

Editorial

Tyler 21 Offers Meaningful Guide For City's Future

Nearly two years ago, the city of Tyler took on a monumental task: developing a comprehensive plan for land use and development that will guide the city's growth in coming years. What has now been delivered doesn't settle all arguments or answer all questions, but it's a fine beginning and a testament to what can be achieved when the public sector seeks citizen involvement.

Tyler residents should now hold the city to the same high standard in the implementation of that comprehensive plan, Tyler 21. And adaptability, an important part of development of the plan, must be remain a part of its implementation.

"I am not concerned that Tyler won't continue to grow over the next 20 or 30 years," Tyler Mayor Joey Seeber said in February 2006. "What I am concerned about is how that growth will take place. Now is the time to step in and decide what kind of city we will leave for our children and grandchildren."

There had already been failures, he acknowledged.

"If we don't have a workable plan, we're

going to pay a high price," Seeber said. "One need only look at Grande Boulevard and see our failure to properly plan. We're spending millions trying to fix it — we don't want a lot of Grande Boulevards in our future."

The process began after the Tyler City Council found that Tyler has more than 101,000 inhabitants, based on results obtained from a private study commissioned by the city.

The plan was to focus on eight key areas: north end revitalization; downtown development; historic preservation; parks, open space and lakes; housing, neighborhoods and quality of life; and public facilities and infrastructure.

What officials delivered to the City Council and to citizens on Wednesday fulfilled the high expectations set in 2006. In large part, that's because the process was set upon the right track from its inception. It began with citizen surveys and an all-day "Community Envisioning Retreat" in June 2006.

"This is the people's plan," Seeber pledged at the time. "If the community says it wants something, the city will find a way to be involved."

'I believe it will yield great benefits.'

-- Mayor Joey Seeber

Items identified by citizens as things that should be preserved included trees, historic integrity, downtown, quality of life, arts and culture and neighborhood identity.

Some positives included the quality of Tyler's public education system, trend-setting health care community and strong support offered by church and nonprofit organizations.

Citizens voiced a desire for more parks, north end development, affordable housing, family activities, entertainment options and development standards.

"As a result of the open dialogue, a number of suggestions made by the public have been incorporated into the plan," Seeber said in a recent editorial board meeting with the Tyler

Paper. "People really rolled up their sleeves and participated in a meaningful way."

Of course, many cities have master plans. What makes Tyler 21 different is that it's not simply a statement of goals.

"We said from the beginning this would be a plan for implementation," Seeber said. "It's not just something that's going to sit on a shelf, look good and make us feel good about ourselves. This will be a guide for the city. And this plan does have a timetable."

The plan wasn't cheap, Seeber admits. It cost more than \$600,000, with much of the expense attributed to the extensive public involvement component.

"Businesses spend millions and millions of dollars on research and development to plan for their futures," Seeber pointed out. "It's the same with the city of Tyler. This was an investment. And I believe it will yield great benefits."

The plan, in its entirety, is available for viewing online at Tyler21.com.

Hard copies are on display at the Tyler Public Library and at City Hall.