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## Guiding Plan Implementation With Degree of Change

By John Zeanah, AICP

In 2019, the City of Memphis completed the *Memphis 3.0 Comprehensive Plan*, the city's first comprehensive plan since 1981 and guide for a new direction of growth (Figure 1). The headline of the vision statement is brief, yet bold: "Build up, not out."

For the last 200 years Memphis had followed the opposite path—outward, mostly eastward, to balloon to 340 square miles with a population density of less than 2,000 persons per square mile. Planners and the public agreed: the path of new growth should no longer create an ever-expanding city but should lead back to the city's core and neighborhoods, many of which had been blighted from disinvestment.

As comprehensive plan vision statements go, "build up, not out" was memorable and effective. But while the public embraced the plan's vision, it led to questions. How far up? And where? And when? Memphis's planners used an emerging tool called "Degree of Change" to answer these questions and organize the plan's implementation and the various actors engaged.

Comprehensive plans are often criticized for lack of focus on implementation, or lack of practicality or equity. While the comprehensive plan is often an expression of the community's optimism, idealism, and vision, the prevailing role of public-sector planning in communities throughout the United States is to facilitate market-led development. Effective plan implementation beyond the limitations of regulating market-led development requires the comprehensive plan to contain clear and organized policies and investments.

Using the Degree of Change approach in the comprehensive plan helps to address the plan's limitations, provides clarity and strategy to the pace of change desired or expected from the plan, and focuses the process of implementing the plan to address questions of where, when, and how.

This issue of *PAS Memo* makes the case for using Degree of Change and illustrates the most effective ways to apply this concept to the comprehensive plan. This article will discuss in depth the experience of Memphis, where the author serves as director of the planning division.



Figure 1. The Memphis 3.0 Comprehensive Plan (City of Memphis)

### What is Degree of Change?

If the purpose of the comprehensive plan is to direct change in the physical pattern of a city's development, Degree of Change is used to direct how much change will be recommended in different areas of the city. Considering degree recognizes that change happens differently in places throughout the city. Degree of Change can be used to provide a menu of implementation actions that match communities' appetites for change with the amount of support and investment appropriate for realizing that change.

This concept has gained some use in recent comprehensive plans, notably in three recent [Daniel Burnham](#)

**Award-winning plans**—*Plan Cincinnati*, *Kauai General Plan*, and *Memphis 3.0*.

In addition to this recognition by the American Planning Association, these three plans share participation by Opticos Design among the project teams. As Daniel Parolek, one of the co-founders of Opticos Design, notes in his recently published book, *Missing Middle Housing*, “most community members typically envision... widespread and dramatic change everywhere, but the reality is that many planning efforts are really targeted for more incremental change” (Parolek 2020).

To address this, Parolek recommends including Degree of Change as part of the comprehensive plan to help define the pace of physical transformation communities will experience. As a starting point, Parolek recommends in *Missing Middle Housing* the following three degrees of change:

- **Maintain:** Smaller, more incremental changes, mostly reinforcing the existing scale of an area.
- **Evolve:** Opportunities for small to medium-sized public and private investments or projects, creating minor changes in scale and targeting opportunity sites.
- **Transform:** Opportunities for larger-scale changes such as a significant increase in scale and possibly mix of uses, with changes more likely to be widespread and not on focused sites.

Opticos Design used these degrees of change in two communities—Cincinnati (Figure 2) and Kauai, Hawaii. Meanwhile, the City of Memphis took a different path to the inclusion of Degree of Change in its comprehensive plan. For Memphis, the question started not as how to articulate the pace of change to the community, but how to influence redevelopment of many of the city’s historically disinvested neighborhoods in the older areas of the city.

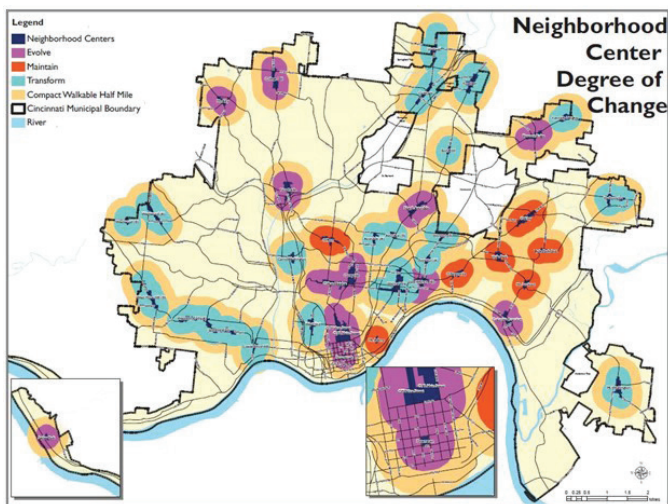


Figure 2. Neighborhood Center Degree of Change from Plan Cincinnati (City of Cincinnati)

