

**Christiansburg Planning Commission
Minutes of September 14, 2015**

Present: Matthew J. Beasley
Ann Carter
Harry Collins
David Franusich
Craig Moore, Chairperson
T.L. Newell
Virginia Peeples
Joe Powers
Jennifer D. Sowers, Vice-Chairperson
Nichole Hair, Secretary Non-Voting

Absent: Steve Huppert
Hil Johnson

Staff/Visitors: Sara Morgan, staff
Cindy Wells-Disney, Montgomery County Planning Commission Liaison
Sachin Kalbag, Michael Baker International
Vlad Gavrilovic, Renaissance Planning
Matt Ucci, Michael Baker International
Gary Coggins, Montgomery County Health Department
Will Drake

Chairperson Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Christiansburg Town Hall at 100 E. Main Street, Christiansburg, Virginia.

Public Comment.

Ms. Hair introduced Will Drake as the new Planner on staff with the Planning Department.

Chairperson Moore opened the floor for public comment. With no comments, Chairperson Moore closed the floor for public comment.

Presentation by Michael Baker International, regarding UDA study in Christiansburg.

Chairperson Moore invited the consultants to begin their presentation.

Sachin Kalbag, Michael Baker International provided an overview of the presentation then introduced Michael Baker International and Renaissance Planning. Mr. Kalbag noted that the consultant team met with the Mayor, Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, department heads and stakeholders earlier in the day. The Urban Development Area Technical Grant Program is offered through the Virginia Office of Intermodal Planning & Investment.

Presentation by Michael Baker International, regarding UDA study in Christiansburg - (continued).

The Town of Christiansburg was awarded \$65,000 for professional consultation for Technical Assistance. This technical assistance is for the adoption of Urban Development Areas. Urban Development Areas are designated by a locality in their comprehensive plan for higher density development that incorporates the principles of Traditional Neighborhood Development. The grant is an opportunity for Christiansburg to develop a vision for future growth. The UDAs are designated areas appropriate for higher density development due to proximity to transportation facilities, availability of water and sewer, or proximity to a developed area. Boundaries of UDAs must be shown on land use maps of the Comprehensive Plan. The concentration of future development should be where public infrastructure can be provided with the greatest fiscal efficiency.

The design guidelines for Urban Development Areas were discussed in the terms of Traditional Neighborhood Development principles. Traditional Neighborhood Design principles include pedestrian-friendly road design, street interconnection, connectivity of road and pedestrian networks, natural area preservation, mixed-use neighborhoods and housing types, reduced building setbacks, and reduced subdivision street width/turning radii.

There are three main benefits of UDAs. Those benefits can be broken up into benefits for the developer, homeowners and public. Developers benefit through reductions in infrastructure cost due to the Traditional Neighborhood Design Development patterns. Homeowners have increased property values due to above-average levels of walkability. The public has less of a tax burden for infrastructure, preserved rural areas and improved water and air quality. Lastly, compact growth can be as much as 70% cheaper for governments.

Mr. Kalbag provided an overview of the work program and schedule this grant will follow. The four tasks were detailed for completion of the UDA study. The Planning Commission and stakeholders will be engaged in each of these tasks.

The consultants have referenced both the Comprehensive Plan and the Vision 2020. In the Comprehensive Plan, population growth is expected to be roughly 17% between 2010 and 2020. The Vision 2020 plan provided the consultant with an idea of what areas the UDAs can support. This will be important in seeing the vision for future growth.

Mr. Kalbag noted the importance of the Neighborhood Planning public comments. The comments regarding history, sidewalks, parks, safety, convenience and community allow the consultants to gain a perspective on the citizens' interests.

Presentation by Michael Baker International, regarding UDA study in Christiansburg - (continued).

The next steps for the consultants will be to analyze the potential areas for UDAs and draft alternatives. These will be presented to the Planning Commission in late October.

