for comments is closed, Chris Rogers will compile all the public input received, including the comments from the Maryland State Clearinghouse, and the document will be presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission for resolution. That may happen at the next P & Z meeting of December 2nd.

Chairman Hanson asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Vice Chair Burroughs made a motion, it was seconded by Commissioner Lewis, all approved. The meeting adjourned at 7:45pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Herve' O. Hamon

Herve O. Hamon, AICP, RA, LEED AP
Director of Planning and Zoning

Reviewed:  Chairman R. Hanson

Date: 1/6/21