

Peachtree City Planning Commission, City Council, and Multiple Boards
Joint Workshop Minutes
February 27, 2017
7:00 p.m.

The Peachtree City Planning Commission, City Council, and multiple boards met on Monday, February 27, 2017, at City Hall. Planning Commission Vice Chairman Aaron Daily welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. With no Planning Commission items on the agenda, the assembly entered into workshop session at 7:02 p.m.

Others attending: Mayor Vanessa Fleisch, Council Members Terry Ernst, Mike King, Kim Learnard, and Phil Prebor; Planning Commissioners Jack Bernard, Lisa Ann Curtis, and J.T. Rabun; Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board Members Sean McMillan, Nathan Walker, and Kim Westwood; Airport Authority (PCAA) Chairman Bryan LeBrecque and Airport Manager Hope Macaluso; and Water & Sewerage Authority (WASA) Vice Chairman Phil Mahler; Fayette County Development Authority (FCDA) President/CEO Joan Young and Vice President of Economic Development Emily Poole; City Manager Jon Rorie and City Planning and Development Director Mike Warrix.

Rorie kicked off the workshop noting that Peachtree City was approaching 60 years of age and was at a crossroads. A great deal of planning had gone into the community so far, but it was time to look at what the City would be moving forward. He noted that every group represented at the workshop had both common and competing interests, and therefore had different world views. Every decision and every trade-off had consequences.

Rorie continued that Peachtree City's Comprehensive Plan was currently being updated, which was a process that should cover land use for the next 20 years. Community facilities, transportation, and economic development were also components, and each of these touched every group represented.

Rorie said the City could approach the Comprehensive Plan in two ways – as a required exercise that had to be completed; or as an exercise to develop an action plan. No decision would be made that evening, but he was hoping to have attendees look at those four topics from a macro level and establish a forum for addressing them moving forward. Rorie said people in attendance, including the citizens, could work together, and how all those issues worked together comprised Peachtree City's destiny. He encouraged everyone to express their thoughts, and the discussion progressed.

Warrix then covered some of the components for the Comprehensive Plan Update, which occurred every five years and was again due in June 2017. Warrix said the Atlanta Regional Commission was assisting in facilitating Peachtree City's update, and there had been two public meetings on the update so far.

Currently, Peachtree City was developed under the "Village Concept." Some of the questions moving forward were: What is a village in 2017? Should we redevelop some places? Annexation policy – What's in it for me?

Rorie asked those attending what "village" meant to them. Bernard said, ideally, the villages were places to live, work, and play, with homes, recreation, and some part of the population able to work there. Rorie asked what villages currently had all those components. Prebor said his village did not offer that – Braelinn did not have a lot of professional office space like some of the other villages.

Fleisch continued that, years ago, the villages had been explained to new and prospective residents as having a fire station, elementary school, and recreation areas. That was no longer true of all the villages.

Rorie asked for participants to also include what areas the City might redevelop. Learnard said redevelopment was going to happen in Aberdeen due to the older homes. Rorie asked what other components would impact that process, and Rabun noted that sewer service would play a role. Rorie said the next question related to redevelopment would be, what type of investment would the community be willing to make. McMillan said that the City should be looking at the highest and best uses of properties, and analyzing parcels that were not returning enough.

Rorie then switched to the impact of annexation on older neighborhoods. He continued that the City required a balance in the tax base, noting that commercial property brought in more than residential property, but also impacted quality of life nearby. For residential property, the "break even" point in tax revenue generated versus services consumed was about \$325,000 in property value.

Curtis returned to the question about villages, which were less important now than issues like the outdated R-1 zoning category. She said people moved here for the Peachtree City environment, not a particular village. Prebor added that, to him, the village was really the local shopping center, and he moved to Peachtree City to retire because of the paths and overall community. Westwood asked if the elephant in the room was that the village concept was no longer viable, noting that successful communities at this time had downtown districts.

King said he lived in Glenloch Village, but primarily identified with his neighborhood, McIntosh Corner. He continued that residents could go anywhere in the City on the paths. The village was more commercial and residents identified with the City as a whole and their individual neighborhoods.

Bob Grove (WASA alternate in the audience) said we were not Peachtree Village but Peachtree City. Another member of the audience said he never remembered the "live, work, and play" concept applying to an individual village but to the entire City. The villages had been marked off by the developer. Ernst said that, in the 1970s, the village concept was a neat idea, with much smaller shopping areas serving as the center point. However, Peachtree City had somewhat outgrown that concept in the intervening years.

