

FORT SMITH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Executive Summary

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THE CITY OF FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This is a general summary of the Fort Smith Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is primarily a physical plan for the growth and development of the city over the next 20 years. It is designed to guide the City's day-to-day activities within the context of a long-range, 10-20 years, vision, so that actions occur in a coordinated, efficient, and effective way. It will be used to assist the Planning Commission, the Board of Directors and City Staff as they make decisions on land use and zoning issues, capital improvement programming, transportation, and coordination efforts with other jurisdictions and agencies.

THE CHALLENGE

While Fort Smith has had long range plans within government departments, and has a comprehensive development code (zoning, subdivision and building regulations) in place, the City has never adopted a comprehensive plan that combines all aspects of the community's development. In October of 1999, the Fort Smith Board of Directors, Planning Commissioners and the City Staff held a retreat that concluded with the authorization to begin the comprehensive planning process.

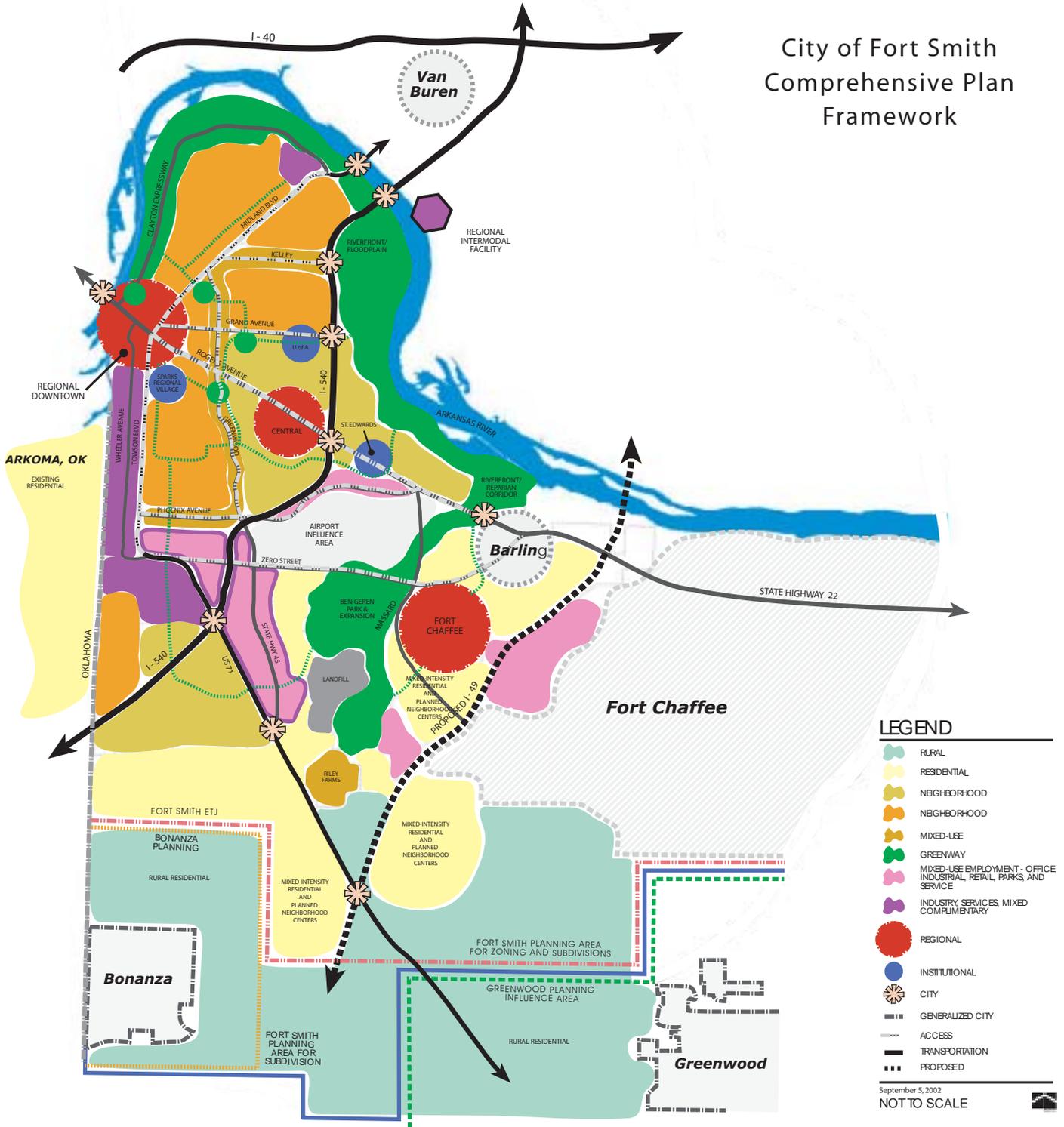
The Plan is organized around the major issues, goals and policies developed through this process. While this is primarily a physical plan, the social and economic aspects of the City are addressed as well. Because this is the City's first Comprehensive Plan, it can not lay out parcel specific proposed changes throughout the city. Rather, it is the first step in creating a proposed land use plan that shows a preferred development pattern for tomorrow. Policies and actions state how existing and future land use patterns need to be addressed, to implement the plan. The City of Neighborhoods provides both a physical framework and a policy framework that work together.

