

Area Plan Implementation Program: *From Paper to Progress*

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The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department is a joint City/County Planning Department that advises the City Council and Board of County Commissioners on land use, design plans, zoning, land development, transportation/transit, economic development, public facilities, and other general planning matters. Through public processes over the years, the Department had amassed dozens of adopted small area plans and hundreds of plan recommendations by 2005, but lacked funding and a comprehensive means to achieve implementation on the ground. Planning Director Debra Campbell asked the philosophical question; “Why is an Area Plan done, if we cannot implement it?”

In response to this need for tracking and follow-through on the community’s collective planning vision, the Planning Department created the Area Plan Implementation Program in order to inventory, analyze, track, fund, and implement capital projects and other recommendations originating from Council adopted small area plans. Since the summer of 2006, the Planning Department has implemented several infrastructure projects that were recommended in area

Id	Adopted Date/Page	Program Category	Project Type	Project Name	Project Description (IAI)
eastb001	06-02 / 32	Infrastructure	Planning	Analysis/Study	Conduct an engineering study to explore potential roadway and pedestrian improvements to East Boulevard, such as PED refuges, bulb outs, signalized crossings, planted medians and bicycle accommodations
eastb002	06-02 / 32	Infrastructure	Vehicular	Street	Abandon the right-turn channel lane at Dilworth Road West and East Boulevard and convert to an area for public and pedestrian use only.
eastb003	06-02 / 33	Infrastructure	Safety	Bulb Out	Install bulb outs at intersections in the PED area where on-street parking exists and where there is adequate roadway width to provide this extension of the curb area.
eastb004	06-02 / 34	Infrastructure	Safety	PED Refuge	Between Euclid Avenue and Dilworth Road West, explore the construction of a true median or PED refuge.

Database example. Planners use the database to quickly identify projects geospatially and by project type. Although a short project description is included, this table provides the ID and page number giving the specific location for where that particular recommendation can be found in the plan. The planner can now retrieve additional context if necessary as well as identify any overlap of other City projects.

plans, and has tracked the implementation of an array of recommendations from various departments.

Funding

Without specific funds for the implementation of some of the area plans, the documents struggled to remain relevant. Therefore, one of the program's first objectives was to demonstrate a financial need to attract financial commitment from Council. The Plan Implementation Team began work with the 2006 Transportation Bond on the horizon. The Planning Department presented a set of the comprehensive matrices along with supporting maps to the Budget Department for consideration for upcoming bonds.

The program was accepted for Bond participation and voters eventually approved the bonds in 2006, 2008 and 2010; providing \$2.5 million per year for area plan implementation projects. The Planning Department thereby positioned itself as a recipient of neighborhood bond funding, which would go towards directly implementing capital projects envisioned during the area plan process. Using these funds, the Planning Department now manages its own capital investment program to construct and initiate capital improvement projects. Historically, the City's Engineering department managed the funds appropriated for implementation projects. Often, monies earmarked for implementing recommendations were insignificant and not enough to focus on the needs identified in the adopted plans. Projects implemented were a small fraction of those included in the area plan.

The program resulted in a more seamless flow from Paper to Progress, and more direct visibility of results in

the eyes of the community, than previously existed. To date, several ambitious capital improvement projects have been constructed or initiated in fulfillment of Area Plan recommendations. Starting this project with no legacy database or process allowed the team to be open to many technological options but it also required the creation of clear and attainable goals.

Process

In setting up the program, the Plan Implementation Team defined a scope and work flow to gather the details needed to support the effort. Below are the general steps, in order, to getting our projects into a geospatial database. :

1. Interpret and document area plan recommendations
2. Design a database structured to provide answers to questions posed by citizens and elected officials
3. Design symbology and standard mapping practices for simple interpretation of data
4. Establish how queries and analysis would be reported.

The Plan Implementation Team created an Excel database documenting thirty Area Plans from which hundreds of recommendations were extracted. These included hard recommendations, such as sidewalks, corrective rezonings, and pedestrian scale lighting, as well as soft ones like community safety, increased home ownership, and creation of neighborhood organizations.

The recommendations were organized and presented in a matrix format and then mapped in GIS. The geodatabase included specific attributes to allow staff to

query and categorize the vast array of recommendations. The attributes included in the database were based on common requests for data and reports staff received from both public officials and citizens such as funding source, lead agency and leverage opportunities to name a few. To aid with tabular analysis, all projects were placed into predefined project categories, types, and names. For example, the broad category might be “Infrastructure,” the project type might be “Vehicular,” and the project name might further describe the project to be a particular “Street Name.” All project recommendations were also assigned specific symbology to allow users to visually comprehend the nature of any particular plan recommendation.

The end products now reside within the Implementation chapters of adopted area plans, utilizing the established matrix format and geodatabase created during this initiative.

Examples of the completed projects include a sidewalk connecting a local elementary school to a neighborhood and a greenway connection to the local residences. Two streetscape projects have been recently implemented; they incorporate a road diet, consequently improving traffic flow and, reducing the number of through traffic lanes allowing for bike lanes, turn lanes with landscaped medians, and enhanced pedestrian crossings.

