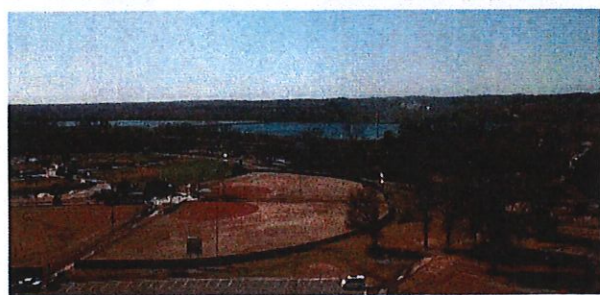
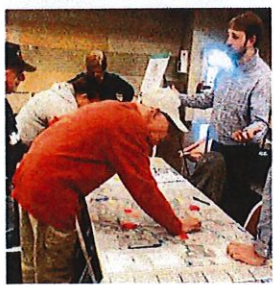


Moving Benton Forward

A Comprehensive Plan for Benton, Arkansas

April, 2020



Benton
THE HEART OF ARKANSAS SINCE 1836



Introduction

The Heart of Arkansas

Benton, the county seat and largest city in Saline County, is situated less than 25 miles from Arkansas' Capital. From 2000 to 2018, its population grew by 63 percent, making it one of the fastest growing and fourth largest city in central Arkansas. This mid-sized city has unique history, culture, and recreational amenities envied by many, and proximity to other opportunities in the state's most populated region. Home to a historic downtown, with landmarks like the Royal Theatre and 1901 Saline County Courthouse, and access to the Saline River and the planned regional Southwest Trail, Benton provides the cultural and recreational opportunities of a premier place to live.

Benton is growing and looks poised to continue. Planning for growth enables Benton to become a more sustainable and thriving city for its diverse residents. In 2019, the city reevaluated its 2008 Comprehensive Plan and engaged the public by asking how Benton should develop over the next 20 years. The new comprehensive plan, *Moving Benton Forward*, was born from these conversations!

What is Moving Benton Forward?

Moving Benton Forward carries the future vision for the city to the year 2030. The plan champions the city's unique assets and rich history, while acknowledging key challenges to sustainable growth. The plan shapes the city's development by setting goals, objectives and actions as well as guides future land development and infrastructure connections with unique neighborhood design



recommendations and a Comprehensive Plan Map. Goals and objectives consider housing diversity and built environment design, streets for multiple types of users, access to jobs and quality of life generally. *Moving Benton Forward* reflects the voice of residents and provides standards to guide city policy decisions for generations to come.

Your Voice. Your Plan

Extensive public input shaped *Moving Benton Forward's* vision and goals, which are its foundation. Strategies were lifted directly from public comments and priorities and are part of the plan's content. The document reflects the results of several months of public engagement, including two public surveys, Third Thursday event outreach, focus groups with a community-based steering committee, and public meetings held in a variety of locations throughout the city. In all, several hundred residents shared their distinctive perspectives of what makes the city great, and how it should move forward.

Community Engagement

Three steering committee meetings with
30+
members

Two surveys with
~600
respondents



Four public meetings with
50+
participants

Outreach pop-ups
at community events



Public participation is a crucial piece to the development of *Moving Benton Forward*. Meeting residents where they are and engaging them via social media allowed for optimum input and survey response.

Stakeholders represent diverse residents and businesses during several public meetings.

Community Vision & Goals

A vision is meant to frame the community's desires and expectations for its future. Goals are set to inform specific city policies and actions that help to reach that vision. Every objective and action in *Moving Benton Forward* contributes to achieving the six goals listed at right. When the city's actions mirror this plan it will move closer to its vision.

Benton Community Vision

As a sustainable, innovative and inclusive community that upholds its safe and family-friendly character, Benton moves forward by championing unique neighborhoods, first-rate public amenities, economic opportunity, and a thriving downtown.

The vision and goals offer a shared language to connect the plans, policies and programs for a more cohesive community.

Goals

1. Design a Connected Community
2. Encourage Innovative Land Development
3. Revitalize City Infrastructure
4. Protect and Provide Natural Areas, Diverse Parks, and Connected Greenspaces
5. Cultivate a Thriving Downtown
6. Reinvent Benton's Economy

Goals are not in priority order. A complete list of *Moving Benton Forward's* Goals, Objectives, and Actions begins on page 13.

Community Assets

Blessed with beautiful landscapes and a rich history, Benton enjoys unique recreational opportunities as well as benefits that only county-seat cities offer. The city is home to historical attractions, advanced educational centers, and natural features that make it effortless to champion it as the "Heart of Arkansas." *Moving Benton Forward* recognizes that planning around the community's greatest assets can help the city reach its vision. The following discussion identifies the assets most frequently identified during outreach.

"Keep it vintage! The downtown area is one of the reasons we chose to move here last year."

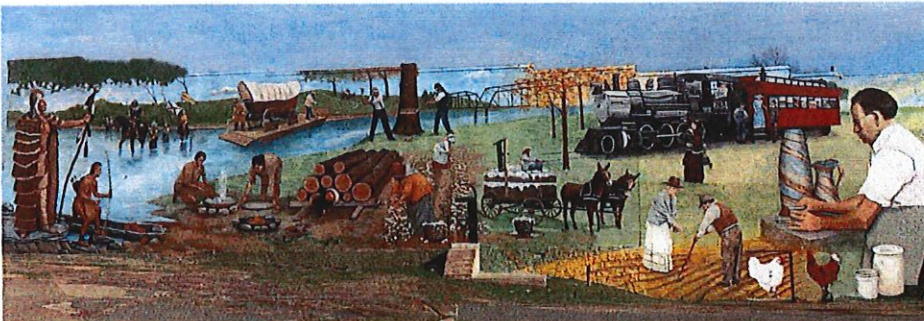
—Survey comment

Benton Beginnings

Settlement began in 1833, and Benton was formally named and chartered in 1836 in honor of Senator Thomas Hart Benton. Benton was originally laid out in a traditional grid pattern with lots as cheap as \$30 each. Revenue from the sale of these lots was used to construct public buildings that defined the city. Population growth soon followed, steadily increasing between 1840-1860. During the Reconstruction era, State initiatives and private investments, like new public schools and a railroad network, contributed to Benton's development.

Benton Historic Downtown

Fifty-three buildings in downtown make up the Benton Commercial Historic District. These buildings cover nearly one hundred years of history from the early 1900s to the 1990s. Amongst the most historic buildings are the Royal Theatre, the Saline County Courthouse, and the Benton Masonic Lodge. The Shoppach House, built in 1857, housed soldiers during the Civil War and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. Several other



This mural on the Bell building in downtown Benton depicts the historic Southwest Trail, which runs beside that building, from Military Road to Main Street onto River Street, and on through Texas. bentonmural.com



The historic Royal Theater.
bentonar.org/about-benton

downtown buildings, such as the 1893 Gann Building, were added to the Register, and in 2008, the district itself was listed. The city should leverage this historic area as it appeals to residents and visitors alike.

Saline County Career Technical Education Center

The Career Technical Education Center (CTE) is a collaboration between the Saline County Economic Development Corporation (SCEDC) and several of the county's school districts that provides students

with career-ready vocational classes. Located in Benton on a 22-acre site, the CTE is accessible to high school students across the county and provides classes for careers in health sciences, medical assisting, HVAC and refrigeration, welding, multi-media communications and other in demand STEM vocations. It will also provide community and adult education programs upon completion in 2021. This will give the city and county leverage for economic growth and development.

Saline River

Rising in the Ouachita Mountains and recognized for its picturesque beauty, the Saline River plays a role in bringing people to Benton and in keeping them around. Despite being close to city services, the river has remained relatively undeveloped, making it an excellent location for observing nature, kayaking, canoeing and for other outdoor activities. The city must consider the Saline River as a potential driver of growth and tourism as it becomes more visible over the next decade to trail users.

In southwest Benton, the river will be accessible by trail once the Old River Bridge is restored. The bridge will serve as the halfway point in the proposed Southwest Trail that will run from Little Rock

In the future I want Benton to be "A community that allows people of all socioeconomic, class, race and backgrounds to thrive and succeed. Where all have access to all Benton has to offer."

