

# OVERVIEW

This chapter is organized by three sections: I. Introduction, II. Current Conditions and III. Next Steps.

## I. Introduction

The City published its last comprehensive plan in 1961. Researching the document, the current city planners found no evidence of public involvement: it appeared to be written by experts for experts.

In 2002, St. Joseph County and the City of South Bend adopted the *South Bend and St. Joseph County Comprehensive Plan*. This Plan addressed specific residential area policies for South Bend, but it primarily established a broad framework for county-wide resources and development patterns. It did not and could not, under its broad approach, significantly address the specific concerns that face the City of South Bend - where it is right now, where it wants to be in the future, and how it can get there.

*City Plan* is a response to that gap. When Mayor Stephen J. Luecke directed work to begin on a new comprehensive plan for South Bend in 2002, he asked the planners to develop an inclusive planning process that could embody the aspirations of the community so that the future direction of the city would come from its residents. He knew that if *City Plan* were going to serve as a guide for decision making over the next 20 years, it had to have enough community support to transcend any one administration. *City Plan* is funded by the City and managed by the Division of Community Development of the Department of Community & Economic Development. City staff has developed a three phase process, approximately two years long, to engage the community at every step in developing a blueprint for South Bend's future.

To launch *City Plan*, planners used the concept of public speaking to introduce new ideas to the South Bend community while creating a public space for dialogue. *An American City: Facing Challenges, Building a Future*, South Bend's first urban and regional planning speaker series began in April 2003. The topics selected for the first series were generated by issues that surfaced during previous community meetings. Nationally renowned experts were sought to address topics such as the future of cities, demographic and housing trends, neighborhood capacity building and the role of the arts and design in urban planning. Approximately 1500 people attended the first American City speaker series.

Phase I began in the fall of 2003 and involved the development of a 20 year Vision for the future. In September of 2003, Mayor Luecke appointed a 50 member Civic Alliance, a diverse group of citizens, to oversee the public process. City staff and Civic Alliance members listened to the aspirations of people in the community during the first round of meetings called Community Outreach. The 22 Outreach meetings, attended by over 600 people, were organized throughout the city. The results of these meetings were recorded by a professional facilitator in a report: *Elements of a Vision for South Bend*. These results were presented back to the community in another round of Report Back meetings in February 2004. City staff worked with the Civic Alliance and drafted the 20 year Vision for South Bend: *Envision South Bend in 2025...* The Common Council approved the Vision, by resolution, on May 10, 2004 completing Phase I. Phase I also helped identify 12 topic areas that would be the focus of further research and discussion in the rest of the *City Plan* process. The American City speaker series contributed to this successful creation of the community's Vision. Many civic leaders encouraged the city to put together another series. The planners responded with *An American City II: Getting Creative* in 2004 to introduce Phase II of the *City Plan* process.

In Phase II, Alliance members organized into seven Panels, dealing with the topic areas. In the Report Back meetings towards the end of Phase I, participants were asked to identify some key community issues. Identifying community issues provides focus to the planning process and is the first step in determining feasible solutions. The Panels and City staff used this basic information to begin Phase II and created a list of stakeholders to meet with or survey over the course of a few months. Stakeholders included the Mayor, City Department Head, Common Council members and approximately 500 other individuals or organizations. Seven Civic Alliance Panels conducted over 200 meetings over the course of eight months to finalize this report. During each meeting, the Civic Alliance Panels discussed issues identified by the community earlier in the process and began gathering South Bend's strengths to overcome them.

## II. Current Conditions

Current challenges, the facts that support them and strengths relative to each form the core of the Current Conditions Report (CCR). Other information provides further context. The following statements only give a snapshot of the research and discussion that occurred for each of the topic areas. Detailed information is provided in each chapter of this report.

The CCR includes an assessment of South Bend's strengths and challenges by the 12 *City Plan* topic areas. This assessment is critical to a successful planning effort that is responsive to the community while providing a benchmark of current conditions. The CCR will be one of several sources of information in developing and shaping *City Plan* and will be helpful in designing the next round of community meetings. Feedback recorded from these community meetings will help in developing goals, objectives and policies which will guide the future growth and development of the city.

For each of the 12 topic areas, the following were identified as current challenges. It is important to realize that some of these challenges are new while some have existed for several years and many different agencies are responsible for overcoming them. South Bend's strengths identified in this report will be a significant factor in achieving the community's vision for the future.

