

comprehensive plan

CITY OF MARYLAND HEIGHTS



SECTION 1.0

INTRODUCTION



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A City is best characterized by the make-up of its people and their living and working environments. Cities having attractive commercial locations, well-kept residential areas, adequate parks and schools, and a street system conducive to the expeditious movement of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, will generally experience positive growth in both population and economy. Unfortunately, as is the case with most mature communities, the basic problem confronting the City is preventing the gradual decline of its residential, commercial and public areas through redevelopment, code enforcement, and strategic investment.

A Comprehensive Plan attempts to bring definition to these problems by considering land as a community's resource, both in terms of its existing condition, as well as space that can be utilized to provide future additional growth for the City. Just as with any resource, there are more efficient ways to use land than others are. The Comprehensive Plan tries to determine the most efficient ways to use this space in terms of both public investment and the services to be provided. In short, the Plan aims at eliminating the inherent inefficiencies of the market mechanism and provide a basis for rational decision-making and, thereby, rational development.

In order to achieve this, such a plan should basically be:

1. Comprehensive – The plan must encompass all geographic parts of the community, and all functional activities which bear on physical development.
2. General – The plan must be flexible. The plan summarizes policies and proposals and should not indicate specific locations or detailed regulations, so that the community's freedom of movement is maintained.
3. Long Range – Although the plan addresses short term problems and issues, its main function is to look beyond this foreground of pressing issues to generate a perspective on possibilities and problems 20 years into the future.

Within this generalized framework, specific areas of concern are identified through a review and analysis of the community's growth patterns. Although growth within any community is an extremely complex action affected by many variables and intricate interrelationships, growth patterns may be simply defined by analyzing six basic components which will impact development patterns. These are people, employment, shelter, community facilities, transportation, and environment. The diagram below graphically presents the interrelationships of the growth cycle.

The key component in the growth cycle is people. People need jobs to provide for their families. People need decent shelter in which to house their families. Groups of families living together within a defined area must have both the living together within a defined area must have both the adequate community facilities necessary to support that density of development, as well as the transportation system necessary to get them to work, to shopping areas, and to school. Finally, people need a suitable living environment. If it becomes degraded, the community's overall quality of life also declines. Through a detailed investigation of these components, weaknesses in the overall fabric of the community can be identified for eventual corrective actions by the City as the plan is implemented. As F. Stuart Chapin, Jr., one of the major authors in the field of city planning states, a comprehensive plan is “. . . a means for systematically anticipating and achieving adjustment in the physical environment of a city consistent with social and economic trends and sound principles of civic design. It involves a continuing process of deriving, organizing, and presenting a broad and comprehensive program for urban development and renewal. It is designed to fulfill local objectives of social, economic, and physical well-being, considering both immediate needs and those of the foreseeable future”.

As a new and major municipality in St. Louis County, Maryland Heights will be closely observed by its counterparts throughout the metropolitan area. The ability to control the type and quality of its future development will be important, particularly with respect to the image which the community acquires. This image is perceived (by both residents and non-residents) largely based on the development they see along the most heavily traveled thoroughfares. Therefore, controlling development along these corridors is doubly important.



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Because the city is so highly developed it has the land use characteristics of a much older community and in fact a small portion of the community is much older than the rest. As such there is very little vacant acreage for new development, but where this acreage exists, it is in prime locations. Pressure will begin to mount for redevelopment of older properties particularly along the eastern half of the Dorsett Road corridor. The type of development which occurs will have a major influence on the City's image.

Parts of the City have serious blighting influences beginning to affect whole areas. The building conditions in part reflect this situation. These areas will need special attention from code enforcement staff if further deterioration is to be avoided. In some instances statutory mechanisms should be considered in order to create redevelopment. The prime example of this condition is the industrial area north of Page on either side of Lackfee Drive; however, other commercial and residential pockets exist along the Dorsett/Old Dorsett Roads corridor and in spots in the north central residential areas.

During the resident input sessions held in various city neighborhoods, street lighting and street and sidewalk improvements were of prime concern to many residents. Residential streets have been constructed to a myriad of standards, in some cases without sidewalks, curbs, and gutters and street lighting. As the community has grown and standards were adopted and/or enforced by St. Louis County, many situations have been created where traffic flow has been impeded by these varying standards. This is compounded by many streets which don't connect to form flow patterns. This has a negative effect on the access to some neighborhoods by emergency vehicles. In many instances pedestrians must walk in the street. Naturally, the City cannot undertake "wholesale" improvements of this type if for no other reason than the total cost required. As a "follow up" to these comments, the City Council began to investigate the physical and financial requirements needed to deal with these issues. The City engineering staff (in conjunction with Union Electric) developed a program for acquisition of existing streetlights and placement/installation of new ones. A utility tax increase approved by voters in the April 1987 election will fund this program. Existing street lights were taken under City jurisdiction and new streetlights will be installed by Union Electric over an 18 month period. With the street lighting program in implementation, work should now begin in developing a similar plan and program for street improvements. This work should be coordinated with St. Louis County since traffic control and flow particularly along primary and secondary arterial roadways is a subject of much concern to City residents.

While most of these thoroughfares are under State or County control, the City can help minimize these problems through development controls. The motor vehicle-oriented business provisions developed for the zoning ordinance will assist in this effort if adopted. Site plan review should also be used as a mechanism to control access points.

Another major factor is represented by storm drainage problems which are known to exist in some areas of the community. Much of the community's sanitary and storm drainage system was not developed under MSD guidance or under that of any other single entity, but rather grew out of private sewer districts, developer, and County programs. Thus, today it is nearly impossible to efficiently locate major collection lines and to determine relationships and or deficiencies. The City should further evaluate at least the known problem areas and (working with MSD) should develop and implement a program for addressing these needs. New development and redevelopment projects should be reviewed carefully with respect to storm water effects, particularly, and when proposals seem questionable, careful coordination with MSD will be needed. "During community meetings, these issues were also a high priority with City residents.

The last introductory comment should make note of future population growth potential. Unless territory now in flood plain areas is reclaimed for development, and in part is residentially developed, Maryland Heights will not have significant population growth. The City area not in flood plain is nearly "full", and many of the areas which could be developed and/or redeveloped are only suitable for commercial or light industrial uses. Development of the flood plain areas will be dependent on or "driven by" many factors which we believe to be unpredictable and /or unlikely at the present time. This is not to say that the potential use of this large area should be ignored; however, the other issue areas discussed above



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need to be addressed as a first priority for improvement and continued stability of the existing, developed parts of the City. Future growth could be addressed by annexation but since much of the annexable area around the City is residential, such an idea may have dubious merit. Residential areas historically cost much more to service than they typically provide in tax revenue. In addition, it may be too soon in the City's life to bring additional land area under its control until City officials and staff have "been on their feet" for a longer period of time.

