

How Good Is Your Comprehensive Plan?

Val Slack, Ag & Natural Resources Educator



Introduction

A community is best characterized by the makeup of its people and their living and working conditions. Communities with attractive commercial locations, well-kept residential areas, adequate parks and schools, and a street system conducive to the speedy movement of pedestrian and vehicular traffic will generally experience positive growth in both population and economy.

A comprehensive plan attempts to bring definition to these features by considering land as a community resource. Land is no different from any other asset. There are uses for land that are more efficient than other uses.

A community's current comprehensive plan may identify a broad pattern of future land use, but it cannot foresee and answer in detail the host of questions that will occur over time. If the comprehensive plan is, in fact, a guide for moving the community from today to some point in the future, it must be adaptable. So how can a comprehensive plan be made more effective?

A lot of time, money, and effort go into the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan. Here are a few suggestions to help make the plan more useful to public decision-makers, developers, and local residents.

- Make sure the plan serves current and near-future needs, as well as long-term community goals. A useful question to consider is whether or not the adopted policies will address day-to-day problems. If not, do something to correct it.
- Set up study periods to go over the plan immediately after adoption and periodically thereafter.
- Promote the plan. Try to stimulate those involved in the private investment sector to support the development goals of the community.

- Make sure that the local officials who will carry out the plan are adequately trained. The plan director, zoning administrator, plan commission members, and the members of the board of zoning appeals are all people who should have training.

- Use the plan as a reference point whenever a controversial issue surfaces. Do not throw away all your careful planning just because something unexpected comes up.

- Maintain a close working relationship with the county commissioners and city council, and encourage them to use the plan.

- Encourage officials to include the cost of updating the plan in the budgetary process.

How Is the Plan Amended?

After your community has adopted and used the plan for a period of time, new and developing conditions might call for its amendment. Indiana statutes provide for amendment; however, this authority should be used with discretion. A plan's value can be diminished through too frequent or capricious changes.

The procedure to amend a plan is similar to the plan adoption process. The plan commission, the governing body or bodies, or local citizens may propose an amendment to the plan, but any proposal must always be referred to the plan commission for consideration. After it is referred to the plan commission, the commission members review the proposal. They may refer it to a study committee for recommendations. The commission then holds a public hearing.

While evaluating an amendment, the commission should be sure that the change fits the goals and policies of

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the comprehensive plan and that special interest groups are not being given preferential treatment. In addition, they should consider all impacts of the change. These might include adverse effects to adjacent landowners, established commerce, existing traffic patterns, public service delivery, and the ability to meet the needs of low-income and minority groups.

After the public hearings have been held and evaluation completed, the plan commission may adopt the proposed amendment and refer it to the appropriate legislative body or bodies for review and adoption. An amendment is not effective until the governing body has approved it.

Finally, the plan commission files the officially adopted amendment with the county recorder, and the amendment becomes part of the revised plan.

How Often Should the Plan Be Revised?

The plan should be reviewed every three to five years. This ensures that the study data and planning maps reflect current status. Policies may also have to be updated. A review by a study committee may be simple in communities that have grown little in recent years or quite elaborate in communities that have witnessed rapid growth or change. The following questions may help you during the review process.

- Can the goals, objectives, and policies be improved?
- Have population characteristics changed? If so, how will these changes affect the jurisdiction in the future?
- Has the economy changed? What long-term effect will these changes have?
- Has the natural environment been degraded or improved?
- What kind of development has been occurring and where? Is this kind of development sought, or can and should changes in this trend be made?

- What impacts have federal and state regulations and funding had? Can working relationships with other levels of government be improved?

- Are the transportation, recreation, and other public services needs of residents being met?

The results of the review and revision study could very well reveal that changes in the zoning ordinance, subdivision control ordinance, or other developmental controls are needed. The study committee can identify some of the specific areas most in need of attention and present recommendations to the plan commission.

Conclusion

A comprehensive plan is somewhat like a new car, new home, or new appliance. It needs to be checked, evaluated, fine tuned, and taken care of in order to last a long time. A successful plan is action oriented, balanced, community supported, and adaptable to change. How good is your comprehensive plan? As good as you and your fellow citizens make it.

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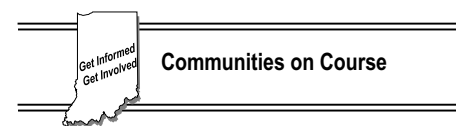
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