
2018 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FRAMEWORK



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Community Development Department
City of Manassas

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2018 Comprehensive Plan Framework

INTRODUCTION

A Comprehensive Plan is the guiding vision document that directs the long-range planning, land use and development of property within a municipality. In Virginia, that plan is required to be reviewed every five years to ensure that it remains a living document reflecting the community's overall actions and policies centered on physical development goals.

The City of Manassas' current Comprehensive Plan, Manassas Next – The 2032 Comprehensive Plan, was adopted by City Council in July 2013. Since adoption, Council, Planning Commission, and City staff have worked diligently to implement the goals and strategies articulated in the Plan. As of 2017, 45 of the 58 unique implementation strategies have been implemented or are in progress.

With the current plan nearly implemented and the deadline for the five-year statutory review approaching, the City is proposing a Comprehensive Plan update in fiscal year (FY) 2019. This framework outlines the proposed planning approach and process overview for the City of Manassas 2018 Comprehensive Plan update.

BACKGROUND

Existing Conditions

The City of Manassas is located approximately 35 miles southwest of Washington, D.C., and is bordered by the City of Manassas Park to the northeast and Prince William County to the north, west, south and southeast. The city consists of 10 square miles of land area, has a population density of 4,219 persons/square mile. The following summary of existing conditions and trends provides a brief background and context for the 2018 update.

- **Demographics** – Since the last Comprehensive Plan update, the City has continued to experience population growth and increasing diversity. The City's population grew by 7.7% from 37,821 to 40,743 between 2010 and 2015. The Hispanic population has increased from 11,876 in 2010 to 13,403 in 2015. The City's population is also aging, with the population age 65 years and over increasing from 6.9% to 8.1% of the total population between 2010 and 2015.
- **Land Use** – Manassas is largely built out, with limited land that is undeveloped. Quality redevelopment and compatible infill remain top priorities, along with improving aesthetics along commercial corridors. Identifying additional opportunities and strategies for implementing the City's sector plans, along with further defining character, design, and infill principles for transitional areas and special districts are an anticipated focus for the 2018 update.

- **Economic Development** – Manassas seeks to create a balanced and healthy economy and has seen great success in the on-going revitalization of the historic downtown. As of 2014, Manassas has more than 1,400 businesses and brings more in-commuters than out-commuters (20,801 compared to 15,772). Management/Business/Science/Arts and Sales/Office are the most prevalent occupations among Manassas residents (31.5% and 25.2%, respectively), followed closely by Service occupations (20.7%). Identifying opportunities for continued economic revitalization and strategic investments to enhance the commercial tax base are top priorities.
- **Transportation** – While the City of Manassas benefits from numerous transportation options, including Virginia Railway Express, Amtrak, and the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission public transportation system, the majority of residents (77.5%) commute to work by private, single-occupancy automobile. Traffic congestion along major commercial corridors remains a major issue, along with an expressed desire of residents for expanded rail service and additional infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists.
- **Parks, Recreation, & Culture** – The City recently completed a needs assessment and facilities plan for parks, recreation, and culture and subsequently adopted level of service standards for recreation facilities in 2017. Based on the adopted level of service standard of 8 acres per 1,000 residents, the City has a 104-acre parkland deficit. A new Division of Parks, Recreation, and Culture, established in 2017, is charged with addressing this deficit and other deficiencies identified in the 2016 needs assessment.
- **Housing & Neighborhoods** – Residents of Manassas take pride in their neighborhoods. The City has demonstrated its commitment to neighborhood conservation through proactive enforcement of property and maintenance codes. The housing stock of 13,284 units is generally mature, with a median structure age of 33 years. New housing construction is occurring primarily as infill and redevelopment within the historic downtown. In addition, a new public-private partnership near the City’s western gateway will increase the supply of new townhomes and condominium units.
- **Public Facilities & Infrastructure** – The City has committed to reinvesting in public facilities and infrastructure to serve the needs of the community, and several projects identified in the current Comprehensive Plan have been completed or are underway. Examples include: Baldwin Elementary School replacement (completed 2016), Fire and Rescue Station 21 (in design), Public Safety Facility (in design), and Prince William Street improvements (under construction).

