



## What Is A Comprehensive Plan?

Comprehensive planning is a process that determines community goals and aspirations in terms of community development. The result is called a comprehensive plan or general plan, and both expresses and drives public policies on transportation, utilities, land use, recreation, economic development, housing and similar issues. Comprehensive plans typically encompass large geographical areas, a broad range of topics, and cover a long-term time horizon.

Each city and county adopts and updates their Comprehensive Plan to guide the growth and land development of their community, for both the current period and the long term (typically 20 years). The Comprehensive Plan is the foundation for establishing goals, purposes, zoning and activities allowed on each land parcel to provide compatibility and continuity to the entire city as well as each individual neighborhood. It has been one of the most important instruments in city and regional planning since the early twentieth century.

Comprehensive Planning typically follows a planning process that consists of different steps. By following this process, planners are able to determine a wide range of interconnecting issues that affect an urban area.

### **Identifying issues.**

Generally, planners determine community issues by involving various community leaders, community organizations, and citizens.

### **Stating goals.**

Once issues have been identified by a community, goals can then be established. Goals are community visions. They establish priorities for communities and help community leaders make future decisions which will affect the city. Stating goals is not always an easy process and it requires the active participation of people in the community.

### **Collecting data.**

Data is needed in the planning process in order to evaluate current city conditions as well as to predict future conditions. The most typical data collected for a comprehensive plan include data about the environment, traffic conditions, economic conditions, social conditions (such as population and income), public services and utilities, and land use conditions (such as housing and zoning). Once this data is collected it is analyzed and studied.

### **Preparing the plan.**

The plan is prepared using the information gathered during the data collection and goal setting stages. A typical comprehensive plan begins by giving a brief background of the current and future conditions found in the data collection step. Following the background information are the community goals and the plans that will be used in order to implement those goals into the community. Plans may also contain separate sections for important issues such as transportation or housing which follow the same standard format.

### **Creating implementation plans.**

During this stage of the process different programs are thought of in order to implement the goals of the plan. These plans focus on issues such as cost and effectiveness. It is possible that a variety of plans will result from this process in order to realize one goal. These different plans are known as alternatives.

### **Adopting a plan.**

The community needs to adopt the plan as an official statement of policy in order for it to take effect. This is usually done by the City Council and through public hearings. The City Council may choose not to adopt the plan, which would require planners to refine the work they did during previous steps. Once the plan is accepted by city officials it is then a policy statement in regards to future development.

### **Implementing and monitoring the plan.**

Using the implementation plans defined in the earlier stages, the city will carry out the goals in the comprehensive plan. City planning staff monitor the outcomes of the plan and may propose future changes if the results are not desired.