
CHAPTER

2

COMMUNITY PLANNING

EFRAIM GIL
ENID LUCCHESI

*Planning is not this document.
Planning is dynamic. Planning is a verb.*
—DARRYL FULMER

MODULE 5: TYPES OF PLANS



Comprehensive Plan

Monterey, California, is a city of old and new homes, red-tiled shopping centers, a historic cannery district, ocean beach, highways, and curving streets. San Jose, California, is a large sprawl of a city with closely packed new housing developments stretching up to brown hills and green mountains, with extensive shopping centers, low-income housing underneath freeways, and an exciting downtown with upscale hotels, interesting shops,

a variety of restaurants, and a park. A low-cost trolley connects the far ends of San Jose with each other and with the central downtown area.

These cities are really just large collections of people with differing tastes, interests, and resources who have settled in the same geographic location primarily because they found employment there. Yet, each city has its own identity, somehow separate from the individuals who live in it. What creates that identity? How do you know you're in Monterey, not San Jose? How do you know you're in Kankakee, Illinois, not Park Forest, Illinois?

Different places can look different—the layout of the homes, the location of the business district, the industry or lack of it, the landscaping, the general physical setting—each is unique. Some areas, neighborhoods, and communities are arranged for the convenience and pleasure of their residents and visitors, new development is well integrated, and the community functions efficiently. Other places appear to have little order, travel throughout the community is difficult, and community services, such as parks, appear inadequate.

What makes the difference? Economic conditions, culture, history—these factors and more affect the nature of a community. However, one pivotal factor that makes a difference is the extent to which the community has guided the use and development of its environment through a comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive plans help a community affect its growth and development. Equally important, the comprehensive plan can be an important tool to prevent degradation of natural resources, preserve prime agricultural land, protect historic buildings, maintain the commercial and economic base, provide good public facilities, or improve the quality of the housing stock.

How does it do this? The comprehensive plan is the only public document that describes the community as a whole in terms of its complex and mutually supporting networks. As a policy statement of long-term goals, it provides both a broad perspective and a guide to short-term community decisions. Many plans express the land-use aspects through a land-use map attached to the plan.

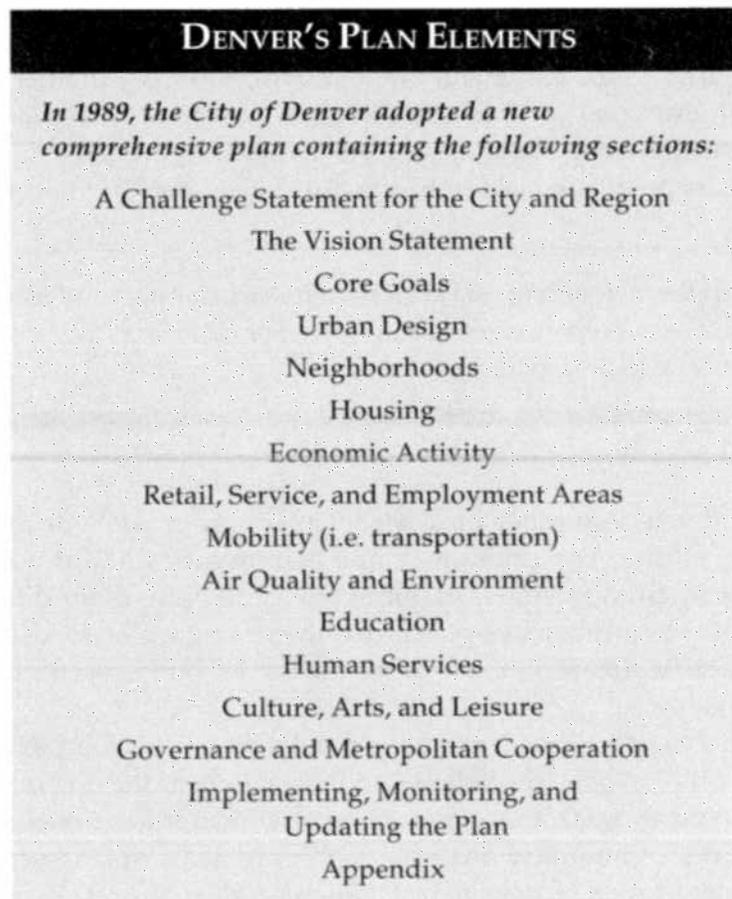
In short, the comprehensive plan is:

- A public guide to community decision making.
- An assessment of the community's needs.
- A statement of community values, goals, and objectives.
- A blueprint for the community's physical development.
- A public document adopted by government.
- Continuously updated as conditions change.

Find the page in your comprehensive plan that gives the date of adoption and identify who has adopted it (city council, board of trustees, etc.). How widely was your plan distributed? Was there press coverage? Where are copies of your comprehensive plan currently located? (Exercise 5-1)

The comprehensive plan usually covers a period of 15 to 20 years. It is a description, through goals and objectives, of how the community wants to look at the end of that time. The policies and descriptions in each element of the plan show how the community will get there.

Look at your comprehensive plan. Locate the goals, objectives, and policies for each section. Are they summarized at the front? Are the goals restated at the beginning of each section? Formats vary. At this point, determine whether your community's plan has all of the elements. What elements are missing? (Exercise 5-2)



Though the organization and format vary, comprehensive plans generally contain the following elements:

- Significant features of the physical environment and natural resources.
- Demographic profile of the community.
- Location and description of existing and proposed land uses on a land-use map.

