2.0 Foundation of the Future

2.1 Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan is a vision of the future for the City of Monroe. It includes policies and projects to implement the Future Land Use Plan and the vision. It is a guide to land use decision-making in Monroe. An equally important function of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide a framework for guiding decision-making within the context of the vision of the future crafted by the Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan is a lens through which development proposals should be evaluated. Each proposal should answer the question: *Will this development advance the vision of the future as articulated in the Comprehensive Plan?* If the proposal is not consistent with the Plan, the proposal should be revised to accurately reflect the vision of the future. The Plan should also be evaluated on an on-going basis to ensure it meets changing expectations. This introduces flexibility through time to evaluate changes in expectations, attitudes or conditions that can't be anticipated by the Plan.

The entire Comprehensive Plan should be revisited and updated every five years. These revisions should reflect changes in the economic, demographic and other aspects of the community and should incorporate changing goals, objectives and policies. The five-year review is the time to accommodate changes in philosophy or direction.

Policies should be updated and evaluated on an on-going basis. Primary responsibility for evaluating the proposals presented to the City lies with the Planning and Urban Development Department and specifically with the Planning and Zoning Office. This office should ensure the Plan and its policies are reviewed on a regular basis through a defined process and with the support of the Planning Commission and City Council. Any recommended changes should be first presented to the Planning Commission for action and then to the City Council for final approval.

2.2 Goals & Objectives

2.2.1 Introduction

The Goals and Objectives provide a framework to guide development and change in the City of Monroe. They set a standard for the City and its residents to meet and provide a benchmark for evaluating the growth of the city.

The Goals and Objectives are the result of the public input process for the comprehensive plan described above. Goals should be: broad, declarative, general, overarching, umbrella statement. On the other hand, Objectives are more specific and are designed to implement the Goals. They should be strategic; directly related to their respective Goals; they serve as the basis for the Policies; and they should be able to guide Evaluation of the Plan.

Goals and Objectives are based on the entirety of what is learned though the Comprehensive Plan process and everything that is contained in the Plan. This includes the Plan inventory but also it is heavily guided by the public input process, for the Goals and Objectives constitute the vision for the future of the community.

During the public input process for the City of Monroe Comprehensive Plan, five general priority areas emerged to guide the Goals and Objectives:

- Government & Civic Discourse
- Education & Opportunity
- Vitality & Revitalization
- Safety, Security & Livability
- Rivers & Bayous

To implement this Comprehensive Plan and as part of the foundation for a sustainable future, Monroe City government will engage itself and its residents in responsibly managing growth to protect and enhance the quality of life for current and future residents. It will achieve this ambition through the application of the Goals and Objectives that follow.

2.2.2 Goals & Objectives

2.2.2.1   Government and Civic Discourse

The public input on government and civic discourse revealed these as the most prevalent themes:

- More and better communication with government is needed
- Government needs to cooperate with residents
- The public wants to be able to understand what is happening and why
- More public input needed in government
- Monroe needs to overcome negative stereotyping and attitudes that divide the City – race, religion, socio-economic status
- The development of leadership capacity is needed to guide the city in the future

The result is the following goal statement and accompanying objectives.

Goal 1 – Government & Civic Discourse

Monroe will foster an atmosphere of inclusivity and spirit of cooperation and collaboration among residents and government

Objective 1.   To encourage citizens' active participation in and interaction with their government

Objective 2.   To develop transparency at all levels of City government

Objective 3.   To celebrate and support all citizens without regard to background, race, culture, religion or socio-economic status

Objective 4.   To continuously seek greater standards for governmental achievement at the local and regional levels

Objective 5.   To apply predictable and reasonable standards for decision-making guided by the Comprehensive Plan

2.2.2.2 Education & Opportunity

The public input on education and opportunity revealed these as the most prevalent themes:

- Schools need to concentrate on job readiness as well as further education
- The resources exist here to focus on seamless education from pre-k all the way through college and beyond
- The community is rich in the array of educational opportunities available – but students need help in taking advantage of it all
- The stigma attached to technical education needs to be ended
- Educational institutions need to cooperate and collaborate with one another

The result is the following goal statement and accompanying objectives.

Goal 2 – Education & Opportunity

The City of Monroe is unique in Northeast Louisiana and it will use the legacy of its forbears and its position as a regional hub to build a strong foundation for the future.

