Direction 2030 Planning Task Force
Meeting 5
Wednesday, June 20, 2012

Attendance
Present
Shad Sletto, Marc Hult, Beverly Willman, Diane Brown, Sherry Carran

NKAPC Staff
Martin Scribner, Sharmili Reddy, Edward Dietrich, Amy Albright

Minutes
The minutes for the May meeting were reviewed and no changes were suggested.

Topic
The results of Public meeting 2.1 Healthy Communities

The discussion started with Diane Brown asking what the market would support with regards to housing - rentals, condos, or single family - and if it is possible to determine the need from the data obtained. The data seems to suggest two different trends: rentals are on the rise, but everyone wants a single family home they can not afford. Michael Dinn said the market upheaval has caused people to reassess what they want and how they want to live and that this is a good time to consider product type. Currently, young adults want to be mobile in terms of what and where they are renting. Marc Hult asked the question – are we trying to determine what the demand is, or, if we are trying to set the stage and let the market respond to what the demand actually will be. There is tension in the community with some people thinking that the government is overstepping its bounds. Sharmili Reddy responded by saying that currently there is a demand for smaller lots and we can address this demand by encouraging flexibility in regulations to allow smaller lots. Sherry Carran added that flexibility is important. Desires differ and people want different things so flexibility is needed. Location and amenities are also important. We need to focus more on amenities than we have in the past. There is tension in the community around the need for amenities.
With regard to amenities, Shad Sletto thinks it is valid to ask about amenities and how they are paid for, but he is more concerned that there is flexibility to allow developers to build interesting aspects in the community. The river cities have many desirable amenities but the suburban cities do not. We need to allow more flexibility in these areas. This can help cities to grow and this growth will help pay for the needs of the community. Sherry said that density (growth) is important but it needs to be executed well. Design and sensitivity to the neighborhood character is important. Well designed infill can enhance a neighborhood and poorly designed infill can cause problems. Good design does not need to be expensive. Martin pointed out that he hears concern from city officials about too much regulation on design.

A tool to achieve this flexibility could be the land use map. Traditionally and currently the land use map showed areas that are for retail only or office only. There could be places that could function well with both or either one. Providing guidance on movement towards flexible regulations could start with the land use map in the comprehensive plan.

A question arose around the health part of the public meeting: what is meant by healthy communities and why was it part of the meeting. Martin and Sharmili explained that the term healthy community can have several meanings but for this meeting the focus was on personal health and the importance of having physical activity in a person’s everyday life. The connection between the built environment and our health is new to our area. Sherry pointed out that healthy communities are more attractive to businesses than unhealthy communities. Businesses are more likely to locate in healthy communities.

Marc Hult responded by saying that an important aspect of what needs to happen to make this community thrive in the future depends in part on the expectations of people that do not live here yet. Do we have a plan to deal with this dilemma? How do we address items in this plan that we are not hearing from the public? Shad added that several of his clients find this area more convenient, walkable and friendly than where they lived before.

Regarding flexibility, Sharmili stated that in our regulations we have had strict rules calling for sidewalks on both sides of the street even when it may not be necessary. There needs to be a way to prioritize the need for walkability. This comp plan can address some of these very strict regulations. Diane added that some of this is being addressed in the subdivision regulations. Sharmili said that it is important that the Comprehensive Plan support the subdivision regulations from a policy standpoint. The function or the overall goal is important but not the strict adherence to a set of rules. Maintaining the infrastructure should also be considered. If a sidewalk is built but rarely used it is costing the city to maintain it for no reason.

Michael Dinn added that flexibility is important and necessary. Another important aspect is incentives. He said it would be good to have incentives that motivate people to make a better decision, not just most cost effective or quickest. Shad added that incentives can take many forms. In Nashville they have certain zones in which a company can build and have their fees waved. Michael added that incentives should be structured so they are in everybody’s self-
interest. Sherry said that in Nashville there are developers that go to the community first and hear what they want. This helps eliminates roadblocks and costs down the road.

There is recognition by several attendees of a bias against multi-family dwellings. Residents usually do not want multi-family units built in their neighborhoods. The idea is that it lowers the value of their homes. Michael said that this major change in the housing market can give us the chance to change the perception of what a single-family home is supposed to be.

To have this flexibility there needs to be buy-in from the public and the city officials. If it appears that the community or city officials are not ready for a complete overhaul of allowing flexible regulations a more incremental approach could be taken by testing the applicability of flexibility in smaller focused areas of the county.

Diane Brown is concerned that we are not getting people to tell us or even think about how they use the land and how they would like to see it change. She thinks we are giving a lot of statistical data but we are not asking the people what they are doing and what they want. Shad Sletto said that people don’t know what they want until they see it. The pros and cons of visual preference surveys were discussed and Shad asked if a survey asking specific questions about how a person uses their neighborhood and how they would like to see it change, would be useful. Staff said surveys are useful but have their drawbacks. To obtain a true representation of the county’s population means paying for a consultant to run a survey. At the first public meetings surveys were taken of the attendees. The findings of these surveys are part of the information for the second round of public meetings.