

Town of Lovettsville

Minutes of the Planning Commission
Regular Meeting
June 17, 2015
APPROVED ON SEPTEMBER 6, 2017

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Joseph Mueller called the Regular Meeting of the Lovettsville Planning Commission to order at 7:31 p.m. on June 17, 2015 at the Lovettsville Town Hall, 6 East Pennsylvania Avenue, Lovettsville, VA.

Present at Meeting

- Chairman Joseph Mueller
- Vice Chair Robert Gentile
- Commissioner Frank McDonough
- Commissioner Nate Fontaine
- Commissioner Anthony Quintana
- Commissioner Buchanan Smith

Commissioners Absent

- Commissioner Thomas Ciolkosz

Staff Present

- Zoning Administrator Joshua Bateman
- Town Clerk Harriet West

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Mueller led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Chairman Mueller called for comments from the public. There were none.

Additions/Deletions/Modifications to the Agenda

There were none.

Approval of Planning Commission Minutes

Chairman Mueller stated that there were no minutes to approve this meeting.

Staff Reports

There was no staff report.

Action/Discussion Items

A. Comprehensive Plan Review: Economic Development and Non-Residential Land Uses

Committee Members present were Buck Smith, Rob Gentile, Roger Hatcher, Pamela Baldwin, Elaine Walker, Heather Whitfield, and Erin Harney.

Committee Chairman Buck Smith introduced himself to the committee. Chairman Mueller reviewed the rules and procedures governing committee meetings and public participation. Committee members introduced themselves to the rest of the group at the behest of Mr. Smith.

Mr. Bateman introduced himself to the committee and explained the purpose and format of the first committee meeting and summarized the contents of information distributed to the committee. Mr. Bateman presented on the economic development goals and policies listed in the spreadsheet distributed prior to the meeting. He stated that he color coded policies in the spreadsheet by topic area for organization purposes. Mr. Gentile asked about the schedule going forward for the Economic Development Committee and Mr. Bateman gave a brief overview of that schedule and the schedule and topics to be covered in future committee meetings generally.

Mr. Bateman delivered a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the purpose of economic development planning and economic development topics, theories and practices generally. The presentation included a discussion of demographic information for the Town of Lovettsville and characteristics of the Town's workforce in terms of occupations and earnings.

Upon completion of the presentation, Mr. Smith asked whether the committee should perhaps envision what types of business and business environment they would like to see and work backwards to construct planning language supporting that vision. Mr. Bateman responded that the plan development process and planning for commercial land uses would have to occur before the market analysis is conducted later in the year and so would not have the benefit of that study. He stated that this was not ideal but was what the committee has been tasked with doing.

Ms. Baldwin asked whether the income figure provided in the presentation was for individuals or households. Mr. Bateman responded that it represented individuals since the median household income is just under \$100,000 annually. Jacob Rohrer asked whether the income information only represented in-Town residents and Mr. Bateman responded that it did. Mr. Smith asked how the committee should think about economic development outside the Town limits and whether it was appropriate to encourage economic activity outside of the Town. Mr. Bateman explained that the Town's market area is not just the area within the Town limits, but includes outlying areas within a certain distance of town. Guest speaker Fred George stated that the 2011 comprehensive plan reflected a twenty-year outlook for the Town of Lovettsville within the existing Town limits with no considerations for annexation. Mr. Bateman cited the wineries just outside of Town as an example of how the Town should have an economic development policy aimed at encouraging the establishment of business in the Town that specialize in the retail sales of such wine, such as wine stores or restaurants; that way, the Town could identify its niche within the larger Lovettsville market area. In response to a statement from Mr. Smith about occupations and businesses, Mr. Bateman stated that there are benefits to keeping jobs and educated and skilled workers in the Town through the creation, for instance, of shared office space since such workers would spend their income locally, thereby boosting the local economy. Ms. Harney stated that many people work from their own homes here in Lovettsville and creating something like that would therefore be a waste. Mr. Bateman stated that the Town needs additional space suitable for such employees.

Guest speaker Fred George moved to the large map displayed in the room and gave a history of growth and development in Lovettsville and the previous comprehensive plan review by pointing out the locations of various properties and owners. He noted that the previous Town Planner Steve McGregor wanted rooftops and for the New Town Meadows subdivision to be started as soon as possible, but that these are now the residents most likely to object to any development on the adjacent Engle Tract. He noted the locations of undeveloped properties in Town, who owns them and how they are likely to develop in the future given that there are few such properties remaining in the Town limits.

