CHAPTER IX: STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning has many broad definitions and applications and may be used at discretion in a wide variety of organization fields and practices to formulate the goals, objectives, strategies, and projects needed in achieving a desired end result or state. The term “strategic” according to Webster’s Dictionary is, “skill in managing or planning” and the related term “stratify” means “to form in layers or strata”. Together these definitions emphasize a skilled planning and management process conducted through a series of steps, or layers, which build upon each other.

Origin and History of Strategic Planning

The term “strategic” is derived from the Greek word “Strategos” which literally means “General of the army” or the art of the general. In traditional Greek society, on an annual basis, each of the ten ancient Greek tribes elected a Strategos to serve as its leader in war council and in combat. The Strategos would give “strategic” advice to the political ruler about managing battles to win wars rather than “tactical” advice about managing troops. Most of the leaders the Greeks elected eventually rose to positions of substantial power such as politicians or generals of the tribes. In time the job of the Strategos would also include civil magisterial duties largely due to their status as elected officials.

Strategy, in relation to war, is also seen throughout history and around the world. For example, a famous treatise called the “Art of War” authored by Suntzu, a legendary Chinese General, around the second century B.C. is considered by many strategists as one of the great masterpieces of strategy. In “Art of War” the goal is to win. Winning is good and losing is bad. Strategies for war were used in the Mediterranean during the time of the Roman Empire when the great Carthaginian General Hannibal, during the First Punic War (264 to 241 B.C.) led an invasion to defeat and capture the City of Rome. Hannibal’s goal was to defeat Rome while his strategy to do this was to bring hidden strengths against the weakness of his enemy at the point of attack. The hidden strength Hannibal initiated and executed was to cross the Alps (mountains to the north of Rome) when his enemy did not believe he could and attack by surprise from that direction. In forming strategy, the general is responsible for multiple units that must work together to win the battle and the war. The way the general adds value to the battle is by providing high level orchestration and vision, that is, he can see what the field commanders cannot see. Great generals think about the whole and they work together to create all the necessary pieces, even sacrificing some pieces when necessary in order to assure that the overall goal is achieved. From its military roots, strategic planning has always been aimed at the “big picture” such as “winning the war” with the focus on results or outcomes rather than on products or outputs. For strategic planning the main focus should remain on outcomes and secondly a method or strategy to achieve the envisioned outcomes. In more recent endeavors, strategic planning has been associated much more with businesses at competition with each other rather than with countries at war and the resulting affects being business gain or loss rather than saving or losing human lives. In the early 1920s, Harvard Business School developed the Harvard Policy Model which defined “strategy” as a pattern of purposes and policies defining the company and its business. From this model and definition a business firm weaves purposes and policies in a pattern that unites company resources, management, market information, and social obligations. However, by the late 1950s this focus shifted away from organizational policy and structure toward risk management, industry growth, and market share, which was called the “portfolio model”. In the late 1950s and early 1960s strategic planning commenced in the public sector when the U.S. Department of Defense began seeking better and more useful means to plan for long-term needs

and at the same time achieve cost savings. The result was the advent of the Planning-Programming-Budgeting-System (PPBS) which used strategic planning to improve federal government operations by establishing long-range planning goals and objectives in regards to projected budgets and appropriations. Many states (as well as local governments) followed suit with this new strategic planning approach as a means to create a long-term plan to guide city improvements and growth and development in a manner consistent with a clearly defined mission and accompanying goals, objectives, and strategies. Since the late 1950s various states have been involved in state-wide strategic planning. In 1997 the Council of State Governments examined models of state-wide strategic planning efforts in Utah, Oregon, Minnesota, Florida, Texas, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Michigan and found that each state's strategic planning process contained unique characteristics. For example, Oregon created a model called "Oregon Benchmarks" in 1989 through a process involving hundreds of citizens and policy makers to develop a multi-year strategic plan along with an Oregon Progress Board to maintain, revise, and oversee implementation of the plan well into the future. As another example, Minnesota produced a significant 30-year state-wide strategic plan in 1991 titled "Minnesota Milestones" involving input from thousands of citizens and also monitored, in this instance, by the Minnesota Planning Division. The plan contains a vision for the state along with goals and milestones to measure progress. The plan is based on realistic ideas such as: 1) What gets measured tends to get done, 2) If you don't measure results, you can't tell success from failure, 3) If you can't recognize success, you can't reward it, and 4) If you can't recognize failure you can't learn from it.

Today strategic planning is conducted for many organizations, agencies, companies, and levels of government. However, in order for a plan to truly be "strategic" the original meaning and focus must not be missed, that is the sight must remain on the "big picture" to attain an outcome (win the war) and not on "tactics" (managing troops), those pieces involved in getting there.

Strategic Planning—"an organization's process of defining its strategy, or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy." Wikipedia.

Strategic Planning—"a systematic process of envisioning a desired future, and translating this vision into broadly defined goals or objectives and a sequence of steps to achieve them." BusinessDictionary.com

Strategic Planning—"is an organizational management activity that is used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, ensure that employees and other stakeholders are working toward common goals, establish agreement around intended outcomes/results, and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment." Balanced Scorecard Institute.

One common thread in the definitions is that strategic planning is a process, sequence of steps, or activity used to meet a common goal or vision. The strategic planning strategy may be useful to an organization or agency in order to "connect the dots" for achieving an end result where the lines themselves are unclear, as Henry Mintzberg, an internationally renowned academic and author on business and management states about strategy formation. Mintzberg explains that strategic planning, "dot connecting" is an inherently creative activity, which cannot be systematized. In other words, strategic planning can assist in coordinating planning efforts and measure progress on strategic goals, but it must occur "around" the strategy formation process rather than within it, as systemization dictates. Systemization is a rigid and unyielding framework which must be based entirely in the system operated in. The strategic planning process must provide a framework in which to work, but it also must be flexible enough to adequately respond to and accommodate changes of ideas or functionality which

may often occur. This “around” type of strategic planning shall be further described and exemplified later in this chapter.

Strategic Planning Process

The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance and direction through the strategic planning process. The Comprehensive Plan then uses this strategic planning to formulate the goals, objectives, strategies, and projects needed to achieve a community vision of the city’s desired future, which are described and discussed in the subsequent chapters. The strategic planning process is organized into a series of five steps which constitute the following:

- **Inventory and Analysis—**gathering Census data and building a City Profile on population, economic, and housing information, conducting community surveys, mapping, and receiving public views and opinions on assets and issues affecting community growth and development.
- **Visioning Process—**Establishment of a community approved “Vision Statement” and “Mis sion Statement”. The vision statement is conceptually an ideal future state for a community, while the mission statement describes what the community is doing to achieve the vision and why it is doing it.
- **Goals and Objectives—**Establishment of goals, objectives, strategies, and projects which agree with, support, and advance the community vision and mission. Goals and objectives should be prioritized at this stage as well.
- **Implementation—**Establishment of implementation tables which lists specific projects and strategies along Stages with their respective timeframes for completion. The implementa tion portion also identifies implementing agencies, potential partners and funding sources, and discusses past efforts in working toward project and strategy completion. Project prioritization should also be conducted at this stage.
- **Evaluation—**Establishment of action plan/evaluation tables listing projects and strategies along with their respective completion status. Evaluation should be conducted during the plan ning process and updated periodically after the plan is complete.

Figure illustrates the strategic planning process “connecting dots” through all the stages involved. The process begins with inventory and concludes with evaluation, however, final evaluation may also proceed, full circle, to the beginning inventory and analysis as evaluation may reveal a need for more recent and updated information about the community.

Along with the stages involved, the strategic planning process acknowledges the need to inquire of necessary information to determine what is being searched for and to focus efforts. Therefore, specific questions have been posed at each stage, tailored to gather the information and ideas needed at every point and in the subsequent stages of the process, thus keeping with “skilled planning” and building upon or “stratifying” upon previous work. The following

lists the stages of the strategic planning process and questions posed at each stage.

1. Inventory and Analysis—Where Are We Now?
2. Visioning Process—Where Do We Want to Be?
3. Goals and Objectives—How Will We Get There?
4. Implementation—How Will We Get There? (Same as Goals and Objectives)
5. Evaluation—How Will We Measure Progress?

Figure below displays the strategic planning process stages along with inquiries at each stage and the tasks involved at each stage. Notice how these stages build upon each other in a "stratifying" fashion. This chapter on strategic planning shall provide a review of the information already collected and analyzed in the Inventory and Analysis (Chapters on Population, Economy, Housing, Community Facilities, Transportation, and Land Use) section of the plan, with a discussion of the most significant findings in the community, and then proceed with establishing Vision and Mission Statements for the community. This shall answer the questions: Where Are We Now? And Where Do We Want to Be? The remaining questions and stages shall be discussed in the following Chapters (Goals and Objectives, Implementation, and Evaluation).

Strategic planning may function reasonably well in the previously described method, however, Mintzberg explains that strategic planning cannot be systematized and that it must occur "around" the strategy formation process rather than within it. Thus, planning may occur at various different stages at once in order to provide more flexibility for ideas and functionality throughout. For example, a community may have established community projects and strategies for implementation before its goals and objectives and vision and mission statements are created. This may be allowed, however, the goals, objectives, strategies, and projects must be in agreement with and serve to advance the vision and mission statements established altogether at the end. Ideally, the strategic planning process should be conducted sequentially along the stages given, however, the final product of the strategic plan is what counts, not necessarily the process itself.

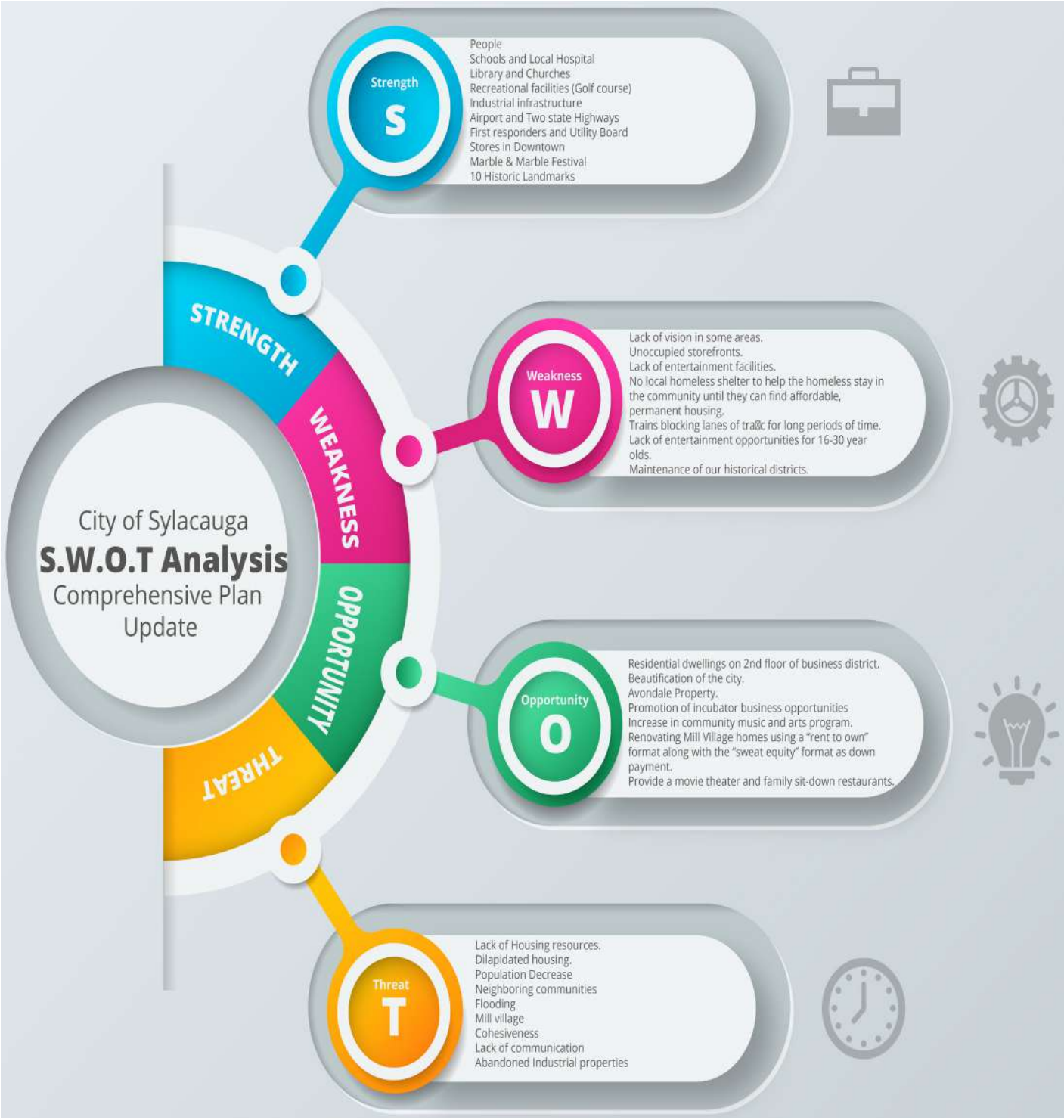
Inventory and Analysis

The purpose of the inventory and analysis stage is to collect and analyze data and community input in order to establish a foundation upon which the plan shall make informed decisions for goals, objectives, strategies, and projects, and form benchmarks upon which community progress is measured. Products produced in this beginning phase include the following:

- SWOT Analysis
- Significant Findings from US Census and ACS
- Sylacauga 2015-2018 Community Survey Results
- Summary of Community Survey Results

SWOT Analysis

The Sylacauga SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis was conducted at the initial public hearing in October of 2018. Sylacauga city council, the Planning Commission, and residents were in attendance to offer their views and opinions of the city's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Figure below shows the results of the SWOT Analysis from this meeting.



Significant strengths and opportunities discussed at the meeting was good location with the city being situated at the intersection with AL Hwy. 21 and US Hwy. 280 and also with reasonably close proximity to major metro markets such as Birmingham, Montgomery, and Anniston/Oxford.

Figure G&O 1. Planning Commission work session.

Natural resources and amenities are a major strength in Sylacauga since the marble industry provides the purest white marble in the world and the city is located in the foothills of Talladega National Forest, which offers an abundance of opportunity for hiking, camping, and fishing. Quality schools were rated as a significant strength along with community facilities, clubs and organizations, churches, and community outreach programs. The community technology base offers high quality and fast fiber optic speeds through the Sylacauga Utilities Board, thus giving opportunity for high-tech companies and other developments dependent on such infrastructure. Participants in the SWOT Analysis overall expressed a major strength being a spirit of volunteerism and a sense of community, which opens opportunities for building upon available human resources. People felt a willingness to re-invest in their community. Re-investment could spark opportunities such as the establishment of a downtown entertainment district which would bring more people to the downtown and increase business in the downtown area. The city could also seek opportunities to identify new sites for industrial development (particularly along the major highways AL Hwy. 21 and US Hwy. 280) or redevelop East Highland School and the Avondale Mill property, which burned in 2011

Weaknesses and threats to Sylacauga were also discussed. Participants in the SWOT Analysis felt a considerable weakness was a lack of skilled workforce and that businesses needed more skilled workers to fill positions. In relation to workforce development and employment, residents felt another significant weakness was that many workers lived in the city but commuted to work in other communities. Threats to the community were perceived as lack of new industrial development, lack of housing for seniors, and illegal drug use.