



WHAT WE HEARD – PART II

A REPORT TO THE CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

*Comprehensive Plan Update: A Summary of Citizen Input Received
Between November 1, 2014 and May 15, 2015*

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WHAT WE HEARD – PART II

A REPORT TO THE CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

OVERVIEW

This report summarizes citizen input gathered through quality of life questionnaires, comment cards, other written communications, various focus groups, roundtables, and interviews between November 1, 2014 and May 8, 2015 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.

This is the second of two reports summarizing citizen input for the comprehensive plan update. The first report captured input between June 2013 and October 30, 2014. 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 the citizen input captured in this report.

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. During the period covered by this report, 13 focus groups were conducted. This brought the total to 15 focus groups conducted as part of the data collection and analysis phase of the comprehensive planning process. Focus groups covered in this report:

- Christopher Newport University (CNU) students from the Center for Community Engagement
- Mayor’s Youth Commission
- Greater Peninsula NOW
- Southeast Community
- Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority
- Newport News Shipbuilding (Huntington Ingalls Industries)
- Newport News Rotary Club
- Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce
- Hampton Roads Association for Commercial Real Estate
- Peninsula Bicycling Association
- Saint Leo University
- Newport News Public Schools (NNPS)
- Fort Eustis

ROUNDTABLES AND INTERVIEWS

The planning team conducted roundtables and interviews with an additional 15 stakeholders including various city departments, Newport News Sheriff’s Office, Newport News Waterworks, and Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport (NNWIA). The team also met with planning staff from James City County, York County and Hampton, and conducted telephonic meetings with Suffolk and Isle of Wight County.

COMMENT CARDS AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Public comment cards are provided at the Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Committee (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 recommendations and priorities, 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 fall 2015.

CPCAC MEETINGS

CPCAC meetings will continue until a final draft comprehensive plan is presented to the Planning Commission and recommended for approval to 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

This site will continue to be updated to provide notices of meetings and special 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.

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 STAKEHOLDER INPUT

GENERAL

Newport News is a great place to raise a family according to many stakeholders, but lacks a viable social scene for 25 to 35 year olds. Some stakeholders see City Center as having potential to draw more interest when it is built out, but perceive the area as lacking energy for now. Younger students stressed a strong desire for a more family-friendly city, as opposed to a business-friendly city. Millennials emphasized the need for diversity—in demographics, activities, food options, education, and employment. There is a strong desire to see a revitalized downtown, with increased density and a mix of uses. Many recognize

that it is unlikely that it will once again be a traditional downtown, but see the opportunity for this area to take on a different—yet well defined—role and be successful.

While Newport News is not a 24-hour city, some stakeholders see the need to recognize that non-traditional work schedules have increased and some services—such as bus and child care services—need to offer more flexible hours to meet the needs of our citizens.

Newport News lacks a “sense of place.” Many stakeholders expressed the need for a consistent city brand and more collaboration between local government and major organizations to market all the positive aspects of Newport News. Some stakeholders feel that Newport News needs to be a stronger regional player and help set the long-range vision for Hampton Roads, especially since the city is the geographic center of the region. Many stakeholders believe that no one locality can offer all the desired services and amenities that larger cities throughout the United States can. Thus, collaboration and marketing as a region is critical to long-term economic vitality and sustained quality of life in Hampton Roads.

There are strong connections between Newport News and nearby communities, especially on the Peninsula. Some stakeholders live in other communities and work and shop in Newport News, while others live in Newport News and commute outside the city to work. Therefore, opportunities to enhance land use and services near locality boundaries and improve the transportation system across city limits will benefit the region.

Some stakeholders believe that the media creates or perpetuates a negative image of Newport News. The media seems to always highlight the “bad”—we need to do a better job of marketing the “good.”

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Newport News provides active, affordable options for entertainment that draw multigenerational interest.
- Localities will work together to create the image/brand for Hampton Roads that will draw unique schools and employers to the area.
- Newport News must tell its story; market the “good.”
- Neighborhoods lack identities and would benefit from signs to distinguish them from each other.

