

MINUTES
JAMES CITY COUNTY COMMUNITY PARTICIATION TEAM
REGULAR MEETING
Building D Large Conference Room
101 Mounts Bay Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185
August 26, 2019
4:00 P.M.

A. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Tammy Rosario called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Present:

Rachel Becke
Rebecca Bruhl
Glen Carter
Thomas Hitchens
Philip Piper
Ginny Wertman
Jack Haldeman
Rich Krapf
Julie Leverenz
Tim O'Connor

Staff in Attendance:

Christy Parrish, Zoning Administrator
Tammy Rosario, Principal Planner
Alex Baruch, Senior Planner

C. NEW BUSINESS

After welcoming the Community Participation Team (CPT) members, Ms. Tammy Rosario asked the group to go around the room and re-introduce themselves, choosing a word that describes them starting with the same letter as their first names.

Ms. Christy Parrish reviewed the agenda and said they would begin the meeting by brainstorming for the engagement and communications plan. She explained they would first go through some of the highlights from the 2035 CPT and then discuss public engagement experiences along with a brainstorming exercise.

Ms. Parrish briefed the CPT about highlights from the 2035 Comprehensive Plan, including communication efforts, citizen input opportunities, quick participation statistics, followed by ideas and discussion. She described the CPT as cheerleaders, with main activities to educate citizens and advertise the process; encourage, facilitate and report citizen participation; and gauge citizen opinion on various issues.

Ms. Parrish said the previous CPT began by advertising in various County publications and

communications, including the eFYI citizen newsletters, Ships Log (the County employee newsletter), and Adjacent Property Owner notifications for Land Use Applications. She said they provided advertisements and press releases in local media sources to include the Virginia Gazette, the Daily Press, Tide/WBACH radio, WY Daily, Richmond Times Dispatch, WMBG Radio, and WHRO/WHRV and Pilot Online.

Ms. Parrish stated video programs included stand-alone shows on TV 48 and YouTube, TV48 Scrolls, CPT Forums, Work Sessions and Public Hearings. She said radio efforts included WMBG Radio with CPT member interviews, and TIDE and BACH to advertise workshops. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter was used as well.

Ms. Parrish explained communication efforts included the website, email, brochures, flyers, posters, Planning Commission reports, HOA newsletters, and the “Speaker’s Bureau” presentation in a box. She said comment cards were always available at events, and their brochure had a rip off comment card that could be mailed in.

Ms. Parrish listed citizen input opportunities from the 2035 Comprehensive Plan, including the 2014 Virginia Tech Citizen Survey, Comp Plan online comment form and questionnaire, Comp Plan telephone hotline, high school comment cards, and mail-in comment cards. She explained they asked the high school students what they liked about the County and what would entice them to stay or come back after college. Ms. Parrish also explained they had three community workshops at Toano Middle School, King of Glory Church, and Little Zion Baptist Church.

Ms. Parrish then described the CPT Forums, and listed the 14 groups who came in to give 15-minute presentations to the CPT: James City County Citizens’ Coalition, Concerned Citizens, Williamsburg Area Association of Realtors, Child Development Resources, Colonial Soil & Water Conservation District, Williamsburg Land Conservancy, Citizens for a Better James City County, United Way of Greater Williamsburg/Housing Collaborative, Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance, Friends of Forge Road and Toano, Historic Triangle Republican Women, Williamsburg Historical Tea Party Patriots, Senior Services Coalition, and Williamsburg Climate Action Network.

Ms. Parrish finished by giving the CPT some 2035 participation statistics as a benchmark. In addition to the 14 organizations who participated in the CPT Forums, there were 77 attendees at community workshops; 17 completed questionnaires from virtual community workshops; 98 comment cards from Jamestown High School; 606 completed phone calls from the 2014 Virginia Tech citizen survey; 141 responses from the web input form; 16 responses from the web rotating question responses; 10 comments from mail-in comment cards, and 7 messages on the County hotline.

