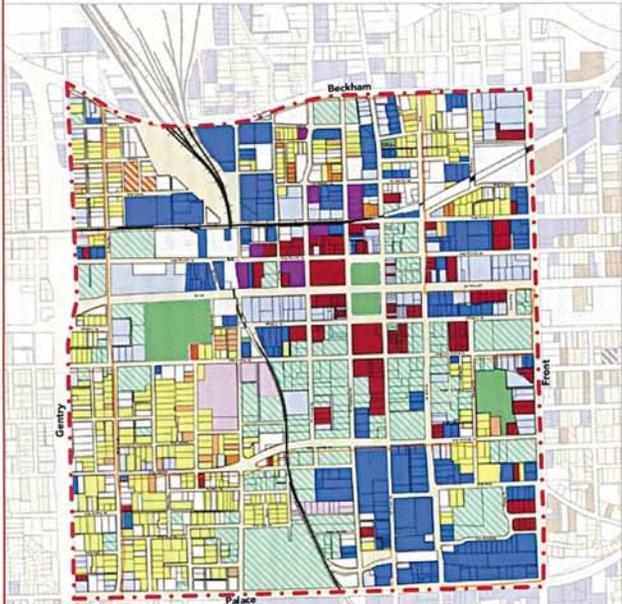


By JoAnn Greco

OLD TOOL



LEGEND

- Downtown district boundary
- Commercial
- Retail
- Office
- Light industrial
- Medium industrial
- Single family
- Duplex
- Multi-family
- Public/Semi-public
- Park
- Neighborhood

DOWNTOWN LAND USE

TYLER 2 City of Tyler **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

GOODY CLANCY

It took an enormous natural disaster—with its toll of destroyed homes, ravaged neighborhoods, and displaced residents—to push New Orleans into comprehensive planning. For San Diego and Raleigh, the impetus was an effort to address shifting population centers. In Tyler, Texas, an influx of immigrants prompted the move. Burdened with outdated and repeatedly

New Uses

A look at today's comprehensive plans.



Opposite: A page from Tyler's book. This Texas city is looking to support locally owned businesses—like this Mexican candy store—increase affordable housing, and attract new residents. Above: The Planning Raleigh 2030 process kicked off with a public event attended by hundreds. Youngsters offered their ideas at Kids City Planning Day at Marbles Kids Museum in Raleigh.

amended comprehensive plans, cites all over the U.S. have decided that now is the time to substantially update or redo the documents that define them.

"There's a sense that a successful comprehensive plan needs to belong to the people, and reflect their aspirations," says Larissa Brown, ACP's chief planner for Goody Clancy in Boston. "What we're doing now goes way beyond the normal public approval process. It's about involving citizens in a way that's real, that says you're paying attention." She adds, though, that part of the process is to adapt good ideas to local circumstances.

Visioning is more important than ever. "I feel strongly that comp plans are undervalued in terms of the role they can play in a community's ability to manage change," says David Dixon, a principal at Goody Clancy and lead consultant on the development of a new comprehensive plan for New Orleans. "If done correctly, and well, a comp plan can also be an opportunity for a community to make a cultural change or a transition in leadership, or

redefine its place in the region or in the larger competitive economy."

Engaging local citizens in these efforts is eased by the introduction of new electronic and presentation techniques—everything from websites to handheld clickers used to gauge feedback at meetings to interactive videos—that make the job of educating and involving the public easier and more thorough. Public forums like libraries and newspapers are getting into the picture, too, by posting detailed accounts of the proceedings.

A new culture

Kenneth Bowers, ACP's assistant planning director of Raleigh, North Carolina (pop. 367,000), says the timing is right for making big plans. "Planning is going through a positive moment right now," he says. "A lot of the issues that people want to see addressed by their cities come under the rubric of good planning."

The Washington, D.C., office of the HNTB Corporation is currently working on Planning

Raleigh 2030, set for completion by next January. It's budgeted at around \$600,000, according to Bowers, with the work being split between city staff and HNTB.

And although Dixon half-jokingly says that "there's never enough money to do most comp plans," he adds that many municipalities and regions have found ways to shake some nickels out of their coffers because they've learned the importance of a good plan. "There has been greater buy-in, even as there is an acknowledgment that there's an element of risk when you undergo this process," he says. "There's a greater understanding that a plan is an investment in the future."

