

MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT: QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE PROCESS

When beginning the planning process, the following questions might be asked to determine the current and future vision of the community:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How do we get there?
- What will we be like when the Plan becomes real?

A **vision** for the community is important to express what is intended to be the ultimate outcome of the master plan. A vision is a set of broad statements about the desired future for the local government. A master plan also includes goals, objectives and policies.

A **goal** is to express the general direction or aim. “Have clean water everywhere” is an example of a goal. Often a goal is very ambitious, and may not be entirely achievable. The purpose is to set a direction for the community to head toward.

An **objective**, or several objectives, may be included under a single goal. The objective is more specific, and is measurable. It is seen as something that can be accomplished within the time frame of the master plan. “All water in Anytown shall meet or exceed Michigan clean water standards” is an example of an objective. Those standards can be measured. Water can be tested to determine that it does, or does not, meet that standard.

A **policy**, or several policies, may be included under a single objective. A policy might also be known as a strategy, method, and so on. These are specific choices or operational actions for the government that can be taken to achieve the objective. “Upgrade the Anytown wastewater treatment plant water cleaning technology” would be an example of a strategy. “Amend the zoning ordinance to require 20 foot greenbelt buffers and 100 foot setback for new construction from surface water” would be an example of a policy.

The city of Marquette, Michigan provides another example of visioning with subsequent goals, objectives and policy:

Vision: We will be “A premier livable, walkable, winter city.”

Goal: Better accommodate pedestrians and cyclists

Objective: Keep streets small and well linked.

Policy: Integrate citywide walkability concepts into street redesign.

Policy: Integrate citywide walkability concepts into maintenance projects.

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One of the often seen flaws in a master plan is when goals, objectives, and policies are written poorly. It is important to write to be specific, but not too detailed. For example instead of saying “the Township will maintain its rural character,” it would be better to say:

New development in the Township will be designed to preserve natural features, rural views, and similar elements intended to maintain rural character.

Goals are intended to lead to actions. Goals should:

- Be realistic and achievable;
- Be broad enough to inspire but narrow enough to be implemented;
- Be limited to no more than 2-3 major points; and
- Paint a picture of the future as the community and its residents would like to see it.

When writing objectives and policies it is even more important to be specific and precise.

Another concern is when the master plan “puts off a decision.” If your plan says something like “Explore creation of . . .”, “Consider combining the . . .” your plan is not done. The purpose of the planning process is to explore and to consider, so that a conclusion is reached. The objectives and strategies should reflect the conclusion. Such statements in a plan suggest the plan was not completed before it was adopted.