



TOWN OF OCCOQUAN

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PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Monday, January 14, 2019

6:30 PM

TOWN HALL - 314 MILL STREET

1. Citizen Comments
2. Approval of Minutes of December 19, 2018
3. Approval of Parking Study Recommendation Report
4. Budget Discussion/Recommendations
5. Chair/Town Council Report

Eliot Perkins
Planning Commission Chair



TOWN OF OCCOQUAN
Town Hall - 314 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125
MEETING DATE: 2018-12-19

MEETING TIME: 6:30 PM

Present: Ann Kisling, Jenn Mathis, Eliot Perkins, Ryan Somma

Absent: none

1. Call to Order

The Planning Commission Public Hearing was called to order by Eliot Perkins on 2018-12-19, at 6:32 p.m.

Secretary for Meeting

Ryan Somma took minutes for the meeting.

2. Citizen Comments

There were no citizens comments.

3. Approval of Minutes of November 27, 2018

Ann Kisling moved to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes of 2018-11-27. Jenn Mathis seconded the motion. The motion carried by poll vote, unanimously.

4. Approval of Parking Study Recommendation Report

Eliot Perkins opened the discussion by bringing members attention to the section on wayfinding in the study and the need consistent messaging in signage in town. Concerning timed parking, there was a rough estimate of \$3,000 to buy signs and that Town Staff could install them. There was no guarantee that owners of private lots would help, but there needed to be an effort to reach out to them. In a conversation Perkins had with JMT, they indicated that timed parking moves people off of one street, but onto other streets. Giving people residential parking permits would secure their spots.

Jenn Mathis suggested that the Town could offer subsidies to incentivize updating signs to promote standardizing signage. Chris Coon said they would need to know how many signs to order them all at once. Jenn Mathis suggested having signs at just the entrances to lots, so three signs Kathleen Leidich said that in Leesburg they used sandwich board sign to advertise open parking during off-hours. Chris Coon said a sandwich board would be better investment because they could be moved around. Eliot Perkins indicated that the report should be updated to include recommendation for a sandwich board and consistent signage in the private parking and signage programs portion of the report.

Jenn Mathis asked for clarification on whether the Commission was recommending timed parking for just Mill Street or the entire historic district. Eliot Perkins said it was just Mill street. Jenn Mathis expressed concern about piecemeal parking standards, and said Union and Washington streets could become employee parking when Mill Street is restricted. Chris Coon estimated it would add four to six signs to include other streets.

Eliot Perkins expressed concern that this would increase the need for residential parking. Kathleen Leidich recommended waiting to see if residential parking would become a problem rather than impose a solution on residents who may not need it and take on the additional administrative overhead of implementing and enforcing that solution. Jenn Mathis suggested that decals for residents would excuse them from timed parking restrictions rather than have the town reserve spaces specifically for residents. Ryan Somma noted this was how residential parking was regulated in Norfolk Virginia, where residents with decals can park on the street without time limits, but visitors had two-hour limits.

Chris Coon said that to legally articulate who qualified for a residential decal would be extremely difficult. For example, a landlord who has a boat in two parking spaces may be denying off-street parking to their tenants. Would that qualify? He recommended waiting to see if there's a problem and let local law enforcement provide leniency to Town Residents in the interim. It was agreed to add this to the "Residential Parking Permits" section of the report.

Eliot Perkins directed members to the cut-through traffic portion of the report, which covers positives and negatives of making Commerce Street two way. Jenn Mathis sought clarification on whether the sections was an exploration or a recommendation as "Make Commerce Street Two-Way" was definitive. Ann Kisling recommended changing the section title to "Explore Feasibility."

Commission members recommended edits to the report. Jenn Mathis noted the new development's name had changed. This would be edited to the "Mill at Occoquan." Eliot Perkins gave approval to cut the addendum as its main points were now incorporated in to the document. Ryan Somma noted that there could be no motion tonight, as the report would need one more draft.

