

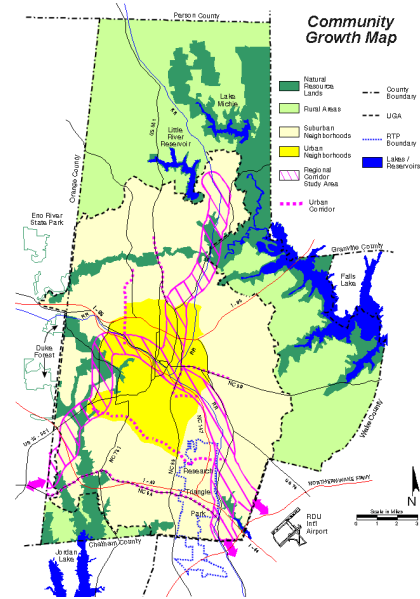


# Module 3. Comprehensive and Strategic Planning

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This training module has seven parts:

- Let's do some planning...making choices
- Comprehensive planning
- Strategic planning
- Future search planning
- Deciding which model to choose...
- Public participation
- The care and feeding of your plan



## Let's do some planning...making choices

• A few good reasons to plan:

- *A good, clearly articulated plan forms the basis of a community's vision of its future. Without it, regulatory controls can be legally challenged as arbitrary.*
- *A good plan ensures that a community can provide services like police, fire, and refuse collection efficiently while maintaining a relatively low tax rate for its citizens.*
- *A good planning process involves a wide variety of citizens and interests. Once a community reaches consensus, the vision created in the plan can make future decision-making easier and less politically charged.*
- *Resources provided by state and federal governments are increasingly tied to good plans and planning processes. Highway funds, water and sewer grants, and environmental clean-up funding is easier to bring to your community if you have a well-crafted plan that shows extensive community involvement .*

Most people and organizations plan. Businesses plan to increase profits or to minimize losses; the military plans both strategically (to win wars) and tactically (to win battles); people daily make planning decisions about personal finances, families, and careers; and communities plan to accommodate growth and change. Although the general concept of planning may be common, the actual practice of community and regional planning is complex and often mysterious to citizen planners. The purpose of this training module is to remove some of the mystery surrounding comprehensive planning, strategic planning, and future search planning.

Unfortunately, most planning boards spend only a small percentage of their time actually planning. The bulk of it is spent with zoning issues and subdivisions...the tools used to implement plans. The role of the planning board in advising elected officials on long range planning issues (in addition to site-specific zoning and development cases) is, however, very important. The plan is the foundation upon which many decisions regarding expenditure of public funds, zoning cases, development approvals, and the future character of the community are built. It should be constantly used and, when necessary, revised.

In North Carolina, there are no state-wide mandates to plan (as there are in some other states such as Florida and Georgia). However, in the 20 coastal counties land use plans are required to be completed by local governments.

• **The historical context**

Planning is a dynamic discipline, and there have been many changes within the discipline over the past 90 years. Names of products change, movements come and go, but sometimes there is a common thread to these changes. Figure 1. below portrays a time-line of different movements and philosophies of planning:

**Figure 1. Changing Planning Aspects and Applications**

Time Period	1900- Present	1950-Present	1960- Present	1970- Present	1970-80s	1980- Present	1990-Present
<b>Products</b>	Master or General Plan	Comprehensive Plan	Community Action	Inventory, Site Plan, and Development Plan	Policy Plan	Vision, Mission Statement, and Action Plan	Regulations and Development Plans
<b>Movement</b>	City Beautiful and City Planning	Urban and Regional Planning	Advocacy Planning	Environmental Planning	Open-ended Planning	Community-based Planning / Open-ended Planning	New Urbanism or Neotraditional Planning
<b>Planning Theory</b>	Physical Planning	Comprehensive Planning	Social Planning	Ecological Planning	Public Policy Planning	Strategic and Transactive Planning	Physical Planning
<b>Roots</b>	<i>Landscape Architecture • Architecture • Sociology • Law • Geography • Engineering • Economics</i>						

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This module briefly describes three major types of planning:

- *Comprehensive Planning* - the preparation of a plan with a broad scope, involving a range of subjects from land use to infrastructure and housing, for a target time frame, usually 15-20 years or so.
- *Strategic Planning* - a shorter-term look into the future, where priorities are established and a specific action plan is prepared to address these priorities.
- *Future Search Planning* - tapping the power of group dynamics to create a vision of the future and an action plan in a single intensive conference.

### • Planning homilies

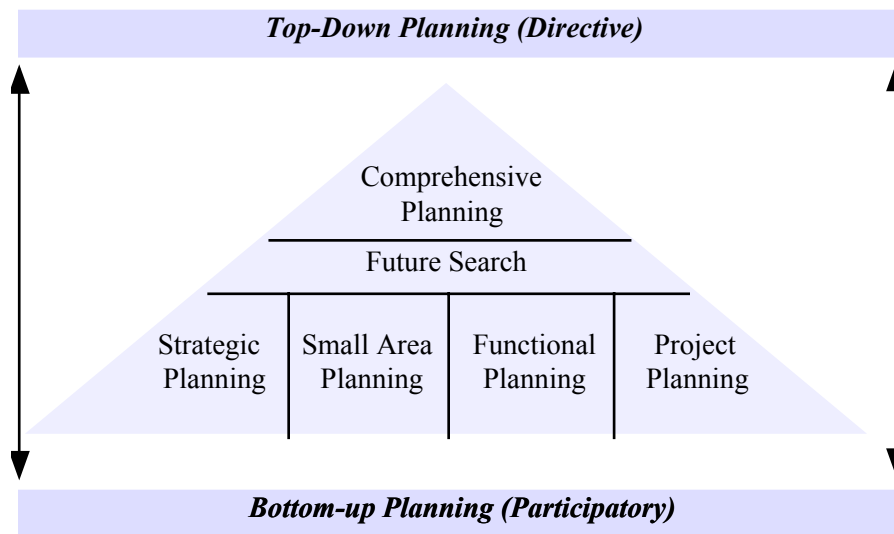
Like apple pie without ice cream, a discussion of plan preparation would not be complete without a few short planning homilies. These homilies belong to all those who consider themselves planners, so modify or add to this list as needed.

