

Chapter 2

The Community Speaks



"I hope that we will have an entire city that is clean, green, and livable. [A city] that is united in such a way that progress will continue."

A. Community-Based Plan

Effective master plans are rooted in an understanding of the values, aspirations and concerns of the communities whose future they are intended to guide. The Birmingham Comprehensive Plan benefitted from a conscious commitment to extensive public outreach and citizen engagement that provided thousands of participants an opportunity to share their hopes and aspirations for Birmingham's future.

The public engagement process incorporated a variety of outreach techniques and activities, allowing residents to participate in ways that worked best for them. Residents, business owners and other stakeholders provided feedback to the planning team by attending the citywide Visioning Forum, meetings for "Communities of Place" focused on geographic areas, meetings for "Communities of Interest" focused on specific themes, open houses for feedback on the developing plan, and by contributing comments online through the project website. Some participated in advisory and working groups. The planning team used the community's feedback and guidance to shape all aspects of the plan, from creating a Vision and Principles for Birmingham that reflected the aspirations of the community, to the strategies and actions needed to achieve that vision.

1. COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

In the fall of 2011, Mayor William A. Bell, Sr. appointed a Steering Committee made up of a representative group of people from the public, private and nonprofit sectors to work with the planning team and provide guidance throughout the planning process. The Steering Committee met regularly in the fall of 2011 to provide information and guidance, and to ensure that the vision and principles reflected the values and priorities of the community. Steering Committee members also participated in the public meetings. In the summer of 2012, the Steering Committee met five times to review and comment on all sections of the draft Comprehensive Plan.

The Steering Committee was also divided into four Subcommittees with additional members, such as city and regional agency staff and local professionals, invited because of their knowledge of the subject matter. The Subcommittees—Green Systems; Housing, Neighborhoods and Community Renewal; Prosperity and Opportunity; City Systems—met twice in 2012 to share information and ideas with the planning team and review preliminary plan materials.

2. PUBLIC OUTREACH

Public outreach opportunities were designed to offer a variety of ways for residents to participate so that the planning team would receive input from a broad cross section of the City of Birmingham community. Because people prefer to contribute and receive information in different ways, whether in person, online or by telephone, a certain amount of redundancy was built into the process to allow more people to participate. Outreach opportunities included:

Birmingham Comprehensive Plan website. The master plan project website, www.birminghamcomprehensiveplan.com, provided general plan information, background materials, a project calendar, and was used to make announcements about upcoming public events around the plan. Visitors to the site had the opportunity to sign up for email updates and meeting reminders so they could remain up-to-date with the plan's progress and activities. Public meeting materials, including visuals, presentations, and result summaries, were posted to the site so that citizens could engage with the plan throughout the process.

Media and community outreach. The planning team took out newspaper and radio advertisements to publicize large meetings, and local print and television media outlets reported on the major events and issues. All public meetings for the Comprehensive Plan were also promoted with e-blasts and flyers that were distributed through the school system and at public locations throughout the city. Nine public libraries served as information centers for the comprehensive plan.

3. CITYWIDE VISIONING FORUM: “WE ARE MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT...”



On Saturday, October 22, 2011, over 200 Birmingham area residents from a broad range of backgrounds and neighborhoods decided to spend a morning in the community meeting room at the new Birmingham CrossPlex on the former Alabama State Fairgrounds. They came to share their hopes and aspirations for the future of the City of Birmingham as part of the Birmingham Comprehensive Plan process.

The purpose of the visioning forum

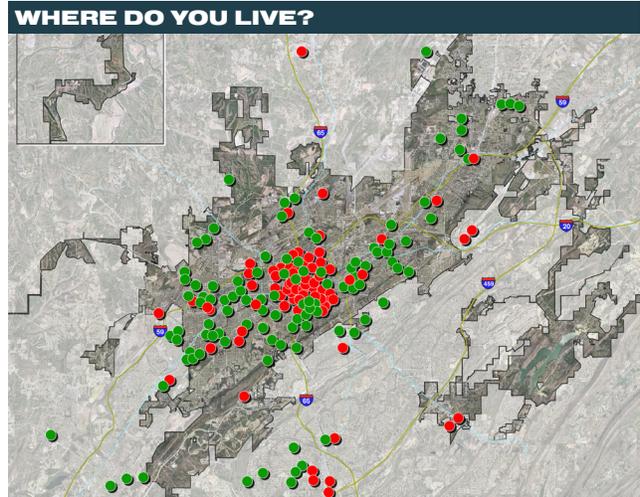
- To provide a place for people who live and work in the City of Birmingham to meet and exchange ideas about their community.
- To provide an opportunity for structured conversation to identify the community’s assets—the best things about Birmingham—and challenges. The discussion focused attention on assets that the community can build on as well as problems that need solving.
- To take a few moments to think about their personal vision for Birmingham’s future and to share that personal vision with participants at their discussion table.
- To identify together a common set of priority elements that should be a part of the city’s 20-year vision and statement of principles.

What happened at the Forum

Registration and exhibits. Participants registered as they came in and were asked to indicate on a map where they lived or worked. Each participant received a folder containing a handout giving an overview of the entire comprehensive plan project; a handout with selected data

on current conditions in the city related to issues such as demographics, land use, economic development, and transportation; several worksheets for individual use during the Forum activities; and an announcement about future public meetings in six locations around the city. As participants moved from the registration counter to the stairs up to the meeting room, they had the opportunity to view exhibits of analytical maps.

Welcome and presentation. Mayor William A. Bell, Sr. opened the Forum by welcoming participants and encouraging them to work together for the future of the City. His remarks were followed by a presentation by David Dixon, FAIA, principal of Goody Clancy (the firm leading the



At registration, every resident was asked to show on a large city map where they live (green dot) and where they work (red dot).



consultant team working with the City on the preparation of the plan). The presentation focused on how cities are making a strong comeback in the 21st century and that Birmingham has many assets and the potential to be a successful comeback city.

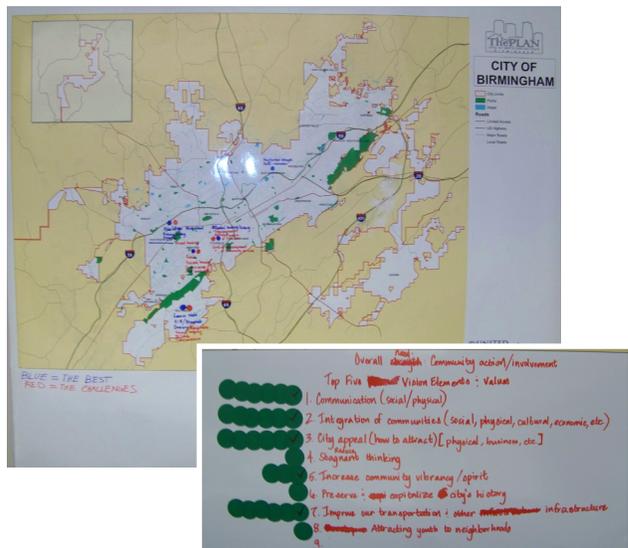
Small group activities. Participants were randomly seated at tables to maximize the opportunity for people who did not know each other to talk to one another. Each table had a base map of the city, as well as a few worksheets.