State Code Requirements

Virginia Code Title §15.2-2223, states: “The local commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction.” State case law envisions strong links between a comprehensive plan, zoning and subdivision regulations, and the capital improvements program that establishes location, financing and timing of local public facilities (Virginia Code Title 15.2-2239). Within statutory limitation afforded by the Dillon Rule, land development is managed according to the land use policies in the Comprehensive Plan.

Title § 15.2-2223 states that ‘the comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in

accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities’ and may be composed of, but is not limited to:

- Designation of areas of urban renewal or other treatment
- Designation of areas and implementation of measures for construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of affordable housing
- Capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps, mineral resource district maps and agricultural and forestall district maps, where applicable
- Designation of a system of community service facilities, including: parks, sports playing fields; forests; schools, playgrounds; public buildings and institutions; hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities; community centers; and waterworks, sewage disposal or waste disposal areas.

Existing Plans

Manassas has a number of existing plans, including the Strategic Plan, Comprehensive Plan, and technical plans and studies, which guide new development and resource priorities (e.g., capital projects, budget, and staff resources). Figure 1 shows the interrelationships between these plans and the community’s overarching vision for Manassas. Existing plans and studies that will inform the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update are described below.

Land Use Plans

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is required by State Code and is the City’s legally adopted guide for physical development. The plan is general in nature and contains information on existing conditions and recommendations for natural resources, infrastructure, and new development. The Comprehensive Plan is a strong guide for decision making on zoning changes and the capital improvement program and is the foundation for the recent Zoning Ordinance update, which aligned regulatory processes and physical design standards with the goals of the Plan.

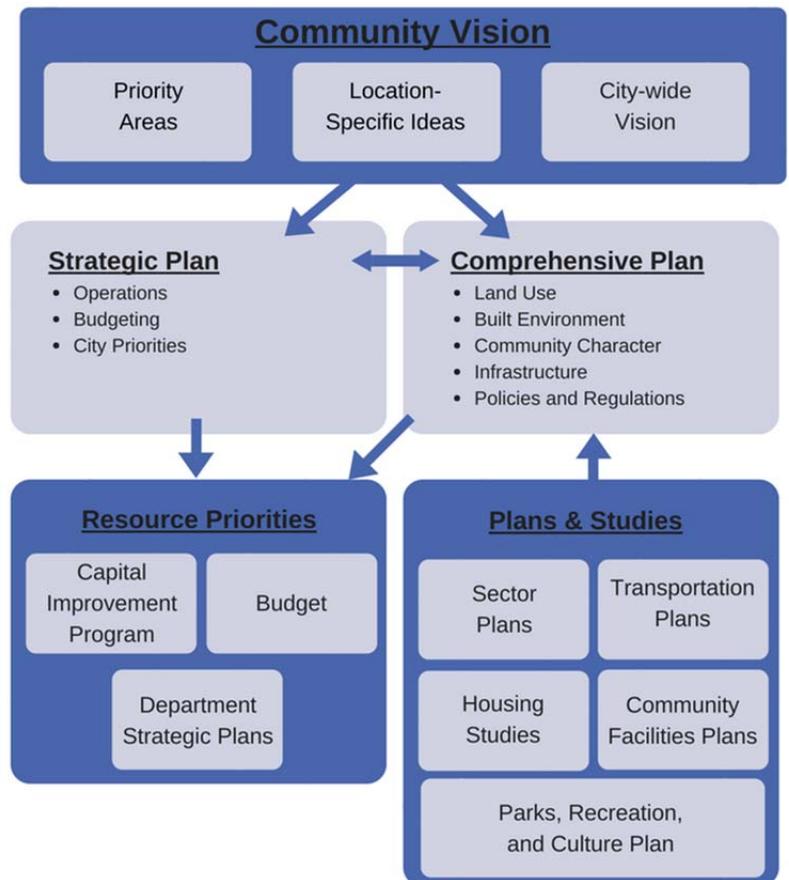


FIGURE 1. THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANNING EFFORTS

The current Comprehensive Plan, Manassas Next – The 2032 Comprehensive Plan, serves as a guide to decision-making regarding the future of Manassas. The Plan addresses three main questions: (1) what is the status of the community in 2012; (2) what are the goals for the City in the future; and (3) what needs to happen to achieve those goals. The plan identifies a framework of goals and community policies, and lists specific implementation strategies to guide future decision making in Manassas.