Many policies are city wide in nature and do not address specific land uses or areas of the city, while others are more specific to uses, activities, and locations. Several actions and policies overlap, achieving multiple goals. Specific land areas addressed include; the downtown, the riverfront, development of Fort Chaffee and land outside of the existing city limits, Extra-territorial Jurisdiction Planning Area (ETJ).

The City of Neighborhoods requires implementation of policies, changes to the development code and specific area plans to be created. Planning for a small area of the city differs from the comprehensive plan in that it is parcel specific and much more detailed. Area, Sector, District, Corridor, Neighborhood and Center Plans can be any size, but are focused on meeting a distinct purpose. They are usually triggered or needed when; disinvestment occurs, there are significant and/or constant changes occurring, when public improvements are needed or planned, when redevelopment opportunities arise and when large developments are on the horizon. These conditions are present along all the major corridors and throughout many of the core neighborhoods of the city. Because of the smaller scale of area plans, property owners, tenants and community groups can work together to make the area more successful.

CITY OF NEIGHBORHOODS WITH ETJ PLANNING

City of Fort Smith
Comprehensive Plan
Framework



LEGEND AND LAND USE

FRAMEWORK

The development framework sets the physical guidelines for how Fort Smith will evolve in the next 10-20 years. It provides a structure and guidelines for land use, transportation and zoning actions. While the areas indicated are general in nature, it is the first step in unifying the land use plan with new zoning and subdivision regulations. This framework is the basis for a land use plan.

Centers or "Neighborhoods" are concentrated areas of pedestrian oriented, mixed land use. They offer a variety of daily services that are more people than car oriented, and provide a focal point, or pocket of activity, within an area for meeting people, shopping and accessing public services. They will occur in a variety of scales, serving different, distinct and complementary needs for the people of the city and larger region.

Regional Centers offer the highest density and diversity of employment, culture, services, shopping, housing and entertainment to the region as a whole. Walkability within these centers is key to their design and function. There is a need to limit the number of regional scale centers based on complimentary services and function within the region. There are three primary Regional Centers: Downtown, Central Mall and Fort Chaffee each serving a distinct need.

Institutional Centers specialize in community service, and have a high priority for regional transportation access with service equal to that of regional villages. Emergency access, commuter and visitor parking should be part of an overall circulation plan. Complementary services need to be provided within walking distance, as these areas can be 24-hour communities. There are three primary Institutional Centers: University of Arkansas-Fort Smith; St. Edward Mercy Medical; and, Sparks Regional Health System.

Neighborhood Centers are small in scale and designed to meet the immediate needs of people living or working within close proximity. Generally, they provide a collection of shops, services and/or recreation that are a focal point of the neighborhood, offering the needs of daily living. Walking and bicycling should be safe options to access these areas. Kids and people of all ages should feel safe and comfortable.

The Road Network

Residential Corridors are roadways through primarily residential and institutional areas that may have been classified as arterials in the adopted 1991 Master Street Plan. Over time, they have become heavily used for through traffic. Special design considerations are needed in order to protect the residential character and values along them. As residential streets, they may be reclassified as Primary Collectors. Examples include portions of Old Greenwood Road, Jenny Lind Road, and, Free Ferry Road.

Boulevards - By partially restoring, or newly creating, a landscaped boulevard system, the roadway will function at a higher capacity through improved chanelization. They will provide an attractive path through and into town and increase the visibility and viability of the businesses located along them. These would include Midland Boulevard, portions of Towson Avenue, and U.S. Highway 71/71B South.

Commercial Corridors - The majority of arterials in Fort Smith provide the commercial space in the City. In the future, these areas will be designed to reduce auto conflicts, consolidate shopping entrances, reduce sign confusion and increase the viability of businesses on them. The primary example of this designation is Rogers Avenue.