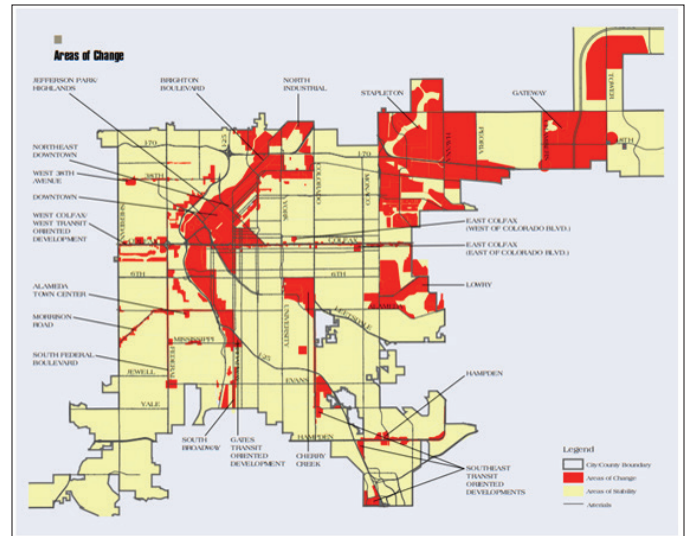


Figure 3. Areas of Change from Blueprint Denver (City of Denver)

## The Case for Degree of Change

Early in the planning process for *Memphis 3.0*, the City took inspiration from the City of Denver’s 2002 *Blueprint Denver* plan strategy to direct growth in 26 designated “areas of change” (see the sidebar on p. 3). *Blueprint Denver*’s approach was adopted as a growth management strategy, dividing the city into areas of change and areas of stability (Figure 3).

In a 2016 visit to Denver, a delegation of Memphis leaders discussed the value of such a framework but identified the need for a third category to acknowledge the Memphis plan’s challenge not of managing growth and expansion, but of enabling growth within the “developed city.”

The question facing Memphis was how to bring back previously developed areas of the city that had succumbed to decline through disinvestment and market exodus. This suggested a role of the plan and public sector to stimulate market activity in neighborhoods that had experienced decline. To achieve this, planners needed to consider not only how places would develop, but how the public, quasi-public, nonprofit, and private sectors would participate in that development in both the short and long term.

## Constraints on Planning

The comprehensive plan (or master plan) was first envisioned to guide orderly development through a zoning plan as well as through provision of streets, utilities, and parks. This vision was articulated in the **1928 Standard City Planning Enabling Act** (SCPEA), along with the directive that “the city plan is an organic whole, every part of which... is organically interrelated with every other part.” What was lacking in the SCPEA, however, was a framework or even suggestion that the plan establish an approach for interrelating these elements or their implementation.

In the years that followed, cities often produced single-purpose plan elements separate from a comprehensive plan (Scott 1969). Plan implementation was to be executed not just by

## Rethinking “Areas of Change” in Denver

*Blueprint Denver’s* “areas of change” and “areas of stability” represent an innovation in comprehensive planning and an important precedent to the concept of Degree of Change.

Since the adoption of *Blueprint Denver* in 2002, areas of change experienced five times more investment than areas of stability—a clear measure of the success of the plan. But like Memphis, planners in Denver recognized the limitations of a binary choice between change and stability. Places change differently. In today’s comprehensive plan, cities need to account for these various factors and contributors of change to guide growth more effectively, especially in developed communities.

In the 2019 update to *Blueprint Denver*, planners introduced a new approach to frame the city’s growth strategy. The city

moved away from areas of change and areas of stability to focus most planned growth to regional centers, community centers and corridors, and high-intensity residential areas in downtown and urban centers.

Implicit in this new strategy, however, was an expanded framework of community change. Ranging from more to less change, the updated plan frames change as “transform,” for areas expected to experience significant character change; “connect,” for areas focused on improving access to opportunity; “integrate,” to address areas with populations vulnerable to displacement; and “enrich,” where change is meant to strengthen communities in an inclusive way.

regulation, but through capital improvements. Many of these capital resources were intended for geographic expansion of cities largely supporting a pattern of suburban, single-family sprawl in most areas of the United States. The first subdivision laws were generated from the imminent need to control the platting of city lots to ensure cities could make the necessary capital improvements to support new development—streets, public buildings, and public utilities. Very quickly, municipal governments realized how much this demand would overextend their resources (Kent 1964).

Over time, expanding cities found it more difficult to provide resources for expenditures on public works and civic uses as shrinking budgets gave way to basic operational needs. In Memphis, the percentage of local dollars spent on parks, public transit, and public works represented 36 percent of the overall budget in 1980. By 2015, the same share had fallen to 10 percent, while public safety costs increased from 48 percent of the budget to 64 percent of the budget over the same period.

The City of Memphis had followed a plan of outward growth recommended in its 1981 *Memphis 2000 Policy Plan*. The result of *Memphis 2000* was an increase in land area by 25 percent, from 270 square miles to 340 square miles, with only a five percent increase in population. This imbalance meant the greater increase in obligations due to annexation was not absorbed by newcomers to the city, but rather in the established areas of the city, many of which also experienced the burden of blighting effects from disinvestment.

Meanwhile, other funding sources, such as federal block grants, had been added to the chest of resources cities could use to promote growth, development, or redevelopment (early on, in the form of destabilizing urban renewal and slum clearance). However, over time, federal investment in community development began to wane. Between 1980 and 2015, nationwide Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding dropped from roughly \$10 billion to \$3 billion (in 2016 dollars) (Boyd 2014; US HUD 2021).

