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Williston plans for the future

Williston Planning Department Administrative Assistant Latricia Wright created the punch. She used a recipe that her sister-in-law Verda

Jackson applied during her term years ago as the food service manager at Lake-Sumter Community College. The recipe is one-third each of Hawaiian Punch, Sprite and pineapple juice.

Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Sept. 23, 2017 at 10:37 p.m.

WILLISTON – The city of Williston is at the forefront of revising its comprehensive growth management plan, and Williston City Planner Josie Lodder, Allison Megrath and Dr. Lynn Patterson want every single resident to know that public engagement in the process is paramount to success.

The kick-off two-hour meeting on Thursday night (Sept. 7) showed a couple of dozen people heard that call to help amend the foundation for planning, zoning and managed growth within the four corners of this municipality.

This cake reflects an invention with Williston roots. PhotoFrost is edible icing that creates the frosting from a photograph. Williston Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat mentioned that this nationally famous icing was founded as a company that still exists in Williston.



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Allison D. Megrath, AICP, speaks to people about the importance of updating the current comprehensive plan for Williston. Seated in the background is Lynn M. Patterson, PhD.



Lynn M. Patterson explains about the benefit of working on the economic development element of the plan that will form the foundation for Williston's future zoning.

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Williston City Planner Josie Lodder holds the bag with the special gift card donated by Drummond Community Bank.

A comprehensive plan should reflect what the people want Williston to be like, all of the planners and consultants agree.

Megrath, who is the president of Megrath Consulting of Gainesville, said that she and Patterson, who is a principal at Three Points Planning of Decatur, Ga., are ready to create the comprehensive plan that will be unique for Williston. Megrath, Patterson and Lodder, though, are not going to do this on their own.

The more input that comes from the people of Williston, the better the comprehensive plan will reflect what the people want.

Do the people want more business? Do the people want bigger arterial roads to handle increased truck traffic? The sets of questions are as many as the people want.

The planners and consultants have limited the plan to 11 elements:

- * Economic Development
- * Future Land Use
- * Transportation
- * Infrastructure
- * Housing
- * Conservation
- * Recreation and Open Space
- * Intergovernmental Coordination
- * Capital Improvements
- * Public Participation, Monitoring and Evaluation
- * Concurrency Management

During the meeting Thursday night, the people present penciled in another element – preservation of historic places (including business and residential structures). And while each comp plan is unique to each city or other political subdivision, this element did not meet a timeline for inclusion.

The concepts behind the request were heard and will be acted upon during the process; however it is not likely to become the 12th element.

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Williston has received a technical assistance grant from the Florida Department of Economic Development which allows the city to have the expert professional services of Megrath.

Williston received a second grant from Competitive Florida to allow the city to utilize Dr. Patterson's expertise to help the city develop an economic development plan, which is where Dr. Patterson is the key person.

Everyone in the city, though, can be a part of this process.

This particular kickoff event included door prizes for everyone and a special door prize for one recipient. Those gift bags were a courtesy provided by Drummond Community Bank to help the city have an incentive for people to participate.

Fresh fruits, cheeses, a special cake, coffee, tea and homemade punch were offered before the start of the meeting as people socialized at the outset.

Megrath and Patterson helped people understand that each element of the plan will have goals, objectives and policies.

Members of the audience heard there will be several opportunities for everyone to participate in this yearlong process.

This work is anticipated to be generally complete by July 1, 2018, Megrath said. After this point, the state will review the work and it will be returned to the city in the fall of 2018 if all goes as is hoped, Megrath said.

People who were present for the meeting placed green and blue dots on each of the 11 elements to show what they saw as opportunities and what they saw as challenges. This initial ranking is not the end-all and be-all for the process. It is a starting point from the relatively small number of people providing input without a lot of thought or discussion for those couple of hours on that one night.