

# **The Comprehensive Plan: Blueprint for Your Community's Future**

## **Introduction**

---

The comprehensive plan is the basic document used to guide the growth and development of a city or county. The planning process emphasizes citizen involvement and careful study of the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the planning area. The result is a document that represents the community's consensus about where residential, commercial and industrial growth should occur and how quality of life can be enhanced for all residents.

## **Why Is Planning Important?**

---

Comprehensive planning is certainly not an easy process. Some cities and counties spend two or three years developing their comprehensive plans. The planning process requires a commitment of time and money from the local governing board—both things that are in short supply for most city and county governments. Given the time and financial resources required, one might be tempted to ask, “What makes planning so important? Why should cities and counties go through the planning process?”

First, planning ensures that the interests of the community are reflected in its future growth and development. “If you’ve got a well thought out plan with everybody’s input, you’re taking the collective vision of the community,” notes Norm Holm, Planning Director for the City of Nampa. “Without planning, you get haphazard growth and development to satisfy interest groups rather than the community as a whole.”

Second, planning ensures that public services and infrastructure are developed in the most cost-efficient manner. “One of the benefits of planning is to coordinate the provision of your public services with your land use,” says Renee Magee, Planning Director for the City of Idaho Falls. “If you do that, you will be growing where you already have the capacity in terms of water, sewer and streets, and you’ll be investing less in new extensions of infrastructure. If you don’t plan and end up with sprawl, you have development leapfrogging all over the place. It’s more expensive to provide services. It takes more time for police and fire to respond to calls because they’re covering a larger area. It costs more to extend water and sewer lines. The most concrete example of the benefits of planning is coordination of public services and land use so that you actually save taxpayers money.”

Third, planning allows local governments to protect the valuable, unique features of their community. Regardless of whether it is a historic downtown, river, lake, or scenic mountains, planning helps to ensure that the exceptional aspects of a community can be preserved for future generations.

## History of Comprehensive Planning

Comprehensive planning is rooted in both the City Beautiful Movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the progressive reform tradition of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Early planning efforts were led by the leading landscape architects of the City Beautiful Movement, including Warren Manning, Charles Mulford Robinson and Frederick Law Olmstead. These focused mainly on improving the aesthetic qualities of urban areas, including parks, public buildings and spaces.

Planning received a major boost in the 1920s as a result of the work done by the Advisory Committee on City Planning and Zoning appointed by Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover. The committee was led by Edward Bassett, author of New York's seminal 1916 zoning ordinance, and produced two model acts destined for passage in state legislatures across the country: the Standard Zoning Enabling Act and the Standard City Planning Enabling Act. Ultimately, most states adopted these model acts in whole or in part, bringing comprehensive planning to thousands of municipalities throughout the United States.

After World War II, the growth of the suburbs reinvigorated the national interest in planning, aided by the establishment of federal aid programs designed to assist local planning efforts. One of the most prominent was the "701 program" enacted by the Housing Act of 1954. The program remained in place through the 1970s and provided funding for local governments with populations fewer than 25,000 to develop comprehensive plans. Another federal subsidy, the "208 program" provided funds for regional planning for wastewater treatment. By the 1980s many federal planning grants were eliminated, but comprehensive planning remains to this day one of the most important and accepted functions of local government.

## Contents of the Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan generally includes a history of the community, an analysis of present conditions and a description of a desirable future. More specifically, the Local Land Use Planning Act requires local governments to address 14 specific planning components in the comprehensive plan (or provide a justifiable explanation for why analysis is not needed).<sup>28</sup> Additional planning components may be included at the request of the planning and zoning commission or governing board. The 14 required planning components include:

- **Property Rights:** An analysis of provisions which may be necessary to ensure that land use policies, restrictions, conditions and fees do not violate private property rights, adversely impact property values or create unnecessary technical limitations on the use of property and analysis as prescribed under the declarations of purpose in chapter 80, title 67, Idaho Code.
- **Population:** A population analysis of past, present and future trends in population, including such characteristics as total population, age, sex and income.
- **School Facilities and Transportation:** An analysis of public school capacity and transportation considerations associated with future development.

---

<sup>28</sup> Idaho Code 67-6508.

