Christiansburg Planning Commission
Minutes of July 8, 2013

Present: Matthew J. Beasley
Ann H. Carter
Harry Collins
M.H. Dorsett, AICP
David Franusich
Steve Huppert
Craig Moore, Chairperson
Ashley Parsons
Joe Powers, Vice-Chairperson
Jennifer D. Sowers
Nichole Hair, Secretary Non-Voting

Absent: Jonathan Hedrick

Staff/Visitors: Kali Casper, staff
Missy Martin, staff
Cindy Disney, Montgomery County Planning Commission
Mr. and Mrs. Casper
Bob Poff
Christina O'Connor

Chairperson Moore 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.

Chairperson Moore opened the floor for public comment. No public comments were made. Chairperson Moore closed the floor for public comment.

Approval of meeting minutes for June 24, 2013.

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Commissioner Dorsett made a motion to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Carter seconded the motion which passed 8-0, with Commissioner Huppert and Chairperson Moore abstaining.

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Planning Commission Public Hearing on the Christiansburg Comprehensive Plan.

Chairperson Moore asked the staff to make comments before opening the floor to public comments. Ms. Casper advised the Commissioners the Comprehensive Plan draft has been advertised, posted online with copies at the library and in the Town Hall. Ms. Casper stated no public comments have been received at this time. Ms. Casper added some changes will be made to the plan and all versions will be updated before the Town Council Public Hearing. Commissioner Huppert asked when the Comprehensive Plan will be viewed by Town Council. Ms. Casper replied August 6th.

Chairperson Moore asked if public would like to address the Planning Commission on the Public Hearing for the Comprehensive Plan. No comments were made. Chairperson Moore moved to close the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Dorsett comments on Ms. Casper's work on the Comprehensive Plan stating how large of a task it is to write the plan and Ms. Casper did an excellent job and should be compensated. Chairperson Moore added he would like to thank the subcommittee for working on pieces of the Comprehensive Plan to bring it all together. Commissioner Collins also commented on the outstanding job Ms. Casper did with the Comprehensive Plan and added the Town should give Ms. Casper a bonus. Commissioner Huppert added he will advise Council how well Ms. Casper completed the task of writing the Comprehensive Plan.

Chairperson Moore clarified the Comprehensive Plan will go to Town Council for Public Hearing on August 6, 2013. Ms. Casper replied yes and she will have revisions for the next Planning Commission meeting. Commissioner Dorsett added the importance of the Planning Commission to attend the Public Hearing for Town Council. Ms. Hair replied the staff would like the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee to attend. Chairperson Moore asked if the expectation at the next Planning Commission meeting is to make a recommendation to Town Council. Ms. Hair replied yes and all revisions to the Plan will be made before the next Planning Commission meeting.

Ms. Casper discussed the list of changes to the Comprehensive Plan such as grammar, a detailed table of contents, a list of maps and tables added, the addition of fire and rescue buildings to the service maps, moving the historic maps to the back, updates to the transportation chapter, and the addition of a basic glossary. Ms. Casper added comments are welcomed and to please send comments as soon as possible.

Work Session-Parking Regulations

Chairperson Moore opened the discussion. Commissioner Dorsett made a motion to go into work session. Commissioner Beasley seconded the motion which passed 10-0.

Commissioner Dorsett made a motion to close the work session. Commissioner Carter seconded the motion which passed 10-0. No action was taken.

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Other Business

Chairperson Moore stated as the Comprehensive Plan moves into the approval status, staff would like the subcommittee to meet at 4:00 pm to help staff on timing with evening meetings. Chairperson Moore asked if this will be a burden for any of the Commissioners serving on the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee. No Commissioners replied it would be a burden to change the meeting time.

Chairperson Moore asked for any other business. Ms. Hair responded nothing at this time for the full Commission. Ms. Hair added the Development Subcommittee meeting would be changed to July 22 at 6 pm. Commissioner Dorsett added the Planning Commission may need to look at having combined meetings with the Comprehensive Plan and Development Subcommittees, to start discussing how to align the Zoning Ordinance with the Comprehensive Plan. Chairperson Moore stated he will work with Ms. Hair on coming up with meeting times.

Commissioner Huppert commented about the joinder study which now includes Montgomery County as part of the Water Authority with Virginia Tech, Blacksburg and Christiansburg. Commissioner Huppert discussed how Montgomery County had a chance to become a member of the Water Authority over 20 + years ago and the County did not want to join at that time. Commissioner Huppert stated Montgomery County has tried to become a member of the Water Authority for approximately 10 years now and Town Council has been working on a decision to add Montgomery County for over 8 months. Commissioner Huppert added the Town Council did vote to approve for Montgomery County to be added to the Water Authority by a vote of 5 to 1.

Commissioner Collins asked what is involved with the Montgomery County joining the Water Authority. Commissioner Huppert replied the County would have to pay $1.3 million to join but originally Montgomery County was asked to pay approximately $4.3 million but the County could not pay that amount. Commissioner Collins asked where the money goes from Montgomery County to join the Water Authority. Commissioner Huppert replied to the Water Authority.

