

How can you help create Spartanburg's next citywide comprehensive plan?

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'Planapalooza' events offer opportunity for residents to gain deeper understanding, share ideas on comprehensive plan



Brian Wright and his team at [Town Planning and Urban Design Collective](#) have worked with dozens of communities across the country to create all sorts of plans, from comprehensive plans that serve as roadmaps for the next decade to designs limited in scope to a single neighborhood or business district.

Their clients include rural communities, formerly sleepy college towns and fast-growing resort towns concerned about maintaining what makes them unique, among many others. They include places in New England and the Deep South, Texas and Colorado, the Carolinas and the Dakotas. They have included cities and towns largely powered by one thriving industry and others working hard to diversify their economies.

Because every community has its own set of opportunities, challenges, assets, built environments, natural assets, cultures, sensibilities, and goals, each of their clients is different. And every plan they create has to be correspondingly tailored to address those factors. (For more, [check out their portfolio.](#))

Even within that context, the work they have recently undertaken in Spartanburg stands out. What they are doing here won't just be a first for their firm — it will be a first for any firm in the urban planning business. The comp plan that TPUDC, the City of Spartanburg and Spartanburg citizens will create together will be unlike any other comp plan ever created anywhere in the United States because it will make equity the foundation upon which it is built.

What is a comp plan?

If you're reading this, chances are good you know what a comp plan is and that Spartanburg has started the process of creating a new one. But just in case, a comprehensive plan (comp plan, for short) "is a document that helps guide the city's growth and development," city Neighborhood Services Director Martin Livingston said. "It helps the city understand exactly what the community wants to see and what the community supports or doesn't support."

Cities are required by state law to create a new comp plan every 10 years and update it every five years. (Spartanburg is overdue — its current comp plan was created in 2004).

When the city went looking for a partner to help create its new comprehensive plan, it examined the qualifications of several planning firms across the country before selecting TPUDC, an award-winning planning and urban design firm based in Nashville, Tenn. From the start, Wright said he and his team were excited about the prospect of working with the City of Spartanburg to develop a comp plan in which “equity was a cornerstone of the plan.

Indeed, a lot of work is underway to try to build a more equitable Spartanburg, from articulating equity as a value to putting the city’s money where its mouth is through targeted investments in infrastructure, amenities and other resources. Making equity the foundation of what is essentially the city’s development roadmap for the next decade is a necessary and logical next step in the effort.

But what does “make equity the foundation of the comp plan” mean in real terms, and how might it play out over the coming weeks and months?

“In the simplest terms,” Livingston said, “we want this comp plan to provide for equitable growth and development across the city.”

As TPUDC Director of Implementation Becky Timmons said, ensuring Spartanburg’s new comp plan is based on equity means “making sure that the plan works for everybody regardless of whatever defining characteristics they have, whatever circumstances they have grown up in, whatever neighborhood they live in, whatever their income is, whatever race they are. Making sure they all have the same opportunities, everyone has the same services available, the same access to the same amenities that make Spartanburg special.

“Making sure that everyone can enjoy what makes Spartanburg, Spartanburg.”

That starts with how information and input from the community that will inform the final plan is gathered — and, most importantly, from whom. Assistant City Manager Mitch Kennedy pushed TPUDC to think creatively about how to engage people of all races and ages and from all walks of life, income levels and neighborhoods in the process.

“That was our first moment when we realized we have all these digital tools, we can run all our meetings online because of the pandemic, but not everyone has access to the internet,” Wright said.

With that in mind, the City and TPUDC will do a number of things differently to engage city residents and ensure no group is left out of the process:

1. A neighborhood ambassador program has been created to connect with people who might otherwise be left out. The ambassadors will reach out directly to people in their neighborhoods. The relationships and trust they have with their neighbors should glean more and better input. “The neighborhood ambassador program will also include people who work with students, people who work with the disabled community, who work with the homeless community to get their ideas and input,” Wright said. “We want to make sure people who may be uncomfortable or unable to interact with us still are heard and feel comfortable to talk to someone who can then share what they learn with us.”

2. Colorful, engaging information sheets that explain the basics of what a comp plan is and the process for creating one have been developed and are being distributed by the neighborhood ambassadors and city officials. The sheets encourage people to get involved and provide a [website](#) and phone number to do that.

3. The City and TPUDC will host Planapalooza, a six-day interactive public planning event beginning Oct. 22. Though Planapalooza will be a virtual event, there will be in-person drop-in opportunities available at the C.C. Woodson Community Center. You can learn more about Planapalooza and register to attend any of the virtual sessions [here](#).

Mailers with feedback cards will be sent to every address in the City to encourage people to submit their thoughts about what they want to see (and not see) happen over the next decade.

“We are going to work very hard to deputize people and bring them in to be a part of our team,” Wright said. “Asking them what is important to them. In this case, that starts with asking them what does equity mean to them. What are your issues you’re facing. We do that by asking people about their hopes, dreams, fears and concerns. ... Once we get people to open up about what they’re hopeful and aspirational about, you’re already thinking about solutions rather than just the things that are bothering you. So that public process for us is the most important thing.”

That public process will only be as good as the extent to which the public participates. Here are some important links to help you do that:

Virtual Visioning Workshop: <https://www.planspartanburg.com/virtual-visioning-workshop>

Register for Planapalooza: <https://www.planspartanburg.com/planapalooza>

About Plan Spartanburg: <https://www.planspartanburg.com/about>