Lessons from the Development of the Database Development:

1. ***Innovation:*** The Plan Implementation Program team took advantage of technology to create a centralized cataloging of area plan recommendations, designed for accurate analysis, project selection, and cost estimation. This cataloging system allowed staff to identify projects for capital funding in less time and with more specificity than could be accomplished previously.
2. ***Collaboration:*** The database supports collaboration efforts between City and/or County departments by identifying geographically similar projects and initiatives that other departments may be considering. Staff are able to access and utilize this data when presented with proposals from the private development community—by leveraging funds from private development, or other capital and neighborhood programs, it extends the City’s resources allowing for more projects to be implemented than originally projected.
3. ***Data consistency:*** The data needs to be consistent across plans. Having too many caveats or exceptions hinder analysis. Indexing plan recommendations and digitizing individual items allows the department to conduct cost estimation, which helps determine capital project funding. Without data standards, your analysis will be limited.



Dilworth Land Use Plan. Image courtesy of Lori Quinn.

4. ***Funding:*** As a result of the Plan Implementation Program, the Planning Department is able to track funding to determine where monies are being directed. In utilizing GIS, staff can locate and determine needs based on attributes and geography. Tracking of past expenditures, while understanding future project needs, has been useful as well in determining budgetary requirements of proposed projects. Staff is also able to provide up-to-date data of funded projects to citizens as well as City Council and County Commission concerning the level of expenditure in any geography.

Conclusion

In documenting all the previous implementation items from plans, the Planning Department recognized the need to create more defined projects in future area plans; one that empowers planners to work with the community to develop a realistic opportunity for implementation. Now, with a better understanding of the costs association with area plan recommendations future area plans now organize the recommendations according to importance to the community’s vision. This program further encourages collaboration between Planning and other City business functions for a more comprehensive implementation plan.

The trust built by planners during the extensive public input process is enhanced by taking the plan

through to implementation rather than solely depending on other city and/or county departments to fill this role. The Department also has a seat at the table for collaboration with other departments and government agencies to align capital resources on joint projects. The Plan Implementation Program has improved the Planning Department’s credibility, raised community expectations and involvement, enhanced citizen participation in the area plan process, and provided a great sense of accomplishment for our area planners in seeing a community’s vision implemented.

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- Alberto Gonzalez, Principal Planner
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Central - Dilworth Land Use and Streetscape Plan		
Id	Type	Project Description
3	Sidewalk	Fill gaps in the existing sidewalk system
4	PEO Signal	Install Pedestrian countdown signals
5	Crosswalk	Install crosswalk treatments at signalized intersections
6	PEO Light	Pedestrian lighting at signalized intersections
7	Traffic Signal	Signal Phasing at signalized intersections
10	PEO Refuge	Pedestrian refuge islands at signalized intersections
11	Trees	Enhanced landscape treatments at signalized intersections
12	Crosswalk	Improve South Blvd PEO crossing along corridor and at LRT stations
13	Greenway	Improve greenway connections to the Little Sugar Creek Greenway
14	Streets	Widen sidewalks, curb/gutter, planting strip & bike lanes at Ideal Way cross-section (Park Rd to MacDonald Ave)
15	Streets	Widen to 43' for sidewalks, planting strips and curb and gutter on both sides of street at Ideal Way cross-section (Sarah Marks Ave to Park Rd)
16	Streets	Widen to 41' for sidewalks, curb/gutter, planting strips & bike lanes at McDonald Ave (Park Rd to Ideal Way)
17	Streets	Widen to 60'; alternating pedestrian refuge island and turn lane in center, bicycle lanes, curb and gutter, alternating parking and planting strip and sidewalk on both sides of street at Park Rd (Charlotte Dr to Ideal Way)
18	Streets	Widen to 60'; alternating pedestrian refuge island and turn lane in center, bicycle lanes, curb and gutter at Park Rd (Kenilworth to Charlotte Dr)
19	Streets	Curb/gutter, planting strip and sidewalks on both sides of the street at Charlotte Dr (Lidgewood Lane to Park Rd)
20	Streets	Widen to 24'; curb/gutter on both sides of the street, planting strip and sidewalk on south side at Ordemore Ave (Scott Ave to Park Rd)
21	Streets	To be determined by CDOT study for Kenilworth Ave (Clayton Dr to Ordemore Ave)
22	Streets	To be determined by CDOT study Scott Ave (Clayton Dr to Ordemore Ave)
24	Streets	Widen to 35'; curb and gutter, planting strips and sidewalks on both sides Floral Ave (Clayton Dr to Ordemore Ave)
25	Streets	Widen/open to 43'; curb and gutter, alternating planting strips, on-street parking & sidewalks, both sides of street of Clayton Dr (Floral Ave to Scott Ave)
26	Streets	Curb, planting strip and sidewalks on both sides of Kenilworth Ave (Filmore Ave to Romany Rd)
27	Streets	Curb/gutter, planting strip and sidewalks on both sides of Scott Ave (Filmore Ave to Pierce St)
28	Streets	Curb and gutter, planting strip and sidewalks on both sides of the street, bicycle lane on east side of street at Scott Ave (Pierce Street to Romany Rd)
29	Streets	Widen to 41'; curb and gutter, alternating on-street parking and planting strips and sidewalks on both sides of Buchanan Street, Pierce Street & Filmore Ave
38	Streets	Eliminate exclusive right-turn lane from eastbound Morehead St to southbound Dilworth Rd
39	Bike Lane	Implement the proposed signed bicycle routes within 2 years of adoption of the plan
41	Greenway	Construct Sedgefield Path to connect McDonald Ave and Elmhurst Way

Dilworth Streetscape Plan. Image courtesy of Lori Quinn.



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