

# Helping Small Towns with Big Plans



By

Aaron C. Ledford

School of Urban Planning and Affairs

C.I.R.P. 5397

May 2011

## **Abstract**

Small rural towns in Texas are under increasing pressure from state and federal entities to develop a master plan in order to procure funding. Unfortunately, many small towns lack the financial capital or the technical proficiency to create such a plan. By sampling plans of select small towns and analyzing plan elements against the criteria set by experts in their respective fields assembled in a rubric created for this report, a template will be created utilizing the most effective implementation methods. This template will enable small town administrators to:

- Understand the elements of a plan
- Prioritize elements of development
- Develop an in-house plan, or
- Evaluate plan proposals from independent consultants.

# **Table of Contents**

## **Contents**

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	10
Chapter 4: Timeline .....	12
References .....	14

## Chapter 1:

## Introduction

### Problem

There are many benefits for a community to have a master plan, especially a small community with a high population growth rate projection. An effective master plan can effectively manage growth, reduce sprawl and decrease traffic congestion, and save the town significant money if implemented before the town experiences a population boom.

Master plans for small, rural Texas towns have little historical precedent. Sought items of the plans would appear as needed. As the city grew, they may hire a planner to essentially tie all the plans into a single document and have a master plan of sorts. This approach is quickly becoming antiquated as requirements for procuring state and federal funding now require the municipality to have a master plan in place and enacted. This requirement varies depending from which agency the town seeks grants, which may be confusing and leaves many small town councils at a loss as how to generate a plan.

The initial obstacles faced by a small town creating a plan are found with budget restraints and limited knowledge of the process. It is simply beyond the budget of many small town (especially those that have bonded out for school construction) to hire a city planner. Hiring a consultant comes at a significant

(although one-time) cost and has other potential drawbacks. A consulting firm that accepts a commission for a small town is not likely to expend much of its resources due to an anticipated small payout and the consultants also will not spend a significant amount of time in the city becoming familiar with the towns specific conditions. City council members attempting to require the city to create a plan will often themselves lack the necessary expertise and the end result will often be compromised at the prospect of re-election.

### **Question**

The central question this project addresses is how can small communities acquire the knowledge and expertise necessary to create a master plan given their limited resources?

### **Claim**

A customizable template for small communities to utilize in the preparation of a master plan would assist more small towns to engage in the process of creating a master plan for the benefit of their citizens.

## Chapter 2:

## Literature Review

According to the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission there are five types of master plans widely recognized as applicable to small town planning : (1) the comprehensive master plan, (2) the small area master plan, (3) the functional master plan, (4) the strategic master plan, and (5) the abridged master plan. The comprehensive master plan will be utilized as it is beneficial to the community because it offers a wide array of funding opportunities across all elements of town planning (Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission, 2011).

The same New Hampshire source sums up very well why all towns should have a master plan. It is basically the duty and responsibility of the planning boards to develop one (Phase I, Chapter 4, 2011).

In New Hampshire, it may be the law that every town needs a master plan, but that it is not the case in Texas. A quick glance of various funding agencies will show, however, that a master plan is indeed required for a town to receive funding. The website for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, for example, will show that to be eligible for most Community Development Block Grants, HUD requires a copy of the master plan be submitted (<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/>, 2011).

Funding for parks will quickly show, per the Texas Park and Wildlife website, that even menial amounts of funding require that a copy of a master plan be

submitted 60 days prior to submitting an application for grants (<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/grants/trpa/>, 2011).

There are, of course, other reasons to develop a master plan. Abby Goodnough (2011), writing for the New York Times about the town of Starksboro in Vermont, notes that the prime concern of the town was developing a plan to preserve it's uniqueness.

Many other reasons for master planning- ranging from developing resort communities to coordinating regional development-can be found in Barbara Wells' *Smart Growth at the Frontier: Strategies and Resources for Rural Communities* (2002).

For a perspective on what other small towns goals are in employing master plans, one can evaluate several case studies from the University of North Carolina at <http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/cednc/stbi/results.php> (2011). Listed here are examples of small town planning ranging in goals from tourism to development.

Once the reasons for planning are clear, evaluating other master plans becomes critical. *The Practice of Local Government Planning* which is edited by Charles J. Hoch (2000), breaks the components of the master plan into elements. Each of these elements is then further broken down into how it is evaluated.

These elements begin with transportation planning, in which the authors Sandra Rosenbloom and Alan Black (2000) examine the role of said planning. Of

particular interest is the local role in transportation planning, which offers suggestions in interacting with regional entities.

Another element is Housing planning and policy in which John Landis and Richard Legates (2000) offer insight into different housing models and make the reader aware of what challenges are to be faced.

Urban Design, by Jonathan Barnett and Gary Hack (2000) explore different concepts of the element and also explain how government policy affects city design.

The last element, Zoning and Subdivision regulations, by Stuart Meck, Paul Wack, and Michelle Zimet(2000) contains a very useful description of the technical aspects of land use are explained well, as are suggestions for ordinances.

*Community Planning: An Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan*, by Damian Kelly and Barbara Becker (2000) to shows a community how to develop a master plan. Although small towns may not require plans as comprehensive as the ones the book shows, it is an excellent source from which to reverse engineer an existing plan.

*Urban Land Use Planning*, by David Godschalk, Edward Kaiser, and Daniel Rodrigues (2006), contains some of the most crucial information for the initial stages of my report. The book includes a section on the criteria for evaluating plan quality based on a basic framework that lays out what is to be expected from a plan. The authors discuss multiple aspects from the internal plan quality and the external plan quality.



The second stage of my project begins with producing a template based in part on *The Small Town Planning Handbook*, by Thomas L. Daniels, John W. Keller, and Mark B. Lapping (1988). This “how to” book explores town planning from the decision stages to the final product.

