

**CITIZENS FOCUS GROUP MEETING #1
SEPTEMBER 19, 2017
MEETING 5 OF 12**

To: Mark Hetrick & Julie Spriggs, Town of Zebulon
From: Chad Meadows, CodeWright Planners
Date: October 3, 2017
RE: Citizens Focus Group Meeting #1 Summary



On Tuesday, October 3, 2017 from 6:30 to 8:30 PM, CodeWright conducted the first of two focus group meetings with the Citizens Focus Group. The Citizens, Civic, and Faith Community focus groups were determined to have similar interests with regards to the UDO project and so were combined into one group renamed the Community Focus Group.

Six stakeholders attended the meeting, including representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, the Zebulon Woman's Club, and Habitat for Humanity.

Attendees included:

Community Focus Group Members in Attendance

Sherri Tant Barnham
David Covington
Donald Horton
Jennifer Lane
Denise Nowell
Rachel Zeitler

Town Staff and Consultants

Joe Moore
Mark Hetrick
Julie Spriggs
Chad Meadows
Cara Isher-Witt

The evening began with short presentation that introduced the project's history, goals, and outcomes. Next, CodeWright introduced some key concepts related to the project, including what a UDO does, why it is important, and what it contains.

In order to gather input from the group, CodeWright conducted a keypad polling exercise. Each attendee (including staff members in attendance) was given a keypad polling device and invited to respond to a series of 18 statements related to the UDO. Each topic was preceded by some information about the options available, trends in other communities, and potential tradeoffs of various choices. Then, attendees were shown a statement about the UDO and asked to vote using the keypad to choose "Agree," "Disagree," or "Not Sure." Immediately following each poll, the results were projected onto the screen to provide a basis for open discussion before moving on to the next topic.

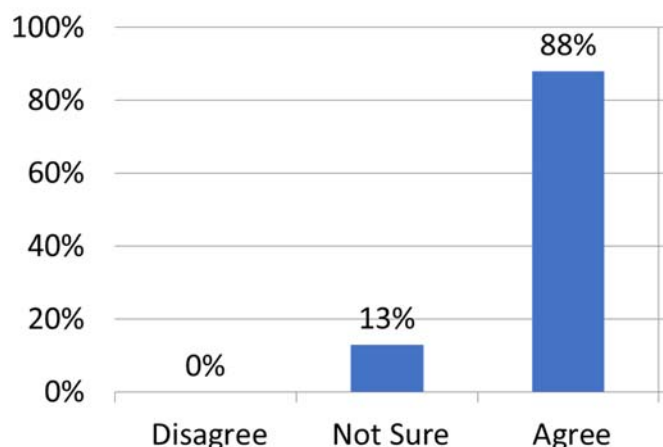


Citizen Focus Group members and Town staff prepare to participate in the keypad polling exercise led by Chad Meadows of CodeWright.

The focus group's collective responses to each of the questions follow. For each question, there is a reproduction of the polling results and a summary of the comments received during the discussion. Similar or related comments have been grouped, and comments are presented in no particular order.

Statement 1:

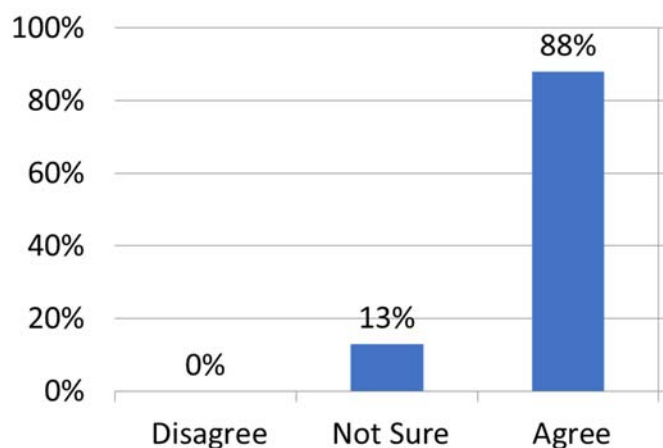
Zebulon needs more passive recreation resources (trails, natural areas, picnic facilities).



There was general agreement that Zebulon needs more passive recreation. In particular, the group discussed a need for more bike trails and walking trails, noting that the existing trails near the community center are good but don't meet all citizens' needs, particularly families with teenagers or older children who want to bike or picnic as a family.

