



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

**Planning Division**

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**TO:** Plan Commission

**FROM:** Heather Stouder, Planning Division Director

**DATE:** December 14, 2020

**SUBJECT:** Plan Commission Presentation: Potential new framework for land use sub-area plans  
(*Legislative File ID #63303*)

In addition to the Comprehensive Plan, the City of Madison has adopted many sub-area plans over the decades which vary significantly in geographic area, scope, level of detail, and depth/breadth of public participation. In recent years, the development of work plans for the Planning Division in coordination with other agencies has been beneficial to identify, prioritize, and scope upcoming sub-area planning efforts. However, the City lacks a long-term, clear framework for sub-area planning, and staff feel that it may be beneficial to thoughtfully create such a framework for the future, as Madison continues to grow and change.

Specific recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan which relate closely to this effort are as follows:

- **Neighborhoods and Housing, Strategy 3** (p. 50) – *Increase the amount of available housing*
  - **Action d** – *Explore the widespread replacement of residential density maximums with building height maximums outside of the downtown area.*
- **Effective Government, Strategy 7** (p. 110) – *Ensure that the City of Madison government is transparent and accountable*
  - **Action c** - *Engage city residents by providing meaningful opportunities for participation in decisions that affect their neighborhoods and the city as a whole.*
  - **Action d** - *Provide a wide range of opportunities for involvement in planning and decision-making, with targeted access and inclusion of underrepresented populations.*
- **Appendix B, Land Use and Transportation Supplement – Sub-area Plan Retirement** (p. 126)
  - *...This Plan recommends that the Planning Division and Plan Commission establish a procedure to periodically review plans to determine whether they should be retired. Stakeholders of areas covered by the plan will be engaged in the review and determination of whether the plan should be retired. General considerations for review may include, but are not limited to:*
    1. *Whether a plan has been implemented*
    2. *Whether a more recent plan has been adopted for the same area or a similar area*
    3. *The age of the plan*

Planning Division staff have begun to consider a new, potential approach to sub-area planning, starting with research on the ways several other cities approach sub-area planning. Essentially, this potential approach would *purposely broaden and standardize* “district” planning efforts to include land use recommendations, building heights, major infrastructure investments, and a few other big-picture recommendations. The City would include 10-15 discrete districts, with a goal of decennial updates to each plan. These plans would be slightly more detailed than the Comprehensive Plan Generalized Future Land Use (GFLU) Map, and would replace the decennial GFLU Map update, as well as the Neighborhood Development Plans (NDPs) on the City’s periphery.

Meanwhile, we would need to develop criteria for determining and be much more targeted with other, more specific sub-area planning and implementation efforts. For instance, staff have discussed the importance of continued planning efforts in low and moderate-income areas with deeper public participation. Moving forward, such efforts could perhaps focus less on long-term land use, and more on strategy and shorter-term actions to address community needs. Also, when the City faces a sudden and significant challenge/opportunity as was presented with the closure of Oscar Mayer, we may need to have the capacity to respond with a strategic and action-oriented redevelopment plan.

Finally, we would need to make decisions as a city regarding the future of *existing* sub-area plans, many of which relied on time and effort volunteered by many contributors. “District” plans could likely involve the careful review and inclusion of relevant recommendations, and could ultimately replace many aspects of existing plans. However, decisions would need to be made regarding how or whether to sustain elements of existing sub-area plans not clearly covered in the more general “district” plans.

With the overarching goal of an equitable, sustainable, and “right-sized” approach, some of the most critical issues we recognize the need to balance are:

- Accommodation of projected growth
- Increased housing & transportation choices for current and future Madison residents across the city
- Inclusive public participation opportunities
- Equitable land use policies and major public investments
- Timeliness, predictability, and clarity regarding sub-area planning
- Transparency regarding City roles and limitations for plan implementation
- Budget and staff limitations (cannot simply “add another layer” to existing sub-area planning efforts)

As staff, we recognize that there are many challenges to the creation of a new planning framework. We are early in the process to explore this, and acknowledge there may be alternatives to this approach. We will present an overview of this approach to the Plan Commission, and look forward to early feedback at the December 14 meeting.

**Questions for the Plan Commission:**

- What benefits would you anticipate from this framework?
- What concerns/suggestions do you have?
- What additional info would be beneficial for refining this framework?
- How should staff coordinate with the PC to refine this proposal?