

Suggestions when updating your Comprehensive Plan

1. Get creative with content. Don't feel obligated to follow the 9-element structure laid out in state law. Hone in on the issues that are important to your community and focus on them. You can still address the issues required by law, but they don't need to be the dominant or organizing focus of your plan. Communities are focusing on new issues such as public health, food systems, energy, sustainability, aging in place, etc. Think about what matters to your community and go for it!
2. Get creative with process. Think beyond the traditional open house and public hearing. Don't expect that people will attend your meetings. Use existing networks, channels, and events to communicate and get people involved. Consider how you will reach different ages and audiences. What are the constraints to participation (i.e. child care, inability to attend meetings, don't know/don't care) and how can you overcome them (technology, meeting on their turf, adjusting meeting times, etc.)? Don't be afraid to involve the community. It takes time and forethought, but results in a better product.
3. Make incremental updates. Don't get stressed out or overwhelmed at the thought of updating your comprehensive plan. The existing content may work just fine with a few tweaks or updates to data or maps. Start with something that seems achievable and use existing groups or advisory committees to distribute the workload. In the future, make a point to meet annually to review the plan and discuss how it is working for you. Make small changes as needed.
4. Consider content and structure. Write simply, use graphics, keep an electronic copy of the plan. Consider using different options for updating - create a plan addendum, selective update sections, rewrite the whole document. Look for new, relevant and updated sources of data and maps.

Chapters 3 and 4 of the Plan Commission Handbook are deal with planning and public participation, including many of these issues. There are also worksheets at the end of each chapter to help people think through the small details.

From: CLUE