

Changing Landscapes

Land use planning curriculum for natural resource professionals

- P** rinciples, people, and policies
- L** and planning and pressures
- A** pproaches
- N** atural resource planning tools

L1: Principles of Planning

Overview

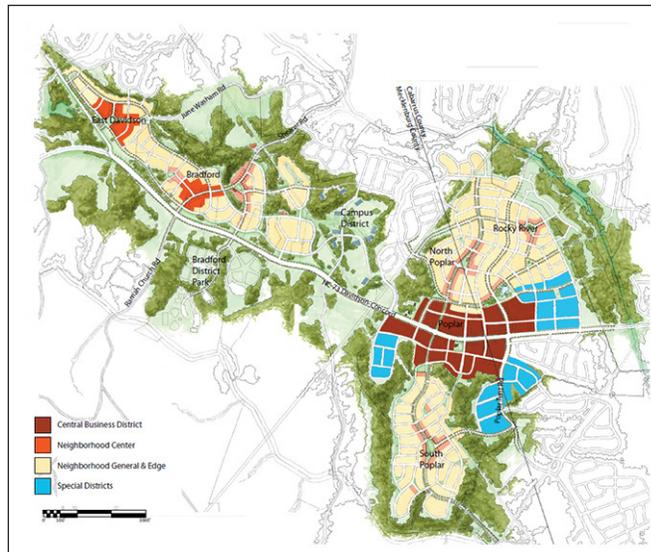
This factsheet provides an overview of the fundamental basis for why we plan. It discusses the basic elements of planning and offers an understanding of how public support strengthens the planning process.

What is Planning?

Planning is a comprehensive and collaborative practice where residents, business owners, landowners, decisionmakers, and interest groups work together to define a community's vision for the future. Planning helps us recognize, preserve, and enhance the qualities that make our communities the places where we want to live. Planning allows communities to shape their future based on available resources, needs, and desires. Planning is an ongoing process of involving and preparing a community for the future, measuring its strengths and weaknesses, examining future trends, and proposing solutions that help all members of the community. It helps find the right balance of new development and public services, environmental protection, and sustainable growth.

Land use change is perhaps the single most important factor influencing our environment. It is exacerbated where there is an absence of any land use planning. These changes are largely the result of urbanization and its associated residential, commercial, transportation, and, to a lesser extent, industrial development. While some level of new development is needed to keep up with our expanding population, the ramifications of unplanned growth and sprawl on agriculture, natural resources, and the environment as a whole are many and cumulative. Impacts result in loss of revenue, quality of life, essential habitats, species, and ecosystem services.

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NC 73: Town of Davidson [NC] Concord Road to Poplar Tent Road Small Land Use and Economic Development Plan map. (Map: <http://ci.davidson.nc.us>)



Planning is important because it establishes a community's priorities; helps guide development; and educates residents, landowners, developers, business owners, and even public officials about the process required to design, review, permit, and implement a project. Planning brings people together to discuss and make decisions about a community's future while creating a forum where all community members can be actively involved in the decisionmaking process.

Why Plan?

There are many reasons to plan. Planning prepares for the future. If decisions about how a community intends to grow are made before unwanted development occurs, resources important to community sustainability can be protected and preserved. Planning helps guide cost-effective decisionmaking because it addresses issues

before they become problems that can cost communities hundreds of thousands of dollars to correct. Directing growth into developed areas can save communities money because infrastructure and services are more efficiently provided and less costly.

Planning helps balance a community's needs and desires and provides a rationale for assigning priorities. It guides decisions using validated data that provides a basis for making informed decisions. The planning process can be used to coordinate all aspects of development. It can ensure that there are adequate community services, needed facilities, road systems, and utility infrastructure to accommodate growth; at the same time, planning can be used to protect critical natural and cultural resources.