- *Good planning starts with an idea or vision of what might be*
- *Every worthy vision or project needs a champion to make it happen*
- *Make high quality development part of the community investment strategy*
- *Artists and artisans can create spiritual value in fast-changing communities*
- *Small-scale projects can add up to great change*
- *Citizen pride is a valuable resource*
- *People are the greatest resource for community change*
- *Action speaks louder than planning*
- *Quality of life is a strategy...not a luxury*
- *Design for the special needs of children in communities*
- *Bridge-building between the public, private, and civic sectors is essential*
- *Nothing creates better opportunity for change than a disaster*
- *Change is not a choice...but transformation is*
- *The moon would never rise if it paid attention only to all the dogs barking at it*
- *A glass that is half full versus half empty conveys a subtle but different message*
- *Inspiration can take many forms*
- *Always try to preserve local character*
- *Most people can become facilitative leaders*
- *Don't try to control people...involve them*
- *Making planning (and planning successes) visible to citizens will help sell planning*

### • The choices

There are two fundamental planning choices that people and communities must make. The first choice is to engage in either top-down or bottom-up planning, and the second choice is to determine which type of planning is most appropriate for the task at hand (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Different Types of Planning and Ways People Plan**



Top-down and bottom-up planning reflect differences in management style and also what people within communities want or will accept. Whereas top-down (directive) planning was acceptable in the 1950-70s, most people today prefer bottom-up (participatory) planning.

Bottom-up planning requires that professional planners and citizen planners alike approach planning tasks as facilitators and actively engage community members in collaborative problem solving activities involving broad constituencies. This, in turn, requires development and utilization of extensive interpersonal communication and listening skills that are not as common with top-down planning applications.

Determining the type of planning that is most appropriate for the task at hand is not an easy choice. Two possible choices involve defined processes (i. e., comprehensive planning and strategic planning). Future search planning is a hybrid choice involving aspects of both comprehensive planning and strategic planning. Small area planning, functional planning (i.e., transportation, housing, economic development, etc.), and project planning are more narrow in scope and closely parallel incremental planning (i.e., doing a little bit at a time).

### **Comprehensive planning**

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Comprehensive planning is the dominant way that communities plan in the United States. This section of the training module identifies what comprehensive planning is, when it is the best choice, some disadvantages to this choice, and the technical components of comprehensive planning.

### • What is comprehensive planning?

The terms "master plan", "general plan", and "comprehensive plan" are synonymous terms. The first application of comprehensive planning in the United States was in 1925 in Cincinnati, Ohio. However, after seven decades of planning applications, the concept of comprehensive planning still remains abstract to many people.

### • When is comprehensive planning the best choice?

Comprehensive planning is the best choice when one wants to bring together all planning functions (e.g., housing, land use, transportation, physical environment, energy, community facilities, etc.), the entire geographical and political jurisdiction, and include a long-range time perspective (e.g., 15-20 years into the future). No other choice will do all these things. In addition, one can argue that at some point in time it is essential that a community look at the broad or big picture spanning several decades.

### • What are the disadvantages to the comprehensive planning choice?

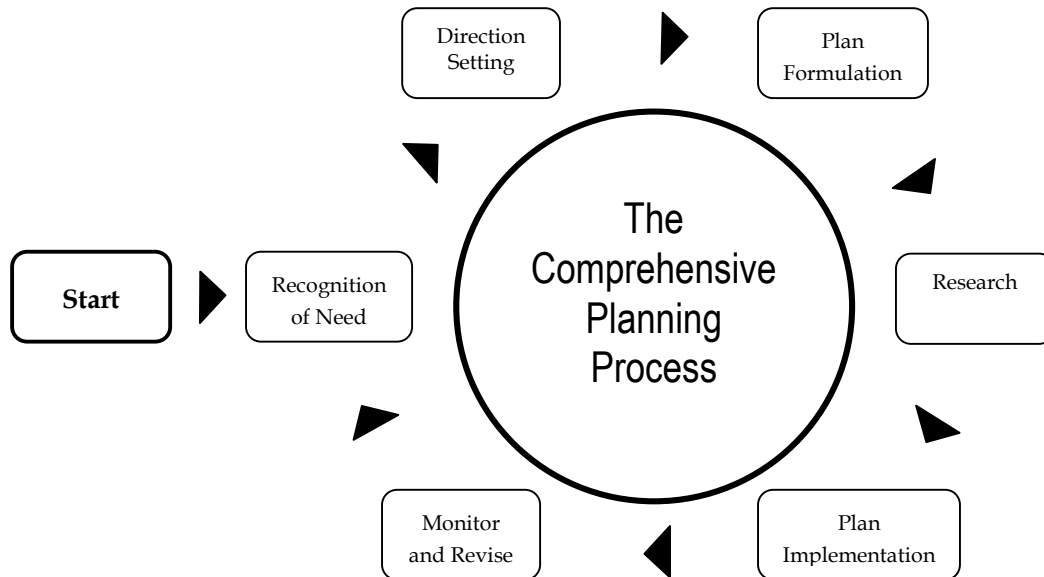
In a nutshell there are three disadvantages to comprehensive planning:

- *It is difficult for the general citizenry to understand the nature of the comprehensive planning process because it is abstract in both concept and application.*
- *The long-term outlook that makes comprehensive planning unique does not fit well with the short-term realities of the political process (i.e., the time commitment of most politicians is much less than 20 years into the future, and worldly conditions are often too dynamic to predict over a 20 year time period).*
- *The means and ends of comprehensive planning are separate; the plan is an end (i.e., a blueprint of where a community wants to be), but the means to achieve the blueprint requires a series of disconnected programming actions over the time period of the plan.*

### • Technical components of comprehensive planning

An easy and simple way to describe comprehensive planning is by planning process steps. Figure 3 portrays comprehensive planning as a 6 step process. Each step in the planning process involves a variety of different technical planning applications. The entire process takes approximately 12-18 months to complete.

