

Dozens at Hearing Oppose Plan Update

Planners Defer Vote, Keep Record Open



Former planning director Greg Bowen talked about preserving agricultural land.

By Dick Myers
Editor

The Calvert County Planning Commission held a public hearing Feb. 26 on the third draft of the update of the county's comprehensive plan. The commission's responsibility is to make a recommendation to the county commissioners, who also must hold a public hearing. The planning commission deferred any decision at least until their March 20 meeting and kept the record open at least until then.

The third draft and the public hearing on it were the culmination of more than two years of intense work by the commission, planning staff and the consultants hired to craft it. But judging from the majority of the more than three dozen comments from the packed house at the Calvert Pines Senior Center in Prince Frederick, the planners still have some work to do.

Towards the end of the two hours of public comments, Mariam Gholl of Keep Calvert Country asked for a show of hands of those who opposed the plan or who felt more work needed to be done. Most of the audience raised their hands. "Please listen to the citizens," she said.

It was reported that more than 1,000 citizens logged in their feelings with written comments and Planning Commission Chairman Greg Kernan said many had been received in the past few days.

Less than a half dozen people who testified showed even some support for the plan. The bulk of the opposition centered around fears the plan will allow for too much additional development with expanded town center boundaries. And there were multiple speakers who felt the plan should not proceed until completion of a transportation plan and town centers shouldn't be expanded until work is done on the individual town center master

plans, so citizens there have a say.

Emotions were high. Newcomer Patricia Simpson said, "I moved here because I felt the soul of this community." She said that soul was at stake with the potential population increase allowed by the plan.

But plan opponents were cordial to those who spoke in support, giving tepid applause after. One plan supporter, Kirby Alexander, said if communities don't grow, they stagnate. Noting some people want no growth, he said, "There is always something amazing about that next person who comes through the door."

Robert Daniel of Prince Frederick moved to the county 24 years ago because of the friendliness, quality of life, rural environment and schools. He said they agreed to endure the hour commutes to the city to take advantage of those positives. His comments were well received when he said of the plan, "It seeks to destroy every reason why my wife and I moved to Calvert County."

Several speakers talked about what they perceived as the plan's failure to achieve one of its goals: preserving agricultural land and the county's rural character. Former planning director Greg Bowen said the plan didn't take into consideration the potential for development of the thousands of undeveloped recorded lots on the books.

Former county commissioner and state agriculture secretary Hagner Myster touted the county's agriculture preservation programs from the past, including its landmark transfer of development rights (TDR) program. The county Farm Bureau presented proposals for incorporating those concerns about TDRs in the plan.

Gary Lowe, a member of the board of directors of the American Chestnut Land Trust, also noted the plan's lack of mention of TDRs and decried the plan's setting aside of measures that have worked



Members of the planning commission listen intently to the testimony.

in previous plans.

The proposed update when ultimately approved by the county commissioners will supplant one originally adopted in 2004 and modified in 2010 and 2016. State requirements call for the process to

be complete by 2020, which has prompted some plan opponents to note there is no rush to complete it.

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