

Executive Summary

The **Wayne County Comprehensive Plan** establishes a policy framework to guide public decisions regarding development for the unincorporated area. It also recommends an approach to growth management for all jurisdictions that seeks to redirect development to the cities, villages and hamlets, with the anticipated outcome of preserving agriculture and greenspace. Protecting the County's quality of life while accommodating a reasonable amount of growth is the desired long-term result, with minimal public expenditure of tax dollars and minimal impact on the environment.

The **Comprehensive Plan** was a dual effort by the County with the Wayne Development Council and business community, which together simultaneously prepared the **Strategic Economic Development Plan**. Both planning efforts were strongly coordinated and each separate steering committee shared membership.

This Executive Summary presents the vision and goals that serve as the policy basis for the Plan, which are the major recommendations and strategies for implementation. As a fundamental basis of the process, a "bottom-up" approach was taken that brought citizens into the planning effort early and consistently as the Plan was formulated. A citizen Steering Committee worked with the County Planning Department and Planning Team to represent the public interest.

Vision and Goals

Well-planned and -managed development, abundant farmland and greenspaces, a full-range of housing opportunities, and economic prosperity are the combined vision of the **Comprehensive Plan**. The goals as developed by the Steering Committee and adopted by the County Commissioners are:

- **Community Facilities and Services** - Community facilities and services to be expanded and improved, with emphasis on safety and crime control, youth activities, outdoor recreation, educational facilities and programs, public health and social services, and communications systems.
- **Cultural Resources** - Cultural and historic assets to be protected.
- **Economic Development** - Quality jobs with good pay and benefits, orderly commercial and light industrial growth to be encouraged, with sensitivity to downtowns, agribusiness, family farms and tax implications.
- **Housing** - Housing opportunities to be expanded, with emphasis on affordability, quality and revitalization of neighborhoods.
- **Land Use** - Growth and development to be managed, with emphasis on preserving farmland, the current agricultural character and the rural landscape.
- **Natural Resources** - Natural resources to be conserved.
- **Population** - Population growth to be consistent with economic and land use goals.
- **Transportation** - Transportation system to be improved to address existing and future traffic challenges.
- **Utilities** - Quality utility services to be provided.

Major Recommendations

The Comprehensive Plan's major recommendations build upon the vision and goals developed by the Steering Committee. These recommendations are presented in detail within specific elements. The following is a summary:

- **Redirect and Concentrate Development** - The Plan seeks to redirect future development to cities, villages and hamlets, and to encourage higher densities to reduce the overall amount of land consumed by development. The result would be a savings in land otherwise developed (estimated at 15,000 acres of lost agricultural land and greenspace), reduced sprawl and reduced public expenditures for infrastructure.
- **Manage Population** - The Plan supports a population level of about 124,000 by 2010, an 18,000-person increase over 1995 estimates. This increase reflects the growth rate of the early 1990's, but by redirecting the location of future development and increasing densities, it will have a lessened impact in terms of land use, infrastructure costs, etc. Without redirecting such growth, the County will lose an additional 15,000 acres of undeveloped land.
- **Conserve Farmland and Greenspace** - The Plan recognizes the importance of agriculture and greenspace to the County's quality of life and economy, and therefore recommends redirecting and concentrating development to existing population centers. Production farming in particular is recognized for its economic role. Redirecting growth will protect farm operations and the greenspace that all residents and visitors enjoy.
- **Protect Rural Character** - The Plan recommends open-space subdivision design and other approaches to better manage development in the rural area. These approaches encourage appropriate treatments to protect rural character and ensure future development is sensitive to the natural environment and agriculture. The rural landscape is especially important to the County's well-recognized quality of life.
- **Encourage Economic Prosperity** - The Plan respects the need for a strong local economy and recognizes this as a basic framework of all other recommendations. Economic considerations are integrated into land use, agriculture, greenspace and other sections of the Plan. Wayne County has certain economic strengths that are to be supported and the Plan recommends special focus in the areas of industrial development, downtown revitalization and agriculture/agribusiness.

Implementation

The Comprehensive Plan is a working document that will result in concrete changes to the way Wayne County and local jurisdictions manage growth. In a sense the Plan presents a *blueprint for action* that provides direction and assists decisionmakers over the next five to ten years. The intent is to fulfill the goals, objectives and strategies that embody the civic contract that is a result of this effort. Implementation will involve a host of individuals and agencies working individually and in partnership. Primary responsibility will fall to the County Commissioners, County Planning Commission and County Planning Department. But all communities in Wayne County are expected to take responsibility for managing development within their own jurisdictions.

