



CHAPTER 2 STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The policies set forth by the Gothenburg Plan are largely based on the planning process in which community members defined the City's primary objectives for the next twenty years. A Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, representing a wide variety of community interests, was the primary contributor to this process.



The policies recommended by this plan are based on a process that involved community members, who know the neighborhood and community best, as partners in thinking about the future of Gothenburg. This participatory process worked to forge a consensus among groups with different interests. Steering committee meetings were held once a month from April 2006 to January 2007 to guide the vision for the community, review the progress of the plan and make revisions to the draft concepts. Committee members consisted of business owners, residents, city staff, and public agencies. In order to measure these opinions and perceptions, public input was gathered in various ways, including:

- **Steering Committee.** Throughout the planning process, steering committee meetings were held once a month from April 2006 to FEBRUARY 2007 to review the progress of the plan and make revisions to the draft concepts. Committee members consisted of business owners, residents, city staff, and public agencies.
- **Issue Identification.** Steering Committee assessed Gothenburg's current condition and determined the most significant strengths and weaknesses of the community. A survey was submitted to business and property owners of the community during the early stages of the planning process. The results of the process identify preliminary issues and goals, which were further addressed during steering committee meetings.
- **Visioning and Goal Setting.** Steering Committee members focused on specific areas of improvements, including downtown, economic opportunity, housing, quality of life, and municipal systems. Committee members worked within small groups to focus and refine the issues and develop goals.
- **Tactical Planning.** Steering Committee members defined tactics, strategies, and actions for accomplishing goals.
- **Focus Groups.** A series of focus groups in which residents, business and property owners, students, young adults, city staff, developers, realtors, bankers and other key stakeholders provided additional insight into the community's issues and needs.
- **Design Workshop.** Public design workshops were held throughout the planning process; two days focusing on the whole community and the downtown and the Interstate 80 interchange. The workshops gave citizens, residents, business owners and other stakeholders interested in Gothenburg the opportunity to share their ideas and concepts for the future of their city with the planning team.

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

During the initial stages of the planning process, a community survey was provided to the public to express their thoughts about Gothenburg's services and facilities. The survey consisted of questions both multiple-choice and short-answer. Survey responses help measure perceptions about the City, examining potential priorities and the applicability of various general actions, and review visual and design preferences. The survey was developed with the help of the steering committee and solicited to the public. Survey participants could respond by completing an internet-based survey or submitting a hardcopy. A total of 122 surveys were collected from the community. The results of the survey act as a base for the sessions with the steering committee, focus groups, and design workshops.

Survey participants completed a "report card" questionnaire that asked participants to rank various features of Gothenburg on a five to one scale, with five representing excellent and one representing poor. Attributes with average scores of 3.0 or above are perceived strengths and those with scores below 2.5 represent areas of perceived weaknesses. Figure 1.1 illustrates the results of the rankings among participants.

Survey respondents identified the following as perceived strengths of Gothenburg:

1. Elementary Education (4.1)
2. Overall Quality of Life (4.0)
3. Services and Housing for Seniors (3.9)
4. Community Image (3.9)
5. Public Safety Systems (Police and Fire) (3.8)

