

## **Town of Emmitsburg Planning Commission Minutes**

**September 25, 2023, 7:00pm**

**Present:** Mark Long (Chair), Kevin Hagan (Vice-Chair) Joe Ritz (Commissioner Liaison), Valerie Turnquist, Patricia Galloway (Alternate)

**Absent:** Dan Garnitz (Secretary)

**Staff Present:** Cathy Willets (Town Manager), Najila Ahsan (Town Planner), Jessica Housaman (Office Coordinator)

### **1. Call to Order**

- a. Pledge of Allegiance

### **2. Review and Approval of Minutes for July 31, 2023**

- a. Motion to approve minutes: Commissioner Hagan
- b. Seconded by: Commissioner Turnquist
- c. Approved: The minutes were approved unanimously.

### **3. Public Comment:**

- i. Dianne Walbrecker, a resident of Emmitsburg, stated her desire to wait until after the presentation on the Comprehensive Plan by Town Staff.
- ii. Commissioner Long stated that he would like to plan for extra public comment to the agenda after discussing the comprehensive plan in each meeting, and it will be an addition implemented going forward.

### **4. Old Business:**

#### **a. Comprehensive Plan**

- i. Ms. Ahsan stated that there are three sub-items under this agenda item: a public visioning workshop plan, rearrangement of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan sections, and parts of proposed chapters 2 and 3 of the document.

- ii. Ms. Ahsan explained the public visioning workshops plan. The plan involves a series of workshops, with the first one scheduled for October 30, 2023. This initial workshop will focus on the town's overarching vision. Subsequent workshops will have narrower focuses on the economy, environment, and community. During the first workshop, there will be a presentation introducing the series, followed by brainstorming and SWOT analysis exercises. The brainstorming exercise will involve capturing words or phrases that define the core identity of Emmitsburg and discussing the values guiding the comprehensive plan update. The SWOT analysis will cover economic development, environmental sustainability, and community development. Ideas will be collected on sticky notes and discussed. The next three workshops in January, February, and March will use the SWOT matrices to create vision statements for the town's future. The goal of these workshops is to assess the town's direction and community aspirations. There will be outreach efforts, including flyers and social media, to encourage community participation in these workshops.
- iii. Commissioner Long asked if the workshop dates coincide with the Planning Commission's regular meetings and inquired about the protocol for handling development applicants. Ms. Ahsan clarified that the workshops take precedence on those evenings. If there are applicants, the plan is to schedule an alternative date for the Planning Commission meeting instead of trying to fit everything into one night. Additionally, Ms. Ahsan confirmed that the survey link will be accessible on both the website and Facebook.
- iv. Ms. Ahsan responded to Commissioner Turnquist's question about the purpose of the survey by explaining that the survey will collect basic information of the participants such as the duration of their residency in Emmitsburg.
- v. Commissioner Turnquist asked about engaging businesses, considering that one of the workshops' relevance to business development. Commissioner Hagan stated that the businesses in the area are enthusiastic about participating in workshops and that he's ready to send a scanned copy of the flyer to all the businesses once the dates are confirmed. Commissioner Turnquist asked whether Ms. Walbrecker had a chance to review. She also praised the plan, describing it as excellent and comprehensive, and expressed her liking for the flyer.

- vi. Commissioner Hagan mentioned that there's a need to involve social and religious organizations as well and asked that efforts are made to connect to those organizations. He also mentioned the need to explain what a SWOT analysis is during the meeting. He also stated that the state-mandated environmental regulations need to be addressed in the plan and that everyone involved has a copy of the state regulations for reference and compliance.
- vii. Commissioner Galloway inquired about the possibility of holding a second public meeting for the first part of the workshops if the initial meeting sees an overwhelming number of attendees. Commissioner Long agreed that it would be worthwhile to schedule a tentative date for the potential second part of the initial meeting. He also proposed that having the community's priorities captured using an online survey would also be helpful in engaging a wider audience beyond physical meetings. Commissioner Hagan suggested announcing this option on the website.
- viii. Commissioner Ritz expressed his appreciation for the idea of involving a comprehensive group of individuals in the planning process and agreed that a second workshop for the "Overarching Vision Workshop" if needed.
- ix. Ms. Walbrecker shared her insights from their prior engagement with community groups. She suggested including specific groups, reaching out to organizations, and considering personal invitations or formal letters to engage the community. She emphasized the importance of direct contact with groups and proposed a plan for delegation. Commissioner Long, in agreement with Ms. Walbrecker, emphasized the need for direct contact with key community groups beyond using flyers and Facebook.
- x. Ms. Willets acknowledged that she had discussions with staff about engaging various demographics in Town and contact different groups. She mentioned that given the small staff size, an advisory group or have commissioners serve as liaisons to focus on different groups would be helpful. She stated that staff will do their best to distribute flyers and engage with the community.
- xi. Commissioner Long, Hagan, and Turnquist all agreed that having a summary of the current vision as a presentation during the workshop would be essential as it would help them make informed comments and suggestions for changes.
- xii. Commissioner Galloway suggested the possibility of recruitment of an Advisory Board during the Overarching Vision meeting which would assist in further outreach if the initial