Eliot Perkins informed members that there was also an initiative to reach out to the Town business community. A copy of a letter by Chris Coon to the members of the Merchant Guild was provided to members. Kathleen Leidich indicated the letter was read at a Merchant Guild meeting, and Members recommended talking as a group and responding to the Town as a collective; however, Chris Coon said that Kathy of guild said they will let their members come to the Town individually as that there was not currently a consensus. Eliot Perkins said the Town needed to give businesses the chance to have their say.

5. Annual Report Discussion

Eliot Perkins presented overview of the report. Chris Coon recommended adding an appendix with the bylaws.

Ryan Somma moved to approve the Planning Commission's 2019 Annual Report with the amendment to correct the spelling of Eliot Perkins' name and add an appendix. Ann Kisling seconded the motion. The motion carried by poll vote, unanimously.

6. CIP Budget Discussion

Eliot Perkins took members through the Comprehensive Plan items that aligned with CIP items:

CIP #1 Community Development and Programming aligned with CP 37, 38, 40, 42, and that Jenn Mathis would take the initiative on these items.

CIP #2 Historic Preservation and Town Appearance aligned with CP 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 50 , 57.

CIP #3 Parking Management aligned with CP 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 39.

Number 58 on the CP would be removed as the Town does not meet the requirements for the Mainstreet America program.

Chris Coon recommended members keep an eye out for items that would contribute to the Community Plan and how many items it hits as it is expensive. Eliot Perkins noted that the maintenance portion was important as the Town was behind on scheduled work. Chris Coon said members can recommend to spend on what thought was most appropriate, but that the Town Council could still reject recommendations.

Jenn Mathis asked if maintenance was appropriate for the Planning Commission to recommend and if it in the Commission's purview. Chris Coon answered yes, that as it related to infrastructure and big-ticket items were in the Commission's purview

Eliot Perkins said they would like a list of specific items Commission wanted done. Need to come to this with a list of specific individual things. That the Commission was still in the phase of gaining a perspective of what members think are the priorities.

Chris Coon suggested members could ask for a budget for things the Commission wants to work on. Ryan Somma asked if this was funding for items for which the Planning Commission is the lead.

Eliot Perkins requested guidance on how best to provide recommendation to Town Council. Kathleen Leidich notes that there is a lot of deferred maintenance that hasn't happened, even though staff members who have done excellent work with the limited resources they have. Chris Coon said members could take a budget item and recommend it to meet Planning Commission goals.

Jenn Mathis noted there were three main priorities from comprehensive plan: beauty, relationship, and parking, and that she would need time to get a better understanding of the budget to make an informed decision.

Chris Coons provided the example of funding for joint trainings or conferences to forge relationships with external groups.

Jenn Mathis recommend each member take a section to work on and come back. Each member of the Commission took a CIP item to determine which CP items should be the focus and inform Town Council as to specific budgetary recommendations. Jenn Mathis took relationships. Ann Kisling took beautification. Ryan Somma took traffic and parking.

Ryan Somma asked about the timeline for delivering recommendations to the Town Council. Chris Coon answered that it would need to be presented to at the January 15th Town Council work session. which would precede the Planning Commission January meeting.

Eliot Perkins asked members to get recommendations to him by January 7th. Kathleen Leidich asked that everything be brought to staff by the 9th to get it on the agenda.

Chris Coon noted the possibility of pushing CIP to February. Kathleen Leidich said they could provide the Town Council with a report on how Planning Commission recommendations were shaping up. She indicated that the budget is an evolving process and there would not be concrete numbers on the 15th, and that there won't be concrete numbers until March.

Eliot Perkins said the plan would be to have an agenda item on 15th, and for members to get recommendations to him by 7th.

6. Chair/Town Council Report

Eliot Perkins said the Kayak Launch project was moving forward.

