

## CONSIDERING THE OPPORTUNITY

Bringing people together to plan for the future of their community is, at its core, a way to reinvigorate democracy and self-governance.

### WHAT IS COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING?

Comprehensive planning can be defined as deciding where you want to go and how you will get there. This sounds easy enough. Yet planning for economic development, housing, roads, sewers, schools, environmental quality and parks is obviously more complex than planning a family trip, and it requires broad participation from the community. The box contains seven key steps in developing a comprehensive plan.

A comprehensive plan generally includes background information on the essential cultural, demographic, economic, environmental, historic, physical and social elements of a community, the community's vision, and the collection of goals, policies and strategies that will be used to realize that vision. The policies and background information can be separated into two documents, one that serves as the official plan and the other that is an official document of relevant background material that serves as the basis for all plans, reports and implementation activities. Sometimes strategies also are contained in a separate companion document called an implementation action plan.

#### WINONA COUNTY'S "UPDATE 2000"

Winona County officially adopted a three-document approach to comprehensive planning by developing a *Background Report*, a *Comprehensive Plan* that includes the implementation strategies, and an official *Comprehensive Plan Map*. The process was titled "Update 2000."

### SEVEN KEY STEPS IN PLANNING

- 1 Organizing the process and engaging people in the community to participate throughout
- 2 Establishing a shared understanding of the most important issues and asking core questions about economic, environmental and social implications of these issues
- 3 Identifying future needs and desires, and developing the vision, goals, policies and progress indicators that reflect them
- 4 Developing alternative strategies for addressing a community's vision, goals and policies
- 5 Understanding relationships between possible plan strategies, accounting for their long-term costs and benefits, and choosing those that best fit a community
- 6 Selecting plan monitoring indicators, and completing and adopting the plan
- 7 Implementing the plan, tracking progress and changing the plan in future years as needed

Comprehensive planning is as much a process to engage the public in local decisions as it is to create a document for guiding development. The planning process is fundamentally a way for people with different perspectives to articulate the sort of community they would like to live in and leave behind. Planning can also help create a stable, predictable, fair set of policies and ground rules within which development, entrepreneurship and the marketplace can flourish. Above all, it is about making places better.

Minnesota Statutes, Section 462.351 describes legislative goals for city and township planning:

- Prepare for anticipated change.
- Guide future development of land.
- Ensure a safer, more pleasant and economical environment.
- Preserve agricultural and other open lands.
- Save money in both private and public expenditures.
- Enable other public and private agencies to plan their activities in harmony with the plan.
- Assist in developing lands more wisely to serve citizens more effectively.

- Make the provision of public services less costly.
- Achieve a more secure tax base.
- Promote the public health, safety and general welfare.

Minnesota Statutes, Section 462.352(5) defines a comprehensive plan of a city or township as “a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards and maps for guiding the physical, social and economic development, both private and public, of the municipality and its environs, including air space and subsurface areas. . .”

For counties, Minnesota Statutes, Section 394.22(9) defines a comprehensive plan as the “policies, statements, goals and interrelated plans for public and private land and water use, transportation and community facilities, including recommendations for plan execution documented in texts, ordinances and

maps which constitute the guide for future development of the county.”

No matter how large or small the community, comprehensive planning boils down to three basic questions:

- **What is the state of the community today?** What are the current social, economic and environmental conditions and trends?
- **What would people like the community to be in the future?** What characteristics and features of the community would residents like to preserve and build on? What would they like to change? What is the community’s picture of itself in the future?
- **How will the community get there?** What goals, policies and strategies will lead to this vision?

Abundant clean water, open space for recreation and people working together to improve their communities are all part of Minnesota’s quality of life.



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Minnesota Planning



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Minnesota Planning

This guide will help communities formulate the answers. Taken together, these are what make up a community's comprehensive plan.

At their best, comprehensive plans not only reflect the vision and goals of a community but also embody:

- **A thoughtful approach to issues that considers all sides and interconnections.** Almost every decision has economic, environmental and social implications.
- **Coordination among neighboring jurisdictions and levels of government on topics of mutual concern.** Regional issues such as traffic congestion, affordable housing, air pollution and labor shortages don't respect political boundaries; there is great benefit in joint problem-solving.
- **A long-term perspective that accounts for the future impacts and costs of today's decisions.** Local policies should make sense for citizens, businesses and the environment, in both the short and long term.

Instead of balancing one thing with another - such as jobs and water quality - in a way that creates winners and losers, a successful comprehensive planning process will identify how to simultaneously improve the status of both.

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## WHY PLAN?

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Planning can help growing areas preserve what made people want to live there in the first place. According to the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning, the population of Minnesota is expected to increase by 14 percent between 2000 and 2025. In many communities, the increases will be far greater. How communities manage and accommodate growth could lead either to vibrant, thriving economies and neighborhoods or to higher property taxes, more traffic congestion, school overcrowding, environmental degradation and the loss of valued landscapes.

For other communities, population growth would be a dream come true. As troublesome as rapid, unplanned growth can be, decline can be as bad or worse. The State Demographic Center predicts that nearly half of Minnesota's counties will lose population through 2025. These areas are faced with the challenges of maintaining a viable local economy, funding schools, reinvesting in aging infrastructure and meeting the needs of older residents as many young people find greater opportunities elsewhere.

Somewhere in the middle are places where the residents like their community's size and character pretty much as they are; they are not too anxious to see rapid growth or decline change things dramatically. These communities may need to take steps to maintain their current quality of life.

While the issues differ, the need to plan does not. Whether a community is declining, growing or maintaining the assets it has, effectively managing change can help it prosper over the long term.

The value of community planning is easier to appreciate when comparing it to the role planning plays in every day life. Planning is so fundamental to the success of both individuals and organizations that most people do it without even thinking about it. Planning has become second nature because people and institutions perform better when they plan than when they do not.

## MINNESOTA BUSINESSES PLAN

What do 3M, Honeywell, Pillsbury, Medtronic, Target, General Mills, Northwest Airlines, The St. Paul Companies and Hormel have in common? All these prominent Minnesota businesses do long-term planning. Such planning includes identifying the forces that are likely to influence their future and positioning themselves to flourish in that future. This planning is essential to remaining competitive in an increasingly international marketplace. These firms plan in an effort to give the best value to their customers and their owners. They plan as a way to recognize change and meet its challenges. In short,

they plan to remain successful and to avoid becoming obsolete and going out of business.

**MINNESOTA FAMILIES PLAN**

Families plan for their vacations. They plan when buying a house. They plan for the expense of a college education, health care and old age. As with a business, this includes identifying the forces that are likely to influence their future and positioning themselves to flourish in that future. While a family is not concerned about flourishing in the global marketplace, it is concerned about making ends meet - and meeting the needs of its members.

