



Minimum Elements of a Local Comprehensive Plan

Background

OKI is an association of local governments, business organizations and community groups serving more than 180 cities, villages, and townships in eight tri-state counties: Butler, Hamilton, Clermont and Warren Counties in Ohio; Boone, Campbell and Kenton Counties in Kentucky; and Dearborn County in Indiana. OKI's board is composed primarily of local elected officials appointed by their communities. OKI's primary mandate is to determine how federal dollars for transportation are spent in the region, by planning, maintaining and improving the highways and transit systems.

OKI conducts long range transportation planning at the regional level and sees increasing shortfalls between local transportation needs and regional dollars available—almost \$3 billion short at last count. Land use decisions, made locally, affect transportation needs. These decisions vary considerably among cities and counties. Linking regional long range transportation planning with local land use planning has challenged OKI's board for years.

In April 2005, after extensive review by local officials and public participation, OKI's board adopted a strategic regional plan. The OKI plan calls for encouraging consistent local comprehensive planning and rewarding it with additional consideration in the funding for transportation projects.

Effective local planning depends on a broad-based constituency that includes citizens, businesses, government leaders, community organizations, special interests and many others. The value of a consensus-driven, widely supported local comprehensive plan can be significant savings for taxpayers and consumers. Taxpayers should expect their substantial infrastructure investments to preserve, protect and enhance the value of real estate and the public interest by being tied to a plan and a budget.

Purpose

This summary is intended to describe briefly the elements of local comprehensive planning that will be considered when OKI evaluates local transportation projects for potential federal funding. Evidence that the project has arisen from systematic comprehensive planning will give it additional weight in the funding process. In addition to this summary, two other related documents may also be of interest. One is a two-page *Completeness Checklist*, assembled as an evaluation tool for transportation projects applying to OKI for funding. The other is a 55-page guidance document entitled *Elements of an Effective Local Comprehensive Plan*, which provides a great deal more detail about effective comprehensive planning, and which has undergone extensive peer review from several local planning directors in the OKI region.

Format and Process

An effective comprehensive plan should be scaled to local circumstances, resources, level of government and authority. It can be completed by competent, experienced planners using the best available existing data, unless the jurisdiction desires original data or special studies. Its completion should not require specialized services such as transportation modeling, laboratory work, or services obtained from specialists such as fiscal consultants or utility engineers.

Each local government comprehensive plan should include a planning period covering at least 20 years. The comprehensive plan should consist of written or graphic materials that are sufficient to set forth principles, guidelines, and standards for the orderly and balanced future development of the community. Orderly and balanced future development means looking beyond the bricks and mortar of development to its economic, social, physical, environmental and fiscal impacts.

Coordinating the elements of the local comprehensive plan should be the overall objective of the planning process. Comprehensive plan elements should be consistent with each other, and the comprehensive plan should be financially feasible, as determined by local analyses and projections.

Public Participation

Effective public participation should occur during every phase of the planning process, and during any updating and evaluation of the comprehensive plan. Effective public participation means that local governing bodies and planning agencies conduct active outreach efforts and provide ample opportunities for all segments of the community to be involved. The techniques used and the results obtained should be summarized in the comprehensive plan.

Local governments are encouraged to develop a vision that provides for orderly growth, recognizes fiscal constraints, and protects natural resources upon which communities depend. The community vision should reflect shared concepts for growth and development and should take into consideration economic viability and private property interests.

Data and Analysis

Data and analysis of existing conditions are essential foundations from which to propose a viable comprehensive plan for the future. All elements of the comprehensive plan should be based upon data appropriate to the element involved. Surveys and studies used in the preparation of the comprehensive plan should be adopted as part of it. Data on existing population, population projections and population studies are important for the foundation of all the elements.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals, objectives, and policies should be developed for each of the elements of the comprehensive plan, based on the relevant data and analysis in each element. The comprehensive plan and its elements should contain policy recommendations for implementation.

