

An Implementable Comprehensive Plan

Michael Chandler, an Associate Professor and Community Planning Extension Specialist, identifies ten questions which planning boards should ask themselves in order to ensure the implementation of a comprehensive plan. The following is based on Mr. Chandler's article entitled "Preparing An Implementable Comprehensive Plan" taken from the Spring 1995 Issue of the *Planning Commissioner's Journal*.

The value of a comprehensive plan is not determined by its adoption but is judged by whether or not the quality of life enjoyed by the residents of a community actually improves as a result of the plan. The comprehensive plan, therefore, should be judged according to the degree to which the plan is implemented. The plan then becomes a tool of the community's leadership. The following identifies ten questions a planning board should be cognizant of in order to create an implementable plan.

■ Is the plan realistic

A plan should indicate not only what is desirable, but also what is possible given available resources. Most plans feature a full range of objectives. A good plan will also include the ways and means to measure whether the community actually achieves what the plan calls for.

■ Is the plan comprehensive

A solid plan addresses the full range of conditions that affect the quality of life in a community. In order to be effective, a plan must recognize the inseparability and interrelationship of all human conditions (e.g., social, economic, environmental, etc.). One particular component cannot be considered without the others.

■ Is the plan specific

Human, economic, social, and environmental conditions are not uniformly felt across a community. Therefore, a plan must reflect the unique needs of individual neighborhoods and the citizens who live within them. A comprehensive plan must be geographically targeted in order to meet distinct needs of different parts of the community.

■ Is the plan linked with related functions

Planning cannot take place in a vacuum, isolated from other governmental activities performed by a locality. At a minimum, the planning process should be linked or integrated with the community's annual operating budget, as well as the capital improvements program or budget. Such linkage is necessary because many of the recommendations contained in a comprehensive plan will be meaningless without the fiscal support of the local government.

■ Does the plan link public and private interests

Improving the quality of life in a particular community cannot be the sole responsibility of government. Likewise, the private sector cannot be considered as a source of unlimited benevolence. An effective planning process will bring public and private interests together in a combined effort to address not only community challenges, but community opportunities as well.

■ Is the plan citizen focused

If the plan is to gain the political and community support required for its implementation, the process by which it is prepared must be open to all those affected by it. Additionally, opportunities for direct citizen involvement during plan implementation should be a key feature in the plan management process.

■ Is the plan understandable

It is vital that the community is able to read and understand the planning document. The plan should not be mired in technical terms and processes. The plan belongs to the community, therefore, the citizens should be able to understand and comprehend its primary objectives with relative ease.

■ Is the plan problem- and solution-specific

A meaningful comprehensive plan will identify community problems in an objective and forthright manner. A solid plan will propose solutions which, if implemented, will remedy or redress the identified problems.

■ Is the plan change specific

A comprehensive plan should be viewed as incomplete if a specific "change strategy" is missing from the document. Having a change strategy means that the plan should offer specific strategies to alleviate identified community challenges and shortcomings.

■ Is the plan current

It is imperative that a plan be updated when necessary to reflect changing conditions, as well as community perceptions. Allowing a plan to grow stagnant through neglect is self-defeating, as well as short-sighted.