Objective 1. To identify, preserve and revitalize the community's cultural, historic and natural resources

Objective 2. To increase economic vitality in Monroe through tourism and development and enhancement of the local visitor industry

Objective 3. To promote the appreciation of local and regional cultural, historic and natural resources through education and interpretation

Objective 4. To promote decision-making that encourages preservation, sustainability and revitalization of natural, cultural and historic resources

Objective 5. To support entrepreneurship and innovation as the engines for a creativity- and knowledge-based economy

2.2.2.3 Vitality & Revitalization

The public input on vitality and revitalization revealed these as the most prevalent themes:

- Creative people need to be attracted to live and work here and the infrastructure needed to attract them: housing, jobs, incentives for them to establish businesses, cultural activities
- Jobs that help support families are needed
- The City's education resources, its location and assets make it a potential hub for regional manufacturing and innovation
- Property maintenance, litter abatement and quality of life issues need to be addressed
- Downtown, the river, the zoo, arts, historic and cultural resources are Monroe's assets to attract businesses and visitors
- Local businesses and business development efforts need support

The result is the following goal statement and accompanying objectives.

Goal 3 – Vitality & Revitalization

The City of Monroe is unique and it will use the legacy of its forbears and its position as a regional hub to build a strong foundation for the future.

Objective 1. To support entrepreneurship and innovation as the engines for a creativity- and knowledge-based economy

Objective 2. To promote and support regional marketing and job- and industrial- development efforts

Objective 3. To increase economic vitality in Monroe through every possible channel including tourism and development and enhancement of the local visitor industry

Objective 4. To promote economic development in the sciences related to existing educational and cultural strengths in Monroe

Objective 5. To promote Monroe as a lifestyle destination of residential and visitor choice

2.2.2.4 Safety, Security & Livability

The public input on safety, security and livability revealed these as the most prevalent themes:
- Safety, and the perception of safety in Monroe needs to be improved
- There are formal and informal social safety nets that ensure no one falls through the cracks – they need support
- More and better housing choices and opportunities are needed
- Housing redevelopment areas need to be identified and addressed to revitalize neighborhoods
- The community has so many assets, should have a better sense of self-esteem and positive identity

The result is the following goal statement and accompanying objectives.

Goal 4 – Safety, Security & Livability

The City of Monroe will be safe and secure for residents and visitors.

Objective 1. To increase preparedness for man-made and natural disasters

Objective 2. To provide a network engaging residents and professionals in public safety

Objective 3. To engage the entire community in addressing substandard housing and long waiting lists for housing in the community

Objective 4. To engage local religious, cultural and educational institutions to increase understanding and empathy in the community

Objective 5. To develop and implement a cohesive and efficient land use pattern that ensures compatibility and functional relationships among land uses

Objective 6.   To engage social service agencies to coordinate the delivery of services to impoverished individuals and families in a manner that encourages and assists them in achieving self-sufficiency

Objective 7.   To promote, support and celebrate neighborhoods

2.2.2.5   Rivers & Bayous

The public input on rivers and bayous revealed these as the most prevalent themes:
- The Ouachita River is an important opportunity for transportation, economic development and leisure
- The river is "liquid gold"
- Flooding and flood control are priorities locally
- Downtown, trees, the river, bayous – all are important local assets
- Wetlands and waterways need to be preserved and protected

The result is the following goal statement and accompanying objectives.

Goal 5 – Rivers & Bayous

> *Water is a defining feature of the City. The City's waterways will be restored as a source of pride, vitality and enjoyment for the City's residents and visitors.*

Objective 1.   To celebrate the City's history and culture as a riverfront community in the Southern United States

Objective 2.   To incorporate flood protection with access for recreation, relaxation and rejuvenation

Objective 3.   To participate in the multijurisdictional revitalization of the Ouachita River as a transportation corridor for commerce and recreation

Objective 4.   To protect and enhance the water quality of the Ouachita River, local bayous, other waterways and bodies of water

Objective 5.   To increase opportunities for enjoyment and leisure in the City's waterways, greenway parks and open spaces

2.3 Policies

The policies for the comprehensive plan are based upon the goals and objectives and are applied to all of the elements of the comprehensive plan adding administration as the lead element. The purpose of this is to ensure that the policies reflect the goals and objectives that are themselves based upon the public's input into the planning process. The policy development strategy of including policies for each element of the plan ensures the goals and objectives are fairly and comprehensively represented throughout so that the recommendations which follow will be similarly all-inclusive.

2.3.1 Administration Policies

As it seeks to implement the actions necessary to realize its vision of the future as expressed by the Comprehensive Plan, the City should be guided by the following policies which are designed to provide a framework for addressing the actions recommended by the Plan as well as actions that are proposed and implemented in the future.

ADM Policy 1. The City of Monroe government should continue to evaluate its charter for its effectiveness

ADM Policy 2. The City of Monroe should use its Comprehensive Plan to leverage state support for local projects and programs

ADM Policy 3. The Comprehensive Plan should be adopted and implemented

ADM Policy 4. Revisions, amendments and deletions of Goals, Objectives and Policies or to the Comprehensive Plan itself should be identified and recommended through a defined process of review and updating which includes all stakeholders with referrals to the City Council for deliberation and possible action

ADM Policy 5. Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan should be coordinated by the Planning Commission with appropriate boards and commissions developing implementation strategies and actions

ADM Policy 6. The City should strive to ensure all departments:

- Have adequate safe and secure space in which to conduct their business
- Are located for ease of access by the public
- Provide an atmosphere of professionalism that instills pride in city government and the important work of the city government

2.3.2 Regional Context Policies

In order to understand the City of Monroe it is important to understand the region of which it is the hub, socially, politically and geophysically. The Regional Context Policies set the stage for increasing understanding, cooperation and collaboration among communities in Northeast Louisiana.

RC Policy 1. The qualities that make Monroe and northeast Louisiana unique should be leveraged to advance the region as a whole

RC Policy 2. The City of Monroe and the neighboring communities within Northeastern Louisiana should cooperate fully in the protection and revitalization of the region's natural resources

RC Policy 3. The City of Monroe should support the planning activities of neighboring jurisdictions

RC Policy 4. The City of Monroe and other communities within Northeastern Louisiana should seek to identify ways to link their roads, trails, parks and open spaces

2.3.3 Community Character Policies

Monroe was part of the Louisiana Purchase and was originally an element of the Territory of New Orleans. Originally known as Fort Miro, it was renamed Monroe in 1819 to honor President James Monroe – one of the negotiators of the Louisiana Purchase. It is very evocative of the Southern United States but unique in its relationship to the Ouachita River to its west and the vast agricultural area on the Mississippi River alluvial plain to its east. As it seeks revitalization, the character of the community should be preserved. The Community Context Policies seek to help the community do so.

CC Policy 1.   The pattern of development in the City of Monroe should rely upon and be guided by the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Plan to preserve the character of the community

CC Policy 2.   Neighborhood development should reinforce and be guided by the character of the existing land use patterns and architectural styles

CC Policy 3.   The City's appearance is critical to its vitality, and the zoning, nuisance property condition and property maintenance ordinances and regulations should be enforced effectively to maintain the City's beauty, instill pride in its surroundings and ensure safety

CC Policy 4.   The City should develop mechanisms to ensure that future development enhances and preserves the existing character of the community

2.3.4 Land Use Policies

The City is responsible for guiding growth and development within its boundaries. It exercises this responsibility by shaping the types, locations and densities of land uses within its boundaries through the Comprehensive Plan and the related documents that directly guide land uses: The Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances. Development proposals are expected to be in compliance with and support the City's adopted regulations. The Land Use Policies set the context for adoption and enforcement of development regulations.

LU Policy 1.   Each development proposal should be reviewed in a timely and professional manner based upon its compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and existing zoning and the scope of its environmental and economic impact throughout the community

LU Policy 2.   The aesthetic character of the City should be preserved and enhanced through comprehensive land use regulations including design standards

LU Policy 3.   Residential and commercial development should be consistent with availability of infrastructure resources and the limitations of the natural resources

LU Policy 4.   The City should develop an integrated approach to return vacant infill areas and tax delinquent and/or dilapidated housing stock to commercial viability, which may include the acquisition and transfer of these properties by a public entity to private owners including the adjacent homeowners

LU Policy 5.   The City should regulate areas prone to dramatic flooding and consider limiting development on them

LU Policy 6.   Balanced and strategic infill development should be encouraged in city neighborhoods

2.3.5 Housing Policies

Monroe offers a range of residential choices from its beautiful and historic garden district to suburban style homes and modest homes typical of the south. However, there is inadequate housing for lower-income and special needs population. The lack of housing, a long waiting list for public housing and dilapidated condition of some of the community's housing reflects poorly on the community as a whole. Monroe has the opportunity to become a leader in housing for low income and special needs populations, including using infill development to revitalize neighborhoods. The housing policies are designed to help guide the City's housing efforts in helping to ensure a range of housing choices including housing for low- and fixed-income and special needs renters and owners through workforce and moderate housing to luxury and executive homes.

HSG Policy 1.   The City should closely track its population change to:
- Ensure that adequate housing opportunities for all residents are provided
- Assure adequate levels of service
- Deliver adequate public services
- Generate employment opportunities to meet the needs of residents
- Ensure adequate transportation planning.

