

Overview to the Comprehensive Plan

I. History of Planning

When North America was settled by the Europeans, many of the new cities were laid out according to a plan. Some plans stressed a grid pattern for efficient movement of citizens and troops (like Santa Fe, Mobile and Savannah). Other plans, like that of New York, with hundreds of rectangular blocks and no alleys, were based on a plan to get the most money for land speculators. Another city, Washington, D.C., was planned with long radiating avenues and grand plazas to show the World, through its capital city, how great America was and how great America would become.

Modern planning, with its emphasis on zoning, housing and transportation, grew out of the efforts of nineteenth century reformers seeking to improve conditions in America's cities. These poor conditions were largely a result of the waves of immigrants coming from Europe. New York, strained by its swelling population, implemented housing reform known as tenement laws. Soon, other major cities around the country then began more elaborate urban improvement projects in what was known as the City Beautiful Movement.

Later, in the first part of the twentieth century, cities across the country began to enact zoning and subdivision regulations in an attempt to improve urban conditions through the control of land. With the popularity of the automobile and the end of World War II, cities expanded outward and municipal governments turned to planning as an attempt to contend with the sprawling city. Today, planning continues to focus on the improvement of the urban environment through urban design, planning for housing, historic preservation, environmental planning and transportation planning

Planning in Mobile has developed in a similar manner. Subdivision, zoning, sign, landscaping and historic preservation ordinances have all been implemented in accordance with the City's Comprehensive Plan; a long range policy document directing growth of the City for the next 20 to 50 years and beyond. These planning efforts, enacted in the twentieth century, have all been initiated to improve the quality of life within Mobile.

II. Growth of the City of Mobile

Known as the City of Six Flags, Mobile has been under the control of the French, English, Spanish, Sovereign Alabama, Confederate States of America and the United States. Mobile was founded in 1702 as a French fort by the Le Moyne brothers, on the west bank of the Mobile River and in 1711 the settlement was moved twenty-seven miles south to its present location. Mobile originated as a French capital for the Louisiana Territory, became a British territory in 1763, and later fell under Spanish rule during the American Revolution. It remained in

Spanish hands until the United States captured it in 1813, ending over 100 years of colonial rule. Mobile prospered in the nineteenth century as a port city handling cotton and other goods. The historic Fort Conde became the downtown core with residential areas developing to the north and west, in the present day vicinities of DeTonti Square and Church Street East. The grid pattern of development was slowly expanding with radial roads leading out of the City, with residential growth following.

Despite the economic hardship of the Civil War and the Depression, Mobile prospered during World War I through shipbuilding. The maritime industries helped populate the cities of Chickasaw and Prichard. World War II witnessed a return to the production of military goods, and once again, shipbuilding boomed. Brookley Air Force Base drove residential growth around this facility and the Dauphin Island Parkway area. Post-war growth has been influenced by the draining of Wragg Swamp, the establishment of the University of South Alabama, the construction of the Interstate Highway system, the closing of Brookley Air Force Base and the expansion of shipyards in other coastal communities. The past ten years have seen further growth in the unincorporated areas of Mobile County and to the east in Baldwin County.

III. Comprehensive Plan Components: General Land Use Plan, Transportation Plan and Community Facilities Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is the physical plan for development and redevelopment based on the current and future needs of the City. The Plan is long range in nature, focusing on the next 20 - 50 years and beyond and is comprised of three sections: The General Land Use Plan, The Transportation Plan and The Community Facilities Plan.

General Land Use Plan: This Plan is a proposal as to how expansion (growth) and renewal (revitalizing existing areas in need) should proceed. It is the most fundamental of all long range planning and is implemented primarily through the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations.

Transportation Plan: The primary purpose of transportation planning is to provide for the safe, efficient movement of people, goods and services. This component focuses on major street planning but also discusses the broader issues of mass transit, trucking, rail, water and air.

Community Facilities Plan: This Plan component provides for parks, recreation, school sites and other community facilities such as libraries, fire stations, health centers, governmental centers and cultural facilities to serve the existing and future needs of the City. These facilities are important to the City's growth as they contribute to the health and well being of its people and have a direct influence on the quality of urban living.

IV. Comprehensive and Regulatory Planning

The planning profession is comprised of two distinct but related areas: comprehensive and regulatory planning. Comprehensive planning focuses on long range issues and develops a policy document that provides for the future physical, economic and social development and redevelopment of a City. The Comprehensive Plan can be thought of as a blueprint indicating how a city will meet the demands for future housing, transportation, public safety and community facilities (including schools, parks and libraries). In addition to new development, a comprehensive plan also demonstrates how to preserve, protect and improve the built aspects of a city.

Regulatory planning focuses on the short range, day to day aspects of the process. If comprehensive planning provides the blueprint, then regulatory planning provides the tools or guidelines for development to follow. Regulatory planning benefits citizens since it specifies, for a city, what is the best use of the land and standards for development (zoning) and the division of land (subdivision), which also protects the environment. Comprehensive and regulatory planning work together for the good of the community.