

Strategic Plan

FOR

ANNISTON, ALABAMA

ONECITY
ONEVISION



FINAL REPORT

Prepared by *planning NEXT*

April 30, 2014

"I believe that Anniston has a great future ahead of itself... and with everyone working together we can make Anniston a true Model City."

– Anniston Citizen

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A message from Mayor Vaughn Stewart...

To the Citizens of Anniston:

Entering a period of renewed vision, optimism, and opportunity, the City of Anniston, Alabama, has undertaken a process to prepare a community-driven strategic plan. One City, One Vision was a chance for everyone who cares about our city to consider where we are today, understand choices for the future, and work together to make Anniston the best it can be.

In the spirit of creating a community-driven plan, the City committed to an open and transparent process. Throughout the process over 1,000 people were engaged face-to-face and another 1,000 were reached through Facebook online.

The Strategic Plan was developed with the help from the Steering Committee and was derived from input from the more than 1,000 citizens across five different public meetings. The Plan is divided into eight topic areas; Arts and Culture, City Image, Community Services, Learning, Place, Prosperity, Safety, Transportation.

I would like to extend appreciation and gratitude to the Steering Committee for their very important role in this process and to all the citizens of Anniston who got involved, helped spread the word and chose to participate in this very important moment in time for our city.

Sincerely,

Mayor Vaughn Stewart

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Acknowledgments

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Acknowledgments (continued)

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Jaqueline Lopez
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Facilities

Steven Folks, PARC Director
Anniston City Meeting Center
Hodges Recreation Center
Carver Recreation Center
Anniston Public Library

Supporters

Anniston Fire Department, Chief Taylor
Anniston Police Department, Cap. Allen George
Anniston High School Marching Band
Anniston High School Annabellies
Ashley Martin / Abby Bass - Growing Trends
Classic on Noble
Cobb Elementary School Choir
Donoho Cheerleaders
Moore Printing
Nunnally's Custom Framing
Peerless Grille

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Supporting documents are bound under separate covers:

Appendix A. Anniston Snapshot Report

Appendix B. Workshop Memo

Appendix C. Summit Memo

Appendix D. Topic Workbooks

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Plan for the city of Anniston is the result of a year-long citizen-based initiative to think critically about the future of Anniston to create a plan to guide the future of the city. Goal statements were developed which have served as touch points throughout the process. These goal statements were developed from input from the first set of public workshops where people were asked what they treasured most about Anniston. These goals along with technical analysis and input from the second public meeting, the Community Summit, make up this action agenda for the future. This document presents the results of that effort.

"I want to be part of moving my city forward, seeing everyone coming together in support gives me hope and encouragement for the future of my city."

– Anniston citizen

Motivation for the Strategic Plan

To be successful at any task, certain steps must be taken. The Strategic Plan is a way to address any issue that is important to a successful community. The community has potential to be better than it is today. Anniston has overcome several serious challenges during the past several decades. The newly elected leadership wants to seize this opportunity for all of us to come together and chart a positive course.

Organization of the Strategic Plan

Actions are programs, policies or projects that are the specific recommendations of the Plan. They are the activities the community is going to pursue to achieve its goals. The One City, One Vision Strategic Plan has 71 actions, which are organized into eight topic areas. These topics were derived from themes heard at the kick-off workshops collected during the treasure card exercise. Topics include; Arts and Culture, City Image, Community Services, Learning, Place, Prosperity, Safety and Transportation.

Chapter Organization

The Executive Summary is organized into the following sections:

Introduction

Community Aspirations

Key Findings

Overview of the Strategic Plan Process

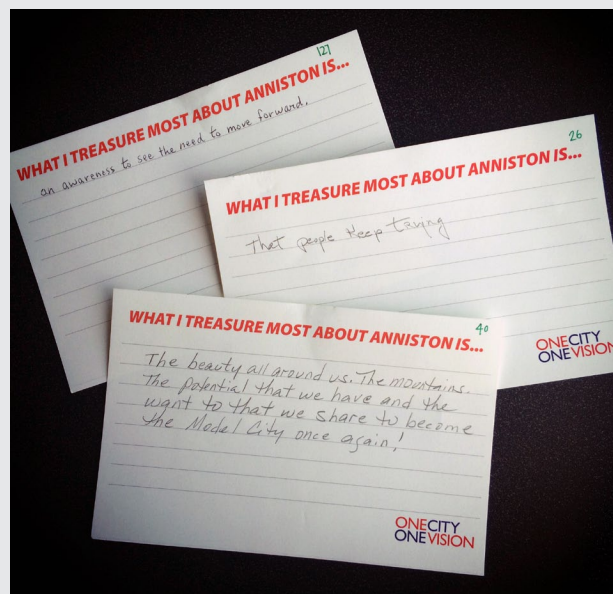
Community Preferences

Community Aspirations

Goals

At the public kick-off workshops people filled out “treasure cards” which were then analyzed and themes identified. These themes were then used to create a series of goal statements. These values will be touchstone for the strategic plan as the specific action items are developed. Each goal describes a **desired outcome or future condition** in simple terms. Addressing each of these goals is critical to achieving the overall vision.