- **Economic Development:** An analysis of the economic base of the area including employment, industries, economies, jobs and income levels.
- **Land Use:** An analysis of natural land types, existing land covers and uses, and the intrinsic suitability of lands for uses such as agriculture, forestry, mineral exploration and extraction, preservation, recreation, housing, commerce, industry, and public facilities. A map shall be prepared indicating suitable projected land uses for the jurisdiction.
- **Natural Resources:** An analysis of the uses of rivers and other waters, forests, range, soils, harbors, fisheries, wildlife, minerals, thermal waters, beaches, watershed and shorelines.
- **Hazardous Areas:** An analysis of known hazards as may result from susceptibility to surface ruptures from faulting, ground shaking, ground failure, landslides or mudslides; avalanche hazards resulting from development in the known or probable path of snow slides and avalanches, and floodplain hazards.
- **Public Services, Facilities and Utilities:** An analysis showing general plans for sewage, drainage, power plant sites, utility transmission corridors, water supply, fire stations and fire fighting equipment, health and welfare facilities, libraries, solid waste disposal sites, schools, public safety facilities and related services. The plan may also show locations of civic centers and public buildings.
- **Transportation:** An analysis, prepared in coordination with the local jurisdiction(s) having authority over the public highways and streets, showing the general locations and widths of a system of major traffic thoroughfares and other traffic ways, and of streets and the recommended treatment thereof. This component may also make recommendations on building line setbacks, control of access, street naming and numbering, and a proposed system of public or other transit lines and related facilities, including rights of way, terminals, future corridors, viaducts and grade separations. The component may also include port, harbor, aviation, and other related transportation facilities.
- **Recreation:** An analysis showing a system of recreation areas, including parks, parkways, trailways, riverbank greenbelts, beaches, playgrounds, and other recreation areas and programs.
- **Special Areas or Sites:** An analysis of areas, sites or structures of historical, archeological, architectural, ecological, wildlife, or scenic significance.
- **Housing:** An analysis of housing conditions and needs; plans for improvement of housing standards; and plans for the provision of safe, sanitary, and adequate housing, including the provision for low-cost conventional housing, the siting of manufactured housing and mobile homes in subdivisions and parks and on individual lots which are sufficient to maintain a competitive market for each of those housing types and to address the needs of the community.

- **Community Design:** An analysis of needs governing landscaping, building design, tree planting, signs and suggested patterns and standards for community design, development, and beautification.
- **Implementation:** An analysis to determine actions, programs budgets, ordinances, or other methods including scheduling of public expenditures to provide for the timely execution of the various components of the plan.

## **Developing the Comprehensive Plan**

---

The process of developing the comprehensive plan can be summarized in eight steps, each described in greater detail below.

### **Step 1: Get Organized for Planning**

---

At the outset it is important for the governing board to decide certain key issues relating to the nature and extent of the planning process, including:

- What is the timeframe that will be covered by the plan? Generally, comprehensive plans cover from five to ten years into the future.
- What additional planning components should be included in the plan?
- Will staff be assigned to work on the plan or will a consultant be hired? If staff are going to work on the plan, what percentage of their time should be spent on the planning process? If a consultant is going to work on the plan, how much money is the governing board prepared to spend?
- What level of citizen participation is desired? Is the planning process intended to be a grassroots citizen-driven effort or a top-down effort driven by local officials and staff? How much money is the governing board prepared to spend on citizen participation?
- What important stakeholders should be involved in the planning process? For example, other cities and counties, highway districts, health districts, water/sewer districts, Department of Transportation, local citizen groups, etc.
- When should the planning process be completed? Who is responsible for each action step and when should each step be completed?
- What is the total budget for the comprehensive planning process?

## **Step 2: Do Your Homework**

---

The comprehensive plan is based on statistical data and projections of population growth, demographics, employment, income, development and housing. This information also gives direction and focus to the community visioning process. The list below includes data commonly included in city and county comprehensive plans (sources are specified in parentheses).

### **Statistical Information and Analysis for the Comprehensive Plan**

#### **Private Property Rights**

- **Takings: Analysis of Constitutional Takings Provisions and Judicial Interpretations, and Attorney General's Takings Checklist** (see Attorney General's *Idaho Regulatory Takings Act Guidelines*—<http://www2.state.id.us/ag/manuals/regulatorytaking.pdf>).

#### **Population and Demographics:**

- **Population, Historical and Projected** (Historical population data may be obtained from the U.S. Census. Population projections may be obtained from Idaho Power or Bonneville Power Administration).
- **Average Annual Rate of Population Growth.**
- **Population by Age: Under 5, Under 18, 25-44, 45-64, 65 and over, 80 and over** (U.S. Census).
- **Population by Race/Ethnicity: Caucasian, Hispanic, African-American, American Indian, Asian and Pacific Islander, other** (U.S. Census).
- **Household Income** (U.S. Census).