Level of Service Management

Level of service standards can be useful guideposts for the maintenance of adequate public facilities and services in a jurisdiction. They may be established by each local government for the public facilities located within its boundary. These standards usually address the public facilities

which are typically most affected by new development, such as roads, water supply, wastewater treatment, parks and recreation, and schools.

Transportation Element

The transportation element of the comprehensive plan should address traffic circulation; alternative modes of travel including public transit, pedestrian and bike travel; parking facilities; aviation, rail and barge facilities, access to those facilities, and intermodal terminals; the availability of transportation facilities and services to serve existing land uses; and the compatibility between future land use and transportation elements.

Future transportation mapping should be created to show the general location of collector and arterial roads; limited access facilities; the number of lanes proposed for each roadway; designated local and regional emergency routes; park and ride facilities; ports, airports, rail lanes and related facilities; significant pedestrian and bicycle ways; and major public transit system routes or service areas, terminals and transfer stations.

Housing Element

The housing element of the comprehensive plan should include an inventory of dwelling units; a projection of anticipated households based on population projections; a projection of housing needs, including those of seniors, low and moderate income families, and special populations requiring group homes and foster care; and an identification of historically significant and other housing needing conservation, rehabilitation, or replacement.

This element should also outline the approach to be used in providing adequate sites for future housing needs, including in-fill housing sites as appropriate. It should indicate plans for eliminating substandard dwelling conditions, and for creating or preserving affordable housing and programs that encourage investment in residential properties, such as homeownership programs and owner/investor occupied programs. Local governments are encouraged to use job training, job creation and economic solutions to address a portion of their affordable housing concerns.

It is important that the private sector be made a partner in the development of housing plans and policies. This partnership recognizes the preeminence of the market in building and transferring ownership of housing.

Public Facilities and Services Element

The public facilities and services element should deal with both the infrastructure and the management needed to serve a community's future land use projections. It should address the public systems that provide management of drinking water, wastewater treatment and storm water drainage systems; educational facilities; public health facilities and services; recreation and open space; gas and electric power facilities; public safety and correctional facilities; and information technology systems.

This element should include an inventory of existing infrastructure, service areas, and level of service, and an analysis of existing and projected needs for more service. The element should describe problems and needs, and the general facilities that will be required to address the

problems and needs. It should outline how coordination will be achieved with governmental units that have public facility responsibilities but have no land development regulatory authority, such as school boards, hospital authorities, and utilities.

Analysis of the inventory should enable correcting existing facility deficiencies; maximizing the use of existing facilities; setting level of service standards and establishing priorities for replacement or new construction. It should provide sufficient planning so that public facilities and services needed to support development can be available concurrent with the impacts of the development, which can be accomplished by phasing the facilities and services or phasing the development

Natural Systems Element

The natural systems element should identify the natural resources within which the community exists, including rivers, lakes, and groundwater; floodplains; wetlands; watershed boundaries; sources of commercially valuable minerals; steep hillsides; areas prone to erosion; and locations of recreationally and commercially important fish, wildlife, and vegetation.

For each natural resource, the existing commercial, recreational, or conservation use, and any known pollution problems should be identified. The potential for use, conservation, or protection should also be identified, based on analyzing the intrinsic and economic values of the natural resources. Based on these analyses, the natural systems element should outline the community's approach to use and conservation of natural resources.

Economic Development Element

The economic development element should strengthen the economic base of the community by considering the development of all business sectors. It should include an extensive inventory of the community's economic health, including such factors as the labor force by wage rate and educational attainment, full-time and part-time employment, employment by type of industry, construction activity, retail sales, and per capita and household income. It should also include an analysis of the cost of doing business in the community, such as market access, transportation facilities, utilities, the state and local business climate, including taxes, and the communications infrastructure.

Based upon the results of the analysis, the element should contain policies to improve economic development as appropriate for the community, such as expanding existing businesses and recruiting new ones; streamlining the local regulatory process; cooperating with local economic development agencies, and workforce development.

