

**PUBLIC MEETING
EASTERN SHORE LAND CONSERVANCY
AUGUST 21, 2007**

Ms. Morgan Ellis called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. In attendance was Rob Etgen, Executive Director of the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC), Gail Owings, Planning Director for Kent County, Suzanne Hayman, County Administrator, Bill Ingersoll, Town Manager and Zoning Director, Chester River Community Mediators Randall Minter and Lisa Cameron, Jennifer Stead, Stenographer, and guests.

Ms. Ellis stated that the meeting was called to inform the public about the Chestertown Gateway Project. She said that she would like to conduct the meeting in a question and answer format.

Mr. Etgen stated that this roughly 500-acre parcel is a property that was in both the Town and County growth plans. Last year there was an annexation/development proposal which included the development of 900 to 2000 houses that was rejected by the Town. He said that when the developer's contract lapsed the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy got the properties under contract with the ambition that they would empower the Town and county to do some planning that would be more suitable for the area. Mr. Etgen stated that this came out of a fear from the Blackwater Development in Cambridge and the Four Seasons development in Kent Island. He said that there were huge developments taking place in Denton, Trappe, and Queenstown.

Mr. Etgen stated that the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy has identified these large annexations as a crucial issue to address on the Eastern Shore. Mr. Etgen stated that he thought development on the Eastern Shore was happening too fast and there was too much of it.

Mr. Etgen stated that the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy had the Clark Farm property under contract and was scheduled to close on the first farm by May 2008 and the second farm by December 2008, if they wished to proceed. He said that this closing would depend on whether this community vision based master plan process yielded a community consensus for what should happen on the property. Mr. Etgen stated that the community consensus also had to be equal to the cost of the land.

Mr. Etgen stated that an agreement was made by the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, the County, and the Town to work together for the life of the contract on the property to try to figure out what the consensus vision was for the property.

Ms. Ellis stated that she was going to pass around comment cards that would be collected at the end of the meeting. She said if any questions were not answered at the meeting, they would be via e-mail. Ms. Ellis stated that there was a sign-in sheet, but if anyone was interested, there was an online e-mail alert system that the ESLC was promoting on their website at eslc.org with up to date information, the Memorandum of Understanding,

and the RFP (Request for Proposals). Ms. Ellis stated that if anyone wanted more information they could sign up with their email address.

Mr. Minter stated that they would now start the comment/question process and asked that each turn be kept to three (3) minutes.

Ms. Alice Macnow stated that she would like to see as much open space as possible at this site and asked how the purchase would be funded, particularly if the residents wanted to keep the open space. Mr. Etgen stated that this was a very expensive property and had been under contract for \$16 million, although the Clarks did lower the price a bit. Mr. Etgen stated that it was a daunting challenge to fund this as land preservation or open space. He said that this area was marked for development, but he hoped to at least get a green belt around that part of town, with public access to the creek, and community trails.

Ms. Macnow asked what the zoning of the property was and asked that they include density in their answer. Ms. Owings stated that there was a variety of zoning on the land at present. She said the County zoned the area as a Resource Conservation District (area closest to the creek) with a density of one (1) dwelling unit per 20-acres, Rural Residential area which was one (1) dwelling unit per 3-acres, and Community Residential which had a density of one (1) dwelling unit per acre. She said there may be a small portion that was zoned village.

Ms. Owings stated that part of this proposal would be to look at the appropriateness of the zoning in a master plan process.

Mr. Ingersoll stated that the County Plan had the actual zoning, but this area was included as a part of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Ingersoll stated that in the Town plan the zoning was not quite the same. Mr. Ingersoll stated that the consultant would have to reconcile and compare the two plans. He said that the Town showed an employment zone along Rt. 291, across the street from Bramble, the County office buildings, and State Highway Administration. There was also the bypass boulevard shown through the farm with medium density residential north and east of it for the rest of the farm, with a greenbelt at the outermost perimeter along the creek.

Ms. Kate O'Donnell stated that at last night's meeting Mr. Clark was asked if there was anything special about the topography of the property that would make it desirable. She said he gave a good description of the land, but said that when driving along Rt. 291 there was nothing pleasing to look at for the residents that would live there. Ms. O'Donnell stated that there was nothing more desirable as a gateway than the corn fields that presently exist on that property.

Mr. Ingersoll stated that he hoped this process would wake people up to the possible uses of the land and what they would prefer to see. Mr. Ingersoll stated that the ESLC was trying to set up a process whereby the land use was discussed and the best options for growth would be put in place.

Ms. Sydney Brooks was present and asked if there were a number of homes in mind that would be allowed to be built. Mr. Etgen stated that there was not a number in mind, but the sentiment was to allow the minimum amount that could justify the purchase price. However, he said there was a fair sentiment for more affordable housing in the area so it was difficult to put a number out at this point.

Mr. Ingersoll stated that to ask for numbers at this point was unfair, but it was the first question usually asked by everyone. He said that an annexation process could change zoning and the question of houses was a moving target. Mr. Ingersoll stated that the process should focus on discussing preservation, zoning types, and communities. He said the last thing that anyone should worry about is making the purchase price work or try to figure out numbers because they would be misleading. Mr. Etgen agreed.

Mr. Elliott Fuhrman asked who was in charge of the visioning process. Ms. Ellis stated that the ESLC was in the process of hiring a consultant who had experience with public participation, land use planning, site consideration, and environmental design standards. She said Request for Proposals was sent out to different consultants with thirteen (13) proposals received. One (1) proposal was chosen and the Management Team was working to securing the contract.

