

INTRODUCTION

CityVision 2010 is Gastonia's first comprehensive plan. Gastonia has been *planning* for many years, with products such as small-area, corridor, thoroughfare, and utility plans. In addition, the City engages in land use planning on a short-range basis through such functions as zoning and subdivision approval. *CityVision 2010* builds upon earlier planning efforts, incorporating them into a comprehensive planning document.

The *CityVision 2010* planning process was initiated by the Gastonia Planning Commission in 1991.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

The plan is divided into three major sections. The initial section lays out the context of Gastonia and this plan, with chapters on Gastonia's community setting, growth & change, and major development issues.

Following this are ten chapters which cover specific planning subjects. These subjects are:

- Community Economy
- Transportation
- Community Facilities
- Built Environment
- Annexation
- Housing & Neighborhoods
- Public Utilities
- Natural Environment
- Recreation & Open Space
- Land Use

Each chapter has an overview section detailing the background and trends of the particular subject. This is followed by a list of major issues. Concluding each chapter is a section of objectives and tools. Objectives are "action goals" that the City wants to accomplish. Tools are used to implement the objective. Tools can be statements of policy, recommended changes to Gastonia's ordinances, or priorities for City programs. To aid the user, the tools are cross-referenced to related tools within the same chapter or in other chapters. The "Policy References" can help you quickly find all the policies that relate to the proposed US 321/74 Bypass, for example. The policy references also help illustrate relationships between the various chapters.

The final section of the plan contains the six sector plans. The sector plans are an integral part of the comprehensive plan, but they are structured so that they can stand alone as well. At the end of each sector plan is a strategy map, which graphically shows such things as neighborhoods, greenways, growth areas and proposed roads.

ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

CityVision 2010 was adopted by Gastonia City Council on July 18, 1995, and it is both a statement of policy and a guide to future decision-making. Unlike a zoning ordinance, the plan is not law, and it places no specific restrictions on any person or their property.

The plan is expected to be revised over time, with minor changes made on an annual basis, and a thorough update every five years. The Planning Department will also prepare an annual implementation guide, which will be used to monitor the progress in implementing the plan.

We hope you find the plan both informative and helpful.



VISION STATEMENT

In shaping the future of Gastonia it is our community vision to provide a high quality of life, characterized by the efficient delivery of public services combined with land use planning that is sensitive to the needs of both human opportunity and natural resources. We will recognize the contributions of our neighborhoods and their variety of lifestyles. We will respond to the challenges of regional and global change in a proactive manner, leading the area as both a regional partner and a competitor. Gastonia of the year 2010 will enhance its image and growth opportunities building on its strengths of economic vitality, environmental sensitivity, beauty, historic character, education and safe healthy living. As Gastonia grows to include new areas as they urbanize, it will form a compact city that combines the freedoms of a small town with all the amenities of a major metropolitan area.

WHY IS PLANNING IMPORTANT TO GASTONIA?

Everybody plans.

From shopping for the evening meal to making arrangements for retirement, we plan for a multitude of things in our lives. We plan vacations: well in advance we begin saving money, researching destinations, making reservations; all these things are involved in planning a typical vacation. Business people plan new products and services, plan for expansion and plan in order to survive setbacks. Many of us plan to buy a house. Again, this involves starting far ahead of the actual purchase, putting together a down payment, deciding on a neighborhood, evaluating our needs.

Planning starts with a look at the present situation and then ahead to the future. What do we want to change, what do we want to preserve, where do we want to go? By thinking about these things we begin to set goals for the future. Next we decide on what needs to be done to achieve those goals. By setting objectives, we develop a framework for making things happen. Getting back to the house purchase, one objective is to save enough money for a down payment on a mortgage. Once the objectives have been set, it's time to decide on what needs to be

done and what tools are to be used to achieve the objectives. If you want to save the money for a down payment on a house, your tools might be not only setting up a savings account, but also cutting your

spending and increasing your income so that you can save the required amount faster than if you did nothing.

