

Focus Group Meeting #4



Below is the meeting summary for the fourth and final Focus Group meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to review the topics and goals created by each Focus Group and to comment on draft Strategic Initiatives generated from that work. All of the collected Focus Group information will be incorporated into the Community Strategic Plan document which will be considered by the Board of Supervisors later this year.

Meeting Date: 4/25/16

Recorder: Grace McCown

Meeting Location: South County Library

Number of Attendees: 65

Host: Supervisor Jason Peters

Other Supervisors in Attendance: Supervisor Joe McNamara, Supervisor Martha Hooker

Lead Staff: Doug Blount, Richard Caywood, Billy Driver, Howard Hall, Jill Loope, Ken Nicely, Patience O'Brien, Dan O'Donnell, Rebecca Owens, Philip Thompson, Jessica Webb

Staff Facilitators: Laurie Gearheart, Audrey Palmer, Dave Weir, Jordan Carlisle, Jimmy Chapman, Jay Brenchick, and Sarah Vaughan

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Comments on Draft Strategic Initiatives

1. Connect Roanoke County to the World

- Regionalism is SO important – we sink or swim together. To the outside world, there is no City/County/Salem – to the outside world, we are just Roanoke!
 - I agree
- A great opportunity for sure! If large jumbo jets for UPS and FedEx can fly in and out of our valley, why not more? Interesting concepts.
- I would tend to not lean toward Lynchburg in terms of air service because it is so important to serve VTech/Blacksburg
- Keep Amtrak-passenger rail high on the list
- How much can actually be done to improve air travel to and from this area? We are limited by the topography
- Regional transportation includes Greenways
- 611
- Transportation has to be better than 8:15 pm so that people with disabilities and the elderly can have a life in the community after hours. For example, employment and going to community events and meetings and concerts
- Need better cooperation with airport. Need more than 2 airlines for better connections
- Need to focus marketing inside the County. Most citizens don't consider where they live as anything special. Create a campaign to inform County residents of all the opportunities for recreation/education...to create ambassadors to the region from our own citizens

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- Roanoke County is traversed by cross country Bike Route 76. Adventure cycling has the maps, first written in 1976 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the USA. The route goes from Astoria, OR to Yorktown, VA. Promote, highlight, capitalize on the route in VA – especially Roanoke County.
- Need porta-potty at the Catawba Community Center. Maybe allow camping.
- We have a fabulous area to market. Take advantage of it – try some quirky, off beat, catchy advertising – love the “K to Gray” branding under Education
- History: we lost our lead to North Carolina when our airport didn’t expand
- How can the entire community be aware of every opportunity to experience the arts – educational programs – church choir programs
- The plan needs to enter a new phase where there is a discussion of alternative means to achieve these lofty goals – private vs. public sponsorship, efficiency of staff vs. expansion, economic development vs. environmental sustainability (this is a trade off area), reflection of County vision vs. urbanization and creation of town centers. Are we large enough to really diversify?

2. Position Roanoke County for Future Growth and Success

- Convince schools (high schools) to put more emphasis on career training rather than 4 year colleges and universities. Not everyone needs a 4 year degree to be successful!
- Totally agree with business friendly and easier development review process. It truly makes a difference in retaining and attracting businesses. Shorten turnaround time and help follow through the process
- Need more employment for people with disabilities and developmental challenges
- Regarding the “online job clearing house” – Stuart Nease of VT created an awesome one for City of Roanoke before the stock market crashed. Find him on LinkedIn
- We need to be sure we are including addressing “under-employed” in black and white. I didn’t see it officially in the report
- Many of the non-profits are also working on strategic plans including “workforce.” Example: United Way. Be sure to collaborate.
- Don’t forget the attraction of professionals as part of this
- Underemployed – offer opportunities to fill some of the skill set
- Why not market the business parks we have that are not full (Green Ridge, Vinton) before building new sites
- AARP says they majority (60%) of new businesses will be started by people 50 or older and they are more successful!
- Be sure to coordinate your efforts – no need to re-invent the wheel. Copy successful projects
- Only reasonable regulations – anything more will stagnate growth
- We not only need to develop business friendly processes, we also need to actively recruit mainstream businesses to the area (e.g. Whole Foods) to make the region attractive to a savvy and mobile workforce

