

Meeting Notes
York 2040 Committee

Wednesday, October 5, 2022 – 5:00 p.m.

Senior Center of York

5314 George Washington Memorial Highway, Yorktown, Virginia

Members Present: Mark Bellamy, Gregory “Skip” Brooks, Chad Green, Michel S. King, Eugene Seiter, Richard Myer, Sheila Myers

Staff Present: Susan Kassel, Director of Planning and Development Services; Timothy Cross, AICP, Deputy Director of Planning and Development Services; Earl Anderson, AICP, Senior Planner; Amy Parker, Senior Planner; Cathy Tartabini, Planning Assistant; Richard Hill, Deputy County Attorney; Jeanne M. Sgroi, Management Analyst

Members Absent: Leigh Houghland, Cowles “Buddy” Spencer, Rick Moberg, Jacob Rizzio

Others Present: Dr. James Carroll, Chief Operations Officer for York County Schools; Brian Fuller, Assistant County Administrator/Director of Community Services; Sheri Newcomb, Deputy Director of Community Services; Darren Williams, Waterfront Operations and Events Manager for Economic Development and Tourism; Diya Patel, Student Intern

Call to Order

Chairman King called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 p.m.

Opening Remarks

Chairman King welcomed everyone. Mr. Hill introduced Diya Patel, who is a student intern from Tabb High School working in the County Attorney’s Office as part of a career mentorship program.

Approval of Meeting Notes

On motion of Mr. Seiter, the meeting notes for September 7, 2022, were unanimously approved.

Committee Discussion of Draft Public Facilities Element of the Comprehensive Plan, Part 2

Chairman King called on Mr. Anderson to introduce the guest speakers.

Mr. Anderson stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss portions of the draft Public Facilities element of the Comprehensive (Comp) Plan pertaining to Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and Schools, which were distributed to the Committee last week. He introduced Dr. James Carroll from the School Division, Sheri Newcomb and Brian Fuller from the Department of Community Services, and Darren Williams from the Department of Economic and Tourism Development.

Chairman King asked if anyone had any general comments about the document. Dr. Carroll stated that he read it and that he agrees with the content. Mr. Fuller stated that the document is good overall and that he had spoken to Mr. Anderson about deleting an outdated statement that was left in from the previous Comp Plan. He added that recreation program participation was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and is now beginning to recover. Darren Williams stated that the document provides a great snapshot of the County’s tourism programs. Mr. Anderson added that the Tourism section of the document is a new addition to the Comprehensive Plan. Chairman King asked if the Tourism Division falls under the Economic Development office. Mr. Williams responded that that the Tourism Division recently

merged with the Office of Economic Development to form the Department of Economic and Tourism Development.

Chairman King stated that he wanted to proceed with a section-by-section review of the draft document, as in previous meetings, and he asked for comments on the "Introduction" section. Mr. Anderson explained that this section was copied over from the document the Committee reviewed last month.

Chairman King asked for comments on the Tourism section. Ms. Myers spoke of the divide between the upper County and the lower County and stated that the County has done a good job bringing the two parts of the County together through its tourism events and activities. She stated that is reflected well in the document.

Mr. King commented that the photo on Page 1 should be an actual photograph of Riverwalk Landing rather than a photo of the model for the project. Mr. Anderson responded the picture relates to the original concept that is discussed in the text and that an actual photograph is included on Page 2. Mr. Myer suggested that maybe the photo could be shifted to the next page. Mr. Anderson stated that he would add explanatory captions beneath the two photos.

Regarding the list of tourism events, Mr. Myer suggested adding the July 4th celebration and the Christmas Lighted Boat parade, both of which draw a lot of attendees. Mr. Seiter agreed that the July 4th celebration should be added and commented that the event is very well organized.