Goals, objectives and tools. A good planner will use these tools to achieve the objective, all the while

keeping the goal in front. Failure to do this lets short term problems and desires intrude. If while saving for the down payment you decide instead to buy a sports car, you have not achieved your goal, even though you have used the tools and

accomplished one of the objectives (saving money.) Short term satisfaction has taken place of the long-term achievement.

City planning is not so different from everyday planning. A community is a reflection of the people who live and work in it. Most communities value good schools, but some will sacrifice them in order to keep taxes low. Some cities promote tourism, others promote industrial development. Large cities are dense, diverse places that offer excitement and access to wide variety of experiences. Rural communities are often tranquil, friendly and close to nature. A community is shaped by millions of individual decisions occurring all the time. Change is inevitable; even places that don't appear to change much are always evolving. We cannot prevent change. What we can do is prepare for it and act to achieve the future that we want.

Planners use a number of methods to help people think about the future and decide their goals and

“If you don’t know where you’re going, you might end up someplace else”

—Casey Stengel

“Where there is no vision, the people perish”

—Proverbs 29:18

how they will accomplish them. Some of these devices are:

Evaluating the current situation

How much sewer capacity do we have? How many parks are there? What is the capacity of our roads?

Forecasting population change

How many elderly people will we have in 20 years? How many school age children?

Gathering economic data.

What are the growth prospects for the textile industry? How much medical office space do we need?

Identifying resources.

How can we get enough clean water for all our needs in 20 years? What industry can we attract?

Surveying attitudes and desires.

Does the public of Gastonia want a system of greenways? Do they want more five-lane roads?

Some thoughtful and intelligent people have maintained that city planning is unnecessary and may even be counterproductive. "Let the free market decide, the rest will sort itself out." This position ignores the everyday planning that people do at every level. If the City of Gastonia were to abandon all planning, we might expect such things as overloaded sewers, clogged traffic, pollution, overcrowded schools, a lack of good sites for new industry, lower property values and a general spread of ugliness and a decline in the quality of life. Such things have happened in other communities. Indeed, the modern profession of planning developed out of concern over just such things in 19th-century cities.

City planning embodies a number of values that guide decision making. Some of these values are:

Health.

Perhaps the fundamental charge of city governments is protecting the public health and welfare. This includes clean air and water, safe streets, and fire protection.

Conservation of resources.

Our natural environment is an integral part of the quality of life in the community. Natural resources are vulnerable to short-term exploitation. Had Crowder's Mountain been strip mined in the 1960's, this prominent natural feature would have been lost forever. Good stewardship of our natural environment allows us to benefit from it without destroying it.

Efficiency.

A universal value. Planning now can save us money in the future. Often we can identify future expenditures and plan for them now, such as purchasing land for a new school before an area is fully developed and

"The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, change amid order."
—Alfred North Whitehead

"Dig the well before you are thirsty."
—Chinese Proverb

while the price of land is still low.

Beauty.

We strive for an urban environment that has long-lasting quality, visibility and psychological uplift. Good land use policy helps avoid both cluttered, clashing conditions and sterile, boring ones. Public investments such as street trees improve everybody's enjoyment of Gastonia.

Equity.

Social equity is influenced by public plans. Can people live close to their jobs? Are police protection and schools better in some neighborhoods than others? Land use policy and public spending can produce windfalls for some sections of the city while

cutting others off. Equity means pursuing a balance so that all people have a chance to fulfill their needs and achieve their dreams.

Democratic participation.

Planning is the government activity that generates the most citizen participation, and for many people involvement in planning decisions is their only participation in public decision-making other than voting. From zoning hearings to neighborhood meetings to opinion surveys, planners are always trying to get a sense of the public interest. One of the basic principles of city planning is that the best

decisions are those that are made with lots of citizen participation.

This plan is not intended to be a blueprint. Decisions will continue to be made day to day, month to month and year to year. Rather it is a *guide* to decision-making, setting out the goals and desires of our community and providing tools for achieving them. Growth and change will come to both our city and region over the next twenty years. We can either plan ahead for the community that we want or we can allow events to shape Gastonia how they will. The choice is ours.