

Countywide Advisory Team Meeting #4 Summary

The fourth meeting of the Countywide Planning Advisory Team (PAT) for *Cultivating Community: A Plan for Union County's Future* was held on Wednesday, February 13th, 2008 at the Carriage Corner Restaurant in Mifflinburg. The meeting was originally scheduled for the Mifflinburg High School LGI Room however school was closed due to the weather and the facility was not accessible as a result. An attempt was made to contact PAT members during the day but unfortunately not everyone was reached. Despite the weather and circumstances there was a good turnout.

I. Welcome & Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Shawn McLaughlin of the Union County Planning Commission at 7:00 PM.

II. County Survey Results

David Rouse of Wallace Roberts Todd (WRT) reviewed the results of the random household survey. PAT members should have received a copy of the Executive Summary. The survey was distributed to 3,000 randomly selected households so one of approximately every five households in the county had an equal chance of receiving one. There was a 20% response rate which provides a 95% level of statistical confidence +/- 4% . Mr. Rouse highlighted some of the findings from the survey such as the top priorities people identified. These included energy conservation, managing future growth, agricultural preservation, improving roadways and transportation, maintaining a low tax rate, and improving employment opportunities. Similar priorities were identified by respondents regarding what the priorities for the future should be. Mr. Rouse said that using cross tabulation it was determined that energy conservation for example was a priority across all income groups including those making below \$25,000 per year up to the higher income categories. On the other hand those earning less money were more likely to view housing affordability as a more important issue than those earning higher amounts.

People cited the low crime rate, small town and rural atmosphere, appearance and scenic beauty of the area, quality of education, and low tax rate as reasons to live and remain in Union County. When asked if their quality of life had improved, stayed the same, or gotten better 43% said it stayed the same, 26% said it has gotten worse, and 22% said it has gotten better. Mr. Rouse said the cross tabulation comparing the responses to this question with how long the person has lived in the county showed that the longer someone has lived in the county the more likely they were to indicate the quality of life has gotten worse. People that have moved here more recently think it has gotten better, possibly a reflection of Union County being a better place than where they previously resided.

The 200 pages of cross tabulations are available if committee members would like to review them. This was used to compare responses across variables and to determine if there were differences between the three planning areas.

III. Themes from Stakeholder Interviews

Mr. Kerns reviewed with the PAT the major themes at the focus groups and stakeholder interviews. He said that overall people were really positive about the future of the county and there were a lot of commonalities among a very diverse group of stakeholders. The themes were as follows: preservation of agriculture and natural resources, regional cooperation, growth management, concern about the quality of new growth, economic opportunity for current residents, creation of trails and pedestrian friendly development, expanded public transportation,

strategic infrastructure investment, regulatory inconsistency, and maintaining the vitality of town centers. Mr. Kerns noted that in terms of jobs people mentioned frequently that there are higher paying jobs at one end of the spectrum and lower paying service jobs at the other but middle range employment that was once anchored by manufacturing is disappearing. Transportation was also mentioned frequently and raised as a concern since there are few alternatives to the automobile.

IV. Existing Conditions Report

Next Mr. Rouse discussed briefly the Existing Conditions Report that has been drafted which identifies the current conditions in the county and multi-municipal planning areas. The table of contents was reviewed. Mr. Rouse said the report is in draft form and will be distributed to the PAT once the edits recommended by the county staff are incorporated. He quickly scrolled through the document explaining its organization and content. Due to the large file size it cannot be emailed so members have the option of obtaining it on CD, a printed copy or by downloading from the FTP site. PAT members were instructed to tell John Del Vecchio their preference for receiving it after the meeting.

V. Revised Vision Statement

Mr. Kerns reviewed the original vision statement and compared it to the new version that resulted from adjustments provided by PAT members Don Bowman and Neal Woodruff. A bridge statement was added and the wording for the eastern planning area was modified. The committee agreed that the revised vision statement, which is shown below, was acceptable.



VI. Preferred Future Growth Alternative

Mr. Rouse recapped the January PAT meeting and explained that the committee was split into three groups (based on planning areas) and each group was tasked with locating future growth and development on a map for their planning area. The PAT was then shown a composite map that resulted from January. PAT members in January requested mapping that showed where constraints existed such as preserved farmland, state forest, floodplains, and steep slopes. Maps with these features were presented on display boards for PAT members to review.

Mr. Kerns noted that some key observations from the January meeting were the following:

- There was reluctance to locate all the projected growth in the planning areas
- Protection of existing towns-tended to shift growth away from them
- There was uncertainty about land available for development within existing towns
- Members placed a high priority on avoiding good farmland.

