

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 6, 2000

TO: The Board of Supervisors
The Planning Commission

FROM: Donald E. Davis, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: Review of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan

Earlier this summer, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to report on the review of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. Staff was instructed to include a discussion of the methodology used in 1997 and several methodology alternatives for the new review. The alternatives were to reflect varying amounts of staff and consultant involvement, different time frames, and rough cost estimates. To accomplish this, staff broke the task into several parts, which are included as separate attachments and which are explained in more detail below.

Background

Before discussing various methodology approaches, it is important to note the State legislation and process underlying comprehensive plans. Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia sets forth that “the local planning commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction and every governing body shall adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.” It then describes the purpose and recommended elements of the plan. Section 15.2-2230 of the Code of Virginia further states, “at least once every five years the comprehensive plan shall be reviewed by the local planning commission to determine whether it is advisable to amend the plan.”

With these directives in mind, the James City County Planning Commission has undertaken two significant Comprehensive Plan updates in recent years, one in 1991 and the other concluding in 1997. In 1991, a new review process and a new plan were created, and in 1997 the process and plan were fine-tuned. In each instance, the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors, and stakeholders throughout the community were assigned to committees that oversaw citizen participation and the drafting of the comprehensive plan. With so many parties with vested interests in the plan, it has proven beneficial to have the most representative committees possible in place to provide guidance and leadership throughout the process.

Attachments

As mentioned previously, the work session material is broken into sections and provided as attachments. They include the following:

- Introduction
- Survey of Other Jurisdictions
- Three Options for James City County
- Conclusions

The introduction provides some explanation as to why comprehensive plans are necessary and what benefits they can provide. It also recounts the methodology James City County used in 1997, which was largely based on the 1991 methodology, and offers some conclusions as to what might be appropriate to retain or to change for the next review.

Next, the survey section relates staff's discussions with ten Virginia jurisdictions regarding their comprehensive plan methodologies. These localities are known throughout the Commonwealth either for their innovation, for their award-winning comprehensive plans, or for distinctive comprehensive plan elements. At the end of the section, the various methodologies are analyzed to discern some of the positive and negative aspects of each.

In the following section, staff outlines three options for James City County by drawing upon the best elements of all methodologies. Each option includes an evaluation of factors such as time, staff and consultant involvement, and required resources. Finally, the conclusions section offers some recommendations on key methodology elements and provides some guidance as to which option may be best for James City County.

RECOMMENDATION:

Detailed conclusions and recommendations are provided in the fourth attachment of this report. In short, staff's recommendations are three-fold. **First, given the investment in and effectiveness of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, the legal mandates for review, and the experiences of jurisdictions throughout the Commonwealth, staff concludes that no major overhaul of the current plan is needed in the immediate future.** In the meantime, there are several specific issues, such as Purchase of Development Rights, the Reservoir Protection Overlay District, and review of new census data, which staff anticipates will need to be addressed prior to the next comprehensive plan review or as part of a smaller, concentrated review effort.

Second, staff recommends the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors decide if there is one model they prefer for the next comprehensive plan methodology. As previously noted, Attachment 3 outlines three models for the Board's consideration. Furthermore, staff recommends that it be given an opportunity to then fine-tune the selected model and return to the Planning Commission with a more thorough version for final action. The Planning Commission would give direction on the scope of work at that time.

Third, while the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors can adopt a methodology now, staff recommends that the County not begin whatever update process is chosen until November 2001. This time frame will reflect the County's normal cycle for updating comprehensive plans and is still ahead of the established norms for review schedules

Donald E. Davis

CONCUR:

O. Marvin Sowers

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Attachments:

1. Introduction
2. Survey of Other Jurisdictions
3. Three Options for James City County
4. Conclusions and Recommendations