**Figure 3. The Comprehensive Planning Process**



• **The Process:**

**Step 1: Recognition of need**

The two most common methods of conducting a needs assessment are:

- a public opinion survey, and
- a town or community meeting.

It may be desirable to do both, using the results obtained from one method to validate or confirm the results from the other method. The supporting activities section of this module contains more detailed information about both of these methods.

**Step 2: Direction-setting**

Direction-setting often begins with a vision and proceeds to development of a hierarchy of ends. The hierarchy includes :

- *Goals that further define the broad statements or desires expressed in the vision;*
- *Objectives that are more specified initiatives in support of the goals;*
- *Policies that are actions, statements, or courses of action adopted to achieve the objectives;*
- *Principles and standards that are quantified requirements in support of policies; and*
- *Targets that specify where and when details about planning policies.*

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### **Step 3: Research**

The purpose of planning research is to better understand the place. It involves an inventory and analysis of existing conditions and anticipation of certain future conditions such as trends and forecasts.

*This is a very complex, technical, and time-intensive part of the planning process.*

It likely will involve computer GIS (geographic information systems) applications, and it may involve satellite remote imagery.

One can approach planning research in a holistic manner, or one can focus on only key research factors. The key factor approach is the choice most communities make. Although there is no recipe identifying which key factors one should include, the most common key factors are:

- **needs assessment,**
- **physical environment,**
- **history,**
- **demographics,**
- **economy,**
- **housing,**
- **land use,**
- **transportation, and**
- **community facilities.**

### **Step 4: Plan formulation**

This step in the planning process is where the community needs assessment and planning research come together, like eyes in sight. There is, however, seldom only one plan option for a community; most communities must choose from among two or more alternatives. The final result is a plan document that contains maps, narrative descriptions, and policy statements.

Although each plan document will vary significantly in content, the plan framework (or plan components) is more consistent. Typical plan components are:

- **An introduction of the plan document and purpose**
- **A listing of community goals, objectives, and policies**
- **A description of the place (or setting)**
- **Existing and future land use locations (i.e., living, working, and leisure-time areas)**
- **Circulation and transportation**
- **Open space and conservation**
- **Infrastructure (i.e., facilities, services, and utilities)**
- **Noise and safety**
- **Special provisions (e.g., civic design, historic preservation, energy, hazardous materials, etc.)**
- **Conclusions...about the community and the plan**

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### **Step 5: Plan implementation**

The spectrum of plan implementation includes three broad categories:

1. *land use controls,*
2. *public capital investment, and*
3. *the tax and fee system.*

Each of these categories may involve various planning tools to accomplish plan implementation.

#### **Land use controls**

- **Zoning,**
- **subdivision, and**
- **nuisance ordinances**

are the three most frequently used land use controls. Other land use controls include:

- **annexation,**
- **historic preservation ordinances,**
- **planned unit development (generally integrated with zoning and subdivision),**
- **transfer of development rights (generally part of zoning),**
- **official mapping, and**
- **extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ).**

**\*\* FOR MORE INFORMATION ON REGULATORY IMPLEMENTATION CONTROLS, SEE MODULE 4 ZONING, AND MODULE 5 SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS**

**Public capital investment** becomes much more routine when a community has a CIP (capital improvement program). A CIP is a multi-year scheduling tool that includes both a budget year and out-years (typically 3-5 years). Even without a CIP, communities can influence plan implementation through categorical programs and the extension of roads and services.

**The tax and fee system** are two distinct mechanisms. The tax system includes preferential taxation and special assessments, and the fee system includes permits, exactions, and impact fees.

### **Step 6: Monitor, review, and revise**

Conditions will change over time. Therefore, it is important to periodically review the plan, possibly a formal review every two years, to determine how well the plan is working. As necessary, a community can revise the plan to accommodate changing needs, values, and conditions.



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## Strategic planning

Strategic planning, like comprehensive planning, is a systematic way of managing change. This section of the training module identifies what strategic planning is, when it is the best choice, some disadvantages to this choice, different types of strategic planning, and the technical components of each type.

### • What is strategic planning?

The terms strategic planning and community-based planning are synonymous. Although businesses and industries have routinely used strategic planning for many decades, it has only been since the 1980s that public sector applications have become common. This is a growing movement in the United States, and it is conceivable that strategic planning will in the future become a serious competitor to comprehensive planning.

### • When is strategic planning the best choice?

Strategic planning is the best choice when:

- *The focus is on only select issues.*
- *The plan involves limited geographical and political jurisdictions, and/or maintains a short-range time perspective of 4-10 years into the future.*

This choice is superior in dealing with dynamic and changing conditions over the short-term. In addition, strategic planning will require less time to complete and will have lower costs than comprehensive planning. Communities can use strategic planning either in lieu of comprehensive planning or to implement select aspects of comprehensive planning initiatives. Lastly, strategic planning effectively combines the *means* (i.e., implementation mechanisms) with the *ends* (i.e., blueprint for change) *as part of the planning process*; this increases the likelihood of plan implementation success.

### • What are the disadvantages to the strategic planning choice?

The disadvantages to strategic planning are the advantages of comprehensive planning. It is not, by definition, complete or comprehensive in data acquisition, function, or geographical area. In addition, strategic planning does not provide for the long-haul.

