

Planning & Community Development

Guiding Growth with Vision, Responsibility, and Purpose

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"Growth is inevitable. Poor planning is optional."

Chapter Overview

Bella Vista is experiencing one of the most significant periods of growth in its history. Families are moving here, businesses are here, and developers are building here. People are choosing Bella Vista because of its natural beauty, quality of life, and strong sense of community.

That growth is something to celebrate, but growth also brings responsibility. Every new home built creates additional traffic and increases demand for utilities. Additionally, the continuous growth severely strains our first responders, roads, infrastructure, and public services.

Growth without planning creates congestion, strains infrastructure, and frustrates residents. Growth with thoughtful planning creates opportunity, prosperity, and a stronger community. My administration will embrace measured growth, but it must be supported by the infrastructure, public safety, and the long-term planning necessary to protect the quality of life that makes Bella Vista special.

Mission

To guide Bella Vista's growth through thoughtful planning, responsible development, infrastructure readiness, and collaborative partnerships that protect our community while preparing for future generations.

The Twenty-Year Growth Challenge

Bella Vista today is not the Bella Vista of twenty years ago and the Bella Vista twenty years from now will be different than the city we know today. If we don't plan properly, we may not like the future Bella Vista however if we do actually plan properly, we should look forward to what is ahead of us.

Here are some facts headed our way:

- Our population will continue to grow
- Our commercial activity will increase
- Our traffic patterns will evolve
- Our infrastructure demands will expand

- Public expectations will rise.

The question facing city leadership is not whether growth will occur. The question is whether our planning decisions today are creating or will create the Bella Vista we want our children and grandchildren to inherit.

My Planning Philosophy

Planning is not about restricting growth, it's about preparing for it. Or in our case, we have some course corrections to make, and we have some catching up to do while were also looking ahead.

Every development decision should answer four questions:

- Can our roads support it?
- Can our current water and sewer systems support it?
- Can our police, fire, and emergency services support it?
- Will this improve Bella Vista twenty years from now?

If the answer to those questions is yes, we should move forward. But how may of those questions can we honestly answer with “yes”?

If the answer is no, should we be solving the problem(s) before approving the project(s). Are we currently approving projects we shouldn't be? How do we make everybody happy? More importantly, how do we ensure the decisions we are making are keeping our residents safe. Public safety should always be the priority. That is responsible leadership.

Strategic Priorities

1. Infrastructure Before Expansion

Development should be supported by infrastructure, not the other way around.

- Public safety
- Roads
- Water
- Wastewater
- Stormwater
- Utilities

All development should be evaluated based on the City's ability to provide reliable services today and in the future.

2. Plan Twenty Years Ahead

Every comprehensive plan should be a living document, and growth projections should be updated regularly. Infrastructure capacity should be reviewed annually, and land use decisions should consider long-term impacts, not just immediate opportunities. Planning is an ongoing responsibility which must be viewed more proactively. We are currently behind and that must change quickly.

3. Protect Community Character

Bella Vista has developed a unique identity over many decades.

Residents value:

- Beautiful natural surroundings
- Recreational opportunities
- Safe neighborhoods
- High quality of life
- Attractive and peaceful residential communities

Future growth should complement these strengths rather than diminish them. I believe growth and preservation can work together but again, we need to make some changes to get there.

4. Support Smart Economic Development

Commercial development strengthens our tax base, creates jobs, and reduces pressure on residential taxpayers.

My administration will encourage investment that:

- Serves and prioritizes our residents
- Expands local services
- Supports long-term financial sustainability
- Creates quality employment opportunities
- Enhances Bella Vista's reputation

Every economic development opportunity should align with the City's long-term vision.

5. Streamline the Development Process

Residents and builders deserve a process that is predictable, transparent, and efficient.

Government should never create unnecessary confusion. Yes, that happens and government does make mistakes, but we also have to recognize that and make the necessary changes. My administration will continue pursuing improvements that reduce duplication, improve communication, and make the development process easier to navigate.

That includes exploring opportunities for:

- Better coordination between the City and the POA
- Simplified application procedures
- Clear timelines and expectations
- Improved permitting and inspections
- Improved communication throughout the review process

Our goal is simple:

One resident, one application, one coordinated process. Yes, that would be nice, however we don't have all that authority. What we can do is work with the POA to seek solutions together. The City and the POA/ACC will continue exercising its legal responsibilities, but the residents' experience should be straightforward and easy to understand.

6. Build Strong Partnerships

Planning is most successful when organizations work together.

My administration will strengthen collaboration among:

- City departments
- The Bella Vista Property Owners Association
- Developers
- Builders
- Realtors
- Utility providers
- Benton County
- Regional planning organizations
- State agencies

Good planning depends upon strong relationships.

Housing and Neighborhoods

A healthy community provides housing opportunities for people at every stage of life.

- Young families
- Working professionals
- Retirees
- Veterans
- Empty nesters

Future planning should encourage housing choices while preserving the quality and character of existing neighborhoods.

Responsible growth should strengthen—not divide—our community.

Transportation and Connectivity

Transportation planning extends beyond roads.

Future planning should consider:

- Traffic circulation
- Intersection improvements
- Bicycle connectivity
- Pedestrian accessibility where appropriate
- Emergency response routes
- Regional transportation coordination

Transportation investments should support the city's long-term growth strategy.

Technology and Data-Driven Planning

Modern planning requires modern tools.

My administration will encourage the continued use of:

- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- Development tracking software
- Infrastructure modeling
- Population forecasting
- Traffic analysis
- Digital permitting
- Public information dashboards

The best planning decisions are informed by accurate data.

Comprehensive Planning

Bella Vista should maintain and regularly update a Comprehensive Plan that reflects:

- Public safety considerations
- Population projections
- Land use objectives
- Infrastructure priorities
- Housing needs
- Transportation planning
- Economic development goals
- Environmental stewardship

A comprehensive plan should guide decisions, not gather dust on a shelf.

Legal Authority

Planning and community development are governed by Arkansas law, municipal ordinances, and adopted planning policies.

Municipal Planning

- A.C.A. § 14-56-401 through § 14-56-426 – Authorizes municipalities to establish planning commissions, adopt comprehensive plans, regulate subdivision development, and guide community growth.

Zoning Authority

- A.C.A. § 14-56-416 – Authorizes municipalities to adopt zoning regulations that promote public health, safety, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare.

Subdivision Regulations

- A.C.A. § 14-56-417 – Authorizes municipalities to adopt subdivision regulations governing the orderly development of land, streets, utilities, drainage, and public improvements.

Municipal Affairs

- A.C.A. § 14-43-601 – Recognizes planning, development, and related municipal functions as municipal affairs, subject to state law.

Interlocal Cooperation

- A.C.A. § 25-20-101 through § 25-20-108 – Authorizes cooperative planning and infrastructure agreements among local governments and public entities.

National Best Practices

My administration will encourage planning practices consistent with nationally recognized organizations, including:

- American Planning Association (APA) – Comprehensive planning, land use, and community engagement.
- International City/County Management Association (ICMA) – Strategic planning and organizational leadership.
- Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) – Community design principles where appropriate.
- Urban Land Institute (ULI) – Responsible development, economic vitality, and resilient communities.

First 100 Days

- Meet with the Planning Commission and planning staff
- Review of the current Comprehensive Plan
- Evaluate projected growth trends over the next twenty years
- Review infrastructure capacity alongside planned development
- Assess the development review process for opportunities to improve efficiency
- Begin discussions with the POA and development stakeholders on improving coordination
- Develop a Growth Readiness Dashboard that aligns planning decisions with infrastructure capacity

Measuring Success

Residents should experience:

- Better coordinated growth
- Development supported by infrastructure
- More predictable permitting processes
- Stronger collaboration between organizations
- Protection of Bella Vista's unique character
- Increased transparency in planning decisions
- Long-term confidence that growth is being managed responsibly

Closing Thoughts

Planning is one of the greatest responsibilities entrusted to local government.

- Every project approved
- Every commercial project reviewed
- Every road alignment selected
- Every infrastructure investment made

These things will shape Bella Vista for decades to come and the decisions we make today cannot be measured only by next year's budget or next election. They must be measured by the community we leave to future generations.

My commitment is to ensure that every planning decision reflects careful analysis, responsible stewardship, respect for our community, and an unwavering focus on the residents we serve. Because every development approval is more than a construction project. It is a twenty-year plus decision and those decisions require thoughtful consideration.