



BACKGROUND TO THE PLAN UPDATE

1.1 - INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Development Plan for Independence, Missouri is the product of a continuing process that started around 1960. The beginning of the planning process in Independence was initially related to the City's desire to benefit from some of the grant-in-aid programs instituted by the federal government after World War II. History of the period indicates that Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949 in which a national goal became a safe, sound and sanitary house for every family. One of the grant programs provided for in the act was Urban Renewal. In 1954, Congress amended the act to require a Workable Program for Community Improvement. There were several required sections in the workable program, one of which was that each jurisdiction must have a comprehensive plan in order to be eligible to receive certain federal funds. Independence undertook the preparation of a plan and subsequently participated in urban renewal and other programs that required a workable program. The City has participated in all federal programs since urban renewal and still receives Community Development Block Grant funds under an entitlement provision of a subsequent Housing Act. At the time of this writing, CDBG is the only remaining federal assistance program for traditional community development related activities.

Future sections of this document contain more information about the historic development of the city planning process in Independence and a summary of several of the more significant studies.

1.2 - DESCRIPTION

This document contains material developed as a part of the planning process through which the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Independence, Missouri has been updated. It contains information which ranges from historic demographic data, to information about present conditions, and projections about the future population and land use of the City. In addition to the background material and documentation of the plan update process which is contained in this Comprehensive Plan Update document, it also contains the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Independence.

The Plan is a statement of official policies intended to be used to guide the future growth and development, as well as the future redevelopment, of the City. The following discussion is intended to indicate: the nature and purpose of the planning document; the scope of the plan elements generated by the planning process which are used in Independence; the officials responsible for the preparation, review, and adoption of the plan; the organization for planning; and the procedure for maintaining the planning function in Independence.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Planning Document for Independence, Missouri represents the combined efforts of the Citizens of the community, the City Council and Planning Commission, The City Manager and his staff, the staff members of the Planning Department, and staff members from other functional City Departments, and staff input from other interested agencies and orga-

nizations in the community. Later sections of this Chapter reference the Statutory provisions and City Charter provisions that apply to the planning function and the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Independence. Some of the material contained in this document has been prepared over the past thirty years of continuous study, review, and critical appraisal by public officials, citizens, members of various private sector entities, and technical staff from several city and local public agencies. In particular, the Comprehensive Plan Update for the City of Independence has been prepared by the staff of the Planning Department.

The Comprehensive Plan, as contained in this document, is reflective of the City's policy at the present time. The Plan also conforms to Statutory and Charter provisions that govern the planning function and the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Independence. It is the City Planning Commission's intent that as conditions change, the appropriate portions of the plan document can be updated and replaced with new text, maps and graphics. This also recognizes that policies carefully formulated at one point in time will need to be changed as social and economic conditions are altered, or as community values change. An acceptable and desirable policy which existed at one point in history may be entirely unworkable at another time in the future. By the same token, a policy that may have been unacceptable at one point may now be very appropriate for the City to implement. The plan contained in this document is therefore designed to serve the City of Independence now and for the foreseeable future, with the expressed understanding that as conditions warrant, regardless of the time frame, the plan and policies will be changed accordingly.

The data on which some of these policies are based, in part, will need to be continuously updated and monitored by the respective City Departments. The Planning Department will continue to serve as a central source of current community data and will also maintain certain data files relative to the Department's ongoing

operations. One aspect of the continuing planning process will be the periodic publication of demographic data and special reports by the Planning Department. It is also intended that the Planning Commission and Council will need to periodically review the policies expressed in this document to insure that they are consistent with the social, economic, and physical conditions of the community and the goals and aspirations of the citizens of Independence.

THE NATURE, PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE PLANNING DOCUMENT

There is wide variation in the organization and content of the planning documents used by cities throughout the United States. Most "comprehensive plans", which were published under a variety of names such as general plan, comprehensive development plan, master plan, or physical development plan, contain a mixture of information. It is common that these documents contain policy statements mixed with factual information; goals, assumptions and issues; historic data; forecasts; development standards; analysis; implementing measures and a variety of other subjects. However, since these documents generally do not separate the "plan" from the balance of the material that documents the planning process, the entire document is adopted as the official statement of policy for the community. This has led to continual confusion and misunderstanding on the part of professionals, elected and appointed public officials, and citizens as to the nature, content, organization and purpose of public planning documents. In an attempt to overcome this confusion and to provide for the easy and periodic update of relevant sections, this document is organized into elements that will be discussed later. Each element contains related background and supporting documentation followed by policy statements for that element. The Plan then has a series of documents, each of which can be adopted, discussed, implemented and changed independent of other materials published as part of the "planning document."

