

SECTION 3



Executive Summary

Growth Management and Plan Implementation
for Metropolitan Hattiesburg

Practical Strategies for Growth Management
Planning

SECTION 3.1

Executive Summary

Growth Management and Plan Implementation for Metropolitan Hattiesburg

Across America, local governments are facing pressing challenges related to growth. Rapid population change and the devolution of responsibility from federal to local governments have caused many communities to reevaluate their growth-related priorities.

Metropolitan Hattiesburg is no exception. If the Hattiesburg region is to continue to grow in a sustainable way, it is imperative that Forrest and Lamar Counties embark on a comprehensive growth management plan with full collaboration with the Cities of Hattiesburg and Petal.

Growth management is an active and dynamic process that seeks to maintain an ongoing equilibrium between development, conservation, and infrastructure provision. It is a process that anticipates and accommodates development needs in a way that achieves local objectives and community vision.

The Metropolitan Hattiesburg area includes the Cities of Hattiesburg, Petal, Purvis, and Sumrall as well as Forrest and Lamar Counties. The City of Hattiesburg currently is in the process of updating the comprehensive plan to reflect Smart Growth Principles, a guide for the future. Neighborhood planning will serve as a key element in the grass roots approach to a city-wide plan.

The City's Neighborhood Improvement Program began in 1999 with a new neighborhood planning program called "Neighborhoods Building Hattiesburg's Future". Neighborhood planning endorses a planning process that is community-driven and outlines how the City will work with its neighborhoods.

Forrest County provides the following planning services:

- Geographic Information Systems.
- Plan Development.
- Data research, collection, and analysis; including, but not limited to, census and other demographic data.

- Grant source research, writing, and administration.
- Phase II Storm Water coordination.
- Environmental program management.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) develops long- and short-range transportation improvement plans for the Hattiesburg, Petal, Forrest, and Lamar urbanized areas. The MPO consists of representatives from the City of Hattiesburg, the City of Petal, Forrest County, and Lamar County.

In the 2006 session of the Mississippi Legislature, the Governor signed a special piece of legislation to help Lamar County with plan implementation. House Bill 1661 authorizes Lamar County to create zoning and development regulations for special portions of the County when prepared “in accordance with an applicable plan.” This legislation gives Lamar County a key advantage in managing and planning for smarter quality growth. *The County needs to identify those special areas and districts where zoning and development regulations make sense and initiate the necessary plans within the next 12 months, so that ordinances can be in place by 2008.*

SECTION 3.2

Practical Strategies for Growth Management Planning

If Lamar and Forrest Counties are to maintain high levels of services for their residents, preserve the local character, and respond to development proposals consistently, both jurisdictions will need a comprehensive growth strategy.

That strategy should include a description of the type of development, the level of service, and the values the community wishes to create or maintain. The vision is the long-range set of guidelines for the community, projected at 5-year intervals for the next 20 years. It is the legacy that the community wishes to leave behind.

The strategy should include an inventory of what currently exists in the community and what growth in population can reasonably be expected to occur in the next 5 to 10 years. Economic and demographic projections also are necessary.

Maps showing present and future land uses are needed to help the public visualize the future. These maps translate the community vision into specifics. Economic conditions, including commercial and employment centers, activity hubs, and regional economic trends, should be included.

Housing choices and access to goods and services is an essential element. Housing type, location, and appearance should be consistent with the community vision. Critically important is the capacity of current infrastructure and knowledge of where future facilities can be located, as well as appropriate timing for repair and extension.

Many communities develop benchmarks or indicators of success as part of their growth management planning process. These indicators may measure such things as environmental quality, economic opportunity, quality of education, community health, and civic participation. These are elements that are important to all residents, regardless of where they live in the region. Development of benchmarks is a good activity for collaboration, because it

shows the community's diverse population that they share many common values.

A comprehensive growth management plan is a guidance document. It must be flexible enough to change as circumstances within the community change, but it should reflect the community's value system to the extent that the spirit of the document is always preserved and reflected in growth and development decisions. The real "teeth" in the growth management process comes with regulation. The goals, values, and vision expressed in the growth management plan should be protected by a set of equitable and realistic regulations that encourage quality growth and create an equal playing field for the development community. *Communities across the country that have failed to create a set of meaningful land use regulations frequently are the victims of haphazard, unattractive, unsustainable development. All local jurisdictions should seek consistency between their codes, regulations, and capital investment plans and their growth management plan. Metropolitan Hattiesburg will find greater success if the growth management plans, transportation plans, and other infrastructure spending is coordinated on a regional scale.*

To this end we believe that a regional planning conference, a "Summit" that includes leaders and planners from Lamar and Forrest counties, the cities of Hattiesburg, Sumrall, Petal, Purvis, and Lumberton be scheduled to discuss the toolkit this study provides and to adopt and schedule a common set of planning goals, as well as their actual implementation in the very foreseeable future. Hattiesburg and its regional neighbors embody enormous potential for economic growth and the magnification of the quality of life that the area enjoys. Cooperation in planning is, we believe, mandatory for the good of all. Consistent, common stewardship of an ordered and managed growth is essential. Without it, discordant growth is almost certainly assured. This threatens the quality of life of the whole area — it should not come to pass. ***The time to act together is now.***