

UP353 Fall 2020

Assignment 1: Evaluation of East Lansing Comprehensive Plan

East Lansing's Master Plan titled The Bigger Picture is the update to the Big Picture Comprehensive Plan of 2006. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires the Comprehensive Plan to be updated every five years. According to documents referenced below, The Bigger Picture is "considerably more graphic in nature... with the intention of providing the legal basis to develop a hybrid form-based code if the City chooses to in the future" and it has more maps and data to reference. The Comprehensive Plan covers a broad-based policy and has a long-range perspective for land use with focus on establishing a framework for community planning activities, to guide policy decisions and thus recommendations are general. The Non-Motorized Transportation Plan, Climate Sustainability Plan, and the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plans supplement the Comprehensive Plan. The following is an evaluation of the master plan regarding the criteria: adequacy of context, "Rational Model" considerations, procedural validity, adequacy of scope, guidance for implementation, quality of communication, and North End Study impressions.

The adequacy of context of the plan is good and complete. The legal context is stated as a requirement of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. The administrative authority for preparation is included in the RESOLUTION OF ADOPTION page just before the Executive Summary. The plan is intended for the City of East Lansing's entire community and interested stakeholders outside the community. The style of the document is written for laypeople with green side bars speckled throughout the document explaining the jargon and the color coding to emphasize the city's five major categories of focus or vision elements. The purpose of the plan was discussed in good detail in both the March 23, 2016 memorandum and on page 2 of the master plan under the Executive Summary. An overview is provided in the Executive Summary section which covers the purpose of the document, a demographic profile, and the major trends associated with each of the five vision elements: Human Dignity, Community Education and Civic Participation; Economic Sustainability; Housing; Transportation, Infrastructure and Environment; and Urban Form.

The Bigger Picture executed some steps of the rational planning model well but not others. I felt the plan did a fine job of identifying problems, formulating goals and objectives, and listing alternatives. These are specified on pages 47-77 of the master plan arranged by vision element in detail and more broadly for three key nodes of the city likely to experience future development pressure; North End, Central City, and South End on pages 16-21. Where appropriate the plan relates to other governments, mainly those in surrounding areas which share utility, transportation infrastructure. The plan does not evaluate consequences of the alternatives, adopt a preferred alternative, or discuss monitoring of outcomes. There are no discussions about follow-up meetings, or metrics to be used to determine progress. The Background in Appendix A provides an excellent description of the existing conditions but nothing in the plan about measurable targets for the future.

The procedure for putting the plan together is well laid out in the Master Plan document in the Creating the Plan section. The Planning Commission selected community members, key MSU employees, regional transportation officials to represent the largest demographic group possible. They were divided into five steering committees, one per vision element. Steering

committees consisted of councilmembers, commissioners, neighborhood presidents, landlords, realtors, business owners, MSU students and representatives, architects, transportation representatives, and developers. The public input of their desires for future lands use was solicited during Planning Week with a community engagement process. Consultants summarized the public input for the steering committees. The steering committees' work was to evaluate the condition of the city as it related to their topic and use the information to assist in the formation of goals, objectives, actions, and the future land use map. The committees began by reviewing the 2006 Big Picture Plan and removing complete or irrelevant items. Then developed new goals, objectives, and actions. The committees came together to work on the three key nodes (North End, Central City, South End), "hot" topics, and the land use maps. The planning commission then performed a detailed review of the goals, objectives, actions, future land use map and land use category context sheets. The draft was sent to city council for approval and distribution to the surrounding jurisdiction, utility companies, and other required entities and presented to the community. The plan was adopted following the 63-day review period.

The scope of the Master Plan is sufficient to poor. Certainly not every issue raised during Planning Week is addressed but a good job was done selecting ones based on the trends associated with the vision categories. A total of 20 objectives are listed, each with 3-12 implementation actions. Issues of equity are briefly addressed in the Human Dignity, Community Education and Civic Participation vision element and are primarily concerned about housing for people 55 years or older. Equity issues need more attention in the plan. I found nothing on the financial, legal, or political implications in this document. There is some information on financials in the Background Information on page A6 but it pertains to the current situation, not the proposed goals, objectives, and actions.