Statement 2:

Zebulon needs more active recreation resources (ball fields, playgrounds, dog parks).



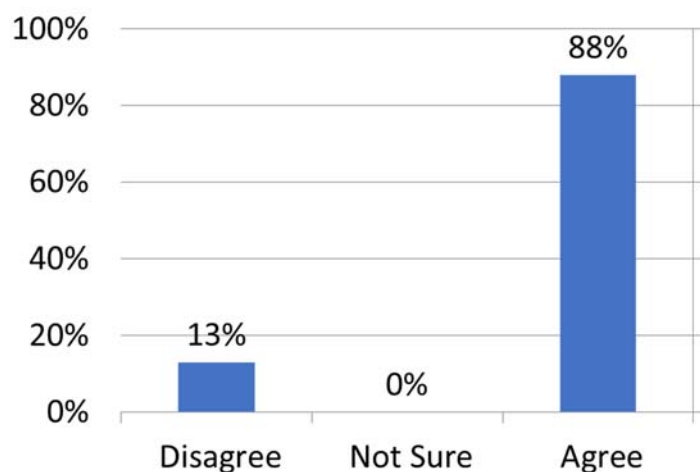
There was general agreement that there is a need for more active recreation resources. The group discussed a splash pad as a main desire in this category. Staff noted that the planning department has been considering how to add a splash pad in town for some time.

The group noted that the Town already has a lot of ball fields, but needs another tennis court, and needs more resources spread throughout town. Particularly, group members noted a need for spaces for active recreation that's not for organized teams – like basketball courts and tennis courts.

There was a discussion about private provision of recreation resources in new residential subdivisions. One focus group member noted that when recreation resources are provided by a subdivision developer, the resource is usually for residents of that subdivision only and does not serve the general public's needs. However, from a resident's perspective, this may be undesirable for reasons of traffic, safety, and sense of community. The UDO will likely address requirements for both public and private recreation contributions by developers.

Statement 3:

It is OK for new houses in Zebulon to be more expensive if developers install greenways.



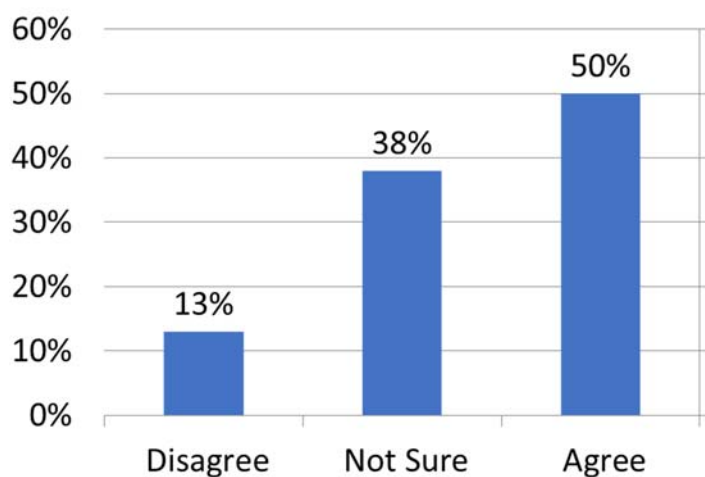
Most respondents agreed with this statement. One person disagreed, and shared concerns about keeping the community affordable for a wide range of residents: If this requirement makes some houses (those with the best access to the greenway, for example) more expensive, that is acceptable. But, if it raises the cost of living and makes it unaffordable for the workforce and older citizens, that is not acceptable.

Another attendee highlighted the potential for new high-quality housing to bring in higher-income residents to balance the town's tax

base. It was also noted that the addition of greenway connections near older neighborhoods would raise property values and quality of life for existing residents without immediately raising their housing costs.

Statement 4:

The Town should use taxes or other Town funds to purchase land for conservation.



This question drew mixed responses from attendees.

One person who responded that they were "unsure" asked: what would be the tradeoffs of enacting this policy? They expressed that land for conservation is important, but they don't want to take away funds from other town goals that are more pressing: police, fire, downtown, etc.

