
CITY OF LIBERTY



Liberty Master Plan

A Roadmap to Strategic Planning

Adopted by Liberty City Council on January 21, 2020

This master plan is designed to be a roadmap for city strategic planning efforts for community development. The city has done activities to determine the present condition of the city, which should be refreshed and updated, but the main focus should be on where does the city want to go and how is it going to get there. Using strategic plans can help the city and community make timely, priority-based and focused progress on community development.

Below are efforts the city has undertaken in planning for the future:

1. 2003 Comprehensive Plan by the Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG). Some of the information is still relevant but it needs updated to reflect the current conditions and general plans (state law requires it be reviewed every five years and updated every ten years). Maybe the largest change since 2003 are the mill and plant closings.
2. Downtown Liberty, SC Market Report by the ACOG. This public input sessions were performed in 2014 & 2015 and the report was published on February 12, 2017. The Market Report includes a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats), retail leakage report, profile of the community (see Heartland Communities & Southern Satellites profiles), and implementation strategies.
3. SWOT analysis by at a March 24, 2018 City Council Meeting.

All three of these documents can be found on the City's website at www.libertysc.com/forms-documents under the Planning section.

With a review of the above planning documents, below is a list of progress the city has made on strategies as well as other strategies identified that would need attention to make significant progress:

Strategies Where Progress Has Been Made

- Cleanup and upgrades in downtown area and main highways
- Utilizing festival and events for activities and bringing people to the city
- Implementation of façade grant program
- Annexation of properties into the city
- Adding pedestrian walkways
- Controlling mobile home development

Other Identified Strategies

- Vision, Marketing and Revitalization Programs
- Grow arts & recreation programs
- Connect places by walkways and pedestrian paths

- Upgrade city infrastructure and facilities
- Increase residential development
- Review and protect historic properties
- Proactive on infill redevelopment

Note: the Comprehensive Plan noted there was a lack of available commercial properties but the plan was published before the mills closed.

Along with the city planning documents listed above there are many resources available on city planning and revitalization. One document that has twelve fundamental steps to revitalization is a document published by The Brookings Institute and titled “Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization”. The twelve steps are fundamental items that should be applied to any community development effort and they apply to large and small communities. Small cities may not have the resources to fully implement the twelve steps but it is worthwhile to be familiar with them and utilize what is possible. The twelve steps include:

1. Capture the vision
2. Develop a strategic plan
3. Forge a healthy private/public partnership
4. Make the right thing easy
5. Establish business improvement districts & other non-profits
6. Create a catalytic development company
7. Create an urban entertainment district
8. Develop a rental housing market
9. Pioneer an affordable strategy
10. Focus on for-sale housing
11. Develop a local-serving retail strategy
12. Re-create a strong office market

Anyone that will be involved in Liberty’s community development effort is encouraged to read this twenty-three page publication which can be found on the city’s website at www.libertysc.com/forms-documents under the Planning section.

Next Step

When thinking about revitalizing a neighborhood, downtown area, or industrial area, it is natural for people to think it can be done in a year, two or three when in fact, it can take decades to see healthy progress and revitalization over an area. Many times, there will be small steps showing improvement

and these have to be celebrated and built upon until the momentum grows and there is a healthy and thriving area. These small steps and momentum are assisted and cultivated by strategic planning.

Strategic planning efforts are crucial in revitalization efforts to ensure a plan is in place for a variety of reasons which include:

- Engages the community and helps build consensus & synergy to help create a better future for the city.
- Decides what is best for the community and when adopted by city council and published, it is available to all members of the community.
- Once adopted, allows decision-makers to make informed decisions on what is best for the community and helps steer programs and projects towards community goals.
- Helps spur residents, property owners, businesses, investors & developers to invest in the community.
- Provides direction for the city organization and employees.
- Is a key element in scoring high in grant programs which leads to more grant funding.

Roadmap to Strategic Planning

Strategic planning will provide a focused look at key areas of community development and revitalization and result in the development of focused goals for the city along with customized programs and efforts needed to accomplish the goals. The planning efforts need to be customized for the city to ensure any goals, programs and efforts are reasonable, attainable and sustainable. With the completion of each plan, the city would need to ensure resources are focused and allocated in a manner so the specific activities can be obtained. A review of the strategic elements of each plan should be reviewed each year as part of preparing for the annual budget.