Elements of Planning

Most planning is conducted within a legal framework. Each community's power to plan comes from state-enabling legislation, which either allows, or requires, local governments to adopt comprehensive plans as the fundamental tool of planning. Comprehensive plans cover many areas of planning from transportation to housing to economic development. However, each form of planning usually goes through the same process of data gathering, analysis, policy making, implementation, monitoring, and enforcement. The comprehensive plan provides the framework for this process, and every community's plan must comply with some basic planning elements that are briefly discussed below.

Key Advantages of Planning

- Establishes a community's long-term goals
- Sets forth strategies and actions to accomplish goals
- Facilitates local decisionmaking
- Provides guidance to developers, local governments, and property owners
- Creates a science-based inventory of a community's resources
- Preserves, maintains, and manages important resources
- Informs the public about options and conditions as a basis for making decisions
- Retains community character



Developing a vision and goals starts with a community working together to identify issues and opportunities, challenges, and hopes.

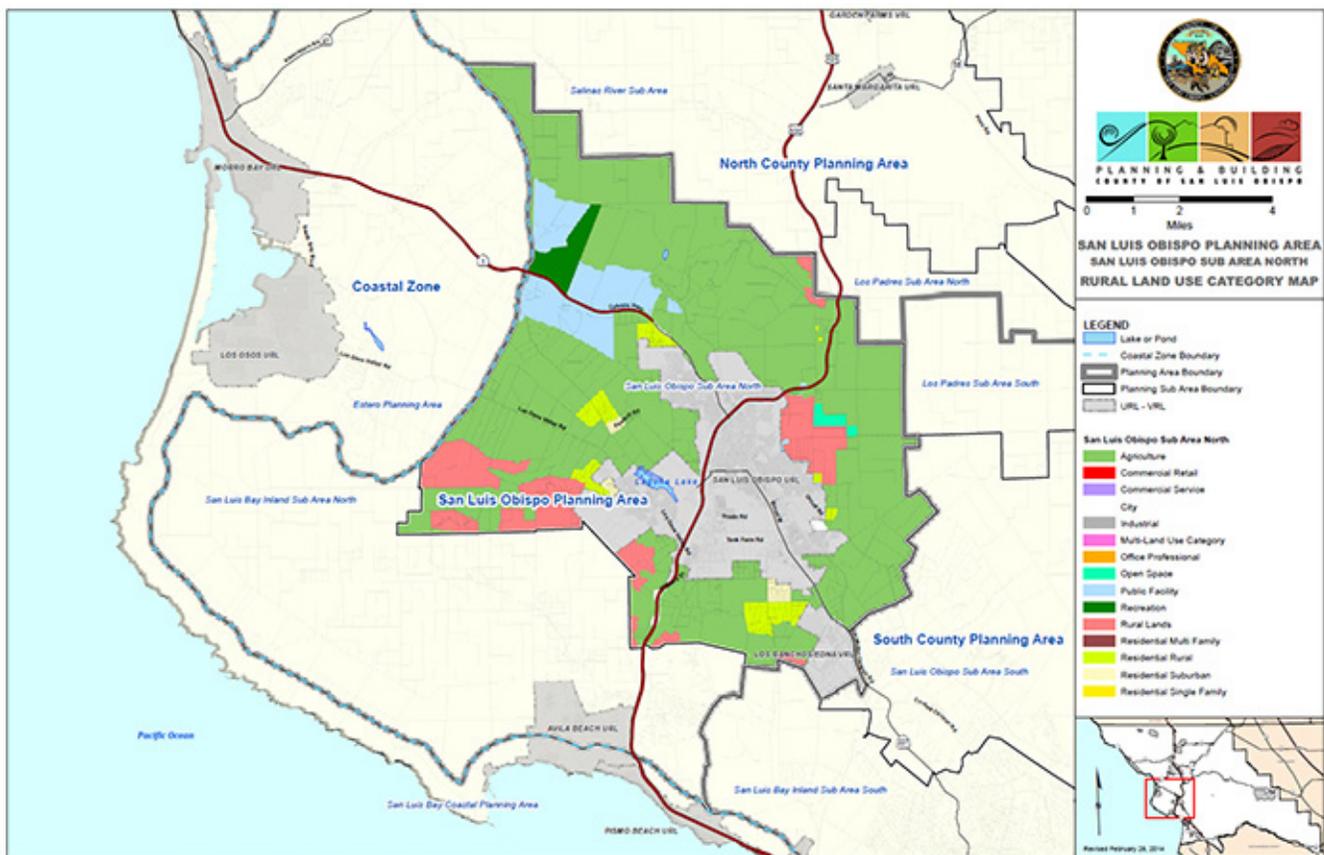
Developing Vision and Goals

Visioning begins with a community working together to identify issues and opportunities, challenges, and hopes. Visioning seeks to find common ground among disparate groups of people. The end result is a long-term statement that captures the essence of the community and what it seeks to be. Visioning leads to the development of goal statements that provide direction on how their vision can be achieved. Community objectives often identify how transportation issues, development, or even the care of parks and open spaces are addressed.

The development of a vision and goals helps communities avoid piecemeal and reactionary approaches to addressing growth and development. It recognizes that there is a relationship between issues and takes into account trends that may affect future conditions, such as population growth or unemployment. Setting a vision and goals helps communities address challenges and balance competing interests while providing a blueprint for future development that reflects the greater vision and keeps coherence in the pattern of development.

Land Use

Land use refers to human use of the land, including management and modification. Most States require an assessment and categorization of land, which includes the general distribution, location, and characteristics of current and future land uses. Land use is typically documented using maps that identify existing uses. Land use planning considers existing land use patterns and seeks to identify the most suitable areas for growth and development, conservation, transportation corridors, community infrastructure, recreation, and open space. Once these areas are identified and their boundaries are established, land use planning is used to support goals and policies that appropriately direct and manage growth within existing or proposed land uses.



