

MPCA Regional Workshop: Crisfield, MD

Thursday July 25, 2024



Discussion Notes

Discussion Led by Danny Winborne, MPCA President

Question: What successes and/or barriers have you had in the past 5 years that we can learn from? What were the components of your success and/or barrier?

General

A: Small town managers play many roles. For example, new site plans require them to handle everything.

A: One planning commissioner responded that he is a registered landscape architect and focused on site specifics. Admitted he probably has had some ex parte communication, and it is something he needs to work on. Good project landscaping can contribute a lot to the local economy.

Comprehensive Planning

A: The current Crisfield comprehensive plan was adopted in 2006. It needs to be updated because comprehensive plans are essential to grant writing and outline what can be funded in the future.

A: Somerset County knows it needs to update its comprehensive plan, but funding was a big barrier until the American Rescue Plan (ARPA). The respondent recommended that other jurisdictions consider using their ARPA funding to update comprehensive plans.

A: Success is attending this workshop and collaborating with other planning board members. It is very important for planning boards to know and understand their comprehensive plans.

Zoning

A: Pittsville completed and approved a full rewrite of its zoning ordinance a year ago and is already processing a text and map amendment. But the planning commission is on board with this work and has been terrific!

A: In Pocomoke City, the change or mistake rule for zoning amendments is a barrier.

A: The Ocean City Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) uses a two-part variance test to determine "unique properties". This can serve as a barrier because members use different definitions.

A: In Salisbury, variances require "hardships", which can be a barrier to approving desired property developments.

A: Pocomoke City asked if BZAs can act on other, indirect planning, such as rental licensing and registration? The [International Property Maintenance Code](#) suggests that such issues could be brought to a BZA. Maryland Department of Planning staff will research this question.

Question: What issues do Lower Eastern Shore Planning Boards specifically face?

A: Recruiting planning board members is a problem. Somerset County provides a stipend, which helps.

A: Confusion over the dividing line between planning commission/municipal/ HOA responsibility for conditions placed on a development. When does an HOA take over?

A: Crisfield has a flooding problem but was recently awarded a \$36 million FEMA grant to implement protections. Serious health events close schools and businesses. Funding comes from [FEMA's direct technical assistance program](#). Applications are due once a year and help small towns access engineering assistance.

A: GIS capacity can be a barrier, but the [Eastern Shore Regional GIS assistance program](#), funded out of Salisbury University, is helpful.

Takeaways

1. Convening regional meetings of planning commissioners is a valuable learning and collaboration endeavor. For example, how can recruitment successes in one jurisdiction inform the efforts of other jurisdictions of a similar size and context?
2. Planning Boards and the staff with whom they work can overcome barriers and achieve success by accessing federal and state resources. They should learn and seek assistance from each other to access these resources.
3. Knowing and understanding your guiding documents (comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances), and updating them to be current, are vital to a successful planning board.
4. Lower Eastern Shore Planning Boards could use help understanding how they should apply certain state and local definitions and tests, such as those used in variances.
5. The MPCA could help by developing guidance on the scope of cases which Boards of Appeals can consider.