



## Fall 2021 Change Academy Session 1 Notes

Doug Jackson began the session with an introduction to the purpose of this series. We hope to explore the City's<sup>1</sup> vision for the next twenty years, to hear how local leaders anticipate fulfilling the goals of City Plan 2040, and to use what we've learned and discussed to consider concrete steps towards building a more equitable society right here in Roanoke.

**Observations:** After the introduction, participants shared their general observations, reactions, and reflections on the first section of the plan, "Interwoven Equity." Respondents said that they were impressed by the plan, particularly by how ambitious it is. One participant noted that a theme that stood out to them is trust. We have the ingredients for success, but trust needs to be incorporated.

**Overview Presentation:** Assistant City Manager Chris Chittum provided some information on the background of the comprehensive plan's development and goals. He noted that most municipalities have a comprehensive plan, and that the development of City Plan 2040 took three years, involving hundreds of community members. It was adopted in December 2020.

- A key focus of City Plan 2040 is getting back to a neighborhood model. Since the 1950s, many neighborhoods have de-densified because of suburbanization and the development of malls. The Complete Neighborhoods idea is that people should be able to live their entire life cycles in neighborhoods in which they can work, support local businesses, and access services. It is a declaration that the mall model is not sustainable because it causes multiple types of segregation and isolation. To develop complete neighborhoods, we must consider:
  - How we get commercial development in neighborhoods
  - How we can turn inward for economic development and give local people opportunities to grow
  - What housing options for young people and seniors are (outside the model of the single-family home for a nuclear family)
  - How we use land and what we encourage
- Luckily, we already have the infrastructure in place to make complete neighborhoods work.
- Another big concept is: how do we invest in our people? There is a big difference between life expectancies in Southwest City compared to Northwest and Southeast. What budget items can we use to address these sorts of discrepancies? Policies help us make decisions into the future.

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<sup>1</sup> A note on capitalizations: "City" refers to the City of Roanoke as an organization consisting of elected officials, appointed officials, and employees; "city" refers to the 100,000 residents of our municipality, and all the communities therein

- Interwoven Equity is a best practice in many planning departments. It is the most difficult part of the plan to work through, which is exactly why we are focusing on it—so we can grow as a city. However, the section is unique to us. It was developed by us.
- The City has earned its distrust through past policies and actions. Even if current employees and elected officials were not responsible for practices of the past, it is still our responsibility to build trust.
  - City Council established the Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board before the adoption of the 2040 plan. This group will constantly advocate for equity. We've built in the advocacy and the board was developed before the plan was even approved. Council was eager to get it launched.
- The City is working on building equity into its budgeting process. By making this part of policy, it leads to thousands of decisions that impact the community. For example, the \$64 million Star City Strong funds provide an opportunity to equitably implement part of the 2040 comprehensive plan.

**Stakeholder Perspective:** Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board member Angela Penn discussed her experience with the development and implementation of City Plan 2040, with a focus on Interwoven Equity.

- Angela noted that an instrumental part of the process of developing the new comprehensive plan was actually when the group paused its efforts to develop a more equitable approach. The community meetings were only scheduled during the daytime, which was excluding people. Evening sessions were added, which gave more members of the community an opportunity to be heard. After the initial discussions, people were able to give feedback that went into the plan. City Plan 2040 is stronger because of this.
- The Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board (EEAB) was formed about ten months ago and consists of seven community members, led by a few City Council members. It consists of sub-committees that are looking at each area of the plan.
  - First, the committee spent some time learning about City policy and talked to staff about the steps involved in certain processes, such as the steps of property assessment.
  - A key question for the Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board is: how do they communicate information with our citizens? Residents noted that they didn't have the chance to participate in the renaming of what is now Henrietta Lacks Plaza, or did not even know it was happening. The board is also reviewing the City's website. The EEAB has public hearings every three months, but nobody attended the last one.
  - The EEAB is looking at greenlining as a way to provide proactive and affirmative information on economic opportunities, particularly for people of color.
  - These are complex issues that will take time.

**Q&A:** Instead of breaking into small groups as planned, we spent the remainder of the session in the large group so people could ask Chris and Angela questions. Below are some thoughts that came out of this discussion:

- A proven way to decrease segregation is to change zoning and housing policies.

- Virginia is the only state that uses the independent city model. This model also enables surrounding counties to benefit from the economic impact of nearby cities without providing supports or services in return. Nearly all of the country's independent cities are in Virginia.
  - This model skews our segregation statistics some. Roanoke's level of segregation is about average for a city in the South, and our desegregation is moving too slowly
  - Virginia is also a Dillon Rule state, which means that localities only have the authority that the state gives them. For more information, visit <https://www.williamsburgva.gov/173/Dillon-Rule>.
- TAP has been designated as the land bank for the City. Property TAP acquires can be made available to nonprofits that provide affordable housing.
  - If you are interested in joining discussions on building a community land trust, contact Hunter Hartley at [w.hunter.hartley@gmail.com](mailto:w.hunter.hartley@gmail.com)
- Around 1960, Roanoke was larger than most cities in North Carolina. Since then, however, North Carolina's cities have grown much faster than Roanoke, Norfolk, and Virginia Beach have; Roanoke has only gained 10,000 people since 1960. This is, in part, the legacy of white flight.
- Roanoke is 43 square miles. We have approximately seven times more land zoned for commercial use than we likely need.