

Columbia Vision Commission: RE-Vision Dialogue
June 24, 2015 – Rock Bridge High School, 4303 S. Providence Road
Columbia, Missouri

Commission Vice-Chair Alvin Cobbins welcomed guests to the RE-Visioning dialogue at 6:10 p.m. Other Commissioners attending included Jeremy Milarsky and Kevin Reape. Chair Maurice Harris could not attend due to other commitments. Vice-Chair Cobbins summarized the Vision process and the five-year review process and observed that the Vision should reflect changes that have occurred in the community over the past few years. He invited applications to fill vacant Vision Commission seats. Commissioner Milarsky said that the Commission met at City Hall every fourth Monday.

Environment

Vice-Chair Cobbins summarized the vision statement and goals for environment, as noted in the Community Vision document, and asked for comments from those attending.

Vision: Columbia residents and businesses conserve all the community's natural resources, work cooperatively to apply best planning practices, model energy efficiency, transition to renewable energy and approach zero waste generation.

Goals (numbering corresponds to Community Vision document)

- 9.1 Environmental Quality – Columbia and neighboring communities will be a place where air, water, land and natural aesthetic qualities are protected.
- 9.2 Resource Conservation – Columbia will be a model community that approaches zero waste of all primary and secondary forms of energy and goods, and that implements best management practices in order to protect and conserve its natural resources and intrinsic beauty for future generations
- 9.3 Energy Efficiency – Columbia will work toward achieving maximum energy efficiency and transition to renewable energy sources.

What progress have you seen since the Community Vision was created?

Jim Loveless, Executive Director, Central Missouri Development Council: Hinkson Creek cleanup – a group has been meeting with the County Commission, Missouri Department of Natural Resources and citizens

Nick Peckham, founder and architect, Peckham Architecture, LLC – serves on City Environment and Energy Commission - have done little with using other forms of energy and with zero waste, and it's easy to understand why – business owners have many challenges, such as making payroll – very soon, there will be no gas and, by the end of the century, no more uranium - if we burn enough coal, there will be no atmosphere – should just go all out for renewable energy solutions - Building Code Commission is currently reviewing the building code - Columbia has never adopted the historical building code - energy code has been modified to the point that it's a joke - Columbia could be the leader in the country

Pat Zenner, Development Services Manager, City of Columbia - City has an award-winning landfill that produces and uses methane gas - trash collection cycle needs to address the ever increasing population increase demands - landfill generates a significant amount of methane that can be sold – needs to be a priority – we are dis-incentivizing folks in the way of leaving trash out - significant resistance to pay-as-you-throw

What else has happened since then?

No further comments

What should the community do, going forward?

John Clark, attorney and CPA – It's "our" environment, not "the" environment – would like to see that reference used consistently going forward – reflects a mind-set

Nick Peckham – might help to distinguish between "natural" and "built" environment

Ivey Boley – Downtown bars should recycle – hear that they should be, but nothing done so far – Hinkson Creek has been a stressed waterway and on a list for 15 years – seems like something we can work toward

Larry Grossman – served on City storm water committee – there are strict guidelines – takes a while for these things to happen – thinks most problems come from upstream – almost no regulations for undeveloped farmland – recourse is to do things within the city, with limited effects

Jim Loveless – federal governments sets the rules, and they can't say identify the single pollution source – there's nothing the City, County or University can say about the solution – it's a broad brush to "spend millions and hope it works" – a group is working on this

John Clark – wants to link this with governance collaboration – would add the school district and the University - seems to be a way to make some progress – put energy into collaboration instead of defending turf – thinks some progress has been made, and is encouraged but more needs to be done

Peter Holmes –was not involved – thinks City government responds with a snail's pace – maybe they don't think change is needed – there's an big gap between needs and action

Larry Grossman – City should not do any more than it's doing now with renewable energy – puts us at disadvantage with other communities – will increase cost of living

Larry Schuster – cost of living already going in wrong direction – was much better in the 80s – he deals with homebuyers who say it's getting more expensive to live here – used to have a recycle bin on the northeast side – it was moved and not put back – only aware of a Mosers and out here – we seem to have fewer drop-off points – City has lamented that our rates aren't what they should be

Larry Grossman – has read that way to increase is to dump all in same area – single bag – it's stupid that we don't have a business recycling program

Nick Peckham – missing piece in recycling is education – Sweden has almost 100%

Brian Touhy – bins might be more efficient

Governance

Vice-Chair Cobbins summarized the vision statement and goals for governance, as noted in the Community Vision document, and asked for comments from those attending.

Vision: Columbia's governance is a model of transparency, efficiency and citizen participation that enjoys the strong confidence of its residents.

