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City Plan

Phase 1: Vision for South Bend

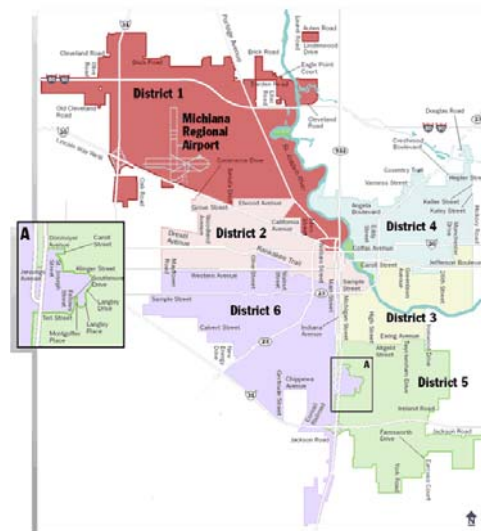
Executive Summary

To effectively guide South Bend into the 21st Century, Mayor Stephen J. Luecke charged the Division of Community Development with creating a public process to develop a new comprehensive plan for the city. A component of Mayor Luecke’s Smart Growth Initiative, this effort, entitled “City Plan,” has become the most inclusive public planning process ever conducted by South Bend.

Once the process was developed, Mayor Luecke appointed 50 community members in September, 2003, to serve as “the Civic Alliance,” reflecting the diversity of South Bend. Pam Meyer, the Director of the Division of Community Development, describes the respective roles within the City Plan process in this way: “City staff manages the process and the Civic Alliance oversees the process. But the community will provide the debate and the ideas which will largely form the content and priorities of City Plan.”

City Plan will be a 20-year policy guide adopted by the City Council. It will analyze the current state of the community; identify elements of a vision to shape future development; and assess how the city can reach this vision most effectively. City Plan will identify where development should occur, and where municipal resources should be directed.

The kick-off to *Phase 1*, involved staff from South Bend’s Division of Community Development joining with Civic Alliance members to organize three Community Outreach Meetings for each of the six Council Districts, as well as targeted other constituencies, organized by either Alliance Members or community residents.



The goals of these meetings were to gather public input toward a community vision, build trust with residents, and reach out to all the citizens of South Bend to convey the importance of citizen participation in guiding city planning priorities. All Council District meetings were facilitated by Capraro Consulting Services between October, 2003 and December, 2003, while sessions with other targeted groups were facilitated by South Bend Community Development staff, utilizing the same visioning tool and agenda (included in the Appendix) to ensure consistency for the present report.

While it is difficult to quantify the spirit of participation and enthusiasm in the individual meetings, participating residents clearly communicated both a vision for South Bend and the values they embrace through statements provided during the visioning exercise. Report-back titles such as “Great Place to Live – Venice of the Midwest,” “South Bend Transformed,” or “Charm Restored” begin to demonstrate the hopes of residents who participated in sessions; individuals who represented the geographic and cultural diversity of the community, working collectively to outline their dreams for South Bend.

The Future Vision exercise asked participants to imagine an important celebration banquet in the year 2024, recognizing the accomplishments of City Plan over the last 20 years. Acting as reporters, participants worked in groups to discuss responses to the following six key journalist questions: **WHAT? WHO? WHEN? WHERE? HOW? WHY?** Each group of participants then recorded and presented their ideas in the plenary session. Capraro Consulting staff subsequently categorized and tallied these responses, both by district and throughout the city. An analysis of the specific responses to the vision exercise is presented in the remainder of this report. Citywide trends are brought into relief through this compilation of over 1281 group responses to the journalistic inquiries.

WHAT:

Participants in City Plan were clearly concerned with improving the transportation in this community. 12% of responses mentioned this topic to describe their hopes for prioritizing South Bend’s planning efforts. Other categories of answers include:

- Good paying jobs & strong businesses (11%);
- Increased access to or availability of cultural events or recreational activities (10%);
- Improvements to housing, reducing homelessness (10%);
- And access to improved educational resources for community residents (8%).



WHO:

According to over a quarter of responses (28%), government officials play a significant role in achieving a vision of a better South Bend in 2024. Another 11% of answers pointed to the essential role of rooted business leaders to improve South Bend's future. And, clearly demonstrating a sense of responsibility for improving their own destiny, 20% of vision statements indicated that citizens and families are themselves key stakeholders to accomplish a new vision.

WHEN:

Participants were generally of two minds as they imagined the timing of the implementation of City Plan. A majority of 64% of groups envisioned a gradual implementation of their visions. A noteworthy 24% of responses indicated that certain improvements could take place immediately; less an indication of impatience than reasoning that quickly mobilizing existing resources could, in many cases, improve the common good in the near term.



WHERE:

Statements by 43% of groups indicated a need for improvements to occur throughout all of South Bend, illustrating the broader perspective held by most participants. Answers for this category were concentrated in Districts 1, 3, and 4, but were mentioned at least once in all meetings. Following the entire community as a priority, 29% of responses pointed to the downtown area in their visions, which taken as a whole, signifies a broad geographic focus across all districts with a preference for downtown redevelopment. Of note, 8% of responses, spread across six districts, indicated a need to focus on the west side of the city in particular.

HOW:

As participants outlined how their visions were realized, 32% of statements pointed toward the importance again of government involvement. Consistent with other questions, participants also recognized the critical role charged to Citizens and Families (15%). Approximately 11% of responses considered the importance of collaboration among multiple constituencies, (such as federal / local government, area utilities, investors, school officials, etc.), while 8% of comments specifically pointed to the role of education in accomplishing their City Plan vision.

Often, the responses to the WHO, WHAT, WHEN and HOW questions also answered the **WHY** question. The responses to this question also shed light on the key motivations for those attending the fall sessions: a sense of community pride and identity (39%); a commitment to youth and families choosing to stay in this city (14%); and hopes for a better quality of life (12%) prevailed in this category.

Taken all together, these visions present a thoughtful and realistic statement of the hopes and dreams of participants, as well as some indication of the tasks ahead. However, to more fully understand the categories summarized above, the following sections will reveal some of the recurring descriptions that creative and reflective citizens of South Bend assembled in Phase I of the City Plan process.