Ms. Parrish then invited the CPT to share feedback from any personal experiences, successes or ideas for input opportunities from past public engagement or communication efforts.

Ms. Julie Leverenz commented that while labor intensive, one-on-one interactions seem best for receiving feedback.

Mr. Piper said he recently received great feedback after giving a presentation to an HOA foundation. He received a lot of questions and feels that HOAs are great organizations to engage. Mr. Piper also added it would be great to utilize the Next Door application where citizens can receive notifications.

Ms. Ginny Wertman stated she had experience facilitating meetings and noted the use of clickers to capture opinion also kept people engaged as they immediately saw the results of voting. She said in her experience it spurred discussion.

Ms. Rachel Becke mentioned that polling can now be done on smart phones. She described her involvement with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) during the opening of J. Blaine Blayton Elementary School and suggested engaging with PTAs, in addition to HOA annual meetings, to reach a different demographic. Ms. Becke also said her church planned recently for an expansion project, and they held a series of forums or “dream sessions.” She suggested engaging with even more churches, as well as open houses or back-to-school nights.

Ms. Parrish and Ms. Rosario began to write the CPT communication plan ideas on a brainstorming board as the group shared their experiences. Ms. Parrish stressed the need to develop trust. She then asked those who were involved in the previous Comprehensive Plan to discuss what worked well.

Mr. Rich Krapf said he really like the CPT Forum where organizations presented to the CPT. He suggested asking organizations to address what they feel is the greatest need in the County.

Mr. Tim O’Connor noted they should ask the organizations not only what is needed but also the desired outcome, in order to form goals. He said there are new or underrepresented groups who should also be invited to join the CPT Forum, such as those associated with the Workforce Housing Taskforce.

Ms. Parrish said staff welcomes ideas and suggestions for groups to invite to the CPT Forum.

Mr. Jack Haldeman noted he presented to one of the three area Kiwanis Clubs during the last Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Krapf asked if information could be included in any County billing mailings.

Ms. Leverenz suggested also asking the CPT Forum organizations to discuss any roadblocks or obstacles they face that the County might be able to address.

Ms. Wertman noted that turnout at the community workshops in the past seemed low and asked how they could improve attendance.

Ms. Parrish responded that even with significant advertising efforts and varied meeting locations and times, turnout is still difficult. She said the main question is how to get more people involved.

Ms. Rebecca Bruhl told the group about her experience working in community-based research and recruiting for research studies. She said even if turnout or response is disappointing, advertising is at least building awareness. Ms. Bruhl also discussed motivations for participation, from concern for the future to incentives offered such as entering drawings or neighborhood comparisons in participation or representation.

Ms. Wertman suggested door prizes such as reusable County bags could be given out periodically.

Mr. Alex Baruch stressed multiple methods and information channels are important in getting

the word out. He said social media use and especially the Next Door app are great ideas for targeting specific neighborhoods.

Ms. Leverenz mentioned the radio messages can also address specific neighborhoods.

Ms. Bruhl noted the messages should come from someone people trust.

Mr. Haldeman noted in his experience living in three different communities and serving on two local school boards, very few people pay attention to local government, unless something will affect them directly.

Ms. Parrish said she tells her children to start locally if they want to make a difference and agreed it is sometimes the personal touch or invitation that gets others involved. She asked the group what other forms of communication they recommend.

Ms. Wertman asked how much Facebook was used last time.

Ms. Parrish replied yes it was used, but Facebook has evolved since with the addition of events, reminders, tagging and groups.

Ms. Bruhl suggested to tie into interests such as Parks and Recreation or the environment.

Ms. Becke suggested having information booths with quick questionnaires or polling at events such as the farmer's market, back-to-school night or at the Williamsburg Indoor Sports Complex (WISC).

Ms. Rosario said she would write down intercept or pop-up events, for engagement opportunities where people are already meeting.

