

# **CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN?**

## **SUMMARY**

A Master Plan is a comprehensive long range plan intended to guide growth and development of a community or region. It includes analysis, recommendations, and proposals for the community's population, economy, housing, transportation, community facilities, and land use. It is based on public input, surveys, planning initiatives, existing development, physical characteristics, and social and economic conditions.

**A Master Plan is a policy based document, it does not nor can it regulate land use. A Master Plan is not a zoning document; therefore the recommendations in this plan are only for guidance, not to regulate properties or land use.**

A Master Plan is a product of land use planning. Planning is an orderly, open approach to determining Antrim County's needs and goals and developing strategies to address those needs and meet those goals. The planning process involves working through four basic questions, which should be answered with the Master Plan:

1. Where is Antrim County now?
2. How did Antrim County get here?
3. Where does Antrim County want to go?
4. How does Antrim County get there?

While the plan has little direct authority, it is an expression of Antrim County's intention for the future and provides guidance to accomplish that vision. Local units of government, citizen groups, and individuals are encouraged to review this plan and make suggestions.

The benefits for having an updated plan include:

1. Consistency in decision making - the plan gives decision makers a steady point of reference for the land use-related actions.
2. Ability to make informed decisions - the plan provides facts on existing conditions and trends, enabling decision makers to better understand the impact of their decisions versus relying on a "gut instinct."
3. Achieve predictability - the plan describes where and what type of development the community desires. This information allows individuals to plan for the purchase and use of property consistent with community goals.
4. Wise use of resources - the plan includes information from different departments and sources. This information can be used in deciding and prioritizing which projects to undertake (such as promoting brownfield redevelopments, buying land for parks, or applying for grants for affordable housing, etc). It also can be used to direct the location of utility extensions and road improvements.
5. Preserving community character - the plan describes the county's vision for the future and establishes its existing and intended growth. It permits the community to identify what is important and how it should be protected.

6. Produce positive economic development - planning for a community helps existing residences and businesses better predict the future development of an area. This prediction creates a comfort zone of knowing what to expect on neighboring properties. It also encourages new businesses and residential developments because they also know what to expect. In addition, the planning process allows a community to consider workforce, education and local infrastructure capacity, among others, so that appropriate economic development strategies can be developed.

To remain viable, the Master Plan should be flexible and dynamic, not static. It must be able to respond to change as well as guide it. It will need to be evaluated and amended periodically (must be reviewed at least every five years) to keep it fresh and current, but each change should be evaluated on its merits (i.e., whether it enhances or detracts from the County's vision).

The Antrim County Planning Commission is charged with interpreting, evaluating, amending, and keeping the Master Plan current. If it becomes stale, outdated, or is ignored, it will not further the vision of Antrim County.

All public County decisions relating to land use, transportation, acquisition of land, and major capital improvements within Antrim County should be reviewed with the Master Plan to ensure compatibility. While the County Board can take action contrary to the Planning Commission's recommendations, the Commission has the authority, according to state law, to evaluate such proposals regarding their consistency with the Master Plan. This gives the Commission the important responsibility of making sure that the Master Plan is current and generally consistent with what the public and decision makers want the County to become in the future.

PA 282 of 1945, the County Planning Act states that any County is authorized and empowered to make, adopt, amend, or carry out a county plan. "It shall be a function of the county planning commission to make a plan for the development of the county.... Such plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the county which will be in accordance with present and future needs."