LAFAYETTE
ComprehensivePlan

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 29, 2012 (Revised May 7, 2012)

From: WRT

Pages: 10

Re: ***Technical Memorandum #2: Summary of Preliminary Stakeholder Input***

The Lafayette Comprehensive Plan kickoff week was held February 13-17, 2012. Consultant team members from WRT, SIDES & Associates, Zyscovich Architects, White & Smith, Neel-Schaffer, and Lambert Advisory participated in kickoff activities throughout the week. The team attended a community tour, conducted over 30 stakeholder interviews, joined the 2012 State of the Parish luncheon, and facilitated meetings with CPCAC, CPTRT, LCG directors, and staff. A summary account of key issues that were raised during the stakeholder interviews is provided below.

As part of the kickoff week activities, WRT also facilitated a brainstorming activity asking various groups of participants to describe ideal outcomes of the planning process and potential challenges Lafayette faces. The results of the brainstorming sessions and stakeholder interviews are described below.

Key Emerging Themes

The first phase of the planning process is about getting organized and learning from Lafayette leaders and residents about the community's issues and opportunities. Community Forum Series #1 will further this discussion and provide opportunities for more people to get involved and share their aspirations for the future of Lafayette. Initial themes emerging from the kickoff week include:

- **Mobility.** Participants in interviews and brainstorming sessions noted the need to improve roadway connections, traffic flow, and pedestrian, bicycle, and various transit options, including planning for regional transit connections. While efficiency of transportation and improved travel options seem to be the focus, there are also concerns about the attractiveness of roads, signage, lack of gateways into the city, lack of connectivity and overall safety for transit riders, pedestrians, and bicyclists. A particular concern is the inability of students to safely walk to school. This concern is also linked to other issues identified such as the consequences of busing on the school system (see below), and impacts on kids' health and wellbeing.

- **Diverse Economy.** Lafayette has a strong economy, and there are many opportunities for growth in a number of sectors, such as energy, healthcare and agriculture. There is palpable optimism about the economic future of the community. Nonetheless, concerns exist that the local economy needs to be diversified, with expanded attention to technology and international trade, among other sectors. Diversification will not only strengthen Lafayette's position regionally and nationally, but also will create new challenging and rewarding jobs that will allow the best and brightest residents of Lafayette to stay in the community, outside talent to be attracted to Lafayette, and those who have moved away to come back, both as active workers or retirees (e.g., UL alumni). In trying to accomplish this Lafayette faces several challenges including the need to improve the quality of its K-12 school infrastructure and programs, the need for stronger workforce development programs and renewed synergy between the business community and the school system to match employer needs with local talent, the need for enhanced travel infrastructure and more direct airline flights, the need for streamlined development approval processes, and the need to address taxation issues.

- **Education.** The need to improve public school facilities, the quality of public education, and the perception of public schools, both within the community and outside, was recognized, almost universally, as a fundamental issue. Public school performance is critical to retaining and attracting families and helping to attract economic development. While the region has a strong private / parochial school system, Lafayette's public schools are struggling to obtain adequate resources to upgrade facilities and to meet Louisiana's state testing goals. One of the obstacles mentioned in making progress on some of these issues has been a historic lack of interaction between the school system and the city. However, it is acknowledged that important changes have been made recently to "break down the silos." Regarding higher education, recognition is also unanimous that the presence of UL in the community is a tremendous asset that needs to be leveraged better. Technical education programs are also seen as increasingly important in generating the workforce needed to attract employers to Lafayette.

- **Green Space and Recreation.** There is also widespread interest in improving green space and recreational opportunities. Lafayette does not currently have a parks and recreation plan, needs assessment, or level of service standards. In addition, parkland dedication is not required for new subdivisions. The community also struggles with issues that include flooding, weak protections for existing trees, the need for increased tree canopy and functional landscape to help make the built environment more tolerable, and a desire for more open space and recreational trails (e.g., improved access to the Vermilion River) and additional recreational opportunities (e.g., boating, recreation centers). Related to the Vermilion River, the need to continue addressing water quality issues systematically was mentioned frequently, including those resulting from the lack of inspection of existing septic systems. Several participants referenced the need to preserve open

space, the plan for passive recreation at the Horse Farm property, and the opportunity to create linkages to other parks and community resources.

