

# **AUSTIN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SCOPE FRAMEWORK**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Communities change, as do families, businesses, institutions and natural systems. Retaining conditions just as they are now is no more feasible than turning back the clock to a prior era. While change itself may be inevitable, the direction and rate of change and the kind of places which change produces, are not. The act of planning, in essence, reflects a decision not to accept “the inevitable,” but rather to influence and guide change to produce a future that gives us what we want; the kind of community we want to live in.

The essential role of the Comprehensive Plan is to be a guide for the management of change, through which we anticipate and solve problems, and seize opportunities to make our community better. The Comprehensive Plan also serves as a bridge through time, spanning different City Councils and administrations. It is both far-sighted and continually attended to.

The process of developing the Comprehensive Plan is an opportunity for Austin to address its difficult questions all at once, in a setting that allows the community to understand constraints, consequences, and trade-offs as it makes decisions balancing public costs and public goods.

This Scope Framework outlines a process for developing a new Comprehensive Plan. The Austin City Charter specifies that, once adopted, all land development regulations, public improvements (including bond elections that finance capital improvement projects), and public facilities and utilities shall be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

The Charter also requires annual monitoring of the Comprehensive Plan for effectiveness, with updates as needed. For example, the current Comprehensive Plan is regularly modified following hearings and actions by the Planning Commission and City Council regarding Neighborhood Plans (NP) and NP amendments. Fuller evaluations and appraisals must be prepared and submitted to City Council every five years. This creates a framework for coping with changes in the community, unforeseen events, and unintended consequences.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SCOPE FRAMEWORK

The following presents an overall framework for developing a new Comprehensive Plan for the City of Austin through a collaborative process involving city staff, the consultant team led by WRT, and the Austin community. It outlines a planning process consisting of three phases:

### Plan Kickoff

In this initial phase, a “Plan for a Plan” will be prepared to define the specifics of how the Comprehensive Plan will be developed, followed by a variety of plan startup activities (e.g., a public open house and orientation briefings).

- **Participation Plan** – During this phase, public input will be taken on how to structure the Participation Plan. The specifics of the plan will detail number of meetings, other avenues for input, and the exercises conducted throughout the process to engage the community and develop the plan. The Participation Plan will also identify the roles and responsibilities of Citizen Advisory Committees, as well as technical working groups that could include City Boards and Commissions as well as other jurisdictions. The participation plan will look at effective practices used to boost public participation and build a model specific to the Austin community.
- **Initial Open House:** A kick-off meeting will launch the community survey, begin the promotional campaign for the planning process, and allow the community to meet the consultants, prior to beginning the visioning forums.

The next two phases of the process will engage the community in asking and answering the following questions:

### Vision and Plan Framework

- **Vision:** What do we aspire to be as a community in 10, 20, 25 years and beyond?
- **The Dynamics of Change:** What are we in the process of becoming? What will Austin look like in 25 years and beyond if current trends continue?
- **Strategic Directions / Plan Framework:** What are the choices to “change course” in the direction of the Vision? What policies and strategies will be most effective in realizing the goals of the Austin community?

### The Comprehensive Plan

- **Plan Elements:** How will the Plan Framework be applied through strategies and actions identified in the different plan elements? How will the elements be integrated to achieve overarching goals such as sustainability?
- **Implementation:** What are the specific priorities, actions, and responsibilities for Comprehensive Plan implementation? How do we build capacity and leverage resources through partnerships? How will progress in implementing the Plan be monitored and measured?
- **Neighborhood Plans:**  
How will Neighborhood Plans coexist with the new Comprehensive Plan? What will the status of Neighborhood Plans be after the Comprehensive Plan is adopted? How will older plans be updated? How will conflict between the Comprehensive Plan and existing Neighborhood Plans be addressed? How will Neighborhood Plans be utilized in scenario testing?

For each of the three phases, an overview of what will be accomplished in the major tasks and an outline of individual subtasks are presented below. Overarching themes that will distinguish the overall process include:

- **Community Engagement:** The planning process will include multiple ways of engaging the public, designed to achieve three broad goals. First, the process should reach beyond those who have a history of active participation in planning to engage a broad range of constituencies within the community. This will require new tools and venues for soliciting input, as well as clear and accessible communication and education (including the use of tools such as case studies of what works in the U.S. and internationally) throughout the process, so that all members of the public are able to make informed choices. Second, the process should seek to narrow areas of disagreement and to define “common ground” as the basis for moving forward. Third, the process should go beyond mere “participation” to encourage citizens and civic leaders to “take ownership” of the plan through active support and involvement in implementation (see capacity-building for implementation below).

