

From the Mayor...  
March 2014

Our new Comprehensive Plan will be presented to the City Council next month for adoption. The Plan Commission is responsible for presenting the plan to the public and recommending the final version to the Council for their review and approval.

The purpose of a comprehensive plan is to give communities a municipal “policy guide” of goals and objectives that guide future residential, commercial, and industrial development. The Indiana Code guides cities to create comprehensive plans that promote “public health, safety, convenience, and general welfare for the sake of efficiency and economy in the process of growth and development.” Community input, existing land use, development trends, land use suitability, and a communities natural features are foundational to the “comp” plan. The final version yields planning strategy, zoning recommendations, and a transportation plan.

I began my service to our city as a member of the Plan Commission in 1995 and participated in the development of the last Comprehensive Plan in 1998. As a newcomer to the Commission, I relied heavily on the goals and objectives of that first plan. I would use it for decision making when conflict arose. As the plan got older, changes in market forces, living habits, and community desires shifted those goals and objectives away from their original intent. Hence the need to update a comprehensive plan that reflects current needs and anticipates future trends.

The first draft of the update highlights several of these emerging trends. Among them is the utilization of existing commercial corridors rather than expanding to new outlying undeveloped tracts (“urban sprawl”). Abundant land for commercial development already exists in established commercial areas. The reuse, redevelopment, and infill of old, vacant, or abandoned sites are encouraged. North Detroit Street, Winona Avenue, and South Buffalo Street are specifically mentioned. “Intensifying” existing commercial districts will give them new vitality.

More compact neighborhood communities, minimizing “urban sprawl,” and encouraging a more walkable community were emerging trends voiced at public meetings. Nationally, several large-store retailers are creating smaller footprint retail outlets to take advantage of neighborhood strategies. In addition, online shopping trends are also stimulating the downsizing of “brick and mortar” stores.

Downtown revitalization is an important facet of the new plan. The suggestion of a “mixed use downtown” emphasizes retail, restaurant, walk-in service providers, and entertainment use, all accessible at “street level”. Second floor mixed uses include residential and professional services. A vibrant, walkable downtown commercial district is enhanced by a higher density residential base. A specific goal of the plan is the development of a new, townhouse style residential project on the downtown fringe.

Current transportation strategies emphasize sidewalk and bicycle trail implementation, stressing connectivity among neighborhoods, schools, parks, and commercial opportunity.

The necessity of shovel-ready sites and spec building also represents a new trend that was not a part of the last comprehensive plan.

The Plan Commission will meet in a working session this next Monday at 4:30 p.m. in the council chamber. You are welcome to attend as the commission develops the final draft.