According to an article in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* last December, Goody Clancy's winning bid set a price of \$2 million for work on the comp plan, a one-year process that is set to begin this June. Dixon says the city's last comprehensive plan was written over a five-year period immediately before Hurricane Katrina.

The new plan will have to address points not even touched on previously, Dixon notes.

"New Orleans has a housing affordability and availability crisis unlike anything it ever imagined, let alone experienced," he says. "The old plan had a housing component, but it was for a city with a very large supply of cheap housing. So we are going to develop a housing component that seeks to understand the role a range of housing options can play in renewing the entire city."

The money spent on drafting a new New Orleans plan is in line with that spent for a state-funded plan for Allegheny County, Pennsylvania (pop. 1.2 million), led by the Columbus, Ohio, office of McCormick Taylor. The plan results from state legislation passed in 2000 making it imperative for all 67 counties to complete comprehensive plans, according to Brandi Rosselli, AICP, of McCormick Taylor.

"The county had never had one before, and planning had never been at its forefront," she says. "They didn't even have a separate planning department. Finally in 2005, the political will was there and now we're hoping to get a draft plan of Allegheny! Places out for public review this summer."

Goody Clancy's just-completed plan for Tyler, Texas (pop. 101,000), located in the eastern part of the state halfway between Dallas and Shreveport, Louisiana, cost about \$600,000, and was largely funded by the sale of city-owned land, according to Brown, lead consultant for the project. "The mayor saw this as a legacy project," she says.

Other cities, such as Washington, D.C., and San Diego, have opted to keep most of the work in-house. Nancy Bragado, general plan program manager for San Diego, says she has worked on the plan full-time for the past couple of years, with the help of one or two associates at various times. The draft comp plan went to the city council this March. "We received no extra budgeting for the general plan," she says, "but we had a lot of the right people in place, so it worked pretty well."

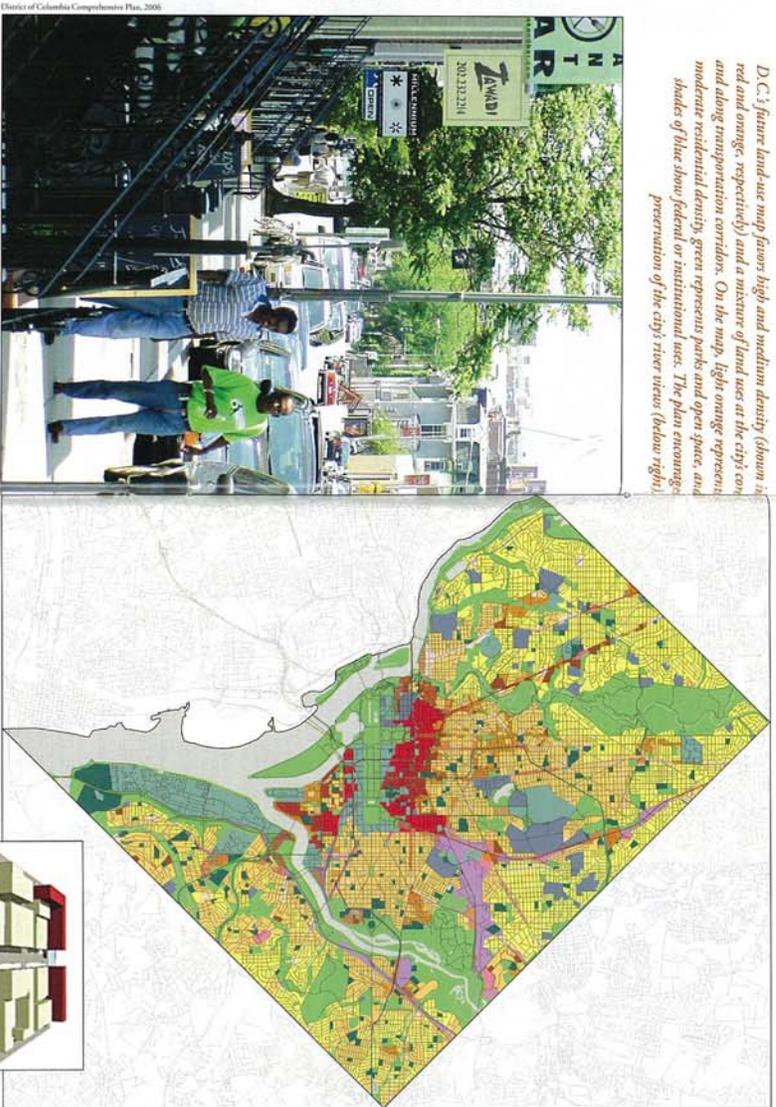
Big changes, big plans

In explaining why so many cities have embarked on this exhaustive process, Dixon and others point to a few dominating trends. "Number one," Dixon says, "is the fact that the demographics are lined up, American cities, and quite a wide range of them, are seeing more older people, more younger people, more single people, more people looking for a short commute rather than a big backyard."