Land use is typically documented using maps that identify existing uses. (Map: <http://www.slocounty.ca.gov>)



Transportation planning addresses present and future needs of all modes of transportation, including rail.

mix of uses, accessibility, employment opportunities, housing availability, layout, design, and timing of land development—play a significant role in the demand on transportation systems. Understanding how transportation influences land use patterns and vice versa is an important element in planning. When done properly, transportation planning can predict transportation demands and be used to control development patterns. This in turn can prevent sprawl and unwanted development in natural areas, areas of cultural significance, or even sacred community places.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure planning can help a community address the availability of necessities such as electricity, telephone, natural gas, sewer, and water. Infrastructure planning begins with an inventory of existing facilities. Infrastructure significantly influences the patterns of growth. If services are not available, development is not likely to occur. If the extension of services is provided without considering natural resources, secondary impacts, and even aesthetics, unwanted and unmanaged development can occur and impact sense of place, the economic vitality of a community, and even human health.



Planning for community facilities and services includes fire protection for the general welfare of residents.

Transportation Planning

Transportation planning addresses the present and future needs of all modes of transportation. This includes roads, traffic circulation, transit, airports, rail, sidewalks, and bicycle and multiuse paths. Transportation elements depend on location and context. Is it a rural area or a major urban city? Transportation planning maps illustrate the existing and planned road network. They also indicate the carrying capacity of roads; current traffic loads; alternative transportation routes, such as sidewalks; transit stops and future transit routes; and so on.

There is a strong connection between land use and transportation. Major transportation improvements encourage new development opportunities either through new access or ease of access. Likewise, a number of factors—density, concentration and

Planning for Community Facilities

Planning for community facilities provides for the construction or acquisition of governmental or quasi-governmental services on the public's behalf. This includes services and facilities necessary for public health, safety, and general welfare such as police, fire, and schools. They can also include services that contribute to the cultural opportunities within a community such as libraries, theaters, and museums. Parks and open space are usually included in community facilities and are sometimes addressed in a separate plan, such as an open space plan. Governmental and community services can be the largest employer in a town.

