

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES – October 5, 2023**

Meeting Date: October 5, 2023

Time: 1:00 P.M.

Location: Worcester County Government Office Building, Room 1102

Attendance:

Planning Commission

Jerry Barbierri, Chair
Rick Wells, Vice Chair
Mary Knight, Secretary
Ken Church
Marlene Ott
Betty Smith
Phyllis Wimbrow

Staff

Jennifer Keener, Director, DDRP
Matthew Laick, Deputy Director, DDRP
Kristen Tremblay, Zoning Administrator
Stu White, DRP Specialist
Cathy Zirkle, DRP Specialist
Bob Mitchell, Director, DEP
Dave Bradford, Deputy Director, DEP
Joy Birch, Natural Resources Planner, DEP
Roscoe Leslie, County Attorney

I. Call to Order

II. Administrative Matters

A. Review and approval of minutes, September 7, 2023

As the first item of business, the Planning Commission reviewed the minutes of the September 7, 2023 meeting.

Ms. Ott noted that there were comments made during the Refuge at Windmill Creek review that were not included in the minutes and asked to amend the minutes to include them. Following the review, a motion was made by Ms. Ott to approve the minutes with the amendments, Mr. Church seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Board of Zoning Appeals Agendas, October 12, 2023

As the next item of business, the Planning Commission reviewed the agenda for the Board of Zoning Appeals meeting scheduled for October 12, 2023. Ms. Tremblay was present for the review to answer questions and address concerns of the Planning Commission.

No comments were forwarded to the Board.

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C. Technical Review Committee Agenda, October 11, 2023

As the next item of business, the Planning Commission reviewed the agenda for the Technical Review Committee meeting scheduled for October 11, 2023. Mr. White was present for the review to answer questions and address any concerns of the Planning Commission.

No comments were forwarded to the Committee.

III. Sea Squared – Minor Site Plan Code Requirements Waiver Request

As the next item of business, the Planning Commission reviewed a request for waivers for Sea Squared, a proposed 9,600 square foot, single story warehouse building for marine storage and an outdoor boat storage area. Located at 11206 Five-L Drive, approximately 950 feet south of the eastern intersection of Five-L Drive and Cathell Road, Tax Map 21, Parcel 267, Lot 7, Tax District 03, A-2 Agricultural District. Hugh Cropper IV, Melissa Clemens, and Ron Croker were present for the review. Mr. Cropper presented the project.

Mr. Cropper stated that the project received Special Exception approval from the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) for the proposed use of a boat storage facility in the A-2 Agricultural Zoning District and the site plan received preliminary approval from the Technical Review Committee (TRC).

Mr. Cropper explained that the Zoning Code requires that the travelway to the proposed facility be constructed of a hard surface such as concrete. He asked that this requirement be waived and stated that it would only create more impervious surface to the property and would be subject to damage from the equipment and trailer traffic. He stated they wish to instead have a stabilized stone driveway comprised of a gravel base with washed stone on the surface. Mr. Croker presented material samples to the Planning Commission members for reference and described how the proposed materials would create no dust. Mr. Cropper added that the road would seldom be used outside of the Spring and Fall.

Mr. Cropper then stated that a condition of the BZA approval is the requirement of a one-hundred-foot vegetated setback between the proposed storage facility and the property border with the Pennington Commons subdivision, which was later described as a one-hundred-foot vegetated buffer in the subsequent BZA hearing Opinion letter. He stated that he felt that the terminology of “buffer” was made in error and does not feel that the area should be treated the same as a landscape buffer that you would typically see in a residential subdivision, requiring certain species of plants, mulch, and irrigation. He stated that he felt that was not what the residents of Pennington Commons were seeking or what was intended. Mr. Cropper stated that the intention was to plant trees and let them grow in addition with the existing trees on the

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site. He added that approximately half of the property is wooded and would not be bothered. Ms. Wimbrow questioned if the site plan illustrated existing or proposed conditions. Mr. Cropper explained that it illustrates the existing tree line along with proposed green-giant arborvitae plantings. Ms. Wimbrow added that she was looking for clarification that the site plan illustrates what is proposed or what is required. Ms. Keener clarified that the site plan is acceptable to the BZA's conditions and that the Planning Commission is not considering the Board's interpretation of the plan. She further clarified that the Planning Commission is reviewing whether irrigation would have to be provided to which Mr. Cropper responded that they are seeking a waiver from the requirement. Ms. Wimbrow added that the landscaping would have to be bonded for survival.

