



2008 ASLA Utah Awards Spotlight



City of Rexburg Comprehensive Plan

By Mark Morris, ASLA, Treasurer

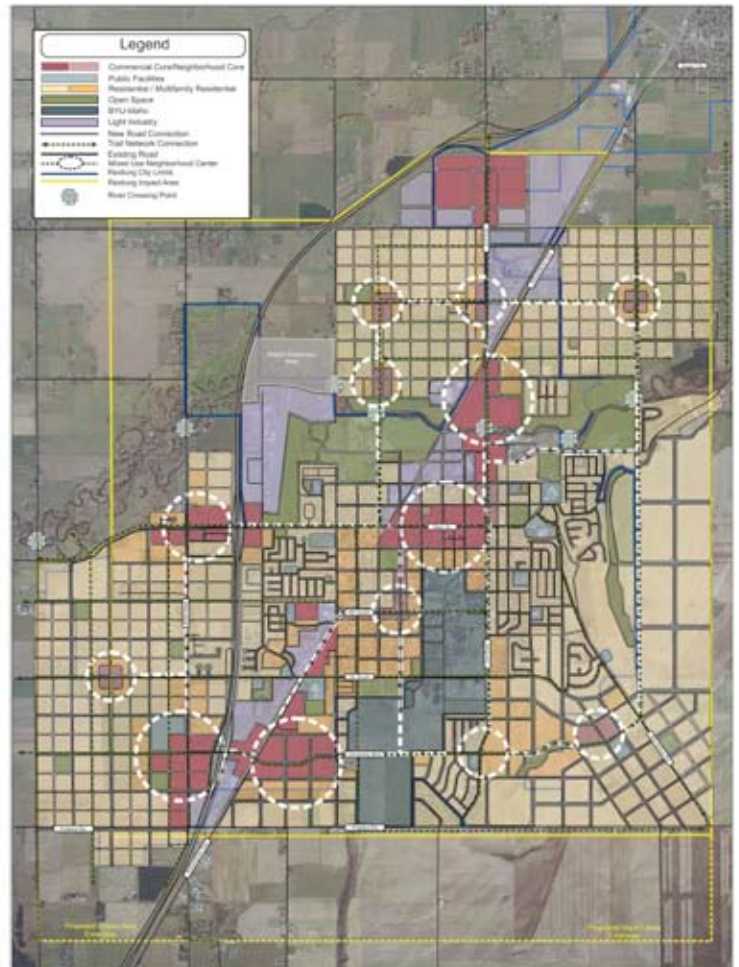
Planners with Cooper Roberts Simonsen Associates have been working actively with the city of Rexburg, Idaho over the last several months to update their Comprehensive Plan document. With planning experience ranging from detailed landscape architectural planning to long-range regional planning, CRSA held regular update meetings with local stakeholders, including the city council and planning commission, in order to thoroughly understand the major issues that the city is facing. The new Comprehensive Plan document will aid local leaders in guiding growth and development in appropriate areas and in appropriate forms in order to mitigate problems that have developed over recent years due to unsustainable growth patterns.

Rexburg was established in the 1880's as part of the settling of the Intermountain West by Mormon pioneers. As with other early Mormon communities, Rexburg's original city plan was patterned after the "Plat of Zion" that was used across the West, viewed by Mormon pioneers as an inspired settlement pattern, and first used by Joseph Smith in the 1830's in Missouri and Illinois. Key elements of this plat include a predictable grid of streets, uniform development lots, and a core civic center.

In recent years, conventional suburban development patterns have become the norm in Rexburg, resulting in various issues, including lack of connectivity, traffic congestion on key corridors, and loss of valuable open space. In 2000 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced that Ricks' College in Rexburg would be converted to a four-year university, Brigham Young University Idaho. With the expansion of the University's faculty, staff, and student body, growth pressures have increased in the surrounding area.

CRSA presented a proposed development plan for the areas planned for growth within the city's declared annexation area. This development plan reintroduced the City's original plat grid, making modifications to the grid when needed in order to respond to physical and natural barriers. A grid of streets on the section lines (one-mile interval) still exists in the city, but it was determined that a more refined grid was necessary in order to prevent major congestion problems on those streets in the future. The final plan requires all new development to occur within a ten block per mile grid.

As part of the proposed development plan, CRSA also proposed creating smaller "neighborhood centers" throughout the city, providing services within individual neighborhoods, encouraging local business growth, as well as reducing congestion in over-developed commercial corridors. Each of these neighborhood centers would have multimodal connections to the other centers in the network, encouraging biking and walking within the community.



Rexburg Comprehensive Plan & Development Code Update
City Boundary and Impact Area
Proposed Grid Extensions





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These neighborhood centers would as serve as important community centers for the large local student community, a significant percentage of which do not own cars, and currently rely on others to drive them to commercial centers.

Integrated into the proposed development plan was an expanded parks and trails system. CRSA found that a top concern of local residents was the loss of open space when new developments came into their neighborhoods. This integrated network of trails and parks would correspond with the network of neighborhood centers, allowing the trails to be used to connect neighborhoods to nearby parks, as well as to larger, regional open spaces, and to their own neighborhood center, which would potentially be the location of the local elementary, church, and commercial center. The centerpiece of the parks and trails system is a greenbelt following the Teton River corridor, which flows directly through the center of the city.

In addition to creating a framework for responsible and more sustainable future development, the Rexburg Comprehensive Plan dovetails with a new Comprehensive Plan for Madison County. Both the County and City plans go back to the historic grid and both focus development around small centers. CRSA developed both plans with an overarching goal of ensuring that as the City expands, that transportation and developments patterns of the City and County snap together and create a seamless transition. The new Comprehensive Plans for Rexburg and Madison County provide an example of a coordinated regional approach to planning, through local level policies.

