

Community Planning Blueprint Initiative

Purpose

A Community Planning Blueprint (Blueprint) is a policy plan for a defined area within the City's planning jurisdiction that further elaborates and promotes the vision of the City's Comprehensive Plan. A Blueprint planning effort is intended to address only a few issues unique to a particular geographic area or that require an atypical set of analyses and actions. The Blueprint can be developed for any location, but focuses on planning needs and issues for a specific area such as a neighborhood, a corridor, or other unique place. It can include residential, commercial, industrial, or a mix of land uses.

Individual Blueprints may serve as **policy guides** for City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, City staff and the public and articulate the goals for the area regarding land use, economic development, aesthetics and urban design, resource protection, transportation and community services and/or the preservation of valued community resources.

The Blueprint planning process is provided as a planning option other than the full-scale neighborhood or corridor plan process. A Blueprint requires less analysis and detail than a neighborhood or corridor plan, thus allowing for faster completion than these other more robust planning processes. However, not every area or neighborhood in Las Cruces will be appropriate for such a plan. The expectation is that this type of plan will be used for areas that are in transition, facing expanded development pressures, are concerned with maintaining their character, or other specific issues. However, a result of the Blueprint planning process may be the recommendation that the geographic area and its issues are more suitable for an area plan or corridor plan effort.

Community Planning Blueprints are policy documents adopted by resolution of the City Council and therefore **are not development regulations or laws**. Individual Blueprints will act as policy guides for activities within their called out boundaries. A Blueprint will function to provide more fine-grained, in-depth analysis and direction tailored specifically for an area and its unique challenges or circumstances.

Objectives

The Community Planning Blueprint Initiative is designed to:

- Achieve the goals and policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan;
- Ensure consistency with the Mesilla Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization's Metropolitan Transportation Plan, and provide information for future updates to this transportation plan;
- Provide a conceptual planning tool to evaluate and address fiscal impacts, neighborhood and stakeholder concerns, public improvement needs, or community vibrancy and stability issues;
- Identify characteristics, features, or conditions that need to be replicated, preserved, or enhanced throughout the defined community;
- Consider needs, challenges and opportunities for an area, neighborhood, corridor or place in an expedited manner;
- Improve city, resident, property owner, business, and stakeholder relationships;
- Identify and propose remedies for zoning and land use conflicts
- Develop future land use plans for small areas, where applicable.

Framework

The Blueprint process should be considered a Level 2 (Policy Plans) planning process under the Las Cruces Comprehensive Planning Framework (see Figure 1). Level 2 policy plans are intended to address community issues and planning needs for a specific geographical location or policy area. It could consist of a report, a policy paper (a/k/a white paper), a full-fledged (but narrowly-tailored) planning document, or any other form of communication that is able to be referenced going forward and is appropriate to the needs at hand.