- Water and sewer systems.
- Existing and planned transportation systems.
- Existing and planned business, industry, and job centers.
- Existing and planned public facilities and services.
- Existing housing stock, its condition, cost, and location.
- Historic preservation.
- Parks, recreation, and open space.

Before you jump to the conclusion that your community plan is wrong, remember that different communities will include different elements. Each plan is based on state statutes and the unique circumstances of the community. Almost all communities will have land-use, transportation, and public facilities elements in the comprehensive plan.

Look at the table of contents of your comprehensive plan and identify which elements are covered in your plan. For now, just look for the section and title. (Exercise 5-3)

Strategic Plans

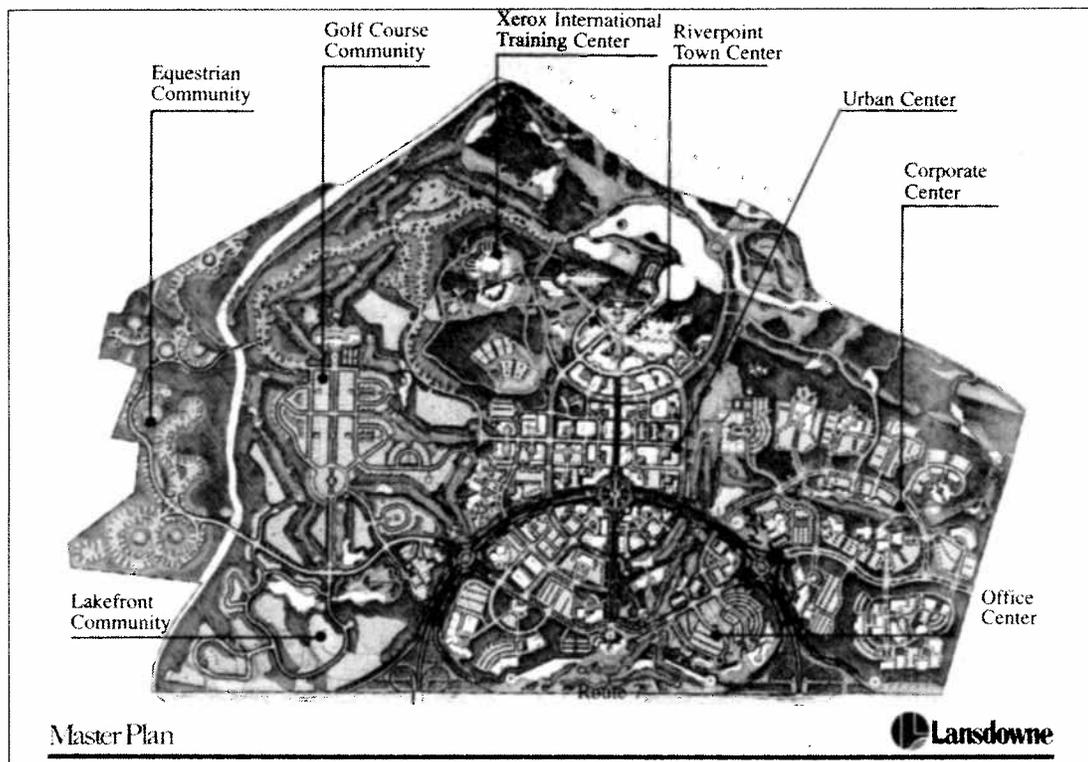
Communities may use a number of different planning models or approaches to their overall planning efforts. For example, some communities adopt a strategic planning approach borrowed from business planning concepts. The main difference between a strategic plan and a comprehensive plan is that the strategic plan focuses on a few selected issues and the specific steps taken to resolve the issues, while a comprehensive plan is—well—comprehensive.

While there are many complicated models and methods for completing a strategic plan, basically the process includes the following: description of the community's population, economy, and other relevant factors; description of national and regional economic and social factors affecting the community; analysis of the problems and issues important to the community and description of steps to be taken to handle the strategic issues.

The most important element of strategic plan development, as with comprehensive plan development, is participation of all affected members of the community. So, while the staff may be compiling the data on the external and internal environments, all participants are involved in deciding which factors (strategic issues) are crucial to the plan. Similarly, the active participation and agreement of decision makers and those who implement is essential for deciding what specific steps to take.

Special Area and System Plans

Another type of plan you may encounter is the special area or system plan. In some cities there will be unique problems that require extra study and special attention. There could



The master plan for Xerox's Lansdowne planned community near Dulles International Airport shows the major elements of the 20-year project.

be a particular need for economic development or there is potential for historic preservation. Perhaps the corridor into the city is unpleasant or there may be a need to locate a new school or library system. In this case, the city will develop appropriate special area plans, using the information collected for the comprehensive plan elements, but will require additional information for a special, in-depth study. These plans detail some of the goals and provide a means of achieving them in a particular area of concern. These plans, however, are part of the comprehensive plan.

Examples of special area plans include plans for such areas as the central business district, a waterfront or riverside in a particular part of the community, an industrial district, civic and cultural centers, a neighborhood, or a set of neighborhoods with common problems.

While a comprehensive plan may identify significant planning issues and policies about systems, going into greater depth requires the preparation of system plans. Examples of system plans include sanitary sewers, storm sewers, mass transit, parks and recreation, libraries, fire stations, health facilities, and others.

*Does your community have a special area or system plan? (You may have more than one; what are they?) What subjects or areas do they address?
(Exercise 5-4)*

If your community's plan is not a comprehensive plan, what would it take to make it into one? (Exercise 5-5)

Now that we've identified the plans before you, we move on to the process of developing a comprehensive plan.