Goals (numbering corresponds to Community Vision document)

- 10.1 Responsiveness – Create a responsive, integrated City system with clear access points to direct inquiries, suggestions and complaints
- 10.2 Tracking – Create and implement a City customer service policy that includes a tracking system in each department.
- 10.3 Interdepartmental Collaboration – Enhance collaboration between City departments

- 10.4 Neighborhood Associations – Enhance and facilitate the use of neighborhood associations
- 10.5 Review Commissions, Boards and Task Forces – Establish a system of ongoing reviews of the activities of boards, commissions and task forces
- 10.6 Increase Council – Increase the size of the City Council and provide compensation and other support to Council members
- 10.7 Finance – Anticipate future needs and review and determine the best way to finance City operations, improvements and infrastructure for next 20 – 25 years
- 10.8 Accountability – Increase the accountability of the City administration to the City Council and the public
- 10.9 City-County Collaboration – Increase collaboration and coordination between the City and County

What progress have you seen since the Community Vision was created?

Larry Grossman – served on Visioning Governance Citizen Topic Group – have made a fair amount of progress, but also a lack of progress – there was consensus to seek to enlarge the Council and pay Council members – Council pay was achieved – the plan was to add a Storm Water Commission, now that there's a fund – a commission, rather than City staff, should have responsibility to review and recommend projects - not sure about other commissions, but a lot has been implemented in other areas – trying to empower people through City Council

Nick Peckham – has similar concern for downtown infrastructure

John Clark – in a council/manager form of government, there are roles for staff and roles for Council advisory boards increased staff accountability to Council hasn't necessarily happened – Citizen Review Board [for police complaints] did happen – Governance Topic Group looked at getting Council to have more awareness of City audit, looking into some form of compensation and other forms of support for Council member – serious citizen consideration of more wards, and that recommendation still stands – did not agree on more wards vs. at-large members

Larry Schuster – accountability has decreased with the proliferation of public communications officers – actual comments from top officials are almost nil – City Manager rarely speaks

Nick Peckham – for the recommendation that the City Council should take control of its agenda, the response is that City Manager handles – recalls canceled meeting between the Council and the Downtown Leadership Council – that was retrogress

Larry Schuster – City Council is not setting policy – they're subject to staff direction – Council is not rolling up its sleeves and getting into this – we've got some pretty good staff who aren't getting clear direction from Council – that's why you see public safety [satisfaction] go down by two-thirds

Larry Grossman – Council is responsible to direct the City Manager, not to direct departments

Larry Schuster – Through the City Manager, Council can say departments are not performing in an acceptable manner – there should be a slight bit of confrontation between Council and City Manager

What else has happened since then?

No further comments

What should the community do, going forward?

No further comments

Development

Vice-Chair Cobbins summarized the vision statement and goals for development, as noted in the Community Vision document, and asked for comments from those attending.

Vision: Columbia, Boone County and the surrounding region protect and preserve the natural environment, agricultural areas and cultural resources; provide adequate infrastructure; include diverse, mixed-use, walkable and bicycle-friendly neighborhoods; and develop in ways that positively contribute to and sustain community culture, heritage and character. Our community accomplishes these ends through an open, inclusive, transparent, predictable and accountable planning process with fair allocation of costs.

Goals (numbering corresponds to Community Vision document)

- 5.1 Infrastructure – We envision a community with a well-planned, proactive growth strategy that addresses the manner in which the infrastructure (including, but limited to, roads, utilities and other common facilities used by the community) is developed and maintained, that offers a fair and balanced approach regarding how payment for infrastructure is shared, that offers flexibility to accommodate change and that provides coordination among all potential stakeholders.
- 5.2 Land Preservation – Land will be preserved throughout Columbia and Boone County to protect farmland, scenic views, natural topographies, rural atmosphere, watersheds, healthy streams, natural areas, native species and unique, environmentally sensitive areas, thereby enhancing quality of life.
- 5.3 Neighborhoods – Columbians will live in well-maintained, environmentally sound neighborhoods that include a range of housing options and prices; that are within walking distance of amenities such as schools, places of worship, shopping and recreation facilities; and that are supported by citywide bicycle, pedestrian and transit systems.
- 5.4 Plan and Manage Growth – We envision a community with an open, transparent, inclusive planning process that values and manages growth, that protects the environment and the city character and that is beneficial and equitable to all.

What progress have you seen since the Community Vision was created?

Brian Touhy – There was an infrastructure task force, and all its recommendations were ignored

Nick Peckham – Black & Veatch did a study of a sewer treatment plant – very expensive – doesn't see a discussion of how to take on 115,000 over the next few years

Pat Zenner – there have been sewer plant expansions – some things cut short because *Columbia Imagined* was not complete – thinks plant was sized to meet Black & Veatch study – need to ask sewer utility about projected service population

What else has happened since then?