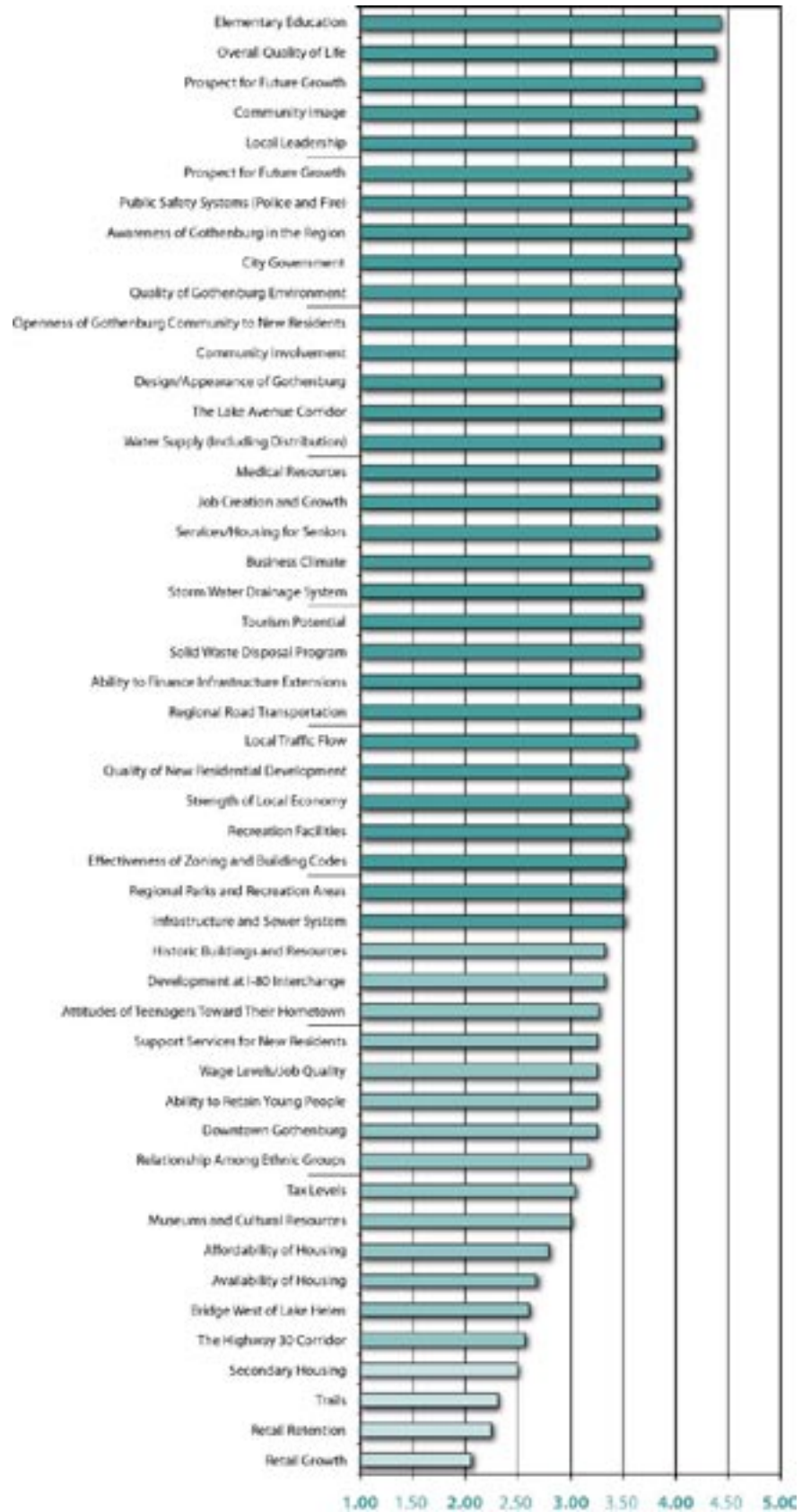
Survey respondents identified the following as perceived weaknesses of Gothenburg:

1. Retail Growth (2.4)
2. Ability to Retain Young People (2.4)
3. Retail Retention (2.5)
4. Museums and Cultural Resources (2.6)
5. Tax Levels (2.7)

The survey also asked short-answer questions, asking participants to identify their top five issues, the greatest assets and weaknesses of the area, favorite and least favorite places, goals and priorities for the next ten years, and specific projects to accomplish in the next ten years. Key findings include:

- What do you believe are the most important issues that Gothenburg will face during the next five years (342 responses)? Survey participants felt that stabilizing downtown and retaining and attracting retail business are the city's most important issues for the next ten years. Other common responses include retaining youth, improving housing conditions, providing job opportunities, controlling public spending, and supporting medical services.

Figure 1.1: Community Survey Results



- What is your favorite place in town (138 responses)? Gothenburg’s recreation and open space areas are favored destinations in the City, notably Lake Helen, the public parks and Wild Horse Golf Club. Other favorite places include public and civic institutions, such as the senior center, library, church, school and hospital.
- What is your least favorite place in town (101 responses)? Respondents identified the physical appearance of the community to be their least favorite thing. Notably, features include Highway 30, bars, Lake Helen, viaduct area, downtown and some residential areas. Responses were strongly associated with the lack of maintenance to these features.
- What do you believe are Gothenburg’s greatest assets or strengths (353 responses)? The “People” is considered Gothenburg’s greatest asset, followed by the schools, community leadership, volunteerism and proximity to Interstate 80, railroad, airport, and other cities.
- What do you believe are Gothenburg’s greatest liabilities or weaknesses (162 responses)? The closing of businesses in the downtown and surrounding area is major concern for residents. The succession of leadership is also a growing concern. Aging infrastructure, availability of jobs for both labor and office positions, providing good wages, and the overall aesthetics of the community are considered as some of Gothenburg’s greatest weaknesses.
- What do you believe should be the city’s most important goals for the next ten years (104 responses)? In light of the concerns for closing businesses in the downtown and surrounding area, residents feel that attracting and retaining businesses is the most important goal for the community, along with enhancing transportation corridors and recreational systems, expanding employment opportunities, and improving housing conditions.
- What specific actions or projects should Gothenburg to accomplish in the next 10 years (146 responses)? Respondents indicated that future projects should include creating a complete and quality recreation system, attracting businesses to relocate or start in the community, improving the condition of the transportation system and its appearance, enhancing the physical appearance of properties and buildings, encouraging tourism activities, and engaging the public to be more apart of the community.



