

# CITIZEN INPUT

## INTRODUCTION

Community planning is a community effort, and citizen input and participation are vital to the success of that effort. As the principal policy document guiding a community's future growth and development, including not just private development but also public services and infrastructure, a comprehensive plan has a major impact on the residents' quality of life. It is important, therefore, that the plan reflect the citizens' vision for their community, and public outreach was a major component of the process of preparing this Comprehensive Plan update. These efforts and the results they yielded are described below.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

The first formal opportunity for citizen input came in early 2012 with a series of joint community forums conducted by James City County, Williamsburg, and York County as part of the coordinated comprehensive plan review for the Historic Triangle. These forums provided an opportunity for citizens of all three localities to come together both to learn about the three comprehensive plans and to share their visions and goals for the future of the Historic Triangle, with a particular focus on three key geographic areas where jurisdictional boundaries meet. Although lower York County does not share a common boundary with either James City County or Williamsburg, a forum was held in the Tabb area to provide an opportunity for York County residents outside the greater Williamsburg area to participate. The combined attendance at these forums was 162, representing 131 citizens, some of whom attended more than one forum. In addition, Planning Commissioners and staff from the three jurisdictions were present at all four forums to hear the citizens' ideas and comments. Meeting dates and locations are listed below:

- February 2: Magruder Elementary School (Riverside/Marquis/Busch Area)
- February 23: Warhill High School (Lightfoot/Pottery Area)
- February 27: Williamsburg Community Building (Northeast Triangle/Surrounding Area)
- March 15: Tabb Library (Lower York County)

Each forum included both structured and unstructured opportunities for citizens to offer their input. Written responses to a series of questions about the Historic Triangle and its future were solicited and then posted on large display boards. This exercise was followed by an open forum to give citizens a chance to voice their ideas and concerns. Each attendee was also given a written questionnaire, which was also made available online, as an additional opportunity to provide input; only fifteen completed questionnaires were submitted, however.

A variety of opinions were expressed and issues raised at these joint community forums, ranging from concerns about the Historic Triangle's heavy reliance on the tourism industry to the need to plan for the impending growth in the senior population as well as concerns about regionalism and its possible negative impact on local government autonomy and individual property rights. All citizen comments were recorded, posted on the project web site, and forwarded on to the members of the three Planning Commissions in preparation for a joint work session held on April 30 and for their information and consideration in working on their respective comprehensive plan updates.

In addition to the joint forums, the localities conducted meetings of their own that focused specifically on their own respective comprehensive plans. York County held two public meetings – one on May 31, 2012 at York High School and another on June 6, 2012 at Waller Mill Elementary School – which included an informational presentation and an opportunity for citizens to review planning maps and talk one-on-one with Planning Commission members and staff about land use, housing, transportation, and other planning issues facing York County. Flip

charts were also provided on which people could write their comments. Once again, all comments were forwarded to the Planning Commission members and posted on the Comprehensive Plan web site.

## TELEPHONE SURVEY

In an effort to obtain statistically valid data regarding general community goals for the physical development of the County, a telephone survey of County residents was conducted in August 2012. Responsive Management, a marketing research firm based in Harrisonburg, conducted the survey and tabulated the results on the County's behalf. The survey questions, developed by the County with input from the consultant, consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions about growth and development, housing affordability, public facility needs, and other long-range planning issues facing York County. A total of 401 interviews were conducted, yielding a margin of sampling error of  $\pm 4.87\%$  at a confidence interval of 95%. This means that if the survey were conducted one hundred times on different samples that were selected in the same way, the findings of 95 out of those one hundred surveys would fall within plus or minus 4.87 percentage points of one another. The survey sample was geographically stratified between the upper County and the lower County to mirror the geographic distribution of the population. The results were tabulated by Responsive Management in a report titled *York County, Virginia, Residents' Opinions on Comprehensive Community Planning* and are summarized in the tables below.

<b>OPINIONS ABOUT LIVING IN YORK COUNTY</b>	
<b>Questions/Top Five Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Responses</b>
<b><i>What three things do you like most about living in York County?</i></b>	
1. Good/quality schools	49%
2. Good place to live	35%
3. Rural lifestyle/country feel	24%
4. Low crime rate/safe	18%
5. Like it here	16%
<b><i>What three things do you like least about living in York County?</i></b>	
1. Traffic	34%
2. Don't know	25%
3. Quality of County services/facilities	17%
4. County use of taxes	9%
5. Lack of/distance to retail areas or recreation opportunities	7%
6. Commercial development	7%
<b><i>Are there any changes you would like to see in York County in the next 20 years?</i></b>	
1. No/unsure/can't think of anything	30%
2. Improve Route 17 traffic flow/congestion	9%
3. Limit or control development/urbanization/industrial growth/ensure green space	9%
4. Improve roads/add more highway or interstate access	9%
5. Increase businesses/commercial presence/retail stores	9%
<b><i>What do you think the top three transportation priorities should be for York County over the next 20 years?</i></b>	
1. Improvements to Route 17	36%
2. Improvements to roads other than Route 17 or I-64	27%
3. Better public transportation in general	19%
4. Bus service	17%
5. Better road maintenance (eliminating potholes, clearing trash near roads, etc.)	15%