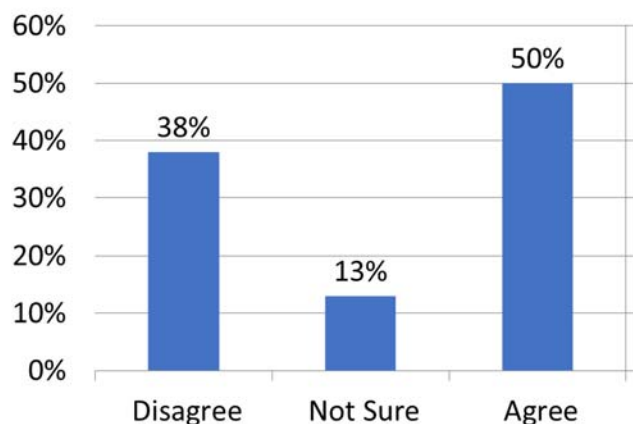
One person said they feel like it's a little too early in the development of Zebulon to consider this, because there is a lot of available land right now and the Town is not

constrained by development. It is important, but not a pressing issue or a current priority.

Another attendee said they do think it's important to have land for conservation and for other uses and asked: is there a way to purchase land now (while land values are low) and keep it in the Town's ownership to be used for one of several future uses – conservation, school, public use. Maybe we should be conserving land for future nonresidential needs, educational needs, public needs in addition to environmental or conservation needs.

Finally, with regards to using tax dollars, group members said they would want the community to have transparency and input on whether or not taxes are going toward these kinds of purposes.

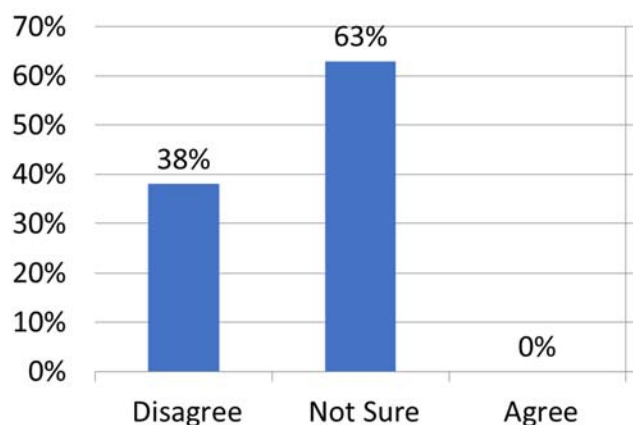
Statement 5:
Building heights should be allowed up to four stories.



Those who said they disagreed expressed worry that building over 3 stories means Zebulon would lose its small-town feel. There was general acceptance of CodeWright's suggestion to make a fourth story conditional based on higher development quality or other higher standards, creating an incentive-based relationship with private sector.

Those who agreed said they did so because increased building heights allow the Town to encourage growth and also encourage affordability with increased housing density and housing choice.

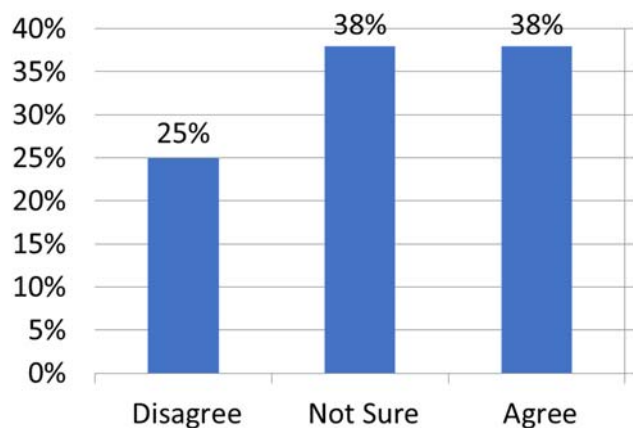
Statement 6:
The Town should prohibit corporate architecture.



Focus group members were uncomfortable with the idea that imposing design standards that prohibit corporate architecture would stifle development, and what Zebulon needs now, they said, is development.

One focus group member noted that if a chain retailer or restaurant is open to restoring and occupying a vacant building downtown, that would be preferable to new-built corporate architecture; but if the choice is between new business with corporate architecture and no new businesses, Zebulon wants the new business.

Statement 7:
New development should be required to preserve trees during construction.