—Survey comment

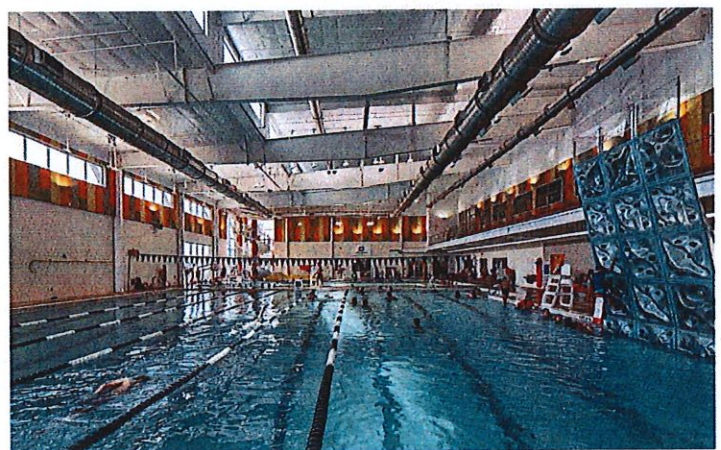
to Hot Springs. The junction of the trail and the river at the historic bridge is perfectly positioned to drive recreation and tourism while boosting economic activity in the city.

River Center

On April 2017, the city celebrated the grand opening of the River Center, which provides many amenities to Benton residents of all ages and abilities. Funded by a 2014 "quality of life" tax, the new park and community center offers a broad range of different features and programs, such as the aquatic center, senior wellness and activity center, the boys and girls club, and new soccer and softball complexes. The River Center has been an essential part of Benton's recent gains and is viewed as a critical asset to its residents. *Moving Benton Forward* outreach found that residents want continued development of existing parks with amenities like picnic areas and walking trails. The city must continue identifying ways to activate the River Center for diverse users.



The River Center is a multi-activity venue that caters to all ages.



The Saline River is an underutilized natural asset needing increased accessibility.

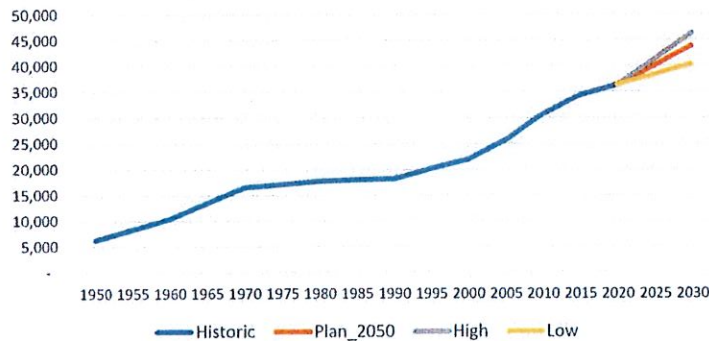
Benton Demographics

Population Profile

Benton is the fourth-largest city in the Central Arkansas region. Having grown by 18 percent from 2010 to 2019, it has grown faster than the region's three largest cities—Little Rock, North Little Rock and Conway—and it has also outpaced Cabot, Sherwood and Maumelle. Benton's pace of population growth has slowed somewhat since the 2000-2010 decade, but it remains one of the region's fastest-growing cities.

In 2020 the city has around 36,300 persons, having roughly doubled over the past 30 years (from 18,177 persons in 1990). Metroplan forecasts that the city will continue growing, reaching 43,800 by 2030. The graph below shows a middle projection of 16,500 households by 2030, up from an estimated 13,800 in 2020.

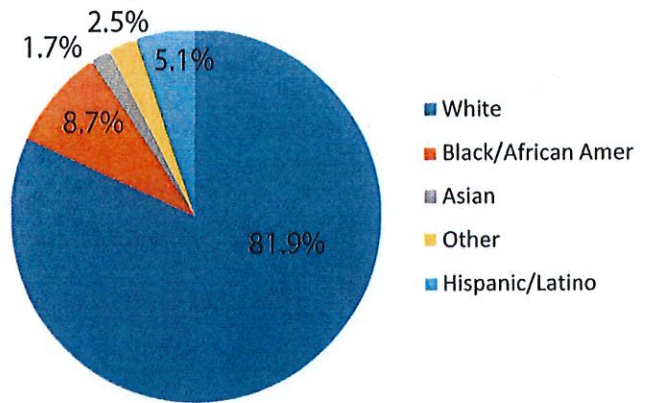
Benton Population 1950--2020 with Forecasts to 2030



smaller populations in minority groups. However, the city's share of minority population has grown in recent years. For example, black / African American population grew from about 1,800 in 2010 (5.9 percent of population) to over 3,000 in 2018 (8.7 percent) and the Hispanic/Latino population now accounts for over 5% of Benton's population.

Household Characteristics

Benton Population by Race / Ethnicity 2018



Source: ACS 2018 (five-year).

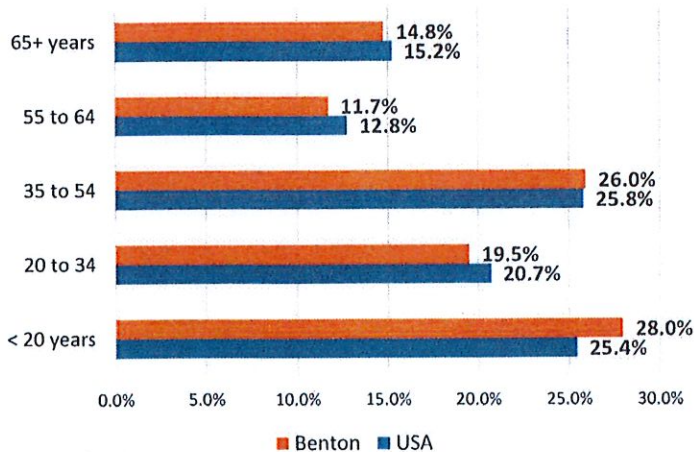
Housing affordability is one of Benton's biggest advantages. The median value of owner-occupied units is \$144,900, compared with \$204,900 for the U.S. average and \$162,800 in Little Rock. Another way of looking at affordability is comparing housing cost as a share of household income, and by this measure the city is very competitive. As the chart shows, residents are less burdened by housing costs as a share of household income, compared with U.S. and regional averages.

In income terms, Benton ranks a bit lower than the U.S. average in both median household income and per capita income. It is likely that, due to the city's cost advantages, actual material standard of

Benton had a median age of 37.0 in 2018, somewhat higher than it was in 2010 (35.0). Its age profile is broadly similar to the U.S. average, with slightly more persons in the youngest (under 20) age groups, fewer in young adult (20 to 34) groups, and generally similar to the average in older groups.

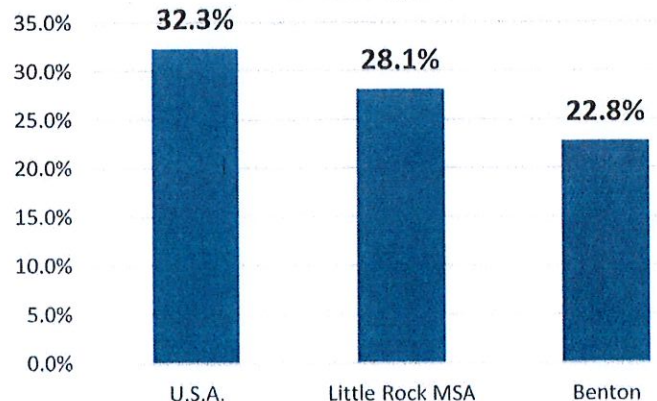
In terms of ethnic breakdown, Benton has a larger share of white population than U.S. and regional averages, and proportionately

Share of Population by Age Group 2018



Source: ACS 2018 (five-year).

Share of Residents Paying 30 Percent + of HH Income for Housing 2018



Source: ACS 2018 (five-year).

living is at least equivalent to the U.S. average, especially in housing costs cited above. At the same time, Benton has a lower poverty rate than the U.S. average, with about 8.9 percent (one in eleven) residents living in poverty.

Comparative Economic Metrics 2018

	US	Benton
Median HH Income (\$)	60,293	55,805
Per capita income (\$)	32,621	28,263
Share in poverty	14.1%	8.9%

Source: ACS 2018 (five-year)

Benton education levels differ marginally from the U.S. average. The city's share of population with a high school diploma is slightly higher than the U.S. average. Its share of population with a BA degree or higher is 27 percent, marginally lower than the U.S. average of 31.5 percent. Benton's share of population with a graduate or professional degree is 9.9 percent, versus 12.1 for the U.S. average.

