



Communities that are special places don't happen by accident. It takes active involvement from citizens, city leaders and staff in planning for the future. It also requires taking a broader view of planning objectives. In the recent past, the planning model used in most communities concentrated almost exclusively on economic considerations. This approach resulted in communities out of balance with the natural environment, areas developed with little concern for the impact of storm water runoff and the loss of many community characteristics that residents valued most. More and more cities are looking for a more balanced approach, one that recognizes economic, ecological and cultural values on an equal footing.

The following checklist will help you evaluate if your community is taking a balanced view and plan for growth in a more environmentally friendly way.

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Comprehensive Planning Checklists

Conservation Considerations

- Review your existing plan to see that preservation of natural resources is the framework around which development decisions are made. Community development should complement the natural characteristics of the area and respect natural features.
- Inventory what you value most about your community, and ensure that the plan provides for preserving highest priority areas. Provide public access to these areas wherever possible.
- Inventory and map your ecological resources and describe their current condition. This helps prioritize preservation efforts, focusing effort on those most significant resources in the best condition.
- Identify all environmentally sensitive lands in your community including steep slopes, wetlands, woodlands, native grasslands, wildlife habitats, creeks and bluffs. These are areas where development would create costly impacts to natural systems, drainage patterns and the natural resource context of your community.
- Identify stream corridors for preservation and prioritize their protection. This should include first and second order streams (the smallest, sometimes perennial) as well as the large third order and higher streams. Most damage to downstream segments is due to a lack of protection in the upper reaches of each watershed.
- Consider protection measures such as mandatory stream set backs to protect stream corridors. The minimum width of the corridor should be 100 feet and the total width protected should vary to include high quality upland forests, steeply sloping areas, wetlands, and floodplain wherever possible.
- Protect natural drainage ways from development. Encroaching development on unstable slopes and soils results in widespread erosion and loss of wildlife habitat.

Development Pattern

- Development should only occur on land most suitable for development, avoiding steep slopes, poor soils, floodplains, and wetlands.
- Identify community activity centers. These should be areas of higher intensity development including a variety of mixed uses. Your existing downtown will more than likely be your primary center. Study your existing downtown and emulate the pattern in other, smaller centers. Plan commercial areas that don't compete with your downtown. Additional centers can be different types of neighborhood focal points such as commercial centers, school sites, small parks, churches and other civic uses. Community centers should occur in those areas least sensitive to development impacts.
- Identify your community edges. These form boundaries between kinds of districts, usually differing in activity intensity. They may be natural or manmade and serve as strong organizing elements of community design. In historic terms, edges were usually land designated to agricultural purposes. Today, these may be conservation areas, very low-density residential use in addition to agricultural areas. Preserving edges strengthens the distinction of your community from surrounding areas.
- Plan for an interconnected system of neighborhoods rather than a collection of subdivisions. The ideal neighborhood size is one-quarter mile radius from center to edge.

- ❑ In environmentally sensitive areas, consider planning for cluster development. This is where development is concentrated or “clustered” on the least environmentally sensitive portions of a site and the remainder is left in open space. The open space designation may be as high as 50 percent of the site depending on specific site characteristics.
- ❑ Avoid identifying land use patterns that segregate one socioeconomic group from another and all housing from commercial areas. It is possible and desirable to provide a variety of housing types, office and commercial uses in close proximity to one another served by an interconnected street system.
- ❑ Provide for diversity in parks and open space in both size and activity type. Trail systems and identifiable streetscapes should connect parks. Consider employing a parkway network to interconnect major recreation areas where the roads actually become an integral part of the park system. The city of Kansas City, Missouri’s boulevard system is an excellent example. It is ideal to have green space within a five minute walk of all residents in a neighborhood. Parkland should front on public streets to the extent possible.

The Process

- ❑ Instead of making planning decisions on a case-by-case basis, local governments should decide where they want new growth, infill or redevelopment to occur and use the comprehensive plan process to guide development decisions.
- ❑ Prior to approval of any development, a specific site plan should be prepared consistent with the community’s comprehensive plan.
- ❑ Comprehensive plans should be developed through an open process. Education on alternative development models is an important component and discussions with the public need to include pictures.
- ❑ Communities and developers should consider holding a public workshop, often called a charrette, to get community involvement in a project’s design and to build understanding and support for the proposal.

