



TOWN OF OCCOQUAN
Town Hall – 314 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125
MEETING DATE: 2019-07-09

MEETING TIME: 6:30 PM

Present: Ann Kisling, Jenn Mathis, Eliot Perkins, Ryan Somma

Absent: Daryl Hawkins

1. Call to Order

The Planning Commission Public Hearing was called to order by Eliot Perkins on 2019-07-09, at 6:33 p.m.

Secretary for Meeting

Ryan Somma took minutes for the meeting.

2. Citizen Comments

There were no citizens comments.

3. Approval of Minutes of 2019-05-28.

Ann Kisling moved to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes of 2019-05-28. Jenn Mathis seconded the motion. The motion carried.

4. Staff Presentation

Town Staff presented the Commission with the concept of the floor-to-area ratio (FAR), a zoning tool that establishes how many floors a building may have in relation to its footprint that can also be used to toggle up and down parking. The planning tool leaves it up to the developer to decide their height to area ratio for parking.

Eliot Perkins asked if FAR was used broadly. Staff confirmed it is used broadly and could help address future variance requests. Jenn Mathis asked how this was different from the Town's current height and setback requirements and how adopting this could benefit the Town. Staff reported that the main advantage is tying it to parking requirements in that it provides flexibility in preventing developing past what's desired and require developers provide adequate parking. Ryan Somma noted this would help in the Planning Commission's interest in strengthening the language on variances.

5. Planning Commission Priorities Update

o Beautification, Town Entrances, Streetscaping

Eliot Perkins extended thanks to the volunteers who helped de-weed the 123 entrance and volunteer efforts will continue and expand to other areas in Town. Some trees did not survive and the landscaper will replace them for the fall growing season.

Anne Kisling reported on signage for the Town's entrances. She took pictures of entrances while on a trip to Coeur d'Alene and tried to apply those designs to Occoquan, putting Occoquan's name on several sample entrances. She said that, to her, Occoquan is the river, the mill, and the stones. It's an earthy rustic historic town, so nothing new and flashy. She then provided many different photographs of existing entrances with Occoquan branding placed over them for the Planning Commission to review.

Eliot Perkin said the existing signage does not reflect the Town's character. Ryan Somma said he liked the idea of a millstone for the "O" in Occoquan and the byline "at the end of the water."

Jenn Mathis said that having visuals was very helpful. The new Town logo would need to be considered for signage. She appreciated the inclusion of stone and the trail sign for use at Mom's Apple Pie where there is a large walking area. The sign would also be perfect for the Old Bridge Road entrance when sidewalk is completed there.

Ryan Somma asked about the timing of new Town logo. Chris Coon said it would be soon, but was intended for use in advertising. Lauri Holloway, present in the audience, said that, from ARB point of view, they would like to get the town seal off signage as it is small and hard to read. Jenn Mathis said this is like how the Commonwealth of Virginia has a seal, but instead uses the "Virginia is for lovers" branding everywhere instead.

6. Parking and Traffic Report

Jenn Mathis presented a draft parking recommendations document she had drafted. She noted that the items within it did not reflect a consensus among Planning Commission members, and that some math was based on best-guesses. She believed the Town Council wanted two to three recommendations to discuss and implement.

She said the document starts off stating the problem. That there is a perception that Occoquan is a small town with limited parking and tight spaces. People come into town, look for parking and leave. It then goes on to explain why this matters. That Town businesses provide tax revenues and that the Town needs businesses to thrive. Eliot Perkins said that now that there are events in town, we want people to come to the park, kayak launch, and businesses. Parking impacts events too. Jenn Mathis said that improving the Occoquan experience results in repeat visitors and more tax revenue.

Jenn Mathis noted the question, "Why can't we just do nothing?" was legitimate. The 2017 study showed four-hour turnover and indicated this was ideal, but that changes to density would require town to revisit this. Acting now gives the Town time to test policies.

The objective is to increase town revenue with more happy visitors, ensure parking is for revenue-generating vehicles, and implement actions that pay for themselves like auxiliary officers and revenues from parking fines.

To measure whether these actions are successful, the Town should see increase in meal tax revenue from existing businesses. If there is no measurable impact, then there would be a need to reevaluate.

Eliot Perkins said the report needs to mention groups of folks exacerbating the situation, which are existing business patrons and event visitors. There is a consistent issue of business staff parking on the street and that staff parking in front of each other's businesses generates strife in the community. He said it was important to reiterate Jenn Mathis' point that the Mill at Occoquan will increase demand on parking with additional visitors and shops.

Jenn Mathis gave an overview of possible solutions. One option was to not widen parking spaces, which saves 13 spaces, but causes a negative experience with door dings and vehicle access. Chris Coon has people coming into town hall looking for car owners because they can't get into their cars. There was also an option to relocate Town Hall parking to a lot or allow after-hours parking. This would free up three spaces, but staff would have to walk further. Another option was to implement a four-hour street parking limit during those times the study found to be the worst.

Eliot Perkins noted a four-hour limit starting at eight am tickets at noon at the earliest. Starting at 11am tickets at 3pm. If someone is parking overnight, they would have to vacate their parking by lunchtime. Ending at 6pm allows for visitors to enjoy dinner and a movie.