### • Different types of strategic planning...and technical components

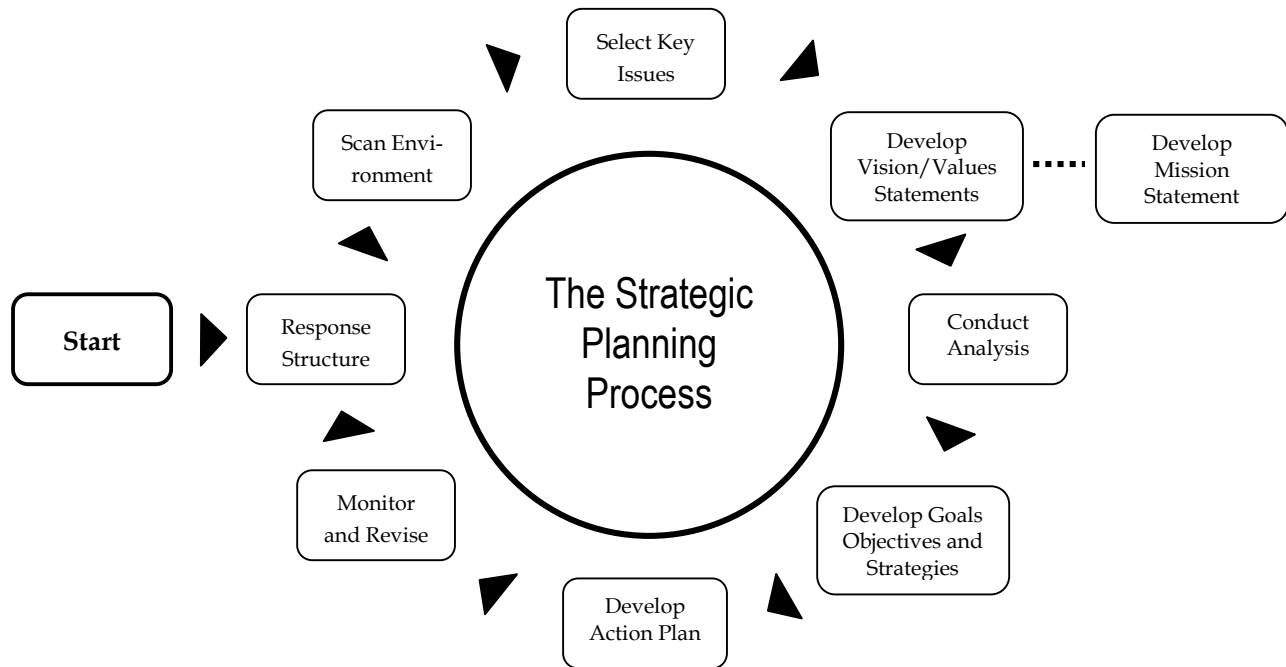
Although numerous variations exist, most are very similar to the traditional strategic planning model. The ToP (Technology of Participation) model is just one example of a variation that is both effective and low in cost to execute. This section of the training module includes a brief description of both traditional strategic planning and the ToP model.

### • Traditional strategic planning

As was done for comprehensive planning, an easy and simple way to describe traditional strategic planning is to identify its planning process steps. Figure 4 portrays strategic

planning as an 8 step process, and each step in the planning process involves several different technical planning applications. The entire process takes approximately 4-6 months to complete.

**Figure 4. The Traditional Strategic Planning Process**



**Step 1: Establish the response structure**

The response structure typically consists of three groups:

- a planning team,
- a steering committee, and
- an implementation committee.

Each group has different functions. The planning team is a small group of 3-5 persons who coordinate the process and perform administrative requirements relating to the process. The steering committee consists of 8-15 persons who provide process oversight (i.e., leadership and direction), provide leverage relating to public involvement, and review and provide comments for all technical planning products relating to the process. The implementation committee is a dynamic group whose membership may change depending on the specific strategies identified in the plan.

**Step 2: Scan the environment**

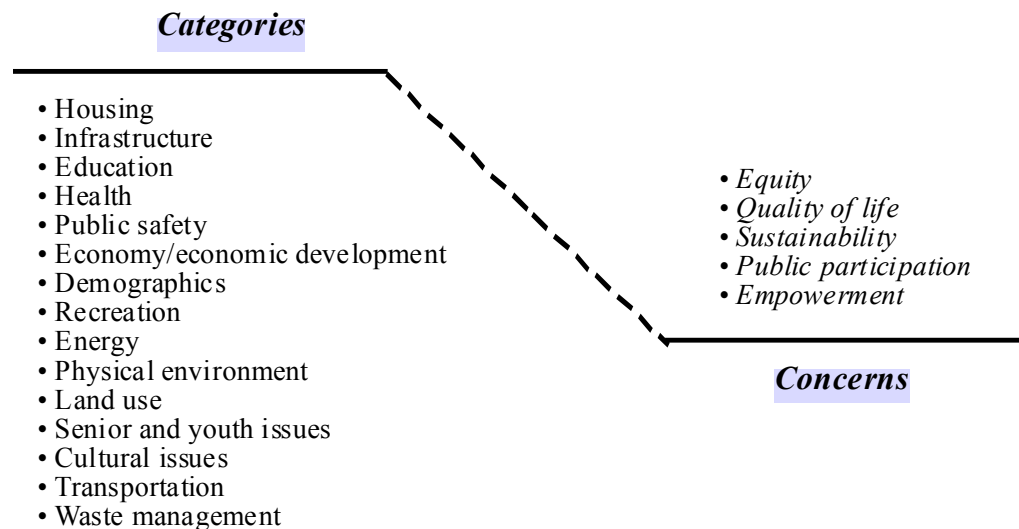
The environmental scan is not comprehensive. It focuses on specific trends and information that are both internal and external to the community. The external factors may be regional, state, national, or international in scope; a community generally has little or no control over these factors. The internal factors, however, are things over which the community can generally exercise at least some degree of control.

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### Step 3: Select key issues

A community meeting is a common method to identify key issues. The supporting activities section of this module contains more detailed information about this method. Figure 5 is a listing of typical issue categories and concerns relating to these issues. Although the issue categories are similar to the elements of a comprehensive plan, strategic planning will focus only on key (i.e., not all) categories.

**Figure 5. Typical Issue Categories and Concerns**



### Step 4: Develop vision/value statements

The vision/value statements will relate directly to each key issue identified in Step 3. Vision statements will identify where one wants to be in 10-15 years, and value statements are more qualitative expressions relating to this desired end. The supporting activities section of this module contains more detailed information about the visioning method.

Communities will sometimes want to additionally develop a **mission statement**. Most mission statements will have four vision/value-related components:

- *essential elements that best describe both the community and governmental operations;*
- *identification of the various community customers, their needs, and how the community helps to satisfy these needs;*
- *special and unique aspects about the community;*
- *the community image in broad or general terms.*

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### Step 5: Conduct analysis

The analysis step synthesizes Steps 1-4. It attempts to bring together where a community is at present, where it wants to be in the future, and factors that will influence its ability to realize identified visions and values. Inherent in this step is identification of both problems and barriers.

