

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Previous Planning Efforts

A Comprehensive Plan was completed for the City of Whitehouse in 1995. The

***"We need to put forth an effort at establishing things that are possible... if we present something this time we want to try and apply it over the next 10 years."
- Danny Hogden***

project was conducted with the assistance of an interested group of citizens and drafted by a nationally recognized consulting firm. While technically sound and well-intentioned, this Plan failed to produce concrete results and was largely forgotten by the public. Officials

within the City felt that the Plan needed a major overhaul in order to provide clear growth guidance under changing regional conditions.

City officials also desired a planning document which was written in a manner focusing on implementation and the identification of achievable goals. It was also deemed important that the document be written in an approachable and straightforward manner. The desire was for any citizen or developer to be able to use the Plan and understand what the City wanted to achieve by 2020.

***"The ultimate goal is that any citizen of the City of Whitehouse can pick the document up and understand where we're going [to be in 2020]."
- Mark Sweeney***

***"When you plan something you need to stick with it."
- Malachi Dews***

During public involvement citizen participants expressed strong support for the project as long as City officials and staff remained committed to Plan adherence. Speakers expressed a desire to see uniform application of the Plan's recommendations and continued efforts by the City to

involve the public in an ongoing planning process.



Public Participation and Community Buy-In

A Comprehensive Plan can be well written, thoroughly researched, and based on extensive analysis yet still fail as an effective guide for a community's growth. Public participation and citizen support are vital components which can

determine whether a technically sound plan is a success or a failure. During the drafting of this Comprehensive Plan far-reaching efforts have been made to involve residents from throughout the community in the planning process.

"It is my point of view that you cannot do enough to invite people to [these meetings]. If I had to justify something that I had a part in... I want to be able to say that there were [10,000 mailings] because after the fact it's not going to matter... now is when it really matters."
- Jan Bellefeuille

The first step in the planning effort was the formation of a Plan Steering Committee (PSC). This committee was composed of seven members from within the community. The committee included citizens who are members of the City



Image 1.1: Plan Steering Committee Members and consultant staff: (from left to right, top) Mike Peterson, Jan Bellefeuille, Christopher Butler, (bottom) Mark Sweeney, Danny Hogden, Debbie Shaffer, Susan Shivers. Not pictured: Darrell Crymes, Suzanne Loudamy

Council, the Planning and Zoning Commission, Keep Whitehouse Beautiful, the Whitehouse Independent School District Board, and the East Texas Council of Governments. Members of the City Staff were present and active at each meeting including the Community Development Director, the Assistant Fire Chief, the City's Mayor, and the planning consultant staff. Several PSC members are also

active in the residential development community, business community, or are citizens at large.

The PSC held a total of nine public meetings with the purpose of determining public opinion on various elements of the Plan. Some of these meetings were conducted in a public workshop format where the citizens could address the committee and each other about a wide range of topics relating to the project. Among these workshops were two design charettes during which citizens discussed concepts for a revitalized Town Center and an enhanced park system. The PSC also worked directly with the planning consultant to set the Goals and Objectives, draw the first drafts of the Future Land Use and Thoroughfare Plan maps, and establish a broad framework for the final document.

Consultant staff also conducted open office hours at City Hall during which citizens were invited to speak one-on-one with a planner about anything related to the Plan or the City's past development efforts. Office hours were held over three days and included mornings and afternoons on both weekdays and weekends in order to permit convenient attendance by a broad group of citizens.

Several different advertising techniques were utilized to educate community residents about the opportunity to participate. A total of thirteen public notices and newspaper articles were published in the Tri-County Leader and/or the Tyler Courier-Times--



Image 1.2: A total of thirteen newspaper articles were published in the Tri-County Leader and/or Tyler Courier-Times-Telegraph which advertised various public workshops held to seek input on the Vision 2020 project, several were Sunday edition top stories.

Telegraph (Image 1.2). Several of these articles were carried on the front page and appealed for residents of the City and surrounding community to become involved in the process by attending the workshops and public meetings.

Several direct mail notifications were also distributed throughout the public involvement phase of the project. The first of these notices was a formal



announcement drafted by the Mayor and the Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman. This notification was mailed to all registered voters within the City Limits. Meeting times and topics were also printed on utility bills, which were mailed to each household with a municipal services account.

The most ambitious direct mailing efforts were centered around a more personal advertising campaign which utilized three different postcard style notices (Image 1.3). Since this campaign was conducted throughout the holiday season, each of the postcards was designed to tie into a different part of life during this time of year. The front of each postcard was designed with a catchy and casual message. A brief introduction to the planning process and the public participation schedule was printed on the back. Each mailing address within the City Limits and Extra-

Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) received the City of Whitehouse's "Letter to Santa" which listed the major capital and planning needs for the City. Cashiers at Brookshire's Grocery handed out another style of postcard which was designed as the City of Whitehouse's "Shopping List." The third postcard, the City's 10 year "Report Card," was sent home with every Whitehouse Independent School District (WISD) student. Over 10,000 of these notices were issued through the three distribution channels.

