



Clarke County Planning Commission

MINUTES – Policy & Transportation Committee Meeting

Wednesday, June 14, 2023 – 2:00PM

Berryville/Clarke County Government Center – A/B Meeting Room

ATTENDANCE:			
Buster Dunning (White Post)	✓	Gwendolyn Malone (Berryville)	✓
Bob Glover (Millwood)	✓	George L. Ohrstrom, II (Ex Officio)	✓
Scott Kreider (Buckmarsh)	✓		

STAFF PRESENT: Brandon Stidham (Director of Planning)

CALL TO ORDER: By Mr. Stidham at 2:01PM.

1. Approval of Agenda

A motion to approve the agenda as presented by Staff was approved unanimously.

Motion to approve meeting agenda as presented by Staff:			
Dunning	AYE	Malone	AYE
Glover	AYE	Ohrstrom	AYE (moved)
Kreider	AYE (seconded)		

2. Approval of Minutes – March 22, 2023 Meeting

A motion to approve the March 22, 2023 meeting minutes as presented by Staff was approved unanimously.

Motion to approve March 22, 2023 meeting minutes as presented by Staff:			
Dunning	AYE	Malone	AYE
Glover	AYE	Ohrstrom	AYE (moved)
Kreider	AYE (seconded)		

3. Continued Discussion, Transportation Plan Update

Mr. Stidham began the discussion by reviewing the Committee’s work plan for the Transportation Plan Update.

Mr. Stidham noted that Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) staff indicated that improvement projects located entirely within town boundaries are not required to be included in the County’s transportation plan. Chair Ohrstrom asked whether improvements at the intersection of East Main Street and Jack Enders Boulevard are located entirely within Berryville town limits and Mr. Stidham replied yes. Mr. Stidham also noted that the southeastern collector road would be an example of a project located in both the Town and County. He added that it would be a good idea to include guidance language in the updated plan to determine which future projects to support and when to select projects for funding applications. Chair Ohrstrom asked if

this would be a decision tree and Mr. Stidham replied that it would be something similar. Mr. Stidham provided the example of the intersection improvement project at Route 7 and Route 601 as an issue that arose unexpectedly due to development of Bear Chase Brewery in Loudoun and increased use of the Appalachian Trail during COVID. He said having guidance in the Transportation Plan would help evaluate the need for new projects and whether they should be prioritized ahead of other projects.

Commissioner Malone asked about scheduling the next meeting and noted that she would be available to meet after the July 5 Work Session. Commissioner Kreider added that he would not be available for any meetings that week. Mr. Stidham asked about scheduling a meeting the following week. Commissioner Glover replied that he would be unavailable for that week and the next week. Mr. Stidham said that we could get most of the work done at this meeting which would leave the July meeting to wrap up loose ends before working on the initial draft. Members said that July 7 following the Business Meeting would work. Members also agreed on other meetings for Wednesday, August 9 at 2:00PM and Thursday, August 24 at 10:00AM.

Mr. Stidham reviewed the proposed outline for the revised plan and noted that it will follow a similar format to the component plans that were recently updated. Chair Ohrstrom asked about statistical information from the 2020 Census. Mr. Stidham replied that he did not think he would use different information from the 2020 Census data. He noted that some more recent data sources such as commuting would likely be skewed due to COVID.

Mr. Stidham reviewed the proposed revision to the plan objectives and strategies. Regarding Objective 1, Mr. Stidham said that the County's focus on transportation improvements is ensuring safety and efficiency, not expanding capacity by building new highways and bypasses. Chair Ohrstrom said that use of the word "efficient" could be interpreted to mean making the transportation network more effective through increased capacity. Mr. Stidham suggested changing the term to "cost-efficient" to emphasize the County working within its ability to pay and members agreed with the change.