Today, Memphis receives approximately \$6 million annually in CDBG funding, half of what it received just two decades prior. Memphis, like many cities, has come to rely on a variety of tax incentives, credits, and philanthropic resources to buttress investment in community redevelopment. But the bottom line is that even with these new, diverse resources, many cities are faced with tighter budgets and growing needs.

### Fragmentation of Planning

For successful implementation of today’s comprehensive plans, public resources, regulations, and actions need to be targeted. But this can be challenging without a framework for interrelating the elements of the plan and its implementation.

Adding to this challenge is the growing fragmentation of the planning environment in most cities, in which roles of planning have not only been delegated across multiple city agencies, but to quasi-governmental and nonprofit organizations as well. While the comprehensive plan ideally serves as a resource to direct implementation, the more planning is fragmented and decentralized, the more difficult it is to achieve coordination.

In the case of Memphis, the city had delegated street planning to the engineering division, utilities planning to the public works division and public utility, and parks planning to the parks division, with no framework established by the planning division to carry out the task of connecting these single-purpose activities. Adding to this fragmentation, planning of community and economic development in the city had been assigned to the downtown commission, the economic development board, the community redevelopment authority, the housing authority, the school board, and several single-purpose public facilities authorities and conservancies. Beyond this, several community-based nonprofits had undertaken planning functions, including four housing and community development nonprofits operating across the city and several more operating at the neighborhood level.



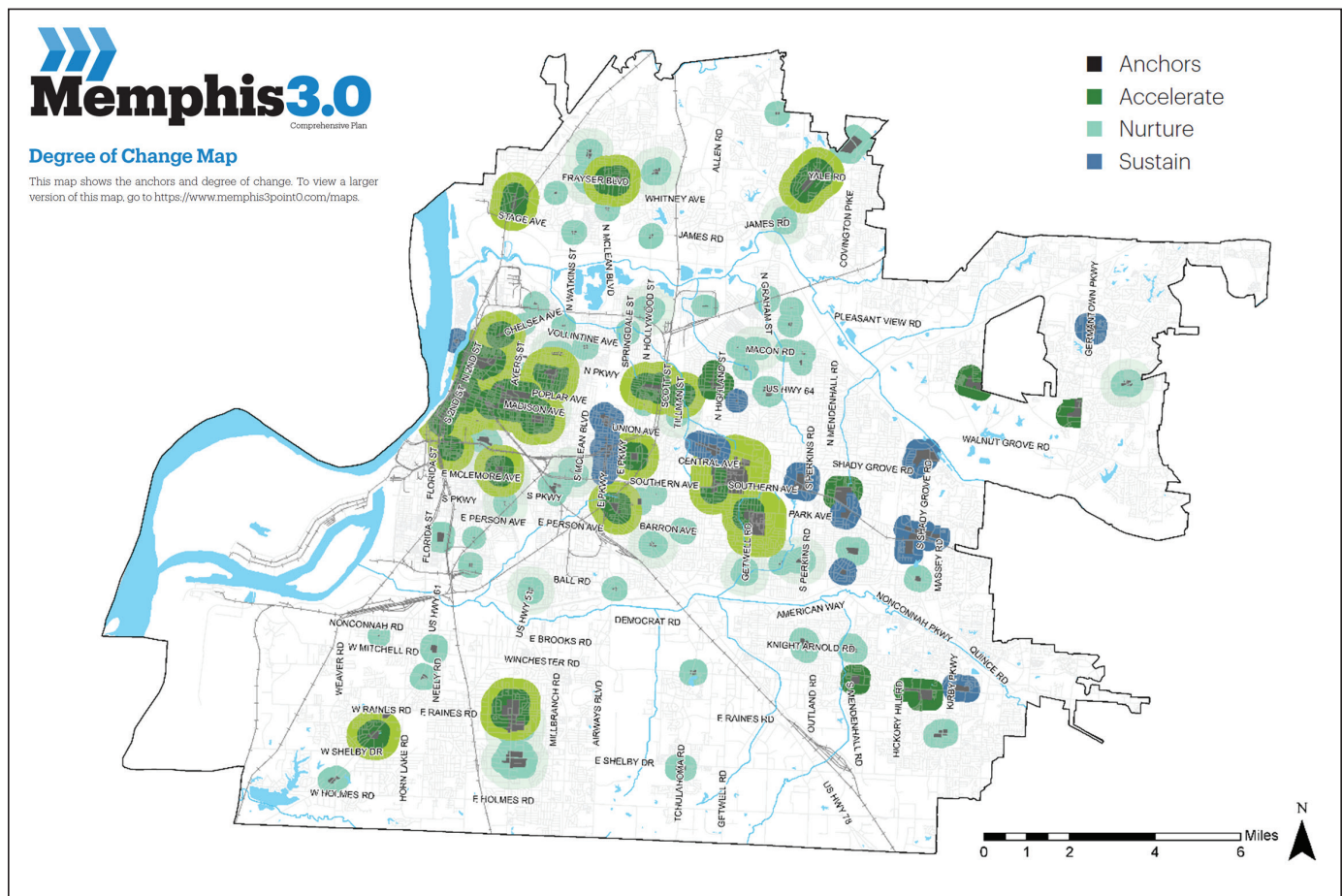


Figure 4. Degree of Change map from Memphis 3.0 (City of Memphis)

In Memphis, the comprehensive plan was expected to guide not only traditional plan elements such as land use, transportation, and housing, but the various forms of implementation and actors engaged in plan implementation. *Memphis 3.0* achieved this goal by using Degree of Change.