Commissioner Collins inquired who required the UDAs and why the requirement changed. Mr. Kalbag stated the Virginia Department of Transportation required the UDA designations. This change came in 2012 when the UDAs were made non-mandatory. Mr. Kalbag then introduced other representatives of the consultant team including Vlad Gavrilovic of Renaissance Planning and Matt Ucci of Michael Baker International. Mr. Gavrilovic explained the UDAs have a longer history when the General Assembly adopted UDAs in State Code as optional in 2005 or 2006. In 2011, UDAs became mandatory for high growth localities. VDOT provided technical assistance for localities to adopt UDAs. Then UDAs became optional again in 2012. The incentive now is more transportation funding through House Bill 2.

Commissioner Powers inquired if the UDAs can apply to redevelopment of underutilized sites like schools or shopping centers. Mr. Kalbag confirmed UDAs can apply to redevelopment. There is a lot of flexibility for UDAs and there is not a one size fits all approach. Main Street could be used for redevelopment of existing parcels or new development could be used for the vacant shopping centers. The UDAs could even house both new and redevelopment. The consultants are using a flexible approach to UDAs to find the highest and best use for the areas.

Commissioner Powers inquired if the transportation funding has to be tied directly to the development or redevelopment of a UDA. Mr. Kalbag stated the funding needs to be tied to the boundaries of the UDA. Mr. Gavrilovic explained the rating and scoring program used in House Bill 2. The qualifications are either being located on a corridor of state-wide significance, within an MPO or having UDAs. The Town of Christiansburg qualifies by being a part of the MPO. The funding itself is not tied to UDAs.

Commissioner Powers asked for an example of a similar locality that has been able to use UDAs over the years. Mr. Gavrilovic noted Montgomery County created UDAs between the Town of Christiansburg and Town of Blacksburg, and at the Carillion interchange. The technical assistance resulted in quantitative planning and at that time the UDAs need to accommodate 10-20 years of growth and density. For the Carillion site in Montgomery County, there was a master plan for future transportation improvements and how to bring walkability to the area. Mr. Gavrilovic noted there is a lot of flexibility in how the technical assistance can be used.

Commissioner Powers asked if the assistance could look at a particular area, such as Downtown Christiansburg's walkability.

Presentation by Michael Baker International. regarding UDA study in Christiansburg - (continued).

Mr. Kalbag confirmed. Mr. Gavrilovic noted the assistance would not be used to design sidewalks but rather develop strategies to increase walkability. Mr. Kalbag explained this can be done through the Zoning Ordinance.

Commissioner Powers stated this would be an opportunity for the consultant to guide the Town in where to take these UDAs in the future. Mr. Gavrilovic added the meetings with Town Staff and stakeholders pointed to opportunities such as that.

Commissioner Collins asked, after the consultants toured the town today, what was the number one item that stuck out as something the Town needs to correct. Mr. Kalbag stated there are a lot of opportunities with Main Street but it will be a completely different approach compared to the Peppers Ferry Road - Route 114 area. The Peppers Ferry Road - Route 114 area provides regional connectivity. The consultants will be doing a massing study for the areas chosen. The Cambria area also has great opportunities with the historic fabric. Commissioner Collins asked what one item Mr. Kalbag would do for the Downtown. Mr. Kalbag stated the consultants do not have those answers at this time. There are many pieces to build from and a lot of other communities cannot say that.

Commissioner Powers asked for Mr. Kalbag to clarify what a massing study is. Mr. Kalbag stated a massing study shows how to fit something into the streetscape. This would incorporate the growth rate and how square footages would be accommodated. The massing study could be used for infill or new development.

Mr. Gavrilovic noted from walking around downtown after 5:00 pm, there is no one of the sidewalks. He sees this as an opportunity and challenge for housing in the Downtown area. Mr. Gavrilovic stated there is a chicken and the egg situation of whether the housing will bring a market for the restaurants or vice versa. Mr. Gavrilovic added successful downtown revitalization is those that include housing. Mr. Gavrilovic touched on his experience in Charlottesville. Commissioner Collins complimented the Charlottesville Mall. Mr. Gavrilovic noted ownership of the downtown area is gained through housing.