1. **Arts and Culture:** Plentiful activities and cultural offerings for all ages that are well-supported, both financially and in participation.
2. **City Image:** A proud and friendly community that promotes its unique story and is attractive to visitors, business and new and former residents.
3. **Community Services:** A coordinated and consolidated system of services for all members of the community that is visible and easy to understand and centrally located.
4. **Leadership:** Engaged, fully committed and effective leaders from all sectors – public, civic and private – that are approachable and collaborate for the good of the Anniston community.
5. **Learning:** Effective and well-regarded educational programs – from pre-kindergarten to vocational to higher education to life-long learning – that nurtures individuals and enhances economic opportunity for the community. For K-12, a diverse curriculum is offered, innovation is demonstrated, facilities are efficiently used and maintained, parents, teachers and community leaders are actively involved, and a more positive image is enjoyed.
6. **Place:** Attractive and well-maintained natural areas and man-made areas that are points of pride for residents and impressive to visitors and investors.
7. **Prosperity:** Broad opportunities for enhanced economic activities available to all citizens that are defined by; a stream-lined coordination, a business friendly approach, diverse jobs and investments, a capable workforce, and leveraged assets.
8. **Safety:** A safe community – in reality and perception – for all citizens.
9. **Transportation:** A well-maintained transportation network that serves the community in a clear, convenient and friendly way, including roads, bus, pedestrian, and bicycles.



KEY FINDINGS

In addition to the public input, technical research on trends and conditions was undertaken. That work is summarized in Snapshot Report which can be found in Appendix A. Key findings from the Snapshot Report are listed below.

People

Anniston's demographic trends reveal daunting challenges. The city has experienced six decades of population and household decline, with families and younger people leading that decline. While Alabama maintained steady growth, much of that growth has occurred at the edges of urban areas. Older cities were stagnant or lost population. In that way Anniston is similar to cities nationwide that thrived in the early part of the 20th century, and struggled with economic and social change in the second half of the 20th century.

POPULATION

Long trend of population decline in Anniston. Since its peak in the 1960s with over 33,000 residents, Anniston's population has declined every decade. The 2010 Census recorded 23,106 residents, which is a loss of about 31% of its residents since 1960.

Recent growth elsewhere in Calhoun County. Since 2000, Calhoun County has grown by about 7,500 (8.5%) people.

Total households declining along with population. From 200-2010, the total population declined by -4.8% and households declined at a slightly greater rate of -5.2%.

Smaller household size in Anniston. On average there are 2.24 people in each Anniston household, which is smaller than the average size of households in Alabama (2.48).

Fewer families in Anniston. Family households with children under the age of 18 decreased -14%. Families with children between the ages of 6-17 declined -24%.

Growing proportion of female-led households with children. The only family group that grew during the decrease was female-led households with children under the age of 6.

Anniston citizens describe what they treasure most about the city:

"Although Anniston has many assets to build upon, when asked, it's residents overwhelmingly pride themselves on the relationships they have with one another more than any other asset. Southern hospitality and a united City is the strongest identifier of Anniston."

"Biking and walking trails are a treasure for residents of Anniston, allowing them to enjoy the natural surroundings that surround the City."

"Access to libraries, museums, and proximity to higher education institutions make Anniston a cultural center for East Alabama."

"That people keep trying."

AGE

An older, aging population. In 2010, the median age in Anniston was 41.3 years versus 37.9 for Alabama. The median age has been increasing at a rate faster than the state.

Fewer young people, more “boomers” and seniors. Young people under the age of 18-24 years old represent a smaller and declining proportion of the population in Anniston compared to the state and nation.

DIVERSITY

Large proportion of African Americans. Slightly more than half (52%) of Anniston’s population identify themselves as African American, compared to 30% statewide.

Small but growing Hispanic minority. Hispanics represent a small portion of Anniston’s population (2.3%) compared to the county (3.3%), and state (3.7%).

Few foreign-born residents. Foreign born residents make up 2% of Anniston’s residents, a smaller proportion compared to the state and county (each 3%).

Citizens change addresses relatively frequently. As of 2011, approximately one in five Anniston residents lived in a different house the previous year.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The conditions and trends research reveals many opportunities for Anniston.

Population Capture: The county and region are growing in population. The city has the potential to capture a share of this growth.

Parkway Completion: The completion of the parkway is anticipated in the next year and this brings increased potential for new economic activity.

Developable Land: The city has abundant land that is developable. This includes both undeveloped land and land that is developed but underutilized. The former Ft. McClellan holds plenty of short and long term development potential.

Natural Setting: The community enjoys a beautiful natural setting that can be further leveraged. Related to this is the fact that the city has abundant park and recreational amenities.

Regional Access: Anniston’s location provides relatively easy access to Atlanta and Birmingham.

Downtown Authenticity: The city’s downtown and surrounding neighborhoods have qualities that are increasingly attractive to those interested in authentic places and authentic experiences.

Continued on facing page.

Place

Anniston's physical characteristics are among its valuable assets. The city is located between two major metropolitan areas in a unique natural setting. Its early prosperity and deliberate planning formed a built environment with elaborate buildings, fine neighborhoods and homes, attractive streets and designed landscapes. But Anniston's current conditions somewhat conceal the city's remaining assets. While many properties are vacant, underutilized or in disrepair, there remains a viable stock of buildings, many with historic character. The city's traditional development patterns anchored by downtown are a good foundation for creating a more desirable place. The new parkway and former Fort McClellan land present tremendous opportunities for development in the city. With maintained public parks and expanding recreational assets, Anniston remains quite livable.

CONTEXT

Close to nature, not far from major cities. Anniston is conveniently located within an hour-and-a-half drive to both Birmingham and Atlanta.

Large land area for the population. Anniston's land area is currently about 45 square miles.

Traditional development patterns remain. Most of Anniston was developed before World War II and retains a traditional street grid with small blocks and buildings close to the street.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Continued from facing page.

Community History: Anniston has a deep and special history. This can be better leveraged to encourage economic development activity.

Education Leadership: The Anniston City Schools has a new superintendent and is working on their own strategic plan.

Job Outlook: Recent trends indicate that unemployment is declining in the community.

