

White Paper: Granger Land Use Planning

Introduction

It is the intent of the Granger Community Action Committee (GCAC) that this white paper serves as the starting point for community determination of issues relating to growth and development in Granger. The content of this document provides a framework for future discussion and decision making grounded in extensive community involvement and a solid analysis of major changes to the area's natural, man-made and cultural environments, as well as the demographics of the area. This document will lay the foundation for the creation of a *Comprehensive Land Use Plan* for Granger.

Comprehensive Plan Mandate and Description

To better understand what a Comprehensive Land Use Plan is and why Granger intends to undertake this effort, the formal mandate and description for it are presented:

- A Comprehensive Plan is a land use and development plan. It lays out the “vision” for the future growth and development of the community, what the community will be like and look like in the future. It then serves as guidelines for community decision making, and provides policy and program direction to help realize the community’s vision.
- A Comprehensive Plan is a document, or series of documents, prepared under the leadership of the GCAC, with input from citizens and community leaders. The Plan sets forth policies for the future development of the entire community. It is based upon inventory, analysis and evaluation of issues such as land use, population, economy, community facilities, housing, natural resources, utilities and transportation.
- Indiana State law says that the primary goal of a Comprehensive Plan is the “promotion of public health, safety, morals, convenience, order, or the general welfare, and for the sake of efficiency and economy in the process of development,” – Indiana Code 36-7-4-501.
- In Indiana, a Comprehensive Plan is required to include three elements: 1) A statement of objectives for future development; 2) Statement(s) of policy for land use development; and 3) Statement(s) of policy for the development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures and public utilities.
- A typical Comprehensive Plan attempts to forecast community needs, define a 20-year community vision and establish policies to achieve our goals. It is not a plan for government consolidation, a program plan, a financial plan or a business plan. It should be reviewed and updated every five years.

The Contents of the Plan

The plan will be organized into sections. Each section reflecting one of the Plan subject areas: Land Use; Economic Development; Housing and Neighborhoods; Transportation; Environmental Stewardship; Community Identity and Appearance; Community Facilities; Utilities and Implementation.

A Plan Shaped by Community Involvement

Throughout every step of the process, the plan will be shaped by the people of Granger. It is our intent that in a multitude of community meetings, open houses, workshops, speaking engagements, focus groups and surveys; through a Web site, personal conversations and media

coverage; the ideas and insight of the public – you –will be gathered and incorporated into this Plan.

The Plan will be the culmination of a planning process that will include the participation, collaboration and consensus of the residents of Granger.

The process itself will be directed by a community steering committee known as the Comprehensive Plan Committee. Its members will be selected specifically to be representative of Granger’s many unique constituencies and diversity of voices.

A series of public meetings will be held over the course of the process to engage residents and to ensure opportunities for full involvement. These meetings are intended to generate comments, ideas and suggestions that, in turn, became the basis for the Plan.

Amplifying participation opportunities, additional subcommittees will be called together for several sessions to help craft the Plan’s vision and goals.

To build the Plan’s baseline of in-depth research and statistical analysis community experts will work to add specialized knowledge to the Plan’s sections, both in the existing conditions phase and throughout the writing of the Plan. Upon completion of the draft Plan, meetings with key stakeholder groups will take place to refine and align the content.

Why Granger Needs a New Plan Now

Granger has experienced rapid growth without the contribution of broad-based community representation into the planning process. This is causing a re-evaluation of current plans and a move to ensure that future growth occurs as a result of involvement from both the business and the residential community.

The Purpose of the Plan

The Plan will define a new vision and an inclusive roadmap for our community’s future growth and development. It will give us an up-to-date policy guide for encouraging high-quality development and for preparing our community for the changes the future will bring.

Equally significant, as we change, the Plan will help us preserve our distinct and diverse community character – all the things that make neighborhood and rural areas unique and desirable places to live, work and raise our families. The Plan will be a fundamental tool to realizing our dreams.

What This Plan Means to Us

The Plan is about building the community one unique and lasting neighborhood at a time. The Plan’s purpose is to lay out a path to sustainability, to preserve and enhance our quality of life and natural environment, and to position Granger as a strong and competitive entity in the economy.

For the first time in our community’s proud history, the public and private sectors will be working off the same page – a common Comprehensive Land Use and Development Plan. The Plan’s shared vision and policy framework will establish a unified approach to infrastructure expansion, economic development and maintenance of our neighborhoods. It won’t alter the character or integrity of our town, rural countryside or suburban neighborhoods. It will send a message to the world around us: this is a community that is ready to grow in a way that builds on our strengths and our most appealing attributes.

The Plan’s benefits are many:

- A clear community vision created through community consensus, one that captures the values, goals and objectives of the community.
- An up-to-date policy guide for encouraging quality physical and economic development.
- A competitive community prepared for the changes the future will bring.

- Preservation of our community character.
- An enhanced quality of life.
- Efficient, coordinated use of public resources.
- Advancement of actions that will be in the long-term, best interests of our community.
- Application of innovative planning, development and growth concepts.