A further aspect of community engagement will be the review of existing Austin plans. These plans represent an enormous amount of time spent by the Austin community.

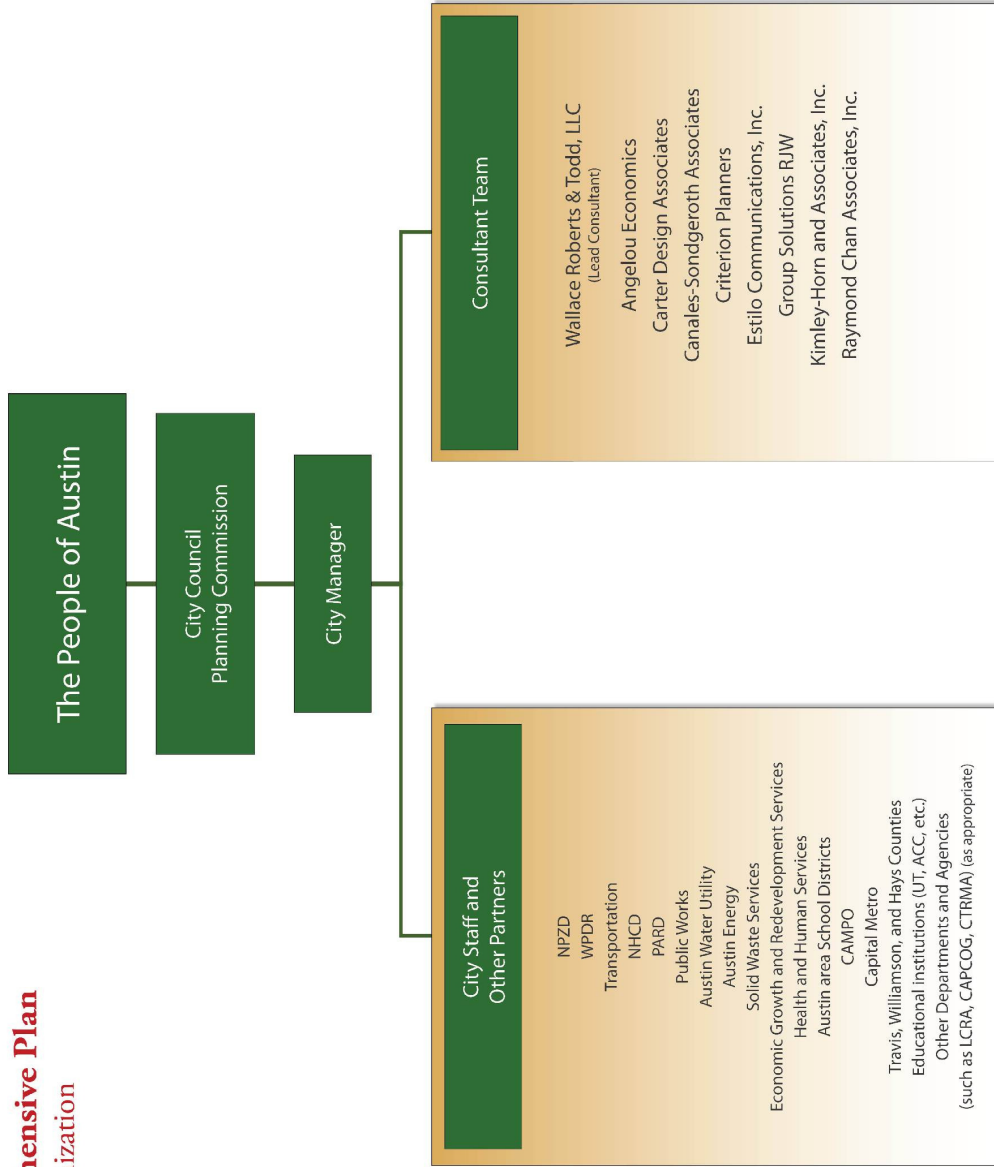
The scope framework identifies four series of “community forums” held in different locations within the City at key junctures in the

planning process. These forums will be designed as interactive events in which a variety of means will be used to share information and ideas and receive public input. The forums will help educate participants on the inter-relatedness of the various charter elements including impacts of decisions on other elements. Other means of outreach will be used to reach those who do not normally attend public meetings, such as community surveys, focus groups, meetings in different settings, an interactive project website, canvassing, speaker's bureau, etc. (The specific techniques to be used will be defined in Phase I of the process.)