It is no different for communities. In an information-based economy where people can live virtually anywhere, communities wanting to be competitive, attractive places to live and work - places that thrive - will need to plan to make that happen.

**TOP TEN REASONS TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A LOCAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

- 1 Provides legal justification for a community's land use decisions and ordinances
- 2 Creates the opportunity for residents to guide a community's future
- 3 Helps a community identify issues, stay ahead of trends and accommodate change
- 4 Offers a process for joint problem-solving and leveraging scarce resources among neighboring jurisdictions
- 5 Protects and makes the most of public investments
- 6 Helps ensure that growth makes the community better, not just bigger
- 7 Fosters sustainable economic development
- 8 Helps a community maintain its resource base and other "natural capital"
- 9 Protects property rights and property values
- 10 Provides an opportunity to consider future impacts of today's decisions

**A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GENERATES A VARIETY OF BENEFITS**

A comprehensive plan fosters the kind of development that citizens really want. This is probably the biggest benefit of planning, but there are several other significant benefits. The top 10 are described here and listed in the box.

**1. Provides legal justification for a community's land use decisions and ordinances.**

A fundamental reason for preparing a comprehensive plan is to establish a legal foundation for local officials' development decisions. Land use decisions can be controversial and spark lawsuits. Minnesota courts have upheld local land use decisions when there was a reasonable basis for the decisions, and the courts are more likely to find a reasonable basis for a decision if it is consistent with a community's comprehensive plan. In 1926, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld comprehensive municipal zoning in Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Amber Realty. And, in 1984, in Amcon v. City of Eagan, the Minnesota Supreme Court stated that "the essence of constitutional zoning is demonstrated by the existence of a plan which uniformly, without discrimination and without unreasonable restrictions, promotes the general welfare."

**2. Creates the opportunity for residents to guide a community's future.**

Comprehensive planning offers citizens a way to articulate common goals and ensure that day-to-day land use decisions reflect their values. It also gives them a way to invite the kind of development they would prefer. Finally, it creates an opportunity for community dialog and for residents to meet one another and discuss community issues from different points of view.

**3. Helps a community identify issues, stay ahead of trends and accommodate change.**

Planning prompts a community to identify issues and prepare for major demographic and development changes. Planning involves collecting and analyzing data on population, employment, housing, land use,

environmentally sensitive areas, business and industrial development, community facilities, shopping areas, waste generation, water and energy use, and growth trends.

Upon study, this data paints the picture of a community's strengths and limitations. This picture, in turn, helps residents and local officials develop meaningful goals and strategies that build on the strengths and deal with any problems before they become a major concern.

For example, as baby boomers face retirement and the elderly live longer, a community may want to consider how well these groups will be able to meet their needs with the current development pattern. Will older people have access to the health care, medicines and food they need? Similarly, a community that has a large college or industry as a neighbor or resident may need to consider whether it has adequate housing, jobs and services for these employees and their families.

**4. Offers a process for joint problem-solving and leveraging scarce resources among neighboring jurisdictions.** Comprehensive planning, by its very nature, helps people look at their community and region as a whole, and identify and account for the linkages between all the economic, environmental and social elements that comprise it.

This allows a community to anticipate the potential ripple effects of any given goal or decision. If stimulating new businesses is a goal, people know they must address the ability of local schools, housing and transportation systems to meet additional demands, as well as the water, energy and waste implications.

Interdependence across issues also exists across political boundaries. Comprehensive planning is a vehicle for engaging neighboring jurisdictions on issues of mutual concern and for citizens and decision-makers to become aware of the impacts their decisions have on areas outside their immediate community.

Cooperation among local governments can benefit everyone by providing a formal mechanism for addressing shared problems that do not respect political borders, such as traffic, flooding, or water and air pollution. Multijurisdictional planning reflects the reality that the fate of one community is, in many ways, tied to the fate of those around it. It is a way to make sure that the many parts of an area pull together toward common ends and do not go in directions that are at odds. The unifying framework provided by the planning process can help prevent serious conflicts.



Taking a broad view helps identify linkages and potential ripple effects. Aerial view of Pipestone, Minnesota, 1954

**5. Protects and makes the most of public investments.** The quality and cost of public infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewer systems, and transit, can influence a community's livability and fiscal health. A comprehensive plan can help a community understand, protect and make the most of public infrastructure and improvements, as well as determine if and when to construct new infrastructure.

In addition, state and federal dollars for local government projects are increasingly tied to sound comprehensive planning. Funding criteria for highway projects, water and sewer grants, environmental protection and local facilities tend to favor communities that have demonstrated their intentions and forethought through comprehensive planning. Some types of planning, particularly water planning,



often are required by law for funding and assistance. One example is flood mitigation grants. More generally, a good comprehensive plan can influence state policy, investments and priorities.

Comprehensive planning can help control long-term costs and increase the quality of public facilities and services by:

- Staging growth so that it coincides with the planned extension of public facilities and services
- Leading to a capital improvement program that establishes the financial support, timing, standards and priorities for providing public facilities and services
- Fostering a mix of land uses, such as residential and neighborhood commercial, and the development of town centers
- Encouraging development patterns that use land, energy and other resources efficiently

Building on unique landscape features enhances a community's distinctive sense of place. River Center, Red Wing, Minnesota



Jack Flynn

- Helping a community understand the need to reduce the risk of loss of property to flooding, wildfire and other disasters through hazard mitigation plans
- Including cooperative planning agreements and active collaboration with adjacent communities that leverage scarce resources, e.g., sharing police and fire services

## THE COSTS OF SPRAWL

A Bank of America-sponsored study asserts: "It is clear that sprawl has created enormous costs ... Housing, jobs, shopping and other activities are scattered across a huge area, and long auto trips are often required to connect them. Such a development pattern imposes a considerable cost on all who use it, though the costs are often hidden and those who pay them are not always aware of it. Businesses suffer from a loss in worker productivity and underutilized investments in older communities ... Suburban residents pay a heavy price in taxation and automobile expenses ... Residents of older cities and suburbs lose access to jobs, social stability and political power. Agriculture and ecosystems also suffer ... Unchecked growth cannot be sustained forever."

Source: *Beyond Sprawl: New Patterns of Growth to Fit the New California*. Bank of America, California Resources Agency, Greenbelt Alliance and The Low Income Housing Fund.

Finally, given that local governments rely heavily on property taxes to fund local infrastructure investments, it is important to note that good planning can make the pace and nature of future development more predictable and the local tax base more stable.

### 6. Helps ensure that growth makes the community better, not just bigger.

Seeking to grow as a community has become synonymous with survival. If the community is not growing, it is dying, goes the logic. Yet what does this say for suburban areas or small cities where the population is stable or declining? Growth and development can and must mean something other than only physical expansion.

