Chapter 6

Land Use Alternatives or Scenarios

Included in this chapter:

- Definition of Land Use Alternatives or Scenarios
- Purpose of Creating Alternatives
- Guiding Principles
- Scenario Building
- Public Involvement

Introduction

The community has arrived at a step within the land use process that is critical for the future of the community. Exploring land use alternatives or scenarios is the creative, fun, visual part of the land use element. Up to this point in the process a number of items have been drafted: a land use inventory and current land use map; a land use analysis; and goals, objectives, policies and programs. The next step in preparing the land use element is to understand what is appropriate, feasible and possible through an exploration of different land use alternatives or scenarios.

After exploring several alternatives and selecting one, the community will prepare a future land use map based on a preferred alternative.

No statutory language in Wis. Stat. 66.1001 requires any community to prepare alternatives for a comprehensive plan. Exploring land use alternatives is an accepted step in a community or comprehensive planning process. The consideration of alternatives can occur through a formal process where different future land use maps are compared or an informal process where the community discusses alternatives without creating and printing a series of maps.
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Definition of Land Use Alternatives or Scenarios

Creating alternatives or scenarios is a process whereby the present situation is transformed by description and through maps or other visuals, such as photographs or drawings, to a situation in the future. Often three main elements are produced: a description of the present situation, a number of alternatives or scenarios, and possible pathways that connect the present situation with images of the future. The idea behind scenarios is to design future images and then “backcast” to the present situation. The primary question in backcasting is how can future possibilities or desired situations be realized?

Purpose of Creating Alternatives

The purpose of this step is to establish a preferred land use alternative. In that sense, it is focused only on the land use element. However, referring back to the first chapter with the hub and wheel diagram, remember that many of the other elements, such as economic development, housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, and agricultural, natural and cultural resources feed into the land use element. All of those uses of land must be accounted for. The scenarios that are developed serve the purpose of referring the community back to its vision, goals and objectives. In that sense, the scenarios are theme-based, are connected to the vision, and can be illustrated with photographs, drawings, etc. Alternatives can address community character and natural resources preservation and can test public reaction to competing goals and objectives, before finalizing them. To reiterate, the land use element brings together many of the other elements of the plan. This opportunity for integration is an important step in the overall process of drafting a plan.

Guiding Principles

Exploring alternatives is one of the most creative steps in preparing the land use element. The following points can be used as community planners, a planning committee or plan commission moves into this step.

1. Return to the overriding goals or vision of the community. For example, if the community discussed maintaining its rural character, it is useful in a scenario building exercise to explore the meaning of rural.

2. Use the analyses from the previous chapter to inform your discussions.

3. Remind participants to think “out of the box” and creatively.

4. Remember that this is not necessarily a purely economic or financial question. Scenarios should think through social and environmental implications as well.

5. Keep ideas on the table that seem implausible, but may spur discussion. While some scenarios may not be feasible for any number of reasons, it may create useful discussions within the community.

6. Decide on a formal or informal process of discussing alternatives. Through a facilitated process, participants can explore various scenarios and rule.

Developing land use alternatives is not required as part of state statutes, however it is a logical step for communities when determining future land uses in a plan.
out those that are not suitable for the community. The future land use map (Chapter 7) is created from a chosen scenario or a hybrid of various scenarios.

7. Determine if there is a need to revise draft goals/objectives/policies. Depending on the outcome of the discussion over land use alternatives, the community may want to revise their goals, objectives and policies. The chosen alternative may not be accurately reflected in the draft goals, objectives and policies.

8. Determine who is making the decision on the preferred alternative and how that decision is getting made. It is critical that the decision making process is agreed upon.

Scenario Building

In building scenarios, the idea is to come up with enough different scenarios so certain scenarios can be ruled out, given vision, goals and objectives. Put another way, the community is going through a process of comparing multiple scenarios of what “could be” and selecting the most appropriate one given the community vision, goals and objectives. The scenarios can be primarily visual or may also include a written story. It is useful to include a brief description of the process that was used to create and select the preferred scenario, but only the chosen scenario needs to be included within the comprehensive plan. One useful way to compare and contrast one scenario with another is to prepare a full build out of the community using current policies and regulations that are in place. This technique was discussed in Chapter 4. In the event that a town does not have any zoning, for example, a full build out could be accomplished by repeating the predominant pattern (perhaps a mixture of 5, 10 and 35 acre lots). This status quo picture will give the community an opportunity to decide if it is going to accomplish its vision and goals using its current policies and regulations. Each scenario should be discussed in terms of its advantages and disadvantages.

A Few Examples To Consider

Most communities need to accommodate more residential growth and the accompanying demand for parks and open space. One way to think through these needs and desires is to ask participants, in a workshop setting or on-line survey, about their preferences for different types of housing density and subdivision designs. At the same time, you can also identify the types of parks and/or open space people desire.

Another way to explore various land use alternatives is to think about unanticipated trends or events. For example, if your community were to grow much faster than anticipated, how would the community be impacted? How would the community respond to additional demands for housing, more school children, increased demand for local government services and for retail, among other impacts? Would increased investments be necessary for utilities and community facilities? There are many other questions that can and should be generated.