Chris Coon said the Mill at Occoquan site plan was moving forward and would be presented to the Planning Commission soon. The Town Engineer and Zoning Administrator would be present for the discussion and if Planning Commission members had any questions for them to get them to town staff as soon as possible.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

Eliot Perkins
Chair, Planning Commission

Submitted by Ryan Somma, Planning Commission Secretary



TOWN OF OCCOQUAN Planning Commission Traffic and Parking Study Recommendations

Occoquan Planning Commission

Traffic and Parking Study Recommendations

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TOWN OF OCCOQUAN

Planning Commission

Traffic and Parking Study Recommendations

Introduction

The Planning Commission conducted several meetings to review and research the findings and recommendations from Johnson, Mirmiran and Thompson, Inc (JMT) November 2017 “Town of Occoquan, Virginia Parking Study.” Research included a deep reading of the study findings, follow-up research on specific recommendations, and a walk about the Town to review existing conditions and garner a more concrete understanding of the scope for each proposed solution.

Cut-Through Traffic

While the study found that public parking within Town has not yet reached full capacity, cut-through traffic is an immediate concern to Occoquan residents as evidenced by numerous comments and anecdotes from residents in Town and on social media.

Present Cut-Through Data to VDOT

As a quick and relatively easy win for the Town is to give the cut-through traffic to VDOT, documenting 250-300 average cut-through vehicles per hour with recommendations, and petition the organization to conduct a study. The Town Clerk characterized the Town’s relationship with VDOT as “9.5” on a scale of one to 10. As no major initiatives, such as making Commerce Street two-way, are possible without coordination with VDOT’s empowerment, this action should take top priority.

Explore Feasibility of Making Commerce Street Two-Way

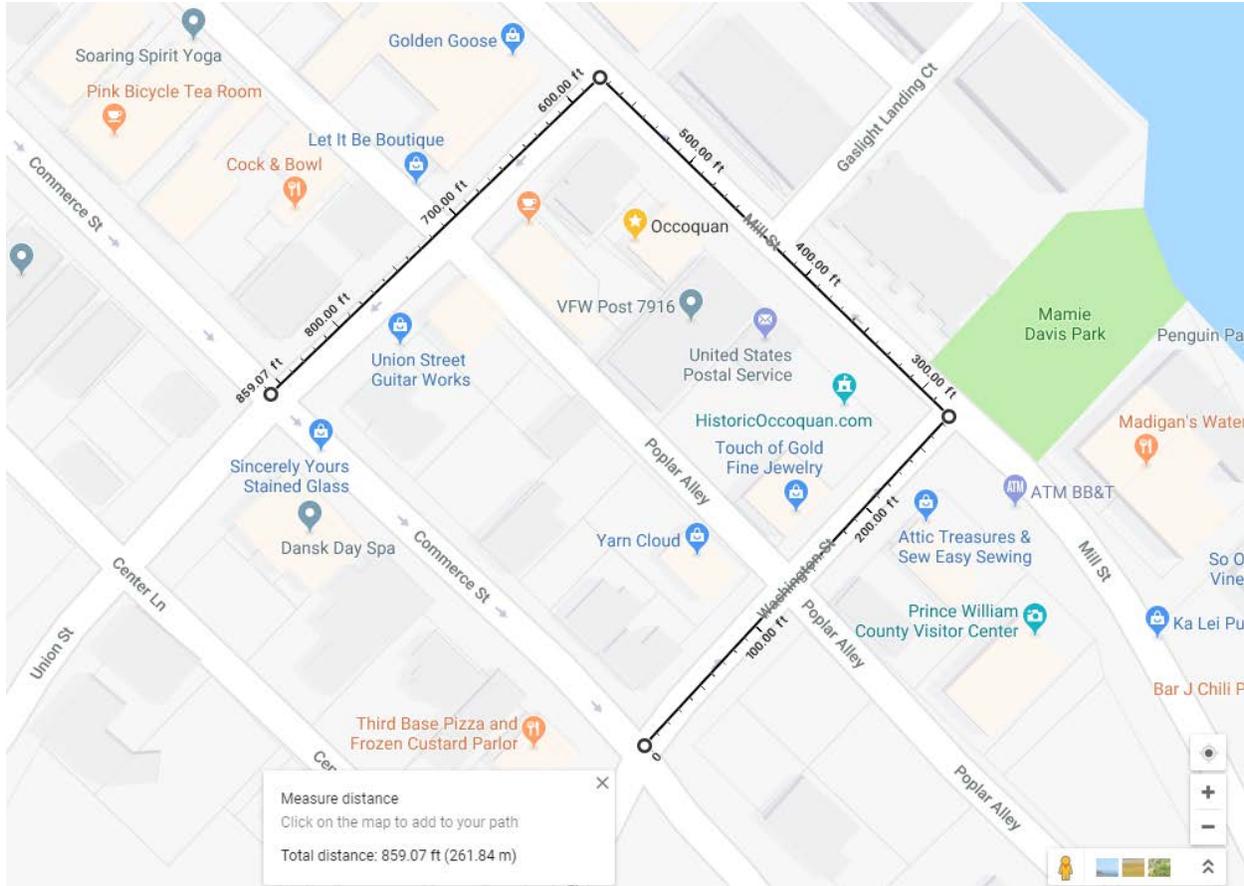
Converting Commerce Street from one-way to two-way traffic between Washington and Union streets may require significant effort and has several drawbacks, but it would also dramatically improve walking conditions in the business district. The conversion would require eliminating eight parking spaces along the street, including one handicapped space, leaving three spaces in that section of street. While this 1.8% reduction in the Town-owned parking is detrimental to the parking situation, rerouting traffic would eliminate six-blocks of cut-through traffic in Town, allow for targeted traffic enforcement at two intersections rather than four, reduce air and noise pollution for residents living along the Mill St., and improve safety conditions for pedestrians around the Post Office and Mamie Davis Park.