Healthful Foods: Recent award of technical assistance and implementation support through the 2013 EPA/USDA Livable Communities Program will allow Anniston to develop plans for local production, distribution and consumption of healthful foods.

Indirect Interstate access. Interstate 20, which connects Birmingham to Atlanta, runs just south of Anniston through the City of Oxford.

Historic resources and initiatives. Anniston retains a wealth of historic resources.

A parkway brings opportunity. The area's Eastern Parkway is nearing completion. This 9.1 mile parkway will make additional land available for development in the city.

LAND USE

Large areas of undeveloped land. Less than half of the city's land area has been developed (47%, 19.5 square miles).

Residential land is the dominant land use. Of the developed land uses within the city, residential dominates. Over half (53%, 4,111 acres) of the city's developed land area is residential.

Development plans for McClellan. A zoning overlay was adopted in 2012 depicting future plans for the redevelopment and preservation of the former Fort McClellan.

Park and recreation needs. A 2001 Recreation Master Plan identified specific improvements for each of the city's parks, some of which were very contentious, so the Plan has mostly not been implemented.

Support for pedestrian and bike planning. The city has taken steps to integrate pedestrian and bike planning best practices into other city policies and regulation.

Growing network of trails. Alabama's largest rail-to-trails project, Chief Ladiga Trail links downtown Anniston to Atlanta. The city is also home to Coldwater Mountain, currently being developed into a world-class destination trail system.

Total park land above a national benchmark. Based on the 2010 population, Anniston has 25.5 acres of park land per 1,000 residents.

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

Mostly single-family housing. As of 2011, there are 12,291 housing units in Anniston. Approximately 76% are single family units, 23% multi-family units and 1% mobile homes.

Significant amount of vacant housing. Approximately 80% of Anniston's housing is occupied, leaving 2,504 units (20%) vacant.

Larger proportion of owner-occupied than renter-occupied housing, but low for Alabama. Of Anniston's housing that is occupied, about 58% is owner occupied and 42% is rental.

Very slow rate of recent housing growth, particularly single-family. Since the year 2000, 208 permits have been issued for new single-family homes in Anniston.

Older housing. Approximately 45% of housing units were built during the 1960s.

Relatively affordable housing. The median rent in Anniston is \$575, while the median home value is \$94,623.

Prosperity

Anniston's statistics related to its prosperity reveal significant challenges. Chief among these concerns is the community's relatively low performance in education. While the graduation rate has slowly improved, the school's performance is a clear area of concern for residents and city leadership, alike. Other statistics related to the labor force and income tell similarly challenging stories but are also showing signs of slow improvement.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

- Increasing educational attainment reflects Alabama trends.
- Relatively low high school graduation rate, but improving.
- Smaller working population.
- Higher unemployment rate, but improving.
- More residents employed in service occupations.
- Anniston's major industries include retail, manufacturing, and entertainment/recreation/ accommodation/food services.

Income

- Lower incomes in Anniston.
- Large number of very low income households.
- Fewer people with earned income in Anniston.

Health and Safety

- High rates of violent crime.
- High rates of property crime.
- Higher rates of disease within Calhoun County.
- Factors contributing to high disease rate and lower life expectancy in Calhoun County.

OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

An effective visioning and strategic planning process requires the active participation of a broad cross section of a community. To achieve that end, the city appointed a diverse 55-member steering committee to guide the process. The group met monthly for the duration of the planning process and met at times outside of the monthly meetings to develop outreach and communication strategies, review ideas generated through the public process and draft the initial actions of the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan process included 3 rounds of public engagement opportunities: 1) Public Kick-off Workshops, 2) Community Summit, 3) Community Open House. Everyone with an interest in the future of Anniston was invited to attend. The purpose and outcome of each event are described below:

Public Kick-off Workshops

PURPOSE

The purpose of the public kickoff workshops was threefold:

1. To inform the public of the impetus for the project;
2. Share initial input gathered from the Community Survey (2011) and the Listening Sessions (2013); and Stakeholder interviews (2013)
3. Engage citizens in a brainstorming activity to gather feedback and ideas about major topic areas.

WORKSHOP FORMAT

The workshop had three distinct parts:

1. Introduction and Reflection – introductions and the welcome were given by the Mayor, City Council members and Steering Committee members. The participants were then asked to reflect on Anniston and fill out a “treasure card”, writing down what they treasure most about Anniston. Those cards were then collected and displayed for all to see at the end of the meeting.
2. Setting the Stage – a short presentation of background information was shared which included; purpose of the meeting, what is a vision, and highlights of what we learned from the Community Survey, Listening Sessions and stakeholder interviews.

“Start where you are.
Use what you have.
Do what you can.”

—Arthur Ashe

Public Participation

Outreach

In order to let people know about the choice to get involved in One City, One Vision and attend one of the public events the planning team, steering committee and staff conducted several outreach tasks:

Press

- Print ad in Anniston Star at critical points in process.
- Print ad in Star Plus at critical points in process.
- Online ad www.Annistonstar.com
- Letters to the Editors were submitted at critical times throughout the process.

TV/Radio

- Local TV Station TV 24, "Calhoun County's Most Wanted" - promoted the workshops

Social Media

- Facebook ad campaign ran for 30 days prior to public kickoff workshops. 1,036 Facebook followers.
- Weekly posts (over 60 posts since July 2013).

Electronic/Email

- Multiple email blasts throughout the process.

Community Events

- Project Business cards distributed at the Anniston Musicfest at Zinn Park.
- Project Business cards distributed at the Army Materiel Band Concert at Montieth Park.
- Project Business Cards and Bracelets distributed at the Woodstock 5K Race.

