

# Area Plans

## I. Overview of Area Plans

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department develops area plans to guide growth and development so that it occurs in a manner that is consistent with the vision for the area and the City. Area plans vary in scope, depending on the geographic area and purpose of the plan. The plans typically address:

- Land use and zoning
- Transportation
- Environment
- Infrastructure
- Economic development/ revitalization
- Community appearance and urban design
- Community safety

Citizens are encouraged to participate in the area planning process, as area plans often recommend changes to the currently adopted land use in order to implement the community's future vision for the area. In some instances, the plan may also recommend that property be rezoned as part of plan implementation.

## II. Developing an Area Plan

### Research and data gathering

At the start of the planning process, staff prepares background information, which typically includes:

- Tentative boundaries for the study area
- Preliminary issues
- Schedule
- Area history
- Maps and charts

### The "Kick Off" public meeting

A public meeting is held early in the planning process to gather input from citizens on the issues confronting the area and the vision for the future. Notification of the public meeting is mailed to all property owners within the study area, area neighborhood organizations, elected/appointed officials and other stakeholders about 30 days prior to the public meeting.



### The stakeholder group

Usually, a stakeholder group is formed as part of the area planning process. Stakeholders represent a variety of interests in the study area and often include people living in the area, as well as representatives from neighborhood associations, businesses, institutions and the development community. The primary role of the stakeholder group is to assist staff in identifying issues and opportunities and developing a vision, goals, objectives and plan recommendations.

### Development of the plan

Once staff and the stakeholder group have an understanding of the issues confronting the study area, they begin to develop the plan. Area plans are usually published in two volumes - the concept plan and

the implementation plan. While every plan is different, the following elements are addressed in nearly all area plans.

#### **Concept Plan**

##### ***Vision, Goals and Objectives***

A vision is an image of what the area should be like in the future. Goals and objectives clarify how the vision will be achieved.

##### ***Policy Framework***

The policy framework describes the area plan's relationship to other plans and policies and defines where the area plan's recommendations replace existing plans and policies.

##### ***Existing Conditions***

The existing conditions information identifies characteristics of the area and analyzes trends. Existing conditions typically include land use, zoning, the transportation network, geography, natural resources, population, employment, housing stock and infrastructure.

##### ***Recommendations***

Recommendations address identified issues and help guide the community toward achieving its vision. While the various recommendations are typically developed concurrently to provide an integrated approach, they are typically organized in the document by the following categories: Land Use, Community Design, Transportation, Infrastructure and Public Facilities, and Natural Environment. Land use and transportation recommendations are usually the most extensive part of the plan document.

##### ***Land Use***

Staff and stakeholders analyze existing land use, currently adopted land use and zoning on a parcel-by-parcel basis. Inconsistencies among these data sets are identified and surrounding conditions are assessed to help determine the appropriate future land use for a site to help achieve the vision for the future.

##### ***Transportation***

Staff and stakeholders review the existing and planned transportation network, including streets, sidewalks, bicycle facilities and transit facilities. They also identify key issues. In particular, they consider what improvements are needed to support the future land use vision and to ensure the long-term viability of the area. Recommendations are made to address identified issues and maintain/enhance community mobility.

#### **Implementation plan**

The implementation plan is primarily a staff document that typically identifies the priorities, preliminary costs and responsible agency for implementing concept plan recommendations. It is not adopted by City Council. Rather, actions identified in the implementation plan require further Council approval and are brought before them on a case-by-case basis.

#### **Public meeting to present concept and implementation plans**

A public meeting is held just prior to the review and adoption process to share and receive public input on the draft plan findings and recommendations. Notice of the public meeting is sent to all property owners, area neighborhood organizations, elected/ appointed officials and other stakeholders approximately two weeks prior to the meeting.

### **III. Review and Adoption Process For Area Plans**

Once the draft plan is complete, the area plan review and adoption process begins. To become official City policy, the plan must be adopted by City Council. City Council considers the recommendations of several bodies, including the Planning Committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission and City Council Committee, when deciding whether or not to adopt an area plan. They also consider public comments, as well as comments from other boards and agencies, including the Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioners and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board.

Several formal opportunities for public input are provided during the review and adoption process for area plans. At a minimum, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Committee holds a public comment session and the Charlotte City Council holds a public comment session prior to making any decision on an area plan. Notices of the public comment sessions are sent to all property owners, area neighborhood organizations, elected/ appointed officials and other stakeholders approximately two weeks prior to the session.