

Summary Memo

Preliminary Results, June-July 2023 Community Engagement

July 31, 2023

This document summarizes the results from the third round of public engagement for Suffolk 2045 that was conducted during June and July 2023.

The memo includes the following components:

1. Purpose
2. Approach
3. Results

1. Purpose

The first round of engagement for Suffolk 2045 was held in Summer and Fall 2022 and was designed to solicit big picture ideas from the public in an open-ended way. Based upon input gathered during that period, a number of topics emerged that the planning team believed warranted special attention in the plan. These ideas were explored further through a second round of engagement that was conducted in Winter 2023, which was based around set of critical questions to “dig deeper.” Drawing from the responses to these questions, and the technical analysis that has been conducted, the planning team developed preliminary ideas for the plan update. The third round of engagement was designed to test these ideas and potential direction for the plan. The results will help to inform the draft plan document.

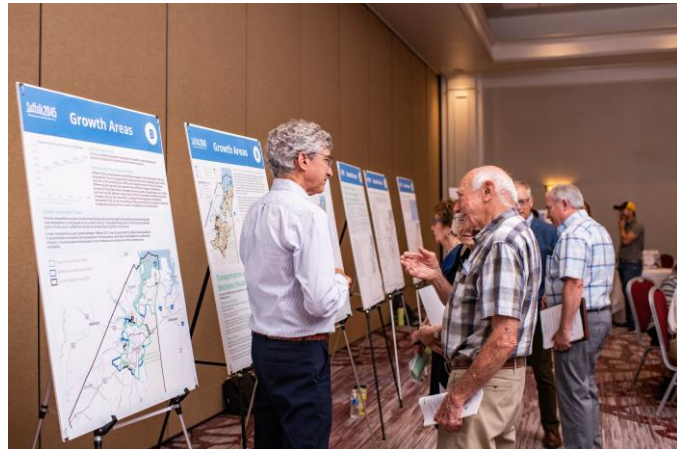


2. Approach

Input was gathered in the following ways:

In-person open houses – Three broadly-promoted in-person open houses were held on three different dates and at different locations throughout the City.

- June 14, 3:00 P.M. – 7:00 P.M., Hilton Garden Inn
- June 15, 3:00 P.M. – 7:00 P.M., Hub 757
- June 24, 9:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M., City Hall



Each open house was conducted over several hours and designed to maximize convenience as a “drop-in” event so that people could come and participate at their own pace, viewing display boards with key information and commenting using worksheets, voting “dots,” and comment cards. The open houses also provided an important opportunity for direct communication with the planning team and City staff. In addition to members of the planning staff and consultant team, staff from many City departments participated and engaged in conversation around the topics of transportation, economic development, broadband, public utilities, and parks and recreation.



Brief overview presentations were made two times at the afternoon/evening events and once at the Saturday event to help orient participants to the planning process and make them feel welcome and comfortable with sharing their ideas.

Online survey – The same materials presented at the open houses were made available online through an interactive online activity and community members were invited to provide responses through the end of July.

Paper survey – Paper surveys with the same information and questions were also made

available in the lobby of City Hall or upon request to anyone who could not attend an in-person open house or participate online. Surveys were also provided to several community groups for distribution to their members.

3. Results

Approximately 150 individuals attended the in-person open houses and over 900 individual comments were collected through the open houses or from online and paper surveys. Responses are summarized below.

A. Values and Land Use Considerations

Participants were asked to provide comments on the following draft values:

- Maintain an efficient transportation network with effective choices for mobility.
- Preserve the agricultural heritage and character of the City.
- Support economic development opportunities with benefits across the community.
- Protect the natural, cultural, and historical assets of the City.
- Support and enhance variety in character and types of places in the City.
- Promote a diverse housing stock, providing options in terms of type, location, and affordability.
- Maintain high-quality services and facilities as growth occurs.
- Support responsible regionalism.

Many participants expressed broad support for the values. Other key themes included:

- Preservation of agriculture
- Support development with transportation infrastructure and multimodal transportation options.
- Focus on improving what exists before encouraging new development.
- Pursue public/private partnerships and support economic development downtown.