The Impact of the Plan

As taxpayers, the cohesive vision and coordinated goals of the Plan will mean more cost-effective, responsive community decision making. As homeowners, the resulting Conceptual Development Map will promote informed choice for homebuyers and protect lifestyle options. For project developers, the Plan will foster efficient project management and growth that is desirable for the community long term. For businesses, the Plan will cultivate an environment in which businesses and good jobs can grow and thrive. For every resident, the Plan's thoughtful stewardship of the land will enhance our quality of life, preserve and protect our natural resources, and strengthen our physical surroundings.

How the Plan Is Different

The Plan will be a pioneering venture for Granger. It is not a one size-fits-all initiative. It is a first in our collective history. It presents a shared vision and goals for the common ground that is our home. But it also recognizes the variety and unique character of the community's many parts. It is a Plan that is designed to work for all jurisdictions.

The Plan's principles, goals and objectives will offer real guidance for land use and development decisions – how we will grow. The resulting Conceptual Development Map will give clear geographic direction on land use and development decisions – where we will grow. Together, the two components of the Plan signify a new approach to growth. The end result: a more proactive, dynamic form of growth, one in keeping with contemporary lifestyles, yet constantly anticipating demographic changes and trends; one that invests in our economic vitality while honoring the natural environment and community characteristics that give us pride of place.

Why We Choose to Grow in a New Way

The Plan will bring an integrated approach to planning and development. Often in the past, land use and development decisions were made in isolation, one governmental entity from another. A road project might have been built for safety and efficiency, without considering the impact on surrounding neighborhoods, the environment, utilities, the sense of place, pedestrian movement and other factors. Now each development project will be examined through the filter of all of the Plan's elements, principles and goals; how they interconnect and relate not just to one project, but also to our greater community.

With its communitywide perspective, moving forward, the Plan will help us institute the policies that will ensure we can accomplish our goals, and actually create the community we envision. The full impact, however, will be seen over time as the implementation process begins to unfold. The concepts contained in the Plan will influence decision making. Even now, we are working to make our community more "walkable," more connected, more welcoming, better able to compete for good jobs and new businesses.

The Role of the Plan and How It Will Be Used

The Plan is intended as advisory in nature. It lays out a vision for the future growth and development of the community, what the community will be like and look like in the future. At the vision and policy level, it will serve as a guide for community decision making. It addresses both where we will grow

and how we will grow.

Communities should strive for concurrence with the Plan in rezoning or development approvals. The Plan's goals and policies aim for an "ideal scenario." These high aspirations mean that sometimes different objectives and strategies may conflict with one another, requiring careful balance. As such, this Plan will supply guidance in the decision-making process.

The Plan will be used by the community as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment and capital improvements, including establishment of community utilities, economic incentives and other matters affecting the growth of the community.

The Plan plays five primary roles to help our community achieve its goals:

1. **Negotiation Agent.** Land use and development decisions often require finding solutions between conflicting or competing interests, for example, the needs of an individual property owner versus the desires of the surrounding residents, or the aspirations of one department over another. Through its direction, the Plan will create a path to reaching negotiated decisions.
2. **Policy Recommendation.** Local elected officials are frequently called upon to make land use and development decisions. In its guidance role, the Plan will aid in the setting of public policy by providing support, assistance, recommendations and counsel to decision makers.
3. **Information Management.** As our society becomes increasingly more complex, both the demand for and the supply of data have grown exponentially. Demographic, social, economic, land use and environmental trends and statistics are crucial to reaching informed, objective choices.
4. **Change Agent.** The Plan can aid the community in anticipating change and preparing for the future. Whether in the identification of trends that may have an adverse effect on area quality of life or in spotting opportunities to increase our economic growth, the Plan can be used as a catalyst to support leaders as they seek to spur action. This change agent role is especially important within our highly competitive global economy.
4. **Program Management.** The healthy, sustainable physical development of the community often necessitates significant investment of public dollars or the development of collaborative public-private sector projects. The Plan can serve as a tool to guarantee that public dollars are spent wisely and that the programs engendered are effectively organized and executed to meet community goals and needs.

Key Findings

The existing conditions analysis will form the Plan's factual foundation for building future policy. It will serve as the intelligence-gathering phase of the planning process and will be designed to inform the more intuitive public input. This component will be more than a snapshot of the community's current situation or an elaboration of key indicators of variance. It will paint a picture of what has changed, what the patterns of change are and what trends are emerging. It will also compare Granger to other peer towns throughout the country to better understand relative similarities or differences. An important note: Current circumstances and trends can tell us what is, but they cannot indicate the only direction Granger can take. They give insight and reveal opportunities to change course and fashion a better future through more strategic decision making.

Guiding Principles

Part of the Plan's overarching structure, the guiding principles are statements of purpose to help in determining the quality, pattern and character of future development. They describe a new approach to development. As such, the principles, summarized below, are touchstones to aid in decision making:

- The visual character, historic features and natural assets inherent within the community

should be retained and enhanced.

