

April 7, 2005

PRESENT: Dr. Charles W. Curry, Chairman  
Charles C. Schooley, Vice Chairman  
Bruce M. Bowman  
Kitra A. Shiflett  
Larry C. Howdyshell  
Betty Jo Hamilton  
Mark Grove  
William Bashaw  
Garland Martin  
Larry Shiflett  
Beatrice B. Cardelicchio

OTHERS PRESENT: Kay Frye  
Becky Earhart  
Rhonda G. Henderson, Director of Planning for Rockingham County  
Charles Ahrend, Board of Supervisors for Rockingham County

ABSENT: Clay Hewitt  
Dale L. Cobb

VIRGINIA: Meeting of the Agricultural Task Force Committee held on Thursday, April 7, 2005, at 7:00 P.M., in the County Government Center, Verona, Virginia.

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Chairman Curry asked if the committee had a motion to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2005 meeting?

Mr. Bowman moved that the minutes be approved with a word correction on page two.

Mr. Martin seconded the motion, which was carried by a unanimous vote.

Ms. Earhart introduced the speakers for the night on Rockingham County's Plan for Sustainable Agriculture. Rhonda Henderson is the Director of Planning and Charles Ahrend is a member of the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors. She stated that both were involved in the drafting of the plan.

Ms. Henderson stated that Rockingham County is one of the leading agricultural counties in the State. She stated that Rockingham County is number two in poultry in the nation. She stated that it would be interesting to see in the 2007 Census how the local poultry economy changes. She stated that farmers are expressing concerns about the growing development in the area. She stated that the poultry industry has been changing from small farms to large corporate farms. She stated that farmers are finding it difficult to upgrade their poultry houses. She stated that the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors appointed 22 committee members. She stated that the

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committee represented a wide range of interests. She stated that the committee met for nine months and had one meeting a month. She stated that the committee began by gathering information. They heard presentations on local, state, and national issues and current conditions. She stated that the committee met with Dr. David Kohl an Agricultural Economist from Virginia Tech.

Ms. Henderson stated that after three months of work several key points emerged. She stated that sustainable agriculture depends on the nurture and protection of the local economy and community. She stated that sustainable agriculture is not a replacement for the globally linked process of food production, but rather it is a complement. She stated that another key point is that agriculture is not just "get big or get out". She stated that the committee wanted to make sure that did not happen. She stated that the committee wanted to keep small farms and have them be able to get land use taxation.

Ms. Henderson stated that the next step the committee took was to brainstorm ideas. She stated that they prioritized a list of challenges and pressing issues facing the farmers. She stated that the committee did not talk a lot about the positives because they wanted to focus on the negatives. She stated that they came up with 28 issues and then prioritized and consolidated them and came up with ten main issues.

Ms. Henderson stated that the committee developed a vision for their draft plan. She stated that one of the visions was that agriculture be the backbone of the community. She stated that the farm households need to be financially secure, particularly the vulnerable small to medium farms. She stated that open space is not just for open space. She stated that there has to be something produced that will make it viable. She stated that the committee thought marketing should be done to promote that connection with people.

Ms. Henderson stated that the next step was to create goals. She stated that there are three major goals. She stated they are: Regulatory Response, Financial Aspects, and Land Resources. She stated that with the Regulatory Response the committee looked at what Rockingham County could do for the farmers. She stated that the committee came up with a list of actions to help preserve agriculture. She stated that the farming community needs to take action. She stated that they could use the Cooperative Extension and the Farm Bureau to help them get started, but that it needed to be farmer driven not government driven.

Ms. Henderson stated that some of the Financial Aspect actions that the committee came up with included the exploration of connections with ethnic communities for marketing local products like goats. She stated that another action was to explore and support the expansion of farmers markets.

Ms. Henderson stated that some of the Land Resource actions that the committee came up with included the increased participation in cover cropping and soil quality systems. She stated that another action was the increased participation in rotational grazing systems. She stated that

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these could be done by the local farmer. She stated that the committee needed ways to help encourage these actions or organizations that could help make these items happen.

Ms. Henderson stated that the committee recommended the establishment of a core group. She stated that the core group would consist of a variety of organizations and individuals and would play an advisory role to the County representatives. She stated that Rockingham County has not moved forward with the core group.

Ms. Henderson stated that Rockingham County rewrote their Subdivision Ordinance. She stated that she had a copy of the comparison for the committee members. She stated that the comparison lays out the differences between the old and new ordinances. She stated that when rewriting the ordinance Rockingham County looked at how they could make agriculture viable and still allow for property rights. She stated that in the future Rockingham County would like to rewrite their Zoning Ordinance to include provisions for supplemental income for farmers.

Ms. Henderson stated that the committee needs to look at the promotion of agriculture with tourism. She stated that the local government needs to be involved. She stated that the committee should look at Special Use Permits to help farmers.

Mr. Ahrend stated that the committee should promote niche farming but they have to be careful that there is not too much of it. He stated that hopefully all of the farming stays local in the valley. He stated that Rockingham County could end up looking like Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Chairman Curry asked if they studied Lancaster's Ordinance?

Ms. Henderson stated that they studied many other Ordinances, but couldn't remember if they looked at Lancaster County.

Ms. Henderson stated that Mennonite farmers take part of their land and give it to their children. She stated they are competing with developers to buy more land if they are in a growing area.

Mr. Martin stated that Morningstar needed 18 acres. He stated that at \$25,000 an acre the farmer would not sell. He stated that when they offered \$35,000 an acre the farmer was not interested in the sale, but when they offered \$50,000 an acre the farmer sold the land. He stated that the temptation was there for the farmer to sell the land for the use of industry.