Commissioner Powers added in the Comprehensive Plan Ms. Casper has a table on population projections from the state of Virginia. Ms. Casper replies yes the state contracted it to the Weldon Cooper Center. Commissioner Powers added the survey shows Montgomery County will have approximately a 30,000 population increase from 2010 to 2040 with 1/3 of the population increase to move into Christiansburg. Commissioner Powers asked Ms. Hair what the population was in 2010 for Christiansburg. Ms. Hair replied 21,000.

Chairperson Moore asked for any other business. Commissioner Collins added Commissioner Powers, Commissioner Dorsett and himself discussed possible ideas they would like Town Council to hear. Commissioner Huppert replied the Town Council will be having a work session in August. Ms. Hair replied the meeting is for discussion of handling site development, site plan review and subdivision review with staff.

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Other Business (continued)

Commissioner Huppert replied he thought it may be a good time for the Planning Commission to present their ideas to Town Council. Commissioner Huppert asked if Ms. Hair could bring up to Mr. Helms the interest by Planning Commissioners to speak to Town Council. Ms. Hair responded it depends on what the Planning Commissioners would like to discuss. Chairperson Moore asked for further clarification on what the Commissioners would like to discuss with Town Council.

Commissioner Collins commented the Town of Christiansburg needs another elementary school and the logical growth is out Route 114. Commissioner Collins stated the Commissioners would like to ask Town Council to consider a trade with Montgomery County from a portion of the 60 plus acres recently purchased by the Town in exchange for the property of the old Christiansburg Middle School. Commissioner Huppert replied the County is stretched to the max on school funding right now and added Christiansburg High School received $400,000 to upgrade portions of the school. Commissioner Huppert stated he did not see the County building additional schools for 15 to 20 years and his opinion is he would not be surprised if one of the schools would be closed next year.

Commissioner Dorsett stated Christiansburg is underbuilt for elementary schools and with the projected growth patterns, younger families are moving to Christiansburg with school children aged between K-5 grades. Commissioner Dorsett added Route 114 needs a larger elementary school located in the area because Belview Elementary School is not equipped for the number of children in the area.

Chairperson Moore clarified the Planning Commission would like to make a recommendation to Town Council to consider as the Town is developing the property located on Route 114 holding approximately 15 acres for a possible trade with Montgomery County. Commissioner Dorsett stated a recommendation to add the request to the Master Plan would be a start. Commissioner Dorsett added the Town would be in a better position to advise Montgomery County where to build a new school then Montgomery County picking a site. Commissioner Collins added the County does not have enough money at this time to purchase land but look at what the Town could do with the old middle school if the County agreed on a land exchange.

Commissioner Huppert commented he has heard the old middle school would need approximately $30 million in improvements for a long term school facility. Chairperson Moore clarified with the Commissioners their intent was to not use the old middle school site for a school but for the Town of Christiansburg to take over the property for future development. Commissioner Dorsett replied the exchange would put prime downtown property back into the Town of Christiansburg's hand so the Town can decide what will be developed on this site. Commissioner Dorsett added numerous uses can be utilized on the property such as nonprofit organizations, a farmers market, park, event center and additional downtown parking.

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Other Business (continued)

Commissioner Huppert stated the Commissioners do have great ideas but the Town does not make money on the Recreation Center, the Aquatic Center, and the Town is losing money on the cemetery so if the land is developed it would need to bring a profit to the Town so no taxes would have to be raised but if the development would draw in revenue then it would be excellent.

Commissioner Dorsett stated a very large parcel of land located in downtown Christiansburg, whether used for park land or redeveloped for economic uses, is better if the Town controls the development then the schools controlling it. Commissioner Powers added the development could be put out for request for proposals to see if private developers would be interested in a mixed use development. Chairperson Moore added once the Blacksburg Middle School vacates the property, the property will stay vacated and unused becoming a piece of land not generating any taxes for Christiansburg.

Commissioner Huppert discussed the issue at Falling Branch with the park and ride and the site needing to be relocated which is a priority right now. Commissioner Huppert added the Town has to address priorities with limited amount of funding. Commissioner Huppert added he does not want to discourage the Planning Commission from addressing Town Council and feels it is a part of their job to make that type of recommendation to get Council thinking. Chairperson Moore commented the Town does have some things that do not generate taxes and revenue but having nice amenities will bring citizens into the Town, which will then generate revenue. Chairperson Moore added he has heard numerous positive comments concerning the Town Recreation Center. Commissioner Dorsett commented she has heard the same regarding the Aquatic Center and if the amenities are improving the quality of life with residents then it will be a long term payoff.

Commissioner Huppert added the Dixie World Series will be starting and bringing in revenue to the Town. Chairperson Moore asked Ms. Hair if the joint subcommittees could possibly draft something to bring up this issue. Ms. Hair replied the Town staff has a meeting every Thursday and she would bring it up to Mr. Helms at that time.

There being no more business Chairperson Moore adjourned the meeting at 7:52 p.m.

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Craig Moore, Chairperson Nichole Hair, Secretary Non-Voting

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