HSG Policy 2.   Development of affordable and diverse housing types should be encouraged, including, single-family homes, multi-family homes, townhouses, apartments and condominiums

HSG Policy 3.   Homeownership should be promoted, encouraged and sustained

HSG Policy 4.   All new housing, including that for lower- and middle-income and special needs owners and renters, should adhere to the highest possible standards of planning, design and construction

HSG Policy 5.   New housing should be energy efficient in its design and retrofits for existing housing should be available and affordable

HSG Policy 6.   Maintenance standards for existing housing stock should be encouraged and incentives for their implementation developed

HSG Policy 7.   To the greatest extent possible, historic residential structures in the community should be inventoried and a plan formulated for their continued protection, preservation and revitalization

HSG Policy 8.   Infill neighborhood development should be encouraged

HSG Policy 9.   Housing for lower- and moderate-income and special needs families and individuals should be fully integrated into the community-at-large

HSG Policy 10. The City's affordable housing agencies and developers should work together to aggressively address the need for public and private subsidized housing in the community

HSG Policy 11. The City should continue to aggressively address deteriorated and dilapidated houses in the community

HSG Policy 12. The City should work with surrounding communities to ensure that emergency shelter is available throughout the region – not just in Monroe

HSG Policy 13. The City should formulate a balanced structure of sales and ad valorem taxes to generate the revenue required to reliably provide the type and level of service required and expected by the citizens of the City of Monroe

2.3.6 Economic Vitality Policies

Monroe is strategically located in Northeast Louisiana within reach of Texas, Mississippi and Arkansas. While it has successfully positioned itself as a regional center for retailing, it has fallen behind in population and job growth. Leaders are focusing on connecting the City's educational resources to one another and to the business community as just one way to spur economic growth. Downtown revitalization is another of many avenues of economic development also being pursued. The economic vitality policies will help Monroe practice economic development creatively and effectively to increase wealth and well-being in the community.

EV Policy 1. Strategies to assist and support local entrepreneurs should be identified and pursued

EV Policy 2. A diverse economic base should be developed to maintain a stable economy

EV Policy 3. Opportunities for public-private partnerships to implement development projects should be identified and pursued

EV Policy 4. Regional economic development agencies should cooperate fully to ensure that all avenues of economic development are pursued to increase wealth and opportunity in the community

EV Policy 5. The region's institutions of higher learning are economic development, cultural and educational assets to the community and they should be included in efforts to enhance the vitality of the City

EV Policy 6. The City should continue its efforts to revitalize the downtown with an enhanced riverfront

EV Policy 7. The economic development potential of heritage and cultural tourism development should be explored

EV Policy 8. The City should develop an identity and shape marketing and job creation strategies accordingly

2.3.7 Environment Policies

Monroe is defined by the beauty of its natural landscape: The Mississippi River alluvial plane to its east, the bayou and river wending their way through the city, Black Bayou Lake, a unique natural resource of unparalleled beauty and critical to the City's supply of fresh drinking water. Protecting these resources is important to the sustainability of the community. The Environmental Resources Policies guide sound decision-making and sustainable practices to preserve the City's environment and natural resources now and for generations to come.

ENV Policy 1. The City should consider the cumulative impacts of land use and policy decisions on the environment and strive to balance them with the other goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan

ENV Policy 2. Cooperation and coordination among communities in Ouachita Parish should be encouraged to preserve the quality and quantity of the aquifer and surface and ground water

ENV Policy 3. Appropriate steps should be taken to protect the community from flooding and other natural hazards

ENV Policy 4. Potential air and noise impacts should be monitored and mitigated to protect the safety and well being of residents

ENV Policy 5. To the greatest extent possible, existing healthy trees in the community should be persevered and protected and replacements promptly planted when they cannot be saved.

ENV Policy 6. Monroe should develop and maintain storm water regulations

ENV Policy 7. The City should ensure new development meets or exceeds Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and state standards in designated floodplains

2.3.8 Transportation Policies

The City's transportation system has been altered significantly from its original grid design. It conflicts with the railroad, contains confusing areas with poor wayfinding and while overbuilt in some areas, is under built in others. The Transportation Policies are designed to guide appropriate development of the City's transportation system so it serves residents and visitors.