General Publicity

- Posters hung in the City buildings.
- Rack cards distributed to schools, churches and businesses around town.
- Yard signs placed at prominent locations within the community.

BY THE NUMBERS

Approximate Participants

Kick-off Workshops:	500
Community Summit:	250
Young Persons Workshop:	25
Open House:	300
Volunteers:	50
Total:	1,125

Ideas Gathered

- 1,207 ideas gathered at the Workshop
- 885 individual "treasures" given at the Workshop
- 150 specific actions considered and prioritized at the Community Summit.
- 51 draft actions reviewed and voted on during the Open House.

Satisfaction

Participants expressed a very high degree of satisfaction with the public process. The following questions were asked on exit questionnaires collected after the Public Kick-off Workshops and Community Summit. Percentages indicate "yes" responses.

- 98% Were you comfortable working in today's small group?
- 99% Did you feel your input was heard and recorded accurately?
- 99% Will you continue to participate in the planning process?

3. Small Group Work – participants worked in small groups to 1) Clarify - discuss topics and identify driving issues within topic areas; 2) Identify Gaps - identify any missing issues/topics and then identify driving issues within those topic areas; 3) Prioritize – identify where to start and suggest an action.

MAJOR OUTCOMES

1. Nearly 500 people in total attended the workshops – This is very impressive turnout for a community of Anniston’s size.
2. Over 2,700 pieces of input were collected – These pieces of input (individual comments, ideas etc.) were collected from the work which took place in the small groups as well as input from youth at the Anniston High School focus group.
3. Workshops had a high satisfaction rate (99%) – people felt their ideas were heard, they were comfortable working in their small group and they would like to continue to participate in the process.
4. Roughly 255 people indicated that they wanted to continue to helpful to One City, One Vision by filling out an “I want to be part of the solution card” which asked for their area of interest and contact information.



Participants worked in small groups in a brainstorming activity to gather feedback and ideas about major topic areas derived from previous public engagement (Listening Tours and Get Moving Survey).

The Young Persons Workshop gave a chance for the Anniston youth to have their voice heard as a part of this planning process.



Young Persons Workshop

A focus group was held with 25 Anniston High School students to hear the youth perspective on their future city. The group was asked three questions; 1) What do you treasure most about Anniston, 2) What would make Anniston a better place to live, and 3) Do you intend to live in Anniston after you finish your education, if not why not? In general, the students expressed an appreciation for their school, the tree lined streets and historic downtown and the close knit community of people. They wished for more activities for young people and wanted more tutoring and access to mentors in their field of interest for future careers. They also expressed that they would consider coming back to Anniston after their college experiences if there the city had progressed and there were more opportunities for finding a good job and more things to do within the city.

Participants at the Public Kick-off Workshops shared what they treasured most about the city of Anniston.



Community Summit

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Community Summit was to:

1. Share the results and feedback gathered at the Public Kick-off Workshops.
2. Review the draft goal statements by having the citizens rank the statements and provide any comments or feedback on the goal statements.
3. Engage citizens to prioritize and refine the actions for each of the topic areas.

SUMMIT FORMAT

The Community Summit had two distinct parts:

1. Kick-off Workshop Results – A short presentation of the results from the Kick-off Workshops was shared which included; who we heard from (the demographics of who came to the workshops) and what we heard (clarifying issues, filling in missing issues and prioritizing where to start). Draft goal statements were also shared.
2. Small Group Work – The small group work included two exercises.
 - A. Goal Statements - Participants were asked to rate the draft goal statement on a scale from one to five of how strongly they agreed with the statement. They circled their ranking number and were given space to provide comments or feedback about the goal statements. In total nine goal statements were rated and reviewed at the Summit.
 - B. Actions - Participants worked in small groups to complete an action worksheet on a particular topic. They were given a list of actions (which had been developed at the Kick-off Workshops) and told to pick the five most important actions. They were then asked to discuss and provide any additional comments about why those actions were the most important. They were also given space to fill-in additional/new actions the group might have come up during the discussion.

MAJOR OUTCOMES

1. Nearly 250 people attended Community Summit – This is very impressive turnout for a community of Anniston's size.
2. Of the people in attendance at the Summit, 60 percent had attended the Kick-off Workshops.
3. In total, nearly 150 actions were considered, prioritized, discussed over the course of the evening.
4. The Community Summit had a high satisfaction rate (98 percent average) people felt their ideas were heard, they were comfortable working in their small group and they would like to continue to participate in the process.
5. The draft goal statements were all strongly supported with the average ranking being 4.5 out of 5 in support of the goal statement.



Participants at the Community Summit worked in small groups to complete an action worksheet on a particular topic and then brainstormed on additional actions that should be considered for that particular topic.



“Coming together is a beginning;
keeping together is progress;
working together is success.”

– Henry Ford

Open House

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Open house was to:

1. Share the draft actions that make up the strategic plan and gather feedback from the public on which actions should take top priority through a voting exercise.
2. Bring the community back together one last time to celebrate the great work done over the last several months.
3. Share the next steps in this process and launch implementation.