Participants were first asked to list on one of the individual worksheets the things that they felt represented the best of Birmingham and to list the things that presented the most challenges. They also identified places that fit into those two categories on the base map, using blue for the “best” and red for the “challenges.” Participants then shared and discussed their individual lists.

The next exercise was to develop the elements of an overall 20-year vision and a statement of principles to guide the remainder of the planning process, the plan itself, and ultimately, the implementation of the plan. First, participants were asked to write their personal vision for Birmingham, imagining that they were going to leave the city for 20 years and envisioning what they would want the city to be like when they returned home. Then, they shared their personal visions with the people around the table. The next step was to make a list on the map of all the elements of the personal visions that everyone could support. Finally, each

participant used five dots to choose his or her top priorities among the list of elements. The top five priorities were then transferred to a worksheet that represented the joint work of all the people at each table.

People responded with a powerful outpouring of ideas, thoughts, challenges, inspirations, and insights. Facilitators assisted the participants at each table. Many rich and thoughtful conversations took place. Through their discussions, participants’ revealed the values that are important to them, such as diversity, education, connection, and history. At the end of the meeting, a volunteer from each table reported back to the entire group on the priorities recorded at each table, giving the flavor of the table discussion.



The results

The individual worksheets indicate significant consensus around what people from Birmingham see as the best aspects of the city as a community and as a place, and they likewise agreed on many of the challenges that the city faces. In a few cases, an issue appears on both lists. For example, while downtown was cited as one of the best things about Birmingham, some also felt that it is not vibrant enough.

The Best. Birmingham’s landscape, history and cultural amenities (including its restaurants) were strongly valued by the participants in the Forum. They also saw the people and the sense of community that has been forged in many Birmingham neighborhoods as an important aspect of the city’s life.

the best MENTIONS IN INDIVIDUAL WORKSHEETS	
Parks/landscape/Topography	79
An important history and heritage, particularly with the civil rights era/Civil Rights Museum	35
Strong sense of community/good neighborhoods	33
A thriving restaurant scene that emphasizes locally grown food	25
The people	22
Downtown	20
World-class cultural amenities (includes zoo and botanical garden)	19
Over three dozen historic districts with an impressive housing stock	17
Hospitals and access to medical services	17
Universities/higher education	15
Libraries	10
Affordable housing options/ reasonable cost of living	9
Communities of faith/Churches	9
Diversity	5
Access to airport	5
Good climate	4
Potential	3
Art scene	2

The Challenges. There were more challenges listed, with a strong emphasis on two issues: lack of good transit and transportation alternatives to the car, and the state of the city’s public education system. Vacancy, blight and crime in many neighborhoods was also a top challenge, as were the lack of good food stores and environmental pollution.

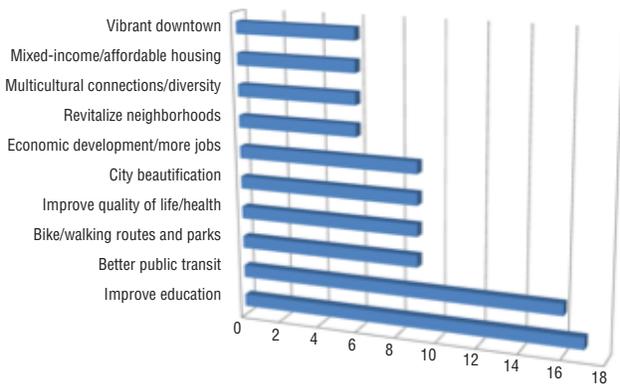
the challenges MENTIONS IN INDIVIDUAL WORKSHEETS	
Lack of transportation alternatives: an inadequate transit system and few bike trails or marked routes	76
The public education system	54
Significant vacancies and blighted properties within the neighborhoods	36
Crime and the perception of crime/ lack of safety	26
Lack of quality grocery stores/access to fresh food	23
Leadership	23
Many parts of the city are not pedestrian friendly/ walkable/issues with sidewalks	21
Pollution/clean air/environmental issues	19
Lack of businesses and jobs within city	18
Lack of connectedness	14
Quality retail	13
Lack of bike lanes and walking trails	12
Affordable housing	8
Disaster Preparedness	8
Social issues (including addiction, homeless)	8
Downtown not vibrant enough	7
County financial problems	6
Access to medical services/ quality of services	5
Airport	5
Condition of parks/need for more parks	5
Constitutional limits and state opposition	5
Self image	5
Lack of communication	4
Recycling	4
Attract and engage younger people	3
Neighborhood newsletters/flyers	3
Parking	3
Race relations/issues	3
Condition of streets	2
Lack of funding	2
New housing	2
Northern Beltline	2
Job Training	1

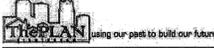
Personal vision statements. The personal vision statements in many respects reflected the preferences and concerns expressed in the lists of the best things about Birmingham and the challenges facing the city. While some participants were more eloquent than others, most people wanted the city in 20 years to be more prosperous, with thriving neighborhoods free of blight, served by a variety of transportation options, more “green” in character and practices, and with a vibrant downtown reinforced in its role as the cultural capital of the region.

Top priorities. After sharing their personal visions and discussing common elements, the participants around each table then focused on identifying the top five priorities for the city. A summary table and graph of the priorities across all the tables can be seen in Figure 2.1.



FIGURE 2.1: VISIONING FORUM TABLE PRIORITIES SUMMARY






Personal Vision Statement

Please write your personal vision for the City of Birmingham twenty years from now. The vision is a word picture that describes your ideal City of Birmingham. It may include:

- The values and qualities you would like the city and community to represent and live by.
- The places, activities, or community elements that you want to preserve and keep into the future.
- The places, activities, or community elements that you would like to change so that they are different in the future.

A Vibrant, 24 hour, visually attractive, inclusive, culturally rich, SOUTHERN (people, cultural) city — with a world-class education system, safe streets, a positive identity with positive perception.

- 24/7 efficient transit system
- Sidewalks city-wide
- Mixed Neighborhoods (Racially/Socio-Economically)

Basically, a progressive example of Urban Southern Culture — complete of good food, music, & hospitality.

All the personal visions will be posted on the Plan’s website. Please add some information about yourself:

What neighborhood do you live in? Irishville/Woodland Park

Please circle the information that describes you:

Gender: Male Female

Age Group: Under 18 19-24 years 25-34 years 35-44 years 45-54 years 55-64 years 65+ years

THANK YOU!