Participants were asked to provide comments on the following land use considerations:

- Maintaining the focused growth approach and expanding growth opportunities
- Supporting fiscally sustainable land use choices
- Protecting natural resources and agricultural lands
- Ensuring a high quality and character of development
- Coordinating transportation and land use considerations
- Promoting synergy between economic development and land use

Key themes from participant responses included:

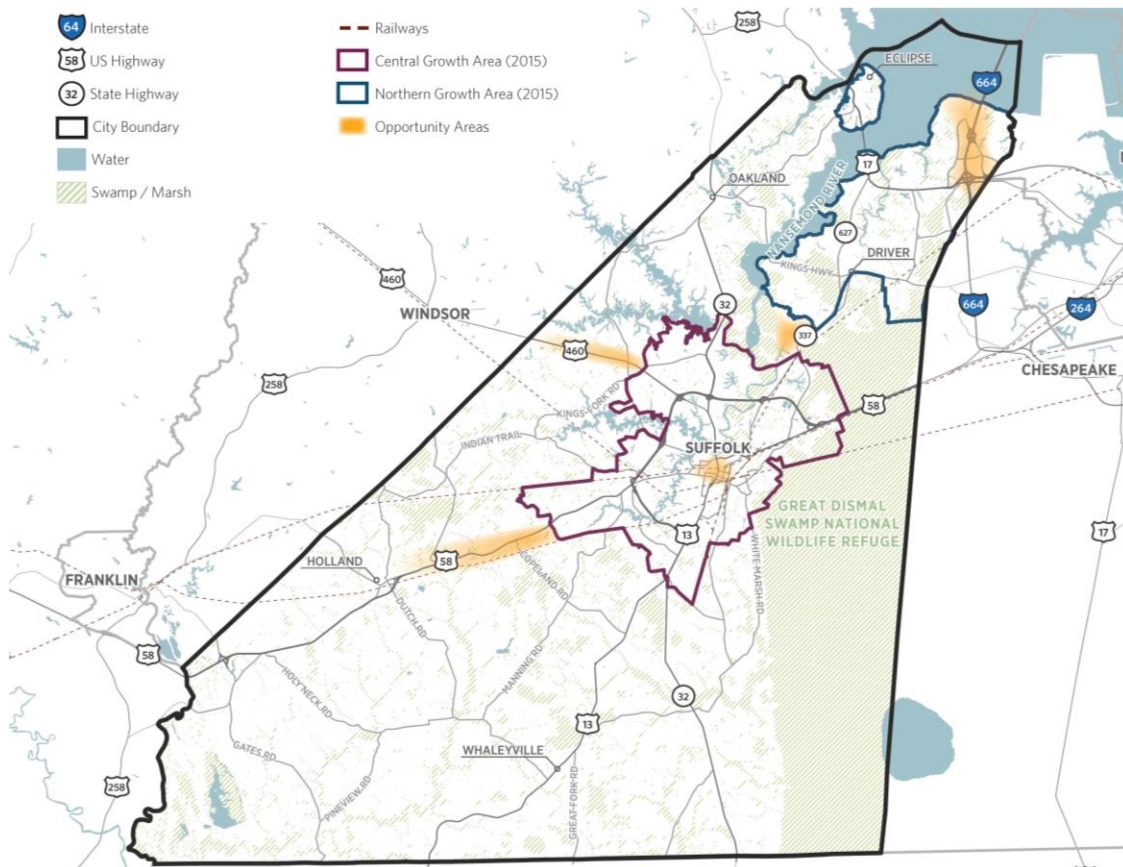
- Prioritize agricultural preservation.
- Coordinate transportation investment and land use decisions; consider phasing carefully.

- Conserve natural areas and open space.
- Take advantage of the opportunities provided by corridors as they develop.
- Encourage quality housing and variety in new housing types (e.g. workforce housing).
- Address potential negative impacts of growth.

B. Growth Areas

Participants were asked to provide comments on five potential opportunity areas for the City as presented below. These are areas where new growth may provide opportunities to support important goals for the City. Some participants expressed that the growth area boundaries should not be changed, while others expressed support for new development along corridors 460 and 58, and aligning boundaries with compatible zoning. (Note: some of these comments were made as part of Activity C.)

