

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES – January 4, 2024**

Meeting Date: January 4, 2024

Time: 1:00 P.M.

Location: Worcester County Government Office Building, Room 1102

Attendance:

Planning Commission

Jerry Barbierrri, Chair

Mary Knight, Secretary

Ken Church

Marlene Ott

Phyllis Wimbrow

Staff

Jennifer Keener, Director, DRP

Matt Laick, Deputy Director, DRP

Stu White, DRP Specialist

Katherine Munsen, Planner V, DEP

Roscoe Leslie, County Attorney

I. Call to Order

II. Administrative Matters

A. Review and approval of amended minutes, December 7, 2023

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

Following the review, a motion was made by Ms. Smith to approve the minutes as written, Ms. Ott seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Board of Zoning Appeals Agendas, January 11, 2024

As the next item of business, the Planning Commission reviewed the agenda for the Board of Zoning Appeals meeting scheduled for January 24 2024. Ms. Keener was present for the review to answer questions and address concerns of the Planning Commission.

No comments were forwarded to the Board.

C. Technical Review Committee Agenda, January 10, 2024

As the next item of business, the Planning Commission reviewed the agenda for the Technical Review Committee meeting scheduled for January 10, 2024. 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.

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES – January 4, 2024**

III. Text Amendment

As the next item of business, the Planning Committee reviewed a proposed text amendment submitted by Mr. Hugh Cropper to add a special exception use in the C-2 General Commercial District to allow multi-family dwelling units to be detached from the principal commercial structure.

Mr. Hugh Cropper, IV, presented the application. He described how they opted to mirror the C-3 Highway Commercial District language that was recently approved. To establish this use, it will require that a property be provided with adequate sewer capacity, as it is not likely to be supported on a septic system. In addition, the parcel or lot will have to be deep enough to support both the commercial and residential uses. He emphasized that there is a strong need for affordable housing in the county, which the Planning Commission echoed. As a special exception use, he noted that specific properties would require Board of Zoning Appeals approval, and that adjoining property owners would be given adequate notification of the request by certified mail.

Following the discussion, a motion was made by Ms. Knight to provide a favorable recommendation on the text amendment. Ms. Ott seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. Proposed Bishopville-Showell Rural Legacy Area

As the next item of business, Katherine Munson, Planner V, Department of Environmental Programs, provided a presentation on land protection in the county and a new proposed Rural Legacy Area in the Bishopville/Showell area. The presentation was also provided in hard copy to the Planning Commission. The draft application and a newsletter describing the Rural Legacy Program were provided in the meeting packet.

Highlights of the presentation included:

- Market value of agricultural products sold in Worcester County in 2017 exceeded \$100 million and Worcester County ranked 4th statewide in agricultural products sold
- Over 80% of the county is designated as Agriculture or Green Infrastructure in the 2006 Land Use Plan; 84% is zoned A-1 or RP
- 32.5% of the county is protected either in fee simple (state-owned) or conservation or agricultural easement.
- Although Worcester County is the 3rd largest county in the state and ranks 4th in agricultural production, the county ranks 11th in acres of farmland protected.

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES – January 4, 2024**

- The Priority Preservation Area was adopted in 2010 with an amendment to the comprehensive plan. The plan calls for protection of 100,000 acres within this area. 1,000 acres per year have been protected in the PPA since 2010.

Katherine Munson explained that the Rural Legacy Program is a state program with the goal of protecting contiguous areas of farmland and forest. It is funded by the real estate transfer tax. Counties apply for designation of specific areas. Once approved, funding awarded is used to purchase permanent easements from willing landowners. She explained that a new RLA in the norther end of the county is being proposed due to a significant lack of protection in this area and that there has been dwindling interest in the program among remaining landowners in the Coastal Bays RLA (Chincoteague watershed). Outreach including a meeting in August was done in summer 2023. Eleven (11) landowners have expressed interest. In response to a question, she stated that this level of interest is a good start. As property owners participate, they share information with their neighbors who become interested in the program. This has occurred in other Rural Legacy areas.

The original outreach area was reduced in size to the proposed area of 11,300 acres –the boundaries were determined mainly based on location of properties owned by interested landowners. The proposed area contains 3,600 acres of prime farmland. 10,300 acres are zoned A-1. It is a highly productive area and contains contiguous farmland. It also contains multiple branches that feed St. Martin River. Protection of land in this area will help protect the water quality of the northern coastal bays.

In response to a question, she clarified that the application to the state is due February 13, 2024. The application will still be reviewed by the Worcester County Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board and will need to be approved by the County Commissioners. In response to a question, she stated that review takes 8 months to one year and it is possible that the county could begin working with interested landowners this year if the application is approved and funded by the state.

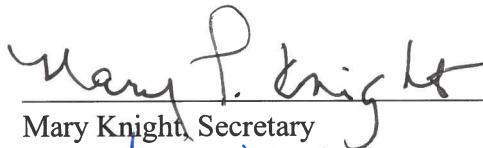
Phyllis Wimbrow made the motion to make a favorable recommendation to the County Commissioners regarding adoption of the new proposed Rural Legacy Area. She said this area is important for agriculture, it is a beautiful area, land protection that has occurred in other areas of the county has not occurred in this area, and the farmers and landowners in this area deserve the opportunity to access this program to protect their land. Betty Smith seconded the motion and approval was unanimous.

V. Worcester County Comprehensive Plan Update

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES – January 4, 2024**

As the next item of business, Michael Bayer and Nicole Wiley presented the final public engagement report to the Planning Commission. During the presentation, Mr. Bayer stated that the survey that was conducted June through August received a robust response. Ms. Wiley added that they had collected approximately 1,400 responses. She stated that there were some common themes and key words throughout the surveys such as affordable housing, availability of senior housing, public school funding, access to broadband, and access to higher paying jobs among others. Mr. Bayer described common key asset responses. Such as natural resources and open space, infrastructure, character and identity, quality of life, and economic development. Mr. Bayer stated that the information has been codified and analyzed and will be used to specifically frame the issues during the Comprehensive Plan update process.

VI. **Adjourn** – A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Wimbrow and seconded by Mr. Church.



Mary Knight, Secretary



Stuart White, DRP Specialist