Growth is often equated with getting physically bigger, but development is more about improving the quality of life for residents and may or may not require growth in the physical size of the community. An effective community plan helps officials and citizens distinguish between changes that improve

the quality of life and others that may simply increase costs. A local comprehensive plan can encourage new construction or redevelopment projects whose long-term environmental, economic and social benefits outweigh their costs.

*Development* means building on the things that make a community unique. Doing so helps a community enhance the distinctive sense of place that retains residents and businesses and draws visitors. Some things that make a community unique are:

- Landscape features, topography or vistas, such as lakes, rivers, forests or bluffs
- The design and aesthetics of a place, including its architecture, landscaping and arrangement of streets and buildings in relation to one another
- Proximity to nearby communities
- Social, cultural and educational institutions, such as places of worship, schools, universities, libraries, theaters, community centers and civic clubs
- Business centers, including downtowns and village centers

### WHAT IS "NATURAL CAPITAL" ?

Although sometimes taken for granted, the state's largest source of capital is its natural environment. This "natural capital" is made up of four elements, all of which communities may want to think of as part of their economic base:

- ▶ The physical environment, including non-renewable resources, such as ferrous and nonferrous ores, sand and gravel, oil and gas
- ▶ Plants and animals living in the physical environment
- ▶ Natural processes, such as the water, carbon and nutrient cycles that provide services ranging from waste recycling to climate control
- ▶ Renewable resources, such as air, water, soils, trees, plants, animals and other resources important for their beauty and ecological significance



Natural resources continue to shape Iron Range communities. Virginia, Minnesota

- Meeting places, such as the local post office, restaurants, parks and recreational facilities
- Historic and cultural features, traditions and celebrations
- Environmental quality and the natural environment, including clean air and water, healthy wildlife habitat and wildlife
- The "sense of place" of a community, or why people call a community "home"

### 7. Fosters sustainable economic development.

Governments make decisions about public investments in things - ranging from streets and sewers to power lines and schools - that have a profound influence on the health, diversity, self-reliance and competitiveness of the local economy. Even though economic development is rightly thought of as largely a private-sector concern, local governments have an important responsibility to ensure that commerce serves the general health and welfare of their constituents.

In addition to sufficient space, transportation and public utilities, businesses look for a mix of characteristics that make for a high quality of life, such as affordable housing, good schools, a clean environment and recreational and cultural opportunities that will attract and retain a high-quality work force.

Good local planning serves both public and private interests by maintaining and improving the social, economic and environmental assets that citizens and businesses need to prosper over the long term.

Done well and driven by community interests, planning fosters the kind of public support, stability and predictability that contributes to a healthy local economy.

Natural capital is the foundation of a community's prosperity. Minneopa Falls, west of Mankato, Minnesota



Deborah Pille

**8. Helps a community maintain its resource base and other "natural capital."** Natural resources such as water, forests and agricultural lands, along with the services they provide such as waste absorption and food and fiber production, are the foundation of a community's prosperity. Together, natural resources and services represent a community's largest form of capital, even though people often do not think of them this way.

Taking care of this "natural capital" is like maintaining the principal in an endowment fund. Comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations and market-based strategies are important tools for ensuring that communities maintain or improve this natural inheritance for tomorrow's citizens, as well as for present-day benefit. Maintaining the community's natural capital is both good business and good public policy.

**9. Protects property rights and values.** The Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution stipulates "that private property may not be taken for public use without just compensation." Article I, Section 13 of Minnesota's Constitution repeats the federal Constitution's "takings clause," saying that "private

property shall not be taken, destroyed or damaged for public use without just compensation, therefore, first paid or secured."

A comprehensive plan protects property owners from arbitrary and discriminatory actions by providing an agreed-upon set of goals and policies by which to judge land use decisions and individual development proposals. Without a plan, local officials face the challenge of giving each issue fair and consistent treatment. In addition, a comprehensive plan gives current and prospective property owners notice of where, when and how the community expects to grow so that they can plan accordingly.

Planning also protects property values by helping communities prevent incompatible land uses from locating next to one another. It helps avoid, for example, a solid waste transfer station ending up next to a residential area. This, in turn, avoids the problems arising from incompatible land uses, such as time-consuming and costly litigation. A community without an adopted comprehensive plan has few tools to avoid or minimize land use conflicts and may be unable to effectively protect citizens' interests.

**10. Provides an opportunity to consider future impacts of today's decisions.** In the day-to-day functioning of a community, the tendency is often to react to issues as they arise and deal with them one by one. While understandable, this reactive approach can, over time, lead to community conditions with

**GOOD WATER QUALITY SAVES MILLIONS**

Many municipal water systems in Minnesota use ground water and as many as half of those systems do not now need water treatment. But as water quality declines, treatment costs rise. A Department of Health study of costs over a 10-year period found that where contamination standards for drinking water were exceeded, water suppliers spent more than \$44 million to solve the problems.



which citizens may not be pleased or that come with a higher-than-expected price tag.

The comprehensive plan is a tool that residents and local leaders can use to ask and answer the question: Is our community on a sustainable path? Does the

community have goals and policies in place that lead to decisions about land use, transportation, housing, utility investments and economic development that make long-term economic sense, improve the quality of life for present and future residents, and are compatible with the health of the environment?

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## THE LEGAL FOUNDATION FOR PLANNING IN MINNESOTA

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The Legislature has recognized the importance of local planning for nearly five decades, passing laws that enable communities to develop plans and exercise various growth management authorities. In 1925, the Minnesota Supreme Court sanctioned the use of comprehensive planning and zoning as legitimate tools for promoting the general welfare of the public, *Berry v. Houghton*. Below are some of the key laws that form the foundation for comprehensive planning and growth management in this state:

- 1939 Township planning and zoning** (Minnesota Statutes, sections 366.10 - .18). Authorized townships to plan and regulate land use to, among other things, prevent excessive concentration or wasteful scattering of population.
- 1959 County planning enabling act** (Minnesota Statutes, sections 394.21-.37). Authorized counties to adopt planning tools and land use controls.
- 1965 Municipal planning enabling act** (Minnesota Statutes, sections 462.351 - .365). Authorized cities to adopt planning tools and land use controls.
- 1969 Regional development act** (Minnesota Statutes, sections 462.381 - .397). Authorized creation of regional development commissions in 12 areas of the state outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area.
- 1976 Metropolitan land use planning** (Minnesota Statutes, sections 473.851 - .871). Mandates the creation of coordinated plans, programs and controls by all local governments in the seven-county Twin Cities region for planned, orderly and staged development that is consistent with metropolitan system plans prepared by the Metropolitan Council. School districts must prepare capital improvement programs for review by the Metropolitan Council.
- 1982 Township authority** expanded with revisions to the Municipal Planning Act (Minnesota Statutes, sections 462.351 - .365).
- 1996 Sustainable development for local governments** (Minnesota Statutes, Section 4A.07). Required Minnesota Planning to develop and periodically update a sustainable development planning guide, as well as a model ordinance for use by local governments.
- 1997 Community-based planning** (Laws of Minnesota 1997, sections 4A.08 - .09). Enumerated broad goals to guide local and state planning efforts. Although the Legislature repealed this law, effective July 1, 2001, many communities find the goals useful in thinking about the future.

