

Minutes
Walkersville Planning Commission Meeting
October 12, 2021

Commission Chairman David Ennis called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. with members Mike Kuster, Dick Brady, Ray Santullo, Michelle Doster, Tom Gilbert and Russ Winch present. Also present were Town Planner Susan Hauver, Town Manager Sean Williams and Town Commissioners Mary Ann Brodie-Ennis and Mike McNiesh. The meeting was also live-streamed on the Town's website.

Chairman Ennis noted that the meeting was advertised as a meeting, not a workshop, to allow voting on the property owner requests.

1. Minutes

Member Brady made a motion, seconded by Member Kuster, to approve the minutes of the September 28, 2021 meeting as corrected. The motion passed on a vote of 5-0-2 (Gilbert and Doster abstained).

2. Comprehensive Plan Update—Straw votes on requests

A. Staley property

Planner Hauver presented applicant Mike Staley's requests. He is requesting that the part of his property that is currently designated Limited Industrial (on the southeast side of Glade Creek) be designated High Density Residential. The remainder of his property, located on the northwest side of Glade Creek, is currently designated Agricultural and he is requesting that it be designated Medium Density Residential. Planner Hauver noted the development potential and impact of approving the requests.

Mr. Mike Staley addressed the Commission, noting that access to his property could be gained by way of Longley Green Drive as well as Devilbiss Bridge Road. He noted the proximity of the property to Glade Elementary School, the Walkersville Library, and Heritage Farm Park. Commission members discussed the railroad and whether it placed a constraint on the development potential of the property. Member Santullo noted his concern that improvements to Biggs Ford Road have lagged behind the completion of the development and the potential for the same situation to occur with the development of this property. Chairman Ennis noted that the Commission had voted to include a roads adequacy standard to the APFO, which would address Mr. Santullo's concern.

Straw Poll on Staley requests:

Mr. Gilbert – MDR / LDR -- MDR on part currently LI, LDR on remainder; noted that access to Devilbiss Bridge Road reduces the traffic impacts

Ms. Doster – HDR / AG -- HDR on part currently LI, leave remainder in AG. She is not opposed to townhouses as the impact of townhouses on schools is less than single family units.

Mr. Santullo – LI / AG -- no to both requests (HDR and MDR); objects to appearance of the townhouses; concerned about traffic and school impacts. Feels the homes planned on the west side of U.S. 15 will satisfy local demand for more housing

Mr. Kuster – HDR or MDR / ? on remainder -- HDR or MDR on LI part, unsure about remainder; noted that the development of this property makes the most sense; represents smart growth; noted issue of affordable housing. Lower density developments increase home prices.

Mr. Brady – HDR / AG -- yes to HDR, too soon to change AG part to MDR; concurs with Mr. Kuster. Need to undo the LI designation; logical to access property through Longley Green and continue the townhouse development

Mr. Winch –LI / AG -- no to both requests (HDR and MDR)

Mr. Ennis – HDR / LDR -- likes HDR on LI part, thinks appearance of Longley Green would improve with more houses; potentially moderate priced housing; this property is best suited for change. Supports LDR over MDR for the remainder of property.

B. Stone property

Planner Hauver reviewed the request for the property designation to change from Ag to Medium Density Residential. The applicant would also proposed Code changes to add flexibility to the housing unit mix and design standards.

Mr. Jeremy Holder of Ausherman Development addressed the Commission, noting the long process ahead if the Town approves their request; their willingness to work to address concerns like schools and roads; and their desire to create a gateway to the Town.

Ms. Doster asked if part of the development could be age-restricted (55+) and Mr. Holder expressed a willingness to gauge the market in the master planning phase to determine if that would be feasible given competition with other developments in Frederick County.

Mr. Gilbert thanked Mr. Holder for his attendance at meetings, the materials and information he has provided and his professionalism in dealing with the Commission.

Mr. Ennis wondered how the development of this property would be comparable to Kellerton, since the Stone property is much smaller. Mr. Holder described how it would be comparable to one of the completed sections of the development that the Commission visited in August. Mr. Ennis also asked about the open space provided at Kellerton. Mr. Holder and his team felt that Kellerton is about 20-30% open space.

Mr. Brady noted that the property was annexed in 1979 and that the owner has been relatively patient. He recognizes that the farms that surround the Town are being placed in permanent agricultural preservation easements. The Town needs to consider where there would be potential for the Town to grow. He noted the plans for MD 194 to be dualized, which will alleviate traffic concerns. He also feels that the Town needs a gateway. Currently, people think that Discovery is part of the Town. He feels that the development of this property would improve the appearance of the entrance to Town. He would be interested in some kind of mix of housing units in the low-density category.

Mr. Kuster thanked the applicant for sharing ideas about different ways of zoning the property. He liked the mix of housing in the Kellerton development. He doesn't want the property out of agriculture, but if it is to be developed, he likes their approach.

