

The Comprehensive Plan Process

Comprehensive Plan Purpose

The Code of Virginia requires each city's Planning Commission to prepare a Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan should represent the community's vision for the long-range development of the city.

This plan is to be based on careful studies of existing conditions, trends of growth and probable future requirements of the community. The plan will be a guide that can be used in problem solving and improving the quality of life in the community. The Comprehensive Plan is required to be

thoroughly reviewed, at least once every five years, to determine whether amendments are warranted.

Public Hearings & Adoption

The Planning Commission may recommend the Comprehensive Plan, or parts of a plan, to the Governing Body after it has conducted a public hearing on it. The Governing Body then considers the plan, and, following a public hearing, may adopt the plan as submitted by the Planning Commission or amend it and then adopt it. The Code of Virginia states that the Comprehensive Plan...

...shall be general in nature , in that it shall designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of each feature shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed in use as the case may be.

...shall include a transportation element that designates a system of transportation infrastructure needs and recommendations that shall include, as appropriate, but not be limited to, roadways, bicycle accommodations, pedestrian accommodations, railways, bridges, waterways, airports, ports, and public transportation facilities. The Virginia Department of Transportation shall, upon request, provide localities with technical assistance in preparing such transportation element.

...with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive matter, shall show the locality's long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory covered by the plan. It may include, but need not be limited to:

- 1. The designation of areas for various types of public and private development and use, such as different kinds of residential, including age-restricted, housing; business; industrial; agricultural; mineral resources; conservation; recreation; public service; flood plain and drainage; and other areas;*
- 2. The designation of a system of community service facilities such as parks, forests, schools, playgrounds, public buildings and institutions, hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, community centers, waterworks, sewage disposal or waste disposal areas, and the like;*
- 3. The designation of historical areas and areas for urban renewal or other treatment;*
- 4. The designation of areas for the implementation of reasonable ground water protection measures;*
- 5. An official map, a capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps, mineral resource district maps and agricultural and forestal district maps, where applicable;*
- 6. The location of existing or proposed recycling centers; and*
- 7. The location of military bases, military installations, and military airports and their adjacent safety areas.*

...shall include: the designation of areas and implementation of measures for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of affordable housing, which is sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents of all levels of income in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated.

Overview

The City of Manassas Park’s previous Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1984, with major amendments adopted in 1990. The City has periodically amended the plan to accommodate land use changes and development needs. These changes have, for the most part, worked well with existing land use designations. However, with very few developable parcels remaining in the city, each land use decision has proved to be more challenging during the last few years.

Vision 2025 – Transforming Manassas Park from Virginia’s “Newest to the Best”

Citizens in Action

The City of Manassas Park is not just the Governing Body, the Planning Commission, and city staff but, more importantly, it is the residents. With this in mind, when the need to update the Comprehensive Plan was identified the Governing Body allocated funding for hiring a planning consultant to facilitate the updating of the plan by the citizens. The process was to be led by a Steering Committee and backed by a Technical Committee and eight defined Focus Groups.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was comprised of the Planning Director, the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Planning Commission and the planning consultant. The Steering Committee was responsible for providing overall guidance throughout the process.

Technical Committee

The Technical Committee was comprised of the Steering Committee, Focus Group Leaders, and members of the city staff, as appropriate. The Technical Committee was responsible for the formulation of the updated Comprehensive Plan.

Focus Groups

The Focus Groups were each comprised of a lead, who was a member of the Planning Commission, a city staff representative, and citizen volunteers who were interested in that particular topic area. Focus Groups were formed to examine eight key areas:

- *Education*
- *Environment*
- *Human Services*
- *Land Use & Urban Design*
- *Parks & Recreation*
- *Public Safety*
- *Public Works*
- *Transportation*

A Collaborative Process

The process of updating the Comprehensive Plan spanned 27 months, beginning with the release of a Request for Proposals for selecting a consultant to final adoption by the Governing Body. Highlights of citizen involvement were:

Town Hall Meeting #1

Key to the success of the comprehensive plan update was citizen input. In September of 2003, a Town Hall meeting was held in the Manassas Park High School Commons. The purposes of the Town Hall meeting were: to describe a framework for updating the Comprehensive Plan; to satisfy the Code of Virginia requirements; to brainstorm in areas of interests to citizens; to highlight areas of focus through a dot-voting exercise; and to solicit volunteers for Focus Groups.



Figure 1.1 Town Hall Dot Voting Exercise

Forty-three interested people attended the Town Hall Meeting; they consisted of members of the Governing Body, the Planning Commission, city staff, consultants, and most importantly – 16 citizens.

Focus Group Meetings

Each Focus Group met independently throughout the process, usually once every six weeks. They worked through the input received at the Town Hall, generated ideas for inclusion, assigned research topics, defined goals, objectives and action plans and continually improve their Comprehensive Plan sections.

Town Hall Meeting #2

A second Town Hall meeting was held on May 1, 2004, at the Manassas Park High School Commons. The purposes of this Town Hall meeting were: to highlight the work of the Focus Groups; discuss possible future uses of the undeveloped parcels in the city; present the draft Comprehensive Plan for review; and to propose areas in the draft Comprehensive Plan for improvement.

Comprehensive Plan Adoption – What’s Next?

Comprehensive Plan in Action

The Planning Commission and Governing Body will use the amended Comprehensive Plan as a guide for making decisions concerning land development. The Comprehensive Plan will also be used to guide the setting of priorities for new and expanded community facilities and other public improvements, based upon the goals, objectives, and action strategies.

Implementation of the Plan

The Code of Virginia authorizes the Governing Body to utilize all legal tools in the implementation of a Comprehensive Plan. The tools most commonly utilized include the Capital Improvements Program, Zoning and Subdivision Regulations and Cooperative Activities.

Capital Improvements Program

The Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is a listing of all anticipated and necessary public improvements for the five-year period. The CIP is prepared annually, reviewed by the Planning Commission, and approved by the Governing Body.

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

As previously noted, the Comprehensive Plan reflects the vision for the City. The principal

means of obtaining this desired pattern of land use is through zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations.

The Planning Commission and the Governing Body closely evaluate applications for rezonings and conditional use permits to determine whether they are consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. Proposed revisions of the Zoning Ordinance, the use of conditional zoning and proffers will also be evaluated for consistency with the CIP.

Cooperative Activities

In addition to the authority vested in the Planning Commission and the Governing Body, many of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan can be achieved through cooperative and joint activities with local, regional, State, and Federal governments or agencies. Maintaining clear lines of communication with the City of Manassas, Prince William County and other Northern Virginia jurisdictions is of primary importance to the City of Manassas Park.

While transportation issues continue to dominate the list of regional interests, land use and community facility concerns are of increasing concern due to local demographic changes and a decrease in developable land in Manassas Park. All surrounding governments should maintain and improve on the established framework for dialogue on matters of mutual interest for successful resolutions of local issues.

Some of the organizations to promote this dialogue are:

- Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC)
- Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NRVC)
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG)

Finally, the Governing Body should increase its influence at the State

level by all means possible. The Governing Body should promote appointments of city representatives to regional and state commissions, committees, and associations, and increase the interaction of local governmental officials with state offices.

The Planning Commission and the Governing Body should continue to encourage the participation of citizens at all levels of planning and implementation of this Comprehensive Plan.