



# CORPORATION OF HARPERS FERRY

## Planning Commission

### MINUTES

**Special Meeting**

**Tuesday, 31 January 2023**

**7:00 p.m.**

**Town Hall – 1000 Washington Street, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia 25425**

The in-person meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m. by President Craig.

#### **THOSE PRESENT:**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Status</b>
Chris Craig	President	Present
Paul Mayhew	Secretary / Mayor's Designee	Absent
Ken Dill	Member	Present
Roberta Meade-Curry, AICP	Member	Present (via Zoom)
Zach Morse*	Vice President	Present
Paul Thomas	Member	Present
Tim Wisecarver	Member	Present

\*Recorded Minutes

In attendance:

Christy DeMuth (WVU Consultant) via Zoom  
Cameron Stoops (WVU Consultant) via Zoom

Emma Duncan (WVU) via Zoom

Storm DiCostanzo – member of Town Council  
Laurel Drake – member of Town Council  
Jerry Hutton – member of Town Council  
Marie Uehling – Citizen and head of Jefferson County Vision  
Eddie Love – Citizen, President of the Harpers Ferry Merchants' Association, and JCDA Representative

**Approval of Agenda:** The Agenda was approved unanimously without motion.

#### **Unfinished Business:**

President Craig gave some updates from the first comprehensive plan meeting with WVU.

- ORC met and edited Ordinance Article 133 based on Planning Commission and Consultants' recommendations. The amended ordinance will be up for first reading at the February Town Council meeting.
- PC passed the bylaws that WVU suggested with a few additions
- Planning Commission passed the Public Input Guidelines that WVU consultants suggested, without modification.

## 1. Review and Discuss Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Exercise

Christy D. led a review of the SWOT document produced previously. See SWOT exercise document.

### **Strengths –**

President Craig suggested MARC train be listed instead of / along with METRO.

Tim W suggested “*Allegheny* trail” should be changed to “*Appalachian* trail”.

Paul T suggested change of “proximity to *river*” to “proximity to *rivers*”.

Roberta M-C. suggested specifying the Shipley school instead of “old high school”.

### **Weaknesses –**

Roberta M-C. suggested change of wording around “limited professional staff”

Eddie L. – suggested we should be more specific on “absentee ownership”

Storm D. – suggested “limited absentee owner engagement”

Roberta M-C. – reiterated that the lack of permanent neighbors is reflected in initial wording in document

Marie Y. – suggested “high percentage of absentee ownership in town”

Eddie L. – Local economy is significantly dependent on tourism – perhaps *overly* reliant on tourism.

Paul T. – Asked what Eddie might be looking for in terms of diversity?

Eddie L. – one example is a lack of grocery store – access to basic daily necessities.

Zach M. – suggested making the sub-bullet on lack of grocery store its own point about economic / shopping options for *residents*

Laurel D. – suggested changing “high water bill” to “high water / sewer bill”.

Laurel D. – suggested clarifying the “Affluent – Hard to get funding” point to say that we don’t qualify for much state funding due to relatively high average income in Jefferson County.

Storm D. – Suggested adding a strength that HF attracts highly educated and highly skilled people as residents.

### **Opportunities –**

Ken D.– Pointed out a typo in the current document - it should be east and west *Ridge* street

Eddie L. – Led a shore discussion of private / public partnership of town hall area into a potentially mixed-use facility with retail and apartment space. It was mentioned in the 2013 Comp plan and should be added in as an opportunity in this SWOT exercise. Focusing on the current town hall area would mean that the town would have significant control without needing to acquire land or permissions.

Paul T. Asked – How realistic should we be when crafting the comprehensive plan? Stated the need to find the right balance between grand plans and achievable goals within the period in which this plan will be in effect.

Eddie L. Asked – Does the Comprehensive Plan address plans for the next 10 years only or can we get more specific.

Roberta M-C. – Noted that the Comprehensive Plan goals are going to be strongly tied to the capital improvements budget. If that budget is 0, none of this can be accomplished. We will need to look at where the funding for these projects is coming from.

### **Threats –**

Marie Y. – Commented that she has been a 30-year citizen of HF who raised child here and is currently the President of Jefferson County Vision. She highlighted that she is thrilled that Rockwool showed up on both the Threat and Weakness lists. She stated that she believes that Rockwool threatens health of citizens, tourism, agriculture etc. She believes PC is off to a great start and that the town needs to be vigilant about more of that type of heavy industry being brought in to this area.

Eddie L. – Noted that the idea of the MARC train leaving should be listed as just a threat not a weakness since it has not left yet.

Eddie L. – Asked for clarification as to why the Tourism Development District was listed as a threat?

Zach M. – Noted that the TDD was listed as a threat because of a combination of a perceived significant change to fabric of the community and the fact that town ordinances don't apply within the TDD limiting the TC ability to input there.

