

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

January 24, 2011

6:00 p.m.

County Complex, Building A

1. Roll Call

Present

Mr. Jack Fraley, Chair
Mr. Tim O' Connor
Mr. Al Woods (via phone)

Absent

Mr. Reese Peck

Staff Present

Mr. Allen Murphy
Mr. Chris Johnson
Mr. Jason Purse
Ms. Christy Parrish
Mr. Brian Elmore

Mr. Jack Fraley called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. New Business – Commercial Districts Ordinance Changes

Mr. Johnson stated staff would like Committee input on raising Development Review Committee (DRC) and commercial Special Use Permit (SUP) thresholds. He stated staff reviewed the commercial SUP triggers in section 24-11, including the building square footage and peak-hour traffic trip counts thresholds against other similar localities. Staff recommends increasing the square footage threshold from 10,000 square-feet to 20,000 square-feet. Although the development community has questioned the restrictiveness of the existing thresholds, staff noted that they have only been triggered 25 times in the past 8 years. Staff did acknowledge that the perceived cost and time of SUP review could have been a factor driving other applicants to pursue development in other localities.

Mr. Fraley stated he had concerns with the phrase 'infill' development as used in the Sustainability Audit's recommendations. He stated there would be more of these types of developments, such as Autumn West, in the future.

Mr. Johnson stated that it was not staff's intention to exclude infill developments from the DRC review criteria. He stated staff was not trying to expedite any residential infill development that may cause significant impacts on nearby properties. However, staff does see residential and commercial infill as two separate issues.

Mr. Purse stated staff is exploring options to better promote redevelopment and infill in the ordinance. He stated that staff continues to view the DRC as the appropriate body to provide a check for projects without an approved master plan.

Mr. Johnson stated that the DRC's role as an appeal board for adjacent property owners would remain unchanged. He stated the DRC's role over the past 18 months has shifted from an oversight body to a strategic body through early meetings with applicants. Raising thresholds would see shifts in the types of cases coming before the DRC, including an increase in conceptual plan review where applicants ask for project feedback in advance of submitting formal applications for legislative review. Early review from the DRC can reduce the need for additional expensive reengineering and streamline the development process.

Mr. Fraley stated he was concerned applicants would no longer feel like they needed to hear early input if higher thresholds eliminated the requirement for them to appear before the DRC.

Mr. Allen Murphy stated changing thresholds may change the number of applicants for early conceptual review and the Policy Committee should keep that in mind when discussing these changes.

Mr. Johnson stated a major incentive for enhanced conceptual plans is the granting of preliminary approval after the meetings. He stated if triggers were increased, the incentives for DRC review should remain.

Mr. Fraley asked about the staff's performance standard recommendations.

Mr. Johnson stated that where there is a track record of similar SUP uses and impacts, the ordinance could allow additional flexibility, such as reduced parking requirements for businesses with drive-thrus. He stated some uses may be able to avoid the legislative process with additional standards.

Mr. Fraley stated that applicants have adapted to the specific tastes of Planning Commissioners. He stated applicants want clear guidelines.

Mr. Woods stated he had concerns with developing performance standards that would apply to one type of development or area, but not another.

Mr. Johnson stated that the county has not yet differentiated the nuances between residential and commercial performance standards.

Mr. Fraley stated the DRC should move to a more strategic role, concentrating on enhanced conceptual plans and appeals. He stated the DRC should not review large subdivisions, although this change would create a greater responsibility to review master plans. The DRC should also not review large commercial buildings in office or industrial parks. A nuanced approach should be used on residential infill projects, including different standards for townhome and commercial developments.

Mr. Woods stated he was concerned master plans approved today may not be good for the community in twenty years.

Mr. Fraley stated the DRC should also review master plan consistency.

Mr. Johnson stated there were legal and financial considerations for vested master plans.

Mr. Murphy stated if there was no agreement on raising commercial thresholds, then the Commission could compromise and only raise industrial thresholds.

Mr. Fraley stated he supported staff's recommendations on the shifting DRC role, with consideration of infill developments and commercial/industrial sliding scales.

Mr. Fraley stated he did not have any issues with increasing the commercial SUP trigger to 20,000 square feet.

Mr. Johnson stated the research into other localities' commercial SUP square footage triggers focused on communities across the country with similar profiles to James City. Based on other localities' triggers, there appeared to be room to raise the square footage requirement in JCC.

Mr. Fraley stated he wanted to know how competing localities, especially York County, handle their commercial SUPs.

Mr. Mark Rinaldi, a member of Bush Construction, stated the county should determine what types of businesses it wants to attract. He stated the county could make it easier for certain businesses to succeed in certain geographic areas.

Mr. Fraley asked about the traffic SUP threshold.

Mr. Purse stated that increased traffic is often the largest impact of a commercial project. He stated the Virginia Department of Transportation's 527 regulations use the same 100 peak hour trips standard. The county also agrees that the 100 peak hour trips is a clear impact on the community, and less subjective than building size, as it is a quantifiable impact on the infrastructure.

Mr. Fraley stated 100 peak hour trips can have varying impact depending on its location. He asked staff to nuance the 100 trip threshold.

Mr. Woods asked if staff had the ability to differentiate between different types of trip generators, such as school, drug stores, and restaurants.

Mr. Johnson stated there are exemptions for office building and industrial trips generation. He stated staff can review additional exceptions.

Mr. Fraley stated he would like to discuss the thresholds with the Board at the upcoming work session before staff makes major revisions.

3. Public Comment

Mr. Fraley opened the public comment period.

Mr. Dick Schreiber, representing the Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance, stated his business owner survey reported that quality of life was the greatest advantage for operating a business in Williamsburg. He stated growth is necessary, but should be targeted in areas and amounts the County wants. The process should be more predictable, and unnecessary obstacles and fees should be removed.

Mr. Bob Spencer stated proposals should be as specific as possible, cumulative impacts of traffic generation should be considered, and there should be greater control of by-right development.

Mr. Jack Haldeman stated that the Business Climate Task Force report states that attracting businesses should be subordinate to maintaining the community character, expediting commercial projects should be balanced against the quality of jobs created and that new development would make it more difficult to address new Chesapeake Bay pollution restrictions.

Mr. Fraley stated the County's red tape should be reduced. He stated the County should define what it wants and that the quality of applications was improving.

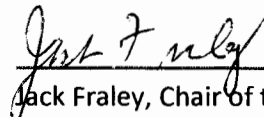
Mr. Rinaldi stated the County should encourage redevelopment in blighted areas and empty shopping centers.

Mr. Fraley stated the Economic Opportunity (EO) zone, combined with state-supported expanded enterprise zones, could bring additional economic development. He stated the County needs to diversify its tax and economic bases.

4. Adjournment

Mr. Woods moved to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.



Jack Fraley, Chair of the Policy Committee