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## SUMMARY OF PLANNING AUTHORITIES FOR COUNTIES, CITIES AND TOWNSHIPS

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The Legislature has given local governments the authority and responsibility to plan for a wide variety of issues that are important for the health and well-being of communities and the state as a whole. There are, however, different requirements and levels of authority for townships, cities and counties. (See table of city, township and county authorities in the appendix.) A community should understand these differences before beginning a comprehensive planning effort.

Key authorities include:

- To plan and regulate land use and subdivision (counties, cities and towns)
- To create planning commissions or agencies, to prepare and adopt comprehensive plans for future development and to establish procedures for plan implementation (counties, cities and towns).  
These include, but are not limited to, the adoption of official controls to further the purpose and objectives of the comprehensive plan, including zoning, subdivision regulations and official maps.
- To undertake joint-planning studies with municipalities located within their boundaries (counties)
- To extend, under certain conditions, zoning and subdivision regulations within a two-mile area beyond their corporate limits (cities)
- To establish jurisdiction over planning in areas outside municipal corporate boundaries (counties)
- To be consistent with or at least as restrictive as county zoning ordinances (townships)

### COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

A county comprehensive plan contains policies, statements, goals and interrelated plans for public and private land and water use, transportation and community facilities. A plan may include recommendations for ordinances and maps to guide future development. A county's main responsibility is to

protect the general health, safety and welfare of citizens and residents.

The law specifies that when adopted by ordinance, a comprehensive plan "must be the basis for official controls." Official controls include zoning and subdivision regulations and official maps.

A comprehensive plan may also provide guidelines for the timing and sequencing of the official controls to ensure planned and orderly development that is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Although not specifically required by law, a county usually asks its planning commission and staff to prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan to the county board. However, a county alternatively may use other planning advisory bodies or create a joint powers board with membership from the county, cities and townships to prepare a comprehensive plan.

### MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

A municipality (i.e., a city or township) may carry on comprehensive planning activities for guiding its future development and improvement, including proposed development densities. It may prepare, adopt and amend a comprehensive municipal plan and implement the plan by ordinance and other official actions in accordance with the provisions of Minnesota Statutes, Sections 462.351 to 462.365.

In exercising these powers, a municipality may collect and analyze data, prepare maps, charts, tables and other illustrations and displays, and conduct necessary studies. A municipality may publicize its purposes, suggestions and findings on planning matters, distribute reports about them and advise the public.

The law requires the municipal planning agency to take into account the plans of the county, neighboring cities and townships when planning. In addition, Minnesota Statutes, Section 462.3585 authorizes the creation of a joint planning board with membership from the city, county and adjacent townships. The purpose of this board is to jointly prepare a plan for the area immediately outside the city but no more

than two miles from the city boundary. In addition to planning responsibilities, the board may adopt and enforce official controls if authorized to do so by the participating local governments.

A key distinction between city and township planning and implementation is that official controls for townships cannot be inconsistent with or less restrictive than the county's controls.

### MULTIJURISDICTIONAL PLANNING

Minnesota law provides a formal mechanism for organizing multijurisdictional planning efforts. Passed in 1943, the Joint Exercise of Powers Act (Minnesota Statutes, Section 471.59) remains a national model for local governmental cooperation and coordination. It authorizes governmental units to enter into voluntary agreements to cooperatively offer services or perform functions to all participating governments.

The act permits service contracts, in which one level of government purchases a particular service from another level of government. It also allows shared power agreements in which participating governmental units share responsibility for the type, amount and distribution of particular services. One example of a shared power agreement is a joint planning effort, in which more than one unit of government works together to cooperatively create a comprehensive plan.

Minnesota Statutes, Section 462.371 authorizes an agreement under Section 471.59 to conduct regional planning activities by any two or more counties, cities or towns. This includes the creation of a regional planning board and the preparation and adoption of a regional development plan. The section on municipal planning law (see above) also has a discussion about the creation of a "joint planning board" to plan for the area just outside a city's boundaries.

### REGIONAL PLANNING

Regional planning may take many forms, from legislatively mandated organizations to groups formed by local discretion through various enabling laws. Organizations may consist of representatives of

local general-purpose governments or have a completely different governing structure. In either case, the organization plans across local boundaries because the issues it is concerned with transcend them.

The Legislature authorized 12 regional development commissions in 1969 (Minnesota Statutes, sections 462.381 - .398) covering all areas of the state outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Since then, three have dissolved; however, various planning activities still take place within these regions. The commissions are composed of local elected officials, a tribal council member if a tribe is located within the region, and citizen members. An RDC is authorized to:

- Prepare comprehensive plans for local units of government, individually or collectively.
- Review and comment on the comprehensive plans of local governments based on their effect on development in the region.

### JOINT PLANNING EFFORTS IN MINNESOTA

- ▶ The cities of Austin, Mankato and Rochester have each joined with their respective counties (Mower, Blue Earth and Olmsted) to create combined city-county planning departments to coordinate efforts in their areas.
- ▶ The city of Sauk Rapids and Sauk Rapids Township created a joint planning board to prepare plans and review development proposals for the fringe areas of Sauk Rapids.
- ▶ A number of Twin Cities metropolitan area cities have entered into agreements to form joint water management organizations for the purpose of developing surface water management plans for the area. About 30 such WMOs exist.
- ▶ Two community-based planning projects, the Upper Minnesota River and the St. Cloud area projects, created joint powers boards with city and county membership. The joint boards are charged with developing and implementing areawide plans.

Regional development commissions provide planning assistance to local governments.

- Provide a range of services to local governments and residents, including technical assistance for comprehensive planning, citizen involvement initiatives and intergovernmental facilitation.



In Region 4, the West Central Initiative provides most of the services of an RDC. Region 11 is served by the Metropolitan Council.

- Appoint citizen advisory committees to assist in the review of plans, programs and other matters requiring public participation.
- Provide funding for commission projects and services through grants and a property tax levy.

A regional comprehensive plan can cover an area defined by common interests and needs, an area defined by topography or natural features such as a river basin, or an area defined by historical, economic or cultural affinity. In any case, some common thread or interest exists that makes a regional approach to planning desirable.

