

# *The Planning Commissioner :*

## *Page County*

### *What is the Planning Commission?*

It is a permanent committee of 10 citizens who have been appointed by the county board of supervisors to review matters related to planning and development. The commission holds public hearings on a regular schedule (2x a month) to consider land use matters. These include such things as the comprehensive plan, rezonings, special use permits, and subdivisions. Commissioners serve at the pleasure of the supervisors, so commission membership changes in response to changes in those bodies.

The commission is the county board of supervisors' advisor on land use planning. The board may choose to follow the recommendations of the commission or not. Accordingly, they may reverse or modify commission actions or send proposals back to the commission for further review. In addition, commission decisions are subject to appeal to the board. The board, have the final say in all county matters.

Because the commission focuses on planning issues, it is a valuable intermediary between the public and the county board of supervisors. When matters run smoothly, the commission has a low profile. However, when there is a controversy, it is there, in the thick of things, doing its best to sort through the facts and make a good decision.

### *Why have a Planning Commission?*

The idea of appointing a group of laymen to make decisions and recommendations about land use planning originated at the turn of the previous century. Government reformers, seeking to take local government out of the hands of party "machines," reorganized administrative procedures in an attempt to reduce political influence on decisions. One solution was to create a planning commission, made up of appointed citizens, that would be responsible for setting the community's development direction.

Virginia law requires each county to have a planning commission. Zoning on the other hand, is not required by Virginia law, but most counties in Virginia have adopted it. Page County adopted zoning in 1989. The Page County Zoning Ordinance is the regulatory tool (county code) for land development in the county. The Page County Planning Commission and Planning Department staff, enforce the regulations within the zoning ordinance.

### *How does the Commission relate to the Planning Department?*

The county planning department is the commission's research staff. The planners can advise the commission on the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance and other land use regulations. In addition, they provide background information and recommendations on the proposals that are under the commission's consideration, answer technical questions, and make sure that meetings have been properly advertised in advance. A planning department staff member will always be in

attendance at commission meetings. Other attendees may include representatives of the county counsel's office.

### *What does the Commission do?*

Counties "plan" in order to identify important community issues (such as the direction of growth, housing needs, and environmental protection), project future demand for services (sewers, roads, fire protection, etc.), address potential problems (such as overloaded sewers or crowded roads), and establish goals and policies for directing and managing future development.

The county supervisors may assign any or all of the following tasks to its planning commission:

- Assist in writing the comprehensive plan or specific plans and hold public hearings on such plans;
- Hold hearings and act upon proposed amendments to the comprehensive plan or specific plans;
- Hold hearings and act upon proposed changes to the zoning ordinance and zoning maps;
- Decide whether or not a subdivision exception should be granted;
- Annually review the jurisdiction's growth statistics and demographics, which is referred to as the "Annual Report";
- Promote public interest in the comprehensive plan;
- Consult with and advise public officials and agencies, utilities, organizations and citizens regarding implementation of the comprehensive plan;
- Coordinate local plans and programs with those of other public agencies;
- Undertake special planning studies as needed.