Transportation Corridors - The main function of these facilities is to move vehicles between major destinations or through town. Land access is secondary to their purpose; examples include I-540 and U.S. Highway 71 South.

Gateways - The major entry points into the city that creates a visitor's first impression. Arrival and departure indicators, views of the city, view corridors, and way finding need to be addressed at these major points.

Planned Mixed-Use Development

Mixed-use Residential - A compatible mix of housing types and commercial and institutional services characterize mixed-use residential areas. The primary theme of these areas is to increase the compatibility of a mixture of activities through better planning and design. Many areas of the city currently have a mixture of housing types and commercial uses, but they are not very visually or functionally compatible with each other. This category can be applied to neighborhood centers or to roadways. New areas will emerge, such as west Phoenix Avenue, Kelley Highway and Massard Road south, fall into this category.

Mixed-use Employment - These areas are characterized by a complementary mix of industrial and office uses that can combine parking, circulation, security, employee amenities and services. These are major employment destinations that can benefit from close proximity to each other. In addition, employees benefit by having services in close proximity.

Residential

Neighborhood Preservation - These are existing, predominately residential areas whose character and value need to be protected, enhanced and/or restored.

Neighborhood Revitalization - These are existing, predominately residential areas whose character and value are to be enhanced and restored through proactive measures and perhaps with both public and private assistance. These neighborhoods have deteriorated through abandonment of structures and/or encroachment of industrial and commercial uses that have negatively affected the value of residential property for residential use. In some cases, these areas may have a high percentage of renters to owners, and may have many structures in poor repair, boarded up or vacant.

Residential - Indicated on the Plan Framework, these are new and developing housing developments at a variety of densities and styles, not identified yet as either an area of revitalization or preservation. These areas are still defining themselves and have the opportunity to expand and more solidly form their character.

Rural Residential - Rural land areas are only indicated in the area outside of the existing City limits. Rural development is very low density, reflecting a desire to have few neighbors and a love of the land. Lot sizes are typically, 5 -25 acres in size, unless a cluster method of development is used to maximize open space.

Parks, Open Space & Trails - These uses are a primary theme of the plan, taking advantage of the lush environment that makes Fort Smith a great place to live. Passive and active recreation, habitat and bird sanctuary spaces, wetlands and regional trail systems, represent the high quality of life that is an intrinsic part of the "Look of Fort Smith".

Floodplain, Bluffs & Natural Resources - Wetlands, floodplains, and riparian corridors flow into the Arkansas and Poteau Rivers, making land areas unsuitable for most development (regardless of historic zoning). The Ozark geology also creates pockets of natural gas and rock formations that restrict most forms of development. These areas need to be studied and identified in detail.

Extra-Territorial Planning Influence Area - This area is currently in agriculture and rural residential use within Sebastian County, and does not have planning, zoning, subdivision, or building permit requirements to govern development. By state law, the city needs to work with the county on planning for these areas, so that development occurs in a way that is compatible and economical. The Plan proposes a process to work with all affected parties to adequately plan for these areas.

GOAL I ACHIEVE A COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PLAN.

Approach: Develop a transportation plan that reserves land in future corridors, prioritizes available funds, functions consistently with the land use plan, and capitalizes on assets such as the public transportation system, river, and highway network. Emphasis should be on connectivity, flexibility (choices of transportation modes), and aesthetic and environmental impacts.

Critical Recommended Actions Include:

- Revise and adopt Master Street Plan for City and ETJ
- Implement access controls and reduce visual clutter on arterials
- Reroute through truck traffic in CBID and concentrate industry at high access locations
- Establish corridor specific plans and develop strong public/private partnerships for improvements

The Street Network

G1.1 Policy: Land development should be compatible with the design function and capacity of the roadway and not place burdens on it that render it unsafe or degrade its function, and conversely, road design should not negatively impact its planned use.

G1.2 Policy: Make major destinations, highly accessible by all modes of transportation.

G1.3 Policy: Minimize the growth in vehicular miles as the city grows through a variety of locational and programmatic measures.

G1.4 Policy: Address improvements to the existing street network by first optimizing access and circulation through better design and utilization of existing right-of-way, in cooperation with property owners.

Neighborhood Streets

The Regional Transportation Network

G1.5 Policy: Promote development of regional highway connections and improvements that will benefit trade, commerce (and ease of movement).

G1.6 Policy: Protect residential neighborhoods from excessive through traffic, where feasible.

