

The Poquoson Planning Commission met in a work session on Monday, October 20, 2014 at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers located at 500 City Hall Avenue.

PRESENT: Commissioner Bonnie W. Shriver, Chairwoman
Commissioner William J. Travis, Vice Chairman
Commissioner Richard D. Clifton, Member
Commissioner James K. Titlow, Member
Commissioner Gustavus A. Goddin, Member

Deborah L. Vest, Director of Community Development
Kevin M. Wyne, Planner
Victoria H. Diggs, Clerk

ABSENT: Commissioner Gregory N. Gardy, Member
Commissioner Shawn M. Avery, Member

Chairwoman Shriver called the session to order and asked Kevin Wyne, City Planner, to present the draft Sign and Zoning Ordinance amendments.

Electronic Message Signs:

At a City Council work session in September, staff presented various options for consideration to allow the use of electronic messages in the City. At the conclusion of the session, Council agreed that this type of sign should be initially available only to City government and the Schools contingent upon adherence to specific restrictions. He presented the following definition for electronic message signs:

“a type of sign or portion thereof that is capable of displaying words, symbols or alphanumeric characters which are defined by a small number of matrix elements using different combinations of light emitting diodes (LEDs), fiber optics, light bulbs, plasma display screens or other illumination devises that can be electronically or automatically programmed and may be changed by remote or automatic means.”

Mr. Wyne also presented the following stipulations for electronic signs as was requested by Council at the aforementioned work session:

- Images shall be static and shall not fade, dissolve, scroll, move or simulate movement in any way.
- Messages shall remain static for eight (8) seconds.

- Each transition from one (1) message to a subsequent one shall be immediate with no fade, dissolve, scroll, etc.
- Combined area of the electronic portion and the regularly permitted sign shall not exceed 48 square feet, which is an increase of 8 square feet above that which is permissible for traditional freestanding signs and the electronic portion shall not exceed 32 square feet.
- If located within 250 feet of a residential district, these signs must be dark from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
- Height restrictions will be relaxed for signs to be built above the BFE in a flood zone.

The City Planner pointed out that any electronic sign that displays lights of changing intensity will also be prohibited. He stated that should the City choose to erect such a sign along Victory Boulevard, it will require approval by the Architectural Review Board (ARB). Lastly he stated that the proposed amendment will allow fueling stations to utilize LED or other static electronic displays for the sole purpose of advertising fuel prices.

The Commissioners commented that these signs would be of benefit to the City and the residents especially during severe weather and emergency events as well as to publicize multiple City events.

During the Commission's discussion, the following remarks and/or concerns were expressed regarding these signs:

- They are often garish and distracting.
- Stipulations should be included in the amendment requiring regular upkeep/maintenance.
- Is this a good use of tax dollars as these signs are very expensive?
- Staff should seek input from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) regarding how long each message should be displayed.
- Messages should always be current.
- Safeguards should be included to ensure that the illumination intensity of these signs does not adversely affect vehicular traffic and adjacent properties.

R-3 Multi-Family Residential Reduction of Setbacks:

Mr. Wyne introduced a proposed amendment to the Zoning Ordinance allowing for a reduction in setbacks in the R-3 District. He stated that in the past decade, plans had been submitted for two townhome developments, Village Park and Firth Lane Townhomes, which had faced several challenges due to the required setbacks in the R-3 District. He explained

that the following modifications are being proposed which are more in line with the allowable yield of 12 units per acre in the R-3 District:

- ✓ Front yard with a front loading garage - 20 feet.
- ✓ Front yard with a rear loading garage - 10 feet.
- ✓ Rear yard with a rear loading garage - 20 feet.
- ✓ Rear yard with a front loading garage – 20 feet.
- ✓ Side yard: 10 feet and minimal building separation of 20 feet.
- ✓ Side yard with a side loading garage – 20 feet.

He pointed out that the proposed setbacks are consistent with the setbacks for townhomes and two-family developments in the Planned Unit Development-Mixed Use Overlay District. In conclusion, he stated that staff is recommending elimination of the minimum unit area requirement in the R-3 District so that the maximum allowable density will determine the shape and layout of each development.

VC-Village Commercial District Amendments:

The City Planner stated that in 2011 residential uses were reintroduced to the Village Commercial District and more recently the Planned Unit Development - Mixed Use Overlay was created to encourage a mix of varying density residential uses with retail and office uses. The purpose of this amendment he explained is to introduce a standalone residential component in the VC District in order to create a center of business and economic activity consistent with the locational advantage and prominence inherent in the Big Woods. Mr. Wyne stated that the allowance of standalone residential structures without requiring the five acre minimum lot requirement or approval of a master plan would allow the VC to act as an independent PUD-MU. In this proposed concept, a Conditional Use Permit would allow townhomes, single family detached, two-family dwelling and multi-family dwellings on a standalone basis, as long as a specified commercial development ratio is met.

The City Planner stated that staff proposes the following setbacks for townhomes, single family and two-family dwellings in the VC District:

- 15 foot front yard setback with a front loading garage.
- 10 foot front yard setback with no garage or a rear loading garage.
- No side or rear yard setbacks would be required except for a rear loading garage in which case a 15 foot setback would be required.

He further stated that multi-family dwellings would be held to the same setbacks as commercial buildings in the Village Commercial District.

During the Commission's discussion concern was expressed about the possible inadequacy of a 15 foot front yard setback for a dwelling with a front loading garage and the importance of requiring green space either in front of or behind residential structures dependent upon the location of the garage.

In conclusion, Mr. Wyne stated that the three proposed amendments would be advertised for public hearings on December 1st for the Planning Commission and December 8th for the City Council.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:30 p.m.

ADOPTED: December 1, 2014

ATTESTE: Victoria H. Diggs
Victoria H. Diggs, Clerk