

# WEST FLORENCE AREA PLAN

## SECTION 1: APPLICATION FORMS

*Documents attached*

## SECTION 2: PROJECT PROPOSAL SUMMARY

**PROJECT TITLE:**

West Florence Alive

**APPLICANT'S LEGAL NAME:**

City of Florence

**CONTACT/ADDRESS/TELEPHONE:**

City of Florence Planning & Development  
Mrs. Melissa H. Bailey  
P.O. Box 98  
Florence, AL 35631  
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**PROJECT AREA:**

West Florence, Alabama

**BASIC AGENCY:**

N/A

**GOAL/STRATEGY:**

Prepare a Specific Plan for West Florence as a detailing of the Comprehensive Plan with a specified scope of work. Plan will utilize a significant degree of public participation including a steering committee comprised of a small, but diverse and representative group of residents, landowners, and other interested parties from the planning area.

**PURPOSE:**

Prepare a Specific Plan for West Florence as a detailing of the Comprehensive Plan with a specified scope of work.

**FUNDING:**

	Amount	Percentage	Source
ARC	25,000.00	50%	
Local	25,000.00	50%	Cash
Total	50,000.00	100%	

**DESCRIPTION:**

The strategy for Florence is based on the strong value system expressed by local residents and the positive attitudes and responses they shared with one another during meetings held with the City while updating the Comprehensive Plan. The Florence Comprehensive Plan is based on the community's vision for its own future. The plan looks ahead, focuses on the physical form of the City, and strives to shape development of public and private properties within the Florence Planning area.

The West Florence area has been identified as one of the lower income areas of the City. West Florence borders the City's downtown area, which is a well integrated mixed-use center that is the symbolic heart of the community. If funded, this project will allow the City to coordinate and determine the organization and planning area boundaries that will affect this area; conduct an inventory of the planning area and immediate surroundings to supplement information from the Comprehensive Plan; evaluate the physical accessibility and City infrastructure that serves the planning area; and evaluate opportunities for economic and housing development.

The City of Florence Department of Planning, along with a citizen steering committee, the residents of West Florence, and interns from the University of North Alabama, will research, collect site inventory, and prepare a specific plan for West Florence. This plan will highlight the key concepts of the City's Comprehensive plan by identifying economic development opportunities, increasing green space, promoting safe neighborhoods, increasing mobility between destinations, and creating a strong sense of community.

**RATIONALE:**

- The City of Florence Comprehensive Plan identifies West Florence as an area with extreme blight. There are structures in disrepair, lack of access, and too many vacant homes, businesses and properties.
- West Florence has been identified as a high-priority need in the Comprehensive Plan and through the public involvement meetings.
- Growth is occurring within our City; long-range planning is the only way to secure orderly and appropriate development, particularly in areas of blight and economic distress. This approach will allow the City to establish a specific plan for the economic, physical, and social issues that currently affect West Florence.

**BENEFIT:**

- Recommend plans for accessibility of planning area; land development; public improvements; considerations for future land use; housing and economic development; infrastructure improvements. Present recommendations to steering committee and planning area residents; make adjustments accordingly. Prepare final plan; present to Planning Commission for adoption; City Council for ratification. Regular reappraisal of goals and objectives with the citizen steering committee will ensure that the plan is carried out successfully

- We expect to see clearly defined corridors from the edges of West Florence into the City's Downtown Area; the growth of businesses within West Florence through redevelopment plans of vacant homes. Business, and property; Residential development, supported by neighborhood centers, will be encouraged toward vacant property; and a strong sense of community relationship accompanied by an improved standard of living.

**OUTPUT/OUTCOMES:**

The Planning Staff will lead the citizen steering committee in a planning leadership workshop. This process will educate the group on planning fundamentals and carrying out the plan. Using GIS technology, the planning staff will update land use information regularly and compare over time. This evaluation will show property improvements through aerial photography and economic redevelopment through changes in land use. The staff will also monitor building permits and licenses for new and expanding businesses.

**MATCHING FUNDS:**

Local Cash

*See Attached Resolution*

**SUSTAINABILITY:**

The plan will be carried forth, monitored, and updated by the City of Florence Planning staff, Planning Commission, and City Council.

**SECTION 3: PROJECT NARRATIVE**

**GOALS & STRATEGIES:**

The goal of this project is to prepare a Long-Range Specific Plan for West Florence as a detailing of the Comprehensive Plan with a specified scope of work. The intention of this plan fits within the strategic goals that have been highlighted within the State of Alabama Annual Strategy Statement for fiscal year 2008. ARC Goal one, is identified as increasing job opportunities and per income in Appalachia to reach parity with the nation. Although Lauderdale County is not identified as a distressed county by the ARC, West Florence is as an area with extreme blight. There are structures in disrepair, lack of access, and too many vacant homes, businesses and properties. This Long-Range Plan will highlight the strategic objectives that have been identified in ARC Goal One:

- *State Strategy 1.1.2: Assist local communities to institute strategic planning and direction for future progress and improvement of their local economy,*

- *State Strategic 1.1.3: Support local efforts to form partnerships, both short-term and long-term, between local governments, nonprofit community-based groups, and private businesses for economic and community improvement.*

### **PURPOSE, DESCRIPTION, & RATIONALE:**

The strategy for Florence is based on the strong value system expressed by local residents and the positive attitudes and responses they shared with one another during meetings held with the City while updating the Comprehensive Plan. The Florence Comprehensive Plan is based on the community's vision for its own future. The plan looks ahead, focuses on the physical form of the City, and strives to shape development of public and private properties within the Florence Planning area.

The West Florence area has been identified as one of the lower income areas of the City. West Florence borders the City's downtown area, which is a well integrated mixed-use center that is the symbolic heart of the community. If funded, this project will allow the City to coordinate and determine the organization and planning area boundaries that will affect this area; conduct an inventory of the planning area and immediate surroundings to supplement information from the Comprehensive Plan; evaluate the physical accessibility and City infrastructure that serves the planning area; and evaluate opportunities for economic and housing development.

The City of Florence recognizes the importance of engaging residents and business and property owners in the specific plan process to develop consensus and to support plan implementation. Public involvement will consist of "town meetings" and planning workshops held in the study area. The recommended plans will be posted on the city's website and comment solicited. Area developers and builders will be invited to join in the process to assure practicality of revitalization recommendations. The project work will be placed into phases to follow a timeline from beginning to end and ensure proper project management. The following is a detailed timeline of the scope of work that will occur during this project.

### **PHASE ONE:**

The City of Florence along with a group of professional consultants will appoint a specific plan steering committee in cooperation with study area leaders. The consultants will be provided with GIS city files and the base information from the Comprehensive plan to determine the goals, objectives and strategies for the desired outcome that benefits the specific area. The consultant will review data with the city staff and prepare a specific plan base map set. The consultant, along with the project manager and interns from the University of North Alabama, will begin a community inventory and mapping analysis. The city and consultants will collaborate on schedule, goals and procedures for public involvement and project management. The consultant will conduct a kick-off meeting with city staff and the steering committee to discuss the progress and goals for the analysis and evaluation phase.

## **PHASE TWO:**

During the analysis and evaluation phase, the city department staff and interns will complete the study area inventory and forward the results to the consultant. The consultant will add the results to the base map set to determine specific goals, objectives and strategies for the final long-range plan. The consultant will conduct a meeting with city officials to discuss accessibility and infrastructure, economic, housing, and land-use development opportunities for the West Florence area. This information will be added to the base map and the consultants and city staff will review the study area opportunities in a leadership workshop with the steering committee.

## **PHASE THREE:**

During phase 3 of this project, the consultant will prepare for and conduct a planning leadership workshop in the form of a town meeting in the West Florence study area. Based on the findings from the planning leadership workshop, the consultant will prepare an overall recommended strategic concept for the study area in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. Once the findings have been reviewed by the steering committee, staff, and city officials, it will be posted on the city's website and common public areas within the city (i.e. library, city hall, recreation center in West Florence) to invite public review and comment. Based upon the responses from the review and comments, the consultant will prepare detailed recommendations regarding study area land use, accessibility, private reinvestment, and public improvements. Based on the responses, the consultant will assemble a recommended specific plan document that will be posted for public review and comment.

## **PHASE FOUR:**

The final phase, phase 4, will include the revision of the specific plan based on review and comment, public advertisement of the final plan, and recommendation for adoption to the city officials at a public hearing. Such recommendations may include changes to the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, or a combination thereof.

Upon adoption of the West Florence plan, it will become a part of the Florence Comprehensive Plan. As customary in Florence, the plan will be updated and refined as market or physical conditions shift, level of interest on the part of local citizens grows, or as the Planning Commission warrants. The project steering committee will remain as an integral part of the plan implementation process.

As growth occurs within our City, long-range planning is the only way to secure orderly and appropriate development, particularly in areas of blight and economic distress.

## **RELATION TO OTHER LOCAL/REGIONAL ACTIVITIES:**

The Florence Comprehensive Plan states the following regarding Specific Plans:

*Keeping the Comprehensive Plan up to date is also an important task. The plan will be refined and detailed from time to time through preparation and adoption of Specific Plans. This will continue Florence's tradition of updating and refining its plans through*

*special area studies and plans as market or physical conditions or level of interest on the part of local citizens or the Planning Commission warrants them. Through this extension of the planning process, city officials and staff, residents, property owners and developers may come together, accompanied by representatives of the county, state agencies and the University of North Alabama, as appropriate, to plan in more detail for the creative development, redevelopment or simply enhancement of such areas.*

*Specific Plans would serve to support and detail the Florence Comprehensive Plan. They would be used to guide planning and design of development within an area of interest—thematic or geographic. Geographic sub-areas of the city could be subject to specific plans to provide needed guidance to development or reinvestment. Sweet Water, Seven Points, **West Florence** and Veteran’s Park areas provide examples.*

Additionally, with virtually “one way in and one way out”, the movement of people, goods, and services remains as issue for the West Florence Area. For example, the Florence Sports Plex, a new \$9.0 million dollar facility, lies adjacent to West Florence. However, direct access by vehicle is difficult and no other mode of transportation is supported. One of the primary goals identified within the Comprehensive Plan is to construct a transportation access bridge from College Street to Highway 20 within the next 5 years.

#### **GEOGRAPHIC AREA:**

As stated previously, the West Florence area has been identified as one of the lower income areas of the City. West Florence borders the City’s downtown area, which is a well integrated mixed-use center that is the symbolic heart of the community. This is an area with extreme blight. There are structures in disrepair, lack of access, and too many vacant homes, businesses and properties.

According to the 2000 census, Data obtained from the United States Census Bureau (1999 and 2000) and The University of Alabama Center for Business and Economic Research for both the City of Florence and the West Florence areas also indicate that: 1) the City of Florence had a population of 36,264 people, 2,628 of which live in the West Florence study area, 2) based on the 2000 population data for the West Florence study area, 75% of the population is African American, 23% Caucasian, 1% Hispanic, and 1% Asian, and 3) the median family income by households for the West Florence area is \$13,488 versus \$40,577 in Florence proper.

*See Attached Map of Geographic Area.*

#### **BENEFITS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES:**

By developing a long-range plan for the West Florence area, we expect to accomplish:

- Clearly define gateways and neighborhood centers to emphasize a sense of place and community ownership.
- The growth of businesses within West Florence through redevelopment plans of vacant/abandoned homes, businesses, and property.

- Neighborhood centers, supported by a mixed use of residential, commercial, and service-related development, will be encouraged toward vacant/abandoned property.
- An Access Plan addressing all modes of transportation for the movement of people, goods, and services.
- Drafting land use policies and infrastructure plans to create physical environments ripe for development
- Utilization of the City's current One Stop Shop program to assist private investors in the development process.
- A strong sense of community relationship accompanied by an improved standard of living.

**AGENCY CAPACITY, STAFF & CONSULTANT QUALIFICATIONS, AND PROCUREMENT MEASURES:**

The City of Florence will manage this assessment grant through its Purchasing and Grant Administrations Department and the Planning Department. The Purchasing Director who has 30 years experience will monitor the performance of the grant and the Planning Director, along with the Land Development Planner, will manage the day-to-day assessment activities. Other City departments are to evaluate the work to ensure it meets the highest accounting, planning, and engineering standards. Florence has a long, successful history of receiving and managing local, state, and federal funds. Most recent history includes over \$8.0 million in Transportation Enhancement funds through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT). Independent audits have been performed with no negative findings before, during, and after the projects.

The City of Florence has a strong track record of receiving and managing federal funds, for a wide range of projects in compliance with federal accounting and reporting requirements including no adverse audit findings by local, state, or federal agencies. Florence has handled a variety of federal funds including, but not limited to:

- Appalachian Regional Commission
- Economic Development Administration (EDA) Funds
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Funds
- Water Conservation Act Funds
- Alabama Department of Transportation Funds
- Federal Highway Administration Funds
- Alabama Historical Commission Funds

In addition to the City of Florence Planning Department and Purchasing Department, a group of qualified consultants will assist with the preparation of the long-range plan. Qualifications include experience in organizing and implementing public participation and the preparation and execution of detailed plans for district

and neighborhood improvements at various scales for public agencies and private developers to assure practicality and the ability to meet public goals and objectives.

The Consultant has prepared comparable Specific Plans for portions of cities desiring to add detail to their comprehensive plans. These include:

- Birmingham: 14th Street Corridor Plan
- Birmingham: 41st Street Revitalization Plan
- Birmingham Airport Authority: Airport Sector Plan
- Birmingham: Downtown West Revitalization Plan
- Birmingham: Ensley Revitalization Plan
- Birmingham: First Avenue Revitalization Plan
- Birmingham: Midtown Development Plan
- Columbus: Liberty District Master Plan
- Gadsden: East Broad Redevelopment Plan
- Gadsden: Nocalula Road Corridor Plan
- Montgomery: Corridor Access Management Plan
- Muscle Shoals: Wilson Dam Road Corridor Development Plan
- Tuscaloosa: Greater Alberta Specific Plan
- Tuscaloosa: Forest Lake Specific Plan
- Tuscaloosa: University Area Neighborhoods Specific Plan
- Tuscaloosa: West Tuscaloosa Specific Plan

*Consultant resumes attached*

**FUNDING NEED AND SUSTAINABILITY:**

ARC and local matching funds are needed at this time to prepare a Specific Plan for West Florence as a detailing of the Comprehensive Plan with a specified scope of work. West Florence has been identified as a high-priority need in the Comprehensive Plan and through public involvement meetings. This specific West Florence Area Plan will aid in the creation of a clearly defined gateway into the West Florence area; well defined neighborhood centers; the redevelopment of vacant and abandoned homes, businesses and property; the growth of business; and a strong sense of place.

Once the West Florence Area Plan has been completed, to aid in the implementation process, the City of Florence has established a program called the One Stop Shop which gives new and existing businesses a one point of contact for information about obtaining city services to assist in their development process. For the resources not funded under this grant, Florence will utilize several sources of additional funding, specifically general city revenues, which most likely will be through the City of Florence One Cent Capital Improvement Fund. Once this plan is in place, it will be carried forth, monitored, and updated by the City of Florence Planning Department, Planning Commission, and City Council.

**SECTION 4: BUDGET INFORMATION AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS:**

*Standard Form 424A Attached.*

*Letters of Support and Commitment Attached.*