G1.7 Policy: Enhance pedestrian, bicycle, transit, service vehicle and emergency circulation.

G1.8 Policy: Ensure that sufficient, well designed and convenient on street and off-street parking is provided to serve land uses.

G1.9 Policy: Provide attractive, safe and continuous detached sidewalks or other pedestrian facilities.

G1.10 Policy: Improve traffic flow and integrate safe pedestrian and bicycle travel into the transportation network, particularly at key intersections of high commercial and employment activity.

Bicycle

G1.11 Policy: To provide for the public's interest, safety and general welfare by encouraging and offering a well planned, safe and efficient bikeway system that will interconnect neighborhoods and provide access to both neighborhood and city-wide destinations.

Transit

G1.12 Policy: Promote and maintain a public transit system that is safe, efficient, cost-effective and responsive to the needs of residents.



Air

G1.13 Policy: Preserve and enhance the air transportation system provided by the Fort Smith

Regional Airport, while protecting the public from airport related noise and safety hazards.

Freight

G1.14 Policy: Ensure that business and industry have sufficient transportation infrastructure to support freight operations and business communications, including rail, air, highways, telecommunications, and pipelines.

G1.15 Policy: Provide convenient, reliable connections between industrial zones and regional highways to facilitate truck traffic that also minimize noise and traffic conflicts with other users.

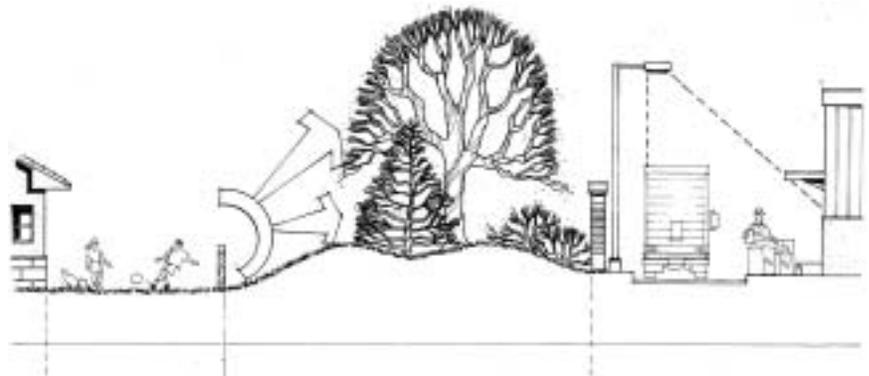
G1.16 Policy: Work with the railroad industry in better service through the region and city.

G1.17 Policy: Support the continued improvements to the Port of Fort Smith and development of the Van Buren regional intermodal facility.

G1.18 Policy: Continue to balance water and port activities with environment and watershed improvements in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers and other interested organizations.

consideration in any project and protected where possible. Lot configurations also should be considered in roadway design, access, land use, zoning and corridor planning. Corridor plans are designed to manage access, safety, economic viability and attractiveness, and will include:

- Road facility function and purpose
- Access management
- Design and aesthetics
- Service and truck access
- Parking and building set-backs
- Land uses, activities and density
- Storm water management
- Lighting and signage



- Focal points, intersection improvements and cross streets
- Landscaping, maintenance, transit service amenities, and landscaped medians and turn islands
- Appropriate bicycle, pedestrian and transit circulation plan element.

GOAL 2 IMPROVE THE FUNCTION AND AESTHETICS OF COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS.

Approach: Create, adopt and implement plans for long-term improvement of commercial corridors addressing both the function and aesthetics of prime commercial corridors.

Critical Recommended Actions Include:

- Establish a set of access management principles to be incorporated into the Master Street Plan, Subdivision Regulations, and Zoning Ordinance.
- Adopt landscaping, lighting, setback, signage, Floor Area Ratio, and other site design standards for lands along the most visible corridors in the city.

Corridor Plans are linear by definition and boundaries of these planning areas usually are a block deep on both sides of the street. Residential land use and values along arterial and collector roadways should be a major

GOAL 3: DEVELOP A COORDINATED, CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Approach: Initiate proactive steps in cooperation with area Chambers of Commerce, Northwest Arkansas, Eastern Oklahoma, University of Arkansas-Fort Smith and other institutions for targeted economic development.

3.1 Policy: Grow the employment base by retaining existing jobs, assisting business expansion and start-ups, and attracting new and diverse businesses.

G3.2 Policy: Organize all economic efforts into a well-coordinated organizational structure.

