Christiansburg Planning Commission
Minutes of January 22, 2013

Present: Ann H. Carter
Harry Collins
David Franusich
Jonathan Hedrick
Ashley Parsons
Joe Powers, Vice-Chairperson
Jennifer D. Sowers
Nichole Hair, Secretary Non-Voting

Absent: M. H. Dorsett, AICP
Steve Huppert
Craig Moore, Chairperson

Staff/Visitors: Kali Casper, staff
Missy Martin, staff
Wayne Nelson, staff
Todd Walters, staff

Vice-Chairperson Powers called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Christiansburg Town Hall at 100 E. Main Street, Christiansburg, Virginia to discuss the following items:

Public Comment.

Vice-Chairperson Powers introduced the new Planning Commission members, Jonathan Hedrick and David Franusich. Vice-Chairperson Powers opened the floor for public comment. No public comments were made. Vice-Chairperson Powers closed the floor for public comment.

Approval of meeting minutes for December 10, 2012.

Vice-Chairperson Powers introduced the discussion. Commissioner Sowers made a motion to approve the December 10, 2012 Planning Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Collins seconded the motion which passed 4-0 with Commissioners Carter, Hedrick, and Franusich abstaining.

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter.

Vice-Chairperson Powers opened the discussion. Ms. Casper stated that the Transportation Plan will be submitted to VDOT the first week of February. She noted the Transportation Plan is the Transportation Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Casper presented the draft. She presented the 2 maps at the end of the document. She noted the Street Classification Map will be inserted on page 10 following a section in which the VDOT road classifications are described. Ms. Casper added the hierarchy of roads and road classifications map are part of the State Code requirement.

DRAFT

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter (Continued).

Ms. Casper explained the Road Improvement Project map accompanies the project descriptions on pages 10-12 that include funded projects and projects that are anticipated to be funded through the year 2035. She added a 3rd map will be including showing bikeways, walkways, and sidewalks within Town. She noted the map is currently being developed to include Town and regional information. Ms. Casper stated the portions highlighted in yellow are still being worked on. She added the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee wanted to present the chapter to the full Planning Commission for comments and concerns. Ms. Casper noted most of the information has been compiled from the MPO Regional Plan, public input meetings and surveys. She added the list on Page 14 will be included as an appendix so staff can edit projects as they are funded or removed from the lists without having to go through the public hearing amendment process for the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Carter inquired if Town Council would need to approve the appendix. Ms. Casper noted the funding priorities will go through the normal amendment process but the working list would not. Vice-Chairperson Powers indicated as projects move forward and become viable, it would go through a more formal process.

Vice-Chairperson Powers inquired how the MPO should be defined to the average citizen. Ms. Casper stated it is a regional organization serving Blacksburg, Christiansburg, portions of Montgomery and Pulaski Counties, and the City of Radford. She added the MPO has representatives from the localities as well as VDOT, Department of Rail and Public Transportation, Virginia Tech and others. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted the MPO has a policy board and a more technical group. Ms. Casper responded there is an MPO Policy Board and an MPO Technical Advisory Committee. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked about the members from Christiansburg. Mr. Nelson responded he and Mr. Wingfield are on the Technical Advisory Committee. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked who is on the Policy Board. Mr. Nelson responded that Mr. Carpenetti is on the Policy Poard. Commissioner Franusich asked if it is composed of Town government members. Ms. Casper responded that it can be staff or elected officials depending on the locality or organization.

Vice-Chairperson Powers indicated it is transportation affiliated people from the organizations. He asked what the TAC does and how they interact with the Policy Board. Mr. Nelson responded that Dan Brugh is the director of the MPO and Steve Sandy is the current chairperson. He added the TAC deals with transportation issues on a regional basis. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted that the projects are regional in nature because they cross boundary lines and transport people through localities.

DRAFT

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter (Continued).

Commissioner Collins asked if the organization attempts to fund projects through VDOT. Mr. Nelson responded that the projects are cultivated by the localities and the TAC studies issues and prepare a transportation plan for submission to VDOT for funding. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted that the MPO was formed after the 2000 Census due to population increases as was required by Federal law. He added that the federal government encourages cooperation between the localities.

Ms. Casper added the MPO expansion to include a portion of Pulaski County and City of Radford are a result of the 2010 Census population increases. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted it may continue to expand every 10 years.

Vice-Chairperson Powers stated the listing of projects is consistent with the MPO plan for regional projects. Ms. Casper responded that the projects are local priorities that were included in the regional plan and also projects from VDOT Six-Year Improvement Program. Commissioner Carter pointed out the advantage of having Dan Brugh as director as a previous resident engineer for VDOT. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted many MPOs are typically staffed by Planning District Commissions but we are more grass roots.

