

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION
North East Town Hall Meeting Room
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Tuesday, May 3, 2016
7:00 PM

Chairman Mark Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M. Present included Commissioner Eric Braley, Valerie Combs, Michael Nair and Judy Duffy. Also present were Melissa Cook-Mackenzie, Town Administrator, Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant.

-MINUTES-

March 1, 2016 Meeting Minutes.

The Planning Commission accepted the minutes as presented.

-COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC-

None.

-NEW BUSINESS-

1. Maryland State Highway Administration: Mr. Peter Sotherland, Acting Regional Planner. Maryland State Highway Administration.

Mrs. Vennell introduced Mr. Peter Sotherland, Acting Regional Planner for the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) and reported that Mr. Sotherland came to discuss the review and coordination of a project between the Town and SHA.

Mrs. Vennell stated SHA will generally review information regarding a project upon the Town's request and will forward their comments, suggestions and sometimes requirements. Mrs. Vennell stated the Planning Commission typically adopts the comments.

Mr. Sotherland stated ideally SHA would coordinate ahead of time with a Town's Comprehensive Plan and in conjunction with their Land Use Plan. SHA would like to have a preliminary meeting with the Town when a project comes in and this meeting would usually occur before a traffic impact study was submitted. During this preliminary meeting the Town and the SHA would discuss what would be mutually beneficial for the Town's Comprehensive and Land Use Plan. The central SHA office is in Baltimore, with several smaller District Offices, disbursed throughout the state of Maryland. It is the smaller District Offices that handle development projects within municipalities and towns.

Mrs. Vennell inquired about projects which occur out of the Town's Corporate Limit, but could be affected by the development, and would the Town be included in the preliminary meeting. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported there was a situation south of

the Town of North East, where 700 to 800 units were going to be developed and part of the access permit agreement stated that some parking along Main Street within the Town was to be eliminated to create a turning lane. The Town had no knowledge of these plans prior to the comment letter from SHA being issued. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated it would be helpful to be notified during the pre-meeting when a project does affect the Town even though the project itself may be located outside of the Town limits. Mr. Sotherland stated he appreciated the feedback and he will forward the information to the person who coordinates the projects. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie also reported a situation where a developer requested the Town allow a cross dock facility in a district that does not currently allow this use. The Planning Commission had asked for a Traffic Impact Study even though technical plans have not been officially submitted to the Town. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie inquired whether SHA would review this Traffic Impact Study at this level or would the SHA not get involved until there was an official submittal. Mr. Sotherland stated the SHA would review any Traffic Impact Study done in relation to potential development. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that once this Traffic Impact Study is received for the proposed project, this office will forward it to the SHA.

Mrs. Vennell inquired if the necessity of a Traffic Impact Study is determined by the size of a project. Mr. Sotherland stated the SHA requires a Traffic Impact Study when there is a change of use on a property that borders a state roadway and if there would be a change of access.

Mr. Sotherland proceeded to explain that roadway improvement projects are categorized according to size and cost of the project. The major projects are called system preservation projects. Then there are Regional projects and usually are upwards of 10 million dollars plus. SHA likes to see potential road improvements to appear in as many different types of plans as possible (e.g. Comprehensive Plan, priority letters) it shows the SHA that there are potential planned improvements in the long term plans. Mr. Sotherland stated that SHA will include these potential planned improvements on their "needs inventory list" which is their fiscal unconstrained planning document. Establishing needs by priority is done using priority letters submitted by county, municipalities, etc. which shows an expressed need by the county or municipality for the improvements or projects. SHA prioritizes the projects, compared against each other for need, then rolled into a consolidated list. Mr. Sotherland suggested that a letter from the Mayor and Commissioners as well as the Planning Commission be submitted with all requests.

Mr. Nair inquired about the Route 7 bridge on West Cecil Avenue, North East. Mr. Nair wondered if letters from the Mayor and Commissioners and Planning Commission would help expedite planned work for the bridge. Mr. Sotherland replied that bridges are different as they typically take into account the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area impacts. However, he reported that a letter of support for the project implicating that the Town has pedestrians on one side and destinations on the other would add significance to the importance of this project. Mr. Sotherland stated there is a current list of bridges scheduled for repair within the next six years on the SHA website.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that the Route 7 Bridge is within a mile and half of the North East Middle School, therefore would the funding apply to having bridge work done or a walkway built for pedestrians. Mr. Sotherland stated that adding an additional structure to an existing bridge is difficult to do. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie inquired if the funds could be used for an independent structure. Mr. Sotherland stated that this project would have to be looked into further however, if the structure proposed is strictly related to a sidewalk project Mr. Sotherland stated the project sounds feasible. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie inquired if the Route 7 Bridge is on the SHA schedule for repair or replacement. Mr. Sotherland stated he will check the schedule. Mrs. Vennell inquired if the town was searching for a grant which would provide a design for a sidewalk for over the creek, would TAP funds cover the design. Mr. Sotherland will inquire and get back to Mrs. Vennell with an answer.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie inquired, if we discover that a future project in our Comprehensive Plan may also be on the SHA's project list, would it be advantageous to submit letters to SHA to express the Town's interest and support of the project as this project is in the Town of North East Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Sotherland stated this often brings the SHA's attention to smaller projects which may otherwise be overlooked. Mr. Sotherland stated that there are many grants available and the District office may be able to assist with leveraging funds for projects. Mr. Sotherland discussed various grants that may be coupled with other grants to bring down the project costs, available for design and construction. Mr. Sotherland stated that Jessica Shearer would be available to assist with locating and applying for available funds and applying for funding for projects. Mrs. Vennell reported she is currently working with Ms. Shearer on Safe Route to Schools grant.