One concern in making Commerce Street two-way is potentially reducing the number of patrons frequenting downtown shops that the cut-through traffic may bring, but this appears minimal. First, Occoquan shops are closed on Mondays, completely missing a day of the commuter traffic. Second, with the exception of restaurants, Occoquan shops are mostly closed by 5:30 PM, and the traffic runs much later than this. Finally, the section of Town in question includes the Post Office, which is heavily trafficked by residents at this same time, and Gaslight Landing, a residential neighborhood with home fronts facing the traffic. With such minimal impact to local businesses and potentially dramatic benefits to residents, this seems an ideal strategy for improving safety and quality of life for residents.

Consideration should be given to restaurants in Occoquan for this plan, as reduced traffic on Mill Street could result in reduced patrons at these establishments in the afternoon hours. Additionally, having commuters encounters two fewer stop signs in the afternoon cut-through traffic could result in encouraging more cut-through traffic in a phenomenon known as “induced demand,” where road improvements encourage more congestion.



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Making Commerce Street Two-Way Would Eliminate 860 Feet of Cut-Through Traffic in Town



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Town Parking

In this section, we will cover strategies for maintaining and improving town parking. A positive finding from the JLM study was learning that parking within Town was not reaching full capacity; however, the Town Clerk and residents have noted that parking does become a problem during special events, like the Chocolate Walk, and during the holiday season. Additionally, new developments, like the Mill at Occoquan plan, will bring a large influx of residents and additional shops into town. These recommendations are prioritized from “easy wins” to more challenging but important actions to take and ongoing activities for the town to pursue.

Easy Win: Wayfinding and Signage

- **Website Updates and Social Media to Promote Existing Parking Resources:** Updating the website with an easily visible and downloadable PDF parking map of Occoquan. Additionally, making use of social media to consistently make people aware of the parking options in Occoquan.
- **Wayfinding Campaign:** replace current inadequate signage and install additional consistent signage as needed.

