



## **Eyes on County Council – April 10, 2025**

### **Land Use Reform Working Group – Meeting #2**

**Highlight comment:** General public attendance more than doubled from the initial meeting – but still only about 30 people. Need to spread the word – our presence will make a difference. Watch on the live broadcast or archived version.

#### **Overview:**

The consultant held individual interviews with the participants following the last meeting and developed “themes” based on the input – common issues/ideas. The initial list of seven themes were:

- Risk of growth outpacing infrastructure
- Housing supply is inflexible and limited, favors single family homes
- Environmental resources are under pressure: long-term impact on water quality/environment/tourism economy
- Development process lacks predictability
- Land preservation and property rights are in tension – protect farmland vs. land as an asset
- Higher density is widely supported, in the right places
- There is a desire for clearer growth areas; growth should be directed to designated high-density areas and away from sensitive areas

#### **Member comments:**

##### **Jill Hicks (SPC):**

- Taking exception to the word risk in the first theme, she said “growth has outpaced the infrastructure. So I think risk is maybe the wrong word to use. We’ve outpaced infrastructure, and we have to find a way to catch up as we develop this plan.”

##### **Jon Horner (Home Builders):**

- Growth has not outpaced infrastructure – there is still capacity, need to plan for manageable growth.
- Ambiguous rules/ordinances provide no predictability for developers

##### **Mike Riemann (Engineers):**

- Regarding road infrastructure, it’s not realistic to expect that roads will be in place before building permits are issued – always a lag
- Developers can’t build schools; this is a fundamental problem that developers can’t solve.

##### **Jay Baxter (Represents Farmers):**

- Planning has been inadequate to provide infrastructure – schools, roads, etc. since county does not control everything

##### **Jill Hicks:**

- Regarding infrastructure, the county has built 24% of new development in state investment level 4 areas: better coordination with the state is needed

- There are objective ways to project what infrastructure will be needed and to get it in place ahead of time or in parallel with development.

**Dave Edgell (State Planning):**

- The state has committed to working with the county. Things work best when infrastructure planning aligns with the Land Use Map – this gives predictability.
- Many counties have entire departments that track traffic and development, and ensure that the Comprehensive Plan is followed.
- Cited the success of planning tools like the TID's
- Must avoid Level 4 for development
- Suggests adding schools planning to 2028 Comprehensive Planning

**Mark Luszcz (DeIDOT):**

- "What is acceptable for capacity of roads?" We are not as bad as other areas regarding congestion.
- We have the ability to decide what Level of Service (LOS) is acceptable for individual roads. Some roads can be LOS E ("Unstable") and that's OK.
- Land use should promote walkable, bikeable, multi-modal transportation
- Parking requirements can be an issue – more parking = more traffic

**Jon Horner:**

- An example of what's wrong with promoting multi-modal is the bike paths go to nowhere. Density is needed in order to enable biking/walking to shopping areas.
- Many ideas are coalescing around high-density development.

**Matt Padron (Affordable Housing):**

- Affordable housing is the least traffic creator – opposite of public perception

**Caitlin Del Collo (Affordable Housing):**

- Regarding housing supply: everything that isn't single-family home is lumped under the designation of 'multi-use'. There's an opportunity for getting low-hanging fruit by making small tweaks by defining different types of multi-use.

**Mike Riemann:**

- Traffic can be at one LOS, say C, but after the next development is built, it moves to LOS D. It's not fair to put the burden of road improvement at that point onto the next developer who wants to build there, when it was a series of developments that produced the problem. Traffic Improvement Districts (TIDs) are a good solution for this.

**Jill Hicks:**

- "Public does not want Sussex to become another Long Island" – traffic concern is big issue

**Jay Baxter:**

- We need to consider the county's economic viability. He wants to make this an overarching theme.

**Christophe Tulou:**

- In addition to economic viability, we need to consider political viability. New County Council members were elected because of these conditions. They will be hearing from their constituents.

**Jon Horner:**

- On the political front, we need to educate the public, prepare them for some potentially unacceptable outcomes – like density

**Christophe Tulou:**

- What we are doing here as the Working Group will educate the public.

**Jay Baxter:**

- Preserving farmland is not the same as preserving open space. He's against open space because it's a tax burden.
- Need to protect the farmer – open space can be an economic liability.

- If no reason to farm (not able to make a living) – farmers will disappear.

Next, using a ‘sticky note’ technique, the moderators worked with group members to organize themes into the project’s goal areas.

Planning and Zoning Director **Jamie Whitehouse** and County Attorney **Vince Robertson** gave an overview of the development process. Obviously, this is an area with challenges and creating efficiency will be critical to improving the land use process.

**Next steps:**

**Moderator Andrew Bing:** In the next four upcoming meetings, the group will begin formulating the outline for recommendations.

**Next Meetings:**

Location: Sussex County Public Safety Complex, 21911 Rudder Lane, Georgetown (near airport)

Date/Time: Thursdays, 10am – Noon (except for May 19)

- May 1
- \*\*May 19 – Monday, 2pm – 4pm
- June 12
- July 10
- Future meetings TBD

**Related Articles to Land Use Actions:**

[New group weighs development’s impact | Cape Gazette](#)