

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
WORK SESSION
MEETING MINUTES – November 14, 2024**

Meeting Date: November 14, 2024

Time: 1:00 P.M.

Location: Worcester County Government Office Building, Room 1102

Attendance:

Planning Commission

Phyllis Wimbrow, Vice Chair

Mary Knight, Secretary

Kathy Drew

Marlene Ott

Betty Smith

Staff

Jennifer Keener, Director, DRP

Matt Laick, Deputy Director, DRP

I. Call to Order

II. Comprehensive Plan Work Session

As the first item of business, the Planning Commission met with Michael Bayer, Ayesha Bilal and Ainsley Pressl from Wallace Montgomery to discuss the draft Housing Element of the proposed Worcester County Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Bayer explained that this version is a first draft, and as other elements are reviewed, additional data is assembled, and stakeholder feedback is obtained, the draft will continue to be updated and refined. A brief explanation was provided on the status of the existing development capacity analysis, which will provide inputs into the Land Use Map and Water Resources Element (WRE). Staff and the consultant will be reaching out to the municipalities to schedule meeting(s) to discuss desired growth areas, which will then be brought to the Planning Commission for their consideration and to develop action items for the Housing Element. Mrs. Keener explained the Housing Study that will be undertaken in 2025 with a grant provided by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

The Planning Commission evaluated the housing chapter goal which is: “All Worcester County residents should be able to live in comfortable, safe and affordable housing.” This goal was taken from the 2006 Plan, and the Planning Commission agreed to carry it forward.

During the discussion, the Planning Commission made the following comments and/or recommendations:

- The Planning Commission again noted that Worcester County has limited public sewer availability, is in dire need of housing, and that there are restrictive regulations on septic


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systems. Therefore, we cannot solve the housing issue until the wastewater issues are resolved.

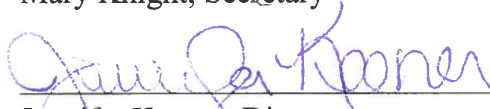
- It was recommended that they consider adding language to new objective #3 or #6 pertaining to “downsizing” for retirees, including assisted living or independent living options to permit aging in place.
- A question was posed about the definition of the term “under-housing” (new objective #9). It is defined as transitional or temporary housing. Mr. Bayer noted that they are still collecting more information about homelessness and under-housing in the county, so this objective and the title block for qualitative discussion serve as a placeholder. The final Plan document will have a glossary that will define these types of terms.
- It was recommended that the nomenclature “apartment” in Table 5-2 Housing Types, be changed to “units”, as it could include duplexes and townhouses, which aren’t apartments.
- The Planning Commission highlighted the vacancy rate for dwelling units in Figure 5-1 Comparison of Occupancy Rates in Eastern Shore Counties and requested additional language to elaborate upon why Worcester County has such a high vacancy rate (59%) and the circumstances that impact that.
- The Planning Commission acknowledged the differences in the northern and southern ends of the county, not only with land and dwelling values, but the size of dwellings that are being constructed to make the economics work.
- Overall, the Planning Commission acknowledged that the chapter was very data intensive, and it was recommended that some of the charts be relocated to an appendix.

The next work session will be held on Thursday, December 19, 2024, to discuss the Sensitive Areas Element.

III. Adjourn



Mary Knight, Secretary



Jennifer Keener, Director