

# July 28, 2012

## **Special Meeting**

10:00 a.m. Main Hall, Bryan Memorial Town Hall

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mrs. Roberts, Ms. Gager, Mr. Frank, Mr. Rimsky, Mrs. Jahnke

**ALTERNATES PRESENT:** Mr. Carey, Mr. Osborne, Ms. Bishop-Wrabel

**STAFF PRESENT:** Mrs. Hill

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mr. Looney and Mr. Harrall, consultants, Approximately 60 Residents

Mrs. Roberts, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. She welcomed everyone, invited them to participate, and explained this was the first of several public meetings to be held on the update of the Town Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD).

Following Mrs. Roberts, the Planning Commissioners spoke briefly on these topics: Mr. Rimsky: historical background and future goals, Mrs. Jahnke: data and its importance in the POCD, Mr. Frank: state statutes governing the POCD, and Ms. Gager: Planning Commission responsibilities. Mr. Rimsky pointed out that the community has changed in the past and will continue to do so in the future, but that this was an opportunity for the public to work with the Commission to preserve what we cherish. He noted that times are complicated and the Commission needs the public's help.

Mr. Harrall, consultant from Milone and MacBroom, noted that public attendance was encouraging and that Washington is a unique town.

Mr. Looney, consultant and project director from Milone and MacBroom, made a Power Point presentation, but said the main purpose of the meeting was to hear from the public. His talk addressed the contents of a POCD, the updating process, the contents of the 2003 Plan, and the critical issues to be tackled in the update. He noted participation by the municipal departments and community outreach were necessary to achieve a cohesive document to serve as the Town Plan.

Reviewing the 2003 POCD, Mr. Looney noted the strong chapter on the preservation of rural character and the environment and credited the Conservation Commission for working since then to achieve these goals. He noted the strong link between the preservation of natural resources and the Town's quality of life.

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2. Regarding community facilities, Mr. Looney said the update would address education to the degree the Commission could, but explained that policy was under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education. He said other chapters in the 2003 Plan such as Housing and Enhancing the Village Centers would be addressed in greater detail in the update. Mr. Looney's presentation included the following points:

\* The update would focus on capitalizing on the uniqueness of the village centers.

- \* Demographics would be reviewed and the implications of recent trends would be important in determining goals and objectives for the next 10 years. He noted the average age in Town had gone up by 7 years in the last decade.
- \* Economic Development would be reviewed in the context of the village centers and existing economic patterns. Plans for economic growth would be done in a way that would not degrade the Town's quality of life.
- \* The functionality of the Town's existing open space and parks would be reviewed.
- \* Community facilities, including educational facilities, would be reviewed.
- \* Implementation strategies would be key and are necessary to ensure the Plan is a living document.

Mr. Looney spoke in greater detail regarding the four topics the Commission had identified as critical issues to be covered in the update; Housing, Revitalizing the Village Centers, Economic Development, and Sustainability. Regarding the revitalization of the village centers and economic development, he stressed that cooperation between the public and private sectors would be essential to achieve the Plan's goals.

#### **Public Comment:**

- \* Mr. Tagley noted that: a) Housing and educational issues go together, should be correlated, and impact who can move into Town. b) Condo development should be considered. c) It was important to integrate affordable housing with market rate housing. d) The Town can't depend on developers to provide affordable housing options; the Town must establish funding or it won't happen. e) The small school population is housed in four buildings and we need to encourage combining or consolidating them. f) Young people want equity housing. g) The Planning Commission should come up with ideas on how to attract families with young children to Town.
- \* Mr. Rimsky responded that if the Town lets the market dictate, its average age will continue to rise and the average lot size will continue to grow. He said the Commission would work with the consultant to address these issues. He noted the Commission is aware of the current school issues, has begun a conversation, but said dealing with a school system composed of three different towns is difficult.
- \* Mr. Farmer noted that older residents are moving out of Town because there aren't enough housing options for downsizing. He thought active adult communities, perhaps providing health care, should be permitted. Also, he said the two private country clubs should be made conforming so they would be allowed to expand.
- \* Mr. Fitzherbert said he would like to see input from many people, one topic at a time.
- \* Mr. Millington noted there are 500 people who commute to work in Washington because they can't afford to live here. He thought that allowing people to build housing on Town owned land could make housing more affordable. Also, he said the Town needs industry and said high tech industries would be well suited for the Town. He thought the Town should reach out to these

industries and offer to provide housing for their employees if the businesses would move to Town.

\* Mr. Canal stated that housing facilities for the aging population are needed. He noted taxes have been very modest in Washington for a long time and suggested a flip tax be instituted. This would be paid for by real estate buyers and the funds raised used for affordable housing. He agreed with Mr. Farnen that the Zoning Regulations should be revised to permit adult communities.

\* Mrs. Boyer noted that under the current Zoning Regulations, only non profit entities can apply to build affordable housing. She did not want this to change. She wanted to allow small developments that the Town could absorb and she thought these should be sponsored by the Town.

\* Mr. Mustich referred to recent applications by Wykeham Rise, LLC. and The Gunnery, Inc., and said there was a disconnect between what people say they want and what they really want. He saw a degree of selfishness in Town.

\* Mrs. Frank noted that extreme weather conditions have been experienced statewide in the last few years. She said too little water impacts wells, whereas, too much water causes runoff and flooding. She said water is a critical issue and recommended the Town take an aggressive stance. She noted, too that the primary school is located in the flood plain and said the school should be in a location that is high and dry. Also she thought more young families would be attracted to Town if we had a new and up to date school.

