Chapter 1: The Vision Element
of the
Town of Cary
Comprehensive Plan
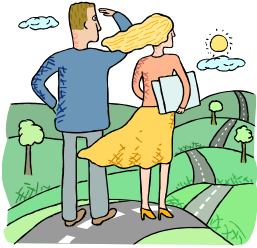

Adopted by Town Council
June 10, 2004

"You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction."

- Alvin Toffler

Project History & Background

Looking ahead… Seeing the "big picture"… Setting long-term goals and trying to reach them… That's vision. Just as individuals, businesses, and organizations think about their future and prepare strategic plans to get there, communities like Cary can benefit from an overall vision that establishes a direction for the future.

Retreat 2003

So, beginning with its 2003 annual retreat, the Town Council worked with staff members and nationally-recognized consultants to focus on the long-term future of Cary. In preparation for this meeting, hundreds of existing policies from numerous adopted plans for land use, transportation, open space, housing, parks, and utilities were reviewed. Council decisions and discussions over the previous five years were revisited. Consultants interviewed individual Council members and assessed the community. Growth and development trends were studied. The results of special citizen surveys and focus group meetings were considered.

Then, the Council worked intensely for nearly three days trying to formulate preliminary vision statements for the future. Special presentations were made, preliminary principles and policies were evaluated and prioritized, and a draft collection of Vision Principles & Policies was prepared. These statements are intended to be inserted as the very first chapter in the Town's Comprehensive Plan, setting the framework and guiding all other planning that the Town does.

"enVision Cary" Public Involvement Process

To share the proposed Vision Element with the community to get reactions, ideas, and suggestions, the Town then embarked on a public involvement process in late 2003. Entitled "*enVision Cary*," this effort provided three different ways for interested citizens to participate.
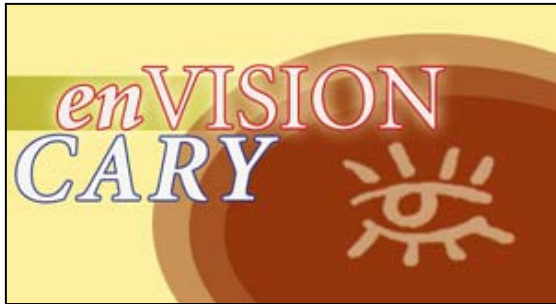
In November 2003, an online web poll or survey was made available on the Town's website. Participants were asked to rank the preliminary policies on a scale of 1 to 10, and instantaneous results were made available. In January 2004, during a four-day period, individuals were next given the opportunity to participate in an online discussion forum. Finally, in February 2004, the staff conducted a "traditional" public meeting as the last step in the "enVision Cary" process to share the results of the first two "electronic" meetings and gain additional comments. Overall, those who participated in these various forms of input strongly supported the direction that was expressed in the Preliminary Principles & Policies.

Retreat 2004

At the 2004 retreat, staff summarized the results of the "enVision Cary" process and shared the comments received from participants on the Preliminary Principles & Policies. Noting that the general consensus was that the Town was headed in the right direction, staff recommended that some minor changes to the policies be made, and that the Vision Element of the Comprehensive Plan be scheduled for formal adoption during the spring of 2004. Town Council wholeheartedly agreed with those recommendations.

Vision Element Adoption Process

The first step in the adoption process of any chapter of the Cary Comprehensive Plan is a public hearing by Town Council. This was conducted on April 15, 2004 where the Draft Vision Element was formally presented. Several citizens commented on the draft plan at the hearing and through written statements. Comments focused on issues such as citizen involvement, air quality, and transportation.

Then, the Planning & Zoning Board reviewed the Draft Vision Element since this plan is to become an official part of the Town's overall Comprehensive Plan. The board also conducted an additional hearing, and then voted to recommend adoption of the Vision Element with a few changes and additions to address concerns expressed by the community.

Finally, Town Council officially adopted this new chapter of the Comprehensive Plan on June 10, 2004.

Principles & Policies

Recognizing that a strategic approach is needed, this vision plan concentrates on only four key topic areas:

- Transportation,
- Growth & Development,
- Public Schools, and
- Public Involvement in the Planning & Development Process

The following principles and policy statements are intended to guide other Town efforts when dealing with these issues. As appropriate, existing Town plans, documents, policies, ordinances, and guidelines will be amended, and new plans will be adopted, to carry out these various objectives.

Transportation

Principle: The Town of Cary will provide multi-modal transportation choices that meet the mobility needs of residents, enhance the aesthetic quality of the public realm, and promote improved air quality.

Policies:

Standards & Requirements

T-1: Improve the Roads APF (adequate public facilities) requirements to recognize that there should be a reasonable limit on the number of through lanes on roadways, emphasizing quality of roads in addition to quantity.

T-2: Develop a street network with appropriate connectivity by establishing guidelines for collector/connector streets, implementing a wide range of bold traffic calming measures, and requiring high-quality streets and connections at destinations.

T-3: Create street design guidelines and/or standards that recognize the character of different parts of Town and address appropriate street width, on-street parking, superior level of quality, traffic calming, and high-performance two-lane streets.

T-4: Improve land development regulations to enhance town-building that would require well-designed streets for commercial and institutional development; mandatory urban design guidelines that address building placement, massing, form, etc. (not architecture);

and major urban street features (under an advanced APF ordinance) concurrent with current commercial development.

Alternative Transportation Modes & Measures

T-5: Support multi-modal travel by facilitating imaginative planning for the Town's two station areas on the Triangle Transit Authority light rail line – focusing development at nodes instead of strip commercial development.