### Step 6: Develop goals, objectives, and strategies

This step attempts to bring order out of chaos. It generally involves brainstorming activities that result in a hierarchy of ends similar to the one described as part of comprehensive planning process. The strategic planning hierarchy, however, will be more limited, consisting only of goals that relate to the vision/value statements; objectives that are more specified initiatives in support of the goals; and strategies that identify specifically what one will do, how to do it, and who will do it.

### Step 7: Develop action plan

The action plan is a narrative summary of Steps 1-6. In addition, it will include two things that a comprehensive plan does not have:

- *a work program (e.g., a composite execution schedule of all strategies identified in the plan), and*
- *detailed information about the establishment of an implementation committee and how it will operate.*

If a strategy does not have execution commitment by this step, it does not belong in the action plan.

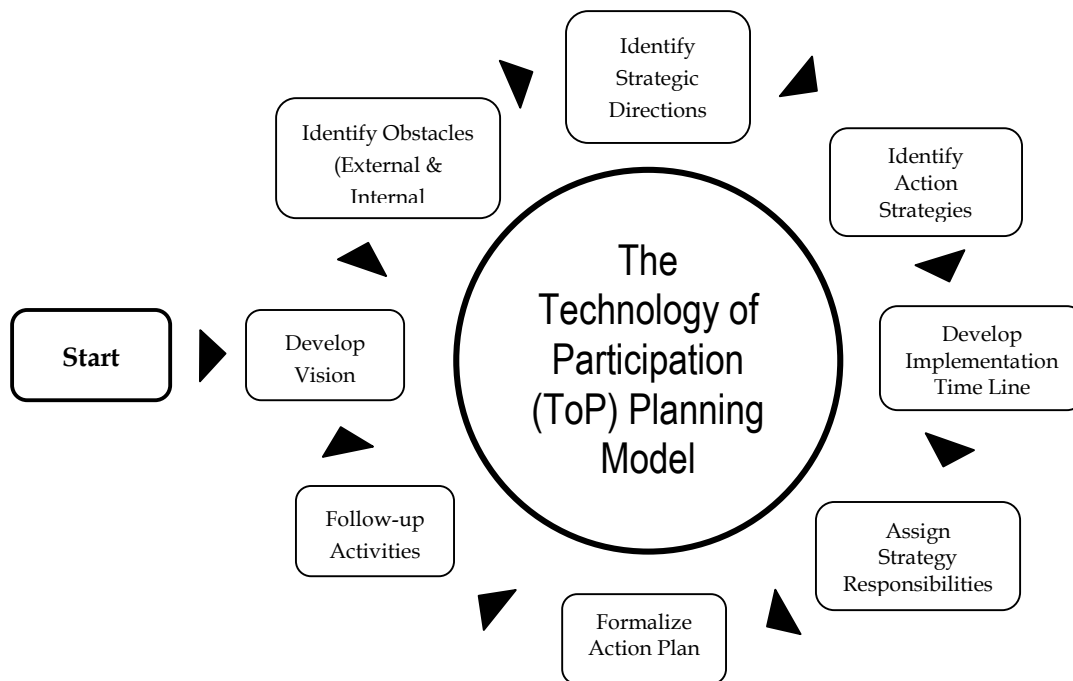
### Step 8: Monitor and revise

Although the traditional strategic planning process has a short-term time frame, conditions can change over even the short-term. Therefore, it is important to annually review the work program. As necessary, a community can revise its strategies, the work program, and the plan to accommodate changing needs, values, and conditions.

## • **ToP strategic planning model**

The ToP strategic planning model is one of several variations to the traditional strategic planning process. It consists of 5 simplified steps, and each step makes use of both workshops and focused conversation techniques to identify insights and build consensus among participants. Figure 6 is a description of the ToP strategic planning model. Facilitator training for the ToP model is available through the Institute of Cultural Affairs offices in most states. In addition, there is available for purchase an excellent technical reference that describes this model. It takes about 3-4 months to complete the planning process using this model.

### **Figure 6. ToP Strategic Planning Process (adapted from Spencer, 1989)**



**Step 1: Develop a vision**

During this step participants search for common images and visions of where they want to be (i.e., as a community) in 10-15 years. This may be a holistic vision (the entire community), a series of functional visions (i.e., land use, transportation, housing, education, etc.), or a combination of both. Participants will at the end of this step express their vision in a narrative form that will help to focus the remaining steps.

**Step 2: Identify internal and external obstacles to realizing the vision**

There will always be obstacles to realizing a community vision, and this step identifies both internal and external obstacles. This is an analysis step. The external obstacles are those things that a community cannot easily influence (e.g., national economic trends); it is important to at least identify these obstacles for the purpose of awareness. The internal obstacles, to include possible contradictions, are those things over which a community can exert varying degrees of influence (e.g., existing projects, programs, and policies).

**Step 3: Identify the strategic directions that will address the obstacles**

Step 3 builds on step 2 by identifying, in a broad context, what can or should be done. This may involve changes or modifications to existing projects, programs, and policies; or it may involve new projects, programs, and policies. In all cases, the strategic directions will address the obstacles (versus focusing on the vision). The end result is creation of a road map for the future journey.

**Step 4: Identify specific action strategies that can impact the strategic directions**

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This step involves identification of specific actions needed to implement the strategic directions. It is common to identify linkages among strategies, potential catalytic action strategies, and also to prioritize these strategies.

**Step 5: Develop an implementation time-line and action responsibilities for each strategy**

The term nitty-gritty best describes this step. The implementation requirements parallel the strategy framework identified in Figure 6...what, how, where, and when it will be done; who will do it (to include leadership assignments); cost and funding factors; and detailed scheduling. In addition, there frequently will be a need for periodic, follow-up review sessions.

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## ***Future search planning***

Although future search planning has more in common with strategic planning than comprehensive planning, it contains elements of both theories. This section of the training module describes what future search planning is, how it differs from traditional strategic planning, advantages of future search planning, and future search planning details.