The Plan contains 10 chapters and 4 appendices. The first two chapters provide an overview and background information on the Plan. Chapter 3 includes a key component, the Character Areas Map which identifies the general areas which will be protected, where growth will be directed in the coming years and the expectations for forms of development and redevelopment. Chapters 3-9 address the primary themes of the Plan and organize the key elements (goals, objectives, and strategies) into guidance for future decision-making in the community. Chapter 10 provides the approach for implementing and updating the Plan over time.

The Plan's Primary Themes:

- Land Use
- Housing and Neighborhoods
- Economic Development
- Mobility (Transportation)
- Community Facilities
- Environmental Sustainability
- Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources

SECTOR PLANS

The City has also adopted two small area Comprehensive Plans, known as Sector Plans, for the Historic Downtown and for the Mathis Avenue corridor. These plans function in a similar fashion to the City-wide Comprehensive Plan, but contain even greater detail and recommendations for these planning areas. The Old Town Sector Plan, adopted in 2008, has been largely implemented. The Mathis Avenue Sector Plan, adopted in 2006, is a largely aspirational plan that remains unrealized.

The Strategic Plan

A Strategic Plan documents an organization's process of defining its strategy or direction for implementing its mission or achieving a desired and clearly defined future. The Strategic Plan guides the jurisdiction in making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy. In the context of local government, strategic planning helps to set budget priorities and guide policy-making priorities over a specific period.

Council Strategic Priorities:

- Community Investments
- Economic Development
- Education
- Housing & Redevelopment
- Public Safety
- Sustainable Government

In the last 15 years, the City of Manassas has adopted three strategic plans. The first, initiated in 2004, began with the City's senior staff leadership and mid-level managers identifying major internal and external issues. In that effort, five issues were identified and the City Council added a sixth prior to the appointment of a City Futures Task Force of 23 citizens, tasked with developing recommendations for the City Council to consider in adopting their 2005 strategic plan.

In 2012, the City Council developed a long-term vision for Manassas with strategy outcomes and goals to address "big ticket issues" such as improving school performance and raising household incomes. In 2015, that plan was further refined

based on the results of the City’s first citizen satisfaction survey, which assessed citizen satisfaction with the delivery of major city services and identified transportation, public education, and economic development as the top three priorities within the community.

Technical Plans and Studies

In addition to the City’s land use and strategic plans, the City has completed a number of technical plans and studies that inform long-range planning and investment decisions. Some of these plans have been completed and adopted by City Council, some are considered for advisory purposes only, while still others are underway. These technical plans and studies are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. TECHNICAL PLANS AND STUDIES

Plan/Study	Relevant Comp. Plan Chapter	Purpose	Status
Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Needs Assessment and Facilities Plan	Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources	Identifies how current facilities are serving the community and provides a guide for decision making on parks, recreation, and culture in the City.	Completed (2016). Incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan (CPA #2017-03).
Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan	Mobility	Identifies a well-designed trail network to accommodate increased user needs and population growth.	Adopted (2007). Incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.
Industrial Zoning District Review	Land Use	Assessed land use impacts and compatibility of industrial zones with the purpose and goal of these districts.	Completed (2013). Incorporated into Zoning Ordinance (2015).
Public Safety Headquarters Needs Assessment Study	Community Facilities	Identified locations and facility requirements to address public safety needs for the City.	Completed (2013), Updated (2017). New Fire and Rescue Station and Public Safety Facility under design.
Manassas City Public Schools Facility Plan 2020-2030	Community Facilities	Provides a 10-year capital projects plan for City Schools.	Completed (2016).
Museum/Library Study	Community Facilities	Identified alternatives for the Museum/Library expansion.	In progress.

Plan/Study	Relevant Comp. Plan Chapter	Purpose	Status
Downtown South Housing Study	Housing and Neighborhoods	Assesses housing conditions and provides recommendations for housing preservation and development within the study area	In progress.

