



CHAPTER 3

Community Participation and the Planning Process

For a town of its size, Beech Mountain has an extremely high level of community participation in town governance and in directing the future of the community. Many residents serve on boards or committees and volunteer in town projects and programs. All of this is a reflection of the high amount of pride that our residents take in their town.

Key to the implementation of this plan is the ownership of it by our public stakeholders, and therefore, their participation in the process has been critical.

Realizing the Need

In 2011, Town Staff along with members of the Planning Board came to the realization of the need for a comprehensive and cohesive

document to streamline the direction of their actions. Rather than planning in an ad-hoc manner focusing reactively on fixing zoning problems as they arose, it was determined that it was important to take a more proactive role in determining the Town's future. It was also realized that the Town's current plan (The 1981 Plan) was an out of date and out of touch document, that had been rarely consulted since its drafting. In fact, the document was so obscure that the common reaction from persons involved in the planning process was a puzzled and shocked reaction: "You mean there's a plan?"

The Planning Process

The initial phases of the Plan came together through a Visioning process accomplished at public meetings held in the Fall of 2011 and Spring of 2012 guided by the Town's Planning Board. The outcome of these meetings was the conceptualization of a vision for the Town twenty years in the future.

During the visioning process, it was determined that it would be critical to proactively seek the input of the public and key stakeholders in the Town. This was done primarily through surveys that were distributed widely to the community. The recommendations of this plan are also a reflection of input gleaned from several public meetings and from discussions with various town staff members.

Public Surveys

Two surveys were sent to town residents seeking their input on a direction for the future. One was directly targeted towards comprehensive planning topics, asking questions to measure the population's attitudes towards growth and development, to determine their feelings about possible infrastructure initiatives, and to rank various elements of town services in terms of their importance, and thereby determine how they felt that the town should focus its efforts. This survey was provided via email to over 1000 Beech Mountain



residents, visitors, and stakeholders. It was also made available on the Town's website and in hard copy at several key locations throughout town. (See Reference B for a copy of this survey and a breakdown of the results.)

Another more general survey was sent out to town residents by Town Councilmember Alan Holcombe that solicited input regarding people's likes and dislikes about Beech Mountain. The survey was simple, but in its simplicity it was effective, allowing for open ended, qualitative responses regarding the state of the Town and its services, and the directions in which it needed to improve. It was distributed via email to over 500 residents and property owners. The responses were varied, but in their diversity the following major themes surfaced:

- People generally appreciate their close relationship with many town employees and the friendly service they receive from town staff.
- Many people are concerned with the cost of services in light of the current economic downturn.
- Many people are concerned with solving some of the Town's ongoing problems with infrastructure (roads, water, and sewer).
- People want to invigorate the Town's economy by capitalizing on the Town's unique resources as an outdoor recreation destination.
- The Recreation Center is controversial- it is either loved (generally by those that use it) or abhorred (generally by those that don't)

Recreation Surveys and Forums

With recreation and recreational tourism such critical elements of life in Beech Mountain, extra focus was spent on gathering input from the public on these topics. Separate surveys were created and circulated that sought to identify what the public desired form recreational amenities on Beech Mountain. Also Recreation Planning Forums were held to give the public an opportunity to voice their opinions on November 22, December 20, and January 24, 2011.

Public Meetings

The next phase of the plan was to develop a strategy to achieve the goal set out in the vision statement. The Planning Board of the Town of Beech Mountain was the lead agency responsible for the development of the plan, and the planning process largely took place at Planning Board meetings. These public meetings are held monthly in Town Hall and are always open to the public. The discussions at these meetings centered on making Beech Mountain a better place in the future. Planning Board members, members of the public, and town staff used maps, graphics, and an interactive process to discuss ideas and plans for land use, transportation, recreation, and other topics.

Format of the Plan

The Plan is outcome focused, beginning with an overarching vision statement for the town, then transferring the vision's principles into *Goals (G)* for each subject. Goals are then expanded upon and made more tangible by identifying *Policies (P)* and *Strategies (S)* that support their realization. Policies and Strategies are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and if possible, time-bound. *A numbering system (i.e. "Policy R.G1.P2:") has been applied to the Goals, Policies, and Strategies in this plan to easily identify them in future references.* Examples of strategies include ordinance amendments, capital improvements, and town-run programs. While many methods of achieving the Town's goals were considered, methods that encouraged



the desired outcome without placing mandates on residents were preferred (i.e. incentives rather than penalties). Finally, where practical, performance measures were identified to help maintain progress toward the stated vision.

Updating the Plan

In 2018, the Town undertook an effort to update the Comprehensive Plan. As part of the update process, additional public involvement strategies were undertaken.



Website

The Town's website acted as the central repository and gateway for public engagement. All other public engagement activities will direct back to the website for additional information and public participation. A dedicated web page was developed to serve as the gateway for the comprehensive plan update and link to the other various public engagement outlets.

The Town's website was updated regularly to provide information and opportunities for input to the residents. Additionally, all public meetings and workshops were listed on the announcements page and added to the Towns' homepage.

Public Meetings and Workshops

Meetings and workshops can be a great opportunity for various stakeholders to share ideas in a multi-directional and group setting. However, because many people may be disinclined to attend public meetings and workshops, a variety of formats and venues were pursued. Public meetings were loosely structured, in order to encourage participation and engagement. Also, the venue was moved between Town Hall and Buckeye Lake Recreation Center. A series of public meetings and workshops were held for the general public, as well as with specific stakeholder groups, such as business owners/operators.



Resident and Stakeholder Surveys

Research suggests that surveys are key in reaching residents and stakeholders that are generally less involved in local government. According to one source, approximately 80-85% of survey respondents have not attended a local government meeting or watched a local government broadcast in the last year. As such, surveys were an integral part of the public engagement strategy for this Plan. Surveys were developed and distributed through SurveyMonkey® and printed for distribution to those who prefer to write their survey responses.

Social Media Posts

The Town currently maintains a Facebook and Twitter account, which was utilized to further engage the residents and patrons of the Town. Posts directed those following the Town back to the dedicated web page(s) for information and input. Social media was not monitored, in any measurable fashion to gauge public opinion or to gather public input. Those wishing to provide input were directed to the survey or other opportunities for input.

