



**Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations Rewrite
Largo Civic Association
October 19, 2016**

The purpose of this discussion was to present Clarion Associates' recommendations contained in Module 3 for process and administration, and to discuss the concerns and questions of the group. Questions and comments are identified by **bold text**. Responses to questions and additional presenter comments are identified by normal text.

We are not comfortable with the Zoning Hearing Examiner (ZHE) being the single authority for special exceptions. The hospital experience has influenced how the community views departures and variances for development standards.

Currently the ZHE makes recommendations and the ZHE is appointed by the Council. The proposed process, as well as the existing process for recommendations, requires public meetings, so this process is inclusive of public input.

The processes listed in the proposed codes are all predicated on the use of a procedures manual that does not exist yet. We will oppose the entire Zoning Ordinance rewrite if the procedures manual is not completed before approval.

There is concern that the Planning Staff and the Planning Board are too quick to ignore standards and provide departures to developers without any real evidence that a departure is required. We have experienced very few instances where the Planning Board denied approval for a departure. Notably, the design requirements for Largo Town Center have been denied.

The consultants agree. The proposed code allows adjustments (a different term for departures), but these are limited to 15 to 35 percent of the standard. This means that the Planning Board and staff would be restricted to how much they could deviate from standards. If the design element is not on the proposed list for adjustments, it cannot be adjusted.

The District Council cannot appeal the adjustments. This is an issue because the public generally cannot hire the legal representation to "fight city hall". This is why "call-up" is important, the public can reach out to their council person to fight on their behalf. It allows the public to participate in the appeal process.

We do not support adjustments or adjusting the standards.

If there are no adjustments, then standards need to be right-sized. However, we cannot make standards too high, because no development will take place at all.

Regarding the proposed test cases, we would like Largo Town Center to be one of the test cases. Especially because it is a big site. As it stands, Parcel D is against the current regulations.



We also do not like the Ascend Apollo development. There is no retail, only residential. Also, the proposed hospital has surface parking, but it needs to have structured parking.

We would like to see the same type of development as there is in Fairfax, Alexandria, and Montgomery counties. We are not expecting high-end retail and communities. We recognize that some of this is market-driven, but we'd be willing to wait 20 years until the market caught up to what is here.

The development standards proposed here are as high as in Montgomery County. However, if the community wants high standards for development, there needs to be a more predictable and streamlined process. There can be high standards and an easy process or low standards and a difficult process.

If the Planning Board and Staff could be held accountable to the standards and have standards that are not easily adjusted, we would be more approving of a streamlined process. For us, the most important standards are those that make an urban environment – buildings with more than three or four stories in height, masonry buildings, etc.

How big is Clarion Associates? If they are all over the country, is it possible that they are just cutting and pasting elements from other codes? Are they the best for this County?

Clarion is a small firm with offices in three cities. The consulting team for this project includes several firms that are based in this region. Clarion spent the first year and a half visiting the County, speaking to elected officials, the public, developers, etc., and understands how the zoning code works in the County. The modules that have been submitted have been crafted specifically for this County adapted from the best practices from all over the country.

We also acknowledge that just because they are experts in zoning, they may not be experts in the County, which is why the modules are posted for public review. We want to make necessary changes to ensure that we make the best code for the County.

Is this an objective review? Is the contract open ended? The consultants mentioned that the code should be revised yearly or every six months – is this more work for them?

One of the reasons that so many drafts have been and will be submitted through this process is to ensure that the code is uniquely Prince George's. The consultants are scoped only to draft the new Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision Regulations. They recommend that we as a County regularly review the code and make necessary updates, because it is unlikely that everything would be perfect on the first go. If the County wanted to hire Clarion to make these changes, they could, but there is no requirement to do so. Changes could be made in-house or with another firm.

Regarding pre-application neighborhood meetings, who decides who would attend? Will there be notice?

When a pre-application neighborhood meeting is required, the applicant would provide public notice and mailed notice to adjacent property holders and civic associations. The applicant would handle all logistics



for the pre-application neighborhood meeting. There will be two sign postings on the site – one for the pre-application meeting and another for the public hearing.

Who will be invited to pre-application meetings for master plans and sector plans?

Master plans and sector plans would be treated differently since they are not development applications. These plans have substantial public engagement throughout the process.

Pre-application meetings should also be extended to the subdivision and development review committee meetings. Often times, the public feels left out of this process. Is the Planning Staff prepared for this increase in public involvement?

The new code will be a mind-shift for not only developers, but also the Planning Staff. The goal is that development is negotiated with the community, not as competing parties, but as two parties cooperating.

Is there a website that shows active development applications?

Yes. The Planning Department's website shows everything that is discussed at public hearings. There is also a development application GIS tool as part of our online mapping application, PG Atlas. The map can show developments that are happening near specific areas in the County and residents can request that PG Atlas send them an email when new applications are submitted near their residence.