TRN Policy 1. Roads in Monroe should be designed, constructed and maintained at levels that ensure the safe and efficient movement of people and goods

TRN Policy 2. The City's circulation system should be designed to provide access to all segments of the population

TRN Policy 3. Rail crossing conflicts with the street system in the City should be addressed

TRN Policy 4. Street lighting and sign controls should be appropriate to achieve maximum street safety while minimizing light pollution

TRN Policy 5. Streets and roads should be developed at a scale appropriate to the adjacent land uses

TRN Policy 6. Sidewalks should be developed throughout Monroe

TRN Policy 7. Alleys should be enhanced for pedestrian and bicycle circulation

TRN Policy 8. Monroe should continue to maintain and enhance its public transit system to benefit all residents in need of transportation and to save energy

TRN Policy 9. Monroe's public transportation system should be part of a wider, regional network to move people conveniently and affordably around northeast Louisiana

TRN Policy 10. Greenway trails, walking trails and bike paths should be developed to enhance the quality of life, link the City's amenities to one another and provide a healthful alternative to car travel

2.3.9 Infrastructure and Utilities

Infrastructure is quite literally the backbone of the community and its condition, operations, distribution system and aesthetics can define the livability of the City. Facilities and services must be in a timely and fiscally responsible manner. The utilities policies set the framework for ensuring service delivery.

UT Policy 1. The City of Monroe should continue to monitor and upgrade its sanitary sewer system

UT Policy 2. The City's storm water system should be addressed

UT Policy 3. Planned improvements to the City's water treatment and pumping system should be implemented

UT Policy 4. The water distribution system should be upgraded

UT Policy 5. When economically feasible, conversion of existing overhead utilities systems to underground systems should be encouraged

UT Policy 6. Infrastructure investment sets the stage for private development and should be a priority

UT Policy 7. Wireless internet and cellular services should continue to be expanded to serve the entire city

2.3.10 Community Facilities Policies

Community facilities help protect the health and safety of the City's residents and educate and prepare citizens for their own and the community's future. Community facilities are integral to the overall health and vitality of the community. The community facilities policies encourage vision, foresight, collaboration and cooperation in the provision of the facilities and services they provide.

CF Policy 1. Educational institutions and the City government should work together to pursue their shared goals and meet the needs of residents and businesses

CF Policy 2. Emergency services personnel (police and fire) should be maintained at a level that is adequate to protect residents and businesses

CF Policy 3. Cooperation and coordination between governmental units should be promoted and encouraged in the provision of public facilities and services

CF Policy 4. Public facilities should be developed, improved and maintained according to high standards of design and performance, to serve as examples for private development

CF Policy 5. Public structures and civic facilities should be provided to meet the needs of the community and support economic development

2.3.11 Parks and Recreation Policies

The City's parks and recreation facilities and programs are central to its quality of life, social infrastructure, educational system and economic vitality. The parks and recreation policies are designed to help the City provide, maintain and enhance open space and recreation facilities and programs adequate for all ages and income levels.

P&R Policy 1. A mechanism should be put in place to assess existing and future needs for parks and recreational facilities and programs

P&R Policy 2. On-going citizen participation should be encouraged in planning, development and operation of recreational facilities and programs

P&R Policy 3. An appropriate balance of active, passive and cultural recreation areas and programs providing year-round offerings, should be maintained and encouraged

P&R Policy 4. The City should maintain and revitalize its parks and recreation facilities through a planned and coordinated program

P&R Policy 5. The City should develop access to the Ouachita River and Bayou DeSiard for recreation

P&R Policy 6. The City's amenities, including parks and waterfront, should be linked by trials and greenways offering spaces for outdoor activity and access throughout the City

P&R Policy 7. There should be marinas on the Ouachita River in the City

P&R Policy 8. The City should ensure that parkland is not converted to other uses without providing a replacement in kind

P&R Policy 9. The City should maintain and promote the Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo as a regional amenity and attraction

P&R Policy 10. Playgrounds, pocket parks and play structures should be located in close proximity to all the City's neighborhoods

2.3.12 Historic and Cultural Resources Policies

Historic and cultural resources impact the spirit and personality of the city. Preservation and understanding of them help guide the future vision for the City's design. Preservation secures the legacy of the City for future generations. Monroe's historic and cultural policies help the City retain this legacy and their social, economic development and educational benefits.

HCR Policy 1. Support for existing cultural institutions and programs should be maintained and or expanded to the greatest extent possible under the applicable circumstances

HCR Policy 2. Opportunities to celebrate the City's historic legacy through the visual and performing arts should be encouraged

HCR Policy 3. Cooperation among the City's cultural agencies and with those in the region should be encouraged for the benefit of all

HCR Policy 4. Whenever possible, alternatives to demolition of architecturally significant structures should be identified and implemented, including adaptive reuse strategies

HCR Policy 5. Interpretation of the City's history should be inclusive of its founding to the present

HCR Policy 6. The City's downtown is architecturally, culturally and historically significant and it should be revitalized and enhanced in this context