Opportunity Areas Map



Key themes from participant responses included:

Route 664 in North Suffolk

- There were a wide range of suggested appropriate land uses for this corridor.
- Suggestions for land uses including single-family housing, apartment living, entertainment and retail, walkable and mixed-use corridors, a truck stop, education/institutional, and continued infill development (undefined).

Area West of 337 between the Northern and Central Growth Areas (Nansemond Parkway)

- Desire for single family residential development with small-scale retail to support residents.
- Concern about the amount of traffic and wetland preservation.

Route 460 extending West from the Central Growth Area

- Maintenance of agricultural and single-family residential uses is important.
- Opportunity for additional industrial and manufacturing uses.

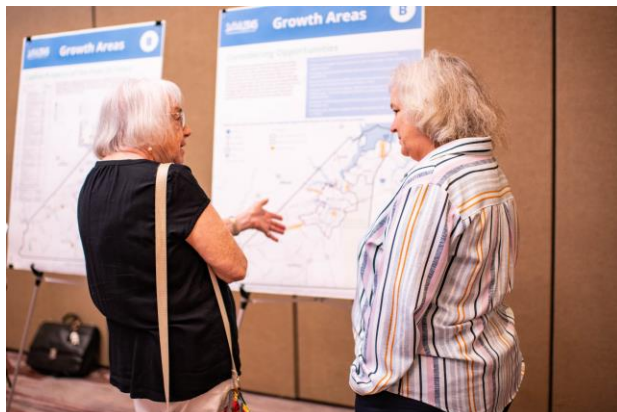
Downtown Suffolk

- More urban shops and restaurants that revitalize the area and promote small businesses should be encouraged.
- Desire to improve safety.
- Desire to preserve the downtown area.

Route 58 extending Southwest from the Central Growth Area

- Desire to keep the area mostly warehousing and increase jobs.
- Prioritize preservation of the remaining open space and agriculture.

Outside of the growth areas, people also expressed a desire to increase recreational opportunities like public pools, and improve multimodal connectivity.

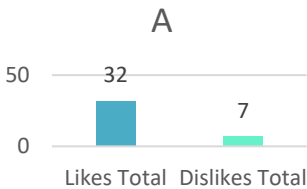


C. Use Districts and Place Types

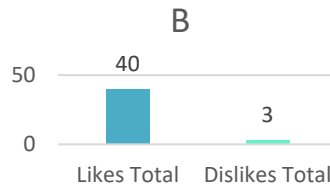
Participants were asked to comment on the overall approach of the Suffolk 2035 use districts and place types. In addition to comments on the growth area boundaries (incorporated into previous notes on Activity B) use district name suggestions include:

- Change suburban to “Outer Ring Suburban” to match inner ring Suburban
- Change mixed use core to “Urban”
- Change core support to “Urban Support”

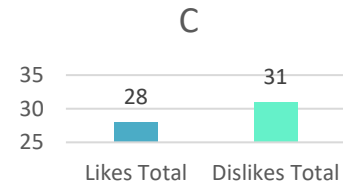
Downtown/Town Center



- Has charm, bring small-town appeal to downtown

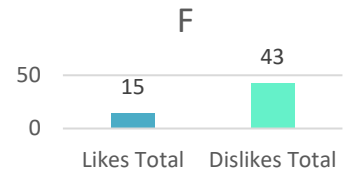
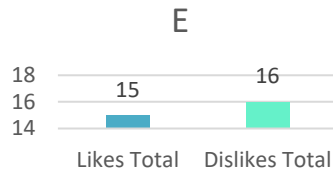
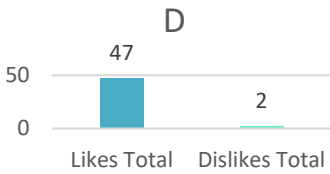


- Mix of residential and business provides more foot traffic
- Would fit in Holland or Downtown



