



**John Jordan, Chairman**  
**Marie Mitchell, Vice Chair**  
**Reggie Bennett, Vice Mayor**  
**Marvin Clements, Commissioner**  
**Jennifer Morton, Commissioner**

**Sharon D. Williams, AICP,**  
**Planning Commission Secretary &**  
**Director of Community Development**

The Regular Meeting of the Planning Commission of the Town of Altavista, Virginia will be held in Town Council Chambers of Town Hall on Tuesday, October 4, 2021, beginning at 5:00 p.m.

## **AGENDA**

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Determination of a Quorum
4. Approval of Agenda
5. Pledge of Allegiance & Invocation
6. Approval of Minutes September 7, 2021
7. Public Expression
8. Public Hearings – None
9. Old Business - None
10. New Business
  - a. 2040 Comprehensive Plan SOAR Analysis, Ada Hunsberger, AICP Candidate, Regional Planner, CVPDC
  - b. Meeting Time
11. Adjournment

**All meetings are livestreamed and can be viewed on the Town's website at [www.altavistava.gov](http://www.altavistava.gov)**

**Next Meeting: Monday, November 1, 2021, at 5:00 p.m.**

The Altavista Planning Commission held a regularly scheduled meeting on September 2021 at 5:00 p.m. in Council Chambers at Town Hall, located at 510 7th Street, Altavista, Virginia.

Members present        -        John Jordan, Chairman  
Marie Mitchell, Vice Chair  
Marvin Clements  
Reggie Bennett, Vice Mayor  
Jennifer Morton

Staff present                -        Sharon D. Williams, AICP, Community Development Director  
John Eller, Town Attorney  
George Sandridge, Main Street Coordinator

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairman John Jordan called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

### **DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:**

With all Planning Commission Members being present, Chairman Jordan confirmed a quorum.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Chairman Jordan asked if there were any amendments to be made to the agenda, to which there were none. Upon a motion by Vice Chair Marie Mitchell, and seconded by Commissioner Marvin Clements, the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to approve the agenda as presented.

### **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & INVOCATION:**

Chairman Jordan delivered the Invocation and afterwards, the Planning Commission recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Upon a motion made by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, and seconded by Vice Chair Mitchell, the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to approve the minutes from the August 9, 2021, meeting.

### **PUBLIC EXPRESSION:**

Chairman Jordan opened the floor for public comment.

There being no speakers to come forward, the public comment period was closed.

### **PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

There were no public hearings scheduled for this date.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

There were no Old Business items for discussion on this date.

## **New Business:**

### **2040 Comprehensive Plan Discussion**

Community Development Director, Sharon D. Williams, addressed the Planning Commission in regard to this item. She reminded the Commission that state code required localities to review their Comprehensive Plan every five years. Ms. Williams stated it was staff's recommendation that the town needed to update their Comprehensive Plan; to incorporate the 2020 Census data, and other items not included in the plan, such as housing and renewable energy. She stated staff intended to make the town's Comprehensive Plan more user-friendly. Ms. Williams stated, during the Comprehensive Plan update, the town's previous goals and objectives would be reviewed, old items deleted if they had been accomplished, and new ones added that reflected the town's future goals. She stated all town partners and organizations represented in the Comprehensive Plan would be included in discussion about their responsibilities. Ms. Williams stated that staff believed a short survey was the best way to gather input from citizens. She stated the survey would be available electronically and in paper form. Ms. Williams informed the Commission that the survey would also be part of her presentation package when she went out into the community to offer information about the town's Comprehensive Plan and gathered additional input from citizens and partners/organizations. Ms. Williams went through the survey's eighteen questions one-by-one and asked for the Commission's input and anything they believed needed to be added to, or deleted from, the survey. She stated the survey was subject-to-change, based on their input.

Commissioner Clements suggested the paper form of the survey be more user friendly for senior citizens. He stated it would be helpful to elaborate on how the survey was to be filled out.

Vice Mayor Bennett suggested the numbered boxes be left blank for the individual to manually fill in numbers 1-4 of their ranking importance.

Chairman Jordan asked how staff intended to offer the survey to citizens.

Ms. Williams informed the Commission the survey would be offered on the town's website and social media pages, as well as a paper form available at the Town Hall office and the local YMCA.

Vice Mayor Bennett suggested the survey be offered at local industries, such as Abbott and BGF.

Ms. Williams continued with the survey presentation.

Vice Chair Mitchell suggested there be a place at the end of the survey which allowed citizens to offer additional input on items that may not have been covered in the survey, and that they wanted to see investigated and/or addressed.

Vice Mayor Bennett referenced the second question on the survey about recreational spaces. He stated the town had a large senior population and suggested staff add something to that question, or add an additional question, that addressed their needs and/or wants, as well as ADA citizens.

Commissioner Clements suggested the Booker Building at English Park be utilized as a senior center on certain days of the week.