VISIONING AND GOAL SETTING

During the initial stages of the planning process, Steering Committee members identified several strategic issue areas, including Downtown, Economic Opportunity, Housing, Quality of Life, and Municipal Systems. The steering committee separated into five small groups, focusing on defining goals and tactics for improving each strategic issue



DOWNTOWN

Vision	Components of the Vision	Potential Directions
Have a lively downtown	Fill empty buildings with specialty shops. Minimize vacancies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have a shared business plan for downtown businesses. - Need committed investors.
	Become regional arts and crafts center.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seek state legislation that enables tax exemptions for artists' districts. - Establish an "incubator" site for artists.
	Encourage downtown activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host regular concerts. - Stronger downtown theme.
	Improve appearance of smaller retail businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordable physical improvements to buildings and along street.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Vision	Components of the Vision	Potential Directions
Higher-paying wages in Gothenburg beyond agriculture and manufacturing.	Consider space for new businesses, such as food distribution, cold-storage warehousing, technology, elderly services, truck driving school, and research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Industrial park in southwest area of the city. - Development looking over Potter Pond . - Block Pivot and Block Floral west of town. - Midstate on Highway 30.
	Develop a stronger tourism market.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use the golf course as an attraction. - Hotel to have meeting space. - Swedish heritage. - Pony Express.
	Develop near Interstate 80 interchange and along Highway 30.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generate a plan for future development around the interchange. - Retail and service oriented businesses near interchange. Encourage traffic to stop in town.

HOUSING

Vision	Components of the Vision	Potential Directions
Expand housing opportunities in Gothenburg.	Provide housing options for seniors and young adults.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish affordable housing (\$100-120K). - Build rental housing and apartments. - Build duplexes and townhouses. - Education program for purchasing homes. - Establish a reward program for workers.
Develop quality housing in Gothenburg.	Improve the condition of existing neighborhoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide grants for home rehabilitation. - Code enforcement. - Modify DPA program. Increase assistance from DPA. - Develop a program where the purchase of the home can include rehabilitation costs.

MUNICIPAL SYSTEMS

Vision	Components of the Vision	Potential Directions
Excess capacity and replacement of aging infrastructure.	Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare a water study for the community and outlying areas. - Consider new well fields and treatment center. - Consider needs of possible ethanol plants.
	Sewer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare a sewer study. Consider plant capacity.
	Streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a streetscape program for Highways 47 and 30. - Identify new truck routes and traffic flow issues - Prepare a transportation study. - Develop a program to improve a certain amount of street per year. - Consider needs of possible ethanol plants.
	Sidewalks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enforce sidewalk ordinance. - Complete sidewalk system. - Replace deteriorated sections of sidewalk. - Develop a program to improve a certain amount of sidewalk per year.
	Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue to work on backup into Gothenburg.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Vision	Components of the Vision	Potential Directions
Having an attractive and progressive community with a wholesome quality of life for all ages.	Recreation is a key element that all ages can enjoy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve appearance of parks. - Create a league play for children. - Update equipment at parks (pavilion, playground, courts). - Maintain and enhance parks and trails. - Develop an activity center, much like a YMCA. - Develop trail links from neighborhoods to Lake Helen. - Develop a trail to Wild Horse golf course.
	Improve the feeling of safety in Gothenburg.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adequate lighting in all parts of town. - Identify safe houses every couple of blocks. - Improve physical condition of community. - Have a beautiful community. - Increase police presence.
	Improve medical services in-town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide air access for doctors and businesspersons. - Increase runway length to allow larger planes.
	Improve transportation modes for senior citizens and children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a master trail system. - Develop a program to transport seniors to destinations.

area. Each group defined a vision for their issue area, components of that vision and potential directions the vision could take the community. Each small group reported to the rest of the committee to expand their vision. Below is a summary of the results.