#### **Economic Development**

- **Employment by Sectors, Historical Comparison** (U.S. Census; Idaho Department of Labor—<http://www.labor.state.id.us/lmi/pubs/idempnews/Idempmenu.htm>).
- **Major Employers, Their Products and Number of Employees** (Local Data).
- **Commercial Building Permits and Assessed Value, Historical Comparison** (Local Data).
- **Regional Economic Forecast: Specifying Nonfarm Employment, Manufacturing Employment, Personal Income** (Idaho Power, Bonneville Power Administration).

#### **Land Use**

- **Historical Comparative Land Use Inventory: Total Acres and Percentage of Land in Low, Medium and High Density Residential; Commercial; Industrial; Public; Open Space; and Vacant Land Use** (Local Data).
- **Area of Impact: Population and Acreage, Historical Comparison and Projected** (Local Data).
- **Development Activity: Residential, Commercial and Industrial Building Permits Issued, Historical Comparison** (Local Data).

#### **Education**

- **Public and Private School Enrollment: Specifying Elementary and Secondary Enrollment, Current Capacity and Percent of Enrollment Capacity** (Local Data).
- **Projected Enrollment: Numerical and Percent Change** (Local Data), **Timeline of Forecast School Facility Needs** (Local Data).
- **Projected Enrollment Composition: Percent of Students in Elementary, Jr. High and Sr. High School** (Local Data).

### Natural Resources

- **Climate:** Elevation, Average Monthly High and Low Temperatures, Average Monthly Precipitation (Local Data).
- **Geology:** Description of Terrain; Soil Types; Suitability of Ground for Development, Agriculture, and Other Uses (Local Data).
- **Hydrology:** Description of Ground and Surface Water Sources and Characteristics (Local Data).
- **Vegetation:** Description of Trees, Logging Activity (Local Data).

### Hazardous Areas

- **Floodplain:** Acres in 100-year Floodplain (Local Data).
- **Areas Subject to Mudslides/Avalanches** (Local Data).
- **Railroad Crossings:** Number of Crossings, ITD Safety Ranking (Local Data; Railroad Crossing Safety Ratings available from Idaho Department of Transportation).
- **Bulk Fuel Storage** (Local Data).
- **Irrigation Ditches** (Local Data).

### Public Services

- **Water:** Number of Wells, Historical and Projected; System Capacity, Historical and Projected; Average Daily Demand, Peak and Non-Peak; Number of Users, Historical and Projected; Irrigation System Capacity and Number of Users (Local Data).
- **Wastewater:** System Capacity, Historical and Projected; Number of Users, Historical and Projected (Local Data).
- **Police:** Average Number of Calls Per Year, Historical and Projected; Territory and Number of Citizens Served; Number of Officers and Support Staff; Number of Vehicles (Local Data).
- **Fire:** Average Number of Calls Per Year, Historical and Projected; Territory and Number of Citizens Served; Number of Firefighters and Support Staff; Number of Engines, Tankers and Other Vehicles (Local Data).
- **Solid Waste:** Number of Residential, Commercial and Industrial Users, Historical and Projected (Local Data).
- **Ambulance:** Average Number of Calls Per Year, Historical and Projected; Territory and Number of Citizens Served; Number of Employees and Support Staff; Number of Vehicles (Local Data).
- **Electrical Power:** Number of Residential and Commercial Users, Historical and Projected; Transmission Lines; Number of Substations (Idaho Power or Bonneville Power Administration).
- **Natural Gas:** Number of Residential and Commercial Users, Historical and Projected (Intermountain Gas, etc.).
- **Library:** Number of Patrons, Historical and Projected; Size of Collection (Local Data).

### Transportation

- **Arterials:** Total Miles; Average Width of Right-of-Way; Average Daily Traffic Volume (Local Data; Average Daily Traffic statistics available from the Idaho Department of Transportation).
- **Collectors:** Total Miles; Average Width of Right-of-Way; Average Daily Traffic Volume (Local Data; Average Daily Traffic statistics available from the Idaho Department of Transportation).
- **Local Streets:** Total Miles; Average Width of Right-of-Way; Average Daily Traffic Volume (Local Data).
- **Traffic Control Signs, Signals:** Number, Condition (Local Data).
- **Bridges:** Number, Condition (Local Data; Idaho Department of Transportation Bridge Sufficiency Ranking).
- **Bike Lanes and Sidewalks:** Total Miles, Average Width, Number of Crosswalks, Number of Curb Cuts (Local Data).

