

Garrett County Planning Commission Minutes

November 6, 2019

I. Call to order

Tony Doerr called to order the regular meeting of the Garrett County Planning Commission at 1:30 pm on November 6, 2019 in the Commissioners Public Meeting Room in the Garrett County Courthouse.

II. Attendance

The following Commission members and staff were present: Tony Doerr, Liz Georg, Jeff Conner, Tim Schwinabart, Bruce Swift, Jeff Messenger, Bill Weissgerber, Jim Hinebaugh, Deborah Carpenter

The following persons from the public were present: Dave Moe

III. Approval of minutes from last meeting

The minutes were approved as presented.

IV. New Business

a) Sign Chapter Update

Director Carpenter informed the Commission that the County Commissioners held a duly advertised public hearing on Monday, November 4, 2019. No citizen offered comment either in person or in writing. The public comment period will be held open for two weeks and the Commissioners will vote on acceptance of the proposed changes at their meeting on November 19, 2019.

b) Hotel/Rental Cabin Research

Director Carpenter conducted research with other Maryland Planning Directors and noted that after hearing from over half the directors, none indicated any such non-traditional hotels in their jurisdictions. Worcester County has not been asked at this point and it was noted by the other directors that this type of use may be unique to resort areas. The Director plans to contact Worcester County and research other resort communities for existing zoning codes that regulate this type of use.

c) Comprehensive Plan Update – Housing Chapter

Carpenter started presenting an overview of the Plan's progress to date. The Department is in possession of 5 completed chapters and 2 more are in progress.

Left to be drafted are the Deep Creek Lake and Infrastructure Chapters, in addition to the Introduction and Action Plan. Of the 5 chapters in our possession the Planning Commission has completed the review of 2. The Commission is averaging a review of one chapter per meeting. Discussion ensued about the contract end date (the end of the calendar year) and how to proceed with this project. It was decided that Director Carpenter would reach out to the consultant to discuss contract extension.

Director Carpenter introduced the first draft of the Housing Chapter, noting that the Commission members had received it to review via email. She reviewed areas that needed discussed in her opinion, but encouraged members to add their concerns and questions as the chapter was reviewed.

- On page 3 the Director noted the addition in Section 4.3 Discussion of Issues for the topic of special needs housing. The proposed language defined this type of housing as including age in place, transitional (out of institutions), homeless and prison & rehabilitation housing. While the Commission members agreed with the need to include this as an issue they wanted (1) the consultant to alter the title to say something other than ‘special needs’ and (2) the types included to say senior and transitional housing without specifying what type of transition is taking place (ie. for homeless, institutional, prison or drug rehabilitation).
- On page 3 change the heading of Cost of Housing (Affordability) to Housing Affordability.
- On page 6, a comment from Community Action on the draft Housing chapter suggested that land trusts may be a way to control land costs. In this scenario the buyer owns the improvements, but the land trust owns the land. This concept was presented as a possible solution to housing affordability for the middle income market. Member Bill Weissgerber, a realtor, stated that the cost of lots seems to be low. For lots that are not in major demand, like waterfront property, the prices seem to be close to what was normal in the 80s. He didn’t see the cost of land as an issue in housing affordability and therefore didn’t think the land trust idea needed to be pursued. He felt the cost of building is more of an impediment to housing affordability than the cost of land. It was suggested that providing assistance with the cost of infrastructure might be a more appropriate way to make housing more affordable. It was noted that the entire section on Cost of Land needs to be rewritten bearing in mind the cost of land has decreased.

- On page 6, under the Cost of Development section, a comment added referenced zoning regulations as an impediment. Staff disagreed with this comment. Generally multi-family developments are considered special exceptions and they are required to go through a public hearing. However, staff believes that is a good thing as it allows the neighborhood to have input. Special exceptions are permitted uses and they are very hard to disallow, but it does give the opportunity to add conditions that may address neighbor concerns (ie. a fence or quiet hours).
- On page 6 under Condition/Age of Housing Stock, it was noted that getting an accurate picture on condition of existing housing is difficult. The Director wondered if a policy needed to be created to find a way to aggregate existing data sources to get a more clear picture. The sentence that begins “Garrett County has a relatively high number of substandard...” needs to be changed to reflect that Garrett County’s substandard housing doesn’t appear to be high compared to state averages. The Commission members felt housing condition isn’t an issue at the moment but should be watched into the future.
- On pages 8 and 9 a comment was made from Community Action that suggested allowing more tiny homes could assist with homeless housing. Staff assessment was that regardless of size a tiny home is still considered a home. As such it still has to meet requirements for water, sewer, sprinkler, etc. It’s not an option that is that much cheaper to build. A homeless shelter seems to be a better option as it can be better attached to programs that better help the homeless person to transition to a better situation. The Commission members would support the need for additional shelters, both for cold weather and specialty needs.
- One Commission member questioned the use of the word ‘family’ as it may be a word that someone may have an issue with. The consultant will be asked if that is an issue in other places that we need to address.
- Draft Policy #1 – Use the word encourage instead of expand and delete the last sentence.
- Draft Policy #2 – delete
- Draft Policy #3 – delete the list within sentence #1, and say ‘Continue to support any affordable housing development efforts and programs.’ In sentence #2 change the word ‘providing’ to ‘identifying’.
- Draft Policy #4 – Change to ‘Continue to provide funding assistance...’

- Draft Policy #5 – keep as written
- Draft Policy #6 – delete
- Draft Policy #7 – delete the word substandard
- Draft Policy #8 – take out ‘tax or other’ and eliminate the last phrase, so that it reads ‘Consider incentives for developers that build affordable housing.’
- Draft Policy #9 – delete second sentence. Put a period after rentals. It will read ‘Provide incentives to encourage development of long-term rentals.’
- Draft Policy #10 – the Director is to speak with Community Action to ensure the wording is adequate and whether or not it is needed as a policy or a narrative.
- Draft Policy #11 – take out one of the ‘housing’ words

The Commission members asked that the consultant try to consolidate some of these policies. Also ask the consultant whether the word market-rate is appropriate.

V. Next Meeting – December 4, 2019

VI. Adjournment

Tony Doerr adjourned the meeting at 3:30 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by: Deborah Carpenter, Director