Shelby County Department of Development Services

What is the Relationship Between
PLANNING and ZONING?

M any people think that planning and zoning are the same. Actually, planning and zoning are separate functions, but work together as part of a long-range effort to plan quality communities. While planning is a process that provides a vision for communities, zoning is only one of several tools available to help achieve this vision.

Planning

The goal of city, county and regional planning is to further the welfare of people and their communities by creating convenient, equitable, healthful, efficient, and attractive environments for present and future generations. Planning is community building.

Professional planning involves a great amount of teamwork. Through this collaborative process, planners help to define the community's vision for itself. Working with local residents, politicians, and other community organizations, planners help establish the vision for communities. This vision is created not only from what the community members want, but based on an understanding of the problems and resources at hand. The planner provides this analysis and helps the community look at the options it has for development and change.

Through the planning process, the physical, social and economic aspects of communities are examined and the connections between them. Professionally trained planners analyze the existing conditions and future trends in the area. They analyze issues such as transportation, land use, housing, recreation and open space, natural and cultural resources, community services, population, and economic development. In addition to generating their own data, planners draw upon the work of others to create a comprehensive overview of the community. Once the analysis has been completed, they develop strategic alternatives for solving problems in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. These alternatives make up a Comprehensive Plan that will guide future development based on the established goals and the systematic analysis.

The Comprehensive Plan consists of these alternatives presented in a formal document. Plans can take several shapes, from comprehensive plans to historic preservation plans. Plans are presented to community officials, who review, revise and adopt them for action. Plans are required at different levels of government. Once the plan is adopted, the primary job becomes the implementation of the plan, coordinating work among many groups. The tools of planning implementation include such things as land use controls and economic develop strategies.

Zoning

Zoning is a tool used to advance and protect the community's public health, safety and general welfare. Communities use zoning to protect the value of property, prevent the establishment of nuisances, ensure compatibility between adjacent uses of land, protect and properly use natural resources, and help to implement the land use objectives of a community's comprehensive plan.

Zoning districts are established to promote compatible patterns of land use within a defined area. Zoning regulations establish site development and performance standards appropriate to the purposes and the uses allowed in each district. Distinct zoning districts exist for residential, office, retail and industrial uses. Furthermore, specific use restrictions, site development regulations or performance standards may apply to zoning districts may be combined with special overlay or combining districts.

As part of the zoning process, planners identify appropriate land uses for an area based on such factors as the intensity, density, height of a proposed project, surrounding land uses, traffic impacts and access to a site, environmental concerns and overall compatibility.

A zoning change may be required to change a land use or alter a building or site within the zoning area.

What are Shelby County's Planning and Zoning Resources?

Part of the staff of the Shelby County Department of Development Services includes professional planners. These individuals perform a number of roles from technical analysts or researchers, to program developers, to educators. Whatever their role, planners are committed to promoting the health, safety and welfare of Shelby County in numerous ways.

* Planners formulate plans and policies to meet the social, economic, and physical needs of communities, and they develop the strategies to make these plans work.

* Planners develop plans addressing land use patterns, housing needs, parks and recreation opportunities, highways and transportation systems, economic development, and other aspects of the future.

* Planners are technically competent and creative and show an ability to envision alternatives to the physical and social environments in which we live.

* Planners work with the public to develop a vision of the future and to build on that vision.

* Planners often function as mediators among conflicting community interests; they are also facilitators, using their professional judgment to help identify the best resolutions to the issues creating conflicts.

* Planners analyze problems, compare alternatives and describe implications, so that public officials and citizens can make knowledgeable choices.

* Planners design and manage the planning process itself, in order to involve interest groups, citizens, and public officials in stimulating and thought-provoking ways.

Shelby County planners use various development regulations to help ensure a strong quality of life for its citizens, including:

Zoning Regulations of Shelby County
Subdivision Regulations of Shelby County
Sanitation Regulations of Shelby County
Flood Plain Prevention Ordinance

For more information about planning, zoning, and other tools used by Shelby County to promote quality communities, including the Shelby County Comprehensive Plan, contact:

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Information is also available on the Web at www.shelbycountyalabama.com

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