Employment by Industry Comparison Benton and LR MSA 2017

Industry	MSA	Benton	Benton LQ
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	816	20	0.79
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas	974	-	0.00
Utilities	3,152	136	1.39
Construction	16,725	584	1.13
Manufacturing	20,733	590	0.92
Wholesale Trade	15,507	294	0.61
Retail Trade	36,648	1,980	1.75
Transportation and Warehousing	11,350	98	0.28
Information	7,221	155	0.69
Finance and Insurance	15,803	321	0.66
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	4,585	69	0.49
Professional, Scientific, and Tech. Svcs.	18,972	332	0.57
Management of Companies/Enterprises	5,611	42	0.24
Administration & Support, Waste Mgt	20,566	247	0.39
Educational Services	23,981	744	1.00
Health Care and Social Assistance	61,650	2,449	1.28
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	3,632	111	0.99
Accommodation and Food Services	27,641	1,163	1.36
Other Services	8,553	459	1.74
Public Administration	20,154	236	0.38
Total	324,274	10,030	

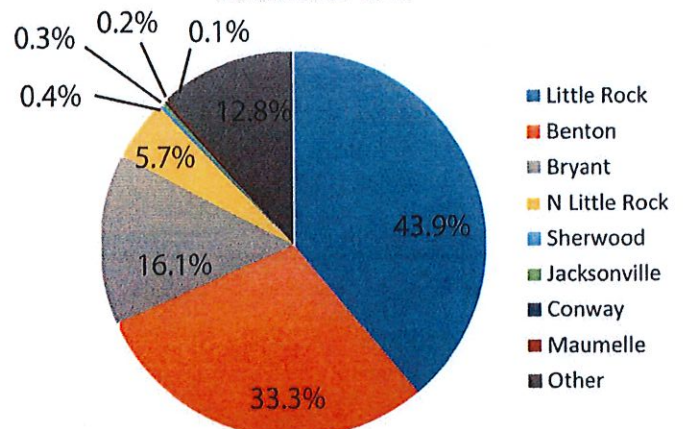
Figures represent primary jobs.
Source: LEHD 2017.

Employment at a Glance

Benton was originally the county seat of a rural county. From the middle to late 20th century, it was an important mining town, with a major role in bauxite mining during World War II and immediately after. Bauxite mining went into decline as the city took on its next major economic role, as a community for workers commuting to jobs in nearby Little Rock. Major population growth has correlated with an expanding presence in service industries like retailing and health care. The table (below left) compares Benton jobs by industry with the region. The LQ, or Location Quotient, is a measure of job concentration in comparison with the region. Benton's largest job concentration is in retail trade, and the closely related "accommodation and food services" sector. Beyond that, the city has an above-average presence in health care and social assistance. In effect, the city is a sub-regional medical hub. Other prominent sectors include construction (related to continuing housing growth), utilities and other services. In short, Benton has the classic characteristics of a bedroom community – the bulk of its jobs serve the needs of locals, many of whom commute to jobs closer to the regional core.

Benton's resident workers mostly commute to jobs outside the city – about 67 percent. The largest share, about 44 percent, go to jobs in Little Rock. Another 16 percent commute to jobs in Bryant. Only about 33 percent of resident workers hold jobs in Benton. Meanwhile, a large share of the jobs located in Benton are held by people commuting in. Nearly half of the jobs in Benton's local economy are held by persons living in nearby communities, including Little Rock, Bryant, Haskell, Malvern, Hot Springs and rural portions of Saline County.

Commuting Destinations of Workers Residing in Benton 2012–2016



Source: CTPP 2012-2016

Key Considerations

Recurring themes expressed throughout public participation revealed citizens' critical concerns. The following considerations must be addressed through the city's goals, strategies, and implementation actions to best serve residents as growth and demographic changes continue in Benton over the next decade.

Livability

Livability is the sum of several community characteristics that indicate quality of life. Priorities can be different in a diverse population but should still speak to a shared community vision. In Benton, public comment consistently called for a community that allows all ages, abilities, and diverse backgrounds the opportunity to live safely and affordably, with access to a safe, efficient, and equitable transportation system, high quality infrastructure and public spaces, and access to education and employment.

Land Development

Land development must address Benton's accessibility for its growing population. Growth is certainly positive, but should account for residents' housing needs, mobility, and the cost of new development on city services and infrastructure. Sprawling development of the last several decades is less sustainable as cities become strapped by high maintenance costs of aging infrastructure required to service low density development. Furthermore, residents want unique, walkable neighborhoods that can accommodate different lifestyles and provide affordable living.

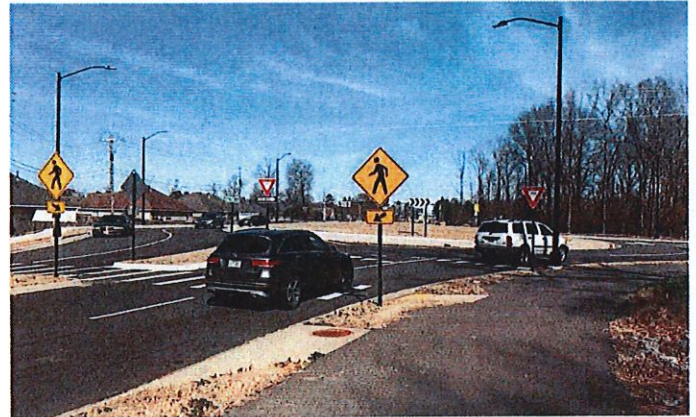
The city can balance its growth with a strategic mix of infill development around existing neighborhoods. With well-designed developments, denser mixed-use infill areas can provide a critical link to essential services in areas where they are currently lacking. *Moving Benton Forward* includes a comprehensive land use map and land use scenarios to guide development to become more sustainable and equitable for the population's various needs.



Single family neighborhoods, like Hendrix Village, can be more walkable.

Mobility

To increase mobility and accessibility, Benton must provide transportation options for all modes of travel. Transportation and land development are two sides of the same coin. Pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists can benefit from a transportation system that considers complementary land development practices that make it easier to walk or ride a bike to essential destinations around town. Transportation choice can curb congestion on roadways and increase access and safety for all users of the transportation system.



Alcoa Road, just east of the city, accommodates several modes of transportation.

The 2016 Benton Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan identifies key corridors for new or improved infrastructure that can connect residents across the city with these modes. Continued implementation will connect residents with schools, city parks, and other amenities. Sidewalks and bike lanes are a start, but the city should consider connectivity of streets, block sizes, and land use through development codes to create a multi-modal friendly city.

During public participation, a desire for public transit was expressed, both as a commuting option and a local service. Currently the city has South Central Arkansas Transit, a service that is mainly limited to Medicaid related trips. However, a more comprehensive service could allow those without a car, those too young or old to drive, and disabled persons access to employment and essential services across town and beyond. Transit can also relieve safety concerns and traffic congestion on roadways in town and on Pulaski County commutes.

City Infrastructure and Services

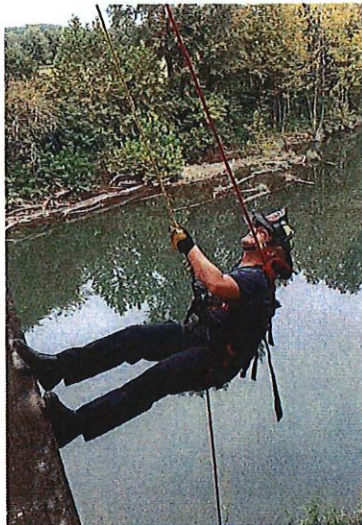
As the city develops, it should consider maintenance and strategic expansion of its infrastructure and services. Many streets require repair or reconstruction. Public sentiment favors maintenance on existing infrastructure over building new streets to serve residents and businesses. Several current neighborhood roads are failing, and some lack crucial curb and gutter. Additional amenities like streetlights and sidewalks can increase safety for residents and

could be added in existing neighborhoods. These streets should take precedence over new construction to encourage infill and redevelopment within the city's current footprint.

Utility infrastructure is also aging. Benton should continue to fix and maintain its sewer and water lines as they are relied on by a growing population. Business recruitment and development may depend on upgraded internet connectivity, mobile technology, and other tech that may benefit from ungrounding efforts. Benton should weigh the costs of utility expansion and upgrades when considering new developments. Strategic investments for new and infill development should be appropriate for a diverse mix of residential, commercial, and service uses.

Population growth necessitates increased services. The city will consider additional personnel, equipment, and facility expansions to serve more residents and land area. Rising population, and a city developing more on its edges, will require greater numbers of police officers and fire fighters. Although new hiring is inevitable, infill development may curb the need for several new additions. The same can be said about the need for new facilities, as stations are strategically located to serve a fixed area. Sprawling development can increase the number of facilities, which is costly to taxpayers.

