

# WHY PLANNING?

There is little doubt that communities throughout Oregon are changing and growing. New technology and changing market demands have created irrigated, productive croplands out of the brown, high desert landscape. Around our cities in the Willamette Valley, prime agricultural land is under pressure for use as home sites, shopping centers, or industrial parks. The coastal estuaries are valued both for their natural functions and economic potential. Population growth and in-migration create rapidly expanding needs for housing, for jobs, and for recreational facilities and open space.

Whatever the changes, decisions need to be made about how communities change and grow. These decisions affect the community's most important asset—*its people*. Sometimes individuals and groups have conflicting opinions and attitudes on such issues as growth, change, environmental protection, and social values. How, then, can these conflicts be resolved?

As an example, in the absence of a local planning program, a land developer may acquire a parcel of land to be used as an industrial park without regard to adjacent uses. While the physical site may be well suited for development, it may be next to a school or hospital, or in a residential neighborhood. If this is the case, should the industry be built anyway, or should it be located elsewhere?

In another case a sewer or water district may extend its lines through agricultural land to service a rural residential area. The agricultural land then can be developed for residential use. But what about roads, schools, and other community costs? What happens if the land is a flood area? And also what about the loss of prime agricultural land? Perhaps other land would be better suited for residential development.

## Planning can resolve conflicts

Unplanned expansion of industrial, residential, or other uses often results in severe use conflicts. These conflicts can cost taxpayers money by inefficient use of public funds spent on schools and sewer and water systems, and cause losses in valuable natural resources and a deterioration of community livability.

Some type of coordination is needed between public agencies, like city and county governments that provide needed public services, and the private individuals and corporations that build homes, shopping centers, and industries. It is also necessary to provide a way to settle community differences over social, economic, and environmental values. Coordination of public and private activities and the determination of community values are part of *comprehensive planning*.



## 1. Planning is an information process

Basically, planning of any kind is a process of gathering and using information, whether it be planning for a personal trip or planning for a whole community.

## 2. Planning involves establishing an information base

Roads, sewers, schools, parks, agricultural and timber lands, employment, housing, geologic hazards, and a number of other topics are all community concerns and are part of the comprehensive planning process. Information on these subjects can be as simple or as complex as needed. Usually, the more information available, the better the decisions for the community should be. Larger, more urban communities require more complex information, since the conflicts are more involved. However, information is often costly. There are limits to the amount of information any community can afford.

## 3. Planning sets priorities

In addition to being an information process, planning also tries to determine what citizens want for their future (GOALS) and expresses these desires as guidelines (POLICIES) for their officials to use in making decisions. These goals and policies are given official status by the adoption of a

comprehensive plan by the city council or county commission.

## 4. Planning includes regulations

Once information is assembled and goals and policies are agreed upon, the question becomes one of how to make decisions on individual cases as they come up. One way is to allow elected officials to decide on a case-by-case basis. This could require elected officials to work around the clock. Also, it violates a basic principle of legal justice: Equal Treatment for Similar Situations. The door would be open for favoritism and personal bias.

An alternative is to establish a set of regulations to provide consistency in decision-making. Goals and policies of the comprehensive plan usually are carried out through zoning, subdivision and building code regulations, and the scheduling and placement of such public facilities as sewer and water lines, roads, and schools to influence growth patterns that are favorable to the community. Other, newer techniques are being tried to offer incentives for developers to cooperate in the planning process. Some of these new techniques are transfer of development rights, density bonuses, land banking, and performance standards. (Contact your county Extension office for more information on these techniques.)

---

## Why some people oppose planning

If comprehensive planning is so essential, why then, do some oppose it? Here are some reasons.

- ***Planning has not always lived up to expectations.***

Planning cannot possibly solve all the social, environmental, and economic ills of a community. Political and financial realities limit planning accomplishments. Weak regulations that are subject to constant change can undermine even the best comprehensive plans. To be really successful, comprehensive plans must have realistic goals, enjoy and maintain community support over time, and be fairly enforced.

- ***Planning is expensive.***

Planning generally requires time of hired staff or consultants in all but the smallest communities. The collecting and updating of informa-

tion and the maintenance of the comprehensive plan and ordinances are continuous processes, often requiring professional services. Plans often call for adequate streets, lighting, sewers, and other services, all of which are expensive. But it should be noted that avoiding planning and public investment do not necessarily save taxpayers' money. In fact, studies show that planning increases the efficiency of land use and actually saves public money in the long run.

- ***Benefits of planning are difficult to measure.***

It is difficult to measure social costs and benefits. Many planning benefits, such as a healthy, pleasing environment, improved recreation and transportation, conservation of historical sites, and personal satisfaction that people gain from

