

## CHAPTER 5

# Phase II: Community Visioning

### Step 1: Community Visioning: Develop Vision Statements, Goals, and Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to review Phase II, Step 1 of the Master Planning Process – Community Visioning. As stated earlier, community visioning is now a mandatory component for all master plans in New Hampshire. Two of the most frequently asked questions about community visioning are “Why should my community be interested in undertaking a visioning process?” and “What does visioning involve?” People want to know the benefits of visioning and how to conduct the visioning process in their own cities or towns.

Visioning is a process by which a community decides the future it wants and then plans how to achieve it (Ames, 1993). Community visioning projects are now fairly common-place. They can take a variety of forms and are unique to each locality, but most visioning processes generally ask four fundamental questions: (1) Where are we now? (2) Where are we going? (3) Where do we want to be? and (4) How do we get there? (Ames, 1993).

The primary purpose of a visioning process should be to develop a set of vision statements, community goals, and objectives that best articulate the desires of the citizens about the future of the community. These vision statements serve to direct the other sections of the master plan, as required by RSA 674:2 II. They offer the guiding principles and priorities upon which the master plan is based. The decision of how to approach the visioning process should not be taken lightly; a well-planned and organized visioning process will ensure that your master plan is understood and accepted by the community.

Visioning processes engage the public in many ways through a variety of tools, including community surveys/questionnaires, community mapping exercises, focus groups/public forums, study circles, community workshops, blue-ribbon committees, community



*Nothing happens  
unless first a dream.*

- Carl Sandburg

tours, newsletters, and special events (see Chapter 10, “Tools and Techniques”). Each technique is designed to gain public input regarding the future of the community. Through public involvement, communities identify their purpose, core values, and vision of the future, all of which is then transformed into manageable and feasible community goals and an action plan.

Visioning is an absolute must for any master planning project. It should be initiated at the very beginning and continued throughout the duration of the planning process. Approaches to visioning should be varied, and they should be tailored to the individual community and its circumstances.

The results of your community's visioning will have a strong presence in the resulting master planning document, both in substance and in style. In some communities, the visioning process may be considered so important that it is given its own event. A community may convene a special meeting, or a series of meetings, to develop a community vision. The primary product of such an event would be a guide for subsequent planning. Usually the vision is followed by the development of specific strategies and an action plan the community wishes to follow. The visioning process may also be "folded," or integrated, into the public participation techniques employed in the master planning process.

## The Visioning Process

Creating a common vision requires several actions to complete the process. Here is one example of how it might go over the course of several working sessions.

- Brainstorm ideas and capture them on flip charts or by other means.
- Break into small groups and discuss and record ideas more fully.
- Present small group discussions to the larger group.
- Gather similar ideas together.
- Assign responsibility for gathering additional information needed.
- Determine focus areas to ascertain if environmental, economic, and social attributes are captured.

Once the additional information is collected, bring together stakeholders to

- develop scenarios for alternative futures
- produce a pictorial/graphic representation of those alternative futures
- create the first draft of the vision statement

- circulate the draft vision statement and gather feedback from community members
- revise the vision statement and circulate it again
- create the final vision statement

Please note that creating a vision statement may require time and work to achieve a broad consensus.

Additional outreach to the community via a community survey, newsletters, or newspaper articles may help to facilitate the process. For communities that have held a visioning event, it is recommended that upon completion, community action groups be formed to carry forward the ideas and projects to be implemented. Some useful ideas for additional public review include

- meetings with community organizations
- reviews with planning board, board of selectmen or city council
- public surveys or questionnaires
- presentations or displays at community events
- articles in local news media and community newsletters

## Visioning Models

A number of visioning models have been developed in cities and states across the country that can be considered when preparing the master plan (see also Chapter 10, "Tools and Techniques"). These models tend to vary with regard to how public participation occurs in the visioning process, how and when data is used in the workshops, and the length of time prescribed for conducting the process. Most are geared toward developing a broad community vision and action plan in a relatively short time period of time.

Consultants who specialize in community visioning and the use of visioning processes for master plan development are available for hire throughout New England as well as the rest of the country. The costs of their services vary, depending upon the type of process that is employed, the time involved, the amount of public participation, and the size of the community. Fees can range from as little as \$3,000 to well over \$20,000.

The University of New Hampshire (UNH) Cooperative Extension Office has developed the Community Profile Project, which offers communities an opportunity to undertake a visioning process that can be utilized in the preparation of a master plan (for more information about the Community Profile Project, see Chapter 10, “Tools and Techniques,” or see: <http://ceinfo.unh.edu>). This process enables communities to develop an action plan for the future by considering eleven different issue areas. For small communities with limited resources, as well as larger communities with numerous volunteers, the Community Profile Project is an excellent resource that can directly benefit the com-

munity and the development of a master plan.

