

City Planning Commission examines visions of Comprehensive Plan
written by Newspark Team | October 23, 2012

After spending over a year taking public comment, the Charlottesville Planning Commission has begun the work of revising and updating the document that provides guidance to the way the city should grow.

Commissioners spent two hours at a work session Tuesday reviewing the vision statements for the Comprehensive Plan's seven chapters, whose topics include community facilities, transportation and economic sustainability.

"It is time to make sure we are moving towards more consistent language and format following the public input sessions," said Missy Creasy, the city's planning manager.

The four commissioners present each provided edits to statements crafted by city planning staff.

Over the next several months, the Planning Commission will work with staff to edit the chapters of the document. The 2007 plan has 11 chapters and three appendices, but the document is being reduced in size during this update.

City staff has spent the past year taking public input with assistance from the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded the commission a \$1 million grant to help the city and Albemarle County coordinate their updates to encourage shared planning principles.

"I'm hoping that today we will take a time out and be able to agree on what is a goal, what is a strategy, and what goes [in the vision statement]," said Commissioner Dan Rosensweig, who said he has sat down several times to edit the document but felt he needed to be in the group to make progress.

Rosensweig said the process gives the commission the chance to visualize how Charlottesville can be made into a better place.

"What do we really want our transportation system to look like? Let's not get stuck at all on details and challenges at this point, but what would excellence look like?" Rosensweig asked.

Commissioner Kurt Keesecker said he did not want the Comprehensive Plan goals to simply be a laundry list of all the things the Planning Commission wants to do, but that it should serve as an aspirational document.

"The words right now are more important because we're dealing with what topics we're going to deal with," Keesecker said.

One starting reference for the discussion was the extent to which the City Council's vision should inform the Comprehensive Plan.

Commission Chairwoman Genevieve Keller said she wanted the vision statements in the draft chapters to inspire citizens, but that they needed more work.

"Even if they are aspirational in intent, it's not written that way," Keller said. "Most of them are written

as a statement of fact rather than something we're striving towards."

During the discussion of the transportation chapter, commissioners debated what role the plan should play in guiding a general reduction of automobile traffic. In 2007, a previous commission established a goal of reducing single-occupancy vehicle usage.

"I love that statement in there here because it's my worldview to create streets where people walk and play on them," Rosensweig said. He acknowledged that traffic has to have a way to get through the city, but that the city could choose to reduce parking in order to encourage more people to walk, bike or use transit.

However, Commissioner Michael Osteen said that half the population might feel alienated by such a move.

"I think the City Council vision is a wonderful document that holds up really well, but I don't really like starting these goals as Comprehensive Plan visions," Osteen said.

Creasy said the finished plan would ultimately need to be approved by the council.

"In our finished document we're not going to make decisions, but we're going to make debatable points," Creasy said. "We know we're going to put things out there that might be in conflict. If you focus on being a walkable community, other things may have to go."

The commissioners will hold a retreat Nov. 27 to discuss the land use chapter, as well as the city's capital improvement program budget. The commission's public hearing will be held in the spring before adoption by the council later in 2013.

Commissioners Lisa Green, John Santoski and Natasha Sienitsky were not present Tuesday.