Commissioner Newell asked about defining housing in the Downtown area. Ms. Newell noted she could point out over 400 residential units in the downtown area. Mr. Gavrilovic noted loft conversions are the first opportunities, but there is not that opportunity here. Commissioner Newell asked if the consultants visited the Montgomery Museum property on Pepper Street. The tour did not include the Montgomery Museum property. Commissioner Newell noted the Crestview apartments and Dee Dee Lane housing provide walkability to Downtown.

Presentation by Michael Baker International, regarding UDA study in Christiansburg - (continued).

Mr. Gavrilovic noted there are opportunities for new housing types with infill and new development. Mr. Gavrilovic added there are emerging demographics and every economic model is looking to build a workforce first. Mr. Gavrilovic stated the workforce is looking for the characteristics the Downtown already has but needs to expand on. Mr. Gavrilovic added this demographic looks for the five minute walkable urbanism in which they can walk to their amenities. Mr. Gavrilovic noted the building height of the original Downtown buildings. Mr. Kalbag stated those buildings had active use on the ground floor.

Commissioner Powers asked if the consultants were able to look at the old middle school site. Ms. Hair confirmed the school property was included in the tour.

Ms. Hair encouraged input from the Development Subcommittee and anyone else that wishes to participate in this project.

Commissioner Collins asked how the Charlottesville mall project worked as far as a timeline. Mr. Gavrilovic stated in 1976 Charlottesville closed the street to create the mall area which was met with much opposition. Mr. Gavrilovic stated the mall was pretty dead for a while due to the old uses like auto parts. Mr. Gavrilovic added turnover of the properties started with the changing generations. Mr. Gavrilovic stated new housing came with the entertainment venues such as the hotel, pavilion and revitalization of the Paramount theatre. Commissioner Collins asked about parking for the mall. Mr. Gavrilovic explained the City of Charlottesville invested in parking garages "book ending" the downtown. Mr. Gavrilovic stated he believes the garages were financed by general obligation bonds. Commissioner Collins inquired about the cost of the parking garage. Mr. Kalbag noted above grade parking garages cost \$10-12,000.

Commissioner Powers noted the advantage with Christiansburg is the Downtown property owners are still living in town. Commissioner Powers went on to ask if the private sector would be included in these efforts. Ms. Hair confirmed the private sector would be included once the boundaries are determined.

Commissioner Newell discussed 10+ Public Policy for Public Places. Commissioner Newell explained the power of ten as needing ten assets and ten destinations in an area. Commissioner Newell stated this is where you get your critical mass. Commissioner Newell stated she will give this information to Ms. Hair as she sees some overlap between this approach and the UDAs. Commissioner Newell added the ten assets pull people in. Commissioner Newell noted there is already a positive direction happening in Christiansburg.

Presentation by Michael Baker International, regarding UDA study in Christiansburg - (continued).

Commissioner Franusich agreed, indicating the Central Business District Committee was recently formed and is meeting tomorrow. Ms. Hair stated she will plan to attend tomorrow and relay information to the consultants. Commissioner Newell stated the committee is just getting started and would benefit from having this information shared with them.

Commissioner Powers requested the consultants' presentation be sent out to the Planning Commission. Ms. Hair confirmed this was possible.

Commissioner Powers stated he sees the value in the consultants guiding the Town on how to amend the Zoning Ordinance. Commissioner Powers added the recent Stateson Homes rezoning was referenced as an area in which their help would have been appreciated. Mr. Gavrilovic noted the goal of this project is to identify targeted growth areas with policy and design guidelines for the Town.