Commissioner Jennifer Morton referenced question number four regarding housing needed in town. Ms. Morton suggested adding tiny homes and container homes as an option for that question.

When discussing question number six, regarding investing in housing rehabilitation programs, Ms. Williams informed the Commission that the town's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) grant application for the Acquire/Renovate/Sell (ARS) program had been approved. She stated this allowed the town to buy a home, renovate the home, then sell the property and reinvest the profit to duplicate the process and continue the program. Ms. Williams stated the program also allowed the town to purchase empty lots for building new homes for the same resell purposes. She stated it was the town's goal to offer first-time home buyers the ability to purchase their home over renting.

Vice Mayor Bennett suggested the town consider implementing a building code enforcement plan. He stated it was beneficial if the town addressed blighted homes and businesses.

Ms. Williams stated when the subject was previously brought to Town Council, there was no action taken at that time.

Vice Chair Mitchell stated she remembered when discussed by Town Council, there was not a consensus for the town to hire another employee at that time.

Town Attorney John Eller stated the subject of the town having its own Code Enforcement Officer has been discussed multiple times over the years. He suggested asking Town Council to decide what they want as the Town of Altavista's code enforcement plan and allow the Planning Commission to develop a Property Maintenance Code to enforce that plan.

All Planning Commission members were in consensus that blight should be mentioned within the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Clements referenced questions number eight and suggested streetlights, trees, and streetscaping be separate from a sidewalk option.

Ms. Williams stated she would separate them.

At 5:45 p.m., Town Attorney John Eller and Commissioner Morton departed the Planning Commission Meeting, in order to attend another business meeting.

Ms. Williams continued the survey presentation with Transportation questions, which included pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders. She stated transportation directly impacted the quality of life for town citizens, as access to employment and community resources, and also contributed to economic development.

Vice Chair Mitchell suggested an option be added to ask if there was a need for the Altavista Community Transit System (ACTS) to extend its services to Rustburg, which was the hub for Campbell County's services and resources. She stated, if there was an overwhelming response to the question, the town could investigate the possibility of offering the extended service to its citizens on one specific day per week.

The Commission was in consensus to add the question.

Ms. Williams moved forward in her presentation with survey questions regarding Town Services and Amenities. She referenced question thirteen, Town Services, and asked for the Commission's input on the existing options given, and if they believed any other items needed to be added.

There was a consensus of the Commission to add the town's snow removal, leaf pickup, weekend truck, and bulk trash pickup services.

Chairman Jordan referenced a previous discussion about the town offering a paper shredding day for its citizens. He asked if the item could be revisited for consideration.

Vice Chair Mitchell suggested electronics disposal be included and scheduled on the same day each year.

Ms. Williams reminded the Commission that when the item was initially discussed, she and George Sandridge, Altavista's Main Street Coordinator, were told not to pursue the event. She stated, if the Interim Town Manager directed staff to proceed, they would contact the company. Ms. Williams referenced question number fourteen regarding new amenities citizens believed were needed in town and asked the Commission for their input on the options given.

Vice Chair Mitchell asked if the fresh food market option was intended to mean the Fresh Market grocery store, or was it intended to represent a farmers market.

Ms. Williams stated the wording was misleading and she would have it corrected.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked if having additional restaurants in town was an option.

Ms. Williams stated it could be. Ms. Williams informed the Commission that Mr. Sandridge had been working with a developer to renovate one of the downtown buildings into a mixed-use facility.

Mr. Sandridge stated the intent was to have an upscale café in the lower part of the building and apartments in the upper portion of the building. He stated, although the project did not proceed, Altavista On Track (AOT) wanted to bring an eatery to the downtown area.

Ms. Williams stated multiple restaurants would draw more people into town, and she hoped they wanted to live in it because of its amenities.

Commissioner Clements suggested adding the options of a bowling alley and skating rink to the amenity question (#14).

Ms. Williams stated the citizen survey was a good opportunity for the town to gather input from the community on potential uses for the Booker Building and the Vista Theatre, to which the Commission all agreed. Ms. Williams referenced the question that asked the individual taking the survey where they lived and worked; and, if visiting, what brought them into town. She stated the survey was intended, not only for Altavista citizens, but also for its surrounding community.

Vice Mayor Bennett suggested having the Town of Hurt included.

Ms. Williams stated she would incorporate Hurt into the survey.

Vice Chair Mitchell asked when the Comprehensive Plan Survey would be sent out and suggested the survey be included in the town's upcoming utility bill mailing, October 1st.

Ms. Williams said it was staff's intent to offer the survey sooner rather than later. She stated staff would investigate the delivery options available and determine which was the most feasible. Ms. Williams informed the Commission that staff would have a table set up at the upcoming Uncle Billy's BBQ, Bourbon, and Beer Festival, October 1<sup>st</sup>, with an opportunity for individuals to take the survey.

Chairman Jordan asked what the Commission could expect from staff at their next meeting.