Mr. Santullo said he is concerned that there are 1,400 homes planned on the northern side of Frederick City on the west side of U.S. 15 near Biggs Ford Road. There is no shortage of homes being planned in the broader area around the Town. He noted the value of the view of this property with the mountain as a backdrop. In that regard, the property already serves as a gateway. He really enjoys that view and feels the Town would be giving up aesthetics.

Ms. Doster also enjoys the view, but agrees with Mr. Brady that the property location is not conducive to agriculture. She is very concerned about school capacity, so is wondering if part could be a 55+ community. She prefers LDR for the property.

Mr. Gilbert reviewed the emails the Commission members received, noting that 53 of 55 were against development. At least 40% of them live in Town. Of those who identified their address, 40% live in the newer developments, on property that was agricultural 30 years ago. About 75% of those who emailed cited traffic and water deficiencies, and 70% cited school capacity

concerns. About 40% are worried about losing the small-town feel. He feels the opinions represent the Town citizenry. Based on citizen opinions, he is against the request.

Mr. Ennis said that a strengthened APFO will address facility and road capacity concerns. The dualization of MD 194 is probably still 20 years off. He sees a lot of opportunity with this property. Whatever zoning tools are proposed for this property to allow mixed housing types, he would like to see made available throughout Town. He likes the idea of an age restricted neighborhood, moderately priced housing, an improved gateway to the Town, and LDR density.

Straw poll on Stone request:

Mr. Gilbert – AG; no to request

Ms. Doster – LDR; needs to come out of AG

Mr. Santullo – AG; no to request

Mr. Kuster – Maybe LDR

Mr. Ennis – LDR; reserves the right to change his mind

Mr. Brady – LDR; needs to be out of AG due to location in Town, on a highway. Work with the developer to develop new standards in Town Code

Mr. Winch -- AG; no to request

C. DeCaro property

Planner Hauver reviewed the request for High Density Residential on this 6 acre property on the west side of MD 194 near Challedon Drive. The property is currently zoned R-1 Residential.

Straw poll on DeCaro:

Mr. Gilbert – MDR; opposed to HDR. In favor of moderately priced single family units.

Ms. Doster – MDR or Commercial

Mr. Santullo – MDR; this property represents just the right type of development that would be suitable in Town, infill

Mr. Kuster – MDR or LDR

Mr. Brady – Commercial -- Not conducive to residential development due to truck traffic braking on MD 194. One of the few places suitable for commercial development

Mr. Winch – AG (no change to current Comp. Plan designation)

Mr. Ennis – Commercial – Not conducive to residential development due to access directly off MD 194.

D. Delaplaine

Planner Hauver noted the property owner's interest in developing this property as a mix of commercial, residential and agricultural reserve. It would have to be annexed into the Town.

Straw poll on Delaplaine:

Mr. Kuster – no change

Mr. Winch – no change

Mr. Brady – no change, Town should make clear to Frederick County its position that the property remain Ag

Mr. Santullo – no change, leave as buffer; would burden the Town and the Town can't provide the services

Ms. Doster – no change

Mr. Gilbert – no change

Mr. Ennis – no change

E. Bowers

Planner Hauver noted the property owner's interest in designating the property for Low Density Residential Development. It is currently designated Agricultural and Limited Industrial. It would have to be annexed into the Town.

Straw poll on Bowers:

Mr. Gilbert – no change, keep as agricultural buffer without annexing

Ms. Doster – no change

Mr. Santullo – no change

Mr. Kuster – no change

Mr. Ennis – no change

Mr. Brady – No LDR, also opposed to LI designation. There is no demand for LI on Century Center.

Mr. Winch – no change

3. November / December Meeting Schedule

Commission members agreed to hold their November meeting on Tuesday, November 9, 2021 and their December meeting on Tuesday, December 14, 2021. There will only be one meeting each month.

4. Public Comments

Mr. Mike Staley, 100 Main Street, said that he would be agreeable to designating the northwest side of his property LDR.

Ms. Karen Watson, 249 Deer Run Drive, originally moved here in 2011, and back to the Town in 2019. She is concerned about the effect of change on the Town and its residents. The Town needs to retain its identity. The Town does not have the infrastructure to support the potential rezonings and it would affect the safety and desirability of living here. She wants to preserve her way of life, and doesn't want to live in suburbia. The Town is exactly what it needs to be.

Commissioner Mike McNiesh, 253 Deer Run Drive, thanked the Commission members for articulating their reasoning on each request. He felt it was a mistake to label residents by where they live or when they moved to Town. Every citizen gets a say. There might be some smart growth that makes sense. He does not feel the Town should try to make housing affordable; that should be left to the market.

Mr. Brady reviewed notes about citizens who submitted emails, and population growth trends in Frederick County. Although the County has been identified as the State's fastest growing County, several other urban counties experienced more absolute growth in population. Frederick County's population density is still quite low. Within Frederick County, Walkersville and areas to the north and east are growing much more slowly than other parts of the County.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan J. Hauver