



CITY OF TUPELO

SPECIAL CALLED PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Date: September 28, 2026, 6:00 P.M.

Location: City Council Chambers, City Hall, 71 East Troy Street, Tupelo, MS

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Mark Williams called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

- **Invocation:** Ms. Patti Thompson
- **Pledge of Allegiance:** Mr. Scott Davis

Committee members and staff introduced themselves for the record.

Committee Members Present:

Mr. Mark Williams, Ms. Leslie Mart, Mr. Lindsey Leake (via phone), Ms. Patti Thompson, Mr. Scott Davis

Staff Present:

Mr. Tanner Newman, Director of Development Services, Mr. Pat Falkner, Planning Consultant, Ms. Kim Rushing, Community Development and Outreach Coordinator

Agenda Item Overview

The meeting's single agenda item was review and public comment on the Tupelo Comprehensive Plan 2040.

- The meeting was turned over to Director Tanner Newman for detailed presentation and discussion.

Tupelo's Comprehensive Plan 2040 Overview

Presenter: Tanner Newman, Director of Development Services.

Core Purpose:

- Serves as a community-driven roadmap to guide municipal growth, reinvestment, and decision-making over a 15-year horizon (through 2040).
- The Director requested a recommendation from the committee to the City Council for the official adoption of the 15-year plan.

Evolution of Planning Approach:

- The 2040 plan shifts the city's strategy from simply enabling growth (as prioritized in the 2008 plan) to actively shaping growth.

Plan Contributors and Steering Committee Governance

Key Contributors:

- The Mayor and City Council, City Department heads, Development Services staff, and professional consultants:/ The Mabus Agency, Pat Faulkner, and Scott Trepolino.
- Steering Committee Structure:
A 35-member steering committee guided the overall planning process starting in April 2023. Members included Tupelo business owners, engineers, realtors, local pastors, law enforcement officers, housing advocates, and two 2025 graduates from Tupelo High School.
The committee operated across five specialized subcommittees:
 - Quality of Life
 - Community Development
 - Housing
 - Community Engagement
 - Economic Development

History, Timeline, and Demographic Context

Planning Timeline:

- The previous comprehensive plan was adopted in December 2008 and ran through 2025.
- Work on the 2040 update started in 2023, with steering committee operations starting in April 2023.
- The comprehensive plan covers all state-required municipal elements, including land use, transportation, community facilities, housing, and infrastructure.

Demographic Baseline and Growth Projections:

- Tupelo serves as a micropolitan hub for a 15-county trade area, competing directly with larger metropolitan markets for talent and investment.
- Prior to 2008, the city grew at an annual rate of approximately 1.57%.
- The 2008 plan projected that the city's population would exceed 50,000 by 2025.
- Actual population growth since 2010 has added approximately 3,600 residents (less than 1% growth annually, driven partly by municipal annexation).
- The 2023 population was estimated at 37,825.
- The 2040 plan utilizes a conservative projection of approximately 41,000 residents by 2040.
- The median household income of residents is \$66,314, which is above the state average.
- The median age of residents is 38.4.
- Demographic Target: Residents aged 20 to 34 make up approximately 19% of the population. Attracting and retaining this age bracket is a primary focus of the city's growth strategy.

Micropolitan Strategy and Guiding Principles

Five Areas of Strategic Opportunity:

- A vibrant, walkable downtown offering business diversity and social interaction.
- Distinct neighborhoods with attainable housing options.
- Recreational and cultural amenities to enhance daily life.
- Strong infrastructure and public services.
- Entrepreneurial pathways for local business growth.

Plan Execution and Measuring Success:

- Level 1: Sets policy and long-term vision for 15 years.
- Level 2: Sets 5-year implementation cycles with measurable actions.
- Level 3: Connects directly to the annual budget and capital plan for project evaluations.
- "Its success will be measured by consistent use, not by adoption alone."

Eight Guiding Principles:

- Welcoming and authentic, supporting downtown, promoting health and safety, leading regional growth, building strong neighborhoods, planning infrastructure for future demand, creating a sustainable future, and connecting people with nature.

The Five Pillars of Delivery

The plan organizes city operations and priorities into five interdependent pillars:

1. Economic Development: The central priority and foundation for long-term growth.
2. Quality of Life and Community Identity.
3. Public Safety and Community Well-being.
4. Housing and Neighborhoods.
5. Infrastructure, Mobility, and Transportation.

Interdependence Statement:

- "Economic growth is strengthened by quality of life. Quality of life depends on safe communities. Safe communities rely on strong neighborhoods, and all of these depend on reliable infrastructure. No single pillar succeeds alone..."

Pillar 1: Economic Development Focus

Scope:

- Addresses two distinct economic layers: "Tupelo's economic structure includes both a regional employment and retail base and a more localized urban center."

Key Priorities:

- Building public-private partnerships.
- Attracting and retaining young workforce talent (specifically ages 20 to 34).
- Supporting small businesses and entrepreneurship.
- Strengthening downtown and destination-based developments.
- Reinvesting in major commercial corridors (Gloster, McCullough, and Crosstown).

Progress and Implementation Actions:

- Construction on the Target Development began in 2025 and is projected to create hundreds of jobs.
- Review and adapt the development code within 6 to 9 months of plan adoption (measured by an updated zoning map and code revisions).

- Formalize city engagement policies with private developers on projects involving municipal infrastructure financing and regulations.
- Maintain capital investments in civic amenities through Parks and Recreation and the CVB.
- Improve monitoring tools for tracking infrastructure capacity to plan ahead of future demand.

Pillar 2: Quality of Life and Community Identity

Purpose:

- Acts as "a defining factor in Tupelo's ability to attract and retain residents, businesses, and visitors."

Key Priorities:

- Expand arts, culture, and event programming (with emphasis on broad participation for younger residents).
- Strengthen parks and green spaces.
- Encourage activity downtown and in public spaces.
- Enhance municipal beautification and place-making.
- Establish distinct identity districts: Gateway East, Gateway West, Midtown, and the Hospital area.
- Improve access to natural assets, including the Natchez Trace.

Featured Capital Projects:

- All-Inclusive Playground at Ballard Park: Opened in 2005 with an 800-child capacity, is ADA-compliant, and won the Hayward Bo Phillips Award of Merit for design.
- The Depot: Completed in 2025 on North Front Street, providing a new home for the Tupelo Farmers Market and other community events.

Pillar 3: Public Safety and Community Well-Being

Purpose:

- Public safety is "a fundamental responsibility of the city and a prerequisite for long-term stability and growth."

Scope and Priorities:

- Extends beyond traditional emergency services to include water systems for fire protection, stormwater management, broadband, and safety personnel recruitment, training, and retention.
- Support safe, well-maintained neighborhoods.
- Strengthen community-centered safety approaches.
- Enhance emergency preparedness and improve code enforcement.
- Expand partnerships for crisis intervention.

Major Capital Investments:

- Fire Station Number One & New Emergency Operations Center: Replacing the city's oldest operating station to improve operational coordination. Estimated cost is \$8 to \$10 million over two years, aiming to improve the city's fire insurance rating from A4 to A3.
- Engine Seats: Replacement estimated at \$1.1 million.

- Fire Station Number Five: Slated for replacement.
- North Mississippi Law Enforcement Training Center: Continued facility upgrades.

Pillar 4: Housing and Neighborhoods

Key Premise:

- "Strong neighborhoods are essential to Tupelo's long-term success," and housing is "one of Tupelo's most important competitiveness issues."

Identified Challenges:

- Shortage of options for workers and first-time buyers, housing costs outpacing income growth, and a significant number of cost-burdened households.

Policy Objectives:

- Shift focus from the stigma of affordable housing to "practical attainable housing across a range of incomes."
- Housing solutions include new subdivision homes, infill housing in existing neighborhoods, reinvestment in older homes, strong single-family neighborhoods, and strategic increases in housing density.