### **• What is future search planning?**

The best way to describe future search planning is that it is a short-course (or conference) in managing the future. However, there are no lectures, there is no training, and it involves no teaching...it involves only learning. The benchmarks in conducting future search planning are: assemble the right people, utilize a conference design that allows participants to explore the past, present, future (at both personal and community levels), allow participants to self-manage their own time, search for common ground (versus problem-solving), and commit to action planning. The maximum size for a future search conference is 72 persons, the minimum size is 25 persons, and the optimum size is 64 persons.

### **• How does future search planning differ from traditional strategic planning and comprehensive planning?**

A future search conference attempts to bring together, in the same room, the entire system (i.e., community stakeholders) *at one time*. A future search conference results in stand-alone documentation that tells the story about the process and action planning initiatives. This type of planning can either replace or complement both comprehensive and strategic planning.

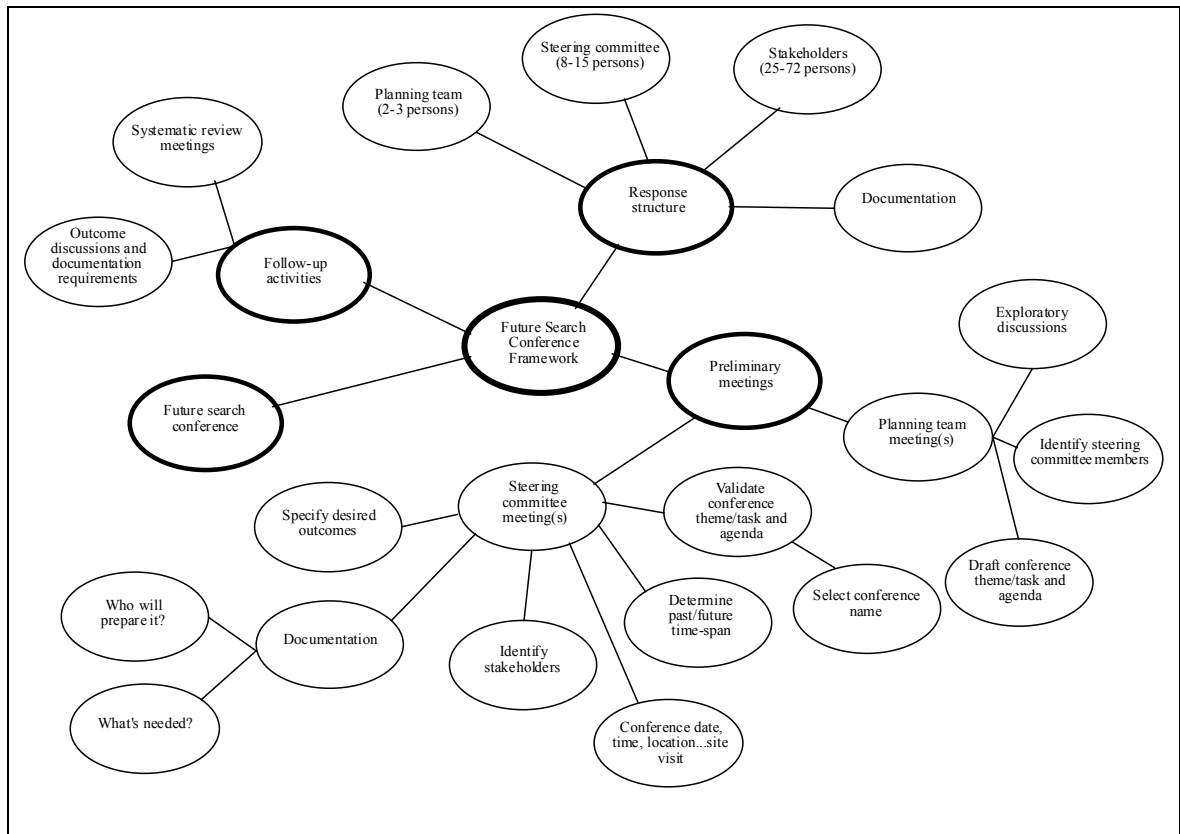
### **• What are the advantages of future search planning?**

Although traditional strategic planning and future search planning are both participative, future search planning is superior in tapping the tremendous powers of group dynamics that can lead to meaningful change within a community. Future search planning helps to build consensus by promoting dialogue that can result in effective planning, increased cooperation, and improved decision-making. A future search conference will require a trained facilitator, and the role of the facilitator will be to manage time and help participants first reach common ground and then engage in action planning.

### **• Future search planning details**

Future search planning involves four major elements: establishing a response structure, holding preliminary meetings, conducting the actual conference, and follow-up activities. Graphically the framework looks like the mind map in Figure 7.

**Figure 7. The Future Search Planning Framework**



Although the design of a future search conference includes some work in plenary sessions, most work is in small groups. Participants start out in a plenary session but quickly begin to work in small groups (both stakeholder and mixed groups). The small groups frequently come together in a plenary session to share and discuss results from their small group work sessions. This mix of people working together creates a dynamic sense of ownership and transactive bonding that is unique to the future search planning model.

The typical schedule for a future search conference is three days (See Figure 8 for a description of the details for designing such a conference). Although three consecutive days is the best alternative, three one day sessions is an option. The logistics of getting 64 people to commit their time for a three day period can be difficult. However, if one can achieve this, the potential outcomes frequently border on the spectacular. In addition, this model is clearly the most time-efficient when compared to either the comprehensive planning model or one of the strategic planning models.



