General Plan Update Ideas

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Here are suggestions for the General Plan update process.

Timing for completion

- Deadline for the Planning Commission's recommendation to City Council: August 1, 2023.
- Have regular "focus groups" made up of community members and city staff that have keen interest in specific strategic issues to develop the key strategies/actions.
- Develop a regular and consistent communication plan on progress and next steps.
- Deadline for City Council approval of the General Plan: November 16, 2023.
- Deadline for code changes (separate from code revisions below) needed to conform to the updated Plan: March 21, 2024.

Code revisions

- Due to significant input from the General Plan survey, don't wait for the completed Plan update to address code changes eliminating tourist accommodations in all zones where they are currently allowed and changing design, density, and other appropriate requirements for multifamily, townhomes, condos. Set a deadline to make these code changes by July 20, 2023.
- Alternately, create a six-month moratorium on hearings for concept plans, zone or land use changes, and preliminary plans for all uses except low density residential (2.32 units per acre or less) to provide time to modify codes based on the input from the General Plan survey.

Resources to use

- Utah State Code 10-9a-403 General Plan Preparation
- Judy Gubler's report
- General Plan Survey results
- Dept. of Workforce Services Housing & Community Dev. "Utah General Plan Writing Guide"
- Recent General Plans from other Utah cities (Springdale is recent, I don't know of others).

General Plan Requirements

It appears the requirements for General Plans have changed since our plan was adopted in 2015 (Utah State Code 10-9a-403). I didn't study it carefully to find all the requirements we don't currently address.

Additional Water Requirements

Our current Plan references water 111 times. But it appears there are new requirements for the General Plan to account for the effect of land use categories on water demand by addressing:

- The effect of development on water demand and water infrastructure;
- methods of reducing water demand and per capita consumption for future development (we do that in our water conservation ordinance – so I think this one is covered?);

- methods of reducing water demand and per capita consumption for existing development; and
- opportunities to modify the city's operations to eliminate practices/conditions that waste water.

The code goes on to list things to include in a water use and preservation element of the Plan, some of which are touched on in our current Plan, but not all and/or maybe not sufficiently.

Utah General Plan Writing Guide

The Department of Workforce Services Housing & Community Development has a 42-page "Utah General Plan Writing Guide." There is a lot of good information and examples in the Guide.

I think the frameworks in the Guide can be simplified to provide clearer community member driven language, while using the Guide's "SMARTER" approach (see below) to vision, values, goals, strategy, actions, and measurement methodology. A lot of the plan information could be presented as tables which would help reduce size and also make it easier to follow. Maybe the following is "old news" to you, but here are a few of the recommendations that were informative to me.

Describe the process of updating the general plan to demonstrate that the plan was legitimately developed and accurately reflects community desires. Include when meetings were held, what public outreach was employed, and when the plan was adopted.

Include a written policy defining how often updates should happen and what events may trigger an earlier update. For example, you could require updates every five years or when more than "X" amount of development occurs.

Define terms used in the Plan in an appendix. Definitions will help readers understand the Plan.

Opportunities and challenges section. This section guides your goals and actions and help frame your thinking. Your opportunities might include proximity to national or state parks, employment opportunities, proximity to an interstate, or established infrastructure. Your challenges may include a lack of commercial or industrial property, limited room for development, or limited water resources.

Vision statement. We have a page on "vision" (page 12) but the Guide suggests doing it differently, saying: A concise statement that describes what the city wants to be and generally how to achieve it. The vision influences and guides goals and strategies for achieving those goals. The vision needs to focus on the quality and character of a community. Avoid vague concepts. While every city should be "a great place to live, work, and play!" a vision should be more specific. Forming a true community vision is possibly the most valuable, and most difficult, exercise of the general plan process.

Future scenarios. Develop likely scenarios and analyze decisions against them. Communities can benefit from three simple population scenarios: higher than current growth, current growth, or lower than expected growth (or no growth). This lets us prepare for multiple potential futures, instead of placing all hopes on one.

Goals. These should broadly identify steps to achieve the vision. They generally reflect wide community values and should provide the basic direction that community actions should pursue. Think of goals as S.M.A.R.T. E.R. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Evaluated, and Reviewed).

For each goal, list the actions needed to accomplish it. Actions should describe the party responsible for that action (mayor, planning commission, public works director, etc.), have assigned human and financial resources, when the action will begin, a definition of what successful completion of the goal means, and when it will be completed.

Best practice suggests that each of these be tied to a schedule or timeframe (e.g., Short term [1-3 years], medium term [4-10 years], long term [11-20 years]) for the action to occur, a rough budget for what it will cost in time or labor, and a responsible party that is charged to make the action happen within the suggested timeframe. Organize the goals and actions in a table like the one below.

ACTION ITEM	REFERENCE GOAL	RESPONSIBLE	BUDGET	PRIORITY	START DATE	DEADLINE	COMPLETE WHEN
Expand river walk trail to town boundary	3.4 Transportation	Public works director	$20,000 public works fund	MED	May 2019	August 2020	Construction is complete to east town boundary.
Add links to website to highlight shops and attractions	5.2 Tourism	Councilperson Smith Chamber of Commerce	$100 general fund	LOW	Dec 2018	Jan 2019	Links active and live on site
Replace #2 fire engine	2.2 Public safety	Mayor, Fire Chief	$50,000 general fund $200,000 CIB Grant	HIGH	March 2018	June 2018	Truck is parked in station.

Definitions:

- Goal: A desired direction defined.
- Policy: Decision made in advance to guide future decisions.
- Strategy: Thoughtful implementation aimed at achieving the desired goals.
- Objective: Measurable benchmark which move towards the goal.
- Action: Incremental step, aligned with strategy, which moves toward achieving an objective or goal, or implementing a policy.

Annexation. The current plan references annexation four times but does not include a map or identify specific properties. The Guide says we can only annex land if it has planned to do so through an annexation plan, frequently incorporated into the general plan. Annexation is generally initiated by property owners outside city boundaries, but it can be initiated by the city as well. Your annexation plan should identify specific properties for future annexation and describe how you will zone those properties. This is accomplished most effectively by an annexation map included with your general plan and future land use map.

Land preservation. Some techniques for preserving agricultural land and open space include: Create a zone for low-density agricultural uses, an open space zone, provide density credits or other incentives for open space design approaches, conservation easements, cluster development, transfer of development rights, and encouraging the establishment of agricultural protection areas. The foundation for any such initiative should be reflected in the general plan.