GUIDE TO COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is a **long-range, high-level planning document** that addresses topics such as land use, development, natural environment, transportation, and resource utilization within a community. The plan is the community's vision for where it wants to be in 20+ years and includes strategies to achieve that vision. Under **Virginia State Code §15.2-2223,** local governments in Virginia are required to adopt a Comprehensive Plan and to review that plan every 5 years for necessary updates. Though having a plan is required, the content of the plan is not regulatory. Rather, a Comprehensive Plan is a **decision-making guide** for changes to the natural and built environment in a community. A Comprehensive Plan is the basis for regulatory tools such as zoning and subdivision ordinances.

Who is Involved?

A Comprehensive Plan is a community-driven process that is meant to develop a shared vision for the community's future. Through public dialogue, citizens discuss the future of their community. Public input creates strong community support for the plan as well as subsequent decisions that are consistent with the plan's policies. The Berkley Group listens, facilitates, and synthesizes community input from a wide variety of stakeholders. We work closely with staff and the Planning Commission to draft the plan.

What Does it Include?

As the name implies, a Comprehensive Plan studies, assesses, and makes recommendations about the many elements that make up a community. Virginia State Code §15.2-2223 mandates the study of subjects such as transportation, development areas, land use, population projections, and coastal resource management to name a few. However, every community is unique and additional elements that are included in a plan are determined by the locality. Determining what a plan will address is an important part of the planning process, and The Berkley Group works closely with the community to ensure the right elements are addressed in the plan. Typical elements include: cultural resources, local economy, housing, natural resources, land use, transportation, and community services. Once determined, the Comprehensive Plan outlines existing conditions for each element and establishes a vision, goals, and specific strategies to improve each of these elements.

Existing Conditions
Vision > Goals > Objectives
Implementation Strategies

A Note About the Future Land Use Map

A key component of the Comprehensive Plan is the Future Land Use Map. The map describes general, ideal future land use patterns in the community. It does not directly regulate private property, rather it is a guide for officials when evaluating growth and development projects. The Future Land Use Map is different from the Official Zoning Map.

What is the Process?

The Comprehensive Planning process is divided roughly into four phases: Data Gathering & Analysis; Public Input; Plan Development; and Review, Adoption, & Implementation. Once the plan is accepted by officials it is then a legal statement of community policy in regards to future development. The work doesn't stop when the plan is adopted. The plan must be implemented and part of implementation is continual review, monitoring, and updating.

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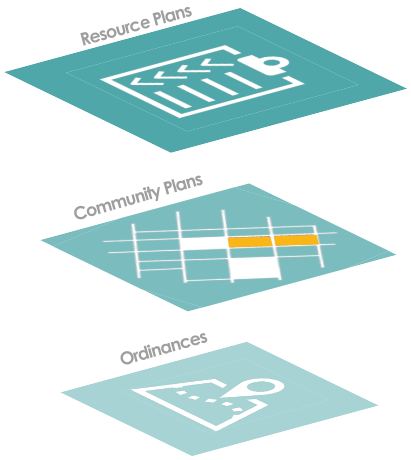
What a Comprehensive Plan is NOT

- Regulation that controls how an individual can use their property.
- A rigid, unchangeable document.
- The only guiding document for the community.
- A plan that sits on a shelf and is never implemented.



How is it Implemented?

Implementation is the most important step in developing a Comprehensive Plan. Continuous review and progress monitoring holds everyone accountable to the plan's vision. The Code of Virginia §15.2-2230 requires that Comprehensive Plans be reviewed every five years. Annual reviews and revisions of ordinances and plans is considered a best practice. In addition to monitoring and updating the plan, there are a variety of implementation tools that enable the long-range vision to become a reality. The following tools are the most vital to ensuring the successful implementation of a Comprehensive Plan: (1) resource plans such as the Capital Improvement Plan and annual budget which allocate public expenditure on projects; (2) community plans and programs that deal with specific subjects; and (3) ordinances and development regulations that control the location, form, and character of private projects.

Capital Improvement Plan

The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is intended to link public capital investments with the Comprehensive Plan. The CIP includes a schedule, cost estimate, funding source(s), and justification.

Community Plans

The Comprehensive Plan sets the stage for more detailed community plans and planning initiatives. Example plans might include: Housing Studies, Green Infrastructure Plans, Parks & Recreation Master Plans, and Small Area Plans.

Ordinances & Zoning Map

The Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances should be guided by the Comprehensive Plan. Theses ordinances are the primary tool through which the land use goals and policies of the plan are implemented.

The Value of Comprehensive Plans

- Provide continuity across time, and give successive public bodies a common framework for addressing land-use issues.
- Guide and protect public investments.
- Allow communities to plan development in a way that protects valued resources.
- Provide guidance for shaping the appearance of the community.
- Promote economic development.
- Provide justification for decisions by providing a factual and objective basis to support zoning decisions.