MODULE 6: THE MAKING OF A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Process

Now that you have a general idea of what the comprehensive plan is and what it can do for your community, you are ready to learn how a plan is developed. The decision to develop a comprehensive plan usually arises from the local governing body—the city council or board of trustees, the planning commission, or the planning department. A comprehensive plan may be developed in response to current problems or a general concern about the future. Something that may prompt the need for a plan is the rapid growth of a formerly stable, small town.

Goals and Objectives

The comprehensive plan is based on and is shaped by goals and objectives. Many of use the term “goals and objective,” lumping the two words together, without really being certain of the difference. So what are they? And how do they work in the planning process? Let’s begin with the goals. Goals provide general direction and serve as the description of a desired future. Full participation of the community is most crucial at the stage when the goals are developed. Typically goals address an unsatisfactory situation, an unmet need, or an unresolved issue. Generally goals are ongoing; they are fundamental to the community and “timeless.” In short, goals provide the “big picture” of what the community wants for its future.

While the planning process develops overall goals for the community, often goals are also developed for specific topical areas. Here are two examples. Goals for economic development might include: (1) an industrial mix minimally affected by cyclical fluctuations, (2) trade and services capable of serving all basic needs of residents and businesses in the trade area, and (3) employment opportunities that match the skills and experience of the area’s labor force. Similarly, goals for open space might include: (1) adequate open-space to protects environmentally critical areas, (2) preservation of critical views of mountains and significant vistas, and (3) opportunities for developing greenways and outdoor recreation sites.

What are objectives? Objectives, on the other hand, are achievable, measurable steps taken to achieve one or more goals. Generally, objectives specify a single key result and explain concisely the “what,” “when,” and “how much” or “how many.” When clearly written, objectives identify who or what group is responsible for achieving the result.

Here’s an example. If the goal is to preserve environmentally sensitive areas, then the objective for implementing that goal might state that the city council will adopt an ordinance to “prohibit development in environmentally critical areas and minimize disruption of natural systems.” For a second example consider the following. The goal is to attract high-tech industry into the community, and the objective might state that “the city council will amend the zoning map to provide industrially zoned areas in small- and medium-sized park-like settings.”

In the plan document, goals and objectives are frequently grouped according to the various plan elements and may appear, grouped by topic, in the goals segment of the plan. Sometimes goals and objectives are also listed at the beginning of each element section. For example, in the 1989 Denver city plan, the goals appear in the fourth chapter “Core Goals.” The objectives are found under the element chapters or sections, such as “Neighborhoods.”

Some objectives serve multiple goals. For example, the objective “improving main thoroughfares” might serve both a transportation and an economic development goal and therefore might appear under both element sections. Some comprehensive plans include a separate document that contains not only the goals and objectives, but also detailed strategies and policies to guide the community.

Reaching consensus on goals, objectives, strategies, and policies for adoption in the comprehensive plan is an intensive, time-consuming, and controversial process. Through public discussion, the proposed goals and objectives are analyzed, tested, and verified. People will differ in their opinions. But it is important for the community to spell out its objectives, because objectives provide the criteria by which the community measures its progress and success in meeting its goals. Objectives also help the community to evaluate how well it accomplished those goals.

As a planning commission or zoning board member, don’t back away from these conflicts or differences of opinion. Why? Because these conflicts will force you to reexamine the goals and their objectives to make certain they work for the community’s good. Sometimes goals and objectives must be modified in order to be adopted. Through this process of questioning, serious discussion, and resolution, commitment to the goals is built throughout the community.

Look at your comprehensive plan’s goals and objectives. List the goals of the plan. Do any of the goals seem out-of-date and no longer appropriate? Which ones? (Exercise 6-1)

Citizen Participation

What have you learned about developing goals? Quite simply, that citizens of the community should have a part in the decisions made in preparing the comprehensive plan. There are both costs and benefits to encouraging extensive citizen participation. Soliciting public opinion takes time and money and may raise expectations beyond what is finally delivered. Sometimes public participation is lopsided and only the most vocal or personally interested participate, leaving most citizens without a voice.

However, there are important benefits to encouraging effective citizen participation. They include educating the public about local government actions, generating fresh ideas about old problems, and generally improving the political climate by creating trust. A citizenry that is encouraged to participate does not feel excluded even if it doesn’t take an active role. It’s nice to be asked. Perhaps most important of all, effective citizen participation, no matter how time-consuming, saves time and builds support for community goals.

The most familiar, common, and least successful method of citizen participation is the traditional public hearing. In a typical hearing scenario, planners and commission members labor hard, in private, to prepare a plan. On the big day of its “birth,” they hold a public meeting to unveil the great document. But few people show up, the press is bored, and the mayor thinks it’s too mundane to warrant her attendance. Worse yet, the citizens who do attend cannot understand how this great plan affects their property, their lives, or their future.

But hope is in sight. Over the past 10 years, planners and commission members have developed a wide variety of new techniques to involve citizens in a meaningful plan development process. Some are even fun. Brunswick, Maine, held a pot luck community dinner to get things rolling. Some of the more novel approaches include experiments in electronic town meetings.

In general, these techniques involve citizens earlier in the process. Most participants agree that the new approaches are also more effective. In the new approaches, planners and commission members expend greater effort to find out what citizens like or dislike about their community, as well as what solutions might be used to address the problems. Why, sometimes even tax dollars have been suggested as a possible means to a solution!

Some techniques you might consider include:

- Mail or telephone surveys
- Technical assistance or funding to community groups
- Cable TV
- Task forces
- Media and public information campaigns
- Telephone hotlines
- Visioning sessions
- Game simulations
- Mediators or facilitators

If you held a public hearing on your community's comprehensive plan at 1 p.m. on a Tuesday in city hall, what members of the community might not participate? Why? (Exercise 6-2)

Describing the Community

To help understand how you set your goals and identify your community's objectives, you need to understand the current state of the community. Perhaps you are not sure of the extent to which conditions have changed since your plan was written. You should ask yourself as a new commission or board member, "Is this plan current?"

Some of the goals or objectives may no longer be relevant. For example, consider a municipality with a large percentage of older housing stock. The goal, established in 1979, is to maintain the quality of the housing stock. Is it still valid? Of course. However, the objectives for achieving that goal might need to be changed.

Instead of stating, "establish an Office of Code Enforcement"—something that was done in 1980—the commission may change the objective to reflect the need for more staff to fulfill the goal. Or, you may wish to add an objective and policy including the phrase "to promote neighborhood conservation and revitalization." So, even if goals remain constant, other segments of the plan, such as the objectives, must be reviewed and modified to reflect current conditions, status, and needs of the community.

Return to the comprehensive plan goals you listed earlier. Are they the goals that you consider important today? How would you change them? (Exercise 6-3)

This brings us to the next step in developing the plan: the description of the community. This is the point where your planning staff or consultant assesses your community's current situation and projects what is likely to happen in terms of social, economic, and demographic trends. Data are gathered on subjects such as population size and characteristics, economy, public services and facilities, features of the natural environment, circulation and transportation, or existing land use.

Thus, in the *population* section of the comprehensive plan, you find information about the community's population: current and projected numbers by age, racial/ethnic characteristics, household size, birth and death rates, and places of employment or migration rates.

In the section on *existing land use* you find descriptions of the current distribution of land into agricultural, residential, industrial, and commercial areas; building and development trends; and special types of development in your community.

In *public services* you find an analysis of water and sanitary sewer facilities, parks and recreation, educational facilities, social services, and police and fire departments.

In the *natural resources* section, you find included a general description of community major resources, nature of soils, climate conditions, mineral resources, environmental hazards.

Locate the data portion of your comprehensive plan. This may be a separate volume or the data may be spread throughout the various plan elements. List the subjects that have been researched. How do they relate to the goals and objectives of the various plan elements? Are the data complete? If not, what is missing? (Exercise 6-4)

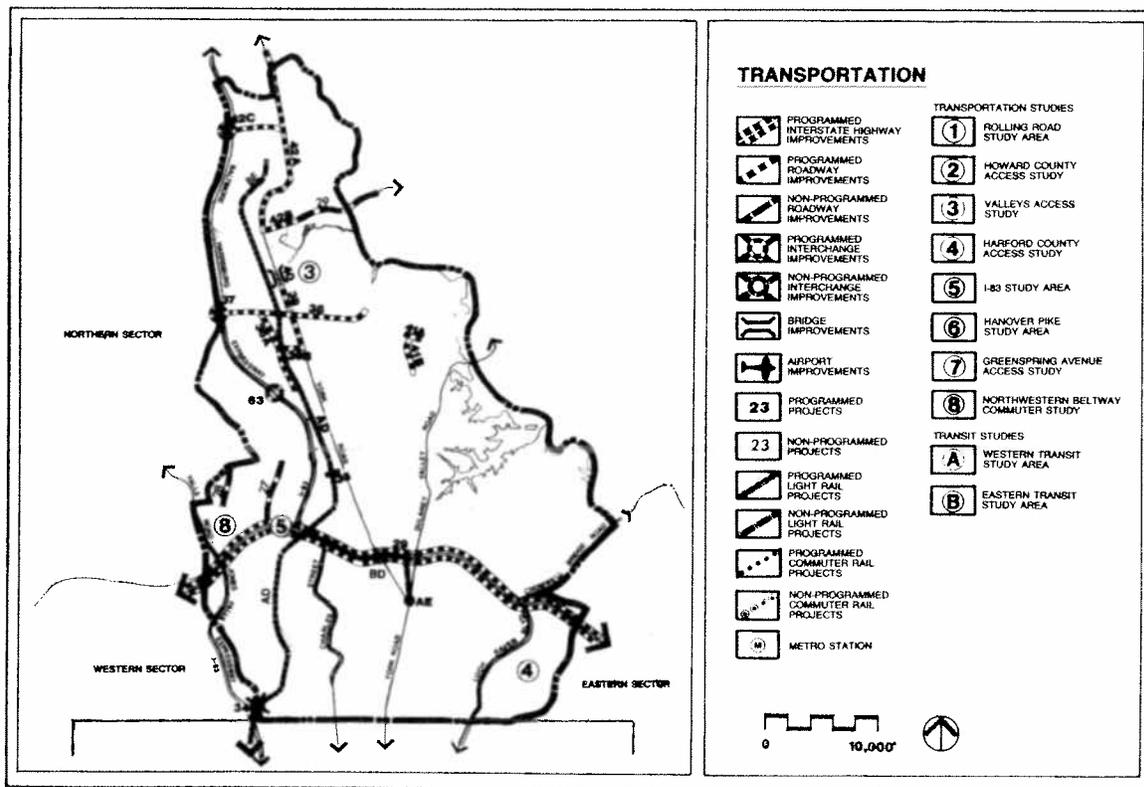
At this point, it is necessary to realize that the data gathering is done differently in each community, depending on many factors. If there is an existing plan that has been regularly reviewed and updated, it may be necessary only to update the data to keep your planning process current. However, in a community with no plan or with a 20-year-old plan (5 to 10 years without an update), it may be desirable to start from scratch in developing new information, and perhaps a whole new plan.

Pick a subject (issue) from your comprehensive plan and look at the data provided. Do you think you need more information about that subject? If so, what information would you want to develop the plan today? (Exercise 6-5)

There is no fixed rule for which data to gather. Critical issues in your community will play a large role in determining the questions you ask. If your community places great value on preserving natural resources, you gather extensive data about the natural

resources—describing your lakes, rivers, woodlands, prairies, or oceanfront. Using that data, you then develop goals for resource protection. In an economically depressed area, the critical issue may be economic development. In this case, your data gathering would focus on economic information and your goals on economic issues. As a planning commissioner you will find conflicts among issues, and time will be spent determining which ones take precedence.

Often, data will be gathered at the same time that the goals and objectives are being developed. As you gather data about the issues, some of the information may bring up new issues or reshape old ones. Goals development and description of the community (data gathering) go hand in hand. Newly gathered data will provide the basis for modifying old goals and objectives or for setting new ones.



Master Plan 1989-2000, Baltimore County

Transportation is often a master plan element, as in this plan from Baltimore County, Maryland.

Plan Elements

Now, let's look at the heart of the comprehensive plan: how the future is described in the plan elements. The number and types of plan elements included in comprehensive plans vary somewhat from state to state and from one local jurisdiction to the other. However, they typically include elements such as land use, transportation, utilities, public services, natural resources, recreation, and open space.

These plan elements (sometimes also referred to as *plans*) summarize what the community wants in each part of the community in the future. For example, the land-use element describes, among other things, where new residential or industrial development will be located. The economic development element may include steps to be taken by the local government to encourage industrial development. The content varies, but the plan

elements often have three parts: a statement of goals and objectives for each plan element (derived from overall community goals); the rationale for the goals and objectives, including some reference to the supporting data, if not the data itself; and a detailed description of steps to be taken to achieve the goals and objectives.

Locate one plan element in your comprehensive plan. Identify the three parts of the element: the goals/objectives, the rationale, and steps to achieve the goals. (Exercise 6-6)

One more note on process: since the community continues to operate at the same time it is developing all parts of the comprehensive plan, some confusion is bound to arise. Thus, you might have business leaders working with elected officials and citizens groups on economic development; planners gathering basic data on the community; the zoning administrator issuing or denying permits; planning commissioners listening to and recommending on requests for new developments; and citizens being surveyed about goals—all at the same time that the comprehensive plan is being developed. The various participants may work at cross purposes, spend time on one area that is ultimately rejected, have to rush to a decision on scanty data, bow to various pressures, argue and fight. Most of this is, to some extent, inevitable. However, by understanding both the contents of the comprehensive plan and the political aspects of the process, planning commissioners can provide a steady influence on the process.

Alternatives Testing and Selection of Alternatives

At the point where the general goals and general objectives have been set and data collection has been done, an assessment must be made of the best course of action. Often, it is the planning staff or planning consultants who evaluate the data and the situation and prepare a set of alternatives among which to select to solve problems. Remember, the goal addresses a particular problem, such as “providing all residents with adequate, safe housing.” Resolving the problem is satisfying your goal.

Let’s look at an example from the Denver city plan. The transportation/mobility element includes this objective: “Employment centers, commercial and residential centers will be vital and competitive, with improved access emphasizing the full range of travel modes.”

An analysis of the data collected showed that getting customers to commercial centers can be done in a variety of ways—auto, bus, rail, bicycle. Through the comprehensive plan, the community and its planning commission decided to emphasize one form or combinations of forms of transportation over others, based on the evaluation of alternatives. The planning commission had to choose where scarce dollars should be invested to reach the desirable end. However, in the analysis of all the variables, the alternatives were tested. The variables included air quality, congestion, neighborhood vitality and safety, and economic stability.