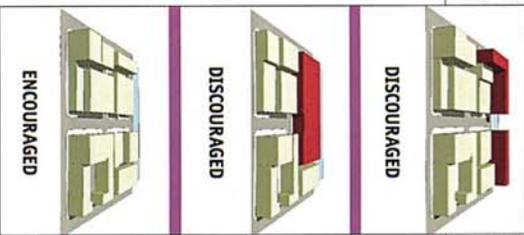
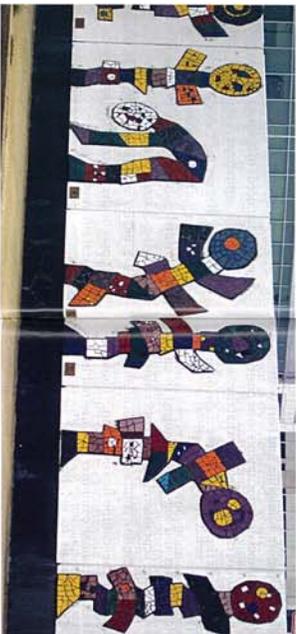
Bowers agrees that shifting demographics is a compelling reason to revisit comp plans. "I think cities are starting to react to a number of big trends from the late 1990s and early 2000s,"

D.C.'s future land-use map favors high and medium density (shown in red and orange, respectively) and a mixture of land uses at the city's core and along transportation corridors. On the map, light orange represents moderate residential density, green represents parks and open space, and shades of blue show federal or institutional uses. The plan encourages preservation of the city's river views (below right).

Washington, D.C.'s comprehensive plan considers how blocks and building uses vary throughout the city, from the large tank facade of K Street to the lively human scale rowhouses and business bring to U Street (right). Below: The H Street overpass, known to locals as Hopscotch Bridge.



Source: District of Columbia Comprehensive Plan, 2006



says. "The big focus then was on greenfield development and the development of future urbanized areas. That scenario has played out, and all but four percent of the city has been developed. So we need to look at new strategies and new issues to address."

She adds that the 1979 plan did not specify a plan for more centrally located older communities. "Preservation of the urban fabric of historic structures is a new issue that comes with development pressures on downtowns," Bragado says.

Also new to the planning mix are buzzwords like sustainability and walkability. "Walkable neighborhoods are hot," says Dixon, "and frankly, they didn't mean a damned thing to anybody 20 or 30 years ago." In Raleigh, a drought that is now officially the longest on record has focused new attention on climate issues, says Bowers. San Diego, in compliance with California state law, drafted a separate environmental impact report when it updated its comp plan.

Often, too, these plans seek a wider perspective. "There's a realization that the problems that cities are facing have to be solved in a more holistic manner," says Alan Urtek, AICP, director of strategic planning and policy for the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. "It's difficult to look at single elements like transportation or single urban projects like waterfront development without understanding why those changes have happened."

In addition, Urtek says, cities have to be more competitive nationally, and even globally. "In Philadelphia, there seems to be a raised level of understanding about housing and development patterns—and an appetite for making sure they work," he says.

That said, Philadelphia is one city that is not pursuing a comp plan, at least not yet. Instead, it has embarked on a much-needed zoning reamp (the current code dates from 1962) and a simultaneous program called Imagine Philadelphia: Laying the Foundation, a sort of pre-comp plan aimed at taking the pulse of stakeholders and centering the case for moving ahead with a thorough overhaul of the city's extant master plan, which was written in 1960.

"We're hitting the high points through white papers and meetings, but not doing the detailed data collection and analysis yet," says Urtek. "Before we do a full-blown plan, with all the resources that may be required, we think this is an important first step."

The vision thing

Even for cities that revisit their plans regularly, 21st century concerns are driving deeper rev-

sions. In 2002, when it came time for Washington, D.C. (pop. 581,000), to review its comprehensive plan, the city there to "look at the document in its entirety and to really start thinking about a major revision," says Rosalyn Huphey, the city's deputy director of citywide and neighborhood planning.

