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Visions and Guiding Principles

Each and every one of us has some sort of vision for our lives and more specifically, what the City of Dothan should be like in the future. Stewarding the vision for Dothan on a regular basis are the members of the Planning Commission, each from varied walks of life, age, gender, and racial background. Although visions differ from one person to the next, they all share the same common thread as far as qualities and reference points. From conversations and discussions with the Planning Commission, City staff, the business community and most importantly, the public, we have formulated a vision of a City that is safe, attractive and sustainable for ourselves, our children and future generations yet unborn. We envision a City where the natural environment is protected, a place where excellent City services are available and provided where the overall quality of life is shared by all, and where citizens are true partners in their City government. We aspire to create a City that is prosperous and an attractive place in which to conduct business.

We Envision Dothan

- *Where the natural environment is protected.*
- *Where the level of City services consistently achieves high standards of quality and availability.*
- *Where a variety of recreational opportunities are available.*
- *Where citizens are true partners in their City government.*
- *Where a high quality of life is shared by all.*
- *Where opportunities for employment and business exist.*
- *Where the appearance of our City is attractive.*
- *Where the ground transportation system has balanced mobility options, with minimal congestion, good accessibility, and connections City-wide that is integrated into the regional road network.*
- *We envision, we aspire, and we hope that our community becomes a great place in which to live, work, own a business, play, educate and rear our children now and in the future.*

Our Small Town Feel

Through our public participation process, citizens consistently mentioned the importance of our 'small town feel'. Dothan residents were concerned that as we grow from a community of 57,737 (2000 census count), to almost 80,000 by 2030 that we risk losing this character. Dothan is already on its way to a significantly larger population in 2030 than it had in year 2000. The 2010 U. S. Census places the population of Dothan in 2007 at 65,496. That represents a 13.4% gain above the Year 2000 count which is almost double the growth rate for the decade of the 1990's. So the concern that the citizens feel are legitimate.

The table to the right shows population projections prepared in January, 2008 by the University of Alabama, Center for Business and Economic Research. The table shows a steady increase for both the City of Dothan and Houston County and documents our recent growth as well as providing projections for the future. These projections show that a steady acceleration in the percent increase of population in Houston County in expected to occur within the City of Dothan. The serious economic recession over the last 2 years of this decade has undoubtedly impacted our rate of growth.

Population Projections

Year	Houston County	City of Dothan	% of HstnCo	Change in Dothan	
				Number	%
2000	88,787	57,737	65%		
2007*	97,171	66,505	67%	7,710	13.4 %
2010	99,442	67,201	68%	1,754	2.7%
2015	102,518	70,178	68%	2,977	4.4%
2020	105,453	73,125	69%	2,948	4.2%
2025	108,171	75,990	70%	2,865	3.9%
2030	110,620	78,733	71%	2,743	3.6%
2035	112,716	81,290	72%	2,558	3.2%
2040	114,554	83,723	73%	2,433	3.0%
2045	116,343	86,175	74%	2,452	2.9%
2050	118,276	88,787	75%	2,612	3.0%

Note: Projections include population in adjoining counties

Source: Center for Business and Economic Research, the University of Alabama, January, 2009.

* Census Bureau Estimate

Our downtown, which once was the retail center of not only Dothan but the surrounding area, a downtown that once had a JC Penney, Woolworth, JJ Newberry, Kress, hardware stores, feed and grain stores, restaurants, and small specialty stores such as jewelers, tailors, cobblers, and the like, suffered a significant decline over the last several decades and is currently enjoying a

renaissance. Some merchants, club owners, restaurateurs, and small shop owners have found niches in the market and have found success among the old, abandoned and in some cases decaying reminders of a day long passed as stated in the "Downtown Master Plan."

If the citizens truly desire to retain the old 'small town feel', this is where their vision should begin. One cannot ignore the heart of a body and concentrate solely upon its extremities. Likewise, a city cannot turn its back on its heart and birthplace to focus solely upon the integrity and development of its outer, urban and suburban areas. Plans have been prepared by outside consultants and by Dothan's Planning & Development Department which identify ways in which a concerted revitalization effort could take place. An overlay district for downtown was created by ordinance which is intended to promote the downtown as a place for new development or redevelopment of existing buildings. The vision has already been established, but the implementation is yet to be embraced by the public. The vision for Dothan is the citizen's.

Many characteristics combine to make Dothan what it is today. The physical setting within an area of South Alabama known as the 'Wiregrass', its proximity to the Chattahoochee River, the States of Georgia and Florida, and its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico all combine to make Dothan what it is today. Dothan has a clearly-defined market window, or business corridor. Dothan like many cities has a defined central business district, however, Dothan's predominate business/retail activities are highway-dependent uses located along the U. S. 231 corridor and Ross Clark Circle. Expansion of commercial and retail activity along U. S. 231 North and South can be expected to continue throughout the next decade. Some commercial/retail expansion will also occur along U. S. Hwy 84 particularly west of Ross Clark Circle near the intersections of U. S. 84 West and Brannon Stand and in between taking the form of infill. The development potential is high on the east side of the City fueled by lower land values and better access, yet weak with utility capacity and service.