Ms. Williams stated it was staff's intent to have a draft copy of the first chapter in the Comprehensive Plan available for review by the Planning Commission.

Vice Chair Mitchell asked Ms. Williams to send her Community Development Monthly Report to the Planning Commission.

Ms. Williams informed the Commission of a few ongoing items. She stated someone wanted to purchase the land between the river and the old Lane property for a campground. She stated the desired use was not permitted by Town Code and there were concerns of contaminants on the property. Ms. Williams stated, through a grant the town received, it submitted an application to conduct a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment on the property. She said this was a service the town offered its local businesses.

Ms. Williams stated staff continued to promote both the town's and AOT's façade programs.

Main Street Coordinator George Sandridge stated there had been several businesses interested in and a few that had already taken advantage of AOT's Façade Program.

Chairman Jordan asked what amount of funds were available from the façade program.

Mr. Sandridge stated AOT would match any amount up to \$5,000 for items such as exterior painting and door or window replacement.

Ms. Williams stated the town needed to distribute the remaining amount of its \$50,000 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant funds awarded for this program by the end of the 2021 year, or the funds would have to be returned. Ms. Williams stated, for that reason, the town was offering its façade program's remaining funds as a no-interest loan, to encourage businesses to take advantage of the program before the funds ran out or were sent back to the USDA.

There were no additional questions, comments, or concerns from the Planning Commission.

**Adjournment:**

With no further business to discuss, Chairman Jordan adjourned the meeting at 6:18 p.m.

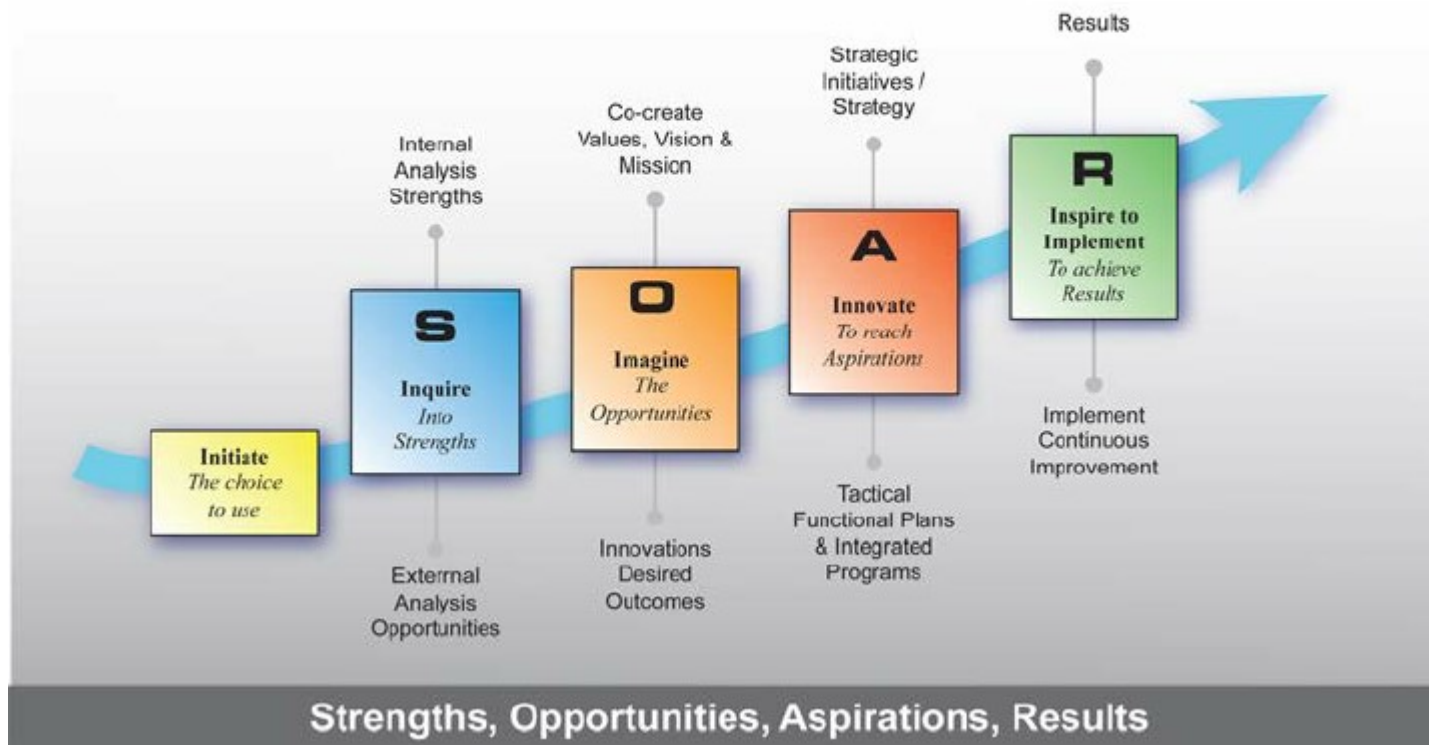
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John Jordan  
Planning Commission Chair

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Sharon D. Williams, AICP  
Planning Commission Secretary

# SOAR Framework





# QUICKNOTES

## The Local Comprehensive Plan

The local comprehensive plan, sometimes referred to as the general plan or the master plan, is the foundational policy document for local governments. It establishes a framework to guide public and private decisions about future growth, preservation, and change within a municipality or county over the next 20 to 30 years. While the comprehensive plan has traditionally focused primarily on physical development, many contemporary comprehensive plans also discuss a wide range of economic, environmental, and social topics that affect the sustainability of a community.

