

MEMO

TO: Town of Irvington Planning Commission
FROM: Will Cockrell, EPR, P.C.
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DATE: April 28th, 2020

RE: Considerations for the Town of Irvington's Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

PURPOSE:

This memo outlines EPR's evaluation of Irvington's existing goals, objectives, and strategies, considering recent public and stakeholder engagement efforts. The following memo offers reflections and options for the Town's Planning Commission as they reexamine Irvington's comprehensive plan.

BACKGROUND:

Over the past several months, the Town's consultants, EPR, facilitated a public and stakeholder engagement process to update Irvington's comprehensive plan, last updated in 2017. The process began with a community survey effort that attracted nearly 400 responses. EPR analyzed and presented those results at a town hall event in 2022. Next, consultants interviewed local officials and conducted multiple stakeholder discussions to clarify a few core topics, such as housing development, public sewer infrastructure, waterfront development, and other capital investment decisions. Finally, on March 23rd, EPR presented results from those additional discussions at another well-attended town hall event.

Using feedback from the survey, interviews, and stakeholder discussions, EPR evaluated the comprehensive plan's existing goals, objectives, and strategies. **Throughout this process, the consultant's main effort focused on engagement as opposed to policy development.** However, the following commentary offers Planning Commissioners additional perspectives as they consider possible revisions to these policy statements.

COMMENTARY:

Currently, Irvington's comprehensive plan includes five goals, twelve objectives, and thirteen strategies. Note that the Town Council removed Goal B, including related objectives, in 2019. Considering recent engagement efforts, EPR offers the following reflections on the existing Chapter 4. The following comments include general best practices in local government and the planning field.

1. **Reconsider the overall structure:** It is best practice to have a hierarchy of goals, strategies (sometimes called objectives), and tactics (sometimes called actions or policies). The Town's existing policy structure causes several issues.
 - a. **Terminology:** The existing plan confuses common terminology, which could cause confusion with potential partners and stakeholders.
 - b. **Policy Purpose:** The Town should tie every action to a policy purpose, bringing clarity and supporting any municipal decisions. During the engagement process, most participants expressed some level of confusion about the purpose of certain capital decisions, such as the sewer and waterfront access. Having a hierarchy of goals, strategies, and tactics should clarify the need and purpose of every decision.
2. **Consider reordering the policy hierarchy:** In the current plan, several goals statements are too specific, functioning more like strategies or tactics. Instead, consider new goals that are broader,



aspirational, and useful as policy statements. Also, every tactic should be a policy, ordinance change, a capital investment, a recurring program, or a one-time initiative.

3. **Reevaluate desired outcomes:** Several of the comprehensive plan’s policy statements appear to be debated or no longer valid. For example, participants in the recent engagement process did not see public waterfront access as a high priority. The Planning Commission should reconsider these statements, given feedback from residents.

The following are comments and considerations for each goal theme. **Note that the following does not represent specific recommendations for local goals, objectives, or strategies.** Any specific recommendations should occur at the Planning Commission’s direction. This memo includes general comments, reflections, and examples to help guide the Commission’s discussion.

Goal A: Preservation and New Growth

The first goal states, *“Preserve and enrich the charm of the Irvington Village by maintaining the value and attractiveness of the Town’s existing real estate and encouraging new growth and development.”*

Subordinate objectives include:

- **Objective A-1:** To protect existing real estate assets and maintain the Irvington Village atmosphere and its Historic District.
- **Objective A-2:** To encourage new development that has a density and mix of uses similar to that of the current Irvington Village.
- **Objective A-3:** To encourage new development that is architecturally appropriate and with the scale and bulk in keeping with the context of the current Irvington Village.

There is one action under this section:

- **Strategy #1:** Implement a comprehensive study and re-write of the Town’s Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances and other Town Ordinances related to land use, construction, and development in order to protect existing land uses and structures; strengthen enforcement of existing and new regulatory tools; and implement new regulatory provisions as needed.

Goal A Commentary

The current Goal A appears to be making two statements. The first is to preserve and enrich the Town’s character. The second is to encourage new growth and development. According to the current process, nearly all participants would support the first element but not necessarily the second. Consider a simplified goal that is broader and that has total consensus. Also, the objective language could be clearer. The following is an example of potential changes that would state the same vision but in a clearer way:

- Goal A: Preserve and enrich the Town of Irvington’s charm and attractiveness.
 - Strategy A-1: Protect existing real estate assets.
 - Tactic (ordinance): Conduct an audit of the zoning and subdivision ordinances to determine code rewrites that would protect existing real estate assets.
 - Strategy A-2: Preserve Irvington’s historic resources and charm.
 - Tactic (ordinance): Examine zoning approaches that can preserve Irvington’s historic charm while balancing individual property rights.

