

Appendix A

Implementation Programs

Introduction

A plan is only as good as its implementation. This section presents a recommended list of implementation items to set in motion the plan as updated during this process. While this comprehensive plan update draws greatly from previous work conducted in the 1997 comprehensive plan, the 2000 parks and recreation plan and the Gateway and Park-Whittington neighborhood plans, its policy direction and prioritizing of implementation tasks are slightly different than those included in the previous plans. Many specific implementation items remain, however, and they are included in this overall list.

The items here are listed in order of priority, providing a brief description of the reason for the project's inclusion, and below, indicating when they should occur and who would likely be responsible for their implementation.

1. Fiscal strategy

Hot Springs has benefited from rather reliable financial resources derived from local sales tax and a generally high level of tourism. Recent years, however, have been difficult for the City to produce a balanced budget while still providing its residents the level of service to which they've become accustomed. The deletion of the City's recreation programs from the spectrum of City services indicates the degree of difficulty the City faces. It is time for the City to establish a fiscal management strategy to help its budget and service levels more resilient to fluctuations in municipal revenues and costs.

2. Annexation policy

A possible component of the City's fiscal policy will likely be its stance on annexations and how to manage land development along the community's perimeter. The City has resisted annexing land, but decisions on annexations and the criteria used to determine which properties are suitable for annexation are made on a case-by-case basis. The City may wish to consider adopting an annexation policy to clarify its approach to annexation, and regarding its expectations for development along the city's edges.

3. Utilities extension and service policy

Another possible component of the fiscal strategy will be a policy concerning the extension of utilities into unincorporated Garland County. Water and wastewater extensions have enabled residential and commercial development in the unincorporated areas, creating a near-urban landscape in areas generally free of land use and development controls. Development beyond the city limits has resulted in increased pressure on the City's arterial streets and, despite the surcharge applied to utility ratepayers, may create difficulty with utility system maintenance in the future. The City may wish to adopt a utilities extension policy, clarifying the conditions under which services will be provided beyond the city limits, ensuring that public health and system integrity are maintained.

4. Comprehensive plan update

This planning update focused on the land use, transportation and community facilities sections of the 1997 comprehensive plan. It will be important for the City to consider more carefully how the direction proposed in this update impacts other facets of City policy. Results from the 2010 Census, when available, will help the City relate its new land use, transportation and community facilities policies to housing, economic development and social trends the 2010 Census will reveal. A more thorough review of the City's entire policy framework is an appropriate response, ensuring that housing, economic development, historic preservation, parks and recreation, and other City policies are consistent with its new long-range vision and the policies established in this update.

5. Collaborative planning agreement with Garland County

As Hot Springs' urban population continues to expand into unincorporated areas adjacent to the city, there will be increased need for coordination between Garland County and the City of Hot Springs. The shared responsibility for regulating land division, issuance of building permits and other development-related activities within the City's extra-territorial jurisdiction is vaguely understood by the public and not easily managed by the City or the County. An agreement between the two agencies clearly stating common long-range goals and outlining each agency's responsibility in managing land development in the ETJ will be an important step in effective community-building along Hot Springs' edges.

6. Transportation system plan update

The 1997 comprehensive plan provided an extensive and detailed list of transportation system improvements. This plan update concentrated on transportation goals and policies, intending that the more detailed Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) coordinated by the Hot Springs Area Metropolitan Planning Organization be the specific document that ensures specific improvement needs are identified. Updating the LRTP would identify needed improvements, shaping and prioritizing them in a manner consistent with the vision, goals and policies included in this update.

7. Housing incentives program

More than 1,200 housing units have been demolished in Hot Springs since the adoption of the 1997 plan, and most of those units were in the Gateway and Park-Whittington neighborhoods. Erosion of the housing stock in the neighborhoods nearest the city's center is also eroding the commercial viability of the downtown and those commercial districts near downtown. This plan update calls for active involvement by the City and agencies such as the housing authority to stimulate reinvestment in housing in the community's central neighborhoods. The City may wish to collaborate with partners to establish a package of housing incentives - potentially including a community land trust, a new-market tax credit, and/or zoning density bonuses - to encourage the replacement of units lost and to energize a residential context in the city's historic neighborhoods.

8. Collaborative planning agreement with rural fire districts

Public safety is the highest priority, and, as urbanized development extends into unincorporated Garland County, the rural fire districts will be called upon to respond to increasing demand. The City and the rural fire districts may consider formalizing their collaborative planning, identifying how the agencies can prepare for increasing population growth in unincorporated areas. This may result in the expanded designation of joint response areas, departmental transition and merging, updates to mutual aid agreements, joint review of water system plans, coordination of fire inspection and prevention programs, and continuing efforts to streamline and coordinate dispatch and response.