- **Parking: Number of Spaces (Local Data).**
- **Projected Transportation Projects (Local Data).**
- **Public Transportation: Average Daily Riders; Number of Routes; Population Served (Local Data).**
- **Airport: Number of Flights Per Day; Number of Runways; Number of Hangars (Local Data).**

#### Recreation

- **Parks: Acres of Parks, Historical and Projected; Acres of Undeveloped Land for Future Parks; Number of Employees (Local Data; U.S. Forest Service; Bureau of Land Management; Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation).**
- **Swimming Pools: Number of Pools; Average Daily Use (Local Data).**
- **Greenbelts: Total Miles (Local Data).**
- **Recreation Programs: Total Enrollment (Local Data).**

#### Special Areas or Sites

- **Historic, Archaeological, Ecological and Scenic Sites: Number and Characteristics (Local Data; Tribal Information; Idaho State Historical Society; National Register of Historic Places).**

#### Housing

- **Residential Building Permit Activity by Type: Single-Family, Multi-Family, Mobile Homes (Local Data).**
- **Housing Unit Distribution: Historical and Projected Housing Units, Specifying Single-Family, Duplex, Multi-Family, Mobile Homes; Percentage of Owner Occupied Residences; Median Value; Mean Sales Price; Owner Vacancy Rate; Renter Vacancy Rate; Median Rent (Local Data; U.S. Census).**
- **Total Housing Units: Historical and Projected (Historical information available from U.S. Census).**

#### Community Design

- **Landscaping: Local Requirements (Local Data).**
- **Signs: Local Requirements (Local Data).**
- **Building Design: Local Requirements (Local Data).**
- **Community Gateways and Corridors: Local Requirements (Local Data).**

### **Step 3: Chart Your Course**

---

During the visioning stage, citizens are asked to agree on a compelling, achievable vision for the future of their community. The vision is a product of a community's core values and provides the foundation for the desired future outlined in the comprehensive plan. The vision is translated into goals and objectives for each planning component, which are, in turn, implemented by changes to local growth management policies such as the zoning and subdivision ordinances.

Visioning is not a complicated process, but it does require local officials and citizens to give serious consideration to what they want for the future of their community. The visioning process should be guided by the data collected in step 2, as well as challenges and opportunities identified by local officials for consideration in the visioning process.

The desired result of visioning is to inspire and unite the community around a shared vision for the future. However, local officials should understand that “vision by its very nature generates conflict,” making dialogue and open discussion a critical element of the process.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Step 4: Set Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

---

The purpose of goals, objectives and policies is to provide a strategy for implementing the comprehensive plan and to monitor progress toward the desired future elicited in the community visioning process. It is important to understand what goals, objectives and policies are and how they interrelate.

A goal is a statement of a general achievement or desired outcome. For example, a goal could be:

- **Goal:** To expand, improve, and maintain infrastructure to meet existing and growing demands in a timely, orderly and logical manner.

Within each goal are a number of more specific objectives that specify how your community seeks to achieve the particular goal. In this example, our objective is:

- **Objective:** To develop master plans for all public facilities and services to guide the growth of the city.

Within each objective are policies, which are the action steps or the means of implementing your goals and objectives. For this example, there are three policies:

- **Policy 1:** Identify and prioritize areas for future city expansion.
- **Policy 2:** Hold an annual meeting with other units of local government to coordinate planning efforts and the direction of growth.
- **Policy 3:** Annually review each master plan and update as necessary.

Some planning experts advocate establishing objectives as measurable criteria—for instance, “to reduce the acreage of enclaved areas within the city by 50 percent by January 1, 2005.”

Generally, it is better to state objectives and policies as a number of priorities, rather than establishing specific due dates. “The presence of specific dates could result in future litigation if planning activities can’t be completed on schedule,” notes City Attorney and Planner Jerry Mason.

---

<sup>29</sup> Sapp, Charles et al. “Visioning: More than Just a Good Idea.” *Journal of Organizational Leadership*. Vol. 1, No. 1. 1999, pp. 60-70.

“Some people will tell you that an objective needs to be a measurable criterion,” explains Renee Magee, City Planner for the City of Idaho Falls. “I think that is a decision that the commission and the governing board have to make, because if the community’s not willing to take that step then you frustrate the citizens who are relying on the plan and you frustrate the elected officials.”

### **Step 5: Develop the Land Use Component**

---

The land use component is the most important element of the comprehensive plan. Local officials often rely on this section in the course of making land use decisions. Because of this, it is imperative that the land use component reflects broad-based community involvement and thorough analysis of growth trends and future infrastructure development.

The land use component includes a map of current land uses and an analysis of the suitability of land for uses such as agriculture, forestry, mining, preservation, recreation, housing, commerce, industry and public facilities.<sup>30</sup> Also included is a future land use map, which assimilates the goals, objectives and policies of the other planning components and serves as a visual representation of the community’s consensus about the nature and location of future growth and development. In addition to land uses, the future land use map also shows the location of proposed extensions of public services and infrastructure, including streets, schools, water and wastewater systems and parks.

