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Leading the Planning Process: The Role of the Garrison Commander

by LTC Christopher Gerdes and Mark Gillem

In May of 2013, Mr. Frank Kendall, the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, issued a policy requirement that all military installations have updated master plans consistent with Unified Facilities Criteria (UFC) 2-100-01 by 1 October 2018. Fortunately, the U.S. Army is well on its way to meeting this requirement. In fact, the UFC was based largely on the draft Army Regulation on the same subject that is nearing publication. UFC-compliant plans are complete at Fort Hunter Liggett and the Natick Soldier System Center, and Joint Base Lewis-McChord (started under leadership at what was called Fort Lewis), nearly complete at Fort Hood, Fort Sill, and Camp Parks Reserve Forces Training Area, and underway at Fort Polk and U.S. Army Garrison Hawaii. Many other installations have completed key elements of a UFC-compliant plan – from Vision Plans to Area Development Plans. At these installations, the common denominator for success has been an engaged Garrison Commander.

A Garrison Commander is the temporary steward of an installation’s history with the responsibility to honor the history of the installation while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the future. If done right, a garrison commander’s efforts will link the installation’s history to its future mission, improvements, and growth. It is certainly not an easy task; various “colors of money,” limited funding, competing priorities, and inheriting a garrison that has evolved in a less-than-ideal fashion over time are all obstacles. Discipline is required. Sometimes, the toughest decision is to not “throw good money after bad” and recognize that hard rudder steer may be needed to get headed in a better direction.

As COL Matt Elledge, Fort Hood’s Garrison Commander notes, “The Garrison Commander can and should provide priorities within the planning process to allow our engineers to develop projects so that we have ‘shovel ready’ projects when funding becomes available and still stay within the long-term vision of the Installation Master Plan.” COL T. Glenn Moore, the Garrison Commander at Fort Polk adds, “As a Garrison Commander, I see my role as ensuring the master plan is created with stakeholder input, so the Fort Polk community creates and owns that plan. I also need to ensure the plan is followed in our decision-making and implementation process, and to continue to communicate our progress to stakeholders. My most important role is to use the plan in executing real property and stationing decisions and to ensure that the plan is clearly communicated to my successor so we can continue to implement our vision.”

Of course, commanders have their DPW planning team to help them in the planning process. While commanders should actively participate in the planning process by providing leadership intent and even opening and closing on-site master planning workshops, they should also ensure that the planning staff has adequate training and that the plans are consistent with the UFC. If not, the staff needs to develop a strategy for updating the plans as needed.

Commanders who have been through the process recognize the near-term and long-term benefits of a clear master plan that includes a Vision Plan, a Long-Range Component with Area Development Plans and Network Plans, an Installation Design Guide, a Capital Investment Strategy, and a Master Plan Digest that summarizes the plan. At Camp Parks Reserve Forces Training Area (RFTA), for instance, the plan is followed in our decision-making and implementation process, and the plan is clearly communicated to my successor so we can continue to implement our vision.

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housing areas (including military family housing and barracks/dormitories).

Take advantage of hot desking, shared conference rooms/classrooms, creative use of outdoor spaces, and similar concepts to reduce facility sizes. Take advantage of telecommuting, flex hours, and similar energy saving measures. When designing the facilities prioritize energy saving measures starting with the lowest life cycle cost first. (See companion article How to Design a Sustainable Building – Where Do I Start?).

Consider centralized renewable energy options for compact cantonment/work areas where they might be more cost effective than individual facility units. Use heat from heat generating facilities (dining halls, computer facilities, etc.) to supply heat to neighboring facilities (dormitories, offices, etc.).

Even though an installation is very similar to a small city, the installation plays a larger role. The installation serves as a launching and training platform for warfighters and weapon systems. An installation keeps the family safe so the soldier can concentrate on his/her job. Good planning helps establish the installation as an effective, efficient system that has been well as is vital to the fight as more traditional weapon systems. It is our job to provide the most efficient, effective, sustainable system we can to the war fighter and their families.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COL</td>
<td>Colonel</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPW</td>
<td>Department of Public Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFTA</td>
<td>Reserve Forces Training Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFC</td>
<td>Unified Facilities Criteria</td>
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this installation that has changed hands from the Navy to the Air Force to now the Army, the typical result is a patchwork quilt effect of growth and maturation through the years. A true master plan – and what Camp Parks RFTA planners are striving for - provides a coherent deliberate plan for infrastructure improvements and future increased mission capability that uses best practices from municipal master planning to provide a best-case future state of the garrison that can be incrementally striven for.

At Fort Hood, COL Elledge states that “Our Installation Master Plan allows me and those Garrison Commanders that follow to be ready with ‘Quick Wins’ if funding comes available in the short term with an eye on the long term vision of the installation in the out years. Habitually funding comes available towards the end of the fiscal year and as that funding becomes available we at the Garrison are ready to execute quickly with ‘shovel ready’ projects because of the master plan. This also allows us to stay on course to reach our long-term vision.

At Fort Polk, COL Moore notes that, “The comprehensive master plan will be flexible enough to meet current mission requirements, adaptive to the changing needs of the Army, and will provide continuity between commanders to achieve a long-range vision. It gives a firm foundation to the master planning process and aligns our priorities to a strategic vision so that we can make smart decisions with our limited resources. The process we are embarking upon gives stakeholders at Ft. Polk an opportunity to create a plan and contribute to the future. We hope to have all organizations, spouses, military, civilians, retirees, and members of the greater Fort Polk community participate in the vision workshop and contribute their ideas and perspectives.”

The comments of these commanders are consistent with experiences across the Army. An effective master plan provides a flexible roadmap that can guide development today and prepare an installation for a sustainable future regardless of funding streams. To create such a plan, garrison commanders need to take a visible, leadership role in the process.

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