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TABLE 2.1: TABLE PRIORITIES SUMMARY

NUMBER OF TIMES THE IDEA APPEARED ON TOP FIVE TABLE PRIORITY LISTS

Improve education	17	Develop neighborhood centers	5
Better public transit	16	City transparency / improve city government	5
Bike/ walking routes and parks	9	Reduce crime	4
Improve quality of life/ health	9	More grocery stores/ retail	4
City beautification	9	Pollution	4
Economic development/more jobs	9	Preserve neighborhoods	3
Revitalize neighborhoods	6	Cultural/tourism	3
Multicultural connections/diversity	6	Mixed use development	3
Mixed income/affordable housing	6	Attract youth	3
Vibrant downtown	6	Help homeless	1
Improve perception of city	6	Technology hub	1
		New zoning	1



Participants' evaluation of the Visioning Forum

Participants were asked to fill out an evaluation form for the Visioning Forum. They were asked to rank various aspects of the event as Excellent, Good, Neutral, Poor or Very Poor. The form also included the following open-ended questions, as well as an area for any other comments:

- In a few sentences, how would you explain what the group accomplished at this forum to a friend who did not attend?
- Do you have suggestions for improvements to future comprehensive plan public meetings?

Ninety-nine percent of the participants found the overall

program to be Good or Excellent, and 100% ranked the table discussions Good or Excellent. This indicates how much value they put on the chance to exchange ideas with other people who care about the future of Birmingham.

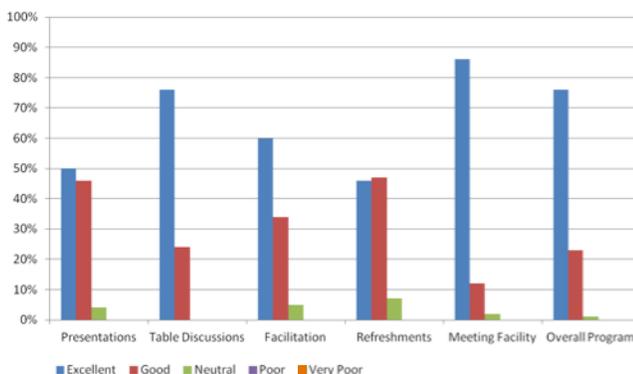
Representative comments from participants

In answering the open-ended questions, participants were overwhelmingly positive about the Forum. In their own words:

- Clarified that our community shares a common heartfelt vision for ourselves and our families. We are more alike than different.
- It was a chance for people who believe in the city to meet, and share what we want to see our city become. The best part was realizing that there are people from every background and from every part of the city that all want the same things, and that all believe it is possible.
- Our diverse table came to the same conclusion about Birmingham. So refreshing to agree with folks from very different neighborhoods.
- We were able to see that most people are on the same page as to what we see as important to the city: mass transit, education, revival of downtown and communities, more grocery stores, removal and reuse of abandoned property, etc.
- Open discussion and exchange of ideas, hopes, dreams, practical and sky is the limit. Listened to others. I learned from listening. Seemed to reach consensus on many goals.
- We brainstormed about what we like about Birmingham, what our challenges are, and last, what our vision is for a perfect city in the future. We met new people, shared our ideas and left with a positive feeling about Birmingham's Future. It was wonderful to see a wide range of ages in the group. We need input from a broad spectrum of our community, including Latinos & other groups. Find a way to convince people that the comp plan will be used to improve Birmingham and will guide our leaders.
- Great dialogue with diverse people.

TABLE 2.2: PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	NEUTRAL	POOR	VERY POOR
Presentations	50%	46%	4%	0%	0%
Table Discussions	76%	24%	0%	0%	0%
Facilitation	60%	34%	5%	0%	0%
Refreshments	46%	47%	7%	0%	0%
Meeting Facility	86%	12%	2%	0%	0%
Overall Program	76%	23%	1%	0%	0%



What did participants say about the Visioning Forum?



- We had thoughtful and serious discussion—a sense of goodwill was evident!
- We realized that in general, we all share the same vision for our community.
- The city took time out to listen to what regular people had to say.
- The meeting was extremely beneficial and an opportunity to learn that we had a lot in common.
- Long overdue! And VERY productive!
- Involvement, cooperation, exciting, great. Well executed. Great workshop.
- Good workshop. Very well organized. Developed a good list of priorities.
- This was well planned and thought out preparation—job well done.
- What a learning experience. Glad I didn't miss the opportunity to voice my opinion.
- This was really encouraging. I hope the rest of the meetings have as good of a turnout. Thank you!
- Everyone in the group from different backgrounds seemed to want some of the same changes for the city.
- A wonderful opportunity to let your voice and ideals for our city to be heard in a forum for our future as a vibrant and forward moving city.
- Great ideas, wish attendance was 10 times greater, although it was a very good turnout.
- A very enlightening event.
- Persons from all backgrounds, races, neighborhoods came together in small groups to talk about what they feel is right and wrong with the city and they'd like to see the city become.
- Thanks for providing facilitators. Our person tactfully kept us on course and helped our group make better choices. I appreciate being included in this decision making process.
- Got people talking about the city and how to make it better. Came away with vibrant ideas for vision of what our city can become.
- This was an amazing, watershed of community consciousness, conscience and future-visualizing.

4. COMMUNITIES OF PLACE WORKSHOPS

During the month of November 2011, six Community of Place meetings were held in different locations throughout the city. These place-based comprehensive plan workshops were held during the evening and covered all residential and commercial neighborhoods within the city. At each one of the workshops, there was a short presentation on the Draft Vision and Principles and on the existing conditions in that area of Birmingham. Participants then worked with facilitators in small groups around tables with maps to identify and rank the most important assets and the most important issues needing improvement in their part of Birmingham. These findings were categorized by:

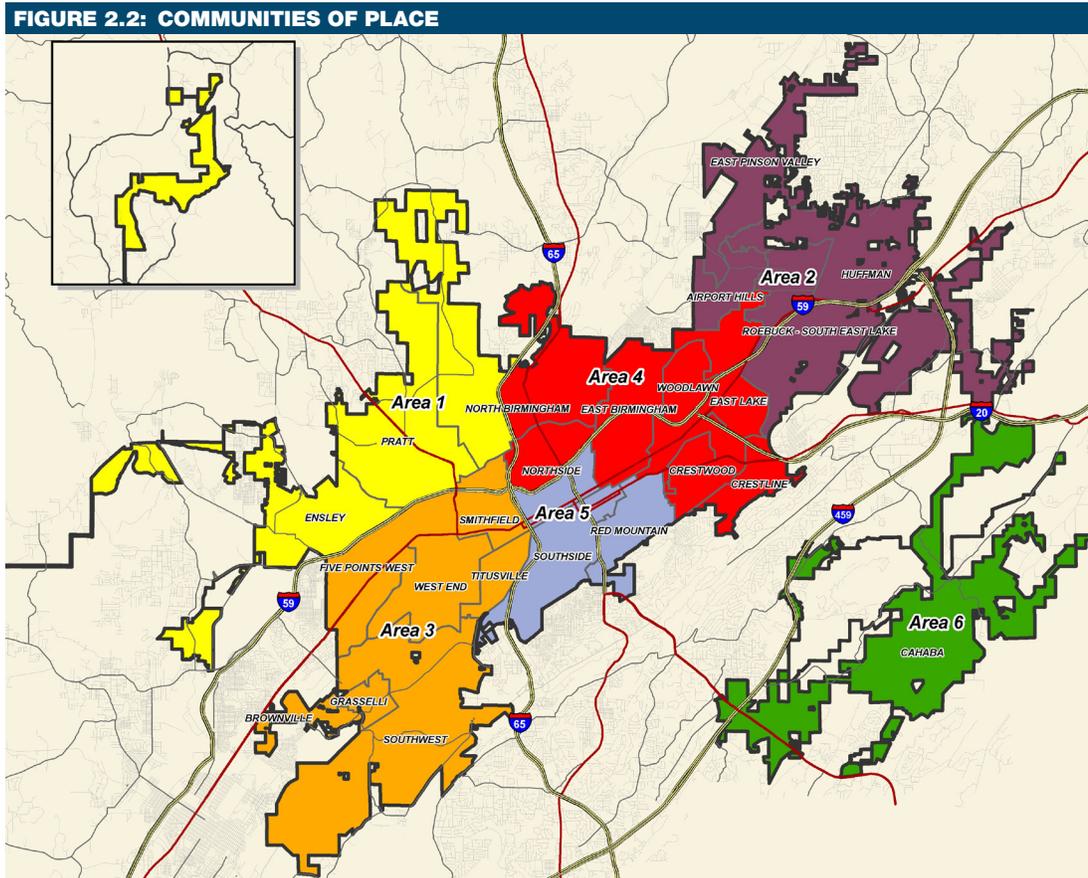
- Housing and Residential Areas
- Commercial and Industrial Areas
- Transportation, Infrastructure, and Public Services
- Environment and Parks

While each area reported unique assets and issues needing to be addressed, several important themes were prevalent at all six community workshops:

1. The value of parks and green spaces;
2. The need to deal with vacant and abandoned properties;
3. The need for more and better connections; and
4. The need for more neighborhood-serving retail and services



Parks and green spaces were considered an important asset in all six Community of Place meetings.





While well-maintained areas were also noted, concerns about vacancy and blight were voiced across the city.



Residents called for more neighborhood-serving retail.

The city's parks and green spaces were universally highlighted as important neighborhood assets, and in most cases the participants included recommendations to expand, enhance, or create new quality recreational spaces. Issues surrounding vacant and abandoned properties were prevalent and identified in nearly all parts of the city, along with requests for new policies to deal with them. However, well-maintained areas were also noted throughout the city by participants at every meeting. Within both challenged and stable areas, the quality of the homes and their historic relevance were commonly noted attributes. More often than not, the participants called for rehabilitation and reuse over demolition. Improved connections were another theme evident at all workshops. Participants repeatedly made requests for improved transportation choices, more walkable neighborhoods, better pedestrian and bike systems, and connectivity between the city's many parks, trails and greenways. Lastly, enhanced retail options—with a particular focus on providing quality and affordable grocery stores—was repeatedly mentioned as an important community need.

5. COMMUNITY OF INTEREST WORKSHOPS

In January 2012, there were four citywide meetings focused on the following topics: Green Systems and Sustainability; Transportation; Neighborhood Renewal and Downtown Revitalization; and Economic Development. At each meeting, planning team consultants presented existing conditions, issues and best practices and then asked the participants to take part in group exercises structured for the particular topics. The participants worked together in small groups at tables with maps. And the end of the exercises, each of the small groups reported back to the larger group to share the results of their discussions.

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST WORKSHOP 1

SUMMARY RESULTS

**1 | JANUARY 10, 2012:
GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE—TRANSPORTATION**

A. What do you see as your highest transportation priorities for the City of Birmingham?

Participants particularly emphasized the need for improvements in public transportation reliability, accessibility and facilities. There was also an emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle friendly culture, improving connections to parks and between neighborhoods, and a need for facilities to improve pedestrian and bicyclist comfort and safety.

- **Public transportation:** Provide more reliable service with posted schedules at stops; develop dedicated bus lanes and/or light rail. Prioritize funding to increase frequency of priority routes and develop more “hubs” in desirable locations (shopping centers, UAB, entertainment

districts, etc.) for people to transfer.

- **Neighborhood connectivity:** Improve connectivity between neighborhoods with more reliable and frequent transit and pedestrian and bicycle trails.
- **Connectivity to green spaces and parks:** Create designated pedestrian and bicycle routes to green spaces and parks within the City of Birmingham. Identify and implement rail to trail opportunities that could connect parks and green space to communities.
- **Pedestrian and bicycle facilities:** Implement dedicated roadway

space and right-of-way to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and comfort. Implement complete streets concepts along major roadways in neighborhoods like Five Points West.

- **Pedestrian and bicycle advocacy:** Educate drivers and transit to respect pedestrians and bicyclists, particularly along roads that have a speed limit of less than 25 mph.
- **Perception of alternative modes:** Rethink Birmingham as a multiuse city for all. Improve the perception of transit and encourage biking, walking and taking transit to work.

B. What transportation improvements should the City of Birmingham implement early to improve livability, connectivity, mobility and economic vitality?

Participants generally emphasized a need for better connectivity between neighborhoods at the urban and suburban scale as well as a need for more “complete streets” and better access to multimodal options.

General:

- More transit hub stations around the City at key crossroads with user amenities for convenience, comfort and safety
- Bus service directly to the airport
- A pilot program that seeks corporate transit riders, attracts all backgrounds and groups to ride the bus and encourages people that run the

service to ride transit to improve the perception of transit.

For Downtown:

- Real time transit information at bus stops to improve reliability and user friendliness
- Wider sidewalks and active storefront businesses
- ADA compliance and maintenance of sidewalks, transit stops and downtown businesses
- Bike friendly roads with dedicated space for bicycles as well as a grid of dedicated bike lanes

- Prohibit right-on-red at major downtown intersections to improve pedestrian safety at crossings

- A transit fare-free zone downtown
- Prioritized funding for certain transit routes to improve reliability and frequency

For Urban Scale Neighborhoods:

- Reduce the priority for cars in urban neighborhoods like the UAB campus. Change the 9 to 10 blocks of campus to be more walkable and accessible with clean and safe transit shelters

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST WORKSHOP 1

- Emphasize a focus on transit with more hubs at desirable locations such as the Five Points West Shopping Center or UAB for connections where people ride

For Suburban Design Neighborhoods:

- Connect resources like the medical centers to the surrounding neighborhoods
- Reduce or eliminate barriers for pedestrian and cyclists like the ones to schools and the medical center in the Huffman-Roebuck neighborhoods
- Create routes to parks that connect neighborhoods to places like Red Mountain Park, CrossPlex and Central Park



COMMUNITY OF INTEREST WORKSHOP 2

SUMMARY RESULTS

2 | JANUARY 12, 2012: GREEN SYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABILITY

A. What aspects of Green Systems and Sustainability are you most interested in?

Immediately before the small group discussions began, participants were asked what topics brought them to the Green Systems and Sustainability meeting. Responses were diverse but several topics had widespread interest: air and water quality, connectivity, parks, greening/beautifying the city, community health and sustainable development:

- **Natural Resources and Environmental Constraints:** Improve and protect water quality through stormwater management, maintenance of sewer facilities, and other efforts; improve air quality; create an interconnected green infrastructure network; protect and plant more trees; and limit sprawl and green-field development.
- **Parks and Open Space:** Interconnect parks and open spaces through greenways; provide a variety of active and passive recreational opportunities, including for different age groups; continue investment in parks; promote recreational access to the Cahaba; and use Birmingham's green amenities as development incentives.
- **Sustainability:** Increase access to fresh, healthy food (i.e., through urban farming and community gardens); use alternative energies; support sustainable development practices (i.e., zoning improvements, reinvestment in existing areas, compact development, and green building design); increase recycling; and improve community health by changing the physical environment.

