

Minutes

Walkersville Planning Commission Workshop

September 8, 2020

Commission Chairman David Ennis called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. with members Dick Brady, Russ Winch, Ray Santullo, Mike Kuster and Tom Gilbert present. Also present were Town Planner Susan Hauver.

1. Draft Storm Drain Study Results and Recommendations

Planner Hauver reviewed the findings of the storm drain study recently completed by the Town engineering consultant, the Wilson T. Ballard Company, as requested by the Town Burgess and Commissioners. The study was focused on the drainage area of the Walkersville Middle School/Rock Creek School campus. The study analyzed the capacity of the drains leading to that site. Most of the pipes were determined to be at or over capacity.

Commission members asked several questions, including the following:

- They questioned the scope of the study—in particular why the culvert under the railroad tracks beyond the Rock Creek School and Mill Run was not studied, as well as the area of Pennsylvania Drive (behind the railroad station and adjacent to Mill Run). Several years ago, when Mill Run was under construction, one or two residents on that street complained about flooding on their properties.
- They wondered if the analysis/results were comparable to the studies completed by the engineers for the Rock Creek School.
- They also asked whether there was any distinction made in the study between public storm drains and private ones (Colony Village, Victoria Park, Rutters, etc).
- Finally, they wondered if the study included any analysis of the condition and age of the pipes in the storm drain system.

Planner Hauver said she asked the engineers to present their findings to the Burgess and Commissioners on Wednesday, September 23, 2020.

2. Comprehensive Plan Update Workshop

Commission members discussed strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of the Town as identified by Commission members and by citizens through the recent survey. They also identified priority areas to address in the plan update. Comments included:

- Economic development and the lack of business growth was identified as a high priority concern. The Town needs to promote itself so businesses realize that residents have the means to support them.
- The Town should ensure that the infrastructure is in place for businesses to thrive, including water, sewer, fiber optics and solar energy.
- Employment growth is needed as well as retail/service growth.
- Residents who work from their homes need reliable infrastructure. Comcast's franchise agreement with the Town limits the ability to receive services from competitors.
- Economic growth is a high priority; residential growth is a low priority.
- The blighted shopping center is a town concern.
- The condition of sidewalks is a concern. Liability in the event of injury on a town sidewalk was noted as an issue by an Old Town resident.
- The impact of businesses in Old Town on neighbors is a concern.
- The Town lacks places for new businesses to locate.

- Need an analysis of all commercial properties in Town and their development potential.
- The 10 acre undeveloped property at the northeast corner of Nicodemus Road and MD 194 would be a prime spot for commercial development, but it is zoned Agricultural.
- There are limited options of affordable housing for senior citizen buyers. Homes in Glade Village are turning over but young buyers are moving in.
- The Foxfield development in Middletown was designed with smaller lot sizes and the prices are in a more affordable range (\$300,000s) than typical single family neighborhoods.
- Homes in Mill Run sold in the \$400,000s range, Parkside in the \$500,000 to \$600,000 range and Spring View Estates in the \$600,000 to \$700,000 range. Longley Green is priced in the \$300,000s range, but the style of townhouse is not desirable to senior buyers.
- Farm communities like Walkersville were originally inhabited by retired farmers, and should continue to provide housing opportunities for retirees. Town needs to be aware of the kinds of household we want to attract. Senior households do not place a burden on the schools.
- The Walker Farm is a large, unused Town asset. The Town should be planning how to use it. A new zoning category for senior housing could be added and applied to a portion of the Walker Farm.
- Housing affordability is an issue for households of all ages and types. Need a zoning category that limits the sizes of the lots and houses.
- The Town has the wealth to attract the businesses to develop a vibrant downtown. The Town does not project itself or its spending capability.
- The Town parks attract a lot of people from outside the Town. Visitors would patronize more local businesses if they were available.
- The sidewalk on Biggs Ford Road in front of Parkside needs to be built immediately. Plans to widen the road as well should be abandoned. A narrower road keeps speeds down. The Town should use letter of credit funds if the developer is stalling.

3. Housing Element

Planner Hauver shared information about the State-required Housing Element that will need to be part of the updated Comprehensive Plan.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan J. Hauver