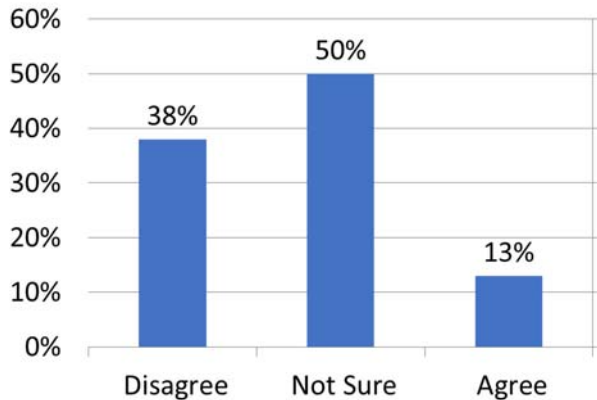


Those who agreed with this statement said that trees are one of the most important features of the community because they attract residents, make places pleasant, raise property values, and conserve energy.

Others said that tree protection needs to be site-specific, or at least flexible: "where possible" but not at all costs and not all new development. There were worries about using a strict across-the-board requirement.

Statement 8:

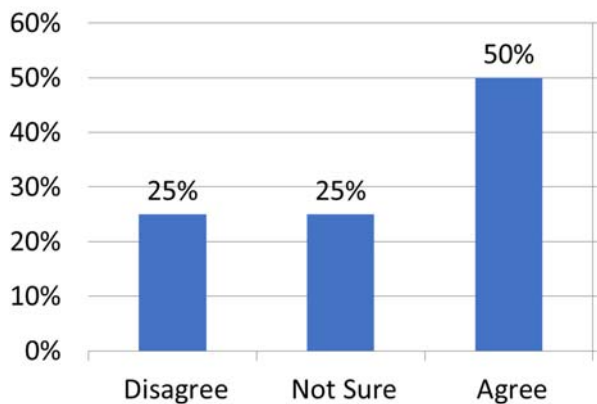
New development should be required to preserve trees during construction *even if it raises construction costs.*



This second way of asking about Statement 7 drew less agreement. There was not a clear consensus on this issue among focus group members, but there was discomfort with disrupting development with too-high costs.

Statement 9:

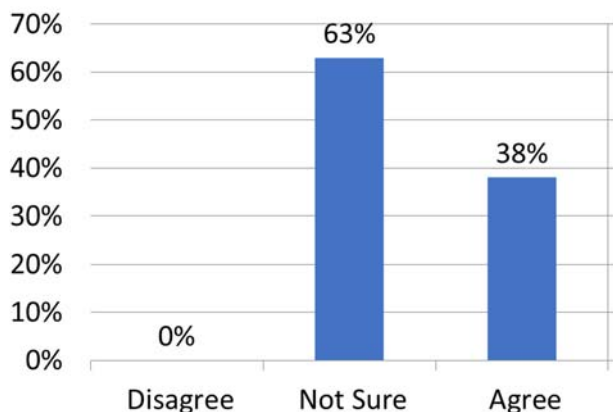
The UDO should allow more accessory dwelling units in Zebulon.



Those who were “not sure” said that they worried about losing control of the community – that there might be too many ADUs or that the unknown character of them might change the feel of the community. CodeWright clarified that there would be development standards regulating the size, placement, and other features so that the community would know what was allowed to come in.

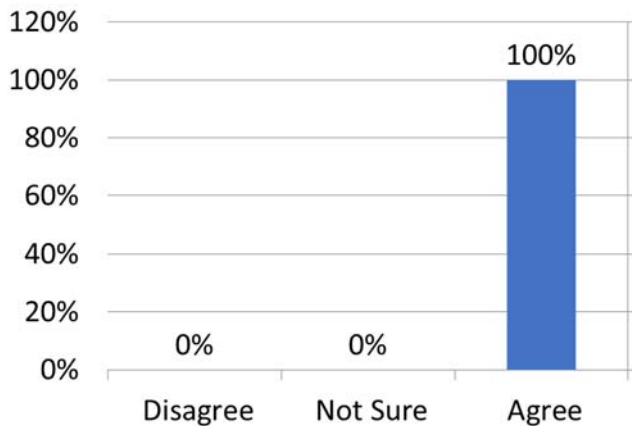
Statement 10:

The UDO should allow pocket neighborhoods and bungalow courts.