Public Involvement

Encouraging public participation during this step is useful. Sometimes scenarios that show very different futures can create a lively discussion and engage citizens that have had a difficult time comprehending the more
abstract steps of this process such as written goals and objectives.

Because exploring scenarios often is a visual exercise, the public can readily be involved with the use of photographs, maps and other visual tools. For example, if a community in their vision has mentioned they would like to “preserve its rural character,” citizens can be asked to identify the meaning of “rural character” by taking pictures of their community. It is probably easier for citizens to agree over a series of photos with an experienced facilitator deriving basic design elements from those photographs.

Public participation techniques can be as simple as using tracing paper and crayons or markers or can be made far more complex with the use of advanced Geographic Information Systems and visualization techniques. The techniques used depend upon the comfort level of the participants in the process, the expertise of the facilitator, and the resources allocated to this particular step. Usually the more technologically advanced the techniques, the more costly the step.

Chapter 7 describes how to prepare a future land use map, a natural progression of the selection of a scenario.
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Example of Alternative Future Scenarios

The following two sets of images shows scenarios for different communities in Wisconsin. The first community, the Town of Springfield, is subject to significant growth pressure because of its proximity to the Madison area. The second set of maps shows development concepts for the area around the City of Sparta, Wisconsin. This type of analysis examines alternative land use concepts and separately lists (through a public participation process) the advantages and disadvantages of each land use.

By creating a series of scenarios, a community can create appropriate land use policies to achieve the vision it has set for itself.

This first scenario shows what the town would look like in roughly 40 years if it developed according to current policies—relatively scattered rural houses (yellow dots) with low density expansion of a nearby city and village.
This second scenario shows the same amount of development in the town in the future. However, rural homesites are smaller and clustered closer to each other and city and village growth would be at a slightly higher density. This scenario would require more adjustments in local land use policies and recommendations.
This third scenario again shows the same amount of future development in the town area. However, in this scenario, future development would be directed to city and village expansion areas. This scenario would require a significant change in local policies, such as a transfer of development rights program. These three maps are courtesy of Vandewalle and Associates.
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The following analysis examines alternative land use concepts by listing the different advantages and disadvantages of each. The alternatives are graphically presented on the Development Concepts Map on the facing page. The number corresponds to the location of the land use area on the map.

Development Concept 1

Open Space/Environmental Corridor Area #1
Advantages:
• Naturally provided.
• Unsuitable soils for development.
• The backbone of why many people live in the area - to enjoy their life.
Disadvantages:
• Requires protection.
• Restricts use and abuse of the land.

Park Areas #2 and #3
Advantages:
• Physically attractive areas.
• Located in both the Town and the City.
Disadvantages:
• Some land acquisition necessary.

Industrial Area #4
Advantages:
• Good access to I-90.
• Generally level land.
• Partially located in the City.
• Partially owned by the City.
Disadvantages:
• Needs utility extensions.

Industrial Area #5
Advantages:
• Level land.
• Access to I-90.
• Visibility from I-90.
• Adjacent to the railroad
Disadvantages:
• Needs utility extensions.
• Many residential uses in the area.

Industrial Area #6
Advantages:
• Level land.
• Good access to STH 16.
Disadvantages:
• Needs utility extensions.
• Would be adjacent to a residential area.
• Access to I-90 is through a corner of the City.

Industrial Area #7
Advantages:
• Level land.
• Owned by the City.
• Utilities available
• Adjacent to the railroad
Disadvantages:
• Not readily accessible to I-90. Would benefit with better access to I-90.

Industrial Area #8
Advantages:
• Level land.
• Adjacent to the railroad, I-90 and STH 16.
• Some of the land owned by the City.
• Some of the land currently an active City industrial park.
Disadvantages:
• Consists of many smaller parcels.
• Some of the site not readily accessible to I-90. Would benefit with better access to I-90.
• Some of the site needs extension of utilities.

Industrial Area #9
Advantages:
• Visibility from I-90.
• Reasonably level Land.
Disadvantages:
• Several residential units in the area.
• Not conveniently accessible to I-90. Would benefit with better access to I-90.
• Needs utility extension.

Institutional Area #10
Advantages:
• Expandable Site
• Significant infrastructure.
• Desirable location.
• County Ownership.
• Served by City Sewer
Disadvantages:
• The County does provide their water supply on site. It is not part of a larger system.

Institutional Area #11
Advantages:
• Expandable Site.
• Level Land.
• Utilities available
Disadvantages:
• Not currently owned by the School District.

Institutional Area #11A
Advantages:
• Partly owned by the County.
• Good access to STH 16 and I-90.
• Reasonably level Land. Expandable site.
Disadvantages:
• A variety of land uses in the area.

Single Family Residential Area #12
Advantages:
• Adjacent to existing residential uses.
• Some level Land.
• Aesthetically desirable land.
Disadvantages:
• Some steep slopes in the area.
• This is a very large area.
• Needs utility extensions if it is to be sewered.

Single Family Residential Area #13
Advantages:
• Adjacent to existing residential uses.
• Some level Land.
• Aesthetically desirable land.
Disadvantages:
• Some steep slopes in the area.
• Needs utility extensions if it is to be sewered.
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Map 3  Developmental Concepts

Sparta, Wisconsin
July 17, 2002

Map Legend

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These images are courtesy of Mid-America Planning Services, Inc. (MAPS)
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