OPEN HOUSE FORMAT

The Community Open House had two distinct parts:

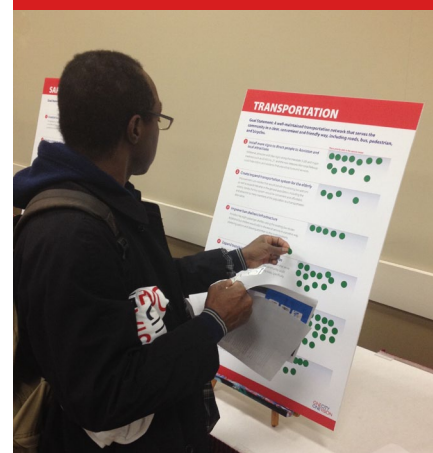
1. Presentation – A brief presentation was given which summarized the planning process to date and presented the next steps. A film was shown and presentation was made to promote the City of Anniston Video Competition as a part of the City of Storytellers project. This project seeks to improve the image of the city and through sharing great stories about Anniston in video. Introductions and the welcome were given by the Mayor.
2. Display Boards – The 51 actions were organized by topics and displayed on boards for everyone to review and vote using sticker dots. Each person was given 6 dots to indicate their preferred actions.
3. Post Open House Viewing – Following the Open House there were three other opportunities for the public to view the boards and vote on priority actions.
 - Kiwanis Pancake Breakfast – March 1, 2014
 - Anniston Public Library – March 2 – 7, 2014
 - Dancing With Our Stars – March 8, 2014

MAJOR OUTCOMES

1. Nearly 200 people attended the Open House Event on February 27, 2014. This was great turnout for the last event, people stayed engaged until the end of the process.
2. An additional 100 people engaged/viewed the boards at the additional opportunities following the Open House.
3. The Learning topic received the most overall votes on actions followed by Place and then City Image.



Participants identified the actions they felt were most important during the Open House.



Community Preferences

The action agenda contains 51 actions, which are organized into eight topic areas. Twelve of these actions were identified as the community's preferences for the most important steps to undertake. These preferences will inform the implementation agenda. The twelve most important actions are listed below, ranked in order of most votes received during the open house review period..

- **Create a coordinated program to significantly reduce the number of vacant and dilapidated buildings (CI 1.2)**
- **Create a community arts center (AC 1.3)**
- **Create a downtown strategic plan (PL 1.4)**
- **Create a city-wide, quality Pre-K Program (L 1.9)**
- **Evaluate the feasibility for improved collaboration among non-profits and community groups (CS 1.4)**
- **Create a downtown arts district (AC 1.6)**
- **Develop and launch a coordinated marketing campaign for Anniston (CI 1.1)**
- **Create a task force to enhance the physical appearance of the community (CI 1.3)**
- **Increase entry-level pay for police officers (S1.4)**
- **Evaluate curriculum (L 1.3)**
- **Create a facility utilization plan (L 1.4)**
- **Create and enhance safe access routes and signage for bicyclists and pedestrians (T 1.5)**

ACTION AGENDA

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ARTS AND CULTURE

GOAL

Plentiful activities and cultural offerings for all ages that are well-supported, both financially and in participation.

ACTIONS

AC 1.1 Develop a community cultural calendar

The community produces many cultural programs and activities and there is a need for a comprehensive community calendar to provide residents and visitors with information about future activities.

AC 1.2 Create more youth art activities

The youth of Anniston could benefit from increased art activities, including visual arts, drama, crafts, and music.

AC 1.3 Create a community arts center *

The city would benefit from a strong physical setting to showcase and host cultural activities. This could include classes, workshops, exhibits, and a small multifunctional theatre/concert hall. Downtown would be a desirable location for a community arts center.

AC 1.4 Develop a program to leverage existing arts and cultural organizations

Formal coordination of existing organizations could leverage limited communication, promotion and programming resources. The program could include creation of an Anniston Arts Council.

An asterisk (*) indicates that a particular action was selected as a “community preference” by participants at the public Open House. Refer to page 16 for a description of the Open House and action voting process.

AC 1.5 Create new arts and cultural events

The city currently hosts numerous arts and cultural activities, including those conducted by CAST, Knox Concert, Music at McClellan, Cheaha Creative Arts, Anniston's Got Talent, Dancing with Our Stars, and others. The community could benefit from additional events that enrich and celebrate the community. Examples include placement of outside art on loan from national museums and foundations in the downtown venue.

AC 1.6 Create a downtown arts district *

Downtown provides an attractive setting for creative activity. The city should develop a program to encourage and incentivize local and out of town artists to live and work in downtown in an arts district or cluster. The new community arts center could serve as a key programmatic anchor

The following actions were added by city staff and council after the public open house.

AC 1.7 Further collaboration to improve and create performing arts facilities

CITY IMAGE

GOAL

A proud and friendly community that promotes its unique story and is attractive to visitors, business and new and former residents.

ACTIONS

CI 1.1 Develop and launch a coordinated marketing campaign for Anniston *

A professionally conceived and coordinated marketing effort is needed. The campaign would be aimed at promoting community assets as well as counteracting and rehabilitating negative publicity from recent years. It would also include preparation of a branding strategy with new graphic identity for the city.

CI 1.2 Create a coordinated program to significantly reduce the number of vacant and dilapidated buildings *

An intense effort is needed—a “war on blight”—to dramatically reduce the number of vacant, neglected, and dilapidated buildings, beginning with Anniston’s most visible commercial and residential neighborhoods.

CI 1.3 Create a task force to enhance the physical appearance of the community *

The task force would educate, encourage, and assist neighborhoods in the formation of effective neighborhood associations, crime watch groups, and similar community improvement ventures. This task force would coordinate with Beautification Task Force and new neighborhood associations. An emphasis would be

placed on improving curb appeal, cleanliness, neighborhood safety and engagement programs, like city-wide clean-up days. Encouragement of business(s) to adopt Downtown and Quintard blocks.

CI 1.4 Recognize and award business and homeowners who enhance their properties

The maintenance and appearance of individual properties has an impact on the appearance, pride and reputation of the community. A program that recognizes and awards property owners for their positive efforts should be established.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

GOAL

A coordinated and consolidated system of services for all members of the community that is visible and easy to understand and centrally located.