The passage of time inevitably brings changes. Dothan differs considerably from the city that it was 20 or 30 years ago. It is definitely different from the city it was during the 1940's-1960 when JC Penney, Woolworth, JJ Newberry, and Kress department stores provided the economic hub of the City in downtown. The task we have before us is to retain the most important characteristics of our City in the face of changes that we can only manage.

No plan and certainly not this Long Range Development Plan can ever expect to have the agreement of the majority of the public. Rather it strives to create balance and blending of opinions to form a community that collectively monitors and manages change. Only then will we hope to maintain the community's unique characteristics and still accept the future. The Dothan 2030 Long Range Development Plan aims to mirror a comprehensive vision of the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of its diverse population composed of a public representative of all age groups, long-term residents or newcomers, those residing in historic districts or other established neighborhoods or those living in newly developed neighborhoods.

Guiding Principles

The principles which guided the development of this Plan for Dothan reflect the values of the community residents expressed through the Long Range Development Plan outreach process of surveys, town meetings and public hearings. The input from the public combined with sound planning practices completed the road map toward the development of this Plan. Listed in no particular order related to significance, urgency, popularity, or viability are the following touch-points that served to steer the City's planning decisions.

- As we grow, we will strive to preserve the attributes of our unique, small town character and community identity, the natural environment, and the strengths of our neighborhoods, while lessening the adverse effects of growth.
- We value open space as an integral part of our community's small town feel and will take advantage of opportunities for its preservation, acquisition, enhancement and expansion.
- We value the native landscape and topographical features naturally occurring throughout our community.
- We will endeavor to restore, promote re-investment in, maintain and enhance the historic and human orientation of our downtown as a destination and urbanized traditional neighborhood.
- We will seek opportunities to promote community events, improve the communication from the City government, and promote cultural venues and experiences.
- We will provide for the health of our community population by embracing and sponsoring active lifestyle opportunities and events.
- Architectural and land use design is fundamental to our desired identity. As our community grows, special attention will be given to promote high quality residential and commercial development that reflects aesthetic excellence with specific design criteria to regulate and encourage creative design and planning for commercial and residential developments.
- We will preserve our single-family neighborhoods, recognizing that traffic connectivity is a needed strategy in tying one neighborhood to another to assist in easing potentially stagnant traffic flows.

- The long-term economic well-being of the City is fundamental to its future. To that end, we will encourage a variety of employment opportunities and promote businesses that contribute to our community including unique, local businesses.
- We will promote multi-modal transportation systems (roadways, bikeways, walkways, and public transportation) that are safe and that emphasize local and regional connections while considering neighborhood impacts.

Smart growth

The International City/County Management Association and the American Planning Association both advocate the incorporation of Smart Growth principals as part of a planning program. ICMA notes in the executive summary of *Why Smart Growth: A Primer* that,

> "in communities across the nation, there is a growing concern that current development patterns -- dominated by what some call "sprawl" -- are no longer in the long-term interest of our cities, existing suburbs, small towns, rural communities, or wilderness areas.
>
> Though supportive of growth, communities are questioning the economic costs of abandoning infrastructure in the city, only to rebuild it further out. They are questioning the social costs of the mismatch between new employment locations in the suburbs and the available work-force in the city. They are questioning the wisdom of abandoning "brownfield's" in older communities, eating up the open space and prime agricultural lands at the suburban fringe, and polluting the air of an entire region by driving farther to get to places.
>
> Smart growth recognizes connections between development and quality of life. It leverages new growth to improve the community. The features that distinguish smart growth in a community vary from place to place. In general, smart growth invests time, attention, and resources in restoring community and vitality to center cities and older suburbs. New smart growth is more town-centered, is transit and pedestrian oriented, and has a greater mix of housing, commercial and retail uses. It also preserves open space and many other environmental amenities.
>
> But there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution. Successful communities do tend to have one thing in common--a vision of where they want to go and of what things they value in their community--and their plans for development reflect these values."

Smart growth values long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over a short-term focus. Its goals are to achieve a unique sense of community and place; expand the range of transportation, employment, and housing choices; equitably

distribute the costs and benefits of development; preserve and enhance natural and cultural resources; and promote public health.

On the following pages, many of the proposed goals and policies are based on the principals of smart growth. These principals are:

1. Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices;
2. Create Walkable Neighborhoods;
3. Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration;
4. Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place;
5. Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective;
6. Mixed Land Uses;
7. Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas;
8. Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities; and
9. Take Advantage of Compact Building Design.

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Within the pages of this document many examples of these smart growth principles are discussed and presented as recommended goals or solutions to existing problems.