Some examples of regional planning based on common interests and needs include:

**St. Cloud Area Joint Planning District Board.**

This board consists of three counties and five cities that banded together to develop a community-based plan addressing the region’s rapid growth.

**Mississippi Headwaters Board.** This board is an example of regional comprehensive planning based on a shared natural resource of regional interest, the Mississippi River.

**North Shore Management Board.** Established by a joint powers agreement between Lake Superior’s North Shore counties and cities, this board works for coordinated management of land within 1,000 feet of the lake.

**Northern Counties Land Use Coordinating Board.** Established by a joint powers agreement between nine northern counties, the board is concerned with how local priorities and goals affect land use and natural resource management.

**Minnesota River Joint Powers Board.** This 37-county joint powers board works to protect the water resources of the Minnesota River basin through coordinated county and state nonpoint source pollution control initiatives.

**Metropolitan Council.** The council is an example of regional cooperation driven by a concentration of local governments having a variety of common interests, ranging from a regional wastewater problem to regional transit and growth management needs.

**CURRENT PLANNING CONCEPTS**

Community planning efforts once focused almost exclusively on land use and zoning issues. While these are still important, the list of issues with which communities must contend has increased dramatically.

Minnesota’s population is getting older. As documented in the Department of Human Services’ *Project 2030* report, the older population (65 and over) will be Minnesota’s fastest-growing age group between 2000 and 2030. This trend will not only contribute to labor shortages and other shifts in the marketplace, it also will bring new demands and added pressures on everything from health care and



school funding to transportation and community design.

Many communities also are facing large infrastructure costs for basic services, such as water and wastewater treatment. According to a 1997 survey, Minnesota's communities will have to spend \$2.4 billion over the next 20 years just to keep pace with the demand for drinking water. A 1998 assessment by the Pollution Control Agency and the Public Facilities Authority projected a \$1.8 billion need over the succeeding five to 10 years for wastewater treatment facilities.

These examples highlight the need for citizen-driven community planning as a way to make sound choices about a community's future. They also underscore the need for better tools to help a community visualize how it may look in the future and better weigh the implications of planning and regulatory decisions.

**TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN**

Anyone who has been to Northfield's main street, Windom's central square or Two Harbors' lakeside neighborhoods has already experienced "traditional neighborhood design." As its name suggests, "traditional neighborhood design" is largely concerned with the design of the built environment and patterns of development on the ground - things that influence the look and feel of a community.

**YOUR FACE IS NOT A FRILL!**

"Challenge anyone to name his or her favorite place and then ask why. Many of the reasons that attractive places are attractive have to do with design. Without these design elements, a specific place becomes just anywhere. Design of a city communicates what it is. It is as much of a frill as your face is."

- Mayor John Bullard,  
New Bedford, Massachusetts

Many aspects of design have profound effects on the sustainability of a community. For example, having a mix of uses in one place can reduce the need for some car travel and the air pollution it generates, as well as offer greater access to services for those who cannot drive, such as the very old and very young.

In Minnesota, even communities that originally adopted a different development pattern, such as Burnsville and Maple Grove, are working toward having a definite town center, a mix of homes, businesses, parks and a library, and more definition between what is urban and what is not.

The re-emerging interest in traditional neighborhood design is guided by a number of key design principles. These principles, called the Ahwahnee Principles for Community Design (named after the Yosemite National Park hotel in which the experts met), were identified in 1991 by experts from around the country who were brought together by the National Local Government Commission.

The principles of traditional neighborhood design ask communities to think of their streets as outdoor "public rooms" defined by building fronts and other elements, such as trees, hedges and fences. In communities following these principles, building codes encourage developers to place garages in back alleys or other inconspicuous places so that the character of the houses enhances these public rooms. Sidewalk and street design practices minimize traffic speeds and conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists. Ordinances allow stores and community facilities to locate in or close to residential neighborhoods, and encourage a mixture of housing sizes, prices and types to meet a variety of needs and income levels. Regulations requiring large lots and large houses are avoided or limited to help make public transit and other community services economically feasible.

**SMART GROWTH**

States as diverse as Arizona, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Utah are actively reforming policies, incentives and zoning codes to invite more cost-effective, environmentally

## AHWAHNEE PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY DESIGN

### Community principles

- ▶ All planning should be in the form of complete and integrated communities containing housing, shops, workplaces, schools, parks and civic facilities essential to the daily life of the residents.
- ▶ Community size should be designed so that housing, jobs, daily needs and other activities are within easy walking distance of each other.
- ▶ As many activities as possible should be located within easy walking distance of transit stops.
- ▶ A community should contain a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within its boundaries.
- ▶ Businesses within the community should provide a range of job types for the community's residents.
- ▶ The location and character of the community should be consistent with a larger transit network.
- ▶ The community should have a center focus that combines commercial, civic, cultural and recreational uses.
- ▶ The community should contain an ample supply of specialized open space in the form of squares, greens and parks whose frequent use is encouraged through placement and design.
- ▶ Public spaces should be designed to encourage the attention and presence of people at all hours of the day and night.
- ▶ Each community or cluster of communities should have a well-defined edge, such as agricultural greenbelts or wildlife corridors, permanently protected from development.
- ▶ Streets, pedestrian paths and bike paths should contribute to a system of fully connected and interesting routes to all destinations. Their design should encourage pedestrian and bicycle use by being small and spatially defined by buildings, trees and lighting, and by discouraging high speed traffic.
- ▶ Wherever possible, the natural terrain, drainage and vegetation of the community should be preserved with superior examples contained within parks or greenbelts.

- ▶ The community design should help conserve resources and minimize waste.
- ▶ Communities should provide for efficient use of water through natural drainage, drought-tolerant landscaping and recycling.
- ▶ Street orientation, placement of buildings and use of shading should contribute to the energy efficiency of the community.

### Regional principles

- ▶ The regional land use planning structure should be integrated within a larger transportation network built around transit rather than freeways.
- ▶ Regions should be bounded by and provide a continuous system of greenbelts or wildlife corridors determined by natural conditions.
- ▶ Regional institutions and services (government, stadiums, museums, etc.) should be located in the urban core.
- ▶ Materials and methods of construction should be specific to the region, exhibiting continuity of history and culture and compatibility with the climate to encourage the development of local character and community identity.

### Implementation principles

- ▶ The comprehensive plan should be updated to incorporate the above principles.
- ▶ Rather than allowing developer-initiated, piecemeal development, local governments should take charge of the planning process. Comprehensive plans should designate where new growth, infill or redevelopment will be allowed to occur.
- ▶ Prior to any development, a specific plan should be prepared based on these planning principles.
- ▶ Plans should be developed through an open process and participants in the process should be provided visual models of all planning proposals.

Source: Local Government Commission. See [www.lgc.org](http://www.lgc.org).

