

**Indian Head Planning Commission & Economic Development Commission
Joint Meeting Minutes
Village Green Pavilion
March 19, 2014**

Rick Allen called the joint meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Those in attendance from the Commissions included:

Rick Allen, Planning Commission Chairman
Warren Bowie, Planning Commission
Mary Thompson, Planning Commission
Wayne Higdon, Planning Commission
Michael Pellegrino, Planning Commission
Peggy Palmer, Economic Development Commission Chair
Mike Jones, Economic Development Commission
Pam Hundley Hayes, Economic Development Commission
John Wheeler, Economic Development Commission
Donald Anderson, Economic Development Commission
Gary Hodge, Regional Policy Advisors President
Richard Parks, Zoning Administrator
Dennis Scheessele, Mayor
Ed Rice, Vice Mayor, Economic Development Commission Ex-Officio
Ryan Hicks, Town Manager
Andrea Brady, Clerk

Planning Commission Chairman, Rick Allen began the meeting by giving a background on how the first joint meeting was put together. Mr. Allen felt that a big issue brought up at that meeting was how to bring more business to Town and Economic Development Chair, Peggy Palmer was able to schedule Gary Hodge as a guest speaker to come talk to the Commissions about economic development. Mr. Allen then opened the floor for everyone in attendance including spectators to introduce themselves.

Following introductions, Peggy Palmer took a moment to introduce the guest speaker, Mr. Gary Hodge, Regional Policy Advisors President and asked that Mr. Hodge share his knowledge and background. Mrs. Palmer also stated that the purpose of this meeting is to hear an outside voice, someone who cares about Indian Head, who can discuss with the Commissions where Indian Head can go, and speak positively about opportunity.

Gary Hodge began by telling everyone in attendance that he is here to have a conversation not give a lecture. Mr. Hodge has lived in Charles County for 33 years. He moved to Waldorf in 1980, and joined the Charles County Council to transition the county from one of the poorest to what it is now. John Thomas Parran was one of Mr. Hodge's mentors, and a touch stone for his commitment to public service. Mr. Hodge stated that there are a lot of players involved in the past and potentially in the future including the excellent people in the county government and economic development. The Town has done an excellent job with the resources available. Mr. Hodge felt the best place to start was looking at the past, and his most vivid memory being the BRAC rounds in the 90s. Mr. Hodge spoke about the BRAC rounds and how they were the only ones in the region to win all 3 rounds, and they successfully prevented the loss of the base in Indian Head. The base provides 3,000 jobs and is the most important employer in Charles County. Another round of BRAC is anticipated in 2017, and Mr. Hodge's concern is BRAC analysts making flash judgments about the Town based on what they see driving down 210. Mr. Hodge spoke about current projects in the county, such as the light rail, and stated that he has never been

comfortable with the perceptions that wealth and growth is only on one side of the county. After reading an article in the November 29, issue of the Maryland Independent that characterized issues in the Town, Mr. Hodge made an offer to come speak with the Mayor and Council and he attended the January 27 work session and discussed issues the Town is facing and what can be done. Mr. Hodge spoke about his partner Robin Finnacom who heads up one of the best community development corporations in Lexington Park. They have faced some of the same issues in Lexington Park that the Town of Indian Head faces. Some of the things they have done to battle those issues is get the State Highway Administration and the County involved in repairing roads, job matching services, streetscaping, and sidewalks. Mr. Hodge brought a copy of the charter for the Community Development Corporation and read portions from the charter including certain aspects the CDC deals with including promotion of development, and making the Town eligible for designations of all kinds. Mr. Hodge explained that designations make the Town a credible recipient for state moneys. There is a whole universe of things outside of the Town limits that the Town needs to gain access to, resources the Town should gain access to. In order to gain access it is part talent search, part organizing institutions, some public relations and marketing, and putting a prospectus together to tell the Town's history. Mr. Hodge also spoke with Marcia Keeth, and based on the demographics he received from Ms. Keeth you have to figure out what your market is. Mr. Hodge used a grocery store as an example, explaining chain store versus smaller store based on your market. Mr. Hodge stated that he doesn't want the 2017 BRAC Committee to come down 210 and see what we see now. The Town has 3 years to work on it.

The meeting was then moved into open discussion.

Peggy Palmer stated that the hardest step is getting from where you are to where you want to be. The Town has several markets, but needs volunteers and man power. Residents need to start selling their own community but no one in the community other than those in attendance at the meeting and a few others, 30 to 40 people total get involved. The Town needs a vision, and startup money.