- Tactic (program): Explore beautification efforts to finance landscaping and maintenance of the Town’s streetscape.
- Strategy A-3: Ensure that new development is consistent with the Town’s character.
 - Tactic (ordinance): Conduct an audit of the zoning and subdivision ordinances to determine code rewrites that would require appropriate densities and uses.

Goal C: Pedestrian Connections

In 2019, the Town Council removed Goal B, making Goal C the next policy statement. It reads, *“Improve the walkability of Irvington through the development of additional sidewalks and trails within Irvington and to other nearby communities.”*

- **Objective C-1:** To enhance the livability of Irvington and promote healthy lifestyles for current and future residents.
- **Objective C-2:** To improve the attractiveness and value of Irvington real estate, particularly non-waterfront lots and buildings.

- **Strategy #1:** Commission the development of a pedestrian and bicycle master plan to be added to this Comprehensive Plan in order to guide the development of both public and private pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- **Strategy #2:** In cooperation with Lancaster County and the neighboring towns of Kilmarnock and White Stone, research the feasibility of developing connecting trails between the County’s three towns and participate in their joint construction if feasible and fundable.
- **Strategy #3:** Seek VDOT Transportation Alternative Program funding in several phases for the construction of planned public pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- **Strategy #4:** Construct the planned pedestrian and bicycle facilities as funds are awarded by VDOT and as matching funds become available.

Goal C Commentary

Like with Goal A, this statement is too detailed, acting as a goal and objective. Ironically, the objectives are broader than the goal and appear to be only loosely related. The following example is a simplified approach that would be consistent with the existing plan.

- Goal B: Enhance Irvington’s livability and promote healthy lifestyles for current and future residents.
 - Strategy B-1: Improve the attractiveness and value of Irvington real estate, particularly non-waterfront lots and buildings.
 - Tactic (ordinance): Conduct an audit of the zoning and subdivision ordinances to determine code rewrites that would protect existing real estate assets.
 - Strategy B-2: Foster active living through bicycle and pedestrian improvements.
 - Tactic (policy): Add a bicycle and pedestrian element to the comprehensive plan that identifies appropriate capital improvements.
 - Tactic (policy): Cooperate with Lancaster County and the surrounding towns to implement the Three-Town Trail between Irvington, Kilmarnock, and White Stone.
 - Tactic (capital): Seek VDOT Transportation Alternative Program funding in several phases for the construction of planned public pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

- **Tactic (capital):** Construct the planned pedestrian and bicycle facilities as funds are awarded by VDOT and as matching funds become available.

Goal D: Tourism and the Commons

This topic was one of the more controversial items in the engagement process, as many participants had strong opinions about the Town Commons. Goal D states, *“Build stronger ties among Irvington’s residents and provide an additional tourism venue by the further development of the Commons/North Commons as the central gathering place for community meetings, events, and festivals.”* The plan also includes three objectives and three actions.

- **Objective D-1:** To provide a space for planned and informal recreational activities geared toward younger adults and young families.
- **Objective D-2:** To boost visitation and interest in Irvington through having a venue for regular outdoor concerts and other special events.
- **Objective D-3:** To encourage citizen participation in the governance of the Town of Irvington by having a more spacious and appropriate facility for community meetings.

- **Strategy #1:** Engage in a community-driven process of discerning the needs, opportunities, and vision for the development of the Commons/North Commons.
- **Strategy #2:** Once a unified vision is agreed to, commission a plan of phased development for the Commons/North Commons to be added to this Comprehensive Plan with the elements outlined in the community’s vision.
- **Strategy #3:** Construct the planned improvements to the Commons/North Commons in phases as funding becomes available for each phase.

Goal D Commentary

Again, this statement is longer than a typical goal. Elements of this section could fit into separate topics – one related to tourism and the other focused on residents. Considering recent feedback, the following example could redirect this goal.

