

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

### Introduction

In April 2007, the James City County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission adopted a methodology for reviewing the Comprehensive Plan. James City County's Comprehensive Plan review process, *Historic Past, Sustainable Future*, incorporated two distinct elements:

- A public outreach drive aimed at informing County citizens and gathering their diverse views for the future, and
- A technical planning initiative that collected and analyzed the background data for planning and development recommendations. The policies and actions outlined in the final Comprehensive Plan derive from both elements.

This methodology called for the formation of two groups who would each be responsible for accomplishing one of these work efforts. The first group, the Community Participation Team (CPT), was composed of three members of the Planning Commission, seven citizens, and their proxies. New with this update was an advertised application process for anyone interested in serving on the CPT. From a diverse community came a diverse group consisting of students, parents, professionals, and retirees. The team was responsible for encouraging, facilitating, and reporting citizen participation throughout the planning process.

The second group, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee (SC), was composed of four members of the Planning Commission, a citizen member from the CPT, liaisons from the Williamsburg/James City County School Board, Economic Development Authority, and Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, and two citizens-at-large. The Steering Committee was responsible for reviewing citizen input generated by the Community Participation Team and incorporating that information into its decisions. In addition, the Steering Committee identified issues, reviewed technical data, developed policies and actions, and made a final recommendation to the full Planning Commission on the draft Comprehensive Plan. *Historic Past, Sustainable Future* began in November 2007 and officially concluded with the adoption of the Plan by the Board of Supervisors in the summer of 2009.

### Public Participation

Community planning begins with open communication and the exchange of information and ideas between citizens and government. This give-and-take ensures that future actions will enjoy broad public support and that the Comprehensive Plan truly is a vision for our community, by our community. Communication elements in this process included the following:

#### *Surveys*

In the summer of 2007, in response to guidance from the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Division conducted two citizen surveys. First, the County conducted a telephone survey in conjunction with the **Virginia Tech Center for Survey Research (VT)**. The survey polled more than 600 persons: a randomly-sampled, representative cross-section of James City County's population. The same questions that were used for the survey in advance of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan were used for the 2007 survey as well in order to measure changes in public opinion on specific subject areas. Second, the **National Research Center (NRC)** survey, which is a standardized mail survey developed by the International City Management Association (ICMA), was provided to 1,200 County residents. This survey compared James City

County to other municipalities nationally who have participated in the survey to provide benchmarking data and results were reported at the 95% confidence level. Together, these surveys yielded thousands of pieces of information and revealed potential issues and new directions to consider during the Comprehensive Plan update.

### ***The Community Participation Team (CPT)***

The Planning Commission recommended and the Board of Supervisors appointed a Community Participation Team responsible for overseeing citizen participation in the review process. The team met weekly from November 2007 to October 2008. It designed public involvement opportunities, led and supervised outreach efforts, evaluated the results of public input meetings, and provided a summary of the input to the Steering Committee.

One main thrust of its outreach efforts was the identification of local community groups and organizations throughout the community which were targeted for flyers and speaking engagements. A speaker's bureau, through which groups could request presentations by Planning staff and the CPT, was open throughout the update process and used by groups such as Ford's Colony, NAACP, and the Kiwanis Club of Williamsburg. The CPT emphasized new technology to facilitate outreach efforts by using social networking sites like Facebook, expanding the web presence to a dedicated site at [www.jccplans.org](http://www.jccplans.org), and allowing citizens to contribute via online surveys. The CPT also made special efforts to reach youth. Seventy students at Jamestown High School completed surveys about their vision for the County's future following a special CPT presentation and reporters from William and Mary's Flat Hat newspaper were included in all press releases.

The public input meetings, called "Community Conversations," further facilitated the ongoing dialogue the County wished to create with the community. The Community Conversations and other public input opportunities were highly publicized, community-wide efforts to involve citizens in planning their future and the future of the County.

### ***Citizen Outreach Efforts***

Throughout the update of the Comprehensive Plan, a variety of public outreach methods were used to promote interest and participation in the process. The first event, the Comprehensive Plan press conference, was taped for rebroadcast on local television. This event was the debut of the Comprehensive Plan website and included overviews of survey results and introduction of the new CPT.

Subsequent promotions advertised the April Community Conversations. Volunteers posted flyers announcing the events around the County. Invitations to the meetings were sent to 132 connected neighborhoods and flyers provided to 3,855 Williamsburg/James City County students. Four hundred brochures with detachable postage paid comment cards were distributed at all speaking engagements and placed in County office buildings. On a mass media level, the CPT developed numerous programs for the County's local television channel and placed ads in two area newspapers and the radio. CPT members also spoke before community organizations, gave updates at monthly Planning Commission meetings, were interviewed by *Next Door Neighbors* and the *Toano-Norge Times*, and wrote opinion pieces for the *Virginia Gazette*. Finally, the County newsletter (*FYI*) and the Neighborhood Connections newsletter (*The Front Porch*) featured stories and updates.

In addition to earlier outreach methods, the CPT employed a number of new promotions for the August/September Community Conversations, including posting topical essays and fill-able questionnaires online, advertising on *W-Y Daily* and William and Mary's *Student Information Network*, mailing invitations to 83 area churches and all previous Community Conversation participants, and door prizes.

Staff and the CPT also opened a number of channels to receive public input. Mail-in survey cards were available at all Comprehensive Plan events. The Comprehensive Plan also had a dedicated website where citizens could submit comments. Staff also maintained an email account and telephone hotline specifically for the Comprehensive Plan.

### ***The Listening Station***

One of the most visible forms of public outreach was the Listening Station. Goals of the Listening Stations were to provide a forum for public comment while at the same time promoting the Community Conversations. CPT members were instrumental in transporting and manning the station and their presence offered citizens valuable one-on-one interaction. Listening Stations circulated throughout the County, appearing at 17 locations including libraries, schools, neighborhood meetings, the James City County/Williamsburg Community Center, the Human Services Building, the County Fair, Grove Christian Outreach Center, public meetings for Shaping Our Shores, the Historic Triangle Substance Abuse Coalition office, and the Williamsburg Indoor Sports Complex. Overall it collected more than 150 citizen responses.

### ***CPT Forums***

A series of four CPT Forums were held in July 2008. The forums provided an opportunity for groups representing a broad spectrum of citizen interests and organizations to give brief presentations, which were then included as part of the public input and research forwarded to the Steering Committee. Fifteen groups responded to the CPT's invitation including Avalon, Child Development Resources, the James City County Concerned Citizens (J4C), Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance, and the Williamsburg Land Conservancy.

### ***The Community Conversations***

#### **April**

After four months of promotion, the first round of Community Conversations was held in April 2008. The meetings were held at community gathering points distributed throughout the County: Stonehouse Elementary School, Warhill High School, James River Elementary School, and the James City/Williamsburg Community Center. The CPT designed these meetings to be discussion-oriented where small groups of citizens, led by volunteer facilitators, could share ideas concerning the future of the County. The participants commented on a number of issues ranging from growth and water concerns to transportation to the character of the community. Volunteer note-takers documented the discussions. That information was later transcribed, organized, and validated by the CPT. Through the course of four meetings, 149 citizens voiced their views and provided staff with hundreds of comments.

#### **August/September**

The CPT designed the second round of Community Conversations with an emphasis on education and policy decisions about the "hot topics" identified during the first round of Community Conversations. Two different formats were used for the three second round meetings. The first two meetings were held at Lafayette and Jamestown High Schools. These featured presentations by County leaders in each of the hot topic areas: quality of growth,

population needs, water, impacts of growth, economic climate, environment, transportation, and housing. Attendees were then given the opportunity to complete booklets containing questions centered on each of the topic areas. The third meeting, held at James River Elementary School, was termed the Comprehensive Plan Expo. At the expo, citizens could learn about the specific hot topics through display boards and were then encouraged to share their ideas with CPT and staff members or complete the questionnaire. During these meetings, citizens had the chance to interact with both County leaders and staff. The meetings produced a wide variety of comments from 131 attendees and the additional 51 questionnaires submitted via the website. As in April, all responses were transcribed, organized, and validated by the CPT. Communications staff videotaped highlights of the first round of Community Conversations and each hot topic presentation during the second round, aired the segments on TV48, and made them available on-demand online.

