

Vision Dixie Approach

A Statement by the Vision Dixie Steering Committee November 1, 2006

Purpose of Vision Dixie

The purpose of Vision Dixie is to create a long-term vision that will ensure a high quality of life in Washington County for years to come. Vision Dixie will do this by engaging the citizens of Washington County in a facilitated conversation about growth, gathering their ideas, employing sound data and scenario analysis, and outlining publicly supported principles to guide future land use and transportation decisions.

Relationship to Washington County Growth and Conservation Act

- The Washington County Growth and Conservation Act of 2006 (“Lands Bill”) does not specifically provide for the Vision Dixie process. Nevertheless, Vision Dixie is an outgrowth of the discussion surrounding the Lands Bill and likely would not have occurred without the bill.
- The issues addressed by Vision Dixie are much broader than those covered in the Lands Bill. Whereas the Lands Bill focuses on public land issues, Vision Dixie also covers the issues typically addressed in local general plans (i.e., land use, housing type, etc.), and countywide transportation plans. Because the vast majority of land in Washington County is publicly owned and managed, any growth-related planning must consider impacts on both public and private land.
- By resolution, the Washington County Commission has determined that if the Lands Bill passes, the results of the Vision Dixie process will guide how much and which BLM lands, if any, are disposed of under the bill.
- Whether or not the Lands Bill passes, the Vision Dixie process will continue and the conclusions reached through the process will guide ongoing county and local general plans and land use decisions.

Workshops

Vision Dixie will host a series of workshops throughout the county that are open to all interested parties. The Steering Committee hopes that a wide and diverse cross section of area citizens will participate in the workshops so the brainstorming sessions yield the best possible thinking about our future. Many workshops have been scheduled in various locations throughout the county in an effort to attract as much attendance as possible. Participants will be divided into small groups to express their preferences for future development and conservation through a facilitated mapping exercise. The workshops are “brainstorming” sessions that will generate ideas to be tested during the scenarios

phase of the process. The workshops are not a public referendum or vote on any particular ideas.

Workshop base maps will show current land ownership and development. All participants will receive relevant information about land development potential, including threatened and endangered plant and animal habitat, steep slopes, flood plains, wetlands, Wilderness Study Areas, and more. With an understanding of these constraints, participants may propose future development or conservation in any part of the county.

Scenario Analysis

Vision Dixie will create a series of scenarios – alternative views of future Washington County development – that can be analyzed to determine how they would impact quality of life. This approach fosters more informed decision-making.

The scenarios will be based on workshop feedback and existing data. They will reflect various planning strategies and a range of potential outcomes, including different amounts of public lands that might be conserved or converted to private developable land. In all scenarios, Vision Dixie will seek to locate proposed development to minimize negative impacts on hazardous land forms (e.g., floodplains, rockfall areas, steep slopes, etc.), or other lands deemed important for habitat, recreation, aesthetics or cultural preservation.

Using sound analytical techniques, Vision Dixie will project the impact of each scenario on key measures of quality of life, such as critical lands, housing affordability, air quality, relative development densities, traffic congestion, etc.

Public Review of Scenario Results and Creation of Washington County Vision

The results of the scenario analysis will be presented to the public at community meetings. Armed with information regarding the effects of alternative development patterns, the public will have an opportunity to express their preference.

Taking the best elements from the scenarios, and steered by public preferences, Vision Dixie will create a Washington County Vision. Vision Dixie will identify planning principles embodied in the publicly supported features of the scenarios. This Vision will include a county map suggesting preferred land use patterns and a set of guiding principles that can serve as a foundation for general plan amendments, as well as guidance and local input for federal and state land managers.

Identifying Lands for Development

Because of the scale of the analysis and the multi-jurisdictional nature of the public involvement, the preceding process is not well-suited to identify specific parcels of public lands for disposal. Nevertheless, the process can help the public and decision-makers gauge the approximate amount and location of land disposition the community supports.

This information could help shape the language or implementation of the Lands Bill, a more detailed determination of specific BLM parcels for potential disposal, or any other efforts to determine the appropriate end state of public lands in Washington County.

If the Lands Bill passes and the Washington County Vision reflects a sound basis and clear public preference for BLM land disposal, an additional phase (Phase II) could be added to conduct the fine-grained analysis needed to identify specific, appropriate lands.

Phase II would start by identifying specific lands based on the Washington County Vision and assessing whether disposal of those lands would be consistent with the strategies and principles identified in the Vision. More detailed and relevant technical information for each parcel would also be included in the discussion. Phase II would inform, but not supplant NEPA or any other legally required process.

In summary, if the Lands Bill passes and the Washington County Vision proposes the sale of BLM lands, the community-supported strategies embodied in the Vision can help Washington County select BLM lands for disposal that will best support a high overall quality of life over the long-term.