**Figure 8. Design Details for a Future Search Conference**

Focus	Type Session	Scope	Comments
• Introduction	Plenary	Process overview	
• Past	Mixed small groups and plenary	World, national, local, and personal levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Who we are, and where we've been</li> <li>_ What happens at one scope level will often have linkages with other levels</li> </ul>
• Present	Stakeholder small groups and plenary	External and internal conditions, to include prouds and sorries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ How we view world trends</li> <li>_ People who have a shared investment in both communities and organizations...but have different perspectives</li> </ul>
• Future	Mixed small groups and plenary	Imagining and describing the ideal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ What we want for the future</li> <li>_ Note: one can add <i>prompts</i> at client request without detriment to the process (e.g., visioning, mission statement, potential product line, etc.)</li> </ul>
• Common ground	Mixed small groups and plenary	Discover and confirm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ Things people agree about</li> <li>_ Entire conference helps to achieve this</li> </ul>
• Action planning	Voluntary, task force, or project groups		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>_ How to get there</li> </ul>

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## ***Deciding which model to choose...***

Success is not found in any particular model, but in the people who participate in the process and make a commitment to action planning. Most successful plans are made or broken in the pre-planning phase, and the secret of success in the pre-planning phase is getting the right people for the tasks. In addition, the outcome of all planning models is not predictable, and there is no guarantee of predetermined product delivery.

As mentioned above, one can make a strong argument that only comprehensive planning focuses on the entire geographic or jurisdictional area and all functions within a community; in addition, comprehensive planning offers a long-term perspective that the other models do not have. One can also make a strong argument that strategic planning and future search planning better support political realities and better focus on specific issues within a community; further, these models are more participatory.

Each model is different in terms of time and cost. As would be expected, comprehensive planning requires the most time and is the most expensive of the three models. Using comprehensive planning as the benchmark (i.e., equal to the factor of one), Figure 9 provides approximate time and cost comparisons between the three models.

Although it sounds like a politically correct answer, each model is necessary...it just depends on the specific needs of a community. If a strong tradition of planning already exists, then comprehensive planning will have a more likely chance to succeed; otherwise, strategic or future search planning are better choices. If the need is for short-term and more immediate outcomes, strategic or future search planning are the better choices. If one wants a large number of participants to feel good about the entire process, strategic planning or future search planning are the better choices. There will likely, however, be a point in time when a community determines that it is necessary to plan holistically...and for this comprehensive planning is the best choice.

**Figure 11. Time and Cost Comparison**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Cost</b>
• Comprehensive planning	1	1
• Traditional strategic planning	.4	.5
• ToP strategic planning	.3	.4
• Future search planning	.3	.4

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## Public Participation

There are always a few members of the community who will actively participate in planning activities. These "planning junkies" are a great resource and a constant source of energy, but it is important to remember that the plan cannot be the "brain child" of a small committee of people. Citizens must be brought into the debate in as many ways as possible. Here are a few supporting activities that can help involve the public as a community plans for its future:

### • Meetings

Plan preparation will always require meetings. Many of these meetings will involve working in small groups, and it is here that meeting guidelines are especially appropriate. The formalization of meeting guidelines is like adding grease to mechanical gears...it reduces friction and promotes efficiency.

It is prudent to introduce meeting guidelines at the first meeting of each work group. All group members should have the opportunity to accept or modify the guidelines.

**\*\*SEE MODULE 1. WORKING TOGETHER FOR IDEAS ON HOW TO MANAGE MEETINGS. THERE ARE SEVERAL GOOD REFERENCES IN THE "RESOURCES" SECTION AT THE END OF THE MODULE.\*\***

### • Public opinion surveying

Public opinion surveying serves several purposes. It is a way to ascertain conditions or perceptions, to facilitate policy development, and to obtain feedback (e.g., evaluate plans, programs, and action alternatives).

There are 7 steps in conducting a public opinion survey, and several steps are technical:

- **Step 1: Identify the survey purpose**, to include who wants the information and how it will be used.
- **Step 2: Decide on the survey method** (i.e., person-to-person, mailed questionnaire, or telephone).
- **Step 3: Decide on the survey structure** (open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, and allowing for comments).
- **Step 4: Decide on the survey design** (cross-sectional or longitudinal).
- **Step 5: Determine sample size.** One can use statistics or judgment. Statistics is necessary with stratified populations. In addition, one must decide on variables such as confidence level, sampling error, and proportion of incidence.
- **Step 6: Conduct pretest and trial-run.**
- **Step 7: Execute**, and evaluate both response rate and the findings. When the response rate is low, follow-up is necessary.

### • Town meetings

Town, neighborhood, or community meetings are one of the best ways to conduct a needs or issue assessment. It is essential, however, that the meetings have a structure that promotes listening versus debating or complaining.

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A simple but effective format for town meetings is to have participants focus on three categories of ideas and concerns:

- *things being done well...continue;*
- *things not being done well...stop, modify, or change; and*
- *things not being done...start.*

The preferred way of getting participants to identify ideas and concerns within these three categories is to use the nominal group process (Supplementary Materials available from the author... see Resources section of this module). Two hours is the approximate time needed to conduct one of these meetings.

## • Visioning

Visioning is a technique whereby community members determine what they want their community to become, and how to achieve it, in a *broad* context. It is a citizen-driven method that brings people together (hopefully, a group that reflects cross-sectional values of the community) in a way that will later make it easier to implement plans.

There are 5 questions that visioning seeks to answer:

- *where is the community now (existing conditions)?*
- *where is it going (trends)?*
- *where does it want to go (alternative or preferred scenarios)?*
- *how can it get there (broad strategies)?*
- *what is the next step (selecting a planning process or model)?*

If one uses the ToP action planning model to do visioning (Supplementary Materials available from the author... see Resources section of this module), there are 6 steps to follow:

- *Step 1: Develop a scenario*
- *Step 2: Brainstorm ideas and concerns*
- *Step 3: Order ideas and concerns*
- *Step 4: Name idea/concern categories*
- *Step 5: Evaluate the results*
- *Step 6: Document the results*

Visioning is a very effective consensus-building tool...and it can be fun, even exciting for the participants. Although it has the potential to involve a large number of people, when there are more than 30 participants it is necessary to use focus groups. The keys to successful visioning are facilitative leadership, trust among participants, and the identification of tangible, transforming visions within the community.

## • Media releases

Planning and planners are always in need of good publicity. The best way to get the word out in a timely and accurate manner is to prepare media releases oneself for all significant planning activities. In short, toot your own horn. This is a time-consuming task, but it makes it easier for the media to provide the needed coverage, and there often will be fewer mistakes.

