

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Wednesday, January 17, 2024
7:00 P.M.

Chairman Mark Dobbins called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. Present included members Commissioner Hilary Crothers, Judy Duffy and Neil DeMatt. Also present were Melissa Cook-Mackenzie, Town Administrator, Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant. Calvin Wilson was absent from the meeting.

-MINUTES-

December 5, 2023

Chairman Dobbins stated that the December 5, 2023 Planning Commission meeting minutes are accepted as presented.

-OLD BUSINESS-

None.

-NEW BUSINESS-

Election of Chairman

Ms. Duffy made a motion to elect Mr. Mark Dobbins as Chairman. Mr. DeMatt seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Election of Vice-Chairman

Mr. DeMatt made a motion to elect Ms. Duffy as Vice-Chairman. Mr. Dobbins seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Chesapeake Club 700+ units: Traffic Impacts

The following representatives from Maryland Department of Transportation, also known as the State Highway Administration, District 2 were present at this evenings meeting: Ken Fender, District Engineer, Richard Baker, Assistant District Engineer Traffic and Henry Dierker, Access Management.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that the Town had requested that State Highway Administration (SHA) come to a Planning Commission meeting to discuss the Traffic Impact Study that had recently been done in conjunction with the North East Middle and High Schools expansion project and the Chesapeake Club 700+ unit's project south of the Towns Corporate Limit. This meeting was scheduled for informational purposes, as there are no items for the Planning Commission to vote on. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that the Chesapeake Club 700+ unit's project is a very large project which will have a considerable traffic impact on the Town of North East. In the past, the Town was invited to provide input to the County and State, on projects that were out of the Towns Corporate Limit, in regards to the traffic impacts the project may have on the Town. However, that process has changed. Therefore, the Town is interested in being brought up to date on the current projects including: what are the SHA's findings to date; what impact

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will the development have on the community, and is SHA satisfied with the area that was studied. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported that in the past, the scoping area was larger and the Town would like to inquire why the area is smaller in the recent traffic impact studies.

Mr. Fender stated that Mr. Baker's responsibilities include reviewing Process Access Request Permits in conjunction with the provided site plan. In addition, Mr. Fender stated the SHA is not involved with the construction or zoning for any of the projects, however, they will work with the County and local Municipalities. Mr. Fender explained the process of when an access permit request is received, such as plan review and traffic impact study. Mr. Fender reported that once an assessment has been completed, they create a site plan, along with the traffic impact study, and send this information to various departments within the SHA for their review, such as Highway Hydraulics Department, Right Away Department and Traffic Safety Department. In addition, once all the information has been compiled from all of the different departments within the SHA, the information will then be sent to the County as well as the local municipalities for additional comments. At this point, the plans will be sent back and forth until such time that they have been finalized.

Mr. Dierker stated that typically a traffic impact study scoping meeting is held, where they meet with the Developer of the project, the County, and it should have been with the Town as well. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie commented that the Town was not invited to this meeting, for this project, which is the reason for this evenings meeting. Mr. Dierker stated that the SHA reviews the existing intersections in the area, within a 5-10 mile radius of the project to see what areas would or could be impacted. Mr. Dierker reported that the County has their own Traffic Impact Study Standards which are more restrictive. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that after reviewing the recent Traffic Impact Studies there is some concern. During a previous SHA scoping meeting for a development project on Shady Beach Road, which is just south of Chesapeake Club, the scoping area included more intersections within the incorporated limit of the Town than the most recent traffic impact studies for the Chesapeake Club 700+ unit's project. In addition, the previous traffic impact study included the summer traffic. The current traffic impact studies do not include summer traffic calculations and this is a popular tourist area. There is a significant impact to the Town from the summer traffic. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated the Town is curious as to why this was not part of the traffic impact studies and inquired whether the other intersections within Town limits were going to be reviewed. Mr. Dierker stated that only the main intersections coming through Town on State Roads were land did not look at every intersection. Mr. Fender added that they have looked at other intersections in the past and is not sure why they did not with these most recent traffic impact studies. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie referred to the Shady Beach Road development project and reported within that traffic impact study comments stated that modifications were going to be necessary on North Main Street which consisted of the removal of parking spaces. The developer was directed to find another location to replace those parking spaces within the Town. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that the report was very specific in its assessment and direction.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that the unofficial Town bypass is Cemetery Road. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie inquired if the traffic on Cemetery Road and the intersection at the four way stop at Mechanic's Valley Road, East Cecil Avenue and Cemetery Road were reviewed. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that these roads and intersections will be considerably impacted on a day to day basis, as well as the main intersections. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that the Town wants to clarify whether they can still make comments for consideration. Mr. Fender stated that they always try to look at the big picture and will ensure that the Town receives an updated copy of the most recent traffic impact studies for comment.

