

**TOWN OF ERIE
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
March 4, 2025**

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Plan and Related Topics

PURPOSE: Discussion only

CODE REVIEW: N/A

DEPARTMENT: Planning and Development
Public Works
Communications and Community Engagement

PRESENTER: Sarah Nurmela, Director of Planning and Development
Kelly Driscoll, Planning Manager
Josh Campbell, Senior Strategic Planner
MJ Adams, Affordable Housing Manager
Eric Leverage, Housing Analyst
David Pasic, Public Works Director
John Firouzi, Transportation and Mobility Manager
Miguel Aguilar, Principal Transportation Planner
Gabi Rae, Communications and Community Engagement
Director

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Informational item only.

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND OF SUBJECT MATTER:

Purpose of Discussion

The Town Council has expressed the desire to assess specific policy direction in the Comprehensive Plan, Transportation and Mobility Plan (TMP), and Housing Needs Assessment and Strategy. These policies include residential density, affordable housing, and traffic. Additionally, the Council has expressed concern over the public outreach process for these efforts. This memo and associated presentation are structured to facilitate a targeted and productive discussion with Council.

Direction Requested from Council

Staff request Council's direction on changes in policy direction, from which staff can develop a path forward to evaluate, draft, test, and present potential changes to the Council for consideration.

Topics Covered in this Memo:

1. Role and Process of the Comprehensive Plan, including Adoption
2. Land Use Classifications & Why they Change
3. Engagement at-a-glance
4. Transportation & Mobility Plan
5. Housing

1. Role and Process of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is an overarching guiding document for development, services, and lived experience in the Town. The document establishes a vision, values, and policies, with action items that set forth implementation of the Town's vision. As a guiding document, the policies are meant to provide direction to decision makers and staff alike as they review development, prioritize investments, and deliver infrastructure improvements. This direction also serves as the basis for more specific regulatory and planning documents that implement the plan, like the Unified Development Code (UDC) and Zoning Districts, Water Supply Plan, TMP, or the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan (PROST)—among others.

The last update to Erie's Comprehensive Plan was a focused, primarily map-based update completed in 2015. To reflect Erie's growth, changing demographics, and needs, the Town initiated an update to the Plan along with an update to the TMP in late 2022, branded as "Elevate Erie". The two plans were scoped together, and engagement efforts were coordinated. Additionally, staff conducted the Housing Needs Assessment in 2023 and adopted a combined Housing Needs Assessment and Strategy in May 2024. This work informed the policy direction in the Comprehensive Plan.

Plan Process

The project comprised four phases. Each phase of the project had an overall goal in conjunction with community engagement. Advisory groups consisted of the Plan Advisory Committee (PAC), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Planning Commission, and Town Council. The PAC included members from the Town's Boards and Commissions, while the TAC comprised staff from departments and divisions such as Public Works, Utilities, Transportation, Sustainability, Planning, Building, Parks and Recreation, Police, Economic Development, Housing, and Finance.

The Plan update process included four engagement and work windows built around documenting existing conditions, visioning, testing ideas, and developing the draft document. The iterative process was designed to establish a vision for Erie's future that is grounded in data and market realities, resulting in an implementable, fiscally sustainable plan.

- **Phase I** occurred between December 2022 and April 2023. This phase of engagement uncovered and documented existing conditions in Erie and included seven in-person engagement events as well as an online survey.

- **Phase II** extended approximately seven months into December 2023, with a focus on visioning and defining the direction of the plan. Residents identified the Vision and Values of the plan through five in-person events and an online survey.
- **Phase III** included public input on the three Land Use Scenarios presented to the Council and Planning Commission in a joint workshop in March 2024. Voting for scenarios occurred online and in-person at seven events over four and a half weeks. The plan team used the feedback and results of voting to draft the fourth and final land use scenario, otherwise known as the Future Land Use Map.
- **Phase IV**, or public review of the draft document and Future Land Use Map, was open from Aug. 14 to Sept. 8. During this fourth phase of engagement, staff held two Open House events and collected written comments from residents through the project page. The online and in-person feedback was incorporated into the document.

Snapshot of Visioning Outcome

Residents identified the Vision and Values of the plan through online survey (230 responses) and feedback at five in-person events. The major themes that emerged from this outreach were:

- Open space and parks
- More retail and commercial options
- Housing options for all life stages
- Resources and maintenance as growth occurs
- Employment opportunities in the Town

Based on survey responses and input from advisory groups the Comprehensive Plan Vision was updated to:

Erie is a sustainable, livable, and connected community that creates positive, memorable, and lasting impressions for its residents and visitors. The Town is committed to collaboratively managing our diverse natural, cultural, fiscal, social, and capital resources.

