

**TOWN OF ROCKY MOUNT
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
NOVEMBER 1, 2011
6:00 P.M.**

The Planning Commission of the Town of Rocky Mount, Virginia, met at the Rocky Mount Municipal Building on Tuesday, November 1, 2011 at 6:00 p.m., with Madame Chair Janet Stockton presiding.

The following members of Planning Commission were present when the meeting was called to order: Madame Chair Janet Stockton and Vice Chair John Speidel; and Planning Commission Members Bud Blanchard, Ina Clements, Derwin Hall and John Tiggle. Let the record show that Planning Commission Member Jerry Greer was not present for the meeting because he was attending a special Rocky Mount Town Council meeting being held concurrently.

The following staff members were present: Assistant Town Manager Matthew C. Hankins, Town Planner Patrick Rust and Deputy Clerk Stacey B. Sink.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Madame Chair Stockton asked if there were any additions or corrections to the presented agenda. The Assistant Town Manager noted that staff plans to update the Commission regarding the Pigg River Bridge replacement during the Commissioner Concerns portion of the meeting. There being no other additions or corrections, Madame Chair Stockton entertained a motion.

- Motion was made by Planning Commission Member Clements to approve the agenda with the addition as noted, with motion on the floor being seconded by Planning Commission Member Tiggle. There being no discussion, let the record show that the motion on the floor passed unanimously by those present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Prior to the meeting, Planning Commission received the following draft minutes for review and consideration of approval:

- September 6, 2011 – Regular Meeting Minutes
- October 18, 2011 – Joint Work Session with Town Council Meeting Minutes

Madame Chair Stockton asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes and being none, entertained a motion.

- Motion was made by Planning Commission Member Tiggle to approve the September 6, 2011 and October 18, 2011 minutes as presented, with motion on the floor being seconded by Vice Chair Speidel. There being no discussion, let the record show that the motion on the floor passed unanimously by those present.

Following the vote, the Assistant Town Manager clarified with the Commission that the October 18, 2011 minutes must also be approved by the Town Council, and if any additions or corrections are made by Council, then the minutes will be brought back to Planning Commission at the next meeting.

PUBLIC HEARING

Let the record show there were no public hearings held at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

(1) Follow-up on items from joint Council-Commission work session

(a) Possible Rise 'N Shine appearances by Planning Commission

The Assistant Town Manager advised the Commission that it had given direction to the Town Planner during the joint meeting, and one of the items discussed was consideration of regular appearances on the *Rise 'N Shine* television show. Since then, he has discussed this with various members of Planning Commission who seem to have indicated that this is something they may not really want to do. He then opened the floor to Planning Commission for discussion.

Discussion ensued:

- Madame Chair Stockton does not want to do this because she does not

want it to be an open forum for debate.

- Planning Commission Member Hall advised that Planning Commission cannot discuss the merits of a particular case before it is heard by the Commission.
- Vice Chair Speidel pointed out that the suggestion did not come from the Planning Commission to do this. He also pointed out that there is a difference between the ways in which the Planning Commission and the Town Council operates.
- Planning Commission Member Clements added that staff could make appearances on the show.
- The Assistant Town Manager added that he would be more comfortable with staff approaching *Rise 'N Shine* with particular important issues that may arise.
- Vice Chair Speidel thinks it could be counter-productive too, because Planning Commission reaches a decision at the meeting, based on a public hearing and a site visit held just moments before the meeting. To go on television a week before the meeting to discuss the issues may not even be legal.
- Planning Commission Member Hall pointed out that sometimes Planning Commission does not even know the issues, as things may be brought up by the neighbors at the meeting.
- Vice Chair Speidel added that Town Council has reports and information from Planning Commission.
- Planning Commission Member Tiggie added that he thinks the main point was to let people know prior to the meeting that the Planning Commission would be hearing a particular case so that the public could come if they wanted to.
- Planning Commission Member Hall suggested that staff send a bulletin to the show, with the Assistant Town Manager agreeing it would be good to send a notice on any important discussion, or anything controversial, so that the topic gets more exposure.
- The Assistant Town Manager added that there are differences between the Town Council process and the Planning Commission process. The Planning Commission process is a much more rational process. It takes the facts that it is given, it learns and applies those facts toward the case and makes a decision. It is bereft of emotion and the other ties that Town Council, in its political process, is free to consider. He agrees with Planning Commission that it does open up some possibilities in talking about the merits of the case before a case is decided. The proposed way is much cleaner and would probably be the method staff would

recommend.

- Madame Chair Stockton asked if any member of Planning Commission wanted to go on *Rise 'N Shine*. No member of Planning Commission expressed interest.
- Planning Commission Member Blanchard added that this seems like a good open forum to present Planning Commission notices that get missed in the paper.
- Madame Chair Stockton clarified that it is the consensus of Planning Commission that no member wishes to go on the *Rise 'N Shine* show.

(b) Other action items from the joint meeting

Madame Chair Stockton advised that one of the items resulting from the joint meeting was to hold regular meetings with the Mayor, noting that the Town Clerk has already worked on this and she will be meeting with the Mayor four times per year, and the Town Manager and Vice Chair Speidel are also invited.