**SMART GROWTH GENERATES SAVINGS**

In addition to improving housing and transportation options, smart growth is intended to help avoid the extra expense of building new infrastructure in areas outside of urban zones when the infrastructure already in town is underused. According to research by Rutgers University, a more compact development pattern - a smart growth characteristic in some communities - can save significant money, including 20 to 40 percent in land area, 15 to 20 percent in local and state road costs, 8 to 15 percent in water and sewer costs and 4 to 8 percent in housing development costs. Nationally, these savings translate into an average of \$5 billion per state over 25 years.

*Source: Impact Assessment of the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, Burchell, Robert, Rutgers University.*

sound, people-friendly and coordinated land use planning.

The concept of smart growth takes many of the sustainable development principles and applies them to how cities, towns, counties and regions grow. The idea is that communities should have a sense of uniqueness and a sense of place, work equally well for people of all ages and income levels, and reflect the goals and values of residents.

Another way to define smart growth is to think of it as "informed growth." In other words, smart growth does not lead to some preconceived outcome but is the result of understanding and accounting for the real costs, benefits and tradeoffs associated with various growth alternatives. Instead of a new layer of regulation, smart growth uses incentives and streamlined regulations to encourage the kind of development people in a community say they want. As the box illustrates, this can save a community money.

Smart growth is not a one-size-fits-all recipe for accommodating growth. What is "smart" for the Twin Cities will likely not make sense in more rural settings. In fact, in part because communities are so diverse, there is no universally accepted definition of *smart growth*. However, in its publication, *Smart Growth: Myth and Fact*, the nonprofit Urban Land Institute has identified common characteristics of smart growth:

- Development is economically viable and preserves open space and natural resources.
- Land use planning is comprehensive, integrated and regional.
- Public, private and nonprofit sectors collaborate on growth and development issues to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.
- The development process is predictable or made to be so.
- Infrastructure is maintained and enhanced to serve existing and new residents.
- Redevelopment of infill housing, brownfield sites and obsolete buildings is actively pursued.
- Urban centers and neighborhoods are integral components of a healthy regional economy.
- Compact suburban development is integrated into existing commercial areas, new town centers or near existing or planned transportation facilities.
- Development on the urban fringe integrates a mix of land uses, preserves open space, is fiscally responsible and provides transportation options.



Smart development preserves open space and recreational opportunities. Elm Creek Park Reserve, Hennepin County, Minnesota

## MINNESOTA PRINCIPLES OF SMART GROWTH

- Stewardship** - Manage land, water, air, energy and other natural resources wisely to sustain them for the future. The State of Minnesota will protect, conserve and restore the environment and agricultural land, wildlife habitat, wetlands, open space, surface and ground water quality and supplies, other conservation and recreational lands, and other natural resources to support activities in the state consistent with these principles. The state will conserve energy and expand development of renewable energy resources. The state will assist communities to maintain a unique sense of place and to respect and restore local cultural and natural resources. These steps will ensure that future growth is sustainable long term.
- Efficiency** - Make efficient, integrated public investments in transportation, housing, schools, energy, utilities, information infrastructure and other public services. The State of Minnesota will coordinate and link its tax policies with public investments in transportation, information infrastructure, land use, housing, schools, energy and utilities so they expand economic opportunity for the entire state while protecting cultural and natural resources. The state will maintain and improve existing investments in roads, schools and utilities to avoid wasteful public spending. New public investments will be consistent with these principles and support sustainable economic development.
- Choice** - Give communities Smart Growth options and choices. The State of Minnesota will work with local and regional governments to encourage citizen and business participation in decisions about growth. The state will help communities by
 
  - providing incentives for linking housing, transportation, energy and utilities, commerce, jobs, education, open space and the other amenities that make communities desirable places to live.
- Accountability** - Reinforce responsibility and accountability for development decisions. For Smart Growth to become a reality, government, businesses and individuals must make smart choices and take responsibility for the true costs and consequences of their decisions. The marketplace can be an effective force for Smart Growth, but only if state and local policies send consistent signals that protect the state's cultural and natural resources, governmental units coordinate regulatory decision-making and act in a timely manner, and if development decisions are predictable, fair and cost effective. The state will not subsidize land use and infrastructure decisions that are not consistent with these principles.
- Prevention** - Prevent future costs and negative impacts. The state has a responsibility to avoid unintended consequences of its actions and to prevent future costs and negative impacts of its decisions on the environment and the livability of communities. The state must account for the long-term implications of its current actions and choose practices that eliminate or minimize future problems. The state will prevent pollution and waste of resources, minimize societal costs and stimulate economic growth by evaluating the full life-cycle costs and benefits of its decisions.

Source: Adapted from *Growing Smart in Minnesota*, Office of the Governor, October 1999.

**Smart growth in Minnesota.** The state's framework for action on smart growth, a work in progress, is laid out in *Growing Smart in Minnesota*. The framework was built around the idea that " some things must grow – jobs, productivity, wages, education, housing and recreational opportunities, savings, profits, opportunity and knowledge. Others – pollution, waste and poverty – must not."

### MARKET-ORIENTED PLANNING

Market-oriented planning offers an approach to managing growth and development that emphasizes using the comprehensive plan as a flexible basis for reforming zoning codes so that developers can respond to shifts in consumer preferences.

A 1997 policy study by the Reason Foundation, *The Sprawling of America: In Defense of the Dynamic City*, describes seven principles that state and local governments can use to " ensure that economic growth is sustainable and land development is consistent with the goals and values of most residents and citizens." See the box, *Principles of Market-Oriented Planning*.

Taken together, the principles of market-based planning and smart growth may help a community set down the rules of the game for development without trying to plan exactly how the community will develop over time.



## COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING

The Legislature adopted the Community-Based Planning Act of 1997 – a voluntary approach to comprehensive planning – to promote greater citizen participation in local planning, encourage coordination among units of government and develop stronger partnerships between the state and local governments.

The act was based on the idea that communities should use local planning to engage citizens in shaping their future based on local values and as a way to prevent or minimize the unintended costs and consequences of development. In addition, it encouraged counties, cities and townships to jointly participate in establishing urban growth areas to manage future land uses, provide for the timely and efficient placement of public infrastructure and serve as the basis for future annexations.