Considered an “easy win” by the Commission, updating the Town website to include public parking information is a top-priority. Chris Coons has already reached out to Google and has had his request to have the Town’s parking clearly marked on Google Maps approved. Additionally, advertising the Town’s parking online presents an opportunity to advertise the Town, its history, and its businesses. A downloadable, printable PDF map of the Town that is inviting and identifies the many shops and historical attractions we have to offer could include a sidebar of advertisements for local shops, helping to fund its creation.

To get a better understanding of existing parking signage within Town, the Commission conducted a walkabout to see what visitors see when they drive into our Historic District. While we found that there is signage directing visitors to the public parking, it seemed poorly placed and very easy to miss.



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Public Parking Signage at Washington and Mill St. Intersection

Additionally, while there is a small “More Parking Available Under Bridge” sign present neighboring the Visitor’s Center, the Commission was unable to find any parking signage at the lot under the bridge itself. Having a clearly marked sign at the bridge, visible from a distance could be very helpful to visitors.



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Only Sign Found for Parking Under the 123 Bridge, No Signage at the Bridge Visible

The Commission did find one sign identifying parking in the lot across the street from the parking under the bridge but found the small size of the sign and the branding made it very easy to miss.



Small Sign Identifying Parking (Right-Side of Photo) Across from Parking Under the Bridge



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Improving existing signage to make it more prominent and additional signage will improve and promote the use of Occoquan's public parking.

Near-Term: Timed Parking and Cooperation with Private Parking Owners

- **Timed Parking:** encourage turnover of on-street parking spaces by limiting the time they may be used during peak business hours.
- **Private Parking Signage and Shared-Parking Programs:** Coordinate with Developers, like the Mill at Occoquan development team to ensure clear way-finding for residents, visitors, and business patrons to provide as efficient movement of vehicles as possible, as well as, minimize parking confusion and other issues.
- **Residential Parking Permits:** Consider Parking Permits and Signage to protect parking for Town residents.

The JLM had three recommendations for optimizing private parking within Town, and the Commission felt that partnering with private-parking owners in a flexible manner to find solutions most advantageous to all residents and business owners. At the time, zoning changes and parking permits were considered undesirable; however, since the study, new developments coming to Town will bring an influx of residents, additional shops, and customer traffic. Because of these developments, ordinances to promote parking turnover and off-street parking are now needed.

Timed Parking on Mill, Union, and Washington Streets

The Town currently has no restrictions for parking on Mill, Union, and Washington Streets. As a result, some business employees and owners will take on-street parking intended for customers and visitors rather than use off-street parking. Additionally, residents who live on these streets will often leave their vehicles parked on-street for convenience rather than make use of the off-street private-parking provided by their residence. Policies that discourage leaving vehicles in Town parking for extended periods of time would encourage parking turnover and open spaces to the Town-visitors for which they are intended.

Utilizing Timed Parking through the installation of approximately 36 parking signs on Mill Street and four to six signs on Washington and Union streets would limit occupying parking spaces to 3 to 4 hours during targeted times and days (Friday 12pm to 8pm, Saturday and Sunday 8pm to 8pm). Prior to the initiation of the timed parking program multiple efforts would be made to educate people including, but not necessarily limited to, leaflets on cars and in post office boxes, the website, other social media (if applicable), and from police officers. Town law enforcement would monitor parking usage.

Private Parking Signage and Programs

During the Commission's walkabout, we found that privately-owned lots were largely unused and empty. The Town should work with local businesses to encourage their staff members to park in either their building's off-street parking or in Occoquan owned off-street parking as opposed to utilizing Mill Street. Additionally, the Town should promote local businesses making use of their additional unused parking in order to provide added parking inventory for their customers.



