



Wilson ~ Growing Together
The Wilson 2030 Comprehensive Plan

SYMPOSIUM OF IDEAS

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

December 3, 2008



SUMMARY OF INDEX CARD QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Following the panelists' presentations, audience members were given the opportunity to pose questions to the panelists on note cards. Twenty-five (25) questions were posed and time allowed for a few to be answered at the forum. Each of the questions has been answered here by the presenters.

QUESTION #1:

What can the City do to work toward cooperative planning arrangements with the County? What experience do you have, if any, with a merged City-County planning department? What can you offer about the advantages/disadvantages of different City-County planning arrangements?

If the community wants to explore a merger of City and County planning functions, it is recommend to have the two governing bodies set up a citizen/stakeholder group to review the proposition and provide input. The development community's stance on this matter is often key to a successful merger effort and their input can help the initiative overcome various turf issues along the way. Having a single location, staff, and planning commission for City and County development matters are often deemed as the advantages of mergers. Loss of separate identity and planning traditions for some jurisdictions are usually seen as disadvantages.

QUESTION #2:

How do you start to get City, County and other government entities to come together on the issues important to each?

Leadership from the various communities need to listen to a lot of people, find common ground on issues and goals, then work together to identify solutions and put them into a plan for adoption. This will often start with a focus on a particular issue and then grow into an institutionalized vehicle for ongoing collaboration. Orange County, North Carolina, uses a county-wide model to address affordable housing issues. The partnership has been in place for over 10 years. Without it, the municipalities in Orange County would not be able to access federal affordable housing funds. What has been helpful in Orange County is that the staff from each of the four (4) governments in the County formed a 'work group' and report issues to the elected officials. The ability to work so well together at a staff level seems to go a long way. Wilson 20/20 has set the stage for such collaborative efforts in Wilson County.

QUESTION #3:

How important is a quality school system to attracting development in a community?

It can be a very important factor, especially if a community is focusing on attracting young families to the area. It is very important in situations where businesses are recruiting new professionals into the community from other locations that have high quality schools.

QUESTION #4:

We have an ongoing debate – do you work to develop downtown residential living first, with the idea that retail and offices would naturally follow, or do you get people downtown with restaurants and shopping first, with residential living to follow?

Conventional wisdom is that retail follows “rooftops” (i.e., housing). Downtown office deals may be freestanding, separate from residential and retail, but you often see restaurants/shopping downtown as greatly benefiting from existing residential in sufficient quantities.

QUESTION #5:

If you go with opportunistic development, how do you ensure that there is a unified, overall concept for downtown revitalization?

Many downtown plans are very focused on short-term development opportunities. Goals and policies for downtown need to be articulated in order to end up with a plan that has staying power beyond the first 3-5 years. A strategic planning framework can guide future development to ensure new development “fits” with the overall vision for downtown.

QUESTION #6:

Is it possible to convince people to buy and live in neighborhoods that are seen as “marginal” or potentially dangerous, but could be revitalized if enough owners moved in? If yes, how?

It is possible, but those people usually need to be convinced of imminent improvements, through plans or assurances that crime and other improvement issues be addressed in the short-term. Chapel Hill created a ‘Community Impact Team’ that consists of non-profit housing developers and community organizations, and a

variety of Town Departments (Police, Fire, Public Works, Planning, Housing, Inspections) and the University of North Carolina. The Town realized that all the agencies were working on different issues in a neighborhood, but not coordinating efforts. Through the Community Impact Team, the Town and its partners look at the entire neighborhood and address the issues of the neighborhood that cause people to think of it as dangerous. Once people recognized that there was a concentrated effort to improve Town services, there was more interest from potential buyers.

QUESTION #7:

Have moratoria on development regulations been effective in shaping ordinances or policies?

Moratoria are only effective in short-term situations where a study effort is underway to upgrade local regulations in a particular area. Moratoria generally can only be put in place for 6-12 months, without getting into dangerous legal territory.

QUESTION #8:

What can a City like Wilson do to encourage first floor retail traffic in downtown? What type of multi-use development can encourage foot traffic to support retail?

Generally speaking, active downtowns have a mix of uses that create an active environment both during the day and at night, such as restaurants, offices, retail/shops, entertainment venues, coffee shops and pubs, and housing. To adequately answer this question for Wilson, existing development in downtown and the larger Wilson area should be assessed to determine what type of market for new development exists in Wilson. An overall plan for downtown, including redevelopment, design, infrastructure, ideas for large scale projects, etc., also needs to be developed.

QUESTION #9:

In efforts to promote affordable housing, how do neighborhoods deal with the "NIMBY" (not in my backyard) factor?

An attractively designed housing development is the best way to try and counteract opponents to affordable housing in their neighborhood. You can approach the skeptics and explain the goals of the affordable housing program, show them pictures of what you plan to build, and discuss who would be living in the homes – hard

working people who need a little assistance to realize the American dream. It may not always work, but convincing people that the project will be an asset can go a long way to addressing many concerns.

QUESTION #10:

What is the difference between a master plan and a comprehensive plan?

A master plan usually refers to a plan for a certain aspect of a community, such as for transportation, parks, water-sewer or maybe a corridor or downtown area. Comprehensive plans generally cover the entire geographic jurisdiction and deal with a variety of community aspects.

