



1. Introduction/Background

1.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF PLANNING IN WARREN COUNTY & BOWLING GREEN

Warren County was created in 1796 from part of Logan County and named for General Joseph Warren, one of the first to give his life in the War of Independence and who fell at the battle of Bunker Hill. Warren County contains about 545 square miles. The first courthouse was constructed in Bowling Green in 1798 providing the central point for the City of Bowling Green's developing urban center. Over time, blocks were generally laid out along a major linear axis originating at Bald Bluff and extending northeast to the Barren River – approximately 15 urban blocks between the current Western Kentucky University and the River, and between College and State streets.



Bowling Green and Warren County thereafter successfully jockeyed for investments that brought freight navigation to the Barren River and resulted in a Louisville to Nashville railroad running through the Community, both of which brought economic opportunity. The period of 1830-1837 saw accelerated growth in Bowling Green, including the construction of several commercial structures in the central part of Town. After the Civil War, the railroad became more important, and the towns of Bristow, Smiths Grove and Woodburn formed along it.

A number of planning efforts followed the acceleration of growth and suburbanization after World War II. In 1954, the Bowling Green Planning and Zoning Commission was created, which began to also serve Warren County in 1958. This body became the City-County Planning Commission of Warren County in 1966, which also served Plum Springs and Smiths Grove. These jurisdictions also shared a Board of Adjustments and planning staff. Woodburn joined this arrangement in 1987, and the City of Oakland joined in 1999, extending the Planning Commission's reach throughout the County.

Meanwhile, subdivision regulations were adopted in 1957 and were effective in Bowling Green and within three miles of the City. In 1958, Bowling Green and Warren County adopted the Zoning Ordinance/Resolution of Warren County. Plum Springs adopted this ordinance in 1969, and Smiths Grove adopted its own zoning ordinance in 1985. Increased development and other factors led to increased awareness and concern about the County's unique and vulnerable karst hydrological system, and the Planning Commission adopted the D.R.A.S.T.I.C. Index in 1989. This Index gauges an area's vulnerability to water pollution, based on seven factors.

Following the prevalent progression at that time, the community's first comprehensive plan was adopted after the zoning and subdivision regulations. This comprehensive plan was called "General Plan, Bowling Green Urban Area," and was adopted on October 17, 1967. On July 17, 1969, the Planning Commission adopted the "Land Use Plan for Warren County, Kentucky." Bowling Green then adopted its "Land Use Management Plan" in 1975.

In 1984, the Planning Commission's Future Directions Committee concluded that the existing comprehensive plan was severely outdated, and recommended the undertaking of a planning effort that eventually culminated in the 1990 Comprehensive Plan. This Plan, adopted on June 21, 1991, included policies and recommended actions to achieve a more compact growth pattern, greater economic growth, stronger protection for the natural environment, and lessen future tax burdens by requiring new development to pay its fair share for new infrastructure and services. Since its original adoption, the 1990 Plan has been amended 11 times, and focal point plans have been prepared for Oakland, Walnut Valley, Smiths Grove, Cedar Ridge, and Woodburn. During this time, the Planning Commission has also continuously sought to update the planning tools that it does have at its disposal. For example, the Planning Commission adopted the present zoning ordinance in December, 2001, followed by adoption of the present subdivision regulations in July, 2002. Additionally, following the 2000 Census, the Bowling Green Urban Area was designated, and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) was formed. The MPO provides transportation planning for all of Warren County by agreement with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, and in 2006 adopted the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the first such plan developed for Warren County under federal guidelines for metropolitan areas. After nearly eighteen years, however, the Warren County 1990 Comprehensive Plan no longer meets the changing needs or aspirations of the community. Upon adoption, the Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan will replace the 1990 Plan with a new vision and new, state-of-the-art planning tools.

1.2 THE NEED FOR A NEW PLAN

One possible "silver lining" to the current economic slowdown is the opportunity that it presents to take stock of the community's past and present, and to rethink its future based on changing circumstances, and the values and shared vision of citizens, without the influence of imminent growth pressures. Further, it is an opportunity to ensure that when these growth pressures resume, as they surely will in time, Warren County and the incorporated communities will be ready and well-equipped to encourage robust, but sustainable economic growth consistent with, and supportive of, the quality of life and unique community character that makes our community the desirable place that it is, and wishes to remain. The preparation of the Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan was an opportunity for a broad cross-section of the community to define just what a sustainable future looks like, and to map out how to get there. The City-County Planning Commission, in considering its history of sporadic plan and ordinance revisions, as well as the challenges that accelerating growth had been presenting, identified the need for a fresh start in planning for the community's future, as excerpted below from its 2006 ***Request for Proposals*** for the Comprehensive Plan:

"Although the existing Comprehensive Plan has served the community well for sixteen years, it is time to develop a completely new plan. New development issues and technologies face the community now, and a new Comprehensive Plan needs to address them directly. These issues facing the community must be met with new ideas and continued expansion in the following areas:

- *a new "Vision" for Bowling Green and Warren County;*
- *redevelopment of Downtown Bowling Green;*

- *establishment of Utility Service Boundaries;*
- *establishment of Development Impact Fees;*
- *establishment of a County Economic Development Strategy;*
- *development of an overall Transportation Improvement Strategy;*
- *development of natural or agricultural Conservation Districts;*
- *preservation of our county's historic assets and natural resources;*
- *implementation and expansion of the Greenways Master Plan;*
- *preservation of the special character of Plum Springs, Smiths Grove, Oakland, and Woodburn;*
- *and the possible relocation of the airport."*

The Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan, prepared in response to this mandate, started with a fresh new vision and then considered all of these, and other, potential initiatives – moving forward boldly with some, more cautiously on others, and even backing away from yet others in some cases. Its most lasting legacy, however, will be how the plan challenges us to a new way of thinking about the community and the connections between, and implications of, decisions that we make about development and growth. For example, the Plan explores the following notions:

- That how we choose to grow and develop our land resources is intricately connected to our transportation needs, directly determining demand for, and length of, vehicular trips;
- That a healthy, growing urban center, and surrounding compact suburban pattern, can take growth pressure off remote rural and agricultural communities that want to stay that way;
- That a pattern of fragmented, sprawling development, with the dispersed population it produces, can stretch our fiscal resources and our ability to provide new services and facilities; and
- That our quality of life and the character of our community can be a core “driver” of our economy, our motivation, and a measure of our success, as we follow through on actions recommended by the Plan.

Thus the primary purpose of Focus 2030 is to provide a “roadmap” that can be used to guide decisions about how our community shall evolve over the next 20 years. The Plan assesses the impacts of growth on every aspect of community life: from transportation and community facilities to social issues and quality of life.

1.3 STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The legal mandate for comprehensive planning in the Commonwealth of Kentucky is addressed in KRS (Kentucky Revised Statutes) Chapter 100. Unlike some states such as Florida, Georgia and Oregon which require strict adherence to a precise schedule and methodology, and requires plan approval by state government, Kentucky provides for a greater measure of local government discretion and autonomy. Key

elements of Chapter 100 which guide the development of the plan and mandate how it is to be used include the following.

The Mandate to Prepare a Comprehensive Plan

KRS Section 100.183, requires that the planning commission established for each unit of local government shall prepare a comprehensive plan to “serve as a guide for public and private actions and decisions to assure the development of public and private property in the most appropriate relationships”. It further requires that the plan take a holistic view by requiring that the elements of the plan “shall be interrelated, and each element shall describe how it relates to each of the other elements”.

Contents of a Comprehensive Plan

KRS Section 100.187 requires that comprehensive plans contain, at minimum, the following elements:

- (1) A statement of goals and objectives, which shall serve as a guide for the physical development and economic and social well-being of the planning unit;
- (2) A land use plan element, which shall show proposals for the most appropriate, economic, desirable and feasible patterns ...(for the use of land)...
- (3) A transportation plan element, which shall show proposals for the most appropriate, economic, desirable and feasible pattern for transportation facilities...
- (4) A community facilities plan element which shall show proposals for the most appropriate, economic, desirable and feasible pattern for...public and semipublic buildings, land and facilities...

This section also permits flexibility to add additional plan elements which could include but not be limited to, community renewal, housing, flood control, pollution, conservation, natural resources, etc.

The Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan was prepared to include elements over and above the minimum required by statute, and the required goals and objectives have been incorporated within, and designed to specifically support the various elements of the comprehensive plan.

Research Requirements

KRS Section 100.191 requires that the comprehensive plan be based upon research, analysis and projections, pertaining to present and future population, the local economy, the need for and adequacy of, land and building uses, transportation and community facilities.

Requirement for Consistency

Although not related to the contents or preparation and adoption of a comprehensive plan, KRS Section 100.213 is important in that it mandates all re-zonings and development approvals be reviewed for consistency with the comprehensive plan, in contrast to some states where consistency with a comprehensive plan is discretionary. This mandate is as follows:

Before any (zoning) map amendment is granted, the planning commission or the legislative body or fiscal court must find that the map amendment is in agreement with the adopted comprehensive plan or, in the absence of such a finding, that one (1) or more of the following apply and such a finding shall be recorded in the minutes and records of the planning commission or the legislative body or fiscal court:

- (a) That the existing zoning classification given to the property is inappropriate and that the proposed zoning classification is appropriate; and
- (b) That there have been major changes of an economic, physical or social nature within the area involved which were not anticipated in the adopted comprehensive plan and which have substantially altered the basic character of such area.