In an attempt to put more focus on the continuing nature of the planning process rather than individual documents being done as discrete undertakings, the documentation of this update process includes summaries and maps taken from previous plans and documents which have represented policy for the community.

CONTENTS OF THE PLAN DOCUMENT

This document brings together material related to the physical planning and development of the City of Independence, Missouri. The first part describes the planning process and the organizational structure established for conducting planning for Independence. This section also provides some historical background as to the City's prior planning efforts. Also included is a discussion of some of the more significant planning issues faced by the community which have been addressed by the comprehensive plan.

The second part contains a description of the physical, social, economic, and environmental characteristics of the community, analysis of the physical components of the community, i.e. residential, commercial, industrial, and public elements of the city, policy statements for the City, and a discussion of goals and objectives and the issues which they address.

This section is broken into elements which contains related background and supporting documentation followed by policy statements for that element. For example land use contains information on existing land use, which refers to the use to which land is being "put" at the time of the land use field survey, and future land use, which refers to the proposed pattern of land use that is anticipated in the development of the City.

The third section covers material related to implementation of policies and plans as well as the monitoring and evaluation aspects of the planning process which are discussed in the first

section. This fourth section also discusses the continuing nature of maintaining the comprehensive plan.

The organization of material for purposes of this "planning document" is intended to separate the material developed in the study, research, and analysis of the city, which is required for plan development, from the actual official policies and plans for the growth, development and redevelopment of the City of Independence.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Independence, Missouri is a very well established community in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The City has one of the oldest continuous City Planning Commissions in the region and the material contained in this document represents the third major effort at a "full scale" comprehensive plan for the city since 1961. This plan update, will result in the publication of a new, complete planning document.

The City, as a physical entity, may be viewed at several different scales which reflect different levels about which decision making is required. In the discussion of city form, Kevin Lynch has distinguished four levels or scales. These include: objects, a building, a bridge, a picnic unit; projects, a complex of buildings having a unity of function and control; systems, a network of facilities such as streets and sewers and water systems; and city or urban scale, the complex mixture of interrelated objects, projects, and systems that form the city.

The problem of public decision making relative to building a city is somewhat more complex in several ways than is the area of private decision making. Private persons are primarily concerned with the construction of "objects" or "projects" on individual land parcels, while public policy makers are principally involved with large scale projects, systems, and the coordination of development of the total urban environment.

Public decision making at an urban scale in a metropolitan area and community the size of Independence is too complex to rely on the capacities of individual city officials to see and acquire a "feel" of needs of people and their requirements for services. The experiences of individuals and their capacity for assimilating knowledge are too limited to permit understanding of the variety of alternatives which should be examined in public decision making at the systems and city scales. For a group of officials to be sensitive to and aid in the fulfillment of the aspirations of the 112,000 citizens of Independence requires organization and methodology that reaches beyond the radius of daily experiences and training of policy makers. One of the primary purposes, therefore, of the planning process is to provide public decision makers with accurate information, objective analyses, and the delimitation and analysis of alternative courses of action, which includes the identification of both expected and unexpected outcomes.

AUTHORITY FOR PREPARATION AND ADOPTION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Missouri Statutes provide that Municipalities may prepare, adopt and amend City Plans. Vernon's Annotated Missouri Statutes provides in 89.310 through 89.360 that any Municipality may adopt a City Plan. The legislation, in 89.340, provides that the City Planning Commission shall make and adopt a city plan for the physical development of the municipality. Further, in 89.350, it provides that, "The plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated development of the municipality which will, in accordance with existing and future needs, best promote the general welfare, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development. The legislation further provides, in 89.360, that the commission may adopt the plan as a whole by a single resolution, or, as the work of making the whole city plan progresses, may from time to time adopt a part or parts thereof, any part to

correspond generally with one or more of the functional subdivisions of the subject matter of the plan."

The legislation provides requirements for adequate notice of the public hearing to consider the adoption of the plan, publication of the notice fifteen days in a newspaper of general circulation, and adoption by a majority vote of the full membership of the planning commission. The legislation also provides that a copy of the adopted plan shall be certified to the City Council and the Municipal Clerk and a copy recorded in the office of the County recorder of deeds.