Vice Chair Speidel added that the joint meeting made him feel like he is out of the loop with information. He knows that staff is available, however, at the meeting there were a lot of things mentioned that he did not know anything about. The Assistant Town Manager advised that sometimes there are things even he does not know about, but he does know there are some things he could be more direct in dealing with Planning Commission on. The problem is he does not always see Planning Commission members on a regular basis. He could change this by visiting with members more often. Madame Chair Stockton advised that she does not feel like it pertains to follow-up from meetings. One of the items Town Council discussed was things it would like Planning Commission to focus on, and she was surprised at some of the things they talked about, one of them being the need for land. The Assistant Town Manager advised that at some point the County and the Town will need to look at additional industrial properties to bring on-line and advised that using the Comprehensive Plan, one of Planning Commission's areas of focus might be, down the road, to look at where the Town should annex land and why. He also pointed out that currently Planning Commission does not use committees at all, but it could consider creating committees to focus on things that it sees as issues, be it communication issues between staff and Planning Commission, economic development, or other things that the Commission might not want to handle in a large group setting.

There was general discussion regarding various topics discussed during the joint meeting, including the Cox property, and the proposed amphitheater. Madame Chair Stockton pointed out that the Town needs to find its niche, make it a good niche, and stick to it.

There was also general discussion regarding water rates and water loss.

(c) Involvement in Comprehensive Plan revisions

The Assistant Town Manager advised that staff is looking for direction from Planning Commission as to how involved the Commission wishes to be in the Comprehensive Plan revisions. The previous direction from the Commission, before the Town Planner position was filled, was that staff would present a section of the plan, Commission would review it, and then at the end it would all be put together and presented to the public for review and comment. However, it is to the point now that it has to be done. Does Planning Commission like the previous plan of action? Does it want to be more involved now? Does it want a committee, or are there some members who want to be more involved? Do you want staff to put it together and bring it to the Commission?

It was the consensus of Planning Commission that staff should work on the Comprehensive Plan and present it to Planning Commission as sections are completed.

(2) Commission feedback regarding Zoning Ordinance updates.

The Assistant Town Manager advised that Planning Commission has been getting bits and pieces of the Zoning Ordinance updates. However, staff has not been getting any responses back from Planning Commission. If there are any changes or if Commission members are happy with the documents as they are being presented, he asks that members please let staff know.

NEW BUSINESS

Let the record show there was no new business to discuss at this time.

COMMISSIONER CONCERNS

Vice Chair Speidel questioned if the periodic joint meetings with Town Council would continue, with the Assistant Town Manager confirming that the next meeting should be in March or April.

Planning Commission Member Hall advised that one thing he would like to have a dialogue about with Council is its vision for North Main Street. Currently, there is a mixed bag of “stuff” on the corridor. There are also some empty buildings. This should be part of the discussion when Planning Commission addresses the Comprehensive Plan. What does the Town want the North Main corridor to be? This could make a big impact on the Town, and the Commission will need direction on what Council wants for this.

Planning Commission Member Clements inquired about the house on Spring Street, asking if the Town is waiting for it to fall down. The Assistant Town Manager addressed her concerns, advising that it continues to be an issue, absent an opinion from the Franklin County Building Inspector’s office that it is a nuisance. The old building official made it clear that it would not be declared a nuisance. However, the Assistant Town Manager does have a meeting scheduled with Peter Ahrens, the new building official, to get his opinion on it. If he will not declare it a nuisance, and if the health department will not declare it a nuisance, then the Town’s only option may be to take it to court to ask the court to declare it a nuisance. Town Council cannot do this on its own. This is still going to be a long term issue. Planning Commission Member Clements asked if the owner has any interest in the property at all, with the Assistant Town Manager advising that when the problem property notices were sent out, she was one of the property owners who actually came in to talk about her property. The owner, Mrs. Gravely, asked for some time to deal with her property, but she does not appear to have the means or the drive to do anything with the property. The day that she met with staff, she brought in a contractor, who was also a realtor, and indicated that he will be doing work on the property to fix it up and get it ready for sale. When she left, the contractor stayed behind and told the Assistant Town Manager that this property is one of the worst properties he has ever seen, inside and out, and that it deserves to be torn down, and he cannot understand why the building inspector will not condemn it. He said the conditions inside are horrible due to things like waterline breaks, and damage from all the cats that were inside. The owner believes that it can be fixed with effort.

Update on Pigg River Bridge: The Assistant Town Manager advised that he, the Town Manager, Town Planner, and Public Works Director all went to VDOT earlier in

the day. VDOT intends to have finished plans ready in two weeks for the replacement of the Pigg River Bridge. They plan to advertise in February or March with an award probably in May or June, and construction starting after the July 4, 2012 holiday. It is expected to be a two and a half year process. It would have been shorter if the Town had agreed to allow VDOT to close the bridge entirely and replace it all at once; however, from a practical standpoint, and with Ronile being right there and all of the truck traffic, staff thought it would be a huge logistical nightmare for traffic throughout Town. VDOT's design is to put in half of the new bridge, tear down the old bridge, and then build the second half of the bridge. There will always be thru flowing traffic with signalization, but there will also be back-ups and closed lanes. Madame Chair Stockton pointed out that the school system would be very happy to know when the project is about to start. The Assistant Town Manager advised that one of staff's questions for VDOT was about when it planned to start informing the public, and staff was not very impressed with VDOT's plan. Therefore, staff plans to hold a couple of meetings, with one focused on the people who live there within a couple of blocks, and then one for the public in general. Even though it is not a Town project, it will affect traffic in Town for over two years.

There was general discussion regarding the Pigg River Dam removal, the Veterans' Park Connector Walk, the N. Morris Building, the Landmark and Plateau developments, and the completion of the Uptown Revitalization Project, with the Assistant Town Manager noting that the ribbon cutting for the Uptown Project would be held on November 15, 2011.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:03 p.m., and with no further business to discuss, Madame Chair Stockton entertained a motion to adjourn, with motion being made by Planning Commission Member Clements, seconded by Vice Chair Speidel, and carried unanimously by those present.

Janet Stockton, Chair

ATTEST:

Stacey B. Sink, Deputy Clerk

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