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- **Image analysis**

Whereas visioning has its roots in the future, the roots of image analysis are in the present. It is a physical planning tool that focuses on mental images that we all form. Some of these mental images are in the resident's domain, some in the visitor's domain, and some are a linear experience. When sufficient persons have the same or similar mental images, the images then become *public* images. The identification and creation of public mental images is a way to create or enhance a sense of place within a community.

Kevin Lynch in his book *The Image of the City* identifies 5 aspects of mental images: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. The Supplementary Materials (available from the author...see Resources section at the end of this module) outlines the procedure for conducting an image analysis of a community using the Lynch technique. Although it is a technical procedure, a lay person can do it with just a little practice.

- **Publication of *community indicators***

Community indicators are a way of measuring change. The grouping of community indicators is generally by sustainability or quality of life. In both cases, it is necessary to develop *benchmarks* for the purpose of a meaningful comparison. However, it is also possible to monitor changes in indicators over time (e.g., up, down, constant).

How many indicators are enough? Generally, 30-35 indicators is the most that a community can monitor at one time.

What specifically are the indicators? Most will relate in some way to the categories in Figure 5. Community members must determine which information is important to them, specifically what they want to measure about the information, obtain the data, and maintain records over time. An example of a community indicator might be a health issue such as the number or percentage of youth who stop/start smoking each year.

- **Changing technology and citizen participation**

The expanding world of electronic communication is opening new doors to interactive participation in community decision-making by individuals...in their own homes. This kind of communication, although not a panacea, does open the planning process to a large group of participants who otherwise might be less inclined to be involved in meetings or committees, but who may have something important to say. Explore the use of cable television, e-mail, the internet, and fax-back services to bring the planning process to the people.

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## ***The Care and Feeding of Your Plan***

### **• Adopt the plan formally**

Regardless of which planning model one chooses, it is important that the governing body adopt or endorse the plan formally. Make a big deal out of it. Ensure that the media covers the event. The adoption or endorsement by the governing body is what makes the plan an effective policy instrument. This allows elected officials, appointed officials, and technical planners to use the plan document as a decision-making guide (i.e., making decisions in accordance with the plan).

### **• Planning is a verb**

As soon as you are done, it's time to begin again. If the plan is seen to be an end only, you have failed. If planning becomes embedded in all governmental decision-making, and you find your day-to-day decisions being based on concepts and goals of your plan, or if you find your plan being adjusted as the realities of day-to-day business evolve, then you have succeeded. Your plan will evolve with your community, and citizens will find their future the better for it.

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### **• Summary of this module...**

## ***FOUR THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT COMPREHENSIVE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING***

- (1) **Good plans, created in an atmosphere of public involvement, help reduce the cost of providing public services, and establish a clear framework for making regulatory decisions.** Resources available to your community from other levels of government are often tied to good planning practices to ensure the most efficient use of public resources.
- (2) **Comprehensive Planning provides a long-term, and more "comprehensive" look into the future. Strategic Planning and Future Search Planning have a shorter time frame and are more narrowly focused on specific goals, objectives and strategies.** When a strong tradition of planning exists in a community, comprehensive planning may be the best choice. If the need is for short-term and more immediate outcomes, strategic or future search planning are the better choices. A future search conference can create a usable product in 3 days, and can capture the creative power of group dynamics better than the other, longer processes.
- (3) **Involvement by as many as possible in the process of exploring alternate futures and creating a strategy for achieving goals is critical to the success of a planning process.** The technology of participation is ever-changing. Be creative about involving citizens in the debate over the future of the community. Make issues concrete and easily understood. Avoid abstract concepts that are hard for the average citizen to comprehend.
- (4) **The "process" of creating and updating a plan is as important than the "product".** Planning is a verb, and the care and feeding of a plan by constantly re-thinking it is as important as the initial effort to put it in place.

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## ***Some Exercises:***

### **Situation 1.**

Acme Widget Company is in the business of manufacturing and distributing hubcaps. They own plants that smelt the iron into steel, plants that flatten the steel into sheets, plants that stamp and shape the hubcaps to the specification of different car companies, a marketing and advertising group, and a series of warehouse and distribution facilities. Some of their competitors are building hubcaps out of plastic and chrome-plating the plastic to provide a less-durable product at a lower cost. Acme wants to emphasize product quality and keep its market share. They need a plan for how to do this.

Think about how Acme might approach the planning process from both a comprehensive planning standpoint and a strategic planning standpoint. Answer the following questions about the plans from these two different types of processes:

- How long would it take for each approach?
- How much would the planning process cost?
- How likely would it be that the plan would result in measurable outcomes?
- Who in the company should be involved in the process...and why?

### **Situation 2.**

Can you answer these questions...

- Does your community have a general or strategic plan (or some other type of overall vision of the future) that is officially adopted? When was it adopted?
- When was the last time the Planning Board referred to the plan when making a decision?
- When was the last time the Planning Board debated an amendment to the plan?
- What is the name of your plan?
- What is the time frame that the plan covers?
- Do any of your community's regulations require conformity with the plan?

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## ***Other related subjects:***

Ask your professional staff to provide you with more training on these issues:

- **Visioning, and Other Techniques to Understand "The Public Interest"**
- **Public Participation in Decision-Making...How Much is Too Much?**
- **CAMA Land Use Planning in Coastal Counties**
- **Planning for Small Towns and Rural Areas**
- **Using Community Indicators**
- **Neighborhood and Small Area Planning**
- **Downtown Area Plans**
- **Transportation Corridor Planning**

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## Resources

**Supplementary Materials are available for this module directly from the author.**

Those who are interested in obtaining additional materials supporting the information presented in this module should contact Dr. Garry Cooper at the Department of Geography and Planning, P. O. Box 32066, Appalachian State University, Boone NC 28608, e-mail [coopergv@appstate.edu](mailto:coopergv@appstate.edu)

Contents:    **A – Typical Key Factor Components**  
                  **B – Small Group Techniques**  
                  **C – Visioning Script**  
                  **D – Image Analysis Technique**

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