



On September 19, 2022, the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission held a joint work session to kick off the Countywide Comprehensive Plan update. The meeting included a presentation and facilitated discussion by the Berkley Group. A general overview of major discussion topics is summarized below. The meeting presentation, along with upcoming community engagement opportunities, can be found on the County website at: www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/866/Comprehensive-Plan-Update-2022-2024.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Agriculture

- Balance is a key theme for the County over the next 20 years. How does Rockingham County balance a very strong agricultural heritage with a need to move forward with non-agricultural jobs?
- Rockingham County is the #1 County in the state and the #37 County in the nation for agricultural production. Therefore, as much future development as possible should continue to be located around the Towns and the City in order to preserve agricultural heritage and economy.
- Maintaining the County's rural character can be obtained in part through preserving viewsheds and agritourism.
- What "agriculture" as an industry will look like 20 years from now may very likely change as the dairy industry is under stress. Additionally, most agricultural operations – especially the poultry industry – are not under local control anymore but are under the control of large national corporations. The nature of the industry is greatly changing. Wineries and horseback riding are new and valid forms of agriculture.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: County Infrastructure and Utilities

- Future growth in the County is likely to follow the location and capacity of utilities.
- The County should be mindful of the environment when planning for future growth. The County must adhere to Chesapeake Bay protection regulations.
- What does growth mean for utilities – the County's water/sewer, trash collection, and landfill? How do we balance all of these moving pieces?
- Public safety is important, and the County should make sure it does not outstrip the abilities of fire/EMS/police to provide adequate, responsible, and appropriate service.
- Parks and Recreation has an opportunity to further leverage partnerships with Towns to establish amenities and meet community needs.
- Addressing water and sewer infrastructure and capacity in and around the Towns is critical in future years.
- Massanutten is not a town, but still town-like. Consider Massanutten and other large industries and how they strain infrastructure.
- Consideration is needed of outdated power grid, especially as power sources are shrinking to more localized levels nationwide. What can the County do about this?
- The City and County share courts, sheriff, social services, and a Commonwealth Attorney.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Economic Development and Tourism

- Shenandoah Rail Trail in Broadway has huge potential to bring new development and activity into what has traditionally been a quiet, more rural area of the County. The Rail Trail is slated to be developed by 2030. Existing structures along the planned rail trail are beginning to be bought and proposed for uses that are appealing to potential trail visitors.



- Massanutten has upwards of 1 million guests annually, and Shenandoah National Park has now surpassed the Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown area as the top tourist attraction in Virginia. How does the County continue to capitalize on these existing assets?
- Asheville, North Carolina is a good example of a locality that has leveraged their outdoor assets and marketed as an outdoor/adventure destination.
- The County should capitalize on trails that run from Grottoes up to Shenandoah National Park and the Appalachian Trail to transform the eastern side of the County.
- Public-private partnerships are needed to advance positive economic development.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Workforce Development and Training

- Merck and Co. and James Madison University have partnered to create a career pipeline; this program has been very successful, and the County should build on that success.
- Higher educational institutions are a huge asset for the County; the County should embrace partnerships with these institutions.
- Virginia's 6th Congressional District ranks 2nd in the nation for number of higher education institutions.
- The Board of Supervisors has done an exceptional job of maintaining the school system; physical buildings are in good shape and the oversight has been fiscally responsible.
- The regional vocational school in the County is a very valuable resource.
- The County needs to find a way to attract young adults and give them training for County job opportunities.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Land Use, Growth, and Development

- The County has a growing population of aging adults, and there needs to be a balance of services and amenities. More local retailers should be readily accessible throughout the County so older adults don't have to drive 8-10 miles into Harrisonburg for everything.
- Keep as much growth in and around the Towns as possible.
- As inflation has happened in post-pandemic years, the County is starting to see more affordable housing development, but it is not of as high aesthetic quality as pre-pandemic development. Lots of spec builders are now developing the area.
- Affordability of the area has increased over time due to the Board's (of Supervisors) positivity and methodical approach towards development. This Comp. Plan should continue that moving forward.
- Larger regional and national builders want to stick closer to Harrisonburg for new development; this is a market-driven decision.
- Most development requests are occurring within a designated growth area. The County therefore is generally satisfied with the location of new growth.
- There is a question of how much land within Town limits remains for new growth and development; this generally varies from Town to Town.
- How can the County enhance recreation and entertainment opportunities? These are greatly needed to facilitate a high quality of life.
- Vertical mixed-use development in urban growth areas should be encouraged to accommodate more growth in a smaller footprint. This higher density is best for the community, but the community doesn't want higher density. There needs to be a better job of community education on newer planning concepts and best practices.
- Student-focused housing is a new use in the County (i.e., Aspen Heights, Retreat, Altitude).



- The lack of childcare and afterschool care is a **huge** problem in the County.
- There needs to be a more comprehensive conversation with the County's larger employers on housing. There should be more affordable housing to maintain a reliable workforce.
- The U.S. Route 11 area north of City limits should be closely reviewed; it is kind of a hodge-podge. There was a plan to create a "new" Rt. 11 between the existing Rt. 11 and the ridgeline to be a truck route into the City, and then taking existing Rt. 11 and turning it into a Main Street. The Plan never made it past draft phase. Incremental redevelopment would not work in this area; it is either all or nothing.
- Robinson Park is an example of a VHDA project within the County.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Transportation

- Bicycles and buggies are alternative transportation methods that need to be accommodated. Both forms of transportation need more space on the roads for safety. Increased space on the roads is also beneficial to farm equipment that needs to travel.
- Commuting to work by bike is increasingly popular in the area.
- A loop road around the City should be built; previous mistakes in not choosing to build the loop road are haunting the County.
- Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation has a bus route to RMH (hospital) and back into the City, and BRITE has a connector route with Blue Ridge Community College.
- Explore more public-private partnership possibilities for housing and transportation.