### Planning the Developed City

By 2015, Memphis had annexed to its physical limit. The following year, new mayor Jim Strickland would begin a series of moves to restrict future outward growth and focus new development inward. Mayor Strickland, like the planners and public engaged in the planning process, recognized the failure of continued outward growth to support the future of Memphis and its neighborhoods.

The first move was to cut off access to the city's sewer system to developments in the city's unincorporated reserve areas. In 2014, the State of Tennessee's General Assembly had drastically shifted its stance on municipal annexation, making the process much more difficult for a city like Memphis to continue growth by expanding its boundaries.

The second move was for the city to begin the process of shrinking those boundaries through de-annexation of roughly 10 percent of its land area (home to only about one percent of the city's population) by December 30, 2020.

The third move was the initiation of *Memphis 3.0*, the City's first comprehensive plan since the *Memphis 2000* plan of 1981. The plan's vision statement—"build up, not out"—is a clear departure from the growth policy of old that resulted in suburban sprawl and urban disinvestment. The vision and strategy of the plan focuses growth, policy, and investments in the core city and neighborhood centers to create more dense, mixed-use, mixed-income, walkable, transit-served communities.

These are worthy goals. Virtually none of the city's residents who participated in the plan process disagreed with the idea of rebuilding disinvested neighborhoods, improving existing communities rather than creating new ones, or improving mobility through transit improvements and walkability. But even though Memphians knew density was the only viable future, some of its associations caused discomfort.

Developed cities like Memphis face a confluence of growth challenges: few greenfield sites, established neighborhoods impacted by development proposals, and changing tastes of consumers seeking urban living. To plan for growth in the developed city, traditional planning approaches are inadequate. Memphis, like Cincinnati, took an approach that focused growth on established neighborhood centers, targeting "anchors" that contained clusters of community assets and

presented the greatest opportunity to grow into walkable, transit-oriented neighborhoods.

But as Parolek notes, dramatic change does not occur everywhere growth is planned, and communities change in different ways. How can the comprehensive plan account for this? And how can it enable desired levels of change?

### ***Places Change Differently***

The idea for using Degree of Change in *Plan Cincinnati* (adopted in 2012) came from principles similar to those promoted by renowned landscape architect Ian McHarg—layering assets, institutions, building form, and other significant characteristics of neighborhoods to arrive at a framework for community character (Keough-Jurs 2021). Beginning with the end in mind (walkable neighborhood centers), planners sought to achieve the desired character from each neighborhood's starting point.

Cincinnati's use of Degree of Change followed Parolek's recommended framework: *Maintain* for areas where desired character is in place; *Evolve* for areas with potential but missing pieces achieved by small investments or regulatory changes; and *Transform* for areas with services or auto-oriented uses, but no defined urban character.

Years later, Memphis followed a similar process. Planners and community members collaborated in a three-part series of mapping and observing neighborhood centers and clusters of community assets, defining areas along a series of definitions of neighborhood "anchors," and determining each area's Degree of Change.

In *Memphis 3.0*, anchors are defined by three Degree of Change designations (Figure 4, p. 4): *Accelerate* for areas that can absorb growth more rapidly; *Sustain* for areas that have reached maturity in character; and *Nurture* for areas that have experienced disinvestment and need investment to stabilize the community, support community assets, and protect and encourage affordable housing.

### **Using Degree of Change**

From the beginning of the planning process leading to *Memphis 3.0*, it was clear that to be successful, the plan must provide targeted guidance on where change would occur and how to direct actions and investments of the public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors.

The preparation of the comprehensive plan allows a community the opportunity to shape a vision of growth and change over time. Traditional approaches and tools to preparing the comprehensive plan tend to address technical issues and solutions facing the expansion of the built environment. Today, most cities face a different set of adaptive challenges as the focus is on working in developed neighborhoods and districts, often with fewer public resources and more actors engaged in implementation.

To meet the demands of these dynamic circumstances, planners must use the comprehensive plan to consider how each area of a city changes differently and organize fragment-

ed approaches to planning into a clear, consistent strategy for implementation. Using a Degree of Change framework can help planners organize and communicate the plan's vision in this way.

### ***Understanding Market Dynamics***

In most cities, the dominant form of planning is facilitating market-led development, and public resources may limit where the local government can lead or provide financial support. Any city engaging in comprehensive planning must understand its market dynamics and plan accordingly.

In the case of Memphis, the city started its comprehensive planning process first by conducting a market analysis to consider trends in housing, commercial, and industrial development. The result was a stark picture of continued concentration of market-led development inside the city's central corridor, with pockets of activity in other neighborhoods across the city.

With the results of the market analysis in hand, planners engaged the public in an exercise of considering three growth scenarios for the future: one that continued the trends of market-led development, one that focused the city's attention onto several main corridors, and one that focused on neighborhood centers.

Not surprisingly, the community reacted strongly against continuing market trends. But to change this trajectory, the city's challenges were recognizing the limitations of planning for a sprawled city with weak private-market activity outside of the city's central corridor and the inherent demands to enhance the character of existing communities. To do this, planners focused on enabling the nurturing and growth of urban assets, especially those in communities that have experienced historic disinvestment.