Source: Responsive Management, *York County, Virginia, Residents' Opinions on Comprehensive Community Planning*

Table 1

<b>OPINIONS ON THE MAXIMUM BUILD-OUT POPULATION</b>				
<b>Question</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Kept About the Same</b>	<b>Decreased</b>	<b>Don't Know/ No Opinion</b>
Thinking specifically about the amount of land available for development, traffic, and public facilities in York County, do you think the target of 80,000 residents should be increased, kept about the same, or decreased?	10%	55%	33%	3%
Thinking specifically about York County's economy, do you think the target of 80,000 residents should be increased, kept about the same, or decreased?	12%	61%	25%	2%
<i>Source: Responsive Management, York County, Virginia, Residents' Opinions on Comprehensive Community Planning</i>				

**Table 2**

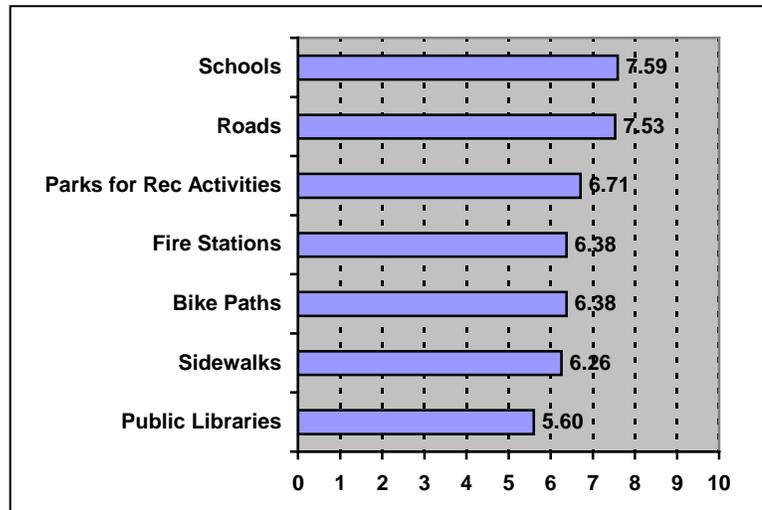
<b>OPINIONS ABOUT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES</b>						
<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Support</b>	<b>Moderately Support</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Moderately Oppose</b>	<b>Strongly Oppose</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
Do you support policies to encourage the development of housing that is affordable to those with lower-paid positions in the local work force such as service and retail workers, entry-level teachers, firefighters, law enforcement, and health care workers?	43%	35%	5%	7%	8%	1%
Do you support increasing the current high density allowance of three lots per acre in order to encourage more moderately priced housing?	17%	20%	4%	22%	34%	4%
Do you support increasing residential densities if doing so would help to attract and support commercial establishments such as various national retailers and restaurants that require a larger population base?	16%	24%	5%	25%	29%	1%
Do you support rezoning some of the vacant land or blighted commercially-zoned development for residential use in an effort to increase the County's population base so as to better support current businesses and help attract new businesses?	34%	36%	4%	11%	12%	3%
<i>Source: Responsive Management, York County, Virginia, Residents' Opinions on Comprehensive Community Planning</i>						

**Table 3**

<b>RATING OF POTENTIAL FUTURE GOALS OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS</b> <b>On a scale of zero (not at all important) to ten (extremely important)</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Score</b>
Preserve open and green space, that is, land that has not been developed	8.08
Improve the appearance of properties and structures along major roads in the County	7.14
Adopt minimum maintenance standards for existing structures, such as requirements for repainting exterior surfaces that are peeling or repairing holes and cracks in exterior walls	7.12
Require businesses along major roads in the County to meet certain architectural and landscaping standards so they are visually attractive	6.88
Encourage more commercial development	5.73
<i>Source: Responsive Management, York County, Virginia, Residents' Opinions on Comprehensive Community Planning</i>	

**Table 4**

With regard to public facilities, the survey asked citizens to rate the importance of building or expanding various public facilities in York County. The responses are shown in **Figure 1**, which gives the average (mean) rating for each type of facility on a scale of zero (not at all important) to ten (extremely important). Not surprisingly, schools and roads earned the highest ratings, followed in order by parks for recreation activities, fire stations, bike paths, sidewalks, and libraries. All of these had an average rating above the neutral mid-point of five, indicating more support than opposition. The survey also asked if there are any facilities other than those named that should be built or expanded in the next twenty years. The vast majority of respondents (64%) answered “no”; the most frequently named facilities cited by the 34% who answered “yes” to this question were YMCAs, recreation centers, and youth centers (named by 11% of all respondents), followed by playgrounds, parks (including dog parks), and open space (named by 5%).



