

Cheney planning its future

Workshops gather input for revisions in city's growth blueprint

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The city of Cheney is thinking about its future – primarily the next 20 years – and updating the current comprehensive plan will help the city set guidelines.

But in order to make sure the city is on the right path, it has set up Choices for Cheney, a group of volunteers who gather in groups to discuss various aspects of Cheney life, such as mobility, economic development, arts and culture, housing, technology, land use, natural assets and sustainability, utilities and capital facilities.

In order to find out if residents agreed with the direction of Choices for Cheney, the city held the first of five public workshops last week at Betz Elementary School.

"This is very important to our community," Arlene Fisher, city administrator, told the audience.

Representatives from the city and from Studio Cascade, a community planning and design firm, were on hand to ask questions of the residents, who were given hand-held answering devices and asked a series of questions. Residents could answer anonymously and after the results were posted, the group talked about why they answered a certain way.

William Grimes, a principal at Studio Cascade, presented information about why cities have comprehensive plans. In 1990, the state passed the Growth Management Act so communities could have some sort of plan for their future, limit urban sprawl, have a say in conservation and more.

In 1997, the city passed its first comprehensive plan, and Grimes said the plan was focused on complying with the Growth Management Act.

The city now wants to rewrite the plan to focus more on what the community really wants and needs.

Grimes also talked about Cheney's growth. In 1990, Cheney had 7,723 residents. In 2008, that number had grown to 10,944. By the 2026, it is expected that 13,409 people will live in the community.

In response to the statement, "The city should base its decisions regarding land use, annexation, infrastructure and budget to enhance Cheney's long-term prospects even at the expense of short-term gains," 33 percent strongly agreed, 46 percent more agreed and 13 percent disagreed.

The statement, “Cheney should make economic development a high priority even if it means taking risks on investments supporting desired growth,” generated a lot of conversation with the group.

One person in the audience thought there wasn’t enough information to make an informed decision about the statement. Another said that Cheney’s Research and Industrial Park was a good example of the city making an investment to grow economically.

One resident asked why Cheney makes decisions to invest in certain projects and not others – while the city is taking a risk in the industrial park, why wouldn’t they take a risk in small businesses in the community?

Council member Tom Trulove said that the city can usually only invest in a project if it gets a grant, and by state law can’t lend to private enterprises, but the city can put in the infrastructure – sidewalks, sewers, water, electricity, roads – much like it is doing at the industrial park.

After the question session, the audience was asked to write opinions and suggestions on large pieces of butcher paper that had questions printed on them. The employees of Studio Cascade said they would transcribe the answers and put the ideas toward future plans.

“I’m just interested in the long-range plans for Cheney,” said Exequiel Varias, a resident of Cheney since 1991, explaining why he came to the meeting. Choices for Cheney is planning four more meetings to discuss the comprehensive plan.

The next one will be held in November, and the topic of conversation will be design. In February, the group will look for public opinion regarding land use. The April meeting will roll out the new plan and the city hopes to implement it in June.

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