

CHAPTER 1: ADOPTING A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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HOW DO I DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

If there is any single document essential to a successful Toolkit implementation, it is a comprehensive plan that:

- Documents a community's shared vision;
- Establishes the guiding principles for how the community will grow and develop;
- Serves as the guide book for all decisions made by the governing bodies;
- Includes issues such as economic development, growth management, schools and public facilities, streets and infrastructure, parks and open space, future land use and development patterns; and
- Is meaningful and accurately represents the desires of the community.

Each decision the community makes should be viewed through the lens of the comprehensive plan. If the decision is not consistent with or does not advance the comprehensive plan, it should be rejected. In the political realm, a comprehensive plan can provide the political support they need to make difficult, but wise, decisions.

What Goes into a Comprehensive Plan?

There is a wide variety of information that may be included in a comprehensive plan. Some comprehensive plans focus only on growth and land use while others may also address issues such as parks, transportation, infrastructure, economic development and schools. Regardless of the plan's form, the ultimate goal is that the plan and the associated public planning process serve as the venue for making many of the difficult decisions about the future of the community.

How Does a Comprehensive Plan Impact the Toolkit?

A comprehensive plan provides the policy basis for how the Toolkit will apply on the ground. It designates where and how to map regional growth sectors, context areas and zoning districts, and helps guide the custom tailoring of specific Toolkit standards. Additionally, a comprehensive plan provides the legal basis for implementing zoning and adopting new land use and development regulations.

What Comprehensive Plan Components are Required to Get Started with the Toolkit?

For the purposes of using the Toolkit to develop a zoning code, a subdivision code or a complete development code, a comprehensive plan must identify a shared community vision, a sound growth management strategy and the location of future land uses. Each of these topics are outlined below.

Shared Community Vision

The values and planning principles contained in a comprehensive plan should be reduced to a shared community vision or set of value statements. The shared community vision is used to guide the difficult decisions that must be made during the course of the using the Toolkit to customize a zoning, subdivision or complete development code.

Growth Management Strategy

The implementation process will require the community to make decisions about where and how a community will grow. It will determine the appropriate level of intensity and the desired character that areas of your community should have in the future. A well thought out and publicly supported growth management strategy will make these decisions much easier.

STEP 1: DEVELOP A SHARED COMMUNITY VISION

The shared community vision and guiding principles are typically the first step in the comprehensive planning process. There are a number of different methods for developing a vision. Communities have found design charrettes, public workshops, town hall meetings and public polling to be effective ways to get the public participation that is essential for this step. A combination of methods may be best. What is important is that the entire process be as transparent as possible and reach as many people willing to participate as possible.

One factor to consider is that before engaging in any of these public processes it is important that the planning staff or consultants have a firm, fact-based understanding of the existing conditions of the community as well as demographic projections of anticipated future growth. This knowledge will go along way toward keeping the public discussion firmly rooted in real possibilities.

What Should our Shared Vision Look Like?

There is no one correct answer to this but if you are reading this document and thinking about using the Toolkit, then hopefully your community's vision is founded on the Smart Growth principles discussed in the first chapter. These principles offer a good starting point to begin the discussion of how your community will grow in the future.

The format of the vision is less specific. Some plans set it out as a series of formal guiding principles, other communities condense it into short descriptive paragraphs. Still others may integrate pieces of their vision throughout their planning document. Ultimately, there is no right answer so long as your vision is easily identified and it is reinforced by the planning document.



SHARED COMMUNITY VISION. THE SHARED COMMUNITY VISION DEVELOPED THROUGH A THOROUGH PUBLIC PLANNING PROCESS.

STEP 2: DEVELOP A GROWTH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

One of the most important and difficult decisions a community can make is where and how they allow growth to occur. If a community decides to build a road, open a new school or extend urban services (sewer, water, police & fire) to an area it will almost certainly generate growth in that area. These activities must be coordinated with land use and infrastructure planning and the comprehensive plan is the place to do this.