### ***Degree of Change Framework***

The Degree of Change framework of the comprehensive plan should serve to connect the interrelated elements of the plan to direct implementation. The plan's Degree of Change framework should generally describe the nature, intent, and methods of change in varying ways experienced in the city.

Cincinnati provides a good example of Degree of Change focused on density, intensity, and form; Denver's update to "areas of change" and "areas of stability" considers social dimensions of growth to express how communities experience change differently. Memphis blends these considerations with factors of implementation, timing, and investment. These factors were included in the Memphis framework to account for market dynamics and the fragmentation of planning and plan implementation responsibilities across public, quasi-public, nonprofit, private, and philanthropic partners engaged in city building.

In their 1996 book *Remaking Planning*, authors Tim Brindley, Yvonne Rydin, and Gerry Stoker observed similar patterns of fragmentation in the 1980s–90s planning environment in United Kingdom cities, primarily the result of relaxed land-use controls and transfer of planning and development authority to quasi-governmental agencies.

**Table 1. Degree of Change Framework for Memphis**

	<i>Market Position</i>	<i>Partners Involved</i>
<b>Accelerate</b>	Strong or marginal markets that can absorb growth more rapidly to intensify the existing pattern of a place	Mix of primarily private and philanthropic resources with public support
<b>Sustain</b>	Strong markets that have reached maturity in character	Limited public support and private resources
<b>Nurture</b>	Weak market areas that have experienced disinvestment and need investment to stabilize the community, support community assets, and protect and encourage affordable housing	Primarily public, quasi-public, and philanthropic resources

To describe their observations, Brindley et al. proposed a typology of planning approaches used by public, quasi-public, and private sector actors and how they might differ in strong, marginal, and weak markets (Brindley et al 1996). This proposed typology provided a model to the approach taken by Memphis to distinguish between *Accelerate*, *Sustain*, and *Nurture* areas of the city. Using the definitions of these areas described above, Table 1 illustrates generally the role of partners in implementation.

For each Degree of Change, *Memphis 3.0* defines the characteristics of each type of change and provides typical action steps associated with plan implementation. Recognizing the market dynamics present in communities across Memphis, the comprehensive plan seeks to guide private investment by relying more on regulation and development review in *Sustain* areas, recommending public financial support in the form of subsidy for

market-led development in *Accelerate* areas, and positioning the public and philanthropic sectors to lead investment to stimulate change in disinvested *Nurture* areas of the city. From each of these approaches or Degrees of Change, planners established the framework shown in Figures 5–7 (pp. 6–7) on ways to enable desired levels of growth in these three degrees.

### Engaging the Community

A priority of the *Memphis 3.0* planning process was to reflect the needs and desires of Memphians by seeking contributions from as much of the community as possible, with a priority on involving groups historically disconnected from planning.

The multiphase participatory process included multiple avenues for residents and stakeholders to share opinions and recommendations on city and district-scale priorities and actions. Planners worked with community groups, artists, ar-

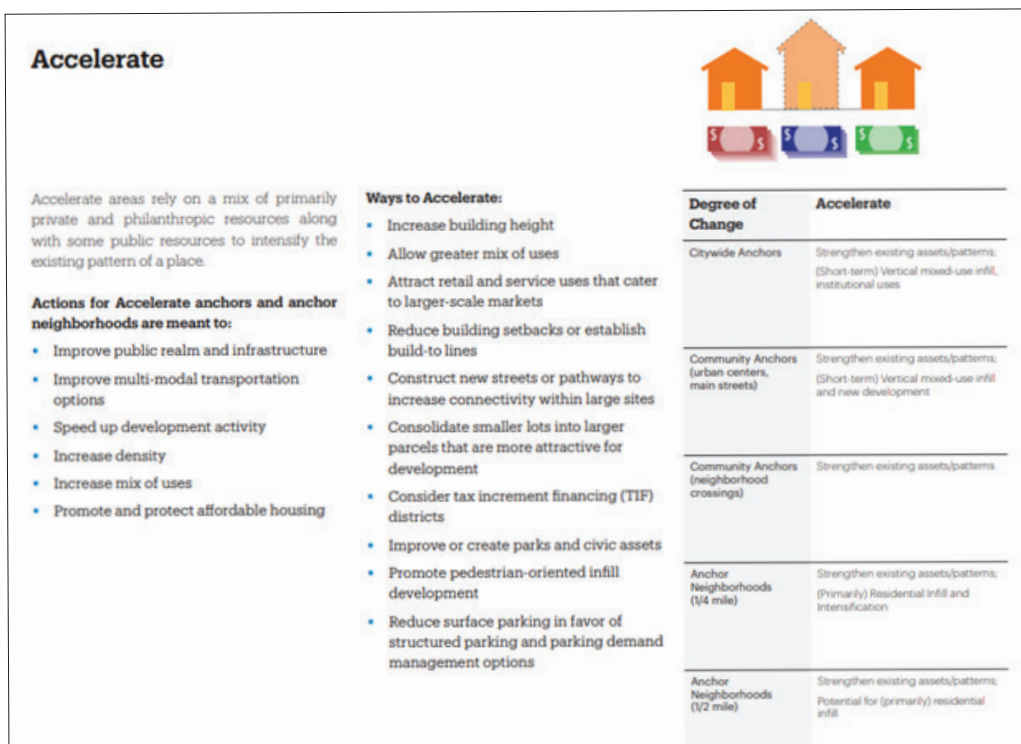


Figure 5. The Accelerate Degree of Change from Memphis 3.0 (City of Memphis)