Although the Legislature repealed the act, effective July 1, 2001, a number of its key provisions are worth mentioning and could continue to guide local governments in their comprehensive planning efforts. In particular, the act established 11 broad planning goals to define the public interest in local planning. The goals, also meant to guide state decisions, are presented in the box *Goals of Community-Based Planning*. By the date of the law's repeal, 17 counties and about 150 cities and towns had engaged in community-based planning.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

*Sustainable development* is thinking and acting long term about the future in a way that connects economic, environmental and social conditions. For a business, this might mean deciding to manufacture a product in a way that makes the most of the energy, land and materials used - that is, in a resource-efficient as well as economical way. It also might mean taking responsibility for the product from its birth to its death. For a community, this might mean deciding to act in ways that make the most of its energy, land and resources while taking responsibility for ensuring that its actions and choices contribute to

## PRINCIPLES OF MARKET-ORIENTED PLANNING

- ▶ **Pursue economic neutrality.** This means not using subsidies to favor one industry over another. For example, this might mean rejecting the use of tax increment financing to lure new businesses into a community at the expense of existing ones.
- ▶ **Price on-site public services at their full cost.** Local governments should collect from developers and residents the full costs of providing on-site services, including capital costs. This could be accomplished, for example, by charging new developments the marginal cost of the burdens they may impose on a community and not merely the cost averaged over the community at large.
- ▶ **Reform zoning to accommodate market trends.** Reforms could include allowing mixed uses and higher densities and adopting performance zoning to streamline the development process so that projects meeting specific outcomes could proceed more easily.
- ▶ **Use flexible, voluntary programs to protect open space.** For example, farmers could be offered a tax credit for voluntarily removing their land from development for a fixed period of time, often between 10 and 90 years. Such approaches allow communities to adjust their priorities over time as conditions and preferences dictate.
- ▶ **Enforce private-property rights.** A well-defined system of property rights increases the predictability of development and is necessary for the smooth functioning of real estate markets.
- ▶ **Adopt nuisance-based standards for land use regulation.** Development often has spillover effects that impact other residents or other jurisdictions. Such "nuisances" include congestion, noise and loss of open space. This approach to land regulation allows local officials to directly address impacts of development that are negatively affecting others rather than being forced to accept certain developments because they meet the zoning requirements for a particular area.
- ▶ **Facilitate change and community evolution.** The community would have policies in place that allow it to adapt and change to new demands. Such policies might include focusing on the actual impacts of development rather than specific land uses and using planning largely for public infrastructure investments, relying on performance zoning and resident preferences to dictate how the community evolves beyond that.

Source: *The Sprawling of America: In Defense of the Dynamic City*, The Reason Foundation, 1997.

Well maintained older homes provide character and affordability.



Carole Zelle

achieving the community's desired future. When viewed this way, sustainable development is more than just a "planning concept." That is why the Legislature directed that this guide follow the principles of sustainable development.

Conventional wisdom has held that a community must balance environmental quality and community character against economic growth, as if these were conflicting objectives. The goal of sustainable development, in contrast, is not to balance environmentally damaging activities with environmental protection but to move toward technologies, development patterns and daily practices that are, by their nature, good for people, business and the environment over the long term. A sustainable community is one that can persist over generations. It functions in ways that do not undermine its economic, environmental or social health, or that of other communities.

Minnesota Statutes, Section 4A.07 defines sustainable development as that which "maintains or enhances economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which people and economies depend." This is not a new idea. Minnesotans have understood for some time that people's needs must be met in ways that are good for communities, profitable and compatible with nature. One of the first calls for sustainable development appeared in 1973 as part of the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (Minnesota Statutes, Section 116D.02): "It is the

## 11 GOALS OF COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING

- 1 Citizen participation.** To develop a community-based planning process with broad citizen participation in order to build local capacity to plan for sustainable development and to benefit from the insights, knowledge and support of local residents
- 2 Cooperation.** To promote cooperation among communities to work toward the most efficient, planned and cost-effective delivery of government services
- 3 Economic development.** To create sustainable economic development strategies and provide economic opportunities throughout the state
- 4 Conservation.** To protect, preserve and enhance the state's resources
- 5 Livable community design.** To strengthen communities by following the principles of livable community design in development and redevelopment
- 6 Housing.** To provide and preserve an adequate supply of affordable and life-cycle housing throughout the state
- 7 Transportation.** To focus on the movement of people and goods, rather than on the movement of automobiles, in transportation planning, and to maximize the efficient use of the transportation infrastructure
- 8 Land use planning.** To establish a community-based framework as a basis for all decisions and actions related to land use
- 9 Public investments.** To account for the full environmental, social, and economic costs of new development
- 10 Public education.** To educate people about communities' and the state's finite capacity to accommodate growth, as well as the need for planning and resource management
- 11 Sustainable development.** To provide a better quality of life for all residents while maintaining nature's ability to function over time

Source: *Laws of Minnesota 1997*

continuing policy of the state government to use all practicable means and measures to create and maintain conditions under which human beings and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations.”

Simply posing the question “ Is this activity sustainable over the long term?” can be a revealing way for a community to evaluate the direction it is heading and chart a new one, if necessary. A community aware of the need for sustainable development is less apt to see economic, environmental and social issues as separate and unconnected. Instead, it is more likely to recognize and think through the long-term, often unintended, consequences of a given decision, policy or activity.

No two places have exactly the same resources, ecology, values, geography, businesses or cultures, so what is sustainable in one place may not be in another. Communities that are sustainable places to live and work, however, share some general characteristics. Based on research conducted by the Minnesota Round Table on Sustainable Development and on the experiences of communities around the country, these characteristics are listed in the box *Ten Things Sustainable Communities Do*.

## THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A comprehensive plan is a kind of business plan for the community. Similar to a good business plan, an effective comprehensive plan includes careful analysis of demographic data and other information on current conditions and trends affecting things important to the identity and livability of the community. The plan identifies a clear and compelling vision of the community’s future, comprehensive goals, and specific policies, strategies and action steps for implementing the strategies and meeting the vision and goals.

Developing a comprehensive plan that expresses community values and sets clear policies for development is a good community investment. The comprehensive plan allows a local government to set well-founded priorities for investing scarce resources, establish long-range policies that guide day-to-day actions and develop publicly supported guidelines for making tough decisions.

For example, local decision-makers can use the plan to guide their evaluation of a particular development proposal, such as for a new school or shopping mall. The plan can and should guide the preparation of development controls, such as zoning or subdivision regulation, and various incentive programs or educational efforts. It also can inform how a local government allocates funds for public improvements and where it might best invest in sewer extensions or new transportation options for the elderly.

The plan also serves an educational function by making citizens more aware of their community, how it is structured, how it is changing, what its major problems are and what needs to be done to remedy those problems. It is a statement of community intentions, setting forth major policies concerning desirable future development on behalf of the common good.

### 10 THINGS SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES DO

- ▶ Promote informed decision-making.
- ▶ Maintain natural and cultural assets.
- ▶ Promote local and regional economic prosperity.
- ▶ Promote a mutually supportive network of businesses.
- ▶ Account for the full environmental, social and economic costs of new development.
- ▶ Plan, finance and provide public facilities and services in a timely, orderly and efficient way.
- ▶ Develop a balanced transportation system that offers people choices in meeting their diverse needs and energy-efficient, low-cost modes of travel.
- ▶ Use natural resources in a way that sustains them over time.
- ▶ Foster livable communities.
- ▶ Preserve community character.