KEY ISSUES FOR THE 2018 UPDATE

Following the last Comprehensive Plan update, the City has continually worked to identify and respond to the needs and concerns of Manassas residents. Previously completed citizen satisfaction surveys (2014, 2016) compared level of satisfaction and level of importance ratings for various City services and identified top priorities based on these ratings. The surveys were distributed randomly and provided in both Spanish and English, offering statistically-valid results from community members whose demographics aligned with those of the City overall. To supplement the quantitative survey data, the City also undertook a major community engagement initiative, “Manassas Community Conversations,” in 2017. Through focus groups, an online engagement portal, and pop-up listening stations at City events, participants in Manassas Community Conversations provided deeper insight into the top priorities and began to define a community vision that will inform future comprehensive and strategic planning efforts. The community’s top priorities as articulated through these recent efforts are shown in Figure 2.



FIGURE 2. THE COMMUNITY’S TOP PRIORITIES

PLANNING APPROACH

This section defines the proposed framework of the Comprehensive Plan update, which will consist of two major components: identification of a *community vision* for the future of Manassas and the articulation of policies to achieve that vision through the comprehensive plan document. The Comprehensive Plan provides the framework for achieving the community vision by identifying specific goals, objectives, and strategies for major topic areas affecting the built environment. Figure 3 offers best practices for the content, process, and attributes of a Comprehensive Plan that will be considered throughout the development of the plan.

Best Practices for Comprehensive Plans

1. **Livable Built Environment:** Ensure that all elements of the built environment—including land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure—work together to provide sustainable, green places for living, working, and recreating, with a high quality of life.
2. **Harmony with Nature:** Ensure that the contributions of natural resources to human well-being are explicitly recognized and valued and that maintaining their health is a primary objective.
3. **Resilient Economy:** Ensure that the community is prepared to deal with both positive and negative changes in its economic health and to initiate sustainable urban development and redevelopment strategies that foster green business growth and build reliance on local assets.
4. **Interwoven Equity:** Ensure fairness and equity in providing for the housing, services, health, safety, and livelihood needs of all citizens and groups.
5. **Healthy Community:** Ensure that public health needs are recognized and addressed through provisions for healthy foods, physical activity, access to recreation, health care, environmental justice, and safe neighborhoods.
6. **Responsible Regionalism:** Ensure that all local proposals account for, connect with, and support the plans of adjacent jurisdictions and the surrounding region.
7. **Authentic Participation:** Ensure that the planning process actively involves all segments of the community in analyzing issues, generating visions, developing plans, and monitoring outcomes.
8. **Accountable Implementation:** Ensure that responsibilities for carrying out the plan are clearly stated, along with metrics for evaluating progress in achieving desired outcomes.
9. **Consistent Content:** Ensure that the plan contains a consistent set of visions, goals, policies, objectives, and actions that are based on evidence about community conditions, major issues, and impacts.
10. **Coordinated Characteristics:** Ensure that the plan includes creative and innovative strategies and recommendations and coordinates internally with federal and state requirements, and horizontally with plans of adjacent jurisdictions.

FIGURE 3. BEST PRACTICES FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

(SOURCE: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STANDARDS FOR SUSTAINING PLACES, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION, 2015)

Process and Timeline

The proposed process includes a four-phase approach, as shown in Figure 4. Following project initiation, the plan preparation will consist of initial community engagement, visioning, and commencement of special studies. This preparation will inform the plan development period, during which the Citizen Vision Committee and Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Committee will develop policies and refine the plan. The process concludes with plan review and ultimate adoption, should City Council determine to do so. The overall process is anticipated to occur over an 18-month period.



FIGURE 4. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROCESS OVERVIEW

Community Engagement & Outreach

Ultimately, the Comprehensive Plan will be the community’s plan consisting of visions and goals defined by citizens. To ensure authentic participation that reflects the diversity of the Manassas community, the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update will include a robust community engagement strategy. Staff proposes that the community vision be guided by a formally-appointed Citizen Vision Committee (see page 10) and informed by public participation in the City’s Community Conversations initiatives. Should City Council opt not to appoint a formal Citizen Vision Committee, a similar visioning process will be convened through the City’s Planning Commission with citizen input.

Community engagement as it relates to plan development is shown in Figure 5, with additional detail on each component of the proposed outreach further detailed below.

