

CITY OF BEAUFORT

NEWS RELEASE

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'Vision Beaufort' eyes fourth century goals for city

From Spanish explorers and French settlers in the late Middle Ages to pirates and war heroes in the 1700s and 1800s, to supersonic fighter jets today, Beaufort grows and changes - sometimes by design, sometimes not.

As the city prepares to celebrate its 300th birthday in 2011 and approaches its fourth century, local leaders, planners and residents are creating a roadmap for the future - the city's Vision Beaufort 2009 comprehensive plan.

For five days in November, hundreds of people shared their hopes and worries and dreams as part of the city's planning update.

Now, after thousands of hours of study and analysis, the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan is ready and will be unveiled Tuesday, Sept. 29. The special 4 p.m. meeting will be held in the Municipal Courtroom at 1901 Boundary Street, located in the city's new municipal complex with parking in the rear. The public is encouraged to attend.

The presentation is part of a joint meeting of the Beaufort City Council, the City of Beaufort-Town of Port Royal Joint Municipal Planning Commission and the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee.

The British founded Beaufort in 1711, but the area already had been discovered 200 years earlier by the Spanish and French. Today Beaufort is a rich mix of longtime locals, newly-arrived transplants and thousands of Marines and sailors stationed at the three local military bases. Together, they create the rich Lowcountry culture that is the base of the city's long-range planning efforts.

"We are proud of our history and heritage, but we are equally excited about the bright prospects for Beaufort's future, thanks to this comprehensive plan," Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling said. "We've learned a lot in the past 300 years, and our goal is to learn from mistakes and build upon the successes. We must always learn from the past but look to the future."

The final draft of the Vision Beaufort 2009 Comprehensive Plan is available online at <http://visionbeaufort.blogspot.com/>. Chapters and links are on the right side of the screen and include videos, documents, maps, charts and narratives.

"This document is very important in the life of our organization," City Manager Scott Dadson said. "Staff has tried to tie 'what we do' with this plan and, as such, finances and serviceability are part of the discussion. In my 20-plus years of being a city manager, this is the first time that this has been done."

There are several important points in the updated plan, noted Libby Anderson, Beaufort's planning director:

- It is based on the policies in the Northern Regional Plan; as a result, the City's plan is coordinated with both the County's and the Town of Port Royal's long range plan. For the first time, the three political jurisdictions in Northern Beaufort County are working together toward a common vision for the future.

- It ties growth of the City with "public" services, a delivery of these services in an efficient manner, and "design-based" development (patterns, regulations, incentives, redevelopment, and retro-fitting) that are financially sustainable for the provider and citizen/customer.

"I think the organization of the plan is unique," Anderson said. "Instead of the having the elements required by state law set out in separate stand-alone chapters, the information is integrated into logical, useful sections."

"The plan also contains several new elements not required by state law--a chapter on Climate Change and Energy (Chapter 7) and a chapter which looks at the economic climate of the city government (Chapter 11, 'Serving Our Citizens')," she said.

The plan includes a special section - Chapter 12 -- that identifies eight "catalyst sites" and presents conceptual development plans for how those areas could be developed or redeveloped consistent with the principles set out in the plan, Anderson said.

What's next? First, review and approval by the Planning Commission, probably in October or November, then a public hearing before City Council and adoption by City Council. The Joint Municipal Planning Commission is required to "review" the comprehensive plan not less than once every five years.

The presentation focuses on four key areas for planning, growth, and development for the City, based on these beliefs:

1. We must protect and preserve that which brought us here including the natural beauty, the historic (and prehistoric) resources, and the strong military presence.
2. We must maintain Beaufort as a living community with vibrant, diverse neighborhoods, workforce housing, and a living downtown with a strong emphasis on its history.
3. We must improve mobility throughout the community with more efficient routes for the auto and prioritized transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements to maintain our quality of life.
4. We must stabilize and improve our economic conditions with a more diversified tax base, expansion of existing major employers and institutions (e.g. military, USC-B, Beaufort Memorial Hospital, Lowcountry Technical Community College), new jobs, new sources of municipal revenue, and the efficient delivery of municipal services.

Sections of the plan include an executive summary, natural and social infrastructure, access and mobility, and economics.

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