The Plan can be used in the following ways:

- **Update Regulations** - The County is to update regulations related to the subdivision of land and improvements (subdivision, engineering and health codes) during 1997. The **Comprehensive Plan** provides guidance in that regard and should be used as a frame of reference in each case.
- **Land Use Decisions** - Various jurisdictions in the County make land use decisions on a regular basis, whether or not those jurisdictions have adopted zoning. Deciding to extend utilities to a development, approving certain permits and providing economic incentives are several ways in which public decisions impact land use. Elected and appointed officials should use the **Comprehensive Plan** for guidance in making these decisions whenever an impact on land use is a potential outcome. In the end public decisionmakers must decide whether a proposal's benefits outweigh its potential costs, including public costs relative to infrastructure.
- **Capital Improvement Decisions** - It is very important that public entities make sound decisions regarding extending utilities, in line with the Plan's land use recommendations. The Plan strongly supports redirecting future development to existing cities, villages and hamlets, especially those with the necessary water and sewer systems. Such future development should be concentrated in those areas and utilities should not be extended until available building sites are fully obligated. On an annual basis communities should prepare and adopt capital improvement plans that reflect the land use and utility recommendations contained in the **Comprehensive Plan**.
- **Economic Incentives** - The **Comprehensive Plan's** land use recommendations should be used as a basis for deciding economic incentives, encouraging businesses seeking such incentives to locate in places consistent with the Plan. The County could adapt application forms to include an assessment of such proposed locations relative to the Plan, land use compatibility with adjacent properties, infrastructure availability, natural constraints, etc.

Existing industrial sites and future industrial parks should be the focus of incentives as well. This would encourage development of appropriate parcels, reuse of available buildings and development of future industrial parks. Again, directing industrial growth in this way is one means of implementing the Comprehensive Plan's land use recommendations.

- **Private Decisionmaking** - Private property owners should use the **Comprehensive Plan** in making their own decisions regarding development potential. The Plan provides very good data on natural constraints that can affect the cost or suitability of development. Likewise the Plan identifies the areas most appropriate for development from a land use policy standpoint using the County geographic information system (GIS). The Plan does not seek to deny an individual development rights, but tries to encourage actions consistent with the Plan's recommended policies. Additionally incentives are proposed to further encourage compatible development, through changes to the County subdivision regulations and changes to local zoning codes.

- **Staffing** - The most pressing impact of plan implementation on staffing levels will occur at the County Planning Department. Currently the staff is responsible for a host of administrative activities and it is assumed that a significant responsibility will fall on the Department to directly implement portions of the Plan, coordinate activities among County and local entities that will implement various actions and provide ongoing information and technical assistance to a host of public and private individuals relative to the Plan. The Department will evaluate staffing levels and forward a recommendation to the County Commissioners.
- **Planning Commission and Steering Committee** - The County Planning Commission will be looked upon to assist implementing the **Comprehensive Plan** through its own responsibilities and decisions. These particularly focus on subdivision authority and intergovernmental review. The Commission should consistently use the Plan's land use recommendations and analysis of natural features to suggest modifications to subdivision proposals, in line with the Plan's policies.

To assist the Commission in these responsibilities and to provide additional consistency following the conclusion of this planning effort, the Plan recommends that members of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee be appointed by the Commissioners to a special subcommittee of the Commission. This subcommittee could meet on a regular basis with the full Commission to consider the status of Plan implementation. The full Steering Committee would also be convened annually to review implementation progress, forecasts and recommended changes to Plan policies and recommendations. Steering Committee members could also be a very good source of future planning commissioners.

- **Funding** - Funding many of the recommendations of the **Comprehensive Plan** will require the identification of special funds. In some cases the County and individual communities will be able to tap state and federal grants to fund certain recommended actions. In other cases annual appropriations (general funds) and capital improvement funds may be reallocated to implement Plan recommendations.

But it appears that a dedicated, reliable source of public funding will be necessary to either directly pay for certain recommendations or to provide financial incentives to encourage non-county organizations and individuals to implement portions of the Plan. Clearly the County will be in a stronger position to implement this Plan if it can provide some funding to assist local partners in positively managing Wayne County's development.

The funding issue should be considered as a major source of public funds dedicated solely to implement various recommendations of the County's **Comprehensive Plan**. Funding could be from a variety of taxes, such as sales tax, sin tax or conveyance tax. The issue would be put to a vote of the public. If approved the fund would be established by the County Commissioners and implemented by the Planning Commission with staff support from the Planning Department.

The fund should be capitalized at a minimum of \$3 million, a substantial portion of which should be earmarked for loans to ensure the fund is self-supporting. Guidelines would be prepared by the Planning Commission

and adopted by the County Commissioners. An annual application deadline and monitoring by the Planning Department would create additional mechanisms to ensure a fair and well-run program.