

MINUTES OF THE STRASBURG PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2023 AT 7 P.M. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS OF THE STRASBURG TOWN HALL.

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Poling, Commissioners Foster, Rhodes, and Zeimet. Absent: Vice Chairperson Dean, Commissioner Nicholson and Council Member Reynolds.

STAFF PRESENT: Planning & Zoning Administrator Otis and Clerk of Council Keller.

Chairperson Poling called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda.

Approval of Agenda:

The agenda was approved unanimously as amended with a motion by Commissioner Foster and the second by Commissioner Zeimet.

Public Hearings:

- *To receive public comment on a Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA23-0001) requested by Landmark Atlantic Holdings, LLC, owner, for property identified as Tax Map 016 A 167A located at 144 Fort Bowman Road, approximately seven hundred feet east of the intersection of Fort Bowman Road and Old Valley Pike and containing 3.306 acres. The request is to recategorize the Highway Commercial Development Area to a Residential Development Area.*

- **Staff Report – (attachment)**

P&Z Administrator Otis said that currently, the property is zoned highway commercial and has residential and highway commercial surrounding it. The future land use map was shown which shows it as highway commercial. Surrounding properties were pointed out and their zoning.

Staff recommends approval for the following reasons:

- Since the adoption of the Future Land Use map, VDOT has identified the access to Fort Bowman Road as a right-in/right-out only onto northbound Old Valley Pike with no southbound access. This would challenge any future commercial use from developing this location.
- Adequate transportation access to this location would be from Hite Lane and Homewood Way through the existing single-family residential development. Residential uses would create a reduced impact on these roadways.
- Residential uses have a reduced light-shed, noise, and traffic impacts on the vicinity's residential and parkland parcels.
- Residential uses are in high demand with limited undeveloped land zoned residential. Higher density residential uses typically provide better opportunities for workforce housing.
- Location and residential use will not adversely affect any viewshed of the valley east of town for existing or future development.

- SWOT analysis of the I-81/Route 11 corridor does not identify concerns with inclusion of residential uses.

Chairperson Poling said without this revision, the rezoning could not take place and that is correct; it would be in conflict with the Comprehensive Plan.

P&Z Administrator Otis said the notice was sent to all the property owners within 500 feet and signs were posted on June 16, 2023. Notices were in the NVDaily on July 11 and 18, 2023. One email was received, and the Commission has 30 days to make a recommendation which would be August 24.

○ **Public Hearing – Opened at 7:10 p.m.**

Kristin Laise, Executive Director of Belle Grove, Inc., owner of Fort Bowman/Harmony Hall: This is a 96 acre property which is on the Virginia and National Landmark and the house dates to 1771, but the land has been used since 1730's by the Bowman family. The property is under easement with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and the historic buildings are under easement with the Department of Historic Resources. This is also a very significant archaeological site, and they have done archaeological work there and hope to do more in the future. The house is currently going through a major restoration project to stabilize it. They hope to soon have a tenant in the dwelling which would allow occasional use by the public.

Ms. Laise agrees that residential is preferable over commercial, but the high density housing has her concerned. It is already adjoining a highly dense development. This is a very small parcel and would be ideal for parkland for those who already live there. Twenty-nine townhomes are extremely dense and they are already concerned about the safety of their property, especially with public trespassing given the sensitivity of its historic nature.

Being no other speakers, the Public Hearing closed at 7:13 p.m.

- To receive public comment on a Rezoning application (REZ23-0001) requested by Landmark Atlantic Holdings, LLC, owner, for property identified as Tax Map 016 A 167A located at 144 Fort Bowman Road, approximately seven hundred feet east of the intersection of Fort Bowman Road and Old Valley Pike and containing 3.306 acres. The request is to rezone the subject property from the Highway Commercial District to the Multi-Family Residential District, construct 29 townhomes, and extend Homewood Way to this development as the primary access.

○ **Staff Report – (attachment)**

P&Z Administrator Otis showed the location and gave some history on the property. It was annexed into town as agricultural and was then changed to highway commercial and medium density. At that time, the developer decided they did not want to use Fort Bowman Road as access due to the cost of improvements to the road. Town Council had a concern in having a secondary access to the property, so a secondary access was made for emergency access only. When the Homewood Way extension came about, **P&Z Administrator Otis** walked the property with VDOT, and they could tell the emergency access was being used by regular traffic.

The plan was shown for the development. Each unit will have an interior and exterior parking space; additional parking will be provided. Stormwater was discussed. The complications are a 100' gas easement and steep slopes which make part of the property undevelopable. They are only applying for 29 units. They are allowed to have eight unit buildings and they will have two eight unit buildings and two six unit buildings. The proffer statement was reviewed. They will be extending a water line to the development and a loop will be created. Sewer will be connected to the gravity system. Homewood Way will be improved, including a sidewalk on one side. A gate will be provided by the developer. There are monetary proffers included.

Staff recommends approval. If the comprehensive plan amendment is approved, it will be in compliance with that plan. Other reasons were reviewed:

- The Rezoning is consistent with the CPA23-0001 application.
- Adequate transportation access to this location would be from Hite Lane and Homewood Way through the existing single-family residential development. Residential uses would create a reduced impact on these roadways in comparison to commercial use.
- Multifamily Residential uses have a reduced light-shed, noise, and traffic impacts on the vicinity's residential and parkland parcels.
- Residential uses are in high demand with limited undeveloped land zoned residential. Higher density residential uses typically provide better opportunities for workforce housing.
- Limitations of access via Fort Bowman Rd and 100-foot-wide gas

One email was submitted and added to the record.