Warrix then moved to the Comprehensive Plan goal of preserving the natural environment, noting that Peachtree City had 3,766 acres (26% of the land) as nature area or greenspace. The greenspace protected water quality and maintained the City's landscape and buffer requirements.

Prebor noted that Peachtree City was not an urban area and should maintain some of the natural look. Curtis felt there was room for some improvement – the original paths probably killed hundreds of trees after construction, but there was surely a way to build paths now that would protect trees. She said she would also like to see an emphasis on water quality. She said the City should certainly keep the natural areas, but look for ways to improve upon them.

Rorie then turned to the community facilities portion of the Comprehensive Plan, noting they helped to maintain a high quality of life. He noted that everyone had a slightly different definition for "Quality of Life," and that during the ONE PTC Comprehensive Plan Update five years earlier, one of the biggest requests was for more community events – not runs, but major community

gatherings like Shakerag Arts & Crafts Festival, Hometown Holiday, 4th of July, etc. Paths, parks, schools, events, and infrastructure (sewer, water, cell coverage, microcells, fiber internet) all had a huge connection to the definitions of quality of life.

Poole said that many of the events and amenities that abounded in Peachtree City were not as attractive to the younger workforce. Learnard noted that West Georgia Technical College was working with seven counties, four of which had College and Career Academies. Coweta County had even gone so far as to adopt a German model apprenticeship program that provided students with an associate degree in a technical field with a job waiting for them upon completion.

Poole said that several Peachtree City companies had asked to partner with the Coweta program since Fayette County was not currently focusing on high tech jobs. The companies were challenged when trying to attract and retain the next generation of employees. Poole continued that, if Peachtree City wanted those types of businesses, it either needed to develop the amenities to attract those types of employees or to develop a means to grow the employees locally.

Rorie then asked if Poole's observations meant Peachtree City should change everything. He continued that he did not feel that was necessary, and the group would come back to that concept later. In general, as the workforce grew slightly older and had children, they began looking for good schools and many of the amenities already in Peachtree City.

Fleisch noted that, currently, one third of Peachtree City's residents were over 50 years of age, and that at age 65, residents could cut their school taxes by 50% or more. However, property values were directly tied to the quality of the school system. Poole said that many companies looking at Peachtree City were initially attracted by the quality schools.

Young then noted that communities had to continue to evolve, and Peachtree City might need to make some changes in some areas. As an example, she said that closer housing and bars could be put in one area without converting the entire city. The question became how to continue the evolution of the Peachtree City lifestyle for future generations. What would it look like, Young asked.

Prebor noted a recent uptick in family-oriented relocations, saying people liked living in Midtown (Atlanta) until their car was broken into or they could not walk their dogs, then they began looking for other locations with different amenities. He also noted that Oak Grove and Huddleston Elementary Schools were currently full, and that Booth Middle School and McIntosh High School were close. Fleisch noted they might not have good population trends until the 2020 census. Prebor felt the free market should decide on some of the development questions.

Bernard felt the age issue was more complicated than it appeared on the surface because older residents did not use some services (schools, police, court) as much as younger residents. He also said that taxes were lower in Peachtree City than in the county where he formerly lived, but that was not his reason for moving here. He said he did not think millennials would move to Peachtree City unless they had children, and that Peachtree City would not be able to create the atmosphere that would attract millennials with no children. Rorie agreed, saying Peachtree City could not spend enough to attract 20 – 30 year-olds who did not have children. However, the amenities that were already here could be enhanced.

Rorie continued that enhancing infrastructure was important. Peachtree City had historically had major battles over the location of cell phone towers, but cell service was vital. Microcells were a

developing alternative. The number one requested site for new towers by providers was the Braelinn Recreation Area. No one wanted towers, but everyone wanted coverage. Sewer service was also important to redevelopment and economic development, and Peachtree City's sewer system had been constructed at a developer's grade. WASA continued to maintain and upgrade the system.

Fleisch noted that sewer service increased property values, noting that in 2011, the Ankle and Foot Center had a fair market value of \$2.3 million, providing \$5,300 in property taxes to Fayette County and \$23,000 to the school system. In 2016, after annexation and connection to sewer, the property had a fair market value of \$6.9 million and provided \$13,000 to Fayette County, \$55,000 to the schools, and \$18,000 to Peachtree City.

There was some discussion about whether the Peachtree East shopping center was served by sewer [it is], and King noted there were several areas that might benefit from annexation and sewer service, but with hook-up fees at \$25,000+, it was cost-prohibitive.

Warrix noted that these types of questions showed how important comprehensive planning was, and noted they would love to have information on WASA about any planned expansions and their Capital Improvements Projects list for the coming years.

Rorie then transitioned the discussion to transportation, noting they were not there that evening to discuss the SR 54/74 intersection. He said the goals of the Comprehensive Plan included managing congestion and multi-use trail connectivity and bicycle routes. The first item, managing congestion, was an example of competing goals and uses.

Rorie explained that, in 2014, the City Council had authorized the Highway 54 W Corridor Study, which produced several recommendations. There had been a lot in the local news recently about the Highway 74 Gateway Coalition, which included Peachtree City, Tyrone, Fayette County, Fulton County, and Fairburn, and was looking at limiting curb cuts along SR 74. State Route 54 was also important, especially when looking at the areas around Peachtree City. The SR 54 W corridor traffic impacted Peachtree City, but was a regional problem. Sewer service to Senoia could increase development on the western border, which could impact SR 74 traffic, making that a regional problem as well.

The Comprehensive Plan mentioned alternate east-west routes to help with the impact of neighboring communities. Bernard said that transportation was a multi-faceted issue that required both a technical approach and a political approach. The technical approach was regional in nature, and he noted that Georgia had the lowest per capita funding for roads of any state. The political track required multiple governments working toward the same end, noting that political pressure worked on the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) if enough entities were involved.

Shayne Robinson (Fayette County Transportation Committee, from the audience) noted that they allowed the municipalities and the County to approach the state together as a group. The committee was also looking at the borders shared with Coweta and Fulton Counties and was working with the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority. Poole added that a County of 150,000 asking for help had more impact than a city of 36,000.

Rorie noted that Peachtree City also shared a border with another County (Coweta) that was in a different Regional Commission [Three Rivers versus the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) that Peachtree City was in]. Allison Duncan (ARC and assistant to staff in facilitating the

Comprehensive Plan Update) noted that the regional commissions did meet periodically to discuss projects that crossed their respective borders.

Mahler asked if Atlanta was still considered a non-attainment area (relating to air quality). Duncan said Atlanta continued to make improvements based on the old standards, but the standards also kept changing. Mahler said the non-attainment status impacted the speed of traffic improvements being made in Metro Atlanta, and that improvements could not be constructed if air quality would suffer. He also noted that House Bill 170 from 2015 increased the transportation budget. He said Peachtree City needed to go to GDOT, but needed the Comprehensive Plan finalized. It would be a minimum of six to eight years from concept to construction for any major transportation projects. Rorie echoed that this was a big issue facing the community.

Fleisch said that, at some point, the SR 54/74 intersection would look completely different than it currently did. She asked if the City needed to enact an overlay district or architectural guidelines for the area since there were a lot of older buildings. She asked what the City needed in the form of ordinances to support the redevelopment that was already starting.

McMillan asked if a Community Improvement District (CID) would be beneficial. Fleisch said it could be a good thing. She also felt that the SR 57/74 intersection and the SR 54/Peachtree Parkway intersection were the closest thing Peachtree City currently had to a downtown. She asked about a Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) grant. Duncan said that was a possibility and also mentioned the Community Choices program. City Planner Robin Cailloux noted that the LCI program had grown considerably since its inception years earlier.

At that point, the discussion transitioned from the Comprehensive Plan to economic development. Poole noted that economic development touched all the areas discussed and was an important component to maintaining quality of life by creating jobs, adding capital investment, and improving the tax digest. She continued that Peachtree City had a unique set of amenities, and they wanted to attract businesses that would allow people to live, work, and play in the city while enhancing the amenities.

She continued that, for the average community in Georgia, 51% of their tax base was residential compared to commercial/industrial. In Peachtree City, residential comprised 66% of the tax base, which could become a big burden on residents in the future. Through economic development, they were trying to increase the industrial footprint in Peachtree City so citizens were not shouldering so much of the tax burden.

Rorie asked attendees to consider whether 66% residential was actually a bad thing. Prebor suggested that, if homes were at or above the break-even point (\$335,000 in value), it might not be bad.