Mr. Fuhrman stated that Washington College had a visioning program and asked why that was not being utilized. Ms. Ellis stated that Mr. John Seidel from Washington College was a member of the Advisory Committee. Ms. Ellis named the other members of the Advisory Committee.

Mr. Fuhrman stated that he had a problem with a property being sold for \$30,000 per acre. He said that nothing could be done on this property without water and sewer and asked what the seller was doing in order to get this amount of money per acre when farmland was presently being sold for approximately \$10,000.00 per acre. Mr. Etgen stated that the land was zoned for development in both the Town and County zoning, so it added a great deal of value to the land.

Ms. Owings stated that they did not want to look at the numbers; they wanted to look as what the community would like to see happen at the site. She said this was what the consultant was going to do in a rough proposal for the properties that could then be purchased by a developer.

Mr. John Hoagland asked if the properties were under contract presently. Mr. Etgen stated that the ESLC had both farms under contract. Mr. Hoagland asked if this was an option or based on development coming to fruition. Mr. Etgen stated that the contract was a right to buy the property by May 2008 for the first parcel and December of 2008 for the second parcel. He said the price was initially \$16 million, but the family was flexible and the price was going to be a process at the end of the contract, but not less than \$12 million. Mr. Etgen stated that they already had a non-refundable deposit down of \$200,000.00 that would be lost if there was not a successful package at the end of the process.

Mr. Etgen stated that the ESLC has preserved over 40,000 acres of land over the last 20-years. He said this undertaking was new to the ESLC but they did not want to walk away from a possible solution. Mr. Etgen stated that the Town and County have shown great leadership in partaking in this process.

Ms. Macnow stated that the idea of having a fairly high percentage of open space in the midst of development was something to strive for. She asked if the houses could be clustered on smaller lots, minimizing the footprints, but maximizing open space for parks, recreation, or wetland preservation. Mr. Etgen stated that this was exactly what this project was about.

Mr. Fuhrman stated that, in his opinion, there would be problems when May 2008 came along because there was no way that this process could be done in the timeframe they were looking at. Mr. Etgen agreed that there were time constraints, and everyone involved was aware of it.

Mr. John Seidel stated that to clarify an earlier statement, the College has offered its services to the process. He said that visioning done in other counties was quite different from this process. Mr. Seidel stated that he would like to discuss how the public input and ideas would be accepted.

Ms. Ellis stated that the ESLC was envisioning hiring the consultant to design and perform a community visioning process with a hands-on charrette. She said that there were links on the website for information, and the email alerts which she discussed earlier in the night. Ms. Ellis stated that Town Hall meetings were a possible avenue as well. Mr. Seidel stated that an open dialogue would be very important and said when a draft plan was arrived at there should be a time for open comment.

Mr. Anthony asked if there was a point where this project would be handed over from the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy to a developer. Mr. Etgen stated that if the project did go to a developer there would be a developer's rights and responsibilities agreement that set out the specific responsibilities of any developer that took on the project.

Mr. Hoagland asked how involved the developer would be in the planning process. Mr. Etgen stated that there were a number of developers who already approached the ESLC about this property. He said at the end of the process he would discuss with all of the builders to entertain competitive bids.

Ms. Macnow stated that she was optimistic that something good would come from the project because the public's desires would be heard and everyone knows what is already happening to the Eastern Shore. She said even if the project failed, it would at least show the way that they would like to see development occur.

Mr. Ingersoll stated that there may not be a complete package to hand over by May 2008 and the location at present the farms were not annexable. However, that would not stop

the Town from having a dialogue with anyone who wanted to discuss what this land should be. He said this process was going to discuss zoning for these areas and a future vision for the Town. Mr. Ingersoll stated that this was a good exercise for the community, even if the option did not get exercised.

Mr. Fuhrman asked if this property included the Wal-Mart site. Mr. Ingersoll stated that this site did not include the Wal-Mart property, but they were currently asking to be annexed into Town in a separate process.

Ms. O'Donnell asked if the idea behind acquiring the property was to turn it over for more money and earn money to save more county farmland. Mr. Etgen stated that the ESLC was not turning a profit on this project; they were looking to recover their costs, if possible. He said this was a new venture for the ESLC and not something that they were looking to make money on.

Ms. Macnow stated that she hoped that the consultant would bring forward ideas that have worked in other small towns.

Ms. O'Donnell stated that she would like to see a survey of where the potential buyers of these homes would be working. She said she could not foresee workforce of affordable housing in this area with the price tag on the property. Mr. Ingersoll stated that demographics of potential buyers as well as pace of growth should be a part of this project. Ms. Owings stated that currently in Kent County 25% of homes were second homes, which was a large percentage.

Ms. Christina Showalter asked who would be responsible for a demographic survey. Ms. Owings stated that information they have from other builders in the county is that there is a mixture of retirees, those who already live and work in Kent County, those with swing shifts such as nurses, police and fire fighters.

Ms. Showalter asked if it was possible to get a tour of the property. Ms. Ellis stated that she thought that would be possible and it would be a good opportunity for the public to become more acquainted with the site.

Mr. Anthony asked if there was a phasing in mind or calendar of events for the project. Ms. Ellis stated that in the Memorandum of Understanding there was a general timeline for the project, but the timeline may change when the consultant gets on board.

There were no more questions and Ms. Ellis thanked everyone for attending the meeting. She said that there was information for anyone interested discussing growth on the shore. She said if anyone had additional comments they could fill out a yellow slip with their name and contact information. If anyone wanted to be included on the email updates they could also sign that list.

Ms. Ellis thanked Chester Valley Mediation for their help at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 7:15.

Submitted by:

Jennifer Stead
Stenographer