Ms. Wimbrow then asked, with regards to the driveway surface requirement, if pavement was required. Ms. Tremblay then read the Zoning Code section which defines the requirements for vehicular travelways and parking areas. Mr. Croker added that the existing driveway and employee parking area already meet the Code requirements and that the driveway to the proposed building would only be used by employees. Ms. Wimbrow added that she agreed with Mr. Cropper's assessment that having a pervious driveway is advantageous with regards to stormwater management.

Following the discussion, a motion was made by Ms. Wimbrow, seconded by Ms. Ott, and carried unanimously to grant the waivers from the hard surface requirement for the driveway and the requirement for an automatic irrigation system for the one-hundred-foot landscape buffer plantings.

IV. Rezoning
Case 443

As the next item of business, the Planning Commission reviewed Rezoning Case 443. Mr. Church recused himself from the review. Hugh Cropper, IV, applicant's attorney, Greg Wilkins, Linda Ayres, and Chris McCabe were present for the review. Linda Ayres started by describing the history of the property and surrounding area. The property has been in the family since the 19th century. Mrs. Ayres stated that she was shocked by the changes in the neighborhood as she rode by the property. She described how there was no true farmland, and that the area was mostly developed by churches, schools, gas stations, housing, and farm stands. Mrs. Ayres also described how the family has a history of preserving farmland in Worcester County. Mrs. Ayres also stated that Mr. Littleton has farmed the land for decades. He wrote to her stating that he could no longer farm the land and make money off it. She stated that the traffic makes it difficult for combines and other farm equipment to access the property as well as problems with wildlife eating the crops.

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Mr. Cropper asked that the Planning Commission ignore the submitted definition of the neighborhood that was included in his submittal, as he would like to redefine it. Mr. Cropper Called Greg Wilkins Professional Land Surveyor for 13 years and has been in the surveying business for 35 years generating site plans and working with the Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Cropper submitted Applicant's Exhibit #1, an excerpt from page 17 of the Comprehensive Plan that talks about commercial centers. The applicants are asking to rezone for two acres next to the existing convenience store as commercial and the rest as an upgrade from A-1 to A-2. Mr. Cropper described the different types of Community Centers that serve 3,000 or more within a 10-to-20-minute travel time and used this definition to define the neighborhood. Mr. Cropper tried to define a narrow neighborhood but stated that did not work due to the cohesive neighborhood of Ocean Pines. Mr. Wilkins believes that the neighborhood is defined by a circle, and concurred it is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The subject property is centered in the redefined neighborhood.

Mr. Cropper described the surrounding zoning and how there is like a peninsula of A-1 zoning with A-2 zoning just to the south and stated that there is no reason why it shouldn't be A-2 and that there is more farmland (Crop Land) in the A-2 than the A-1 area. He further stated that there have been substantial and material changes since the November 3, 2009, rezoning. The first being the Tidal Health campus across the street. He stated that the property had to obtain several special exceptions to develop it, as it is zoned C-1, and they developed several large establishments on the property.

Mr. Cropper explained that the second change in the neighborhood was the expansion of the casino, which applied for and received Water & Sewer Plan amendments and an expansion of the Ocean Pines sewer. Planning Commission and County Commissioners approved a Casino Overlay District text amendment which essentially changed the zoning of the property. He argued that this defines a substantial change to the neighborhood. Subsequently, Crabs to Go received a Water & Sewer amendment to connect to County Sewer which created another change to the neighborhood.