B. What are your priorities for improving the City as it relates to Green Systems and Sustainability?

Group discussions identified the following as priorities for the City regarding the environment, parks and open space and sustainability. Each of eight groups was asked to discuss and identify their top five priorities. Many priority recommendations echoed or overlapped with those of other groups:

- Improve air quality
- Improve water quality, protect and clean up waterways (i.e., Village and Valley Creeks); encourage best stormwater management practices/alternatives
- Improve development regulations to support compact, sustainable development and design; provide incentives for green building design
- Increase access to fresh food
- Maintain habitat for [native] wildlife; protect biodiversity
- Protect, promote, expand and link parks and open spaces through greenways and trails (including along streams)
- Promote and expand recycling
- Improve connectivity through better transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities; dedicate annual funding to sidewalk and trail improvements
- Increase public awareness on the importance of green systems and sustainability
- Promote alternative energy sources and energy efficiency
- Protect and increase Birmingham's tree canopy
- Clean up and re-use brownfields
- Provide points of interest and activities along greenways and access to Cahaba
- Finish what we start

Many participants noted the connection between environmental quality, community health, alternative transportation modes and sustainable development. Participant groups also viewed transit (and other alternative transportation modes) as being critical to improving the city environmentally and economically. Almost every group included transit and/or walkability among their top five priorities.

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST WORKSHOPS 3

SUMMARY RESULTS

3 | JANUARY 23, 2012: COMMUNITY RENEWAL AND DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Participants worked in small groups focusing either on community renewal in neighborhoods or on downtown revitalization.

A. Community renewal—where should we start?

Participants working on Community Renewal were asked to consider criteria which could be used to guide decisions on where to make strategic interventions for neighborhood revitalization and to identify some areas in the city which meet some or all of the criteria. Suggested criteria included the presence of a large employment center, community assets (such as parks or schools), a commercial center, location near a major transportation route, and opportunities for new or renovated housing. The small groups were asked to identify their top three priority choices, which are indicated here by “Priority Choice.”

Additional criteria:

- Existing momentum
- Good local leadership (neighborhood and merchant)
- Walkability
- Large parcels of surplus land

Potential locations for strategic action:

- Priority Choice: Norwood and 12th Avenue North
 - > City and county employers
 - > Greenway (Norwood Blvd) and potential Village Creek Greenway
 - > Historic School (high performing)
 - > Bus route—transit potential
 - > Proximity to interstates and airport

- > Attractive housing with rehab potential—historic district
- > Vacant land
- > Momentum in place
- > Walkability
- > Commercial district at 12th Avenue North with a bus route
- > Farmers market pilot project
- Priority Choice: Avondale
 - > Proximity and access
 - > Recent investment
 - > Commercial district
 - > Avondale Park and library
 - > Walkability
 - > School
 - > Transit potential (train tracks underutilized at 1st Avenue South)
 - > Good neighborhood leadership
 - > Main Street District
 - > Momentum
- Priority Choice: Woodlawn
 - > Transportation (all roads lead in / out of downtown)
 - > Historic, intact commercial core
 - > Woodlawn (renovated) High School
 - > Momentum and partnerships
 - > Interesting housing ready for rehab
 - > Arts incubation
 - > Walkability
 - > Good local leadership
 - > Large parcels for redevelopment
 - > Main Street Birmingham District
- Priority Choice: Downtown
 - > Buildings to renovate for business to occupy

- > Restaurants
- > Southtown Public Housing—make it a mixed income neighborhood
- > Multi-use around Railroad Park area
- > Catalyze 7th Avenue South
- > Needs reliable transportation; entertainment throughout downtown; grocery store
- Priority Choice: Northside Adjacent to Downtown—Druid Hill/Norwood/Enon Ridge
 - > Good housing stock
 - > Adjacent to downtown
 - > Near future Village Creek greenway
 - > Transit potential—extend DART beyond downtown
 - > Commercial district
 - > Renovated elementary school in Enon Ridge
- Priority Choice: East Lake
 - > Commercial development on 1st Avenue North
 - > Good housing stock
 - > Two good parks
 - > Industrial park proposed by airport authority
- Priority Choice: West End
 - > Mixed use commercial on Tuscaloosa Avenue
 - > Future Valley Creek greenway
 - > Good housing stock for potential rehab

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST WORKSHOP 3

Others areas mentioned include:

- North Birmingham
 - > Historic commercial center
 - > Vacant land for infill on US 78
 - > Potential for light rail line
 - > Walkability
 - > Historic school
- > Vacant light industrial property ready for redevelopment
- > Good neighborhood leadership
- > Main Street District
- Fountain Heights at Civil Rights District
 - > Employment center
- > Park with Recreation Center
- > New Affordable Housing
- > Master plan in place
- > Large parcels and vacant/tax delinquent property
- > Walkability

B. Downtown revitalization: what issues need to be addressed for downtown to move to the next level?

Connections and Transportation:

- Public transit that is more than DART
- Corridor development from 2nd Ave North to the Art Museum for walking; park once and then walk in downtown
- Establish a good wayfinding system
- Make downtown more pedestrian friendly
- Create a bike trail link to Crossplex

Retail and Services:

- Affordable retail in the central part of downtown, not scattered in fragments
- On Sundays, a farmers’ market and flea market
- Attract a grocery store
- Attract a movie theater

Downtown Lifestyle:

- Promote the 2nd Ave North lifestyle, exemplified by new restaurant opening (El Barrio), for young professionals
- Build condos
- Focus redevelopment to benefit the people who live in downtown

Downtown Character:

- Preserve historic buildings
- Explore creating a water feature—bring the lake back to Lakeview
- Brand the various downtown districts

Security:

- Install more and better lighting
- Expand CAPS to more areas in downtown

Businesses:

- Recruit high tech businesses rather than car-dependent businesses
- Move the car dealerships to more suitable locations
- Streamline business and development processes and provide incentives

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST WORKSHOP 4

SUMMARY RESULTS

4 | JANUARY 24, 2012: PROSPERITY AND OPPORTUNITY

A. What are the 3 or 4 most important things the city can do to make the City of Birmingham a place where people want to work and do business?

