

Visioning Summary

Community visioning sessions were held in three locations throughout the city during January and February 2018. The purpose of the sessions was two-fold: to introduce the community to the comprehensive planning process and to initiate dialogue about the future of the city. The meetings were held in disparate parts of the city to make it convenient for residents to participate. The planning team posed several open-ended questions to participants to get a sense of which aspects of the city they value the most, which conditions they are most concerned with, and how Hoover can evolve to reach the potential that the community perceives for the city.

PURPOSE

Meeting participants were asked to name the reasons they live, work or have invested in Hoover. Their answers indicate the purpose Hoover serves in the lives of its residents and businesses.

Most people have chosen to live in Hoover because it is a good, safe place to raise a family with quality schools, neighborhoods and green space. You can find a good home for a reasonable price. It is diverse yet there is a sense of community that binds people together. Jobs and healthcare are available in and around Hoover.

ASSETS

Meeting attendees were asked about what they considered assets of Hoover—those special features they hold in especially high regard and that set the community apart from other places.

Hoover is centrally located within the region and metro area. The city features great views and nearby parks, golf courses and natural spaces like Moss Rock Preserve, Shades Mountain and the Cahaba River. Beautiful neighborhoods are nestled in Hoover's a diverse natural landscape. There is a strong sense of community; and residents take pride in their homes. An abundance of goods and services are available in the city. Residents love the library, recreation center and schools and feel well-protected by the police and fire departments. The city keeps its roads better condition than in neighboring areas.

ISSUES

Meeting participants were asked to identify city conditions that are not up to standard.

The city's continuing growth and its effects on city schools and traffic are top concerns for residents. Natural areas are being lost to new business developments while existing shopping areas are declining—storefronts are empty or converting to lower tier businesses—such as in Bluff Park and along Highway 31. As a result of limited reinvestment older commercial areas are beginning to show their age; and some take issue with the aesthetics of newer commercial development. Proliferation of business signage is negatively impacting community appearance.

Residents are frustrated with limited connectivity in the road network, however, one road project—to connect Ross Bridge to the Shades Crest Road area—has been met with contention. Combined with limited road connectivity, a lack of access roads (on major arteries) and other access management efforts have allowed traffic congestion to worsen over time. Major roads are experiencing increasing wear and tear from heavy truck traffic. Litter is seen as a problem on some major roads.

Residents feel there is not enough street lighting or sidewalks in neighborhoods, and available sidewalks are not well-connected. Hoover does not have a network of greenways or other off-street walking and biking facilities.

Flooding and drainage issues are impacting some areas. There are issues with water and sewer services and rates—Hoover is served by multiple water and sewer utilities.

Some residents yearn for more city facilities—and equitable distribution, such as in easternmost Hoover—like libraries, parks, and community and arts centers. Hoover does not have a downtown or a central location with public space for parades and other civic events. The community wants to see the Hoover Met achieving greater potential. Others are concerned with the uncertain future of the former Bluff Park Elementary School, which has housed the Artists on the Bluff organization, Hoover Historical Society and the Folklore Center.

Many are concerned with increased density and the impact of aging multifamily housing, concentrated mostly in one part of the city, on area schools. At the same time, residents note the lack of affordable for-sale housing such as townhomes, for recent college graduates, young professionals and empty nesters.

More communication and transparency from the City is desired, particularly around spending and use of tax incentives for development. There is also a perceived lack of cooperation among local governments.

OUTSIDE FORCES

There are always factors not subject to local control—influences and trends may operate at county, regional, state or national levels—that affect every community, each in its own way.

The Amazon effect—a decline in brick and mortar retail as online commerce increases—could have a significant impact on Hoover, which is home to a high concentration of retailers—an important part of the city’s revenue stream. Because the economy—nationally and internationally—has become increasingly oriented around technology, urban and suburban communities are competing for industries that can lead their economies into the future. The state is considering an internet sales tax that some argue would increase state coffers disproportionately over cities as they watch their retail economies decline.

Young tech-savvy millennials, who are the workforce for emerging industries, are looking for amenities and environments that are more diverse and more urban than Hoover offers, including more walkable and bicycle-friendly neighborhoods and business districts.

Hoover households are aging, and older residents have only limited options to stay in the city. Meanwhile, these older residents are selling their homes to newcomers, which is changing neighborhoods physically and socially.