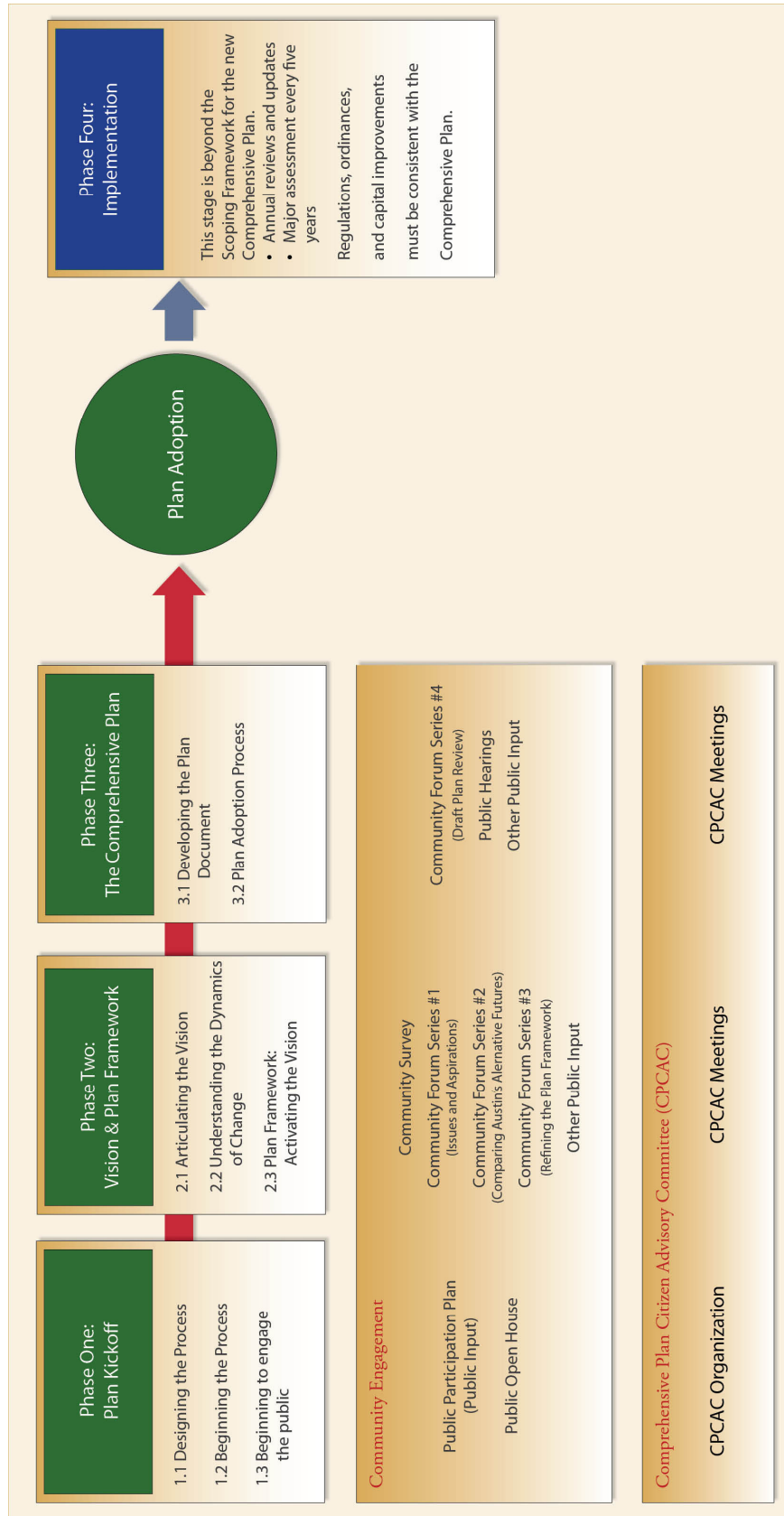
The Vision developed in Phase II represents a critical benchmark in the planning process, reflecting areas of common ground on which most of the community can agree and providing the framework for developing detailed strategies and actions in the Comprehensive Plan itself. Planning Commission and City Council workshops will be held at key junctures in the process to provide direction and make decisions on unresolved issues.