Vice-Chairperson Powers introduced the topic of Corridors of Statewide Significance and asked for an overview on that. Ms. Casper responded State Code requires the Christiansburg Comprehensive Plan to maintain consistency with Statewide Transportation Plans. She added the Corridors of Statewide Significance were identified in VTrans2035. Ms. Casper noted both the Crescent Corridor, which includes Interstate 81 and Route 11, and the Heartland Corridor, based on Route 460, run through Christiansburg. Ms. Casper stated the strategies in the Plan are consistent with the State. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted VDOT is using the corridor approach to look at the whole state.

Commissioner Carter asked about the unofficial park and ride located at exit 114 of Interstate 81. Vice-Chairperson Powers responded it was not currently being addressed. Commissioner Parsons added if additional funding is available when the bridge is replaced, the park and ride would be considered. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked if Mr. Nelson would like to comment. Mr. Nelson responded that he is only aware of the concept. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked about whether the park and ride might be considered with the project. Mr. Nelson asked if that desire has been communicated. Ms. Hair responded yes. Commissioner Parsons noted it has been mentioned a few times. Ms. Hair added VDOT indicated it will be studied with the bridge replacement.

DRAFT

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter (Continued).

Vice-Chairperson Powers noted the Primary Transportation goal and the sections on transit and multi-modal transportation and asked for a summary of bus service. Ms. Casper noted there is some background information on the Blacksburg Transit service within Christiansburg. She added Blacksburg Transit provides fixed service, demand response, and special event service. Ms. Casper referenced the Transit Development Plan (TDP), which is the long range plan for Blacksburg Transit. She noted implementation strategies are supportive of and consistent with the TDP. Vice-Chairperson Powers referenced the implementation strategies and asked about Council's perspective on bus service currently. Ms. Hair responded Town Council is currently in favor of the bus service. She added there is support for further outreach and marketing to make more citizens aware of the service. Commissioner Franusich inquired about whether improved signage at bus stops will include route information. Ms. Casper responded it may be different with different locations but everything from route information to electronic signage with time information is being considered.

Vice-Chairperson Powers requested Commissioner Franusich present his views as a transit user. Commissioner Franusich responded there is a need to improve public transportation and as a user of the commuter service, it could improve with scheduling flexibility. Ms. Casper added a primary goal for Blacksburg Transit's Christiansburg bus service is to monitor and modify the service as needed to respond to demand and make changes as needed. Commissioner Collins asked if Commissioner Franusich could catch the bus at a convenient location. Commissioner Franusich responded the route was created for Virginia Tech workers and more surveying could be done to broaden the user base. Ms. Hair added a large portion of the commuter route is paid for by Virginia Tech. Commissioner Franusich noted the service is convenient for him. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted it is a benefit to Virginia Tech to reduce the need for additional parking structures. Commissioner Collins noted parking is a problem on campus.

Commissioner Hedrick asked for an explanation of the Mall Hub. Ms. Hair explained it has been discussed but a location has not been determined. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted the location would be useful for future development planning. Commissioner Franusich commented on the lack of pedestrian infrastructure in the Mall area. Ms. Hair responded it is meant to be a more centralized service where the Two Town Trolley could tie in with Radford Transit and other services. Ms. Casper added the need for pedestrian and bicycle connections are addressed in another section of the plan. Mr. Nelson asked if including a map of bus routes is too specific. Ms. Casper responded it could be included but there is concern that it may change frequently and be out of date. Vice-Chairperson Powers inquired as to what the best option is for tying in pedestrian and transit and how to plan for that. Mr. Nelson responded staff discusses it on an almost daily basis. Ms. Casper responded including these as implementation strategies helps when funding becomes available. Ms. Hair agreed that including it in long range plans will aid in funding and applications for development.

DRAFT

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter (Continued).

Commissioner Collins asked about Planning Commission attending the Town Council Street Committee meetings. Mr. Nelson responded the Street Committee deals with transportation planning and is the mechanism by which issues are studied by staff and communicated to Town Council. He added staff aids Town Council members with technical expertise to provide recommendations for Town Council when requested. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted the changes on Miller and Alleghany Streets with traffic calming. Mr. Nelson indicated the changes are not radical but should make people more aware of their speed. He added it can be taken to another level if needed with added expense. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked how the Planning Commission interacts with the Street Committee. He noted those meetings are open to the public so someone can attend. He added that Montgomery County had Planning Commission liaisons to various County Committees and attended when meetings involved Planning Commission issues. Mr. Nelson commended Ms. Hair for inviting Engineering staff to attend and that they hope to come back to work with the Planning Commission.