9. Zoning ordinance review and update

This comprehensive plan update has generated several changes in land use policy, some of which may impact the City's zoning ordinance. Issues such as mixing housing and retail uses, ensuring compatibility of infill development and incentives for housing and retail rehabilitation may drive amendments to the zoning map and text.

10. Subdivision ordinance review and update

Calls for increased coordination with Garland County and for increased connectivity in neighborhood and commercial design can be addressed in part by revising the subdivision ordinance's design and process provisions. Other policies may also motivate review of the subdivision ordinance to ensure this plan update's vision is met.

11. Neighborhood plans implementation audit

The Gateway and Park-Whittington neighborhood plans suggested several implementation items, but few have been achieved in the decade since those plans were adopted. The City may wish to revisit those implementation items in light of this comprehensive plan update and reassess their appropriateness, relevance and reality, committing to those that still make sense. If necessary, the City may wish to conduct an abbreviated neighborhood plan update process, convening the community to participate in the review and to restate their support for City action.

12. Redevelopment plan for "The Box"

Highway 70 is the western gateway to Hot Springs, but the area of that corridor just west of downtown (bounded by Summer, Hobson, Third and West Grand) is in transition. The City can take the opportunity that area presents and establish a strategy for its redevelopment. Existing residential property owners have little incentive to reinvest in the area, and many commercial storefronts are vacant. Still, it is very close to downtown and is exposed to some of the highest traffic levels in the city. A redevelopment plan for this area could take advantage of the preliminary planning work Champion Baptist College and Gospel Light Baptist Church have conducted, finding ways to integrate the campus' long-range vision into a more comprehensive master plan for the entire area, achieving urban design, revitalization and community development objectives.

13. Central Avenue corridor plan

This major north-south spine is one of the community's busiest and most important arterials. It travels through many distinct character areas, linking the historic downtown, the racetrack, major shopping districts and the residential landscape around Lake Hamilton. A "one size fits all" approach to street design and to the management of land use along the street's edge is inappropriate for this corridor. The corridor is a unique and challenging community asset, and an integrated approach to managing land use and transportation design is vital to its success.

14. Revised economic development strategy

The community's fiscal strategy likely will result in the need to review Hot Springs' economic development strategy. While the three-tiered approach of tourism, retirement and jobs creation may continue as the mainstay of Hot Springs' efforts, the strategic elements and actions may shift to complement more localized fiscal and economic development needs.

15. Neighborhood plans

Hot Springs' neighborhoods are varied. Generally, those neighborhoods nearer the city's center have an older housing stock and are in poorer condition than are those on the community's periphery. While neighborhood plans will not on their own cure the growing imbalance, they may help stabilize neighborhoods in decline by addressing directly change issues, resident disinterest, and uncertainty. These neighborhood plans, such as the ones prepared for Park/Whittington and Gateway, will give residents and local businesses an opportunity to guide development, investment, and public services provision and to rebuild civic and social connections at the neighborhood level.

16. Commercial rehabilitation program

Hot Springs' downtown is a legacy of its heyday, but its buildings are in decay. Deferred property maintenance and resulting vacancies - particularly in the area's residential and hotel units - makes the downtown's decline seem terminal. Without rapid action, some of the downtown's most iconic structures will likely become unsafe and will be subject to demolition. The community values its downtown as a historic asset and will need to support a rehabilitation program to save it. The program could consist of a system of tax incentives, tax assessments, zoning incentives, grants and loans to help stimulate building repair and increased occupancy.

17. Water system master plan

The City's water utility has made progress on the 1997 plan's implementation items. The City is reviewing and updating its water master plan to address water treatment, affirm water availability, enhance fire suppression capabilities, and specify additional implementation projects for inclusion in the City's capital facilities program. Additional review and/or work should be performed to ensure the water system plan complements the goals and policies contained in this comprehensive plan update.

18. Sanitary sewer system evaluation and master plan

While many of the wastewater implementation items in the 1997 plan have been addressed, the system's current struggles with wastewater discharge indicate that it is time for a comprehensive review of the system and the creation of a new list of capital and planning projects. The new project list can help inform the system's operating and capital budgets.

19. Stormwater management strategy

The 1997 plan suggested that the City explore alternative strategies for stormwater management, including using filtration and detention for runoff, installing flood warning sirens downtown, and replacing deteriorating system components. (Hot Springs Creek Greenway Trail is an excellent example of such multiple use investments.) The City is also responsible for implementing Phase II regulations of the National Pollutant Discharge Emission System requirements. The City should review its storm water management plan and revise its list of capital projects and programs to ensure conformance with new rules and to implement low-impact design where practical.