G3.3 Policy: Establish standard policies for the use of economic development incentives that Measure the performance of city investments with a cost benefit analysis of the actual long-term economic and quality of life benefits to the city and region.

GOAL 4 PRESERVE, PROTECT AND IMPROVE FORT SMITH'S EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS

Approach: *Create friendly but stringent development ordinances rigorously applied throughout the City to protect existing neighborhoods and to create strong new ones*

G4.1 Policy: Improve and encourage maintenance of structures, prevent vagrancy, structural damage, theft, and fire hazards, by providing education, incentives and programs for structural maintenance, particularly in areas designated Neighborhood Revitalization.

G4.2 Policy: Improve public participation in the revitalization process through the establishment of neighborhood associations and other organizations recreation centers, schools, medical care, and public transit.

G4.3 Policy: Maintain housing opportunities in urban areas by renovating and revitalizing existing housing and promoting infill development of vacant land within the corporate limits.

G4.4 Policy: Provide quality affordable housing by actively promoting construction of a variety of sizes and types of housing through zoning and subdivision regulations and other incentives.

G4.5 Policy: Provide convenient safe, connections between neighborhoods and important destinations such as downtown, employment centers, schools, parks, shopping areas, and neighborhood services.

G4.6 Policy: Plan for senior housing and other special population needs by locating diverse housing opportunities accessible to shopping, parks, community centers, schools, medical care and public transit.

G4.7 Policy: Require new subdivisions to develop through public streets.

G4.8 Policy: Increase public awareness, education and knowledge of the historic district and historic architecture throughout the city.

Belle Grove Historic District and Historic Preservation

G4.9 Policy: Encourage revitalization of the Belle Grove historic district and downtown historic buildings.

GOAL 5 EXPAND CITY PARKLAND AND RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING TO REFLECT OR EXCEED NATIONAL STANDARDS.

Approach: *Take advantage of underutilized space, create a variety of recreation opportunities, and continue to pursue, expand, and implement current park plans.*

Plan Elements

Regional Facilities

G5.1 Policy: Promote and establish regional support for Fort Smith Parks and Recreation through agreements, user fees, programs and grant applications with counties and neighboring towns.

Neighborhood Parks

G5.2 Policy: Develop neighborhood parks amenities within walking distance to residents.

Greenways and Trails

G5.3 Policy: Develop greenways and trails that serve to connect the city

Recreation Programming

G5.4 Policy: Plan recreation facility land, space and programming needs with other service providers in order to meet community needs and national standards.



GOAL 6 PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES AND REDUCE THEIR WASTE AND OVERUSE .

Approach: *Inventory and establish goals for resource protection, conservation and waste reduction.*

G6.1 Policy: Investigate and pursue a cooperative regional water supply arrangement with neighboring jurisdictions.

G6.2 Policy: Develop and manage watershed programs to minimize pollution from storm water runoff and other sources.

G6.3 Policy: Preserve wildlife habitats.

G6.4 Policy: Improve air quality by encouraging responsible industry practices and reducing sources of air pollution.

G6.5 Policy: Enhance and promote Fort Smith’s recycling and reuse programs.

GOAL 7 ADOPT DESIGN STANDARDS AND CITY SIGNATURE LOOK FOR PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS.

Approach: *Take advantage of current momentum in creating the “look of Fort Smith” and translate community support for quality urban design into consistent, enforceable design standards that leverages public and private investments as incentives for more investment in quality design.*

G7.1 Policy: Preserve and protect Fort Smith’s historic and architectural resources.

G7.2 Policy: Encourage the inclusion of public art and plazas with new public facilities and major private development.

G7.3 Policy: Enlist the vision and support of the arts community and seek partnerships with the University, convention center and other interest groups to advance opportunities for visual and performing arts within the region.

G7.4 Policy: Establish a public museum of art and an interactive children’s museum

G7.5 Policy: Improve gateway features, commercial corridors and scenic views within the City.

G7.6 Policy: Implement programs to enhance landscaping and tree preservation.



G7.7 Policy: Integrate existing commercial activities within residential neighborhoods by enforcing quality urban design, and prohibiting further commercial and industrial uses in neighborhoods.

GOAL 8 REVITALIZE DOWNTOWN INTO A MULTIPURPOSE ACTIVITY CENTER.

Approach: *Create an AM/PM activity center with a consistent image and strategy for redevelopment. Identify opportunities for public participation, and establish incentives and market niche strategies.*

Housing

G8.1 Policy: Increase the number and type of residential opportunities in and around downtown.