- Roanoke County missed out on roundabout design
- Village Centers (Vinton, Salem) – identify boundaries and provide incentives to develop transportation hubs, service centers in village centers
- Roundabouts in Roanoke County are below standard. Review/look at roundabouts in Roanoke City and Blacksburg. First impressions are important

3. Promote Neighborhood Connections

- Mixed use developments are needed and will only happen with planning. Thanks for promoting this idea.
- Vitally important and desperately needed
- Include greenways which are more than bike or ped
- Everybody from outside our area is amazed by the greenway. Let's get it done.
- Mt. Pleasant area needs support to develop economic opportunities. The PTA and other organizations find themselves with very little business partnerships to encourage.
- I know it is VERY hard to "impose" walkability on a community that was developed around drivability – BUT – even baby steps can help – I would not know where to begin, but someone smarter than me could identify some places to begin. And at the very least some small extensions of transit could open up the County for employment sites for people who are transit-dependent.
- Change school policies to allow students to walk or bicycle to school.
- Need to include specific references to Greenways as key element of access in transportation summary
- Need longer hours after 8:15 pm. At least until 11:00 pm for employment and community events
- Need more housing opportunities for people with disabilities
- Connect to the world begins with our neighborhoods, expand to the community, region, and state. Employers need a reliable workforce. Provide bicycle facilities/walking corridors to allow people to safely access the workplace. It is the individual – not public – responsibility to get to work. It is the government responsibility to provide the infrastructure for people to move safely by other modes than motor vehicles
- Work with VDOT to pin-point needs – synchronizing light systems
- On multimodal transport – great idea. But don't ruin rural areas with more roads (maybe improve those we have)
- Be very cautious on major road development (like a new circumferential road). Our beautiful location should minimize sprawl and encourage IN-FILL
- Increase hours of available public transportation. We need sidewalks!!
- YES to walkability. YES to town centers (even small ones). Tanglewood represents a huge possibility for redevelopment in a way that respects car/pedestrian/transit
- Work with VDOT to pinpoint County needs
 - Move traffic – synchronize lights on major roadways

- Institute red light system for safety
- Review VDOT plans to coordinate with County goals
- Plan, plan, plan new roads carefully and strategically to move people in the future to outlying areas
- Yes to extending public transit, even on a limited basis – it will help with employment centers. REGIONAL is a must
- Tanglewood could stand to erect a series of parking garages with townhouses on the roof to unite living and shopping with some workplaces thrown in. It could be greened by trees on the pedestrian streets and back gardens with roof gardens as well
- Connectivity East–West. RT 460 – Work with the City to correct the issue. 419 – improve connection from Salem to 220
- The Eastern circumferential road needs to have priority to join the eastern / northern / northeastern (Mt. Pleasant) and permit economic development of that area with Vinton and Bonsack
- ...But as the population grows, overdeveloping current roadways will be detrimental to quality of life. We must develop our road system to carry the traffic away from the core and them combine with mass transit
- It would be nice if peripheral bus routes linked with the inner valley transit system. Example: starting with a link at Tanglewood then down by the Franklin shopping area, to Walmart at Clearbrook, and over Buck Mountain Road to the Sports Complex and this [South County] library, and between the two high schools, and by the Brambleton business area to a link at Cave Spring Corners.