The roadmap to strategic planning includes six separate, but interdependent, strategic plans that can guide the city for many years to come. The strategic plans include:

Strategic Plan # 1—Visioning, Branding & Marketing Plan (VBM Plan)

This VBM plan is recommended to be the first one developed and once adopted, it will help guide the other plans. The VBM plan would help identify what is unique and special about Liberty, decide the short term & long-term vision for the city, develop a brand & logo, and start the development of marketing messages.

Strategic Plan # 2—Brownfield Site-Reuse Plan

With the textile mill and industrial sites in the city being abandoned and underutilized and identified as potential brownfield sites, a strategic brownfield site-reuse plan would help determine the best use of these sites in preparing for the city's future and could help the city, property owner, developer or investors in redeveloping the sites into assets for the community. The Brownfield Plan would look at the city's redevelopment needs, market conditions, analyze opportunities and constraints, and identify potential brownfield reuse options. Potential uses for the industrial sites include affordable housing, recreational facilities, a hub for multi-use paths to connect destinations, and industrial use. The city would like to connect with the nearby Pickens County Industrial Park and one of the potential brownfield sites could be a recreational destination with a multi-use trail connecting to the industrial park (and other places). With the relocation of the U.S. Waffle Company to Liberty with the influx of 350+ jobs, the city's demand for affordable housing will be greater and having affordable housing on a redeveloped brownfield site would be a nice fit for the city. A brownfield site reuse plan would give valuable information for the redevelopment of the former textile and industrial sites.

Strategic Plan # 3—Downtown & Main Entry Plan

Some progress has been made on the downtown plan that was started in 2014 and finalized in early 2017 but it is ready for an update to look closer at private/public partnerships, façade improvements, retail strategy, business needs, redevelopment activities, etc. The city needs to take a closer look at the main entryways, and find reasonable, attainable & sustainable solutions for making them more attractive and inviting to help the city's redevelopment effort. The community has citizens, business owners, and property owners that want to be engaged in helping the downtown prosper and the downtown planning effort would benefit from their involvement.

Strategic Plan # 4—Land Use, Housing & Zoning Plan (Comp Plan)

The last comprehensive plan (comp plan) was done in 2003 under a contract with the Appalachian Council of Governments. This was a time when the textile mills were operating and much has changed since then. Per South Carolina state law, comp plans are to be reviewed every five years and updated every ten years. The comp plan would review and make recommendations on proposed changes to land use, housing, and zoning and it would be a project of the City's Planning Commission. Once city council is ready to proceed and it's funded, the Planning Commission would work with the Appalachian Regional Commission and community to develop and recommend a Comp Plan to City Council for adoption.

Strategic Plan # 5—Recreation Plan

Recreational activities have become more important to individuals and families and consequently, expectations have increased for local governments to provide more recreational facilities and programs (along with arts & cultural activities). The city also has the challenge of providing youth sports to a large area outside the city and funding is a challenge. Having a comprehensive recreation program and facilities can help spur residential development, can serve area industrial companies and families, can be a viable redevelopment project for brownfield sites and can help Liberty be a destination. Is it worthwhile to create a special purpose district or partner with Pickens County to create more recreational activities for all ages and many interests? A recreation plan would explore ideas on what level of recreation is needed and desired for the community and how best can it be funded and accomplished.

Strategic Plan # 6—Transportation

Along with a recreation plan, a transportation plan would help identify potential routes for multi-use trails to connect destinations. Are there streets in the city that need realigned, reconstructed or otherwise improved to serve residential, businesses or industrial needs. Are there any sidewalk improvements needed to help make a safe route to the schools? Having a transportation plan is a must to score high in federal highway funding programs via GPATS and could be used to seek funding via the Pickens County Transportation Committee and other funding sources.

Planning Steering Committee

To help ensure the various planning efforts are coordinated with each other and coordinated guidance is provided, a planning steering committee is recommended to oversee and guide the planning efforts. Steering committee members should include a combination of city and community members.

Summary

Using strategic plans can help the city and community make timely, priority-based and focused progress on community development. The planning efforts need to be customized for the city to ensure any goals, programs and efforts are reasonable, attainable and sustainable. With the completion of each plan, the city would need to ensure resources are focused and allocated in a manner so the specific activities can be obtained.

The roadmap to strategic planning includes six separate, but interdependent, strategic plans that can guide the city for many years to come. With a combination of city funds, grant funding, and possibly private funding, the city should strive to fund each one of the plans within the next two years.