



**SUSSEX COUNTY LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS**  
**Summary – 5 District Land Use Forums regarding**  
**the 2018 Comprehensive Plan**  
**Total Attendance: 119**

**Summary of reoccurring concerns in all 5 Sussex County Districts:**

- Increase focus on economic development that promotes well-paying jobs (*i.e., technical, industrial, manufacturing*)
- Include environmental impact/natural resource protection ordinances in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan
- Better inter-governmental agency collaboration for land use planning

<b>Top 3 Concerns Voiced In Each District</b>	
<b>District 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More economic development needed</li> <li>• More natural resource protection and planning</li> <li>• Better inter-government land use coordination, planning, and accountability</li> </ul>
<b>District 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of inter-governmental agency collaboration for land use planning between municipalities, county agencies, and the state</li> <li>• Lack of county water/sewer access in remote areas</li> <li>• Need more focus on economic development</li> </ul>
<b>District 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local environmental pollution impacts from development</li> <li>• Transportation/traffic issues</li> <li>• Level 4 developments: minimal support in county council to discourage development in level 4 areas</li> </ul>
<b>District 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current (2008) Comprehensive Plan lacks authority</li> <li>• Sussex County Level 4 developments are the largest in the state – a burden on county resources</li> <li>• Reliance on development transfer taxes for county revenue contributes to unplanned development and infrastructure shortfalls</li> </ul>
<b>District 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local environmental pollution correlates with increasing incidences of asthma, cancer, and heart problems</li> <li>• More economic development needed to ensure jobs with living wages and affordable housing nearby</li> <li>• Quality of life declining – the reasons for living/moving to Delaware are diminishing</li> </ul>

**Overall visions for the future of land use in Sussex County:**

- Quality of life is maintained for current and future county residents
- Attractive job opportunities and affordable housing retains our Delaware talent
- Proactive planning of road systems, infrastructure, and development to provide predictability for citizens and developers and ensure that these systems operate smoothly together
- Ordinances are written with established deadlines to enforce Comprehensive Plan
- Sussex County infrastructure is funded with revenue streams in addition to development transfer taxes
- Connectivity within the county is increased with effective transportation for walkers, bikers, cars, and mass transit
- Sussex County waters are safely fishable and swimmable
- More land use categories than AR-1 are established with specific criteria for evaluating environmental impact

## **DISTRICT 1 – League of Women Voters Land Use Forum 4/29/2015**

At the public library in Seaford, DE

17 people in attendance

### **CONCERNS VOICED** (Top 3 concerns (**in bold font**) as voted by the audience)

- **Economic development needed:**
  - Commercial/industrial/technical growth in the county.
  - Development to support well-paying jobs in industry (not more retail).
  - Jobs with nearby affordable housing – keep our younger generation here.
- **Natural resource protection and planning:**
  - Expansion/maintenance of resources for outdoor life – “no child left inside”.
  - Cleanup the inland bays so they are both safe for recreational use and a safe food source.
  - Stop approving development in environmentally sensitive areas (i.e., landfill of wet lands, no adequate land buffers for waterways).
  - Balance environmental impacts with development by establishing long-term cost and environmental analysis not just short-term/local impact.
- **Inter-government land use coordination, planning, and accountability need to be improved.**
  - Develop processes to handle conflicts and jurisdictional overlaps between municipalities and the county.
  - Establish deadlines for developing accountability (ordinances). Build deadlines into the Comprehensive Plan, not just “we’ll consider them”.
  - If ordinances in the plan are not to be developed, public hearings need to be held to inform the public ‘why not’.
- Failing infrastructures (water/sewer) can’t support new residential development in populated areas.
- East-west roads that cannot handle beach traffic and increased residential development.
- State needs fiscal discipline and follow-through with the county on associated development infrastructure with the county. No diverting of funds for needed roads and public transportation in Sussex County.
- Fairness of tax revenue dollars disbursed for infrastructure services across the county districts.

### **VALUES/VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

- Civic education: residents are helped to understand how and when things happen in the county to avoid finger pointing without supporting facts or understanding.
- Increased citizen participation in land use public meetings to provide input during the Comprehensive Plan process.
- Fiscal responsibility at the state level to fund roads in the county, so development impact taxes are used as they were intended.
- Cross-county roads expanded or built to support a direct route for beach traffic without impact to small communities.
- Attractive job opportunities and housing for younger generations to keep our talent in Delaware.
- Dignified aging in place a reality. Health care options available for those living alone.
- Development and infrastructure predictability for citizens and developers.

