

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS: **Carbondale Comprehensive Plan**

The Carbondale Comprehensive Plan was prepared by Camiros, Ltd., a planning consulting firm from Chicago, along with Hanson Engineers, Inc. and was adopted on April 29, 1997. As part of the planning process which created the Comprehensive Plan, an Advisory Committee was formed and included a representative from the Preservation Commission and from Carbondale Main Street. By introduction, the Comprehensive Plan states: "This Comprehensive Plan considers the past, present and future of Carbondale, Illinois and its surrounding planning area." The Comprehensive Plan goes on to state that:

"There is a sense of pride in the citizens who live in this community. Residents recognize the qualities that make life in Carbondale good. These qualities, which set Carbondale apart from other cities, are what this plan seeks to preserve and enhance—Community Character, Neighborhoods, Natural Features, and Transportation."

While the Comprehensive Plan offers no strong statements about historic preservation, it does focus on issues which touch upon historic preservation, i.e. the community character and neighborhoods, which are so highly regarded by its citizens. The Plan describes the vision, goals, and objectives for the future of Carbondale, and clear within that vision are aspects of community growth which relate to historic preservation. These aspects of the future of Carbondale should be examined by the Preservation Commission for anticipation of their potential effects on historic resources in the community.

One of the key areas which is recognized by the Plan and relates to historic preservation is the issue of infill housing. As the Plan notes, "Because the growth of the City is not substantial, an increase in land areas will not be needed. Instead, the development of the City should be focused more to the interior of the community, developing vacant parcels of land." As these vacant tracts can occur within historic areas—areas potentially eligible for recognition as historic districts or neighborhood preservation districts—the prospect of active development of infill housing poses changes for these historic neighborhoods. The ability of the Preservation Commission to propose local designations for as many districts as possible will be key to the protection of these areas. Infill housing could do much to strengthen housing stock (new and old) in these areas, but some level of design review will ensure compatible new construction.

The Comprehensive Plan also points out that Carbondale's senior population is expected to double over the next thirty years, requiring an increased demand for retirement housing. This increased demand could also be coupled with a change in neighborhood characteristics, with long-time occupants moving out of older neighborhoods to specialized senior housing. Again, the designation of districts will establish some level of consistency in neighborhoods where population changes may occur.

Housing is another focus of the Comprehensive Plan. Single family homes constitute almost 40% of the City's housing stock, but home owner occupancy is substantially less at 29%. By comparison, the average for owner-occupied housing in the State of Illinois is 64.2% and for Jackson County, 52.7%. In discussing "A Vision for Carbondale," particularly "Community Character," the Plan

states that many citizens describe Carbondale as having “small town character.” The Plan goes on to state:

“What is central to this “small town character” is the neighborhoods within Carbondale. They provide a network of friendship and support. Over the years, the quality of some housing has begun to decrease and the character of certain neighborhoods has changed from single family homes to apartments and rental units. This change has begun to affect those neighborhoods and the lives of the people who live there.”

Where rental housing, particularly conversion from single family to multi-family, has adversely affected potential historic districts and neighborhood preservation districts, the Preservation Commission may wish to work with the City in examining how special incentives for the conversion of rental housing to owner-occupied housing may help improve these areas. Incentives should be keyed to properties which are designated locally, either as landmarks, historic districts, or neighborhood preservation districts. (See Section IV. *Recommendations: Incentives for Historic Preservation* for additional information.)

“Significant Policies and Programs,” which are outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, include (Chapter 4) the encouragement of the establishment of neighborhood associations for each neighborhood. The Preservation Commission could assist with fostering neighborhood pride through education and awareness programs. Also included in the Comprehensive Plan is the recommendation that the City pursue rigorous code enforcement, a policy which could be good, and bad, for historic preservation. The Comprehensive Plan states that code enforcement can “help with the problems of overcrowding and conversion of neighborhoods into high density residential areas . . . provides an opportunity to control and deal with the problems associated with inattentive land owners.” While this is generally a good policy, it could ultimately result in historic properties being abandoned or demolished due to rigorous code enforcement. This policy should be coupled with special code provisions for historic buildings and with incentives for the conversion of multi family housing back to single family/owner-occupied dwellings. (See Section IV. *Recommendations: Technical Preservation Assistance* for additional information.)

Downtown was another focus of the Comprehensive Plan. One of the findings initiated from the community-wide public meetings, which were held as part of the planning process, was that the downtown should be strengthened as a focal point for the community. At focus group meetings, downtown revitalization again was addressed as a way to expand the economic base of Carbondale. “This area is what helps to establish the character of the community and participants felt that the area should be preserved.” Again, the designation of as many districts and local landmarks as possible will do much to preserve existing character. The promotion of existing incentives, which are available to income-producing properties and pre-1936 commercial properties, could also encourage proper renovation of downtown properties. (See Section IV. *Recommendations: Incentives for Historic Preservation* for additional information.)

While the Comprehensive Plan includes no policies which are obviously in contrast to historic preservation, it does not include any strong statements specifically about the importance of historic preservation. This Preservation Plan should be adopted by the City Council as the official historic preservation policy of the City of Carbondale. In addition, specific recommendations included in the Preservation Plan may be integrated into the City's Comprehensive Plan where appropriate. For example, the recommendation of developing incentives for the conversion of rental housing to owner-occupied housing may be included in the Housing section of the Comprehensive Plan.

Recommendations

- The City Council should adopt this Preservation Plan as the official historic preservation policy of the City of Carbondale and incorporate appropriate recommendations into the City's Comprehensive Plan.
- Copies of the Preservation Plan should be provided to City departments, commissions, and county and regional planning agencies, accompanied by a notice that it represents the City's official historic preservation policy.
- Copies of the Preservation Plan should be provided for distribution to the general public, including the Carbondale Public Library, Jackson County Historical Society, Southern Illinois University, etc., accompanied by a notice that it represents the City's official historic preservation policy.
- The Preservation Commission should rigorously pursue listing historic districts and neighborhood preservation districts to stabilize the City's historic neighborhoods.
- The Preservation Commission should encourage the City to adopt incentives for the return of multi-family housing to single family residences and owner-occupied dwellings. Any such program(s) should be keyed to local designation of such properties.