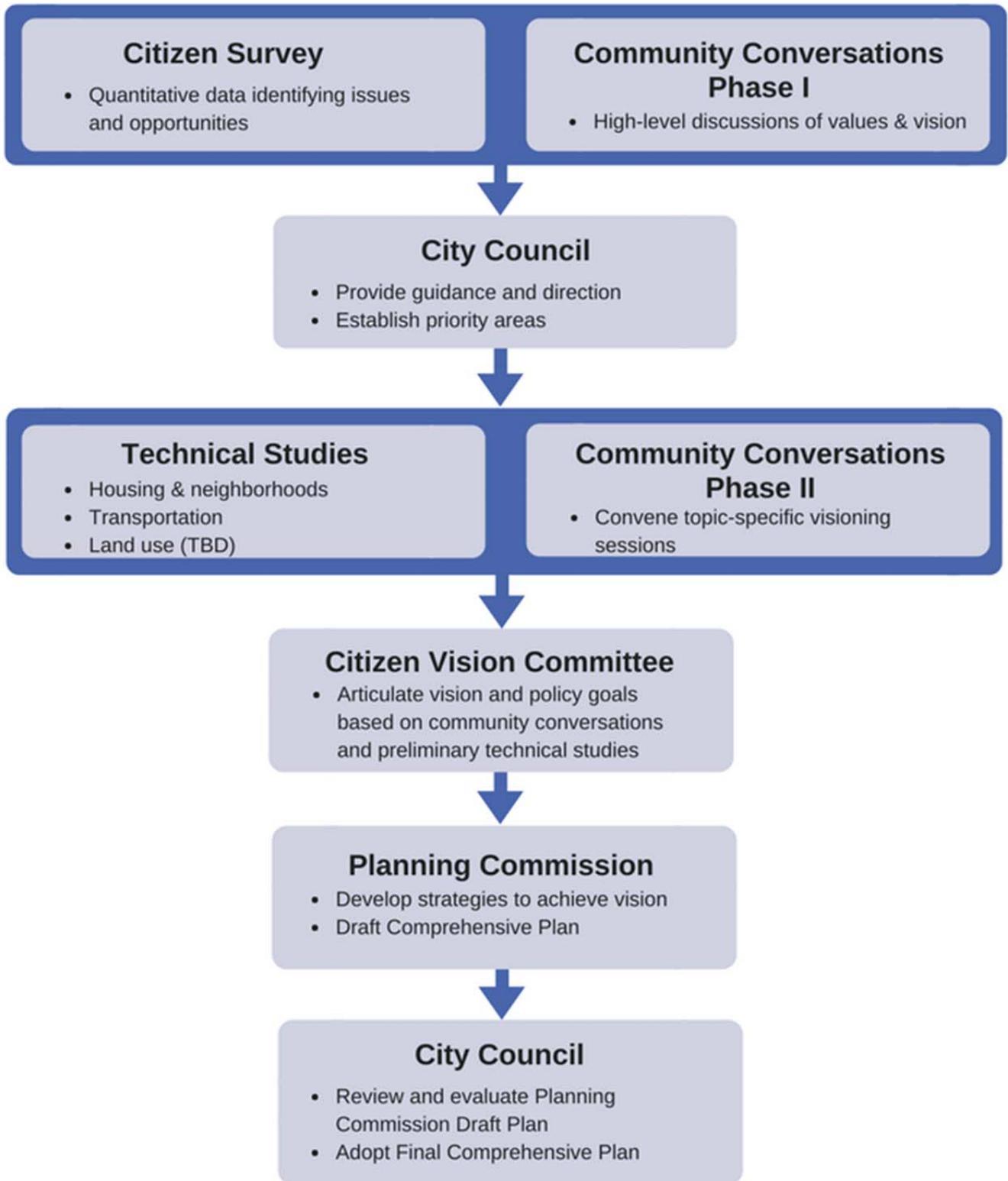


FIGURE 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PLAN DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW

Public Participation

Recognizing that a successful Comprehensive Plan can only be generated based on a community-driven vision, the City seeks to create an inclusive and accessible process through which participants can be informed, interact, and impact the decisions being made.

The City's recent Community Conversations initiative is envisioned to serve as the umbrella for public participation in the development of the Comprehensive Plan. Through focus group discussions, pop-up events, and an online engagement portal, Community Conversations offers a multi-faceted community engagement approach intended to reach a widespread and diverse audience.