Gary Hodge stated that in his experience the Town has to make the commitment and then you can speak with the County, State, and private sector to get them involved. Volunteers are a huge asset. Local commitment becomes a multiplier for what can be done. In addition to money a strategy is needed. The building blocks are vision, strategy, resources, and a plan.

Rick Allen spoke about the Town's concept plan that was put together when Ron Young was Town Manager. It is a very far sighted plan with great ideas. The Planning Commission has been chasing that gold ring for at least 20 years, but there has been no easy answer. A plan needs to be put together that everyone agrees on and then stay the course.

Peggy Palmer feels the most common vision is economic development built around the trail, but there are still people in Town that don't know about it.

Gary Hodge agreed that the Rail Trail has been a success story, and it unites the two halves of the county. More people are becoming aware of it every day. Mr. Hodge then spoke about the proposed ferry project. The Town needs to find a way to make an interlocked package that joins together all the pieces, including the trail piece, the grocery store piece, and the ferry piece. Each piece will have its own strategy, set of players, and financing. The Town having waterfront access should be marketed.

Vice Mayor Rice stated that putting seed money into the ferry projects gave the Town stakeholder status and access to contacts and resources. Vice Mayor Rice also stated that a weakness of that project was Maryland Department of Transportation not wanting to get involved.

Town Manager Hicks felt that citizens could care less about the ferry project. The citizens want something in the vacant Ely buildings, and the old Super Fresh, but the problem is the Town doesn't own the vacant properties and we need the owners to work with the Town. Mr. Hicks has had people interested in the vacant buildings and if the owners were willing to work with the Town they would not be vacant right now.

Donald Anderson introduced himself as a new member of the Economic Development Commission. Mr. Anderson owns an investment property in Town that he purchased back in 2005. Originally Mr. Anderson was attracted to the Town by the lower taxes, and feels that the Town needs to figure out a way to minimize foreclosures, which will help stimulate the economy. Mr. Anderson also spoke about development in La Plata, and that the vacant buildings in Town are not attractive to developers. Mr. Anderson worked with Gary Bagley to get the Potomac Mews HOA off the ground and get the street lights back on. Mr. Anderson feels that if the people within the Town don't care they get a depressed perception of the Town. Mr. Anderson also asked if the Town has incentives for potential developers.

Town Manager Hicks and Peggy Palmer spoke of the incredible incentives the Town has available for potential developers.

John Wheeler feels it would be great to bring in new business but where will you put them with the state the available locations are in. It would be easier to rebuild than repair, and the Town needs to find a way to pressure the property owners into doing something. Mr. Wheeler would also like to see the rental property owners charged fees or a higher tax.

Mayor Scheessele and Town Manager Hicks spoke about the process the Town has been taking with the blighted buildings and the recent success in court, and the rental inspection program. They also discussed an ice-cream shop that is interested in coming to the Town.

Warren Bowie stated the importance that the issues get handled before the 2017 BRAC.

Representatives from the Moose Lodge expressed their upset over the boarded up buildings, as well as not being able to hold a turkey shoot due to a Town ordinance prohibiting firearms within Town. They feel that the Town should be able to make an ordinance to force inspections of vacant properties.

Rick Allen said you have to be careful when stepping on people's rights, and have a good lawyer and a lot of money to back up an ordinance like that.

Mike Jones stated that there are businesses in Town that care about the Town.

The representatives from the Moose Lodge brought up an issue they are having with the Connector Trail project taking place on Town Street. They are concerned about the raised walkway making it impossible for delivery trucks, and fire trucks to turn, and causing them to head out up the one way street, and requested to see plans and discuss the project before further construction. Town Manager Hicks will set up a meeting to review the plans with the Moose Lodge and discuss the project.

Mary Thompson stated that the Town is the beginning of the road not the end of it, and she feels that the attitude that the Town is the end of the road needs to be changed.

The general consensus of everyone in attendance was that the Town needs to find a way to finance a person to work on economic development for the Town, and eventually put together a Community Development Corporation. Once residents see something taking place it will build their interest, and the Town needs to handle the issues before the 2017 BRAC.

Town Manager Hicks plans to set up a meeting with Gary Hodge to discuss cost for an economic development advisor.

Rick Allen and Peggy Palmer thanked Gary Hodge for attending the meeting and speaking with everyone. The Planning Commission and Economic Development Commission will hold another joint meeting in three months. The EDC will not meet again until the joint meeting.

There being no further comments, Rick Allen adjourned the meeting at 8:44 pm.

Submitted by:


Andrea Brady
Town Clerk

4/16/14
Date