

Countywide Advisory Team Meeting #3 Summary

The third meeting of the Countywide Planning Advisory Team (PAT) for *Cultivating Community: A Plan for Union County's Future* was held on Thursday, January 10th, 2008 at the Mifflinburg High School Large Group Instruction (LGI) Room. 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 welcomed everyone and mentioned that PAT members should receive a project binder before leaving. Mr. McLaughlin noted that the February meeting falls on Valentine's Day and there was concern that attendance might be low if it is not rescheduled. Mr. McLaughlin noted that attendance was already sparse enough as only about half the committee was present. After several minutes of discussion no decision was made and the matter would be revisited. Mr. McLaughlin also asked for suggestions on how to increase interest and attendance at PAT meetings and for names of new members because it was time to find replacements for individuals that have not been able to attend any of the first three meetings.

II. Natural Resources & Existing Land Use Mapping

Robert Kerns of WRT reminded PAT members that comments on the existing land use maps (that were distributed at a previous meeting) should be provided to the county staff as soon as possible.

III. Existing Conditions Assessment

David Rouse of WRT began the PAT presentation with a PowerPoint slide of the planning process and explained to the group that the project is still in Phase Two: Taking Stock, which is an assessment and analysis of existing conditions. He noted the project is however moving into Phase III of the work program which is developing the vision statement, land use alternatives and the growth management framework.

The main themes from the existing conditions assessment included: Union County is an attractive place for growth, likely a moderate growth rate, due to proximity to major urban centers; has excellent quality of life assets, and lower cost of living than many areas. Expansion is expected in education, healthcare, and other service sectors of the economy. Agriculture is healthy but consolidation is occurring. Growth appears to be spreading out in the county and until this planning effort there was a lack of coordination on local planning issues. In many cases infrastructure is not ready for new growth.

IV. Report on Community Outreach Efforts

Mr. Rouse also briefly touched on the outreach efforts that have been ongoing. There were three public forums held in November around the county with one in each planning area. The citizen survey was distributed to 3,000 households during the fall and the results are currently being tabulated and will be publicly released at a press conference in February. Interviews continue with various stakeholder groups. This month senior citizen interests, service clubs, and social services are among those that will be interviewed. These will be concluded in January. In addition a meeting was held on January 9th to get input from municipal officials that included elected and appointed planning commission representation. All were invited to participate and between 50 and 60 were present for the session.

Mr. Kerns noted that updates to the website continue. He said a summary had been prepared of the November public forum results but it was not released or put on the website so it would not influence municipal officials prior to their session. The summary will be on the website this week for people to review. Mr. McLaughlin stated that PAT members will be sent via email or mail a copy of the summary.

Mr. Fetterman asked if the PAT members could have a copy of the household survey results to review as well. He felt the committee should see it before announcements are made at a press conference. Mr. Kerns indicated that the executive summary could be provided to the PAT if members did not distribute it. The entire analysis of the survey is not complete but the executive summary is compiled and will be distributed to the PAT.

Mr. Woodruff asked what the purpose of the website was. He said it might be fine if the intent is simply to provide information but he did not find it very inspiring. He did not feel it would get people fired up or overly excited about the plan. Mr. Woodruff suggested that perhaps putting Census data or other information on the site might interest residents. He said even a link to data that already exists on the county's website might suffice. Mr. Kerns stated the team could add links and asked if there were any other specific recommendations or ideas for the website. None were mentioned

Mr. Rouse briefly covered the November public forum results. The overall county findings were:

Strengths

1. Natural Resources, Farmland, & Open Space
2. Rural Environment, Beauty, & Character
3. Recreational Opportunities (outdoor)
4. Education
5. Sense of Community/Quality of Life

Weaknesses

1. Sprawl/Lack of Regulation/Threats to Open Space
2. Lack/Loss of Employment
3. Lack of Public Transportation & Transportation Options
4. Lack of Local Government Cooperation
5. Lack of Hiking/Biking Paths & Recreation

Ideas for the Future

1. Better Ordinances/Zoning to Contain Sprawl & Reduce Land Consumption
2. Build Close to Existing Towns/Smart Growth/Traditional Neighborhood Development
3. Trails/Walkways/Improve Pedestrian, Buggy, & Bike Safety
4. Develop a Common Regional Vision
5. Preserve Farmland/Agriculture (tie)
Improve Public Transportation/Provide Transportation Alternatives

V. Vision Statement Elements

Next Mr. Rouse presented the draft Vision Statement. He said that the consultant team took all the input received to date from the public, advisory team, and by looking at existing conditions to develop the vision. The Vision Statement defines the plan and sets the overall tone for its development (See graphic).