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Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that it is important to address these impacts before the developer has completed the project. In addition, we need to address solutions and look at some ideas regarding future development.

Mrs. Vennell reported that the October 13, 2023 traffic impact letter was sent to the Town by Mr. Dierker which was in response to the August 2023 traffic impact letter. Mr. Dierker inquired if the Town wanted the traffic impact letters combined into one letter. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie clarified that combining the letters is not the Town's decision. However, the Town would like to have input on the scoping area and would like to have a meeting with them to discuss the findings. In addition, the Town would like to know what the developer will be required to do to mitigate the traffic impacts. Mr. Fender stated they will give the Town an opportunity to provide comments and a follow-up meeting can be set up to keep the Town up to date.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie also inquired if the new schools can be discussed as there are some questions such as a traffic light being installed at the end of Irishtown Road. Mrs. Vennell commented on one of the concerns is who would be funding the traffic light. Mr. Baker stated that in regards to the proposed light at Irishtown Road typically the school would get the funding if the increase of traffic was a direct result of the school. However, Mr. Fender and Mr. Baker commented that there are 3 projects, therefore all those that would create a new impact may be responsible for funding the light and at this point it is too early to know. Therefore, they may work together on the financing of the new light. Mr. Fender added that they would like to see both projects, the new schools and the Chesapeake Club 700+ units on one traffic impact study. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie inquired if there would be changes to the intersection when installing the full traffic signal. Mr. Baker replied yes.

Mr. Fender also commented that it sounds like there was a lot of confusion between the County and the State in informing the Town of pertinent information and Mr. Fender will ensure going forward the Town is informed and has a chance to comment. Mr. Fender inquired if the Town could share the Transportation Plan within the 2012 Comprehensive Plan and Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie replied that the Planning Office will forward a copy to him.

Mr. Fender reported that in regards to the Chesapeake Club 700+ units, the State Highway recommended two entrances into the development, however one of the entrances will be used only for emergencies. Mr. Fender also reported that they are waiting for additional information regarding the proposed entrance. Mrs. Vennell inquired if they will have any additional entrances other than off of Route 272. Mr. Baker replied that is the only proposed entrance at this time. Mr. Baker stated that according to the site plan, it appears that there is opportunity to connect the apartment complex to the existing development.

Mr. Fender stated that they are struggling with the funding for paving, as funding is divided between five counties. Mr. Fender reported that a request for funding to do patch work on Route 272 has been submitted, and if approved, work will begin July 2025.

-Reports-

North East Comprehensive Plan

Mrs. Vennell reported that a request for a proposal for the remainder of the refinements and revisions to the North East Comprehensive Plan went out. Once a contractor has been hired, the Planning Office will schedule some workshops.

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Chairman Dobbins inquired if the North East Preserve will be part of the revisions within the updated Comprehensive Plan and Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie replied yes.

New Member

Chairman Dobbins welcomed Mr. Neil DeMatt as a new member of the Planning Commission.

-COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC-

Mr. George Lutz stated that a subcommittee may be beneficial to deal with questions and coordination of information regarding development projects. Chairman Dobbins replied that after this evenings meeting he is reassured that the State Highway will include the Town moving forward.

-NEXT MEETING-

The February 6, 2024 Planning Commission meeting has been cancelled due to no agenda items.

-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Ms. Duffy made a motion to adjourn at 5:36 p.m. Mr. DeMatt seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully submitted:

Attest:

Lisa Rhoades
Planning and Zoning Assistant

Mark Dobbins
Chairman