Economic, Environmental, Political Implications

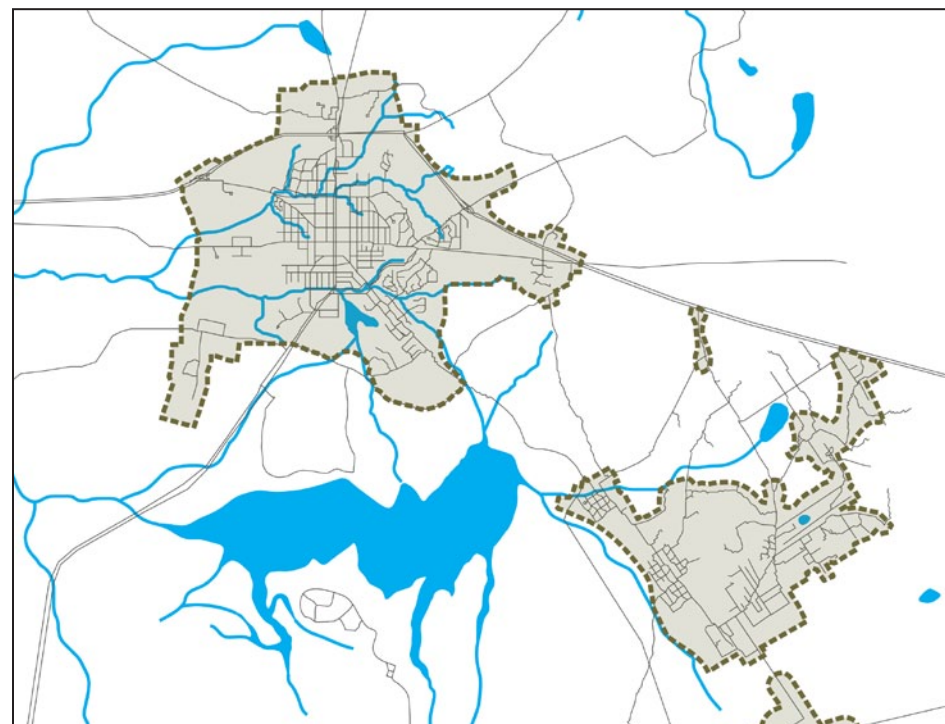
As unplanned growth occurs, residents often must subsidize the cost of sewers, roads, utilities, police and fire protection and schools. When growth is allowed to sprawl out from existing infrastructure, the community must pay even more to extending services. However, when new growth is focused inward where capacity for services already exists, the costs for the community are reduced. Unplanned and unmanaged growth perpetuates urban or suburban sprawl. Sprawl destroys environmentally sensitive lands. Focusing growth inward preserves the rural and natural lands at the community's edge. The political implications of unplanned growth emerge in public conversations about the location and intensity of new growth. Without a clear growth management strategy, neighbors often oppose everything located in "their backyard."

What Goes into a Growth Management Strategy?

One way to think about growth management is to identify where your community is willing to extend an urban level of services. The urban service "boundary" helps guide planners and decision makers about what level of development is appropriate inside the boundary as opposed to outside the boundary.

How Do We Display Our Strategy?

For the purposes of implementing the Toolkit, your growth management strategy should be summarized as a projected urban services boundary within the planning time frame. If your comprehensive plan is looking 15 years into the future, then your projected urban services boundary must realistically indicate where you plan to extend an urban level of services within this time frame.



URBAN SERVICES BOUNDARY MAP. SHOWS HOW A MODEL COMMUNITY MIGHT EXTEND THEIR URBAN LEVEL OF SERVICES WITHIN THEIR PLANNING HORIZON.

STEP 3: CREATE A FUTURE LAND USE MAP

What is a Future Land Use Map?

A future land use map graphically communicates the community’s vision and projects how the community should develop over the course of the planning time frame. This map doesn’t necessarily reflect current uses, but rather the uses desired in the near future.

The future land use map is not a zoning map. It does not entitle property with any rights nor does it take any property rights away. The land use classifications are very broad and reflect only general land uses such as mixed use commercial, low density residential, agriculture, industrial or civic. Each category might eventually have multiple context areas and zoning districts implementing it.

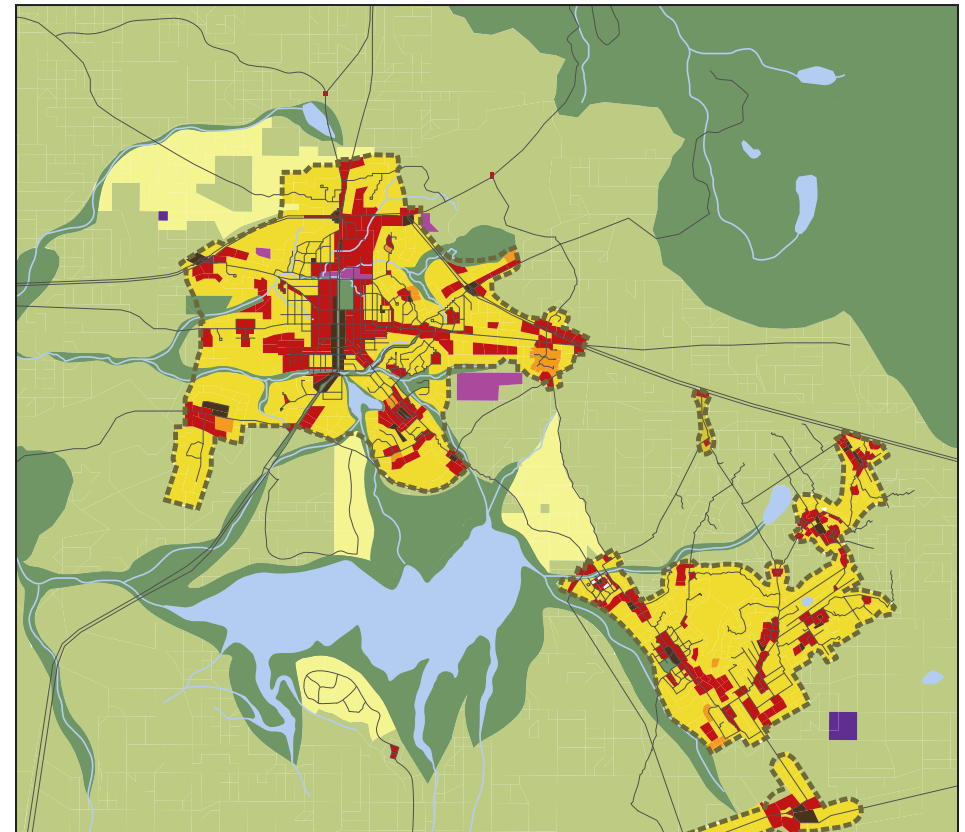
What Purpose Does the Future Land Use Map Serve?