Another critical concern from public participation is code enforcement. The city must be responsive to concerns and may need to hire additional officers as growth continues. Properties considered abandoned or unsightly can make neighborhoods feel unsafe, diminish property values, and affect livability. More attention to code enforcement can help maintain a livable Benton.



Growth will demand additional firefighters and other essential personnel.



Events like Third Thursday can contribute to a community's sense of place.

and more stories. Large, landscaped sidewalks with benches and lighting should line the streets to enhance safety and aesthetics. The city could study narrower travel lanes for motorists, more on-street parking, and alternatives to one-way streets.

Benton invested a great deal in the River Center and surrounding park, but citizens would like to see investments continue around the city. Several smaller, neighborhood parks could increase accessibility to recreation and provide a safe place for families to be active and more engaged in the community. The Saline River is an underutilized amenity that can develop into a multi-activity riparian corridor. Expanding a trail system to connect these public parks and spaces can enhance livability.

Quality public spaces in downtown and parks should include places to gather and schedule events for the public to attend. Benton must foster community development by partnering with businesses, citizen groups, and city leaders to activate public spaces.

Economic Opportunity

Benton residents would like to see diverse economic opportunities. Public participation revealed the desire for employment beyond retail and food services. Although the city has its share of health care and professional service jobs, the information and technology sector is weaker. The city should pursue knowledge-based employers, but also foster local entrepreneurship with programs like those established in other Central Arkansas cities.

Business development is aided by a skilled population and livability considerations. Benton should identify skillsets that knowledge-based employers' value and work with local educational and training facilities to develop relevant programs. Public comment consistently mentioned The Saline County Career Technical Education Center (CTE) as being an asset to train locals for new industries. Benton can leverage its education to diversify its employment.

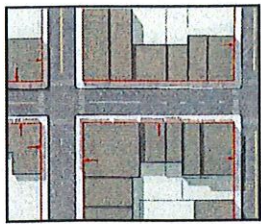
Today's employers consider quality of life when deciding where to locate or expand their businesses. Benton should consider previously mentioned challenges to ensure the most livable environment for its diverse population. It starts with *Moving Benton Forward*. A good plan can grow a great community!

Public Spaces and Amenities

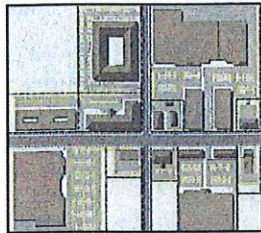
Key to Benton's livability is quality public spaces and amenities. Public participation made clear that residents want a thriving downtown, access to trails and parks, and more activities for kids and adults. This is the recipe for a welcoming place that benefits current residents and is a recruitment tool for new residents and businesses.

Downtown can increase its vibrancy by encouraging foot traffic. Allowing a mix of uses including residential, commercial, and entertainment can activate a space. Codes should also allow new buildings to "enclose" the pedestrian realm with limited setbacks

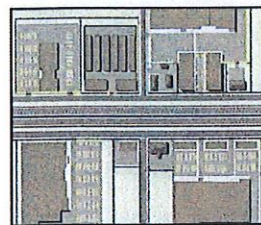
Future Land Use Placetypes



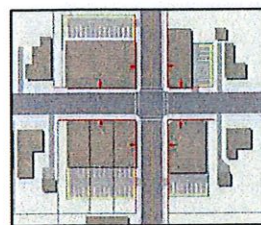
The **Town Center** land use includes downtown Benton and the surrounding area. Mixed use development that is pedestrian oriented is encouraged in this area. Form based zoning may be used in this area to ensure that buildings help create a strong sense of place in downtown Benton and help encourage a vibrant and walkable downtown for the city.



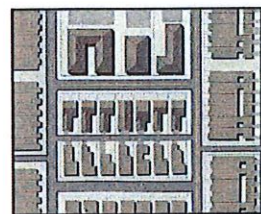
The **Mixed Use Corridor** land use accommodates medium to smaller scale commercial development and should be convenient to both motorists and pedestrians. A variety of uses are appropriate along commercial corridors, including mixed-use development. Big box stores should utilize liner buildings, and gas stations and other auto oriented businesses should be designed in a way to accommodate pedestrians and contribute to the sense of place along corridors such as Military Road.



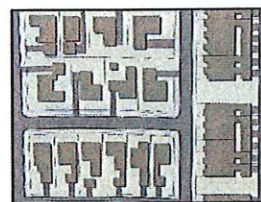
The **Regional Commercial** land use is appropriate for areas along frontage roads and other areas of the city where vehicular traffic is high and pedestrian facilities are limited. Large floor plate commercial buildings are appropriate in this land use, but site designs should still enhance sense of place through siting, orientation, and design of buildings, and sites should safely accommodate pedestrians.



Commercial nodes provide needed access to retail and other commercial services in different areas of the city. Commercial nodes should be walkable and smaller scale when located within the city and near neighborhoods. Commercial nodes in lower density areas may have designs that are more convenient for motorists, but should still safely accommodate pedestrians.



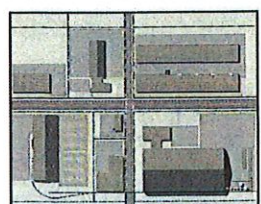
Higher density residential areas provide a variety of needed housing types and consist of a mix of walkable smaller multi-family buildings, townhomes, and smaller lot single family development with alley accessible driveways. This placetype should be located close to major transportation corridors and commercial areas. Multi-family buildings should integrate into walkable neighborhoods rather than being located in large multi-building complexes.



The **moderate density residential** land use covers the majority of the city and consists primarily of single family development. This can be a mix of attached and detached single-family homes. Smaller lots size subdivisions may utilize alley accessible driveways.



Low Density residential land use is appropriate in areas where it may be difficult to extend city services and in areas where physical constraints may make low densities more practical.



Industrial areas of the city should be convenient to transportation facilities, and separated from residential areas. Undeveloped areas with suitable topography and infrastructure access are preserved to allow for future high-tech manufacturing and clean light industrial development

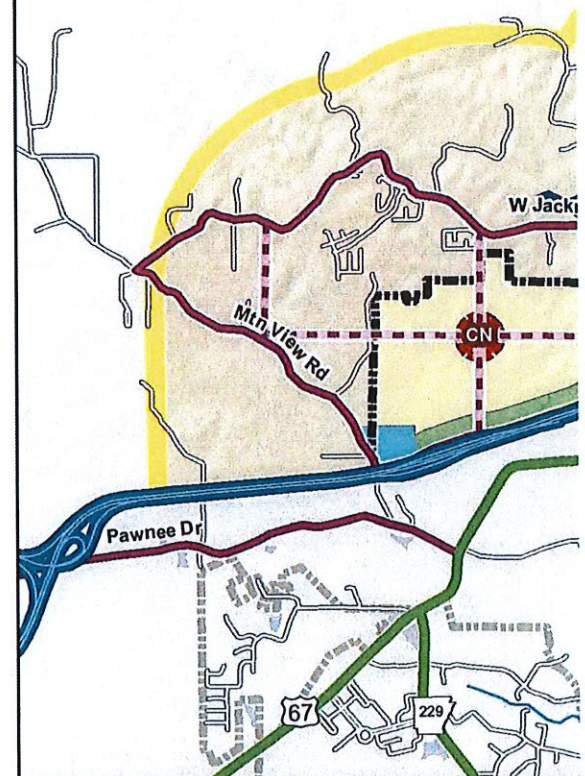
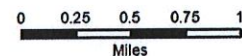
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MAP

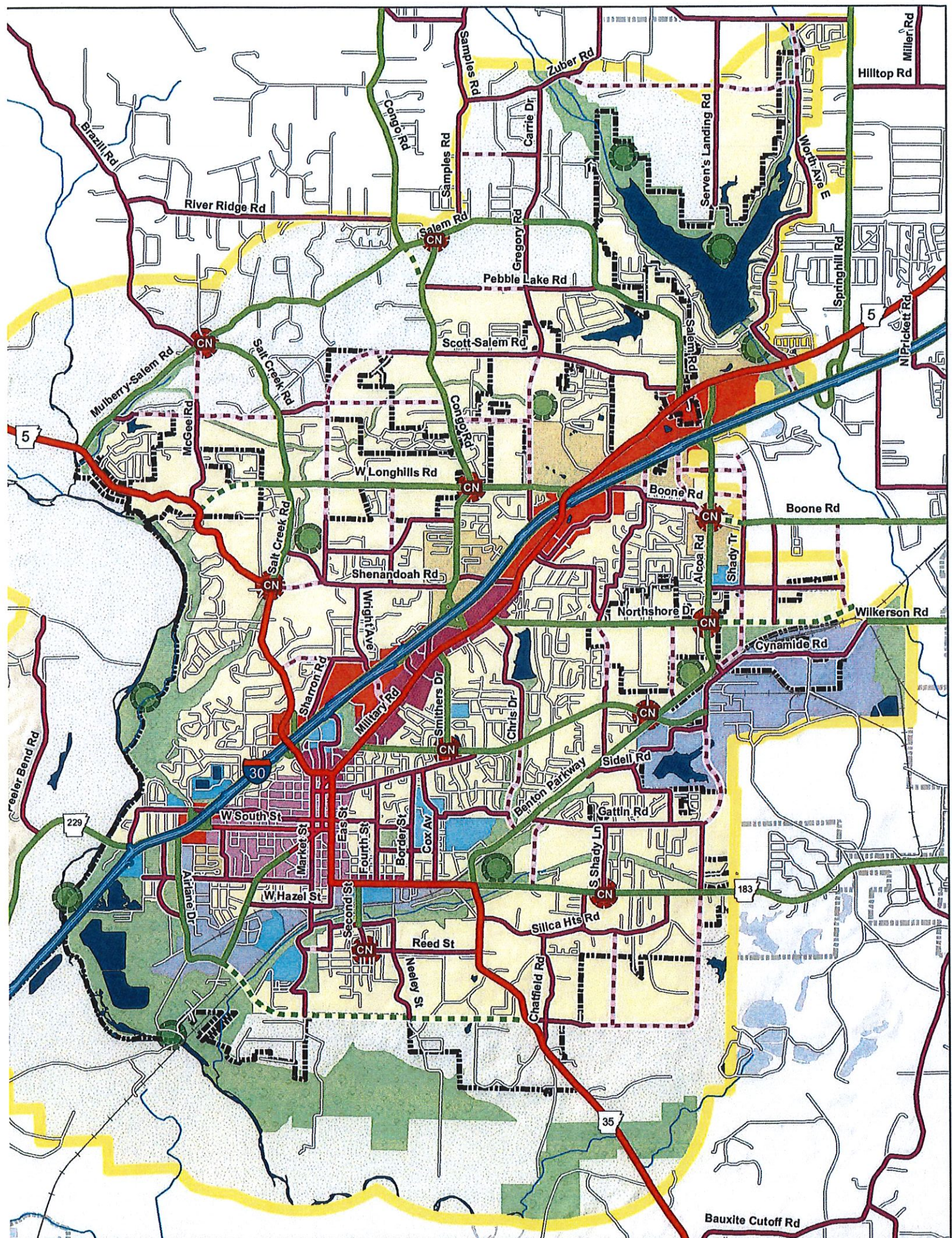
Master Street Plan Classification

- Interstate
- Principal Arterial
- Arterial
- Urban Collector
- Collector
- Proposed Arterial
- Proposed Collector
- Local Road

Land Use Placetype

- Town Center
- Mixed-Use Corridor
- Regional Commercial
- Residential Higher Density
- Residential Moderate Density
- Residential Lower Density
- Public/Civic Facility
- Transportation
- Industrial
- Agricultural
- Open Space
- Commercial Node
- Potential Park Location





Land Use Planning in Benton

The *Moving Benton Forward* Future Land Use Plan (pg. 10) will help guide growth and development in the Benton Planning Area. Public input received during outreach was supplemented with a data-driven land use suitability analysis to propose appropriate land use and development for the Benton Planning Area.

Comments indicated an overwhelming desire for a new land use future that includes more compact, mixed-use, and walkable neighborhoods. Residents desire development that is more efficient, fosters a vibrant downtown and several viable commercial corridors, that provides housing choice, and creates a more livable city.

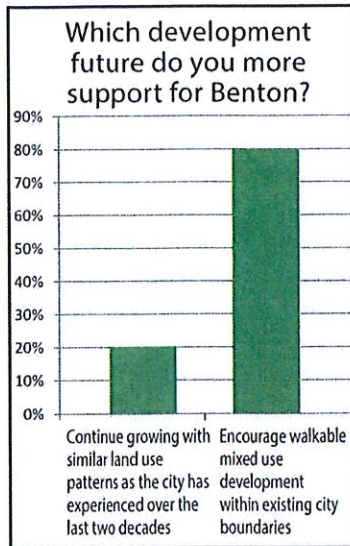
Comprehensive Land Use Map

The map is a plan for future development to help the city determine what areas are most appropriate for growth.

In general, areas around downtown and areas closer to the Interstate 30 and the Military Road Corridors are shown as most appropriate for denser growth. Areas on the periphery of the Planning Area are more appropriate for lower density development. Concentrating higher density development in central areas and closer to major transportation corridors will minimize traffic impacts for residential portions of the city and reduce strains on city infrastructure and services.

Moving Benton Forward's land use plan classifies development into eleven different "place types" that are described on the plan map. A place type is a land use pattern for which specific impacts can be determined such as water consumption, traffic generation, or stormwater runoff.

- Town Center
- Mixed-Use Corridor
- Regional Commercial
- Residential Higher Density
- Residential Moderate Density
- Residential Lower Density
- Public / Civic Facility
- Industrial
- Agricultural
- Open Space



Planning for Smarter Growth

Future development will need to accommodate thousands of new residents over the next decade. The city is projected to grow by almost 7,000 people by 2030. Over 2,500 new housing units will be required to accommodate this growth. If development continues at current densities, over one thousand acres of land will be consumed by new housing. There is still undeveloped land in the city to allow for future development at this density. However, continuing this low-density trend will necessitate more road and utility investments, which will require expensive maintenance in the future. Lower density development also means more ground for emergency services to cover and will result in a less walkable city.

To achieve the vision that was expressed by the public, Benton will need to begin developing in new ways. New residential land use patterns that incorporate a wider variety of housing types and smaller lot sizes combined with new mixed-use walkable infill development will help create more vibrancy for commercial areas and more housing choice for residents.

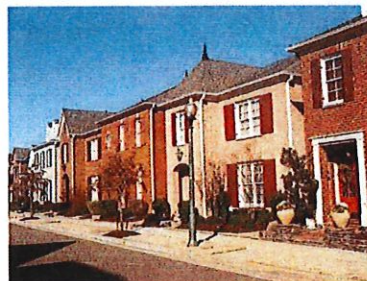
Diversity in Residential Options

The desire for a greater variety of housing options was expressed by many residents. Recent residential development has predominately consisted of detached single-family housing on medium sized lots. However, this housing option does not fit the needs of many residents. Both young and old residents have expressed a desire for a greater variety of housing types, including smaller lot single family homes, town houses, patio homes, live-work units, smaller scale multi-family developments, and mixed-use developments.

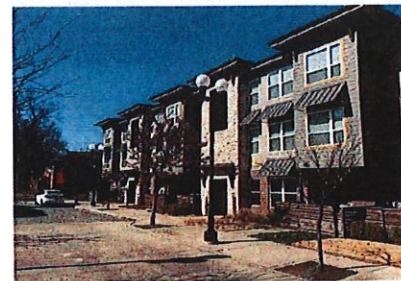
While most residential areas will remain detached single-family, mixing townhomes and single-family homes on smaller lots into more areas of the city will allow for increased housing options for



Single-family Duplex and small lot development



Detached small lot single family



Smaller scale multi-family building

those who desire smaller yards to maintain, while also helping to create more compact, efficient and walkable neighborhoods.

Places that are closer to commercial areas and major transportation corridors are more suitable for higher densities that incorporate smaller lot sized single-family, attached single-family, attached multi-family and walkable smaller scale multi-family buildings that will further increase housing choices for residents.

Strengthening Downtown



Walkable urban building form is essential to strengthening downtown.

Fundamental to creating a vibrant and walkable downtown is ensuring buildings enclose the pedestrian realm, creating a street-wall, by being built closer to the sidewalk and utilizing ample ground floor windows to showcase activity.

Continuing this traditional downtown development pattern will strengthen the city center. A form-based zoning code, which favors how neighborhoods look over separating them by specific uses, can ensure new development helps contribute to a strong sense of place.

Developing Commercial Corridors



Busy commercial corridors can accommodate walkable design.



Parking lots are redevelopment opportunities for Military Corridor

The urban form of new development must be considered to achieve the vision of *Moving Benton Forward*. How buildings are sited and how they face the public realm greatly impacts an area's walkability and ultimately its sense of place.