Mr. Cropper submitted Applicant's Exhibit No. 2, the County Commissioners Findings of Fact from Rezoning Case No. 392. The Planning Commission and County Commissioners found based on a smaller neighborhood that there was a change in the character of the neighborhood and rezoned the property from Agricultural to Commercial. The case was appealed to the Court of Special Appeals, submitted as Applicant's Exhibit No. 3, opinion from the Court of Special Appeals. Mr. Cropper mentions Bob Mitchell's comments about the properties being growth areas or EDA under the Comprehensive Plan. The Court of Special Appeals was not concerned about the underlying land use designation. He stated that the AGH complex added

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the traffic light and has made significant road improvements. Mr. Cropper defined this as the fifth change in the character of the neighborhood.

Mr. Cropper submitted Applicant's Exhibit No. 4, which was the County Commissioners Finding of Fact and Resolution Rezoning Case No. 396, and Applicant's Exhibit No. 5, Resolution 19-2, requiring service area expansions and a Water & Sewer Plan Amendment. Mr. Mark Cropper represented a group of clients who owned the properties across from the casino and they were rezoned from A-1 and E-1 to C-1 and C-2. He stated that was a sectional rezoning that was a significant change in the character of the neighborhood.

Chris McCabe, owner of Coastal Compliance Solutions, submitted Applicant's Exhibit No. 6 which was the County Commissioners Finding of Fact for Rezoning Case 403. The property was rezoned from A-1 and E-1 to R-1 on Beauchamp Road and is part of the neighborhood and a substantial change in the neighborhood. The property owner now has 90 single-family lots under construction and obtained Water & Sewer amendment to purchase service from River Run. Mr. McCabe reviewed subject property from an environmental perspective. The land is generally upland and suitable for development with the woods having some non-tidal wetlands dispersed. The entire area will be converted farmland with plenty of uplands. It has limited on-site septic capacity, but that is theoretical as Mr. McCabe is not a soil scientist. The property is constrained by wastewater disposal. In his opinion, the changes previously outlined are a substantial change in the character of neighborhood, Mr. McCabe agrees with Ms. Ayres that it is a bad location for farm equipment.

Mr. Cropper submitted applicant's exhibit No. 7, an email from Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) State Highway Administration (SHA) showing that they have no objection to the rezoning and that SHA would require road improvements if it were ever developed. Mr. Cropper admitted that there are traffic problems on Rt. 589, but that the potential traffic generated from this project would be mitigated by road improvements required by SHA. He further stated that traffic generated from this property would be a drop in the bucket to the current Rt. 589 traffic.

Mr. Cropper submitted applicant's exhibit No. 8A and 8B, the complete A-1 and A-2 statutes. He described that the permitted uses in both the A-1 and A-2 are nearly identical. There are two more permitted uses in the A-2, under the Special Exceptions there are 8 more in the A2 than in the A-1. He suggested that in every other respect, both districts are the same. From a traffic perspective there is no difference from A-1. Mr. Cropper listed Special Exception uses in the A-1 District and suggested that only difference is that the A-2 allows golf courses, campgrounds, contractors shops and storage facilities. He stated that the two acres next to the existing convenience store as Commercial part would allow more uses.

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In conclusion, if the Comprehensive Plan designates this as agriculture, Mr. Cropper disagrees with staff and believes that the adjoining commercial zoning area touches this property, and that it should be part of the commercial intersection. Mr. Cropper feels that the requested 2 acres of C-2 is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as it adjoins the existing gas station property. This is an isolated piece of property that has been left behind because of the change in the character of the neighborhood. Mr. Croppers Opinion is that entire section of the A-1 peninsula should be A-2, but he is only asking for the subject property.

Mr. Barbierri inquired about the traffic circle that was proposed to be included in the last rezoning. Mr. Cropper said SHA proposed a roundabout, designed it, and put it to a public comment period with Ocean Pines Association. He stated that it received so many negative comments that they decided to table it. Sewer capacity was also brought up and Mr. Cropper stated that sewer will be handled on site.

