**Town of Washington**

**Planning Commission Meeting**

**Monday April 25, 2022**

**Approved Minutes**

In attendance: Drew Beard, Judy DeSarno, Caroline Anstey, Jeanne Kauffmann and Constance Bruce. Deb Harris, Architectural Review Board Secretary, was also in attendance.

Chair Caroline Anstey opened the meeting at 7:05 PM. Caroline began with the first order of business which was adopting the agenda for the evening. Judy moved. Jeanne seconded. All voted in favor. Next was the approval of the minutes from the March meeting. Judy moved to approve the minutes, Jeanne seconded, and all voted in favor.

Old Business

1. Solar Panels

The Planning Commission briefly discussed sections of the Virginia Code related to solar panels that had been highlighted to the group by the Zoning Administrator. Jeanne mentioned that we had concluded the previous meeting assuming that local ordinances could not restrict roof-based solar as they were allowed by-right. Deb clarified that the code was state level guidance which empowers historic communities to restrict solar panels if they violate height/setback requirements or other architectural requirements unique to those locations. The PC briefly discussed the visual implications of roof-based solar on Town. Deb and other members of the PC emphasized how technology was improving the appearance of roof-based solar and recommended instead focusing restrictions on ground-based solar panels that would potentially have a bigger impact on viewsheds in the community.

Caroline suggested a sentence be inserted into the general ordinance that reiterates the state code as it relates to roof-based solar and defer specific aesthetic requirements to the Town’s Architectural Review Board who is presently working to revise their own guidelines.

Returning to the issue of ground-based solar, Drew mentioned that the PC had decided to recommend screening requirements for ground-based installations similar to what had been decided for pools. Deb added that ground-based solar, compared to roof-based, for residential purposes was a poorer option with more limitations. Moreover, the number of panels needed to power each Town residence was likely to be small and therefore better suited for roof-based.

After further discussion, it was determined that an ordinance would need to address residential, commercial, and institutional uses, as Town government buildings and infrastructure may also pursue solar power in the future. Jeanne asked if we should be more restrictive in the ordinance to give legal weight to the issue. After some additional discussion, the PC decided that an ordinance should specify ARB approval prior to receiving a building permit for roof-based solar, while ground-based solar would need to adhere to screening restrictions similar to pools.

1. Swimming Pools

The PC next discussed several questions supplied by the Zoning Administrator regarding a pool ordinance. It was agreed that the recommended definitions should be included in the ordinance and that pools or spas within or part a structure would still need to adhere to the screening requirements. The Zoning Administrator had also raised a community concern about the number of fences that screening requirements might create in Town. After discussion, the PC agreed that the ordinance should specify both natural fencing (i.e. landscaping) as well as structural, with the ARB having final approval over specifics.

1. Next Steps With Comp Plan

Caroline mentioned that she did not anticipate anything related to the Rush River development for our consideration in the near future. She also asked if the PC thought we should hire a researcher to assist in revising and writing the new Comp Plan. All agreed that was a good idea given the group’s workload and other commitments, and Judy recommended asking Town Council for up to $15,000.

The PC concluded their meeting with a discussion of summer schedules. Caroline clarified that members can attend remotely (via video or conference call) but only when there is an in-person quorum. The next meeting was agreed to in May, but June will likely be cancelled due to travel with other summer meetings potentially postponed.

There being no other business to address, Jeanne moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:50, Constance seconded, and all voted in favor.

Signed:

Drew Beard

Secretary of the Town of Washington Planning Commission