Access & Circulation

G8.2 Policy: Improve the accessibility of downtown by increasing public transit access, implementing an efficient parking plan, and creating safe and attractive pedestrian and bicycle connections within downtown and between adjacent neighborhoods.

Economics & Marketing

G8.3 Policy: Retain and expand existing job base in downtown by developing strategies that support existing businesses, and by directing specific economic development actions to downtown.

G8.4 Policy: Concentrate available resources to encourage job creation and population growth in the downtown and riverfront area.

G8.5 Policy: Develop and promote niche markets that distinguishes downtown from other retail and entertainment options and reinforces downtown’s position as a destination.

G8.6 Policy: Locate cultural activities, entertainment options, service-related businesses, and public, private, or institutional programs in downtown.

Design & the Look of Fort Smith

G8.7 Policy: Improve the aesthetics of private buildings and public areas in downtown

Management & Coordination

G8.8 Policy: Establish full-time CBID marketing and management position in cooperation with city, CBID, Chamber and other property and business owners, who sole task is revitalizing downtown.

GOAL 9 REGAIN CITY ACCESS TO THE ARKANSAS RIVER FRONT.

Approach: Acquire the necessary property and create specific planning actions to make the river front accessible to the citizens of Fort Smith.

G9.1 Policy: Integrate the Arkansas River frontage with new and existing development.

G9.2 Policy: Comprehensively plan access and development along Clayton Expressway to reflect passive and active recreation, pedestrian, bicycle and tourist activities.

G9.3 Policy: Provide recreation activities and access to the Arkansas River while preserving and protecting the natural environment, watershed and critical wildlife habitats.

G9.4 Policy: Integrate unified design and construction standards that complement downtown and city design elements, yet provide a symbol language distinct to the riverfront.

G9.5 Policy: Land development within the river district needs to reflect uses appropriate to the 100-year flood plain and adjacency to the downtown and residential neighborhoods.



GOAL 10 COORDINATE AND PLAN FUTURE DEVELOPMENT WITH NEIGHBORING JURISDICTIONS.

Approach: Develop better relationships with the neighboring cities, counties, and property owners to ensure compatible development patterns both inside and outside of the City limits, and mitigate or eliminate physical and economic barriers that may create inefficient land use and development patterns.

G10.1 Policy: In recognition of the impacts of uncoordinated growth and development, the City of Fort Smith will exercise its extra-territorial jurisdiction over land in Sebastian County.

G10.2 Policy: The City will annex land under any of the following circumstances:

- The extension of city water/sewer or roads is a requirement for the development of the land.
- A more logical service area boundary would be created.
- The elimination of an existing County “island” would occur.
- A more efficient provision of all urban services would be the result.
- Issues of health and safety and general welfare would be addressed.
- A neutral or positive fiscal impact to the city would result.

G10.3 Policy: Subdivision of land within the 5 mile ETJ will comply with city subdivision and infrastructure guidelines as revised to address rural and estate development.

G10.4 Policy: The city will take a leadership role in:

- Working with the County, private developers, land owners and school districts;
- Ensuring consistent and compatible development patterns, both inside and outside the existing city limits; and,
- Mitigating or eliminating any physical or economic barrier that may create unsuitable land use and development patterns.

G10.5 Policy: Protect rural lands from premature growth.

G10.6 Policy: Ensure adequate, well-maintained infrastructure and public facilities for all development and plan infrastructure and service provision ahead of development.

G10.7 Policy: The City will consider a variety of options in its exercise of the ETJ, and will propose a long-term growth and development plan that embraces the City of Neighborhoods philosophy while addressing the preferences of existing county residents for a rural lifestyle.

NEXT STEPS

Implementation of a Comprehensive Plan does not happen over night. It requires that activities occur on many fronts simultaneously, over many years. The tools, priorities and actions that need to occur for this plan to be implemented are simple. Re-orienting and reordering individual efforts into a work plan for the city is more difficult. The essential steps that begin the plan implementation process are as follows:

- Organize and staff to accomplish the mission;
- Set priorities for actions and funding;
- Establish the partnerships and process to achieve success;
- Communicate effectively with the community and affected parties;
- Establish benchmarks and check-points to monitor progress; and,
- Establish an outside monitoring entity, a continuation or modification of "the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee".

Actions that need to occur include:

- Revisions to the zoning and subdivision regulations
- Writing, adopting and enforcing a housing code
- Revisions to the Master Street Plan and classification system
- Corridor, neighborhood, center and district plans



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