

# Introduction

## Overview

The City of Hot Springs is updating its comprehensive plan, adopted in 1997. This update seeks to revise specific policies proposed in that plan as suggested by public participation in this process and more recent policy documents adopted by the City since the 1997 plan's adoption. While this process has touched on many issues important to the greater Hot Springs community, it is truly only a start. The process has revealed that the City must invest in a more rigorous planning process to fully update its comprehensive plan.

This update is divided into four main components:

- *Vision – This chapter is new to the comprehensive plan, stating a long-range community vision and suggesting how that vision relates to overall community form and the topics the comprehensive plan should address.*
- *Updated elements – These elements updated the land use, transportation and capital facilities chapters, drawing information from the 1997 plan as appropriate and identifying policy revisions based on the current policy environment and direction provided in this process.*
- *Goal and policy framework – This policy framework presents a compiled listing of*



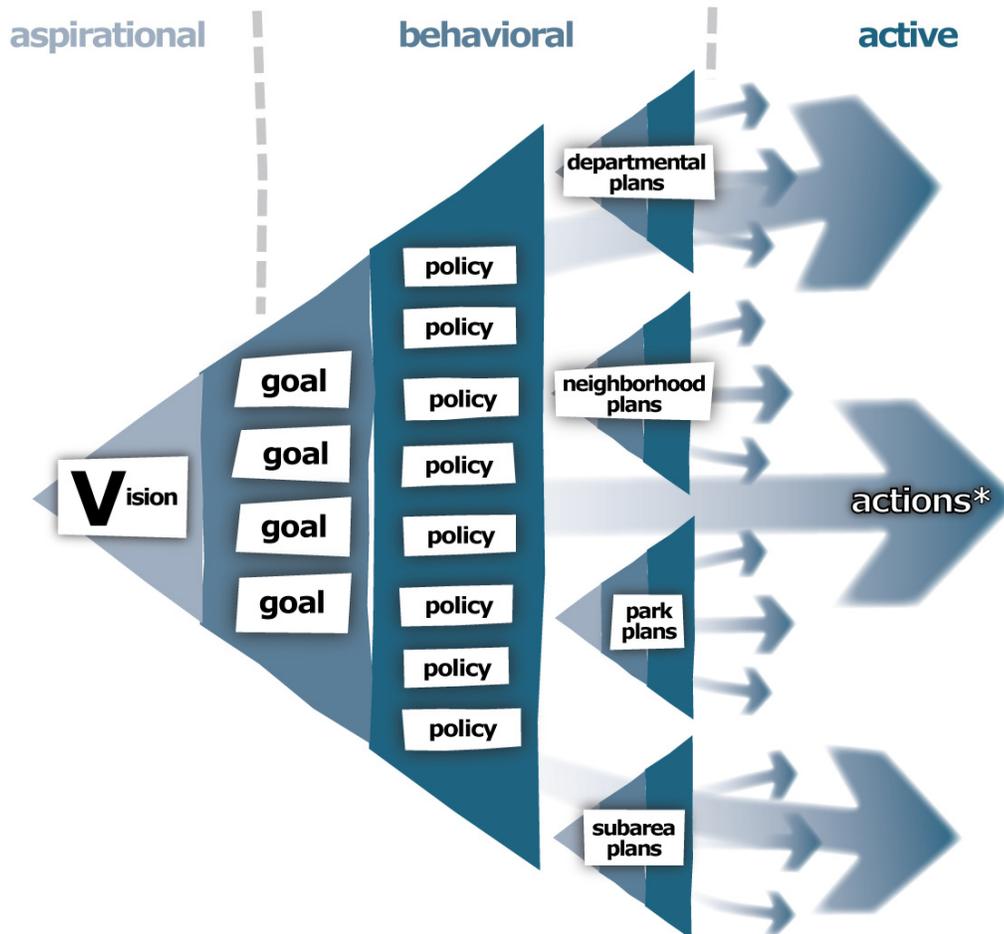
**Figure I.01** - Hot Springs has a long and colorful history, owing in large part to its namesake springs. Following the Civil War, the community grew rapidly as coordinated efforts to establish bathhouses, and later, a National Park, took hold. (Image source: Studio Cascade, Inc.)

*updated policies for the comprehensive plan's complete range of topics. It also includes a list of implementation actions consistent with the plan's direction. While this update concentrates on the three elements included in the second component, the policy framework relates to many other topic areas, ensuring consistency throughout the entire comprehensive plan. As a result, several policies are included in the framework that don't appear in the three updated elements. This framework presents internally-consistent goal and policy guidance to the City as derived from this process, pulling forward those goals and policies as appropriate from the 1997 plan.*

- *Appendices – The appendices include a glossary, the policy framework and implementation table detailed above, plus the adopted 1997 plan and its community profile. While that plan’s goals and policies are superseded by the updated elements and the policy framework included here, the 97 plan and its community profile provide great depth of information germane to this present update. The appendices also include a portion of the process documents produced in the update, followed by an index listing of the full range of documents, comments and*

*other materials generated for the 2010 plan update.*

This process included several means of public engagement, designed with a small budget to acquire meaningful public influence on the plan update. A series of community interviews, a two-day community charrette, public newsletters, a project website, a citizens’ advisory committee, ad hoc technical advisory committees and the Hot Springs Planning Commission all contributed to the scope, nature and focus of this update. While the initial direction was to evaluate and amend the 1997 plan as necessary, the process revealed a more philosophical shift in vision and



\*Actions include programs, capital investments, regulations, etc.

