

Pantops community shares planning perspective from city-county border  
written by Newspark Team | October 26, 2012

In the last of four scheduled One Community Conversations at Martha Jefferson Hospital on Thursday, county residents discussed government services, growth and density, and the private sector.

The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission designed the One Community Conversation series to gather public feedback on the joint vision and goal language they crafted for potential adoption in the Charlottesville and Albemarle comprehensive plans.

"It's important to note that consensus is not the goal of these meetings, the conversation is the goal," said Summer Frederick, manager of TJPDC's Livable Communities project. "We're hoping that this is an arena to get [community members'] feedback in front of the planning commissions."

While TJPDC staff heard feedback on content in all eight sections of the joint vision and goals, members of the public commented most frequently on coordinating services across municipalities, the balance between growth and density, and the absence of the private sector in the joint goal language.

Ashcroft resident Casey Beeghly touched on how county residents' sense of community with nearby Charlottesville is often splintered due to a division of services.

"When you're standing around the water cooler, you feel like you're part of a community," Beeghly said. "But we separate government services so much it changes that sense of community."

"And we could combine services, like schools and emergency services, between the city and county," she added. "In a tight economy we could do more with our funds."

Albemarle Planning Commissioner Calvin Morris said that he'd like to see the city and county's partnership improve as well, but noted the need for a culture shift politically.

"I've been on joint committees for a long time," Morris said. "The thinking usually boils down to 'us and them.' We're beginning to focus more on 'we,' which is great, but we need to connect more."

Also of concern was how the city and county plan to balance encouraging growth in the designated growth areas with the housing density that process will bring.

Keswick resident and Martha Jefferson Hospital's vice president of planning Ron Cottrell cited the conflict he sees between building taller structures to accommodate density, and government's resistance to doing so.

"Grow the growth areas," Cottrell said, "but you can't do that with a ceiling on the growth areas."

The Pantops Master Plan classifies the immediate area surrounding Martha Jefferson Hospital as employment mixed use. This distinction permits business and professional parks, as well as research and development and laboratories.

Albemarle senior planner Andy Sorrell pointed to areas that have dealt with density well.

"In Arlington, you see that they've built taller," Sorrell said, "but the taller buildings are set back from the street behind shorter buildings, so you get more sunlight on the street and don't feel like the

buildings are so overwhelming.”

Cottrell also noted an absence of language including the private sector.

“Government has a role in development, but the private sector is going to execute those goals, and they are the ones taking the business risk,” Cottrell said.

“That doesn’t mean that the private sector can go wild,” he added. “There needs to be collaboration, and there needs to be a fundamental understanding of what the respective parties need.”

Reflecting on myriad comments received during all four of the One Community conversations, Summer Frederick noted the common trends.

“There was a lot of focus on the [Rivanna River] as a theme in our community, as well as water quality and housing,” Frederick said. “The details about each of these issues differed, but those issues came up frequently.”

TJPDC staff will now prepare a report on the One Community conversation series, which will be discussed during a joint city-county planning commission meeting in December.