### Background

All states either allow or require local governments to prepare comprehensive plans. However, there is no consensus about what, precisely, constitutes a comprehensive plan. This is largely due to the fact that many state enabling laws are still rooted in the U.S. Department of Commerce's Standard Zoning Enabling Act (SZEa) and Standard City Planning Enabling Act (SCPEa), published in 1926 and 1928, respectively. The SZEa stated that zoning regulations must be "in conformance with a comprehensive plan" but did not define the term. Subsequently, the SCPEa purposely avoided defining the comprehensive plan (or master plan in the act's language), choosing instead to give examples of the subject matter that should be covered in the plan.

While the content and format of comprehensive plans can vary considerably from place to place, there are still a number of common characteristics that help distinguish these plans from other types of local plans (e.g., subarea or functional plans). First, comprehensive plans have a broad scope, meaning they address an extensive range of topics of communitywide concern. Second, they are comprehensive in terms of geographic extent, meaning that a comprehensive plan covers the full area of a local jurisdiction. Third, they present multiple goals and policies to be implemented over a long time period.

While these three core characteristics have defined comprehensive plans for decades, there is also a set of basic best practices for contemporary plans. First, planners and public officials should develop a comprehensive plan with input from all segments of the community. Second, comprehensive plans should be readily available to and easily understood by any interested community members. Third, comprehensive plans should be formally adopted as official policy by the local legislative body.

### Reasons to Prepare a Comprehensive Plan

The local comprehensive planning process gives a community an opportunity to step back and see the big picture. By looking at multiple topics over a long time horizon, planners, public officials, and community members have a chance to discuss both compatibilities and potential points of conflict among different goals and policies. This makes the comprehensive plan an important tool for coordinating local decision making.

The comprehensive plan is the legal foundation that legitimizes local development regulations. In fact, many states require zoning and subdivision ordinances to be in conformance with an adopted comprehensive plan. Ideally, the local comprehensive plan is a primary guide not only for updates to development regulations but also for the creation of local capital improvements plans, which detail planned capital expenditures over a multiyear period.

An up-to-date comprehensive plan provides a measure of certainty to landowners and developers and reduces the likelihood of arbitrary decisions by local officials. Because a comprehensive plan shows how a community hopes to change over time, it gives applicants a sense of the types of



Comprehensive plans cover a wide range  
of topics of communitywide concern.



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development projects that are likely to be approved in a specific location and helps owners and developers avoid spending excessive time and money on incompatible proposals. The data gathering and analysis that informs a comprehensive plan also improves the factual basis for land-use decisions. Last but not least, the comprehensive planning process builds an informed constituency. As planners, public officials, and community members exchange ideas and listen to alternative perspectives, they become invested in the vision of the plan and willing to assist in implementing plan policies.

## Plan Content and Format

Traditionally, a comprehensive plan is comprised of a series of thematic elements (i.e., chapters or major sections). Common topics for plan elements include land use, transportation, housing, economic development, and community facilities. In recent years an increasing number of communities have added elements addressing the environment, natural hazards, public health, climate change, intergovernmental cooperation, or energy to their comprehensive plans. While the themes of the plan may be more or less expansive depending on state requirements, community context, and local interests, there are a number of basic features common to many comprehensive plans.

Virtually all comprehensive plans include a discussion of issues and opportunities. This discussion describes the legal authority or mandate for the plan; summarizes the community's long-term vision for growth, preservation, or change; provides data and analysis that establish the context for the broad goals and objectives of the plan; and sets the stage for policy considerations detailed in subsequent plan sections.

Most comprehensive plans contain one or more sections presenting goals and objectives related to the thematic elements of the plan. Goals are general statements about desirable future conditions. Objectives are statements of measurable outcomes in furtherance of a certain goal.

Finally, many comprehensive plans include both specific policy statements and action steps. Policies are statements of intent with enough clarity to guide decision making, and actions are directives about programs, regulations, operational procedures, or public investments intended to guide the implementation of specific policies.

While many comprehensive plans are formatted and designed to read like a richly illustrated book, advances in website design and improvements in broadband access open up additional opportunities for communities to share plan content in more accessible and interactive formats. Many contemporary plans have their own websites that allow community members to view plan themes or features using hyperlinks and embedded media content.

