

Growth planners aim to turn dreams into reality You'll get chance to see proposals later this month

Two pioneering planning programs launched last fall are combining to ensure they don't work at cross-purposes, and later this month local residents will be asked to comment on two models for developing the Treasure Valley over the next 20 years.

More than 500 people spoke out on growth at four public sessions, and from their comments emerged four main priorities:

- Preserving open space.
- Getting commuters from Canyon County to Boise via light rail.
- Creating vital city centers.
- Emphasizing compact neighborhoods.

Now planners are preparing to share their recommendations for making sure those priorities are translated into law and policy. They'll send an army of experts into the community to explain the two projects and unveil the two possible Treasure Valley development models at a series of public meetings at the end of the month.

Jeff Agenbroad of Nampa participated in a workshop last November and said his group focused on working from the core out, keeping high-density development in the cities and open spaces in the surrounding areas. Agenbroad said his workshop group also wanted to "preserve pocket communities, like Melba, and allow those communities to keep their identities, yet foster an efficient transportation system that allows people to live and work in an environment conducive to their lifestyles."

The two plans, which more than 30 local and regional governmental agencies and planning organizations banded together to create, are Communities in Motion, a regional long-range transportation plan, and Blueprint for Good Growth, a land-use and transportation plan for Ada County. Forward thinking, unified vision and fiscally conservative growth management are the plans' key concepts for organizers, who want to accomplish on-the-ground change instead of traditional pie-in-the-sky long-range goals.

Michael Lauer, a Kansas City consultant working on the Blueprint for Good Growth, thinks managed growth is vital to creating successful communities.

"It is a misnomer that growth management stifles growth. The opposite is true. If done well, (planning) draws more growth by making the region a more desirable place to live and work," Lauer said. Collaboration between the projects' members is key to making growth planning work, said Star Mayor Nathan Mitchell, who thinks the process has gone well so far.

"Just having everyone go through the collaborative process together in itself is valuable," said Mitchell. "The true benefit comes at the implementation stage. As long as we all stay together and implement the tools that come from the project, it will be a huge benefit for the valley." Treasure Valley agencies and governments have a long tradition of poor communication and cooperation.

"We've been talking the talk in this valley for a long time, not walking the walk" when it comes to cooperation on regional planning issues, developer Peter O'Neill said at a joint project meeting last week.

He, too, is optimistic about the level of cooperation taking place as the Communities in Motion and Blueprint for Good Growth projects move forward.

The rapid pace of the valley's growth is another problem.

"I think we are behind the curve in this valley. Private sector-driven growth is exceeding the government's ability to meet the growth's demand," said Agenbroad, a vice president with Title One Corp. in Canyon County.

Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, a planning organization for Ada and Canyon counties, is coordinating committee meetings for the Communities in Motion and Blueprint for Good Growth projects and is also hosting community workshops and open houses.

The first step in creating these projects is to determine an ideal growth plan for the Treasure Valley.

"Which type of growth are you looking for?" is the question COMPASS staff put to the community over the past four months through a series of scenario workshops held in Ada and Canyon counties. Scenario workshops bring community members together to brainstorm solutions to key growth challenges and then test the solutions to learn what works and what doesn't, according to COMPASS.

The three-hour hands-on workshops gave participants an opportunity to play professional city planners. Workshop facilitators divided participants into groups and gave each group a map showing existing roads, development and open space, and stickers representing different types of population densities, buildings and land uses. Each group arranged the stickers to create different development scenarios like infill, which focuses on putting new development within already developed areas, or trend, which continues converting the valley's farms and rural areas into residential developments.

"Workshop turnout was better than expected," said Boise Mayor Dave Bieter. "We were surprised and encouraged by the response."

COMPASS compiled workshop-generated maps and ideas and came up with and analyzed nine different land-use scenarios to use as a model for completing the Communities in Motion and Blueprint for Good Growth projects. COMPASS tested and evaluated the scenarios to see if they were affordable and doable, came up with two recommendations they thought had a chance of working, and presented them last week at a joint meeting of Communities in Motion and Blueprint for Good Growth.

The committees endorsed two of the scenarios: Satellite Cities, which features several self-sustaining communities, and Concentrated Mixed-Use Corridors, which channels growth along efficient transportation corridors. COMPASS is tweaking both scenarios and later this month will present the two scenarios to the public at three community open houses.

In addition to the open houses, a team of speakers will travel the area making presentations to interested groups and organizations on the scenarios and the projects' progress. Presenting planning and growth issues to the public can be a challenge because it is easy to get tangled up in technical jargon and detailed analyses.

Bieter is aware of how easy it is to turn people off and said it is the politicians' and planners' duty to not only encourage public participation in the planning process, but also to present information to the public in an easy-to-understand format.