Regarding proposed Objective 1 Strategy 2, Chair Ohrstrom asked who would be charged with evaluating the list of proposed improvement projects on an annual basis. Mr. Stidham replied that it is the Board of Supervisors and added that he always found that structure to be unusual. He also noted that other counties use a transportation committee, a joint board of supervisors/planning commission committee, or the planning commission itself in this role. He also said that the County's six-year secondary road construction budget is down to a minimal annual amount that is used primarily for hard surfacing gravel roads or small safety projects. Commissioner Glover asked if language could be added to tie to the capital improvement plan (CIP). Mr. Stidham replied that the Transportation Plan would be used to guide the prioritization of projects which then would be added to the CIP. He noted that a description of how the CIP and Transportation Plan work together can be added to the introductory section of the revised Plan.

Regarding Objective 1 Strategy 3, Commissioner Glover said that some projects are good ideas that should be documented even if funding is not available for them. Mr. Stidham noted that the Route 7 pedestrian bridge project was documented in the CIP as an unfunded project which

would be a good place to include projects for which funding is not available. Commissioner Glover asked about when unfunded projects would be added to the Transportation Plan. Mr. Stidham replied that once they have been identified, they would be added to the annual review list and also to the CIP as an unfunded project. When the five-year Transportation Plan review occurs, all projects not previously noted in the Plan would be added. Mr. Stidham noted that there is not a rush to add projects to the Plan because the VDOT process takes so long to add a project for funding and construction.

Regarding Objective 1 Strategy 4 requesting VDOT to conduct safety studies, Chair Ohrstrom asked if VDOT's Millwood study should be included. Mr. Stidham replied that the list is not intended to be all-inclusive. Regarding Objective 1 Strategy 5, Chair Ohrstrom asked what is meant by "encourage voluntary provision of recommended improvements" and suggested making the language stronger. Mr. Stidham replied that the language is purposely written this way to encourage developers and landowners to do improvements that are recommended but not required by VDOT. Chair Ohrstrom asked if this would provide the authority to turn down an application if the applicant does not provide the recommended improvements. Mr. Stidham replied that there must be other concerns with the proposed development to support a denial and not just refusal to provide the recommended improvements. Commissioner Glover said that deceleration lanes should be added to the list in addition to acceleration lanes. Chair Ohrstrom asked for an example of an off-site transportation improvement. Using the Rappahannock Electric Cooperative conditional zoning case as an example, Mr. Stidham said that a VDOT recommendation to contribute to the improvement of the U.S. 340/U.S. 522 intersection would be considered an off-site improvement. He added that neither VDOT nor the County can require off-site improvements to be provided.

Regarding Objective 2 Strategy 2, Chair Ohrstrom asked about whether there should be a policy on hard surfacing gravel public roads given that other counties want to preserve their gravel roads rather than paving them. He added that gravel roads typically have less traffic. Mr. Stidham noted that the rural rustic paving program does not include realignment of gravel roads as it is a pave-in-place program only. Commissioner Dunning noted that you drive more carefully on dirt roads and hard surfacing them in place can cause speeding dangers. Commissioner Glover suggested including language about erosion control and runoff on gravel roads. Mr. Stidham said that he would add "address stormwater impacts." Regarding the introduction to Objective 2, Chair Ohrstrom asked if this paragraph could be divided into two sentences, and Mr. Stidham replied that it can be rewritten as a bulleted list. Mr. Stidham also noted that there are not many gravel public roads remaining in the County. Commissioner Glover asked if the County has any say over which roads get paved. Mr. Stidham replied that it is our choice whether to designate rural rustic program funding to pave a gravel road and added that there is a minimum traffic threshold to qualify a road for the program. Commissioner Glover asked when residents are consulted about hard surfacing and Mr. Stidham responded that there is a public hearing required for annual adoption of the six-year secondary construction budget. Mr. Stidham also said that it would be a good idea to add language to solicit public comment from residents on whether to pave their gravel roads.

Regarding Objective 2 Strategy 3, Chair Ohrstrom asked whether it would be appropriate to add a recommendation that cyclists take measures to improve their visibility such as attaching flags

to their bikes. Mr. Stidham replied that he does not believe we should be promoting cycling on secondary roads that are narrow and unsafe for cyclists. He added that cyclists can be safety impediments themselves especially when you encounter them over a blind hill.