## Plan Implementation

While a broad base of community support is often the most important factor that influences if and when plan recommendations will be enacted, providing a detailed implementation program in the plan itself can be an effective tool to organize local efforts. This implementation program should include a list of specific public or private actions connected to each policy recommendation in the plan. Ideally, the program will also identify a responsible party and include a cost estimate and a time frame for each action.

## Summary

The local comprehensive plan is a community's official statement about how it hopes to grow or change over the next 20 to 30 years. Comprehensive plans differ from other local plans in terms of scope, geographic coverage, and legal authority. While different communities will choose to emphasize different themes in their plans, the hallmark of an effective plan is that it provides valuable guidance to public- and private-sector decision makers.

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## FURTHER READING

### 1. Published by the American Planning Association

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### 2. Other Resources

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Meck, Stuart. 2006. "Comprehensive Plans." In *Planning and Urban Design Standards*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Available at [www.planning.org/store/product/?ProductCode=BOOK\\_RPUD](http://www.planning.org/store/product/?ProductCode=BOOK_RPUD).

# QUICKNOTES

## Integrating Health into the Comprehensive Plan

Land-use policies and development directly affect many aspects of public health. The quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink, the safety of the streets we use to get around, and even our daily levels of physical activity and dietary choices all depend, to some extent, on land-use and transportation decisions made by local governments. Yet, until recently, relatively few comprehensive plans explicitly addressed the potential effects of land use on health.

The comprehensive plan is the official statement of a city council or county board about where and how to accommodate future growth or change in the built environment. Because it addresses a broad range of interrelated topics using a long time horizon (at least 20 years), a comprehensive plan that includes strong public health goals and policies can be the single most important document for putting a community on the path toward a healthier future.

### The Relationship of Planning to Health

Community planning processes set the stage for policies, programs, and regulations that guide decisions about land-use development and transportation investments, and a growing body of research points to numerous connections between community design and public health.

One major connection is the effect urban form can have on both obesity and air quality. When development is compact (i.e., higher density and intensity), people are more likely to walk, bike, or take transit. Furthermore, if there is a mix of uses (e.g., commercial and residential) in an area with a compact development pattern, people are even more likely to get out of their cars. Therefore, bringing destinations into closer proximity can act as both an obesity prevention strategy and an effective way to reduce smog.

Similarly, the amount and location of parks and other green spaces can affect obesity, mental health, and water quality. When people have convenient, safe access to parks and recreation facilities, they exercise more. There is also evidence suggesting that the mere presence of greenery can lower stress, promote healing, and help children concentrate in school. Green spaces also capture and filter stormwater runoff, which recharges drinking water sources and reduces surface water contamination associated with waterborne illnesses.

Community design can affect public health in other important ways too. For example, when streets are not well connected or not designed to accommodate users of all ages and abilities, people drive more. When people don't have convenient access to stores that sell fresh, healthy food, they are less likely to eat recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables. And when people live near hazardous waste storage or transportation facilities, they face increased exposure risks.

Each community has opportunities to address all of these connections through goals and policies in its comprehensive plan. Depending on community context and preference, cities and counties may decide to either integrate these goals and policies throughout existing plan elements such as land use, transportation, housing, and community facilities, or they may choose to create stand-alone health elements.

### Integrating Health Throughout the Plan

Many comprehensive plans already address a wide range of issues important to public health. Traditionally, though, relatively few plans have taken the opportunity to make health an explicit overarching theme for the plan.

www.pedbikeimages.org/Laura Sanot



*People are more active when they  
have access to safe, convenient parks,  
sidewalks, and bike paths.*



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Integrating health throughout existing plan elements often starts during the visioning process for a plan update. Visioning gives planners, public officials, public health professionals, and engaged citizens a chance to discuss relationships between planning, community design, and health. The information shared during these visioning discussions can be used to inform the introductory issues and opportunities element of the plan. This element should include a narrative description of the reasons for addressing health explicitly in the comprehensive plan as well as overarching goals related to health outcomes.

After setting the stage in the issues and opportunities section of the plan, participants can add more specific goals and policies that support health to each element of the plan. These goals and policies may be grouped together in each element or dispersed in accordance with the organizing principles of the plan as a whole (e.g., goals and policies may be grouped by community areas or by time horizon).

The land-use element is the place to include goals and policies that encourage increased density and intensity and an appropriate mix of uses. This element is also a good place to add goals and policies that promote pedestrian- and transit-friendly design and encourage the use of Health Impact Assessments in development proposal review.

The transportation element is the place to state the importance of a transportation network that considers the needs and abilities of all users. Health-related goals and policies may encourage well-connected streets with safe, attractive routes to promote bicycle and pedestrian activity, as well as public transit systems that provide viable alternatives to personal car use.

Since the housing element sets the stage for the types and locations of housing opportunities, this is a logical place to put goals and policies aimed at decreasing concentrated poverty and increasing the availability of affordable housing for vulnerable populations.