TACTICAL PLANNING

The Steering Committee identified a series of actions in order to achieve the community goals formulated during the visioning process. Members of the committee separated into small groups and worked as teams to identify tactics for making Gothenburg a better place to work and play. Teams were provided aerial photographs and markers to indicate issues and opportunities. Specific improvements include:

- Enhancing the appearance of major streets by planting trees, improving adjacent property and building conditions, and repaving streets.
- Improving the appearance and use of the land near Interstate 80.
- Creating gateway features into the community along major highways.
- Developing a graphic wayfinding system to major community destinations, including downtown, Pony Express Station, Lafayette Park, Lake Helen, Gothenburg Memorial Hospital, Quinn Field, and rodeo grounds.
- Developing a complete network of parks, trails, and open spaces.
- Rehabilitating residential areas.
- Identifying new development areas for residential (large lot, affordable, and senior), commercial (retail and office), and industrial uses.
- Identifying possible access routes (road and railroad) for new development, as well as identifying a route for truck traffic.

FOCUS GROUPS

A series of ten focus groups in August 2006 invited input from students, young adults, business owners and managers, hospital staff, property owners, city operations staff, and civic organizations. Focus group participants discussed Gothenburg's assets and liabilities, their visions for the community, businesses needs, and priority projects. A total of 65 community members participated in the process. Major themes of the focus group discussions follow.

Gothenburg should promote a sense of community and a premier quality of life as the community ages.

The City should strive to foster a sense of belonging and pride among residents, promoting volunteerism. Entrances into the community should communicate the values treasured in Gothenburg, effectively creating a strong positive impression of the community to passersby and residents. Participants want to celebrate its high quality schools, beautiful neighborhoods and way of life.

Gothenburg should aggressively pursue new quality retail development in downtown while supporting existing business enterprises.

Retail development and retention is as a significant community wide issue. The role of the downtown is changing as storefronts that once were occupied with retail businesses have closed and reopened as offices. This change has transformed the dynamic nature of downtown from a retail center filled with activity to a center with less movement. Participants felt that downtown should become a retail destination once again filled with niche businesses. Some unique strategies for new businesses include collocating businesses such as an ice cream service and art gallery or a pharmacy and internet café, and opening a mercantile business.

Participants want to encourage activity to the downtown by hosting festivals and events in the area, such as the Fireman's Ball and Farmer's Market.

Gothenburg should remain active in initiating economic development and job growth opportunities.

Attracting a qualified labor force is a key component to future business and industrial development. Participants want to attract businesses offering quality jobs not quantity of jobs. Participants identified various perceived challenges to economic development, including:

- Finding qualified employees. One possible solution is to provide a vocational training program at the high school to help students enter the workforce.
- Employment in specialized areas for young adults. The lack of variety in the job market often forces young people to leave Gothenburg.
- Jobs that do not provide competitive wages or benefits compared to similar businesses in surrounding communities.
- Tight labor force. The new ethanol plant will create jobs for the region. However, there is concern about the region providing a stable workforce. A member of a leading industrial plant shared that they operated for nearly ten years before having a stable staff of 17, while the ethanol plant will generate over 30 staff positions.
- Concern for several businesses closings, including Red Apple, Taco Bell, the furniture store, jewelry store, and clothing store.

Participants also shared that businesses that contribute to the quality of life in Gothenburg should be saved. The operation of the Sun Theater was rescued through a collaborative effort by community organizations. The bowling alley is a unique destination in the community; it too, should be supported through a community-wide effort if needed.



Gothenburg needs an improved environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Many participants believe that the existing parks need greater maintenance and upgrades even if it costs more money and time. Providing beautiful open space for kids to play and families to gather is important and should be a priority for the community. Having a community trail that connects all of the parks and surrounds Lake Helen is also desirable.

Focus groups agreed that the condition of Lake Helen needs improvement. Participants want to enjoy their public investment of Lake Helen by creating conditions that allow them to experience its lost recreational activities, including boating, fishing, and swimming. A strong majority of participants believe the geese at Lake Helen create a nuisance and discourage its use. Geese droppings along the trail make the park unappealing for walkers and droppings in the lake raise the ammonia level to be harmful for people, fish and other wildlife. Also, geese are apparently aggressive towards pedestrians and cyclists. Participants believe that controlling the number of geese at Lake Helen should be a priority, along with increasing measures to encourage safe recreation activity.

Neighborhood youth need activity and entertainment.

Destination. Youth participants identified the need for places to meet and socialize in Gothenburg. The school district sponsors activities for students to participate in; however, beyond these activities some students tend to socialize in parking lots or cruise in their vehicles. Students feel that they are discouraged to congregate anywhere in the community, to the point of closing the parking at Lake Helen Park. Adults agreed that there needs to be an identifiable place conveniently located for young people to gather.