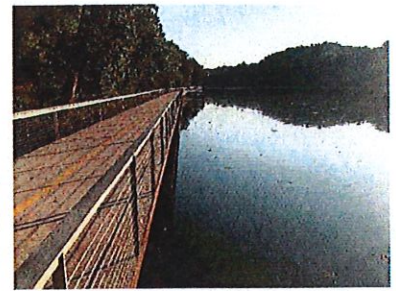
To ensure the Military Road corridor remains a vibrant commercial destination in the future it will need to be redeveloped as a walkable mixed-use corridor. Keeping existing retail space occupied will be a challenge with future online retail competition

Underutilized parking lots offer ample redevelopment opportunities along the corridor. New walkable infill buildings and liner buildings can help contribute to the walkability of the corridor by

fronting the street. Allowing a variety of uses, including multi-family residential and mixed-use buildings, will contribute to the corridor's long-term viability.

Recreational Spaces

Benton residents expressed a strong need for additional park and open space in all areas of the city. A variety of park and open spaces are needed, including neighborhood pocket parks, greenways, natural areas with trails, and parks with a combination of active and passive uses suitable for people of all ages. A high priority should be placed on developing additional park space along the Saline River.



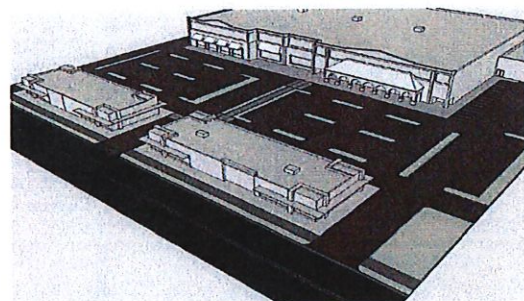
High quality parks and open spaces are needed throughout the city.

Lower Growth Areas

Some locations in the planning area are not appropriate for residential or commercial development over the next decade. Areas lacking utility and road infrastructure may be most appropriate for agricultural uses until further population growth and development requires expansion of utilities beyond the current utility service area. Areas such as the 100-year flood plain, steep slopes, wetlands should remain as open space, or in some cases may also be appropriate for agricultural land uses.

Preserving land for future industrial use is important for the economic development. Large flat sites with rail access and access to major transportation routes are optimal sites for cleaner light industrial development. Modern light industrial and high-tech industrial spaces are needed to further diversify Benton's economy. These areas' uses should include clean landscaped sites that have minimal noticeable environmental impacts.

Liner Buildings



Liner Buildings can be an important tool in retrofitting aging auto oriented commercial corridors. They are shallow buildings built along the street side of large parking lots and have entrances that are convenient to both the parking lot and the sidewalk along the major street. Generally, these buildings serve as out parcel retail and are built on underutilized areas of parking lots. Liner buildings help to enclose the street and help enhance walkability and sense of place.

Benton Transportation Plan

Transportation Needs & Priorities

Benton residents spoke clearly about the importance of developing and maintaining a safe, efficient, and equitable transportation system. The system includes not only Benton streets, but also sidewalks, paths and potential transit service.

The transportation plan consists of a Master Street Plan map (p. 10) and recommended roadway cross sections. These should be used in conjunction with the 2016 Benton Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan that addresses those issues in greater detail.

Primary transportation concerns expressed by residents during *Moving Benton Forward* outreach were the need to fix and maintain existing streets, the need for complete streets that incorporate facilities for all users, and the need to improve Benton's walkability.

Maintaining the Current System

Participants recognized the need to maintain and improve existing roadways. Pavement condition was cited by many to be in poor condition throughout the city. An assessment and inventory of the street network's condition is needed. Assessment should note pavement roughness and overall road condition. The city should develop a year-by-year resurfacing and crack sealing plan for all

city streets. Preemptive strategies such as crack sealing can extend pavement life and minimize the need for costly road reconstruction.

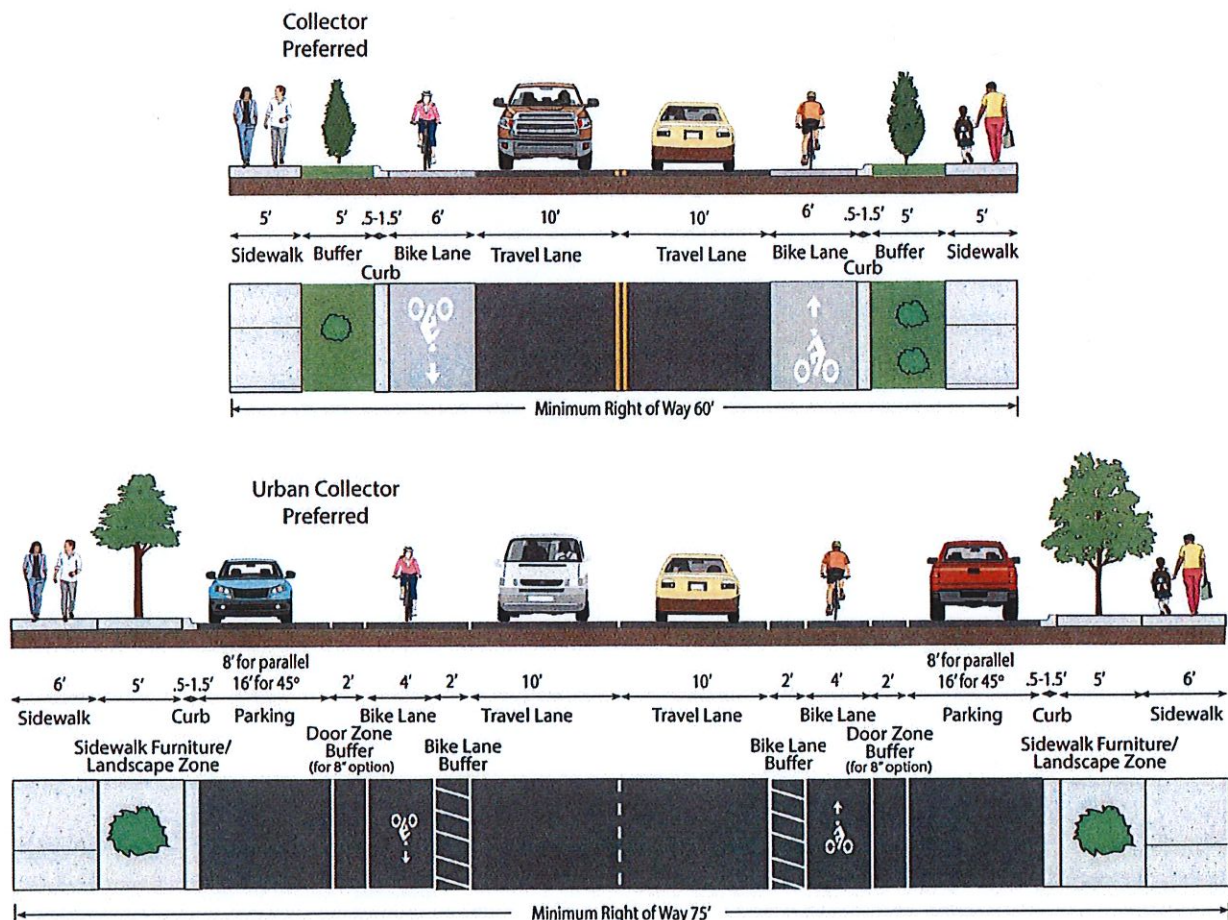
Roadway capacity, congestion, and system reliability were not viewed to be as significant of issues as road maintenance and complete streets.

Recommended Actions

Moving Benton Forward recommends prioritizing road maintenance in the street budget. Limited strategic expenditures for new road construction, widening and intersection will be needed in growth areas. It is important that rights of way be preserved for these future connections.

Master Street Plan Components

The Master Street Plan map (p. 10) shows proposed future roadway connections that may be needed as growth continues. Roads are classified based on expected roadway capacity, intensity of use, the character of trips using the facility, and the adjacent neighborhood's character. Principal arterials carry the highest volumes of traffic, serve major activity centers and provide for regional connectivity. Minor arterials augment principal arterials but serve shorter trips



and have lower traffic volumes, collector streets help distribute traffic to and from local streets. The Urban Collector prioritizes sense of place and walkability and is appropriate for new facilities in future traditional neighborhood and mixed-use development that have not yet been identified on the map. Existing Urban Collectors in the Town Center may vary from recommended cross sections to accommodate existing conditions, but improvements should include all recommended elements.

