



TOWN OF OCCOQUAN
Town Hall – 314 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125
MEETING DATE: 2019-05-28

MEETING TIME: 6:30 PM

Present: Daryl Hawkins, Jenn Mathis, Eliot Perkins, Ryan Somma

Absent: Ann Kisling

1. Call to Order

The Planning Commission Public Hearing was called to order by Eliot Perkins on 2019-05-28, at 6:30 p.m.

Secretary for Meeting

Ryan Somma took minutes for the meeting.

2. Citizen Comments

There were no citizen comments.

3. Approval of Minutes of April 23, 2019.

Jenn Mathis moved to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes of 2019-04-23. Ryan Somma seconded the motion. The motion carried.

4. Planning Commission Priorities Update

Eliot Perkins opened the discussion, noting the Town now has a painted fence along the 123 entrance that is not tax-payer funded. Grass is starting to come in, and it will look good for the craft show. Anne Kisling previously volunteered to spearhead renovations for the Tanyard Hill town entrance and will bring drawings to the next discussion.

Parking and Traffic

Eliot Perkins said that now that the budget process is ending, he was bringing the Town Council's focus to parking and traffic. At their last meeting, the Town Council asked the Planning Commission to provide multiple parking options for consideration and discussion.

Eliot Perkins led the Planning Commission through a brief history of the parking and traffic issue for the benefit of new members. Key issues center on staff and patrons parking in front of each others' stores as well as the increase of town sponsored events. Chris Coon indicated that the Town had gone from eight annual events to 24. Chris Coon volunteered to get feedback from local businesses regarding changes to the town's parking policies.

Eliot Perkins noted that, as Occoquan is becoming more popular, there is limited parking, especially on weekends, and the proposed Mill at Occoquan development will have an additional substantial impact. Ryan Somma noted that timed parking was considered an easy win in the budgeting process.

Eliot Perkins said that wayfinding and parking signage were previously noted as easy wins. The Town can create a targeted plan focusing on days of the week that most impact the parking inventory. It won't be a perfect solution, but will influence people to park in appropriate places rather than on the street. There were also future options discussed such as parking kiosks, marking tires, police enforcement.

Eliot Perkins said that four-hour parking limits seems reasonable to allow visitors time to watch a movie. Talking to Chief Lynn, he feels this is something the Town can do. Enforcement doesn't have to be consistent, but sporadic. Timed parking lets people find spots faster, gets people working at businesses to use off-street parking, has people living on Mill Street park in their off-street parking and have their friends use off-street visitor parking. Timed parking would help all of these things. Eliot Perkins then opened discussion to everyone's thoughts.

Jenn Mathis posed a question for the Town Attorney, asking if there would be a way to do implement a new parking policy on a trial basis. Acknowledging that the Town hasn't done this before, there is a need to have an opportunity for feedback and adjustments.

Chris Coon said there was previously a policy of three hours timed parking every day of the week. This didn't work because it was every day of the week. The policy requires an action by Town Council to repeal so it's difficult to run on a trial basis; however, changing days and times are just a matter of changing a sticker on the signs.

Ryan Somma asked Chris Coon to elaborate on every day. Chris Coon said the policy was prior to 2014, when there was only a Town population of 500 people. Business owners had said it was done previously and that didn't work out. He said he will ask the Town Maintenance Supervisor about the history.

Daryl Hawkins asked if the business owners were against the policy. Eliot Perkins noted the survey indicated that Friday, Saturday, Sunday had 50% of respondents having difficulty or over. Wednesday and Thursday this dropped to 30%. Daryl Hawkins asked if this data came strictly from business owners. Chris Coon had reached out to business guild for input.