- **Sustainability:** Sustainability and climate change are overarching issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. Towards this end, the planning process will define what sustainability means specifically for Austin and the aspirations of its citizens for a sustainable future environment, economy, and community. This focus on sustainability will span community engagement, analysis of existing conditions and trends, carrying capacity of the natural environment and existing infrastructure, scenario formulation and evaluation, development of plan strategies and actions, and identification of indicators to measure implementation progress.
- **Implementation:** The planning process will include a strategic focus on implementation, culminating in formulation of a realistic action agenda and benchmarks to measure progress in achieving the vision. To support this key outcome, the process will engage community stakeholders in the public, private, nonprofit, and institutional sectors first to help frame the issues within realistic fiscal and regulatory constraints, then to obtain “buy-in” on proposed solutions, and ultimately to leverage and mobilize resources for action through partnerships.

**Austin Comprehensive Plan**  
Project Team Organization



# Austin Comprehensive Plan Planning Process Chart



## I. PLAN KICKOFF

### Task 1.1: Designing the Process

#### Overview

Over an approximately 4-week period, an initial exercise will be conducted to scope and prepare an Organizational Design (i.e., a “Plan for a Plan”) for the Austin Comprehensive Plan, including the following:

- The specific roles and responsibilities of staff and the consultant team
- Protocols for communications and outreach to provide a variety of opportunities for input from Austin's citizens
- The organization of data to inform the planning process
- Methodologies to be employed in developing and testing future scenarios
- A framework to utilize and reference Austin's array of neighborhood plans and other plan and policy initiatives

The public participation plan, including the community's suggestions from a public input meeting, will be the document that specifies venues and tools for reaching out to the public and finalizes the number and scope of the Plan's public meetings and other methods for input. In addition, the size, composition, and role of a Comprehensive Plan Citizen's Advisory Committee (CPCAC) will be determined. It is expected that this committee will act as a sounding board, provide input on plan directions, and generally “shepherd” the planning process.

#### 1.1.1 Team Orientation Meetings

#### 1.1.2 Definition of Roles / Responsibilities

- Consultant
- Staff / technical support group
- CPCAC
- Other institutions, organizations, non-profits, and quasi-governmental authorities

#### 1.1.3 Public input meeting: involve the public in addressing how the public participation plan should be structured.

#### 1.1.4 Project Organizational Design

- Public participation plan
  - Geographic / demographic breadth of outreach
  - Ongoing outreach (e.g., project website, newsletters, media relations / press releases)
  - Citizen input venues (e.g., community forums, open houses, surveys, web input)

- Project branding (process)
- Speakers “bureau”
- Goals and measures for participation and to ensure that the full breadth of stakeholders in the planning area are given a real opportunity to participate
- Process for reaching decisions where there is no clear common ground.
- Inventory / data book contents and structure
- Scenario development / testing methodology
- Utilization, review, and incorporation of neighborhood / other plans

#### 1.1.5 Work Program Development

### **Task 1.2: Beginning the Process**

#### **Overview**

Over a second approximately 4–week period briefings will be provided on the comprehensive planning process to various audiences. In addition, the CPCAC will be formally organized and given an orientation as to their role and responsibilities. Plans, policies, GIS information, and other data will be assembled and analyzed for use in the planning process. In addition, a series of small group interviews will be held with representative stakeholder groups and community opinion leaders to provide an initial scan of key issues.

