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Branson plan maps 20 years down the road

Cliff Sain • News-Leader • August 22, 2010

Twenty years ago, it would have been impossible to predict the growth that Branson has seen. Today, city leaders hope to lay the groundwork to get them through the next 20 years.

To that end, the city has begun the process of creating a comprehensive plan that will guide current and future city leaders in everything from capital improvements to budgets and zoning.

"It's a road map to get us where we are going," said city's planning director Jim Lawson.

He said the final plan should be completed in March. So far, the city has put together a steering committee of residents and hired a team of planning consultants -- at a cost of \$175,000 -- to help the city through the process.

Last week, officials invited members of the public to attend a public hearing at the Branson Convention Center to learn about the process and present its own ideas and observations.

Branson Senior Planner Joel Hornickel said they got some valuable feedback.

"The big response we got was the need for year-round employment," Hornickel said.

He said there was also a lot of interest in promoting sports tourism, with the area already hosting annual events such as AAU basketball tournaments and College of the Ozarks hosting the annual NAIA Division II championship basketball tournament.

He said the meeting also was a chance to educate the public.

"The city has a master trails plan, but many people didn't know about that," he said.

That public input is important because the city wants to make sure that the city's residents drive this process, Lawson said.

"Right now, we're trying to give the government back to the people," he said.

The process is being directed by Design Workshop of Denver, which has steered comprehensive plans in several other tourist-related towns, such as the Colorado ski resorts of Aspen and Vail.

Design Workshop Project Coordinator Amanda Steinle said the comprehensive plan will allow Branson to take control of its future.

"Rather than reacting to growth and market pressures, this will be a plan that will allow them to be proactive," Steinle said.

Why now?

Lawson and Hornickel said there are several reasons why a comprehensive plan makes sense right now.

For one, a new mayor and a new group of aldermen swept into office a couple of years ago, and subsequently, several new people joined the city staff.

"There are a lot of people here now with a fresh perspective," Hornickel said.

Lawson said the current sluggish economy is another reason to address issues about how Branson can maintain its role as a prime tourist destination.

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"We're on top now and we want it to stay that way for awhile," Lawson said. "You don't ever want to start hearing that Branson used to be the place to go."

What next?

Steinle said more than 600 people have already been interviewed by city officials and by Design Workshop. There will be plenty of opportunities for more public input.

Hornickel said public comments taken so far will be included in public meetings on Oct. 7 and 28.

Hornickel said the public will have a chance at the first meeting to brainstorm about various possible futures in Branson.

At the other meeting, they can see examples of possible outcomes.

To learn more

To learn more about the city's comprehensive plan, visit www.bransoncompplan.com.

Consultants

A team of consultants has visited with the steering committee, taken tours of the city and held discussions:

- Design Workshop, Denver, for planning, economic analysis and public facilitation
- Olsson Associates, Springfield, infrastructure planning
- TranSystems, Kansas City, transportation planning
- RRC Associates, Boulder, housing specialists
- Terra Cognito, Eldora, Colo., geographic information systems specialist
- Stinson Morrison Hecker LLP, Kansas City, legal counsel



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