Intergovernmental Coordination Element

Coordination of the local comprehensive plan with the comprehensive plans of adjacent jurisdictions should be a major objective of the local comprehensive planning process. Coordination should also include working with school boards, regional water supply or wastewater treatment authorities, and any other entities providing services but not having regulatory authority over the use of land. This coordination should be demonstrated within the plan through an identification of the relationships with other planning entities and the process(es) used to foster cooperation with them.

Capital Improvements Element

The comprehensive plan should evaluate the need for public facilities and services identified in the previous plan elements, and estimate the cost of the improvements to the local community. The capital improvements element should analyze the community's fiscal capacity to finance and construct public facility improvements, and schedule the funding and construction when and where public facilities will be needed, so that public facilities can be used most efficiently. This element should consider any needs for fixing existing problems and should cover at least a 5-year period.

Standards to ensure the adequacy of public facilities and the management of debt should be part of the plan, including acceptable levels of service. With standards in place, a schedule of capital improvements can be planned which includes publicly funded projects. The schedule may also include privately funded projects for which the local government has no fiscal responsibility, but which are necessary to ensure that adopted level of service standards are achieved and maintained.

The schedule of capital improvements should account for transportation improvements included in OKI's transportation improvement program to the extent that they are relied upon to maintain levels of service and financial feasibility. The schedule should also be coordinated with OKI's long-range transportation plan.

The schedule of capital improvements within the element should be reviewed on an annual basis and modified as necessary. All public facilities should be consistent with the capital improvements element.

Land Use Element

An analysis of existing land use by categories, use intensities, and residential densities is the first step in preparing this element. The next steps are to analyze future land use needs based on existing land use and the analysis in all the other elements in the plan. Ultimately, the land use element should be the culmination of the relationships among all the other elements of the comprehensive plan.

The land use element should designate the community's future land use patterns based on analyses of all the elements of the plan, including population projections; public facilities' needs and projections; natural resources; and existing land uses. Future land use patterns should be depicted on a future land use map or map series. Mapping and supporting information should indicate the general distribution of land for residential uses, commercial uses, industry, agriculture, recreation, conservation, education, public buildings and grounds, and other public facilities.

This part of the comprehensive plan is where everything comes together. This is the community's opportunity to identify where new development and redevelopment should occur, where opportunities exist for infill or mixed use development, for historic preservation, for new parks or nature preserves, where public facilities need to be expanded or reconfigured, and to be certain of their availability at the right time because of the financial analysis performed in the capital improvements element.

Plan Implementation

This element should describe how the community's plan and the associated activities and land development regulations will be consistently implemented. If the goals, objectives and policies in the rest of the plan are sufficiently clear and detailed, they will provide adequate guidance for developing the land use and development regulations needed to carry out the plan. This element should generally identify the actions needed for implementation, such as additional policy development, enacting or revising zoning and subdivision regulations, or pursuing new analytical tools and models.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A comprehensive plan should be evaluated and updated every 5 years, or more frequently as conditions warrant. The process of evaluating and updating the plan should be similar to that of its creation and adoption. The purpose in evaluating the comprehensive plan is to see if it has resulted in progress for the community, to update baseline data, to take stock of previously unanticipated problems and opportunities, and to modify goals, objectives and policies if current circumstances warrant such a change.

Technical Assistance

OKI recognizes that not all communities in the region have previously prepared a comprehensive plan, or they may have a plan that is not as comprehensive or as current as these minimum elements suggest. OKI also recognizes that many communities have resource and staff limitations that may constrain their ability to undertake comprehensive planning to the degree that is being recommended. Because of these constraints, OKI would like to provide technical assistance to local governments to the extent that resources are available. If you are interested in technical assistance through OKI's regional planning department, please contact Bill Miller, Larisa Sims, or Jane Wittke of OKI at 513-621-6300 to find out how OKI can help.