

**Paper #2: Plan and Planning Process – Jackson, MS**Introduction

The city of Jackson, the capital and biggest city of Mississippi, created their FABRIC Comprehensive Plan in the early 2000s to guide the process of making Jackson more socially equitable. This plan is important for two reasons. Firstly, people have long known Jackson and the state of Mississippi for their virulently racist histories. This has greatly affected the planning patterns of both places. This plan represents an attempt to break free of these old stereotypes and create new images of social equity, inclusiveness and tolerance. Secondly, this plan somewhat goes against the common argument among planners that the more specific a goal is, the easier it is to obtain. Despite this plan's nine broad goals, Jackson was surprisingly able to work successfully towards achieving some of them.

Planners can expect to learn numerous lessons from analyzing Jackson's plan. Firstly, in general, the more specific a goal is, the easier it may be to obtain because the process that needs to be taken to achieve it can be clearer. However, a goal being broad does not necessarily make it unrealistic. Secondly, it is important to have adequate funding for any plan, because a lack of funding being available to implement a plan's recommendations hurts its ability to succeed. Thirdly, cities have a wealth of modern resources at their disposal they can use to involve their citizens in the planning process. Using these resources can help transfer more planning power from bureaucratic city officials to the citizens themselves.

Planning Context

The plan was undertaken because in the early 2000s, the city found itself at a crossroads. The physical profiles of many Mississippi towns have been slow to change in the post-Jim Crow era southern United States due to lingering racism. Due to Jackson's prominence in Mississippi, other Mississippi municipalities look to Jackson as a leader and role model.<sup>5</sup> One of the campaign promises of Jackson's first African-American mayor Harvey Johnson Jr, who was elected in 1997, was to decrease inequalities between white and black Jacksonians.<sup>8</sup> This made it logical for him to direct his city planners to create a comprehensive plan that would focus on his political agenda of decreasing those inequalities.

Jackson's planners saw the city as having two options. The city could either continue to have its social conflict left over from the Jim Crow era, or it could work to eliminate this so the city becomes more inclusive, united and equal and a better role model for other Mississippi towns that are struggling to move forward.<sup>5</sup> Since natural gas was first discovered in the Jackson area in the 1930s, the population mostly grew up until 2000. The mayor and his planners wanted to see all of the city's residents benefit from this, regardless of their backgrounds. This motivated them to make the plan.<sup>5</sup> This is especially evident in the plan's guiding theme of "FABRIC", or "For a Better Revitalized Inclusive Community", and the plan's official slogan "I Am Jackson" which the committee and group members decided upon during their retreat.<sup>5</sup>

There is no specific local law in Jackson that requires the Jackson Department of Planning and Development to create comprehensive plans.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the convention and planning culture are that politicians direct the Department of Planning and Development to map out what those politicians' policy ideas could look like if implemented. This makes the Department of Planning and Development function more as a research bureau.<sup>5, 7</sup> The FABRIC plan resulted from the directive of Mayor Johnson Jr in 1999,<sup>5</sup> who clearly wanted to show Jacksonians his will to carry out his campaign promise of making Jackson a more socially equitable place. Jackson has a strong-mayor form of municipal government,<sup>13</sup> giving political figures like the mayor considerable amounts of power in the planning process and paving the way for these planning conventions to take hold.

The effects of the Jim Crow era continued to affect the physical characteristics of Jackson into the early 2000's. Considering how Jackson saw itself as a leader among Mississippi municipalities,<sup>5</sup> it is understandable Jackson wanted to remake its image as a more socially equitable city due to benefits that can come from this. One of the biggest benefits of this could be attracting new residents who would want to live in a socially tolerant and unified place. This would help Jackson and its surrounding area continue the overall population growth it was seeing up until the early 2000s, which could lead to increased tax revenues. All of this shows how in Jackson, planners are expected to take on the city's social and equity problems.

