Direction 2030: Planning Task Force/Technical Task Force
Meeting
Wednesday, August 8, 2012

Attendance
Present: Diane Brown, Chuck Eilerman, Marc Hult, Sherry Carran, Paul Darpel, Tom France, Paul Meier, Jim Kreissl, Mary Singler, Dan Petronio, Thomas Witt, Emi Randall, Tim Bender, Dan Allen, Richard Harrison, Mike Schoettelkotte, Rebecca Weber, Gary Wolnitzek,
Staff: Sharmili Reddy, Martin Scribner, Andy Videkovich, Jenna Haverkos, James Fausz, Edward Dietrich

Presentation/Discussion
This joint meeting of the Direction 2030 Planning Task Force and Technical Task Force covered three topics to gather feedback on input gathered thus far in the comprehensive planning process. Staff gave a brief presentation of public input and some research gathered on the topics of parks and open space, economic competitiveness, and walkability. After the presentation of each topic, the joint task force were asked to discuss these issues as they relate to the creation of county-wide goals and objectives.

Parks and Open Space
Staff has noted, in their initial findings, the public has a mixed reaction on parks with 58% of respondents believing that our current parks system is adequate and 61% wanting additional amenities. The youth tend to think parks are important and there is generally strong support for a county-wide park system. Studies have shown that proximity to a good park can increase the value of a home. Currently Kenton Co has 89 parks totaling nearly 650 acres. (These numbers will be updated.)

Staff initiated a conversation by asking the joint task force if they felt that a vision for a county-wide or regional park system was appropriate.

The task force seemed to generally agree that a regional parks approach would be beneficial to this community. However, some challenges to achieving this were discussed. It was noted that it is becoming more difficult to obtain the funding and volunteer support necessary to do the
work of local organizations but a regional system may help this situation. It was also noted that it may be helpful to make a distinction between parks and open space as not all green areas need to be parks. Parks represent a bigger commitment in maintenance while native open space can require very little maintenance or funding.

There are many questions which would need to be answered with respect to budgeting and staffing of a regional parks system. This type of system would likely require a public/private partnership to create and maintain a regional effort. A local example of a relatively successful public/private partnership is the Licking River Greenway where private entities provide a large amount of volunteer assistance.

It appears that this area may already be seeing the emergence of a regional parks system along the water ways. Efforts from such organizations as Vision 2015, the Conservation District, and the Banklick Watershed Council have already begun to link together significant open spaces along our region’s waterways. Various organizations are doing this despite major obstacles such as property maintenance. A strategically funded regional system could alleviate the problem of long-term maintenance for these properties. New projects seem to be politically favorable; however, existing parks need to be maintained as well and often this can be financially challenging.

There seems to be a two tier park system evolving in our area. Efforts around the area waterways seem to be independent of the traditional park system. These efforts have the potential to be the backbone of the entire park system. The integration of the municipal parks could be happen over time as the cities felt more comfortable turning over their parks. The comprehensive plan should further the goal of a water based regional park system. It was noted that it will be important to connect these parks with other existing parks.

Overall it was generally agreed that there is a need for a county-wide vision for a parks system which includes trails across municipal boundaries and a regional approach. This vision should state the goals and potential costs to this type of system. Within this vision, the terms ‘regional’ and ‘system’ should be defined to help better determine the direction of such a plan.

Southbank Partners and Riverfront Commons may be organizations which can help governments to work together because they can create continuity within a project. Turn over that often occurs in a public organization can cause problems when dealing with long-term projects. Inter-local agreements may also be necessary for parks to cross jurisdictional lines. The Cincinnati and Hamilton County park system may be a good example of how to break down a more regional park system.

**Economic Competitiveness**

Staff noted that at public meetings, there appears to be strong support for attracting large companies, more high technology jobs, investment in business development, and attraction of young professionals. Nearly half (45%) of high school students surveyed, indicated that were likely to not live in this area after graduation. There is general agreement that a high quality of
life is important in attracting and retaining businesses. The public meeting which focused on economic competitiveness indicated that our region is in competition with other metro areas for good jobs and businesses. A primary attractor of businesses is access to talent. To attract and keep talent, a place needs to have a high quality of life. The 20 year scope of this planning effort indicated that the needs and desires of the young need to be understood and addressed by this plan to retain them throughout this planning period. Attracting and retaining a highly educated workforce (i.e. ‘talent’) needs to be a priority from an early age and span all levels of education. Market accessibility is a major draw of Northern Kentucky.

