

## APPENDIX 9

### III. APPROACH TO INTEGRATING EXISTING PLAN <sup>1</sup>

Many communities that developed comprehensive plans in the 1990s already had some form of plan document on the books. Some of these documents were revised and updated both to meet the requirements of the Growth Management Law and to reflect current issues and opportunities. But for the numerous towns whose existing comprehensive plans were modest in scope and detail, the typical approach was to scrap the earlier document and to start from scratch.

Now, with much more substantial comprehensive plans in place, these communities are faced with an important decision regarding the extent to which their existing plan should be revised as part of an update process. A number of different options exist, each with pros and cons regarding cost, organization, continuity with past planning efforts, ease of future updating and other factors.

#### Option 1: Selectively Revised/Updated Plan

Even with a 10-year-old plan, you may find that much of its material is still relevant. Rather than writing an entirely new plan, you may opt to selectively revise and update specific sections.

This approach has the advantage of focusing the plan update project on those portions of the plan that truly need updating. It is more cost-effective and less time than a total rewrite. Inventory maps that still provide accurate can be left intact or given minor For the inventory, the focus

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generally consuming sections or information updates. should be

on providing an up-to-date analysis of current and projected issues. For the policy component, the emphasis should be on determining which policies and implementation strategies should be retained or revised in the updated plan, as well as what new policies and strategies are needed. This approach works best when the plan being updated is a well-written and organized document that lends itself to easy modification and addition.

If, on the other hand, the original plan has significant weaknesses in organization or content, using it as a template for an updated plan may merely perpetuate the earlier plan's weaknesses.

Be aware that the approach of selectively revising an existing plan may have the effect of hampering efforts to take a fresh look at issues or problems, or embrace new policies. Sometimes a tendency exists to leave existing language alone, even when it is of limited usefulness or relevance. And there are instances when selectively updating and revising existing language can be more cumbersome than rewriting – and lead to a less coherent product.

#### Option 2: New Policy Section/Updated Inventory

A variation in the approach described above is to make necessary updates to the inventory sections, but to restructure and rewrite the policy sections of the plan. This approach may lend

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from: Updating Your Comprehensive Plan: 50 Recommendations for Making Plan Updates More Effective, Maine State Planning Office, April 2003

itself best to a format in which the policy section is distinct rather than integrated with the inventory section. The selectively revised inventory section might constitute one volume of the plan, and the rewritten policy section, which could include a review of major inventory findings, another. To retain a degree of connection to the earlier plan, this section might also include a discussion of what policies and strategies were revised from the previous plan and why.

This approach has the advantages of allowing a selective update of the inventory section, while providing an opportunity to take a fresh look at the policy section. Most of the recommendations of this handbook pertain to the policy section of the plan, and their consideration may substantially change the content and emphasis of this section. A rewrite also provides for more flexibility in reorganizing this most crucial section of the plan in a way that seems most effective and user-friendly.

### **Option 3: Plan Supplement**

Some communities may evaluate their comprehensive plans and determine that they are working quite well. Instead of substantially revising the existing plan or writing a whole new one, your community may choose instead to develop a plan “supplement” that highlights the information and policies that have been changed from the existing plan. Under this approach, the previous plan would be retained essentially in its current form and serve as a compendium or appendix to the supplement.

This may be the “easiest” and least costly approach to an update project. It allows the community to build on its current plan, but avoids the need to integrate new information into an existing document or to create an entirely new comprehensive policy section. The supplement may lend itself well to a discussion of how the existing plan can be strengthened by considering some of the recommendations of this handbook and other refinements.

A possible disadvantage of this approach is that, unless carefully handled, it may result in an overall format that is difficult or confusing to use. The reader may need to jump back and forth between the supplement and the previous plan to ascertain what information is still current and what policies are still in force. This limitation might be overcome by making the supplement a more comprehensive distillation of relevant policy-related components from the previous plan. At this point, however, the supplement would begin to more closely resemble the format of Option 2 described above.

A supplement may be most appropriate if the existing plan is relatively recent and effective, but the community wishes to make adjustments or to focus in on a particular issue or topic area. In light of the weaknesses of the Land Use Plans and their linkages to Capital Investment Planning in many 1990s plan, a supplement that concentrates on these areas may allow for a relatively clean mid-course adjustment.

### **Option 4: Entirely New Plan**

For a variety of reasons, a community may decide that it wants its plan update to be an entirely new document – one that references and uses some information from the previous plan, but which otherwise starts again from scratch in integrating the old and new into a coherent whole. This approach would likely involve a review and update of the inventory and analysis section to focus on the most pertinent information. The policy and implementation section would integrate

existing, revised and new policies and strategies, with some sort of discussion of what changes were made from the current plan's approach and why.

This approach has the advantage of providing a comprehensive update of the previous plan. Although it may involve significant additional writing, it avoids the time-consuming and sometimes tedious task of trying to revise existing plan language and structure new components so that they work with existing ones. This approach may have particular merit when the community feels that its existing plan lacks a coherent organization or has other major problems.

This approach has the disadvantage of making the plan update into a major undertaking that may exceed the financial and time resources of some communities. The reinvention of the inventory section may itself prove to be an expensive and time-consuming exercise – a scenario that runs counter to the recommendation of this handbook to de-emphasize that component. In taking this route, communities should be careful that the strengths and lessons of the earlier plan are not lost, and that the emphasis should remain on the policy section of the plan.