Participants particularly emphasized the need for improvements in public transportation, P-12 education, the business environment, and the city's general quality of life. Other frequently mentioned topics included downtown revitalization, enhancing the city's image, and governmental reform. Some of the specific ideas put forward included the following:

- **Public transportation:** provide more reliable service with posted schedules at stops; develop dedicated bus lanes and/or light rail
- **P-12 education:** enhance curricular offerings, improve staff and teacher capabilities; engage businesses in career exploration and exposure activities; provide trade schools and apprenticeships; increase the number of students entering post-secondary institutions
- **Business environment:** streamline the process of starting a business and doing business with the city (e.g., permitting, licensing, inspections, contracting); provide incentives to startups and other small businesses; provide incentives for vacant or derelict property renovations; establish a business retention service; develop technology parks; establish a microloan program; make existing programs and incentives more transparent
- **Quality of life:** develop more public green spaces; expand cultural offerings; create more livable neighborhoods with urban amenities; improve public safety; develop attractive business districts; repair urban infrastructure; make the city more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly
- **Downtown revitalization:** provide incentives for property renovation and mixed use development; provide incentives for businesses to locate downtown; attract more retail businesses, particularly grocery stores; provide affordable space for business-startups; increase cultural attractions and other evening activities; improve transit options; improve lighting and other security measures
- **Image enhancement:** increase marketing activities to the region and beyond; dispel negativism and misinformation in the surrounding region; more effectively showcase the city's assets; highlight positive developments
- **Government reform:** increase government efficiency; restructure city council and school board to include at-large representation

B. What kinds of industries, businesses, and jobs do you think the City of Birmingham is best positioned to grow and attract during the next five to ten years?

Participants identified several industries and economic activities that they considered Birmingham well positioned to grow and attract. Most frequently mentioned were medical technology (e.g., pharmaceuticals, medical devices, diagnostics, and bioinformatics), health care, research (with a focus on life sciences), higher education, tourism (e.g., historic, cultural, recreational, ecotourism) and transportation/distribution. Others included automotive and light

manufacturing, computer- and internet-related businesses, financial activities, food products, and green industries (e.g., green-standard manufacturing, green energy, energy efficiency, recycling).

A number of participants noted the nexus between research, higher education, health care and technology industries, with UAB at the center. Some participants more generally emphasized the

opportunity to shift from traditional to more knowledge-based industries.

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST WORKSHOP 4

C. How can business, government and residents best work together to support economic development?

Some of the responses to this question focused on improving processes for engagement and collaboration while others identified key issues that should be the focus of collaborative efforts. Among the process-focused recommendations were the following:

- Develop stronger mechanisms for resident and business input into economic development planning processes and demonstrate that this input is meaningful by incorporating it into public policy decisions
- Political leaders must demonstrate greater internal unity and alignment on economic development issues in order to demonstrate to residents and businesses that their engagement will be productive
- Integrate and align the various local and regional economic development planning initiatives
- Participants also identified several issues related to economic development that they believe business, government, and residents should work collaboratively to address. These included the following:
 - > Improving the city's image by communicating its assets and successes
 - > P-12 educational reform and greater business engagement with the schools around career development
 - > Public-private partnerships to expand and improve job training and placement
 - > Support for increased research funding to local research institutions and expanding the city's research base
 - > Developing a stronger entrepreneurial "ecosystem" through public and private investments
 - > Improving public transit
 - > Increasing governmental efficiency

6. OPEN HOUSES

Three Comprehensive Plan Open Houses were held the week of March 12, 2012 at CrossPlex, the Central Library, and the Don Hawkins Recreation Center, and drew over 240 residents and other community stakeholders. The Comprehensive Plan Open Houses marked the halfway point in the comprehensive plan process.

The PLAN using our past to build our future

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Three Open Houses

for Public Comment

20 minutes is all you need to:

- Find out more about the Plan
- Talk to members of the planning team
- Give your feedback on the goals, strategies and actions being developed for the plan

You told us your hopes for the City of Birmingham's future in the public meetings over the last few months. Stop by to see how the plan is taking shape!

FREE PARKING. FAMILIES WELCOME! CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES PROVIDED. REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED.

OUR CITY | OUR VOICE | OUR PLAN
www.birminghamcomprehensiveplan.com
For more information call: (205) 254-2524

Monday, March 12
Birmingham CrossPlex
2331 Bessemer Road

Tuesday, March 13
Birmingham Public Library
Central Branch (1st Floor Atrium)
2100 Park Place

Thursday, March 15
Don Hawkins Recreation Center
8920 Roebuck Blvd.

UNITED
FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY
MAYOR WILLIAM A. BELL, SR.

- To help shape key components of the comprehensive plan and guide the planning team as the plan was being drafted.

What happened at the Open Houses?

The open houses were drop-in events in which participants could spend as much time as they wished during the three hours of the events. After registration, participants received a packet of handouts including the comprehensive plan vision statement and a Frequently Asked Questions handout to bring people up to date on the planning process so far and provide information on additional ways to comment.

At each location, there were a series of posters with preliminary goals, strategies and actions listed under four comprehensive plan topic areas: Strengthening City Systems (Public Infrastructure, Facilities and Services); Green Systems; Neighborhoods, Housing and Community Renewal; and Prosperity and Opportunity. At registration, each participant received 8 green adhesive dots and 8 yellow adhesive dots. Green dots were used to identify items that participants felt were *important to the city as a whole*; yellow dots were used to indicate items that were *important to the participants personally*. Participants could distribute the dots any way they chose—putting them all on one item or spreading them across different topics. Each topic area also included a blank poster where participants could give free comments by writing on a post-it and attaching it to the poster.

The purpose of the Open Houses

The Open Houses built on four months of analysis by the planning team and public discussion about the assets, challenges, issues, and opportunities facing each part of the city, as well as the Comprehensive Plan Vision and Principles. At the time of the Open Houses, the planning team was in the early stages of drafting the comprehensive plan. The purpose of the Open Houses was:

- To provide an opportunity for residents and other stakeholders to view and comment on preliminary goals, strategies and actions, as well as talk informally with members of the planning team.

Open House results

Following the Open Houses, participants' "votes" were tallied and all additional comments were compiled. The results of the Open Houses indicate community enthusiasm for goals and strategies that align with the results of previous comprehensive plan public participation events. Top goals and strategies are identified below, along with a summary of representative comments. Overall, several key priorities emerged from community input:

- A strong transportation network that supports high quality **transit, pedestrian, and bike connections**, along with well-maintained streets.

- Improved public schools and **education outcomes** as a foundation for Birmingham’s prosperity—for instance, through further collaboration with the Birmingham Education Foundation.
- **Reinvestment in neighborhoods**, including removal of blight, vacancy, sub-standard housing and more neighborhood-oriented retail (e.g., small grocery stores).
- A **strengthened downtown** with a positive reputation, more entertainment options, and thriving businesses.
- Connected **parks**, a robust **recycling** program, and **less litter**.

OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

RANK		GOAL/STRATEGY	
		MOST IMPORTANT FOR THE CITY	MOST IMPORTANT FOR PARTICIPANTS PERSONALLY
1		The City of Birmingham has a high quality transportation system of well-maintained streets, complete bicycle and pedestrian networks, and excellent public transportation connecting employment, community, and visitor destinations.	The City of Birmingham has a high quality transportation system of well-maintained streets, complete bicycle and pedestrian networks, and excellent public transportation connecting employment, community, and visitor destinations.
2		Pursue and advocate for new funding strategies and for coordination among, the City BJCTA, ALDOT, the MPO, major employers, and adjoining municipalities for better transit service and efficient routing within the City and County.	Pursue and advocate for new funding strategies and for coordination among, the City BJCTA, ALDOT, the MPO, major employers, and adjoining municipalities for better transit service and efficient routing within the City and County.
3		All students graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education.	All students graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education.
4		Vacant industrial sites and buildings are prepared for new uses consistent with shifts in the city’s economic base.	Streets are maintained in good repair, with traffic calming elements where needed.
5		The transit system is fast, efficient, dependable and user-friendly, with high ridership.	A comprehensive housing policy creates and sustains quality neighborhoods so that all housing is in good condition and code compliant, and quality housing meets the diverse needs of households at all income levels and all stages of the life cycle.
6		Continue public school improvement initiatives, including the collaboration with the Birmingham Education Foundation.	The transit system is fast, efficient, dependable and user-friendly, with high ridership.
7		Develop a marketing plan for downtown living and as a place to visit, building on the excitement over Railroad Park and the new baseball stadium.	People in the city and the region perceive downtown as a safe, fun, and exciting place to live and visit.
8		Reinvestment in existing communities conserves resources and sensitive environments.	A comprehensive green infrastructure system provides access to and preserves natural areas and environmentally sensitive areas.

OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

RANK	GOAL/STRATEGY	
	MOST IMPORTANT FOR THE CITY	MOST IMPORTANT FOR PARTICIPANTS PERSONALLY
9	Establish an office responsible to the Mayor with the authority to coordinate and organize the blight eradication activities of all relevant city agencies to clarify roles, ensure that offices and agencies work together to implement policy, and to make regular public reports on progress.	Pedestrian facilities are safe, functional, and attractive and connect residents to schools, parks and commercial areas.
10	Support the academic improvement programs of the public school system and the Education Foundation.	Continue to recruit grocery stores and fresh food outlets for locations in or adjacent to neighborhood commercial districts.
11	People in the city and the region perceive downtown as a safe, fun, and exciting place to live and visit.	The city makes every effort to help the region consistently meet or exceed clean air standards.
12	Ensure strengthened connections for transit, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists between north and south, and linking downtown and adjacent areas.	Ensure strengthened connections for transit, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists between north and south, and linking downtown and adjacent areas.
13	Water and sewer services meet the long-term needs of the city.	Coordinate streetscape improvements (sidewalk repair, tree planting, and so on) with street paving projects.
14	Continue to recruit grocery stores and fresh food outlets for locations in or adjacent to neighborhood commercial districts.	Expand city recycling operations to include apartments and businesses.
15	A comprehensive housing policy creates and sustains quality neighborhoods so that all housing is in good condition and code compliant, and quality housing meets the diverse needs of households at all income levels and all stages of the life cycle.	Every resident is within a ten minute walk of a park or publicly accessible, usable open space.
16	A strong entrepreneurial environment supports new business ventures and small business growth.	The city's bicycle and pedestrian networks include marked bike routes and dedicated space for bicyclists.
17	Strengthen partnerships between the public schools and business and the public schools and higher education, for example, by providing career exploration opportunities, contributing to curriculum development, and advising on management practices.	Continue public school improvement initiatives, including the collaboration with the Birmingham Education Foundation.
18	Coordinate streetscape improvements (sidewalk repair, tree planting, and so on) with street paving projects.	Quality of life in Birmingham neighborhoods has been enhanced by public and private investments and city neighborhoods have a good public image.
19	City parks and recreation facilities are safe, well-maintained and widely used.	Establish regulations and standards to support urban agriculture, community gardening and other programs to enhance food security for residents.
20	Expand city recycling operations to include apartments and businesses.	Emphasize revitalization of strategically located "urban villages" that provide compact, walkable neighborhoods with the potential to support transit hubs.

Summary of representative comments

Green Systems

- More green jobs
- Why can't we recycle here and now?
- Fight pollution like it's nobody's business. Clean AIR and H2O are our birthright. Without them we are unhealthy, unhappy, unproductive, and negative. Let's clean it up in Bham
- Get the parks connected as priority
- Link existing sidewalk system to parks and open space

Prosperity and Opportunity

- Prosperity and opportunity begin with education, youth and adult
- Improving our education system has to be priority #1 if we are to keep our age 25–40 group in the city—they move out, if possible, when kids are school age
- Downtown area needs a grocery store and entertainment to draw in new residents
- Allow small and minority businesses to use vacant city buildings as hubs and place of business for a small fee
- Create an attractive environment for people and business: jobs, school, public safety, transportation

Strengthening City Systems

- Strengthening city systems begins with improving education for youth and adults
- It is imperative to create better public transportation systems
- Rail system would be nice
- Libraries are an important component of any great city's infrastructure
- Tear down elevated highways—create boulevards and incentivize mass transit
- Transparency in all activities

Neighborhoods, Housing & Community Renewal

- People are leaving the city because of poor housing conditions. The housing in many of the neighborhoods is substandard
- Focus on neighborhoods
- Tear down old homes and buildings that are falling apart
- Streamline permitting
- Get a Trader Joe's grocery store

- Provide permanent supportive housing for the chronic homeless
- Keep Birmingham clean of trash, literally!

7. CITYWIDE FORUM ON THE PLAN

On the morning of Saturday, August 25, 2012—almost one year after the Citywide Visioning Forum in October 2011—over 200 participants came to the Birmingham Museum of Art to hear about the Draft Birmingham Comprehensive Plan and discuss its recommendations. Fox News anchor Steve Crocker emceed the event, and Mayor William A. Bell, Sr. welcomed participants. He spoke about the need for implementation and active use of the plan once it is approved by the Birmingham Planning Commission. Participants viewed exhibits about the plan's recommendation and the planning process and gave individual and group feedback about major implementation of the plan.





As residents filtered into the museum, they were introduced to the project via a series of maps and posters that summarized key topics in the Comprehensive Plan. Each participant received an Executive Summary handout with information about the purpose, process, and major recommendations of the plan. One of the posters at the entrance was a “word cloud” of keywords that was signed by participants as they entered into the conference room, marking their commitment to contributing their energy toward the success of this plan.

After Mayor Bell’s remarks, a two-part presentation by lead consultant Larissa Brown of Goody Clancy was followed by roundtable discussions to review participants’ priorities, table interviews where participants shared what they discussed in their table groups, and, finally, a question-and-answer session with a panel with local members of the consultant team, Herschell Hamilton of BlocGlobal, Nolanda Bearden of NHB Group, and Jason Fondren of KPS.