QUESTION #11:

Are design standards involved in Neighborhood Conservation Districts?

Definitely. Neighborhood conservation districts primarily consist of design standards, which must be detailed at time of adoption of the district. These standards are applied as an "overlay district" that places neighborhood specific restrictions on development located within the designated neighborhood boundary.

QUESTION #12:

How can a City ordinance be established to keep a neighborhood desirable?

This is not an easy question. Local governments can enact a variety of ordinance provisions ranging from standards that "encourage" a certain type of development to mandatory standards that strictly control development and design. It is important to create a balance between maintaining or improving a neighborhood and allowing for private property rights, and this balance is different for each community. In general, if you establish a reputation in a community/neighborhood for high quality development, that can help make or keep that area desirable. This often means establishing neighborhood conservation districts and design guidelines to insure that new development fits in with existing development, and can help to maintain a certain level of quality in the neighborhood.

QUESTION #13:

Can the City back up neighborhood covenants?

Many neighborhood conservation districts are developed using neighborhood covenants as a starting point for designating new standards. The City can not actually enforce private covenants, but it can adopt regulations that mimic the covenants and enforce those development/design standards.

QUESTION #14:

Are there restrictions in placing sidewalks in existing neighborhoods?

There are two main factors involved in developing sidewalks in existing neighborhoods: 1) the space to accommodate sidewalks in the public right-of-way adjacent to the street, and 2) a funding source to plan, design, construct, and maintain the sidewalks. If adequate space doesn't exist in the public right-of-way, the City will have to negotiate with landowners to gain an easement on their property for the public sidewalk.

QUESTION #15:

Are these ideas for future development, or would recommendations for new standards and rules apply to existing developments as well?

Ideas presented at the Symposium of Ideas include a mix of standards for both new and existing development. This is an important distinction, and one that will be addressed throughout the planning process.

QUESTION #16:

Why would "neighborhood conservation" be better than the existing "historic districts" and the regulations in place to preserve and protect these?

Many neighborhoods are not eligible to become historic districts because they don't meet the criteria; however, there may be unique qualities to the neighborhood that are worth protecting. A neighborhood conservation district is a good fit for this type of situation, because design standards can be crafted to fit a neighborhood even if historic district status cannot be achieved.

QUESTION #17:

How are property values impacted by neighborhood conservation?

Generally speaking, neighborhood conservation districts help to maintain, and in some situations increase property values where they are applied. Property values are maintained or increased because the design of development is consistent throughout the neighborhood and higher quality of design is required.

QUESTION #18:

Neighborhood Conservation District – I'm not clear on the authority for these – is this federal, state, or simply the municipality deciding to have these?

Authorization for a neighborhood conservation district is by local adoption of development guidelines and the district. This is usually conducted through a rezoning process to establish an overlay district.

QUESTION #19:

In developing residential uses downtown, usually the first road block is security. How do you overcome that and convince individuals to reside in downtown "loft style" housing?

Wilson will need a public safety plan along with other planning actions to address security concerns in downtown. Part of this planning effort is adequate police/security patrols, but more importantly, it is about education and property owners/tenants working together to watch and police their area.

QUESTION #20:

How do we change area confidence, and convert the present Wilson attitude: "Why in the world did you move here?" to "Welcome to Wilson. Can I help you?"

First, study the development issues in Wilson. Next, put together a plan that is supported by the City. And last, work very hard at implementing the plan and gaining trust from the community. Build momentum and you build confidence and turn around old attitudes.

QUESTION #21:

What are the most important considerations developers give for downtown revitalization, i.e., tax incentives, property values, parking availability, etc.?

Developers are traditionally most concerned about security and parking on downtown projects. They may have other ideas on ways the public can help fill the “gaps” in their project financing plans.

QUESTION #22:

What did it take in Durham to achieve a merging of the separate city and county planning departments?

A steady push from several leaders of the local homebuilders association, along with a careful study involving stakeholders on the different issues involved led to the consolidation of city and county planning departments. The results are a joint planning commission, merged staff and director, a single office location, joint funding and merging ordinances and other planning bodies.

QUESTION #23:

As a developer, how would you feel if the City required sidewalks and bike lanes in all new development?

If the City had a consistent policy and goal to achieve connectivity and provide alternative modes of transportation such that all developments were required to provide these types of amenities, developers are usually comfortable with these types of requirements. Many developers include these types of amenities in projects where local governments don’t even require them. Consistency and fairness in development regulations are what are most important to developers.

QUESTION #24:

What systems are used to set the priorities for projects and initiatives that are identified in a Comprehensive Plan?

Evaluation of feedback from citizens, elected officials, and the Plan Steering Committee will usually result in several priority initiatives rising to the top. These are discussed and explored by the group that is guiding development of the Plan (i.e., Steering Committee) to determine the priority and timeline for implementing projects and initiatives. New programs and expenditures can often happen quickly. Recommendations on changes to regulations and additional studies generally take longer.

QUESTION #25:

What is tax increment financing?

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a tool to allow property owners in a specified area to float bonds, with a legal pledge to repay the bonds from increased property tax revenues in the area. Increased reinvestment is generally the key to insure that property values and revenues rise to pay off the bonds.