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'Common Vision' document unveiled

December 9, 2010 - By Matt Armstrong Journal Staff Writer

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HARPERS FERRY - Members of the Blue Ridge Mountain communities and Jefferson County came out to Blue Ridge Elementary School for a public meeting regarding the "Common Vision" document Tuesday night.

The document, prepared by consultant groups Downstream Strategies and Harbor Engineering Inc., which were hired through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant awarded to the county, is intended to help the County Commission, Planning Commission and the Department of Planning and Zoning create a small area watershed management plan for the Blue Ridge Mountain.

"This has been designed all along as a process of listening to you rather than telling," said Planning Commission President John Maxey. "The Planning Commission is not here to tell people on the Blue Ridge how to manage their affairs and protect the environment. We're here to present a problem and to ask you, who know best, how to go about solving it."

The purpose of the meeting was to unveil the Common Vision document and its engineering report, said County Planner Seth Rivard.

"The vision document was created, from a series of meetings, from citizen input, and that information was taken by Downstream Strategies, and they have written the vision report based on what the citizens have said," Rivard said. "The engineering report has taken best-measured practices from other communities and put that in an engineering document."

Now that the county has the Common Vision document, the plan is to proceed with a small area watershed management plan for the Blue Ridge Mountain.

"We will not adopt anything or implement anything without further public input and consultation with the public," Rivard said. "That's what we intend to do, move forward from a broad vision to something a little more concrete."

The vision document contained statements about where citizens would like to see the mountain communities in 20 years, and the engineering report addresses other areas, such as stormwater management and how to control runoff.

"We have to balance property rights and the need for some improvements to some of the lack of stormwater or watershed management runoff here on the mountain," Rivard said.

Property rights were an important issue in the Common Vision document, as well as to elected officials who attended the meeting.

"I had an opportunity to be involved in the process, and one of the things that I've heard, over and over again, was the idea of

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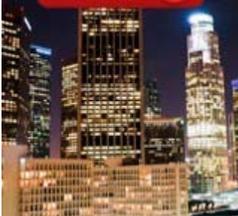
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preserving the individual property owners' property rights, as well as being sensitive to the environment," Jefferson County Commissioner Dale Manuel said. "If you can come up with that kind of a balance, it's fantastic. It's very difficult to, at the same time, make sure that no one gets compromised with what they can and cannot do with their property."

Board members for the nonprofit organization Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains attended Tuesday night's meeting to present its 2010 Friend of the Mountain Award to the Jefferson County Planning Commission.

"We give the award to an individual or to an organization that is taking on some initiative that enhances and preserves and develops the Blue Ridge Mountains," said Al Van Huyck, president of the organization. "We saw and recognized this Blue Ridge communities effort as the initiation of a watershed plan for the mountain, and we figured this is really quite unique. What you're doing here in Jefferson County is truly a unique effort."

For additional information on the Common Vision document, or to view the document itself, go to www.blueridgecommunitiesplan.com.

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