Mr. Gavrilovic asked about the population projection and target growth areas and whether the Planning Commission sees multiple areas or one area for the population growth. Commissioner Franusich stated he sees multiple areas. Commissioner Franusich added there are different areas in town such as the Downtown and Rt. 114 Corridor. Commissioner Franusich stated the Downtown area is traditional and has cozy storefronts which can support infill development. Commissioner Franusich added the areas around the mall are already developing but need to be steered in a better direction. Commissioner Franusich added those that seek housing in the mall area are looking for an affordable housing option and often commute to Blacksburg or Virginia Tech for work. The Stateson Homes requests for apartments and single family homes were discussed along with the business property located in front of this property.

Commissioner Franusich and Commissioner Newell discussed the opportunities in the Roanoke Street area such as the Food Lion. Commissioner Powers noted three important nodes of transportation within the Town of Christiansburg. They are Downtown, mid-county area and Roanoke Street. Commissioner Powers stated these areas could be redeveloped and interconnectivity would be important.

Commissioner Collins asked if the consultants were only working with the Town of Christiansburg or if they were also working with the Town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County. Mr. Gavrilovic stated they are only working with the Town of Christiansburg and the closest locality they are working with in Vinton.

Commissioner Powers asked Cindy Wells-Disney to provide the Planning Commission with some insight into Montgomery County's UDAs. Ms. Disney noted there have been no conversations at this point but she will bring the topic up to them at their next meeting.

Presentation by Michael Baker International, regarding UDA study in Christiansburg - (continued).

The UDAs were established before Ms. Disney joined the Montgomery County Planning Commission. Mr. Gavrilovic stated, not speaking for Montgomery County, the establishment of the County's UDAs were in response to the legislation.

Commissioner Powers reiterated the importance of utilizing the infrastructure the Town already has. Commissioner Powers stated this includes transportation, water and sewer. Commissioner Powers added this concept can tie into the development of the three nodes previously discussed.

Commissioner Newell and Commissioner Collins stated they attended the last Town Council meeting and they listened to a presentation by the Public Works department. Commissioner Newell noted the relationship between the roadways handled by the Public Works department and cost savings with increased density as well as utilization of existing infrastructure. Commissioner Collins praised the Public Works department.

Mr. Gavrilovic noted their earlier meeting with department heads and how their comments are similar to that of the Planning Commission.

Chairperson Moore closed the discussion.

Presentation by Gary Coggins, Montgomery County Senior Environmental Health Manager, regarding urban chickens.

Chairperson Moore invited Mr. Coggins to begin his presentation.

Mr. Coggins noted the Planning Commission has heard the benefits of urban chickens and the Health Department does not have a stance for or against. The Health Department would like everyone to be aware of the potential risks of keeping urban chickens.

There are two respiratory diseases associated with fowl that develop from the fowl droppings. Additionally, chickens are a common reservoir for salmonella and other bacteria including E.coli. The chicks common at Easter are associated with salmonella outbreaks. This is due to the chicks being covered in feces and people do not always remember to wash their hands after handling them. The coops and keeping of chickens can cause additional issues. Chicken coops can become rodent harborages due to the feed, litter, and eggs. This can lead to issues with critters such as mice, rats, groundhogs, raccoons, and skunks. This leads to a threat of rabies. Neighborhood cats and dogs can also be attracted. Property damage disputes can result when neighborhood pets get into the coops.

Presentation by Gary Coggins, Montgomery County Senior Environmental Health Manager, regarding urban chickens - (continued).

Chicken coops can also result in a nuisance and noxious odors. This can develop when the coops or chickens are not maintained well. Flies can also become an issue.

The various diseases associated with the keeping of chickens were discussed, including avian flu, can spread from an animal to a human. Avian flu has not done this in the United States but it is possible.

There are many strategies associated with urban chickens as they are becoming a popular topic.

When urban chickens are introduced they are not a big issue at the beginning since those that were a proponent of its adoption are more likely to follow the regulations associated with its allowance. Those urban chicken owners are more courteous about the coops in relation to their neighbors and disease. The issue arises later down the road when people who are not as invested in its allowance have urban chickens.