Diagrams below show recommended cross sections for new corridors and future improvements. All cross sections stress the importance of providing complete streets with facilities for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists. Bike facilities should be constructed consistent with the city's bike plan. A travel demand model was used to identify new road connections that were the most effective routes for minimizing the overall system delay.

As future growth expands outward, a regular grid of minor arterial and collector streets is needed to evenly distribute traffic across the network. Short strategic connections which can significantly improve the network's reliability are shown on the Master Street Plan map. When possible, local roads in new subdivisions should utilize a grid pattern, minimize cul-de-sacs, and preserve the ability to connect to future development.

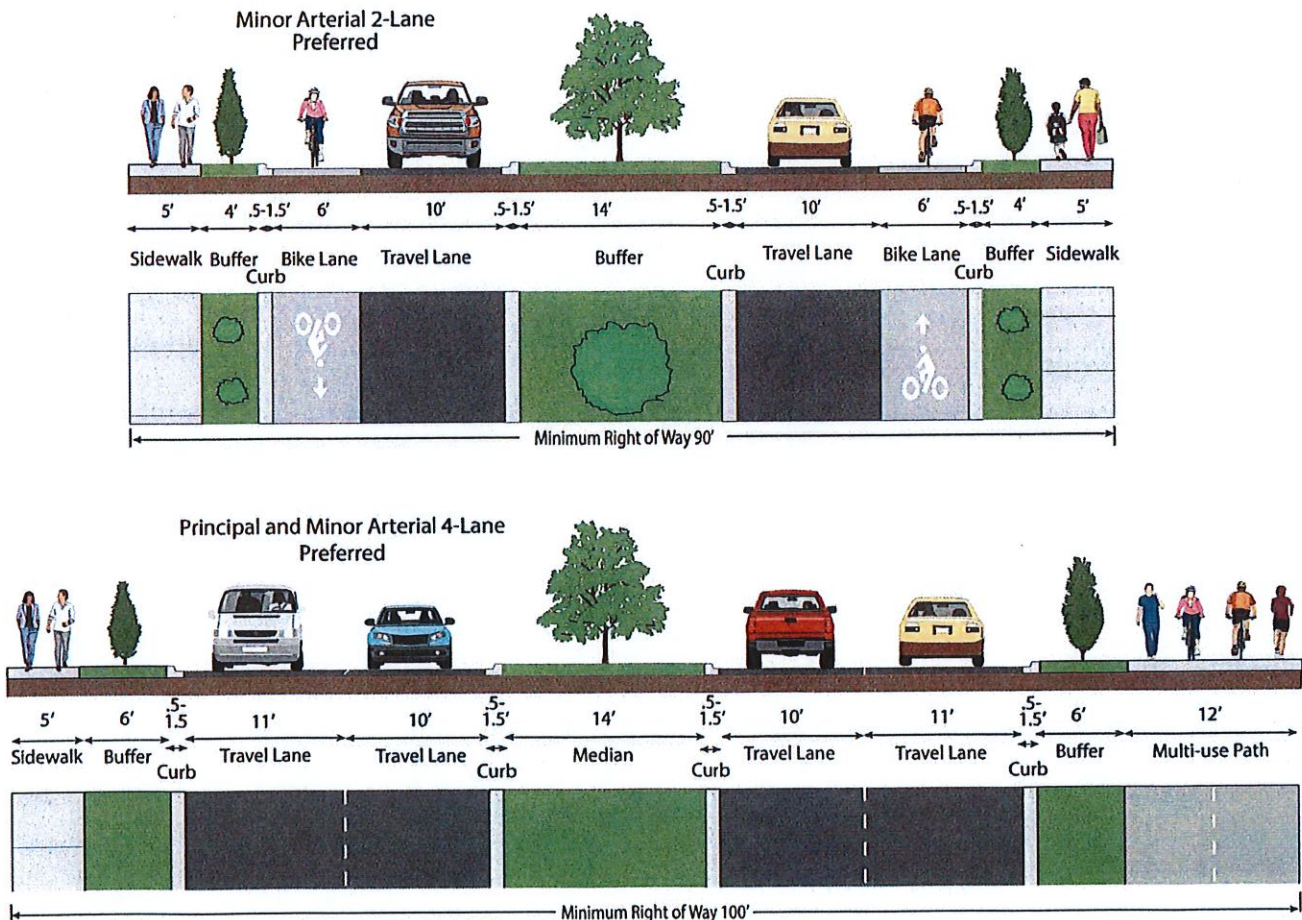
Additional elements that must be considered to provide a safe and efficient transportation system include:

- Minimizing turning radii to reduce the speed of turning traffic ;
- Sidewalk bulb-outs should be used when on-street parking is present to minimize pedestrian crossing distances;
- Traffic calming measure such as chicanes, neck downs, speed tables, roundabouts, raised crosswalks, and surface textures can be used to reduce speeds on collectors;
- Access management strategies including shared driveways and reduced median breaks should be used to protect capacity on arterial roadways.

Beyond Automobiles

Walkability was emphasized in public feedback and is essential to accessibility and livability in Benton. Safe and comfortable pedestrian accommodations allow access to parks, schools, civic centers, and commercial districts, which unlocks opportunities for all residents to enjoy their city.

Transit is a key component of an equitable transportation system. However, future studies are needed to determine the feasibility of local fixed route service and express commuting service to Little Rock. The recommendations in Moving Benton Forward can help ensure that Benton develops with a land use pattern that allows for efficient transit service in the future.



Moving Benton Forward Goals, Objectives, & Actions

Moving Benton Forward recognizes the community's diverse characteristics (demographics pgs. 4–5) and explores the city's advantages (community assets pgs 2–3) and unique challenges (key considerations pgs. 6–7). With these factors in mind, public outreach focused on creating an actionable set of goals, objectives, and actions to best guide development toward Benton's future. After several stakeholder meetings with city staff, 6 goals, 18 objectives, and 92 actions were developed to chart a course for Benton's quality livable future.

But what is the difference between a goal, objective, and an action in *Moving Benton Forward*? Goals are big picture themes addressing

the city's challenges and represent broad, long term desired results. Objectives are more specific issues the city must address to reach each goal. Action items are detailed policies or recommendations that implement the objectives. The following goals, objectives, and actions are meant to guide the city's policy decisions over the plan horizon.

The Goals, Objectives, and Actions listed are not in priority order. The prioritization, funding, and actions needed to accomplish *Moving Benton Forward's* Goals will be determined by committees and/or by City of Benton personnel assigned to accomplish these goals in the future.

Goal 1. Design a Connected Community



Objective 1. Promote safe multi-modal transportation

Actions

- Implement the *2016 Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan*.
- Designate resources to repair the existing transportation network.
- Research feasibility of local bus service to connect neighborhoods to important destinations.
- Pursue agreements with Rock Region METRO for commuter transit to key centers in Little Rock.
- Employ new traffic calming measures in strategic locations.



Objective 2. Develop walkable neighborhoods

Actions

- Implement the *2016 Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan*.
- Land development regulations should encourage shorter distances between destinations.
- Catalog city-wide sidewalk condition and prioritize reinvestment areas of need.
- Include sidewalks and bicycle facilities in new subdivision development.
- Minimize parking's impact by locating it on street, behind or to the side of the development.



Objective 3. Connect public facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists

Actions

- Implement the *2016 Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan*.
- Increase the street network's connectivity to improve access to public facilities.
- Street design must include sidewalks and bicycle paths in new roadways.
- Prioritize the bike-pedestrian connections between the River Center to downtown, and Tyndall Park/Benton school campus to downtown.
- Create wayfinding signage to help trail users find routes to local destinations.
- Partner with utility companies to utilize their easements for new trails.



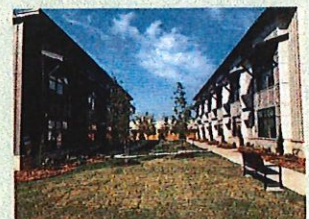
2. Encourage Innovative Land Development



Objective 1. Create new housing options to better address affordability

Actions

- Use city codes to require connected streets, alleys, smaller blocks, and to allow traditional neighborhood and mixed-use development.
- Incentivize infill development with a streamlined permitting process.
- Establish a public landbank to influence development of affordable housing for seniors, young professionals, and those with limited access.
- Identify funds, like community development block grants, for affordable housing.



- Encourage new neighborhoods with smaller scale multi-family, small lot single-family, and affordable housing through breaks in permitting costs and fees.
- Townhome housing should be allowed in most residential zones.
- Allow accessory dwelling units, like “granny flats,” in single family zoning districts.