The purpose of this policy map is to guide the mapping of regional growth sectors, context areas and zoning districts during Toolkit implementation ([Chapter 2: Mapping the Toolkit](#)). Decisions made during the zoning or rezoning of property must be consistent with this map and may require the governing bodies to amend the future land use map as conditions change. For example, if the future land use map shows an area as low density residential, then you should not re-zone the property to commercial mixed use without amending the future land use map to reflect this change.

Why Must Zoning be Consistent with the Future Land Use Map?

One of the primary roles of the development code is to advance the policies established in the comprehensive plan. If the provisions of the development code are not consistent with the plan, then the rationale behind the zoning is questionable and open to legal attack.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP. SHOWS HOW A MODEL COMMUNITY MIGHT DESIGNATE BASIC FUTURE LAND USES IN THEIR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.



- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ OPEN SPACE | ■ COMMERCIAL MIXED USE |
| ■ AGRICULTURE | ■ MAIN STREET COMMERCIAL |
| ■ LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL | ■ CIVIC |
| ■ MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL | ■ INDUSTRIAL |
| ■ HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL | ■ WATER |

STEP 4: IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Either as part of your comprehensive plan or as an appendix to an already prepared plan, consider working with a planning and zoning expert to prepare a report or memorandum identifying all current regulatory barriers to implementing the community vision adopted in your plan. This report should serve as a diagnostic summary of how effective or ineffective your regulations are. In the event that you decide to implement the Toolkit it will be a helpful reminder to staff, the advisory committee and the public of what needs attention.

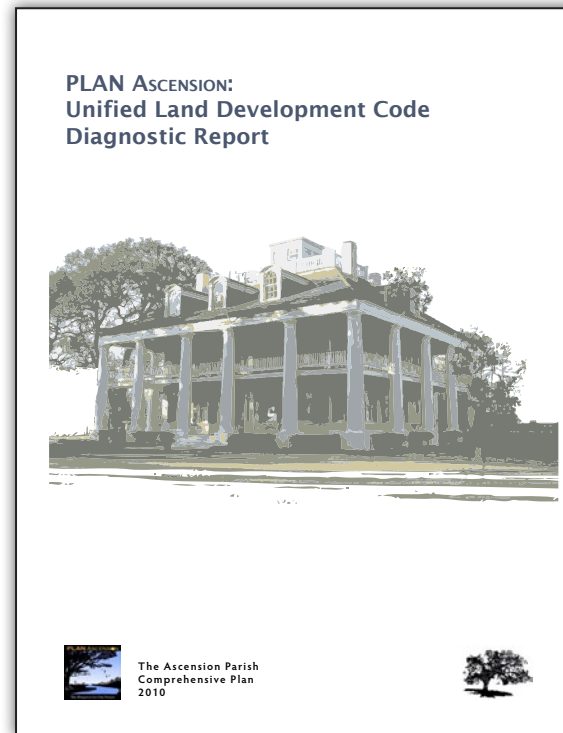
What Types of Barriers?

Ideally this diagnostic will identify specific areas where existing regulations stand in the way of specific plan goals. For instance, if your plan contains a goal of preserving the rural character of the parish, but your zoning allows one acre estate lots throughout the parish, then the lack of a true rural zoning district (20 acre lots or larger) may prevent your rural preservation goal from being implemented.

Another example might be that your plan calls for building vibrant, walkable, mixed use neighborhoods, but your zoning regulations lack mixed use districts or have site dimensional standards that are focused on accommodating the automobile as opposed to the pedestrian.

Who Should Prepare this Report?

If your community is currently preparing a comprehensive plan, then consider asking the author of the plan or perhaps another professional planner or land use attorney to help prepare this report. Another alternative may be the local planning staff; however, they may be too closely involved with the regulations to be able to provide an unbiased opinion. The Center for Planning Excellence may be able to help provide you with contacts of professional planners capable of preparing such a report.



DIAGNOSTIC REPORT. PREPARE A REPORT IDENTIFYING CURRENT REGULATORY BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING THE COMMUNITY VISION ADOPTED IN YOUR PLAN.

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