### 1. Transportation

- Transportation emphasis remains on automobiles instead of on alternatives that emphasize service, availability, safety for the environment, convenience and affordability.
- Multi lane one-way streets, such as St. Joseph Street and Main Street, in the downtown promote higher traffic speeds and are a detriment to pedestrian activity.
- The current Amtrak station on Washington Street is not centrally located and has no visual appeal.
- The scheduling and travel time for the South Shore service from South Bend to Chicago attracts only a few commuters.
- South Bend and the state capital of Indianapolis are not well-connected by air, rail, car & bus transportation.
- Transportation planning by agencies in St. Joseph County lacks adequate coordination and involvement of the public.
- Discovering and locating prominent local destinations upon entering the city limits is difficult for visitors due to the lack of appropriate guide signs.
- Pedestrian activity in some parts of the city is discouraged by absence of adequate sidewalk infrastructure and street lighting.
- A coordinated system of bike trails, paths and lanes with bike parking facilities is absent in South Bend.

### 2. Infrastructure

- Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) in South Bend fall short of meeting the Environmental Protection Agency's CSO Control Policy, a national framework for the control of CSO's.
- The local roadway network lacks sufficient yearly funding for its maintenance and upgrading.
- South Bend does not have a parking plan for the downtown.
- Physical infrastructure plans for South Bend are not well coordinated and have different service area boundaries.
- Alleys in some areas of South Bend are unpaved, dirty, and require expensive alley grading.
- Sidewalk infrastructure is inconsistently available throughout the city and is poorly maintained in some areas.
- South Bend does not have a high tech communication infrastructure plan.
- There is underutilized infrastructure within city limits, due to brownfield sites and vacant properties.

### 3. Land use / Zoning

- The Zoning Ordinance for the city was created without a comprehensive plan in place and will need revision once City Plan is adopted.
- Auto-oriented development over the last 30 years has caused downtown to lose its traditional urban characteristics.
- Surface parking lots in the downtown consume developable parcels and reduce its urban density.
- Buildings and neighborhoods in South Bend tend to be single use in nature.

- One-way streets are diminishing pedestrian orientated commercial viability and residential appeal in the downtown.
- There is a lack of broader community planning oversight guiding development that looks out for impacts beyond the immediate parcel/project in question.
- There are perceived governmental barriers and a general dissatisfaction with public agency relationships that is limiting or discouraging development in South Bend.
- Neighborhood plans which are used to protect, preserve and revitalize neighborhoods are not coordinated through a citywide comprehensive plan.

#### **4. Urban Design**

- Vacant parcels, surface parking lots, underutilized and poorly maintained structures in the downtown have a negative aesthetic and economic effect on the downtown.
- The community lacks well designed and landscaped spaces throughout the city.
- Demolition of existing buildings without firm plans or commitments for reuse of the site causes economic and spatial blight.
- There are inadequate visual and physical connections to the River, monuments, landmarks, parks and significant public venues.
- Parking structures in the downtown lack visual appeal and are mostly designed for single use.
- Major arterial streets into the city need better streetscapes, visual enhancements and recognition as our community's front doors.
- The established urban fabric of many neighborhoods has not been recognized, maintained and enhanced.
- Area specific master planning efforts in the city fail to anticipate impacts on adjacent areas and beyond.
- New construction is often favored over the adaptive reuse of historic structures.
- A lack of effective building and development design guidelines has negatively impacted the entire urban fabric.

#### **5. Environmental Management**

- St. Joseph and Elkhart counties have not attained EPA-acceptable standards for ground-level ozone.
- South Bend has a number of abandoned, inactive, or underutilized parcels of real estate of various sizes whose marketability and development are hindered by their real or perceived contamination.
- E. coli, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and mercury impair the use of the St. Joseph River.
- There is improper disposal of some household hazardous waste in South Bend.
- Although the quality and quantity of the drinking water in South Bend is good, careful and diligent management of drinking water will be required in the future.

#### **6. Parks and Open Spaces**

- South Bend's park acreage for community, neighborhood, and block parks is below national standards as set by the National Recreation and Park Association.
- The South Bend Municipal Code does not sufficiently promote protection, preservation, and creation of open space and wetland habitats.
- Most of South Bend's urban form does not encourage walking or biking as a transportation alternative for fulfilling the needs of daily life.
- South Bend does not have a sufficient number of public swimming pools, volleyball courts, and baseball and football fields to accommodate its population.

#### **7. Community Building**

- The South Bend community's capability to address the needs of its children and youth is inadequate.
- Racial / ethnic tensions exist in South Bend that are detrimental to the economic and cultural vitality of the community.
- There is a lack of uniformity / coordination in information exchange among local service agencies, organizations and institutions.
- The city lacks a clear, marketable identity, making it vulnerable to lost economic opportunities.
- The South Bend community has had difficulty retaining or attracting educated young professionals.

- The City of South Bend has not successfully addressed the physical and social conditions in the areas of the city with the greatest concentrations of poverty.
- The participation of the public in local civic affairs and decision-making processes is declining.
- The absence of social capital in some areas of South Bend weakens residents' ability to be collectively proactive in affecting neighborhood quality of life.

