

GARRETT COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND LAND MANAGEMENT

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MINUTES

The Garrett County Planning Commission held its regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, January 3, 2018, at 1:30 p.m., in the County Commissioners Meeting Room. Members and guests in attendance at the meeting included:

Tony Doerr
Bruce Swift
Tim Schwinabart
Shelly Argabrite

William Weissgerber
Jeff Conner
Jim Hinebaugh
Liz George

Jeff Messenger
Deborah Carpenter -staff
William DeVore -staff

1. Call to Order - by Chairman Tony Doerr at 1:30 pm.
2. The December minutes were approved as submitted.
3. Report of Officers – None
4. Unfinished Business – The Election of Officers was held and the current slate of officers was elected to another term.

Tony Doerr was re-elected chairman by a unanimous vote of 7 to 0.

Jeff Conner was re-elected vice-chairman by a unanimous vote of 7 to 0.

Jeff Messenger was re-elected secretary by a unanimous vote of 7 to 0.

Shelley Argabrite, from the Garrett County Health Department was introduced as an alternate member of the Commission.

5. **New Business** – Director Carpenter explained that the Transportation Priority Letter will be on the agenda, for February and is due by March 1. Legislation, known as Chapter 30, has necessitated a scoring process be initiated on all projects over 5 million dollars. That process needs to be completed by March 1. While the Transportation Priority Letter for all projects

remains due by May 1, both processes involve the same engagement and public hearing process. Therefore, it has been decided to do them both at the same time and submit both by the earlier deadline of March 1.

The director explained it is hoped that the consultant will be able to meet with the Commission at the next regular meeting. Minor amendments in the contract are currently being worked out. The Department plans to meet with the consultants during January to begin the process of data compilation.

A. Miscellaneous

1. Deep Creek Watershed Zoning Appeals Cases- None

2. Action on (PRDs) Planned Residential Developments- None

3. Action on Major Subdivisions- None

4. Comprehensive Plan Chapter Seven–*Consultant Topic List*- Director Carpenter distributed a list topics that would be sent to the future consultant. Plan Topics for Chapter Seven, include:

1. Update growth projections and the acreage and mapping of protected agricultural and forest land.
2. Update the changes to applicable Ordinances and Plans such as the Subdivision, Stormwater Management and Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinances and the Deep Creek Watershed Management Plan.
3. Discuss ridgelines as a possible area of protection.
4. Note the reduced threat to agricultural fragmentation.
5. Discuss the impact of the “Septic Bill” on development of agricultural lands.
6. Continue to support agricultural preservation efforts through the MALPF and Rural Legacy programs and explore sustainability of the farmer as a means of protecting the land.
7. Discuss solar as an alternative to fracking and wind power, especially on unproductive land such reclaimed surface mines, while considering the possibility of solar consuming agricultural land.

B. Comprehensive Plan Discussion-Chapter 8- Community Facilities-

The director notes that Chapter 8 discusses topics largely handled by outside organizations such as the Board of Education, Garrett College, the libraries and the Garrett County Health Department. Each of these agencies are independent and have their own plans. The zoning office generally collaborates with these agencies and allows them to update their sections based on the projections and issues that they have identified in their own plans. She noted that the part that refers to the Health

Department could use some enhancement and this may be an opportune time to do that. Shelley Argabrite volunteered to assist with that work, because of her position as the Planner for the Health Department.

Problems being experienced by the local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) were discussed by the Commission. Volunteerism is decreasing which is creating staffing issues for the group. Some Commission members believe that more fulltime, county paid staff may be needed in the future. So far, all county fire departments are staffed by volunteers, though paid firemen may also become necessary at some point. The Commission believes that the commitment required for training, liability issues, the amount of hard work, weather conditions and certification requirements are some of the problems faced by these organizations. The age of the members is also an issue, since recruiting younger members is difficult. Other EMS problem issues include the opioid epidemic and water rescue at Deep Creek Lake. All of these subjects should be further discussed in Chapter 8 of the Plan.

Topics concerning the school system should also be mentioned in this Chapter. The Board of Education's budget, possible school consolidation, school renovations and the need for a quality education were discussed. The school board is elected independently and are developing a strategic plan based on student enrollment, budget and facilities. Typically, fiscal issues arise in Maryland, regarding education funding between elected boards of Commissioners and local School Boards. The Commission is in agreement that Garrett County currently has an exceptional education system. Strategic decisions must be based on projected enrollment and other factors. The Commission also is in agreement that elementary schools are vital to the county's small towns. Inequity caused by the "Wealth Formula", which penalizes Garrett County school/education funding was also discussed. This formula is based on the assessable tax base, which is higher here due to second homes in the County. This formula is being addressed legislatively, but it will take time. There has been some discussion of consolidating middle school students into the high schools and of building one new high school at a central location. These decisions are complex and will require careful consideration by the Board of Education. The Commission will not be able to solve these problems, but plans to acknowledge these issues in the Plan.

Commissioner Hinebaugh noted that the population of the County is fairly stable, but there are problems associated with current demographic trends. By looking at the age groups, one can see that the population is aging, while the younger age groups are shrinking. Workforce availability and training, health care issues and school facilities must be adjusted to account for these trends. Rural communities across the nation are facing these same challenges. The Plan should focus on overall planning for the next ten years, based on the best available information and public input.

C. Next Scheduled meeting –The next regular meeting of the Planning Commission is scheduled for **February 7, 2018**, in the County Commissioners Meeting Room, at **1:30 pm**.

D. Adjournment

Respectfully submitted,

William J. DeVore
Zoning Administrator

