

Case Study: Livable Tucson Vision Program

What will the future be like in your neighborhood? Will your children inherit a healthy, vibrant community or one suffering from the legacy of poorly planned growth?

From Seattle to Jacksonville, communities across the country are starting to define a vision for their future that balances the needs of this generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Residents of “sustainable” cities are learning and demonstrating that balancing the economic, social, and environmental concerns of their communities can improve their quality of life and ensure a better future.

In the spring of 1997, the mayor and city council of Tucson, Arizona, initiated the Livable Tucson Vision Program to identify a long-term, community-driven vision for the city. That vision was created to help shape the city’s budget and to provide a framework for developing programs and services that address the real concerns of the community.

More than 1,200 community members, business-people, and city employees have participated in the program to date, thereby laying the groundwork for developing new and enhanced programs and services that will help realize the community’s vision of a more Livable Tucson.

Background

During the spring and summer of 1997, three public forums were held in each ward to engage the community in identifying a common vision and finding strategies for achieving a sustainable community. In addition to the ward forums, additional forums were held in the fall that targeted businesses, youth, and Spanish speakers. An Internet site also gave citizens the opportunity to contribute their priorities, and city council offices had bulletin boards for community input.



Based on thousands of comments voiced by the community, 17 key goals emerged. Those goals embodied the values and aspirations of the community to maintain and improve Tucson in the future. The next phase of the Livable Tucson Vision Program involved holding six workshops in the spring of 1998 to develop indicators of progress toward each of the 17 key goals. Taken together, the indicators form a community report card.

Livable Tucson Goals and Indicators

The 17 key goals and the areas that they address for a livable Tucson are as follows:

- Better alternatives to automobile transportation—improved public transportation system, bicycle and pedestrian-friendly streets, improved roadways (with landscaping, lighting, sidewalks, and bus stops), and promotion of alternatives to the automobile
- Engaged community and responsive government—involvement of citizens in the community, volunteering, neighborhood participation, responsiveness of government organizations to citizen input, and the connection between government and the people

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- Safe neighborhoods—how safe people feel in their neighborhoods, crime, policing, and risk perceptions
- Caring, healthy families and youth—opportunities, services, and conditions that support Tucson’s families and youth
- Excellent public education—the quality of education at all levels, youth to adult, as well as vocational, life skills, cultural, and civic training
- Infill and reinvestment, not urban sprawl—well-planned growth, management of sprawl, and development in the city’s core rather than on the periphery
- Abundant urban green space and recreation areas—recreation and green space within the city, including neighborhood and regional parks, common space, community gardens, bike and walking paths, linear and river parks, trees, and urban landscaping
- Protected natural desert environment—the protection of the Sonoran Desert ecosystem and protection of washes, hillsides, open space, and wildlife
- Better-paying jobs—the wages, job quality, job diversity, and an improved standard of living
- Clean air and quality water—the reduced pollution and provision of clean, potable water
- People-oriented neighborhoods—the designing new neighborhoods and investing in old neighborhoods to promote a mix of commercial and residential uses, a pedestrian focus, landscaping and aesthetics, and interaction among residents
- Respected historic and cultural resources—the preservation and celebration of local landmarks, buildings, neighborhoods, archeological treasures, open spaces, cultures, and traditions that make Tucson unique
- Quality job training—the education, training, and skill development that lead to high-quality, living wage jobs
- Reduced poverty and greater equality of opportunity—the fair distribution of resources and creation of opportunities to overcome poverty and social and economic inequality

- Strong local businesses—the local economy, particularly small, Tucson-based businesses
- Efficient use of natural resources—the conservation of resources and use of sustainable energy sources
- Successful downtown—the cultural and commercial aspects of the city center

Strategic Plan

Livable Tucson is no longer an active program in its original form. It has evolved into a city strategic plan that focuses more narrowly on six priorities: transportation, growth, neighborhoods, good government, downtown, and economic development. Thus, the plan is more specific than Livable Tucson in that it identifies projects and programs that the city is undertaking to accomplish those priorities. In this way, the plan is tied to the budget; it has specific dollars associated with it and, therefore, is more likely to produce results. The six areas also focus on what the city of Tucson is responsible for and can control.

The focus shifted because the original goals were too complex and broad. The goals were not tied to the city budget, meaning that public dollars were not directly aimed at trying to achieve the goals. Also, many goals were actually the responsibility of other jurisdictions such as school districts or the county. It was difficult for the city to influence the other jurisdictions. Furthermore, turnover among leadership proved to be another obstacle (there is now a new city council and city manager). The new leadership had different ideas about how they wanted to move forward. This change doesn’t mean the 17 key goals have been abandoned. Instead, the goals of the Livable Tucson program were incorporated into the city’s general plan in the 2001 update approved by voters.

Source:

Excerpted and adapted with permission from City of Tucson 2000 (E).