

# INTRODUCTION:

## EXCELSIOR SPRINGS PLAN

### A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

*Excelsior Springs is a vibrant, historic community in a strategic location for future growth. The city's prospects present both exciting challenges and opportunities.*

Excelsior Springs' unique history began with the discovery of its mineral waters in the late 1800s. Founded in 1880 the city grew as a destination for healing waters. Its numerous mineral wells attracted people from a large region to come experience "America's Heaven of Health." The city used its special features to grow and prosper well into the 1960s when changes in medical science caught up with the city. The city's economy was forever changed but not its unique beauty, character, and history. The Excelsior Springs Plan is designed to provide a comprehensive vision of the city's future, based on taking actions that will improve the lives of residents and make the city uniquely attractive for potential growth.

### **The Role of a Comprehensive Plan**

The comprehensive development plan for Excelsior Springs has two fundamental purposes. The first provides an essential legal basis for land use regulation such as zoning and subdivision control. Secondly, a modern comprehensive plan presents a unified and compelling vision for a community, derived from the aspirations of its citizens; and establishes the specific actions necessary to fulfill that vision.

### **Legal Role**

Communities prepare and adopt comprehensive plans for legal purposes. Missouri State Statutes enable cities to prepare a plan for the "general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated development of the municipality which will ... best promote the general welfare, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development." Land use regulations, such as zoning ordinances, recognize that people in a community live cooperatively and have certain responsibilities to one another. These regulations establish rules that govern how land is developed within a municipality. The comprehensive plan creates a vision for how a community should develop and thus should guide land use decisions.

### **The Community Building Role**

A comprehensive development plan has an even more significant role in the growth of a community. Based on the participation of residents in the planning of their community, the plan establishes a picture of Excelsior Springs' future. This vision continues to be crucial, as challenges related to population growth and economic changes affect the character of Excelsior Springs. The plan is designed as a working document that both defines the future and provides a working program for realizing the city's great potential.

## **The Comprehensive Plan: Approach and Format**

The comprehensive plan takes a thematic and goal-oriented approach to the future development of Excelsior Springs. The plan is laid out in ten chapters or themes that correspond to the city's most important strategic issues. The traditional sections of a comprehensive plan, such as land use, housing, infrastructure, and transportation, are organized as leading components of each chapter. This enables the plan to tell the story of the city's future development and presents an integrated program for the city's growth.

The plans chapters include:

### **1. Strategic Planning Process**

This section summarizes the findings of the community participation process and identifies key issues and perspectives identified by stakeholders. Based on this process the plan's goals and guiding principles are established. The chapter identifies "Development Principles," the general principles and ideas that guide the more detailed elements of the plan.

### **2. A Profile of Excelsior Springs**

This chapter considers Excelsior Springs's population characteristics and growth, its role in the region, and its emergence as a vital center for government, services, residential development, education and recreation. Through population and land use analysis this theme considers the future growth and development needs of the city.

### **3. Growth and Land Use**

This chapter considers one of Excelsior Springs's most critical issues - how to accommodate growth and in what direction that growth should occur. It provides a detailed strategy to guide future growth in new development areas.

### **4. A Recreation Lifestyle**

This section describes Excelsior Springs's parks and sports facilities and outdoor recreation as a part of the regional recreation opportunities available to Excelsior Springs' residents. It presents improvement plans for new and existing parks and trails to be integrated into the city's growth, housing, and regional tourism efforts.

### **5. Quality Public Services**

This section inventories Excelsior Springs' public facilities and services and provides a program of recommendations. This includes an examination of the functionality and conditions of Excelsior Springs' vehicular and non-vehicular transportation systems.

## **6. Housing and Neighborhoods**

This chapter examines housing demand characteristics, and presents strategies to assure that each area maintains a positive state of health. Important issues include the preservation of the city's older and historic housing stock, as well as provisions for additional rental and affordable housing opportunities.

## **7. Downtown Excelsior Springs**

This section proposes an innovative development program for the city's vital town center, a distinctive place that remains an active mixed use center. This theme analyzes downtown, and presents a multi-faceted downtown development program that includes the public environment, redevelopment opportunities, and management strategies designed to improve the district's already historic environment. It is designed to create opportunities for additional business, and to improve the functioning and financial success of the district.

## **8. The Character of the Community**

This section addresses improvements to Excelsior Spring's public environment that can enhance the city's civic quality and appearance to residents and visitors.

## **9. Implementation**

This chapter draws together the analysis and policies of the plan into a program for implementation. It summarizes the recommendations and development policies of the plan, and presents an Implementation Schedule, listing proposed projects and the time frame for their completion.