#### Plan Format and Summary

The plan is a hybrid of two different planning formats: Agenda plans and vision/scenario plans. Just like an agenda plan, Jackson's FABRIC comprehensive plan is essentially a big to-do

list detailing reasons why each ideal solution should be implemented and each solution's benefits.<sup>4</sup> The plan's stress on making Jackson a more socially equitable city makes this similar to an agenda plan.<sup>4</sup> Since this comprehensive plan focuses on the many preferred futures Jacksonians discussed in the meetings, it strongly resembles the vision/scenario plan format too.<sup>12</sup> Undertaking this plan required building consensus among diverse Jacksonians with differing opinions, making this process a consensus-building exercise in many ways, similar to vision/scenario plans.<sup>12</sup> This plan in many ways aimed to mobilize public support for Johnson Jr.'s campaign agenda, further giving this plan similarities to vision/scenario plan formats.<sup>12</sup> Johnson, Jr. and his planners most likely chose to use a hybrid of the agenda and vision/scenario plan formats because these formats help Johnson Jr. communicate his campaign message of making Jackson a more socially equitable city to Jacksonians.

The plan consists of five primary sections: Existing conditions, goals and objectives, the land use plan, the transportation plan and the community facilities plan. The goals and objectives section details the nine primary goals participants came up with and agreed on at the public meetings. The existing conditions section discusses trends in the city since the 1980s that relate to demographics, economics, land use patterns, transportation and community facilities. The land use plan consists of future demographic projections, development alternative ideas, new land use allocations, growth and infill strategies, and implementation strategies. The transportation plan simply details improvements to the city's existing transportation system. The community facilities plan details improvement ideas for the city's general housing stock, education/cultural facilities, parks and recreational buildings, public safety facilities, miscellaneous public buildings, overall infrastructure and implementation strategies for this plan. Overall, however, it focuses on improving the parks.<sup>5</sup>

The trends occurring in Jackson that the plan discusses include recent trends in population totals, race composition, educational attainment level, household types, employment, income, retail sales, land uses, transportation usage types and community facility qualities. One of the plan's biggest goals is to keep what is working while reversing the trends most residents in the meetings found harmful. These include increasing income disparities between more affluent whites and poorer blacks, corporate offices leaving downtown for the city's suburbs, increases in sprawl and high amounts of vacant lots compared to the suburbs.<sup>5</sup> The goals and objectives section goes further to detail the plan's nine primary goals, also called "threads": High-quality

and equitable physical growth and development, strong neighborhoods, high-quality and equitable community services and infrastructure, enhanced quality of life and community image, exceptional and diverse cultural and educational experiences, effective community-oriented leadership and partnerships, improved race relations, safe and healthy Jacksonians, and inclusive strategic economic opportunity.<sup>5</sup>

For the most part, the plan only discusses matters relating to public property. The only two times the plan discusses issues relating to private property are in the land use plan and the community facilities plan. Firstly, in the land use plan, the planners argue that Downtown should be the only core of Jackson. As a result, the city should work to attract corporate offices back into the downtown core.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, in the community facilities plan, planners discuss incentivizing private property owners in neighborhoods with growing populations and lack of park space to construct parks on their properties.<sup>5</sup> This shows how the comprehensive plan mostly deals with modifying public property only, with a couple exceptions. This also relates to implementing the comprehensive plan's recommendations. The city government departments implement the plan's recommendations.<sup>13</sup> This is especially the case for recommendations that relate to public property, comprising most of the recommendations.

This comprehensive plan is more indicative rather than prescriptive because the land use, transportation and community facilities plans primarily provide rough road maps of what future Jackson could look like with only minimal actual physical planning. This is because none of these sections specifically lay out drawn-up proposals for carrying out specific alternatives. These sections are only based off the broad goals residents discussed during the meetings.

### Planning Process

Johnson Jr. initiated the planning process. Before the first phase began, the mayor enlisted 70 city residents into a steering committee and two focus groups in the summer of 1999 to guide the development of the comprehensive plan. These residents then took a two-day retreat to discuss the plan's theme, agenda overall goals, missions and the public participation process.<sup>5</sup>

The planning process entailed two primary phases. The first phase consisted of public participation through public meetings to create the goals and objective element of the comprehensive plan, which took place from March to April 2000, when around 300 people participated in public workshops throughout the city. At these public meetings, participants

collectively identified and prioritized issues about the city's condition most felt were important, discussed what they saw as the city's strengths, and then worked with the planning staff leading the meetings to develop the goals, objectives and alternatives for the comprehensive plan, and possible outcomes of those alternatives.<sup>5</sup> The City Council of Jackson then legally adopted the goals and objectives developed at the public meetings in 2001.<sup>5</sup> The mayor chose this process because he felt this was the most efficient and direct way to communicate his message to Jacksonians that he was serious about his promise of making the city more equitable.<sup>5</sup>