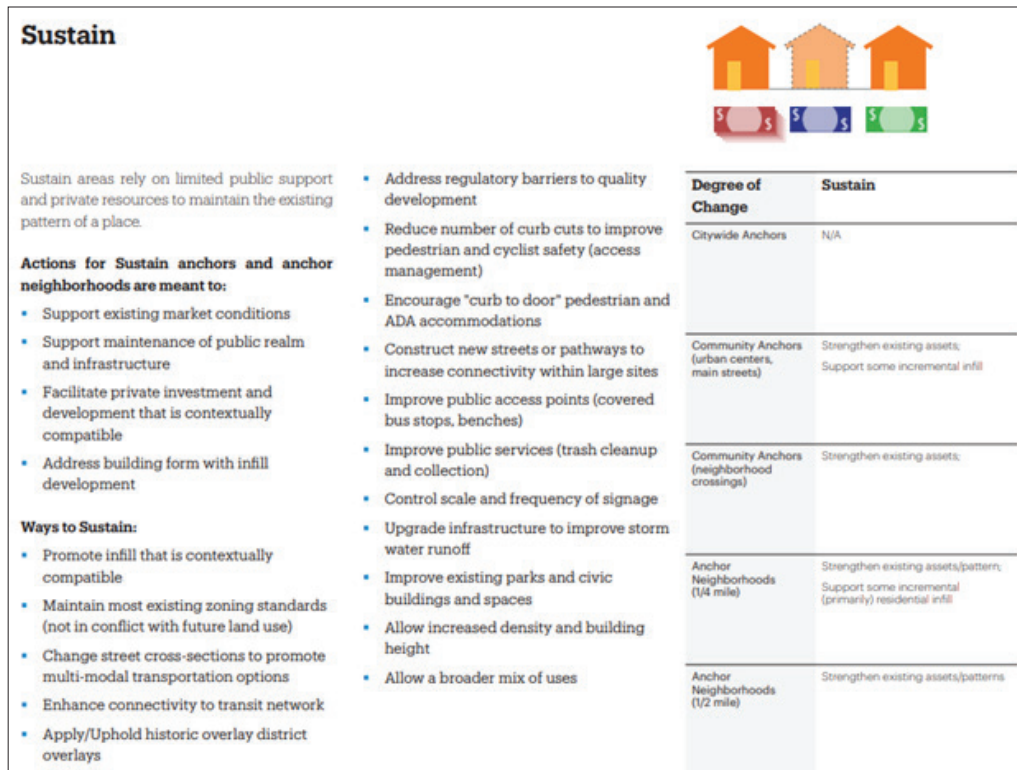


Figure 6. The Sustain Degree of Change from Memphis 3.0 (City of Memphis)

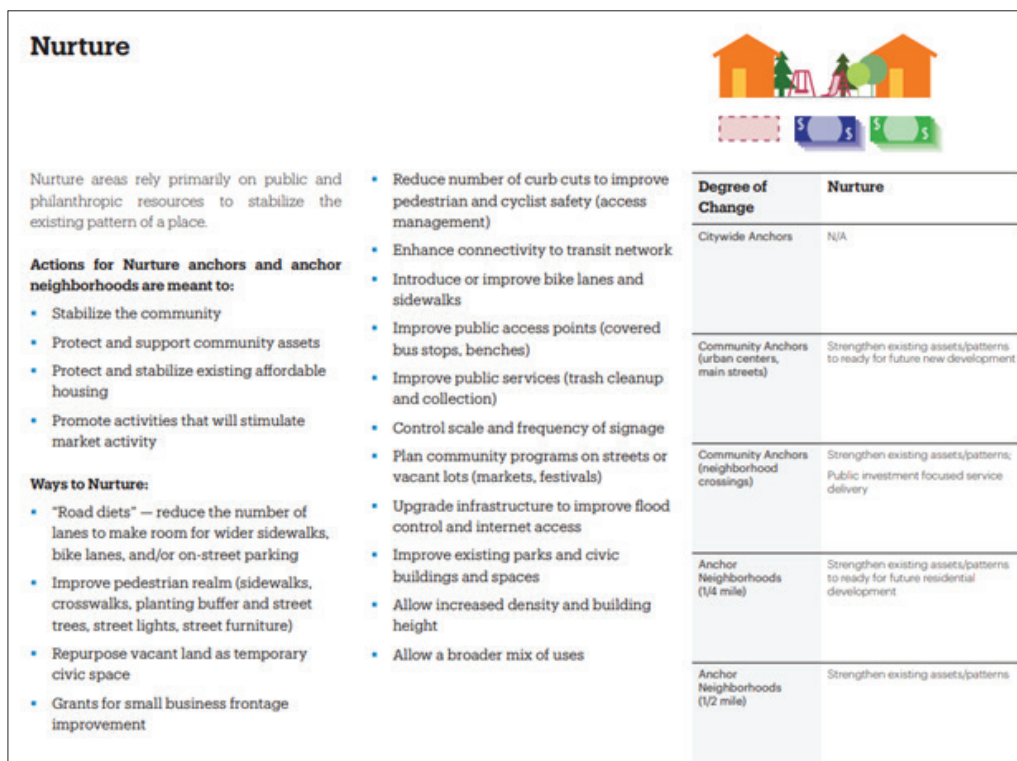


Figure 7. The Nurture Degree of Change from Memphis 3.0 (City of Memphis)

chitects, and nonprofits to identify and understand local assets and issues, shaping the plan's guiding principles and leading to the city's vision of "build up, not out." The result of the plan's engagement was input from over 15,000 Memphians who

influenced the plan through a variety of channels, including more than 400 meetings and events.

