

July 10, 2003

At a joint meeting of the Southampton County Board of Supervisors and the Southampton County Planning Commission held in the Social Services Multi-Purpose Room of the Southampton County Office Center at 26022 Administration Center Drive, Courtland, Virginia on July 10, 2003 at 6:00 PM

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Reggie W. Gilliam, Chairman  
Carl J. Faison  
Dallas O. Jones  
Charleton W. Sykes  
Ronald W. West  
Walter L. Young, Jr.

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Eppa J. Gray, Jr., Vice-Chairman

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Dr. Alan W. Edwards, Chairman  
Ira H. Barham, Vice-Chairman  
Benjamin J. Bryant  
Douglas A. Chesson  
Freeman J. Harrell  
Dallas O. Jones  
Oliver W. Parker  
Keith Tennessee

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

J. Michael Mann

OTHERS PRESENT

Michael W. Johnson, County Administrator  
J. Waverly Coggsdale, Assistant County Administrator  
Richard E. Railey, Jr., County Attorney  
Julia G. Williams, Finance Director  
Cynthia L. Cave, Community/Economic Development Director  
Susan H. Wright, County Administration Executive Secretary  
Steve McMullan, *Tidewater News* Reporter

Chairman Gilliam, called the meeting of the Board of Supervisors to order, and Chairman Edwards called the meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 6:20 PM. (A light dinner was provided at 6:00 PM.) The purpose of this joint meeting was for the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission to come together and discuss concerns of the County.

Chairman Edwards began by asking what topics the Board and staff discussed at their Retreat in March? Mr. Waverly Coggsdale, Assistant County Administrator, replied that the main focus was on economic development, where Southampton County's potential of becoming involved in the wine industry was briefly mentioned. He stated there was also substantial discussion regarding the County's public utilities issues. (As part of the FY 2004 Budget, the Board ultimately accepted the Utilities Management Plan of consulting firm Draper Aden Associates.)

Supervisor West initiated the topic of "road stripping", which became the primary topic of discussion for this joint meeting. "Road stripping" was a term used to refer to large parcels of agricultural land, mainly farms, being sold into several large lots with road frontage. The buyers of those lots were typically constructing one house on 5 acres of land, for example. Supervisor West stated that this practice was becoming more and more common in his district (Berlin-Ivor) and other areas in the County. He was afraid that it would hinder business and/or industrial development in those areas, especially along road frontages.

Supervisor Jones pointed out that current zoning allowed for one house to be built on 5 acres of agricultural land.

Chairman Edwards noted that Southampton County's Zoning Ordinance promoted the practice of "road stripping", while its Comprehensive Plan discouraged it.

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Commissioner Chesson stated that they needed to identify the tools that would help remedy or control “road stripping”. He thought that perhaps expanding road frontage requirements could be a possible tool.

Chairman Edwards commented that he thought a very important tool would be to get the Zoning Ordinance more in sync with the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Harrell strongly agreed and complained that the current Zoning Ordinance had allowed numerous farms, such as the Barrow Hill Farm and Williams Farm, among others, to be sold in lots with one house being built on 5-10 acre parcels.

Supervisor Jones remarked that when an individual purchased a piece of property, he wanted to do what he wanted to with it.

Commissioner Harrell stated that eventually, some of the owners of those homes on 5-10 acre parcels might want the County to provide them with water and sewer service, and it would not be feasible for the County to do so with the homes being so spread out. If there were numerous homes being built close together, on 1-acre lots for example, providing water and sewer service to those neighborhoods might be feasible.

Commissioner Tennessee pointed out that landowners had to build homes in locations where the land would perk. An individual might own 5 acres of land, but in some cases maybe only 1 of those acres would perk. You could not force a 5-acre parcel of lot to be broken into 1-acre lots if only one area of the 5 acres would perk.

Supervisor West suggested that they contact Prince George County, Isle of Wight County, and the City of Suffolk, all of whom have had success in controlling “road stripping”, find out what tools they used in doing so, and determine which of those tools might work for Southampton County.

Supervisor Young remarked that the only way to keep farm land as just that, farm land, was for it to turn a profit as such.

Supervisor West thought the practice of “road stripping” was a huge problem and that remedying it should be a top priority for the County.

Commissioner Bryant thought it was important for any solutions or remedies to the problem to be consistent and fair to all landowners. In other words, he did not think land located in certain areas of the County should be unrestricted, thereby allowing those landowners to build a house on a 5-acre agricultural parcel, for example, and land located in other areas of the County be restricted, thereby prohibiting those landowners from doing such.

Mr. Richard Railey, County Attorney, cautioned that there was no easy solution to controlling the problem and it would not take place without a lot of political involvement.

Chairman Gilliam advised that proposed solutions to control “road stripping”, whether it be changes to the current Zoning Ordinance, or whatever, should not take place without involving the public and getting their input every step of the way. He added that they had to do what their constituents wanted them to do.

The Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission agreed to revisit the topic in the near future. Chairman Edwards advised that the Planning Commission would be glad to do the research and planning involved in developing a solution to the “road stripping” situation, but would like clear direction from the Board of Supervisors on how to proceed, since they would be the governing body who would ultimately accept or reject any proposal.

On a different subject, Commissioner Parker asked if there were any industries that may potentially be interested in locating to Southampton County? He stated that regarding the widening of the road and the extension of water and sewer service to Route 671 in order to prepare for industrial development in that area, the water and sewer there would cost more than in New York, and the people in Southampton County did not make the money of those in New York. In addition, he thought that houses would eventually be built along Route 671 and hinder industrial development there.

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Ms. Cindy Cave, Community/Economic Development Director, stated that they were looking at the potential of the Agri-Business Park in attracting businesses to the area, as there was natural gas and water/sewer services there. She mentioned that they had talked about possibly changing its name to something that would reflect Southampton County's interest in attracting businesses other than just agricultural-related businesses, as the current name of the park might suggest.

Commissioner Chesson commented that he would like to see water and sewer services extended along the Route 460 corridor. Mr. Johnson explained that the Town of Stony Creek's negative vote "killed" the merger of Sussex Service Authority and Southampton County Utilities, thereby "killing" the extension of water and sewer services along the Route 460 corridor. Supervisor West remarked that that had been some time ago, and that perhaps the topic of extending those services along that corridor needed to be revisited.

Supervisor West commented that distribution centers/warehouses for Wal-Mart and other retailers were big businesses and that perhaps Southampton County could be a prime location for such. Ms. Cave informed that Target looked at Southampton County a few years ago for their distribution center that was recently built in Suffolk. She stated that there was great potential for business in Southampton County, but the County had to be ready.

In conclusion, Mr. Coggsdale stated that he thought the joint meeting had been a great starting point for the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission to "bring to light" issues of the County and start the process of addressing those issues. He thought that perhaps this meeting would be the beginning of more to come in the future between these two governing bodies.

Supervisor West asked Mr. Johnson to add the topic of "road stripping" to the agenda for the Board's next regular meeting on July 28 to give the Board an opportunity to discuss it further. Mr. Johnson advised that he would be glad to do so.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 PM. (The Planning Commission's regular meeting followed at 7:30 PM).

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Reggie W. Gilliam  
Chairman, Board of Supervisors

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Michael W. Johnson  
Clerk, Board of Supervisors

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Dr. Alan W. Edwards  
Chairman, Planning Commission

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J. Waverly Coggsdale, III  
Secretary, Planning Commission