

Summary of Planning Commission Work Sessions: October 10, 2023 and November 14, 2023

At their October 10 work session, the Planning Commission provided feedback on draft Goals and Objectives for the following Comprehensive Plan chapters: Environmental Stewardship, Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources, and Parks and Recreation. At their November 14 work session, the Commission provided feedback on draft Goals and Objectives for the Housing and Economic Development chapters. A summary of Commission input from both work sessions is provided below, organized by chapter.

It should be noted that this feedback and direction from the Board of Supervisors could be incorporated into either Goals, Objectives, and/or Action Steps for these chapters. While only draft Goals and Objectives have been shared to date, some of these recommendations may fall more within the definition of Action Steps.

Environmental Stewardship

Dark skies:

- Should also have recommendations in this chapter (not just Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources)
- Regional coordination needed (City, UVA)

Community resilience and wellbeing:

- Consider impacts on business continuity for resilience recommendations and more emphasis overall on recovery
- Consider options for some properties that are in the Rural Area but adjacent to/very close to the Development Areas to connect to public water and sewer; there are houses without functioning septic and connections to public utilities could have multiple benefits including to help people stay in their homes and protect waterways
 - Also consider related ways to help community members stay in their homes, e.g. additional funding for AHIP
- Emphasize Goal 2 and associated objectives; resilience is key and is cross-cutting across the Comp Plan
- Identify high risk areas in the County for natural disasters/hazards, such as possible fire risks adjacent to/within Shenandoah National Park and possible fire-wise techniques
- Consider how these recommendations will be funded, and opportunities for collaboration between the public/private sectors and leveraging grants/partnerships

Protecting water quality/waterways/habitats:

- Regional collaboration needed for water resource management; need improved communication
- Consider opportunities for low impact development (LID) for stormwater management
- Paving gravel rural roads can break up habitat connectivity; overlaps with Transportation
- More emphasis on community and landowner education and land conservation programs
- Update the land cover maps from the Biodiversity Action Plan
- Consider a groundwater study for the county
- Distinguish between steep slopes that are natural and have environmental value compared with slopes that are man-made and not true steep slopes

- Consider how emerging/newer uses in the Rural Area (such as utility-scale solar) could impact natural areas; find ways to mitigate impacts
- Consider requirements for tree preservation and use of native plant/tree species

Provide more measurable objectives:

- Review the draft objectives and see which can be updated to be more measurable – make sure we can track success and implementation
- Consider metrics for CO2 reductions for buildings

Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources

Recognizing communities and under-told narratives:

- Include specific action items and recognition of historic Freetown communities in the Rural Area
- Make history/narratives more broadly accessible; e.g. through videos or podcasts
- There are also underrepresented geographic areas in the county, such as Howardsville – more recognition of those areas
- Need to catalog and inventory our historic resources and stories/narratives
- Consider a longer view of history beyond the National Register's 50-year window

Entrance Corridors:

- Objective 4.1 seems like two different ideas – may need to split into two objectives (one for Entrance Corridors)

Requirements for historic preservation:

- Consider recommendation for historic preservation ordinance
- Need requirements (not just encouragement/recommendations)
- Consider stricter requirements for demolition – adaptive reuse often happens when not allowed to demolish – forces creative thinking

Funding options for historic preservation:

- Look for ways to leverage funding options, such as historic tax credits (DHR)

Arts and culture:

- Need to figure out where current arts/cultural resources fit into the Comprehensive Plan; e.g. free concerts, festivals
- Build off of existing assets – also supports tourism; previous coordination has been done with the PDC

Parks and Recreation

Need for additional parks in the Development Areas:

- Equitable distribution of parks needed; address park 'deserts' and prioritize where new parks are needed, especially in the urban ring
- Consider pocket parks with County-owned land, such as Northside Library and other locations where community members are already spending time
- Should the County purchase more land for parks?
- Use catalyzing projects that inspire additional projects/investments

- Consider creative funding options the County could use for acquiring funding for more parks, such as public bonds, tourism tax revenue, transfer of development rights, and leveraging partnerships
- Consider maintenance and staffing that will be needed to achieve goals

Emphasize a system of parks and greenways:

- New trails/bike paths; improve connectivity and accessibility
- System that also connects parks, business districts, rails to trails, housing
- Need a system that is publicly-accessible (not just privately-owned greenspaces)
- More regional coordination needed

Provide more measurable objectives:

- Review the draft objectives and see which can be updated to be more measurable – make sure we can track success and implementation
- Also tie parks to factors for possible future Development Areas expansion – should meet certain standards within existing Development Areas before expanding

Community health and wellbeing:

- Parks are important ‘third spaces’ for community members and are key to quality of life
- Consider adding a recommendation (could also be in action steps) related to safety and security in park
- Should the County support cell towers in/near parks for emergency response?

Parks recommendations in the Rural Area:

- Better document rural roads used for recreation (walking/biking/running); use data from Strava/similar sources
- Consider where additional parks/trails may be needed in the Rural Area, including potentially in locations that already have development (e.g. Ivy)

Overlap with Environmental Stewardship and the natural environment:

- Include invasive species management plans for parks
- Parks are an opportunity to educate the community about native species; could use demonstration projects for native plants or xeriscapes

Housing

Prioritization of housing recommendations:

- There are a lot of recommendations in these draft Goals and Objectives, and while they are all worth for pursuing, we should evaluate what is most feasible with this Plan update and prioritize what should be implemented first
- Overall right direction, but want to know how this all will be implemented; balance aspirational with achievable

Options for increasing the number of affordable housing units:

- Explore using County-owned land for affordable housing
- Consider a housing trust fund with consistent/dedicated funding; same for voucher programs
- Consider community land trusts
- Dedicate County funding to affordable housing and then build on it each year

- Important to increase options so that people employed in Albemarle County can live in the county and not commute long distances
- Consider options for affordable housing in the Rural Area – explore allowing for smaller lots/duplexes without increasing overall density
- Support for increased housing choice and more missing middle housing options; this includes using the Development Areas efficiently and considering higher densities
- Incorporate results of the developer incentives into the action steps, once those have been decided on
- Regional collaboration will be key, including for addressing other areas of housing recommendations such as ensuring homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time
- Increase affordable housing options in activity centers/locations with job opportunities; significant overlap with other Plan chapters

Aging in place:

- Need to address high cost of assisted living – many local options are prohibitively expensive; need subsidies/programs to address
- Need partnerships to address and consider overlap with other chapters (e.g. transportation)
- Multigenerational options needed, such as accessory dwelling units
- Overlaps with availability of services/health care in the Rural Area; if aging in the Rural Area need to be able to maintain home and also access health care/basic services

Maintenance of existing housing units:

- Important to maintain existing aging housing stock in both the Development Areas and the Rural Area
- The most affordable housing units are the ones that already exist; collaborate with partners such as AHIP (and continue to provide with funding)

Updated data/information:

- Hoping for more updated data as move through the Plan update – e.g. Regional Housing Analysis was done in 2018, but a lot has changed since then
- Add more measurable objectives/targets to achieve
- Make sure County is tracking data over time, including after Plan adoption; make sure designated affordable units are being filled with qualified buyers/renters; make sure achieving Plan recommendations
- After Plan adoption, share successes as they're achieved – show how we're making progress and what it looks like

Economic Development

Leveraging partnerships, grants, and funding opportunities:

- Explore availability of additional grant opportunities (beyond what we've already identified); including building reuse grants
- Overlap with SMART Scale – having a Tier 5 (site readiness criteria) site is a positive for applying for funding

Tourism:

- Recreational economy is a large generator of revenue (e.g. races, hiking); consider action steps with more specific language on recreational tourism opportunities

- Partner with CACVB

Small businesses and entrepreneurs:

- Consider the overlap with housing; many employees (including for many small businesses) cannot afford housing in the county; difficult for employers to find staff
- Consider ways to support small businesses and entrepreneurs, such as retrofitting existing buildings for small businesses; can be prohibitively expensive for businesses just starting out

Land use and economic development:

- More opportunities needed for living and working in the same area, including through mixed-use developments
- Explore sustainable uses in the Rural Area that can also create jobs; action steps should address
- Consider strengthening language of Objectives 1.1 and 1.2; site readiness and a diversity of sites throughout the Development Areas is important

Workforce development and mobility:

- Consider ways to strengthen ties to equity in this chapter (including this section)
- Need to support a variety of careers and training, including trades/technical skills; consider ways to partner with high schools

Updated data/information:

- Update data where more recent data is available; need post-COVID data
- Add updated list of top employers if have more recent data; see how this could impact the target industries