If your community desires to undertake a more extensive visioning exercise, the Oregon Model is the most popular and commonly used example. The following article by Steven Ames is included here to provide more information about the Oregon Model. For a more in-depth treatment see *A Guide to Community visioning: Hands-on Information for Local Communities*, a handbook written by Steven Ames and published by the American Planning Association (see also the reference in Chapter 12, “Bibliography/Resources”).

## WHAT IS VISIONING?

### A Brief Introduction to the "Oregon Model"

By Steven C. Ames

Virtually every step forward in the progress of mankind has begun with a dream. Seeing something in the mind's eye has been the first step to achieving it in reality.

Visioning is a process through which a community envisions the future it wants, and then plans how to achieve it. It brings people together to develop a shared image of “where” they want their community to be in the future. Once a community has envisioned where it wants to be, it can begin consciously to work toward that goal.

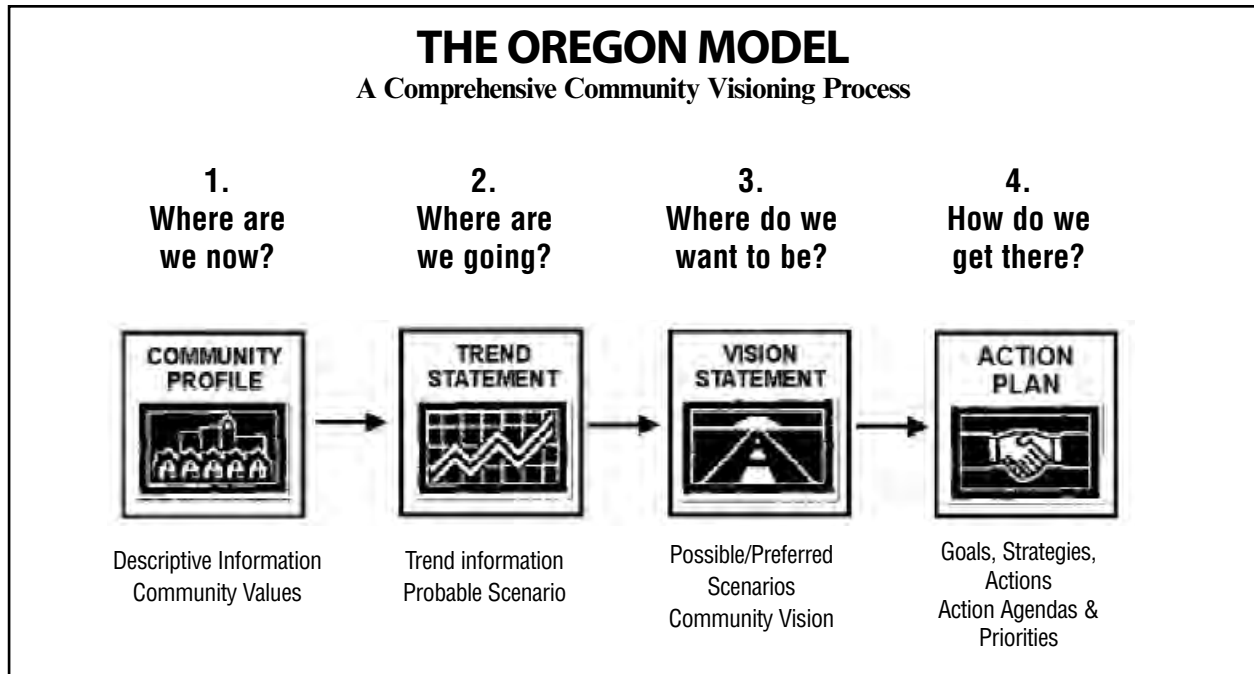
A vision is the guiding image of what a community would like to be, and a vision statement is the formal expression of such a vision. It depicts in words and images what the community seeks to become – how it would look, how it would function, how it might be different or better. A vision statement is also the starting point for the development and implementation of a strategic action plan that can help the community mobilize to achieve its vision over time. In undertaking a visioning process, a community can: better understand local strengths, weaknesses, and core community values; identify outside forces, trends, and issues that are shaping its future; articulate a preferred vision to guide its future directions; and develop the strategic tools to achieve its vision

### The Oregon Model: Comprehensive Community visioning

Oregon communities have been at the forefront of the use of visioning as a planning tool. Increasingly, visioning is used by local communities in Oregon to complement their state-mandated land use plans, introduce a broader dimension into local planning, and build greater consensus for preferred future directions. This trend fits well with the state's reputation for being innovative, forward-thinking and values-oriented.

In recent years, communities ranging in size from the largest city in the state (Portland) to some of its smallest (e.g., Yachats, Mosier), have engaged in community visioning projects. Each of their visioning experiences has been unique, providing new insights and lessons for the communities that have followed them.

