

## City Council approves contract with consultant to develop new comprehensive plan

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28



## City selects Town Planning and Urban Design for citywide planning effort

Spartanburg City Council took the next step towards developing a new citywide comprehensive plan at their meeting on Monday, unanimously approving a \$250,000 contract with Town Planning and Urban Design to lead the effort to develop the City's first comprehensive plan since 2004. The plan, which is required by state law, will guide the city's development for the next decade and will have an impact long after that, informing strategies on areas as wide-ranging as racial equity, housing, economics, health and wellness, parks and recreation, public facilities, infrastructure, traffic, and the overall livability of Spartanburg for its residents.

The 18-month process will include a robust and varied public input plan, which will include extensive information gathering from all corners of the city. Work is expected to begin on the planning process in the coming weeks.

Also at Monday's meeting, City Council heard a report from consultants AECOM detailing the results of their study of SPARTA, the City's public transit system. AECOM's recommendations were broken down into short-term, cost neutral recommendations including streamlining the bus system's eight routes and the exploration of a vanpool program to fill gaps in the current system and longer term recommendations that would require additional funding such as extended transit hours and increased frequency of those routes.

Also noted was a lack of opportunity for city residents without reliable transportation to accept job opportunities with major employers located in Spartanburg County. Including that service would also need additional funding. Currently, SPARTA is funded by Federal Transit Authority funds (33 percent), City revenue (22 percent), and State funding (11 percent). Bus fares make up around 14 percent of SPARTA revenue. Though the system includes routes with stops outside city limits, Spartanburg County contributes no funding to the SPARTA system. Council is expected to deliberate some of the recommendations brought by AECOM at a future meeting.

Council also voted 5-2 to approve design and placement standards for small cell "5G" wireless installations after postponing their second reading for the ordinance in order to gather more data and public input. As part of that process, a public meeting occurred on Tuesday, October 22, 2019. At that

meeting citizens, residents and non-residents of the City, expressed concerns about the installations affect on health, privacy, and their aesthetics. As a result of that meeting, the City's approved process for the implementation of small cell facilities will allow staff to factor into the permit decision the proposed locations, will regulate radio frequency, will provide notice to owners and residents within a certain distance of proposed site, will protect historic trees, and will minimize negative visual impacts of the facilities through concealment requirements. Council members Erica Brown and Jerome Rice voted against the revised standards.

Telecommunications companies cite the potential for 5G's increased capacity and speed to be used for everything from improved home and mobile internet connectivity to the future of automated vehicles and advanced virtual reality therapies that could revolutionize healthcare. Health concerns cited by opponents on Monday reference the higher frequencies needed to achieve that increased capacity and speed. Those [non-ionizing](#) frequencies are above commonly used radio wave frequencies—operating in the same range as airport scanners and radar installations used by the military—and sit below the infrared and visible light spectrum, far below the dangerous [ionizing](#) ultraviolet, x-ray and gamma ray radiation spectrum.