

Mount Jackson
Planning Commission Meeting
May 2, 2022
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Regular Meeting

Chairman Larry Ambrose called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM in the council chambers at 5901 Main Street. Commissioners Jim Hines, Evelyn Burner, and Anita Miller were in attendance. Commissioner Dennis Andrick was absent. Also present were Neil Showalter, Town Manager; Erick Moore, Planning and Development Director; and Debbie Allen, Town Clerk. There were no visitors.

Agenda Additions/Deletions/Changes: None

Introduction of Guests: None

Hear from Visitors: None

Approval of the Previous Meeting Minutes – Commissioner Burner MOVED, seconded by Commissioner Miller to APPROVE the Minutes of April 4, 2022 Regular Meeting.

VOTE:

AYE

NAY

ABSTAIN

ABSENT

Commissioner Andrick

Commissioner Miller

Commissioner Burner

Commissioner Hines

Commissioner Ambrose

4 AYES, 1 ABSENT, motion carried

Old Business:

1. Progress Report on the 2022 Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Moore thanked Commissioners for providing their feedback on the comprehensive plan update action items, which will be continuing in regards to the 5, 10 and 15 year plans. He spent most of the month on the transportation section which was challenging, but the Town's residency VDOT representative advised he would provide assistance if needed. Some of the items from the 2017 plan, such as the replacement of the bridge and the north end sidewalks, can be checked off as projects currently underway. Mr. Showalter stated staff had a meeting with contractors on the sidewalk project, who will be submitting their bids on May 12. Mr. Moore stated in line with Councilmembers and their desire to have a broader focus on outdoor activities, he will be adding many ideas. Ms. Miller asked if Commissioners would be involved in frequent committee meetings as was the case in the previous rewrite in 2017. Mr. Moore stated it was decided due to COVID, many items did not come to fruition from the 2017 plan, and the opinions of the Town had not changed. The 2017 comprehensive plan was a huge rewrite, and under state law only needs to be reviewed every five years. Mr. Moore stated public participation was the main focus in 2017 and will be again once the draft is complete. He stated he is working with Tyler Hinkle, planner at Shenandoah County, who is going to have an information booth at the Battle of the Bands event in May. Each Town that is updating their comprehensive plan has provided a questionnaire, and Mount Jackson's is a simple yes or no five component questionnaire. Example questions include 1) should the Town add other activities at the park, and 2) should the Town should encourage a boat ramp at the new bridge. Chairman Ambrose asked if the Town is considering a boat ramp, and Mr. Showalter stated if it is ever going to come to fruition it will be helpful to have it in the comprehensive plan.

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Ms. Miller asked if there have been any updates on the Beall house on Main Street. Mr. Showalter stated nothing further was submitted to the Town, and his understanding is since Mr. Beall would have to deal with the drainage issue he did not think he could recoup his money through rent income. Mr. Moore stated there will be a new business coming into Town that is a mixture of a restaurant and a ground floor apartment, at the old Nostalgia Mart. Mr. Moore stated he is also looking at possible grants and studies to be done regarding off-street parking, which is a major issue. He spoke to some local business owners who say they will not invest in upgrades unless they know people have a place to park.

New Business:

1. Discussion of Planning Commission By-Laws Update.

Mr. Moore stated the last update to the by-laws was in 2011, and this new update came about as a necessity following inquiries on membership. The current by-laws state there “shall be” seven members, and his understanding is there have been no more than 5 members on the Planning Commission. The concern is the by-laws are not compliant with Town code. Mr. Moore stated the Planning Commission establishes its own by-laws and no public hearing is required, but Town Council will review it as well. Mr. Showalter stated the Town Council will look at a possible amendment to the Town code, and Councilmembers would be interested in how Commissioners feel about whether to keep membership at 7 or reduce it down to 5. Mr. Moore stated the Code of Virginia says there shall be no less than 5 and no greater than 15 members, and staff proposes changing membership to five. He stated some of the other updates proposed are from the Code of Virginia, and give more clarity to processes, procedures and operating methods. For example, the Town Council approves all new members to the Planning Commission, but how is it known when someone wants to become a member. The update under Article III - Membership, states “The method of appointment shall be for prospective new commission member(s) to make application to the chairman consisting of intention to service, residency and property ownership status within the Town and qualifications by knowledge and/or experience to make decisions on questions of growth and development. Applicant(s) in compliance with commission by-laws and requirements are forwarded to Town Council for review and approval or disapproval”. Chairman Ambrose stated he feels membership should stay at 5, and Ms. Burner agreed. Mr. Moore stated Article VI - Voting, adds a process in the absence of a quorum, and Article VII – Meetings, adds a process if a meeting has to be canceled for any reason. Article VIII – Order of Business, is the second most important item which offers protection to the Commission if challenged in court. Article IX – Procedures, is brand new and in the Code of Virginia, as well as Article X – Amendments. Mr. Showalter stated staff will introduce a code amendment to the Town Council which would change membership from 7 to 5, and on the number needed for a quorum. Ms. Miller asked if there is any length of time that a Commissioner has to serve or not serve. Mr. Moore stated the officers are appointed every year and members serve 4-year terms. Ms. Burner asked if the officers are appointed in June for the new fiscal year. Mr. Moore stated the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Secretary would be appointed at the first meeting in January for the upcoming calendar year. There was some discussion on the need for a Secretary, or if the Town Clerk held that role, and Mr. Moore stated he will check into that. Mr. Showalter stated July 1 will continue to be the organizational meeting with the Town Council.

Board of Zoning Appeals Report: None

Town Council Items: None

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Zoning Administrator Report: Mr. Showalter reported the Town Council did approve the substantial accord, special use permit, and siting agreement for the solar farm, which is now complete until they submit their site plan. He stated the Town had a boundary adjustment in Avondale where two lots became one, and a zoning permit was issued for Massanutten Park to replace a trailer that had burned down. He stated there are several other items in the process of being worked on, which will be reported on at a subsequent meeting. Ms. Burner asked if anything has been decided at the Old Mill property, and Mr. Showalter stated nothing has been submitted.

Board Members' Items: Chairman Ambrose stated he spoke with a co-worker of Mr. Foltz, who said erosion inside the solar farm is as deep as 18 inches in places. Mr. Showalter stated the site is still under construction and the soil and erosion controls have to be effective and in place, as well as the decommissioning plan and bond, before the applicant can receive an occupancy permit.

Commissioner Miller made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:06 PM.

Submitted by: Deborah L. Allen, Town Clerk