The second phase of the planning process firstly entailed city planners sitting down to collect the most common alternatives that participants suggested. The planners then used their technical skills to create the land use, transportation and community facilities plan sections of the comprehensive plan based off those alternatives. After this phase was completed, the City Council of Jackson officially adopted the plan on March 2, 2004.<sup>5</sup> The entire City of Jackson Department of Planning and Development was involved in the process, but the Land Use Division had the most involvement in creating the technical land use, transportation and community facilities plans. Those planners completed this work in their offices physically separated from the residents.<sup>5, 7</sup> Therefore, the alternatives most commonly suggested by residents were included in the plan, but the planners did not create the maps and other technical images representing those ideas with resident involvement.

All of this shows how the city chose to undertake the collaborative planning and traditional rational comprehensive planning models. Collaborative planning involves accomplishing such tasks as assembling relevant stakeholders, engaging in joint fact-finding to uncover knowledge about the planning issues at stake, and identifying jointly acceptable alternatives or options including possible future paths.<sup>1</sup> Jackson did this in their comprehensive planning process through their meetings, in which the planning staff led all participants in the process. This process also fits the traditional rational comprehensive planning model, since this process involves setting goals and objectives, identifying alternatives, analyzing possible outcomes of each alternative, choosing preferred alternatives and attempting to implement them.<sup>2</sup>

The two biggest implementation recommendations from the land use plan are to concentrate new development in a small amount of specific locations in the city's core and

protect residential neighborhoods from overdevelopment. Since the adaptation of the comprehensive plan, many of the land use plan's recommendations have been implemented with much success. Many of the plan's ideas for regenerating Downtown Jackson have been successful. Downtown Jackson is in the midst of an apartment construction and parking garage boom,<sup>10, 14</sup> infusing new life into the neighborhood. Businesses are returning to Downtown Jackson from the suburbs, bringing foot and car traffic back to the neighborhood.<sup>9</sup> The plan also enabled the construction of the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Downtown, set to open in December 2017.<sup>9</sup> This further increases activity downtown and improves the image of both Jackson and the state of Mississippi by eliminating old racist stereotypes about those places, among other benefits. Since Downtown Jackson has only recently started to gentrify,<sup>10, 14</sup> it is too soon to determine how the gentrification in Downtown Jackson will affect nearby residential neighborhoods.

The most significant implementation aims of the transportation plan are to improve links between the area's job centers, remake Jackson's transportation infrastructure to better accommodate bikers, collect more data on the transportation infrastructure such as traffic counts and signs, and improve overall vehicular and pedestrian safety on city streets. Jackson is working slowly to make its streets friendlier and safer to bikers, but it is making progress. The community of bicyclist advocates within the city is growing, with organizations being founded like Jackson Bike Advocates attending city council meetings to voice their support for the creation of more bike lanes.<sup>11</sup> The city government also adapted a clean streets policy in November 2015, which enables the city to put in bike lanes whenever they work to renovate an existing street or build a new one. It also establishes how it would obtain funding for its complete streets projects.<sup>3</sup> The Department of Planning and Development Transit Services Division has been working to collect data on traffic counts, signs, bus line ridership broken down by route, and other features of the city's transit system which they are using for a new transit plan.<sup>6</sup> All of this falls in line with the FABRIC comprehensive plan's goals, and goes even farther by creating an entirely new plan just for transit. They also went farther by establishing further instructions the city has to follow to make Jackson's streets suitable for bikers. Therefore, many of the comprehensive plan's transportation planning goals are being implemented successfully.

