

Chapter 1

Introduction

"A comprehensive plan is a statement in documented text setting forth explicit goals, objectives, policies, and standards of the jurisdiction to guide public and private development within its control" [North Dakota Century Code]

The City of Wahpeton's 2030 Comprehensive Plan serves as the primary guide for managing change, improvements, redevelopment, and growth in the community over the next 20 years. The Plan's most essential function is to define the community's vision, guiding principles, goals and policies that are needed to manage and shape future changes in the community. First and foremost, the Plan provides future guidance for the community of Wahpeton. The Plan also recognizes Wahpeton's strong connections to Breckenridge, MN as part of the Twin Towns and the larger Richland-Wilkin Counties region.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

The North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) defines a comprehensive plan as "a statement in documented text setting forth explicit goals, objectives, policies, and standards of the jurisdiction to guide public and private development within its control." A city's land use regulations typically have a city plan as their basis. This city plan needs to provide future guidance for land use for all land under the jurisdiction of the city. North Dakota's enabling legislation refers to three types of city plans - comprehensive plan, master plan, and street plan. The comprehensive plan is most consistently thought of as a city's main "plan". The NDCC does not identify specific



elements which must be included in a comprehensive plan. The NDCC does not identify specific required elements for comprehensive plans beyond this general definition. The North Dakota Planning Handbook identifies typical elements of a comprehensive plan as land use management, public facilities, transportation systems, parks and open space, housing, and community/economic development.

A Comprehensive Plan is a big picture, comprehensive tool used to guide physical and socio-economic changes in the community over the next 20 years. The Plan is intended to be broad in scope and establishes general goals, policies and maps addressing critical elements of the community. The Plan is a guide for citizens, elected and appointed officials, city staff, property owners, business owners, developers and investors as they make decisions about land use, development and public improvements.

The planning commission has the primary responsibility for the process of developing a city's comprehensive plan. To achieve citizens' support for the Plan, it is important

to facilitate a community input process, such as public input meetings, surveys, and working with community organizations and key stakeholders.

City's Previous Plans

Authority for City Planning

In North Dakota, land use regulation has its basis in the state enabling legislation in Titles 11, 40 and 58 of the NDCC. Three types of local governments have general authority to regulate land use: cities, counties and townships. In addition to the enabling legislation to regulate land use, the NDCC also provides the right of "home rule authority" for cities and counties. "Home rule authority" enables the local government to establish certain powers for themselves which extend beyond the authority specifically granted by state law. The City of Wahpeton adopted its home rule charter in 1988.

The state planning statute for development of city plans is the oldest of North Dakota's planning statutes, written in 1929 and amended in 1943. In 1981, the state planning statute pertaining to city zoning was amended to include requirements for comprehensive plans. However, the state planning statute related to city plans was never amended to include requirements pertaining to comprehensive plans. Due to this gap in the statutes, the North Dakota Attorney General's Office has opined that local governments must have a comprehensive plan in place as a basis for zoning.

The City of Wahpeton has had three previous comprehensive plans throughout its history. The City's first comprehensive plan was completed in 1969, followed by an updated plan in 1980 and 1997. These previous plans addressed the many issues related to the community's land use, transportation, public facilities and economy. The previous plans approached future change and growth in the community differently based upon the existing community patterns, issues and anticipated opportunities.

The most recent Plan, the 1997 update, was based on assumptions that the City would experience significant growth over the next 20 years or the year 2015. The Plan addressed future growth needs based on an analysis of four alternative growth scenarios ranging from annual population growth of 1% to 4%. This community growth analysis was used to project future land needs for urban development through the year 2015, for residential, commercial, manufacturing, public/semi-public, and transportation land uses. The 1997 Plan established general goals and planning principles as well as goals, objectives and policies for the various elements of the community, including land use, business/industry, downtown development, fringe area development, growth and development pattern, public facilities/services, transportation, housing, and neighborhood planning.