Eddie L. – Inquired why hunting listed as a threat?

Chris C. – Noted that hunting was a point of differing opinions when the PC initially discussed Roberta M-C. – Noted that Urban Hunting / Deer culling can be dangerous to residents. Stray arrows can affect tourists, residents, property, etc.

Paul T. Suggested that perhaps the Planning Commission change the text to "Deer Culling". Also noted that there are two sides when considering the damage that deer do. He agreed that there are definitely differing opinions on this issue.

Storm D. – suggested rewording to be specific such as hunting / deer culling close to residents and trails

Paul T. – suggested that the PC and SWOT exercise should differentiate between Deer Culling and Deer Hunting. He noted that Deer Culling is a specific program and suggested that perhaps we should have two points.

Eddie L. – asked if "volunteerism" indicated in SWOT exercise means lack of volunteering for things that make the town run? The answer, yes, was given by multiple members of the PC. Eddie agreed that a lack of volunteering is a threat.

Eddie L. – Noted on the point of "Unmanaged tourism / parking" that Parking is a significant source of revenue to the town. This should be pointed out as well. It is a balancing act.

Chris C. – Suggested adding a strength item about parking revenue.

Christy D. stated that she will edit the SWOT document based on the above discussion and will send out an updated version when complete.

## 2. Discuss Stakeholder Identification Assignment

Christy D. – Note that the PC is off to a great start on this list (Gold star). She stated that most of the stakeholders will be contacted directly by WVU with questionnaires or surveys. The PC will need to consider how to solicit input from groups. The team will need to establish a list of points of contact for each of the stakeholder organizations – ideally email addresses. Cameron and possibly other WVU students will begin reaching out and conducting small interviews.

Roberta M-C. – Asked if Planning Commission members be present for all stakeholder interviews?

Christy D. – Responded that transcripts will be recorded for all of those meetings.

Roberta M-C. – Asked if the Planning Commission will design the questionnaires?

Christy D. – Responded that WVU already has bespoke questionnaires for specific types of stakeholders. She noted that scheduling for everyone if PC is fully involved in this process could be difficult.

Roberta M-C. – Stated that she does not want stakeholders to feel like the PC or Town is not participating / present

Paul T. – Noted that he thinks the PC is best suited using the contractor and professionals from WVU. With the goal of moving project forward.

Roberta M-C. – Stated that she does not think full PC involvement would delay the process.

Chris C. – Suggested tabling the discussion until WVU has done initial contact of potential Stakeholders

Chris C. – Noted to Christy and the WVU consultants that the PC cast a wide net when crafting this initial spreadsheet of stakeholders. Some listed would be minimally interested in HF / the Comprehensive Plan. Many of the business might best be served under the Merchants' association or other organizations. Maybe while working on points of contact, we split up the list and receive recommendations on where to thin the list down.

Christy D. – Noted that it is interesting how some stakeholder interviews go. Some want to participate a lot; some don't want to be bothered. This is where PC help will be needed if some groups / stakeholders don't want to talk to WVU.

Chris C. – Asked if the PC needs to decide how to divide up this list during this meeting.

Christy D. – Responded that dividing up the list can be done as a subsequent meeting when looking at questionnaires

Chris C. – Noted that the Planning Commission will put that action on the Feb agenda.

## 3. Discuss and Review 2013 Comprehensive Plan

Christy D. – Noted the WVU has reviewed the 2013 plan and that while it contained no specific vision statement, it certainly identified goals and themes.

Cameron S. - Provided a summary of 2013 plan. (see document)

Roberta M-C. – Noted that she has drafted a spreadsheet of priorities from the 2013 CP that lists priority levels, actions, and ordinances that are related to each point.

Paul T. – Suggested that the PC should evaluate this spreadsheet before it gets sent to the contractors.

Chris C. – Suggested that the PC should look at the higher-level summary provided by Cameron S. first and then use Roberta’s spreadsheet as a more detailed tool as we move forward.

### **Topic 1 – Environmental Issues and Constraints**

Paul T. – Stated that this issue is well placed and still relevant to the town.

Zach M. – Noted that all listed issued in this topic are still very relevant.

Chris C. – Stated that the town is making great strides on the topic of trails and storm water. He also noted that local efforts to affect air quality seems difficult to quantify / achieve.

Paul T. – Noted that trees are a huge part of that local air quality. Suggested that PC and Tree Committee can contribute and effect this aspect.

Ken D. – Noted that some of these goals may not result in tangible actions, but things we could consider to not make things worse.

Storm D. – Suggested that PC consider burning of yard waste in this topic as well.

Roberta M-C. – Noted that a noise ordinance was accomplished and codified. She also noted that a dark sky initiative and ordinances should be written and are a high priority.