Community facilities can be focal points in a community. They may help define community character and often determine a community's desirability as a place to live and work. Community facilities and services can direct where, when, and at what scale development will occur. Community facilities are usually located

in proximity to the people and neighborhoods they serve, and development is more likely to occur where facilities are already present. However, community facilities can also be directly influenced by growth. Growth adds people, streets, and buildings to a town, which results in increased traffic, expanding service areas, more maintenance, and higher capital expenditures. It is imperative that a community plans for the growing needs of its population so that public facilities and services can accommodate changing cultural and land use patterns.

Housing

An adequate and affordable supply of housing is essential to the health, economic vitality, and quality of life of a community. When housing is not appropriately planned for in a city or town (i.e. in walkable neighborhoods with access to public transportation, parks, and civic spaces), people seek homes in outlying areas where housing demand is less and prices are lower. This contributes to sprawl development, which can result in air and water pollution; higher energy costs; increased demand on public facilities and services; development pressures in natural, undeveloped areas; segregation and lack of diversity; and overall loss of neighborhoods and community character. Planning for housing can sustain or accelerate a community's economy, protect the environment, reduce infrastructure and facility costs, encourage social integration, and maintain a sense of place.



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Economic Development

Planning for economic development helps stimulate community growth; preserves existing jobs; and is often linked with other community priorities related to housing, transportation, and the environment. An economic plan usually begins with collecting background information relevant to the financial health of a community such as the existing labor force; projected employment growth; existing businesses; and vacant or unused commercial, industrial, and institutional lands. This information is used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy and help the community define what it can do to maintain, diversify, or improve its economic development.

Economic plans are closely tied to housing and development, and should include strategies for smart growth. Walkable and robust downtowns attract businesses and visitors, increase access to downtown districts through better transportation options, and use existing infrastructure. A community that prepares to meet future economic challenges can help preserve important assets, support existing infrastructure, and improve the quality of life for all residents. Many regions prepare a comprehensive economic development strategy that analyzes the regional economy and serves as a guide for establishing regional economic goals and identifying investment priorities.

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Natural Resource Protection

Identifying critical natural resources at the outset of planning provides opportunities for communities to use integrated approaches to protect them early in the planning process. It enables growth and development to be directed away from critical natural areas and makes compliance with local, State, and Federal policy much easier in the long run.

Planning efforts should begin with an inventory and assessment of natural resources such as soils; water bodies; wetlands; steep slopes; rare, threatened, and endangered species; and wildlife habitat. The inventory process ensures that the value of and threats to critical and sensitive natural resource areas are evaluated.

Incentives for Planning

Effective planning ensures that growth and development occur when and where they are most beneficial to a community. Communities that protect their natural and cultural resources are much better places in which to live, work, and raise families. Data related to real estate prices support this by showing that livability and access to community amenities and services directly impact how much people are willing to pay for homes.

When public involvement is integrated into the planning process, local residents and groups can provide additional information and resources that may not otherwise be known or available to planners.

Planning is a means of educating, involving, and informing the public and decisionmakers. It can uncover potential for positive change in a community in ways that were never before thought possible. Working closely with the public results in greater insight into communities and more often produces results that are more easily embraced by community residents. The process of working together builds confidence and trust. People who are involved in community decisionmaking processes are more likely to support decisions that positively affect a community's future.

Importance of Public Involvement

The most effective planning processes are developed through collaboration and inclusive community participation. It is important for towns to recognize and encourage, and perhaps even require, community involvement throughout the planning process. Involvement should include a number of consensus-building and conflict management approaches that include public meetings, workshops, charrettes, fairs, surveys, focus groups, and citizen advisory committees. Public hearings are the most commonly used way to involve the community. They may become adversarial, especially if the conversation becomes polarized in one direction rather than being an open group discussion.



One of the first things to do when planning is to take an inventory of natural resources, such as water bodies. (Photo: <http://usda.gov>)

Planning with natural resources in mind can save development costs because environmental constraints are considered before issues arise. It can make communities more attractive and marketable. Cultural resources such as historic buildings and sacred places are irreplaceable once lost. The preservation of working economies like agriculture and forestry can strengthen a community's economic health and ensure that a sense of place is not lost during the development process.