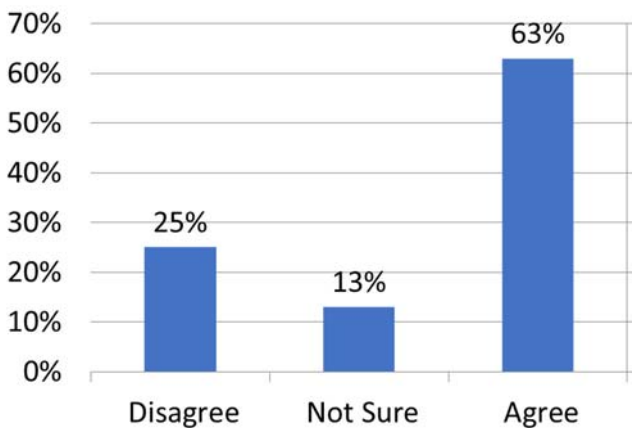
Discussion on this topic centered on questions about parking. At least two focus group members were not comfortable with residents having only street parking. CodeWright clarified that there are many ways to deal with parking for these types of developments, but they can include alleyways or a shared parking lot for all the homes.

Statement 11:
The UDO should allow live-work units.



This topic yielded full agreement and no comments.

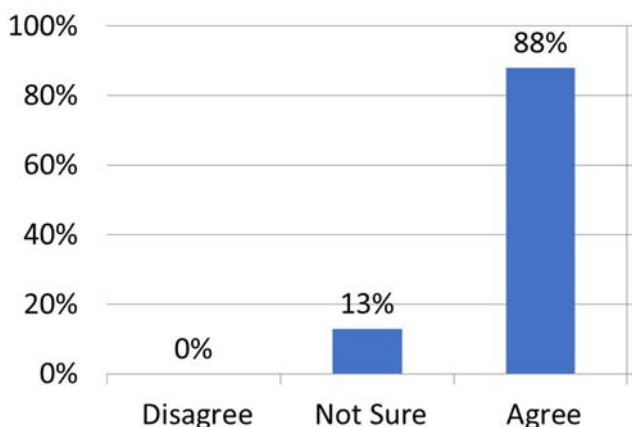
Statement 12:
Cell phone service in the Town is good enough already.



Most focus group members were in agreement that cell service is acceptable.

One person raised concerns about how population growth would affect cell service.

Statement 13:
Zebulon should prioritize development in downtown right now.

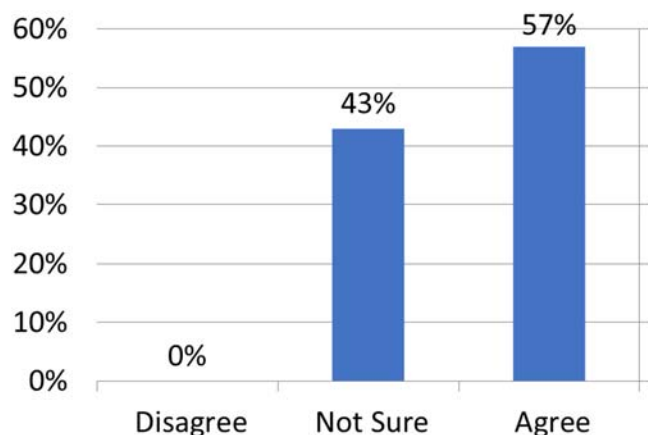


One person in agreement commented that Downtown is a hot topic in Zebulon. People talk about a lot of goals for the community, but always seem to come back to downtown as the logical starting point.

Another person summed up the advantage to concentrating on downtown: Downtown Zebulon as a whole is small, but people are wanting the older character of traditional downtowns. Even in the case of chains, it's more desirable as an experience to go to a chain establishment in an older, renovated, unique building; you get a richer experience in a downtown environment.

Statement 14:

The UDO should limit the amount of off-street parking between commercial buildings and the street.

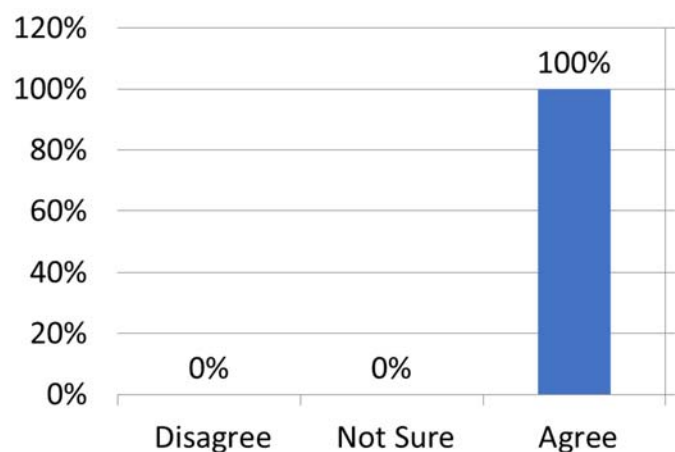


Those who were “unsure” asked where the parking would be instead, and CodeWright clarified that parking would be situated to the side and rear of buildings, or in the downtown context either in shared lots off-site or interior to blocks.

