



There is sure to be a rather large crowd sitting in [City Council chambers on the third floor of Birmingham's City Hall starting at 6 p.m. tonight \(April 4\)](#) – at least, that's the image I have in my mind.

It will not be for a council meeting, though the eventual result will have a significant impact on the future of Birmingham, AL. It's [the scheduled public hearing](#) being held by the [Birmingham Planning Commission](#) focusing on the working draft of [the city's new comprehensive plan](#). It's a process many hope will lead to adoption of the first such plan in the city's history.

Before someone begins to split hairs about that last sentence, several plans have been commissioned in recent years, including one for the region (a la the former Region 2020), [an update focused on the city center](#), and individual commercial revitalization and residential districts. A previous comprehensive plan process was undertaken in 1961, getting to the draft process. Parts were implemented, but it was never fully adopted. This is a chance to truly take a holistic look at the city and its future.

[The current draft document was revealed on March 4](#) and has been available since at City Hall, Birmingham Public Library branches and [online](#) for review.

I had the privilege of serving on the plan's steering committee for the last 18 months as we tried to make sure everyone's interests were heard and addressed. I'd say we were pretty successful considering there were ten community meetings, two public forums ([including this one](#)), three open houses, and fifty small group gatherings that crisscrossed the city. The initial public comment period associated with the process has taken place over the last month, with many of those comments and concerns scheduled to be addressed this evening.

Birmingham has gained a significant amount of media attention in recent months, partially due to the ongoing commemoration of the events of 1963. The most recent accolade is courtesy of Forbes Magazine; [the publication included the city in a list of downtowns to watch](#). Based on some of the buzz online, the path this document takes moving forward will keep the spotlight on Birmingham as we wait to see if we're willing to adopt it.

Is it a perfect plan? No – anyone who suggests there is such a thing really doesn't understand its true function. It provides a framework city officials, the private sector, and the general public can use to move the city forward. The message we are sharing with ourselves and the world this year is one of progress and advancement. This plan lets us show we're serious about that message.

It is one that contains the voices of the city's future, ones we need to be listening to as it is their home we're planning and not ours. It's those conversations I'm looking to as drivers of this site's focus in the coming months and years.

Adoption and passage of a comprehensive plan matters as much as any other effort currently underway in this city. It could even mean more as it demonstrates to interested parties a commitment to consistently improving the city. I'm excited about the conversations this document will and needs to encourage about the future of Birmingham and what it will take to get there - conversations many of us look forward to covering in the future.

If you've got some time this evening, stop by City Hall and make sure your voice continues to be heard. We owe it to the future of the city to make sure it's the true voice of the city, its general population, and not those fearful of change, that's heard.

André Natta *is the stationmaster for* bhamterminal.com.