

Members hold public forum on subdivision rule change

FRONT ROYAL -- The Front Royal Planning Commission on Wednesday began the process of updating the current subdivision ordinance by hearing recommendations on how to integrate innovative and environmentally friendly concepts into the town's present design standards.

The panel held an open forum meeting at Samuels Public Library to receive public comment on changes to the ordinance.

A total of five people addressed the panel, including David Vazzana, president of Front Royal Limited Partnership.

The Town Council in February voted 5-1 to approve a rezoning request submitted by Vazzana for about 150 acres along Happy Creek to allow for a subdivision of approximately 300 single-family homes.

On Wednesday, Vazzana presented the Planning Commission with proposed changes to the subdivision ordinance intended to facilitate "low-impact development."

The suggested changes would help developers create open-space subdivisions by updating storm water management methods, tweaking the amount of pavement, and reducing setbacks and minimum lot sizes, Vazzana said.

Vazzana also said crafting a subdivision ordinance that empowered developers with "flexibility" would encourage environmentally friendly development.

A subdivision ordinance weighted down with the need for conditional-use permits to implement the design techniques could

prove too expensive for the developer, Vazzana said.

Director of Environmental Services Steve Burke told commission members the suggested changes could pose practical maintenance and upkeep issues for the town.

"A lot of what is being presented to you, the town has looked at in the past," Burke said. "Low-impact development is wonderful, but the problem the town has had with its implementation is we have got regulations we have to follow."

The town has to accommodate the diverse needs of residents, Burke said, and trying design innovations such as limiting sidewalks and street parking has proved problematic with a growing town population.

"While a lot of what has been talked about sounds wonderful -- long-term, it poses a problem for the town," Burke said.

Former councilman Stan Brooks advocated the use of a special or conditional-use permits for specific subdivision developments for low-impact development techniques.

"Making that as part of by-right is a mistake because you will have different situations in different places," Brooks said. "Making that a special use and leaving it up to your staff to decide rather than the developer, I think, is the first step."