



WHAT WE HEARD – PART I

A REPORT TO THE CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

*Comprehensive Plan Update: A Summary of Citizen Input Received
Between June 2013 and October 30, 2014*

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November 6, 2014

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OVERVIEW

This report summarizes citizen input gathered through a citywide survey, quality of life questionnaires, comment cards, other written communications, community workshops, and various focus groups between June 2013 and October 30, 2014 in support of the comprehensive planning process. Input has been grouped by common, overarching themes and is maintained in an Excel workbook for tracking and analysis. This report does not list every comment received, rather presents the overarching concerns and recommendations as provided by citizens. Many comments are summarized rather than included verbatim as numerous comments were expressed by multiple stakeholders in slightly different ways. Some issues, opportunities and recommendations may be presented under more than one theme. This recognizes that key topics – housing, transportation, economic development, education, services, etc. – are not standalone elements of the comprehensive plan, rather are an intricately linked system of topics that must be addressed as a whole to ensure a healthy, economically viable, and sustainable city tomorrow. Detailed recommendations related to specific sites or activities will be considered as alternatives when future land uses are explored and the implementation matrix is developed. Responses are not ranked, unless otherwise noted.

A second report summarizing citizen input between November 2014 and February 2015 will be generated and presented to the CPCAC at a future meeting. A final consolidated report will be included as an appendix to the comprehensive plan.

Please note that citizens and stakeholders include all people who individually or as part of an organized group are participating in the comprehensive planning process by providing input on current conditions and direction for future land use management and development. The terms may be used interchangeably, as staff is using the definition of stakeholder as being “an individual, group or organization who may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity or outcome of the project.” (5th Edition PMBOK® Guide)

WHAT WE DID

Below is a summary of the various methods used to gather citizen input in the initial phases of the comprehensive planning process. Outreach is an ongoing effort throughout the planning process.

COMMUNITY PREFERENCE SURVEY

A community survey was administered for the City of Newport News in 2013 as part of the effort to assess citizen satisfaction with the quality of services. The multi-page survey was mailed to a random sample of households. A total of 1,038 surveys were completed.

CPCAC VISIONING

Planning staff facilitated a visioning session with the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Committee (CPCAC) in March 2014, and results were ranked by the committee at the subsequent meeting. The CPCAC Chairman led a second visioning exercise in April 2014.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The planning team (staff and CPCAC) hosted three community workshops, one each in the north, central, and south districts. The first workshop, held in June 2014, had low attendance. Workshops held in July and October 2014 were well attended. The agenda for each of the workshops was the same: participants were provided with an overview of the comprehensive planning process, a presentation on visioning, and a visioning exercise. Participants were also asked to complete a quality of life/visioning questionnaire and were provided comment cards for additional feedback.

FOCUS GROUPS

The purpose of holding focus groups in the comprehensive planning process is to bring together small gatherings of stakeholders with a common interest – whether geographic, economic, environmental, historic, cultural, etc. – to gain more detailed insight on a specific topic. The planning team has identified numerous organizations with whom to conduct focus groups as part of the data collection and analysis phase of the comprehensive planning process. Staff has conducted two focus groups to date: (1) Virginia Peninsula Association of Realtors, and (2) Naval Weapons Station Yorktown.

COMMENT CARDS AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Public comment cards are provided at the CPCAC meetings and a fillable version is available on the comprehensive plan website. Comment cards provide citizens an opportunity to ask questions and share ideas for CPCAC consideration. All comments are reviewed by staff to capture input.

A quality of life questionnaire is distributed to participants of the various public outreach efforts throughout the data collection and analysis phase. The purpose of the questionnaire

is to gather citizens more detailed opinions on issues and opportunities within the city and quality of life priorities.

WEBSITE

Citizens who are either unable to participate in the various outreach efforts or who have participated and are simply interested in updates and tracking progress can do so on the comprehensive plan website. Meetings, agendas, meeting summaries, announcements of key events, and special reports are posted on the site. In addition, a fillable comment card is available for public input.

HOW CITIZEN INPUT WILL BE USED

Citizen input is sorted by relevance and grouped by themes or topic areas and serves as the inspiration for the comprehensive plan goals and strategies, and the foundation for the existing conditions report and development alternatives. The input is shared with the CPCAC for consideration as they develop a vision statement, goals and recommendations, and provide direction to Planning staff on plan development.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZEN INPUT

Planning staff will provide numerous ongoing opportunities for citizen engagement and feedback throughout the remaining phases of the comprehensive planning process. Updates on progress and consultation with key stakeholders will occur through early summer 2015.

CPCAC MEETINGS

CPCAC meetings will continue until a final draft comprehensive plan is presented to the Planning Commission and recommended for approval by the City Council. Due to time constraints, the public does not have the opportunity to comment during CPCAC meetings. However, meetings are open to the public and comment cards and the questionnaire are provided to gather input for the CPCAC's consideration.

COMMENT CARDS AND QUESTIONNAIRE

The comment cards and questionnaire will continue to be distributed during all citizen outreach activities, and the fillable comment card will remain on the website. Staff will continue to review feedback and present it to the CPCAC for consideration.

WEBSITE

The City's website was recently updated; as a result, so too was the Department of Planning's site. Staff has reviewed the content and format and identified several opportunities to improve the comprehensive plan tab and expand content for public accessibility. This site will continue to be updated to provide a calendar of events, meeting notes, and a library of reports and special studies generated as part of the comprehensive plan update. Citizens will have the opportunity to submit feedback through the website.

FOCUS GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Focus groups will continue throughout the remainder of the calendar year and into early January 2015. Meetings have already been scheduled with the Mayor's Youth Commission, CNU, Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and Greater Peninsula NOW. Staff has reached out to the Junior League and Fort Eustis, and will continue to coordinate with them and other organizations to gather more detailed information and insight on specific topics.

Interviews will be conducted with various City departments and other organizations as needed to establish existing conditions, challenges, and priorities for future investment.

OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD

The final draft *One City, One Future Comprehensive Plan* will be posted to the Department of Planning's website and hard copies will be placed in public libraries for a 30-day public review period. Electronic copies will be provided upon request. All stakeholders who have identified interest in receiving meeting notices and updates on the process via email will be notified of the release of the final draft document. Citizens will be able to submit comments via the website and by phone, mail and electronic mail. During the review period, the CPCAC will host three public meetings in an Open House format to present the plan and gather public feedback.

PHONE CALLS AND EMAIL

Planning staff is available to accept comments by phone or in person at City Hall. Citizen comments can also be emailed to staff at any time during the comprehensive planning process.

SUMMARY OF CITIZEN INPUT

GENERAL

While some citizens see Newport News as a blue collar community with plenty of commercial blight, crime, and congestion, many can envision a future where the region and the world recognizes what many have known for a long time: it's a great place to live, work, learn and play. Newport News is "home" for many. For others, it comes down to location: the geographic center of Hampton Roads, proximity to the water, proximity to the transportation network, and proximity to major employers. In general, citizens recognize that Newport News is built out and resources will need to be focused on infill development, revitalization of existing neighborhoods and activity areas, and redevelopment of strategic areas. Many comments on future development stressed the need to build up, not out and to cluster higher density, mixed use development in targeted areas.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The city lacks a consistent identity/brand.
- A comprehensive wayfinding system is needed to define the city's gateways, major corridors, and entrances to areas of interest.
- A sense of place is created in every neighborhood through gathering places that are based on community driven plans, design, and implementation actions.
- The city lacks a regional draw such as a sports arena, amphitheater or large commercial retailer like IKEA.
- Promote maritime history and proximity to water to draw visitors to Newport News.
- Celebrate diversity.
- Focus on the basics first: infrastructure improvements to eliminate flooding and reduce crime.
- Stop creating a city of commuters – keep people in town rather than just passing through.

A PROSPEROUS CITY

Some citizens expressed concern with the city's perceived reliance on the shipyard and the Department of Defense for economic health and recommended more economic diversity to encourage new businesses and development, especially in the downtown and the southeast

community. Recommendations included establishing a more diverse industrial base, expanding the medical base, and growing the high-tech sector to keep the workforce in Newport News. Several identified the need to emphasize the technology and research opportunities within the city. Others saw a demographically and economically diverse city that has competing interests, but is improving in many areas such as education and public safety. It was pointed out by several citizens that there is a high vacancy rate for commercial property on the Peninsula, and that there are numerous older, large vacant commercial properties in Newport News. Stakeholders saw a connection between a strong education base and economic prosperity and recommended improved partnerships with Christopher Newport University (CNU), the Apprentice School, and other educational institutions. Citizens also see the opportunity to utilize sports as an economic driver, building more sports fields to host local and regional tournaments, and perhaps finding a location to support a semi-pro sports team. There were more than a few recommendations to allow casinos, especially on the river.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Support sustainable growth of CNU.
- Strengthen and promote the Town and Gown relationship.
- Support neighborhood schools.
- Work with educational institutions to align programs with workforce opportunities.
- Downtown is revitalized and supports a hotel.
- Entrepreneurial training programs geared to youth and young adults leads to new, thriving businesses citywide.
- Collaboration between public and private sectors to establish a workforce development program with local established industries.
- Increase science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) jobs, and promote the city as a hub for research and development.
- Support small businesses and a diversified economy to retain the younger populations (Generation Y [the Millennials] and Generation Z [the next generation]).
- Inventory and assess commercial areas throughout the city to determine opportunities for reinvestment and redevelopment.

- Utilize the port to promote global trade.
- Promote tourism.

A SUSTAINABLE CITY

There is a prevailing feeling that there is insufficient green space throughout the city and that more recreational opportunities are needed, especially those geared toward the youth. Several citizens believe that there is a lack of vision and plan for long-term management and development of Newport News. Some stakeholders expressed concern with sea level rise and how it may affect the city long-term. Others stressed the need to promote the use of sustainable materials in construction, while a few recommended that the City incentivize sustainable design and development. Green buffers are recommended along major streams and other waterways. Alternative vehicles are encouraged and supported with modified infrastructure, and options for alternative/clean energy sources are studied.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Enhance transportation and land use around military installations to prevent encroachment and support long-term sustainability of the missions.
- Allow and promote community gardens citywide.
- Every neighborhood activity center includes a grocery store.
- Neighborhood and corridor plans are asset-based community development plans that lead to sustainable development.
- Watershed protection is critical for long-term sustainability.
- Rehabilitate and reuse existing facilities instead of always building new.
- There is too much surface parking in downtown. Build parking structures and provide sufficient landscaping/green area and improve overall aesthetics.
- There appears to be a growing number of brownfields and greyfields within the city.

RESPECTING OUR HERITAGE

There are numerous recommendations to show a greater appreciation for the city's history and cultural resources by preserving and promoting remaining historic buildings, sites, and neighborhoods. Many stakeholders recommended opportunities to enhance tourism by investing in existing facilities, creating greater connections between established facilities, and promoting the city's historic features.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Downtown is revitalized. Investments include green space and parking garages to eliminate most of the surface parking lots.
- Celebrate and promote the city's history with ship building and the military in the downtown area.
- The restored Lee Hall Train Station becomes the City's welcome center.
- The USS United States (or other similar historic ship) is anchored off Christopher Newport Park and becomes a draw to downtown and the waterfront.
- The restored Greek Orthodox Church becomes the Newport News Museum and Visitors Center.
- Preserve and reuse older/historic buildings to maintain neighborhood character.
- Preserve Warwicktown archeological site and promote historic presentations similar to Jamestown and Williamsburg.
- Respect the history of key areas of the city and incorporate preservation of these areas into any plans for future development.
- Historic preservation becomes an economic driver.

A HOME FOR EVERYONE

There appears to be a general consensus that the housing stock in Newport News is aging, there are insufficient affordable (quality) housing options for seniors and low and mid-income residents, and there is a lack of high-end housing. Many stakeholders did not foresee a change in the demand for homeownership in general or for single-family homes in particular. Others, however, identified the need for a mix of housing types to capture the needs of both an aging population and the younger generations. The ability to age in place was a common theme among stakeholders. Many citizens envisioned housing near parks and in walkable neighborhoods with activity centers.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Established neighborhoods are preserved and enhanced.
- Alternative types of affordable housing are provided, e.g., micro apartments or houses for commuting workers.

- High-end residential development is needed throughout the city.
- Senior housing developments provide opportunities to age in place.
- Alternative housing styles like mother-in-law suites and ground floor flats allow seniors to age in place in their current neighborhoods.
- Homeless shelters are smaller and dispersed throughout the city.
- Concentrations of public housing should be eliminated and affordable housing should be dispersed citywide.
- There are many influencers on housing choices, the most common of which are proximity to and quality of schools, access to and convenience of the transportation system, and proximity to key services.
- Endview/Lee Hall area is developed to provide a variety of housing choices and a walkable neighborhood that incorporates dining, shopping and recreational opportunities such as multi-purpose trails.

A HEALTHY COMMUNITY (PREMIERE FACILITIES AND SERVICES)

There is a vision for a well-connected city that features walkable urban pockets and great services in the form of activity centers in all neighborhoods. Numerous citizens expressed concern with crime and youth violence. Some citizens perceive local schools to be of poor quality and low performing, while others expressed concern with the perception that schools are of poor quality when in fact they appear to perform well.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- More green space and parks are needed throughout the city.
- Small neighborhood parks are needed throughout the city.
- Build upon cultural development programs at Pearl Bailey, Downing-Gross and Doris Miller to increase growth of youth.
- Create walkable waterfronts and provide public access and parking to allow for water activities including kayaking and fishing.
- The city lacks sufficient multi-purpose athletic fields.
- Satellite libraries with computer labs are provided citywide to support online education opportunities.