- **Goal C:** Support Irvington’s tourism industry while preserving its quiet waterfront character.
 - **Strategy C-1:** Boost tourism by having a venue for regular outdoor concerts and other special events.
 - **Tactic (capital):** Invest in improvements to the Town Commons.
 - **Tactic (program):** Organize and host a community events calendar.
 - **Strategy C-2:** Foster local business development for a healthy and active main street.
 - **Tactic (ordinance):** Conduct an audit of the zoning ordinances to determine code rewrites that would support local business development while limiting chain stores.
 - **Tactic (capital):** Conduct a feasibility analysis for a public sewer system that would support existing and new local businesses.

- **Goal D:** Foster Town unity and fellowship.
 - **Strategy D-1:** Provide a space for planned and informal recreational activities geared toward younger adults and young families.
 - **Tactic (capital):** Maintain playground equipment and other amenities for children.

- Tactic (ordinance): Conduct an audit of the zoning ordinances to determine code rewrites that would support local restaurants.
- Tactic (program): Organize family events and festivals that would draw families and children.
- Strategy D-2: Encourage citizen participation in the governance of the Town of Irvington by having a more spacious and appropriate facility for community meetings.
 - Tactic (capital): Identify opportunities for a new town hall with meeting space.

Goal E: Waterfront Development

Goal E may be less relevant after the recent engagement process, where participants stated that public waterfront access was not a priority. The existing plan states, *“Strengthen Irvington’s tie to the water through the development of a public waterfront park/canoe & kayak launch.”*

- **Objective E-1:** To provide free water access to residents who reside on interior parcels within the Town of Irvington.
- **Objective E-2:** To boost tourism by making it easier to enjoy the waterside location of the Town of Irvington.

- **Strategy #1:** Research the acquisition or donation of an appropriate waterfront parcel and take ownership of the land as the land is made available by donation or as funding becomes available.
- **Strategy #2:** Once land is secured, commission a plan of development for a public waterfront park/canoe & kayak launch.
- **Strategy #3:** Construct the planned public waterfront park/canoe & kayak launch as funding becomes available.

Goal E Commentary

This goal may be more effective if it focuses on enhancing Irvington’s waterfront character. The following example offers an alternative.

- Goal E: Preserve and enhance Irvington’s waterfront charm.
 - Strategy E-1: Maintain existing waterfront access points.
 - Tactic (initiative): Maintain coordination with the Gaskins family to preserve Gaskins landing.
 - Tactic (capital): Formalize a right of first refusal for the Gaskins property if the family wishes to sell.
 - Tactic (policy): If the Town secures the Gaskins property, commission a plan of development site improvements.
 - Strategy E-2: Provide tourism information on waterfront access points.
 - Tactic (program): Develop information materials on where visitors can find waterfront access.
 - Strategy E-3: Maintain a working waterfront.
 - Tactic (ordinance): Conduct an audit of the zoning ordinances to determine code rewrites that would preserve waterfront operations on industrial land.



Goal F: Internet Connectivity

The final goal states, *“Position Irvington as a great place to grow a small or home-based business by seeking partnerships that help deliver stronger internet connectivity.”*

- **Objective F-1:** To provide additional job opportunities within the Town, making it easier to live and work in Irvington.
- **Objective F-2:** To attract the new generation of entrepreneurs that are coming up in Virginia and build a creative economy that enhances the vitality and viability of the Town.
- **Strategy #1:** Monitor and engage in efforts by Lancaster County, the Northern Neck Planning District Commission, the Northern Neck Broadband Authority, and the Center for Innovation and Development to develop more robust internet connectivity in the area.
- **Strategy #2:** Continually keep an eye on the public and nonprofit resources that might become available to boost the internet connectivity in the Town.

Goal F Commentary

This goal functions more like an objective. Consider a broader statement, such as the following.

- Goal F: Attract families and full-time residents that can help to preserve the Town’s sense of community.
 - Strategy F-1: Provide additional job opportunities within the Town by making it easier to live and work in Irvington.
 - Tactic (program): Monitor and engage in efforts by Lancaster County, the Northern Neck Planning District Commission, the Northern Neck Broadband Authority, and the Center for Innovation and Development to develop more robust internet connectivity in the area.
 - Tactic (program): Continually keep an eye on the public and nonprofit resources that might become available to boost the internet connectivity in the Town.

ACTIONS

The Planning Commission should consider these reflections in their discussion on May 2 and forward additional guidance to EPR on whether to develop revised policy statements. If the Commission prefers formal recommendations, our office will develop an updated chapter for its review.

In the meantime, our office is currently:

- Replacing maps and figures in the existing plan,
- Replacing the engagement chapter, and
- Revising various sections with updated language and formatting.