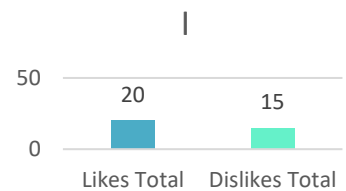
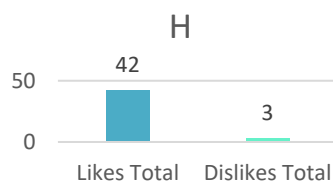
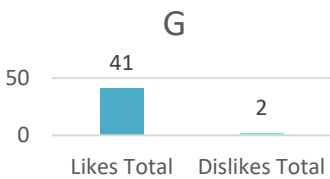
- Appropriate use of mixed-use buildings
- Reduces car dependence
- Would fit in Holland or Downtown

Urban Neighborhood



- Too sterile and closed-off

Traditional Neighborhood Center



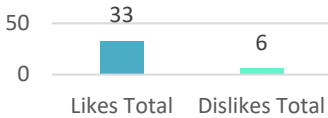
- Dining too close to vehicle traffic
- Would fit somewhere with a view of the harbor

- Would fit on East Washington St.

Traditional Neighborhood



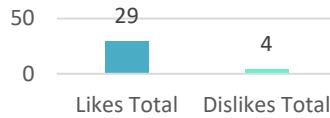
J



- Dislike lack of sidewalks
- Good variety of homes



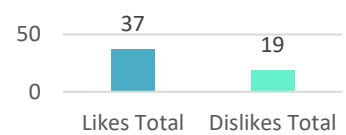
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- Would fit in most neighborhoods



L

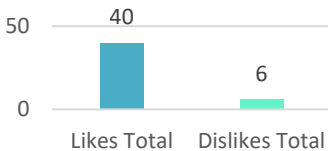


- Good gathering space in communities

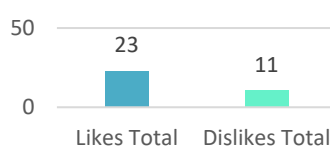
Suburban Center



M



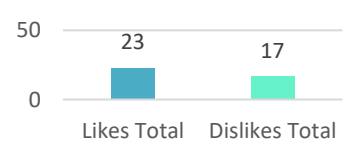
N



- Older character, and brings employment opportunities
- Would fit in West Washington

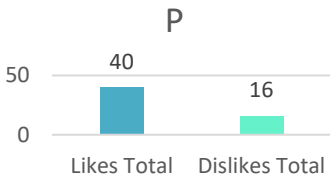


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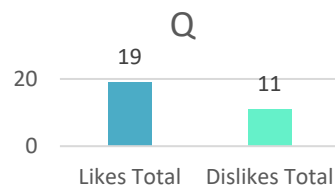


- Worry about malls/town centers remaining well occupied

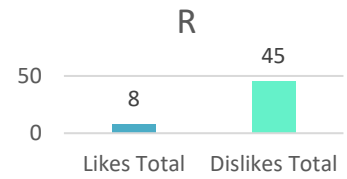
Suburban Neighborhood



- Houses too similar
- Like the bigger lot size
- Would fit in suburbs

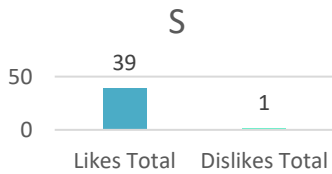


- Houses too close together and too similar

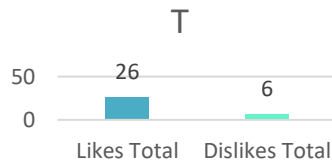


- Mundane

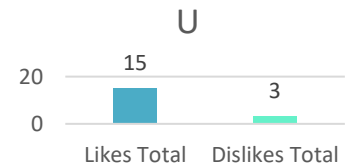
Villages



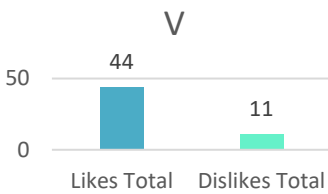
- Quaint and peaceful



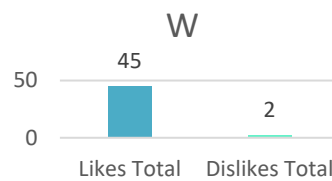
- Needs sidewalks and trees
- Improve building structure
- Would fit in Whaleyville