ACTIONS

CS 1.1 Create a Youth Alliance

Diverse summer youth programs exist but they are limited in numbers, scope, and ages served. Accessibility (due to transportation and cost) is also limited. A unified and coordinated plan is needed to identify and serve currently under served youth populations.

CS 1.2 Establish a Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness

A clear, seamless, sustainable, and comprehensive service delivery process is needed to simplify access to services and housing, track system outcomes to inform and enhance decision-making, promote on-going interagency communication, and improve overall system efficiency.

CS 1.3 Develop a partnership between the City of Anniston and the Anniston Police Department with Hobson City's Dannon Project

Transitioning from jail to successful living can be a formidable task in the absence of supportive services, case management, and appropriate referrals. The Dannon Project is the "Point of Contact" within a community to provide these forms of assistance so that at risk populations can find employment, access to housing, health supports, mentors, counseling, stability, and improved behavior patterns.

CS 1.4 Evaluate the feasibility for improved collaboration among non-profits and community groups *

The community has many effective organizations, but resources and operations could be enhanced with additional collaboration. An evaluation should be undertaken of opportunities for non-profits and community groups to communicate, partner and align according to missions—perhaps through the establishment of umbrella councils—in order to enhance grant opportunities and delivery of services.

The following actions were added by city staff and council after the public open house.

CS 1.5 Establish recycling services

CS 1.6 Update and enforce ordinance on animal control

CS 1.7 Develop a Neighborhood Leadership Development Program to promote neighborhood enhancements

LEARNING

GOAL

Effective and well-regarded educational programs — from pre-kindergarten to vocational to higher education to life-long learning — that nurtures individuals and enhances economic opportunity for the community. For K-12, a diverse curriculum is offered, innovation is demonstrated, facilities are efficiently used and maintained, parents, teachers and community leaders are actively involved, and a more positive image is enjoyed.

ACTIONS

L 1.1 Create a mentoring program

Exposure to positive role models and job opportunities can have a powerful impact on young people. School and business leaders should create a mentoring program for the youth of Anniston. This program could be integrated with an Adopt-a-School Initiative.

L 1.2 Create a program to increase parental involvement

Research and intuition support that increased parental involvement in education produce better outcomes for students. A coordinated effort should be undertaken to support parents and their participation in school and at home activities with their children.

L 1.3 Evaluate curriculum *

Curriculum is a course and type of study or list of courses and is at the core of the education mission. It outlines the skills, performances, attitudes, and values pupils are expected to learn from schooling. The schools should evaluate the current curriculum to ensure it is meeting the needs of students and the community. This should include innovative ideas like creating magnet school(s) at elementary and secondary levels. For instance, a medical magnet could be created for 7th-12th grades leveraging Anniston's abundant medical assets at local hospitals and nursing schools.

L 1.4 Create facility utilization plan *

The school system's leadership and board have acknowledged that the system has too many schools for the number of pupils enrolled. Efforts will continue to reduce costs and become more efficient in the utilization of school facilities.

L 1.5 Create a pro-active communications plan

A topic very important to the community is the school system's image, how the community's city residents and citizens perceive it, and what the media and communications say about the local school system. The schools should be more deliberate in sharing and promoting the efforts of the children, teachers, administrators, parents and board.

L 1.6 Create partnerships with higher education institutions

Anniston has the benefit of close proximity to higher educational institutions which should be leveraged to improve student outcomes. As an example, a partnership between Gadsden State Community College and Anniston City School System could offer qualified students unlimited access to dual enrollment and career tech opportunities.

L 1.7 Investigate creating a "Friends of the Anniston Schools"

The school system could benefit from an outside organization acting as an advocate and critical "friend." This could be a completely new entity or one of the several foundations that already help the schools could be expanded to serve this role.

L 1.8 Establish a city-wide, quality After School Program

Young children could benefit from organized programming. A quality After School Program—weekdays, weekends and summer vacation months—could include academic tutorial, mentoring, life skills training, recreation, arts/culture and an "Anniston Reads" programs. Youth development providers such as PARD, Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA to be a part of planning and program. Volunteers from the Greek system, business community, education foundations, AmeriCorps and others to be solicited.

L 1.9 Create a city-wide, quality Pre-K program *

Critical learning development takes place at an early age. To foster improved long-term achievement, a city-wide Pre-K program should be created.

L 1.10 Create an Adult Education Workforce Development Center

Industry location and expansion decisions are heavily influenced by availability of a capable workforce. Economic competitiveness and individual prosperity could be enhanced by the creation of an Adult Education/Workforce Development Center to capture former high school students and dislocated workers.

The following actions were added by city staff and council after the public open house.

L 1.11 Increase the number of “dual enrollment” students by taking advantage of grants from the State of Alabama

L 1.12 Create a teacher/staff assessment and accountability system

L 1.13 Hire a full-time grant writer

L 1.14 Build a community-wide support and mentoring program including parents, teachers, businesses, and civic organizations

L 1.15 Re-introduce high school dropouts to learning through evening GED and career tech classes partnering with GSCC

L 1.16 Engage JSU for teacher development, teacher recruitment, and transformation strategies

L 1.17 Utilize Flexibility Act to implement nontraditional school concepts

- L 1.18 Invest heavily in elementary education to ensure all students upon reaching 3rd grade are performing at grade level
- L 1.19 Decrease costs through consolidation and other cost-saving measures to better meet students' needs
- L 1.20 Develop quality ACT preparation course offerings and AP classes
- L 1.21 Study benefits of a medical magnet school and IB program
- L 1.22 Build a relationship with "Teach for America"

PLACE

GOAL

Attractive and well-maintained natural areas and man-made areas that are points of pride for residents and impressive to visitors and investors.