Hoover has little control over the water and sewer systems that residents depend on, and over which several raised concern. City government also does not have control over local schools, an amenity for which many residents chose to live in Hoover. The ALDOT has control over several of Hoover’s major roadways, e.g., I-65, I-459, US 31, US 280, AL 150 and AL 119. Limited cooperation and communication between Hoover and other area governments continued to impact the success of Hoover and the metropolitan area.

Some nearby suburbs are perceived to have been more selective about growth and annexation, increasing demand in Hoover where land is available for residential development. At the same time, growth in communities south of Hoover are driving up congestion on major roads through Hoover.

Flooding and severe weather is increasing, which must be accounted for in the city's planning.

SACRED

Participants were asked to name community features that are essential to Hoover's sense of place and need to be protected.

The library, school system, senior center and police and fire departments are critical to Hoover's identity. So too are the Cahaba River, Shades Mountain and Moss Rock Preserve. Many residents want natural areas and trees protected as the city evolves, including capping population density as it is today. Others felt the diversity, history and eclectic character of communities like Bluff Park are essential to Hoover's sense of place. In particular, the arts community centered around Bluff Park must not be lost.

Some see the Galleria, the StarDome Comedy Club, Aldridge Gardens and area golf courses as being important to Hoover's character. Others noted the importance of sports and local traditions such as I Love Hoover Day and the City Hall Christmas Tree.

VISION

Town Meeting participants were asked to imagine Hoover as they would like it to be in twenty years. After a moment to fix this vision in their minds, attendees were asked to name one significant physical aspect of that future community that is absent from Hoover today.

Meeting participants envision a future Hoover that is more walkable and more bike-able—with a pedestrian-friendly downtown (or multiple smaller downtowns in different parts of the city), more sidewalks, bike paths and greenways. They also see public transportation linking the various parts of the city. Strategic road connections will improve mobility and reduce traffic congestion.

They foresee more cultural attractions and amenities, such as a museum, arts center, farmers' market, brewery/entertainment district, convention center, ice skating and a minor league team. There would be additional libraries, parks and a new high school (or two!). Hoover will attract a four-year college focused on science, math, engineering and technology (STEM). The Hoover Met will evolve, hosting regional and national events.

That future Hoover will have more small businesses that were cultivated in Hoover. Redevelopment will create business areas that are accessible on foot or bike, well-planned and fully occupied. High rise development suitable to tech companies will create a more fully-formed city skyline. The city will remain diverse as it continues to grow. A community "like Bluff Park" will develop along the Cahaba River. Older neighborhoods will be vibrant, and there will be affordable, comfortable places for older residents to "age-in-place."

Attendees want Hoover to have a stronger brand that sets it apart from everyone else.

THE WOW QUESTION

As the meetings concluded, participants were asked to choose a future change to Hoover that would impress them the most. Here is what they said:

- Mixed-use development with residential, retail, dining and recreation in one walkable place with a low environmental impact
- High school students attending school in their own community
- Beautiful views preserved
- History Center/Museum
- Cultural/Fine/Performing Arts Center
- More patrolling in neighborhoods
- Downtown/city center
- Planning and zoning that encourages commercial near residential, like Crestline or Edgewood
- Shades Crest Road without litter/garbage
- Hoover known for the number of scholars it produces rather than the number of football championships
- Bluff Park shopping center reinvested in, cleaned up
- Sidewalks, bike lanes and trails connecting communities
- Smart development – Hoover becomes a city of villages
- A beautiful city that retains value and pride
- A modern Hoover that has remained true to why people loved it originally
- A facility large enough to accommodate school plays, concerts and proms
- High caliber school administrators and athletic directors
- Hospital on west side of Hoover
- Large park with plenty of green space in east Hoover (280/Greystone)
- High rise district for STEM companies with luxury apartments
- Equality in schools
- A facility for civic meetings, rentals to groups
- A viable commercial center with gathering space / entertainment district
- Cooperation with other cities, county and state
- No trees cut until empty buildings are filled
- 50% of Hoover electricity comes from renewables
- More green spaces with natural surfaces that are easier to walk/bike on than concrete
- Cohesive local, neighborhood, community “village” centers with mix of residential and commercial
- Planned [well-managed] development, not unbridled growth led by developers
- Honda technology offices
- Capers back on the Bluff
- Traffic solution on 280

Visioning Session 1 – Greystone Elementary School, January 26

PURPOSE – Why do you live, work or invest in Hoover?

- People with similar interests, values
- Schools
- Community
- Lower taxes
- Best, affordable housing choice
- Best deal
- Unique
- Family-oriented
- Healthcare
- Quality of life

ASSETS – What characteristics of the City meet or exceed your own personal standards?

- Shopping
- Security (police & fire protection)
- School system
- Library
- Landscape
- Road conditions
- Accessible/central location
- Center of four automotive manufacturers
- Beauty of neighborhood
- Golf
- Parks

ISSUES – What characteristics of the City do not meet your own personal standards?

- Traffic
- Not enough facilities on east side, like library, feel neglected
- Sewer system
- 31 to Galleria unattractive, showing its age
- Lack of lighting on major roads (Birmingham, especially)
- No community meeting space
- Lack of townhomes for certain age/economic groups
- Lack of consistent, quality business appearance, aesthetics
- Multifamily adding to traffic
- Litter along roads

OUTSIDE FORCES – What external influences or trends do you foresee that may impact Hoover, for better or worse, in the future?

- Amazon effect
- Online sales tax
- Charter Schools?

- Too many jurisdictions, poor communication
- Changing family dynamics
- Drugs
- Turnover in homes as existing residents age
- Young and old generation transition

SACRED – What features of the city are sacred, or essential to Hoover’s sense of place, and should be protected or retained?

- Schools and school bus system
- Golf course
- Moss Rock/Veterans Park
- Galleria
- StarDome Comedy Club
- Library
- City Hall Christmas Tree

VISION – What is missing today from Hoover that you foresee in your own personal vision for the community?

- Blank spots filled in
- Downtown Hoover/City Center (Tech/Stem)
- Library (on east side)
- Community center
- Public Park – More community down 119/Pavilion
- 280/119 Missed Opportunity
- Chastain Park/Dog Park
- Economic development, vertical towers for tech companies and workers, etc.
- Public transportation
- Autonomous vehicles
- Conventions
- Bike lanes, sidewalks
- More sports and park areas for community
- Accidents resolved more quickly (traffic)
- Additional north-south route
- Cahaba Beach Road/Grants Mill connection
- Hoover Met hosting regional/national events, continuing to evolve

Visioning Session 2 – Shades Crest Baptist Church, January 30

PURPOSE – Why do you live, work or invest in Hoover?

- Better situation/education
- Police
- School system
- Socially diverse
- Church
- Neighborhood
- Proximity to medical
- Community atmosphere
- From here
- Place to raise kids
- Unique
- Always something exciting
- Newer, bigger home
- Green space
- Great community support

ASSETS – What characteristics of the City meet or exceed your own personal standards?

- Close to everything
- Clean air
- Views (e.g., Shades Crest, Cahaba River)
- Moss Rock Preserve
- Proximity (though somewhat isolated)
- Library
- Fire protection
- Recreation center
- No need to leave the City for goods and services

ISSUES – What characteristics of the City do not meet your own personal standards?

- Development, increasing density
- Lack of green space
- No town center
- Empty storefronts
- Lack of communication with residents
- Lack of transparency on spending
- Lack of sidewalks, sidewalk connectivity
- Lack of street lighting
- Road conditions (e.g., Oxmoor)
- No fine arts infrastructure
- Use of sidewalks
- Neighboring cities
- Traffic

- Quality of development on Hwy 150
- Irresponsible growth, need third high school
- Bluff Park shopping centers
- Use of The Met
- Vehicular connectivity (e.g., high school has only one way in-one way out)
- Heavy trucks wearing out major roads
- Need more police patrolling in neighborhoods (e.g., back of Russet Woods)
- Continued development while older commercial buildings are empty
- Old zoning
- Tax incentives not used responsibly
- History not promoted (94 year old school)
- Destruction of green space
- Signage
- Width of streets
- Drainage
- Pawn shops on Hwy 31
- Arts, Bluff Park Art Show without home
- Proposed road connecting Ross Bridge to Shade Crest Road on mountain
- Potential loss of green space, development on slope of Shades Mountain
- Bluff Park Art Show/Loss of history, school

OUTSIDE FORCES – What external influences or trends do you foresee impact Hoover, for better or worse, in the future?

- Homewood, Vestavia, Mountain Brook – how does their control over growth impact Hoover
- Consolidation of retail
- ALDOT
- Competition from other places
- Water and sewer utilities
- Landowners selling
- Internet sales tax
- Growth in Downtown Birmingham offers amenities that draw people from Hoover
- Loss of school teachers
- New shopping facilities built while older strip shopping areas declines

SACRED – What features of the city are sacred, or essential to Hoover’s sense of place, and should be protected or retained?