\* Ms. Polly Roberts asked whether the current POCD documents were on line. Mrs. Addie Roberts said they were.

\* Mr. Streib stated the declining school population is a very serious problem that must be solved or the Town will die. He also complained about the empty Texaco Station property in the middle of the Depot and suggested the owner be given a tax incentive to encourage him to find a suitable reuse.

\* Mr. Fitzherbert noted there were several Zoning commissioners in attendance, but urged those present to stay away from current issues and to speak about the POCD.

\* Mr. Cornet made several points: a) Schools are the Towns main industry and this industry is not declining. b) One reason the Town is not affordable is because it has no public transportation. c) There is nothing in Town for young people to do. d) Distribution of taxes is a major concern. The last assessment was unfairly done, resulting in the wealthier people getting a break. e) Having more children in school will increase our taxes.

\* Mr. Picton urged the Commission to integrate policies so they can be used together to achieve goals. He used sustainability as an example of an area where a comprehensive conceptual framework is needed. He recommended the Town adopt the LEED standards for neighborhood development. He gave three examples of how Town goals and objectives sometimes work against each other and why they should be coordinated. a) The protection of agricultural land has been a Town goal, but soil based zoning targets the best land for development. He thought this situation could be improved with consideration of cluster development and transfer of development rights. b) The Town has the goal of walkable and more densely developed village centers, but located the highway department within a half mile of the Depot center, potentially at the expense of housing and business opportunities. c) He asked whether the construction of the Myfield affordable housing project moved the Town closer to its goal of 10% affordable housing without moving backwards on

other goals.

\* Mr. Talbot thought that excellent points had been raised so far and asked how the public could help in the update process. Mr. Looney responded that he would be working on different topics over the next few months, and when he had completed drafts, public feedback and analysis would be very helpful. He said there would be additional meetings in the future, but these had not yet been scheduled.

\* Mr. Chute stated past Plans had been great, but had lacked specifics. For example, he did not think the decision of what kind of school the Town wants should be left up to the Board of Education. He also noted the good job the Board of Finance has done in keeping taxes low, but thought Planning should coordinate with the Board of Finance to raise the mill rate for the specific purpose of achieving some of the Plan's goals.

\* Ms. Polly Roberts explained how the mill rate is tied to the grand list and how the assessment value of properties must be considered.

\* Mr. Showalter, Fire Chief, noted that volunteers are important for the safety programs in Town, and that ties in with affordable housing. He spoke about how difficult it is to get young volunteers when either they can't afford to live in Town or they have to work two or three jobs to enable them to do so. He urged the Town to help provide affordable housing.

\* Mr. Kozak noted a) the Town is not providing enough affordable housing, b) he questioned why the public generally equates volunteers with lower income people, and c) he thought many properties that were getting tax write offs for non development were the most appropriate locations for affordable housing.

\* A young woman suggested the Town get the word out somehow about the great things it has to offer young families such as the lake and hiking opportunities.

\* Mr. Parker urged members of the business community to work together with the assets they have and said the Town should encourage small business opportunities. However, he cautioned that commercial development should not be permitted in the residential districts, but should take place within the existing commercial districts.

\* Mr. Tagley recommended the Plan address food supply and security. He thought a long term plan for feeding the Town should be written in case the food supply is interrupted during a war or other emergency. He also thought that one resident state trooper would not be enough to handle bands of people who might try to take over the Town during a future emergency situation. He agreed with Mr. Parker that commercial enterprise is needed in Town but that the residential neighborhoods should not be commercialized.

\* Mr. Frank noted the business community had been disappointed that this meeting had been scheduled on a Saturday morning in the summer; its busiest time of year. But he said the Commission and consultant would meet with them in the future.

\* Mr. Cornet said the Garden Club has done a great job growing food for the poor in Judea Garden. While he recognized that many want more businesses in the village centers, he cautioned that the Town does not have the population to support them. He said to stay in business, the

businesses need to be subsidized because most residents do not want an influx of people in Town.

\* Mrs. Addie Roberts noted how good it was to have a pharmacy back in Town and asked everyone to support it.

\* Mrs. Clark said the Texaco Station property had been remediated, but has a huge price tag and a very small septic system, so it is not selling. She suggested the Town could raise the money to purchase it.

\* Mr. Fitzherbert said that attracting young people to Town should be a high priority. He thought the effort should not just be affordable housing as there are also young people who are well off who could live here. He said that young families do not want to be isolated; they want to be part of a neighborhood where there are other children to play with. He also noted the lack of diversity in the Town's population and said this must be addressed.

\* Mrs. Moliniere said the Town should create a public forum/think tank where new ideas could be generated and people could come to for advice on how to solve their problems.

\* Mr. Canal responded briefly to points raised. He said any housing development should be environmentally sensitive, he agreed that water is a critical issue, he agreed that the local businesses are high priced, but urged residents to buy local. He thought higher prices could be considered part of the cost of living here. He thought the think tank idea was a good one. He recommended the Planning Commission have professionals evaluate how the Town is progressing with the implementation of the POCD on an ongoing basis.

Mrs. Roberts thanked everyone for their valuable comments. The meeting was adjourned at approximately noon.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill, Land Use Administrator