

Public gives input on Albemarle's next master plan
written by Newspark Team | July 25, 2014



More than 100 people gathered earlier this week at Monticello High School to provide input on Albemarle County's master plan for its southern and western urban areas.

Supervisors Jane Dittmar and Liz Palmer were on hand at Thursday's meeting to hear comments from the public.

"Liz and I are very thankful as elected folks to be able to discern better what are the hopes and dreams of the people we are charged with representing," Dittmar said.

Elaine Echols, a senior county planner, told the crowd that the objective of the meeting was to receive feedback on the two areas' master plan.

"The purpose of tonight's meeting is to get additional input from you all. It is not to try to develop consensus," Echols said.

Albemarle County has designated 5 percent of its area for development, leaving the other 95 percent for rural uses. The county creates master plans for each of its development areas as part of its Comprehensive Plan, but has not yet completed a master plan for the southern and western urban areas.

The southern urban area includes neighborhoods south of Charlottesville such as Mill Creek,

Willoughby and Redfields. The western urban area includes neighborhoods west of the city such as Bellair and Ednam Forest.

"The Comprehensive Plan is our guide to development and other kinds of decisions that take place within the county," Echols said.

Echols said she is proud that the county has a long history of following its Comprehensive Plan.

"A Comprehensive Plan is strong because decisions are made in accordance with it," she said. "It's like a muscle — the more you use it, the stronger it gets."

✖ The Board of Supervisors is in the process of conducting a chapter-by-chapter review of a heavily updated Comprehensive Plan and likely will review the chapter related to these development areas in September.

At Thursday's meeting, Echols provided an overview of the recommendations of the draft master plan, which has been developed over the past two years.

"We want our development areas to have an urban look and feel," Echols said. "That doesn't necessarily mean New York City. Our model is Charlottesville and the downtown Charlottesville area."

Echols also pointed out several development centers in the area, including the shopping center between Fifth and Avon Streets, where a Wegmans grocery store will be located, Biscuit Run State Park and Piedmont Virginia Community College.

"A center is a place, a focal point, a destination," she said. "We try to do land uses surrounding those areas that are walkable."

After Echols' presentation, officials fielded questions from the audience.

Several questions were raised about light-industrial uses and exactly what they entail.

Echols referred to the light-industrial designation as "light, light industrial," explaining that uses in such areas are expected to have the fewest impacts on surrounding areas in terms of noise, vibration and odor.

County spokeswoman Lee Catlin responded to concerns from audience members about including light-industrial designations as part of developments next to homes and retail space.

"Lower-impact companies like to be in settings where they're not isolated, where they're really part of the fabric of the community," Catlin said.

David Benish, Albemarle's chief of planning, responded to questions about extending Charlottesville Area Transit bus service to the southern urban area, including parts of Avon Street Extended and Mill Creek Drive.

"That's ultimately a decision that has to be worked through jointly with the city. It's also a decision of the Board of Supervisors to fund that service."

Palmer added to Benish's comments, saying that the Board of Supervisors is strongly in favor of

improving public transportation.

“I would encourage anybody that cares about this to write the Board of Supervisors, especially during the next budget season in the fall,” she said.

After the meeting, community members had a chance to meet with county staff to discuss their specific concerns.

The next public hearing opportunity will be when the Board of Supervisors reviews the draft master plan in September. Echols said the entire updated Comprehensive Plan will be ready for a public hearing and adoption in early 2015.