The relationship between land use and infrastructure is critical—one can visualize the relationship between transportation infrastructure and land use as a perpetual cycle. “The cycle begins when a change in land use generates more traffic. Service deteriorates as traffic increases and citizens begin to complain to their elected officials about how long they had to wait to make a turn or cross the street. At some point improvements are made (for example, a turning lane or traffic signal is added at a busy intersection, a street is widened, a bridge is replaced). But the improvements increase the accessibility of the area, thus generating a demand for more intense land use, which in turn generates more traffic, starting the cycle again.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Step 6: Draft the Plan**

---

Compiling the plan document is a significant task—even a small city’s comprehensive plan is likely to be more than 50 pages. It is important to include information and analysis on all fourteen planning components, or provide an explanation for why analysis of a particular component is not needed. Local officials should circulate the document for review by citizens before the plan is scheduled for a public hearing. Once a public hearing has been held on the comprehensive plan, any proposed changes trigger additional notice and hearing requirements (see below).

---

<sup>30</sup> Idaho Code 67-6508 (e).

<sup>31</sup> Idaho Transportation Department. *Transportation in Your Local Comprehensive Plan*. 1998, p. 57.

It is important to ensure that the plan is a user-friendly document for citizens and policymakers. Lengthy narratives should be summarized in bullet points, particularly when stating goals, objectives and policies. Statistics should be accompanied by descriptive graphs and charts. Remember, the comprehensive plan is not a document that is made to sit on a shelf—it should be a resource for local officials and citizens to rely on and consult regularly.

## **Step 7: Hearing and Adoption of the Plan**

---

Before the plan may be adopted, the Local Land Use Planning Act requires at least one public hearing to give citizens an opportunity to comment on the proposed plan.<sup>32</sup> For cities and counties with planning and zoning commissions, an initial hearing is required before the commission and a second hearing may be held before the governing board if required by local ordinance. For cities and counties that do not have planning and zoning commissions, only a single hearing is required before the governing board. Public notice must be given before each hearing, and the minimum notice requirements include:

- Notice of the hearing must be published in the official newspaper at least 15 days prior to the hearing, specifying the date, time and place of the hearing and a summary of the matter.
- Notice must be sent to all political subdivisions providing services within the jurisdiction (including school districts) at least 15 days prior to the hearing.
- Additional notice must be made available to other newspapers, radio and television stations serving the jurisdiction for use as a public service announcement.

There are a few procedural requirements that local officials should be aware of during the hearing and adoption stage of the planning process. First, the law requires that if a “material change” is proposed in the plan following the initial hearing, there must be public notice of the change and a second hearing.<sup>33</sup>

- If the change is recommended by the planning and zoning commission following its public hearing and the governing board *will not* hold its own hearing on the plan, the commission must give notice of the change and hold another hearing.
- If the change is recommended by the planning and zoning commission following its public hearing and the governing board *will* conduct another hearing, notice of the recommended change must be included in the notice of hearing issued by the governing board.
- If the change is recommended by the governing board following its public hearing, the governing board must give public notice of the change and hold another hearing.

---

<sup>32</sup> Idaho Code 67-6509. As a practical matter, larger cities generally hold multiple hearings to accommodate the number of individuals that will want to testify.

<sup>33</sup> Idaho Code 67-6509.

A “material change” refers to a change that is substantial, not merely a trivial revision or clarification. If there is any question about whether a change is material in nature, local officials should comply with the additional notice and hearing requirements to remove this potential point of challenge. Because of these requirements, local officials should circulate the plan and receive feedback *before* the plan is scheduled for public hearing.

Second, the statute expressly prohibits the governing board from taking any action on the proposed plan, *even scheduling a public hearing*, before receiving the recommendations of the planning and zoning commission.<sup>34</sup> Local officials may want to consider enacting a time limit for commission recommendations or provide for an automatic transfer of jurisdiction after a certain time that is defined by local ordinance. Sometimes there are time pressures for local governments to complete the planning process, and it would be easy to overlook this requirement.

Finally, the comprehensive plan must now be adopted by resolution.<sup>35</sup> In the past, some jurisdictions adopted the plan by ordinance, and those cities and counties will continue to amend their existing plans by ordinance. However, new plans must be enacted, and subsequently amended, by resolution of the governing board.

## **Step 8: Implementing the Plan**

---

The work doesn’t stop once the comprehensive plan is passed. The plan must be implemented by changes to local zoning and subdivision ordinances. For example, the comprehensive plan for the City of Meridian includes the following:

- **Objective:** Maintain the integrity of residential areas to preserve property values and protect the ambiance of these areas.
- **Policy:** Require new residential development to meet development standards for landscaping, signage, fences and walls.