Previous community planning efforts that provide a critical foundation for this updated Comprehensive Plan are:

- Breckenridge/Wahpeton Comprehensive Housing Study (2010)
- Wahpeton Regional Labor Availability (2010)
- Cities of Wahpeton ND and Breckenridge MN Downtown Design Guidelines (2008)
- Wahpeton-Breckenridge Downtown Action Agenda (2006)
- Facility Plan for Westside Development (2001)
- City's previous Comprehensive Plans (1997, 1980 and 1969)
- Advantage of Wahpeton: A Framework Plan for Regional Industrial Development (1997)
- City of Wahpeton Wastewater System Needs Assessment (2006)
- North Dakota Highway 13: A Class II Standing Structures Inventory (2006)

Previous Plans & Studies

In 1997, the City also developed Advantage of Wahpeton: A Framework Plan for Regional Industrial Development, which is a plan specifically focused on the complex issues related to the potential development of a large industrial region north of the City. This potential North Wahpeton Industrial Region encompasses approximately 6,000 acres north of ND Highway 210 and 16th Avenue NW. The Plan provides guidance for land use, transportation and environmental protection. Essentially, the Plan recommends that the entire area be guided for industrial land uses with 3/4 of the area guided for agricultural industries and 1/4 for non-agricultural industries. The Plan recommends a system of highway connections, including an additional bridge crossing of the Red River. Finally, the Plan also establishes three planning objectives and 18 policies for this emerging industrial region. Although some of this land lies within Wahpeton's ETZ area, much of the land is under the jurisdiction of Dwight Township and is not zoned.

Although it is not a "plan" per say, the Wahpeton-Breckenridge Downtown Action Agenda was developed for the Twin Towns joint downtown area in 2006. Based on the concerns, preferences and desires heard from citizens of Wahpeton and Breckenridge and a realistic downtown market analysis, this downtown plan was developed to guide public and private sector implementation efforts. The Plan establishes a downtown vision, guidelines/principles, course of action/initiatives, and implementation sequence.



Wahpeton's Comprehensive Plan addresses these community elements:

- Land use & development
- Housing
- Economic development
- Historic preservation
- Transportation
- Potable water system
- Waste water system
- Storm water & flood protection system
- Parks, trails and recreation facilities
- Community institutions
- Emergency management

Elements of the Plan

Importance of Wahpeton's Comprehensive Plan

As a City's most important guide for community change, improvements, redevelopment and growth, Wahpeton's Comprehensive Plan should influence many decisions in the community. While it is true that zoning and subdivision regulations provide more detailed information regarding land use and development issues, the Plan should be used as a benchmark to ensure that the community's decisions are contributing to achieving the vision, guiding principles and goals of the Plan. It is intended that the Plan's goals, policies and maps are used to guide daily decision-making. Particularly in ambiguous situations, the Plan may be very helpful in providing the needed big picture, long-term direction missing in the community's more detailed regulations.

This updated Plan was developed based on input from the community, review of the previous Plan, and careful studies of each of the Plan's elements. In particular, input was strategically solicited from key stakeholder groups. Wahpeton's updated Plan is important for future planning because the Plan:

- establishes a community vision and guiding principles based on what was heard through stakeholder listening sessions, community meetings, and focus area meetings;
- provides a nexus for establishing zoning regulations, subdivision controls and other land use management tools;
- influences the location, form and pace of new development, redevelopment and infill development;
- protects property investments by ensuring consistency and compatibility of land uses and development policies;
- promotes the maintenance and revitalization of existing neighborhoods and commercial districts;
- determines and reinforces approaches for protecting natural resources and open spaces;
- guides the City's expenditures of scarce resources for capital investments in public streets, facilities and parks.

The Plan is intended to be a dynamic document that is regularly reviewed and updated, rather than just filed away once it starts to feel outdated. When the City finds itself facing decisions where what seems best for the community is inconsistent with the Plan, it is most likely time to reevaluate and update the Plan's goals and policies. As a rule of thumb, a community should update its comprehensive plan every five to ten years.

Organization of the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter 1 Introduction provides an introduction to the Plan and overview of the comprehensive planning process.

Chapter 2 Vision and Guiding Principles summarizes the community's desires for the future and serves as the foundation for the Plan.



Chapter 3 Community Context provides an overview of the community's existing conditions, demographic trends and projections, community input regarding issues and opportunities, and the major trends and issues influencing the community's future planning.

Chapter 4 Land Use Management describes the community's desired future land use and development patterns and establishes the community's goals and policies related to land use and development, housing, and economic development.

Chapter 5 Transportation describes the community's transportation system issues and future plan, including streets, highways, sidewalks and trails to accommodate the needs of drivers, walkers, and bicyclists.

Chapter 6 Community Facilities describes the community's desired public facilities and services over the next twenty years or 2030, including potable water supply, waste water, storm water, flood protection, parks and open space, recreational buildings, trails, civic institutions, and public schools.

Chapter 7 Implementation briefly summarizes how the Plan is to be implemented to achieve the community's vision, guiding principles and goals.