○ **Public Hearing – opened at 7:22 p.m.**

Jim Guisewhite, Edinburg, represents the sellers: Stated he has been here many times through the years. Commercial was not welcome at this site and he thanked everyone for attempting to take this in a different direction. To him, it never made sense to try to put commercial there. He showed the original map of the Homewood development. Originally, there were to be 39 duplexes, another 52 duplexes, a three-story apartment building with 96 apartments, a community center, an assisted living facility with 40 units, and a skilled nursing facility with 40 units. When you think about this, the entire land parcel was full. He said that now land has been preserved and given to the Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Association which is up against the Belle Grove land. The homeowners now have preserved land/green space behind them that will not be built on. This development makes so much sense, with the road and the community and the people who are already living there. He again thanked all for considering this proposal.

Debra Strong, 146 Signal Knob Drive, Strasburg, VA: Stated when she bought in the development five years ago, they were told that the land right behind them was “green” and would never be built on. It was not the land over the hill. **P&Z Administrator Otis** showed where the development is being proposed and the other land is in conservation.

Being no other speakers, the Public Hearing closed at 7:26 p.m.

Citizen Comments on non-agenda items:

Action Items:

1.) Approval of Minutes

Description: Approval of Minutes of the June 27, 2023 Planning Commission Meeting

Commissioner Zeimet moved to approve the minutes of the June 27, 2023 meeting as corrected; second by Commissioner Foster. With no discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

2.) Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Commissioner Zeimet said there is a quarter of an acre that is not developable because it is too steep; **P&Z Administrator Otis** said that was correct. **Commissioner Zeimet** asked if the other setbacks will be impacted, and they will not be. **Commissioner Zeimet** asked if this will impact the view of the other homeowners, and **P&Z Administrator Otis** does not see it blocking any views except the interstate.

Commissioner Foster said after seeing VDOT's recommendation of the right turn in and out, he was concerned for access to Harmony Hall, but the gate will prevent the people from leaving the development via that road. Harmony Hall was his only concern.

Commissioner Zeimet asked if there is a market for this many townhouses in our town. Will these be bought? **P&Z Administrator Otis** said the townhouse market is there. Available housing is sparse in town. The developer has been very successful in selling the single-family houses they have.

Commissioner Zeimet said these are higher end townhouses, based on the comments on the views, etc. **P&Z Administrator Otis** said he is not sure about the view. This will be close to the highway, but Cedar Springs is also close to the highway and has sold out. He thinks the market is there. Post-COVID, more people spend less time outside.

Commissioner Rhodes moved to recommend to the Strasburg Town Council the Comprehensive Plan Amendment as discussed; second by Commissioner Foster. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

3.) Rezoning application (REZ23-0001) requested by Landmark Atlantic Holdings, LLC

Chairperson Poling asked what the residents' feelings are of traffic running through their development. **P&Z Administrator Otis** said that originally, he had discussions and they thought it was the lesser of two evils. They would rather see the residential over commercial which could go there by right.

Marsha Beaujon, 123 Signal Knob Drive, Strassburg, VA: Stated she has not lived in her home too long, If the commercial offered Fort Bowman Road and then for some reason, that road was closed, would that traffic then have to funnel through the neighborhood? With this plan, that is not even an option. All 29 families, all their teenagers, all of their recreational driving, the school bus, all of that traffic will have to go through their single-family neighborhood. She is leaving the city to get away from that and she is shocked and

appalled that people are saying it is the lesser of two evils. If there was a commercial business, it would be closed half of the time. She doesn't think it is an apple to apple comparison and she doesn't think it is a fair assessment of the community.

Chairperson Poling asked **Ms. Beaujon** if she was familiar with the application several month ago, and she said only by the information she has gathered. **Chairperson Poling** said there was an application for a transient hotel on the property and all that traffic would have come through the neighborhood. **Ms. Beaujon** thinks the hotel and the townhouses are about the same. **Chairperson Poling** said it would have been transient and **P&Z Administrator Otis** said it was for 98 units.

Chairperson Poling asked about Harmony Hall and how they would access the property with the gate. **P&Z Administrator Otis** said the gate will be on Homewood Way and not on Fort Bowman Road.

Commissioner Foster had a similar concern about where the gate would be. No one should be turning left onto Fort Bowman Road, and you would have to go across the median to turn south. If you were coming out of Fort Bowman, you would only be able to turn right. With the forethought of VDOT closing the median area, not having a lot of traffic coming off of Fort Bowman is a good idea. It is a narrow road going to Harmony Hall and the gate will provide a safety net to the neighborhood. He understands the concerns of the traffic, but it is safer route or so he feels.

Chairperson Poling asked if Homewood Way is designed for additional traffic and **P&Z Administrator Otis** said he had a discussion with VDOT and was told that if they were to create a third lane on northbound I81, they would have to redesign the interchange which would take away the Fort Bowman Road intersection on Old Valley Pike which would by default, require any access to come through Homewood Way. VDOT determines the trips and traffic.

Chairperson Poling asked who maintains Homewood Way now. **P&Z Administrator Otis** said the developer is still maintaining it, but once it comes out of bond, it will be maintained by the town. The gate will be installed by the developer and maintained by the town.

Commissioner Foster moved to recommend the approval of the rezoning application (REZ23-0001) requested by Landmark Atlantic Holdings, LLC to the Strasburg Town Council; second by Chairperson Poling. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Staff Updates:

P&Z Administrator Otis said the Planning Commission had recommended the SUP for the increase to the number of townhouse units on Mineral Street. Town Council approved this.

P&Z Administrator Otis said he had a conversation with **Chairperson Poling** about the buffer on the creek (Town Run) and they will probably lose about six units to meet that buffer.

Old Business:

New Business:

Adjournment:

Commissioner Foster moved for adjournment; second by Commissioner Rhodes. With no discussion, the motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.