Bolstered by the level of community participation in the scenario workshops, Bieter hopes the public turns out in force again at the COMPASS open houses later this month. "We need the momentum to keep building," said Bieter, "because we all have a vested interest in the community and want to see positive change and growth."

Agenbrod said the process being used is going to come up with a phenomenal community-based, grass-roots plan that will work. "The next key is taking the plan and executing it. It is worthless if there is not good timely execution of the plan, which will be a moot point in 10 years if we don't use it," he said.

About the plans

Transportation and land-use plans are plentiful and rarely seem to come to fruition. Two new plans under way, one a regional transportation study and one a county transportation and land use study, differ in scope to earlier plans by using an integrated approach and unified vision. Communities in Motion, a joint project of the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho and the Idaho Transportation Department, is a long-range transportation plan covering the Treasure Valley's six counties—Ada, Boise, Canyon, Elmore, Gem and Payette.

The plan will evaluate growth and transportation issues with an emphasis on creating policy rather than create a checklist of projects. A draft of the \$1 million plan should be completed this fall.

Occurring in conjunction with Communities in Motion is Blueprint for Good Growth, a cooperative land-use and

transportation study involving Ada County, its six cities — Boise, Eagle, Garden City, Kuna, Meridian and Star — and Ada County Highway District. The blueprint will shape development patterns, which create transportation needs, bridging the gap between land use and transportation planning. The study will serve as a tool for Ada County and its cities to use to update their respective comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances and planning policies. A draft of the \$800,000 plan should be completed next fall.

Learn more, get involved

Public meetings

COMPASS has scheduled a series of open houses to present two scenarios appropriate for the Treasure Valley to use as a model for future planning.

- March 29, 4-8 p.m., Boise First Community Center, 3852 N. Eagle Road, Eagle.
- March 30, noon-8 p.m., Hispanic Cultural Center, 315 Stampede Drive, Nampa.
- March 31, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Idaho Historical Museum, 610 N. Julia Davis Drive, Boise.

After gathering feedback from the open houses, COMPASS will fine-tune its scenarios. On April 18, the COMPASS board and Blueprint consortium will meet to decide whether to adopt one of the scenarios as their model to use in completing the Communities in Motion and Blueprint for Good Growth projects.

For more information on the open houses, contact COMPASS at 855-2558.

How to comment: Contact COMPASS at 855-2558 or e-mail comments@compassidaho.org.

Talk to an expert

From March 22 to March 31, COMPASS staff, planning consultants and members of governmental agencies will embark on a joint outreach program to make 20-minute presentations to interested businesses and groups.

"Our presentation will be on the process to date and the preferred scenarios selected by the COMPASS board and Blueprint for Good Growth consortium," said Karen Doherty, a consultant coordinating the outreach program.

For information, call Doherty at 336-0420.

Growth trends

- The Boise metropolitan area was the seventh-fastest-growing region in the United States through the 1990s.
- The Treasure Valley's population is up 44 percent since 1990 and by 2030 the population will grow another 60 percent, from just over 500,000 to nearly 800,000.
- By 2030, Ada County's population is expected to reach 548,210 — a jump of 220,000 people, a population greater than present-day Canyon County.
- By 2030, 87 percent of Canyon County's rural land will be developed for housing.

Source: COMPASS

What planners heard ...

- Preserve open space, including the Foothills, floodplains and Snake River Birds of Prey area.
- Provide light-rail between Canyon County and Boise.
- Create and sustain vital city centers.
- Emphasize compact neighborhoods over large-lot residential developments.

... and how they're responding

COMPASS took everything it heard from citizens and developed two planning scenarios the public will get to see this month. They are:

- **Satellite Cities:** Growth is evenly dispersed throughout the region. Smaller towns grow into complete self-sustaining cities with a mix of housing and employment. A new small town forms adjacent to Interstate 84 south of Boise.
 - **Concentrated Mixed-Use Corridors:** Growth concentrates along high-capacity corridors with lots of transportation options.
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The Idaho Statesman is looking at growth in the Treasure Valley and its costs, benefits and trade-offs. Read these and other past stories at IdahoStatesman.com:

- **Schools:** In 2002, Meridian created a 10-year plan to limit school crowding and traffic congestion, create options for housing and make new growth pay for itself.
- **Communities:** Meridian is failing to update laws to match the intent of its 2002 plan for growth that emphasized limiting school crowding and traffic congestion and making new growth pay for itself.
- **Traffic:** A new Karcher interchange will mean quicker commutes and fewer train delays for Nampa residents, as well as better access to retail for local and regional shoppers.
- **Environment:** Treasure Valley smog, or ozone, levels are on the brink of breaking federal limits, which would result in sanctions and loss of federal road funds.