The result of the January exercise was that 63% of future growth was placed adjacent to existing towns and villages and 37% was placed in rural areas. It was noted, based on WRT's analysis of new development in the county since 2001, that this is roughly the same pattern that has been taking place with 60% near existing development and 40% in outlying areas. By planning area the western group had 100% of future growth in or adjacent to existing towns, the eastern group had exactly the same as the overall average 63% and 37%, and the central group had 47% in or adjacent to existing towns and 53% outside in rural areas. Nada Gray said she would like an opportunity to change what they did in January because after thinking about it she felt it was a mistake to locate so much development in the rural areas because of the problems associated with it that she has seen while serving on the Union County Planning Commission. Other members stated that it was difficult to locate all those housing units because there were so many of them. Mr. Bowman also stated that he had second thoughts on where his group decided to place future growth.

Mr. Kerns said a future growth challenge is before the committee and county. Low density development equates to higher development costs and higher environmental and resource impacts. It can also contribute to added costs in providing municipal services which is counter to maintaining the low tax rate that residents prefer. Mr. Kerns then went back and reviewed the top ideas for the county's future heard at the public forums in November, the top five issues identified at the municipal officials meeting in January, and the draft vision statement. He questioned whether or not the future growth arrangement from the January PAT was consistent with the message being heard from the public and stakeholders.

Mr. Rouse then revealed sustainability criteria that were developed by WRT. He said the criteria were formulated based not only on sound planning principles but on what they have been hearing from the public throughout the process. The criteria were as follows:

- Develop in proximity to existing infrastructure
- Maintain agriculture and prime farmland soils
- Preserve sensitive natural features and scenic views
- Decrease levels of energy consumption
- Reduce automobile use/ Increase transportation alternatives
- Promote reinvestment in existing towns
- Limit impacts on municipal budgets
- Minimize impacts on community services (police, fire, EMS...)

The question posed to the committee was whether or not they wanted to keep the results of the January meeting or modify the growth framework based on these criteria and all the input received. A number of PAT members felt the map from January needed reworked. Mr. Rouse and Mr. Kerns stated that without a change the county would just continue to see more of the same development pattern that it has been getting. It was suggested that a goal be set to direct 80% of new growth into designated growth areas and allow 20% outside in rural locations. A *Recommended Growth Management Framework* map that was prepared by WRT was shared with the PAT members.

A good discussion followed. Ms. Pearson said that people tend to repeat what they are accustomed to seeing and that could have contributed to the PAT results mirroring the recent trends. Mr. Fetterman asked how one could control the quality of the development so that if you

increased density it would still be livable and legal. Mr. Kerns and Mr. Rouse indicated there are a number of tools available through zoning, including incentives for developers, in order to encourage the desired type of development. Ms. Warner Mills said that while she thinks growth areas are a good concept and the committee supports it, she wondered how you deal with market forces brought by consumers and developers. She noted that in her profession as a realtor people in the market for a house want a two to four acre lot in the country. She was not sure how you could deny people that if it is the lifestyle they choose and it is what the developers want to provide. Mr. Rouse said the community basically has an option in that it can let other people and developers decide what the future will be or we can have a plan and rules for it that aim to achieve something different than what is taking place now. Mr. Hoskins said that he prefers the 80% / 20% split because it protects more of the county's natural resources and open spaces.

Mr. Griffith said he supports increased density but a challenge is every municipality has its own zoning ordinance and utilities. He said there is no consistency and it is hard to get everybody working together. Ms. Barrick said one difficulty is the condition of the public sewer systems in the county. Many of them have operational problems and need major investments in order to facilitate increased development densities. She said people are currently being forced into the countryside on one and two acre lots because they cannot get public sewer in many areas. Mr. Patton said he believed it was absolutely necessary to find a way to put more people on less land and increase density. He felt that looking long-term it will not be sustainable or affordable from an energy standpoint to keep spreading people out.

VII. March Forum: Vision and Framework for the Future

Mr. Kerns and Mr. Rouse briefly discussed the March public forums that will be held in the county as per the handout that was provided to members. The purpose of this round of meetings is to get input on the draft growth framework and vision statement. They said it is important to see how the public feels on a general growth concept before moving ahead with a more detailed future land use plan. The growth framework will impact many of the other elements of the plan.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. McLaughlin announced that the March PAT meeting would be held on Thursday, March 13th at 7:00 PM in the Mifflinburg High School LGI Room. With there being no further business the meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM