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Lafayette planning forums well attended



BY RICHARD BURGESS

Acadiana bureau

May 16, 2013

0 Comments

LAFAYETTE — About 900 residents attended community forums this week to help shape Lafayette's future, according to estimates from city-parish government.

The Tuesday and Wednesday forums were held to gather input for Lafayette's

Comprehensive Plan, a guidebook for growth and development in the coming decades.

The specifics of the plan will be based on the public comments this week, but it is expected to address issues ranging from how to encourage economic growth to where to build roads and parks and how best to guide new commercial and residential developments.

"I thought it would be interesting to see where Lafayette is going," said Josh Coen, a 23-year-old Lafayette resident who attended the Wednesday comprehensive plan forum at the Heymann Performing Arts Center.

Coen said he would like to see more options for bicyclists and pedestrians to get around, more greenspace and more redevelopment.

All of those issues are up for consideration in the plan.

At the forums this week, residents were given the chance to vote on different strategies to guide future commercial and residential development by placing small stickers beside their preferences.

Three planning scenarios were offered.

The first would focus new development along major roads that have already been built in Lafayette Parish.

The second would encourage development in clusters throughout the parish, each a self-contained neighborhood of sorts offering office space, retail, homes, apartments, restaurants and schools.

The third option would shift new developments into areas north of downtown — a part of the parish that has not attracted the intense development seen in southern Lafayette Parish, despite good roads and other infrastructure.

Residents could also choose to avoid planning altogether, which planners say would likely lead to increasing traffic congestion, sprawling development and few options for alternative transportation.

Carroll Baudoin, who attended Wednesday's forum, opted for the "balanced growth" plan that would encourage more development in north Lafayette.

The 79-year-old Lafayette resident said that no matter what type of plan is adopted, he believes the planning process is making the community stronger by focusing on the critical issues facing Lafayette in the future.

"One thing we get out of this is that we are bringing our community together," Baudoin said. "This is a learning process."

Residents at the forums this week were also asked to rank their priorities on various development issues, such as conserving farmland, improving public transportation or developing streets more friendly for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Consultants working with city-parish government will use the information gathered this week to develop a rough draft of the comprehensive plan, which will probably not stick to one particular development scenario but rather combine different elements of each, said Carlee Alm-LaBar, who is helping oversee the plan's development for city-parish government.

The draft comprehensive plan will be brought back to the public for comment this fall, she said.

Alm-LaBar said anyone who missed the meetings this week will have the opportunity to voice an opinion in an Internet survey to be rolled out in a few days.

Residents can also download a presentation kit from the comprehensive plan website, hold a small forum with friends or co-workers and then send the results back to city-parish government, she said.

"Anybody who wants to participate will be able to," Alm-LaBar said.

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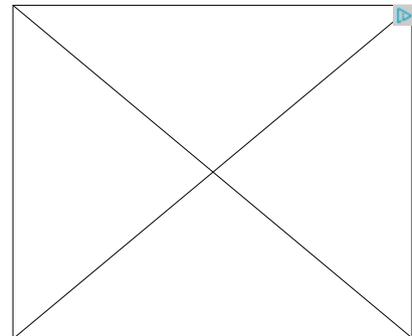
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Work on the comprehensive plan began last year, and two prior community forums were held for input. Alm-LaBar said the attendance at the forums this week was the highest yet. The plan that emerges will be a policy statement, not a set of regulations, though new regulations or incentives would be necessary for city-parish government to implement the recommendations for development that are being discussed. The Lafayette City-Parish Council would have to approve any new regulations on commercial and residential developments.

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