A question was asked about the proposed commercial area. Mr. Cropper provided an aerial photograph illustrating the proposed 2.0-acre area. He stated that he will have Greg Wilkins prepare a survey illustrating it.

Mr. Wells stated that he was very concerned about traffic issues in this area and that a better solution could be a roundabout or other resolutions. He stated that it's not what the property is used for, it's what the traffic is doing to it. He further stated that something can be done with the property now, but it will still require entrances and it is not safe. Mr. Wells does not think the rezoning will make traffic worse though.

Mrs. Wimbrow is in full agreement with Rick about the traffic and feels that we need to deal with the issues first before granting a rezoning. Read code reference ZS1-113(c)(3) aloud. She said "personally, that's where we need to put our foot down." She stated that she disagreed with the sectional rezoning across from the casino and feels she cannot vote for this.

Mr. Barbierri states that he is hearing from people "What is the Planning Commission approving now for Rt. 589 to worsen the traffic conditions?" Mr. Barbierri states that until they had a definitive plan for Rt. 589, he felt they would be doing an injustice to approve any additional commercial rezonings in that area of Rt. 589.

Mrs. Knight asked if the Planning Commission was overstepping SHA's authority and questioned who has the final say on traffic.

Mrs. Wimbrow stated that it is the Planning Commission's responsibility for land uses.

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Motion made for a Favorable recommendation by Mrs. Knight, fails for lack of second.

Motion made for a unfavorable recommendation by Mrs. Wimbrow, seconded by Mr. Wells,

Motion passed 5 to 1 with Mrs. Knight in opposition.

V. Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area – Growth Allocation Request

As the next item of business, the Planning Commission reviewed an application associated with an Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Growth Allocation. The subject property for this request is identified as Tax Map 40, Parcel 93 and 241, which is located within the boundaries of the Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Program (ACBCA), specifically within the Resource Conservation Area (RCA) designation. According to the Exhibits provided, a small area of the requested Growth Allocation is within the lot boundaries of Tax Map 40, Parcel 93 and 241. According to the Growth Allocation request, 33.46 acres within RCA is proposed to be reclassified as Limited Development Area (LDA). David Bradford, Deputy Director, and Katherine Munson, Planner V, prepared the staff report submitted to the Planning Commission. Mark Cropper, Attorney, presented on behalf of the Applicant, Bob Ewell.

Mr. Cropper made an opening presentation to the Commission and explained the history of the development of the campground, including its prior use as a surface mine and finished with the zoning history of the property as well. He explained in detail about the uses permitted in A1 and A2 zoning categories and how the existing campground was in existence before the A2 category was adopted by the county. He detailed how he believed under the current code expansion of existing non-conforming uses can be accomplished, reviewed special exceptions vs a variance and a rezoning in addressing inconsistencies with existing non-conformities, and finished with his summary of peculiarities with respect to the history of the property and how they could proceed in the future with any additions to the existing campground. In a request from the Commission Chair for comments, Robert Mitchell, Director of Environmental Programs, explained a portion of Environmental Programs comments regarding conformance with the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Mitchell said that the Department didn't ignore literal inconsistencies with The Plan, but acknowledged that the existing campground was granted a special exception in January of 2008 by the Worcester County Board of Zoning Appeals to expand the existing campground for the initial expansion and a variance was also granted to reduce the required setback to a residential district. Mr. Cropper presented a vigorous response detailing his arguments that the application was in conformance with The Plan and emphasized the historical approvals in that presentation which was well received by the Planning Commission members.

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Mr. Cropper reviewed and concurred with staff's findings on their report, save the aforementioned Comprehensive Plan comments, and asked that it be incorporated along with the comments from the state Critical Area Commission. He introduced James Cook from Rauch Incorporated to review their critical area report for the application and detailed the history for the property, which presently contains an active campground, support buildings, and an onsite sewage disposal system with advanced treatment within its boundaries. Mr. Cook and Mr. Cropper explained these existing uses on the property, located with the Critical Area boundary, were approved prior to the implementation of the Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Law, and per §NR 3- 108(c)(4), and how they may remain in use.