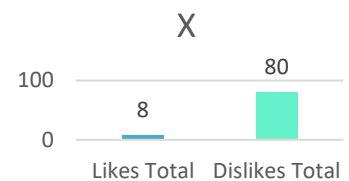
Rural



- Prefer large, rural lots
- Must allow access to agricultural land

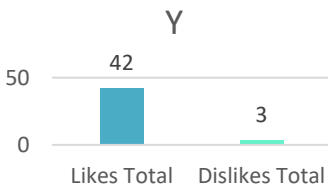


- This is liked – retain farmland

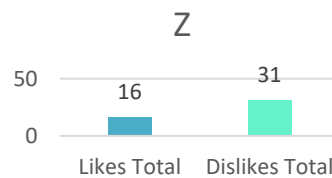


- Not appropriate for rural areas
- Would fit around other warehouses

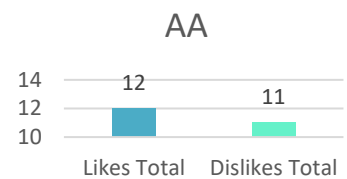
Commercial Corridor



- Dislike street parking (safety)
- Would fit in downtown



- Strip malls have too many vacancies

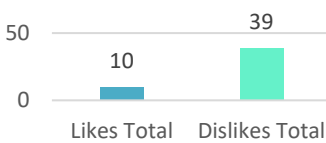


- Accommodates people hanging out
- Would fit in side-streets

Special District



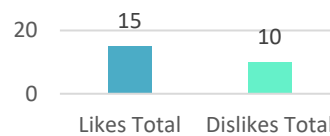
BB



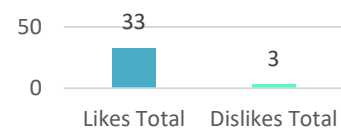
- Would fit in North Suffolk



CC



DD



- Not preferred, but the traditional landscaping is good for office

D. Key Recommendations

Participants were asked to comment on draft key recommendations and to rate them on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Following is a list of recommendations with their average rating and a summary of comments.

Land Use and Development Character

1. Review current zoning districts to align with growth districts and pursue a City-initiated rezoning effort to improve compatibility with the comprehensive plan.
 - Ave. Rating: 3.46/5
 - Comment Summary:
 - Make sure development is distributed throughout the City
 - Rural and agricultural areas need to be preserved
2. Continue to develop new and expand existing incentives that encourage mixed-use development. Encourage affordable housing within these districts.
 - Ave. Rating: 3.50/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Affordable housing options are a necessity
 - Accessibility to open and recreational space is important
 - Continue to invest in current areas that need revitalization
3. Adjust residential density range targets within Use Districts to better align with

recent trends and market demands.

- Ave. Rating: 3.11/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Targets should be able to work in the long run, not just reactionary
 - Walkability and access to transportation are needed
 - Infrastructure must be in place to support any density changes
4. Revise the Unified Development Ordinance (which includes zoning and subdivision regulations) to promote additional affordable/work force housing in the City.
- Ave. Rating: 3.70/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Workforce housing is necessary

Natural and Cultural Resources

5. Continue to promote use of cluster developments to protect environmentally sensitive areas.
- Ave. Rating: 3.72/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - It is important to preserve the environment, especially wetlands
 - Cluster developments should not disrupt habitats and landscape
 - Invest in existing infrastructure and vacant built land
6. Seek public outreach opportunities to educate citizens and stakeholders on new shoreline management strategies including Living Shorelines.
- Ave. Rating: 4.52/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Agree that it is important that education is a focus
 - Look for partners (VIMS, VA Department of Agriculture, HOAs and local colleges, etc.)
7. Utilize VIMS' Comprehensive Coastal Resource Management Portal (CCRMP) Shoreline Best Management Practices for management recommendations for all tidal shorelines in the City.
- Ave. Rating: 3.81/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Should be expanded to rivers/waterways
 - Waterfronts could be used to attract tourism

Economic Development

8. Identify priority economic development sites and make strategic investments to advance site readiness.
 - Ave. Rating: 3.77/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Residents looking for more modern, walkable spaces, not more warehouses
 - Current businesses should continue to be supported and invested in