- **Floodplain and FEMA Maps**. Drainage and flooding are big issues because this area does not drain well. Affluents do not have a lot of fall between this area and the Gulf of Mexico (fall to the Vermillion is only 4 feet). Revised FEMA maps are pending and will change the location of floodway and floodplains in Lafayette. For example, some areas once classified as floodplain will now likely be located within the floodway. The pending maps pose a challenge for long-term land use and conservation planning, as well as for property owners who are uncertain as to how properties or flood insurance rates will be affected. There seems to be a wide disconnect (and resulting frustration) between developer perceptions of how FEMA regulations should apply and the way that flood regulators apply them**.**

- **History, Culture, Downtown.** Although Lafayette Parish is very diverse, the community's uniqueness in history, culture, arts and architecture are perceived as being closely tied to, and most visibly represented in, downtown Lafayette. The numerous amenities existing in downtown are noted as community assets that need to be protected and enhanced. Some stakeholders expressed concern that Lafayette is not taking full advantage of its culture and downtown amenities ("A lot happens here in spite of ourselves"). Downtown Lafayette struggles with the need for more activity (e.g., residents living downtown) and better connections to surrounding areas (e.g., University of Louisiana at Lafayette). At the same time, there are few incentives (and significant regulatory barriers, e.g., adjudication processes) to redevelop vacant or infill sites and uncertainty about the development process and/or NIMBYISM that make it less attractive to invest in downtown.

- **Compatibility and Conflicts between Land Uses.** As part of the kickoff week activities and tour, many described lack of compatibility between land uses and lack of buffering between uses as key issues the Comprehensive Plan needs to address**.** One example is agriculture, an important economic sector that is being gradually encroached upon by scattered residential development. As of the date of the interviews, there was no zoning in place to promote compatible mixed uses (or prevent incompatible uses, e.g., heavy industrial next to residential) in unincorporated areas of the Parish. The city of Lafayette has also struggled with compatibility issues and separation between uses (e.g., residential, bars and entertainment, commercial) for infill projects.

- **Public Services and Infrastructure.** While some believe that the new development and growth pays for itself, others observe that the costs associated with providing infrastructure and services are not shared equally. There is little knowledge or understanding among the general public about how much it really costs to service a property, or how location affects those costs. Many stakeholders feel that LCG needs to provide public service that keeps up with growth the community is experiencing, is cost-

effective, and is equitable for all residents. There is a perception of inadequate focus on and funding for infrastructure operations, maintenance, and services (e.g., parks, police, water infrastructure), in particular funding for many public services has not kept pace with population growth.

- **An Actionable Plan with Clear Metrics and Outcomes.** Lafayette has developed many plans in the past and participants expressed concern that this not be a "plan that sits on the shelf." The Comprehensive Plan must be based on a common vision, tie all the different components of the community together, and serve as a plan that can be implemented with clear metrics and outcomes. In addition, many proposed that Lafayette's new comprehensive plan needs to inform people about the true cost of services, include baseline metrics and benchmarks, and provide opportunities for Council involvement and a clear process for plan implementation and progress monitoring.

- **Consensus and Trust.** The planning process should encourage as much public participation as possible by reaching out to diverse groups, building consensus, and establishing trust between residents and elected officials. After the plan is adopted, there needs to be a clear and predictable process for property and business owners and guidelines for elected officials to follow that adhere to the vision and goals set by the comprehensive plan. An understandable and consistent process would help reduce current uncertainties within the development process.

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APPENDIX
Summary of Brainstorming Sessions

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Summary of Brainstorming Sessions

The Consultant Team facilitated several sessions during the 2012 kickoff week and last year's Building Community Conference. The word cloud graphics below represent a summary of the ideas generated during the different sessions. Words that appear most frequently are given greater prominence. Summaries of each of the ideal outcomes and challenges sessions follow.

Ideal Outcomes "Wordle"

Greatest Challenges "Wordle"

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<u>Directors and CPTRT Sessions</u> *(February 12, 2012)*

Ideal Outcomes:

- Strengthen property values / tax base; prevent blight
- Public services that are funded and keep up with growth;
    - equitable investment strategy
    - sustainable and planned growth
    - Connect rural areas to city services
- Consistency and follow through in public policy / implement the plan
- Reduced legal friction
    - Unified Development Code that is clear and transparent
    - Annexation policy and legal framework
- Neighborhood conversations / education; increase awareness of community needs; rural citizen support
- Clear measurable outcomes / benchmarks; clear roadmap for implementation
- Public safety and infrastructure improvements
- Walkable, bikable community, increase in parkland
- Enhance use of technology
- Creating more opportunities for choice
- Revitalize urban core
- Buy-in from elected officials
- Economic diversity
- Create a plan for Horse Farm

Challenges:

- Lack of knowledge about what it takes to be a great place
- Buy-in / involvement from non-vocal majority / engaging the public
    - Overcoming "planning fatigue" and apathy
- Buy-in consensus from elected officials
    - Divided political structure
- Keeping the plan simple (language and action items), implementing the plan
- Achieving "quick wins" – building credibility and consensus
- Changing the way we do business
- Media relations
- Overcoming fear of planning process / government
- Engaging smaller municipalities

<u>CPCAC Session</u> *(February 12, 2012)*

Summary of Ideal Outcomes:

- Improving all types of mobility in Lafayette
- Healthy community and people

- Diverse and sustainable economy / creating a place where kids, families, and college graduates want to stay
- Creating seamless connections between K-12 education and economy
- Improving green space network and accessibility to open space
- Stronger emphasis on Lafayette's unique history, culture, architecture, walkability / pride in Lafayette community
- Reinvesting in neighborhoods
- Comprehensive Plan that has support and can be implemented / developing public trust
- Parish-wide zoning
- Remove barriers and strengthen relationships across parish (geography, government, economic, education, ethnic)

Summary of Challenges:

- Building and improving trust, building consensus
- Bridging geographic, political, and technological barriers
- Implementing the plan, measuring progress
- Differentiating this plan for other planning processes
- Getting everyone (including seniors, minorities) to the table / public participation
- Preserving Lafayette's culture
- Keeping people engaged and excited over a two year process

State of the Parish Summary *(February 15, 2012)*

Summary of Ideal Outcomes:

- Informed community
- Preserve unique attributes of culture / maintain unique culture while accepting change
- More united community / Bring people together around shared vision for future
- Mobility improvements
    - Traffic flow, highway loop around the City
    - I-10/I-49 gateway improvements; I-49 extension through City
    - Develop frontage roads along interstates
    - Improve walkability / connectivity
    - Overall better multi-modal options. Transit and otherwise.
- Education improvements, include a component in the Plan and work with teachers, staff
- Focus on healthcare component in Plan
- Beautification – of roads, city center, neighborhoods; signage controls
- Increase recreation and green space
    - Increase green space
    - Better utilization of Vermilion River – riverfront destination
    - Recreation improvements, bicycle, recreation paths
- Better arts/culture – streamline arts organizations, find new funding sources

- Strong downtown focused on the arts
- Improve safety where needed, keep other areas safe; include a public safety section of Plan
- Economy - new jobs, retain young adults, UL students
- Increased support of University of Lafayette
- Smart regulations that promote growth – modernize tax structure
- Properly deal with population growth
- Government transparency – free flow of information between governmental and public
- Consolidated Parish governmental functions
- Parish-wide Zoning

Summary of Challenges:

- Political infighting
- Lack of trust in government
- Education of citizens / Better education system – both academic and facilities
- Educational facilities in deplorable shape
- City vs. Parish accountability; parochialism; lack of accountability
- North Lafayette vs. South Lafayette (where all development occurs)
    - Big divide between Upper Lafayette and southern, more populated areas of Parish
- Fear and reluctance to change
- Money/taxes; funding sources; funding availability
- Resistance – to change, to taxes, to process
- NIMBYism
- Anti-government rhetoric; lack of trust in government
- Unattractive roadways / poor traffic conditions
- Ensuring public voice is heard
- Loss of young people and inability to attract new people/families

Summarized Results of "Lafayette Unleashed" *Visioning Exercises*
Building Community Conference (3/24/11)

Top 10 Ideal Outcomes:*

- World-class, diverse, innovative public education system (education reform)
- Robust, integrated transportation/mobility system (light rail, high-speed rail, transit, vehicles, biking, walking)
- Improved/complete Parishwide infrastructure/utility systems (water, sewer, electricity)
- Economic sustainability (sector diversification – energy, technology, tourism, international/global focus)
- Retention/strengthening of Lafayette's heritage, values, culture, identity
- World-class green space, parks and recreation system connecting the entire community

- Regionalism/regional planning, leveraging regional strengths (economy, transportation, cultural)
- Completion of I-49/I-10/loop
- Revitalized/improved Johnston Street
- Attractive environment for business/business friendliness

Top 10 Impediments:*

- Lack of funding/resources ("how do you pay for it?")
- Lack follow-through on plan implementation (stagnation, maintaining community support)
- Politics ("dysfunction," parochialism, selfishness/self-service, "turf wars")
- Lack of trust (in politicians, government, sectors of the city/parish, each other)
- Retaining talent (brain drain)
- Weak leadership
- Naysaying/negativism
- Lack of buy-in for the plan
- Unwillingness to/fear of change, complacency/apathy
- Form of government (bureaucracy/institutionalization, "silos" system)

* Similar or related ideas listed most often, by the greatest number of small groups.