Vice-Chairperson Powers noted the inclusion of park and ride studies in the implementation strategies. Ms. Casper noted the inclusion of informal park and ride locations in the plan.

Commissioner Franusich asked about the proposed passenger rail service. Ms. Casper responded yes that it is describe on Page 5 and it is meant to link Bristol to Richmond and to DC but is just a proposal and was in the previous plan. Ms. Casper added the governor recently included passenger rail to Roanoke in his proposed transportation plan. Commissioner Collins asked who has made the proposal. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted it is an interest group. He added Town Council is supportive of this proposal. Commissioner Franusich noted there is not much the Town can do to bring the rail beyond saying yes. Ms. Casper responded showing support, as well as show user demand and prepare for a stop location. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted it is important for Christiansburg to be supportive because some communities are not.

Commissioner Carter noted Virginia Tech needs to be added to the airport information.

Vice-Chairperson Powers introduced bikeways and walkways including the Huckleberry Trail. Mr. Nelson reviewed the Huckleberry Trail Phase II Sections A-F which will connect from the Mall to the High School. He added the Route 114 project includes a pedestrian bridge crossing Peppers Ferry Road. Mr. Nelson continued by stating the trail then extends behind Wal-Mart and Home Depot, crosses the railroad and extends to Cambria Street. He noted Phase C has been constructed between Forelmont Street and the Christiansburg Recreation Center. Mr. Nelson stated Phase E ties in from Forelmont Street to Phase B. He stated Phase D is along Providence Boulevard and up the 100 foot strip that will be called Woody Park until the Peppers Ferry Road Connector is built. Commissioner Sowers asked if the park only includes the future street area. Mr. Nelson responded yes, it is more of a linear park.

DRAFT

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter (Continued).

Mr. Walters noted Phase D will tie into the Food Lion parking lot and go across Oak Tree Boulevard connecting to the high school. He added the trail then moves from the high school to the sidewalks on N. Franklin Street as Phase F. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked how it will tie into the Aquatic Center. Mr. Walters noted this is as far as the plan currently goes. Commissioner Franusich stated sidewalks do not extend all the way to the Aquatic Center. Mr. Nelson noted there is a bike lane on Mill Lane to the Aquatic Center. Mr. Nelson added the Diamond Hill Stream Restoration Project will connect to Phase F assuming the Town can acquire easements. Mr. Nelson added this connection will allow for the Christiansburg High School Track and Cross Country teams to run in a safer environment.

Vice-Chairperson Powers noted the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee has discussed how to include a safe pedestrian crossing at N. Franklin Street near Independence Boulevard. Mr. Nelson responded this is still being planned. Mr. Walters added the Cambria Street trail crossing will be a rapid beacon crossing as seen on Prices Fork Road in Blacksburg. Commissioner Sowers noted this will slow traffic down. Mr. Nelson added they are considering a speed hump where the trail will cross Oak Tree Boulevard.

Commissioner Collins asked about the intersection at Cambria Street and N. Franklin Street. Mr. Nelson responded the intersection has become the top priority project for the Town. Ms. Casper added the project is Number 14 in the project list and Numbers 14 and 19 have been included in a resolution by Town Council to increase their priority. Commissioner Collins asked about funding for the project. Mr. Nelson responded there is no funding currently. Mr. Nelson stated the intersection will be included in the study the corridor from Independence Boulevard to Cambria Street. He noted that a recent traffic study at Patricks Way in that corridor did not meet the warrants for a traffic signal.

Vice-Chairperson Powers asked about the numbers for priority. Ms. Casper noted the first four projects are funded and two of those are complete. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked about project number 1 and where these projects move. Mr. Walters responded the Route 114 project is number one and will stay there until completed. Ms. Casper explained the first four projects are not ranked in the list but are funded projects according to VDOT Six-Year Improvement Program. Vice-Chairperson Powers clarified that of the remaining unfunded projects, those two are priorities. Ms. Casper responded yes. Commissioner Collins asked how the funding is obtained. Ms. Casper responded that the resolution is the first step. Vice-Chairperson Powers indicated as money becomes available, these will be considered. Mr. Nelson noted project Number 19 is meant to alleviate congestion on Route 114. Commissioner Hedrick asked about the intersection near the Villas at Peppers Ferry Road where Quin Stuart Boulevard intersects Route 114. He noted the homeowners have met regarding the new bridge, the pump station, and the future fire house. He stated residents have concerns about the project and plan to submit their concerns to Town Council. Commissioner Hedrick asked if the intersection would be right turn only. Mr. Nelson responded you would be able to turn left.