 T-6: Encourage development that recognizes the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists, and continue to design and implement Town programs that yield an effective, well-engineered system of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

T-7: Support management of transit efforts to ensure effective integration of regional mass transit, feeder buses, rail, and other transportation modes.

T-8: Require strong integration of mass transit features in developments (e.g., connections, sidewalks, and shelters).

T-9: Pursue methods to implement a range of transportation demand management strategies such as car pools, van pools, transit, exit ramp meters, non-peak work hours, HOV (high occupancy vehicle) lanes and telecommuting.

Growth & Development

Principle: The Town of Cary will be distinguished by a high quality physical environment that is achieved through strong design appearance requirements; time-honored town-making principles; protection of natural areas, air, and water quality through use of innovative techniques; carefully managed infrastructure improvements; and sound fiscal practices.

Policies:

Location, Density, and Mixed Use

G-1: Pursue implementation of adopted plans like those for downtown and the northwest areas (near Research Triangle Park) to create mixed-use environments featuring increased densities.

G-2: Prepare plans in the southwest and south that focus on lower density development, and emphasize protection of open space and natural areas with appropriately scaled activity centers that serve as focal points.

Appearance and Identity

G-3: Ensure that future development creates a unique sense of place and provides areas – town-wide and in neighborhoods – for formal and informal public gatherings.

G-4: Ensure that future development meets strengthened urban design regulations that create a both high quality public realm and private development that promotes human-scale, pedestrian-friendly places.

Timing/Rate/Amount

G-5: Permit future development with evidence of adequate infrastructure, determination of fiscal impact, and compliance with demanding design quality standards while monitoring an expected annual average growth rate of 3 - 4 percent over a rolling 5-year period.

Natural Resources, Open Space and Parks

G-6: Ensure that future growth protects sensitive natural, historical, and cultural resources and preserves open space and the Town's rural heritage as exemplified by the Green Level and Carpenter areas.

G-7: Continue to create an inter-connected system of greenways, parks, and open space.

G-8: Develop large, community-wide parks and smaller neighborhood parks.

G-9: Pursue opportunities to develop mini-parks in "in-fill" areas of town.

G-10: Support the development of special purpose recreational facilities that are regional and national attractions while providing a balance between development of general and specific use parks.

Infrastructure

G-11: Concentrate growth in areas already served by existing or planned infrastructure to minimize costly service area extensions.

Housing

G-12: Integrate a full range of housing choices for all income groups, families of various sizes, seniors, and persons with special challenges in new and redeveloped neighborhoods throughout the town.

Fiscal Considerations

G-13: Identify sustainable funding sources for community infrastructure, services, and amenities, including impact fees for recreation needs, open space acquisition, and general community facility needs.

G-14: Maintain a reasonable tax rate while balancing individual burden and community service and facility needs.

G-15: Emphasize high quality, "clean and green" businesses to expand and locate in Cary through a specific recruitment and/or incentive program.

Schools

Principle: The Town of Cary will continue to help improve schools that serve Cary residents.

Policies:

Support for Capital Facilities

S-1: Continue to make financial resources available – both public and private – to support capital needs (land acquisition and water, sewer, and road improvements) that facilitate the creation of permanent school seats in Cary, which will be allocated on a project-by-project basis as determined by council.

S-2: Encourage more school seats/school capacity regardless of whether the schools are public or private.

Coordination

S-3: Improve the relationship between Wake County School Board representative(s) and the Town's elected officials.

S-4: Support lobbying of state legislators to separate the governance structure of school boards from boards of county commissioners.

S-5: Work with other local governments to lobby the General Assembly for legislation to allow municipalities and/or counties to impose schools impact fees.

Citizen Involvement in Planning & Development

Principle: The Town of Cary will ensure that all sides in an issue and all interested and affected citizens have equal and effective access to the planning and development process.

Policies:

Communication

I-1: Improve communication tools for proposed planning and development activities through use of:

A. Notice letters that include a pamphlet summarizing the processes, including citizen involvement opportunities

B. Notice letters that contain staff and developer contact information and links to the Web site

C. Attention to the qualitative aspects of communication materials, making sure they are "user-friendly" and written in plain English—not professional jargon or "legalese"

D. A Web page with general process information, a dictionary of terms, and calendars.

E. A Web page for each project with conceptual drawings, statistical data and the like submitted by the developer as well as contact information

F. Videos for Cary TV 11 outlining processes for citizen input

G. An informative map with hot links that provide information on engineering projects, redevelopment efforts, rezoning, site plans, land use/zoning categories (with linked explanations), park planning, public works projects, and similar activities.

Participation Opportunities

I-2: Have Town Council and staff conduct annual "Question & Answer" meetings by council districts to talk about proposed projects as well as answer questions.

I-3: Have staff offer to conduct meetings with affected neighborhoods and/or homeowner associations to talk about planning or development projects when they are proposed.

I-4: Strongly recommend that developers meet with affected property owners regularly during the months immediately prior to initiating a planning or development activity.

I-5: Consider the use of a staff liaison to educate the public on planning processes, procedures, and current projects.

I-6: Form small advisory committees or focus groups for citizens to provide input on specific planning projects or activities.

I-7: Utilize appropriate means of communication to involve citizens and property owners located outside or adjacent to the Cary planning area but affected by Town decisions.

I-8: Seek input from existing community groups and organizations when conducting public meetings on planning and development issues.

Monitoring

I-9: Conduct follow-up research to assess changes in citizen perception.