The first half of the presentation, “The Big Picture: Shaping the 21st-Century Birmingham,” focused on the plan vision; building a community consensus; and national and local demographic trends. The second half of the presentation, “Investing in People and Places,” spoke to the core strategies and implementation actions being called for in the Draft Plan.

Participants were randomly seated at tables to maximize the opportunity for people who did not know each other to talk to one another. There were roughly 10 people seated at each table. Following Part One of the presentation, participants reflected both individually and with those at their tables on “The Big Picture”. Individually, they completed worksheets on which they indicated their level of support for various plan recommendations. Following that reflection, they discussed their priorities and came up with “table priorities,” composite rankings of each topic based on the

priorities of the individuals. The table below highlights the overall rank of each priority, based on the average rank position for each priority from all of the tables.

After the second part of the presentation, participants at each of the tables went through a similar process to agree on a set of top three priorities for implementation. In addition to discussing and then ranking the priorities, participants provided numerous comments that highlighted their aspirations for what the Comprehensive Plan needed to address. Neighborhood revitalization and a variety of recommendation initiatives received repeated support in

TOP TABLE PRIORITIES FOR PART 1, “THE BIG PICTURE”

PRIORITY	RANKING
Revitalization and land use: Do you support the creation of a citywide Redevelopment Authority and Land Bank with professional staff to deal with tax delinquent and abandoned properties and redevelop vacant property?	1
Transportation and land use: Do you think that it makes sense to provide extra investment and services in compact, “urban villages” in order to create critical mass that supports better transit service, express buses, and eventually, bus rapid transit?	2
Neighborhoods: Do you support the idea of having a Birmingham Neighborhood Futures Conference in 2013 to bring national funders and practitioners to the city to share successful strategies for sustaining and revitalizing Birmingham neighborhoods?	3
Systems: Do you think it is a good idea to invest in comprehensive information systems about neighborhoods, real estate, businesses and jobs, and city facilities to support more-informed decision making?	4
Economic development: Do you think the city should focus some of its economic development funding on initiatives to help move research and startup products into the marketplace, in order to expand the city’s economic base industries of the future?	5
Green systems: Do you think that implementation of the Village Creek and Valley Creek Greenway sections of the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System should be a high priority?	6

TOP TABLE PRIORITIES FOR PART 2, “PEOPLE, PLACE, PROSPERITY, PARTNERSHIP, PERFORMANCE”

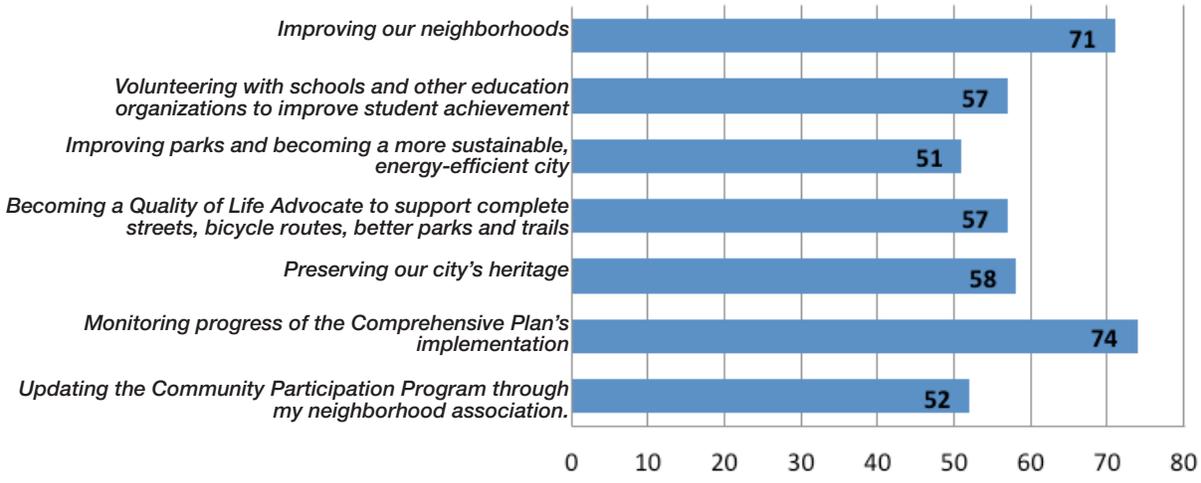
PRIORITY	RANKING		
Education, economic development and jobs: Do you support strengthening and expanding public school/business partnerships to give every student high quality career exploration and work experience?	1	Transportation choice: Do you think that transportation planning and improvements in the city should include attention to creating good connections and travel conditions for walking, biking, and transit, as well as for cars, and that truck routes should be designated and enforced?	4
Neighborhoods: Do you support measures to maintain and improve neighborhoods such as a vacant property registration ordinance, a rental registration and inspection system, and reorganization of the code enforcement system to make it more effective and efficient?	2	Land use and economic development: Do you support investing in preparation of selected vacant industrial sites, for example, by extending infrastructure, so that the city can be more competitive in retaining and attracting business?	5
Downtown: Do you support investment in a Downtown Connections program of streetscape improvements, public art programs, development incentives, and other initiatives, in order to link the various activity centers in downtown and stimulate more private investment in housing and businesses?	3	Green systems: Do you support providing incentives, such as expedited permitting, for “green” and sustainable site design and building practices related to energy use, stormwater management, and similar issues?	6

the public discussions. Participants also expressed concern about how the plan would be implemented and how to obtain resources for implementation.

At the end of the event, participants were asked to fill out a sheet identifying how they might want to contribute to the implementation of the Plan. The results show that people in Birmingham want to be a part of the process to revitalize Birmingham in every capacity. There was an especially strong interest in improving neighborhoods and monitor-



BE A GAME CHANGER: ACTIONS PARTICIPANTS WOULD UNDERTAKE TO SUPPORT THE PLAN



ing the implementation process. The City's Planning Division will contact participants who filled out this form.

B. Public Review and Adoption

After the August Citywide Forum, the plan was revised and reviewed by the City's Planning Division. It was posted on the plan website and a hard copy distributed to public libraries in Spring 2013 for a public review process. The Birmingham Planning Commission held a public hearing on April 4, 2013, to receive public comment on the plan. At the request of several groups, the Planning Commission extended the period for written public comment to June 4, 2013. All public comments were documented along with a response from the consultant team. The Planning Division staff worked with the Birmingham Planning Commission, individuals, and groups to develop mutually acceptable revisions on issues where there were concerns. The final draft of the plan with public comments was submitted to the City of Birmingham Planning Commission for review and adoption in September, 2013.

After several public hearings, the text of the plan in Volume I was officially adopted by the Birmingham Planning Commission on October 2, 2013. After additional public hearings on the Future Land Use Plan Maps, the Land Use Plan Maps were officially adopted on February 5, 2014.