Finally, the community facilities element is the place for goals and policies that set standards for public safety service and adequate access to parks and open space. This element is also a place to address access to healthy food through grocery stores and community gardens.

## A Health Element

For some communities, a new health element may be an effective way to place special emphasis on the importance of goals and policies that support public health. Moreover, there are some issues, such as food access, that may not fit neatly in existing elements.

However, when creating a new health element, it is important to carefully review the other elements of the plan to make sure they support the new element's goals and policies. For example, if the health element expresses a desire to encourage increased physical activity by providing compact, mixed use environments, the land-use element should be updated to detail appropriate locations for increased density or a mix of uses.

## Conclusion

Protecting public health has always been an explicit purpose of both planning in general and, more specifically, the comprehensive plan. However, until recently, most comprehensive plans neglected to emphasize certain connections between community design and health outcomes. After making these connections explicit during the visioning phase of the planning process, each community has a choice about how best to integrate health-supportive goals and policies in its comprehensive plan. While some cities and counties may elect to use health as an organizing theme for the plan, others may choose to adopt a new plan element. In either case, integrating health into the comprehensive plan is an important way for planners to make sure future growth and change leads to healthier communities for all.

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### 2. Other Resources

Design for Health. 2007. "Planning Information Sheet: Integrating Health into Comprehensive Planning." Version 2.0. [www.designforhealth.net/pdfs/Information\\_Sheet/BCBS\\_ISHealth-CompPlanning\\_082307.pdf](http://www.designforhealth.net/pdfs/Information_Sheet/BCBS_ISHealth-CompPlanning_082307.pdf)

Stair, Peter, Heather Wooten, and Matt Raimi. 2008. *How to Create and Implement Healthy General Plans: A Toolkit for Building Healthy, Vibrant Communities Through Land Use Policy Change*. Oakland, California: Public Health Law & Policy. [www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning/create\\_implement\\_gp](http://www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning/create_implement_gp)

# QUICKNOTES

## Integrating Sustainability into the Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan is a guiding document for the future of an entire community. It establishes goals and policies and lays out action steps for meeting those goals.

While sustainability has often been an implied goal of comprehensive plans, communities are increasingly placing a new emphasis and focus on making sustainability a clear part of their comprehensive plans. They have done this through new goals and policies that establish sustainability as an objective and create the foundation for programs and steps to implement these goals. Some communities have created entire new elements in their comprehensive plan to incorporate these goals, while others have integrated sustainability throughout their existing plan elements.

### DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY

One of the first steps in updating a comprehensive plan to incorporate sustainability is to decide what sustainability means to your community and what new issues and concerns might be addressed under the umbrella of sustainability. Communities may choose to reference other commonly accepted definitions of sustainability or draw upon community input and the community vision to state what sustainability means to their community in particular. Also, decide if your community will use the common triple-bottom-line approach to sustainability, which encompasses environmental, economic, and social equity concerns as the three prongs to sustainability. Alternatively, you may choose to focus on one or two of these or different areas, to reflect what is not currently in the comprehensive plan and what is important to your community.

Communities should also decide what sustainability issues will be reflected in new goals and policies. This list could include climate change, renewable energy, green building, green infrastructure, water, food access, alternative transportation, land conservation, habitat protection, and more. Assessing what policies are currently in your plan, which of those need to be updated, and what is missing from the plan will help you determine where to focus your efforts.

### A SUSTAINABILITY ELEMENT

One approach to updating the comprehensive plan to include sustainability measures is to add a new element to the plan that focuses on this topic area. Communities may choose this approach for a variety of reasons, one of which may be the desire to add this area before the next comprehensive update of their plan. While this new element should follow a similar format to other elements of the plan and comply with any state-specific requirements for comprehensive plans, here are some guidelines for incorporating a sustainability element:

- Provide an overview of the issue, the rationale for addressing sustainability in the plan, and the relationship to other elements of the plan. Also include a definition of what sustainability means to your community, as described above.
- Summarize existing conditions and any baseline assessments. For example, if your community has completed a greenhouse gas inventory or an assessment of energy use, those could be summarized here as background information.

James C. Schwab



*The City of Greensburg, Kansas, adopted a Sustainable Comprehensive Plan in 2008. The 5.4.7 Arts Center in Greensburg, the first LEED Platinum building in Kansas, reflects the community's commitment to becoming more sustainable.*



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- Establish sustainability goals and then develop policies to support those goals. Consider connections to land use, transportation, infrastructure, and other important aspects of the plan.
- Create implementation or action steps to achieve the sustainability goals, identifying who will lead the implementation, what the timelines will be, and any known resources or funding sources that could help with the implementation. You may also include metrics to assess and track your progress toward your sustainability goals.

## INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGHOUT THE PLAN

Other communities have taken a different approach to addressing aspects of sustainability by incorporating sustainability goals and policies throughout existing plan elements, such as land use, transportation, and housing. Communities may prefer this approach if they already have a separate sustainability plan that comprehensively addresses this topic. In this case, communities may choose to focus on integrating major goals and policies from that plan into the respective elements and reference the sustainability plan for background information and details. Other communities may prefer this approach in order to ensure compatible goals and policies and integrate sustainability as a theme. Marin County, California, for example, used sustainability as the overarching theme for their countywide plan.

Even if your community has already been addressing aspects of sustainability such as climate change, energy concerns, and green building through other programs, integrating these priorities into your comprehensive plan is a good idea. The comprehensive plan is one of the most important documents that the planning department and the planning commission uses, and including your priorities for a sustainable future for your city is integral to ensuring that these priorities are part of your community's long-term vision. The comprehensive plan is also a useful tool for establishing new policies and priorities related to climate change, renewable energy, and sustainable development. In addition, revisiting goals and policies that are already in your plan to see how they might fit into your new sustainability vision—or be updated to help achieve that vision—will improve the likelihood of successful implementation.

Regardless of which approach your community chooses to take, planners and planning commissioners should ensure that new goals and policies related to sustainability are supported by other elements of your plan. For example, if reducing greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled is a stated goal, closely examine your land-use and transportation elements to ensure that future plans for accommodating growth will not work against your goal.

## CONCLUSION

Communities are increasingly recognizing the importance of becoming more sustainable and thinking about sustainability in planning for the future of their communities. Planners and planning commissioners should review their comprehensive plan to see to what extent sustainability is incorporated, and update plans when needed to integrate a sustainability vision as well as goals, policies, and action items to help the community become more sustainable. Planners and commissioners should also ensure consistency between elements and be mindful of how other plan elements, such as transportation and land use, may affect your sustainability goals.

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# QUICKNOTES

Planning fundamentals  
for public officials and  
engaged citizens

This PAS QuickNotes was prepared by  
James C. Schwab, AICP, Manager of  
APA's Hazards Planning Research Center.

## Integrating Hazard Mitigation into the Comprehensive Plan

The cardinal purpose of planning is to advance the public welfare. Because the overwhelming majority of American communities are subject to natural hazards, few can afford not to plan accordingly.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has defined hazard mitigation as “the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters.” Hazard mitigation planning follows a defined process of identifying hazards within the community, analyzing the risks posed by those hazards, establishing priorities for addressing those risks, and choosing specific actions that will mitigate those risks. A hazard mitigation plan should describe each of those steps and lay out both the actions to be taken and the means for achieving them. Ideally, it may also identify opportunities for accelerating those actions with post-disaster resources in the event that a disaster actually occurs. For example, a disaster may present the opportunity to buy out badly damaged properties in order to establish permanent open space in high-risk floodplains.

### FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

In 2000 Congress passed the Disaster Mitigation Act (DMA), which amended the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1988, the law that forms the cornerstone for federal involvement in responding to disasters. It marked a major shift in federal policy by requiring states and local governments to adopt a state or local hazard mitigation plan (LHMP) approved by FEMA in order to qualify for federal hazard mitigation grants, which fall into several different categories. Historically, the most important category has been the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, available as a percentage of overall disaster aid following a presidential disaster declaration.

FEMA is responsible for promulgating rules in the Code of Federal Regulations that establish the terms for compliance with the goals of DMA. Plans must be updated every five years. Local plans may either serve a single local jurisdiction or multiple jurisdictions adopting the same regional plan; however, every jurisdiction must formally adopt the approved plan in order to be eligible for mitigation assistance. In short, Congress opted to insist on accountability through planning for the money it made available.

### STATE REQUIREMENTS

Even before DMA, some states required hazard-related elements in local comprehensive plans in their state planning enabling legislation. In addition, some had other laws addressing specific hazards by laying out requirements affecting land use and building codes in hazardous areas. These are most common in the West (exemplified by California's requirement for a safety element in general plans) and in the Southeast (exemplified by Florida's requirements for a coastal element and post-disaster redevelopment plan in coastal jurisdictions). Altogether, 10 states that mandate comprehensive planning by localities also require that hazards be addressed in some form within those plans.

The big question is how those state planning requirements mesh with the federal requirements under DMA. In states without such mandates, local hazard mitigation plans are more often than not produced as stand-alone documents that are not coordinated well, or at all, with the provisions of the comprehensive plan. On the other hand, Florida has deliberately cultivated such coordination of local mitigation strategies (its term), and California has provided incentives for integrating the LHMP and safety element and meeting both sets of requirements in the same plan.