- Bluff Park School/Art Association
- Residences of Shades Mountain
- Cahaba River
- Schools
- Moss Rock Preserve
- City facilities
- Restoration of facilities

- Library
- Sense of community (e.g., Bluff Park)
- International Baccalaureate Program at Hoover High
- Natural areas, green spaces, trees
- Identity/sense of place
- Density
- Diversity of residents
- Trees taller than homes

VISION – What is missing today from Hoover that you foresee in your own personal vision for the community?

- Better planning for commercial areas
- Dog park
- Cultural center
- Library
- City center
- Performing arts center
- Fourth high school (third needed now)
- Good water system
- Bicycle paths
- A community like Bluff Park developed along Cahaba River
- Public transportation within Hoover
- Small business development
- Co-working spaces for startup businesses
- Walkability to goods and services
- Fully-occupied retail space
- Redevelopment
- Branding
- Shades Mountain
- Sidewalks
- Alternative to Shades Crest Road/Local Access DDS [sp?]

Visioning Session 3 – City Council Chambers, February 6

PURPOSE – Why do you live, work or invest in Hoover?

- Schools
- School bus system
- Housing
- Annexation (“Hoover came to us!”)
- Church
- All-American city
- Job

ASSETS – What characteristics of the City meet or exceed your own personal standards?

- Transparency
- Location/central location
- Proximity to goods and services
- Sense of community, relationships
- Diversity
- Schools
- School campuses
- Unique
- Hoover Public Library
- Proximity of parks & recreation
- Pride in the appearance/upkeep of homes
- Dog park
- Restaurants and stores

ISSUES – What characteristics of the City do not meet your own personal standards?

- Floods
- Roads and traffic safety
- Connection to other cities
- Communication with others/governments
- Lack of greenway(s)
- Few quality housing choices for recent college grads (detached homes too expensive, apartments are aging and unattractive)
- Sidewalks
- Street lights (e.g., Flair Knoll)
- Traffic (e.g., at I-459 & 65S, 65N & 31, Hwy 150, to Ross Bridge)
- Litter (e.g., Valleydale Road)
- Signage (size, number, appearance)
- Deterioration of business areas (increase in pawn shops)
- Deterioration of major corridors
- Lack of access roads for connectivity, traffic flow
- Lack of connectivity
- Lack of a main street/downtown/urban center to tie the city together

OUTSIDE FORCES – What external influences or trends do you foresee impact Hoover, for better or worse, in the future?

- Climate change (flooding and severe weather)
- Water and sewer rates
- Decline of brick and mortar retail, shift to online shopping
- Growth of Birmingham
- New companies, economic development
- Keeping work in Hoover over Birmingham
- Technology, banking and medical jobs
- Attracting people
- Turnover of in existing housing
- Increasing interest in transit and bicycling (lacking in Hoover)
- Median age in Hoover is relatively high, need housing choices/accommodations for aging population
- Electric vehicles, charging stations
- Growth in Chelsea, Sylacauga, etc. bringing more traffic
- Schools

SACRED – What features of the city are sacred, or essential to Hoover’s sense of place, and should be protected or retained?

- Schools
- Police and fire departments
- Library and theater
- StarDome Comedy Club
- Sense of community
- Moss Rock Preserve
- I Love Hoover Day/ Celebrate Hoover
- Football, baseball and other sports (including SEC Baseball Tournament)
- Senior Center
- Aldridge Gardens
- Art Shows (Moss Rock)

VISION – What is missing today from Hoover that you foresee in your own personal vision for the community?

- Greenway
- Arts venue (shared space)
- All facilities tied together with public transportation
- Affordable senior housing
- Four-year college extension (STEM – Auburn or Alabama)
- Downtown Hoover
- Walking trails and connections
- District with “city scape,” tall buildings
- Multiple connected downtowns

- Walkability
- Diversity
- Brewery – economic opportunity
- Farmers Market
- Improvements in older neighborhoods, sidewalks, lighting
- Cahaba River Greenway
- Cultural arts facility (able to host concerts, graduations, prom, etc.)
- Convention center
- Ice skating/hockey
- Minor League sports team
- Museum/visual arts center
- Population growth
- Branding, something to be known for (e.g., tech jobs)
- Draw to retain younger residents