This Plan has been prepared generally in conformance with the Missouri Statutes. However, the City of Independence presently operates under a Charter form of government which imposes some different and additional requirements on the preparation and adoption of the Plan.

The present City Charter was adopted at a Special City Election held on December 5, 1961, and Article 12, Planning And Zoning, provides in Section 12.2 City Planning Commission: Powers and duties, that, "the City Planning Commission shall have power and shall be required to:

- (1) Develop and recommend to the Council a Master Plan for the physical development of the city and its environs, which may be adopted in its entirety or in parts, and recommended changes therein;
- (2) Prepare and recommend to the council regulations governing the subdivision of land within the city and outside the city insofar as it is not in conflict with law, and recommend changes therein;
- (3) recommend to the council the approval or disapproval of plats, and the council shall approve or disapproval a plat within one hundred and twenty (120) days after it is filed with the commission, and if the council takes no such action in such time, the plat shall be deemed to be approved;

(4) Prepare and recommend to the council an official map of the city, and recommended changes therein;

(5) Prepare and recommend to the council a zoning plan or ordinance in accordance with the powers granted to the city by this charter and law, and recommended changes therein; and the council shall take appropriate action, affirmative, negative, or other, pursuant to a request, application, or petition for rezoning property or other change in zoning regulations within one hundred and twenty (120) days after the request, application, or petition is filed with the commission;

(6) Recommend to the council appropriate action relating to urban renewal;

(7) Make reports and recommendations relating to the master plan and to the development of the city and its environs to public officers and agencies, public utility companies, citizen organizations, and others.

(8) Promote public interest in and understanding of the master plan, planning, zoning, and related matters;

(9) Submit annually to the city manager, not less than ninety (90) days prior to the beginning of the fiscal year, a list of recommended public improvements which in the opinion of the commission are necessary or desirable to be constructed or acquired during the forthcoming six (6) year period, and such list shall be arranged in order of preference, with recommendations as to which projects should be constructed and acquired during the next fiscal year and during the succeeding five (5) year period;

(10) Make a report annually to the council; and

(11) Perform such other functions as the council may provide by ordinance consistent with this charter.

The Charter further provides in Section 12.4 Master Plan that:

“The master plan shall be so prepared that all or portions of it may be adopted by the council as a basis for community development.

The master plan shall include a statement describing it and a statement of objectives, principles, and standards used in developing it,

and shall include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following parts or elements:

(1) A land use element which designates the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of the uses of the land for housing, business, industry, recreation, education, public buildings and grounds, and other categories of public and private uses of land.

(2) A transportation element consisting of the general location and extent of existing and proposed major highways, airways, railways, waterways, and related terminal facilities.

(3) A community facilities element including all necessary community facilities and services, such as schools, parks and recreational facilities, public utilities, libraries, and police and fire facilities.

(4) a statement of the standards of population density and building intensity recommended for the various districts and other territorial units, and estimates of future population growth, correlated with the land use element of the plan.

(5) Supporting maps, diagrams, charts, descriptive material, and reports.

The master plan or elements thereof and any changes therein may be recommended by the city planning commission only after a public hearing thereon, and may be adopted by the council only after a public hearing thereon.”

ELEMENTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AS UPDATED

The Comprehensive Plan for Independence is comprised of several elements, namely: future land use; housing and redevelopment; community facilities; major streets and transportation; utility services; education; economic development; public services; parks and recreation, historic preservation; and environmental considerations.

1.3 - GOALS AND ISSUES

There are a variety of issues that face the City of Independence as it embarks on the update of its Comprehensive Plan. No one could have forecast the many significant changes that would take place after the preparation of the last plan and the impact that those changes would have. Although this document is not a world history text, it is important to remember that the world's economy has undergone significant changes and that such issues as the environment and energy have become significant terms. The world oil market's fluctuation and this nation's first environmental protection legislation were unknown at the time the last plan was prepared. The drastic changes in both our local and national economy, in part as a result of inflation and the affects of rising interest rates on development patterns and anticipated growth, were also not anticipated, but they significantly impacted the nation. Other factors, such as the continuing marked decline in household size, have also become factors that still must be reasoned with. The implications of these and numerous other questions on future planning for the City must be addressed, although it is done with the knowledge that there are no really good answers for some of the questions. However, if planning is indeed a continuing process, it is not important to have all of the answers now. As factors change, or as more information becomes available, the plan can change or adjust to accomodate new conditions.

