



**TOWN OF OCCOQUAN  
PLANNING COMMISSION**  
Town Hall - 314 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125

**MEETING DATE: 2024-04-23**

**MEETING TIME: 6:30 PM**

**Present:** Chairperson Eliot Perkins, Commissioners Ann Kisling, Robert Love, Ralph Newell, Ryan Somma, Don Wood

**Absent:** Darryl Hawkins

**Town Staff:** Matt Whitmoyer, Deputy Town Manager; Jeff Harvey (remote), Assistant Zoning Administrator; Adam Linn, Town Manager

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 pm

**2. Citizen Comments**

Chairperson Perkins recognized Walt Seiberling and expressed the Commission's delight that he had returned to attending meetings.

The Chair then recognized former Commissioner Ryan Somma and announced that he would be leaving the Planning Commission effective immediately. The Chair expressed his appreciation to Mr. Somma for his 7 years of service to the Commission and spoke about his character and the skills that he brought to the Commission. The Chair then listed all the items that Mr. Somma had brought to fruition as a member and Secretary of the Commission, including the Mill at Occoquan, the Town's parking strategy, and the Trail Town programming. The Commission congratulated and thanked Mr. Somma.

Mr. Somma thanked the Chair for his words and expressed his belief that the Planning Commission will continue to do great work. Mr. Somma then left the meeting.

Chairperson Perkins encouraged the Commissioners to follow up and thank him for his service.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

a. March 26, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Kisling motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Commissioner Wood seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

**4. Reports**

a. Town Council Report

Chairperson Perkins explained that the Town Council is currently working on the budget and that the Town Council accepted the Planning Commission's Strategic Planning Recommendations. He said that the Town Council will review and provide feedback soon. The Chair highlighted that one of the items, the glass recycling bin, is already in the works; however, the County will place it at the Rt. 123 and Old Bridge Commuter lot just outside of town and not under the Rt. 123 Bridge, due to noise concerns.

Commissioner Newell asked if the single stream recycling bin would be removed from under the Rt. 123 Bridge and commented on its redundancy since commercial properties already have recycling. Chairperson Perkins and Mr. Whitmoyer responded that the current recycling bin will remain under the bridge as it does not handle glass and there are no noise concerns. The new glass bin will replace the single stream bin currently at the commuter lot so both sites will act as recycling points for the larger area. Commissioner Newell explained that he does see the bin being used. Commissioners Love and Kisling stated that many businesses and residents use the bin for bulk and excess recycling.

Chairperson Perkins thanked the Commissioners for all their work on the Strategic Planning Recommendations. He then explained the minor differences that were made to the report between its approval by the Commission and submission to Town Council, such as bike lanes that proved infeasible due to VDOT standards.

#### b. Deputy Town Manager Report

Mr. Whitmoyer informed the Commission that there will be a mural dedication on Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup> at 2 pm for a new mural on the LOVEwork in River Mill Park. The Commissioners discussed the new mural.

#### c. Architectural Review Board Report

None

### **5. Discussion Items**

Chairperson Perkins received the approval of the other Commissioners to remove the Belmont Bay Expansion Project from future agendas as the project has changed in nature and will not affect the town.

#### a. Zoning Administrator Report on Potential Zoning Text and Comprehensive Plan Amendments Relating to Accessory Dwelling Units and Density

Chairperson Perkins reviewed the two focus areas for the discussion. He asked the Commissioners to compare the costs and benefits of increasing density in Occoquan, weighing the increased tax base and residents against limited amount of buildable land in town and the affects of density on traffic, infrastructure, and the character of the town. He also asked them to think about how the regulations for accessory dwelling units can and/or should vary in each zoning district based off each district's existing characteristics.

Mr. Harvey gave a presentation on potential amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance that would increase density. Mr. Harvey focused on the low-density residential parcels

along Washington Street that are surrounded by medium-high residential parcels on the Future Land Use Map. Chairperson Perkins asked for an explanation of the different levels of density on the map. Mr. Harvey explained how each density level corresponds to a zoning district designation.

Mr. Harvey iterated how each goal of the Comprehensive Plan influences the decision-making process for increasing density, including concerns of traffic and circulation, coordination with the County and VDOT, and environmental concerns. He also explained that some of the affected parcels would actually be downzoned if following the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Harvey recommended that the Commission and Town Council decide whether to amend the Comprehensive Plan now or do it with the required 5-year update for 2026. No matter which choice, he explained the various items that that the Town will need to address before making a Comprehensive Plan update, including traffic impacts, public improvements, and community character concerns.

Commissioner Wood asked why this particular area along Washington was the focus of this discussion on density. Mr. Harvey explained that this area was identified by Council and staff but that the Commission is welcome to focus on other areas. Chairperson Perkins clarified that the overall discussion is about increasing density for the town in general and then secondarily would be about which parcels to address.

Commissioner Newell asked what the source of the discussion was, from Town Council or homeowners, and what currently exists on the discussed parcels. Chairperson Perkins explained that a Town Council request was the impetus of this discussion and that certain parcels have single family homes and a significant amount of space for denser development.

Chairperson Perkins asked Mr. Harvey what the benefits of increased density are. Mr. Harvey highlighted increased tax value, connecting parts of the community, and potentially meeting the housing goals of the community, such as a mix of housing types and affordability. Chairperson Perkins argued that it may also help make the town younger and boost the economy.

Commissioner Love asked if there is a downside to waiting until 2026 to amend the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Harvey responded that it would be up to the Town Council to decide if this is an urgent issue or not.

Chairperson Perkins and Commissioner Love discussed that they did not want any amendments to be a knee-jerk reaction and that they want to thoroughly discuss all the impacts of increased density on the town. Mr. Harvey clarified that a Comprehensive Plan update for 2026 is not that far away.

Commissioner Love asked about the need for zoning changes for the parcel east of the Rt. 123 Bridge. Chairperson Perkins explained that no zoning change is needed for any public improvements to the property.

Mr. Harvey gave a presentation on accessory dwellings. He emphasized that the Code is currently inconsistent on accessory buildings and dwellings in the B-1 district. He recommended that the Planning Commission decide how it wants to define accessory dwellings, whether and how it wants to allow them, and in which districts to allow them.

Chairperson Perkins asked Mr. Harvey to provide examples of how to decide in which zoning districts accessory dwellings should be allowed. Mr. Harvey provided examples, weighing the pros, cons, and questions for each.

Mr. Harvey recommended allowing accessory dwelling units in residential districts and correcting the inconsistencies for the B-1 district. He then discussed current accessory dwelling examples in town. Chairperson Perkins asked about allowing businesses in accessory buildings. Mr. Harvey recommended that, if allowed, the Town should create some kind of permitting process to address the potential impacts of that use. He then discussed the enforcement processes for confirming accessory dwelling units comply with the Code and efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of these units. Chairperson Perkins asked about parking requirements and Mr. Harvey said that parking would be a greater issue in residential areas and explained how required spaces could be allotted.

Mr. Harvey then discussed the factors in determining what size, character, and number of units the Town would want to allow.

Chairperson Perkins provided an overview of next steps and asked the Commissioners on their preference for having staff craft a draft amendment pursuant to this meeting or at a later date once the Commission has taken time to review and define its preferences for recommendations to Town Council.

The Commission instructed staff to finalize a definition for accessory dwelling units and present it with recommendations for a zoning text amendment and recommendations for density-related comprehensive plan amendments at the next Planning Commission meeting.

## **6. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32 pm

*Minutes Prepared by Matt Whitmoyer, Planning Commission Liaison*