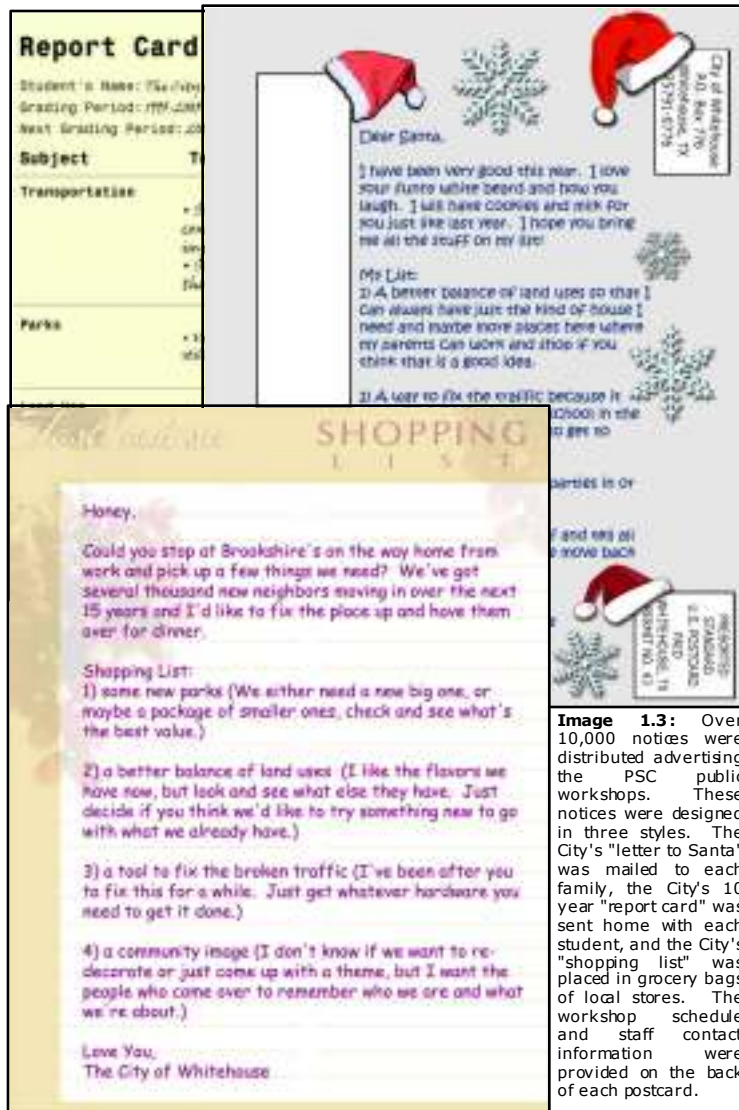


Image 1.3: Over 10,000 notices were distributed advertising the PSC public workshops. These notices were designed in three styles. The City's "letter to Santa" was mailed to each family, the City's 10 year "report card" was sent home with each student, and the City's "shopping list" was placed in grocery bags of local stores. The workshop schedule and staff contact information were provided on the back of each postcard.

Talk radio and television news also provided schedule information for several meetings. Key sessions were advertised using temporary signage placed on City property at high-traffic locations. The public participation schedule and consultant staff contact information were also published on a special portion of the City's website (Image 1.4). This web presence resulted in a large number of unique visitors to the site and provided another communication channel for residents unable to attend the public workshops or

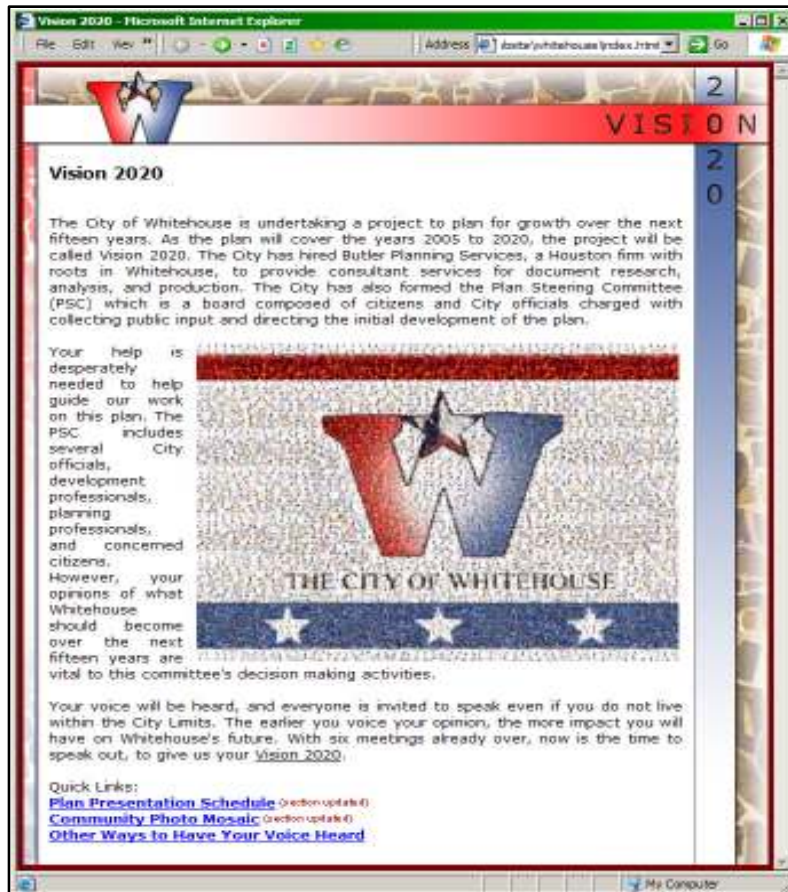


Image 1.4: A screen capture of the Vision 2020 website which contained information and schedules for PSC workshops and events

office hours. Several thousand unique visitors accessed the site during the public involvement process.

In all, a concerted effort was made with the intention of bringing interested community members into the planning process. Many residents from

***"If there is anybody in this fair City that doesn't know about [these meetings] they just moved here last week."
- Danny Hogden***

neighborhoods just outside the City Limits were represented; and in some cases outnumbered their in-city counterparts. A strong desire to inform residents about the process was expressed by the PSC even if these residents did not attend any meetings. By the end of the public involvement program it is unlikely any residents of the City or community were not aware of the planning project and the opportunity to provide feedback.

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Introduction

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