Chair Ohrstrom asked where Objective 2 Strategy 4 regarding private access easements came from and Mr. Stidham replied that it was his recommendation. Mr. Stidham replied that property owners wanting their private roads hard surfaced or maintained has not been a problem in the County historically but is a common problem in other counties.

Mr. Stidham stated that the changes to the objectives and strategies do not need to be finalized today and that members are welcome to add any issues that he may have missed. Regarding Objective 3 Strategy 3, Chair Ohrstrom noted that the second "in" in the second line should be changed to "of." Mr. Stidham said that he would make the correction. Members had no other issues or concerns with the draft changes.

Mr. Stidham reviewed the chart of current and proposed projects. He noted that the seven projects in the current Plan are not prioritized and Staff has included three new projects for the Committee to consider including. He noted that most of the current projects were originally scoped in the 1990s and have not been vetted in detail for many years other than the cost estimates. He then described each project in detail.

Regarding the US 50/17 and US 340 intersection project, Mr. Stidham noted that some of the issues with the intersection may have been addressed with recent developments such as the HandyMart complex. He added that for the most part there are not a significant amount of safety concerns with this intersection. Chair Ohrstrom said that the right turn lane from US 50 to Berryville used to be an issue. Commissioner Glover said that it is a bit of a mess getting into the gas station but visibility and most turn lanes seem to be good. Mr. Stidham added that if the northeastern corner is redeveloped, the entrances and turn lanes would have to be brought up to current standards. He also said that the property on the northeastern corner could be limited to a right-in only off of US 50 and a right-out only onto US 340.

Regarding the Route 7 and Shepherds Mill Road intersection, Chair Ohrstrom asked if a traffic signal is planned. Mr. Stidham replied that VDOT is actually planning to block the intersection to prevent left turns from Shepherds Mill Road onto eastbound Route 7, requiring eastbound traffic to go west and make a U-turn at the next crossover at Hawthorne Lane.

Regarding the property at the northeastern corner of the US50/17 and US 340 intersection, Commissioner Dunning asked if the property is sold would the owner have to disclose that the property must be rezoned. Mr. Stidham replied that the property is already zoned Highway Commercial. Commissioner Dunning clarified that he was referring to the entrances having to be updated and Mr. Stidham replied that VDOT would require this at the time of redevelopment. Chair Ohrstrom said that if a new buyer operates the property in the same manner, VDOT would not require any changes. Mr. Stidham provided an example of VDOT's current review of a potential development in Double Tollgate and the upgrades to current entrances that they will require. Regarding the Route 7 and Shepherds Mill Road intersection, Commissioner Kreider said that years ago VDOT tried to take land at the northeastern corner and lost a lawsuit against

the property owner. Mr. Stidham said that all VDOT can do now is prevent the property owner from expanding the business without providing upgrades.

Commissioner Glover suggested that the project list should be prioritized. Mr. Stidham asked what the members thought about tying prioritization to VDOT's review and recommendations on each project. He noted that aside from Route 7/Shepherds Mill Road, VDOT has not reviewed any of the projects in recent years. Chair Ohrstrom said that Objective 1 Strategy 4 would support this suggestion. Commissioner Glover said that in the meantime, the largest projects should be included at the top of the list because currently one of the smaller projects is at the top. Mr. Stidham suggested grouping them by area and Chair Ohrstrom said that Mr. Stidham should organize them how he sees fit. Mr. Stidham replied that if he were to create his own priority list, the projects would be:

1. Double Tollgate intersection (US 340/277 and US 522)
2. Route 7 and Shepherds Mill Road (Rt. 612)
3. East Main Street (Bus. Rt. 7) from Route 7 to railroad crossing in Town of Berryville
4. West Main Street (Bus. Rt. 7) from Route 7 to Hermitage Blvd. in Town of Berryville
5. Waterloo intersection (US 50/17 and US 340)
6. US 340 drainage improvements in Town of Boyce
7. Future park-and-ride lot on Route 7 one mile west of Town of Berryville

Mr. Stidham noted that the three proposed projects are each supported by a study. He added that the Route 7/Route 601 intersection improvement project was not approved for SmartScale funding. Commissioner Glover asked if VDOT was going to do some minor short-term improvements and Mr. Stidham replied yes.

