

2045 Comprehensive Plan Update Work Session Notes

April 11, 2023

Planning Commission Members: Mike Shepp, President; Matt Knott, Vice President; Steve Stolipher, County Commission Liaison; Jack Hefestay, Donnie Fisher, and Aaron Howell, were present in person. A quorum of the Planning Commission was present for the Work Session.

Staff: Jennifer Brockman, Chief County Planner; Luke Seigfried, County Planner; Alexandra Beaulieu, Deputy Director and Zoning Administrator; and Michelle Evers, Planning Clerk were present in person.

Executive Summary

On 4/11/23 the Planning Commission held a work session to hear presentations by representatives of Bolivar, Charles Town, and Harpers Ferry. Planning Commission also discussed public outreach for the Goals and Objectives survey.

Agenda

1. Municipality Presentations
 - a. Bolivar
 - b. Charles Town
 - c. Harpers Ferry
2. Livability Profile
 - a. Staff Presentation of Community Data Housing

Item 1: Municipality Presentations

Steve Paradis, Bolivar Town Council member represented Bolivar's long term planning priorities. The Town of Bolivar is currently performing its own comprehensive plan update with a survey of residents going out in May. The process is expected to be done in the fall of 2024 following input from residents, compiling of responses, writing the new update, and performing the necessary approval steps. Council member Paradis explained the continued interest in Bolivar for an Urban Growth Boundary. Such a proposal has been brought forward in the past and Bolivar would like this intent acknowledged in the 2045 Comprehensive Plan Update. Ms. Brockman mentioned that a way to proceed could be to have the Mayor send a letter along with the proposed boundary to County Commission. Council member Paradis reiterated that the intent for Bolivar is not to begin a large annexation program but to serve as a long term planning tool for the town. The traffic congestion on the 340 corridor was also mentioned as affecting the quality of life of town and county residents. Council Member Paradis also discussed Bolivar Planning Commission's concern in the reduction of County Impact Fees that have historically paid for infrastructure growth. Council Member Paradis concluded by stating the importance of the Elks Run watershed as the primary source of drinking water for Harpers Ferry, Bolivar, and parts of the county.

Chris Craig, Harpers Ferry Town Council member presented the ongoing planning goals of Harpers Ferry. The town is preparing a comprehensive plan update with help from the West Virginia University Law Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic. Council member Craig thanked Ms. Brockman for directing the town to the organization. There will be an open house about the Comprehensive Plan on May 22nd to gather input from the community. The most notable change in Harpers Ferry has been the expansion of short term rentals and second home acquisitions which are changing the viability of Harpers Ferry as a residential community. Council member Craig then discussed several trends in Harpers Ferry including the interest in resilience, EV charging stations, and Broadband connectivity while retaining the historic character of the town. Harpers Ferry has an interest in the public transportation provided by the MARC train and the EPTA as a function for both residents and provide connections for tourists. Infrastructure in the town is often used by tourists including the multi modal growth brought in by the state. Harpers Ferry Waterworks has finished their new water plant and the town used all of available ARPA funds for the project. However, Council member Craig noted that there was some distress that Jefferson County did not contribute any of their allotted ARPA funds to upgrading the water distribution system that has customers in the county, Bolivar, and Harpers Ferry. There is a large number of trails in Harpers Ferry and the town is working with DOH on a hiker biker trail along the Armory Canal and CSX line as well as constructing a ramp to ease hiker biker connections between the town and the C&O towpath. Commissioner Knott noted that bike lanes along Bakerton and Millville road would be excellent for connections. Hilltop Hotel construction is due to begin soon after intense attention by business owners and residents. Council member Craig also explained the sale of right of ways and streets as well as the State's Tourism Development District as the main drivers of the regulation and development of the site. The Shipley School is currently considered to be in need of redevelopment potentially as a public-private partnership. The council member concluded with by emphasizing the importance of affordable housing in the community for park rangers, law enforcement, and teachers.

James Newman, Charles Town City Planner explained Charles Town's current Comprehensive Plan and recent developments. Mr. Newman began by explaining the ongoing work for a Master Plan of the Parks system. This is related to development within the city that requires a growth of the Park system as new developments happen in Charles Town. Street and sidewalk connectivity to downtown was also highlighted as important as the city undergoes the current influx of residential development. Mr. Newman then described the overhaul of the Zoning and Subdivision ordinance, particularly in light of the city council conversation on allowing food trucks. Stone Spring, Hillside, and Fairview are three new developments within the city that will be cumulatively adding 393 townhomes, 514 single family detached homes, and 5 commercial pads. Mr. Newman mentioned the town's development is predominately residential development focusing on townhomes with very little commercial developments proposed. The outlined desires of Charles Town are for a mix of housing types and designs with increasing commercial development all without straining public services. The Commissioners and Mr. Newman discussed that no apartments were currently being built in the city and the draft ordinance on food trucks.

Item 2: Livability Profile

Staff briefed the commissioners on requested research from the March 14th meeting. This included an assessment on public outreach avenues, particularly how texting out surveys is currently untenable. Commissioners Knott and Fisher both brought up the ease of use in advertising on social media, particularly Facebook. Further conversation about outreach concluded with a strong preference for social media and some signage while forgoing direct mailings and text outreach for surveys. Staff also discussed the ongoing ASCEND program and its efforts to bring new residents into the region. The staff presentation included the WVU Health Needs Assessment, residential building permit numbers, and priorities of WVU Medicine, Conservation groups, JCDA, and JCS within the county. Planning Commission also discussed where to host the Public Input meetings and settled on Jefferson High School or Wildwood Middle School.

These notes were prepared by Luke Seigfried.