When the old plan was originally prepared in 1984, the median price of a house in D.C. was \$90,000. The city had 50,000 more residents than it does today and its Metro transit was only a few years old. Today the district is at the center of a fast-growing region that's expected to add more than a million people in the next 15 years—100,000 of them in Washington alone.

After a mayoral task force decided in February 2003 that the time was right for a new plan, the city began to figure out what it should address. A framework called *A Vision for Growing an Inclusive City* identified three major themes: creating successful neighborhoods, increasing access to education and employment, and connecting the entire city. (The final revised plan became effective in March 2007.)

New chapters covering parks and open spaces, arts and culture, and educational facilities were added. Instead of eight ward plans, the revised plan has 10 area elements based in part on different geographies and natural edges, says Huphey.

Brigado describes a similar process in San Diego. "Our entire comp plan update has been about five-year process," she says, "but truly it started eight years ago when we did the strategic framework element. We needed to be more certain about the direction the city wanted to move in; we needed to get a better understanding of our core values and vision. What came out of that framework was the 'city of villages' strategy, which was carried through the rest of the general plan process in much greater detail."

The villages strategy is the central focus of the plan, which the city council adopted this March. That strategy focuses future housing, retail, employment, educational, and civic uses in mixed-use village centers of different scales. It's not unlike a strategy recently adopted by New York City in its PLANYC 2030 effort, which, while substantially oriented toward green initiatives, also addresses a future that could include an additional one million residents. However, PLANYC 2030 may actually be an



Back in Tyler, Texas, residents have installed outdoor fixtures in their yards in the absence of street lighting.

alternative to comprehensive planning, at least as other cities define it.

"This is a plan that looks at each borough and creates economic centers in each one that focus on mass transit accessibility," says Amanda Burden, AECI director of the New York City Department of City Planning and chair of the City Planning Commission. "We're channeling growth to the neighborhoods through intense zoning," she continues. "We feel that comprehensive planning is wrong; that each neighborhood deserves a master plan and that together they make a patchwork quilt that's a wonderful whole."

In the case of Jamaica, Queens, an ethnically diverse area of nearly 100,000 residents where 368 blocks have been rezoned to allow large-scale commercial development (the largest such rezoning in New York City history), everything from extensive sewer work to transit improvements is included in the plan. For another planned redevelopment—Hartlett's 125th Street corridor—Burden says the city held about 200 meetings with "elected officials, merchants, community leaders, civic organizations, developers, preservationists, neighbors, public-space advocates, transportation advocates, housing advocates." Bottom line: "It's all about building consensus," she says.

Such devoted public outreach both creates a planning-savvy public and responds to it, says Brown of Goody Clancy. "There's been a confluence, I think, that's gotten people more interested in planning and the direction of their city," she says. "Whether it's increased housing prices and the subsequent development pressures

or traffic congestion or the awareness of open space, citizens are entering into planning from a particular experience they've had. They're seeing that in order to be happier with how your community is physically organized, you have to plan it. The market remains important, but there's a sense that you want to shape conditions so the market responds and doesn't drive."

The electronic village

The thrany of meetings Burden mentions is common these days, planners agree. "For the strategic framework phase, we stuck to a formalized series of meetings with high-level policy makers—the blue-ribbon folks," says Brigado in San Diego. "After we developed the vision, the guiding principles, we broadened that to include loose public workshops. We went to all 43 community planning groups."

That was just the beginning for San Diego, which aired half a dozen public forums, over cable access and eventually compiled a list of 2,700 e-mail addresses of people interested in receiving regular updates.

Technology is certainly a factor in expanding reach, says Russell of Allegheny County. "We started each of our public meetings with a video that explains what it is that planners do in the first place," she says. "We used a lot of visual aids and mapping software to help people understand just how much space various land uses consume. And we used electronic polling at some of the smaller meetings, where everyone was given a handheld transmitter in order to vote on different scenarios." Participants could see in real time what percentage of the vote each answer received.

Raleigh is using a software package developed by Limehouse Software that's been adopted in Atlanta, Baltimore, Louisville, and Fort Worth. The system allows draft documents to be posted online. Citizens can comment on what they see and then print the materials or save them onto a CD-ROM.