Implementation aspect of this plan seems lacking. I'm not really sure if the list of actions under each objective in the Goals/Objectives section is prioritized or not. Referring to the six goals prioritized by the steering committees, it states that "priorities will be carried out as the city council directs staff through its Strategic Priorities, Capital Improvement Program, and as they work to attract the desired development through public/private development partnerships in the DDA". This seems vague but perhaps it is suitable for the scope of this document. No cost of implementation is discussed, no time span for implementation is mentioned, no programs for impact analysis or responsible agency for implementation are identified.

The quality of communication of the Master Plan is good. The client is the community and interested stakeholders. The ideas are clear, each vision element is linked to a broad, long-term goal. Associated with each goal are several objectives and for each objective, several actions, consistent with the goal. The rationale behind the ideas are specified in the Executive Summary in the Trends section. Missing from the document are criteria or a procedure for evaluation of the actions. Specific targets are lacking, as well as plans for monitoring and feedback. It would be helpful to see examples of quantifiable targets such as those in the Denver Comprehensive Plan 2040, see Figure 1., and methods for updating the community on progress.



Figure 1: Quantifiable metrics, such as provided in Denver Comprehensive Plan 2040, are missing from The Bigger Picture

The North End Study identified concerns for sprawling development and a failure of development to provide a sense of community. The plan also states a “need to continue office development on the west side of the Northern Tier, while adding additional technology and light industrial development in the future.” Future goals are creating a better experience, connecting north end to regional attractions such as open space and retail, retrofit along Lake Lansing with a small-scale mixed-use node near technology and innovation cluster. Action items include 1. Implement regulatory zoning and form-based code to ensure consistent design and area-specific solutions, 2. Code north end areas for light industrial and mixed use, 3. Utilize existing utility infrastructure when considering new developments, 4. Provide non-motorized connections throughout. The North End, extending north from, but not including, Burcham Road, has several future land use categories as shown on the Future Land Use Map on page C2 and these categories are more detailed than those on the Existing Land Use Map on C3. Of the residential categories, R1 is the most plentiful, followed by R4, some R2, a small amount of R3, and no R5. There is a tiny bit of mixed use M1 and M2, and slightly more M3 around the Lake Lansing/Coolidge intersection. Commercial C3 dominates the northwest along US127 which mostly now vacant. Commercial C1 and C2 are dispersed, mostly along Lake Lansing and Saginaw/M-78. A fair amount of area is Parks/Schools/Open Space/Vacant and finally there is a large parcel of Special Study Area in the northeast which was annexed into the city in 2002. Additional analysis is needed to determine a specific future land use recommendation for this parcel. Though the word ‘equity’ is used, there are unfortunately no substantive items identified relating to it in the North End Study. Providing non-motorized connections and procuring conservation easements are some environmental initiatives.

Overall, I think The Bigger Picture is a decent plan but lacks in some key areas such as addressing social equity issues, specifying cost and timing of implementations, and criteria for evaluation. A table of contents would be helpful. It is successful in creating a vision with the five elements as a theme referenced throughout. The procedural validity was proper and thorough. Goals and objectives are aligned with the vision. The maps are tidy and informative.

Links:

East Lansing Master Plan <https://www.cityofeastlansing.com/DocumentCenter/View/7403/Final-Master-Plan-2018-PDF>

Memorandum of March 23, 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update – The Bigger Picture, <https://www.cityofeastlansing.com/DocumentCenter/View/4872/Comprehensive-Plan-Update-2016-PDF?bidId=> Denver Comprehensive Plan 2040

[https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/Denverright/documents/comp-plan/Denver Comprehensive Plan 2040 city council draft.pdf](https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/Denverright/documents/comp-plan/Denver%20Comprehensive%20Plan%202040%20city%20council%20draft.pdf)