Larry Grossman – we have a collection system but assumes City Council has been allowing everyone to have sewer service on the cheap – need to collect every month to charge for maintenance – haven't figured on a 30-year life – make people pay what it's worth not put cost off on new development

Jim Loveless – some of that comes through inflow and infiltration – recent bond issue includes some funds and actions to help alleviate, but we're not forecasting far enough ahead – need to build a pot of money

Larry Schuster – Capital Improvement Plan only goes out 20 years – if you build a condo complex, banks want longer-term projects...40 years

John Clark – we've done some good projections, but for dry weather – infiltration and inflow is kind of threatening – plant is not considered cap able of handling all that load and have not found a way to

charge full cost, including maintenance – new development can't pay for everything – must pay fair share if we're going to make case to citizens

Jim Loveless – Hancock concerns may limit what you can charge, although there is a difference between fees and taxes

Nick Peckham - Majority of the I&I problem is downtown - comprehensively covered in Downton Leadership Council report - road repair funds are only adequate to replace roads every 42 years - roads don't last that long

What should the community do, going forward?

John Clark – we have six or seven groups that never talk to each other – should look at overall problem from multiple perspectives – might get around silo problems – give us a shot at coming to some agreements

Mark Farnen – elephant in room is student housing – is not mentioned in Columbia Imagined – University has said it will only house 7,500 students – if you don't build that housing, it competes with market for affordable housing – none of those studies include Stephens, Columbia College or Moberly Area Community College – we've made it a pariah by calling it "student" housing – others who live downtown don't want it there – limited infrastructure capacity – this is a problem of governance, environment, development and many other topics – very little cooperation between players in this game – there will be 38,000 students in 3 years – builders and apartment owners should be at the table – development community has to follow all the rules, then you get rejected – that flies in face of predictability – few incentives to build here, flies in face of affordable housing – should disperse in community, not isolate in certain areas – don't impose that on other groups - improve transportation and treat people fairly

John Clark – University spent an enormous amount to develop this plan...recruitment efforts – it affects all departments and Visioning topic groups – doesn't know if students have to live near university – they have not been at table – University has a ton of land for student housing – can work with developers

Pat Zenner – doesn't make sense to put students miles away – not going to get more federal money – students will continue to drive unless they have a place to live where their demand is created – University's responsibility to provide academics, not housing – City needs to be able to project and plan – Sasaki plan identified spots for parking and good sites for high-rise development

Mark Farnen – downtown is there to serve all community, not just students – can address parking by privatizing shuttles and letting them go to campus, or have University run a fleet and transport – limiting growth is wrong-headed

Pat Zenner – no opportunity for housing diversity downtown – that's why you see negative results – not many amenities to live downtown unless you're a student – if you look at what's pending, we're finalizing form-based zoning that will require better use – will depend on landowners – mandatory, significant change – Columbia Imagined eerily similar to Vision, but there's a vacuum of direction – infighting – must be addressed by populace

John Clark – doesn't agree that MU's only job is academics – time for other governments to say, "I'm sorry, you must pay the cost of your siloed effect" – say it nicely – with 38,000 students, have broad responsibility

Mark Farnen – incentives may be better than sticks

Nick Peckham – part of visioning is looking ahead – at some point, may double in size again – where are the young people going to be – details don't seem to contribute to coherent vision of future

Pat Zenner – urban service area is not meant to be a hard line, but raise consciousness about implications when you cross it – help you consider how to prioritize – avoid environmentally sensitive areas – what’s left after you eliminate areas that are unsuitable for development – what diversity can you support – if you want to be Austin, it’s probably not going to happen – would increase population seven times - comparatively, Columbia is low-density, has been for a long time – there are sticks

Larry Schuster – must address safety to attract women downtown – when you jam students together, you get a party district – student housing attracts different retail than owner-occupied – if you don’t get them, you limit opportunities

Larry Grossman – disagrees – downtown looks better – thinks it’s safer

John Clark – vision for downtown...academic, economic, cultural center – how much of what has happened aligns? We may not get there because we’ve sort of backed off

Alyce Turner – was on Governance Citizen Topic Group during community Visioning – much of distrust in City government and staff stems from rushed development decisions – everyone wants a plan for downtown – never felt unsafe downtown until this year – doesn’t want to see her friends distrust government, but they do

John Clark – Topic Group’s best work was our vision statement – citizen survey by ETC doesn’t adequately reflect progress in those areas – we’ve moved as far back as forward – our vision is still a valid goal

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Messina, Civic Relations Officer and staff liaison