Mr. Rouse asked for reactions to the Vision Statement. Mr. Hovey gestured by giving a “thumbs up”. Several members felt the first two levels were acceptable but the third level that discusses the planning areas could prove to be divisive, depending on how it is interpreted. Mrs. Moyer asked for clarification on what would be included in “rural enterprise” and who the vision statement was for. She said that while visitors might see the eastern region as the gateway due to Route 15 and Route 45 local residents probably do not think that way. Rural enterprise was meant to include those economic activities that capitalize on rural and natural resources and might include tourism related businesses, lumber/sawmills, and even agriculture. Mrs. Gray asked why healthcare and education were not included in the eastern region statement. Mr. Kerns responded by noting that “creative economy” has as its foundation education and that healthcare would certainly be captured by the terms. Mr. McLaughlin asked if the committee was developing the final Vision Statement or a draft to be presented to the public in March for review and comment. Mr. Kerns stated the PAT was to facilitate developing a draft that would be released at the March meetings for feedback from the general public.

There were other comments by several members including Mr. Bowman, Mr. Woodruff, Mr. Kling, and Mr. Patton and it was decided that Mr. Rouse and Mr. Kerns would take this feedback and revise the vision statement accordingly. They encouraged PAT members to continue to think about it and forward any additional thoughts.

VI. Future Growth Scenarios

Mr. Kerns proceeded with presenting a number of growth scenarios. He explained using a graphic illustration that Union County is presently growing at a density of one new housing unit per acre and that if this pattern continues about 10,591 acres would be needed for new development between 2006 and 2050. This was graphically displayed (See attached map) to illustrate the figures by planning area. Mr. Kerns noted that the boxes appearing on the map were to scale and represented the size of the space on the map needed to accommodate such growth. This was called the base scenario if nothing else was done. Mr. Kerns also showed the slide of where growth has been occurring in the county from 2001-2007 (See attached map).

The first alternative, titled *Growth Tiers*, showed primary future growth in Tier 1 (boroughs) at an average of 3.5 dwelling units per acre (DU/acre) with additional growth in Tier 2 at an average of 1 DU/acre. Minimal development would be accommodated in rural resource areas and the majority of growth (85%) would be focused in the tiers. A map was used to illustrate this concept and to show the difference in the amount of land needed to support future growth as compared to the base condition. A set of photos was shown to visually depict the different densities of development so people could have a better understanding of what a specified number of dwelling units per acre might look like.

The second scenario, titled *Town and Village Centers*, showed primary growth in compact Town Centers at an average of 6 DU/acre and additional growth in Village Centers at an average of 2.5 DU/Acre. Again minimal development would occur in the rural resource areas and the majority of growth (70%) would be focused in Town Centers, 15% in Village Centers, and the remaining 15% in rural areas. Again a map was shown to illustrate this in the county along with amount of land needed to support this approach. This scenario requires the least amount of land to support future growth but does increase the density of development in certain areas. Photographs were shown to depict the different densities and what develop might look like under this scenario.

Scenario Three, titled *Town Centers and Rural Neighborhoods*, proposed 50% of growth in Town Centers at an average of 3.5 DU/acre with the remaining 50% of growth in Rural Neighborhoods at an average of 1 DU/acre. This approach would preserve high quality agricultural lands and woodlands in rural resource areas but would also provide for more development on the fringes. The Rural Neighborhoods would be located away from prime farmland and would be designed with 60% of the land area in preserved open space. Mr. Kerns stated that challenges with this concept are the ability to provide sewage treatment and delivery of other public services. A map was shown of this concept along with photographs.

Mr. Kerns and Mr. Rouse stated that they are not promoting any one scenario nor are they suggesting that any of them are perfect for the county. The purpose of showing the alternatives is to get the PAT members thinking about the future and how we might address future growth taking into account public input. Several members offered comments regarding the growth scenarios. Mr. Woodruff said it was difficult to digest all these options and it would be better for him, and perhaps other committee members, if he had a set of the maps to look at and think about before the next meeting. Mr. Rouse stated that PAT members would not be supplied with the maps due to sensitivity issues. He said the maps are so preliminary at this point that we run the risk of things possibly being greatly misconstrued if they were to get in the hands of the general public before being refined. He also said the maps have not been shared with municipal officials yet. Mr. Rouse and Mr. Kerns said the growth scenarios would be explored further at the February meeting.

VII. Breakout Groups by Planning Area

Next the PAT members worked in smaller groups by planning area in an exercise regarding the location of future growth. Participants used maps of their planning area along with Monopoly houses, hotels, and checkers to identify areas for growth. They could implement the techniques presented earlier or come up with new ideas. The Monopoly houses and hotels represented the number of new residential units needed for that particular planning area based on the growth projections. In addition each group was provided with two checkers, a black one that represented a new employment center and a red one that represented a new retail center and these had to be sited on the maps as well. At the conclusion of the exercise each group showed the other groups their growth arrangements and described how they arrived at their decision. Mr. Kerns and Mr. Rouse said they would record the results of this exercise and would use it to develop and refine a growth scenario for the county and three planning areas. They also said this topic would be discussed at the February meeting.

VIII. Conclusion and Next Meeting

Mr. McLaughlin thanked PAT members for attending and said the Planning Commission staff would be in touch via email and/or mail regarding the February meeting date. With no further business the meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.