ACTIONS

PL 1. Update the zoning regulations

The city could benefit from updated land management tools to create a stronger physical environment. The current zoning rules are inadequate and need to be reviewed and updated based on a conceptual development framework.

PL 2. Prepare a plan to identify and protect historic properties

The city has significant historic assets and more proactive efforts are needed to care for these places that are unique to Anniston. The Plan should determine the process for identifying and selecting properties as well as recommendations for securing funding resources.

PL 3. Enhance process for handling vacant lots *

The community has an abundance of vacant property. A coordinated and creative process for managing these lots should be developed. This could improve property maintenance requirements and enforcement as well as creating community gardens and “mow to own” efforts.

PL 4. Create a downtown strategic plan *

Downtown Anniston is the physical heart of the community. It should be “everybody’s neighborhood.” In order to better manage this asset, the community, including government, civic

groups and businesses should join the Spirit of Anniston to create a plan to improve the economics, physical condition, promotion and management of downtown. This plan could help advance the creation of mixed-use neighborhoods Downtown and re-energize the farmers market.

PL 5. Build new parks and trail amenities

The city could benefit from additional investment in parks and trails. Funding and planning should help create the following: creation of multi-functional park in West Anniston to tie into Chief Ladiga Trail; completion of the Civil Rights Trail in 2014; completion of Coldwater Mountain and Chief Ladiga bike trails; completion of the McClellan amphitheater; completion of additional bike recreation component for neighborhood parks; and, in general enhance neighborhood recreational opportunities for youth and seniors.

PL 6. Create conceptual plan for West Anniston

Planning is good stewardship and West Anniston could benefit from a clear, logical and effective plan to improve the area. An effort has been initiated and its implementation should be supported.

PL 7. Develop more mixed income housing

The city could benefit from additional housing choices. City and other local stakeholders should partner with Anniston Housing Authority to develop mixed income housing.

PL 8. Create a community garden program

Community gardens can be effective in creating stronger neighborhood ties, providing a source of fresh food and better use of underutilized land. The city—working with community stakeholders—should create a program to encourage creation of community gardens.

The following actions were added by city staff and council after the public open house.

PL 9. Utilize the current Beautification Task Force

PL 10. Expand Mainstreet Anniston (formerly Spirit of Anniston)

PROSPERITY

GOAL

Broad opportunities for enhanced economic activities available to all citizens that are defined by; a stream-lined coordination, a business friendly approach, diverse jobs and investments, a capable workforce, and leveraged assets.

ACTIONS

PR 1.1 Complete the Veteran's Parkway

Complete development and paving the road that connects 10th Street (Henry Road) to Highway 21. This parkway will connect Interstate 20 to Alabama 21 and U.S. 431 North of downtown Anniston by a route through Fort McClellan.

PR 1.2 Develop a retirement community at Fort McClellan

Develop and promote a retirement and assisted living community on the old Fort McClellan. This would increase the taxes generated from this community and lead to additional housing developments in addition to industrial park expansion.

PR 1.3 Hire an economic development staff member

The city could benefit from an experienced professional whose singular focus is improving economic opportunity for Anniston. This would include developing stronger ties with existing industrial/manufacturing concerns. The city should hire an economic development specialist.

PR 1.4 Create a “One Stop Shop” at City Hall

Quality customer service is a priority for the city. The city should create a One Stop Shop for new and expanding businesses to meet their various needs in an efficient manner.

PR 1.5 Install city broadband service

Internet and high-speed data transfer is essential to many businesses. To better serve existing businesses and attract new investment, city wide broadband should be installed.

PR 1.6 Create a minority-owned business support program

The community has a variety of talented members of the community that may not be best positioned to be competitive. The city should support minority and disadvantaged businesses through programs, service and incubator opportunities.

PR 1.7 Encourage “pop up stores” and other business innovation

Many business opportunities can be launched with little investment in “brick and mortar.” Pop up stores can provide low-risk ventures in a unique venue and help animate sidewalks and or underutilized space.

The following actions were added by city staff and council after the public open house.

PR 1.8 Create a co-op for local businesses

SAFETY

GOAL

A safe community - in reality and perception - for all citizens.

ACTIONS

S 1.1 Establish nuisance abatement boards

An approach is needed to hear complaints of public nuisance involving a number of illegal activities such as drug use and prostitution on store property or property that represents a major crime problem.

S 1.2 Create a program where police are visible in neighborhoods

Increased visibility of police officers—on foot, day and night—in neighborhoods could deter crime and increase a general sense of well-being for residents. A program should be created that puts more “boots on the ground” and, in general increases pro-active policing.

S 1.3 Create a program that utilizes neighborhood Community Centers during non-school hours as youth programming hubs

A coordinated effort for youth programming could benefit young people in Anniston. The Community Centers can easily serve as hub for increased youth programming.

S 1.4 Increase entry-level pay for police officers *

Recruiting and retaining high-quality police officers is a challenge for the city. Increasing entry-level pay would help recruiting and retaining officers and in the long run create operational efficiencies by reducing the turnover rates.

S 1.5 Increase the size of the police force

The city could benefit from additional police officers. The city should work to increase the police force.

S 1.6 Leverage federal assets in crime prevention and law enforcement

There are significant federal assets in the region that could be leveraged for the improved safety of Anniston community. An inventory and assessment of these assets should be undertaken to determine the opportunities to benefit.

TRANSPORTATION

GOAL

A well-maintained transportation network that serves the community in a clear, convenient and friendly way, including roads, bus, pedestrian, and bicycle.