## **DISTRICT 2 – League of Women Voters Land Use Forum 5/6/2015**

At the Country Council Chambers, Georgetown, DE

17 people in attendance

### **CONCERNS VOICED** (Top 3 concerns (**in bold font**) as voted by the audience)

- **Lack of inter-governmental agency collaboration** for land use planning between municipalities, county agencies, and the state.
- **Lack of county water/sewer access:**
  - Need to proactively plan county infrastructure between existing town water/sewer systems that would encourage and promote development in those locations.
  - Need to address old/failing infrastructure when development is planned to extend an existing grid.
  - Currently too much approved Level 4 residential development in Sussex County that requires private septic systems that will eventually fail due to forecasted salt water intrusion in low lying areas in Delaware.
- **Need more economic development:**
  - Some AR-1 zoning needs to be redesigned to agri-business and industrial zones with environmental protection ordinances to attract more industrial and technical business along with their associated higher paying jobs.
  - Increase the county's higher level education options to keep our youth in Sussex County.
- Comprehensive Plan does not address how to manage or limit development risks to the ecosystem associated with coastal development. Industrial development is prohibited by the Coastal Zone Act. Comprehensive Plan needs ordinances to limit new residential and retail development in coastal zones to reduce risk of future catastrophic damage and loss of life due to increasing storm intensities and sea level rise.
- Recreation and open space needs to be detailed in the Comprehensive Plan along with development:
  - Populated/density areas need connected access to outdoor exercise and recreation facilities.
  - Town centers can promote business with walking access (versus having to drive to get there).

### **VALUES/VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

- Identify additional revenue streams to fund needed infrastructure such as county water and sewer availability between towns.
- Ordinances written and implemented to enforce Comprehensive Plan.
- Attract 4-year college/medical school/research facility:
  - Attract industry and technical jobs.
  - Educate youth in Sussex County past high school.
  - Provide candidates for higher paying jobs in Sussex after graduating.
- Have effective public information available on impending government actions:
  - Advertise that public meeting agendas are available on the county web site ([www.sussexcountyde.gov](http://www.sussexcountyde.gov))
  - Create email distribution option on county web site where voters could sign up for advanced announcements or notifications (like meeting agendas).
  - Video tape county council meetings for review after the fact (not just audio) – currently available live on the web, but not available afterward.
- Communities connected with easy access to Delaware walking/biking trails ([www.easystriders.com](http://www.easystriders.com) and rails-to-trails [www.trails.com/stateactivity.aspx?area=13907](http://www.trails.com/stateactivity.aspx?area=13907)).

### **DISTRICT 3 – League of Women Voters Land Use Forum 4/15/2015**

At the public library in Milton, DE

37 people in attendance

#### **CONCERNS VOICED** (Top 3 concerns (**in bold font**) as voted by the audience)

- **Local environmental pollution impacts:**
  - Current county plan is ineffectual and too generic. It lacks specific direction. Include more land use categories than AR-1 and specific criteria for evaluating environmental impact.
  - Little proactive preparation for growth that protects natural resources as part of the plan.
  - Nothing in the plan to address sea level rise and building in at-risk areas.
  - Nothing in the current plan to protect the coastal zone from more retail and residential development.
- **Transportation/traffic issues:**
  - Change the way county council addresses transportation and traffic issues such as fixing the disconnect between developer's investments in infrastructure (development impact fees) and actual infrastructure completed by DOT. Put teeth in the Comprehensive Plan that requires state infrastructure improvements to be done before development is completed.
  - No current focus on carrying capacity studies that extend beyond the immediate area being developed. Study scope requirements need to include travel to populated areas that will be impacted with traffic congestion.
- **Level 4 developments:** minimal support in county council to discourage development in level 4 areas such as assessing hefty impact fees to make it less attractive to developers.
- Lack of inter-departmental participation/cooperation in long term land use planning.
- Plan lacks assurance that development is an extension of existing grid with money available to proactively expand and sustain the infrastructure services needed.
- No timely adoption of ordinances by county council to support Comprehensive Plan (the 'teeth' to ensure things happen).
- Lack of enforcement or accountability for current historical preservation regulations. Regulations need to be strengthened, adopted, and enforced.

#### **VALUES/VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

- Maintain quality of life for native born residents as well as those who have moved here for that same quality of life.
- Expand County revenue options: don't rely on development transfer taxes. Have reasonable tax structure to develop and sustain support infrastructure. As part of the discussion on development, identify any negative development long-term impacts in terms of dollars and seriously factor that into the decision to approve.
- More mass transit options and enough taxes to pay for it all. Address all aspects of effective transportation for walkers, bikers, and cars. Have inexpensive or free trolleys that run the entire Route 1 corridor from Lewes to Dewey, especially during tourist season. Look at train lines that would feed into mass transit to the beach area.
- Development options that create jobs and provide nearby affordable housing options for workers that are tied into mass transit.