DRAFT

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter (Continued).

Commissioner Hedrick asked about the safety of the intersection. Mr. Nelson responded VDOT considered a traffic signal at the intersection early in the design process but the warrants were not met. He added conditions probably would still not be met. Commissioner Hedrick added there are two parcels of land for sale at the intersection as well. Mr. Walters explained the amount of traffic on the side streets is what does not typically meet the warrants because it is looked at over a 12 hour period. Mr. Walters added if the parcel across the street is developed, it would create a four way intersection that would be more likely to meet the warrants. Commissioner Hedrick added that there may be some miscommunication regarding a divider on Route 114 that would prohibit left turns. Mr. Walters responded there is a divider at the railroad track so that the signals cannot be avoided. Commissioner Hedrick asked if the divider extends to Quin Stuart Boulevard. Mr. Walters responded staff would check. Commissioner Hedrick just wanted to point out the interest in that project. Vice-Chairperson Powers suggested that staff might explain the project and eliminate any misconceptions. He added the fire station has been in the plans for quite some time. Ms. Hair responded the Town owns the lot there. Commissioner Carter added it has likely been twenty years that the fire station has been planned there. Commissioner Hedrick asked about how a fire station would affect the traffic. Mr. Nelson stated there will be an effort for VDOT to communicate with businesses in that corridor and he will notify VDOT to include the homeowners' association in that list. Mr. Nelson also noted the challenging nature of meeting the warrants for a traffic signal explaining the example of N. Franklin Street and Independence Boulevard. Mr. Walters added he went through two traffic studies at that location. Commissioner Carter suggested explaining the criteria for traffic signals and how some localities will install signals without meeting the warrants at a high liability risk. Mr. Nelson added it sets a precedent as well and that more detail could be given at a future meeting. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted at Independence Boulevard, there was tremendous side street traffic but not consistently over a 12 hour period. Commissioner Hedrick asked if the speed limit would be the same after the widening. Mr. Nelson responded that it likely would remain the same.

Commissioner Collins asked about design plans for N. Franklin Street and Cambria Street intersection. Mr. Nelson noted that a preliminary design was done to create a cost estimate and it is available through the MPO.

Vice-Chairperson Powers introduced the topic of Safe Routes to School. Ms. Hair explained it is a new program for Christiansburg and a Travel Plan has been approved Christiansburg Primary and Elementary Schools. She added staff will submit two infrastructure projects this week for grant funding. The first project will connect the two schools with connections to Depot Street and Wades Lane. Ms. Hair stated the project will also include improving the crossing at Wades Lane with a rapid flashing beacon. Ms. Hair added the second project is part of a previous rezoning at Overlook Drive. She stated there is an existing trail system that can be connected to the school campus. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked for clarification on the location.

DRAFT

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter (Continued).

Ms. Hair responded it is on Overlook Drive off of Clearview Drive. Commissioner Sowers asked about the area of the trail. Ms. Hair noted children from the apartments would be able to walk with completion of the project. She added there are currently zero children walking or biking to either school. Ms. Hair stated non-infrastructure projects include encouragement and education and funding will hopefully be available this fall. She added staff will pursue funding for specific projects. Commissioner Sowers asked about how many families are within walking distance of the school. Ms. Hair responded they are considering a ½ mile radius. She added Christiansburg Middle School is also eligible for Safe Routes to School but will not work at this time. Commissioner Franusich asked if the high school was eligible. Ms. Hair responded no. Commissioner Sowers noted many kids walk from the high school. Ms. Hair responded staff may be able to create links within a 2 mile radius later. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked where the students are going from the high school. Commissioner Sowers responded they walk down N. Franklin towards the Skate Park or towards the Recreation Center. Commissioner Parsons added some walk down Cambria Street as well. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted a safe crossing is needed in at least two locations for N. Franklin Street.

Commissioner Franusich asked about the bikeway/walkway map. Ms. Casper responded yes, it is in development. Commissioner Franusich asked if a copy can be emailed to the Planning Commission when it is complete. Ms. Casper responded yes. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked about the plan/map. Ms. Casper indicated the Town's current map includes the sidewalk system, some trails, and some shared roadways. She added the regional Bikeway Walkway Blueway Plan includes a Christiansburg specific map which shows additional trails and shared roadways. Ms. Casper indicated staff is currently compiling all the information into one map. Vice-Chairperson Powers added the map will include the Huckleberry Trail extensions. Commissioner Franusich asked who makes the Regional Bikeway Walkway Blueway Plan. Ms. Casper responded the PDC creates the plan with the localities. Ms. Hair responded it is a regional TAC project. Commissioner Franusich asked if the map includes both existing and proposed facilities. Ms. Casper responded yes.