ACTIONS

T 1.1 Install more signs to direct people to Anniston and local attractions

Additional, attractive and clear signs along the interstate (I-20) and major roadways such as US 431/AL 21, and the new Veterans Memorial Parkway could help visitors and residents find area attractions and services.

T 1.2 Create/Expand transportation system for the elderly

Improvements are needed that would benefit the existing bus patrons as well as expand ridership in the general population, including the elderly. Ideally, the bus system would be convenient and affordable, and attractive to many members of the population as a transportation alternative.

T 1.3 Improve bus shelters/infrastructure

Anniston has eight passenger shelters along the existing bus routes. Additional bus shelters would add to the transit service in a positive way, sheltering patrons and drawing attention to the route locations.

T 1.4 Expand transit into surrounding areas for jobs

There are four fixed routes (North, South, East and West); three that serve Anniston and one that serves the Oxford area. The community could benefit if these routes are expanded to surrounding areas, specifically Jacksonville and Oxford.

T 1.5 Create and enhance safe access routes and signage for bicylists and pedestrians *

Dedicated bike lanes, sidewalks, and multi-use trails provide safe access to and from nearby recreational facilities to residents and tourists, and to alternate transportation (bus and train) at the multimodal center. The city and related agencies should increase effort to develop sidewalks and crosswalks, multi-use (non-motorized) trails, dedicated bike lanes and bike routes that link recreational and residential areas with the bus routes, the Central Business District, and the multimodal transportation center.

T 1.6 Prepare a comprehensive strategy to leverage the presence of Amtrak in Anniston

Amtrak is an underutilized asset in the community. More could be done to attract tourists. In addition, the station could anchor redevelopment and be a hub for a range transportation choices, including bus, taxi, van, and bicycle.

The following actions were added by city staff and council after the public open house.

T 1.7 Develop promotional program for Anniston Regional Airport

T 1.8 Keep roads/streets in operational condition

Implementation Plan

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Implementation Plan

OVERVIEW

The Strategic Plan for Anniston presents an action agenda for realizing the community's shared vision for the future. The success will not be determined by the quality of this document, but rather by the committed, ongoing implementation of its actions. The all-encompassing nature of the Strategic Plan means that it can only be achieved through the collaborative efforts of the community.

These individuals and organizations have already begun to work together during the preparation of the Plan. Over 1,000 community members representing a wide range of backgrounds and interests served on committees, volunteered, or attended meetings to guide the process. There is widespread awareness of the Strategic Plan. It is time now to harness that energy to work towards achieving the vision.

This section of the report outlines the issues that may affect implementation and describes the suggested approach for carrying out the Strategic Plan.

STRUCTURE FOR INITIATING IMPLEMENTATION

The Strategic Plan is not intended to be solely implemented by government. Commitment to the Plan and commitment to implementation will require the coordinated efforts of individuals and organizations representing the public, private, and civic sectors of the community. Even those actions that require public sector involvement need an active citizenry to place them on the agendas of government agencies and ensure that the agencies follow through.

Chapter Organization

The Implementation Plan is organized into the following sections:

Overview

Structure for initiating implementation

Managing the Strategic Plan

Monitoring

Updating

Using the Strategic Plan

Summary table of all actions

MANAGING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Strategic Plan should be monitored on a regular basis, and, when necessary, it should be revised or updated. This section outlines the guidance for monitoring the Plan's effectiveness and maintaining its relevancy.

1. Monitoring the Plan

The Plan should be monitored for implementation effectiveness and relevancy. This review should happen on a formal basis no less than once per year. A status report should accompany this review and be promoted throughout the community, such as through a permanent One City One Vision website. An annual public meeting—perhaps with a noted speaker—could take place to share progress and attract additional participants to move the community forward.

2. Updating the Plan

A major update of the Plan should be considered every ten years to incorporate new decennial Census data. In the interim, key milestones may be reached which necessitate an update sooner than a ten-year cycle.

USING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Strategic Plan is intended to be used on a daily basis as public and private decisions are made concerning the community's future, including development, redevelopment, capital improvements, economic incentives and other matters affecting the community. The following is a summary of how decisions and processes should align with the goals, and actions.

1. Annual Work Programs and Budgets

Individual city staff and administrators should be cognizant of the recommendations of the Plan when preparing annual work programs and budgets. Local institutions might also consider the Plan when making important policy and financial decisions that impact the community.

2. Community Planning

Community planning efforts, particularly the update of the zoning code, which will be updated later in 2014 and 2015, should be aligned with the values and goals, and other Strategic Plan recommendations.

3. Development Approvals

Administrative and legislative approvals of development proposals should be a central means of implementing many of the Plan's actions. Decisions by the City Council and Planning Commission should reference relevant Strategic Plan recommendations.

4. Capital Improvement Plan

The city's capital improvement plan (CIP) should be updated annually and be consistent with the Plan's recommendations.

5. Economic Incentives

Economic incentives should be reviewed to ensure consistency with the recommendations of the Strategic Plan.

6. Private Investment Decisions

Property owners, developers, and other private entities should consider the Plan's recommendations in their planning and investment decisions. Public decision-makers will be using the Strategic Plan as a guide in their deliberations about development proposals, zoning updates, infrastructure projects, and funding requests. Property owners and developers should be cognizant of and complement the Plan's recommendations.

7. Civic and Social Engagement

All civic and community groups should create opportunities to explore solutions to issues and problems of concern to the community. They should seek alignment with the recommendations of the Strategic Plan and collaborate across interests, missions, and constituencies.

9. Consistent Interpretation

The implementation leadership should collaborate with city and county staff and other critical decision-making entities to ensure clear and consistent interpretation of the Strategic Plan.

Please see Appendix E for Implementation Matrix showing full list of actions and timeframes.