# ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

# PLANNING BOARD

**MINUTES**

**ROCKINGHAM COUNTY PLANNING BOARD**

**REGULAR MEETING – DECEMBER 14, 2020 - 7:00 P.M.**

The Rockingham County Planning Board met in regular session on December 14, 2020, 7:00 PM, Governmental Center, Commissioner’s Chambers, Wentworth, North Carolina.

1. Vice-Chairman Paul Ksieniewicz called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

**2.** Invocation was given by James Harris.

**3.** Attendance:

Regular members present: Chairman Paul Ksieniewicz, Vice-Chairman Julie Talbert, James Harris, James Fink, Cory Scott, Philip Stone, and Matt Cardwell

 Alternate members present: None.

Staff and others present: Carrie Spencer- Planning Director (via Zoom), Emily Bacon & Tim Mack- Planners, John Morris – County Attorney, Roy Sawyers – A/V Technician, Bricen Wall – Code Enforcement, and citizens

**4. The following Minutes were approved.**

November 9, 2020. Julie Talbert motioned to approve the submitted minutes, Philip Stone. The Board approved the minutes 7-0.

**5. PROCEDURES**

Chairman Paul Ksieniewicz read the Rules of Procedure for public hearings.

**6. PUBLIC HEARINGS BEFORE THE PLANNING BOARD**

Land-Use Plan: Review & Recommendation:

Carrie Spencer, Director of Community Development, opened the presentation by addressing comments and questions from the Planning Board members who were able to review the Land-Use Plan prior to the meeting.

Carrie spoke about the plan’s focus on maintaining – and developing – the distinct Main Street feel of Rockingham County’s cities, and noted that the plan has a new streetscape design to preserve that character. She also discussed the shared work with officials in Henry County, along US 220 on the Virginia border. Our Director of Economic Development has been in close contact with those leaders, and they will continue to work together on projects in that corridor. She noted that they are also working to repurposed several trails and outdoor settings areas with the goal of boosting the County’s outdoor recreation and tourism. The Piedmont Triad Council and Dan River Basin are also a part of this coordinative effort. Infrastructure projects along US 158 and US 220 are currently being assessed by developers and other parties to understand capacities and needs in those areas.

Carrie also addressed public k-12 schools in the county, and what steps were being taken to improve test scores and quality of education. She stated that both quality and balance are going to be evaluated, and that there have been interviews with members of the school board to better understand the issues they are facing. They are also working with the school board to determine if their facilities and personnel are able to handle the growth that Rockingham County is anticipating in the future.

Another question was raised about obstacles to new business. Carrie answered by saying that Rockingham County’s Economic Development department is currently working on an East-West connector that would connect Eden directly to US 29, and that they are also looking at ways to support and development new business in that area.

A question was asked if there was a plan to retain graduates. Carrie answered by saying that, while there are no big action items, there is an awareness of that, and that local workforce programs are currently working with economic development to address and improve this.

Carrie talked about some Planning Board concerns over density average, and how it compares to lot size. The Planning Board made mention that they were concerned that it might create a pattern that could potentially upset or disrupt land use, or change the character of the county. She reiterated that the point of the new Land-Use Plan was to provide flexibility rather than a rigid guide to development. Carrie ended her presentation segment, and introduced Eric from Destination by Design.

Eric talked about the comments from the last time he presented to the Planning Board. He noted that the new map in the proposed Land-Use Plan is there only to increase organization and predictability. He added that developers would be able to use the map to address potential housing and development.

Eric referred exhibits 14.1 and 14.2 to show rural commercial node concepts – their parking and business layout. He said that the goal of those concepts were to provide distinct locations that signal to people that they have arrived at a specific place.

Eric followed-up on Carrie’s remarks that density average does not change between the two concepts. What changes is the actual housing type and size of open space. He said that, right now, the way the ordinance is setup, there is no flexibility for new development, and that they are attempting to create a framework that would at least entertain the ideas around the concept of a commercial node. Again, he reiterated, the major difference with the nodes in the new LUP is not the adding of houses, but rather, making lots smaller, which in turn would create more open space.