The City of Independence, however, has little control over many of the factors that influence growth and development. These external conditions, such as interest rates, fuel cost, and the effects of federal tax codes on certain types of investments are far outside the scope of the City's sphere of influence. Therefore, this plan does not address these types of issues.

This plan, however, does address the issues that the City has reasonable control over

(see Table 1.31) such as: growth management and development policy; land use controls; subdivision and development regulations; development standards; redevelopment policy and standards; building codes and related regulations; capital improvements programming and fiscal management.

LAND USE ISSUES

Urban communities, such as Independence, are extremely complex places. It is impossible to separate some issues or subjects into nice neat categories such as social, economic, physical, and environmental. It is also impossible to separate some land use issues from their social, economic, aesthetic aspects. The following discussion of land use issues is therefore based on an awareness that many of the subjects presented transcend purely land use considerations, if such a thing exist anyway, and relate more to their comprehensive context.

The question of land use as an issue for the update of the Comprehensive Plan in Independence can be viewed as one with numerous subparts. The land use issue is divided because the city has grown significantly through annexation, there are in fact three different "cities" within Independence as will be discussed later. Much of the annexed areas were and are undeveloped and rural in nature. There are significant differences between the physical character of the older original city; the more recent suburban areas; and much of the recently annexed more rural areas. For example, settlement patterns, age of structures, topography, housing types and densities are markedly different throughout the present city limits. This will be discussed in later chapters.

One perceived aspect of the land use issue centers on questions such as: should Independence attempt to try to remain a residential community, as was stated in the previous plan? According to the data, Independence is no longer just a residential community, but rather one with extensive commercial development

Table 1.31

ISSUES

The following issues have been identified for consideration in this plan update. Many of them are inter-related and are quite complex.

LAND USE

- Growth management land use controls*
- Development standards and regulations*
- Mixed use developments*
- Annexed areas*
- Open spaces*
- Industrial parks and other industrial land use*
- Environmentally sensitive areas*
- Commercial*
- Residential*
- Reuse and redevelopment*
- Major changes in land use*
- Agricultural*

TRANSPORTATION

- Streets and highways*
- Regional freeways*
- Interstate interchanges*
- Airport*

UTILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

- Conservation*
- Rehabilitation*
- Mixed use redevelopments*
- Community development block grant utilization*

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- Slopes*
- Vegetation*
- Flood plains*
- Drainage ways*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

- Tourism*
- New development areas*
- Level of available resources*
- Expanded investment and employment opportunities*
- Land reuse and redevelopment*
- The independence Central Business District issue (the Square)*

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

- Parks and recreation areas*
- Schools*
- Public buildings*
- Libraries*

CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Historic sites and structures*
- Historic areas*
- Non-historic cultural resources*

and somewhat lesser industrial developments. Indications are that the "residential community" goal is no longer one that the "community" intends to work toward for several reasons. One must remember that on any significant planning issue, such as land use, there is not one community attitude, but rather there will likely be a difference of opinion between segments of the community.

This plan update is based on the general goal of developing an orderly, attractive community which offers a wide range of residential

opportunities; ample investment and employment opportunities; adequate community facilities and services; good transportation and circulation; and, a community which still maintains a proper balance with its cultural and historic background.

As shown in the list of land use sub-issues, there are some special concerns involved. Some of the questions address such complex subjects as the following:

A recognition that in order to provide a desirable level of municipal services without having

to levy excessive taxes and user fees; and, to continue to offer investment and employment opportunities within the community, rather than depend on those developed elsewhere in the region; it will be necessary to designate suitable and attractive industrial sites as part of the future land use plan.

The city has considerable experience with the problems related to residential development in flood plains and the difficulty in correcting and mitigating those situations.

New residential development in flood prone areas of the city is such a critical issue that one objective of this plan is to designate certain flood prone areas, based on recognized FEMA criteria, and to preclude residential development from taking place in these areas until and unless the threat of flooding is removed or substantially reduced.

The location of industrial parks and other intense urban developments in or near environmentally sensitive areas is an issue that the City is addressing in this plan update, and attention to the issue has been heightened since portions of the designated Little Blue River flood plain have been removed from flood prone status and subsequent development of these portions of the "valley" will soon begin.