Based on the work of the Oregon Visions Project, a committee of the Oregon Chapter of the American Planning Association, and the experience of local communities, an overall approach to community visioning has emerged. Because this approach directly reflects the visioning efforts of local communities around the state, we call it the "Oregon Model."



### The Four Steps of the Oregon Model

The Oregon Model for community visioning involves a comprehensive four-step process. Each step focuses on a driving question, involves different activities, and results in specific products. While all four steps are recommended, a community may choose to follow only some of them or to undertake specific activities at different points in the process. The model allows for these kinds of changes and flexibility. The four steps in the Oregon Model are:

**Step One: Profiling the Community** The first step is to profile the community as it exists in the present. This involves identifying and describing key characteristics of the area, such as geography, natural resources, population, demographics, the local economy and labor force, political and community institutions, housing, transportation, education resources, and cultural and recreational resources. An assessment of community strengths and weaknesses is prepared. This step also typically includes the development of a statement of community values that articulates core beliefs shared by community members.

- **Driving question:** "Where are we now?"
- **Activities:** Research and data collection, compilation and analysis. If a values statement is developed, additional activities such as a community survey, community meetings, etc., may be required.
- **Products:** Community profile, strength and

weaknesses assessment, values statement.

**Step Two: Analyzing the Trends** The second step is to determine where the community is headed if current trends and activities continue. It involves analyzing research to determine current and projected trends, and their potential impact on the community. A "probable scenario," describing what the community will look like at some point in the future if it stays on its current course, may be developed. (As discussed later, additional "possible scenarios" also may be developed.)

- **Driving question:** "Where are we going?"
- **Activities:** Determination of current and projected trends, assessment of their future impact. Creation of a probable scenario (or alternative possible scenarios) through a taskforce, work groups, community meetings and brainstorming sessions, or other means.
- **Products:** Trend Statement, probable scenario, additional possible scenarios.

**Step Three: Creating the Vision** The next step involves the actual creation of a vision for the future, describing what the community seeks to become. Based on identified community values, a "preferred scenario" is developed to describe what the community will look like if it responds to emerging trends and issues in a proactive manner. Ultimately, the community's formal vision statement is based on this scenario.

While developing the vision statement involves imagination and creativity, the process is also firmly grounded in reality. By basing the preferred scenario on concrete facts and trends identified through the visioning process, citizens create a vision that is both realistic and achievable.

- **Driving question:** "Where do we want to be?"
- **Activities:** Creation of a preferred scenario and final vision statement through task forces, work groups, community meetings, brainstorming session, or other means.
- **Products:** Preferred scenario, vision statement.

**Step Four: Developing an Action Plan** Once the vision has been created, a strategic action plan to achieve it can be developed. The action plan should be as specific as possible, including actions to be taken, assignment of responsibilities, timelines, costs, opportunities and constraints, and more.

- **Driving question:** "How do we get there?"
- **Activities:** Identification of goals, strategies, action, implementation agendas and priorities through a task force, work groups, or stakeholder meetings. The action plan may also be linked to the development of a community benchmarking system to measure progress in achieving community goals.
- **Product:** Action plan(s).

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## **Incorporating Vision Statements, Goals, and Objectives into a Master Plan**

It may seem like a straightforward task, but incorporating the vision statements, goals, and objectives developed as a result of a community visioning process into a master plan, may not be as easy as it seems. Vision statements can come in all shapes and sizes. Typically they are expressed as general recommendations, goals, concepts, or ideals. They can also identify likes and dislikes, as well as the pros and cons of specific topics. It is extremely important in the preparation of a master plan that your vision

statements articulate the desires and ideals of your community in a clear and definitive fashion. In other words, the vision statements need to be clearly written so that they can be easily incorporated into the plan.

One way to accomplish this is to translate the vision statements into overall guiding principles. For example, your community might place the protection of its downtown as one of its highest priorities. This theme can be considered a guiding principle throughout the plan, as other associated goals, objectives, and recommendations are considered.

**Helpful Hint:** Always look for the guiding principle behind each vision statement and then use it in the preparation of the master plan. It is not the quantity of vision statements that counts, but the clarity, the underlying purpose, and how the vision statements can be applied as themes throughout the plan. This will go a long way in making the plan more effective.

When articulating the vision statements in your master plan, it is important to stress the guiding principles first. This can be accomplished in the introduction as well as the executive summary. The balance of the vision statements, goals, and objectives can be summarized in the overall vision or general statement section of the plan. If there is a summary report of the visioning process, this report can be included as an appendix. The vision or general statement section should include, at a minimum, the following elements:

- an introduction
- an overall description of the visioning process
- the questions and topics discussed
- a description of the level and frequency of public participation
- the main vision statements
- a list of goals and objectives

In accordance with RSA 674:2 II., it is important that each section of the master plan be consistent with the other sections of the plan in its implementation of the vision section.