4. Ensure Citizen Safety

- EMS and hospital staff need more training on how to communicate with people with disabilities in a calm and patient manner
- This is everyone's job. Teach us how to take care of ourselves.
- Excellent presentation. Group did a fine job on identifying problems and needs.
- Be smart about equipment purchases. Purchase equipment that can access the areas they serve.
- Look at ways to do more with less (i.e. retention – better pay, benefits, etc)
- Don't close fire and rescue stations and leave them to fall down. Why build new ones if we have old ones?
- Encourage public safety officials to live in all areas of the County/City by providing housing incentives
- Public safety members need to be trained in dealing with mental illness. This is a growing problem across our area and the US. It needs to be approached from a holistic point of view. It is vital to the success of our community.
- Vitally important and realistic opportunities
- Topic 1 – This issue proceeded from a questionable assumption that the current staffing/funding is inadequate. I was not part of this group, but I would not have

agreed. There is no recognition or plan to address efficiency or to find ways to maximize effort with current resources. Where did the \$.02 tax rate increase appear? Why not \$.01? Why not \$.10? Why not \$1.00? Spurious!! There appears to be an assumption that the economic status of the County can afford this.

5. Be a Caring and Inclusive Community

- Need improvements including people with disabilities in community living and employment opportunities
- Utilize LEAP (mobile unit) in areas that need access to healthy foods
- Expand knowledge of 211 system
- What is 211? Publicize.
- Healthy Roanoke Valley – 50+ organizations. Carilion did health needs assessment and community outreach. Roanoke College – good to partner with for health needs assessment
- Definite need for transportation for vulnerable populations. I did not know until tonight that we had a 211 system.
- One central clearing house would be very helpful
- Reading and then personally telling people what is offered I've found is tiring! "Clearing house" idea is fabulous
- Meetings for the population that depends on available transportation is brilliant
- Need central clearinghouse for information about what is now available
- Vulnerable populations typically lack resources. This is a large reason why they are vulnerable. None of the recommendations addressed the lack of "voice" and "political will" to devote the resources needed to help the vulnerable. Without voice and political will, many of these recommendations will fade.

6. Promote Lifelong Learning

- Non public school entities such as: home schoolers, private K-12
- How do you motivate the students in the public schools
- It's already here so let's work at it so everyone knows about us
- "K to Gray" – encouraging precept possibility of joining different generations by interests – great idea
- More job shadowing in a variety of career areas would be great
- The topic areas are obvious. Love increasing technical/trade/skilled educational opportunities. Once we train the people, we need to have jobs here for them – or we are losing a valuable resource
- I am a college faculty member and can attest that "high stakes testing" has led to an increased focus on numeric scores and less focus on learning. None of the recommendations dealt with a strategy to move away from the testing/funding alliance
- Where are the arts! Visual performing...

7. Keep Roanoke County Healthy, Clean and Beautiful

- Recycling program is very important
- Yes to recycling program!
- Cannot wait for curbside recycling!!
- Implement existing plans. Parkway trail plan, bike plan, update Greenway plan, transit plan
- Need collection points at apartment/condo complexes to encourage recycling
- Expansion of recycling should be based upon realistic assessment of cost-benefit and volume
- For an area as beautiful as Roanoke, it would be WONDERFUL to have County-wide recycling – we do it on our own, but if everyone did it, it would be great for the environment
- Much improvement needed in recycling. We are really behind.
- What a great river and greenway. Let's make the most of it.
- Protect viewsheds (no more South Peaks)
 - Ditto
- Natural resource is only useful if it is used "wisely." Use it.
- Please! Please! Please! Come up with a viable County wide recycling program
- Recycling efforts and material resources- education opportunity for awareness of resources
- Recycling – GREAT!! Finally. Protect us from outside projects like the Mountain Valley Pipeline. Won't bring us any money or improvements – just destruction of our community and possible contamination of our water. Who's to protect my house, property, and investment in Roanoke County??
- Change school policy to allow students to walk or bicycle to school. Added infrastructure would make this possible
- Continue to expand the Greenway
- Work with Carilion and the Health Initiative promoted through the City
- Utilize LEAP – fresh foods to food deserts
- Involve Lewis Gale in promoting health access to challenged individuals in the County
- Let's mention Explore Park and Roanoke River Greenway
- Where are the arts!! Roanoke has a vibrant arts community – why was it ignored?
- Recycle glass. How can we have breweries and no glass recycling?