They also reviewed this proposal for reclassification of 33.46 acres of RCA to LDA, resulting in the proposed use of 33.46 acres of Growth Allocation. The applicant is proposing to expand the current campground within this area and include 62 new campsites. Presently, this proposed commercial use and expansion is not permissible within the RCA designation without the acquisition of a Growth Allocation aware. As noted under §NR 3- 108(c)(5), "new commercial, industrial, and institutional uses shall not be permitted in the Resource Conservation Areas." Hence, Environmental Programs noted that is why they are here with this growth allocation application.

Mr. Cropper closed with a request for the approval of the Growth Allocation, noting that there is ample Growth Allocation remaining for the Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area. In response to a concern expressed by Ms. Wimbrow, Mr. Bradford replied that the comment made regarding half of the growth allocation acreage was already awarded was not correct. He specified that there were 369 acres of remaining growth allocation acreage available for utilization. Many of the interim period projects, which occurred during the establishment of the Critical Area Law, used a portion of our total allocation which may make it appear that more acres had been used. He also stated that the utilization of some of the growth allocation acres for this project would be a good fit, as it was expanding upon an existing campground use rather than the construction of a new campground in another area of the county.

Following the discussion, a motion was made by Ms. Knight, seconded by Mr. Church, to find this application consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and recommended that they forward a favorable recommendation to the County Commissioners. The vote was unanimous.

VI. Maryland Coastal Bays Program – Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) discussion

As the next item of business, the Planning Commission met with Kevin Smith, Executive Director, Maryland Coastal Bays Program (MCBP), Steve Taylor, President, MCBP Board, and Nancy Zeller, Vice President, MCBP Board. Kevin Smith explained that MCBP is a non-

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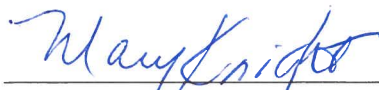
profit mainly funded through the EPA's National Estuary Program that has been working for over two decades to restore Maryland's coastal bays. They mentioned that Katherine Munson, a county employee, is a Board member, demonstrating the close working relationship the Coastal Bays Program has with the county. The MCBP is preparing an updated Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP), the blueprint for restoration and preservation of the bays. MCBP wanted to communicate the connections between the CCMP and the Comprehensive Plan with the Planning Commission as they are about to prepare the Comprehensive Plan. Kevin Smith noted the 2006 Comprehensive Plan is an excellent document that reflects the goals of the CCMP.

Steve Taylor referred to a letter dated August 10, 2023, from Kevin Smith and himself to the Planning Commission. He addressed the negative effects of impervious surface on water quality, nutrient impairment of the bays and impacts of septic systems, sea level rise, flooding and shoreline impacts, and the need for landscape level stormwater management. Nancy Zeller noted that she is an officer of her community association and also volunteers as an educator at Assateague State Park. She said she speaks to many people, both residents and visitors, in these capacities, and feels she speaks for their interests/concerns about impacts to the bays. She addressed innovative ditch management, greenways, land protection, and farmland preservation. She noted that the Land Preservation and Recreation Plan and Priority Preservation Area element are excellent guiding documents.

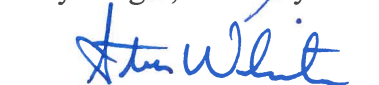
Steve Taylor stated that during the development of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan, MCBP provided support to the county with outreach, including funding for community sessions with outside experts, and a public lecture series. He stated the program is willing to provide this support again.

Kevin Smith concluded by stating that MCBP has enjoyed a long-time strong partnership with Worcester County and looks forward to continuing to work with the county towards shared goals.

VII. Adjourn – A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Ott and seconded by Mr. Wells.



Mary Knight, Secretary



Stuart White, DRP Specialist