Fleisch noted that the average age of a home in Peachtree City was 27 years, and said if the City did not maintain the infrastructure, home values (which made up 66% of the tax digest) would drop. Council and staff had positioned Peachtree City to come out of the recent recession in a financially strong position, but they were still playing catchup on the maintenance. Realtor.com currently listed Peachtree City as one of their "most searched" zip codes, but that could change if problems were ignored.

Poole then noted that a data center type of business could bring in positions that paid \$80,000 to \$100,000 per year, plus millions in equipment and their building. Rorie noted tax abatement strategies were a common trade-off to attract these types of businesses. Poole said tax

abatements bonds would cover a specified number of years during which the industry was only liable for a portion of the taxes each year to offset their capital investment. Most locations offered incentives. Having incentives did not guarantee getting the business, but not having them guaranteed losing that business to another location. Poole noted that the community still got a portion of the taxes, as well as the facility and jobs, during the limited abatement period.

Rorie said everything came with a trade-off, noting that offering an abatement to the type of business described by Poole might be a good investment, but bringing in a warehouse that paid \$35,000 to employees would not. It was actually cheaper to keep existing businesses in Peachtree City than to recruit new businesses. He said the reason traffic backed up on SR 54 eastbound from Coweta County in the mornings was that people were commuting to work centers. Peachtree City had 12,000 jobs that people were coming to. By the same token, 12,000 left Peachtree City every day to go to jobs elsewhere.

Rorie then asked what role Atlanta Regional Airport – Falcon Field played. LeBrecque said the airport had about 80 acres of developable land, but they were limited by FAA requirements that the land only be used for aviation-related business. Access and infrastructure were also an issue because Dividend Drive was the only way to reach the facility and it was not particularly easy to access. PCAA's mission included developing that 80 acres, and they would work hand in hand with the FCDA to accomplish that. LeBrecque also noted that the facility also provided a great community gathering location due to the number of airline related families in Peachtree City.

Poole echoed that the airport was a phenomenal partner, and aerospace and aviation were one of the six targeted industries the FCDA recruited and incentivized.

Macaluso noted the reason for the airport's existence was to support the businesses in the City. People flew into the facility because it was located in or closest to the community or place they wanted to be. LeBrecque noted that the current runway was currently just short of the ultimate goal, with the next expansion planned in approximately two years after the approaches were addressed.

Rorie wrapped up the discussion by reviewing the next steps, which included the Comprehensive Plan meetings in March and April, and the City Council Retreat sessions that were currently being scheduled. He encouraged everyone to attend and participate.

In closing, Rorie asked if anyone had any final thoughts.

McMillan said that, during the discussion, he felt that a balanced approach was vital. Peachtree City could continue to be relevant, a place they were proud to call home, but had to continue to push forward and improve. Also, they had to make sure they remained relevant to working age people (which was not a particular generation and extended from age 18 to age 65).

LeBrecque said that traffic was probably the greatest barrier to looking forward – they continuously were looking at options or opportunities through the lens of, "if we do this, it will add traffic." If traffic was not addressed, it would drive every other consideration moving forward.

Prebor said his family found Peachtree City through Delta, and noted that Delta hired about 1,000 pilots a year.

King said everyone had moved here for the quality of life, and Peachtree City was still a premier place to raise children in South Metro Atlanta. There were not many homes in Peachtree City for

sale, which spoke highly of the community. Their job was to keep doing what had worked, clean up what had not, and then maintain it.

Curtis said that, nearly 50 years before, someone came up with the crazy concept of Peachtree City's paths. She said that type of forward thinking needed to be kept up. Communities all over the country were doing cutting edge things, and Peachtree City could choose which great ideas would work here.

Rorie said his goal in the workshop had been to address a possible disconnect among the various boards, noting that WASA usually did not hear Council deliberate, Council did not always hear Planning Commission deliberate, etc. The disconnect impacted how every board operated, and he felt more interaction and forums like this one helped to overcome that disconnection.

Curtis gave one final thought, noting that the destiny of Peachtree City rested largely on the people in the room, not working alone, but together to determine where the community was going, how to enhance and improve amenities, maintain property values, and attract workers.

The workshop adjourned at 9:08 p.m.



Betsy Tyler, City Clerk

Vanessa Fleisch, Mayor