Staff initiated a conversation with the joint task force by asking what should be emphasized in the comprehensive plan with respect to economic competitiveness.

Discussion revolved around several key components of economic competitiveness. Transportation and alternative transportation opportunities were mentioned as a priority for economic competitiveness because young people do not want to drive as much. They want to be mobile but not use a car. To keep and attract young people, these alternative modes of transportation need to be available.

Housing for several income levels as well as providing a variety of housing types in various locations around the county was noted as very important. Residents should have a variety of options. Along with housing variety, it was noted that mixed use neighborhoods are important; particularly those allowing small businesses. These mixed use neighborhoods could be more dense than the typical community and staff should look to other areas in the country to find successful examples to follow. It was also noted that levels of concentration within mixed use developments might vary depending on location within the county. In urban areas, concentration level would be higher than in suburban or rural areas.

Walkability was another issues identified to be emphasized in the comprehensive plan to encourage economic competitiveness. Good walkability needs desirable destinations and Kenton County does not have many good examples of this. Enabling people to walk or bike to work is important. It is often difficult for people to cross busy streets to get to work. Often it seems that the only way to provide a connected walkable environment is to build where one already exists. Incentives will likely need to be used to encourage developers to build mixed use, walkable areas.

Aesthetic appearance of the county is also important to attracting and retaining business owners to the area. Business decisions are about more than building sites, low taxes, and cheap prices. Businesses and their employees want good places to live.

Zoning and subdivision regulations were mentioned within this conversation and it was noted that these regulations need to be forward looking and flexible to allow for the type of development the community would like to see. Preservation of historic areas and natural systems were also brought up as a priority for encouraging economic competitiveness. Additionally, the individual identities of each neighborhood should be preserved and celebrated.
whenever possible. Each neighborhood needs to determine what creates their identity and maintain that.

Industrial areas cannot be left out of this discussion either. These areas need to be preserved for economic growth. Attention was drawn to the fact that most of Kenton County’s industrial areas are within the rural character of the southern portion of the county. This may be important in shaping policy within the comprehensive plan.

**Walkability**

Public meetings indicated a strong interest in walkable communities as well as walkable connections between housing and jobs/schools. Many respondents would like to see amenities within walking distance of their homes and jobs. The many reasons cited for encouraging walkable communities include – rising transportation costs, moving toward a more healthy community through active lifestyles, and an overall market demand for walkable communities.

Staff initiated a conversation with the joint task force by asking what walkability means in an urban, suburban, or rural setting.

Several comments were made about the importance of biking. As new roads are built and existing roads rebuilt biking needs to be considered and accommodated when possible. KYTC’s policy on bikeways along new and rebuilt roads is on a project by project basis. However bike lanes are considered on all major projects. The decision is based on potential use, if there is room for a bike lane, and if it is cost effective.

The differences in biking issues in an urban area compared to suburban and rural settings were then discussed. An example of issues in urban area includes crossing the Licking River. There are two bridges to choose from, one is rather far away and the other is dangerous for a cyclist. These specific obstacles can be addressed in the plan and have a big impact on urban cycling. It was also pointed out that in urban areas traffic is slower but in suburban areas traffic speed is a problem. Suburban bike issues are area wide whereas urban issues are more site specific. Another important element of walkability is having a destination. Typically while there are sidewalks everywhere there really is no destination that would make it attractive for people to walk.

It was noted that in a past meeting the cost of a bicycle lane was given and it was a significant amount. Providing biking facilities is good if it can be done in a cost effective manner. The comprehensive plan can identify the destinations and use them to help determine where bike lanes should be built. Using this approach some roads will have a higher priority than other. Staff mentioned that there is a bike plan for Kenton County that was adopted in 1998 but had not been used very much over the years. The plan was based on a ped-shed approach. Prioritization of areas where bike lanes are desirable may be one way to make this effort more implementable.
Task Force members mentioned that having a biking lane network that realtors could show to their clients would be a big impact on the desirability of the area. It allows people to experience the various types of places that are here to a large number of people. Additionally roadways with lot of cyclists such as KY 177 are not really designed to handle cyclists; they are very narrow. These roadways need to be looked at to accommodate cyclists.

Closing
Paul Darpel thanked everyone for coming and especially the people on the technical task force for all their help. The challenge is to take all that has been said and put a plan together. The planning commission wants to find ways to encourage the type of developments and concepts that have been talked about at the meetings. He called for anyone that has ideas on how to get these concepts and ideas into reality give us those ideas. What incentives can people think of to help make these ideas reality.