

Albemarle County's Citizen Advisory Committees Get the Word Out (and Back In!)

Here in Albemarle, we're making citizen engagement part of the routine. Engaging citizens across 726 square miles to keep them informed and part of the conversation for the myriad issues facing the County at any given time is a monumental task. Local TV, radio, periodicals, and e-news help to push out information, but those outlets do not provide a straightforward way for people to give feedback. To bring local government out to the community, Albemarle County implemented Community Advisory Committees (CACs).

Originally an extension of the master plan process, the seven CACs focus on issues facing their respective master plan areas – discrete geographic areas that are small enough to feel like a tight-knit community and large enough to bring a diversity of stakeholders to the table. Committee members represent neighborhoods, businesses, and other specific interests and each CAC includes a liaison from the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission. The Committees are citizen-run, with a Chair elected by the members to create the agenda and preside over the meetings, and meetings are held in the community – at libraries, schools, and fire stations across Albemarle.

CACs meet monthly and provide a regular venue for the community to get together, learn about current issues, and, most importantly, weigh-in on rezonings and special use permits, parks and trails planning, and capital projects in their part of the County. CACs also serve as an established venue for discussing special countywide topics, like the budget, stormwater management funding and recycling. CACs do not have decision-making authority, but allow the Supervisor, Planning Commissioner, and staff the benefit of hearing directly from the community regarding their support and concerns on a particular issue, which helps craft recommendations and policy. But most importantly, it gives citizens a way to get involved in local issues close to home.