In terms of non-pedestrian projects due to poor performance or safety issue, Mr. Sotherland stated there are funds often available for these types of projects. The District is also available to perform studies of traffic signaling and functioning of the highway. Mr. Sotherland stated if there are any concerns of the functioning of any of the roadways within the Town of North East, the SHA District office would be happy to meet with the Town to discuss how to resolve the concerns.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated there has been a request to keep the stop signs temporarily installed at Mechanics Valley Road, Route 7 and Cemetery Road. These stop signs were installed to assist with traffic flow during the Route 272 Bridge over Amtrak construction. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated it was the Town's understanding that District 2 was going to be performing a study regarding the permanent placement of these signs. Mr. Sotherland stated he will look into the status of the stop signs and their permanent placement.

Mrs. Vennell inquired about County roads that currently do not have sidewalks such as Mechanics Valley Road, which are dangerous for pedestrians. Mr. Sotherland stated this is a project that they could start speaking to the County about, possibly set up a meeting to open the discussion and TAP grants could possibly fund some of the project. Mr. Sotherland stated the complication is obtaining the right a ways for construction and maintenance. Mr. Sotherland added the SHA Administration can only administer funds for projects on the State Highway right of way, otherwise they would have to purchase the property.

Chairman Dobbins inquired what kind of tools SHA uses to form recommendations on the change of use of a property. Mr. Sotherland replied there is a standard using square footage and the type of use anticipated, traffic generation verses the square footage and use. For example, if the use was a warehouse, there may be 2/10th of a truck for every 10 square feet, therefore a building that is 100,000 square feet they project to generate "X" number of trucks per day. Growth factors are considered as well. Chairman Dobbins stated when reviewing the results algorithm used, does SHA consider the current design of the intersections. Mr. Sotherland replied that SHA considers the time delay at the intersections, is there enough capacity in the road so that there is free flow, is there a delay and if so, how many minutes of delay is present, and at what times of day. These factors will influence the letter grade given at the end of the evaluation.

Ms. Combs will this letter grade influence the recommendations and comments regarding what is necessary to improve the grading. Mr. Sotherland stated yes, there is a prior to development and an after development analysis. If there is a significant impact by development that causes the grading to decline upon the post development evaluation, the SHA will comment "as part of the access permit being granted you are required to ..." Some of the requirements may be an additional turning lane, longer or shorter signals etc. Ms. Combs other than a traffic impact study what other tools are used for recommendations of a development. Mr. Sotherland stated that there are several alternatives that can be tested through a computer model to see the impact of traffic pattern in the area would be. Mr. Sotherland added that the SHA will compare the traffic impact study submitted against their most recent information on file for the area as well. If a traffic issue arises independent of new development the SHA District office would perform an alternatives analysis for that location and what improvements to the area would be beneficial. Ms. Combs does the SHA consider plans they may already have for a particular area when reviewing new development. Mr. Sotherland stated the SHA District office does consider a municipality's Comprehensive Plan.

Chairman Dobbins inquired if developers hire independent firms to conduct traffic impact studies. Mr. Sotherland stated the developer will hire an independent firm and SHA will review the study. SHA will also run their computer models for traffic verification. Typically, the only time that SHA will perform a traffic study is when improvements to the State/County road is proposed. A Town or County may also contact the District office to request a traffic count and/or run computer models as a tool for improving the flow or future flow of traffic.

2. Annual Planning Report – 2015 Adoption.

The Planning Commission received the Draft Annual Planning Report-2015 in their planning packages. Mrs. Vennell inquired if there were any comments, questions or changes from the Planning Commission. Chairman Dobbins reported he liked the addition of pictures and the addition of the Elk and North East Rivers Watershed to the annual report and would like more pictures included next year. Mr. Nair inquired about whether the Code Enforcement section could include more detailed information. Mrs. Rhoades responded the majority of violations are nuisance violations for over grown

grass & weeds and junk & debris. Mrs. Vennell reported that next year, the Annual Report will be broken down into sections to outline the number of Friendly Reminders distributed, first violation notices, second violation notices, third violation notices and citations issued. Mrs. Vennell stated that over 90 percent of the violations are resolved with the first Friendly Reminder notice.

Ms. Combs made a recommendation adopt the 2015 Annual Planning Report. Ms. Duffy seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-OLD BUSINESS-

None.

-REPORTS-

Heron Cove

Mrs. Vennell reported that Heron Cove recently resubmitted the Stormwater Management Plan to the County, and was granted conditional approval. The conditions have to be met prior to submitting a tentative plat to the Town. One of the conditions not yet met was that the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) review the plan. The MDE comment letter will state whether there can or cannot be development in the floodplain.

Safe Route To Schools

Mrs. Vennell reported that she will be applying for a grant to fund a walkway from Jethro Street and the North East Middle School.

Subdivision Regulations

Mrs. Vennell reported she continues to work on revising the subdivision regulations.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

Mr. Nair inquired whether the Planning Commission would receive a copy of the traffic impact study for the proposed Cross Dock facility. Mrs. Vennell reported that once the Town receives the completed study, the study will be sent to SHA for review and comments, and the Planning Commission would review the study and the comments during one of their regular meetings. After the Planning Commission's review, the Planning Commission will most likely make a decision whether the Highway Commercial District Regulations should include the 'Cross Dock Facility' use.

Ms. Duffy asked Mr. Sotherland whether SHA considers the impact on traffic during the actual construction of a project. Mr. Sotherland stated yes.

-NEXT MEETING-

North East Planning Commission
May 3, 2016

Next Meeting is scheduled June 7, 2016.

-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Ms. Combs made a motion to adjourn at 8:38 p.m. Mr. Nair seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.