Mr. McDonough asked why the five-acre parcel across from his house is zoned commercial. Mr. George responded that the previous owner had a business installing wells and pumps and that is why it is commercial. Mr. McDonough asked Mr. George whether that should be rezoned to residential if no business is going in there, or whether it should remain commercial. Mr. George responded that maybe he should ask the landowner that question. Mr. Smith asked Mr. George whether he thinks that the Town has enough rooftops, and Mr. George responded that it depends on the type of business and that most of what he owns and leases is small and therefore does not require that many rooftops. Mr. George summarized his properties and the businesses that rent from him in the context of zoning requirements

and need to have demographic information readily available to prospective businesses. Mr. Smith asked what Mr. George thought was needed to better welcome businesses to the Town and whether there were any roadblocks or obstacles that could be removed. Mr. George talked about the need for automobile repair and auto parts stores given the increase in personal automobile ownership rates. Chris Hornbaker asked about the ballfield on Lovettsville Game Club property and whether anyone has ever thought about using that frontage on Route 287 for commercial use. Mr. George stated that a dollar store had recently approached the game club about that but that no deal was reached.

Mr. Smith stated that the biggest takeaway from Mr. George's presentation was the need to be as welcoming as possible in the comprehensive plan and remove roadblocks to possible economic development. Mr. George discussed the Lovettsville Retirement Community project and the fact that there was no timeline and that that was why there is still that brick house in the middle of the community.

Mr. Bateman stated that it was beneficial for Mr. George to use the map for his presentation since these are the undeveloped and underdeveloped parcels of land where development will take place in the future.

Elaine Walker pointed out that there are no places for new businesses to go and that this is good time to welcome new businesses to come to Town by planning for additional business space. Mr. Bateman noted that the Game Club property is not planned or zoned for commercial use but the committee could recommend a change to the future land use designation of that property.

Ms. Harney expressed concerns about the fact that she moved to Lovettsville to get away from busy, neighboring areas to someplace small that does not have dollar stores, strip malls, and grocery stores. She stated that the fact that Lovettsville does not have these things was the draw for her and wondered whether she would have to move her family again. Mr. Bateman stated that many other citizens have expressed the same opinion to staff and the Planning Commission, but that blocking all commercial development was not practical. In response to Ms. Harney's question about whether the plan should reflect her views or the public's views more broadly, Mr. Bateman responded that the committee has been charged with forwarding its recommendations to the Planning Commission and Town Council and should therefore do so. He highlighted the need for the committee to decide what types of businesses are appropriate, what they should look like, and where they should go. A discussion followed about the locations and character of past and potential future commercial developments in the Town.

Ms. Harney reiterated her concerns about runaway commercial development and how she had to move out of Purcellville because of all of the businesses that moved in next door to her. Mr. Bateman stated that her views and experiences were representative of many people in Lovettsville but that we need to discuss expectations because places like Lovettsville change over time and expecting it not to change is probably unrealistic. A discussion followed about growth and change in Lovettsville and the types of people moving into the Town.

The committee thanked Mr. George for the presentation and Mr. George left the meeting.

Councilwoman Tiffaney Carder presented background information on the Lovettsville "We're In!" Committee and their programs aimed at attracting, supporting, and advocating on behalf of local businesses. She summarized upcoming business development activities, events, and initiatives.

Mr. Smith asked Ms. Carder whether she has heard any complaints from people trying to run businesses in Lovettsville. Ms. Carder responded that no one has ever expressed to her about Lovettsville being a bad place to do business, and discussed how the Potomac Partnership promotes businesses in the Lovettsville and Brunswick areas. Mayor Zoldos said that the one complaint he does frequently hear is that there is no place to open businesses in Lovettsville, and that the Town has lost businesses to Brunswick because of that. Ms. Carder stated that the Town Center would provide new opportunities for businesses to locate in Lovettsville. Mr. Fontaine asked whether there was any data that could be used to attract businesses, and Mr. Bateman stated that the trick is to attract and retain the right businesses that fulfill unmet needs. He stated that demand currently outstrips supply and that the market analysis will

quantify those trends. Mr. Smith asked if staff could compile information on what type of businesses are currently in the Town and Mr. Bateman agreed to do so. Mr. Smith and Ms. Carder highlighted the need to obtain public input regarding the need for additional types of businesses in Lovettsville and Mr. Bateman stated that a survey of local businesses and citizens could help obtain that information. He asked the committee to email him a list of questions they would like answered with respect to economic development.

Ms. Carder concluded by saying that the "We're In!" Committee supports businesses in the Lovettsville zip code.

Mr. Smith discussed the establishment of landing strip in Lovettsville and identified the location of this new Lovettsville airstrip.

Guest speaker Clinton Chapman gave an overview of his work studying various jurisdictions on behalf of developers, including local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, for information about how a community feels about commercial, residential, and industrial development generally and whether a development project is a good fit for a piece of land. He explained what commercial developers look for and attempt to understand in developing property. He stated that the questions Lovettsville needs to answer are: What is Lovettsville, what types of business do you want to attract, and how can you assist them? He explained the importance of localities welcoming economic development and giving developers a straightforward and predictable process to follow in developing property.