Regarding the Parks and Recreation section, Mr. Fuller stated that the data on youth participation includes County programs only. He explained that people are recreating differently than they did ten or more years ago and that the emphasis now is on competitive travel sports leagues with youth participating in the same sports year-round. As a result, he said, some people are shifting from County programs to private programs and thus are not included in the participation data even though those programs use County fields and facilities. Mr. Fuller added that adults are also recreating differently, which the participation data demonstrates. Ms. Myers asked about Pickleball. Mr. Fuller responded that Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the United States and that the County is looking at adding more Pickleball courts in the future.

Mr. Brooks asked if Figure 5 includes both men's and women's softball. Mr. Anderson responded that it does.

Mr. Myer suggested moving the paragraph on Page 3, lines 30 through 32, to the beginning of the Parks and Recreation section because the statement reflects what the graphs illustrate. Mr. Fuller suggested deleting lines 21 through 24, which reference the recession of 2010.

Mr. Fuller commented that one thing that has changed since the current Comp Plan was written is that youths participating in high school sports typically practice almost year-round, which puts extra pressure on the facilities.

Chairman King commented that the National Park Service (NPS) picnic area in Yorktown is typically very crowded in the summertime, and he suggested that more picnic tables be added. Mr. Fuller explained that the land is owned by the NPS but managed by the County. He stated that the County wants to add a shelter but has run into some obstacles that staff is trying to work through, and he added that there has been some discussion about extending the Riverwalk further into that area. Mr. Williams added that the NPS has shown interest in developing a master plan for that area that could include more shelters and a reimagining of the utilization of that space, which he said is encouraging. Mr. Fuller added that about two years ago, the NPS changed its policy of not allowing non-motorized vehicle access to the river from the Colonial Parkway. He stated that with the new policy in place, the County is exploring the idea of

establishing kayak/canoe launches. He added that Back Creek Park is also being considered for a handicap-accessible kayak launch. Mr. Hill asked if Table 5 includes school facilities, and Mr. Fuller responded that it does.

Mr. Myer suggested deleting the statement on Page 6 regarding the leasing of land for Kiln Creek Park from the School Board. He said that sentence is very confusing. Mr. Green stated that he wasn't sure the statement needs to be in the Plan and explained that the land was originally intended for a future school site but that a school is not currently needed there. Mr. Fuller stated that he believes the lease payment, if there is one, is negligible, and Dr. Carroll added that the land is mentioned in the School Division's Facilities Master Plan.

Mr. Fuller commented that the boat landings discussed on Page 7 were originally managed by the state but were transferred to the County in the 1970s and '80s. He said the parcels are very small and that parking is extremely constrained and problematic, especially on weekends, since pickup trucks and boat trailers tend to be larger than they were when these facilities were originally designed. He said this issue is going to have to be addressed somehow.

Mr. Green asked if the Comp Plan should include some discussion of the indoor sports facility planned for the Colonial Williamsburg Visitors Center. He explained that the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has agreed to give the land to the City of Williamsburg to build an indoor sports facility, with cooperation from James City County and York County, in order to provide more facilities and increase sports tourism. He said he likes the concept but that some important issues, such as how the expense and usage will be distributed among the three localities, are potential hurdles. Mr. Green suggested adding some language to the Plan addressing the need for indoor sports facilities and their effect on tourism. Mr. Cross responded that this would probably belong in the "Planning Issues for the Future" section of the Public Facilities element and that it might also be referenced in the Economic Development element since it includes discussion of sports tourism. Ms. Myers commented that the idea appears to be very controversial based on newspaper articles she has read. Mr. Bellamy commented that a decision on the facility might be made by the time the Plan is adopted. Mr. Fuller added that he sits on the Historic Triangle Recreational Facilities Authority and that in the next six months the localities should have a much better idea of their respective cost shares at that point.