Complaints about urban chickens first go to the local health department. While the Health Department is glad to take those complaints however this is not one of their primary functions. If enforcement is needed then the Health Department would need to have another conversation with the Town of Christiansburg. Typically they request local code enforcers to handle those inspections.

Commissioner Franusich asked what some of the mitigating factors are. Mr. Coggins listed the following: no roosters, limit on number of hens (many localities cap at 6), minimum lot sizes, setback requirements for coops, limited to the rear yard, requiring a full enclosure with roof, prohibit the slaughter of chickens, prohibit the outdoor slaughter of chickens, and regulate the disposal of chicken litter. These regulations help mitigate the impact on the neighbors and provide a buffer. Localities with the by-right use of keeping chickens tend to have stricter regulations.

Commissioner Powers inquired about the number of chickens in relation to egg production and its classification of a commercial use. Mr. Coggins indicated that this was no longer the case. The threshold has been raised to 10,000 chickens. He does not foresee this being an issue for the Town of Christiansburg. The Health Department does encourage the ordinance to indicate the urban chickens are for personal use only not commercial.

Commissioner Carter noted that chickens live to be 10 years old and laying chickens only produce 2-3 years. Mr. Coggins confirmed Commissioner Carter's statements.

Presentation by Gary Coggins, Montgomery County Senior Environmental Health Manager, regarding urban chickens - (continued).

Commissioner Newell asked Mr. Coggins to clarify the avian flu is not specific to chickens. Mr. Coggins confirmed any bird litter can cause avian flu. Commissioner Newell noted one could expose themselves to avian flu by working in their garden where a bird has defecated. Mr. Coggins stated the concentration of feces becomes an issue.

Commissioner Newell asked if 6 chickens are permitted and the owner adds the chicken litter to their compost, would this create an issue or would an issue result over a number of years? Mr. Coggins stated the potential is there but it depends on if the composting is done correctly. Risk can be lowered by an educational brochure.

Commissioner Newell discussed the permitting required by Virginia Department of Health inspection for restaurants and vendors at local farmers markets. She went on to ask if any Virginia municipalities require this type of permit. Mr. Coggins is not sure at this time. Permitting is done in other parts of the country. The Health Department is open to discuss this option with the Town. There was further discussion of code enforcement.

Commissioner Powers asked staff how other localities handle permitting. Do they have an annual permit fee that covers the cost of the inspections? Ms. Hair is not sure at this time. She believes permits are required for the original inspections of lot sizing and setbacks. After that initial inspection it may be complaint based. Mr. Coggins noted that a lot of the localities that allow chickens by-right handle enforcement by complaint basis. Enforcement results in a misdemeanor or civil penalty. Within the New River Valley, the County of Pulaski allows chickens by-right.

Commissioner Collins inquired about Mr. Coggins' colleagues feelings regarding the allowance of chickens in their locality. Mr. Coggins is not sure how they feel as he does not believe the Environmental Health Managers have been actively involved in the enforcement process.

Commissioner Newell discussed the egg producers at the farmers market. She believes they receive inspections from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Mr. Coggins noted that VDACS has extended exemptions for small producers. He would be surprised if they are getting annual inspections. VDACS merely conducts compliance inspections.

Chairperson Moore inquired if there have been any health issue in other localities due to chickens. Mr. Coggins stated that once a year the Health Department will deal with a salmonella outbreak due to chickens. Education is an easy correction for this type of issue. Commissioner Power noted that it would likely be operator error for a salmonella outbreak. Mr. Coggins confirmed that would likely be the case for a salmonella outbreak. The more practical problems are managing of nuisances.

Presentation by Gary Coggins, Montgomery County Senior Environmental Health Manager, regarding urban chickens - (continued).

Commissioner Collins asked if any localities have approved urban chickens and then restricted them. Not to Mr. Coggins' knowledge. Those that allow it are very proactive and put regulations in place to mitigate any issues.

