

2045 Comprehensive Plan Update Work Session Notes

January 10, 2023

Planning Commission Members: Mike Shepp, President; Matt Knott, Vice President; Wade Louthan, Secretary; Steve Stolipher, County Commission Liaison; Donnie Fisher, Jack Hefestay, and Ron Thomas were present in person. J. Ware and Shane Roper were present via ZOOM.

Staff: Jennifer Brockman, Chief County Planner; Luke Seigfried, County Planner; Jonathan Saunders, County Engineer; Alexandra Beaulieu, Deputy Director and Zoning Administrator.

Executive Summary

On 1/10/23, the Planning Commission held a work session to perform a SWOT exercise and reviewed a Staff presentation of initial demographic information. The SWOT exercise highlighted several priorities specifically; the interest in tourism, the traffic on US 340 around Harpers Ferry, and livability factors. Staff then presented demographic data which showed a slower growth than anticipated by the Envision Jefferson 2035 Plan and increasing diversity in the County. The Planning Commission agreed to have their future 2045 Comprehensive Plan Working Session on the same days as Regular meetings but held from 5 to 7 pm. The Planning Commission also approved the Amended Summarized Timeline to be presented at the requested Joint County Commission meeting.

Notes from the Planning Commission Work Session on 1/10/2023

Agenda

1. 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update SWOT Exercise
 - a. Guided questions and input gathering.
 - b. Voting on priority items.
 - c. Discussion
2. 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update Demographic Profile
 - a. Presentation of Jefferson County's existing conditions and initial staff research.
 - b. Direction related to future research.
 - c. Review and Approval of the amended Summarized Timeline to be presented to County Commission.
3. Summary

Item 1: 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update SWOT Exercise

The SWOT Exercise had three parts where the Planning Commissioners made notes on factors that were the County's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. These factors were mounted on boards and all of the members then separately voted on the importance of each. After the top factors were isolated, the Planning Commission discussed these priorities. All of the suggestions loosely fit into five categories, Employment, Traffic, Livability, Government Policy, and Tourism. A later staff analysis showed that Livability and Tourism garnered the most thought with the two factors receiving the most votes being Traffic Delays on US 340 through Harpers Ferry and Tourism/ Agritourism/ proximity to the Metro area combination factor.

Discussion points are summarized below based on components of the SWOT exercise. It should be noted that this was a timed exercise meant to focus on a few critical components.

- Strengths
 - How can the County encourage Agritourism in light of statewide restrictions and ABC laws?
 - There is limited public access to the Shenandoah and Potomac within the county, can there be access through preserved farms and open space?
 - Can the County work with the ASCEND West Virginia program to bring in residents with remote work?
 - The Commissioners had a general conversation about the cost of living and the expansion of remote work importance coupled with broadband in the County.
- Weaknesses
 - The County lacks general access to natural gas.
 - Commissioners noted that public teacher's wages are set on a state level and are lower than Maryland and Virginia.
 - An absence of high paying jobs in the county was discussed and how new employers need to be brought in.
 - Traffic on the 340 crossing outside of Harpers Ferry was examined as a major ongoing problem for the county as changes are being blocked by expense and other stakeholders.
- Opportunities
 - Commissioners explained why broadband access needs to be expanded and that the county is expecting to hear new information in February.
 - Some solar projects were mentioned as well.
- Threats
 - A trend in state incentives to start pilot programs in the county was brought up as an opportunity in the past.
 - The public perception around change in the community that deters business was debated.

Item 2: 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update Demographic Profile

Staff presented basic demographic information to the Planning Commission. This included the population size and distribution in the municipalities, unincorporated areas, and the villages. Information also included the age and increasing diversity of the County and the region at large.

Item 3: Summary

1. Planning Commission approved the Amended Summarized Timeline to be presented to County Commission at the requested 2/2/2022 meeting.
2. The working title will be 2045 Comprehensive Plan Update
3. Comprehensive Plan Work Sessions for the next five meetings will be held prior to Regular meetings, starting at 5 pm, and ending by 7 pm.
4. No specific research guidance was given for staff. Staff will be targeting to have summaries of relevant municipality and regional Comprehensive Plans for the next meeting.

5. Binders were provided to the Commissioners to hold provided documents relevant to the Comprehensive Plan.
6. Staff mentioned they were working on ways to collect ongoing feedback from the public that would be accessible over the County Website.

These notes were prepared by Luke Seigfried.