

The Comprehensive Plan

- What It Is, What It Is Not, Why It Matters, and When to Update.

What a Comprehensive Plan IS

- A policy document required by Idaho Code §67-6508
- Zoning districts shall be in **accordance with the policies** set forth in the adopted comprehensive plan.” Idaho Code § 67-6511(1).
- Guides zoning, subdivision, and land use decisions
- Provides long-range (10-20 year) goals and direction
- Foundation for consistency and defensibility
- The comprehensive plan has one purpose and one purpose only: to guide planning and zoning decisions.
(Givens Pursley Land Use Handbook)

What a Comprehensive Plan IS NOT

- Not zoning or regulation
- Does not approve or deny projects
- Not self-executing
- Not permanent – update when necessary

What a Comprehensive Plan IS NOT

- The Idaho Supreme Court has emphasized repeatedly:

A comprehensive plan is not a legally controlling zoning law, it serves as a guide to local government agencies charged with making zoning decisions. The ‘in accordance with’ language of I.C. § 67-6511 **does not require zoning decisions strictly conform to the land use designations of the comprehensive plan.** However, a board of commissioners cannot ignore their comprehensive plan when adopting or amending zoning ordinances. (Givens Pursley Land Use Handbook)

Idaho Reality Check

- Plan age varies widely across counties
- No statutory required update cycle
- Sometimes all you need are targeted updates, not a full overhaul
- Is your plan easily available and able to locate for the public?
- Rewrites and updates are time consuming. In house or consultant?

Why Keeping the Plan "Current" Matters

- Growth patterns and service demands change
- Expectations around land use evolve
- Outdated plans can create inconsistency
- Current plans improve predictability and defensibility

When Should a County Update Its Plan?

- If sustained growth or development pressure changes the plans for the future
- If you have repeated rezones, code amendments, or zoning ordinance amendments
- If you are having a lot of appeals or legal challenges
- If there is misalignment between you plan and current practice

Key Takeaway

- Plans guide decisions, not outcomes
- Updates can be targeted and manageable
- A current plan strengthens local control
- A plan that changes too frequently undermines the long-range planning purpose of the plan.