Registration and log-in are required of all users, who are kept informed about upcoming events, publications, and other information relating to the comprehensive plan. Those without a personal computer can use public library terminals to get the same benefits. The Raleigh planning department has even established a hotline to help those using the web-based software.

"We're excited about the possibilities of this technology," says Kenneth Bowers. "For our first round of meetings in November, we reported back on what we saw as the themes that were emerging and how we can address them. We also summarized the comments we received and talked about what we proposed to do about them. There's much more of a dialog this way. We put out a 96-page document for this first stage that was one-third analysis and two-thirds commentary from the public."

The top theme that emerged from these meetings was growth and a "new recognition of the importance of regionalism," Bowers says. Transportation was second, and affordable housing third.

As a result, he continues, "the plan will include a number of big recommendations. We want to see new investments in transit. Another change is that the current plan doesn't have a land-use component—it just has an urban form plan—so that will be added. We're thinking the best thing is a combination of the two. Also, we feel that the plan doesn't address zoning as comprehensively as necessary, so we're looking to follow this with a reamp of the codes."

Not only do new plans tackle new issues, they also look different. "Our new document is so much friendlier," says Huphey. "The last one had no photos, no maps, no charts. This one is wonderfully organized; it's filled with images. It's a great, working guide that can be accessed by anyone who's interested."

In Tyler, Texas—which hadn't updated its plan since 1999 but had seen an immigration-fueled population surge from 86,000 in the 2000 Census to 101,000 by 2005—planners placed drafts of the plan in public spots like libraries, supermarkets, and in the local newspaper, as well as on a dedicated website.

"The plan has much more visual content and is written in a much more accessible way," says Larissa Brown. "The result is that Tyler has really taken it to heart. It's brought up at city council meetings when budget matters are discussed, and citizens are very knowledgeable about its contents, and embrace them."

Tactics like an extensive use of technology and an emphasis on visual elements has special relevance for future beneficiaries of today's city plans. Urak says, "We're going to be looking at the whole world of social networking," he says. "Biggs, MySpace, sessions with high school students. We'd like to see a much more robust dialogue that's pertinent to the mediums that younger people use. After all, we're talking about a plan that's for 2035 or so. They are the ones who will live the plan."

Jaham Gresco is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.



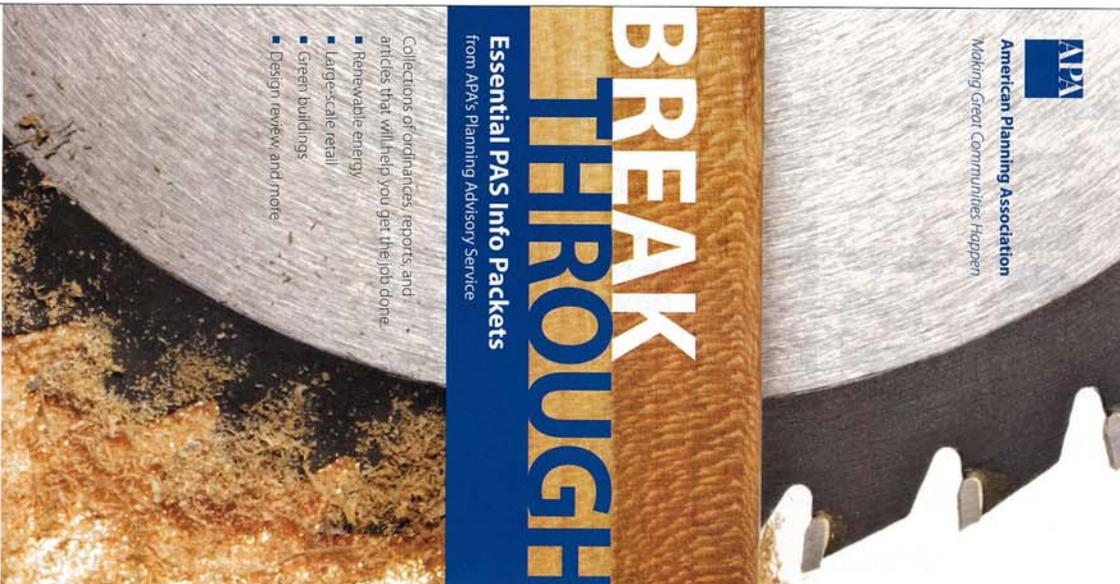
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