Eliot Perkins said the Town will have a meeting to let all stakeholders have their say, to hear the challenges, explain the why's, and see if the business community is behind it. Eliot Perkins noted that, while it is normal for people to object, the Planning Commission must make recommendations based on the best interest of the Town, and having cars circle looking for a spot and then leave Town is in no ones best interests. Eliot Perkins stated that Wayfinding is a good solution but does not address the issue of people working at businesses parking on the street; an incentive for off-street parking is needed. Eliot Perkins also stated the need to consider whether enforcement goes beyond Mill Street so that parking challenges on Mill St do not spread to other parts of the historic district.

Jenn Mathis recommended making this as minimally invasive as possible and do this incrementally by first implementing the policy on Mill Street. If that goes well and there are no other issues, then stop there. Chris Coon said it would be easier to take it off Mill St if limited implementation.

Jenn Mathis asked if there were questions from the Town Council as to why we need timed parking. Eliot Perkins said that some members may have recollections of how this did not work in the past. The Town Council has requested details on how many signs and what the signs will specifically say and the Planning Commission needs to be prepared to answer all Town Council questions and objections. Eliot Perkins would like to have a list of questions to put before Town Council that Planning Commission can answer, and asked that each Planning Commission member prepare specific questions that need to be answered for the next meeting.

Jenn Mathis said that when it comes to enforcement that Chief Lynn may have the best insights on given the very recent ruling on the illegality of chalking tires for timed parking enforcement. Chris Coon said the police can take pictures of the vehicles both for timed parking violations and other parking violations such as double parking.

Eliot Perkins asked how much additional officer time Chief Lynn would need for enforcement and how much will it cost. There is a need to make sure the enforcement can take place with the resources he has. Chris Coon said he had already spoken with Chief Lynn, who believed he could get volunteer enforcement from some officers who work the Craft Show.

Jenn Mathis said that one additional thing the Town could do to address parking issues is to organize events outside of the peak traffic days of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. If the Town could be cognizant when scheduling events and bring visitors in on off-peak times like Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Chris Coon said they were in the process of starting something like that but noted that it is difficult to have the types of events planned by the Town on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The Planning Commission concurred that feedback from restaurants on events such as 'Restaurant Week' would be a good idea.

Eliot Perkins reported on the wayfinding pieces and that the Town was seeking to have signs in by September. This will involve Architectural Review Board approval, and a sign inventory is currently underway by Chris Coon to find signs that will meet the needs.

Eliot Perkins brought up the issue of parking space widths, noting that wider parking spaces make people happier and more comfortable, but at a cost of roughly 13 spots. Chris Coon said he had asked Kathy Leidich to reach out to VDOT to see what requirements are for changing parking widths. Daryl Hawkins said that VDOT would be concerned with how the parking spaces affect the right-of-way as it relates to turning space, as the wider the spots the less turning space you need. Daryl Hawkins said that between each block there are different needs, and widths should address the needs at each block. Eliot Perkins asked if VDOT does that kind of customization. Daryl Hawkins answered no. He said that the Town could possibly concentrate kinds of vehicles into appropriate parking widths, such as "compact cars only" spaces. Eliot Perkins asked Chris Coon to see if we could have variation in kinds of cars and if VDOT would allow this.

Jenn Mathis suggested the parking space width question be viewed from the aspect of the "Occoquan experience," in which case there would be a strong desire to avoid a negative experience concerning tight parking and door dings. Jenn Mathis noted that one of the focuses of town officials should be to make visiting an enjoyable experience to increase the likelihood of return visits, and that if that means

sacrificing a few spaces, then it's worth it. Eliot Perkins said the spots are too small, and he was interested in exploring possibility of spots for bigger vehicles. Daryl Hawkins said the Town could enforce parking lengths, and if someone is over the line then it's a violation.

There were no updates on Strategic Relationship Building or the CIP.

5. Chair/Town Council Report

Eliot Perkins noted the Town Council had discussed wayfinding and parking pieces. He told the Town Council that after the next Planning Commission meeting we would produce a document with multiple options for improving the parking situation in the historic district.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Eliot Perkins
Chair, Planning Commission

Submitted by Ryan Somma, Planning Commission Secretary