- Crime is spreading, i.e., to the central business district and to Eastwood/Young's Mill neighborhoods.
- There is a lack of supervised youth activities in various areas of the city.
- Many community amenities are aging and require investment.
- Improve access to libraries citywide, including areas not currently served such as Lee Hall.

PROVIDING ACCESS AND MOBILITY CHOICES

All citizens recognize the challenges of our transportation system, both locally and regionally. The majority believes that light rail along the CSX corridor or bus rapid transit (BRT) in a dedicated lane would not only relieve much of the congestion within the city, but also provide quick and reliable connections to jobs, services, and shopping for residents that currently find it challenging to get around Newport News without a privately owned vehicle. Some stakeholders are thinking of regional connections and envision ties to Richmond and areas further north by high speed rail and to the Southside by water taxis and ferries. Some citizens see the need to expand the airport, while others recommend building up the area around the airport with other land uses. Park n' Rides are desirable, especially in conjunction with any future light rail or BRT connections. There is a general consensus that bike lanes, bike routes and multi-purpose trails are needed throughout the city. Many also believe that public access to the waterfront is limited and should be expanded in strategic areas to allow everyone the opportunity to enjoy this natural amenity. An increase in the use of alternative vehicles is anticipated and charging/refueling stations are envisioned in parking garages and other key locations throughout Newport News.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Improved public access is needed to open space and recreational areas including Newport News Park.
- Public access to the waterfront is needed throughout the city.
- Light rail or BRT is needed along the CSX line with feeders to neighborhoods and activity centers throughout the city.
- Transportation options should target various age groups including youth and young military members, many of whom do not have access to privately owned vehicles.
- Bike lanes and routes are needed throughout the city and in key areas such as Newport News Park to improve connectivity and safety.

- A bicycle master plan is needed.
- The airport use is expanded and becomes the center of an aerotropolis node.
- Parking garages and charging stations are located citywide.
- Rail infrastructure in the downtown is used for emergency evacuations of citizens in the southern district.
- Public transportation is also provided using the waterways in the form of ferries and water taxis.
- All bus stops are safe and provide shelter.
- Lack of curbs and gutters citywide should be addressed before sidewalks are widened.
- Transportation and land use planning need to occur simultaneously – transit-oriented development should support new transit lines and existing stops.

GOOD PLACES, NEW SPACES (COMMUNITY LIVABILITY)

Newport News of the future preserves and celebrates its history and historic neighborhoods; recognizes and promotes the unique character and diversity of its neighborhoods; supports a revived downtown; provides services and work opportunities in walkable neighborhoods; provides connections to major employment centers, entertainment, and shopping via light rail and/or BRT; and provides both formal and informal gathering places to encourage social activity and interaction. Newport News of the future has a high quality of life and is recognized for this value regionally and nationally. Corridors are beautified through façade improvements, improved design, and enhanced landscaping. Complete streets provide safe and alternative modes of transportation.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Relocate or close City Farm and develop the waterfront area, providing public access and entertainment venues.
- Relocate or close City Farm and develop housing, entertainment, and waterfront access.
- Provide public access to the waterfront throughout the city.
- Every neighborhood has an activity center that provides general services and recreational opportunities.

- Oriana Road shopping center is redeveloped as a high-density, mixed use activity center.
- Leverage the waterfront in the Southeast Community to draw new investment and revitalization.
- The Superblock and Christopher Newport Park are redeveloped to provide waterfront access, connections to the Southeast Community along 28th Street, restaurants, an outdoor entertainment venue, and access to the USS United States or another similar historic ship.
- Convert vacant public facilities to provide additional services and commercial opportunities, e.g., convert the old Hilton Fire Station into a coffeehouse.
- Improved wayfinding and branding draws people to the downtown.
- Reinvest in older commercial areas like Hilton Village.
- Create walking/biking connections between schools and nearby neighborhoods, e.g., between Menchville High and the Riverfront Planning Area across Deep Creek.
- Complete streets (major corridors) include landscaping and façade improvements to beautify these multi-modal areas.
- The Newport News Transportation Center is supported by mixed use development, walking and biking trails, and safe connections to higher density areas nearby.
- There is a lack of commercial development and investment along the Warwick Boulevard corridor from Denbigh Boulevard north and along the Jefferson Avenue corridor from Mercury Boulevard south.
- Downtown is underutilized. Consider port and industrial expansion and provide millennial housing and amenities.
- City government should be located in the geographic center of the city to better serve all districts.
- Visitor welcome centers and rest areas are established at the north and south ends of Newport News to capture what often is pass-through traffic.