Mr. Seiter stated that he is a boater and uses the Rodgers A. Smith Boat Landing frequently and that it is very well run and probably the easiest place to get in and out of that he has ever seen. He asked if the County has kept up with policing the increased beach activity at the Yorktown waterfront to ensure the safety and property of the residents. Mr. Fuller responded that the County has enhanced police protection in Yorktown over the past several years. He said there is a strong police presence from April through Memorial Day, and Ms. Newcomb added that the County has installed numerous security cameras in the waterfront area.

Ms. Myers stated that she likes the discussion of the R.F. Wilkinson Family YMCA in the upper County and the James City County Rec Center, both of which provide a lot of recreational opportunities for the citizens. Mr. Fuller responded that there is a need for more indoor facilities to provide such opportunities, noting that activities cannot be scheduled during the day in the schools since they are used for instruction. He stated that the Senior Center is the only stand-alone recreation center in the County.

Ms. Myers noted that only one percent of the tidal shoreline in Virginia is publicly owned and she asked if that is because most of it is owned by the government. Mr. Fuller responded that most of the shoreline is privately owned, adding that about 17 of the 29 miles of public shoreline in all of Virginia is in Virginia Beach, while Yorktown has two acres of public beach access, and most of the rest is privately owned or, in York County's case, owned by the federal government. He said this is why many beachgoers travel from Richmond to Yorktown Beach. Mr. Seiter stated that when he first moved to the County, one of the first

things he noticed was that there was a lack of waterfront access. He said this is because it is an old county and the first land to be acquired and settled hundreds of years ago was along the waterfront. Mr. Fuller added that another reason is that York County did not have a parks and recreation department until 1972, so prior to that, there was no emphasis on parks and recreation, whereas a lot of other localities have had parks and recreation departments since the early 1900s when there was plenty of land available.

Mr. Myer asked why the Cheatham Wilderness row in Table 6 is blank. Mr. Fuller responded that the Cheatham Wilderness is an approximately 800-acre tract of land located between Cheatham Annex and New Quarter Park and is owned by the federal government. He stated that years ago there were discussions between the County and the NPS about conveying it to the County until the Navy determined that it owned the property and needs it for national security. He said there are hunting cabins on the property, and dignitaries use it for hunting and fishing. Mr. Brooks stated that he was involved in those discussions and that the NPS was not able to convey the property to the County because the deed transferring it to the NPS was never signed by the Navy. Mr. Fuller stated that the reference in Table 6 is held over from previous Comp Plans and should be deleted since acquiring the property is no longer a realistic option.

Mr. Seiter stated that the only potential opportunity for public access to the Chesapeake Bay appears to be in the Bay Tree Beach area. Mr. Green responded that he did not think that would be a realistic opportunity.

Ms. Myers asked for a definition of the term *greenway*. Chairman King responded that a greenway is a green area that links two or more vegetated areas through a combination of walking and bike trails, with no motorized vehicle access. Mr. Cross described greenways as linear parks. Mr. Green added that in some cases, greenways are meant for migratory animals so that they won't wander out in the road or in populated areas.

Chairman King opened up the discussion of the Schools section, stating that the focus of the discussion needs to be on the school facilities and not on educational programs or curricula, which are under the purview of the School Board and not part of the Comp Plan. Mr. Brooks observed that the School Division appears to address problems on a piecemeal basis with renovations and additions rather than new construction or reconstruction. He added that he doesn't know how to solve that since it would require more funding. He said York County has some of the oldest schools he has ever seen. Dr. Carroll commented that schools are typically designed to last 75 years and that the average age of the County's schools is over 50 years. He stated that he feels the School Division has done a good job, with the County's financial support, of keeping facilities in good shape through renovations. He explained that the challenge is trying to balance need for renovations, additions, and innovations. Another challenge, he stated, is that there are some fairly sizable projects planned in the next several years that will require careful scheduling and programming of available funds. Mr. Green commented that he attended a conference recently where it was stated that the average age of schools in Virginia is around 60 years. Dr. Carroll stated that the situation is worse in rural areas of the state that do not have the tax base to keep up with maintenance.