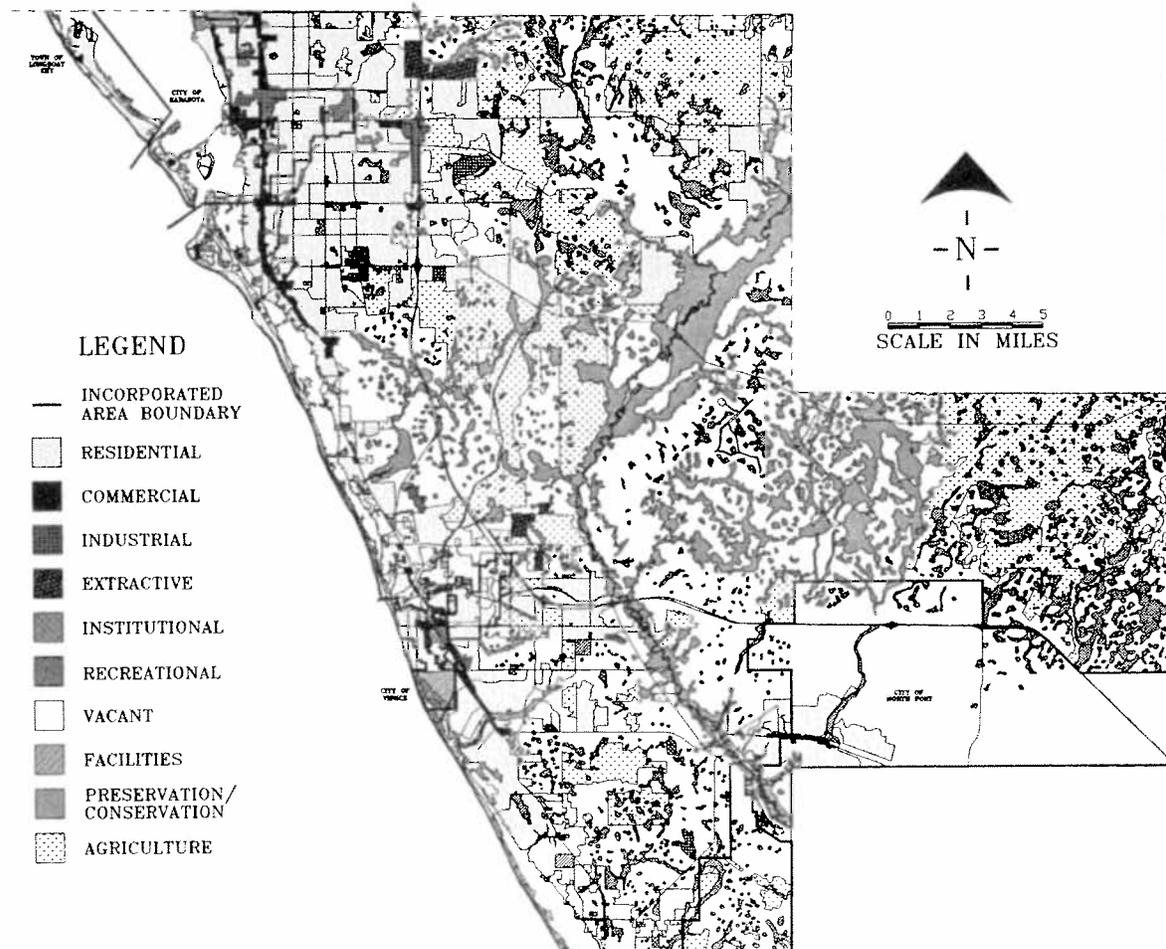
The series of alternatives was then narrowed to the few that best served the objective of improved access. Those that did not serve it were abandoned (say bicycling to shopping center commercial areas) or modified (emphasizing the use of bicycling for work and recreation trips, but not for shopping trips). In the case of Denver, the plan expressed this decision two ways, through *strategic objectives* and *policies*.

What specifically did Denver choose to do? The strategic objectives include, among others: "The parking supply will be managed to ensure adequate short-term parking while increases in spaces for long-term uses are restricted," and "Before 2010, there will be a fifty percent increase in ride-sharing over present levels."

In this way, the plan made clear to the public how the community defined the problem, how it analyzed the situation, how various solutions were weighed, and how the final solutions or objectives were selected.

Land-Use Plan Map

Once goals and objectives have been developed, current conditions have been assessed, and the desired future has been described in a series of plan elements, a land-use plan map is prepared. This map is sometimes referred to as the future land-use map.



The patterns of land use in Sarasota County, Florida, show up clearly in this land-use plan map.

Although land-use plan maps vary, most often they show the location of existing land uses that will not change over time. They also show proposed land uses, including residential, industrial, business, commercial, and other districts. Most often they also show existing and proposed highways and roads and depict proposed recreation areas and open space. In short, the land-use plan map shows how the community will look when the land-use policies are implemented.

Look at your land-use plan map. Locate all of the land uses, highways, and roads, both existing and proposed. Identify all the other markings on the map. (Exercise 6-7)

The land-use plan map is the most frequently referred to portion of the comprehensive plan. Often this map along with other maps may be provided (usually for sale) along with a summary of the comprehensive plan. Often such maps, when provided separately, have some key definitions of land uses and an outline of major goals and objectives. Such detailed maps are frequently referred to as the plan. Some maps may not have all the critical textual information, but an accompanying pamphlet or brochure map. In such cases, it may be possible to include all the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan in the publication.