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The Commission also found that privately-owned parking was very inconsistently marked from lot to lot. We misidentified employee-only parking as customer parking in the lot behind the Bottlestop and found no signage for what we knew was customer parking behind the Virginia Grill – Occoquan Inn. We did find the Riverwalk Shops had clearly marked and pleasant signage at the entrance of its lot for tenants and customers as an example of what private-lot owners could emulate. The Town should encourage better signage clearly identifying customer parking. The Town should establish recommendations or requirements for private parking signage as allowed to identify private parking in a consistent fashion throughout Town. The Town could offer subsidies for new, consistent signage to incentivize private parking owners updating their signs. Optionally, sandwich board signs could be brought out during events or during top-usage times to bring attention to off-street parking.

Public parking primarily becomes an issue during special events and the holiday season. During the bi-annual Craft Shows, several residents charge for hourly parking in their yards or lots. Because of these two factors, the Town should establish recommendations or standards for private parking owners to encourage this practice and legitimize it. This can be promoted with applications like Spot Hero or Parking Panda.



Customer-Only Parking Sign Behind Pin Curls Salon (Left) and a Parking Sign for Riverwalk Shops (Right)



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Residential Parking Permits

Because utilizing timed parking on Mill Street people could push residents onto other streets in the historic district, causing additional parking issues. A residential parking pass program could be used just for the residents on those streets involved who do not have available off-street parking. These would be decals for Town Residents that would allow them to park in timed parking spots without limits.

It is important that such a program be implemented only if it is found to be needed to avoid taking on the administrative overhead associated with issuing and overseeing residential decals and the complexity of defining which residents would qualify for decals. While evaluating if a decal program is needed, local law enforcement should be directed to monitor parking and show leniency to residents concerning parking enforcement.

Mid-Term: Walk Occoquan

- **Improved Pedestrian Experience:** Crosswalks / ADA Ramps at ends of Mill Street
- **Evaluate Walkable Network:** Conduct Study for Walkable, Compliant Network

Parking under the 123 Bridge to visit Occoquan Shops can present a quite a walk for some customers and the cut-through traffic along a portion of Mill St is highly unpleasant; therefore, making Occoquan a pedestrian-friendly Town should be the primary mid-term focus. The lack of crosswalks at the Washington-Mill Street, Union-Mill Street, and Ellicott-Mill Street intersections make crossing Mill Street stressful and hazardous for pedestrians. Raised crosswalks, clear signage, and other strategies that prioritize pedestrian traffic over vehicular will make shopping downtown more pleasant and inviting. Encouraging visitors to engage with Occoquan on foot will provide greater exposure to all the historical details and shopping opportunities within Town.

Long-Term: Bike Occoquan

- Website Updates for Bike Occoquan
- Bicycle Parking

While the Commission did not see the promotion of Occoquan as a biking Town as immediately beneficial to either the parking or cut-through traffic situations, we do view Bike Occoquan as a fantastic opportunity to promote the Town as a waypoint for cyclists as a mid-to-long term priority. Updating the Town website with information for cyclists falls into the “easy win” category of initiatives, while signage for bike parking and a bike-tune-up station could brand Occoquan as a bike-friendly town like towns along W&OD trail.

The JLM study recommended additional bicycle parking in Town; however, the Commission found that we were unaware that there is existing bike parking in Town and learned from the Town Clerk that the existing parking is seldom, if ever, used. Encouraging the use of existing parking for cyclists through signage should take priority over constructing additional parking.

Ongoing: Traffic Enforcement

- **Traffic Enforcement:** Continued Traffic Monitoring Programs



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Town law enforcement has increased cut-through traffic monitoring with stop-sign enforcement and a May Pedestrian Safety Program. These measures appear to be dramatically improving driver-awareness of pedestrians and respect for Town traffic laws. Such efforts should be renewed periodically to promote public awareness of pedestrian safety.

Rejected: Back-In Parking Modifications

This recommendation involves re-striping the existing angled parking on Mill Street so that visitors will back-into parking spaces rather than pull forward into them. While the literature on back-in parking is compelling, the Commission believes the unusualness of this configuration and the learning curve for it are too steep to endorse such a reconfiguration. We believe this strategy should not be pursued further.