9. Develop a policy in privately-owned master planned commerce/industrial parks to encourage a diverse industrial base for long-term economic sustainability.
 - Ave. Rating: 3.63/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - A balanced approach is necessary to keep industrial parks from taking over the City
 - Any new development should be environmentally conscious

10. Develop a publicly owned commerce/industrial park to promote diverse industry growth in support of higher-paying jobs.
 - Ave. Rating: 3.78/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Public/private partnerships should be explored
 - Want to encourage higher-paying jobs

11. Prepare master plans and implement development strategies at a strategic area/district scale for Downtown Suffolk and the North Suffolk/Harbor View mixed use core districts.
 - Ave. Rating: 4.42/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Public input is important and people want the opportunity to share thoughts on development strategies
 - A master plan could attract new small businesses and residents to the downtown area

12. Develop a cultural arts district for Downtown Suffolk to support existing and attract new cultural arts activities and related organizations and businesses.
 - Ave. Rating: 3.96/5
 - Comments Summary:
 - Want a “hip” downtown
 - Bring more tourists into the area and support local artists

- Looking for programs with strong resiliency

Rural Lands Conservation

13. Develop/amend ordinances to mitigate the impacts of utility scale solar installations on surrounding properties and agricultural and environmental resources in the City.

- Ave. Rating: 4.03/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Should promote positive growth
 - Be mindful of agricultural land/wildlife habitats and utilize rooftop solar where possible

14. Identify and implement strategies to protect and grow the City's agriculture and agriculture-related businesses.

- Ave. Rating: 4.38/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Talk with citizens about their needs

15. Continue to review the minor subdivision ordinance requirements to ensure compliance with adequate public facilities standards and other growth management objectives.

- Ave. Rating: 4.68/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Make sure infrastructure can support the developments
 - Enforce subdivision requirements consistently
 - Discourage splitting farms into small lots

Schools

16. Focus on rehabilitating, expanding or rebuilding schools, while conducting priority preventative maintenance needs of existing schools such as replacing HVAC, roofs and playgrounds in accordance with the joint facilities plan.

- Ave. Rating: 4.51/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Aim for LEED buildings
 - Recommendations should include time frames as well as prioritization

17. Implement a regular data collection and review of school capacity, attendance zones, and student population to accurately anticipate student generation as populations shift and family dynamics change generationally.

- Ave. Rating: 4.70/5

- Comments Summary:
 - Increase multimodal access to schools
 - Consider increase in private schools
 - People looking for more measurable elements and accountability

Transportation

18. Prioritize transportation investments to address corridors that will be most affected by growth in local development and regional traffic, both within and outside of the Growth Areas.

- Ave. Rating: 4.63/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Roadway infrastructure needs to be updated to support the current traffic first
 - Transportation investments should be a high priority

19. Ensure that new growth will improve multimodal connectivity in the Growth Areas through complete streets and better pedestrian, bike and transit connections.

- Ave. Rating: 4.55/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Good connectivity should be required
 - Safety is very important

City Services

20. Continue to support provision of high-speed, reliable, and affordable fiber internet service to City residents and businesses.

- Ave. Rating: 4.76/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Additional options should be offered

21. Continue to focus on the adequacy and funding of public facilities, including roads and public utilities in the review and approval of new development.

- Ave. Rating: 4.44/5
- Comments Summary:
 - This is very important
 - Infrastructure cannot support the current usage

22. Continue to develop and implement projects within the City's Capital Improvement Plan for the timely repair or replacement of system assets to ensure sufficient capacity to meet current and future demands, promote

economic development growth, and protect adjacent surface water bodies within the City.

- Ave. Rating: 4.61/5

23. Ensure that the planning for and availability of public infrastructure services and facilities is coordinated within the Growth Areas.

- Ave. Rating: 4.67/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Focus on water and waste management
 - Make sure there is adequate funding to keep things from stagnating

Plan Implementation

24. Develop and implement an ongoing process to engage the community in the implementation of the Suffolk 2045 comprehensive plan.

- 4.85/5
- Comments Summary:
 - Keep the community engaged and informed
 - Citizen boards could help educate the staff and areas they live in