

MEMO

To: Monroe County Plan Commission
From: Elizabeth Fields, AICP, McBride Dale Clarion
Date: August 25, 2020
Re: County Development Ordinance – Focus Group Summaries

Between July 17-24, Monroe County Planning Staff and MDC conducted seven focus group discussions over Zoom. The groups ranged in topic and attendance, but each session offered a unique perspective and feedback on the county's code, development process, and policies. The seven focused groups were on the following topics:

- Affordable Housing (~18 attendees)
- Engineering, Construction, and Development (5 attendees)
- Environmental Sustainability (4 attendees)
- Agriculture (6 attendees)
- Historic Preservation (5 attendees)
- Economic Development (~13 attendees)
- Citizen Advisory Group (*made up of individuals that did not have a specific interest in any of the topics, but wanted to participate in the process*) (6 attendees)

This memo will summarize the feedback received from each group and highlight the key takeaways that we intend to research further in order to decide if they are appropriate to include in the code update. We would appreciate the feedback and input from the Plan Commission on these key takeaways to understand the level of support on these items moving forward.

The public engagement strategy thus far has focused on Module 1. For this Module, we have conducted an online kick-off Meeting for the entire CDO, hosted seven focus groups, and invited the public to join Plan Commission meetings to discuss the status memo and diagnostic memo. We intend on re-engaging these focus groups as we get further into the ordinance and have follow-up questions for these specific groups (NOTE: we are still able to add to these focus groups and these groups will continue to change). Additionally, we will be promoting questionnaires and inviting people to meetings of the Plan Commission where we can discuss items like the diagnostic memos and drafts of the ordinance. We are sharing our information with our list serve (215 have signed up via our website or we have added manually), Facebook, County website, and our CDO website. We have also requested focus group attendees fill out a stakeholder survey prior to the meeting to give us more information about who is included and who we are missing. We are seeking feedback on how to engage people safely. We also intend on engaging future specific groups, such as Township Trustees.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The affordable housing focus group was made up primarily by members of the county's Affordable Housing Advisory Commission. The discussion focused on how to define affordable housing, strategies to encourage affordable housing in the county, how we can incentivize affordable housing with the zoning and subdivision ordinances, model ordinances for us to review, and housing types that are in demand in the county. Below are the key takeaways from the discussion:

- Defined affordable housing as a 80-100% Average Median Income
- Monroe County needs to have a more diverse housing stock that includes a wider range of price options and housing types
- The county needs more housing inventory. Lack of housing supply is driving up cost
- Incentivize affordable housing by allowing residential uses with affordable units to be permitted by-right in certain areas or zones, which will allow for a simpler approval process
- Allow for a mix of housing types by-right and more flexible dimensional standards – smaller lot sizes, smaller setbacks/no setbacks for attached products
- Congregate multi-family and more dense residential developments in the urbanizing area of the county, along major thoroughfares, bus routes, and trails
- Instead of defining 'family' consider regulating use by number of kitchens proposed in a development

ENGINEERING, CONSTRUCTION, AND DEVELOPMENT

This focus group was made up a variety of professionals from the real estate, engineering, construction, and development fields. This conversation covered both how the county can improve their subdivision and zoning regulations including bonding for public improvements, current site plan requirements, survey requirements, and development trends. Below are the key takeaways from the discussion:

- Better define subdivision regulations including buildable area to make the development procedure easier to understand - accommodate development types like walk out basements where it works with topography
- Consider allowing large rural lots to construct a second dwelling unit on the property
- Allow for more flexibility in the phasing of development (approved administratively?) to make the financing of phased improvements easier
- Allow for mixed use developments (both residential and commercial mixed uses) in the county, especially in the urbanizing area and along major thoroughfares
- Improve the consistency between the city and the county code in terms of language, terminology, uses, and requirements to make development more consistent
- Research any opportunities for sidewalk construction deferral for subdivisions

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

This focus group was made up of individuals interested in preserving and enhancing the county's environmental regulations. The conversation covered threats to the county's watersheds and types of protections that should be included in the code. Below are the key takeaways from the discussion:

- Allow growth and development in urbanizing area and transit hubs in order to preserve open space in the county
- Promote better bufferyard and setback standards between residential and commercial/industrial areas
- Allow for cluster-type subdivisions in the rural areas to allow for development in safe areas while preserving sensitive areas
- Consider allowing large rural lots to construct a second dwelling unit on the property
- Allow land trusts to plat sensitive areas on separate parcels for conservation purposes without the same requirements (i.e. access, buildable area, etc.)
- Identify and conserve existing mature trees before development starts
- Strengthen karst protections, but allow for invasive mitigation in all cases
- Identify ways to continually track stormwater infrastructure/services that get approved as part of a subdivision long after development is complete

AGRICULTURE

This focus group was made up a variety of local and regional agricultural representatives. The conversation covered how the regulations could allow more flexibility for farmers, what types of uses are currently demanded by farmers, and other issues that our agricultural uses are currently faced with. Below are the key takeaways from the discussion:

- Allow farmers to have roadside stands including appropriate signage for such use – include regulations for location, access, and parking
- Review the minimum acreage for farming – micro farms do not need much land area to have productive farming businesses
- Include community gardens, cooperative markets, food hubs, and seasonal sales and events as permitted uses
- Research successful wedding/party barns in the county and draft regulations to allow such uses in specific circumstances – ensure regulations cover such items such as parking, hours of operation, dust from gravel parking areas, impervious cover impacts, screening/buffering, setbacks, and lighting
- Promote conservation of large tracts of farmland

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

This focus group included members of the county's Historic Preservation Commission along with additional historic preservation stakeholders. The conversation covered successful preservation strategies in other communities, changes needed to the current regulations, and the role of the Historic Preservation Commission in the county. Below are the key takeaways from the discussion:

- Research available financial incentives for preservation – tax abatements, property tax freezes, etc.
- Add flow charts to the process within the code to flag when projects need to go to the Historic Preservation Commission for review
- Consider adding demolition delay regulations into the code
- Research local landmark designation protocol – can the county nominate and designate local historic landmarks?
- Research Historic Overlay Districts and determine if they are good fit for the county - could be incorporated over parts of rural communities as part of the County rezone process (i.e. Stinesville)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This focus group included a variety of professionals with interests in development from an assortment of backgrounds and organizations. The conversation covered issues that businesses are facing, how the county can attract new jobs and companies, and things that effect workers in the area. Below are the key takeaways from the discussion:

- Economic opportunities at the I-69 intersections – zoning should support desired development in this area
- Demand for small flex spaces that can accommodate growing and developing businesses
- Housing demand and availability is linked to economic development – businesses have issues recruiting workers if there is no where for them to live
- Need to support home-based businesses – review and update home occupation regulations and commercial vehicle parking regulations, while focusing on nuisances to avoid aspects of businesses impacting surrounding properties
- Ensure landscape regulations are realistic and allow for flexible planting schedules
- Have a spectrum of development requirements (i.e. landscaping) for small businesses - allow a la carte improvements like choosing from façade improvements, landscaping, replacing old signage, etc.
- The process for getting development approved should be reevaluated
- Allow 4 years' timeline before a subdivision preliminary plat is expired

CITIZEN ADVISORY GROUP

This focus group was made up of various individuals with different interests and backgrounds. It was intended to allow people interested in the code update a chance to participate in a discussion without having a specific interest or priority in mind. Below are the key takeaways from the discussion:

- How do we support artists and artisans in the zoning code – review uses and home based business regulations
- What is the best way to enforce dark sky compliance regulations
- Preserve the rural character of the county
- Consider I69 development carefully as a place of growth but also preserving unique greenspace.
- Buffer residential areas from high-traffic areas
- Best practices for zoning enforcement

NEXT STEPS

We will begin drafting Module 1, based on the feedback from the focus groups, county staff, the Plan Commission, and the Module 1 diagnosis. We will work with staff through the drafting process. A draft of Module 1 will be presented to Plan Commission at a future meeting in order to obtain feedback on the content. Additional public engagement will be conducted during the drafting of Module 1, such as questionnaires and re-engaging focus groups with specific questions.