

# The A. J. Advisor



Winter 2016

Are you catching us in your email? The A. J. Advisor only publishes three times per year.

Volume 22, Issue 1

On Odenton



## ABOLISH THE PAB

Major Kudos to County Executive Steve Schuh for his initiative to streamline the permitting process as well the departments involved in that process. The County Executive also spearheaded and supported efforts to reduce the fee structure for development in the County which has for many years, put it at a competitive disadvantage with its neighboring counties and cost it valuable revenue from property taxes.

Hopefully, in his efforts to streamline County government, he will turn his attention to the Planning Advisory Board (PAB). It has long been an extra and largely unnecessary stop for the planning, budgeting and approval process in the County.

The PAB's stated purpose as found on the County's own web site is to make "advisory recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Officer and County Council related to the Master Plan, the zoning maps and rules and regulations relating to zoning." It also reviews capital improvement projects annually with the County departments, Board of Education and Community College and prepares a report for the County Executive.

I've watched this Board in action for more than 40 years and find that it generally wastes a huge amount of time in the important process of decision making by the County Executive and County Council. It has generally become a rubber stamp for plans and budgets already researched and developed by the various departments and agencies of the County. One would expect the members, appointed by the Executive as an advisory panel would be qualified to add something to the process.

However, as recently demonstrated by their review and comment on the Odenton Town Center Master Plan, they are unprepared and unhelpful at best and potentially damaging at worst. Except for the Chair of the group, members were not aware of the area's history of planning, or years worth of input by many

## CONTRAST OF DEVELOPERS AND PLANNERS



Stuart Title

A dentist by example is a planner and a developer. He examines your mouth (the site), takes and reviews one dimensional x-rays (the plans) and then based on both reviews, constructs a crown or filling based on the "reality" of the site visit rather than just what he saw on film.

Real Estate developers spend countless dollars to hire professional engineers and architects to produce plans and drawings to submit for approval of their projects to a local municipality. Most times the projects are not approved with first submission and are returned to the developer with comments that address anything from location of a fire hydrant, to materials used in construction, to code issues that were not addressed adequately from their point of view.

Planners and reviewers rarely visit a site prior to plan review. They take one dimensional plans and verify that generic codes written in a book have been followed with little regard to the reality of the situation.

In reality many of the issues that arise are due to the fact that developers think and plan in a three dimensional perspective,

whereas planners and reviewers typically look at a one dimensional perspective on a sheet of paper. The developer and his team of experts have made countless visits to the site. They understand the lay of the land and its topography, disposition and intricacies that many times do not translate to a generic municipality code for that particular type of development or zoning.

Using our examples above the fire hydrant may have been placed in a location that may deviate from code due to a gas line that was found during a site visit by the developer but unknown to a reviewer who has never seen the site other than on paper. Materials used may deviate due to their availability, wear or costs but have no bearing on the look or presentation of the project, but once again "on paper" doesn't translate.

I believe that it is important for planners and review-

different agencies, citizens and organizations. Their questions showed this lack of knowledge. Virtually everyone, including the County Executive already knew the details. The PAB's uninformed questions only served to raise more doubts as to the readiness of the Plan to be implemented.

So, in the end what do the recommendations of this advisory panel mean? Delay in the process of good government, confusion and an unneeded layer of complexity. The idea that the County capital improvement program, already almost impossible to decipher as part of the budget, is subject to the review and recommendation of the PAB seems to add insult to injury. The County Executive has the authority to appoint ad hoc or formal advisory committees as needed for each of the same elements that now come under the purview of the PAB. It's time to do that.

FIND US HERE



We welcome Chuck Hood to the staff at AJP. Chuck has worked with AJP more than 10 years through his cleaning and porter services and now joins the AJP team as a Facilities Manager.



At their recent Annual Meeting and Business Awards, the West County Chamber named AJP's Michele Waits their Volunteer of the Year.

She is also celebrating 25 years at A. J. Properties

Contrast continued from page 1, column 2

ers to have a three dimensional perspective to enable them to better understand why or why not a deviation may have been made on a one dimensional drawing. Doing so would speed up the processing of development projects by better understanding why a deviation may have been made and reducing comments thereof; generating an increase in revenue sooner for the municipality through development fees and increase in tax base; and reduce cost of the development process which is passed through to the consumer with higher rental or purchase cost for both business and residential occupancy.

The development community anticipates the changes County Executive Schuh has announced for the Office of Planning and Zoning planning reviews will also reduce the unnecessary comments and delays by allowing the planners and reviewers to better understand the "lay of the land" prior to their review process of a project.

A shout out to Anne Arundel County Executive Steve Schuh and his administration and Councilman Andrew Pruski and staff for the focus given to making changes to the Odenton Town Center Master Plan.



Sign up for our e-version of the newsletter at [www.ajprop.net](http://www.ajprop.net) under the News tab, text AJPNEWS to 22828 or call us with your email address.