1.4 PLANNING PROCESS

The Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan was prepared over an approximately four-year period as part of a process that included five (5) phases of work. The process was facilitated by the Planning Commission's consultant, WRT, but in fact it was led by an appointed citizens' Task Force. Task Force members were charged with representing the interests of numerous, sometimes divergent interests in the County. Not only did these citizens generously volunteer their time to participate in monthly meetings, but also, and most importantly, they were instrumental in distilling their fellow citizens' ideas into the Vision Statement and in defining a policy framework best suited to Warren County to make the vision a reality. They also served as facilitators, scribes, and hosts for the planning processes' various community involvement activities. All meetings of the Comprehensive Plan Task Force were open to the public.

After a one-month Mobilization and Orientation Phase, during which WRT collected data, toured the County, held kickoff meetings with staff and the Comprehensive Plan Task Force, and conducted interviews with over thirty (30) individual and group stakeholders, the progression of planning tasks began with Phase Two. During this phase, which ran in parallel with Phase Three, WRT developed a community assessment (included as Appendix 5.1 at the end of this volume) to characterize key conditions and trends related to growth and change in Warren County and the City of Bowling Green. As part of this assessment, WRT reviewed regulations, demographics and economic conditions, the transportation and infrastructure systems, and other components of the County's physical structure to identify key issues, needs, and opportunities.

In Phase Three, Community Visioning, WRT and Planning Commission staff conducted a series of interactive exercises with the residents of Warren County to solicit input on the community's values and expectations for quality of life, growth and development, and design character. This input served to prepare the Focus 2030 Vision Statement, which expresses "what we want Warren County and Bowling Green to be in the future." Eight (8) visioning sessions were held throughout the County to maximize opportunities for participation, and some 200 people participated.

In Phase Four, a series of principles were developed based on the Vision Statement to guide growth, and they were used as the basis for the Future Land Use Map, which illustrates the desired general pattern of future land use, to be achieved incrementally, and over a period of 20 years. Goals, policies and actions were prepared for each topical Plan element, always with an eye towards achieving the vision. The elements were presented sequentially and in detail to the Task Force, and feedback was requested at each meeting. Comments were addressed and/or incorporated into each element. The Task Force also

formed subcommittees and met individually with the consultant to review and discuss each element, until a consensus on the content was reached on the appropriate course of action. The resulting documents were then presented to the full Task Force for review and endorsement.

Only after the Task Force sanctioned each element, were the resulting products of Phase Four refined and developed into this Draft Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan document. This report, which constitutes Volume 1 of the Plan, includes the Vision Statement, the seven (7) topical elements containing the Plan's goals, policies and actions, and the implementation program, which defines the specific sequence of actions to be taken by the County. The Task Force subsequently reviewed the document, provided comment to the consultants, and met numerous times to address issues and questions raised by various stakeholders. The concerns have been taken very seriously and, in response, numerous adjustments have been made to this document.

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE POLICY DOCUMENT

Volume 1 of the Plan is designed to make the Policy Document easy to read and understand. After this chapter, which provides a general background for the process of development of the plan, this document is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 describes the Focus 2030 Vision Statement and the key guiding principles that framed the preparation of each subsequent element of the plan.
- Chapter 3 includes seven (7) sections which establish the goals, objectives and actions to guide decisions by the County in the following areas:
 - Future Land Use
 - Transportation
 - Infrastructure and Community Facilities
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Natural and Cultural Resources
 - Housing and Neighborhoods
 - Economic Development

While the objectives and actions are organized into separate elements, they are designed to be strongly interrelated and mutually supportive in guiding the County and the cities toward achieving the Vision Statement.

- Chapter 4 lays out the strategy for implementing the Comprehensive Plan, establishing procedures for adopting, amending, monitoring, and updating the plan on a regular basis, and defining an "action plan" that prioritizes the content of each element, provides a timeframe for start-up and completion, and identifies each action by type. Since individual actions can contribute to achieving

goals and policies for more than one topical element, cross-references between actions from different elements are also shown in the action plan.

The Policy Document is accompanied by two complementary but separate documents. Volume 2 contains a series of Appendices, including the Community Assessment, which helped to identify changes that Warren County would need to make to achieve its 2030 Vision, and which, together with the Vision Statement, served as the basis for the land use and development frameworks. The results of the community visioning sessions are also included, as is a glossary of terms that are used in both the Community Assessment and the Policy Document.

The third volume of the Plan is an atlas, which compiles in all the maps that are contained in the different sections of the Plan.