Eddie L. – Noted that under the topic of Air quality the word “maximize” is used, while such a qualifier is not used in the wording of other goals. He noted that doing our part to bring light to Rockwool issue is another way to act on this. He pointed out that some of the listed goals are very specific. Other seem very vague. Hard to measure if we were successful or not. Noise is hard to quantify.

Paul T. – Noted that ordinances (dark sky, noise, etc.) are a good way to specify and enforces some of these measurable and specific qualities.

### **Topic 2 – Building on Historic Character**

Paul T. – Noted that these are all still relevant. Having a low population and limited land are limiting factors in this area.

Chris C. – Noted that on the topic of affordable housing, there are things we are going to have to talk about. As local market value increases, mixed-use development on a small scale might be achievable.

Paul T. – Stated that the Shipley School would be a critical / significant change to the community and is a realistic goal to pursue.

Roberta M-C. – Noted that the main goal of the first Comprehensive Plan was to preserve the historical nature of the town. Several goals listed in the 2013 CP are still outstanding.

Chris C. – Noted that encouraging home businesses / cottage industries could still improve this topic

Storm D. – Noted that fostering a *diverse* economy in a 19<sup>th</sup> century town is a great way to move forward here.

Eddie L. – Noted that it is still important to include tax base portion as this is key revenue source for town. He noted that if the town does not have the funds, we will not be able to accomplish other goals. Growing the tax base of the town is a great goal.

Eddie L. – Shared his idea that Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) unlock more affordable housing and gentle density growth without the need for direct town control of the land used. He noted that cottage industries / home business that are consistent with residential nature of a neighborhood are a good way to unlock additional space to improve towns' tax base.

Zach M. – Noted that Historical Preservation will be a very high priority moving forward with the 2023 CP.

### **Topic 3 – Transportation & Public Facilities and Services**

Chris C. – Stated that the new water plant, making more money from parking than almost any other sources, and storm water management plan are all almost complete – lots of progress made in this area. He noted that the PC should continue to see them as important goals and we should discuss what further improvements can be made.

Roberta M-C. – Noted that this section of 2013 CP had a lot of HIGH priority objectives. Some of these goals can be viewed as completed. Several other still need to be met. She estimated that the town is about ½ way there.

Storm D. – Suggested that one idea that was likely not a big priority in 2013 but could be a big help now is IT infrastructure. He noted that Improvements to IT infrastructure would be a huge benefit to economy and lives of town residents.

Laurel D. – Noted that another item that was likely not on the RADAR in 2013 would be maintaining the sources of water for the water plant (Elk Run, Spring Water, and Potomac River). She stated that all three of these options should all be ready to go in case any become inaccessible. The technology & physical equipment should be maintained to use any of these sources.

Roberta M-C. – Noted that Climate Change, resiliency, and disaster preparedness are all new topics and need to be included for the 2023 Comprehensive Plan.

Jerry H. – Stated that the Town needs to maintain local control of the *water company*. He noted that there is a potential ongoing threat from large company in Charleston who wants to take over. He noted that the town has fended of takeover attempts already.

Chris C. – Agreed with Jerry and noted that there may be differing opinions on the topic of local water plant control. He suggested that the PC should bring this idea up at the public hearings for additional public input. He also noted that most if not all in attendance at this meeting do agree with Jerry.

#### **4. 4. Identify Key Focus Areas**

Christy D. – Summarized that it sounds like the Planning Commission may keep a lot of the identified areas from 2013 with some updates and additions (climate change noted). She also noted that the specific goals may change or be updated as we go through the matrix.

Chris C. – Also noted on the water issues that one thing that the Town Council has faced over the past year is that there has been excitement over the new plant, but that town is still faced with a big distribution issue. Finding funding to overhaul old and overtaxed water distribution system has been difficult. He noted that the Planning Commission / Town Council will need to consult experts and consider this topic more.

Christy D. – Stated that the next steps include putting together stakeholder contact lists. The Planning Commission will need to develop a vision statement and specific goals for the 2023 Comprehensive Plan. She noted that the new comprehensive plan will include some overarching goals, objectives, and specific action items. She also noted that the 2013 Comprehensive Plan had lots of goals. We may be able to be more general with goals and more specific with objectives. She suggested that the next meeting will include discussion of how to get started with public participation and planning for public hearing / open house.

President Craig noted that the Planning Commission plans to prepare resources at Feb Meeting and meet with WVU in March.

President Craig thanks Cameron and Christy for all their work and the PC + members of the public who participated tonight. He noted that the Planning Commission will meet again on February 21<sup>st</sup>.

#### **Adjournment**

Paul T. Motioned

Ken D. Seconded  
Vote to adjourn was unanimous.

President Craig adjourned the meeting at 8:56 PM.

**- End -**