

A. History

The City of Sandusky initiated this update to the City's Comprehensive Plan in January, 1997, recognizing the need to prepare broad land use and development policies. The Plan builds upon a series of previous planning-related activities, including the Strategic Plan, Bayfront Corridor Plan and Port Development Plan. Following completion of the Comprehensive Plan a Heritage Tourism Marketing Plan for Downtown was created. The process that led to the Comprehensive Plan Update included significant public participation – considerably more than the previous Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for making decisions about the future of Sandusky. It addresses important issues related to land use, economic development, urban design, housing, parks and recreation, community facilities, transportation and utilities. These issues are addressed as individual elements in the Plan.

The most successful community planning efforts are those that are inclusive in every aspect. The City of Sandusky made a commitment to engage anyone that had an interest in the community. This commitment began with creating a Steering Committee that reflected the diverse interests of Sandusky: citizens, business leaders, civic groups, and appointed and elected officials.

The planning effort also brought the community together through a series of forums and open houses, which provided opportunities to debate important issues and which resulted in a consensus about the future of the community. The implementation of the Comprehensive Plan is the next bold step.

B. Plan Update

According to the implementation schedule provided in the Comprehensive Plan, in 2003 the document was to be formally evaluated to determine whether the Plan's goals, objectives and strategies continue to be relevant to the City and conditions at the time. In keeping with that charge the City contracted with Burns, Bertsch and Harris, Inc. (BBH) to conduct the required update. BBH was charged with determining if the Plan's goals, objectives, and strategies were still relevant. BBH used several techniques in order to undertake this task including interviews with elected officials, community board and commission members, and the administration, as well as public focus groups, and targeted work sessions.

Overall participants felt that the goals were relevant and important; however, many questioned whether the goal statements were realistic. Others felt that some of the goals were difficult to focus on, especially the housing and land use goals. In addition, the economic development goal, housing goal, land use goal, and parks and recreation goal specifically emphasize the Downtown and/or Bayfront. While these are important elements of the community and a key part of the City's revitalization plans, the goals of the Comprehensive Plan should focus on the community as a whole. The Downtown and Bayfront areas become part of the strategies used to accomplish the goals. Other concerns were that the City's goals were not adequately communicated with residents. According to respondents, the City needs to promote a positive image.

While the 1999 Comprehensive Plan's goal areas will be applicable to the proposed 2008 update, one major goal area not considered during the 1999 Comprehensive Plan was natural resources/open space. The City has an abundance of natural areas that contribute to the quality of life of its citizens and also serve as a tourism draw. The importance of this community resource makes it a worthy addition to the City's goals.

During the interviews and work sessions it became clear that new objectives and strategies were needed to address many of the concerns expressed by elected and appointed officials as well as the administration. The strategies contained with the Comprehensive Plan are a combination of both policies and recommendations. Policies define a clear commitment on the part of the City and are not time bound. Recommendations require further action by the City and therefore require a time frame for completion. However, both policies and recommendations are assigned a time frame.

During the workshop held with the City Commission, they felt that the housing objectives needed to be re-examined with an emphasis on creating quality housing as well as encouraging redevelopment. In addition, objectives related to housing maintenance and increasing new single-family housing should be added.

Regarding parks and recreation, several new objectives should be created. First, an objective should be created that addresses internal cooperation in the review of subdivision plans. Currently the Parks and Recreation Director does not see subdivision plans prior to approval. The Parks and Recreation Director should be included in the review process to ensure that park and recreation needs are adequately met. New objectives should also be created that address both local and regional cooperation and coordination in the provision of parks and recreation as well as preservation of the natural environment through the creation of passive parks.

When considering transportation, an objective should be created that addresses the connection between transportation improvements and economic development as well as land use. Another objective should be created that addresses the public transportation infrastructure.

It is important to note that the economic development section of the plan as well as the economic base analysis report should not be substituted for an economic development plan that would give more detailed guidance to the City regarding economic development strategies. In the short term the City should consider the creation of such a plan.

On January 5, 2004 the City's department heads and other key staff met to discuss the implementation strategies of the Comprehensive Plan and were asked several questions regarding key issues related to the update. The City Commission discussed the results of this meeting during a workshop held on February 12, 2004 and provided additional input. According to the time frame established in the Comprehensive Plan, all short-term strategies were to have been completed by 2001 and mid term strategies were to be underway and completed by the end of 2004. During the work session, participants were asked several questions. First, has this strategy been completed or has action been undertaken to begin completion of it. Second, if the strategy has not been completed or action been undertaken to begin completion is it still a relevant strategy that should be included in the Comprehensive Plan. If the strategy remained relevant, did the person(s) responsible for implementation or the time frame need modified and if so, how.

One key point regarding the strategies should be noted prior to discussion the results of the work session. The strategies contained with the Comprehensive Plan are a combination of both policies and recommendations. This leads to some confusion when a time frame is assigned to a policy. Policies define how the City operates and makes decisions. They tend to be on going with no definite time frame. Recommendations require further action by the City and therefore require a time frame for completion. Therefore the strategies should be identified as either policies or recommendations.

C. Organization of the Document

Following the Introduction, there is an Executive Summary that provides an overview of the planning process, describes the Plan's Goals and Objectives, and highlights key recommendations. Following the Executive Summary is the Existing Conditions chapter which documents current conditions in Sandusky and trends which together served as a baseline to prepare the Plan.

Following Existing Conditions are the Plan's six major elements: Community Facilities and Services, Economic Development, Housing, Land Use, Parks and Recreation, and Transportation. The elements are consistently organized by the following sections: Overview, Goal, Objectives and Strategies, except the Land Use Element which also addresses principles, standards and land use recommendations for the City's subareas.

Following these elements is Implementation, which summarizes strategies and actions that must be accomplished to achieve the preferred future for Sandusky as reflected by this Plan. The Implementation chapter is followed by the Appendix, which includes a Glossary, Bibliography and Index.