The comprehensive plan is not a regulatory document—therefore, this change in public policy must be implemented by amending the zoning and subdivision ordinances to require standards for new residential development.

The implementation section of the comprehensive plan should specify:

- Proposed changes to the zoning ordinance and map,
- Proposed changes to the subdivision ordinance,
- Proposed changes to the planned unit development ordinance, and

---

<sup>34</sup> Idaho Code 67-6509 (b).

<sup>35</sup> Idaho Code 67-6509 (c).

- Development of capital improvements plan/future acquisitions map.

Frequently during the comprehensive planning process local officials identify the need to develop other policies relating to growth management, such as a capital improvements plan or future acquisitions map. A capital improvements plan allows the local government to prioritize capital improvement projects over a five-year period. The future acquisitions map is a tool to allow the local government to select desired sites for future public facilities and infrastructure.<sup>36</sup> The development of these policies is another important aspect of implementation that should not be overlooked.

Because local officials and staff are generally kept busy dealing with the day-to-day work of planning and zoning, it is important to assign responsibility for implementation tasks and set deadlines. "One of the keys to a comprehensive plan is establishing a schedule of who is going to do what, when to implement the action steps," says Norm Holm, Planning Director for the City of Nampa.

### **Amending the Comprehensive Plan**

As with any planning document, the comprehensive plan should be updated on a regular basis to reflect changing community values, revise statistical information and to implement changes in public policy. The Local Land Use Planning Act formerly required that any changes to the comprehensive plan must be to correct errors in the original plan or to recognize substantial changes in the area. Now, local officials are free to amend the text of the plan at any time, but changes to the land use map may only be made *once every six months*.<sup>37</sup>

The public notice and hearing requirements for amending the plan are the same as for adoption of the plan. For cities and counties with planning and zoning commissions, an initial hearing is required before the commission and a second hearing may be held before the governing board if required by local ordinance. For cities and counties that do not have planning and zoning commissions, only a single hearing is required before the governing board. Public notice must be given before each hearing, and the minimum notice requirements include:

- Notice of the hearing must be published in the official newspaper at least 15 days prior to the hearing, specifying the date, time and place of the hearing and a summary of the matter.
- Notice must be sent to all political subdivisions providing services within the jurisdiction (including school districts) at least 15 days prior to the hearing.
- Additional notice must be made available to other newspapers, radio and television stations serving the jurisdiction for use as a public service announcement.

---

<sup>36</sup> Idaho Code 67-6517.

<sup>37</sup> Idaho Code 67-6509 (d).

Property owners may request a comprehensive plan amendment when a desired land use conflicts with the land use map. When considering comprehensive plan amendments, local officials should determine what changes have occurred in the area to justify the change in land use. Certainly, local officials should be willing to amend the plan if the area has changed substantially since the plan was adopted and the preferred land use is no longer practicable. However, changes can have the effect of weakening the plan and local officials should be certain of the long-term effects before granting amendments.

### **Updating the Comprehensive Plan**

---

In updating the comprehensive plan, local officials have to decide between doing the plan in its entirety or incrementally updating sections of the plan each year. There are definitely pros and cons to both approaches.

After a three-year effort to update Pocatello's comprehensive plan, the city will likely do updates on an annual or biennial basis, says Robert Chambers, Planning and Development Services Director for the City of Pocatello. "The net result is that over the course of five to seven years you have strategically updated your entire plan, but you've done it in increments. The advantage of doing it incrementally is that you can gear up your resources for a very focused outcome and it doesn't take as much time and money. Plus, you're only mobilizing those segments of the community that have an interest in the particular component, allowing you to zero in on specific topics and eliminate a lot of controversy. The disadvantage is that sometimes when you look at pieces of the plan it is difficult to see how the rest of the plan might interrelate. There is the concept of a unified plan and transportation affects land use, which affects public facilities and so on."

### **Public Participation Techniques for Comprehensive Planning**

---

Public involvement is critical to the long-term success and legitimacy of the comprehensive plan. Because the plan represents the community's vision for future growth and development it is imperative for citizens to be involved in the process. Local officials should avoid the temptation to simply adopt a plan developed by another city or county. Every community has its own unique strengths, weaknesses, goals and aspirations, and these should be reflected in a plan developed with input from local residents.

There is tremendous diversity in the nature and extent of public involvement in the planning process among cities and counties. The purpose of this section is to examine ways that local governments, large and small, can get people involved in comprehensive planning.

