

West Monroe Master Plan Update -- The First Public Meeting Issues Addressed

After months of brain storming ideas listing what we like and dislike about the Town of West Monroe, hiring Kent Environmental Planning and Design to develop a Draft Master Plan which I outlined for you in a previous column the Master Plan Committee scheduled its first official public meeting March 31st. All Master Plan meetings are open to the public. However, the public meeting allowed residents the opportunity to ask questions and inject ideas to the committee.

Anticipation for this meeting ran high among committee members; bi-weekly meetings have taken place since May of 2008 and several columns have appeared in the citizen Outlet as well as on the Town web site (www.townofwestmonroe-ny.us) outlining progress and the possible effects a Master Plan would have on the town. Based on the West Monroe citizenry turnout and attendance at their first public scheduled meeting, disappointment by committee members is a gross understatement. Other than committee members my estimate is fewer than six residents participated in the meeting.

James Kent outlined to those in attendance the contents of a 2nd draft plan of Policy, Goals and Actions the town may take. There are few changes in this draft from the original draft of a few weeks ago. The Draft Plan is listed on the town web site. The upgraded changes include adding the word "commercial" under the Town Actions identifying areas where the zoning map would allow as a right commercial industrial; previously the plan stated only "industrial".

Under the heading Town Goals establishing a Town Center the new draft plan states "create one or two hamlets in the town; the previous plan listed create one hamlet. The new draft plan now specifically outlines a Town Goal of extending sewer the entire length of New York Route 49 from the I-81 Bridge to County Route 11. With regard to all automobile related businesses, sales and repair facilities the new draft plan lists as a possible action by the Town to "consider" development of a permitting process for all used car sales and automobile repair facilities.

Although there were few residents in attendance, several great suggestions and concerns were made by residents. One resident suggested we adapt a "green" theme to the commercial industrial areas with pleasant walkways of wood chips lined with flowers and trees. Other suggestions included that any road construction or improvements include shoulders suitable for safe walking or bicycles.

The purpose of the Master Plan if adapted by the Town Board is to promote growth by providing infrastructure, develop zoning maps specifically identifying areas of residential use, commercial/ industrial uses and through the process set rules and guidelines that ultimately will protect residents investments and property. Residents need to understand that if the Master Plan is adapted by the Town, non-conforming uses within a zoned area will NOT be disturbed; there are no provisions anywhere in the plan to remove or shut down an existing business. However if an area is map zoned "residential" the plan will not allow any new non-conforming business to establish.

Should the Master Plan be embraced and adapted by the Town Board most residents will experience little or no change concerning monetary investment; the worry of an unwanted

business establishing next to your biggest investment your home will be a thing of the past. Commercial industrial businesses that locate within established commercial zones will have pleasing facades that will enhance their districts.

Will there be costs to some residents? Of course there will. Residents living along the paths of suggested infrastructure improvements i.e. water and sewer will bear some of the burden. However if the plan is adapted by the Town Board, every effort and every avenue will be pursued to obtain grant funding to offset costs of infrastructure projects. Our federal government is releasing billions of dollars of stimulus moneys to create jobs in infrastructure improvements such as those West Monroe would undertake should the Master Plan be adapted.

The next regular meeting of the Master Plan Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, April 7th, 6:30 p.m. at the West Monroe Town Hall. Residents of West Monroe this is your town, you are welcome at all meetings; time will be allowed for your questions.