# **CHAPTER ONE: A VISION FOR EXCELSIOR SPRINGS**

## **GOALS FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

*Excelsior Springs' residents and business owners are critical assets and their participation was essential to the planning process. The Excelsior Springs Comprehensive Plan includes a thorough public participation program, giving stakeholders the opportunity to frame the goals and directions of the Plan. This chapter of the Plan presents the vision for the community, from community members.*

The specific components of the public participation process included:

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

#### **A Steering Committee**

A Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, representing a wide variety of community interests, was the primary contributor to this process. Committee members met regularly to assist in identifying issues, developing vision statements, and prioritizing the community's goals. They also reviewed the progress of the overall plan.

#### **Community Questionnaire**

To begin the planning process, a community questionnaire was completed by over 130. The survey provided insight on important community services and facilities. The results helped to frame the issues and goals for the community, and were addressed in more detail during focus group meetings. The results of the community survey are located in Appendix A.

#### **Focus Group Meetings**

Focus group meetings were held in November 2008. Residents, business and property owners, financial institutions, and public officials participated in roundtable discussions to share their opinions of the community and its future opportunities. An overview of comments from the Focus Group meetings is located in Appendix A.

#### **Community Strategic Planning Workshop**

A community wide workshop was also held in November of 2008. Interested residents were invited to share their thoughts on the issues and opportunities for Excelsior Springs over the next 20 years.

#### **Community Presentation**

A community presentation was held in January 2009 where the Plan's First Principles were presented to residents. A summary of the public input process and Community Profile (Chapter 2) were outlined to the public as the building blocks for the First Principles or guiding goals for the Plan and the future of Excelsior Springs.

## **Design Workshops**

Two public design workshops were used to engage residents, business owners, and other stakeholders in the planning process. The first workshop, held in February 2009 focused on the entire city. The second workshop, held in April of 2009, focused on opportunities for the downtown. Participants shared their ideas, issues, and concerns informally with planners and designers, while ideas were illustrated for their reactions. The results of the city wide workshop are the basis of the Development Plan outlined in Chapter 3. Results from the Downtown Workshop are presented in Chapter 7.

## **Open House**

### **Process Not Completed**

## **FIRST PRINCIPLES**

The First Principles are the guiding principles or policies of the Excelsior Springs Comprehensive Plan. Formulating and adopting policies as part of the comprehensive planning process are important for a number of reasons. Some of these include:

- Providing advance notice to private decision-makers, including developers, builders, and property owners, about basic principles that will guide Excelsior Springs' public decisions. This helps these groups make decisions more efficiently, avoiding conflicts and wasting time and money.
- Providing a framework for consistent decision-making, while providing flexibility for review of individual situations.
- Keeping decisions oriented to overall community goals.
- Increasing interagency communication and cooperation, assuring that different bodies act in accord with similar assumptions.
- Providing a firmer basis for evaluating the costs and benefits of public investments, and their consistency with overall policy objectives.
- Providing for public participation in local government, helping to implement ideas that grow from citizens of the area.
- Providing a general basis for interpreting and applying the comprehensive plan, maintaining the flexibility to respond to individual situations.

- Giving staff a context for developing recommendations for action by local government.

In developing this section, input from the Steering Committee, residents, and city staff was integrated with the demographic, economic, and land use information detailed in Chapters 2 and 3. The committee evaluated preliminary principal statements and action items, and clarified them as needed. These were then presented to the public for further comment.

The subsequent sections of the Excelsior Springs Plan provide more detailed directions toward implementing these policies and, in some ways, illustrate the physical outcome of their application. Decisions by public officials should be grounded in these concepts and directions. However, policies are guidelines rather than laws. Situations arise that require a flexible rather than literal application of these statements. Sometimes, a new or changed policy can create substantial benefits to the city and its residents, and still remain consistent with overall community goals.

### **Growth and Land Use**

*Excelsior Springs will grow as a unified community through attractive and sustainable land development.*

- Encourage land use concepts that respect landforms and improve on conventional development practices.
- Expand infrastructure into areas that provide maximum yield, efficiency and consistency with plan objectives.
- Connect all parts of the city with a balanced transportation system that provides convenient vehicular access and encourages active transportation.
- Establish land use regulations that relate to the vision of the comprehensive plan.
- Balance development between new development on the edges of the city and reinvestment in older portions of the city.
- Establish incentives for the conservation of established neighborhoods.
- Reuse the old high school building and other underused structures of community importance.
- Use annexation policy to expand the city's tax base, provide areas for future growth, and preserve critical green space.
- Consider the land use effects of transportation decisions and projects.
- Plan for community commercial nodes that serve present and future populations and provide attractive and welcoming destinations for residents and visitors.
- Identify and encourage business park development that capitalizes on natural and locational assets.
- Improve access routes and transportation links to the interstate and the Kansas City Metro Area.