#### 1.2.1 Public Open House

- Key Issues
- Desired outcomes
- Ideas for project branding
- Results of review of existing plans

#### 1.2.2 Orientation Briefings

- Planning Commission
  - Recommend Participation Plan to City Council
- City Council
  - Adopt Participation Plan
- Media
- Identifying other jurisdictions and institutions and inviting their involvement and support

#### 1.2.3 CPCAC Organization

#### 1.2.4 Past Plans Array / Review

#### 1.2.5 Information Array / Review

#### 1.2.6 Stakeholder / Opinion Leader Interviews

#### 1.2.7 Community Tour

- 1.2.8 Preliminary Issue Identification (including possible additional plan elements)
- 1.2.9 Project Branding (theme and logo)

### **Task 1.3: Beginning to engage the public**

#### **Overview**

Immediately after initiation of the plan process, public engagement will begin that will involve, for example, presenting and explaining the community inventory to citizens, providing tutorials on urban planning, city government, laws, and examples of tradeoffs associated with decisions made by city government. This will last throughout the life of the project so that citizens can join into the discussion on the plan development at any point.

- 1.3.1 Begin outreach and education to the public, according to the Public Participation Plan
- 1.3.2 Launch Speakers Bureau

## **II. VISION AND PLAN FRAMEWORK**

### **Task 2.1 Articulating the Vision**

#### **Overview**

In this task outreach activities will be conducted to elicit citizen values and aspirations for the future. This effort will include facilitation of the first of several community forum series to be held in locations throughout Austin, focused on identifying “*Issues and Aspirations*” with citizens. Similar exercises will be conducted through community surveys and made available on the project website and in other venues, as defined in the public participation plan prepared in Task 1.1. The results, including indication of areas of agreement or “common ground,” will be tabulated and made available for public review. This public input will then be used in articulating a draft Vision Statement to define and describe the future of Austin, representing the “destination” for which the Comprehensive Plan will be the “roadmap.”

- 2.1.1 Community Forum Series #1 (“Issues and Aspirations”)
- 2.1.2 Community Survey / Other Public Input
- 2.1.3 Results Validation (“Common Ground”) / Public Input
- 2.1.4 Revised Tabulation (Elements of a Vision)
- 2.1.5 Vision Statement Development and Refinement
- 2.1.6 Vision Statement Adoption
  - City Council / Planning Commission Workshop/Hearings

## **Task 2.2 Understanding the Dynamics of Change**

### **Overview**

An overview of existing conditions and trends will be conducted concurrent with the community visioning process. This task will begin with an overview of prior plans, studies and policy initiatives, including neighborhood plans, station area plans, and plans for transportation, infrastructure, and resource protection.

Current conditions and trends in Austin will be addressed by assembling an inventory of pertinent information in a user-friendly format designed to support development of the Comprehensive Plan. Issues such as public facility deficiencies, natural resource degradation or threats to neighborhoods, and other conditions and trends that are contrary to the health, well-being and quality of life of Austin's families will be identified.

In conjunction with this inventory, a Trend Growth Scenario will be constructed based on a projection of conditions and trends to depict "what Austin will likely look like in 25 years if we don't change course". To prepare this scenario, a range of population projections will be allocated based on land use patterns and trends, development capacity (available land compared to regulatory constraints such as zoning), and "factors for change" (triggers such as transportation improvements and new schools that will influence growth). The Trend Growth Scenario will then be compared to the Vision, which will indicate the need for "course corrections" from the present direction of the City. The Trend Growth Scenario can also look at what travel modes or lifestyles would be likely with current trends and whether people would like other options.

Based on the comparison of the Vision to the Trend Growth Scenario, one or more alternative scenarios will be prepared to highlight choices available to move the City in the direction of the future desired by citizens. The trend growth and alternative scenarios will be evaluated to assess their comparative performance with regard to factors such as sustainability, neighborhood quality of life, and fiscal and economic health. These scenarios and their consequences will be the focus of a second community forum series entitled "*Comparing Austin's Alternative Futures*" and made available in related venues for public discussion and comment. The public input on the scenarios will be synthesized and used in defining preferred "Strategic Directions" based on broad areas of community consensus. The City Council and Planning Commission will review and provide direction on the Strategic Directions in joint or separate briefing workshops.