Ms. Parrish stated the Community Development Department keeps a list of upcoming special events in the area.

Mr. Thomas Hitchens said anytime there is a large group gathered it is an opportunity to engage. He mentioned speaking to car clubs and Kiwanis, to raise awareness and encourage participation and input. He noted afterwards many want to get involved or give feedback.

Ms. Leverenz said she really likes the idea of reaching out to churches, particularly in underrepresented areas. She suggested asking pastors if they could speak for a few minutes on a Sunday morning.

Ms. Rosario said a lesson learned for good turnout is to have churches sponsor the meetings.

Ms. Parrish asked what the group thought was the best way to receive feedback at the meetings. She asked if they would want to give out comment cards or direct people to the website.

Ms. Leverenz suggested handing out cards with a few multiple choice questions during the "meeting in a box" presentations in order to get some immediate feedback, then invite them to forums for more in-depth discussion.

Mr. Hitchens suggested a form to capture contact information of those interested in attending

future events, then ensuring follow-up to avoid frustration.

Mr. O'Connor said a presentation and invitation format would work well, since there would be different presenters who may not be prepared for all questions. He said there seems to be greater participation meetings topical in nature such as rural lands, environmental or traffic-related discussion. He suggested targeted citizen input with subject matter experts available at the meetings.

Mr. Hitchens suggested offering a monthly County meeting to hear and meet with citizens.

Ms. Wertman said it is important to know the goal of these sessions, whether it is for people to answer a couple of questions or attend additional meetings for more in-depth input.

Ms. Rosario noted the meetings and engagements will build upon each other.

Ms. Parrish said the goal of the presentations is often to explain the process and topics.

Ms. Leverenz said the questions asked could relate to the topic at the next meeting.

Mr. Baruch noted an issue in the past is the large size of the County. He asked the group how they envision getting feedback from the community.

Ms. Leverenz said one answer might be technology and mentioned how TV shows have people vote from home.

Mr. Hitchens suggested holding the same topical meeting on multiple nights of the week in different parts of the County.

Ms. Parrish said they will be giving the CPT input to the consultants as they draft the communications plan.

Ms. Wertman asked if the County had contact information for the HOAs in the area.

Ms. Rosario replied they have limited information, although previously there was a Neighborhood Connections group. She said Mr. Baruch and interns with the Planning Division have been working to update contacts for all organizations. She said they will be asking the CPT to assist with any missing information.

Ms. Parrish asked if the CPT members speak with a group to let staff know so they can include the information in any summary.

Ms. Rosario said it is important to track efforts so we can measure and know who we are reaching or not reaching.

Mr. Haldeman then shared with the group a portion of a citizen's email, in response to an invitation to get involved in the Comprehensive Plan process. Mr. Haldeman said the citizen had recently argued one side of an issue during a controversial case before the Planning Commission. The citizen declined the invitation to get involved and questioned the decision process of the County government, believing effort would be wasted in what he feels is a pre-ordained outcome. Mr. Haldeman said he wonders how many people feel this way, that their input would be buried. He asked how to ensure people feel their opinion matters.

Mr. Krapf agreed that they face the challenge of cynicism, when there are competing needs and limited resources. He said the number of goals, strategies and actions in the Comprehensive Plan can seem overwhelming.

Mr. Baruch noted the Strategic Plan listed what would be the total cost of implementation, compared to the reality of a set budget and limited resources. He asked if there were a similar way to quantify costs or show resources in the process.

Ms. Rosario stated it is important to remember and convey the differences between the Strategic Plan and Comprehensive Plan. She said the Comprehensive Plan is meant to be aspirational, not constrained by fiscal reality or unknown resources, while the Strategic Plan is the work plan for the next 5, 10, or 15 years. Ms. Rosario gave the Capital Trail as an example, stating it was a dream before becoming an initiative that caught the eye of the Governor who directed special funding to it. She said there are also grant programs and road projects that require mention in the Comprehensive Plan in order to qualify and compete for future funding.