- **Community Conversations Phase 1**— The first phase of Community Conversations concluded in November 2017 with the identification of top priorities and issues for further exploration. This phase consisted of high-level questions focused on community values, priorities, and issues identification. The results serve as the basis for the Key Priorities for the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update, to be explored deeper through Community Conversations Phase 2.
- **Community Conversations Phase 2** – The second phase of Community Conversations will focus on policies and objectives associated with specific topic areas relevant to the Comprehensive Plan, such as land use, transportation, and housing. Prior to these meetings, the community will be offered background information on existing conditions and trends impacting each topic area.

Using the information gained from these Community Conversations, the Citizen Vision Committee (or Planning Commission if a Citizen Vision Committee is not appointed) will begin to develop the strategic vision and draft goals and policies for the Comprehensive Plan. Additional Community Conversations, work sessions, and open house/town hall meetings may also be used, as needed, to keep the community informed and engaged as plan development progresses.

Best Practices for Authentic Participation

1. Engage stakeholders at all stages of the planning process.
2. Seek diverse participation in the planning process.
3. Promote leadership development in disadvantaged communities through the planning process.
4. Develop alternative scenarios of the future.
5. Provide ongoing and understandable information for all participants.
6. Use a variety of communications channels to inform and involve the community.
7. Continue to engage the public after the comprehensive plan is adopted.

FIGURE 6. BEST PRACTICES FOR AUTHENTIC PARTICIPATION

(SOURCE: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STANDARDS FOR SUSTAINING PLACES, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION, 2015)

Citizen Vision Committee

Staff recommends that a Citizen Vision Committee (CVC) be appointed and charged with articulating the community's vision and drafting overarching goals and policies for Planning Commission consideration. To ensure active involvement by all segments of the community, it is recommended that the CVC consist of fifteen members. At a minimum, CVC members should possess:

1. Strong interest in the successful future of the City of Manassas;
2. Ability to work collaboratively with people of diverse perspectives and experiences;
3. Willingness to contribute to successful group work;
4. Ability to commit a minimum of 2-3 hours for monthly night meetings, plus meeting preparation time, public involvement events; and
5. Live and/or work or own or operate a business in the City of Manassas.

Planning Commission

After the CVC completes the initial visioning and policy formation, the Planning Commission will synthesize the CVC's efforts and develop a draft Comprehensive Plan. In the event that City Council opts not to appoint a formal CVC, Planning Commission will also have the responsibility of articulating the community vision. The draft plan will be available for review by the public and will be considered by the Planning Commission through a formal public hearing process. If approved, the draft Comprehensive Plan will then be forwarded to City Council for consideration.

City Council

Ultimately, adoption of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan is the decision of City Council. At their discretion, City Council will review, evaluate, and make changes to the Planning Commission's recommended plan. This draft City Council plan will be available for review by the public, considered through the formal public hearing process, and ultimately voted on by City Council should they determine to do so.

RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

The 2013 Comprehensive Plan provides a strong foundation for physical development in the City of Manassas. Therefore, staff recommends that the 2018 update focus on validating the existing plan and addressing the top priorities identified by the community through citizen surveys and Community Conversations. This approach will concentrate resources on consultant services for topic-specific technical studies and community outreach and public engagement. As outlined in the proposed Planning Approach, the CVC and Planning Commission, supported by the City's professional planning staff, will synthesize the results of the consultant deliverables into a draft Comprehensive Plan.

The first phase of consultant services will include community outreach support for Community Conversations Phase II and technical services for completion of a city-wide transportation master plan and a study on housing and neighborhoods.

Based on the results of land use topic meetings during Community Conversations Phase II, additional technical assistance for urban planning and design services may be needed to develop commercial corridor plans and update existing sector plans.

APPENDIX A. PROPOSED PROJECT SCHEDULE

	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September
Project Initiation																			
City Council Initiation																			
Community Conversations Phase II Prep																			
Technical Consultant Selection & Procurement																			
Comp Plan Kick Off																			
Community Conversations Phase II (est. 6 mo.)																			
Special Studies																			
Transportation Master Plan (est. 12 mo.)																			
Housing & Neighborhoods (est. 6 mo.)																			
Community Vision Committee																			
Planning Commission																			
Comp Plan Committee																			
PC Worksession(s)																			
PC Hearing																			
City Council																			
Land Use Committee / Council Worksession(s)																			
CC Hearing																			
CC Adoption																			