- 2.2.1 Planning Context: Past / Present Plans and Policies
- 2.2.2 Existing Conditions and Trends Inventory (structured to address plan elements required by Austin City Charter)
  - Regional Context
  - Demographics (population / household conditions, trends, etc.)
  - Land Use (land use patterns and trends, regulatory framework, area types, etc.)
  - Housing and Neighborhoods
  - Economic Development (employment patterns / trends, commercial / industrial market conditions, current initiatives, etc.)
  - Environmental Resources
  - Transportation (roadway, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle networks; mode split, sustainability implications)
  - Infrastructure (utility and energy systems)
  - Public Services
  - Public Facilities (public buildings, related community facilities and services)
  - Recreation and Open Space
  - Health and Human Services
  - Other element(s) as appropriate
  - Synthesis (key issues and challenges)
- 2.2.3 Trends / Scenario Development
  - Trend growth scenario development (growth projections, development capacity, factors for change, regulatory constraints, land use allocations)
  - Comparison to Vision
  - Alternative scenario development
  - Scenario testing (constraints, implications for sustainability, fiscal conditions and trade-offs, neighborhoods, etc.)
  - Public input
    - Community Forum Series #2 (“Comparing Austin’s Alternative Futures”)
    - City Council / Planning Commission Workshop
  - Definition of Strategic Directions
  - City Council / Planning Commission Workshop

## **Task 2.3 Plan Framework: Activating the Vision**

### **Overview**

The Plan Framework represents the core content and structure of the Comprehensive Plan and will provide the foundation for developing the

plan elements required by Austin City Charter in Phase 3. It will address key themes or principles as defined based on community input in the Vision and Strategic Directions, and define how the Vision relates to the plan elements.

The Draft Plan Framework will be made widely available for public review and comment and will be the focus of a third community forum series entitled “*Refining the Plan Framework.*” The City Council and Planning Commission will review and provide direction on the Plan Framework in joint or separate briefing workshops.

#### 2.3.1 Draft Plan Framework

- Key themes / principles
- Integration of Vision and plan elements
  - Land Use (including land use and growth management concepts)
  - Housing and Neighborhoods
  - Economic Development
  - Environmental Resources
  - Transportation
  - Infrastructure
  - Public Services
  - Public Facilities and Buildings
  - Recreation and Open Space
  - Health and Human Services
  - Other element(s) as appropriate

#### 2.3.2 Review / Refinement

- Community Forum Series #3 (“Refining the Plan Framework”)
- Formal review (e.g., staff, boards and commissions, focus groups)
- City Council / Planning Commission workshop
  - Including finalizing any additional elements to be addressed by the plan.

### III. THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

#### Task 3.1 Developing the Plan Document

##### Overview

The Draft Comprehensive Plan will define specific strategies and actions to implement the Plan Framework. While the Plan will address the elements required by Austin's City Charter, interrelationships between the different elements related to the key themes and principles defined in the Plan Framework will be emphasized. In addition to the elements required by the Charter, additional elements may be prepared based on community input and the results of the planning process. In addition, the Implementation Component of the Plan will include:

- Guidance for use of the Comprehensive Plan in governance and decision-making, including protocols for plan revisions and updating
- A framework of modifications to development regulations necessary for plan consistency
- Implementation actions, such as capital improvements and partnerships
- An "action agenda" specifying timeframes and responsibilities for carrying all of the actions mandated in the comprehensive plan
- A monitoring system, including indicators for use in measuring progress in implementing the plan

The Draft Plan will be submitted for review by the public and various boards and commissions, followed by initiation of the formal public hearing and adoption process.

##### 3.1.1 Draft Plan Document

- Introduction / Purpose
- Vision
- Plan Framework / Strategic Directions
- Plan Interrelationships
- Plan Elements
  - Future Land Use (land use / development strategies and actions; future land use concept; growth management concept)
  - Housing and Neighborhoods
  - Economic Development
  - Environmental Resources
  - Transportation (roadway, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle networks; multi-modal system; relationship to land use)

- Infrastructure(water, sewer, solid waste, drainage / stormwater, energy, relationship to land use)
- Public Services
- Public Facilities, and Buildings
- Recreation and Open Space
- Health and Human Services
- Other element(s) as determined in 2.3.2
- Implementation (protocols for use, revisions, and updating; regulatory framework, capital improvements, action agenda, plan monitoring)

#### 3.1.2 Draft Plan Review

- Community Forum Series #4 (“Draft Plan Review”)
- Formal Review (e.g., staff, boards and commissions, focus groups)
- Final Draft Plan Document
- Transmission / Recommendation for Adoption

### **Task 3.2 Adopting the Plan / Moving Towards Implementation**

#### 3.2.1 Public Hearings

#### 3.2.2 City Council Adoption by Ordinance