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## **Comprehensive Plan's role is to guide progress**

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by Thomas Lester, Editor

03.30.10 - 12:07 pm

Where do you see Carroll County five years from today? Ten? Twenty?

That's what county officials want to know.

To that end, Carroll County partnered with planning consultants Mike Chandler and Bruce Peshoff to shape the vision of the county through 2030. While this guide won't have to be followed, it will offer direction in all aspects of community growth, including agricultural, economic, infrastructural and developmental.

The Plan is the County's guide to action that provides direction for decision-makers and staff. It is the "constitution" that guides public and private development decisions and the provision and funding County facilities and services. The Plan will provide broad direction, in the form of goals and policies, and identify specific tasks for County staff, in the form of strategies. The Comprehensive Plan will address agricultural protection, land use patterns, housing, economic development, infrastructure, County services, natural resource protection, County fiscal health and standards for new development.

Supervisor David Hutchins is one of the county's biggest Comprehensive Plan proponents. Hutchins said in looking at other counties' plans while attending classes through the Virginia Association of Counties, he felt Carroll needed to refine its approach and get input from its citizens in doing so.

"When I looked at other counties that had actually performed an in depth plan prep with people who knew how to do it, it became a road map for the future," Hutchins said. "One of the things it identified, for example, were the places that most need infrastructure for potential growth, be it commercial or industrial. It identified places that were best suited for residential, and in particular with rural counties like Carroll, there was a tremendous amount of agriculture. It was based on citizens' input in those localities. It wasn't big government driving something to them; it was the locality begging input from the citizens. Those I think were successful had tremendous input from citizens."

One important distinction in working on a Comprehensive Plan is that it is not the same as zoning. The Plan will guide the location and intensity of future growth and the location, when and where infrastructure will be provided and who pays. Zoning regulations are an implementation tool that is designed to achieve Plan goals and policies. Development Codes protect investment in farms and property, require that County and State health and safety standards apply to new development and protect County fiscal resources by establishing public and private infrastructure requirements.

Having an idea of what should go where is key in attracting businesses to an area. Just placing infrastructure doesn't always guarantee its usage, so planning should maximize those assets by placing them in areas that are ripe for growth and

development.

“With the infrastructure development and the investments that have taken place in Carroll County, the citizens are owed a Plan,” said County Administrator Gary Larowe. “Where do we go from here? Once you get the infrastructure in place without a Plan, you still have the potentiality of nothing.”

To that end, the public is invited and encouraged to make their voices heard throughout the planning process.

“We really need to have good participation,” Hutchins said. “If we do, they see the benefits. If you can get the majority of folks in a community to realize you have a long range plan and this is how we’re going to get it to work, they see what’s happening.”

The planning process includes building consensus for a unified community vision, developing goals and policies to support the vision, and prioritizing strategies to achieve the vision. The Plan will maintain a community-wide focus, including opportunities for public participation throughout the process. In addition to the countywide kick-off meeting held in January, last week the County held public visioning workshops in the five planning districts. County staff and the consultant team also met with numerous focus groups and stakeholders to gather input and discuss priority issues.

“I strongly believe the role of the comprehensive plan is what Carroll County will do five years, 10 years, 15 years out,” Hutchins said. “We can’t predict the future but we can draw a road map based on the information we have today and tweak it if we have to. If we develop a sound Comprehensive Plan with citizen input, we will have a plan citizens will support.”

There are numerous opportunities to get involved and stay involved with the planning process. Visit [www.plancarrollcounty.org](http://www.plancarrollcounty.org) for more information, to register for updates, and to submit your idea for the “Name that Plan” contest.

In June, the preliminary review draft will be released and a countywide public meeting and a series of district meetings will be held to go over the Plan.

In August, the final review draft will be released, followed by public hearing in September. Once through the hearings, the Plan is scheduled to be adopted by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors in the fall. Throughout the process, citizens are asked to let officials know their thoughts.

“How do you want Carroll County to look, feel and be in the future? I think that’s an admirable position for the Board to have,” Larowe said. “The Board is looking for all the input possible from citizens across Carroll County.”

In the weeks to come, The Carroll News will take a look at the Comprehensive Plan from a number of angles. Next week, we will examine the data gleaned from a recent countywide survey.

Future articles in the series will focus on the big picture questions facing the county.

What is the future of agriculture in Carroll County? How can the County protect and promote agriculture? How can we protect our rural and agrarian quality of life?

How is infrastructure planned and provided? What is fiscally sustainable capital facility planning?

What steps can the County take to support economic development? What types of economic development are desired? Where?

Where should different types of new development be located? What should it look like?

Plan Coordination – How should the Plan be used? How can the County work more effectively with Galax and Hillsville? With farms and property owners? With developers? How can we implement Plan goals, policies and strategies?

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