When examining methods for citizen participation it is useful to keep three criteria in mind:

- Are citizens given the information necessary to effectively participate?
- Are citizens that participate representative of the community as a whole?
- Are citizens given a real opportunity to influence the policymaking process?

One of the most common techniques for public participation is the use of citizen committees. Cities and counties will sometimes appoint a single committee to guide the planning process or will appoint a committee to examine each planning component.

Committees can be useful tools for participation if they are designed to provide representation to a broad array of interests; conversely, it is important to ensure that membership on the committee does not get so large that it impedes progress. City officials also need to consider how much authority they are delegating to these committees, notes Renee Magee, City Planner for the City of Idaho Falls.

“The planning and zoning commissioners and the governing board really need to understand how much authority they’re giving up to that advisory group, because they are going to have a very strong buy-in into the process. If the commissioners and governing board are not willing to make that commitment, then I think it’s best not to involve advisory committees that will devote a lot of time to the process.”

“I believe the most effective way to get citizen participation is to actually go out to the people, to places like the grocery store, the mall, the library or convenience store,” notes Magee. “That way you don’t have special interest groups in the process. If you do it through meetings where you ask people to come to you, the only people who come are those people that are immediately interested in the process or the issue, so you don’t get the opinion of the average person.”

One of the best techniques for going out to the people is the listening post, says Magee. In developing the Idaho Falls comprehensive plan in the winter of 1992-93, “we held listening posts at five grocery stores where our planning and zoning commissioners asked people three questions. The first question was, ‘What is the best thing about Idaho Falls?’ The second question was ‘What is the worst thing about Idaho Falls?’ The last question was ‘What is your favorite place in the city?’ Then we went back out to the Grand Teton Mall and the Library to ask people about their preferences in terms of residential and commercial development. We drafted the plan and went back out to the Arts Festival in July and that involved about 700 people coming by and giving us their ideas.”

The City of Pocatello is an example of a comprehensive, coordinated effort for citizen participation in comprehensive planning. “We had the greatest level of participation in this planning process of any that we’ve had,” says Robert Chambers, Planning and Development Services Director for the City of Pocatello. “We’ve estimated over 4,000 people have participated in our effort to create the latest comprehensive plan. We utilized everything from the traditional town meeting to focus groups, individual interviews, surveys, public hearings and notices in water bills—everything we could think of.”

One of the citizen involvement techniques used by Pocatello was to invite different groups of community interests, such as builders and contractors, environmentalists, youth groups and senior citizen groups to discuss the plan with city officials and staff. “It gives everyone a level playing field—everybody gets the same amount of time and consideration and we found that to be valuable,” notes Matthew Lewis, Planning Division Manager for the City of Pocatello. In addition, individual interviews were held with local civic leaders. “These are the people that

lead the discussion in the community, and we tried to get to them early on in the process and let them know what was going on and get their buy-in,” says Chambers.

Pocatello also used scientific and non-scientific surveys in the visioning process. “We identified some desired future scenarios and sent a nonscientific survey to about 16,000 households,” says Chambers. “We wanted to know how people felt about the community today, what they like and dislike and where they want the community to go in the future. The scientific part of the survey was a follow-up telling them what we had heard from the first survey, telling them the direction that the plan was going, and asking if we were justified in making the assumption that this was correct. The scientific survey validated the direction established by the first survey.”

“We’ve spent three years working on the comprehensive plan—a considerable amount of time to gather the public opinion and to reach a consensus,” says Chambers. “When the commission finally made a motion recommending the plan to the council, the audience actually gave them an ovation—we’re talking about residents, numerous associations, environmentalists, builders and contractors—they were all clapping. That was the result of three years of effort in public outreach, but it came at a price. If you want to cut down on the dollars and do your plan on a shoestring, I think it’s going to limit severely the amount of contact, as well as the quality of contact you have with the public.”

Smaller cities and counties may not have much money to spend on public participation, but they can still craft effective outreach techniques. The City of Hauser implemented a comprehensive public participation strategy during its planning process in 1992-1993. The strategy included listening posts at the Hauser Lake Celebration, where planning and zoning commissioners asked residents to identify their favorite place in the community, voice concerns and learn about the planning process. The comments from the listening post were collected and used to guide discussion of issues later in the process. The city also held informal meetings with their team of consultants, allowing citizens to discuss issues directly with the consultants and learn about the process of developing the plan. Finally, a planning subcommittee drafted a citizen survey and hand delivered it to more than 450 residences and businesses, along with the monthly issue of the community newsletter.

### **Consultants in the Comprehensive Planning Process**

---

Planning and land use issues require specialized knowledge, which is why many communities hire consultants to assist in developing the comprehensive plan. The advantage of consultants is that they are professionals with a detailed understanding of planning issues and they are able to objectively analyze the needs of a particular community.