Paul Ksieniewicz: Questions from the Board? He commented that the overall objective of tonight is to get enough information to make a motion.

Philip Stone: Yellow and orange areas are in major corridors. Request for something like this – just outside of those areas – does that change anything?

Eric: The nodes are meant to be the general location. It’s not so much about encouraging growth, but more about discouraging random growth.

Carrie said that this is really good criteria for us to review. It can be applied to our cases.

Cory Scott: Are you saying this doesn’t have to be concrete. Carrie answered yes.

Eric then added that it doesn’t have to be developed exactly as it is. He said that the goal is to move beyond the large single-family home in order to start accommodating something in the middle. He said they want water and sewer to be in play in these areas as well in order to maximize return on investment.

Carrie then went over urban sprawl with the Board. She used the example of farmland being sold to developers, and how the process works with the instillation of roads and neighborhoods – a typical example of land-use progression. In order to counter and combat urban sprawl, Carrie said that the aim is to be more market driven, and to let the market determine density.

Paul Ksieniewicz made the statement that he was initially opposed to changing the lot size requirement, but can see now that density has some advantages where water and sewer are concerned. He confirmed that he was dropping his opposition in favor of density average.

Julie Talbert asked if the new LUP will help drive sales.

Carrie answered that the goal isn’t to develop everything, and that the market will determine the growth of business. That the new plan is a framework to guide the growth and provide flexible options for developers.

Eric followed Carrie’s reply by saying that there are two primary objectives with the LUP: To identify and create target growth areas help developers go a step further with by giving them various types of housing flexibility. The variety in housing and diversity is where you see communities come alive.

Philip Stone asked if water and sewer are dependent on the plan. If the plan is adopted, how will Rockingham County address infrastructure that may not already be in the yellow and orange nodes?

Carrie answered that we will give the developer the opportunity to explain the gain of being outside the node area. If a property is far from that area and someone wants to build, we will run it through the numbers to determine the return on investment, but more than likely we wouldn’t agree to let it be done.

Eric: We are not assuming there is going to be water and sewer at the nodes. There are other possibilities, like that of a master well or shared septic system.

Paul Ksieniewicz: Are there any other questions for Eric or Carrie?

Julie Talbert asked if the plan is adopted, will it have any impact on the plans already in development, referring to Collybrooke.

Paul Ksieniewicz said that Collybrooke is currently in hands of TRC and will not be affected.

Julie Talbert: What does the plan do for people who want to sell their family farm?

Eric: This is where the density average comes into play. That family farm will be moved into a density average, where lots can be smaller and development clustered.

Carrie: And that may or may not be able to be done depending on soils, water, etc. Again, this is how we encourage you to develop.

Philip Stone: Some areas of lands may not be developable on certain lots, so clustering would work well.

Eric: Large lots and cluster lots. Flexibility allows for more.

Carrie: It turns out that clustering homes and leaving areas open does incur much lower development costs – less roads, smaller cleared areas, less environmental areas that have to be dealt with.

Paul Ksieniewicz: Questions? There were none. He asked if they would consider a motion. Julie Talbert motioned to recommend the LUP to the Board of Commissioners to adopt. Philip Stone seconded. The motion carries to recommended adoption to the BOC 7-0.

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

1. Old Business – None.
2. New Business – Carrie mentioned that the Board of Commissioners is going to be reviewing this for adoption on 1/19/20 while the Planning Board is simultaneously being introduced to the UDO. The Planning Staff is requesting a second Planning Board meeting on 1/25/20 to discuss the UDO. The Planning Board and Staff agreed on Planning Board meeting schedule of 1/11, 1/25, 2/8 and 2/22.

**9. ADJOURN**

Cory Scott moved to adjourn. Matt Cardwell seconded. The motion was approved 7-0, and the Planning Board adjourned at 8:19 PM.

Minutes Read and Approved, Respectfully submitted,

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Chairperson, Planning Board Date Planning Staff Date