## CHIEF COMPONENTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Although Minnesota law provides different requirements for various units of government, some important components of a comprehensive plan include:

**A vision statement.** This describes what residents want their community to be like in the future.

**Statements of goals and policies.** These lay out the framework for how a community will achieve its vision. The goals describe the ultimate ends of a community in pursuit of its vision (e.g., affordable housing for all or a balanced transportation system). The goals may not always be achievable, but they set a challenging “high bar” toward which a community can work. Policies are the principles or courses of action that guide a community’s actions in pursuit of its goals. Together, the vision, goals and policies provide the foundation, or policy framework, for everything else in a comprehensive plan.

**Strategies for achieving the goals and vision.** Strategies are the steps a community will take, consistent with its policies, to achieve its goals and vision. They should have measurable objectives and definite time frames. A community should pick those strategies that offer the greatest long-term benefits at the lowest long-term cost.

**Information to inform decisions.** Surveys, studies and other information about existing conditions tell a community about its overall health

and how it may be changing. Background data should cover the community and its area of influence and include major aspects of a community’s physical (including environmental), economic and social conditions and trends. This is the information that helps a community define its assets and challenges, and develop its vision, goals, policies and strategies. This element can serve as a stand-alone plan document, as well as reference for a comprehensive water plan, transportation plan, recreation plan, zoning ordinance or other implementation effort of a community.

**A land use element.** This element guides future development of public and private property to implement a comprehensive plan’s goals and policies. It should designate allowable land uses, as well as lay out specialized plans for specific areas or specific types of land uses. A land use element may also identify development densities acceptable to a community.

**An implementation element.** This element describes the recommendations, timing, cost, resources and steps needed to implement the various aspects of a plan. This should include performance measures that allow citizens and others to track how well a community is doing in implementing its comprehensive plan.

Many communities may see the need to address what, for them, seem like new issues, whether that means tackling historic preservation, housing, intergovernmental cooperation, natural resource stewardship or energy. Sometimes, these issues can have just as profound an effect on a community’s character as the more traditional elements of economic development, land use and transportation. The appendix includes a table covering the various planning duties of cities, counties and townships.

## OTHER TYPES OF LOCAL PLANS

In addition to a comprehensive plan, many communities develop special, more detailed plans, many of which emphasize specific implementation strategies and programs. A comprehensive plan guides and helps shape these special plans. Linking

Public art invites people to explore Lake Superior’s myths and realities. Canal Park, Duluth, Minnesota



Carole Zellie



and coordinating special plans and programs with a comprehensive plan will minimize duplication of effort. Recognizing other local plans in a comprehensive plan also will facilitate the management and implementation of those plans.

This guide focuses on the comprehensive plan, but a community may choose to develop a number of related plans, depending on its needs.

- **Land use plans** focus primarily on physical land use issues and can form the basis for community zoning ordinances. Although land use plans can be freestanding documents, they are most effective as part of a comprehensive plan.
- **Comprehensive water plans** focus on water issues of a county, including objectives for future development, use and conservation of water and related land resources - both ground water systems and watersheds. Watershed districts and soil and water conservation districts also develop water-related plans. In the seven-county metropolitan area, watershed management organizations develop surface water management plans while counties develop ground water plans.
- **Solid waste plans** determine how a county and local governments will reduce, reuse, recycle, collect and dispose of solid waste.
- **Capital improvement plans** guide spending on specific infrastructure elements, such as parks, roads, and water management, wastewater and drinking water facilities. A capital improvement program includes a proposed schedule and priority of all capital improvements to be implemented during a specific period of time, along with cost estimates and anticipated means of financing. The comprehensive plan provides the basis for and guides development of a capital improvement program.
- **Hazard mitigation plans** evaluate and rank the major natural, technological and domestic preparedness hazards affecting a community and recommend strategies for reducing their actual threat by limiting the impact of damages and losses. Communities are encouraged by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to prepare mitigation plans before disasters strike,

and in certain cases may be required to have one before receiving disaster assistance.

- **Strategic plans** are perhaps more often associated with the private sector, but they can be very useful in helping a community analyze its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This analysis helps a community understand how it relates to the larger world and how best to position itself for the future.
- **Corridor plans** focus on specific corridors that transcend political boundaries, such as the land along a stretch of highway, a recreational trail, a river or other open space. A transportation corridor plan, for example, involves detailed analysis of the existing and future land uses, as well as the resulting transportation needs in the defined area. Again, corridor plans should be developed or used in conjunction with a comprehensive plan. Planning for any one aspect of a community in isolation from other aspects can lead to unintended and sometimes costly consequences.
- **Neighborhood plans** are often developed for a geographic area smaller than an entire jurisdiction, which means that they are most often done in larger cities. Through this more geographically focused planning effort, strategies in the plan can be made specific to the situations and needs of particular neighborhoods.

**REALITY CHECK ON A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Does it:

- ▶ Use common sense?
- ▶ Balance public interests with the interests of individual property owners and businesses?
- ▶ Encourage flexibility in the means of achieving community goals while avoiding overly strict or prescriptive approaches?
- ▶ Meet its intended public purpose?
- ▶ Guide development to fit the community's vision and avoid or mitigate negative effects?
- ▶ Include a means of implementation, monitoring and enforcement, and a process for plan evaluation, review and updating?

## BASIC PLANNING STEPS

Whether a community is beginning a planning process for the first time or has a history of planning, it is important for people involved to understand the basic steps of community planning and communicate them to others. These steps, however, have as many variations as there are types of plans. Communities should make adjustments as necessary to fit their situation, capabilities and resources. Also, it is important to realize that some steps in the process should be taken simultaneously and that while planning may seem linear, it is actually a cyclical, iterative process. Perhaps the most important reminder is that there is no one right way to plan.

Each of the following planning steps will be discussed in more detail in later chapters of this guide.

### Getting started

- Considering the commitment
- Establishing the structure for planning
- Marshalling resources
- Developing a plan for public participation

### Assessing the state of your community

- Creating a community profile
- Establishing two levels of a community inventory
- Identifying community assets and challenges

### Setting a community's course

- Creating the vision
- Setting goals
- Developing policies
- Identifying community progress indicators

### Developing strategies

- Identifying a range of alternative strategies
- Evaluating alternatives and understanding interconnections
- Selecting preferred strategies
- Setting priorities

### Implementing a comprehensive plan

- Drafting or changing ordinances and tax and investment policies
- Implementing policy through administrative actions and programs
- Monitoring progress with community progress and plan implementation indicators
- Adjusting plan as needed

## CHECKLIST OF BASIC PLANNING STEPS