The main implementation recommendations from the community facilities plan are to renovate existing parks by constructing new ADA-compliant facilities in them, construct new parks in high-growth neighborhoods, devise alternative funding sources for park upkeep, and involve Jacksonians more in the park planning process.<sup>5</sup> The city has begun implementing the FABRIC comprehensive plan's recommendations for improving its parks. For example, as of 2017, the city has been working to secure funding to renovate some of Jackson's most prominent public parks. For example, they want to renovate one of their most prominent parks called Smith Park to make it look like how it did in the early 1900's, while also adding some modern additions like new concert stages and playgrounds. The city is also working to bring food trucks to Smith Park to liven up the space further. Local park advocacy groups such as Friends of Smith Park have formed to take a role in this. However, the city is having trouble finding the funding to complete projects like these, and the state government is not helping.<sup>10</sup> This shows how the city has started to implement some of its recommendations that it discussed in the FABRIC comprehensive plan, such as renovating parks and getting Jacksonians more involved in park planning. However, the city is running into trouble with finding alternative funding sources for park projects, one of FABRIC's key recommendations.

### Assessment

There are both benefits and drawbacks to the planning process Jackson used. One important benefit was the city government taking steps at the earliest stage in the process to involve citizens by creating the steering committee and focus groups made up entirely of them and having them meet before the process officially started. Doing this sends the message to Jacksonians that the city government cares about what Jacksonians believe planners should do with their city. Another important benefit of the process is how the comprehensive plan's recommendations were inspired by the suggestions Jacksonians brought up during the meetings in 2000. This further shows how the planners did consider residents' concerns.

Despite those benefits, there were some drawbacks to this process as well. Firstly, the public meeting timeframe may have been too short at being only two months. It is possible there were citizens who wanted to participate in these meetings, but could not attend any during that two-month period for special reasons. As a result, such people may have been shut out of the process for reasons they could not control. Planners should have allocated more time for these

public meetings. Secondly, another drawback is how the only engagement method they used was public meetings. In addition, only a small proportion of Jacksonians could attend, giving those attendees an outsized say in the future of the city. To remedy this problem, Jackson planners could have utilized additional methods of reaching out to Jacksonians for input, such as street surveys, web surveys, etc. Thirdly, another drawback with this process was how planners created the maps in the land use, transportation and community facilities plans separately from the citizens. By doing this, planners sometimes applied alternatives discussed in meetings to specific locations that residents did not specify. This takes some decision-making power away from the residents at the meetings and puts it in the hands of bureaucrats, when the overarching goal of this comprehensive planning process was to have high degrees of citizen involvement in the planning process.

Since the plan focused heavily on social issues, it is understandable that the city chose to use the agenda and vision/scenario plan formats when making this comprehensive plan. One of the most important motivators of the plan was Harvey Johnson Jr.'s campaign promise to make Jackson a more socially equitable city.<sup>5</sup> This would have a big role in the choosing of an agenda format. It is also understandable that the city chose the vision/scenario plan format since this plan focuses heavily on social issues, which require much consensus building to make the plan successful.<sup>12</sup>

The city has done a reasonable job in working towards achieving its nine goals, or “threads”. The city is obtaining some high-quality physical growth and development, as evidence by its resurging Downtown, improving transit system and progress towards making its streets complete. However, it may be too early to tell if that growth if Jacksonians of all backgrounds are experiencing this high-quality growth equally. For example, the new apartments being constructed in Downtown Jackson may be too expensive for poorer residents of the city to afford, which can exclude them from Downtown Jackson’s resurgence. Issues like these will need to be addressed in plans if the city chooses to undertake them regarding such issues. The city is in the process of working to achieve its goal of high-quality and equitable community services and infrastructure, as exemplified by how it is working to improve its public transportation system and even going as far as to make a new plan dedicated just to improving that.



The city is successfully working to enhance its community image and bringing in exceptional and diverse cultural and educational experiences to the city by doing things like constructing the brand new Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Downtown. Not only can this bring more activity into Downtown, it does this in a way which honors the valuable contributions of the city's and state's African American populations to the histories of those places. This can also help build trust between the city's African-American population and Jackson's government, furthering one of the goals of the FABRIC comprehensive plan. This also helps Jackson serve as a role model to the rest of Mississippi because the city could be setting a precedent for how other Mississippi municipalities should honor the accomplishments of their African-American populations, which can ideally lead to the elimination of stereotypes that say Mississippi is still stuck in the Jim Crow era. This is one of the goals of the FABRIC comprehensive plan.