Mr. Stidham stated that the Town of Berryville's southeastern collector road project is going to be a big discussion topic not just for this Plan update but also for the Berryville Area Plan update. He said that a 2020 memo containing County Staff's concerns is included for the Committee's review, adding that there is some merit to including the project in the Plan subject to some caveats. Chair Ohrstrom stated that he agrees with Staff's concerns beginning on Page 20 of 22 and added that these concerns are likely the reason why the Board of Supervisors is not interested in proceeding with the project. He added that the Town still wants this project to move forward. Mr. Stidham said that the collector road project has a larger impact than the area studied by PrimeAE and added that pass-through traffic would create issues on East Main Street as GPS would likely route eastbound traffic to the collector road. Chair Ohrstrom noted that GPS routes southbound traffic on West Main Street to Hermitage Boulevard. Commissioner Glover noted that the collector road would not be constructed because of development but to disperse traffic. Mr. Stidham noted that traffic on Jack Enders Boulevard is currently intermittent but the collector road could cause a steady stream of traffic that would impact residential areas.

Commissioner Glover said that the Town is growing as is downtown traffic and the collector road could make a difference. He added that the project should be included somewhere in the Plan. Mr. Stidham said if you were going to build the collector road, you should do the East Main Street widening project first. He added that the challenge for this project is that the south

side of East Main Street is state-owned Clermont which is in conservation easement meaning that the widening would have to come from the residential properties on the north side of the road. Mr. Stidham then asked the members how they want to deal with this project. Chair Ohrstrom suggested having it vetted through the Berryville Area Plan process. Mr. Stidham noted that the collector road project has not been reviewed by VDOT at all. Chair Ohrstrom said that the option of extending Jack Enders Boulevard into the Smallwood property and ending it in a cul-de-sac makes the most sense. He added that you have to do something with East Main Street. Commissioner Glover suggested making the statement that the collector road project should not be pursued until the East Main Street project is addressed. Commissioner Kreider said that he is concerned with the cut-through traffic but he does not know of a better area to have a collector road. Mr. Stidham said that he would contend that our local traffic is a drop in the bucket compared to the pass-through traffic.

Mr. Stidham said that he provided the project list to the Sheriff's Office and Travis Sumption recommended adding the Route 7 and Kimble Road intersection as a new project. He noted that VDOT's Route 7 corridor study did not identify any issues with this intersection. Committee members suggested that Mr. Stidham get more information from Deputy Sumption about his concerns with the intersection. Commissioner Glover said that there is a lot going on at that intersection with multiple businesses and traffic trying to cross Route 7.

Mr. Stidham asked members if they had any other questions about the draft project list or other materials discussed. Commissioner Glover asked Mr. Stidham to send out a confirmation of the upcoming meeting dates. Mr. Stidham noted that the Committee finished reviewing all of the materials today and he anticipated that the July meeting would be needed to finish the materials. He suggested not having the July meeting and authorizing Staff to develop an initial draft for review in August. Members agreed with this approach.

Commissioner Kreider asked if the Friant property development is on hold. Mr. Stidham provided the Committee with an update and members had a brief discussion about the project. Commissioner Malone asked about development on Route 7 west of Berryville and Chair Ohrstrom replied that this is part of the gas pipeline upgrade project that has been going on throughout the County. Commissioner Glover asked about a drainpipe on westbound Route 7 just after the Shenandoah River bridge. Commissioner Kreider replied that someone hit the drainpipe and it has been that way for years.

ADJOURN: Meeting was adjourned by consensus at 3:24PM.



Brandon Stidham, Clerk