



Jefferson County West Virginia

Public Information

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Jefferson County Commission
P.O. Box 250
Charles Town, WV 25414

Separation of Zoning & Engineering Departments

Commissioners

In rebuttal to the assertion that the existing Planning, Zoning & Engineering Department is meeting the needs of Jefferson County as it is presently organized, my two experiences with them (Hawthorne variance, Summit Point Library) indicate otherwise. The heirs of Hawthorne here in Summit Point wish to convert the existing historical structure into a bed & breakfast. 127 residents of Summit Point have responded to the heirs with support for their plan.

The Zoning Department is responsible for publishing the minutes of all meetings of the Zoning Board of Appeals. The final decision on Hawthorne's request to host weddings at their bed & breakfast was made at the meeting on December 16, 2004. The decision is not publically available until the minutes are approved at the following meeting. After approval of minutes, the applicant has 15 days to appeal the BZA decision in circuit court. The meeting at which the decision was finalized was on January 20, 2005. The Zoning Department promised the minutes would be typed by Monday, January 24. Hopefully, the minutes will be available by Monday, January 31, eleven days after the hearing. In finalizing the minutes of the December 16 meeting, one of the Board of Appeals members amended the content of the decision. Without written documentation of the amended decision, no one knows the exact provisions of the ruling.

The heirs cannot decide if the decision needs to be appealed since the minutes with the amended decision are not available. Recipients of BZA rulings have only 15 days file an appeal in circuit court. For Hawthorne, since the Department of Zoning has not had time to type up the minutes, the heirs may not receive the BZA decision in time to appeal. The Planning & Zoning Department clearly needs to have more time to fulfill the duties it is intended to complete. Separating the Engineering Department has to be a good change.

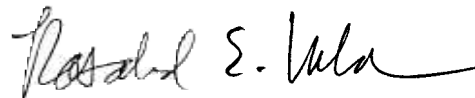
The Planning, Zoning & Engineering Department is also in charge of building permits and inspections. Many contractors have complained to me, as the project architect, about incorrect inspections by county inspectors. I constantly tell them to put it in writing and forward complaints to the County Commissioners. None of them will take the

time because they are usually on deadline. Included separately (letter dated August 6, 2003) are the experiences I had with the permit/inspection staff while the Summit Point Library was being built. Al Hooper asked me to hold off mailing this letter until a later date. In the interest of Jefferson County reorganization, now is past time to send this letter.

Engineering/inspections requires different training from Zoning. From my experiences, it is clear that the head of Planning, Zoning & Engineering doesn't know much about construction. The engineering portion needs to be headed by someone who is familiar with commercial and residential building codes as well as construction practices.

Jefferson County needs to fix as many problems as possible. Splitting Engineering from Planning & Zoning is a good start.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rosalind S. Vela".