## **Downtown Development**

*Downtown Excelsior Springs will maintain its role as the city's image center and core of civic life. Economic and physical development initiatives will combine to conserve and enhance this unique district.*

- Implement a downtown development program rooted in markets and the district's distinctive features.
- Focus on strategic projects such as the Royal Hotel building to avoid "demolition by neglect"
- Develop policies and remove obstacles to upper level adaptive reuse, including downtown residential development.
- Engage residential property owners in programs to improve downtown housing.
- Complete Historic Design Standards for new construction and major renovation projects.
- Position the Hall of Waters as a community attraction, including better utilization of the Water Bar and spa.
- Provide adequate parking to support residential needs in and around the downtown.
- Establish a downtown brand based on the springs and mineral waters.
- Establish public use and access to the museum.
- Find more functionally appropriate locations for human service providers.

## **Economic Development**

*Excelsior Springs will promote and encourage economic development activities that capitalize on community assets, support the needs of present and future residents, and strive to ensure a stable and diverse economic base.*

- Excelsior Springs' business leaders should come together to form an Economic Development Group.
- The city, chamber, and economic development group should establish an industrial park.
- Improve connections to I-35 and take action on the Smart Moves work.
- Work with state and local leaders to create tax incentives for residential and commercial developments.
- Promote rail service to industrial areas.
- Create financing programs for improvements to existing businesses.
- Invest in and market major quality of life features such as parks, clean air, cultural amenities, and natural resources.

## **Tourism**

*Excelsior Springs will improve its balance of trade by establishing itself as a regional destination, capitalizing on the historical and commercial assets of the city.*

- Work with Downtown Excelsior Springs Partnerships and Chamber to establish a paid position that is focused on tourism development in Excelsior Springs.

- Establish a marketing plan and campaign focused on the city’s market region.
- Work to establish a movie theater.
- Evaluate ways to develop and promote the mineral waters.
- Create a network of attractions, focusing on evocative assets such as the Hall of Waters and the Elms.
- Identify two additional community attractions.
- Link the city’s natural and built environment.
- Develop “wayfinding” signage that will guide visitors around the city and to key attractions.

### **Recreation and Community Wellness**

*Excelsior Springs will become a healthier city by providing attractive recreation resources to residents and visitors, and providing infrastructure that encourages physical activity.*

- Develop a new, multi-use Community Center. Identify a location that functions well, enjoys convenient access by a variety of modes, and is perceived as being the territory of all residents.
- Initiate a community-based process to program and guide the development of a new community center.
- Ensure that the center meets the needs of all generations.
- Improve the city’s existing parks and upgrade park service for all residents.
- Develop and implement an affordable long-range parks plan for the development of an overall parks system. Consider the green system to provide a hierarchy of parks and open spaces, connected to one another.
- Incorporate active transportation into the fabric of the community.
- Encourage the development of commercial recreation.

### **Human Services**

*Excelsior Springs will convene providers of human services to improve critical services and help residents in need, and move clients toward self-sufficiency and economic independence.*

- Consider a Human Services Campus that coordinates efforts, improves economic efficiency, and provides better service to clients.
- Initiate a process involving stakeholders to establish a coordinated program and consider sites for such a campus.
- Encourage public and private partnerships to address housing (assisted living, subsidized, and affordable), job training, drug and alcohol abuse treatment, and other human services.

## **Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization**

*Excelsior Springs will preserve its housing stock and offer a variety of safe, affordable housing alternatives in attractive neighborhoods.*

- Establish a community housing partnership that includes a nonprofit development corporation and financing sources to fill market needs not easily met by the private market.
- Encourage local financial institutions to finance rehabilitation of existing housing.
- Sponsor periodic forums with planning and building staff, building contractors, realtors, and other interested persons to review codes and procedures.
- Maintain and enforce the International Building Code.
- Support efforts to provide a variety of housing types and densities to meet emerging demands.
- Create a rental and property owner association that works to build and maintain quality rental property.
- Build on the character and identification of existing neighborhoods.
- Assemble vacant and dilapidated properties in the downtown for infill development
- Implement a comprehensive corridor enhancement along Isley Boulevard.
- Establish neighborhood improvement districts.
- Expand the police presence in troubled neighborhoods, along with expansion of voluntary efforts such as neighborhood watches.
- Decrease densities in specific neighborhoods.
- Establish a street and sidewalk improvement program for older portions of the city.

## **Community Services**

*Excelsior Springs will support community services that support and direct future development, ensure effectiveness and efficiency, and control public costs.*

- Upgrade water and sewer systems in the older parts of town.
- Improve telephone and wireless access in the city.
- Expand infrastructure into areas that provide maximum yield and efficiency and consistency with plan objectives.