

Wilmington City Council met in special session on Tuesday, March 24, 2015, at 6:00 p.m. with President Cindy Peterson presiding.

Call to Order

Roll Call: Jaehnig, absent (arrived at 6:04 p.m.); Spicer, present; Stuckert, present; Mead, present; Miller, present; Milburn, absent; McKay, present.

A motion was made by McKay and seconded by Miller to excuse the absent members, Jaehnig and Milburn.

Motion passed. All yeas.

Absent member excused.

Pledge of Allegiance

Council gave the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

Moment of silence observed

Judiciary Committee

Taylor Stuckert presented an overview of the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Wilmington. He presented a history of planning, the public participation process, overview of the current conditions, and an overview of the goals for the implementation of the plan.

History of Planning: There have been two comprehensive plans: The 1954 Master Plan for Wilmington and the Land Use, Thoroughfare, and Open Space Plan from 1978. The 1978 plan was the first plan written after the closure of the Air Force Base. The community at that time treated the closure of the Air Force base in much the same way that the community today treats the closure of DHL. This is an opportunity for the community to be proactive about the future rather than reactive of events.

Public Participation: Revolved around evaluation of the Physical Development, Economic Development, and Social/Cultural Development. Group discussions focused on three questions: What have we learned from the past? What are we not doing today? What should we do for tomorrow? Public participation included in-person meetings, focus groups, interviews, on-line survey. They received feedback from over 300 residents. The most discussed topic was economic/business development. In terms of the online survey, the number one priority for a dream community would be safety, followed by cleanliness. People online perceive that the City of Wilmington emphasizes parks but does not place a strong emphasis on strong neighborhood identity. Overall, the response toward the city was very positive. City services are perceived as adequate, but adjustments and improvements are wanted. There is a willingness to pay for increased services. There was also a sense that entrepreneurship is an important priority.

Taylor Stuckert outlined the priorities encompassed in creating the Comprehensive Plan: These included: Economic/Business Development—Entrepreneurism; Infrastructure, Physical Development, Services; Downtown Development/Historic Preservation; and Parks, Trails, Walkability, Pedestrian Safety, and Recreation. He further presented charts on population and growth rates. The growth rate after the closure of DHL is the second lowest historically. The last census information suggests that we have an aging population.

Taylor Stuckert reviewed the education demographics in terms of the percentage of population with Bachelor degrees. Of note, there has been a decline in the number of Bachelor-plus education. In 1978, Wilmington was described as a highly educated community. At that time we were about six points above the State. Today we stand about ten points below the State. We need those numbers to improve to become an attractive community to employers.

Taylor Stuckert reviewed income and housing statistics in the City. In Wilmington, compared to the County and the State, we have severe decline in median household income. In the year 2000, adjusted for inflation, the median household income was just near \$50,000. Not adjusted, it was around \$40,000. Today, the median household income is \$29,000. It's a 40% drop from 2000 to 2013. The figures are from the American Community Survey. Stuckert reviewed charts showing changes in family size, median household income, poverty rates, and wage rates from 1990 to 2013. He went over charts of growth rate per township. He reviewed the housing market in terms of owner-occupied versus rentals. The number of owner-occupied homes has steadily decreased in recent years. From a planning standpoint, the City wants to work to counter that. Also reviewed was the increase in commercial acreage. Growth in manufacturing has declined. Transportation growth has increased in the past 30-year period, but when you look at the number of employees in the transportation industry in 2011 versus 2006, it has declined sharply, as would be expected with the loss of DHL. He reviewed employment and workforce numbers. The current unemployment rate per the Community Survey is around 15%. High growth in parks and trails from 1978 to 2013.

Taylor Stuckert presented the issues faced by the City of Wilmington: Aging population, Declining educational attainment and income; and Increasing poverty. Understanding these issues helps us adapt. Issues in terms of land use include: Need for In-fill development; Changes in housing tenure; future land use. Local Economy: Need greater diversity; Encourage entrepreneurship; Workforce Development; Greater economic preparedness. If we ever get into another situation similar to DHL where 30% of GDP lies in one employer, as a community we need to start thinking about our emergency preparedness plan. When you are in prosperity, what can you do to prepare for a year of crisis?

[Discussion of diversity of workforce]

Natural Resources Issues include: Connecting Natural Resources; Increase trail mileage by completing linkages; Focus quality; Ensure adequate support and resources. Trails have a very positive economic effect. From an investment standpoint, the City should recognize the positive effect parks have on the citizens.

Implementing the plan is broken down into several categories: Land use/physical development; Economic development; Thoroughfare/infrastructure; Quality of life/Social, cultural development. The plan is further broken down into phases: Short term (1-3 years); Mid-term (4-7 years); and Long-term (7-20 years).

Taylor Stuckert outlined considerations for future land use and development: Unlikely to see dramatic expansion of municipal boundaries; Focus should be inward and on the periphery (Union Township); Prioritize in-fill development and efficient use of open space; and Adopt general guidelines and priorities for development. When we make decisions in Planning Commission it should reflect these guidelines. He presented a combined Union Township and City of Wilmington land use plan map.

In terms of Residential Development, emphasis should be placed on strengthening neighborhoods, in-fill development, efficient greenfield development, greater connectivity to adjacent areas and other land uses, and incentivizing new development (especially in the urban core).

President Peterson asked if an inventory should be done on vacant lots to start to develop an in-fill plan. Taylor Stuckert said that one possibility was contacting a developer and encouraging them to do in-fill projects in the city.

In terms of commercial development, emphasis should be placed on leveraging and improving existing infrastructure, clustering new growth, encouraging mixed use development, and improving pedestrian safety/access. He used the Rombach crossing at Lowes Drive as an example of a difficult pedestrian crosswalk.

In terms of industrial development, Taylor Stuckert emphasized the following: develop around existing industrial uses; consider alternatives to development types/densities;

maintain communication/engagement with large employers. In terms of Thoroughfare, Infrastructure and Access: prioritize maintenance of existing infrastructure; prioritize thoroughfare safety and pedestrian infrastructure; and prepare for future capital improvement needs;

In terms of Downtown Development: Support current momentum and look toward development projects; prioritize infrastructure improvements; focus on improving “quality of life” issues. He emphasized that the direction moving forward should be about pedestrian safety in the downtown.

[Discussion of downtown parking and traffic]

In terms of Parks and Trails: Identify ways to increase support to the Parks system; Explore ways to work with the County Parks District (share resource opportunities); Continue to support connectivity to regional/national trail systems.

In terms of Quality of Life: Continue working on addressing declines in educational attainment; Re-establish code, zoning and maintenance enforcement standards; Explore ways to support “aging in place.”

The next step is the Comprehensive Plan document goes to City Council for review. A change upon acceptance of the plan would be that the plan guides land use and planning decisions (City Planning Commission). New policies and city strategies should refer to the plan for guidance. Area or issue-specific plans/strategies can be produced and cohesive.

Mayor Riley thanked Taylor Stuckert for all of the hard work.

Councilman Jaehnig explained that the next step was to digest the information. Council will have readings on the ordinance over the next three council meetings.

Taylor Stuckert invited members to email him with any feedback, changes or errors.

President Peterson asked if anyone wished to address council while in session.

Seeing no one else who wished to speak, President Peterson asked for a motion to adjourn.

A motion was made by Jaehnig to adjourn.
President Peterson declared the meeting adjourned.

ATTEST:

President of Council

Clerk