The concern that the plan provide for the preservation of ample open spaces while vacant lands and fringe areas continue to develop is recognized in this plan update; the series of Park System Master Plans done since the last Comprehensive Plan have identified several park and recreational open spaces that are needed in the City; concern for the protection of prime agricultural farmland is also an issue which is recognized in this plan update.

The continued erosion of established residential areas and neighborhoods through the further development of "strip" commercial land uses and non-residential zoning remains a major issue for the future of Independence; not only does this practice endanger the stability of the residential areas, it undermines the economic viability of established commercial areas and continues to adversely affect the ability of the street system to adequately move traffic; strip development in Independence has markedly reduced the visual quality of the community; the need to somehow match total market demand for commercial land use and the amount of commercially zoned

land, along with the productive reuse of existing marginal strip commercial areas, is perhaps the greatest single issue that faces the City of Independence in the future.

The designation of portions of older urban areas for reuse as future industrial land is also a sensitive issue, in that older, more fragile residential neighborhoods may not withstand the pressures caused by certain factors related to industrial development, such as increased traffic; any major changes which are proposed to existing land uses or neighborhoods should be made in a context that insures reasonable protection, such as adequate alternative access; and where appropriate, the redesign of the interior circulation system should reduce the risk of adverse impact to existing development that may be caused by major changes in the land use pattern.

The demand to allow new and/or larger commercial developments to take place in fringe and undeveloped areas of the city while major portions of the older "strip commercial" areas continue to suffer economic decline, is a complex land use/economic issue as previously stated; in addition, as more of the areas that contain older commercial land uses continue to be in a state of decline and experience growing vacancy rates, they become increasing blighting factors on the visual, economic and physical environment.

The "Square", the traditional Central Business District for the City, has undergone a significant change from its role as the major retail center of the community to one of a historic based, mixed use area that is striving to revitalize itself and become a more unique component of the city; this update is based, in part, on a recognition that the Square will never again serve as the center of retail trade that it once was in Independence, and that its future probably lies somewhere else; which will continue to include the governmental center of the community and eastern Jackson County; since tourism and the historic structures are both very high priority issues in the city, one objective of this plan is the continued revitalization of the "Uptown" area of the City.

New single family residential growth is taking place in eastern Independence areas while older, once very stable neighborhoods are facing decline, deterioration, and/or a more unfavorable comparative market.

This plan acknowledges the need for Independence to provide for attractive, efficient residential developments and redevelopments which will satisfy the need for the maximum range of choice of residential types, sizes and cost for present and future residents; also a recognition that one key to revitalization of some older commercial and mixed use areas may be to include a combination of new residential construction and existing sound commercial uses in the same areas; these areas will also probably contain opportunities for major redevelopment and rehabilitation of existing structures.

The city has outgrown its basic skeletal street system; several existing and future residential and commercial areas are not presently being served by an adequate circulation system; there is a real need to implement the major thoroughfare plan that has been revised as part of this plan update process.

There are several major transportation facilities being proposed by MARC, the regional planning entity, which will penetrate the Independence city limits and these facilities are included as part of the thoroughfare plan; the City must also recognize the need to protect the future right of way for these facilities.

The City, Jackson County, and the Region have recognized the need to provide improved general aviation services; the city has undertaken a study which indicates that it is possible to develop a new airport to serve general aviation's demands and support future economic development in the area; however, the City recognizes that issues related to either new airports or the expansion or existing facilities are not always popular with the entire community and that the prospects of developing this new airport have not received unanimous support within the community; the City is very conscience of the need to mitigate any adverse impacts that this new facility may have on existing development and to insure that future urban development in the area will be compatible with the airport so that its integrity will not be compromised.

Independence contains numerous significant historic sites and structures of which several are being preserved and enhanced by a variety of entities; in addition, several major cultural, educational and interpretive centers are provided in the community to supplement the cultural resources; this update process is aware of the

importance that cultural and historic issues play in the City of Independence and that such complex issues will be addressed in the city's continuing planning process and in the implementation of plan related policies and program.

In Independence, tourism is an issue that cuts across cultural, physical, social and economic lines; the preservation of existing tourist attractions and the creation of additional public facilities and spaces which may be compatible with the City's tourism development program are subjects that will be included in the City's continuing planning process. At the present time, several significant facilities are being developed which will complement the existing cultural resources in the community. The further development of such facilities is also a larger concern to the city and the type that will continue to be addressed in the City's long range planning. Other future land use considerations, such as recreational facilities, that relate to the tourism development program will be included in the plan update.