

Summary Public Visioning Workshop

Washington County Comprehensive Plan ● Salem City Hall ● July 29, 2009

The meeting began with an introduction to the planning process by Scott Burgins of Strategic Development Group, the company which is facilitating the process.

He explained that a \$50,000 grant from the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs is paying for most of the plan, with a 10 percent match from the county. He also explained how a 22-member steering committee of local residents is overseeing the process.

There was a short comment period where people with strenuous objections to land use planning were allowed to speak. There were comments about landowner rights and the Constitution as well as an accusation that the foundation for the planning process was based on “a pack of lies.”

Attendees were then divided into three groups (at its most crowded, about 45 residents attended the meeting). Participants spent about 20 minutes at each of the following stations:

- Mapping future land uses
- Comprehensive plan survey
- A Visioning Exercise for Washington County’s future

Workstation: Visioning

Participants were asked to look ahead 20 years and discuss changes they’d like to see to Washington County’s image, green space, economic development, transportation system and other topics.

Some residents stayed on those topics, but others used the opportunity to express a wide range of opinions about land use planning. Some of the comments include:

The Future

- “I’d like to see it better than it is now.”
- No minimum or maximum lot sizes.
- More tourism.
- More growth along SRs 64 and 65.
- “Things should be safe for our families and children.”
- “People take the initiative and are responsible for their own actions.”
- “Freedom.”
- Family friendly; close neighborhoods.
- Honesty in government.
- Fewer taxes.

Recreation Space and Greenspace

- We should protect our parks and greenspace.
- Another county park and trail system.
- “We have plenty of greenspace if you count cropland.”

Agriculture

- 20 years of chicken farming has been good for Washington County’s economy.
- I’m afraid farmland is going to disappear.
- “We should preserve our farmland.”
- “A person who runs a confined chicken operation has a right to produce a smell – it’s part of country living.”

Workstation: Mapping

A draft map of the county depicting areas of various designations was presented to the group. This map was intended to show the county’s vision for development and preservation over the next 20 years. It included areas of prime agriculture, general agriculture, rural residential development, commercial centers, industrial development, and park/open space areas. In additions, an overlay depicted sensitive areas, such as karst, floodplains, wetlands, forested areas and steep slopes.

Meeting attendees were asked to comment on what they saw. Generally they agreed that the overwhelming majority of the county should be preserved in the agricultural designations. Rural Residential areas, shown along the south and east edges of the county, were clustered along major roads. Commercial nodes were shown at Beck’s Mill, near Livonia and along SR 56 near Scottsburg.

Comments included:

- Please show the small commercial areas at Rosebud, an Amish community.
- We don’t need to show and new residential areas, because we don’t need any more people in the county.
- There is high quality farmland in the southeast corner of the county as well.
- The State of Indiana has begun purchasing bottomlands along the Muscatatuck River for preservation, which should be included on the map.

Workstation: Survey

A 9 question survey was distributed to a total of 31 meeting attendees. The survey contained a mix of multiple choice, ratings, and open-ended questions on quality of life, housing, natural resources, transportation, regulations, growth and infrastructure.

The survey showed that 52% of respondents were “satisfied” with the quality of living in Washington County. It also showed that growth, planning for growth, and natural resources, including farmland and lakes, are very important assets to the respondents.

Many attendees took the survey as an opportunity to relay comments and concerns they would not otherwise be comfortable expressing in a group discussion setting. Some of these comments included:

Agriculture

- It’s important to consider location , regulation, and effects of Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO)

Natural Resources

- Give attention to sensitive areas such as; lakes, watersheds, floodplains, and karst topography areas and provide protection to valuable areas likes lakes, forests, etc.

Development

- Provide a plan and protections to attract new industry, new jobs, and provide economic growth.

Housing

- Push for cluster developments and to reduce fragmented growth spurts that are not connected to utility & infrastructure.

General Concerns/Considerations/Comments

- Keep entire process very public. Allow time and opportunity for public feedback. Provide a clear and specific listing of plan. Is the plan easy to change should there be a need for change or updating?
- Stop the comprehensive plan and zoning. The county doesn’t need outsiders messing things up. People have the right to build chicken and turkey houses on their land.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Comprehensive Strategic Plan?

The comprehensive plan is a policy document adopted by the plan commission and county commissioners that serves as a guide for decisions about the future of roads, housing, businesses, parks and other land uses.

The purpose of the plan is to anticipate and guide that growth in a manner that promotes economic development while retaining quality of life.

Why are we creating the Comprehensive Plan?

The county does not have a current plan for the future. Additionally, community leaders think more effort is needed to protect the county's natural resources and promote growth that benefits the entire county.

What is included in a Comprehensive Plan?

The first and most important component of the plan is the statement of goals and objectives. This should reflect the vision and desires of the community. There will be chapters on issues such as transportation, housing and economic development, as well as an implementation plan.

What is the difference between land use planning and zoning?

The comprehensive plan reflects what the community desires to see in general areas of the county in the future. Zoning establishes the actual land uses and densities, and is legally enforceable.

How can I stay updated?

Check the website and contact the consultants with your thoughts after the meeting. There will be another public meeting to present the draft comprehensive plan, but the date has not been scheduled.

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