Before a community begins the process of looking for a consultant, they should do some homework, notes Renee Magee, Planning Director for the City of Idaho Falls. “The governing board, planning and zoning commission and staff should sit down and discuss what they want to accomplish and what they want the plan to look like. It’s very important to get everybody on the same page from the start.”

Once local officials have determined their priorities for the planning process, the search for a consultant begins with published notice of a Request for Proposals (RFP). The RFP should include:

- A brief description of the nature and location of the project, along with the desired completion date.
- A description of the consulting services required.
- The criteria used to evaluate proposals, specifically: prior experience in similar projects, familiarity with state and local laws, certification by the American Institute of Certified Planners, etc.
- Instructions and other documents are available from the city/county.
- Those interested should submit proposals including: experience in similar projects, capability to undertake the project, the names and qualifications of the project team, familiarity with the city/county, project approach, the amount of time that will be dedicated to the project and preliminary schedule.
- The deadline for submission of proposals, the address to which proposals should be sent and the name of a contact person to answer questions and provide instructions.

After the proposals are received, they are ranked in order of preference according to the established criteria. Then the local government meets with several of the top ranked individuals or firms to discuss the project. Local officials should ask:

- **Experience:** What degree(s) does the consultant have? Is the consultant certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners? How many comprehensive plans has the consultant done?
- **Local Knowledge:** How much time has the consultant spent getting to know the community? Who has the consultant spoken with about the community? What issues does the consultant think are most important for the community?
- **Planning Process:** What methods for citizen participation does the consultant recommend? What population and demographics information will the consultant utilize? What is their process of developing goals and objectives? How will the consultant keep local officials involved in the development of the plan? What is the timeline for completion of the plan? How much time will the consultant allocate to developing the plan?

After these preliminary discussions, the local government can begin negotiations with the desired individual or firm, where details are set including the project timeline, cost and services. If the city or county is unable to reach a satisfactory agreement with the top-ranked firm, the process is repeated with the second ranked firm and continues until an agreement is reached.

There are several considerations that local officials should keep in mind when interviewing consultants, notes Magee. “Look for a proposal that allocates enough time for the consultant to work with your community in developing the plan. Also, the consultant should be present during citizen participation activities—they shouldn’t lead the discussion, but they should certainly hear what citizens have to say and the dynamics of the interaction between local officials and citizens. Local officials should also make sure that the consultant’s plans are really designed for the community, not just boilerplate statements that they can cut and paste into your comprehensive plan.”

## **Future Acquisitions Map**

---

Planning for timely and economical expansion of public facilities and infrastructure is one of the most important tasks of local government. To this end, the Local Land Use Planning Act allows cities and counties to establish “Future Acquisitions Maps,” which designate proposed land acquisitions during the next 20 years.<sup>38</sup> The designated properties may include land for streets, schools, airports, parks, water and sewer infrastructure.

The future acquisitions map is adopted by the governing board in compliance with the public notice and hearing requirements of Idaho Code 67-6509. For cities and counties with planning and zoning commissions, an initial hearing is required before the commission and a second hearing may be held before the governing board if required by local ordinance. For cities and counties that do not have planning and zoning commissions, only a single hearing is required before the governing board. Public notice must be given before each hearing, and the minimum notice requirements include:

- Notice of the hearing must be published in the official newspaper at least 15 days prior to the hearing, specifying the date, time and place of the hearing and a summary of the matter.
- Notice must be sent to all political subdivisions providing services within the jurisdiction (including school districts) at least 15 days prior to the hearing.
- Additional notice must be made available to other newspapers, radio and television stations serving the jurisdiction for use as a public service announcement.

The law requires that local officials must be notified when development is proposed (by a request for a building permit, rezone, or other application) on any of the properties designated on the future acquisitions map. Within 30 days, the local government may request that consideration of the application be suspended for 60 days (from the date of the request) to allow the city or county to obtain an option to purchase the property, acquire the land, or institute condemnation proceedings. If the city or county fails to act within 60 days, the application continues through the review process.

“We recently had the future acquisitions map concept approved,” says Robert Chambers, Planning and Development Services Director for the City of Pocatello. “If we can determine the

---

<sup>38</sup> Idaho Code 67-6517.

location of major arterials and collectors, lift stations, pump stations, parks, schools and fire stations, then we have a greater ability to influence the location and timing of future development. The future acquisitions map not only identifies the location of critical elements of a community's infrastructure, but it should exact a commitment from the governing board to set funds aside to acquire these properties."