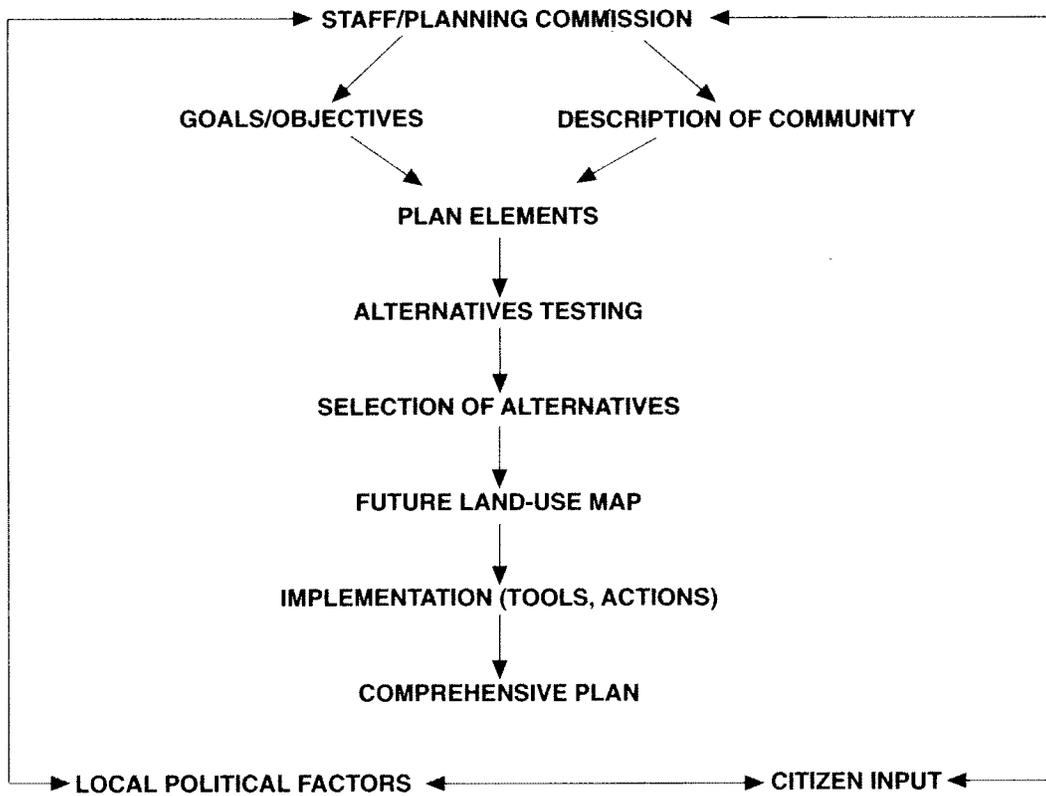
Implementation Strategy and Tools

The comprehensive plan, while serving as a guide for the development of the community, is implemented by regulatory ordinances and other local tools. Such implementation tools include the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, capital improvements program, building and housing codes, annexation agreements, flood prevention code, and so on. Some of these are discussed in detail in following chapters. Remember, not all implementation tools—housing codes, for example—fall under the purview or control of planning.

Some plans also articulate the precise implementation strategies that will be used. Returning to the Denver city plan, let's see how the implementation was described. Under each plan element, in addition to the objectives, strategic objectives, and policies is a section labeled "actions." Turning to the objective to "improve air quality" we find the specific recommended action "amend the Zoning Code to encourage the construction of moderate density housing in transition areas around Downtown." The purpose being to provide housing close to jobs and reducing some energy consuming and polluting travel.

Although the following flow chart presents the development of the various parts of the comprehensive plan in relation to each other, remember that developing a comprehensive plan is an interactive process. In practice, you may start by identifying some goals and objectives, and as you look at the description of your community and get additional input from the community, you may revise or expand the goals and objectives. Or you may find that as you are developing one or the other of the plan elements, adequate political support is lacking for achieving some of its stated goals; a revision of these goals and a rethinking of that element may be in order.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



MODULE 7: THE USE OF A COMMUNITY PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan and Decision Making

The primary purpose of the comprehensive plan is to guide decision making. State enabling legislation, the formal adoption by the local legislative body, and the reference to the comprehensive plan in court decisions about zoning or other municipal decisions all support that single purpose. In addition, all of the work to develop the comprehensive plan—the effort, the discussion, the heated argument, the political maneuvering, the citizen participation, the planner headaches, the final writing—is for that one purpose: to guide decision making.

Communities vary in terms of the extent to which they use their comprehensive plans to guide their decisions. Many states mandate the development and adoption of a comprehensive plan; some, such as California, specify the required content in great detail. However, as the courts increase their reference to the comprehensive plan as the basis for reviewing local government decisions, the importance of the comprehensive plan is becoming more widely recognized even in states in which it is not mandated by legislation.

In states where it is permitted as well as in states that mandate it, the comprehensive plan is often viewed by the courts as the necessary basis for zoning and other decisions. Increasingly, the courts will uphold a zoning decision if it is in conformance with the community plan and the plan is determined to be valid. Likewise, the courts will strike down a decision if it is not supported by the plan. This means that the plan must be up-to-date, comprehensive, clearly written, and well-documented. Of course, the zoning ordinance should be in conformance with the comprehensive plan. For example, a land-use policy for business and industry in the comprehensive plan should be reflected in land zoned for industrial or business development in the zoning ordinance. Similarly, the analysis on which the plan is based needs to be documented through supporting data as precisely as possible and grounded in the realities of the community.

The good planning agency does not keep its plans on dusty shelves but uses plans in day-to-day decision making. How do you keep the plan vital? Let us say that a private developer wants to build a 150-acre development that is predominantly residential (135 acres) and partly commercial (15 acres). Assume that a mixture of housing types—single-family homes, rental apartments, and condominium apartments—is proposed. How does the planning agency use its plan in reviewing such a development?

The planning agency staff first checks the land-use plan to determine whether the general area is designated residential and whether or not this designation allows for commercial uses. Next, the staff examines the proposed densities to see how well they fit with the plan's goals and projections. Then staff checks to determine any physiographic characteristics—soil conditions, stream profiles, and important stands of trees—to see the environmental constraints that will influence site planning. The staff also examines the land-use plan policies determining the amount and location of commercial space in the center of the community.

On the basis of the land uses and anticipated population needing service, the staff in turn checks other plans for sanitary sewers, storm runoff, major and minor streets, and public facilities to determine how well the proposed development “fits into” the

community's plans. For example, the parks and recreation plan may call for a neighborhood park site within the area. Or the school plan may have identified the area as being served by an existing school. The staff also examines the capital improvements program to determine how public facilities will serve the new development in the future, or if new facilities are needed.

Sometimes the development raises major policy issues not covered by the general plans. This may happen if the plan is out of date. Or perhaps it was not detailed enough to help the community make a judgment in this situation. In these cases, planning staffs will carry out supplemental studies that amplify or update a plan element.

Once the assessment is complete (it will also include a review of zoning or other ordinances), the planning staff prepares a staff report and presents it to various decision makers, such as the planning commission, the mayor, the local manager, and the local council.

What is the role of the comprehensive plan in your community? When was it developed? Has it been used to support disputed zoning decisions? Have there been any court cases in which the comprehensive plan has been referenced? (Exercise 7-1)

Format and Presentation of the Comprehensive Plan

For the comprehensive plan to be a viable tool in the planning and decision making of the community, it should be easy to use. The text needs to be written clearly. The table of contents should make it easy to find information within the plan.