Jenn Mathis said in that context 8am makes a lot more sense. The positive aspect of this proposal is that it provides more parking spaces and addresses the most critical issues. The negative is that it impacts business and property owners and pushes them to other streets instead of lots.

Eliot Perkins said the survey responses indicate businesses recognize the problem. Spots should be open to visitors. The Town can solve the problem of people moving to commerce if it comes up at a later point.

Jenn Mathis gave an overview of several timed parking options. 24/7 four-hour street parking on Mill Street would address the issue of vehicles camping out, but this was more invasive and would cost more. Eliot Perkins said eight to eight everyday was an option. Jenn Mathis said an additional negative of 24/7 enforcement are the impacts to residents who do not have off-street parking. The option of 24/7 enforcement on the entire historic district would eliminate the issue of spillover, but was very invasive and may negatively impact residents. Chris Coon recommended changing "24/7" to "7 days a week" so that officers aren't ticketing at 3am.

Jenn Mathis said another option was timed limited paid parking. It would generate revenue, but was highly unpopular, even with Planning Commission. Eliot Perkins said it was a good fit for other communities, but not Occoquan.

Jenn Mathis said another option was to direct town-planned events to target off-peak visitor hours. Businesses need visitors during off-peak hours. Town Events that draw visitors for restaurants that are open for breakfast rather than bringing in visitors during peak times.

Chris Coon said he met with business owners and the events group. The Town Visitor Center will go away and the Town will lease building and use it for a shuttle service. Costs would be managed with a grant for a bus and off-duty bus drivers could drive. Business owners have asked for this in the past. The service would be April through December on Saturdays and well-advertised. Combine this service with parking limits so that regular visitors will know about shuttle and new visitors will have an easy time parking.

Jenn Mathis said that when she met with the PWC development people, there was a discussion about the role of VDOT in using the commuter lots and how they would be open to that.

There was a discussion about costs for the project. Chris Coon said it was difficult to get grant dollar estimates, but could get numbers on leasing. Jenn Mathis said there were two questions: what is cost of the project and how do you pay for it with grants and leasing income and that it should be possible to get a stick-figure of the cost. Chris Coon said the stick figure is \$20k a year, leasing is \$24k a year and that the project should be self-containing. The only way it would work is if Visitor Center rental income would be cover shuttle. The Business Guild would help. Losing the Visitor Center also loses the public restrooms on that side of town, so one condition would be to keep those opened. Jenn Mathis provided the example of a shop getting reduced rent for keeping bathrooms public.

Eliot Perkins asked if there was a middle ground on the parking restriping, 8.5 feet instead of nine? Chris Coon said the VDOT people will know what's allowed. If 8.5 isn't allowed, they will say so.

Jenn Mathis asked about the option to relocate Town Hall parking. Ryan Somma asked how staff felt about the option. Staff replied that it didn't affect them as much, but the police won't be willing to move for security reasons. Chris Coon said he was all in favor of allowing use after hours. Jenn Mathis noted that the Commission would not recommend relocation, but would allow parking after hours.

Jenn Mathis said it felt like the consensus was for the least restrictive 4-hour parking option. Eliot Perkins said this addresses biggest problem. Chris Coon said it could be expanded later with a sticker.

Jenn Mathis asked if the Commission should recommend 6pm versus 8pm for an end time? Eliot Perkins said that if someone comes home at 5pm, then they are fine. Chris Coon recommended starting at 8am to clear out at noon and that ending at 6pm lets someone come in at 2:15pm and leave their car all afternoon, so there was a small advantage for 8pm. Jenn Mathis said the Commission would recommend 8am to 8pm and that the report would include other proposals as rejected to show what was considered.

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

7. Chair/Town Council Report

Eliot Perkins said that it has been eight years since efforts began on Kayak Ramp. As part of Occoquan's connection to the water the project is important. The positive for the project is that it creates a connection to the water. A potential negative is people may put into the water and leave their cars parked in Town, but not visit town. So there is a potential cost to town.

Chris Coon said that if people use it and don't visit town, then we are losing parking spaces. If people don't use it then the money is wasted. The Planning Commission should talk about it and make sure this is something people want.

Eliot Perkins said that as a town we are trying to increase the use of the water and bikes. The ramp makes Occoquan more of a hub for these activities. Anne Kisling asked about the ramp providing free public access. Jenn Mathis said the Town can't charge because of the grant. Chris Coon said this would be the only ADA compliant ramp in PWC. Planning Commission members all noted that they all have kayaks and are biased to want the ramp.

Jenn Mathis said that the ramp is in the spirit of the comprehensive plan and our identity connected to the water. If the project took a long time and wasn't so connected, then she could see revisiting it. This project is so connected to the town, she sees no need to revisit. She does not want to set a precedent of revisiting things that take a long time.

Chris Coon said the issue may come up of the Planning Commission adding timed parking but giving up parking for a ramp. Jenn Mathis said that everything the Commission is doing is about promoting visitors to Occoquan. Having a ramp promotes visitors. This is the heart of everything we do. We have no control over visitors using the ramp and not visiting town as with other attractions in Town, but this is the heart of everything we do. Eliot Perkins said we want to create an environment where people come to Occoquan and want to stay. Eliot Perkins noted there was agreement among the Commission members and no need to revisit the issue.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Eliot Perkins
Chair, Planning Commission

Submitted by Ryan Somma, Planning Commission Secretary