Commissioner Newell asked which Planning Commissioners were present for the original vote. Four of the current Planning Commissioners were present for the original vote. Commissioner Powers noted that Town Council asked the Planning Commission to study chickens and they developed the best approach in their minds. There was a split vote.

Chairperson Moore thanked Mr. Coggins for his presentation.

Approval of meeting minutes for August 31, 2015.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Commissioner Carter made a motion to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Collins seconded the motion, which passed 8-0. Commissioner Sowers abstained, as she was not present for the last meeting.

Other Business.

Ms. Hair provided an update on the Obesity Prevention Grant and the Bike Art Competition winner. The winning art piece of the Bike Art Competition can be seen outside Town Hall. Two plaques for the art piece have been ordered. The artist Nikki Pynn, titled the art piece "Wings and Wheels." The plaques will take three weeks before they are installed. There will be a press release regarding the art. The Obesity Prevention Grant efforts have been completed. Ms. Hair praised the Public Works Department for coming in under budget. The grant committee has tried to spend the last of the funding from the state as we could be eligible for further funding to look at the sustainability of the grant. The crosswalks and bike racks installed would be evaluated for public use. Ms. Hair noted the bike rack at Union Bank in Downtown Christiansburg fronting Main Street.

Chairperson Moore discussed the grading at the Aquatics Center. Chairperson Moore went on to note the grading of the area near Sheetz on 460- Business. This project is being applied for House Bill 2 funding. Mr. Moore praised Public Works for their competency on the projects we have seen and how this may work in their favor for applying for funding.

The Development Subcommittee meeting will be next week at 8:30am on September 23rd.

Other Business - (continued).

Commissioner Powers asked if UDAs would be discussed. Ms. Hair does not know if there will be anything to provide to the subcommittee at that time. When staff has that information available, it would be good to invite the rest of the Planning Commissioners. The consultants will be back in town in October to discuss their findings.

The Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee met Wednesday, September 9th.

Commissioner Franusich brought up the carports being installed violating the setback requirements. Commissioner Franusich asked if the contractors installing the carports know about the requirements. Ms. Hair confirmed those installing have been notified in writing by the Building Official regarding the requirements. Ms. Hair stated the Planning Department has become aware of a carport installed over the weekend on Overhill Drive. Ms. Hair added the department will be looking into the complaint on Tuesday and pursuing a violation. Commissioner Franusich asked what recourse the homeowner has in that situation. Ms. Hair stated luckily this issue is early enough that it can be moved and the homeowner would reference their contract with the carport company. Commissioner Newell added the Board of Zoning Appeals has seen them as an issue. Commissioner Newell asked that business licenses be revoke for violators. Commissioner Newell praised Ms. Hair and Jerry Heinline, Building Official for educating the public. Commissioner Newell stated ultimately it falls on the home owner to do their due diligence in working with the contractor. Ms. Hair added inspections are performed by her staff and the Building Department. Commissioner Carter appreciated the educational piece included in the water billing. Ms. Hair noted she has presented at Town Council regarding permit requirements.

The Wilderness Trail festival is this Saturday, September 19th downtown and the Food Truck Rodeo is the following Friday, September 25th from 5 to 10pm. An Open House will be held at the Rescue Building this Saturday afternoon during the Wilderness Trail festival.

Commissioner Powers inquired about next steps for the chicken discussion. Ms. Hair stated staff will bring back information, including a comparison of different localities, to a future meeting. Ms. Hair noted preliminary research shows other localities require a larger minimum lot size. The previous information collected and drafted by the Planning Commission is also an item to be revised or reviewed at this time. Commissioner Carter noted that she does not believe it is fair to put the responsibility on the enforcement officer when complaints arise. Ms. Hair referenced the permitting process that was drafted the last time chickens were discussed by the Planning Commission. Commissioner Franusich added his neighbors had illegal chickens and they did not bother his family.

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There being no more business, Chairperson Moore adjourned the meeting at 8:26 p.m.



Craig Moore, Chairperson



Nichole Hair, Secretary Non-Voting