

master plan for Detroit: a special report

Without wide support, plan only blueprint of a dream

By RICK RATLIFF
Free Press Staff Writer

The city's new master plan may help officials determine whether their ideas conform to city goals, residents to see whether neighborhood projects fit city policies and developers to determine what they should build.

But a master plan is only a tool. To make an impact, it must be embraced by residents and business, political and community leaders. That support is by no means assured, and without it the plan could turn out to be what Mayor Young says too many plans become — "just so much paper."

Corrine Gilb, director of the city's Planning Department, said the plan results from more than 200 meetings with community groups. She admits that the three-volume document probably will be changed many times in coming years.

from God; it is hammered out in politics," and she said that many of its goals are intentionally vague.

"One has to be extremely careful not to promise what you cannot deliver," she said.

Young, who signed and approved the document this week, will not comment on it until it is released, a spokesman said. When asked whether Young has read the plan, Gilb, said, "No comment."

Gilb oversaw the master plan's development for the last six years. During that time, the plan and Gilb's department have been widely criticized. Last year, the City Council cut her department's budget in half. Council members said they were upset that the long-promised plan was not done.

Other critics have blamed the city's helter-skelter downtown development on the lack of a master plan.

Members of some community

news analysis

groups, suspicious of her work, have said they thought Gilb was carrying out the mayor's secret wishes and would never complete the plan. Some said Young feared it. The appearance of the master plan may put that rumor to rest.

REACTION FROM some City Council members, who must approve the plan, was not enthusiastic.

Councilman Mel Ravitz said he is concerned that the report will not be detailed enough about directions for the city's future. He said the council might send the project "back to the drawing board."

Said Councilman Nicholas Hood: "I haven't been too excited. We've gone the last 10 years without one. If they want to come in and drop another GM

plant, they can have it anywhere they want it," regardless of what the plan says. He referred to the new GM assembly plant built on the Detroit-Hamtramck border.

The first of the three master plan volumes outlines social, economic and land use policies. The second volume examines development goals for the city's Central Business District along the Detroit River, and up Woodward.

The third volume examines the city's neighborhoods. Its policy recommendations are as broad as "improve crime prevention" and as specific as suggesting that a northeast side school for the deaf share its athletic field with neighborhood children.

"There are just hundreds and hundreds of recommendations," Gilb said. "... I hope they are practical. We try to be practical."

Gilb said it is impossible to estimate how much the plan would cost.

THE CITY'S first master plan was drawn up in the late 1940s and adopted in 1951. It emphasized the city's agenda for capital spending, Gilb said.

Unlike the new one, the 1951 plan limited itself to land use policies, public education, recreation, public service, traffic patterns, redevelopment, public housing, the civic center and the riverfront.

Gilb noted that the first plan was written when the city was growing and the new one is coming out when the city is losing population.

Whatever happens, Gilb said she feels some relief that the plan finally is about to be made public.

"This has involved a lot of endurance, patience and willpower," Gilb said Friday. "But we have done it."

Free Press Staff Writers Patricia Edmonds and W. Kim Heron contributed to this report.

Highlights of new city master plan

Downtown: develop downtown into a high-speed computer communications center; promote housing, office buildings and government centers near People Mover station stops; encourage development of an automobile history museum; expand public access to the riverfront.

Neighborhoods: eradicate blight; provide do-it-yourself renovation classes, home improvement grants and beautification contests to encourage home and yard maintenance and rehabilitation; demolish vacant commercial buildings; rezone vacant commercial property for residential or recreational use; repair and expand retail and commercial districts; build a 26-mile light-rail system along Woodward Avenue.

THE PLAN, she said, "doesn't come