Mr. Chapman discussed the importance of economic development initiatives like the City of Manassas's economic opportunity fund and what it has achieved in terms of private investment. Mr. Smith asked what the city has done with the funds the program has produced and Mr. Chapman explained the rules governing how such funds can be and have been spent. He stated that there are things a town can do to attract businesses, and that one of Lovettsville's challenges is identifying its overall economic development goal and whether it desires commercial development or wishes to remain predominately residential. He again discussed the City of Manassas economic development initiatives and the need to have clear economic development goals in the comprehensive plan about exactly what types of businesses the Town wants. He said that he has looked at different commercial properties in the Town and discuss with investors the possibility of developing them, but that the lack of rooftops makes such development a 10- to 15-year proposition. He discussed the Town of Round Hill and how it sells water to customers outside of the Town limits at higher rates. He also discussed how the City of Fairfax is trying to attract businesses and obtain positive feedback from business owners, and talked about the lack of food trucks when he took his family to Movies on the Green here in Town recently and how to encourage more business activity in Lovettsville.

Mr. Smith inquired as to whether there was any magic number of rooftops within a certain square-mile radius to attract a commercial developer to the Town. Mr. Chapman responded that at least 4,000 units were necessary. Mr. Bateman asked whether this figure represented the number of people or housing units, and what type of businesses this would support. Mr. Chapman responded that 4,000 housing units within a three-mile radius of Town would be needed to support retail. Mr. Bateman asked whether this would support a 40,000 square-foot grocery store, and Mr. Chapman responded that it would support a 12,000 square-foot grocery store. A discussion followed about the size of the area needed to support a Trader Joe's.

Mr. Smith thanked Mr. Chapman for participating in the meeting and asked whether there were any further questions for him. There were none.

Mr. Smith asked whether any of the committee members had anything additional to share before the committee concluded for the evening.

Ms. Harney explained that she was not against development and growth, but reiterated the importance of surveying residents to obtain public feedback since many people will never attend public meetings due to

a lack of available meeting space. Mr. Smith again asked staff to develop a survey of business owners and folks in Town and felt it was a great idea. She stated that there was a rumor in her neighborhood of a McDonald's coming to Town and that people flipped out, and that she joined the committee to be better informed. Mr. Smith noted that there were two different surveys needed: one of business owners and one of the resident population. A discussion followed about how to implement these surveys.

Ms. Walker spoke about the challenges of doing economic development in small towns using the example of Lovettsville Town Center. She stated that the developer of that project fulfilled every proffer before breaking ground and had thirteen letters of intent from prospective businesses before the recession occurred in 2009, at which time the businesses withdrew one-by-one. At that time, she explained, the Town was criticized for not doing enough to help businesses in the old part of town. She stated that the square footage cost in Town Center was and is much higher than older properties, both from an initial development cost and leasing perspective, but that people did not take that into account. She noted that there are currently many empty businesses in Brunswick, and asked Mr. Chapman how he had overcome such challenges in his experience. Mr. Chapman explained how high rents can act as a deterrent to established businesses. A discussion ensued on the types of businesses likely to locate or relocate to the new Town Center commercial building, why the owner is able to charge higher rents for mixed-use developments compared to those that are less favorably located, and importance of Town initiatives and incentives to assist businesses.

B. Comprehensive Plan Review: Public Comment Period

Dan Brubaker stated that he has a friend looking at developing property in Town but ended up developing someplace else due to the increased costs of developing in Town. Mr. Bateman cited an example of a chiropractor that decided to locate out of town after looking at a property in the Town, and that was the only case of which he was aware.

Chris Hornbaker of 15 Black Forest Drive stated that he knows Clint very well because he is his brother's uncle-in-law. He wanted to know why Mr. Chapman had invested two and a half years of his time in the Town and stated that he first learned about the potential for a dollar store today. He expressed his hope that more owners looking to leave the Town or develop their property would be forthcoming about their plans. He explained why he has continued to live in Town and stated that he would walk his girls to the community center regardless of whether sidewalks are installed. He stated that the Town needs to look at policies like extending business hours given that the Town is a bedroom community and people commute such long distances to work and back.

Mr. Smith stated that the next committee meeting is scheduled for July 15th. He said that committee members should identify questions for business owners and residents, reread the chapters that concern them, and review Mr. Bateman's edits to the economic development chapter's background information. In response to a question from Ms. Walker, Mr. Bateman agreed to email the PowerPoint presentation to the group. In response to an inquiry from Mr. Smith, Mayor Zoldos explained that discussions by email are not permitted under the open meeting law. A discussion ensued about the proper way to share information by email while not violating the rules on open meetings.

Mr. Smith adjourned the Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting at 10:09 p.m.

Information Items

There were none.

Next Meeting

Chairman Mueller stated that the next meeting was scheduled for July 1st.

Comments from the Mayor and Commissioners

Mayor Zoldos explained the open meeting law requirements and thanked the Planning Commission and Economic Development Advisory Committee for participating in the planning process. He discussed

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some of the issues to keep in mind as the Commission and committees decide what Lovettsville is and what is will be as part of this process. He explained the importance of Town staff and the rules that they administer. He continued by delivering an overview of issues currently before the Town Council and events and happenings in the Town generally.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the Planning Commission the meeting was adjourned at 10:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Harriet West, Town Clerk

Date Approved: September 6, 2017

Attachments:

None