#### **8. Health and Safety**

- There is a high level of distrust between the South Bend Police Department and segments of the local population.
- Many properties within the city are not well-maintained.
- Many people living in South Bend have inadequate access to affordable healthcare.
- There are health disparities between non-minorities and minorities in South Bend the causes of which need to be investigated.
- Programs designed to prevent disease and promote health do not adequately reach the populations most in need.
- There is insufficient support for ex-offenders re-entering society.
- The crime rate in South Bend, though declining, is significantly higher than comparable cities in Indiana.

#### **9. Housing**

- Substandard housing and properties adversely affect the marketability of our older and historic neighborhoods.
- Neighborhood stability and market values are adversely affected by abandoned and unoccupied structures.
- Existing funding and staffing levels are not in place for Code Enforcement to proactively assist in the improvement of South Bend's neighborhoods.
- Property tax reassessment has placed disproportionate financial burden on South Bend's property owners, especially in the older and historic neighborhoods.
- The current housing stock in many of South Bend's neighborhoods does not contain a sufficient variety of types, amenities, and price ranges.
- Many first-time homebuyers are not prepared for the financial responsibility required for the purchase and maintenance of a home.
- Current banking guidelines used to obtain financing for renovation and repair are prohibitive.
- Preservation of the historical, architectural, and character of South Bend's neighborhoods is very challenging.
- The South Bend Community School Corporation's negative reputation influences some families to seek housing outside the corporation district.
- The perception of South Bend as an unsafe community adversely effects the desirability and marketability of the city's housing stock.

#### **10. Economic Development**

- The City of South Bend has not developed a comprehensive strategy to draw more market-rate housing and broad commercial development to strengthen its downtown.
- The competition and provincialism of jurisdictions in St. Joseph County impede efforts to create a better regional economy.
- The City of South Bend's land use decisions are ineffective in maximizing property tax revenues.
- Perceived unassertiveness by City leadership and a cumbersome and underdefined development process slow decision making concerning development.
- Business leadership has not been effective in communicating and establishing relationships with government to advocate for a more successful economic development environment.
- The performance (graduation rates and ISTEP test scores) of grades K-12 public schools in South Bend dissuades many people from locating in the school district.
- The job skills of the current and emerging workforce do not match what will be necessary for the future workforce of South Bend.
- The absence of an interstate-grade highway connection from South Bend to Indianapolis hampers economic development.
- Communication and promotion efforts are not sufficient to share successes, present assets, and dispel inaccurate negative perceptions about South Bend.

- South Bend has not fully seized its economic and demographic opportunities to compete successfully in a global economy.

### 11. Arts and Culture

- Many children are not being exposed to or participating in arts and culture.
- Arts and cultural programming available in downtown South Bend is not sufficiently abundant, vibrant or varied to have downtown recognized as a regional destination for the arts.
- Current levels of communication among arts and cultural organizations do not ensure coordinated and unified planning and marketing.
- Funding from all sources does not reflect arts as a priority for the community.
- The current levels of housing, commerce and entertainment do not support downtown as a regional destination for arts and culture.
- The cultural assets that exist in South Bend by virtue of the diversity of its population are not being fully recognized, celebrated or utilized as potential revitalization tools.

### 12. Education

- There is not a fully shared commitment throughout the community to support the efforts of the South Bend Community School Corporation to achieve a higher level of academic excellence.
- Many in the community have a negative perception of the South Bend Community School Corporation.
- The level of collaboration between institutions, which includes higher education, and the SBCSC is insufficient and limits the community's ability to meet the academic and social needs of our children.
- Young people who are not successful in a traditional high school setting have limited alternative educational options for high school completion.
- The perception exists that communication and collaboration between the South Bend Community School Corporation and the broader community are insufficient.

## III. Next Steps

Growth is a fundamental concern for communities. To determine future growth, communities use various techniques to model their projected population. Some basic information useful to any planning effort in a community includes:

- Total population of the community
- Total population of the region
- Age of the population (by age groups)

An analysis of population trends over the past few decades can help in anticipating the future size and composition of the population and help a community plan for its future. The Demographic Information in the CCR includes population projections for South Bend. This information will be applied to the *City Plan* topic areas to determine its impact. For example, if a community's population is expected to increase by x amount in the next 20 years, how many more housing units are needed to accommodate that population? Land use planning will involve determining where these projected housing units will need to be built. In addition to housing, it will be important to determine other compatible uses significant to growth such as commercial /retail development, industrial development, parks and open spaces, transportation, etc.

The CCR along with other research will be used to form the next round of community meetings in Phase II. Input from these meetings will be used in the development of future goals and general policies for achieving them. The first draft of *City Plan* is expected to be complete by December 2005. A public review of the *City Plan* draft will follow. Based on the public review, a revised version of the *City Plan* draft will be submitted by Mayor Luecke and the Civic Alliance to the Area Plan Commission (APC) of St. Joseph County for adoption. After APC's adoption, Mayor Luecke and the Civic Alliance will submit *City Plan* to the Common Council for their review and adoption as a resolution.