

'Loop' Foes Suffer Setback

County Asserts Authority To Decide Which Projects Stay On Plans

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By JEREMY HUNT

HARRISONBURG — Opponents of a controversial transportation project in Rockingham County see a decision Wednesday as a setback to their goal of eliminating the so-called “loop road” from planning documents.

The Board of Supervisors voted to send a letter to a regional transportation planning group saying the county has the authority regarding projects in its jurisdiction, not the regional group.

The move directs county representatives on the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization policy board to support the group’s constrained long-range plan.

The plan lists parts of the loop road as potential future projects but not as priorities — or even proposals at this point.

Called the loop road because it originally was envisioned as a circuit around Harrisonburg, sections of the project north and east of the city remain in the county’s comprehensive plan.

They’re in the regional plan by virtue of their inclusion in the county plan.

Board members contend that if it’s to be removed from planning documents, it must be done as part of revisions to the county plan, as opposed to the regional one.

District 4 Supervisor Bill Kyger described the MPO as a federal body and said the board should not cede control of land-use issues to it.

“Land-use issues are sacred to local governments,” said Kyger, chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

While the MPO is required by federal law based on the area’s population, its composition is entirely local, with representatives from the city, county, Dayton, Bridgewater and Mount Crawford.

The MPO’s policy board is expected to vote on the plan during its meeting today at 3 p.m. in the County Administration Center, 20 E. Gay St., Harrisonburg.

Kim Sandum, executive director of the Rockingham County Community Alliance for Preservation, said the supervisors’ decision could lead to a cyclical process where the loop road is included in the county plan because it’s in the MPO plan and vice versa.

“They’re talking about how they want to retain control over local roads [and] they don’t want a federal organization telling them what to do. The ironic thing is they’re the ones that sit on the committee,” Sandum said. “They have complete control over the plan.”

Supervisors Fred Eberly of District 2 and Dee Floyd of District 3, who aren’t in favor of the loop road, made certain they were not approving any projects or plans with their vote.

Eberly said the issue would be revisited when the county updates its comprehensive plan, which is not expected to happen in the near future.

“We have to look again at what’s appropriate ... and how we’re using or misusing our ag land,” he said.

Kyger said Wednesday’s vote merely makes clear who the county believes should be in charge of its roads.

“It is not an endorsement of any conceptual road,” he said. “It’s a statement of philosophical belief that land-use decisions need to stay in the jurisdictions that are most affected.”

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