Public hearings are the most commonly used way to involve the community. (Photo: <http://www.hanover-ma.gov>)

Communities must get past conflict and work through it so that it does not lead to reduced involvement during planning. There will be differences in opinion when information is being gathered for planning. These differences must be respectfully heard, documented, and addressed; otherwise, they will continue to surface throughout the process. This ensures that the opinions, issues, and needs of all residents are adequately addressed—from residents of different geographic areas of a town to those of differing backgrounds, citizens' groups, and special interest groups.

Most importantly, it is essential that people understand how important their role is in shaping the future of their community. Their input helps define values, goals,

needs, and desires of the entire community. Furthermore, by involving the public in all stages of the planning process and offering an open exchange of ideas and information, a town's comprehensive planning process, master planning efforts, and all other applicable planning initiatives will be more relevant. An involved public will have a greater feeling of involvement and control in the community's future. This involvement will result in broader support and help ease the adoption and implementation of plans and regulations.

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“A positive, open, and collaborative civic culture will not only bring political, technical, and values-oriented criteria together, but it will help promote constructive community decisionmaking and trust between citizens and local officials. In addition, better decisions will emerge as communities enable joint thinking among a diverse group of people, thus encouraging greater creativity and a larger number of options of better quality.”

—American Planning Association's
Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook:
Model Statutes for Planning and the
Management of Change

“Even when you are not required to invite the public into the deliberations, it may be a very good idea if you do. Enlisting the public as a partner, or at the very least, informing it of your point of view, can defuse potential opposition, acquire allies in unlikely places, and unite a community and its leaders around a common purpose. It also builds trust.”

—Successful Public Meetings:
A Practical Guide

Case Study — Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan – New York, New York

Vision 2020 is an example of how the city's vision for a sustainable, vibrant waterfront was realized through long-range planning. With the newfound availability of 520 miles of shoreline that had been inaccessible to the public for decades, the New York City Planning Department embarked on a yearlong participatory process to develop *Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*. The plan provides a sustainable framework and is developed around eight specific planning goals. These goals focused on expanding use of the waterfront for parks, incorporating mixed-use development, providing waterway transportation, and improving and protecting natural habitats. The plan outlines many new citywide policies and site-specific recommendations, including a set of 130 short-term implementation projects that have an expected cost of \$3.3 billion. These proposed projects are expected to catalyze waterfront investment, improve water quality, and expand public access. The *Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan* is available for download at http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/cwp/cwp_2.shtml.

For more information, visit the Department of City Planning, City of New York Web site at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/about/pr031411.shtml>.



Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan.

Relevant Factsheets

P1 – *An American History of Planning* – Provides an overview of the formative years of planning and discusses these influences on the practice of modern planning.

L2 – *Scales of Planning: From Landscapes to Ecosystems* – Helps us understand the levels and complexities of planning.

N2 – *Comprehensive Planning for Natural Resource Conservation* – Provides an overview of comprehensive planning and the tools required to best protect natural resources.

N5 – *Planning for Healthy Forests and Timber Operations* – Provides useful forestry operations resources, tools, and Best Management Practices that can be used in developing comprehensive plans, zoning, and other land use regulations.

Resources

Daniels, Tom. 2014. *The environmental planning handbook for sustainable communities and regions*. 2d ed. Chicago: American Planning Association Planners Press. 792 p.

Kelly, Eric Damian. 2009. *Community planning: an introduction to the comprehensive plan*. 2d ed. Washington, DC: Island Press. 424 p.

Meck, Stuart, gen. ed. 2002. *Growing smart legislative guidebook: model statutes for planning and the management of change*. Chicago: American Planning Association Planners Press. 1,400 p.

The Cities Alliance; United Nations Environment Programme; International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives – Local Governments for Sustainability. 2007. *Liveable cities: the benefits of urban environmental planning. A Cities Alliance study on good practices and useful tools*. Washington, DC: The Cities Alliance. 139 p.

Acknowledgements

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