Engagement was anchored in a commitment to fair, equitable, and accessible community involvement, allowing every

resident the opportunity to have a voice. At the beginning of the planning process, planners developed a community involvement plan focused on four shared commitments: transparency, responsiveness, community orientation, and flexibility. To meet these commitments, planners structured the planning process around background and data collection, vision and goal setting, future growth scenario planning, and plan development, with the community engaged at each stage.

While Parolek notes that community members often envision widespread change everywhere, it is worth asking what the planners' role in promoting this perception may be. Often, comprehensive plans cast ambitious visions for communities and cities, but lack clarity and direction on how to achieve the change envisioned. Clarity and direction in the plan's land-use element and policies are necessary to ensure the community can understand and follow the intended strategy.

To inform decisions on Degree of Change, planners worked with communities to consider how market dynamics enabled or limited the scale or pace of change in neighborhoods and to identify the community's vision for future growth and preferred areas of growth and change. Finally, in a series of planning workshops in each planning district of the city, planners worked with community members to identify community centers or clusters of key assets that would form the "anchors" of the plan. During these workshops, planners asked residents to think about what change looks like for each area, both big and small. These exercises helped to elicit feedback from communities necessary for determining each anchor's Degree of Change and how changes could shape anchors, influence investment decisions, and encourage development activity in the surrounding area.

### ***Policies Change Differently***

Planning for change in developed cities requires a different approach than traditional methods of land-use planning focused

on defining the density of new places. In planning for established places, planners should first aim to understand what makes a community's built environment distinct and engaging.

To define elements of a community's physical character, Memphis developed a land-use plan following a foundation of community character to illustrate development intensity and form to enable reinvestment to fit each place in ways that are recognizable and meaningful to residents.

As an example, the intersection of Summer Avenue and National Street is mix of single-story commercial buildings, new and old. Once considered a neighborhood downtown, it has gradually become predominantly auto-oriented with highway commercial uses (Figure 8).

This area was designated as the most important anchor for redevelopment within the Jackson planning district and was deemed central to the revival of the nearby Highland Heights neighborhood. To achieve these goals, the plan recommends the character change from its low intensity character to a higher-intensity "urban Main Street" (Figure 9). Based on the transformative change in character recommended and pace of change desired, the anchor was designated an *Accelerate* Degree of Change.

To guide plan implementation, planners may treat application of regulation with more urgency in *Accelerate* anchors such as Summer and National. First, this is accomplished through the development review process. For project applications located in anchor areas, planners review applications for consistency with the comprehensive plan, considering whether the application is consistent not only with the plan's future land-use map, but also the area's Degree of Change (this is described in greater detail in the [February 2021 issue of Zoning Practice](#)).

Policies and actions identified in the plan elements related to communities, parks and public spaces, housing, and transportation also consider how anchors and Degrees



Figure 8. Existing conditions at Summer and National in Memphis (City of Memphis)



Figure 9. Illustrated concept of Urban Main Street Anchor (City of Memphis)





Figure 10. A Nurture Degree of Change implementation project from Memphis 3.0 (Self Tucker Architects/City of Memphis)

of Change should be prioritized or treated differently. For example, *Accelerate* anchors receive higher priority as planners consider zoning map amendments to implement the comprehensive plan.

Since plan adoption in 2019, planners have followed the Degree of Change framework to address targeted areas for rezonings, rather than pursuing a complete re-mapping of the city's zoning. The city has recently re-zoned the Summer and National area from an auto-oriented commercial use district to a mixed-use district that encourages increased height, greater mix of uses, and build-to requirements, all of which are strategies identified in the Degree of Change framework as "Ways to Accelerate" (see Figure 5 above).

### Guiding Investment

Degree of Change has been the framework used by the city to not only guide decisions in the planning office, but across divisions and agencies. The plan directs investments in sewer, parks, and streets in *Accelerate* and *Nurture* anchors where change is anticipated and support of public resources is most needed.

The adoption of *Memphis 3.0* and the implementation framework organized by Degree of Change prepared Memphis to better direct a significant infusion of public investment announced in January 2021. Fiscal discipline in the wake of unbridled outward growth, combined with

deannexation and sewer restrictions, ultimately prepared local officials to issue **\$200 million in bond indebtedness** to invest in the city again through public infrastructure, affordable housing, parks and greenways, and reinvigoration of diminished public assets. Of this funding package, nearly \$80 million will go toward investments intended to activate implementation of *Memphis 3.0* in and around over 50 anchors throughout the city.

While this is a significant milestone for public investment in Memphis neighborhoods, the preparation of the funding package required decisions on where to invest and how much. The comprehensive plan's Degree of Change framework gave clear direction to the city and leadership to quickly make these decisions. The plan's focus on anchors provides the target areas for new investment; the plan's Degree of Change framework directs public dollars to lead in *Nurture* areas (Figure 10) to stimulate private-market interest in the medium or long term and to support in *Accelerate* areas where private investment is leading transformation.