Chairman King asked for comments on the "Planning Issues for the Future" section of the document. Ms. Myers noted the discussion of replacing grass athletic fields with synthetic turf and asked if the new artificial turf is safe. Mr. Fuller responded that the old artificial turf was very hard but the new synthetic turf is as safe as grass, if not safer, and can be played on year-round.

Mr. Myer asked for a definition of placemaking. Mr. Williams responded that placemaking is about creating places that will make the community desirable and draw people to it. Mr. Myer suggested adding that language to the document. Mr. Cross responded that the Economic Development element of the Plan has a section on placemaking that includes a definition, and he suggested that it can be added to the Public Facilities element as well.

Chairman King opened the discussion on the “Goals, Objectives, and Implementation Strategies” section. Mr. Seiter suggested that having a quality public education system be included in the overall goal for Public Facilities. Mr. Cross responded that the Committee had agreed to make that change at the September meeting and that the document simply has not been updated yet to include that change.

Regarding the Tourism goals, Mr. Williams commented that local residents as well as visitors enjoy the facilities and events on the waterfront. Mr. Myer suggested that the Implementation Strategy pertaining to the Freight Shed be reworded to say “maximize utilization” rather than “maximize rental fees.”

Mr. Fuller commented that the County does not have a Comprehensive Master Plan for Parks and Recreation and does not have the staff to prepare such a plan. He recommended that an outside professional consultant be hired to take a holistic look at the County’s facilities and programs for parks and recreation. Mr. Green asked how much such a plan would cost, and Mr. Fuller estimated that it would cost around \$120,000. Mr. Green asked why it could not be done in-house. Mr. Fuller responded that Parks and Recreation Division does not have the staff to do all the research, analysis, and writing that would be required. He added that one of the benefits of having a consultant prepare the plan is that their independence would enhance the document’s credibility. Mr. Brooks added that an outside firm would not be biased or have its own agenda.

Ms. Myers asked what the County can do to promote the provision of open space in new development. Mr. Green responded that it can be done in several ways. He explained that through the rezoning process, developers sometimes offer to provide additional open space and recreational amenities in exchange for an increase in housing density. Chairman King added that a lot of Planned Developments have recreation facilities but they are typically accessible only to residents of that development, and he mentioned the concern expressed to him by a citizen at one of the land use forums about the need for more publicly accessible parks. Mr. Anderson responded that Objective 2, Implementation Strategy 1 at the bottom of Page 27 is intended to address this concern.

Chairman King said he would like to see the Yorktown Fishing Pier improved or replaced with a better pier. Mr. Fuller responded that this need is mentioned on Page 25, line 19.

Mr. Seiter spoke about the need for more sidewalks and bikeways. Mr. Fuller responded that the County has been working on this issue for a long time, adding that there is a regional effort to extend the Virginia Capital Trail from Williamsburg through York County and into Hampton. Mr. Seiter stated that the absence of a passionate advocate for sidewalks is a problem. Mr. Bellamy added that although citizens are generally supportive of having more sidewalks, it often takes just one opponent to derail a sidewalk project. He then gave a brief summary of all the County sidewalk and crosswalk projects that are currently in the pipeline.

Chairman King asked Ms. Patel if she had any comments about York County schools. She stated that she only knows about Tabb High School, which she said is in need of repair. Dr. Carroll responded that renovations at Tabb are scheduled to begin next year.

Citizen Comments

There were no citizen comments.

Other Business

Chairman King thanked the Committee members for their comments, and he asked Mr. Cross about the next meeting. Mr. Cross responded that the next meeting would be November 2 if the Land Use Element is ready for review by then.

Mr. Anderson stated that Doug Holroyd, who has attended several Committee meetings in the past but was unable to attend this one, had emailed him a list of comments on the draft document. Chairman King asked him to forward the email to the Committee.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:36 p.m.