Preface

With regard to planning in Alabama, the Code of Alabama states;

"Any municipality is hereby authorized and empowered to make, adopt, amend, extend, add to, or carry out a municipal plan as provided in this article and to create by ordinance a planning commission with the powers and duties herein set forth" (Alabama Code 11-52-2). Furthermore, "it shall be the function and duty of the commission to make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the municipality, including any areas outside of its boundaries which, in the commission's judgment, bear relation to the planning of such municipality" (Alabama Code 11-52-8). Finally, "the plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the municipality and its environs which will, in accordance with present and future needs, best promote health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development, including, among other things, adequate provision for traffic, the promotion of safety from fire and other dangers, adequate provision for light and air, the promotion of the healthful and convenient distribution of population, the promotion of good civic design and arrangement, wise and efficient expenditure of public funds, and the adequate provision of public utilities and other public requirements."

The City of Dothan Planning Commission adopted a Land Use Plan in April, 1999 replacing the previous plan that had been prepared 20 years earlier. In the introduction to the 1999 Plan, it is noted that:

> "Dothan's current Land Use Plan was adopted in 1977. Since that time, Dothan's population, the number of households in the City, and the amount of land within its Corporate Limits has increased dramatically. In 1983, Dothan was declared to be a Metropolitan Statistical Area by the United States Department of Commerce. In 1993, the Dothan City Charter was amended to change the City Commission from one made up of a mayor and four commissioners elected by the entire electorate to one composed of a mayor and six commissioners representing single member districts. Areas of the City which contained virtually no population in 1977 now have thousands of residents. The traffic volumes on some of Dothan's streets have more than doubled during that period."

The Dothan City Commission and the Dothan Planning Commission, acknowledging the need for a Land Use Plan which took into account these, and other changes, authorized the City's Planning Staff to prepare a revised Land Use Plan to guide Dothan's physical growth and development for the coming 20 years. Although this Land Use Plan addresses a 20 year

planning period, the City Commission, Planning Commission, and Planning Staff realize that unforeseen changes will occur during that time which will make it necessary to revise portions of the Plan. Therefore, in adopting this Land Use Plan, the City should commit itself to conduct a comprehensive review of the Plan at intervals of no more than five years. At that time, the trends and patterns on which this Plan is based, as well as the recommended policies, should be re-evaluated and revised as needed.

It has been over ten (10) years since the 1999 Plan was adopted and many of the assumptions made regarding growth and development remain valid today. This document then constitutes the comprehensive review alluded to earlier.

In late 2006, staff of the Department of Planning and Development began the task of planning an update of that earlier plan. We knew that a conventional "Comprehensive Plan" was more involved and would require more time and staff resources to accomplish the task. Therefore, we concluded that a modified land use plan, with emphasis on transportation would be the focus of this Plan, making it a Long Range Development Plan (LRDP). Additionally, pertinent goals and strategies outlined in this document will be refined and applied through a series of neighborhood plans to be developed subsequent to this Plan.

In January, 2007, staff prepared a detailed guide for the development of this Plan, a plan for planning, if you will. The following is a summary of that guide.

Phase I – Organizational Structure
Phase II – Information Gathering
Phase III – Preparation of Existing Conditions and Analysis
Phase VI – Goals and Objectives
Phase V – Implementation Plan
Phase VI – Final Long Range Plan Document

The center piece of Phase I – IV was the assembly of an advisory committee that consisted of:

City Manager, Michael K. West
Public Works Director, Jerry Corbin
Dothan Utilities Director, Billy Mayes
Fire Chief, Larry Williams
Planning Commission Chairman Chuck Harris
Planning Commission Member Albert Kirkland

Chamber of Commerce President, Matt Parker
Executive Director of the Southeast Regional Planning and Development Commission, Thomas Soloman
The Mayor and City Commissioners were ex-officio members.

The role of the advisory committee was to review the components of the Plan as produced by staff and provide feedback and guidance as appropriate.

In Phase II, we started gathering information on existing conditions in the community in preparation of the analysis section of the Plan. Simultaneously, information of community attitudes was collected in order to develop goals and create a development strategy.

One of the most important components of any long range plan is setting community goals. Community goals can be determined in a number of ways, the most accepted and popular of which is the public forum as well as surveys. It is important that the pulse and opinion of the citizens of the community is accounted for in the planning process because to be effective, the Plan must be embraced by the general population as "their plan".

Attitudes regarding the existing condition of the community, its infrastructure, public facilities, open spaces, neighborhoods, schools, and even the government itself compose the barometer by which a government measures its performance. After all, the local government exists to serve the community as well as the population within the area of its jurisdiction, and its legislative body serves only at the will of the population. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the community be involved in the planning process from the start.