The consensus of the group was that this standard should be in place downtown, but not necessarily in other areas of Town.

Statement 15:

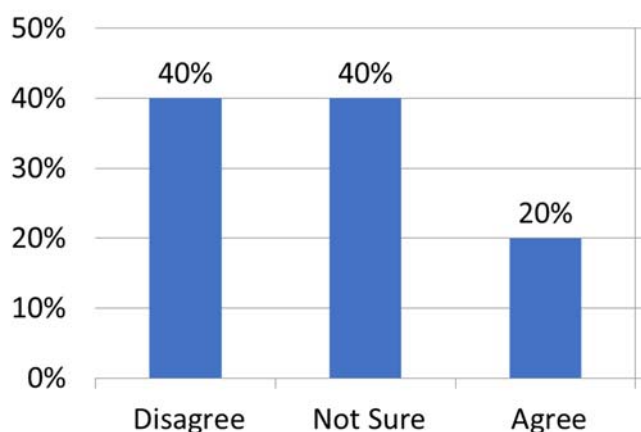
The UDO should require sidewalks on both sides of most streets.



This topic yielded full agreement and no comments.

Statement 16:

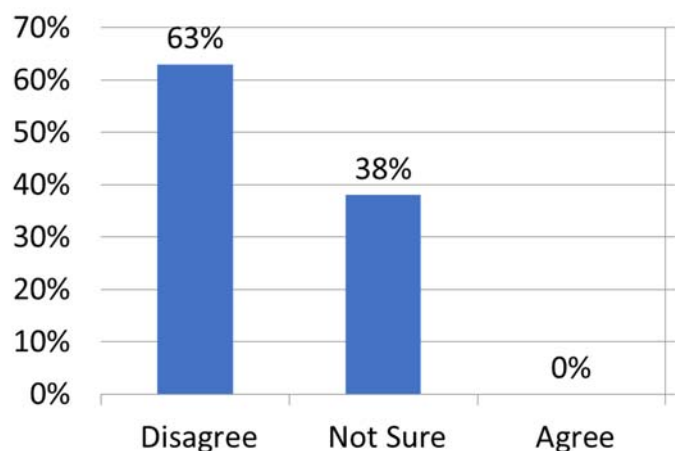
Right now, signs in Zebulon are too big.



Those who commented on this statement said they don't feel like this is a problem; they don't feel like what we have now is detracting from the community's character.

Statement 17:

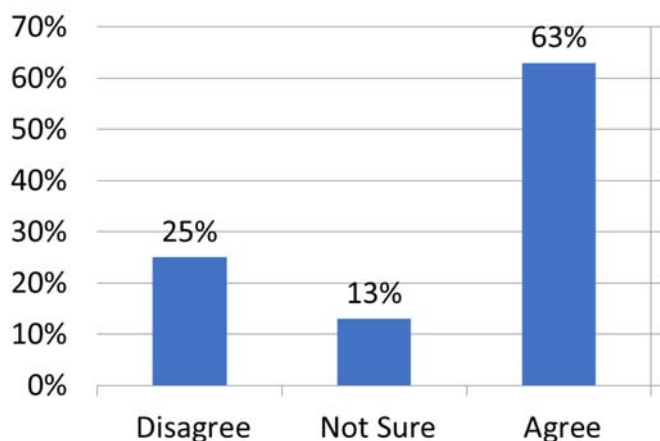
Right now, signs in Zebulon are too tall.



Sign height was not seen as an issue facing the Town right now.

Statement 18:

The UDO should limit how bright signs can be.



This statement drew general agreement and no comments.

Other Comments

The following were additional comments from focus group members:

1. Downtown parking – pay parking. Some also have Town-owned parking for pay. Prefer off-street parking, whether for pay or for not.
2. There was also some discussion of the timing of this project and others. Town Manager Joe Moore discussed the strategic planning process also underway and emphasized that the UDO is one very important tool of many in the works in Zebulon right now.
3. There was discussion of how to get more participants out to these meetings. One suggestion was advertisement through facebook groups that already exist in the community. The focus group members were encouraged to invite other community members out to events as well.