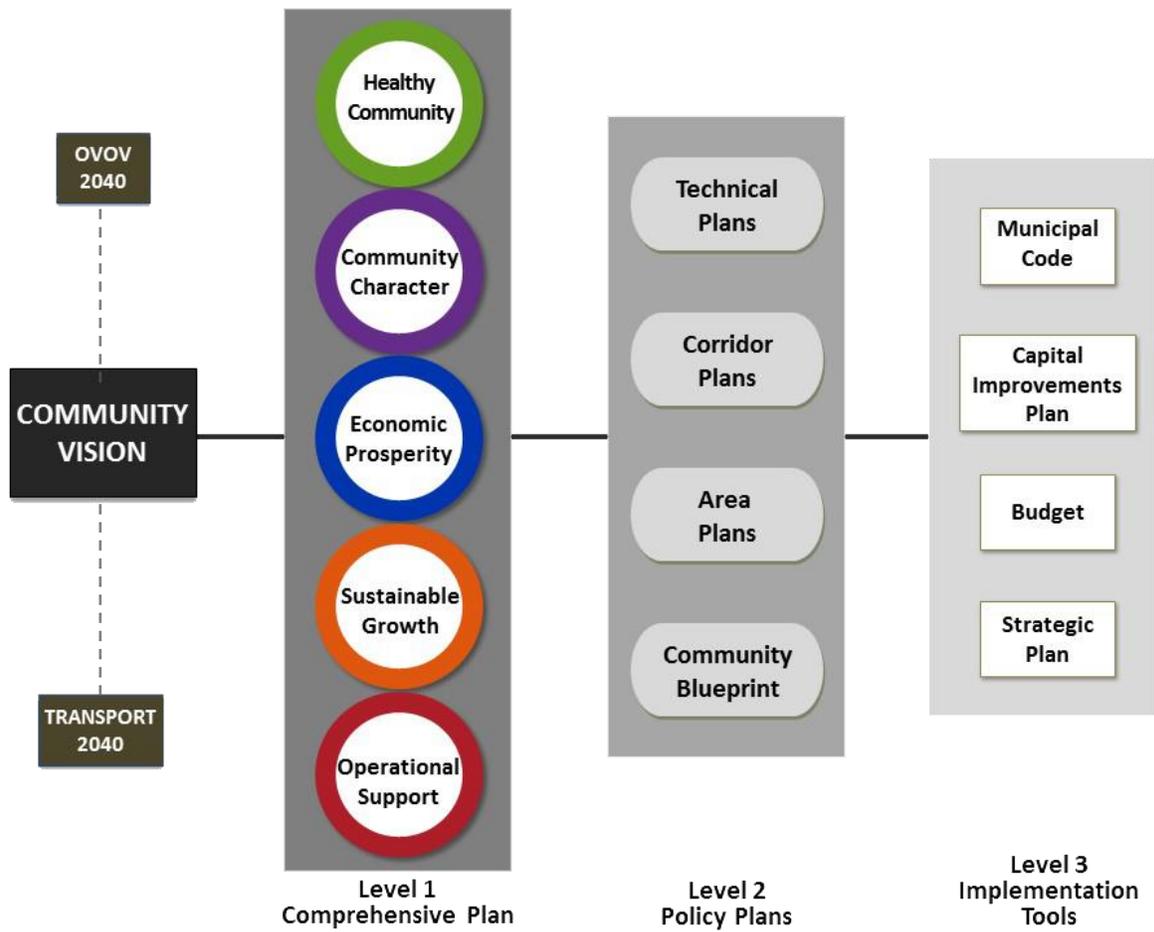


Figure 1: Comprehensive Planning Framework

Criteria for Initiating Blueprint Planning Areas

The first step in the Blueprint process is for the requesting parties to present information to Community Development staff to support a determination to proceed. For staff to reach this determination, all of the following criteria must first be met:

1. The proposed planning effort would address issues which cannot be addressed through other available planning or implementation processes such as a rezoning effort or capital improvement plan;
2. It directly supports an objective detailed in the Blueprint objectives;
3. There has already been outreach and involvement with critical stakeholders;
4. The planning area boundaries must be clearly defined;
5. The request should be consistent with any approved plan in place for the proposed area.

The community group or other entity initiating a Blueprint planning process must meet with Community Development staff in a pre-application meeting to clarify the above points and to go over the Blueprint Planning Process Application Form. If all of the criteria are not met, or if it is determined that there are other, better ways to deal with the area or issue under consideration, the Blueprint application will be either returned to the requesting parties for additional information or denied. The denial by staff is not subject to an appeal process.

Blueprint Design

Each individual blueprint will *generally* include the following parts:

1. **Plan Boundaries**: A clear definition of the limits of the planning area and a short summary of why that boundary was selected.
2. **Issue, Challenge, Opportunity Identification**: A paragraph or two explaining the reason(s) for the Blueprint; list of the issues, challenges, or opportunities identified; and the existing conditions and circumstances demonstrating the need for the Blueprint. The critical issues to be addressed by the Blueprint vision statement and policies should be identified. Topics may relate to one or more of the following subjects:
 - a. Land Use and Site Design (zoning, buffering and transitions, aesthetics, landscaping, access management, signage, drainage).
 - b. Urban Services (infrastructure improvements, schools, transit, recycling)

- c. Special Needs (codes enforcement, graffiti remediation, ADA, neighborhood empowerment)
3. Vision Statement. This is a sentence or short paragraph that states what the community wants to see in the future for the subject area.
4. Goals, Strategies and Actions: Identify the policies and strategies for livability through public and private investment, physical improvements or preservation strategies for valued resources in the planning area. The strategies and actions of the Blueprint must directly or indirectly support the city's Comprehensive Plan policies;
5. Maps: A map showing the boundaries of the Blueprint area shall be provided. Photos and other graphics may be included to convey the character of the area and to demonstrate suggested design elements.
6. The Blueprint product should be limited to discussing and providing policies, strategies and actions to address the defined goal of the Blueprint. The Blueprint process is not designed to address items of a more general, all-encompassing nature.
7. For topical Blueprints, the format may vary.

Plan Development

Once a Blueprint request is accepted, the process will proceed as follows:

1. Establish defined boundaries for the Blueprint;
2. Collect initial data for analysis (i.e. maps, demographics, zoning, ownership);
3. Identify potential issues, challenges and/or opportunities that are important to the Blueprint area;
4. Notify the area residents and property owners of the Blueprint area pursuant to the Citizen Notification Policy Manual for the City of Las Cruces Community Development Department, as amended;

5. Hold at least one public involvement event, e.g. SWOT exercise (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats), visioning session, charrette, public input meeting, etc.;
6. Analyze the identified challenges and opportunities, and refine maps as needed;
7. Present the analysis and maps for the Blueprint in a public setting with affected parties and general public;
8. The approval of specific Blueprints will follow the standard plan adoption process of public input, staff preparation, public review, Planning and Zoning Commission recommendation and City Council adoption.

Implementation

After the City Council adopts a Blueprint by Resolution, it will be used to assist the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, City staff and the public in reviewing permit applications, managing quality of life initiatives, and promoting well-planned neighborhoods and distinct places within the plan area. A Blueprint can facilitate or lead to:

- A policy guide for public and private development & redevelopment projects.
- An evaluation tool for grant applications, zone changes, subdivisions, planned unit developments, special use permits, variances and construction site plans.
- A mechanism to empower public involvement.
- A means to assure appropriate provisions for public and social services.
- An amendment to development regulations (e.g. zoning, subdivision, design standards).
- A publicly funded infrastructure project.
- The formation of a Neighborhood Watch or similar public safety program.
- Another program, project or activity beneficial within the plan's boundaries.

The intent of a Blueprint is **not** to:

- Negatively impact an existing property right (e.g. prohibit a permitted use of a lot or the subdivision of land).
- Create a development moratorium.
- Delay or postpone a pending development application (zone change, zoning variance, infill, subdivision).
- Preclude the requirements of the City's Zoning, Subdivision, and other development codes, plans, and regulations, especially as it relates to the processes for changing the zoning on, subdividing of, or construction of an allowed use or building on the property.
- Change an existing/approved master plan, subdivision or zoning classification.
- Circumvent the variance process.