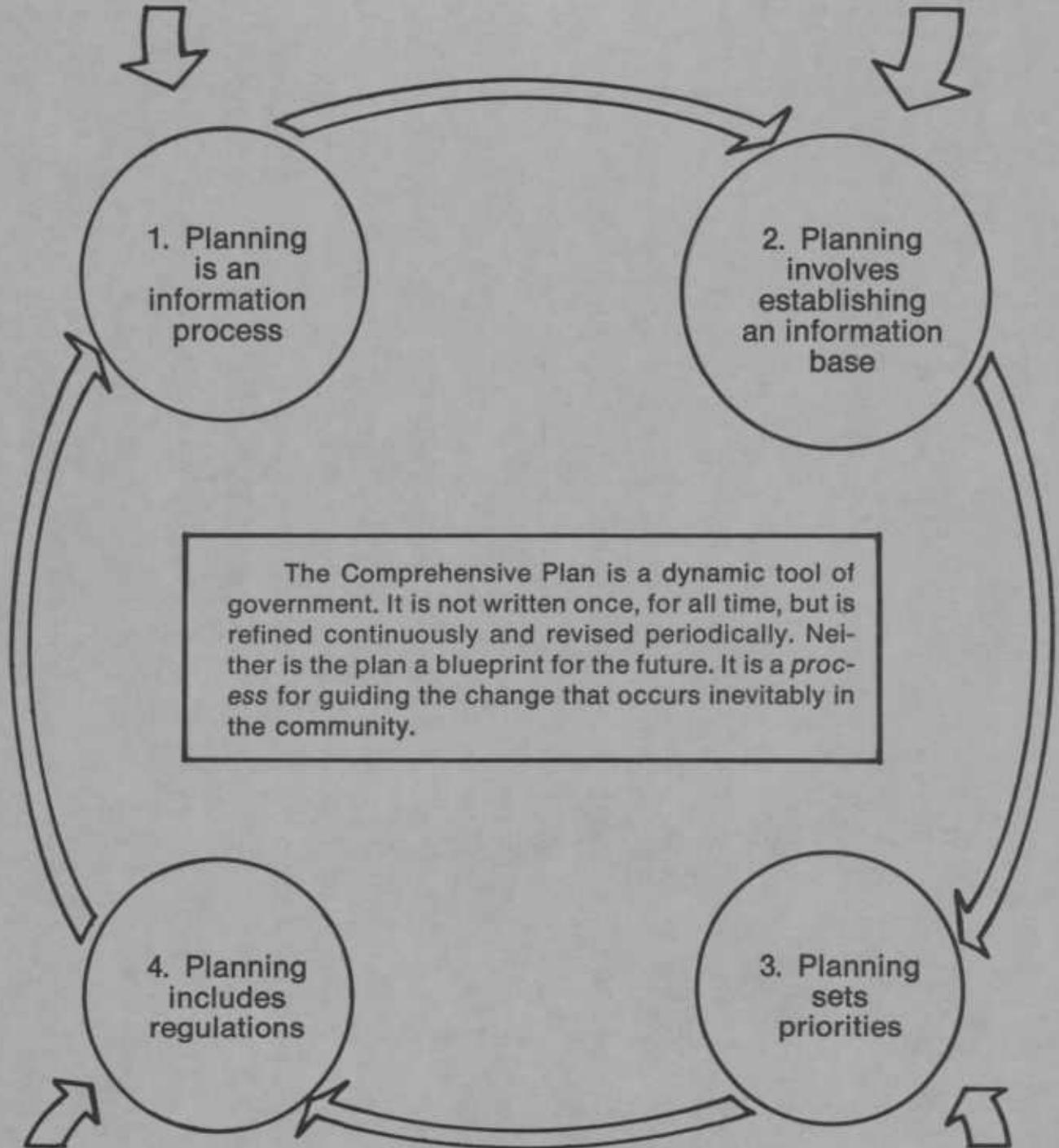
open space and nature are not measured in dollars alone—but then neither are pollution, overcrowding, and traffic congestion. Many people expect that money paid out of taxes will yield more tangible results, and are disappointed when confronted with intangible returns. The problems that never occur, because of preventive measures, often are not identified or tallied in the costs and benefits.

- ***Controls on private property.***

Planning requires some type of regulation on the use of land. Many people resent this restraint. They feel that ownership of land allows them to do what they wish with their property. But as land becomes more scarce and people become more crowded, the actions of individuals often affect the entire community, especially future generations.

- *Planning has not always lived up to expectations*

- *Planning is expensive*



1. Planning is an information process

2. Planning involves establishing an information base

The Comprehensive Plan is a dynamic tool of government. It is not written once, for all time, but is refined continuously and revised periodically. Neither is the plan a blueprint for the future. It is a *process* for guiding the change that occurs inevitably in the community.

4. Planning includes regulations

3. Planning sets priorities

- *Controls on private property*

- *Benefits of planning are difficult to measure*

## Planning and zoning are not the same

The terms planning and zoning often are used as one and the same. This is not correct and it causes confusion. Forget about "zoning" for a minute. Think first of the comprehensive plan. It is the plan that defines the issues, and guides and gives direction to community growth. Next think of some way to achieve the goals of the comprehensive plan. Tools are needed to implement the plan. Zoning can be one of those tools. But zoning, without a comprehensive plan as a guide, cannot really do the job. Because your community has zoning regulations does not necessarily mean that comprehensive planning is as good as it should be. In Oregon, the comprehensive plan is the legal basis for zoning and land-use decisions.

### What can you do?

Probably you can do much more than you realize. Every citizen has a large storehouse of knowledge and information about his or her community that is often difficult or impossible for the professional staff to obtain. Professionals are hired by a community to do a job. But that job can be ac-

complished only if citizens in a community cooperate and guide the professionals.

In Oregon, citizen involvement is required by law. If you or others wish to have a hand in the future of your community, join the advisory committee for your area or attend a public hearing of the planning commission to find out what is happening in your community. Encourage your civic or religious groups to become involved. Invite a planning commissioner or elected official to come and speak to your group about how to become involved.

Whatever it is you decide to do, just make sure you actually follow through and do it. Decisions about the future of your community are being made every day. You can either help guide the process or simply accept the consequences. Responsive government depends on you.

For more information call your local planning office, probably at city hall or the county courthouse, or your county Extension office. Ask for more information on comprehensive planning.

---

Prepared by James R. Pease, Extension land resource management specialist, Bill Rompa, Extension agent in community development, and John Fregonese, graduate student assistant, Department of Geography, Oregon State University.

*Remember--it's your community.*

EXTENSION *Community Development* PROJECT  
OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY