

Executive Summary



Since its origin, Thornton has undergone a transformation which has resulted in a community that is tremendously attractive because of the quality of life available to a wide variety of individuals and families. Some of Thornton's strengths are the diversity of housing choices and wide range of age, income and cultural groups present in the City. One of Thornton's distinct advantages is that an individual or family can move into affordable neighborhoods. Then as their incomes and housing needs expand, they can move into other levels of housing, both in size and cost, while remaining in Thornton. This means that children of Thornton residents can choose to live in the same community as their parents when they are ready to leave home. It also means that as parents age and no longer need large homes for families, they can move into smaller, more manageable housing while still remaining in Thornton. This diversity of choices is a hallmark of the community and represents a true quality of life which many other cities in the Denver region cannot claim. This range of choices and options that vary with lifestyle changes enables individuals and families to invest and develop deep roots in Thornton over a long period of time.

Thornton has diversified its housing choices, income characteristics and other demographics, and has become known throughout the region as a community which provides all citizens a very high level of basic services, such as utilities, emergency services, etc. As Thornton has grown to a population nearing 120,000 people, it has desired to differentiate itself from other nearby communities by being able to establish quality public gathering spaces, a diverse local economy with a variety of job choices and yet not lose sight of the basic building block of a community – the neighborhood.

From a year-long effort that included outreach to citizens through public workshops, three geographic focus subcommittees and an overall steering committee, the Comprehensive Plan has sought a wide range of opinions regarding strategies for the future of Thornton. The culmination of this planning process is the establishment of a vision for Thornton that can be expressed by what the City strives to be;

- **A City of Quality and Diverse Neighborhoods**
- **A City of Plentiful Quality Jobs**
- **A City of Great Amenities**
- **A City of Active and Engaged Partnerships**

With many neighborhoods now over fifty years old, Thornton is moving into a stage of its development where attentiveness to older neighborhoods is as important as planning for quality new neighborhoods. To achieve the Comprehensive Plan goal to be **“a City of quality and diverse neighborhoods”**, Thornton must continue to routinely monitor the condition of its existing neighborhoods and put in place practices to maintain each neighborhood’s stability. Other measures recommended in the Comprehensive Plan include encouraging pride in ownership and revitalization or redevelopment of select neighborhood commercial areas. In new neighborhoods, Thornton must develop and administer a high standard of housing construction that promotes the use of low maintenance building materials and encourages higher density development in targeted areas to encourage transit use.

For Thornton to achieve the Comprehensive Plan goal of becoming **“a City of plentiful quality jobs”**, Thornton must be disciplined in reserving land for employment growth around its areas with the highest regional access and attraction for new regional employment centers (interchanges and transit stops). While retaining its current focus on preserving retail sales tax base, Thornton must expand its programs into non-retail job attraction. With these policies, Thornton could move from having one of the lowest ratios of jobs to housing in the region to being on par with many of its peer communities. These land use and economic development policies are necessary for Thornton to change its image and reality in the region from that of a “bedroom community” to that of a complete full-service City.

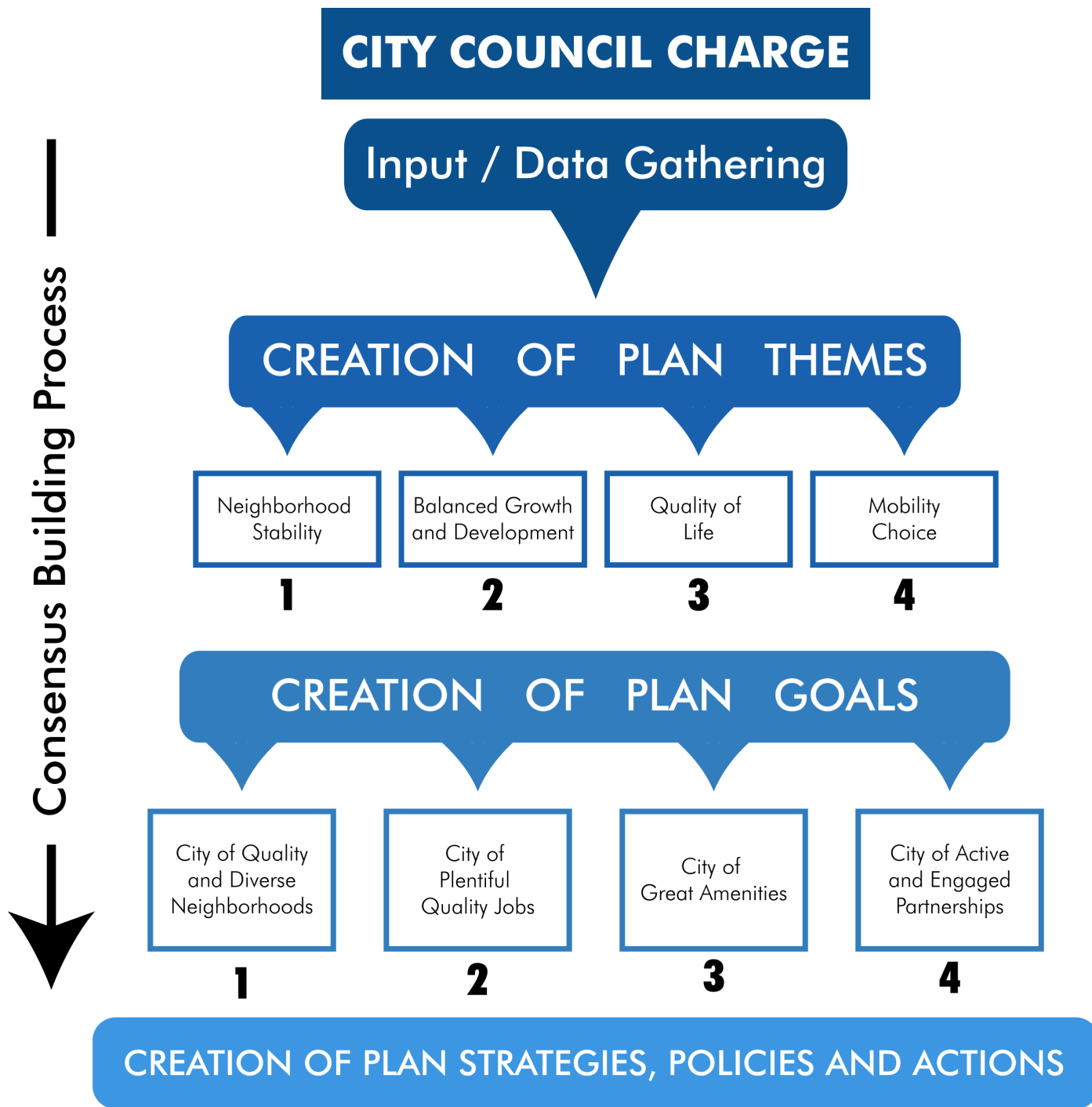
Because Thornton, like many other peer communities, was developed in an era oriented around the automobile, it lacks pedestrian oriented public gathering spaces. Plan participants from the public expressed a strong desire for Thornton to develop places where people can gather, meet, discover and be entertained. Key to the goal of Thornton becoming **“a City of great amenities”** is the strategy to develop a series of special places, or “placemaking” districts throughout the community. The Plan proposes six such districts including; the Civic Arts District, the Health Services Campus District, the Sports and Wellness District, the Eastlake Historic District, the North Recreation Center District and finally the North Washington Urban Village District. Connecting these “placemaking” districts is the proposed Thornton Placemaking Cultural Trail that would essentially ring the community. Other strategies to realize the Comprehensive Plan goal of creating a community of great amenities would include protecting and enhancing the public realm that includes community facilities, rights-of-way and civic spaces. The final strategy related to amenities includes the development of a community branding strategy to distinguish Thornton and its identity.

The Thornton Comprehensive Plan is an aggressive plan. It is aimed at continuing Thornton’s progress at becoming a great community. With its high aspirations, there is the need for additional funding to support added programs, policies and improvements. For Thornton to achieve this Plan, it ultimately must engage others and become **“a City of active and engaged partnerships”**. Using the comparison of other peer communities, Thornton must seek and cultivate participation of other community partners as the City of Thornton will not have the resources necessary to undertake or fund all the efforts described in the Comprehensive Plan. For neighborhoods, for example, several of the recommendations are reliant on the creation of a Community Development Corporation to engage in neighborhood revitalization. Other potential neighborhood partnerships include development of neighborhood associations, faith-based organizations, as well as corporate partnerships to assist with neighborhood sustainability needs. To achieve the aggressive economic development goals, other partnerships need to be created with the development community, as well as with the newly created non-profit Community Development Corporation. To achieve the aggressive level of amenities, corporate sponsorship and developer contributions will be needed to help achieve the level of amenities that are advocated in the Plan. Simply stated, the full recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan cannot be viewed as being the sole responsibility of the City of Thornton to fund or administer. Instead the City must engage other partners and therefore commit to give up some control in certain matters in order to attract and nurture these partnerships. The strategy of being ambitious in the vision, versus developing a plan that is fiscally constrained to existing municipal revenues and capabilities, has consciously been debated and a broader vision has been chosen.

The Comprehensive Plan for the City of Thornton is a powerful vision of how Thornton could become an even more desirable place to live, work and play. Given Thornton’s progress over the past fifty years, the challenge facing Thornton’s future is achievable.

Plan Process

Figure ES-1 on the following page summarizes the consensus building process used to create this Comprehensive Plan.



▲ Figure ES-1: Consensus Building Process

Plan Content and Organization

This Comprehensive Plan document is organized in a logical manner for ease of use according to the following outline:

1. **Section 1.0 – Introduction:**
An overall description of the Comprehensive Plan’s development and its organization.
2. **Section 2.0 – Setting:**
A description of key issues, needs and trends addressed by the Comprehensive Plan.
3. **Section 3.0 – Future Land Use:**
An overall vision and direction for Thornton, reflected by the Land Use Framework and the Future Land Use Map.
4. **Section 4.0 – Transportation and Utilities:**
A general overview of the transportation systems and utilities in Thornton.
5. **Section 5.0 – Quality and Diverse Neighborhoods:**
An overview of the current challenges, planning framework, major strategies and key policies needed to support this core Plan goal.
6. **Section 6.0 – Plentiful Quality Jobs:**
An overview of the current opportunities, important needs, core recommendations, major strategies and key policies needed to support this core Plan goal.
7. **Section 7.0 – Great Amenities:**
An overview of the current opportunities, important needs, core recommendations, major strategies and key policies needed to support this core Plan goal.
8. **Section 8.0 – Active and Engaged Partnerships:**
An overview of the Partnerships and a description of the current opportunities, important needs, and core recommendations needed to support this core Plan goal.
9. **Section 9.0 – Implementation and Use:**
A discussion of the use of the Plan, its amendment, monitoring and evaluation, and the catalyst actions required for implementation.
10. **Appendix A - Glossary of Planning Terms**
Definitions for planning terms used in the Comprehensive Plan.
11. **Appendix B - Plan Themes**
The 10 value statements of the City Council Charge organized into four basic Plan Themes.
12. **Appendix C - School Districts Map**
The City’s Collaborative Planning Effort with School Districts.

Technical Appendix (Bound as Separate Document)

1. **Technical Appendix 1 - Meeting Summaries**
2. **Technical Appendix 2 - Economic Reports**
3. **Technical Appendix 3 - Surveys**