Ms. Henderson stated that property away from utilities most developers will not want.

Chairman Curry stated that water and sewer is an important asset to the developer.

Mr. Shiflett stated that the Community Development department makes it easy to develop. He stated that developers are buying land and developing it very easily.

Chairman Curry asked what are the division rights in Rockingham County?

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Ms. Henderson stated that in A-1 zoning a lot can be created every five years if the parcel is over 40 acres. She stated that a parcel that is 40 acres or less cannot be divided except to family members and the property owner must hold on to it for at least five years. She stated that in A-2 zoning a lot can be created every three years as long as the parcel is over six acres. She stated that with the Subdivision Ordinance amendment they deleted the spousal division rights.

Chairman Curry asked Ms. Earhart how does this compare with Augusta County?

Ms. Earhart stated that when Augusta County created the General Agriculture and Exclusive Agriculture districts, cards were sent out asking the property owners which zoning they would prefer. She stated that Augusta County did not use soil types.

Mr. Ahrend stated that A-1 zoning is tillable land.

Ms. Earhart stated that A-1 zoning does compare to Augusta County's Exclusive Agriculture. She stated that there are more restrictions in Exclusive Agriculture in Augusta County in regards to setbacks and uses.

Ms. Henderson stated A-1 zoning is where a family division can take place. She stated that when that occurs the family member must hold on to the property for five years. She stated that there is no limitation on adjacent transfers.

Ms. Earhart stated that adjacent transfers, also known as boundary line adjustments could be one of the loopholes in Augusta County's Ordinance.

Mr. Ahrend stated that A-2 land is where the poultry houses are.

Mr. Martin asked how were small and medium farms determined?

Ms. Henderson stated that they did not get into anything that specific. She stated that Rockingham County does not care whether it is a small or large farm. She stated they encouraged all farms.

Mr. Shiflett asked about Purchase of Development Rights.

Ms. Henderson stated that not all property is appropriate for a PDR. She stated that in well established farming communities a PDR may not be needed. She stated it may be needed where the developer can extend the utilities for the property to develop. She stated that is where the Comprehensive Plan comes in to play.

Mr. Shiflett stated that in Exclusive Agriculture you could wake up one morning and land could be divided into many lots.

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Ms. Henderson stated that the edges where development is not out of the question are the places where PDRs may work. She stated that the County has to have a solid Comprehensive Plan as well as looking at the Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances. She stated that Rockingham County tried to tighten the Subdivision Ordinance.

Mr. Ahrend stated that Rockingham County requires a Special Use Permit in A-1 zoning for a dwelling. He stated that you could not use it as a rental.

Chairman Curry stated that if a son or daughter would get divorced after the five years is up then anyone could buy the property.

Ms. Shiflett asked if the subsequent buyer needed to hold the property for five years?

Ms. Henderson stated no.

Vice Chairman Schooley stated that farmers are more willing to sell when developers are offering big money. He stated that in Virginia Beach they have shorter PDRs that are for 30 to 40 years.

Mr. Howdyshell asked how many building permits are taken for the A-1 zoning?

Ms. Henderson stated that they do not breakdown building permits by A-1 and A-2 zoning. She stated that in 2003 there were 625 new homes and in 2004 there were 913 new homes. She stated that this is a huge jump. She stated that 60-70% of those numbers are sites that have public water and public sewer. She stated that 30% cover A-1 and A-2 zoning and there is no public water and sewer.

Mr. Shiflett asked if there are a lot of alternative systems?

Ms. Henderson stated that there are more alternative systems.

Vice Chairman Schooley asked if the 913 counted all of the towns in the area?

Ms. Henderson stated that it does count all of the towns plus the County.

Mr. Bowman asked if the goals are being followed through?

Ms. Henderson stated that the core group could do a lot, but it hasn't been established. She stated that there are local entities that could act as resources. She stated that Peter Mitchell, Agriculture Development Officer, from Fauquier County has done a lot for agriculture in that County. She stated that Anthony Flaccavento from Appalachian Sustainable Development coordinated a major campaign for truck farming in southwest Virginia. She stated that someone will have to organize and orchestrate the ideas and goals. She stated that it is hard for a farmer to set time aside and get started.

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Chairman Curry asked if the County got enough out of the Task Force?

Mr. Ahrend stated that the niche farming was one of the main things they looked at.

Mr. Howdysshell stated that farm families require two jobs to survive.

Ms. Henderson stated that from the case studies that they did, some farmers are making a good living.

Ms. Henderson stated that she has a number of items that staff could copy for the committee members. She stated she has a copy of the presentation, and a list of Special Use Permit commercial uses in agriculture, and the comparison of changes in the subdivision ordinance.

Chairman Curry thanked Ms. Henderson and Mr. Ahrend for attending the meeting. He stated that at the next meeting the committee will prioritize the threats and problems of agriculture. He stated that we will talk about resources that the Task Force will need as well as the Task Force actions and what the committee would like to do on strategizing. He asked the committee members to prioritize five items from each list. He stated that staff will provide dots for everyone to use.

Ms. Earhart stated that when the committee knows what they want staff to research, our new planner could do that for the committee.

Chairman Curry stated that maybe the committee can decide next time who the committee would like to meet with.

Ms. Earhart stated that the Valley Conservation Council is having a seminar on financing Purchase of Development Rights program here at the Government Center on April 19<sup>th</sup> if anyone is interested.

Chairman Curry stated that the committee was handed out flyers at the last meeting.

Ms. Shiflett asked if the committee should skip the May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting since a number of members would not be available to attend?

Chairman Curry stated that would be a good idea and if the committee needs to makeup a meeting the committee could do so. The committee agreed to cancel the May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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Chairman