

**WORCESTER COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
WORK SESSION  
MEETING MINUTES – April 11, 2024**

**Meeting Date:** April 11, 2024

**Time:** 1:00 P.M.

**Location:** Worcester County Government Office Building, Room 1102

**Attendance:**

**Planning Commission**

Jerry Barbierri, Chair

Mary Knight, Secretary

Ken Church

Kathy Drew

**Staff**

Jennifer Keener, Director, DRP

Matt Laick, Deputy Director, DRP

Bob Mitchell, Director, Environmental Programs

Katherine Munson, Planner, Environmental Programs

**I. Call to Order**

**II. Comprehensive Plan Work Session**

The Planning Commission met with Michael Bayer and Nicole Wiley from Wallace Montgomery to discuss the visioning statement for Worcester County’s update to the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Bayer provided an overview of the comprehensive planning process, and the behind-the-scenes data collection and work that has been going into the plan preparation to date. He explained that a comprehensive plan is the blueprint for the future, typically with a twenty-year horizon. With new administration at the state level, there will be additional guidance that will be provided on recently adopted legislation, such as the shift from smart growth to sustainable growth. In addition, while this is a county plan, it is important to coordinate with the local municipalities as it is developed. Just recently Wallace Montgomery completed a comprehensive plan for the town of Poolesville, Maryland, which was their first under the new housing element guidance. They will apply the lessons learned as a case study to aid in the housing element for Worcester County.

The Planning Commission reviewed the preliminary work schedule through the end of the calendar year, which will consist of regular work sessions during the second “special” meeting. A more detailed schedule will be provided at the next work session. The initial steps have included data analysis and mapping, which will then lead into individual element/ chapter plan reviews through mid-2025. Each chapter will have its own data, with goals and objectives. The process will involve Wallace Montgomery preparing the first draft of each chapter within a template they have created. The draft will be sent to staff for comment, and then finalized for Planning Commission review and feedback to ensure it is specifically tailored to Worcester County’s needs.

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Mr. Bayer noted that land use is a key component, one that most people associate with comprehensive plans. What the Planning Commission decides about land use will affect all other elements, so it is typically one of the first topics they like to review. It is anticipated that the first draft of the Land Use Map will be presented in August 2024, and put out for public feedback before further changes. In addition, the state is working on their land use map, and when it is finalized, it will be compared to the proposed county map.

All public input will be logged into a spreadsheet, and a redacted version can be made available online so that feedback and any changes made to the plan as a result will be tracked. Staff noted that the county website will be updated to include the agendas, minutes, as well as draft and final documents for public review as we move forward. Wallace Montgomery has also flagged items that were identified by the public in the final engagement report to incorporate into the plan.

Mr. Bayer asked the Planning Commission if there were any specific topics that they would like to have them keep in mind as they start to develop the chapters. Ms. Knight noted that the Planning Commission has been approving a large amount of townhouse and single-family residential development, and that she has concerns about the impacts that high levels of residential growth will have on emergency responders. She also mentioned that Ocean City is pursuing a sports complex, possibly near the town of Berlin that could cause similar impacts. Mr. Bayer noted that those concerns were raised in the public engagement report as well.

To begin the visioning session portion of the meeting, Ms. Wiley read several examples of visioning statements from other jurisdictions to give the Planning Commission an idea of what has been done elsewhere. She explained that the visioning statement is the guiding statement for the plan. It is then supported by the goals and policies of the plan that are developed in each chapter. Even after the visioning statement is finalized, they will continue to revisit it with the Planning Commission to make sure that their vision for Worcester County is met in each chapter.

Ms. Wiley then read the draft vision statement for Worcester County. She asked for feedback, whether it addresses everything that Worcester County is, or could be? Ms. Knight stated that she wants it to directly reference tourism as economic growth in Worcester County is through tourism. Without acknowledgement of tourism, she thought that it is ignoring the largest economic driver. Ms. Drew stated that while tourism is an important element, she stated that the plan is for the entire county and believed that tourism is reflected in the reference to “visitors”. Mr. Barbierrri stated that he likes the old school adage of the shorter the better. Tourism and technology are inferred in the existing verbiage of “economic growth”, because without them, growth wouldn’t happen. Mr. Mitchell also stated that agriculture was a significant economic driver for Worcester County in addition to tourism. He noted that concepts such as sea level rise would need to be addressed in this plan as well. Based on the general feedback, Wallace Montgomery will think through the comments made, and wordsmith for the revised visioning statement to be presented at the next meeting.

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Regarding the next steps in the process, the vision statement will be updated and discussed at the next work session. In addition, a more detailed schedule is being prepared. Mr. Church asked what the overall end game was. The intended schedule will be about 18 months from initial kickoff this past winter, with an anticipated completion in the summer of 2025. It is 100% the Planning Commission’s plan, so they will work within their desired timeframe. Ms. Drew asked for a word document of the chapters, so that she can type her suggestions. Staff will provide both word and PDF documents to the board based upon personal preference and will combine the feedback from all members into one master draft.

The Planning Commission discussed how they would like to incorporate public comment into the process. They advised staff that they would prefer written public comments to review rather than allow the public to speak at every meeting. However, they would like to hold open discussion meetings every few months as several chapters have been developed to receive more comprehensive public input. There was also discussion about when it may be recommended to engage certain stakeholder groups, and how to obtain feedback from the County Commissioners during the review stage, rather than at the end when the plan is fully drafted. Mr. Mitchell also stated that the Maryland Coastal Bays Program was interested in holding a speaker series, which could focus some of the public thoughts and comments that may be raised during this comprehensive planning process.

**III. Adjourn**

  
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Mary Knight, Secretary

 FOR JENNIFER KEENER  
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Jennifer Keener, Director