

Countywide Advisory Team Meeting #1 Summary

The initial meeting of the Countywide Advisory Team for *Cultivating Community: A Plan for Union County's Future* was held on Monday, October 15th, 2007 at the Carriage Corner Restaurant in Mifflinburg. A summary of the meeting follows:

I. Welcome & Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Shawn McLaughlin of the Union County Planning Commission at 7:00 PM. Mr. McLaughlin then welcomed everyone and introductions of county staff, the consultant team, and attendees followed. Attached is a list of those in attendance.

II. Role of Planning Advisory Team

David Rouse with the consulting firm of Wallace Roberts Todd (WRT) reviewed the role of the Planning Advisory Team (PAT). Mr. Rouse described the PAT as an extremely important body that has been organized to represent various interests and perspectives around Union County. He said the PAT would act as a "sounding board" and provide direction throughout the planning process to the county staff and consultant team to ensure that public input is translated into plan concepts.

III. Consulting Team

Mr. Rouse briefly reviewed the consultant team makeup and the roles each firm would fulfill during the project. It was noted that WRT will be the lead consultant with McMahon Transportation Engineers and Planners, American Farmland Trust, Susan Huffman & Associates and ETC Institute serving as sub-consultants. McMahon Transportation will address transportation issues in the county including vehicular and pedestrian, American Farmland Trust will be assisting with agriculture, forestry, land use, and rural economy portions, Susan Huffman & Associates specializes in economics, downtown revitalization, and housing, and the ETC Institute is a public opinion research firm that will be conducting a statistically valid survey.

IV. Why Comprehensive Planning

Mr. Rouse then discussed with the PAT the purpose of comprehensive planning and why it is important. Counties are required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code to update the comprehensive plan every 10 years. More importantly comprehensive planning helps to aid local officials in making strategic decisions about directing public and private investment to meet citizen's goals. In Union County the planning process also promotes regional cooperation since three multi-municipal comprehensive plans are being developed simultaneously for specific groups of municipal partners. Mr. Rouse indicated that this is a unique and very good approach that should result in greater consistency between county and local plans. The comprehensive plans will address natural resources, land use, transportation, housing, economic development, cultural and historic resources, community facilities and infrastructure, and implementation. It was also noted that sustainability and energy conservation will be themes throughout the planning process. Mr. Rouse said he could not stress enough the importance of implementing the plan. He said communities may put a lot of time and money into a planning process only to have the plan sit on the shelf because there was not ownership from the public or the plan goals and actions

were not realistic. Mr. Rouse said the PAT and community will need to find a balance between all the competing interests in the county and create a plan that can be effectively put into action.

V. Comprehensive Planning Process & Schedule

Mr. Rouse reviewed with the PAT the planning process and schedule for project completion. The first phase was getting organized, mobilizing the county and consultant staff, and assessing available data. The current phase is “Taking Stock” where existing conditions are explored in the county and try to determine local values, issues, and concerns through various public outreach techniques. In addition this second phase includes a smart growth audit and the preparation of a probable future analysis based on existing trends and development patterns. The third phase will be the development of the overall vision, land use analysis, and drafting the growth management framework. Phase four will be the actual plan development where the consultants will write the plan and work with the PAT to weave all the plan components together into strategic actions. The final phase will be issuance of the draft written plan and the official adoption process. The entire planning process will take until approximately December of 2008 until a draft plan is developed.

VI. Public Outreach Initiatives & Forum 1 Agenda

Mr. Rouse reviewed with the PAT the various levels of public involvement and the specific techniques that will be used to obtain public input. The PAT is one component plus there will be coordination with and involvement of municipal officials, the general public, and other stakeholders (i.e. farm community). Methods to be utilized include public forums, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, a project website, and a statistically valid citizen survey. A PAT member asked how many surveys would be distributed and Mr. Rouse indicated that ETC Institute is guaranteeing 600 valid responses. Although 600 does not sound like a large number of households to be surveyed he said public opinion polls that predict presidential election outcomes are generally based on only a sampling of 1,000 people in the entire nation. Mr. Rouse stressed that a properly delivered survey can be quite accurate but is only one of many forms of public involvement for this project. Another member asked if the survey is different for one multi-municipal planning area versus another. It was reported that everyone will receive the same survey; however, the first question identifies the municipality in which the person resides and the remaining questions are comprehensive to the point where all the options listed may not apply to every region of the county. There is also a place on the survey where people can write other comments and/or concerns if their particular issue was not addressed in the survey. Mr. Rouse also indicated that WRT and the county is in the midst of holding focus groups and stakeholder interviews on various topics and that eight would be completed in October with more to follow in November. A list of possible focus groups and stakeholder interviews will be provided to the PAT.

Mr. Rouse then reviewed the agenda and general format for Public Forum #1 that will be held in November. The forums, being advertised by the county as “Talk Turkey” forums will be held on November 14th at 7:00 PM at the Hartley Township Community Center in Laurelton and on November 15th at 8:30 AM at the Union County Government Center in Lewisburg, and at 7:00 PM at the Sun-Career and Technology Center in New Berlin. The consultant team will briefly present general trends in Union County and then organize participants into breakout groups where each group will have a facilitated discussion about the strengths of the county, weaknesses, and ideas or solutions people have for the future. There will be a facilitator and note taker at each breakout group. The consultant team and county staff will assist with this but volunteers from the PAT would likely be needed depending on the public turnout. Those willing to volunteer

should notify Mr. McLaughlin. Mr. Rouse suggested that the next PAT meeting precede the November forums and the PAT would then go through the same exercise as well in order to get the PAT's input.

VII. General Trends in Union County

Rob Kerns of WRT presented a series of general trends in Union County based on the consultant team's preliminary data review and analysis. This included information on demographics and population, economics and commerce, agriculture, and land use and zoning. See attached handout from the meeting for more details. Mr. Kerns reviewed with the PAT a map showing the geographic dispersion of the 1,100 new structures built in the county from 2001 through 2007. He also showed a map of generalized zoning and talked briefly about how although there are many zoning districts that might be rural by name, such as agricultural preservation or woodland preservation, but most of them still permit quite an array of non-agricultural uses. A PAT member asked if it would be possible to combine the two maps in order to overlay the structures built since 2001 with the zoning districts. Mr. Kerns and Mr. McLaughlin indicated that it should be possible and is something they will pursue.

VIII. Next Meeting

Mr. Kerns again quickly reviewed the next major public participation opportunity in November with the three forums and directed PAT members to the website at www.cultivatingcommunity.net. He said items are still be adding as they become available but there is information on the site about the consultant team, an explanation of comprehensive planning and this project, and meeting announcements. There is also a summary and photos of the kickoff event held on September 5th at the Campus Theatre. Mr. McLaughlin noted that some areas of the website are under construction such as the link to the maps and items will be added as they become available.

Mr. Kerns and Mr. Rouse then discussed with the PAT potential dates for the next meeting. The PAT was informed that meetings would average about once every other month; however, another meeting was necessary in November prior to the public forums. The *next meeting* was set for ***Tuesday, November 13th, 2007 at 7:00 PM at a location to be determined.***