

# Describing the Worst-case Scenario

Scenario building is a technique that can provide a common understanding of the roles that neighborhood planning and action can play. It is a tool that can be used to paint a picture of what your neighborhood could actually look like. The picture could be pretty or pretty ugly. Let's start with the ugly.

This next step in the neighborhood planning process involves taking a very negative look at things. The worst-case scenario will describe what is likely to happen if current negative trends continue in your neighborhood. The worst-case scenario builds from the weaknesses and threats you have identified in your SWOT Analysis. It assumes that no positive action will be taken in the next 10 to 20 years to change/improve the course of events.

Developing a worst-case scenario is helpful in getting the Leadership Team members to see what may happen in their neighborhood if no planning and no positive actions occur. Most Leadership Team members probably know intuitively what the worst-case scenario is – this is most likely what motivated them to become involved in neighborhood planning! This planning step involves putting these thoughts and fears down on paper. It provides a probable scenario for what your neighborhood could look like if nothing is done.

You will need to decide whether you will have an outside facilitator for this planning step or someone from the Leadership Team. You will also have to decide how elaborate the group wants to get in depicting the worst-case scenario.

## *Studying Your Weaknesses and Threats*

Obtain demographic or other data to help you identify current trends and conditions within your neighborhood, if you have not already done this. The worst-case scenario should be based on actual data as well as perceptions and feelings.

**Developing a worst-case scenario is helpful in getting the Leadership Team members to see what may happen in their neighborhood if no planning and no positive actions occur.**

At a Leadership Team meeting, review the neighborhood's weaknesses and threats that were identified in your SWOT Analysis and other relevant data. If these trends and conditions continue for the next 10 to 20 years without any applied strengths and opportunities to balance them out, what will your neighborhood look like? What will be the condition of the housing? What kinds of businesses will be here? How safe and how attractive will the neighborhood be?

**If this discussion (answering the above questions) did not occur previously, now is the time to talk about these issues in depth. It will not be unusual for participants to express many fears about the future. If most of this discussion already took place at another meeting, the ideas previously expressed should be summarized and then added to the worst-case scenario.**


Agreement should be reached on what negative trends are the most likely to continue and then how these will affect the neighborhood. It will be difficult for some Team members to be so negative, but it is worth the time to lay it out for everyone to see. The process will become more positive in the next step!

### *Depicting the Worst-case Scenario*

At a minimum, the Leadership Team should describe in a paragraph the worst-case scenario for the neighborhood. If time and interest allow, you could draw a picture and/or map of what your neighborhood would look like if the negative trends continue. It is up to the Leadership Team to decide what they would like to do to understand fully the consequences of not taking any positive action. Thought should also be given to how this will be communicated to the broader neighborhood if the Leadership Team feels that neighbors lack understanding of some of the negative forces affecting the neighborhood.



Now that you've anticipated and reached some agreement on the negative consequences of what will happen to your neighborhood if no planning is done, it is time to begin planning for a positive future.

 **LAND MINE:** The probable scenario can be a difficult concept for some members to handle because they do not like to state solely negative conditions. The only thing you can do is bite the bullet and be glad we are now moving to a more positive planning step.

### **Resources/References**

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Jones, "Neighborhood Planning: A Guide for Citizens and Planners."

# Developing a Vision or Preferred Scenario

In Chapter 4, you developed a worst-case scenario that described what your neighborhood may be like if negative trends continue and no actions are taken to improve them. The preferred scenario or Vision will describe how you wish your neighborhood to be in the future. This is a time for you to dream about the kind of place in which you would like to live – your “Camelot”!

The first step in developing a preferred scenario is “visioning” or imagining what you would like your neighborhood to become. Just as the worst-case scenario built off of the weaknesses and threats from your SWOT Analysis, the preferred scenario will build from the strengths and opportunities you identified. The preferred scenario becomes the Vision for the redevelopment of your neighborhood.

This step is one of the most difficult parts of the planning process. It requires that the Leadership Team look 10 to 20 years into the future, which is a stretch for everyone. If Leadership Team members have not had significant experience beyond their own neighborhood or city, it is even more difficult for them to imagine how things can be done differently. In preparation for the visioning exercise, Team members should spend some time studying Web sites (Appendix G) and other materials that show various street designs, in-fill housing designs, brownfield redevelopment potential, etc. If resources allow, actual tours of other cities, or even of other neighborhoods within your city that have successful revitalization projects, would be very worthwhile.



*The aim of this planning step is to gain a consensus on how the Leadership Team would like the neighborhood to look, feel and be in the future. This will then be a framework or guide to where you are going and what the neighborhood should become. This is done first through an exercise that helps you envision what you would like to see.*

The Leadership Team will need at least a 2 to 3 hour meeting to do the visioning process. Pens and paper for each Team member and a flip chart are needed materials. The meeting should be held where there are few distractions because Team members will need to concentrate. Someone will need to function as a facilitator to take the Team through the following suggested steps in a timely manner.

## *Visioning Process*

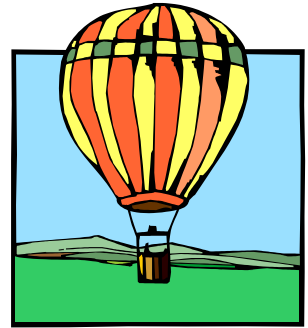
Visioning is a process by which a neighborhood envisions or dreams about the future it wants. It creates a shared image of what people want their neighborhood to become – the preferred scenario.

### **Review**

The facilitator reviews with the Leadership Team what the visioning process is and how it is a critical step in the neighborhood planning process.

### **Setting the Stage**

The facilitator then sets the stage by asking Leadership Team members to imagine they are flying over the neighborhood in a hot air balloon 10 to 20 years from now. What do they want to see as they look down? What will the neighborhood look like? What will people be doing, and how will they be interacting with one another? Don't be shackled, now is the time to dream!



### **Vision of Housing**

To help Team members envision the future for their neighborhood, first ask them what the housing looks like from their hot air balloon. Have available several pictures of various kinds of housing types to get them thinking. Ask Team members to write down as many characteristics as they can to describe the housing they see (want to see). These characteristics should be both physical (two-story, restored, etc.) as well as intangible (safe, affordable, etc.).



### **Vision of Commercial District**

After everyone is finished writing about housing, ask them to imagine what the business district will look like from the hot air balloon 10 to 20 years from now. Again, to help get them started, have pictures of several kinds of commercial buildings, street landscaping and examples of business activities. Ask them to write as many words as they can think of that would describe the desired characteristics of the commercial area in the future – again, both physical and non-physical characteristics.

### **Vision of Quality of Life**

The third category of visioning involves the neighborhood's quality of life. The Leadership Team members will really have to stretch their brains on this one. In addition to the houses and businesses, what else would they like to see from their hot air balloon? Are children playing? Are neighbors talking to one another? What about the neighborhood park, school or other gathering place? This category can include physical structures as well as social and cultural factors. This can be a "feeling" part also. Again they should write as many characteristics as they can to describe what they want to see.

### **Other Vision(s)**

If the Leadership Team has identified another important component of the neighborhood (in addition to the above three), ask members to describe what they see from the hot air balloon in 10 to 20 years, following the same process.

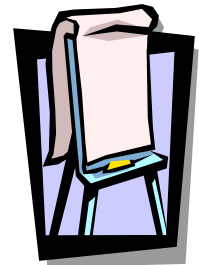
## ***Recording the Visions***

### **Record Housing Visions**

After everyone has finished writing, ask each Team member to identify (prioritize) his/her top three characteristics within each category. What three things are most important? Of all the characteristics you dreamed, starting with housing, go around the table and ask each person to give his/her top characteristic for housing. Each characteristic should be written on a flip chart. Continue around the table three times so that people give their three most important characteristics. There is no problem if two or more people report the same basic characteristic.

### **Record Commercial District Visions**

Ask each person for his/her top business district characteristic. Go around the table three times, having people to state the characteristics most important to them. Write each idea on the flip chart.



### **Record Quality of Life and Other Visions**

Continue the same process with the third category and any other categories your group envisioned.

## ***Creating the Vision/Preferred Scenario***

Your visioning process will have taken a lot of time, so a subcommittee should be appointed to take the lists of characteristics the Team just brainstormed and create the preferred scenario or Vision. This will require some good thinking. The Vision will have three or four components (housing, business district, quality of life, etc.), and it should capture the essence of what the Leadership Team envisioned. We suggest the following process for developing the Vision, which will be presented at the next Leadership Team meeting.

### **Develop Summary Phrase**

A subcommittee should develop a short phrase for each of the components that briefly summarizes the majority of characteristics listed by the Leadership Team. For example, under “Housing”, “a variety of housing types” might best describe the characteristics envisioned by the Leadership Team. A short summary phrase is all that is needed – nothing fancy, but the phrase should capture the essence of what the Leadership Team generally described in its visioning.

### Include Pictures or Drawings

Pictures or drawings that illustrate the summary phrases can be used if desired.

### Record Summary Phrase and Pictures/Drawings

On one flip chart sheet, list a category (Housing, for example), the summary phrase (a variety of housing types, for example), and any pictures or drawings, and then list the priority characteristics\* brainstormed by the Leadership Team. Do the same for each category. The categories taken together become your Vision (preferred scenario). These categories are now called the components of your Vision.



\*Some of the characteristics listed by Leadership Team members may be contradictory, or some members may not agree with the dreams of others. No problem! The only thing you need consensus on right now is the main components of the Vision (housing, business district, quality of life or whatever you've chosen) and the summary phrases. You will want others from the neighborhood to have input into specific ideas under each component as the neighborhood planning process proceeds. Discussion and prioritization of the ideas (characteristics) will not occur until the Action Plan is developed. This is why it is important that your **summary phrase for each component** (for example, "a variety of housing types") **encompasses most of the characteristics expressed** – whether everyone agrees with all the specific characteristics or not. This is again a process that focuses on the common ground among Team members rather than their differences.

### Report on Vision

At the meeting after the visioning process, the Leadership Team will hear the report of the subcommittee and review the summary phrases for each component of the Vision. Does the Leadership Team feel comfortable with the vision/preferred scenario? Does this basically seem like the direction your neighborhood should be headed? If there are any major concerns with the Vision, they should be addressed now.

### The Neighborhood Survey

You will test out the most important ideas in the Vision through the Neighborhood Survey (next chapter) to make sure the broader neighborhood concurs with the group's dreams for the neighborhood's future. If the survey results do not support the Leadership Team's Vision for the redevelopment of the neighborhood, corrections must be made.

The major point of the Vision is to have a future focus that is agreed upon in the neighborhood so that your planning efforts will be aimed at the same target. You do not have to be specific at this point – for now all you need to articulate is just an overall direction. This now becomes your neighborhood’s Vision for its future redevelopment. It is the star to which you will hitch your neighborhood wagon.



**LAND MINE:** If the Leadership Team cannot agree on the major components for the Vision and some general characteristics for each component, stop where you are and look for shared beliefs. Although there is no need to agree on everything, you must identify some common ground upon which you can build a Vision. Do not go any further in the neighborhood planning process until this common ground is developed.



**LAND MINE:** Although *general* agreement is always needed among the Leadership Team before you can progress to the next neighborhood planning step, it is not unusual to have someone who does not agree with the rest of the group. Consider carefully whether that person represents an important perspective within the neighborhood that needs to be incorporated. If a compromise cannot be reached, the majority rules (this is a democracy). The planning process cannot be held up for one contrary person. However, ignoring a valid perspective can jeopardize the entire planning process. As a group, the Leadership Team must decide if an individual’s disagreement is representative. If it is not, do not let one person hold up this important neighborhood work.



**LAND MINE:** It is **not** recommended that you spend time developing a vision statement – one sentence that tries to capture the essence of your Vision. This can be a long and tedious process – time is better spent undertaking activities that will achieve the Vision. Much disagreement can also be generated when wordsmithing a vision statement. There appears to be no good reason to put your Vision into a single statement.

## Resources/References

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“A Guide to Community Visioning.”

Jones, “Neighborhood Planning: Guide for Citizens and Planners.”

Vandenberg, “Strategic Futuring Resources for Working with Communities and Organizations.”