Vice-Chairperson Powers introduced the Traffic Calming program. Mr. Nelson indicated the Town has recently responded to issues on Miller and Alleghany Streets and on Sleepy Hollow Road. He noted the addition of stop signs. Commissioner Sowers asked about complaints lately on Sleepy Hollow Road. Mr. Walters noted there were complaints originally but have not heard anything in the last few weeks. Mr. Nelson noted it is a relatively inexpensive first step and incorporating traffic calming at the development stage is a good plan. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted interconnections can create a burden on particular neighborhoods. Mr. Nelson suggested integrating traffic calming measures into road design. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked about including the measures in the ordinances. Mr. Nelson indicated narrower street widths are included as a goal to promote calmer traffic. Vice-Chairperson Powers suggested a staff review to bring ordinances into consistency with the traffic calming program. Commissioner Collins asked about roundabouts. Commissioner Franusich noted the improvement of North Main Street and Prices Fork Road in Blacksburg since the addition of the roundabout.

DRAFT

Comprehensive Plan – review of Transportation Chapter (Continued).

Vice-Chairperson Powers reviewed the street improvement projects and priorities. Ms. Casper indicated duplicate numbers show future street connections. Commissioner Franusich asked how Phlegar Street will be shifted to line up with Radford Street. Ms. Casper responded the specifics have not been determined at this time. Mr. Nelson added when there are issues on the interstate; it alleviates the burden on downtown. Commissioner Carter asked about prohibiting cattle trucks on Park Street. Ms. Casper responded the Working List of Projects is pulled from public input meetings. Commissioner Carter asked about a no through truck sign.

Vice-Chairperson Powers asked about VDOT submission. Ms. Casper responded it will be submitted to VDOT the first week in February. Ms. Casper added it will be reviewed next week by the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee. Ms. Casper requested Planning Commission to review and submit suggestions or comments by noon on Monday. Ms. Casper added changes can be made after VDOT submittal but VDOT requires a 90 day review period prior to the public hearing adoption process. Commissioner Franusich asked the date. Vice-Chairperson Powers requested an email be sent regarding this to all Planning Commission members. Ms. Casper responded it is January 28th.

Meeting Dates – 2013.

Vice-Chairperson Powers opened the discussion. Ms. Hair asked to be notified if the email regarding meeting dates has not been received. She noted Tuesday night meetings are due to Town Holidays.

Other Business

Ms. Hair stated the Planning Directors would like feedback from the joint session to see about an annual meeting with the other commissioners. Commissioner Franusich asked about it being only once a year. Ms. Hair noted we meet twice a year with PDC group but with Blacksburg and Montgomery County this is the first time in many years. Commissioner Collins thought VDOT was very helpful and that it was nice to meet the other commissioners. Commissioner Parsons added it was nice to stay up to date on other locality projects. Commission Carter indicated it was well worth having. Vice-Chairperson Powers asked about the housing numbers Kevin Byrd provided. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted that 9,000 of 10,000 units in the next 10 years would be in Blacksburg, Christiansburg, and Montgomery County. He added a regular meeting would be appropriate.

Ms. Hair noted the Historic District Subcommittee met on Wednesday and completed the task at hand and will now plan to meet only as needed.

Ms. Hair noted that recouping delinquent taxes will be put in the Administrative Chapter of Town Code so it encompasses any submissions to the Town. Town Council will hold the public hearing on that in February.

DRAFT

Other Business – (continued).

Vice-Chairperson Powers noted the Planning Commission has three subcommittees: historic districts, comprehensive plan, and development. Ms. Hair noted Development Subcommittee meets on 4th Wednesday at 9:30am. Ms. Casper indicated the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee meets generally on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays at 4:30pm. She added for the next month and half, meetings are moved and to check the website. Commissioner Franusich asked about the difference between Development and Comprehensive Plan committees. Ms. Hair noted the Development Subcommittee looks at zoning changes whereas the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee is specifically working on the update but there is some overlap and the committees have met jointly. Vice-Chairperson Powers noted traffic calming, subdivision and zoning changes come through the Development Subcommittee. Ms. Hair asked new members to note their interest and she will pass them along to Chairperson Moore.

Commissioner Parsons asked about Blacksburg and Montgomery County commissioners being appointed to come to our meetings. Ms. Hair responded that they do occasionally attend. She noted Bryan Rice from Montgomery County will attend sometimes.

There being no more business Vice-Chairperson Powers adjourned the meeting at 8:48 p.m.

_____ _____

Joe Powers, Vice-Chairperson Nichole Hair, Secretary Non-Voting

DRAFT