Specific Timelines and Action Items:

- Continue funding neighborhood redevelopment projects.
- Seek outside funding for homebuyer assistance.
- Review the residential tax abatement program.
- Research zoning changes within 3 to 6 months to allow small-scale rental housing in locations outside single-family neighborhoods.
- Amend rental licensing within 3 to 4 months to allow well-maintained properties to receive simpler, less frequent inspections.
- Reassess the Neighborhood Development Corporation (NDC) staffing and capacity within 9 months to scale redevelopment efforts.
- Review and implement a first-time homebuyer assistance program to help purchase and renovate homes in older neighborhoods (some 75 years old) to increase owner occupancy.

Pillar 5: Infrastructure, Mobility, and Transportation

Current System Gaps:

- System is heavily centered around vehicles, featuring limited driving alternatives, gaps in pedestrian/bike networks, and substandard annexed roads.
- Railroad crossings significantly impact traffic flow, emergency response times, and overall mobility.

Strategic Priorities:

- Structured pavement management program.
- Expanded pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.
- Modernized utility systems.
- Stronger stormwater and flood management.
- Solve railroad crossing conflicts through the Tupelo Rail Improvement Program (TRIP).

Tupelo Rail Improvement Program (TRIP) Budget and Components:

- Total Project Cost: Estimated at \$64.9 million in current dollars.

- Overpass Bridge Project (Eason Boulevard crossing): Estimated at \$14.3 million. Planning and engineering are underway, and construction is imminent.
- Quiet Zones (Safety upgrades at 11 crossings to create three quiet zones): Estimated at \$5.7 million. Planning and engineering are currently underway.
- Switch Project (Moving rail switching operations away from Crosstown): Estimated at \$44.9 million. Start date is currently unknown.
- Funding Status: \$19.2 million has been secured (via federal RAISE grant, state legislative match, and federal THUD designation). Approximately \$45.7 million remains to be funded.

Future Land Use Plan and Calculations

Strategic Direction:

- The plan does not propose rearranging the city; it reinforces what works, protects stable areas, and guides growth to appropriate locations.

Land Use Categories:

- Agriculture and Open Space: Under 35% of land (includes protected floodways).
- Residential: Approximately 29% of land.
- Mixed-Use Regional Center: Barnes Crossing District (the city's largest sales tax generator).
- Industrial: Not expected to expand significantly.
- Vacant Land: About 16% of the city.

Land Capacity Details:

- Calculations account for undevelopable floodways.
- Much of the land classified as agricultural is available for future development, which offsets unbuildable areas.
- It is estimated that more than 15% of the total city land is buildable and available.

Ten Priority Development Areas

Section 6 of the plan identifies 10 specific priority areas for focused effort:

1. Jackson West: Initiated in 2011; city and NDC removed substandard apartments and created Ingram Drive and Cicada Cove subdivisions. By 2020, private investment and value gains exceeded the city's original investment.
2. Park Hill: The next, more difficult effort. Requires homebuyer assistance, drainage, street upgrades, and potentially direct home construction by the NDC to establish baseline value.
3. Birthplace District: Approximately 30 homes near the Elvis Presley birthplace. Focuses on an incremental approach to renovate short-stay rentals for visitors without displacing residents.
4. East Main Street: Sidewalks and zoning changes are complete; private investment has not yet followed. Next step is finding an anchor use while managing floodplain constraints.
5. Garfield Commons (next to NMMC): NMMC acquired One Deville Place and engaged a developer. The city will help structure project financing, potentially through a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, for a phased mix of housing and medical office space.
6. Barnes Crossing: Target is scheduled to open in late 2026, and a new road will open up more land. The focus is on coordinating infrastructure and managing flood constraints.

7. Crosstown and West Main Street: Relocating the railroad switch station is expensive; the current approach focuses on incremental streetscape improvements and selective property acquisition.
 8. Tributary Two: Approximately 85 city-owned acres with capacity for 100 to 200 homes. Contains floodplains (to be used as a greenway amenity) and cultural resources to protect.
 9. Threadkill Property (south of Fairport): Preliminary plat approved in 2025; will extend Fairport's design standards southward.
 10. Mill Village: Historic neighborhood near downtown with 19 historic homes currently at risk. The plan calls for direct assistance with historic preservation and tax credit applications.
- Mill Village Housing Initiatives:
 - The majority of the 19 historic-eligible houses are currently occupied and could benefit from renovations.
 - The code enforcement team (which is fully staffed and uses a GIS-based system implemented over the past year) will assist these homeowners in obtaining historic tax credits.

COMMITTEE QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Following the presentation, the Chairman opened the floor for committee questions and discussion.

1. Undeveloped Land and Floodplain Considerations
 - Mr. Davis asked whether the percentage of undeveloped land included floodways and other property that could not reasonably be developed.
 - Mr. Faulkner explained that the calculations recognize significant acreage that should not be developed. However, some land currently classified as agricultural remains suitable for future development. He indicated that potentially developable land may exceed 15%.
2. Tupelo Rail Improvement Program – Funding and Timeline
 - Mr. Williams asked about the estimated \$65 million cost of the TRIP projects, the amount of funding secured, and what would trigger construction. He also asked whether the estimates reflected current costs or anticipated inflation.
 - Mr. Newman explained that the projects are in various stages of development, with funding allocated toward planning, engineering, and construction activities. Planning and engineering are already underway. He indicated that the estimates were believed to reflect current-dollar costs.
 - When asked about the anticipated start date for relocating railroad switching operations, Mr. Newman stated that he could not provide a definite timeline. However, he noted that the bridge and quiet zone projects were progressing and that bridge construction was expected to begin in the near future.
3. Code Enforcement Staffing
 - Ms. Thompson asked whether additional code enforcement officers would be needed to support the plan's objectives.
 - Mr. Newman stated that the Code Enforcement Division was fully staffed. He explained that the City had implemented a GIS-based system and continued evaluating ways to improve efficiency and public service through available technology.
4. Rental Housing Inspections

- Ms. Thompson requested clarification regarding the proposal to reduce inspection frequency for rental properties that consistently meet required standards.
- Mr. Newman explained that the recommendation was a potential policy consideration rather than an adopted change. He said future ordinance and policy reviews could consider ways to better use existing code enforcement resources, including directing more attention to properties with recurring maintenance or compliance issues.

5. Mill Village Historic Preservation

- Ms. Thompson asked whether the plan proposed tax incentives for the historic homes identified in Mill Village.
- Mr. Newman explained that approximately 19 homes had been identified as potentially qualifying for historic rehabilitation tax credits. The plan recommends assisting eligible homeowners with the application process.
- When asked whether the properties were occupied, he indicated that the majority were believed to be occupied, although some might be vacant. Many could benefit from rehabilitation and preservation efforts.

6. Reinvestment in Older Neighborhoods and Homebuyer Assistance

- Ms. Mart expressed concern about aging residential neighborhoods throughout Tupelo and asked whether the City intended to provide funding for rehabilitation, particularly for individual homeowners and first-time buyers. Ms. Mart emphasized the importance of encouraging owner-occupied housing and reinvestment in neighborhoods beyond Mill Village.
- Mr. Newman responded that the City was evaluating options for a first-time homebuyer assistance program. He noted that such a program was one of several approaches under consideration to support homeownership and neighborhood revitalization.

7. Acknowledgment of Comprehensive Plan Contributors

- Committee members expressed appreciation to the individuals involved in developing the Tupelo 2040 Comprehensive Plan, recognizing the extensive time, research, and coordination required to prepare the document.

Approvals, Decisions, and Next Steps

Planning Committee Action:

- Mr. Scott Davis made a motion to approve the comprehensive plan, seconded by Ms. Leslie Mart. The committee voted to approve the recommendation to approve the Tupelo 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Lindsey Leake voted to approve via phone.
- This recommendation will be forwarded to the City Council for official adoption consideration.

Document Availability:

- The full comprehensive plan presentation will not be made available to the general public until it has been formally approved by the City Council.
- A seven-page public-facing summary document is currently available for distribution.

Next Steps and Follow-Up:

- Mr. Newman will review the City Council's final decision on the item and report findings back to the Planning Committee at the next meeting.
- The next regular monthly meeting is scheduled for next Monday at 6:00 PM in the Council Chambers.
- The meeting was officially adjourned following a motion by Ms. Patti Thompson and a second by Ms. Leslie Mart.

Meeting adjourned.