

# Highland begins 12-month review of county comp plan

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• STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — A review of Highland County's comprehensive plan is officially under way. Last Thursday, members of the committee appointed to review the document held their first, organizational meeting.

Lisa Kodger, representing the planning commission, was elected chairman of the committee, followed by Caroline Smith as vice chair, representing the Mill Gap Ruritan Club, and Aaron Marshall, assistant to the zoning official, as secretary.

The comprehensive plan is a guide to all county planning issues, and is required by the state of Virginia for all localities. It must be updated every five years. The Code of Virginia offers guidance to towns and counties on how they could approach writing and revising plans. Highland's committee will review every section of the 1999 plan, and present its recommendations to the planning commission. The commission makes a final recommendation to the board of supervisors, which will decide on approving the plan. The entire process will take about one year. Kodger explained that the planning commission could have chosen to accept the current plan as-is and keep it the same for another five years, but members "saw if needs some work," she said, and are asking for a thorough review.

County administrator Roberta Lambert, a committee member, reminded those attending that as a committee appointed by county officials, their meetings are open to

the public and subject to Freedom of Information Act laws. She also explained that someone from the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission will join committee meetings to offer guidance during the process.

While some Virginia localities choose to include their zoning ordinances in the comprehensive plan, Kodger said Highland County has not done that historically, although it could choose to do so this time. "The (plan) is not an enforcement document," she explained. "It is strictly a guide."

Committee members expressed concern about how to get the public involved in the review process. Kodger said, "We're always encouraging people to participate. It's a stumbling block. I don't know what else to do but get the word out in *The Recorder*." Kodger said the last time the plan was reviewed, there was little public participation until the end, during a public hearing on the plan, when lots of people attended and wanted to make several changes after it had been mostly worked out. "Participation needs to come during the whole process," she said.

One member asked about including a new "All for Highland" survey in this review. The survey, which has been conducted twice in the last 10 years, consists of a series of questions and demographic statistics geared toward specific topics. Its results have been included in the back of the last two plans, offering detailed information about the wishes of Highland residents and landowners.

Kodger said she believed since the review process this time was already a little behind schedule it would be difficult to add it now. "I think we're too late in the process to that," she said, "and I'm not sure there are any funds available."

Committee members agreed they would organize "sub-committees" to take on chapters of the plan in detail. They will find a way to gear their review to each section, and enlist public support and input from those who aren't on the committee along the way. In addition, they agreed each would take topics in the plan back to their respective non-profit and civic groups to gather input from a wider section of the community.

The committee set the following dates for meetings through the end of this year: Sept. 22, Oct. 27, Nov. 17 and Dec. 15. All meetings are on Wednesdays beginning at 6:30 p.m., held at the Highland Modular Conference Room at The Highland Center, Monterey. Information about the subject of meetings and ongoing discussions will be published in *The Recorder*.

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## Comprehensive plan committee

*The committee to review Highland County's comprehensive plan has been appointed by county officials. The committee urges all Highland residents and landowners to become involved in the 12-month process of reviewing the plan. Meetings are open to the public. Members include:*

- Janice Warner, Town of Monterey
- Diane Klein, Highland Historical Society
- Toby Swecker, Blue Grass Ruritan Club
- Valerie Hilliard, individual
- Kathy Patterson, Highland County Public Library
- David Smith, Highland County Industrial Development Authority
- Tommy Hevener, Highland County Board of Zoning Appeals
- Caroline Smith, Mill Gap Ruritan Club (vice chairman)
- Kate Wilke, Valley Program for Aging Services
- Laurie Berman, The Highland Center
- Carolyn Pohowsky, Highland County Chamber of Commerce
- Roy Gutshall, Highland County Farm Bureau
- Leo Schwartz, Stonewall Ruritan Club
- Elizabeth "Bobbie" Hefner, Highland County School Board
- Georgeanne Armstrong, individual
- Lisa Kodger, Highland County Planning Commission (chairman)
- Roberta Lambert, Highland County Administrator, board of supervisors
- Donovan Hower, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation
- Aaron Marshall, building and zoning (secretary)