**Figure 1**

In general, the survey responses of upper and lower County residents mirrored one another, but there are some differences:

- Support for policies to promote affordable housing is greater in the upper County (85% vs. 76%).
- Upper County residents are about evenly split on the question of allowing higher densities to achieve affordable housing (46% support/48% oppose), while most lower County residents are clearly opposed (34% support/58% oppose).
- Upper County residents expressed slight support for higher densities to attract businesses (52% support/47% oppose), which is opposed by most lower County residents (38% support/56% oppose).
- Support for rezoning vacant or blighted commercial land to residential to support/attract business is higher in the upper County (80% vs. 67%).
- Consistent with the findings noted above, the number one change that upper County residents would like to see in the next twenty years (behind “don’t know”) is more businesses/commercial presence/retail stores, named by 20% of upper County respondents and only 6% of lower County residents. The lower County residents’ most desired change (again, behind “don’t know”) is improved roads, named by 11% of lower County respondents and only 2% of upper County respondents.

The survey also included questions asking for information about the respondents (income, age, housing type, etc.). Such questions are intended to see how well the sample population reflects the larger population from which it was drawn. Based on the responses, the average respondent is a 48-year old homeowner (Only those residents who were 18 years old or older were surveyed.) with a household income between \$60,000 and \$80,000 who lives in a single-family detached home and has lived in the County for 16.4 years. Eighty percent of the respondents live in single-family detached homes, 9% in townhouses or duplexes, and 9% in apartments or condominiums.

In general, the survey population is fairly representative of the total population, although homeowners appear to be overrepresented compared to renters. People who live in owner-occupied homes represent 74% of the County's population, while those in rental housing represent 26%; among the survey respondents, however, 81% are homeowners and 15% are renters. For the County's population overall, the median age of the adult (18 and over) population is in the 45 to 49 range, and the median household income is approximately \$80,000. According to the Census Bureau, approximately 89% of the County's residents live in either a single-family detached home or a townhouse; the same is true of the sample population. (More detailed population data by housing type is not available.)

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Generally speaking, most York County residents appear to be relatively satisfied with the County the way it is and, other than improved traffic flow, do not want it to change very much. The top two responses to the question "What do you like the least about living in York County?" were "Traffic" and "Don't know." Furthermore, a 30% plurality of respondents could not think of any changes they would like to see in York County in the next twenty years. Not surprisingly, what they like most about living in York County are its schools and its "rural" or "small town" character.

Consistent with these attitudes is the strong opposition, in both the upper and lower County, to increasing the 80,000 maximum build-out population, which is opposed by a margin of approximately 88% to 10% (or 86% to 12%, depending on how the question was phrased). No other question on the telephone survey yielded such a lopsided result. This concern about excessive population growth is also reflected in a general opposition to increasing housing densities, whether it is to encourage more moderately priced housing (56% opposed/37% in favor) or to attract national retailers and restaurants that require a larger population base (54% opposed/40% in favor). Nevertheless, there is support for rezoning some of the vacant land or blighted commercially-zoned development for residential use in an effort to increase the County's population base so as to better support current businesses and help attract new businesses.

For the most part, upper and lower County residents agree on the major goals for the County to pursue over the next twenty years, but there are some differences. In general, the survey responses of upper and lower County residents mirrored each other, but some differences do emerge from the survey responses. Traffic congestion is a much greater concern in the lower County than in the upper County, where residents are more concerned about the quality of County facilities, services, and recreational opportunities. Concern about traffic congestion in the lower County appears to be largely a concern about Route 17, which, not surprisingly, is not shared by residents of the upper County, most of whom do not drive on Route 17 on a regular basis; 42% of lower County residents feel that improving traffic flow on Route 17 should be the County's top transportation priority, compared to only 9% of upper County residents. Support for building more libraries is stronger in the upper County, where the County does not operate a library, choosing instead to provide funding to the Williamsburg Regional Library system in lieu of directly providing library service. In addition, upper County residents are generally more supportive of policies to promote more affordable housing, less concerned about allowing higher residential densities, and more inclined to support policies to attract more businesses into the County than are their lower County counterparts.