Objective 2. Develop mixed-use districts

Actions

- Develop a best practice mixed-use development template for local developers.
- Make mixed-use zones flexible by focusing on a building's form versus its use.
- Provide incentives to mixed-use developers such as reduced permit fees.
- Destinations should be within ¼ mile walking distance of most residents.



Hendrix Village

Objective 3. Encourage walkable infill development on existing commercial corridors

Actions

- Create area-specific plans on commercial corridors to redevelop underutilized big box sites and parking lots.
- Prioritize mixed-use infill at strategic locations (Military Rd., Edison Ave., South St.)
- Repurpose older vacant structures as community gathering spots over demolition.
- Surface parking lots should be located to the side or rear of a buildings.
- Ensure there are building entrances from sidewalks along surrounding streets as well as from parking lots.
- Study incentives for walkable infill developments such as reduced permit fees.

Goal 3. Revitalize City Infrastructure



Objective 1. Rebuild and maintain existing streets, sidewalks, and bikeways

Actions

- Prioritize funding repairs to existing infrastructure before absorbing costs of new construction.
- Develop a multi-year resurfacing plan to prioritize streets that need to be rebuilt completely and identify those whose lives can be extended with overlays, crack sealing or other treatments.
- Utilize technology, like pavement management software, to prioritize fixes.
- Create an I-30 corridor gateway study to transform design and aesthetics.

Objective 2. Reinvest in blighted areas

Actions

- Identify vacant or underutilized properties as catalyst sites for redevelopment.
- Earmark funding to repair existing sidewalks to ADA standards with streetlights.
- Bolster the city's code enforcement with additional resources to ensure compliance.
- Remove dilapidated structures in blighted areas.
- Pursue grants for reinvestment historical properties.
- Establish an aid program to encourage private owners to preserve and restore historic buildings and sites.



Objective 3. Promote efficient provision of city utilities and services

Actions

- Ensure costs of extending utilities, providing new service, and future city supplied maintenance for new development is balanced by developer fees.
- Use the latest technology to improve the energy efficiency of city utilities.
- Use energy efficient fixtures (lighting, plumbing, etc.) in city owned buildings.
- Underground utilities on targeted corridors.



Continued on page 16

“Advertise recreational points we tend to forget we have.”

—Survey comment

In the future, I want Benton to be “A place called home. Envied by others.”

—Survey comment

Goal 4. Protect and Provide Natural Areas, Diverse Parks, and Connected Greenspaces



Objective 1. Provide public spaces for citizens of all ages and abilities

Actions

- Use best practice examples to develop parks that are accessible for all abilities.
- Develop more neighborhood pocket parks and spread them throughout the city.
- Protect lower maintenance natural areas, like riparian corridors and hillsides.
- Connect parks with a greenway network.
- Study impact fees to maintain existing and fund new parks.

Objective 2. Leverage the Saline River

Actions

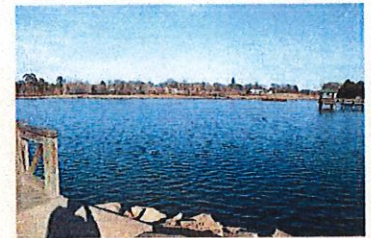
- Keep the river beautiful and litter free with regular organized clean ups.
- Develop scenic river overlooks with restrooms, campgrounds, and other amenities for people of all ages and abilities.
- Develop a greenway from the Southwest Trail, north along the Saline River and connect to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Develop a park along the river on city owned land northwest of the Chenault Reservoir.
- Connect the River Center to the AGFC Saline River Access point with a shared use path, incorporating a wider Sunset Lake Trail and paved Henry Street.
- Create river-related recreational opportunities.
- Create wayfinding signage for river access points.



Objective 3. Construct a mix of activities

Actions

- Include various active and passive recreational activities in park design.
- Improve existing parks with more seating and picnic areas, lighting, and amenities.
- Dedicate funding to the Southwest Trail and its connection to the Old River Bridge.
- Pursue universal design in playgrounds for kids with all abilities.



Goal 5. Cultivate a Thriving Downtown



Objective 1. Encourage a unique sense of place

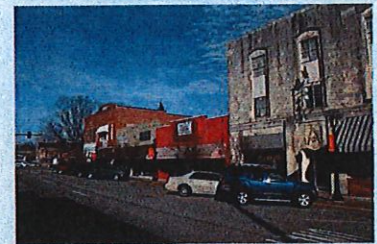
Actions

- Develop a city-wide way-finding signage system to help navigate destinations.
- Use markers to promote Benton's historical places and events.
- Downtown buildings should be taller to create an enclosed intimate space.
- Create an Arts Council to promote murals and public art in downtown.
- Develop a gateway entrance feature to downtown at Military and Main.
- Consider novel transportation options that can attract tourists downtown.

Objective 2. Support a vibrant mix of uses and activities

Actions

- Promote a mix of boutique shopping, specialty shops, and restaurants through the A&P commission.
- Program city sponsored weekend events in downtown to activate the area.
- Encourage varied top floor uses in downtown.



*"Protect/refurbish/use existing historical sites
and other existing buildings. Stop building more."*

—Survey comment

*In the future I want Benton to be "Safe
community oriented. Active Downtown
area. More Kid friendly activities."*

—Survey comment

Goal 6. Reinvent Benton's Economy



Objective 1. Make land development easier

Actions

- Streamline the permitting process.
- Study ways to improve utility capacity in underserved areas of the city.
- Ensure consistency in the enforcement of development regulations.
- Schedule a regular city forum with local developers to stimulate discussion.



Objective 2. Lower barriers to small business creation

Actions

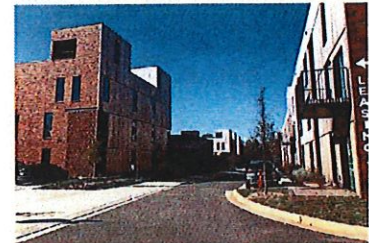
- Review city policies that may limit opportunities for economic development.
- Create low-cost shared office and makerspaces with access to technology and tools.
- Create an improvement grant program for businesses, including façade restorations to increase curb appeal.
- Support festivals and farmers markets to help the promotion of small business.



Objective 3. Consider affordability for Benton's diverse residents

Actions

- Allow single-family on lot sizes under 5,000 square ft.
- Allow smaller scale multi-family developments in strategic areas.
- Allow accessory dwelling units like "granny flats" in residential districts.
- Allow multi-family residential to mix with existing commercial corridors.
- Mixed-use districts should provide options to live, work, and play in close proximity.
- Improve transportation options to jobs for low and middle-income households.



Objective 4. Attract and retain key job sectors

Actions

- Attract knowledge-based talent by improving livability with excellent public spaces.
- Attract diverse employment opportunities beyond retail and food service.
- Develop business retention and recruitment programs.
- Continue development of the C.T.E.
- Expand highspeed broadband access city wide.
- Protect potential industrial sites close to railroads, the freeway, and existing utilities.



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Achieve a Vision Together

Moving Benton Forward will be accomplished through city actions guided by these goals and objectives. The city may employ zoning and subdivision tools, more focused neighborhood plans, corridor specific plans, or a city-wide market study to advance livability efforts. New citizen-advocacy

groups should be utilized to provide insights beyond city staff. *Moving Benton Forward* offers a foundation for the city's next decade of development. Whatever the action, city efforts should continue to engage the community through implementation.

Moving Benton Forward

A Comprehensive Plan for Benton, Arkansas

April, 2020

Moving Benton Forward is...

Benton's Comprehensive Land Use, Development and Master Street Plan for the year 2030. City decisions are guided by the Vision, Goals, Objectives and Actions set within the Plan. *Moving Benton Forward* represents a diverse group of citizens coming together to share a vision and integrates hundreds of responses from online surveys, focus groups, and public meetings.

What to Expect

The Plan sets the city up for success. It consists of six components, described below, that guide important sustainable development decisions:

1. A Vision with Goals, Objectives and Actions—this provides a clear direction and specific efforts to achieve the community where Benton residents want to live.
2. Community Assets—these make Benton unique and can be built upon for more success.
3. Demographics—this is the population's profile. It's important to understand who we plan for.
4. Key Considerations—these are the issues most critical to residents and they define what the plan must address.
5. Land Use Plan—this identifies how development should look as the city grows. It emphasizes opportunities for sustainable development that can help the city provide quality infrastructure and services.
6. Master Street Plan—this plan identifies critical corridors for maintenance and proposes new facilities. Street cross sections provide recommendations for ideal multi-modal components for new infrastructure projects.