**Figure I.02** - This image, developed from a slide presented at the Malco Theater event, shows the relationship between broad-brush ideals (vision) leading to more specific action items including policies, implementing plans and program actions. (Image source: Studio Cascade, Inc.)

community priority than a simple update could easily accommodate. The public engagement process was critical to every component of the update, indicating a level of nuance and detail that the revised vision and policy framework convey. A chart of key topics discussed, including those plan elements they relate to, is provided in this section as Table I.01.

This update includes a direct policy course intended to empower Hot Springs to achieve its desired future. It is based on the issues and priorities the community members brought to the process, establishing goals and policies the community will support as the City implements the plan.

This document is structured to be as efficient as possible, outlining the changes in policy direction in land use, transportation and capital facilities since the comprehensive plan's 1997 adoption. Each of the three updated elements present a summary of its relationship to the 1997 and other key plans, the planning objectives the section strives to achieve, and a set of goals and policies for the City to pursue. This update does not supplant the 1997 plan. It amends it, targeting those areas most in need of change.

The goals, policies and programs in this 2010 update offer a platform for reinforcing the positive aspects of the City while striving to overcome barriers to success in achieving the plan's vision. The intent is to balance growth and development, encouraging investment to create a thriving economy in a quality living environment.

## Using This Document

Towns and cities generally employ two types of instruments to guide and enact legislation – policy documents, such as long-range or comprehensive plans, and regulatory documents, such as zoning or development regulations. Each are intentionally distinct, but for obvious reasons, must be well-coordinated and complementary.

Citizens, often far more familiar with local regulations, may confuse the two. In using this



**Figure I.03** - Scores of residents helped develop this plan update through meetings, questionnaires, photographs, and committee gatherings. This clip from a video made for the process shows residents participating in an all-day workshop. (Image source: Studio Cascade, Inc.)

document, it's important to understand that its intended role is, in brief:

- *An internal guide, providing City staff with set goals, policies and programs leading actions and budgeting activities*
- *A guide for elected and appointed leaders, providing direction on decision-making and in establishing regulations*
- *An outline agreement between residents and leadership, articulating and establishing expectations regarding key issues and city characteristics*

It's also important to understand the limits of this or any other plan. Many assume plans are a type of "end-all," holding legal sway over City activities or somehow extending automatically into land-use regulation. This is not the case. Instead,

**Table I.01 - Topic areas cited during planning process**

Issue	Vision	Land Use	Transportation	Capital Facilities
Annexation	■	□	■	■
Downtown vitality	■	■	■	■
Collaboration with Garland County	■	■	■	■
Quality of life/quality of place	■	■	■	■
Complexity and diversity	■	■		
Neighborhood reinvestment	■	■	■	■
Community institutions	■	■		■
Institutional expansion	■	■		■
Historic and cultural conservation	■	■	■	■
Tourism	■	■	■	■
Economic development	■	■	■	■
Recreation	■	■	■	■
Resource conservation	■	■		■
Public facilities	■	■	■	■
Connectivity	■	■	■	■
Corridor reinvestment	■	■	■	■
Affordable housing	■	■		■
Development review and regulation clarity	■	■		■
Hot Springs Village	■			
Plan implementation	■		■	■
Fiscal planning	■	■	■	■
Storm drainage	■		■	■
Community activities and attachments	■			
Education	■			
Partnership with community groups	■			■
City's "regional centerpiece" role	■	■	■	
Relationship with National Park	■	■		■
Geology	■	■	■	■
Planning area boundary	■	■	■	■
Land use compatibility	■	■	■	
Residential dispersion	■	■	■	■

this document provides a first, comprehensive and coordinated step towards a large variety of community goals. Further actions, just as essential as this one, include:

- *Further study – in some cases, the City will need to conduct relatively simple inventories or studies; in other cases, the creation of more topic-specific or sub-area plans will be necessary*
- *Consistency – the City’s set of development and zoning regulations will need to be updated and/or revised to implement the plan. Other, department-specific plans such as those related to public works, recreation and parks, or utilities, may also require review*
- *Use and updates – City leaders and staff will need to internalize and use the plan, marking progress, considering revisions, and updating the plan regularly, on-pace with conditions*
- *Public involvement – expectations for this plan – as evidenced by the level of public input sought in crafting it – seem to mark the desire for a new, more participatory role for residents in the City’s future. If so, residents will need to remain active in helping achieve goals and in monitoring the plans’s progress over time*

objectives. Some, such as City services staff, may wish to review individual chapters to assess project budgeting or compliance with plan objectives. Others may value individual chapters as a more immediate, accessible way of understanding City objectives. But for those wishing to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the plan, it should be taken in its entirety; an excellent means of absorbing this plan’s intent is provided with the full list of goals, policies and projects, included as **Appendix B**.



## Caveat

Few, if any of the various goals, policies or programs in this or any plan should be considered isolated from the larger whole. Decisions which on the surface seem exclusively transportation-related, for example, may well have deep implications related to housing, commerce, land value, or even to social issues. Therefore, it’s important to understand that although this plan attempts to order itself by chapter and subject for the sake of accessibility, it does not imply that these orderings present a complete, or even best representation, of the plan’s comprehensive