



Date: August 3, 2020

To: Wendell Davis, County Manager
Through: Jay Gibson, General Manager
From: Sara M. Young, AICP, Acting City-County Planning Director
Subject: City-County Planning Department FY21 Work Program

Summary

The Interlocal Cooperation Agreement between the City and County for merged planning functions charges the Planning Director with preparing and submitting to the Joint City-County Planning Committee, the Planning Commission and both Managers a work program and annual budget that must be forwarded to both governing bodies for approval. The proposed work program is structured on the Department receiving sufficient resources for 46 full-time employees and operational overhead. Staff resources have been fully allocated for the tasks reflected in the proposed work program with no capacity to take on additional tasks without either revising the work program.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board approve the proposed FY21 Work Program.

Background

The Interlocal Cooperation Agreement between the City and County for merged planning functions charges the Planning Director with preparing and submitting to the Joint City-County Planning Committee, the Planning Commission and both Managers a work program and annual budget that must be forwarded to both governing bodies for approval.

Attached please find a revised draft of the proposed FY21 Planning Department Work Program. The work program constitutes a catalogue of the various processes and projects that the Department will work on over the coming fiscal year. They can be categorized as one of three types:

- Ongoing projects and processes that reflect legal requirements to respond to proposed site plans, zoning map changes, use permits, certificates of appropriateness, zoning enforcement actions, etc.
- Ongoing projects and processes that relate to City and County policies for providing timely public information support for boards and commissions, and Department management, etc.

- Projects and process that are somewhat discretionary, reflecting City and County desire to engage in long range planning activities, such as the Patterson Place Compact Design District, and various Ordinance text amendments.

Issues

Since a large portion of the Planning Department's work is dictated by state or local law, the main area of variability in the work program is in the Policy and Urban Design section. For the coming fiscal year, the main policy planning emphasis and resource allocation will continue to be on development of the new Comprehensive Plan, which was added to the FY20 Work Program last year. A detailed update on the status of that project will be presented as a separate item at this meeting.

In addition to the Comprehensive Plan focus a few new policy-related projects are being added to the Work Program. The following projects, while new to the Work Program proper, were actually started in the current fiscal year as need for them arose.

- **County Transit Plan Update:** Identify specific investment priorities for transit service in Durham County to be implemented through the half-cent sales tax for public transportation improvements. The Durham County Transit Plan is a collaborative effort between Durham County, the City of Durham, the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Triangle J Council of Governments, GoTriangle and GoDurham.
- **Durham Landscape Manual Update:** Propose updates to the Durham Landscape Manual to change the format to make the manual easier to use and understand, include more locally-available, native, and waterwise species in the plant lists, and to allow for more options under the general species name.
- **Departmental Racial Equity Work Plan:** Develop a racial equity work plan that seeks to build partnerships with communities of color, redress elements of racial inequities related to past planning principles, and review both internal and external policies through a racial equity lens. In addition, the department will spend time developing two other areas that will attempt to address racial inequity, which include: developing a project-based learning partnership with Durham Public Schools and creating racially equitable hiring, recruitment, and retention policies within the Planning Department.
- **Language Access Plan Implementation:** Implement priorities from the departmental Language Access Plan in support of the City's Language Access Plan policy.

The following new projects were proposed and discussed at the February Joint City-County Planning Committee (JCCPC) meeting.

- **Natural and Historic Resources Standards:** Propose amendments to the UDO to provide clear standards for the protection of natural and historic resources identified in the Durham County Inventory of Important Natural Areas, Plants, and Wildlife, the North Carolina Heritage Program, the National Register for Historic Places, adopted open space plans, and other identified sites of historic, cultural, or environmental significance.
- **Adopted Open Space Plans Review and Implementation:** Conduct a review of all adopted open space plans to identify policies to be: 1) incorporated into the new Comprehensive Plan; 2) re-evaluated as part of the new Comprehensive Plan; or 3) to be implemented through a near-term text amendment to the UDO.

At the JCCPC meeting in February staff was asked to explore what it would take to add the Flat River Open Space Plan and Durham Natural Inventory Update (described in Attachment 3) to the annual work program. Staff completed that research, which is summarized below.

- **Flat River Open Space Plan:** Staff estimates that the development and adoption of such a plan would take approximately 12 months and would cost between \$75,000-100,000. Expertise in biology, chemistry, biodiversity, water quality, and other natural sciences would be needed to develop the plan. As planning staff does not have this expertise, a consultant would likely need to be hired to complete the project. The increased focus on equitable community engagement for all planning processes in recent years means that a modern engagement strategy would need to be developed and implemented in the plan, which is made particularly challenging in the current environment. A successful consultant would devise both an engagement strategy and perform scientific analysis.
- **Natural Heritage Program Update:** The most recent comprehensive assessment and survey of biodiversity in Durham County was completed in 1999. The program director for the Natural Heritage Program (Misty Buchanan) has proposed a five-year effort shared between Alamance, Chatham, Durham, Orange, and Wake Counties to update the Natural Heritage Program Inventory for the triangle area. Durham's portion of this project would cost an estimated \$130,000, over a five-year period. The money would cover the salary and travel costs of a lead biologist, and two part-time biologists hired by the state. Their duties would include meeting with Durham officials and other stakeholders to prioritize survey areas, performing biological surveys, writing summary reports, and updating existing boundaries of natural heritage areas. Given the intensity of development in Durham County in the past decades, and that the most recent inventory was performed in 1999, it is likely that the results of an updated inventory would generally show a reduction in the total area that qualifies as Very High or Excellent under the program's classification system. Additionally, it is expected that only minor or modest modifications of the natural heritage area boundaries would result from the update. It is unlikely that the update would uncover large areas of biodiversity that were previously unknown.

After discussing and considering the costs of the above two items, the JCCPC did not recommend seeking funding to add these items to the department's proposed work program.

The proposed work program is structured on the Department receiving sufficient resources for 46 full time employees and operational overhead. Staff resources have been fully allocated for the tasks reflected in the proposed work program with no capacity to take on additional tasks without either revising the work program to modify tasks by deleting existing tasks or changing expected outcomes and/or timelines.

Attachments

Attachment 1, Proposed Work Program, FY21, Part A, Programs

Attachment 2, Proposed Work Program, FY21, Part B, Programs and Descriptions

Attachment 3, Proposed Work Program, FY21, Part C, Future Projects