The city is also succeeding at creating effective community-oriented leadership and partnerships, as evidenced by local biking advocacy groups pushing the city to adhere to its goals of making complete streets, and by local park advocacy groups like Friends of Smith Park that work to help the city improve local parks.

It may be too soon to tell whether the city achieved its goals of improving race relations, making Jacksonians safer and healthier, bringing inclusive strategic economic opportunity and forming strong neighborhoods. These four goals are heavily reliant on the results of the other five goals the city is currently focusing its efforts on. Since the city is still in the process of working on those other five goals, it is too soon to tell as to whether or not the city has achieved these four reliant goals. Therefore, it is unclear as to whether or not the plan achieved its overarching purpose of making Jackson a more socially equitable place, as it may be too soon to tell this. However, the plan may have at least somewhat worked in portraying the image to the rest of the country that both Jackson and the state of Mississippi are starting to move past the Jim Crow era, as exemplified by the construction of the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Downtown Jackson.

It is clear that despite the broadness of many of the plan's nine main goals, the city has found some successful ways to implement some of them. Despite this, however, there are some goals like improving race relations, making Jacksonians safer and healthier, bringing inclusive strategic economic opportunity and forming strong neighborhoods, which are broad enough that

their abilities to be robust and implementable become hampered. Goals like these will take much time before the city's success at achieving them can be completely analyzed.

### Lessons & Conclusions

One lesson that can be learned from analyzing this plan and its process is that generally, it is easier for a city to reach specific goals rather than broad ones. This is because the more specific a goal is, the better it may be for a city to figure out the best process it should take to implement such goals successfully. This is exemplified especially by how it may be a long time before whether or not Jackson became a more socially equitable city can be truly assessed. Despite this, however, Jackson was able to succeed in at least partially achieving its other broad goals like improving its transit system, bringing back Downtown Jackson, enhancing Jackson's and Mississippi's images, and getting Jacksonians more involved in improving the city. This shows how a goal being broad does not necessarily make it unrealistic. Another major lesson from this plan and its results are realizing the importance of having adequate funding for the planning process. The city is struggling with finding alternative sources of funding to maintain and renovate its parks. Without such funding, it is hard to implement any plan.

Despite the numerous benefits of the planning process that Jackson took, its planning process had enough drawbacks to the point where other cities must learn from those if they want to emulate the process Jackson used. To improve on where Jackson made mistakes, cities can use a variety of other public engagement methods to reach wider segments of their populations. The more citizens that can have input on the planning process, the more planning power that can potentially be transferred from bureaucratic planners to the citizens themselves. Because Jackson undertook their planning and public engagement processes so long ago, they were less able to access the wide range of public engagement technologies cities have at their disposal today, such as social media. Cities today can use new tools like social media to engage the public during the planning process in ways that are more successful.

## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup>Brooks, Michael P. *Planning Theory for Practitioners*. Chicago: APA Press, 2002.
- <sup>3</sup>“Complete Streets Policy: City Of Jackson, Mississippi,” *Jackson Mississippi*. Accessed December 17, 2017. <https://www.jacksonms.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2319>
- <sup>4</sup>Hopkins, Lewis D. *Urban Development: The Logic of Making Plans*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001.
- <sup>5</sup>Jackson, Mississippi. *Jackson, Mississippi Comprehensive Plan*. Jackson, MS: 2003. Web. Accessed November 18, 2017. <https://www.jacksonms.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7>.
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- <sup>8</sup>Nave, R.L. “Candidate Profile: Harvey Johnson Jr.,” *Jackson Free Press*. Published April 2, 2014. <http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2014/apr/02/harvey-johnson-jr/>
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- <sup>12</sup>Shipley, Robert. “Visioning in planning: Is the practice based on sound theory?” *Environment and Planning A* 34 (2001): 7-22.

<sup>13</sup>Summers Jr, Tim. “Changing the Form of City Government,” *Jackson Free Press*. Published October 26, 2016. <http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2016/oct/26/changing-form-city-government/>

<sup>14</sup>Warren, Anthony. “Downtown Jackson Booming,” *Northside Sun*. Published November 22, 2017. <https://northsidesun.com/front-page-slideshow-news-breaking-news/downtown-jackson-booming>