



Howard County Council

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Courtney Watson, Vice
Chairperson
District 1
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District 3
Mary Kay Sigaty
District 4
Greg Fox
District 5

Minutes (revised 6-26-14-Approved)
County Council Legislative Work Session
Monday, June 23, 2014

The County Council met in the Banneker Room at 4:30 p.m. on June 23 for a legislative work session.

Members Present: Calvin Ball, Chair; Courtney Watson, Vice Chair; Greg Fox, Member; Mary Kay Sigaty, Member; Jen Terrasa, Member.

The Chairman called on Marsha McLaughlin, Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning, to discuss Council Bill 33-2014, concerning presubmission meetings. She raised the following points:

- The Administration will submit an amendment related to page 5, line 20 to clarify that notices for PTA presidents will be sent to the school;
- The Administration will submit an amendment related to page 6, lines 12-13 to clarify that posted notices on property will be visible by the public and to change in line 12 the word “adjacent” to “adjoining.”
- She clarified her understanding that page 9, lines 23 and 27 allow the Department to require a second presubmission meeting if the developer fails to fulfill the requirements in the first meeting.
- In response to a question from Ms. Watson, Ms. McLaughlin reported that there were 112 presubmission meetings in the period from May 2013 through May 2014, and that fewer than half were controversial. A discussion followed about various ways to meet citizens’ desire for a staff presence or an electronic explanation of the process.
- In response to a question from Ms. Terrasa, Ms. McLaughlin explained situations in which the Department would “redline” a project, an approval process for minor modifications in the plans.
- She promised to put together an informational video on conditional use and zoning.

Two additional points were considered without specific direction on amendment: 1) including Good Friday among the holidays to avoid when scheduling a presubmission meeting; and 2) removing the words “as available” when describing which maps must be provided.

The Council Chair then called on Chris Merdon, Director of the Department of Communication and Technology Services, to discuss CB 32-2014, requiring documents to be displayed on the web in a searchable format. Mr. Merdon said that he could not estimate the cost of the proposal until certain policy issues are better defined. He raised the following points:

- He recommended the addition of a purpose clause.
- He wants a more elaborated definition of “document” to clarify whether or not this includes drafts, e-mails, and a variety of other types of communications.
- He suggests better definition of the data sets that need to be posted for the public and of the specific agencies, particularly county-related, State agencies that are intended to be included.
- He noted problems in the language “to the highest degree of granularity” on pages 24 and 25, citing examples.
- He suggested starting by taking an inventory of what already is posted on the web, identifying which of those posts are most visited, identifying electronic tools to organize the data, and determining who would be accountable for updating the data.
- There was discussion about timeframes; it was agreed that the legislation would provide that prospective web postings would be searchable in the initial phase, given the difficulty in making some archival data searchable.
- Making documents searchable is the easier part of the requirement; however, to make data useful, there must also be a capacity to organize the information in a way that allows the public to search among the documents for a particular subject. This is a more complex and costly process.
- It is easier to make documents we produce searchable than to make documents we receive from other searchable; clarification is needed to know whether both are expected.

The Council discussed the following follow-up:

- Possibly tabling the bill to allow additional time to consider amendments.
- Chris Merdon and Jim Vannoy will consider the items discussed and issues raised in the work session and produce a set of recommendations on those issues.
- A task force should be created, either through separate legislation or as an amendment to the provisions in CB32-2014 requiring a plan, which will consider and make recommendation on the issues raised concerning scope, timing, and definitions.
- An amendment should be made to CB 32-2014 to clarify that it is a two-part process, the first part requiring all documents that now are posted on the web to be posted in searchable format prospectively and the longer-term part requiring possible posting of additional data sets accessed through a single portable and searchable both within the document and across documents by subject or key words.

If drafts or versions of items are posted, Ms. Terrasa requested that the date of the last update be included in the posting.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 6:20 p.m.