Survey ranks residents' priorities for planning in Charlottesville-Albemarle
written by Newspack Team | August 14, 2012

In June, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission released a Community Priorities Questionnaire designed to measure what issues residents from Charlottesville and Albemarle County consider most important for the future development of the area.

According to those who responded to the survey, the No. 1 priority for residents of both the county and the city is limiting rural-area development.

Participants were asked to rank the 10 issues that they viewed as most important out of a list of more than 50 issues. Beyond limiting development in rural areas, those surveyed included improving bicycle facilities and the protection of open spaces and natural resources among the top four priorities.

Mandy Burbage is a planner with the Livable Community Project, the TJPDC group that released the survey. According to her, the list of issues was populated through community input from several meetings held over the last year.

"We had initiated an outreach series starting in September of last year that ran through March of this year to elicit feedback from the community. What we wanted to do … was to get more detailed information on the priorities of the community members," Burbage said. "We then put together a questionnaire and came up with 55 priorities that were reflective of the comments that we received in the community series."

The 55 items were then organized into categories to reflect the subjects of the different workshops that the TJPDC held during those months, including economic development, housing and land use.

The final analysis of the data will be used to focus planning priorities, especially as the city and county review their comprehensive plans.

"They are all issues that relate to topics that are covered by the comprehensive plans," Burbage said. "We're hoping to tie this in with some of the outreach that the city and county are doing this fall … we will also be sharing the results with the city and county planning commissions."

Of the 620 people who responded to the survey, 39 percent responded as residents of Albemarle County, 30 percent responded from Charlottesville, 4 percent responded from elsewhere, and 27 percent did not indicate their place of residence.

"For the purpose of analysis, we are looking at Charlottesville and Albemarle together," Burbage said. "We're not disregarding the other responses, but the focus will be on the responses that came from city or county residents."

Burbage added that early versions of the survey did not ask where participants live, which helps to explain the large number of respondents who did not give a location. Although analysis of the data will encompass all responses, those that can be identified as coming from the Charlottesville-Albemarle area will be highlighted separately.

The Livable Community Project combines input from different organizations and businesses in the area, as well as community members, to provide participation in updating the city and county comprehensive

plans.

According to Matt Weaver, a TJPDC planner, surveys were initially given to members of the Livable Community Project partnership but soon spread to the general public.

"Originally, it started out in the partnership group and then there was a link that was provided online that received a lot of hits," Weaver said. "Word of mouth really helped out."

Weaver added that the survey also was distributed among neighborhood groups and at community events such as farmers markets and neighborhood meetings.

Currently, in-depth analysis of the data is still ongoing, and a final, more detailed report is expected to be completed before the end of August.

"We hope to take this information back out to the public but the form that that takes is undefined at this point," Burbage said. "I do predict that we will be doing more outreach this fall."

A list of the top 10 priorities for Charlottesville and Albemarle County is available on the Livable Community Project website, .