As a part of the visioning process, a key principle of equity and core values of sustainability, livability, and connectivity emerged during this phase. These underpin the policies found in Elevate Erie and are highlighted in the document.

What and Why of Scenario Planning

In Phase three, the Plan Team used the community feedback from the first two phases to develop and test three unique land use scenarios that expressed different aspects of the community's values. Creating and evaluating scenarios allows the community and decision-makers to understand the impacts, benefits, and trade-offs

of key policy decisions. Consultants Verdunity and EPS were engaged to evaluate each of the scenarios. Verdunity provided the Town with a Fiscal Analysis and model of the land uses proposed in each, while EPS evaluated the scenarios for market feasibility. These analyses were utilized in communicating the scenarios and trade-offs to the community and in developing the Future Land Use Map.

The scenarios included:

- Scenario A: Status Quo, modeled out the existing comprehensive plan footprint and pattern of primarily low density and limited commercial and employment uses.
- Scenario B: Commercial & Employment, emphasized jobs and regional commercial activity, along with a variety of housing types to support these uses.
- Scenario C: Neighborhood Center, emphasized a tapestry of complete mixed-use neighborhood centers that include daily needs.

In a joint workshop on March 5, 2024, the Council and Planning Commission considered the draft scenarios and provided feedback. Public input on the three scenarios occurred via voting for first and second choices, online and in-person, at seven events over four and a half weeks. Staff had many in-depth conversations with the community at these events, answering technical questions related to density, transportation, and utilities. With over 400 votes cast, Scenario C earned first choice, with Scenario B second.

In Person Voting:

	First Choice	Second Choice
Scenario A	12%	9%
Scenario B	20%	73%
Scenario C	67%	18%
Total	100% (98 votes)	100% (93 votes)

Online Survey:

	First Choice	Second Choice
Scenario A	40%	31%
Scenario B	9%	50%
Scenario C	51%	19%
Total	100% (409)	100% (409)

Developing the Final Plan

The Plan Team utilized the feedback and results of voting to draft the fourth and final land use scenario, otherwise known as the Future Land Use Map. This involved starting with a mix of B and C, focusing on mixed-use, housing variety, neighborhood-scale services, and employment, while also downsizing some of the highest densities, focusing on infill, and prioritizing the small town feel through community design policies. Development of the Future Land Use map also relied on TAC analysis of utilities capacities, water needs, and parks and open space

maintenance. The Future Land Use Map aligns with the community's feedback and desire for:

- More commercial activity and jobs
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Variety of housing
- Amenities and daily needs that are easily accessible

Analysis of the Future Land Use Map in the Plan includes projections of new potential buildout in terms of residences, jobs, population, and commercial square footage. The predicted buildout projects that over the next 20 to 30 years, development consistent with the Future Land Use Map could result in 73,000 to 80,000 residents. More details on the buildout projections are in the table. All buildout numbers including housing units, population, and jobs are rounded to the nearest thousand while commercial square footage is rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.

Plan Policies

Feedback from the community, PAC, TAC, PC, and TC helped shape the policy framework of the Plan, including the identification of implementation and action items, responsible parties, and timing. The drafted goals and policies were brought to the public for prioritization at 12 pop-up events around Town and in an online survey. Events included the Erie Farmers Market, Touch-A-Truck, Coal Creek Park, Fox Dog Coffee, Active Adult Lunch, and various times at the Erie Community Center atrium from July 24 to August 12. Over 415 participants picked their top two policy goals for each chapter. Top priorities included:

- Water conservation
- Inclusive and effective public facilities
- Protecting and enhancing nature
- Preparing for climate change disruptions
- Thriving, accessible neighborhoods
- Reducing housing costs
- Supporting and attracting small businesses
- Creating vibrant spaces and events
- Connecting neighborhoods with parks, open spaces, and trails
- Celebrating Erie's identity with arts, culture and entertainment

The goals and policies were then incorporated into a public review draft of the Plan and Future Land Use Map. The update carried over many goals and policies from the 2015 Comp Plan, maintaining an overall consistency in vision and values.

Comprehensive Plan Adoption

The Planning Commission was extensively involved throughout the 18-month plan development process, reviewing work products and discussing in-depth at nine meetings throughout plan development. The Commission considered Elevate Erie at their September 18, 2024, meeting. Planning Commission voted unanimously to pass

resolution P24-14 recommending that Town Council approve the 2024 update to the 2015 Town of Erie Comprehensive Plan, Known as Elevate Erie.

Town Council considered the recommendation of Planning Commission at their October 8, 2024, meeting ultimately adopting the Plan update in a 4 to 2 vote. The Transportation and Mobility Plan draft was discussed at the October 22 and November 12, 2024, with unanimous adoption on December 10, 2024.

Adoption of Elevate Erie does not change the zoning for any property, nor does it automatically allow development types shown on the Future Land Use Map. In many cases, entitlements (rezonings, platting, site plan, etc.) would be necessary to allow development. These entitlement proceedings include neighborhood meetings and public hearings at Planning Commission and Town Council.

2. Land Use Classifications and Densities – Why the Change?

The Land Use chapter of the Comprehensive Plan includes both the Future Land Use Map and associated land use classifications. These classifications provide direction on how land is envisioned to be used. The classifications are general in nature, providing a description of uses, density or intensity of use of the land, and potential limitations or considerations when applying the uses. The mapping of these classifications is meant to act as a guide for staff and decision-makers like the Planning Commission and Town Council as they apply the Town's codes and zone sites.

Typically, Comprehensive Plan updates evaluate land use classifications for their applicability to and reflection of existing development and reflection of real estate market trends. Erie's land use classifications have evolved over time with the growth of the Town. In 1999, the residential land use classifications included Low, Moderate, and Urban Density, with densities of 0.5, 1.0, and 2.0 dwelling units to the acre (du/ac), respectively. These classifications were updated significantly in 2005, where Low, Medium, and High Density residential classifications were updated with densities of 0-6, 6-12, and 12-20 du/ac. Similarly, mixed use land use classifications were introduced in 2005, reflecting the changing types of land uses envisioned and built in Erie. In 2015, the Town also introduced a greater focus on housing diversity, which brought duplexes, townhomes, and apartment typologies into the Town.

Thus, with the 2022-2024 update, the land use classifications were again evaluated to ensure they reflected existing development and market trends. For example, existing densities were used to help inform the updated density divisions of Rural (0-2), Low (2-8), Medium (8-18), and High (18-30) du/ac. Examples of these densities include the following existing neighborhoods:

- Flat Iron Meadows, single family detached, small lot, 6.7 du/ac
- Westerly Filing 1, duplexes and townhomes, 8.9 du/ac.
- Erie Highlands, townhomes, 11 du/ac;
- Erie Commons Cottages, single family detached, small lot homes at 12 du/ac;

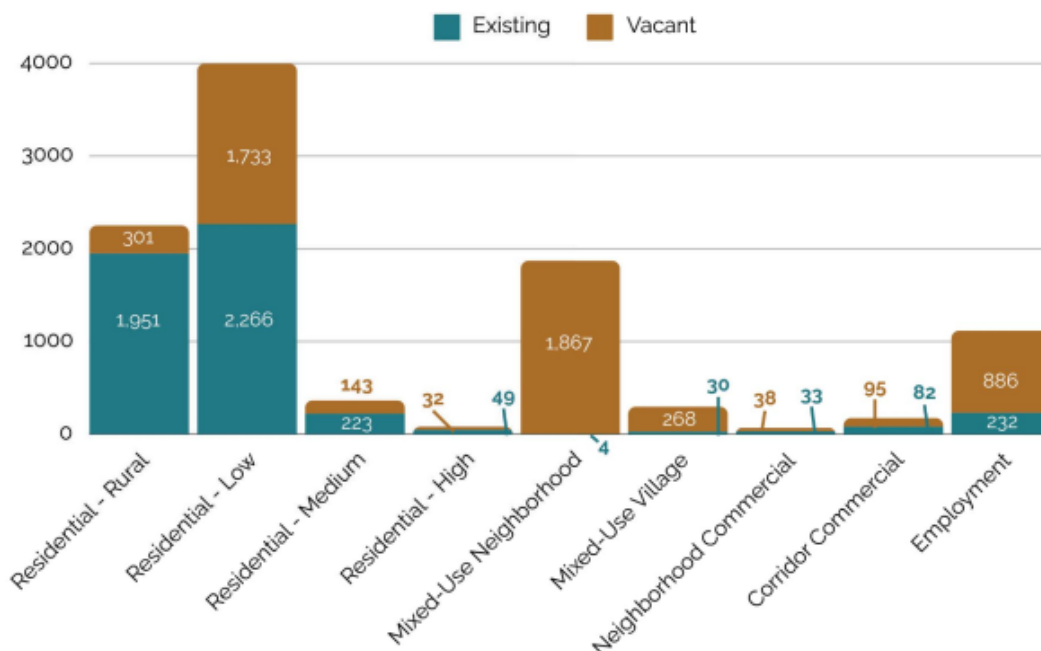
- Vista Ridge Enclave, townhomes, 16 du/ac
- Cheesman Residences, single family detached and townhomes, 17 du/ac;
- Blue Sky Condominiums, 20 du/ac;
- Aura Apartments, Colliers Hill, 25 du/ac; and
- Nine Mile apartments, 25 du/ac.

