



Sylvan Springs, Alabama

Comprehensive Plan **2016 Update**

*to the original Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Sylvan Springs, Alabama,
adopted by the Planning Commission on June 21, 1990.*

Prepared By
The Sylvan Springs Planning Commission
In Association With
The Zoning Board of Adjustment and The Sylvan Springs Mayor & Council

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PREFACE

TWENTY-SIX YEARS AGO, the Town of Sylvan Springs, Alabama, embarked upon a project to chart its *own* course into the future by establishing its own Planning Commission and developing its own comprehensive land use plan. Prior to that time, the Town had relied on Jefferson County boards and officials to oversee development in and around the Town. But on June 21, 1990, the Town officially adopted its own comprehensive plan – as well as its own zoning ordinance, which was developed concurrently with the comprehensive plan. And thus began a new era in the Town’s history, with the Town’s own people now guiding the development decisions that would paint the Town’s future.

Over the ensuing 26 years, many changes have swept through Jefferson County in general, as well as through Sylvan Springs in particular; and while the County had made staff available from its Planning Department to assist the Town in that original planning endeavor, so too would the County assist with the 2015 updates to those critical 1990 documents – including working through the same planner (now retired and working as a consultant for the Town) that directed the original project.

This document, then, is an update to the original 1990 Comprehensive Plan, not intended necessarily to *replace* the original, but more along the lines of carrying that original work *forward*. Generally, municipal plans look ahead 10 to 20 years – at which time they are adjusted to account for any unanticipated changes in conditions; to address any emerging trends or issues discovered during the past administration of the plan; and to adjust its goals, objectives and expectations for the “new” future. And that is the goal of this update.

Similarly, this updated Plan will also examine areas where the Zoning Ordinance should be updated, as changes in the Plan will likely necessitate changes in the Ordinance that will administer that Plan.

In preparation for this update project, work actually began back in May of 2014, when the Town’s Official Zoning Map was updated and converted to digital form, and will henceforth be maintained on Jefferson County’s Geographic Information System (GIS) – courtesy of the Department of Land Planning & Development Services. And then in July of that year, the Town hosted a training seminar for planning commission and board of adjustment members, as well as Town staff and council members, as things began to gear up for the Plan and Ordinance update project.

The update project began in earnest in August of 2015 – and the document that follows is the fruit of those labors, as the Town of Sylvan Springs continues ***Growing Into The Future...***

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INTRODUCTION

As was the case in 1990, this Comprehensive Plan is the result of an extensive study of the Town of Sylvan Springs and its surroundings. The proposals presented herein are based on findings that came out of that study, while taking into account the development goals of the Town's officials, its planning and zoning boards, and the citizens who live and work here. With this update version, however, the process also involves looking back to the original plan, and how well those goals and objectives were accomplished over the past 26 years. The new Plan will examine the changes and the new needs, and then go on from there.

One of the most important tools in achieving the goals of the Comprehensive Plan is the Zoning Ordinance: and just as the original Ordinance was developed in conjunction with the original Plan, so did this process include an evaluation of how well that Ordinance did in helping the Town achieve the desired outcomes expressed in the original Plan. And so the new Plan will identify any items in the Zoning Ordinance that might also need to be "tweaked" in order to ensure that the good things that "are" Sylvan Springs are maintained; and that future growth and development takes place in a proper and orderly manner that will facilitate the long-term goals of the Town.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

Alabama state law charges a Town's Planning Commission with the responsibility for developing and adopting a comprehensive master plan for its development. But because the Comprehensive Plan is the key element in maintaining the Town's focus on its future; and because the Town's Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Town Council itself are every bit as instrumental to its success as the Planning Commission; *all three* of these bodies were involved, at least to some degree, from the very start of this project – and especially so with regard to adjustments to the Zoning Ordinance.

Further, since the citizens are the ones that will ultimately be most directly impacted by the decisions resulting from this planning process – and in fact, it is ultimately for the citizens' benefit that this process was undertaken in the first place – their input has been actively sought and highly valued throughout this project as well.

Thus, with the Planning Commission working with a professional planning consultant as lead, the Zoning Board of Adjustment was brought in to help analyze the existing state of the Town, and to draft the initial ideas as to the direction the new Plan should take, and the changes to the Zoning Ordinance that should be considered. The public was then invited in to review these ideas, and to submit ideas and thoughts of their own, before the Commission proceeded. And

though the Town made every effort to keep all aspects of this project available to the public, and to keep the lines of communication open *throughout* the process, the key points for citizen participation were two (2) publicly advertised “open houses”. All interested citizens were invited to come in – the second time by direct mail to all residents via the Town’s quarterly newsletter – and personally review and discuss the new Plan and tentative Zoning Ordinance amendments with the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment members and staff; and then were asked to offer their own input and suggestions. The Town Council was encouraged to attend those sessions as well, so they, too, would be able to hear what their citizens – and their boards – were saying. In addition, all documents and maps were posted and regularly updated on the Town’s website and Facebook page, giving anyone who was interested immediate access to the status of the project and the current proposals.

Following those open houses, the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment went back to work on the Plan, taking into serious and deliberate consideration all of the input they had received to that point – *all to the end that the new Plan would best reflect the entire Town’s conception of what their community should look like in the future*. A series of formal public hearings on the Plan and the Zoning Ordinance would then follow, offering yet another opportunity for public input before *anything* was actually adopted – and the rest, as they say, is history. Or rather, *future*...

PURPOSE AND USE OF THE PLAN

The main and most obvious purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to serve as a guide for the Planning Commission, the Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Town Council regarding the future development and use of properties within the Town of Sylvan Springs. But then, as a sort of fringe benefit, the Plan is *also* a guide for property owners, developers, realtors and anyone else interested in doing something in the Town – because it describes what the Town is (and is *not*) looking for, and even explains *why* certain positions have been taken on various matters and why certain ordinances have been adopted. So anyone who wants to know, *coming in*, what to expect when they get here... well, they can.

Secondly, this Plan is a yardstick of sorts, measuring how much the Town has changed and how well its initial goals have been accomplished since 1990 (when the original Plan was adopted). Of course, it also presents a picture of what the Town is like right now, and also what it will look like yet another 10 to 20 years into the future.

And finally, this Plan will present considerations for how the Town might proactively pursue its development goals – whether through amendments to existing ordinances and regulations, or by

adoption of some additional provisions and strategies... but *all* designed to help the Town achieve the desired end.

Adoption and use of these and any other similar or related documents is ultimately to create and maintain not only a healthy, safe and harmonious community environment, but also to ensure that *future* development is consistent in that regard as well. **This Plan is the “supporting documentation” for all of the ordinances and regulations that go with it – and so, whether it be the Planning Commission or the Zoning Board of Adjustment or the Town Council itself, should there ever arise any question or uncertainty as to the appropriateness of a given decision or action in a particular situation, this Plan should be consulted whenever additional guidance, justification or explanation is necessary.** The Comprehensive Plan – duly vetted through a public participation and hearing process – contains many, if not all, of the guiding principles used in developing the enforcing ordinances and regulations; and so, if any further guidance beyond the ordinance or regulation itself is needed, it should be *the Plan* that the community turns to.

Conversely, it is a fact of life that things can change contrary to what one has anticipated; or things can sometimes not work exactly the way one might have expected them to. In the realm of planning and development, such instances are remedied through a structured amendment process. So whether it be the Plan itself, the Zoning Ordinance or any other development regulation, the same process by which they were adopted can be undertaken to amend them as necessary for the health, welfare and prosperity of the Town.