James C. Schwab



*Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is one of many communities affected by floods in recent years, but in 2010 the state adopted the Smart Planning Act, which includes hazards as one of 13 suggested elements in a local comprehensive plan and specifies that steps be chosen “after considering the local hazard mitigation plan approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.”*



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## IMPORTANCE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The problem with the prevalence of stand-alone hazard mitigation plans lies with the issue of implementation. Most natural hazards have geographic contours that can be mapped, with various levels of probability for events of specific levels of severity or frequency. The more clearly this is the case, the more clearly land-use controls and incentives are implicated as part of the solution in mitigating the hazard. This is most obvious with flooding issues, whether riverine or coastal (e.g., from coastal storms or tsunamis). Flood-zone maps are issued by the National Flood Insurance Program, but local jurisdictions can exceed its requirements with their own stipulations regarding elevation or buyouts. Other land-use issues may involve restrictions on building in wildfire-prone areas or on steep slopes prone to hillsides, as well as in areas near fault lines or subject to soil liquefaction during earthquakes. Perhaps the most problematic hazard involves tornadoes and high winds, but plans can address these to some extent through building codes and provisions for safe rooms and tie-downs.

What is important about the comprehensive plan in all this, however, is its legal status compared to the LHMP. The comprehensive plan, with some variation among states, is typically viewed by courts as a major policy document, and most state laws specify some degree of consistency between zoning and development decisions and the comprehensive plan. This gives the plan considerable weight in emphasizing a community's intent to implement the solutions it spells out, particularly with regard to development regulations. Stronger state laws with regard to such consistency make it all the more imperative that mitigation be addressed in the comprehensive plan in order to enhance the probability of successful implementation through local land-use codes.

Comprehensive plans are the domain of professional planners, while hazard mitigation plans have often been crafted by emergency managers. Integrating local hazard mitigation plans into the comprehensive planning process tends to ensure some degree of communication and collaboration between these professionals, producing interdisciplinary and interagency cooperation in local government that can pay substantial dividends in mutual empowerment and awareness. Both plans should provide ample opportunity for public involvement and comment, and the relationship between them should be a fertile area for citizen advocacy. When disaster strikes, emergency managers and planners will need to work together for a smooth transition from immediate response to long-term recovery. This will come far more easily if they have worked together in planning for that day.

## PRINCIPLES OF INTEGRATION

Successful integration of hazard mitigation into the comprehensive plan involves a series of key points:

1. Include an element within the comprehensive plan that clearly addresses hazards. If possible, use the federally required LHMP as the foundation for that element or, better yet, make the element and the LHMP one and the same. Above all, don't reinvent the wheel in different departments or do the same work twice, and avoid contradictions between plans.
2. Identify in all other elements of the comprehensive plan those areas where hazard mitigation may play a role in advancing the overall goals of the plan. For instance, the transportation element may identify bridges that need to be elevated above flood stage; the land-use element may identify hazard-prone areas where at least some kinds of development should be limited or prohibited; and a historic preservation element may identify resources that need to be protected from floods or seismic shaking.
3. Establish the linkages between identified hazards in the hazard element and these specific opportunities, and cross-reference them to clarify where and how mitigation needs to address these problems.
4. If the plan has an implementation element, be sure that it includes specific provisions, such as financing and timing, for how mitigation solutions will actually be achieved, and by whom. Assign clear responsibilities, and identify the funding streams that are needed. Where the solutions involve code changes, lay out a timeline and responsibilities for moving them forward.

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# 10 BENEFITS

## Digital First Community Engagement

Digital engagement can help achieve better community outcomes and improve the overall public experience. Below are ten reasons to consider transitioning your community engagement practice to an online platform and the value of bringing resident feedback into local government decision making.



# 1

Community engagement requires you to invest in time. Utilising digital engagement in the planning stages of your project can

**FACILITATE MORE FOCUSED  
AND EFFECTIVE OUTCOMES.**

# 2

Taking discussions online supports ongoing conversations with community groups and

**MAKES FACE-TO-FACE  
MEETINGS MORE IN DEPTH.**

# 3

Digital engagement allows you to

**MOVE YOUR STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS  
BEYOND THE PHYSICAL SETTING OF THE TOWN HALL.**

Keeping your organisation relevant and engaged.

# 4

**WIDENING YOUR REACH**

by offering engagement opportunities to people who cannot attend town hall meetings.

## **BUILD TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST**

and rebuild relationships with your communities.

## **BROADEN YOUR SCOPE**

by digitally engaging those who live within your community as well as people who visit or work within your city limits.

Using a digital engagement platform will help you to collect evidence of partnering with your communities and

## **IDENTIFY GAPS IN YOUR DEMOGRAPHICS TO ENSURE TRUE REPRESENTATION.**

Use technology to

## **CREATE ACCESSIBILITY TO YOUR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES.**

A digital engagement platform offers one dedicated space for information gathering and reporting. Storing all information clearly in one space and allowing residents to provide meaningful insight directly to that dedicated space

## **REDUCES ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSING TIME.**

Digital Engagement can demonstrate the history of your consultation and **CREATE A RECORD FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING.**

Your communities are able to find past consultations and read about your decision making process.