Updating the classifications allows Low Density to accurately capture single family and duplex developments, Medium Density to capture small lot single family detached to townhomes, and High Density to capture existing and market-based apartment typologies. The areas designated as Residential High on the Land Use Map are properties that are already built at that density or are entitled to develop that way. The Map does not designate any opportunity sites as Residential High.

Land Use Map

While Land use classifications are important, the Future Land Use Map is the vehicle for their application. The chart below shows the number of acres of each classification that are on the Future Land Use Map. The three classifications with the greatest vacant land area include Low Density Residential (2-8 du/ac), Mixed Use Residential (6-12 du/ac), and Employment. As part of the analysis of the scenarios and the final Future Land Use Map, each map was tested against the fiscal model for the Town. The model included revenues and costs to the Town, showing the relationship to different land use types and densities. This information was presented in great detail in August 2024, here:

https://erie.granicus.com/player/clip/3222?view_id=9&meta_id=161681&redirect=true



3. Engagement at-a-glance

Over the course of the project, the Plan Team engaged with the public at more than 30 events and through multiple online surveys, resulting in more than 2,500 touch points. Additionally, 30 meetings with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Plan Advisory Committee (PAC), Planning Commission, and Council occurred during the project in which staff asked for comments and direction and then revised the Plan to reflect those comments and direction. Throughout each of the engagement periods the PAC and TAC met multiple times to review work product and provide direction and feedback. Consultants Verdunity and EPS engaged to provide Fiscal and Economic Market Analyses. All told, the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update included over 550 hours of consultant time, over 200 hours of advisory/stakeholder time, 250 hours of staff time for public events, and \$460,000 in contracts, and a \$100,000 grant from the state. Public engagement for comprehensive planning efforts is typically low, around 1 to 2% of the population. Engagement for the 2024 Comprehensive Plan update was approximately 7%, and far exceeded previous plan updates (2005, 2015), which had only a handful of events.

4. Transportation & Mobility Plan

The Transportation Mobility Plan (TMP) is a policy document that highlights the transportation and mobility preferences of the community in conjunction with technical details such as community demographics (census data), commute patterns (jobs), and land-use trip generation factors. The TMP is aligned with the long-range vision of the Comprehensive Plan. Prior to the 2024 TMP update, the previous version was updated in 2018 when remote work, transit ridership, and peak commute periods were in "pre-pandemic" conditions. Additionally, the 2018 document lacked strategic initiatives.

The project team applied the latest data and trends in the development of the proposed network, street classification, and policies in the 2024 TMP with community priorities such as connectivity, options for all modes of travel, congestion management, and safety. The updated TMP links neighborhoods through multiple travel options while holding regional plans accountable for regional investments for the Erie community. The TMP highlights the buildout conditions of the Town and guides developer investments to support community growth.

5. Housing

The Town has been working to achieve a greater diversity of housing and access to housing at a wider range of incomes since 2005. The 2005 Comprehensive Plan acknowledged the need to facilitate affordable housing in the community. Over the years, the Town has worked to develop the Vic Smith Senior Housing and Cheesman Residences in Old Town Erie and to join regional and State efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing in the Town. The 2023 Community Survey showed overwhelming interest in and support for various aspects of housing affordability.

The 2023 Housing Needs Assessment and its update with the Housing Strategy in 2024 highlights the high cost of housing in Erie as well as the economics of achieving housing affordability in the current construction market. These projects require creative and complex funding packages that are often a combination of local, State, and federal grants and incentives. Because of the tight financial structure of these projects, flexibility on design standards, increases in density, and expedited review processes are important and highly effective non-financial incentives that many cities employ. The Town's adopted Housing Strategy outlines a number of these and additional financial tools and incentives that can be applied to help facilitate projects.

One of the tools adopted in 2023 was Ordinance 017-2023, which provided multiple non-financial incentives like administrative site plan review, density increase, and flexibility on targeted design standards. Council has expressed a desire to evaluate this ordinance in relation to concerns about administrative review; a separate staff report was prepared to provide more detail on this topic.

Attachments

1. Staff Report
2. Presentation
3. Elevate Erie
4. Transportation and Mobility Plan
5. Housing Needs Assessment and Strategy
6. Plan Relationship Diagram
7. Entitled and Planned Projects