Mr. Krapf said this is an important distinction and suggested updating messaging to address or include this aspirational, long-term aspect of the Comprehensive Plan. He said the message should stress it is not about making choices but creating a vision for the future of the County.

Ms. Wertman said it is not important for people to know the difference between a Comprehensive and Strategic Plan. She said they need to know we are setting the direction of the County. Rather than being pre-ordained, she asked where citizen input can bend the curve of development or rural lands, for example.

Mr. Hitchens discussed his experience championing the Purchase of Development (PDR) cause, stating it did not happen overnight and took a tremendous amount of time, effort and dedication.

Ms. Rosario noted the idea of having a Greenspace and PDR program had its origins in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. She said it is not just an aspirational plan, but tangible initiatives can come out of it.

Ms. Leverenz said those kinds of examples will help to combat any cynicism they may face.

Mr. Hitchens mentioned how enthusiasm is contagious, noting the bond referendum for funding the PDR program passed by a very high percentage. He said the community wants to protect what it has and hold developers to their promises.

Ms. Parrish asked the group how they can convey to citizens that they have been heard. She suggested a summary of what each forum was designed to answer and what was heard.

Mr. O'Connor said a challenge he faces as a Planning Commissioner when asked why he voted a certain way, is that people have no idea about the land use map or Comprehensive Plan. He said the education piece of some kind of close out could be helpful. He said participation seems to fall off towards the final stages of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Hitchens said education and addressing concerns with follow up are keys to success.

Ms. Parrish stressed the importance of making connections and understanding how input

translates into the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Leverenz said it is important to not only let people know they were heard but also what was done with their input. Similarly as discussed, she said to also show how input made a difference in past Comprehensive Plans.

Mr. Krapf suggested having a digestible executive summary or a citizens' guide to the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. O'Connor said a missed opportunity is the Annual Report, with few outside of the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, and Board of Zoning Appeals aware that we use the Comprehensive Plan and track progress towards the goals set within it.

Ms. Rosario stated after exploring some of the communication methods for engagement, they would now examine the different communities or audiences within James City County and explore where to prioritize efforts if resources are limited.

Ms. Rosario shared the "population at a glance" sheet and stated that James City County is a growing community. She shared that all projections show a population of over 100,000 people in James City County by the year 2040. Ms. Rosario added that we are an older community, one of the oldest in Virginia, and projected to get older over time. She said we are predominately a white community at almost 79%, with approximately 13% Black or African American race and 5.4% Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. Regarding educational attainment, Ms. Rosario pointed out the County typically has higher levels of education than the surrounding Hampton Roads area.

Ms. Rosario said she wanted to focus on how the community is much more than statistics, which do not tell the whole story. She said the sense of community is tied to how one feels, who one knows or makes connections with, and organizations one might belong to. Ms. Rosario said to consider the challenges and opportunities the CPT might face in reaching different segments of the community in order to tailor and measure outreach efforts. She asked for the CPT's help in ensuring no one is left behind in the process.

Ms. Rosario and staff then facilitated an exercise similar to the game Scattergories. For each category given, she asked teams to list every example they could think of. The first category given was "who are our audiences, or what are the different segments of our community we are trying to reach?" Examples given included high school students, retirees or seniors, civic organizations, houses of worship, growth and non-growth advocates, business and professional groups, homeowners and renters, recreational groups, mobility impaired, Grove corridor or geography, minority communities, greenspace advocates, stakeholders or developers, political or interest groups, parents, farmers, young voters, bus users, first responders, teachers, government workers, the unemployed, commuters, people in planned communities, HOAs, community leaders, GenX and millennials, the medical community, and the tourism industry.

Ms. Rosario then asked the teams to list both roadblocks and inroads for each example community. These inputs were captured in an excel spreadsheet by staff.