This guidance has also been used to direct activities of quasi-governmental agencies, including those with the authority to grant incentives. Coinciding with the adoption of the comprehensive plan, the redevelopment authority amended its workable program map to target tax increment financing only in anchor areas defined by the plan. Shortly after, the agency amended the boundaries of its largest and most well-funded

district to encompass two *Nurture* anchors nearby, sending much-needed funding to these historically disinvested neighborhoods. Later, the downtown commission launched its own master planning process, using the city's comprehensive plan as its foundation. Last, the city and transit authority recently initiated planning for its first bus rapid transit corridor, using the plan's anchors as the primary guide for selecting future stops and Degree of Change to determine where to focus the most intense change in planned development along the corridor.

### Action Steps for Planners

As planners embark upon the comprehensive planning process in their own communities, they should consider whether the Degree of Change framework could serve as a useful structure for implementing the plan's policies, guiding regulatory and fiscal decision making, and enabling change. The experience of Memphis in its *Memphis 3.0* planning process suggests the following steps for using Degree of Change.

#### *Involve the Community Throughout the Process*

Plan ahead for how the community will influence the comprehensive plan throughout the process. Determine your values for community involvement, and think ahead about what the planning team will share and what you will ask the community to share. Define the community's role in making decisions throughout the planning process, including how they will shape and use the plan's Degree of Change framework and structure public input methods and exercises that lead to decision making.

#### *Understand the Market*

Gather market insights about your city early in the planning process. Go into the comprehensive planning process with an understanding of where and how market-led development alone directs growth. Use the comprehensive plan to challenge market dynamics and influence growth in new directions, especially in ways that support reinvestment in weak markets. Consider submarkets within your city that have different dynamics and require different measures to induce or stimulate private-sector development activity. Markets are fluid and planning and implementation can contribute to change.

#### *Develop a Degree of Change Framework*

Organize a Degree of Change framework that considers the way places change in your city. Ask questions such as: How will character changes be different? How quickly could or should places change? What types of actions help to enable change? Who enables change? Establish guidance on how places change differently based on the selected Degrees of Change, similar to the examples from Memphis. Be sure to consider the roles of policy, investment, and the various actors involved in community development.

#### *Set Targets or Anchors*

Similar to the approaches of Memphis and Cincinnati, identify city and neighborhood assets and institutions and start thinking about

how to build around those strengths. Consider building form, density and intensity, community character, and public infrastructure, as well as the state of the (sub)market and the actors involved in community change. Determine the plan's targets for desired character of the anchors or areas and what it takes to achieve targets. Revisit the questions from the Degree of Change framework to assess how the area could or should change over time.

#### *Interrelate Plan Elements*

Degree of Change is most valuable when it helps direct not only decisions around character, form, and land use, but also policy, investment, and timing. Use Degree of Change to direct the development of the plan's policies and actions. Not all policies or actions in the plan elements have universal application across the city. Use Degree of Change to direct or prioritize policies and actions, especially in plan elements addressing roles of departments and quasi-governmental agencies outside of the planning department. Degree of Change should direct timing, priority, and location of public investments as well. Use Degree of Change to shape the CIP or other planning for public improvements.

#### *Track Progress*

In Memphis, we continue to revisit Degree of Change through implementation. Is change taking place the way we expected? Is development occurring in targeted areas and by Degree of Change in ways we expected? And at the scale we expected? Are departments and quasi-governmental agencies aligning their investments, incentives, and initiatives through the same framework? Starting out, we began tracking this in a quarterly report prepared by the planning department but involving multiple agencies across the city. Going forward, the city plans to begin using a data dashboard that helps to routinely measure the effectiveness of the plan and the Degree of Change framework.

### Conclusion

The role of the comprehensive plan is not only to express a unified, or collective, vision for growth of a city, but also to frame the relationship among the various elements of the plan and guide the implementation of those elements.

Since the advent of the comprehensive plan, cities have struggled to interrelate these elements successfully and guide implementation effectively. These issues are further compounded by fragmentation of planning functions across multiple public and quasi-governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other actors responsible for a community's development.

Planners in communities large and small must find effective solutions to coordinate across these fragmented actors to unify not only the vision but the areas of focus, timing, and means and methods of implementation. This coordination is necessary for any comprehensive plan to deliver on the public sector's role to bring about necessary change in communities across the city, while balancing the pace and placement of regulation to lead the private sector toward delivering on this vision through implementation.

Getting implementation right is the most important step of the comprehensive planning process. Using Degree of Change can be an effective planning method to ensure successful implementation.

### About the Author

John Zeanah, AICP, is director of the Memphis and Shelby County Division of Planning and Development. He leads a cross-functional division providing planning, zoning, and building services to the city and county. Among his accomplishments, he led the development and adoption of the *Memphis 3.0 Comprehensive Plan*, winner of **APA's Daniel Burnham Award for a Comprehensive Plan for 2020** and a Charter Award from the Congress of the New Urbanism in 2021. He earned his master's degree in city and regional planning from the University of Memphis, where he now teaches land-use controls as an adjunct faculty member.

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