meeting doesn't reach everyone. Commissioner Long suggested that waiting to see who attends the first meeting before creating an outreach team or advisory committee would be beneficial.

- xiii. Ms. Willets suggested deciding on a tentative meeting date for the second part of the "Overarching Vision" workshop during the current discussion so that it could be included in the flyer. The Board chose to mark November 13, 2023, as the as-needed, tentative date for the second part of the initial workshop.
- xiv. Ms. Ahsan introduced the newly proposed format of the Comprehensive Plan which includes an introductory section, existing conditions, vision for the future, and implementation in order to make it more accessible for readers. She mentioned that the introductory chapter may have needed rewriting to fit the new format, and that an executive summary is to be included. The "Existing Conditions" chapter will cover various aspects of the town, and the public visioning workshops will contribute to it. The "Vision for The Future" section focuses on the town's preferred future, and the "Implementation" section turns goals into actionable strategies. The proposed title for the document is "Envision Emmitsburg," reflecting the approach of planning and creating a future based on the current conditions. The Commissioners expressed support for the proposed document structure, finding it progressive and forward-thinking.
- xv. Ms. Ahsan provided a brief overview of the proposed Chapter 2, which centers on Emmitsburg's population and demographics. The Commissioners emphasized the importance of providing a clear explanation to the public concerning the population decline. They also delved into the topic of temporary populations created by educational and religious institutions. It was mentioned that despite not being included in Emmitsburg's official census, these populations have a significant impact on local businesses and traffic patterns. Additionally, the Commissioners explored the analysis of population by age groups, particularly questioning the characterization of an "aging population."
- xvi. Ms. Ahsan provided a brief overview of the proposed Chapter 3, which focuses on the Town's natural environment and its impact on current and future development. The chapter provides an overview of how the natural environment has influenced the Town's development and emphasizes the importance of considering these factors in the future

development plans. The chapter also includes information about surface water, floodplain, and wetlands.

- xvii. In response to Commissioner Ritz's request, Ms. Willets discussed the Scott Road farm that is currently leased by the Chesapeake Wildlife and Heritage Group, and the lease is set to expire next year. She mentioned that the decision to renew the lease or repurpose the area for parks and recreational activities will ultimately rest with the Mayor and the Board. She stated that the property includes a house that is currently unused. She also mentioned that the Town owns a portion of the area that is leased to a cattle farmer.
- xviii. Commissioner Long suggested a couple of revisions
  - 1. Rewrite the second sentence in the first paragraph of Chapter 3 to make it more concise and clearer.
  - 2. Reduce redundancy of language addressing Monocacy River watershed.
- xix. Ms. Willets confirmed that the entire area is about 85 acres with 65 acres being leased to Chesapeake Wildlife and Heritage Group, which is set to expire in February of 2024.
- xx. In response to Ms. Walbrecker, Ms. Willets mentioned that the Town has worked with Dennis Dudley, the Frederick County Hazard Mitigation Officer, and a related ordinance was adopted by the Board.

## **5. New Business:**

- a. NONE

## **6. Next Meeting Date:** Monday October 16, 2023

## **7. Adjournment**

- i. Commissioner Long thanked Commissioner Ritz for his service
- ii. Commissioner Ritz expressed gratitude towards his fellow commissioners
- iii. Commissioner Long announced a reminder to vote in the elections and extended good wishes to the candidates.
- iv. Commissioner Long adjourned the meeting at 8:00pm