Ms. Rosario then asked which groups they would prioritize if they could engage just three or four groups.

Mr. Haldeman replied he would prioritize geographic groups.

Ms. Leverenz and Mr. Hitchens answered that they would target retirees.

Ms. Wertman replied minority communities.

Mr. O'Connor said from his perspective and experience the Grove community brings its own unique set of challenges and circumstances as an all-encompassing audience.

Ms. Wertman also nominated young people as a top group to engage.

Regarding stakeholders, Mr. O'Connor noted the challenge to balance protection of rural lands and opportunity for property owners.

Mr. Krapf suggested large parcel land owners might be a separate category given pressure for by-right development in rural lands.

Mr. Hitchens noted there is a generational factor to these decisions as well.

Ms. Becke highlighted the goals of education and awareness of the process. She nominated the Grove community, underrepresented groups, and parents as top groups for targeted outreach efforts.

Mr. Baruch then offered to send out the multimedia portion of the presentation for feedback before the next meeting. He said he would send out links and specific questions regarding other Comprehensive Plan videos and websites for them to review.

Mr. Baruch then showed the CPT the current draft website, currently visible only within the County complex. He said they will notice some inspiration was drawn from other award-winning sites. Mr. Baruch stressed the site will not be just for the CPT but for the entire Comprehensive Plan update and future updates. He said the CPT, citizen survey, and each section of the Comprehensive Plan will have a distinct page on the site. He noted that each section could then have its own set of related questions on its page. Mr. Baruch stated that interested citizens could be added to a listserv through the website.

Mr. Krapf inquired if word cloud technology could be utilized with citizen comments, with topic font size changing with responses.

Mr. Baruch said he will inquire with the website designer about the possibility of incorporating the idea. He cautioned they would not be able to limit website interaction to just County residents, and there could be censorship concerns regarding word selection. He said one lesson learned with online surveys is to ask first whether someone is a citizen of the County.

Mr. Baruch noted the CPT web page would include the member biographies and headshots as well as related documents, upcoming meetings and events, and frequently asked questions (FAQs) for those interested.

Ms. Rosario said beyond the emphasis on having a website, they would also have a video to engage the public and welcome the CPT's ideas. She said the last County Comprehensive Plan video and additional video examples from other localities would be included in the email sent out to CPT members.

Mr. Baruch stated the County video team has won many awards, and he will send the group other examples of their work.

Mr. Baruch then asked whether the group felt ready to elect a chair and vice-chair of the CPT.

Ms. Rosario said they could also wait and elect the positions at the next CPT meeting on September 17, in time for the chair to attend the Planning Commission Working Group (PCWG) meeting on September 26.

Ms. Wertman asked if it would be possible to have two co-chairs, which she said worked well on the Workforce Housing Taskforce.

Mr. Baruch replied two co-chairs for the CPT could work, but only one person would be able to serve on the PCWG. He said a vice-chair would act in the same capacity if the chair were absent.

Ms. Leverenz asked if Ms. Wertman would consider the position of CPT chair.

Ms. Wertman said she would consider it.

Ms. Rosario stressed that an important role of the chair as CPT liaison to the PCWG is to represent the body of input collected during the CPT process and remind the Planning Commission what the public said throughout the process.

Ms. Leverenz noted the members of the Policy Committee who are on the CPT will also be present on the PCWG.

Ms. Leverenz also asked Mr. Carter if he would consider service as chair or vice-chair.

Mr. Carter said he would consider the positions.

Ms. Rosario asked the members to talk with each other and see who is interested in serving and in what capacity. She said they could email staff their interest, and an election would be set up at the next meeting.

Mr. Baruch reminded members the next meeting would be held on Tuesday, September 17 at 4 p.m. in the Building F Work Session room.

D. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Parrish thanked everyone for attending the meeting and asked for any additional comments.

Ms. Rosario adjourned the meeting at 6:00 p.m.