
Direction 2030 is an 18-month planning effort focused on preparing a new comprehensive plan for Kenton County. The comprehensive plan is a guide that provides policies for growth and development in Kenton County and outlines goals, objectives, and implementation strategies aimed at making Kenton County an even greater place to live.

Public engagement is a key area of focus for this effort. Round One concluded in late 2011 with four public meetings focused on discussion of national trends and implications for Kenton County. Round Two included two round tables – one on the topic of Healthy Communities and a second on Economic Competitiveness. Round Two meetings provided an opportunity for the public to ask questions of a panel of experts and provide comments. A summary of the Healthy Communities Roundtable is provided below. Information on the second meeting was not available at the time of publication.

Healthy Communities Roundtable

Held on June 14 from 6-8 pm at the Ludlow school cafeteria, the meeting began with a presentation from the plan’s market advisor, Michael Dinn of Dinn Focused Marketing, Inc. (DFM). Dinn spoke briefly about the current status of the housing market nationally and how Greater Cincinnati markets were not affected as harshly as other major U.S. markets. He explained that homes in Kenton County are valued roughly at the same level as they would have been in 2003 or 2004 — before the market increased sharply and then declined.

Panel Discussion. Panelists for the Healthy Communities forum included Brian Miller of the Home Builder’s Association of Northern Kentucky, Dr. Lynne Sadler of the Northern Kentucky Health Department, Kathy Schwab of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and market analyst Michael Dinn. Amanda VanBenschoten of the Kentucky Enquirer moderated the discussion.

Mr. Miller began by providing a brief discussion of the changing market for housing in Kenton County. He described that at the height of the housing boom approximately 800 building permits were issued for single family detached residential units. By comparison, only 174 permits were issued last year for the same type of development. Moving forward, he anticipated the “new normal” for home construction numbers to range in the mid-500s each year. He also spoke about changing market desires — including the need for more rental housing. Miller stated that flexibility in regulations will be a key factor in dealing with the market forces in housing.

Schwab spoke about changing demographics and how both aging and younger populations desire a different product. She described how empty nesters want to return to urban areas. She described her experiences with people who want to walk and bike to amenities and how they are moving to areas with these features. Ms. Schwab finished by saying “planners should, where possible focus on reinvesting not only in the urban core, but also in its existing real estate and community assets.”

Dr. Saddler responded to the topic of changing demographics by stating that today’s buyers do not just want what is in the home; they want a high quality of life in terms of their community. She suggested that communities and home builders need to figure out what buyers want to make communities more attractive from a quality-of-life standpoint. She pointed out the relatively new but critical connection between planning and health. Dr. Saddler said that while the built environment is not the only factor that affects the health of a community, it is a significant factor.

Dinn wrapped up the panel discussion by speaking about senior housing. He described how the local community may be lacking in the valuable “move-down” market choice that seniors often seek. He recommended that there be a mechanism to free up housing stock and create communities where there’s an affordable attached housing choice for seniors. He also believed these new housing types might be attractive to younger buyers as well.

Questions for the Panel and Next Steps. VanBenschoten opened the floor to questions from the audience and several comments were made regarding the rigidity of zoning ordinances and the need to make regulations smarter and more flexible. Panel discussion and the audience’s questions and comments along with input from the first round of public meetings, small group meetings, discussions with task forces will all be used to craft new goals and objectives for the comprehensive plan. A public meeting will be held in late October to present a draft of the Goals and Objectives.

More information about Direction 2030 is available at direction2030.org.