After the authors in the book challenge the reader to question if they need a plan, they begin to describe the process involved. The book also provides the readers with helpful tips on managing the process and some initial questions the planner should be asking of the community.

Finally, *Rural Sustainable Development in America*, edited by Ivonne Audirac (1997), examines some unorthodox methods used on successful small town plans. This book can be used to reinforce the vision-planning theme and justifies why a successful plan may not cover all of the technical areas.

## Chapter 3

## Methodology

To understand the typical content of small community master plans in North Central Texas, I plan to collect master plans that have already been created by small towns in and around the Dallas/Fort Worth area and in general in Texas. The method of selection is explained in Table 1. I plan to evaluate these plans by examining their issue and vision statement, fact base, goal and framework policy, plan flexibility, and clarity as these facets are deemed critical in *The Practice of Local Government Planning*, edited by Charles J. Koch (2000). I also plan to examine the resources that the communities had available to them at the time the initial plan was created (i.e.; budget, outside consultants, internal expertise, etc) by reviewing public city budget records. A timeline has been created in Table 2.

From these data I intend to piece together how the best elements of these plans were made with the least level of resources. Essentially I am attempting to discern which methods provided the optimum balance between quality and expense. In addition I plan to interview small town planners and administrators to get information about their respective planning process and elements of their current plan. The interview will inquire about the history of how the plan was developed, the resources required, and what elements of the plan that are considered underperforming.

TABLE 1.

<b>Research design components</b>	<b>Qualitative research strategy</b>	<b>Qualitative research strategy</b>
<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Where can I find examples of master plans for small towns?</b>	<b>How can I find what a small town needs in a master plan?</b>
<b>Spatial Element: Where the research is located</b>	<b>Small towns across the U.S.: to include communities in states that require master plans</b>	<b>Small town within 100 mile radius of Arlington, TX</b>
	<b>Small towns within a 100 mile radius of Arlington TX, essentially the heart of DFW</b>	
<b>Sampling:</b>	<b>Non-random sample guided by availability</b>	<b>Non-random town guided by accessibility</b>
<b>a. What are the units to be selected?</b>	<b>Master plans from towns with a population &lt;5000</b>	<b>Town with a population &lt; 5000 without a master plan</b>
<b>b. How many units are to be selected?</b>	<b>4-6 from within DFW and 4-6 from outside DFW</b>	<b>3-4</b>
<b>c. How many units are to be included in the study?</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>One</b>

<b>Method of administration</b>	<b>Compare elements of plans against a rubric</b>	<b>Interview city manager or administrator</b>
<b>Time Element</b>	<b>4-6 weeks</b>	<b>2 weeks</b>
<b>Comparison Group</b>	<b>Administrators from the towns of the selected plans</b>	

## Chapter 4

## Timeline

Table 2

	June	July	August	September	October
Collect community plans					
Create Rubric					
Evaluate Plans					
Create Template					

## Chapter 5

## Conclusion

The goal of my report is to identify the means by which small North Central communities have been able to generate a master plan to and suggest to a community in need of a master plan the best way, given their resources, to create one. A Planning rubric will be developed to assist these communities with this task. Some of the expected rubric's evaluative criteria will be budget, growth projection, access to external resources, and existing documentation. After analyzing the input received from city managers or administrators and once the best planning strategy has been identified, the aim of this project is to provide guidance to a small community on how to begin the planning process and complete a plan. As stated earlier, it is more important than ever for a town to have a plan on file. Even if major population growth is not projected for the community, it is becoming necessary to secure funding from state and federal levels. Also, if little or no growth is projected, having a plan on file may actually spur unforeseen economic development as businesses often measure a plan as a sign of community stability. I do not intend to create a plan, I essentially aim to create a template for the city to begin the process.

## References

Audirac, Ivonne. *Rural Sustainable Development in America*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997.

The Borderlands Project. "Smart Growth at the Frontier: Strategies and Resources for Rural Communities" <http://www.borderlandsproject.org/content/Publications/RuralSmartGrowth.pdf>. (accessed April 1, 2001).

Berke, Philip, Godschalk, David, and Kaiser, Edward. *Urban Land Use Planning*. Champaign, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Campbell, Scott, and Susan S. Fainstein. *Readings in Planning Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003.

Daniels, Thomas, Keller, John, and Lapping, Mark. *The Small Town Planning Handbook*. Chicago: American Planning Association, 1988.

Goodnough, Abby. "Vermont Town Turns to College in Bid to Guide Change." *The New York Times*. December 3, 2008.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/04/us/04middlebury.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/04/us/04middlebury.html?_r=1). (accessed April 4, 2011).

Hoch, Charles, Linda C. Dalton, and Frank S. So. *The Practice of Local Government Planning*. Washington, DC: Published for the ICMA Training Institute by the International City/County Management Association, 2000.

Kaiser, Edward and Godschalk, *Twentieth Century Land Use Planning*. Chicago: Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol. 61, No. 3. Summer, 1995.

Kelly, Eric and Becker, Barbara. *Community Planning: an Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2000.

Kent, T.J., *The Urban General Plan*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co, 1964.

Levy, John M. *Contemporary Urban Planning*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006.

Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission. "Basic Planning Theory."  
<http://www.nh.gov/oep/resourcelibrary/referencelibrary/m/master>

plan/preparingamasterplan/documents/chapter9.pdf (accessed April 1, 2011).

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "Recreation Grants Program." <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/grants/trpa/>. (accessed April 1, 2011).

The University of North Carolina. "Small Towns, Big Ideas." <http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/cednc/stbi/results.php>. (Accessed April 4, 2011).

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Community Development Block Grant Program." <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/>. (accessed April 1, 2011).