A PROSPEROUS AND RESILIENT CITY

Our economic strengths are in research and development (R&D), advanced manufacturing, traditional manufacturing, and food processing and distribution. We will continue to grow in

these areas, but may also see high growth in the aerospace and aviation industry, including material sciences. Some stakeholders want to see more professional and fewer retail jobs, especially in the science and technical fields. We continue to celebrate our national reputation as a shipbuilding community and promote Jefferson Lab to draw new science and technology businesses to Newport News.

Tourism, a regional draw that peaked in 2007, has been slow to rebound throughout Hampton Roads. To increase tourism generated revenue, our marketing strategy could draw on the fact that Newport News is the center of Hampton Roads and all other destination points are easily accessible from here. The interstates are assets that can lead to greater investment and prosperity.

There is a disconnect between some stakeholders' perception of the public school system and the actual performance of our schools based on statistics. For the past 5 years, NNPS has focused on ensuring all students graduate college, career, and citizen-ready. On-time graduation and completion rates continue to go up, the number of dropouts continues to decline, and the Instructional STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) program continues to grow. There is an increasing focus on post-secondary education as employers place a higher premium than ever on educated workers and the number of "middle skills jobs" continues to increase. Some stakeholders believe more apprenticeship and internship programs are needed, both at the high school and college level. Some employers see the need for more trade programs.

CNU students identify diversity and professional mobility as key factors when evaluating employment opportunities.

Jurisdictions across the country are focusing on disaster planning and leveraging their resources to achieve healthier and more resilient communities. Newport News' Division of Emergency Management has a comprehensive emergency operations plan in place to manage responses and coordinate damage assessment and recovery after a disaster. While the plan allows emergency personnel to respond to typical events, there is concern that a major event would be challenging to respond to especially in terms of accessing vulnerable areas of the city and providing temporary housing to displaced citizens. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is a secure facility from which responses are coordinated during emergency situations. Long-term, a consolidated EOC/911 call center would improve emergency planning and response activities by relocating the center to higher ground and constructing a hardened facility to withstand a Category 2 or greater hurricane.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Retaining industrial land— especially for manufacturing— may be a challenge. This land is critical to support expanding and new businesses.

- The Air Commerce Park provides opportunity for growth in production services.
- The Seafood Industrial Park is a major asset.
- Industrial and commercial opportunities are expanded in the Southeast Community. Targeted areas include Jefferson Avenue, Chestnut Avenue, and the west side of Jefferson Avenue between 14th and 22nd streets.
- Employers in Newport News and throughout Hampton Roads reach out to students early to promote job and career opportunities.
- More workforce training centers are established to meet the needs of area employers.
- Every job will require some level of post-secondary education.
- Development in flood prone areas is discouraged.

A SUSTAINABLE CITY

Newport News has gone “green,” in an ongoing effort to save energy, prevent pollution, and take the practical actions needed to facilitate environmentally sustainable government policies and practices and make our community viable for future generations.

Overall, the Newport News water utility is in good shape. There is sufficient capacity to meet the needs of Waterworks’ customers for the foreseeable future, and water treatment capability is more than adequate to absorb projected growth. The watershed is well protected and parks/open space needs are balanced with water quality management measures. There is a backlog of water distribution system projects to replace aging components. Needed improvements are being studied and will be programmed through capital improvement planning. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality is requiring individual groundwater withdrawal permit reductions to alleviate impacts on the state’s aquifers. Withdrawal rights reduction will affect some Hampton Roads localities as they will not be able to meet their current water needs. While groundwater withdrawals add a safeguard to our water system for times of drought, Newport News Waterworks can meet customer needs during severe drought conditions using the existing surface water supplies and some level of voluntary and incentivized reductions by customers. The proposed reduction— or even elimination of groundwater withdrawal—for Newport News would affect maintenance of the Lee Hall treatment facility, which requires a minimal amount of groundwater to operate. Newport News Waterworks is participating in the regional effort to establish a groundwater advisory committee and delay decreases in permitted groundwater withdrawals to allow the region to study ways to meet water needs without the reductions.

Virginia adopted new stormwater regulations that went into effect in July 1, 2014. As a result, the city amended its stormwater and Chesapeake Bay Preservation regulations to be in compliance with the state's requirements. Stricter regulations affect how properties are developed and redeveloped.

Although Newport News will not be as impacted by sea level rise as other localities in Hampton Roads, we do have areas that experience recurrent flooding. The city will need to look at modeling and reporting to understand how critical infrastructure along the waterfront may be impacted and determine whether revisions to existing policy are needed. A first step in addressing recurrent flooding in low lying areas was to update the Floodplain Development Regulations to meet new Federal Emergency Management Agency requirements.

The city continues to repair and replace the wastewater collection system in the ongoing effort to eliminate groundwater and stormwater infiltration and reduce sanitary sewer overflows. Education on and enforcement of the fats, oils and grease (FOG) ordinance has resulted in reduced frequency of stoppages and overflows, thereby decreasing preventive maintenance costs for the city. Continued education and outreach will further reduce the amount of FOG being poured down drains.

Illegal dumping continues in some areas of the city, affecting safety, property values, and quality of life. It is also an economic burden on the city, which is responsible for cleanup.

Some stakeholders recommend adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized properties throughout the city instead of clearing the few remaining green sites for new shopping centers.

After several years of being designated as a marginal non-attainment area for ozone, Hampton Roads meets air quality standards and continues to experience a steady decline in the number of annual high-ozone days. Efforts to further improve air quality around the Commonwealth may place an even greater emphasis on complying with standards in the coming years.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- An energy use policy will promote and encourage energy efficiency and associated cost savings.
- An integrated natural resources management plan will inventory our natural resources and establish management goals to protect those resources long term.
- Flood control in the Southeast Community is a priority.
- The James River is a critical natural resource that is well protected.

- The city works closely with James City and New Kent counties to establish sufficient protective buffers and land use controls within the watersheds of Skiffe's Creek and the Little Creek and Diascund reservoirs.
- Newport News is a leader in the regional effort to study groundwater withdrawals in the area and identify measures to meet water requirements without reducing withdrawal rights.
- Continued FOG education and enforcement further reduces sewer system overflows, thereby reducing penalties and impacts on the environment and our health.
- Enhanced education on and enforcement measures for illegal dumping will reduce risks to public safety and water quality, and reduce the cost to the city for cleanup.
- Solid waste conservation continues to be a challenge, as recycling is costly. A resource recovery park would reduce the expense for the city and encourage the use of recycled items and an end-product for businesses.

AN ACCESSIBLE CITY

There is a prevailing feeling that light rail or similar transit option is needed to reduce the number of vehicles on the road and provide reliable transportation for those that do not have access to cars, including soldiers and sailors stationed at Fort Eustis and Naval Weapons Station Yorktown. Bicycle paths are desirable, especially to connect neighborhoods and schools. Students hope to see more pedestrian-friendly school zones. Traffic safety is a concern for some stakeholders, who expressed a desire for more traffic calming measures throughout the city to protect both cyclists and pedestrians. Most stakeholders support transit alternatives to connect Newport News to other Peninsula localities and to Richmond and Washington, DC. A multi-modal transportation system is seen as vital to the long-term viability of Newport News and Hampton Roads.

Some stakeholders question the viability of the NNWIA, and suggested a regional mega-airport to replace the three located between Norfolk and Richmond. This may provide better flying options for the region's residents and businesses, and provide opportunities to redevelop the three small airports. The NNWIA, however, has a master plan that adds a third runway to provide simultaneous approach capability, which neither of the other two airports can do. Further, the master plan includes an economic strategy that capitalizes on opportunities in the R&D and technology sectors to expand the reach of these sectors by helping to transfer technology to the market. The master plan also recommends realignment of Brick Kiln Boulevard, improved circulation on McManus Boulevard, and connecting Siemens Way to Turnberry Boulevard. These transportation improvements will improve traffic flow, eliminate cut-through traffic, and provide enhanced economic development opportunities at the airport and surrounding area.

Safe, affordable housing in stable neighborhoods continues to be a challenge in several areas of Newport News. The number of property maintenance calls to Codes Compliance continues to increase. These calls generally report poor housing conditions and complaints of blight on commercial and residential buildings and properties. The number of persons occupying a dwelling unit and illegally converted boarding houses are also challenges for the city. The list of dilapidated buildings targeted for demolition continues to grow.

Homelessness remains an issue for both the city and the Peninsula, as the most recent point-in-time count shows. Funding and locations for services to address this segment of our population remain difficult to obtain. Some stakeholders recommend reduced density in public housing complexes, instead hoping to see more compact, mixed density developments spread throughout the city rather than concentrated in one area.

There is an opportunity to look at affordable housing across the region to ensure that each locality is providing its fair share. A housing study should be conducted to analyze the housing distribution of workforce and affordable housing locally and regionally.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Additional connectors between Warwick Boulevard and Jefferson Avenue are constructed to improve traffic flow citywide.
- Public transportation is cleaner and safer, and headways are increased to enhance service to employment and activity centers.
- Sidewalks are constructed in neighborhoods and around schools and community centers to promote walking and ensure more pedestrian-friendly school zones.
- NNWIA has a healthy future with an expanded aviation school and training.
- Alternative types of housing are provided, including duplexes, condominiums, and family-oriented (child friendly housing) complexes.
- A rental inspection program will help protect vulnerable tenants, preserve safe and healthy rental housing, reduce blight, and increase neighborhood property values.
- Affordable housing solutions and a day center alleviate homelessness in Newport News.
- New residential developments include a mix of incomes to provide a better balance of affordable housing throughout the city.

- City Center is fully developed, providing a greater mix of uses and high-end housing.
- Higher-density development is needed to support job growth in key areas.

A HEALTHY AND SAFE CITY

Crime is a shared concern, with stakeholders identifying numerous areas around the city that are believed to have increased criminal activity. Some stakeholders see the need for more police stations; others believe there are too many. Some stakeholders recommend the institution of an improved neighborhood watch program that trains residents on how to rebuild neighborhood pride and values. Overall, the number of reported crimes in Newport News actually dropped between 2004 and 2013. But, youth and gang violence prevention continues to be a focus for the Police Department and city. Programs for youth leadership and employment training enrichment continue to grow. A more focused approach, however, is needed to engage youth and discourage them from violence and crime.

There are facility needs for the Police Department, including a new Central Precinct. The former Rite Aid store is too small to support assigned staff and functions. The precinct lacks designated work space and there is no room to properly store temporary evidence or to issue equipment at shift change. Further, the parking lot is unsecured and police vehicles continue to be vandalized. A new library in the North District should include a collocated North Precinct to replace the undersized and outdated facility on DeShazor Drive. Ideally, a new North Precinct will include a training facility with a computer lab, multi-purpose room, conference rooms, and a library.

Aging infrastructure is a challenge for the Sheriff's Office. Although the jail has been renovated several times, it was designed to old standards, which makes it difficult to comply with current regulations. The jail does not function as it should, and it was never designed to house inmates on all seven floors. A new facility should be planned for downtown, generally in the same area it is located in today.

As more development occurs along the arterials, traffic becomes a greater challenge for the Fire Department as response times are affected. Age, condition and location of Fire Department facilities are concerns. Two stations are almost 60 years old and will need to be replaced. Several other facilities are more than 30 years old. Station 11 is a temporary facility at the airport. A new station should be constructed along Turnberry Boulevard. Fire operations (Fire Marshall, administration, and logistics) are split between several facilities across the city and should be located in one. The department has outgrown the capacity of the Training Center, which lacks an auditorium.

NNPS facilities are old and aging; the need to renovate and replace continues to grow. In the past, the schools added trailers to meet capacity needs. These trailers are also aging, and should be phased out.

Non-profit and faith-based organizations are community assets that improve quality of life for many residents. There needs to be a more deliberate effort to coordinate between the various assets to improve our neighborhoods.

There are growing health concerns in the community, and more health education and services are desired. As our population continues to age, health care and adult protective services requirements increase. The community is in need of more farmers' markets and community gardens to provide all citizens access to fresh and healthy food. There is a need to increase the capacity of quality child care providers.

Parks are a good thing, regardless of size. More green space is desirable, especially in areas that are underserved. Newport News remains strong in regional parkland, but deficient in neighborhood and community parkland and athletic and recreational facilities. Increased public access to the waterfront is still a priority for most stakeholders. More off-street multi-use trails are desirable. Sufficient resources to properly maintain park, athletic and recreation facilities remain a challenge.

Libraries will remain relevant in the future, serving a range of needs. Libraries are public spaces that are neutral and positive; they create a sense of place and add to the quality of life of an area. Next generation libraries are designed as flexible spaces that can support a variety of activities and on-demand space (known as makerspace). New libraries will be located along transit lines within activity areas. Renovation of Grissom and Pearl Bailey libraries remain a priority for the Newport News Public Library System.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Strong relationships and open communication are established between neighborhoods and police officers.
- Future mixed-use and higher density development is designed to ensure that Fire Department resources can effectively respond to emergencies.
- Human Services will continue to automate, thereby streamlining processes and reducing both footprint and costs. Collocation of services—a one-stop shop—that serve similar clientele will improve outreach, education and overall effectiveness of programs and services.
- Prevention programs provide residents with the tools to succeed, increasing overall health, economic viability, and self-sufficiency of the community.

- Food deserts are a thing of the past. Healthful food options are available citywide and there is strong support for the garden to table movement.
- The Noland Trail is a model that is replicated in other areas of Newport News.
- Collocating various city services within neighborhoods will improve customer service.
- Libraries are improved and expanded to offer more services and activities for the community, and help create a sense of place in neighborhoods.

A CITY THAT RESPECTS ITS UNIQUENESS

Tourism has declined. Many stakeholders stress the need to protect and enhance the city’s uniqueness—those characteristics that make Newport News different, unusual, and unique and make people both want to live here and visit.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- We recognize and celebrate our history and culture.
- Development and property improvements are completed in a way that recognizes property owners’ rights while improving neighborhood value and quality of life.
- Art districts—like SoHo and Ghent—encourage diversity, innovation, and are appealing to all generations.
- New historic districts preserve the unique character of our oldest neighborhoods.

A CITY THAT BALANCES GOOD PLACES AND NEW SPACES

Newport News has three distinct activity areas—north, central and south—each with a different character. We need to recognize and enhance those differences to make each area successful and a draw for a mix of demographics. The neighborhoods south of Mercury Boulevard require special attention. Some stakeholders hope to see new housing developments for both seniors and families in this area, with others identify the need for new recreation/youth/sports facilities and job opportunities.

Many stakeholders hope to see vacant and deteriorating commercial centers revitalized and/or redeveloped instead of developing new commercial centers on the city’s few remaining green sites. This approach will help eliminate blight in older neighborhoods, allow for the productive reuse of commercial centers, and reserve green sites for future

development or preservation actions. A shared choice for revitalization and redevelopment is downtown Newport News.

Many stakeholders see opportunity in the historic downtown. But, the city will need to create interest to bring people to the area. One attraction should be the waterfront, the other is the shipyard. Workforce housing is needed near the shipyard and should provide opportunities at various price points. Note that only 27 percent of shipyard employees live in Newport News.

Aesthetics are a priority for many stakeholders who believe overall community character has been impacted by developments that detract from their surroundings rather than enhancing them. There is a feeling that Newport News lacks a “sense of place” and does not put a high enough value on aesthetics and visual resources. In addition to creating a “sense of place” and improving overall community character, new developments—regardless of size—should incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design strategies to reduce the potential for crime.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The Warwick Courthouse area is redeveloped to create an activity center including a new library and teen center.
- The Southeast Community has a viable central business district and an active waterfront that includes entertainment and food options.
- Efforts to revitalize downtown, the Southeast Community, and Huntington Heights include aesthetic improvements to the public realm.
- Efforts to revitalize downtown will require more rooftops—higher density and a choice of housing types.
- Entertainment and dining options are desirable along the waterfront.
- Christopher Newport Park and Victory Landing are recognized assets and enhanced to draw more people to downtown.