There should be extensive graphics. Presenting the plan in a variety of formats can be useful. For example, in addition to the land-use plan map, a brochure of goals and objectives can be prepared for potential developers and investors, or for public relations. Sometimes, the map and summary are printed as one short piece. Some communities frame the goals and objectives and place them on the board room wall next to the land-use plan map. San Bernardino, California, made its new plan accessible to the public through an attractive short video. Whatever reproduction methods are used, it is important that the comprehensive plan be distributed throughout the community in ways that ensure accessibility and familiarity.

Copies should be sent to major developers, banks, savings and loans, libraries, consultants who represent clients in the community, newspaper editors, officials in adjacent communities, and officials at special districts in the county. The planning director should prepare news releases for local papers, radio and TV stations, and community magazines. Special briefings and press conferences for local media should also be held.

What is the format of your comprehensive plan? Is it clearly written? Can members of the community find it easily? In what ways has it been presented? (Exercise 7-2)

The Comprehensive Plan and Other Planning Documents

The zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, the capital improvements program, and the impact fee ordinance are some of the tools for implementing the comprehensive plan.

As discussed above, one of the legal tests for the validity of a zoning ordinance is whether it is based on the comprehensive plan. In addition, an increasing number of states are adopting impact fee legislation. Impact fees are legally defined assessments on new development, discussed in Chapter 4. However, here it is important to note that in states permitting impact fees, the contents of the comprehensive plan are specifically defined and, in fact, required as a prior condition to impact fees being adopted.

*What planning tools does your community use to implement the plan?
(Exercise 7-3)*

Every community and region needs a comprehensive, organized approach to the physical development of a community so that all ongoing and daily decisions on everything from locating a new housing development, to opening a store, to widening a street, are integrated and compatible.

MODULE 8: ADOPTING, AMENDING, AND REVIEWING THE PLAN

State Enabling Legislation

We've seen that the comprehensive plan is the basis for planning decisions made in the community because it contains the community's goals and provides guidance for organized development. However, it is important to realize that in some states the comprehensive plan is also the legal basis for zoning and other decisions.

In order to develop, adopt, or amend your community's comprehensive plan, it is necessary to know what your state requires. A few states require that a comprehensive plan be developed, adopted, and kept up-to-date. Amending your comprehensive plan must be done within the context of state enabling legislation, following the provisions of that legislation.

How does this work? Each state adopts its own version of a general planning enabling act. In some states, the legislation is very general, permitting, but not requiring, a comprehensive plan. However, in some states where a comprehensive plan is required by law, specific plan elements must be included for the plan to be considered valid.

For example, Kentucky requires that a comprehensive plan's elements and goals be interrelated. New Jersey and Florida require contiguous communities to have compatible comprehensive plans. California and Florida have extremely detailed requirements for the content of comprehensive plans.

It is important that you know your state laws regarding planning and development requirements.

Take a moment to familiarize yourself with your state's enabling legislation. At the beginning of each section of the legislation is an outline of contents. Find the section that discusses establishing a planning commission. Is a comprehensive plan required? What specific components, if any, are required? (Exercise 8-1)

Adopting the Comprehensive Plan

In many states, the comprehensive plan must be reviewed by the planning commission in a public hearing. Further, the commission must make a recommendation to the local governing body. The local governing body may also have a public hearing process, depending on state law. If desired, the local governing body makes revisions and adopts or rejects the plan according to the state-mandated procedure. Many states permit the adoption of the plan in parts.

Thus, for example, while the land-use plan map may be adopted, the economic development plan or the natural resources plan may still be under discussion. The comprehensive plan is so complex that this ability to adopt it in parts can assist a community. Development can continue while certain difficult issues are being resolved.

Plans are adopted by the following legal process:

The *planning commission* holds public hearings, reviews and revises the plan, and makes a recommendation to the local governing body.

The *governing body* may hold public hearings, makes revisions if desired, adopts or rejects the plan according to state-mandated procedure, and may adopt the plan in parts.

What process was used to adopt your comprehensive plan? (Refer to Exercise 5-1.) Describe the process. What was the role of the planning commission in adopting the plan? (Exercise 8-2)

Reviewing and Amending the Comprehensive Plan

It is important for the planning commission to review and revise the plan as conditions and community priorities change. The relevance of the comprehensive plan is based, in large part, on its being up-to-date.

When was your plan last reviewed? (Exercise 8-3)

A viable comprehensive plan, capable of guiding decision making, must be updated periodically. The rules for amending the comprehensive plan usually appear in the state enabling legislation. Typically, the same procedure for adopting the plan is used for amending it. The plan remains valid only if the required procedure for amending it is followed.

Look at your state enabling legislation. Does it mandate a process for amending the comprehensive plan? If so, what is the process? (Exercise 8-4)

It is also important that amendments are compatible, both with the other elements of the comprehensive plan and with other planning documents. The consistency of the comprehensive plan and the zoning ordinance and other implementing documents must be maintained.

Has your comprehensive plan been amended? If so, what process was used? What other planning tools were affected by the amendment(s)? (Exercise 8-5)

Similarly, when the zoning ordinance or subdivision regulations are changed, the comprehensive plan must keep pace. The dynamic nature of the planning process requires clear coordination between all municipal decisions and the comprehensive plan. No matter how hard you try to keep consistency between the plan and the other planning documents, after a few years of amendments and interpretations, there are very likely to be inconsistencies. A thorough review and revision can ensure that the comprehensive plan and the other planning documents are compatible.