The Planning & Development Department created a survey which was mailed to all customers of Dothan Utilities and included in the March, 2007 Dothan Utilities bill. Besides being mailed, the survey was also posted on the City's website as a "downloadable" document. The Planning and Development Department received and catalogued 1,708 survey forms, which is a 5% survey return.

We asked the public their opinions on issues that ranged from topics relevant to the City and region down to the condition of their neighborhoods. We attempted to perceive the attitude of the public with regards to the functionality of the physical systems of the City, the condition of the downtown area, and solicited their thoughts on future development projects.

The following spring, Planning Department Staff conducted a series of forums to collect additional input from the public.

The agenda for these meetings was simple, educate the audience, measure their preferences for a variety of development characteristics and collect their thoughts directly on their perceptions of what is a strength, weakness, opportunity or threat to the City of Dothan.

As an educational tool, the video, a "Community of Choices" (produced by the Dunn Foundation), was shown to illustrate how development impacts our community and how we, as a community, can influence development through planning if we better understand the connections between community appearance, design and economic development.

Following the video, staff presented a Visual Preference Survey (VPS), which is a widely used method of assessing community preferences regarding the form and appearance of buildings, landscape, and streetscape elements. The audience was asked to indicate on a score card which of two images they preferred. If they preferred neither, they were asked to make no entry. This report presents the results of the VPS and outlines the characteristics or elements that separated one image from the other. A few preliminary conclusions are offered for consideration.

Finally, staff gave the participants four colored note cards and asked them to list as many strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats they could think of on a different card when prompted by staff. In the SWOT Analysis, participants were instructed to think of strengths and weaknesses in terms of current issues and opportunities and threats as future issues.

Together, staff is hopeful that the survey and the two "visioning" exercises will point to obvious community-wide concerns that will become the basis for Plan goals, policies and objectives that can be used to implement them. Results for all three of the public participation elements are available as separate documents upon request.

The Existing Conditions analysis was completed on December 19, 2007 and presented to the advisory committee. The committee received the report and no comments were recorded from the members.

This Long Range Development Plan contains a series of eight chapters organized in a manner that can be divided into four groupings – The Community; the Plan; The Big Picture; and Key Components to our community.

The two principal chapters (Chapters 7 & 8) are topic-specific with goals and strategies. These elements are defined below as they apply to this Plan.

Vision: Visions describe preferred conditions for the future of a community regarding land use, transportation, quality of life and other related issues. They set goals for our community and provide us with an avenue through which we can achieve them.

Goals: Goals are objectives, plans and statements of purpose or intent used to navigate through the public and private decision making process and supply us with a general direction or road map to achieve our more precise strategies.

Strategies: Strategies are the list of actions or implementation plans that the City and its citizens can use to accomplish its overall vision. Strategies are tied to a specific goal and establish steps that when undertaken will implement the goal.

Chapter 1: Community Profile - The LRDP begins with our community profile establishing from where we came, who we are as a community, and who we expect to be in the future. It includes an overview of some demographics from the community, however, a more detailed presentation of those demographics are found within a precursor report to this one entitled "Dothan's Existing Conditions -2007 Report".

Chapter 2: Community Involvement - This document is a plan for our community and by our community. It was of the utmost importance to the City to assure that the community was not only allowed to participate, but strongly encouraged to participate. Chapter 2 provides a discussion about the public participation process that was undertaken for this LRDP.

Chapter 3: Understanding the Context of Our Future Decisions - The purpose of this chapter is to set forth the boundaries of our decision making process.

Chapter 4: Purpose of the Long Range Development Plan - This chapter provides a roadmap for steering the City's policy and decision making over the next 20 years.

Chapter 5: LRDP Vision and Guiding Principles - Chapter 5 establishes the overall vision and guiding principles for this planning effort. The vision and guiding principles described herein were obtained through community input and planning policy that helped define our decision process and set the LRDP direction.

Chapter 6: Land Use and Community Appearance - This chapter presents a detailed view of how existing and future land uses might interact with one another. Community appearance and design were primary concerns expressed by a number of citizens providing feedback. The appearance of our downtown, neighborhoods, and residential structures within the neighborhoods was expressed.

The remaining chapters, as outlined below, address specific key components that make up our community.

Chapter 7: Transportation – Chapter 7 contains a discussion of what the existing issues are with the city transportation system and the issues that will likely impact the shape of the future transportation system in Dothan.

Chapter 8: Implementation Plan - A plan without implementation is useless. This vital part of the Plan determines how the issues conveyed to the City by its public are to be considered, studied and acted upon.

This is NOT a comprehensive plan by design, but a land use plan with a focus on transportation.