## **DISTRICT 4 – League of Women Voters Land Use Forum 4/25/2015**

At the South Coastal public library in Bethany Beach, DE

26 people in attendance

### **CONCERNS VOICED** (Top 3 concerns (**in bold font**) as voted by the audience)

- **Current (2008) Comprehensive Plan lacks authority.** Plan needs more ‘teeth’. Ordinances to enforce plan not drafted or implemented. Those that are implemented are not enforced.
- **Sussex County Level 4 developments are the largest in the state** – a burden on county resources with little or no state funding for service infrastructure.
- **Reliance on development transfer taxes for county revenue contributes to unplanned development and infrastructure shortfalls.** Need to devise alternative methods to raise money to fund infrastructure requirements like adequate roads (state) and safe waste management (county sewers).
- Failing infrastructures burdened by new development on the grid and no identifiable revenue to fix the problems.
- Lack of synchronized planning and coordination between government agencies, municipalities, the county, and the state.
- Standardized buffer zones to protect natural water resources and prevent pollution are not stated or enforced in the plan. An ordinance needs to be developed, implemented, and enforced.
- East-west county roads needed to support traffic headed for the additional residential development in beach communities. Need to match roads from connecting states such as the expansion of Route 404 to 4 lanes in Maryland. Where’s Delaware’s Route 404 expansion?

### **VALUES/VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

- Planning and zoning makes decisions versus recommendations on proposed new development. County Council makes revenue disbursement decisions on any development transfer tax revenue.
- County Professional Planner has a decision making role and authority.
- The Sussex County Land Use Trust (non-profit organization) has acquired land corridors that facilitate the migration of wildlife.
- Sussex County waters are safely fishable and swimmable. Currently (4/2015) 94% are not fishable and 84% are not swimmable – a public health hazard.
- Road systems and development planned proactively and work smoothly.
- Pride in the land use stewardship of decision makers when it comes to development in the county.
- Land use decisions reflect the entire demographics in the county:
  - Good public transportation options for aging population.
  - Good public transportation between affordable housing, workers, and jobs.
  - Better mix of land use (i.e. village structure of home, work, play, and recreation in proximity).
- Route 1 safety for walkers from Lewes through Dewey (cross walks and sidewalks).

## **DISTRICT 5 – League of Women Voters Land Use Forum 3/25/2015**

At the public library in Laurel, DE

22 people in attendance

### **CONCERNS VOICED** (Top 3 concerns (**in bold font**) as voted by the audience)

- **Local environmental pollution impacts** – local industrial pollution of water and air correlates with increasing incidences of asthma, autism, cancer, and heart problems. Business and youth apathy and lack of education for environmental impact issues that come with development.
- **Economic development for Delaware** – more living wages and jobs with affordable housing nearby.
- **Quality of life declining** – the reasons for living/moving to Delaware are diminishing.
- Higher paying industrial/technical jobs lacking in the county (versus low-paying retail or service jobs).
- Communication from county government to the public needs to be better on development in the process of seeking approval.
- The County's enforcement of existing regulations and permits is deficient.
- Electronic infrastructure in rural areas inconsistent or non-existent (e.g., web access).
- Traffic congestion is increasing with new developments without implementing the needed road improvements.
- Oversaturation of new housing lowers older home property values.
- Forced sewer hookups versus keeping septic systems.
- Concern that residents' taxes will increase to cover new development infrastructure costs.

### **VALUES/VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

- Respect for the environment – education and 'marketing' contains environmental messages; "Be able to safely eat fish and crabs from the Indian River in my lifetime".
- The scopes for carrying capacity studies by the county and state result in more selective development approvals by county council.
- Community "village structure": people, available jobs, affordable housing, and public transportation all in proximity.
- Better public transportation that reduces traffic congestion.
- Clever ways to provide community services in rural areas (e.g., web access, Skype for medical consultations) using technological developments.
- Equitable 'voice' for rural areas and state/county tax dollars to facilitate preventive safety improvements before someone has to die.
- Well-paying jobs (not more retail).
- East/west county collaboration to solve issues.

*Summary data provided by Marti Austin, Sue Claire Harper, and Carole Somers, LWV Land Use Committee Members*

*6/26/2015*