Participants discussed possible initiatives from public, private, or public/private partnerships, including a youth center, restaurant, billiards, café, library extension, coffee shop, and recreation center (YMCA). The administration of the facility could be through a partnership with the students, where students represent a board of directors and bear the responsibility of operating the facility. Similar programs have been implemented by high school students in Albion, Nebraska and Nevis, Minnesota.

The City should also consider private/public partnerships that facilitate development of youth, such as a dance studio, martial arts dojo, or after school program. In addition, the City could collaborate with the school district to establish youth educational programs that develop vocational skills, including instruction on construction and carpentry, electrical and plumbing, vehicle maintenance, computer added drafting, and landscaping.

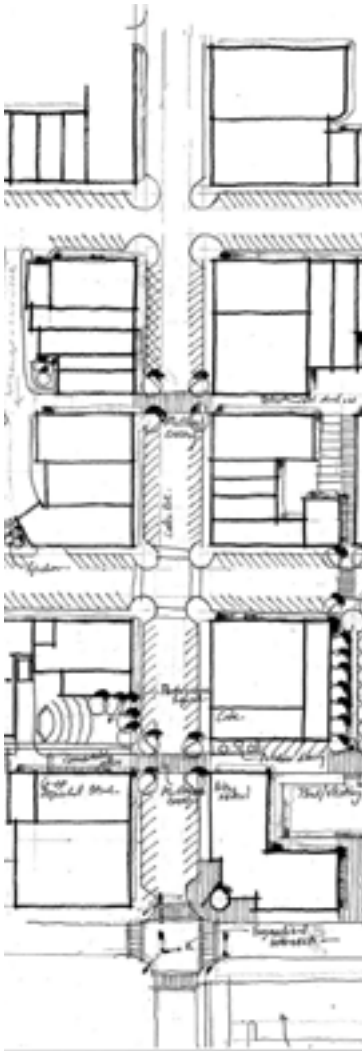
Services. A strong park and trail system could be developed to encourage youth activity. In recent years, children with obesity in Nebraska communities have become a growing issue. A connected trail system would provide them with new recreation opportunity.

Support Gothenburg Memorial Hospital while it continues to provide excellent services to the community.

The Gothenburg Memorial Hospital is operating well within its goals, and its presence is important to the quality of life enjoyed by all of those living in the community. As part of the strategic planning process, one focus group was dedicated to health services in the city. Discussion includes physical location of the hospital and other health facilities and programming of health care services.

Generally, participants favored facilities being decentralized, where medical-related facilities are not on a campus setting. Medical services, similar to a business, must compete with one another. By having office locations in different places in the community, it distinguishes the services from other practices. Participants did discuss the business structure of the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. The base operation of the Mayo Clinic is centered in Rochester, Minnesota with smaller satellite clinics throughout the state. Participants thought the structure of the Mayo Clinic could have some applicability to the Gothenburg Memorial Hospital, but in association to a Nebraska-based medical center.





Maintain variety in the City’s housing stock, with dwelling units affordable to a variety of income levels and age groups, particularly elderly residents.

Increased diversity among household types is indirectly tied to an increased variety in Gothenburg’s housing stock. These might include attached owner-occupied housing for empty nesters; moderately priced units to help young families build equity in the community; apartment or condominium units with common spaces; smaller lot single-family development in innovative design settings, as well as “standard” single-family development. Attached housing can mean single-family units on separate lots, duplexes, or townhouses. New development should maintain continuity and linkages among neighborhoods.

Gothenburg should use the existing subdivision plats and infrastructure investments as first priorities toward meeting the city’s development needs and objectives. Creative financing should be pursued to encourage new housing in developing areas without substantial cost to the homebuyer or developer.

Participants felt that public initiatives should be made to acquire dilapidated housing and vacant property for redevelopment. They indicated that the condition of some housing is poor, needing significant repair or razing. Mechanisms should be adopted to encourage investors to rehabilitate rental and owner-occupied properties.

DESIGN WORKSHOPS

The public at-large was invited to help plan and design the future of Gothenburg. The community issues often reflected the concerns noted in the steering committee and focus group meetings including transportation improvements and housing. The two-day community workshop focused on the existing conditions of the community and investigated opportunities for improving Gothenburg. The workshops provided more insight into the day to day functioning of the community, what people like about the community, and how they relate to future development in the city.

OPEN HOUSE & PRESENTATION

The city council and public at-large were invited to review the ideas developed for Gothenburg on March 20, 2007. This meeting kicked-off the approval process for adopting the Gothenburg Comprehensive Plan.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

The Gothenburg Planning Commission and City Council of City of Gothenburg held public hearings prior to adopting this plan in April and May of 2007.