

Elected officials react to study identifying new business targets
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Charlottesville city councilors and Albemarle County supervisors were briefed Wednesday on the results of a targeted industry study commissioned by the Thomas Jefferson Partnership for Economic Development.

Sharon Younger, the consultant who conducted the \$150,000 study, said both communities should focus on industries that provide high-paying wages while creating other support jobs.

"There are a lot of things that balance this economy that do not belong [strictly] in the 10.4 square miles of Charlottesville," Younger said.

Councilor Kristin Szakos said a regional approach to economic development could provide job opportunities for city residents.

"They may live in Charlottesville but they could work in Albemarle County," Szakos said.

Councilor Dave Norris asked Younger what a targeted industry study would have looked like if the charge had been to lift as many people out of poverty as possible.

"That was clearly not reflected in this report," Norris said. "How would that have shaped the findings?"

Younger said successful economic development strategies are not meant to end poverty, but to improve a community's overall economy.

"We have targets that were put there thoughtfully to create a [job] ladder," Younger said. "You want something that has a high job-multiplying effect."

Younger estimated that every new job created in the businesses and financial services sector would create an additional 9.3 support jobs.

Norris said many of the industries identified in the report would provide no opportunity for many Charlottesville residents who lack both skills and the education system in which to gain them.

"There's no ladder that's going to get them there," Norris said. "It's going to be through something else and I'm trying to figure out what that something else is."

Norris said he was intrigued that retail did not play a large role in the study.

"So often we hear that [some] people equate economic development with building more retail stores," Norris said.

Younger said those types of jobs are at the bottom of the spectrum.

"[Retail] is a non-sustainable form of economic development because someone has to buy what's in those stores," Younger said.

In her comments to the Board of Supervisors, Younger said that by encouraging development of bioscience and biotechnology sectors, the community could retain more University of Virginia students after they graduate.

"If they know this is a hotbed for biosciences, your odds of keeping them are that much greater," Younger said.

Supervisor Dennis S. Rooker said his interpretation of the study was that very few rezonings would have to be undertaken to implement the plan.

"Most of these targeted industries can be located in commercial zoning and we have a plethora of that," Rooker said.

However, Supervisor Kenneth C. Boyd disputed that claim and said he was not certain much of the commercial development that has not yet been built would ever be constructed.

"How much of that land is now in receivership because it's been taken over by the bank?" Boyd asked. "These are all the kinds of things we need to flesh out."

Supervisors' review of the plan took place just before members were briefed on the ongoing update of the county's Comprehensive Plan. So far, the county Planning Commission has held six work sessions on the topic.

Most notably, the Planning Commission has recommended against expanding the county's designated growth area at this time.

"After looking at the amount of land that was available for our projected population, they came to the conclusion that there is no need to expand because of our existing capacity," said Wayne Cilimberg , the county's director of planning.

Boyd disputed that claim and said he was not sure if developments such as Cascadia and North Pointe would ever be built, and so they should not be taken into consideration.

Cilimberg said whoever owns those properties is entitled to build.

"What we find is that when the market is there, they will be ready to go," Cilimberg said. "The banks don't want to hang onto these properties."

The commission also expressed no interest in changing county rules that restrict development of rural interstate interchanges, which would discourage development of an industrial park near Crozet .

"They believed the Crozet interchange had been decided with the Crozet Master Plan ," Cilimberg said.

However, both Supervisor Rodney S. Thomas and Boyd disagreed that was the county's official policy because the master planning area does not extend to land owned by the Yancey family.

"No vote was ever taken on that by the Board of Supervisors," Boyd said.

However, the commission has indicated that it is willing to consider allowing for some commercial and industrial development around the Shadwell exit on Interstate 64 .

The commission has so far not weighed in on expanding the amount of land designated for industrial uses.

"What they wanted to know is what would be the needs for the selected targeted industries and businesses," Cilimberg said. "They wanted to know how many could be accommodated within our existing zoning."

Possible areas under consideration for expansion are near the National Ground Intelligence Center and between Avon Street and Route 20 .

"The commission said they would consider these if it were felt the areas were needed to accomplish the needs of the targeted industries," said county planner Elaine Echols.

The Board of Supervisors will further consider the study at a work session on May 2 at which public comment will be taken.