### **Consultants**

Similar to previous comprehensive plans, the 2009 update process utilized the skills and services of consultants. Consultants, such as the Virginia Tech Center for Survey Research, as in past updates, continued to serve as technical resources. The Board of Supervisors provided necessary funding for consultants from the URS Corporation and the Renaissance Planning Group, who assisted with background research, analyzed and made suggestions on policy recommendations, conducted transportation model analyses, and offered a high level of support for the Land Use and Transportation sections at Steering Committee meetings.

### **Steering Committee Review**

After verification by the CPT, the citizen comments collected during the outreach process were made available online and at the County Planning office. Staff also delivered copies to the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the body responsible for overseeing the technical side of the Comprehensive Plan, when the group began meeting in October 2008. The Steering Committee encouraged public participation, advertising its sessions in local newspapers, *FYI*, local cable channels, and on the County's website. Additionally, the Steering Committee allowed at least two periods for public comment per meeting and held a dedicated public comment meeting in April 2009. Each meeting was televised live on local television, videotaped for rebroadcast later in the week, and made available on-demand on the website. The materials and minutes for each meeting were also accessible through the Comprehensive Plan website. Additionally, staff created a new blog to facilitate communication among committee members in advance of meetings. The blog was also equipped to send notifications to subscribers from the committee and general public when new messages or meeting materials were posted. The aim of the blog was to make the review process more transparent and participatory, particularly for those unable to attend meetings.

Each week from October to May, the Steering Committee reviewed technical reports provided by the County Planning staff and Comprehensive Plan consultants. Each chapter contained background material, technical data, citizen input, a sustainability spotlight, and a statement of goals, strategies, and actions for the particular topic. Staff drafted Comprehensive Plan text based on the committee's deliberations. The chapters included Demographics, Population Needs, Public Facilities, Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, Environment, Transportation, Community Character, Housing, and Land Use. Proposed changes to the Land Use Plan Map were included as part of the Land Use review.

The Steering Committee was greatly aided by the assistance provided by senior representatives from the County's departments and agencies, who were very supportive of the process. The Steering Committee also received input from several associated bodies, such as the Economic Development Authority, the James City Service Authority (JCSA), and the Williamsburg/James City County School Division. Numerous citizens, civic organizations, industry representatives, and business groups also provided valuable input during the update.

### **Land Use Application Process**

Early in the Comprehensive Plan review, County staff created an application process for those land owners wishing to change the land use designation on their properties. The application due date of June 30, 2008, was advertised at all public meetings, in *FYI*, in the newspapers, on local cable, and on the County website. Applications and a frequently asked question sheet were available at the County fair, numerous County offices, and the second round of Community Conversations. The due date was subsequently extended to July 15 and 34 applications were submitted. In addition to owner-initiated applications, staff also brought forward another 12 applications. These proposed changes were printed on a full-page color insert which appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in December 2008. Adjoining property owners were directly notified of the applications by mail.

The Steering Committee drew from a wide range of sources in making its final recommendations for Land Use Changes. Staff presented recommendations on the applications in January and offered updated information on some applications in April. Organizations, property owners, and individuals potentially affected by each application were given a variety of opportunities and methods with which to be heard. One entire meeting was devoted to public comment, each applicant was given an opportunity to present information to the Committee, and public comment periods were offered at the beginning and ending of each Land Use application meeting. Staff also dedicated an area of the website to receiving public comment and continued to accept comments via e-mail and letter. All input was provided to the Committee for their consideration and posted to the website.

The end results of the Steering Committee process were twofold. First, the committee produced *The 2009 Comprehensive Plan Technical Report*, a reference document laying the groundwork for the Comprehensive Plan. The report, which spans over 1,000 pages, contains technical data, background information, Community Conversation notes, survey results, meeting minutes, letters from citizens, and other items. It also documents the progression of Committee thinking as topics moved through review and revision to final draft form. Copies of the report are available for review at the James City County Planning Division office on Mounts Bay Road.

The Steering Committee also reviewed and edited the final text of *Historic Past, Sustainable Future*. In May 2009 the Steering Committee recommended both the technical report and the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan to the Planning Commission.