- Contiguous development and compatible patterns of development delineated by sound planning are the preferred forms of growth.
- Land use planning should shape the community's development framework with utilities, transportation, infrastructure and institutional decisions coordinated to support those land use objectives.
- Housing with a diversity of values and types should be encouraged to provide housing choices within neighborhoods and throughout the community.
- Mature neighborhoods should be stabilized, maintained and enhanced; and new suburban development should be encouraged to develop as planned neighborhoods.
- The use of open spaces, such as parks, plazas and squares, should be encouraged to promote gathering places within neighborhoods, in the center of town, and commercial centers.
- Corridors and trails should be used to define and connect neighborhoods, commercial centers, and the center of town.
- A connective framework of transit, pedestrian and bicycle systems should be provided that allows alternative modes of travel in addition to motorized vehicles.
- The interconnection of existing and new residential, commercial and industrial development should be encouraged.
- Each community or cluster of neighborhoods should have a well-defined edge and be interconnected wherever possible.
- The continued agricultural use of the county's most productive farmland should be encouraged.

Goals

The Comprehensive Plan will have three key layers of policies: goals, objectives and strategies. Goals will contain the broadest policy statements and state a desired outcome in general terms. The goals will be developed by the Comprehensive Plan Committee and will be derived from the ideas generated by the public through its wide-ranging participation. The Goals will frame the development of the objectives and the subsequent strategies.

Objectives will denote a more specific policy direction and help organize strategies. Strategies are detailed actions necessary to initiate or complete an objective – such as a program or project. Within the Plan, we anticipate multiple objectives for each goal and multiple strategies for each objective. The recommendations for each element of the Plan will contain all three policy layers. The Plan goals are as follows:

Land Use

Carefully planned, sustainable growth and efficient use of land resources through coordinated and quality development, and maintenance which leads to improved community well being.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods that are stable and diverse, providing a wide range of housing options, linking residents to a variety of land uses, which meet the needs of the community.

Environmental Stewardship

A healthy, sustainable, and enjoyable environment with clean air and water, greenways and open spaces for residents, habitats for wildlife, protection of other environmental assets (farmland, woodlands and wetlands), and promotion of a strong ethic among residents and businesses to control pollution and support environmental stewardship efforts.

Community Identity and Appearance

An attractive, vibrant community with a positive image and physical appearance in its rural

areas, neighborhoods and the center of town that celebrates its heritage and diversity through ongoing quality development, historic preservation and maintenance of neighborhoods.

Community Facilities

Quality facilities that promote recreation and cultural enjoyment, ensure public health and safety, provide educational opportunities, and encourage tourism and investment; collectively building a thriving, accessible and welcoming community for all ages and backgrounds.

Environmental Stewardship

Safe and abundant drinking water and regionalization of interests for improving regional water quality- such as reduction of failed septic systems.

Implementation

The success of a Comprehensive Land Use and Development Plan is measured in terms of its implementation. Only when the recommendations in the Plan are translated into actions can the goals and policies within the Plan be realized.

It is our intent that The Plan will be updated every five years. If community circumstances change more rapidly, an update may be initiated in a shorter period of time.

It is our intent that this Plan is to be used by the community as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment and capital improvements, including: community utility-system improvements, economic incentives and other matters affecting the growth of the community.

Guiding Principles

Introduction

Principles are statements of purpose intended to describe the direction and form of future development and revitalization efforts in Granger. The principles focus on the quality, pattern, form, character, and organization of development and address a desire to strengthen the quality of the physical environment.

The principles apply to already established as well as the developing areas of Granger. As stated above, the principles express the intended direction for land use.

Numerous meetings with the GCAC, Comprehensive Plan Committee members, citizens, the Area Plan Commission and planning staff will be conducted to provide input to augment the following principles.

1. Encourage the retention of the natural and visual character derived from areas such as woodlands and wetlands.
2. Retain and enhance the visual character derived from existing natural features.
3. The pattern of future new and infill development should be compatible with the character of existing development, including historic and natural features.
4. Discourage development not served by a sewer system.
5. Efforts to establish a utility system should be coordinated with proposed and current land uses and together with road improvement projects when possible.
6. As the suburban area expands into rural areas, residential development should be contiguous to existing commercial and/or residential development and be served by existing or planned services.

7. Ensure coordination between major civic and institutional organizations and local planning departments.
8. Residential areas should remain residential.
9. Neighborhoods and areas in the town should be compact and pedestrian-friendly.
10. Single family housing with a diversity of values and types should be encouraged to provide housing choices within neighborhoods.
11. The pattern of new and infill development should be compatible with the character of existing development, including historic and natural features, where it contributes to an outcome that is in conformance with the goals and policies of this Plan.
12. Mature neighborhoods should be stabilized, maintained and enhanced.
13. A range of open spaces, including parks, plaza, squares, etc., should be mandated within commercial centers and neighborhoods as gathering places.
14. Encourage planned development with adequate roadway design and infrastructure, along regional transportation corridors and at interchanges.
15. Corridors and trails should be encouraged to define and/or connect neighborhoods, commercial centers and the center of town.
16. Each community or cluster of neighborhoods should have a well-defined edge and be interconnected wherever possible.
17. A connective framework for transit, pedestrian and bicycle systems, including sidewalks and multi-use paths should be provided to allow for alternative modes of transportation.