

3. Public Engagement



3.1 Public Engagement Process

Involving citizens in the planning process is the crucial step which empowers the community to shape its own future. The public engagement component of the 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update was comprehensive in itself, including proven tactics to garner community input. As a first step, the Ennis CPAC (Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee) was formed to represent the community at large. Members included City Commissioners, Planning and Zoning Commissioners, and neighborhood and business leaders. The committee, working as the City Commission's liaison, established goals for the 2015 Plan Update and provided input on a regular basis during the planning process.

The community engagement activities were dynamic and provided platforms for dialogue. They included a mail-out citizen survey, city-wide public meetings and a workshop with the City Commissioners and Planning and Zoning Commission. The most formative activity that occurred during the development of the 2015 Plan Update was a three-day Visioning Event that was comprised of interviews, focus group meetings, and a wrap-up session.

A total of 5,564 surveys were mailed to persons who purchase water from the City, of which about 1,207 completed surveys were received. Approximately 200 people shared their ideas during interviews and meetings. There were 18 CPAC members, seven City Commissioners, nine P&Z members, and city staff participating. During the Vision Event, about 60 citizens participated in an evening community meeting. Two focus groups were



held. The Downtown Focus Group was attended by 11 persons and the Neighborhood Focus Group was attended by 15. About 25 persons participated in a two-hour visioning session facilitated by the planning team. Considering Ennis' population of 18,500 persons, the number of community members that were involved, represents a great deal enthusiasm for the planning process.

Public engagement also extends to outreach into the community and educating citizens across-the-board about comprehensive planning. Consequently, the consultant team proactively encouraged news articles in the *Ennis Daily News*, the local newspaper of record, which contributed significantly to the overall awareness of the initiative.

A special effort was made to reach out to the large Hispanic community in Ennis. One of the four interviewees is a longtime leader in the Hispanic community. A Spanish version of the citizen survey was included in the mail-out packets of which 33 responses were returned.

3.2 Public Engagement Results

Overall, the greater community of Ennis, as represented by all who participated in the dialogue defining Ennis today and in the future, is proud of its heritage and looks to tomorrow with enthusiasm as well as respect for the city's past. The following are positive comments shared by many participants. They should be as the considered community's strengths.

- Ennis is a small town, with a small town feel. People are friendly, compassionate, caring and optimistic.
- Ennis' heritage is to be valued and protected.
- The community's diversity is to be valued: the Czech culture still lives; the African-American heritage is to be respected; and the growing Hispanic population contributes its family values.
- Ennis' industrial base continues to provide jobs for the community.
- City services are dependable for the most part.
- Ennis is strategically located for managed growth.
- Downtown is an asset.

The following are perceived weaknesses and threats.

- Ennis is a small town; how does the community recruit new businesses and employers to come here?
- Retail, food and beverage and entertainment venues are lacking.
- Residential options are limited.
- City streets are in poor condition and are in need of repair.
- Young adults are choosing to leave Ennis for college and good jobs; they are not returning.
- Empty buildings and lack of code enforcement are problems for Downtown and older neighborhoods.

2015 Comprehensive Plan Update

Opportunities as envisioned by community members who participated in the planning process include the following:

- The 2015 Plan Update is a foundational tool for revitalizing the community.
- Downtown is the heart of the community and is primed for positive change.
- City-sponsored projects like a Farmers Market, walking and bike trails, park and recreation improvements, and athletic facilities will help to improve quality of life in the city.
- Business owners and managers stand ready to grow with support from the City.
- Festivals such as those celebrating the Czech heritage and the bluebonnets are excellent ways to promote Ennis among its citizens and to tourists as well.
- Community leaders are poised to recruit businesses that will offer higher-paying jobs, perhaps in the technology sector.
- Economic growth and diversity will be supported by residential development across the city.
- Likewise retail and food and beverage options will grow with increasing numbers of rooftops.

More information gleaned from the various components of the public engagement process is provided in **Appendix 1 Visioning and Public Engagement**.



