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## COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

### **Description:**

Comprehensive planning should form the basis of all planning efforts by a community. It is among the most important powers and duties granted by the state legislature to a municipal government. The purpose of a comprehensive plan is to regulate land use for the purpose of protecting the health, safety, and general welfare of the community's citizens. Comprehensive planning lays the foundation for land use controls. Comprehensive planning can (and should) be performed by all municipalities, whether or not it results in a set of land use controls.

The State's statutes define a comprehensive plan as "the materials, written or graphic, including but not limited to maps, charts, studies, resolutions, reports, and other descriptive materials that identify the goals, objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices, and instruments for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth, and development of the municipality."

A comprehensive plan may also include the following topics, at the level of detail adapted to the needs of the municipality: a survey and analysis of existing conditions and future needs related to housing stock, natural resources, parks, land use, agricultural use, historic and cultural resources, sensitive environmental areas, demographics, health, and emergency facilities and infrastructure. The plan may also include consideration of regional needs and existing local and regional plans.

An important component of the process is public participation. The more the final plan is built upon consensus and reflects the collective will of the residents, the more support there will be on the plan's vision for the future and subsequent implementation of the plan's policies and objectives. Public participation can occur both formally through mandatory hearings held by the preparing board and by the legislative body prior to adoption of the plan, and informally through the participation of the public at workshops and informational sessions.

However brief or detailed the plan may be, its real value is in how it is used and implemented. Just as each town, city, and village has the power to regulate land use and, therefore, has its own unique set of requirements and options built into its laws and ordinances, each comprehensive plan will be unique. It will reflect the municipality's unique location, resources, infrastructure, demographics, and vision, and it will consider short- and long-term goals, objectives, and implementation strategy. The size and format of the comprehensive plan will vary from municipality to municipality. It may consist of a few pages or contain volumes of information.

The comprehensive plan should be thought of as a blueprint on which zoning and other land use regulations are based and should not be confused with zoning or other land use regulatory tools. The comprehensive planning process allows the community to guide its own future. This process presents unique opportunities to assess the evolving needs of all members of a community and to implement policies that support and advance the ability of people in all of life's stages to successfully age in place.<sup>1</sup>

**Reference:**

<sup>1</sup> Division of Local Government Services (2009), *Local Government Handbook*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Albany, NY: New York State Department of State.

**Benefits:**

*For older adults and younger individuals with disabilities:*

- The Comprehensive Plan can voice community support for goals that support the needs and preferences of all residents, including older adults and people with disabilities. This support can translate into policies, laws, and implementation plans that enable successful aging in place in the type of home and community of these individuals' choice. This requires thoughtful planning. For example, addressing the basic needs of older adults and younger people with disabilities for housing and transportation options will benefit all sectors of society, regardless of age or ability.
- Comprehensive planning can promote an active, fit population, including children, older adults, and people with disabilities, by providing and improving recreational opportunities and parks.

*For the community:*

- Comprehensive plans outline orderly growth and provide continued guidance for decision-making for the years ahead. They focus on immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, and development. For example, if a community census indicates that the older population has increased, a goal could be to make smaller housing units available (such as accessory apartments) or may indicate the need for more diverse housing options for this age group (such as senior housing apartments, mixed-age co-housing, townhouses, shared living residences, and assisted living facilities).
- Comprehensive planning provides a legal defense for regulations. The comprehensive plan sets the stage for all land use regulations and, therefore, should be an integral part of laying the groundwork and support for projects such as innovative housing developments or transportation alternatives; and it can also provide the basis for other actions affecting community development options. For example, are new housing options (such as elder cottages, accessory apartments, or mixed-use residential developments) being considered in areas where the current zoning code does not allow them? Could the community implement its goals through additional land use tools, such as a floating senior housing zone or cluster housing zone? Whatever a community

chooses to do, all zoning must be in accordance with a community's comprehensive plan.

- Comprehensive planning can facilitate techniques that enhance the sense of place and protect and preserve natural resources. For example, the plan can create policies to discourage sprawl—such as providing clean, potable water and storm water mitigation measures only in ways that are effective and economical.
- Comprehensive planning can:
  - Maintain community character by ensuring an appropriate variety of good-quality housing stock for residents of all ages, physical abilities, and incomes.
  - Promote the installation of community amenities, such as sidewalks, street lighting, benches, and public transportation shelters—enhancing the quality of life for residents.
  - Promote transportation improvements, such as access to regional highways, improvements to streets and sidewalks, and development of walkable communities, including trails and bike paths.
  - Encourage increased availability of accessible public transportation options, including innovative alternatives such as the Independent Transportation Network, e-bikes, and volunteer-driver programs.

**Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:**

- Small or rural communities may feel that they are too small to need a comprehensive plan. Some feel that nothing will change in the community and only discover the benefit of having a plan when it is too late or when new development threatens to destroy some aspect of the community.
- “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” Waiting until a controversial land use issue is at the door before deciding a comprehensive plan is necessary or needs updating is not a recommended approach. Many controversial decisions and issues are best handled through the development and maintenance of a comprehensive plan.
- Comprehensive plans can cost time and resources, but it is important to note that plans can be completed on all budgets. Some communities may not have professional planners on staff to assist in the preparation of a comprehensive plan; however, several resources are available to them. Options include: assistance from their county or regional planning agency, a contract with a professional planning or engineering firm for all or for parts of the plan, help from board members or municipal residents who have experience and expertise in planning or other disciplines and who are willing to volunteer their skills and service to help create or update the plan.
- Plans should be reviewed periodically (this is required if the comprehensive plan is adopted under the State's statute) because policy-making views and characteristics of a community change. The plan should reflect new priorities and opportunities. Unless a periodic review is automatically built into the plan,

it is unlikely to be done because reviews take time, money, and resources to address. A review every five years is a good rule of thumb for comprehensive plan updates.

**Resource—examples:**

- Rural:
  - Town of Chatham, Columbia County, New York—*Comprehensive Plan* (Draft: July, 2009; adopted August 20, 2009):  
<http://www.chathamnewyork.us/DraftCompPlanJuly%2009.pdf>.
  
- Urban:
  - City of Tampa Bay, Pinellas County, Florida—*Future of the Region: A Strategic Regional Policy Plan (SRPP) for the Tampa Bay Region* (Adopted 1995; amended September 12, 2005):  
[http://www.tbrpc.org/about\\_us/pdfs/srpp/SRPP\\_2005.pdf](http://www.tbrpc.org/about_us/pdfs/srpp/SRPP_2005.pdf).
  - Pinellas County, Florida—*Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan* (adopted March 18, 2008; amended October, 2010, , October 21, 2008, March 17, 2009, March 16, 2010, October 26, 2010, and April 26, 2011):  
[http://www.pinellascounty.org/plan/pdf\\_files/flutable.pdf](http://www.pinellascounty.org/plan/pdf_files/flutable.pdf).  
[http://www.pinellascounty.org/Plan/comp\\_plan/comp-plan.pdf](http://www.pinellascounty.org/Plan/comp_plan/comp-plan.pdf).
    - *Pinellas County, Florida, Comprehensive Plan Compendium* (adopted February 17, 1998; amended April, 2006, March 16, 2010, October 26, 2010, April 26, 2011, March 27, 2012, and April 24, 2012).  
[http://www.pinellascounty.org/Plan/comp\\_plan/14compendium/intro.pdf](http://www.pinellascounty.org/Plan/comp_plan/14compendium/intro.pdf).
  
- Suburban:
  - City of Manhattan, Riley County, Kansas—*Manhattan Urban Area Comprehensive Plan (MUACP)* (April, 2003):
    - <http://www.ci.manhattan.ks.us/index.aspx?NID=493>.
    - <http://www.ci.manhattan.ks.us/DocumentCenterii.aspx?Folder=Community%20Development%5CLong-Range%20Planning%5CManhattan%20Urban%20Area%20Comprehensive%20Plan>.

**Resource—statutory authority:**

- The local legislative bodies of cities, towns and villages may create planning boards in a manner provided for by state statute or municipal charter, and may grant various powers to the planning board:
  - General City Law, § 27;
  - Town Law, § 271;
  - Village Law, § 7-718.
  
- While the use of the state comprehensive plan statutes is optional, these statutes can guide boards through the comprehensive plan process:
  - General City Law, § 28-a;

- Town Law, § 272-a;
- Village Law, § 7-722.
- A municipality's governing board must refer the adoption or amendment of a proposed plan to the county planning board:
  - General Municipal Law, § 239-m.
- Comprehensive plans must include a provision setting maximum intervals for periodic review:
  - General City Law, § 28-a.

**Resource—written and web:**

- David Church and Cori Traub (2002), *A Practical Guide to Comprehensive Planning*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. An overview of the importance of planning and the steps involved in preparing a comprehensive plan, including case studies and resources. Watervliet, NY: New York Planning Federation.  
<http://www.nypf.org/publications.htm>.
- New York Planning Federation, 440 3rd Avenue, Watervliet, NY, 12189, (518) 270-9855: <http://www.nypf.org/>.
  - New York Planning Federation Book Store—list of numerous publications and handbooks <http://www.nypf.org/editable/bookstore1.html>.
  - Model Ordinances:  
<http://www.nypf.org/editable/modelOrd.html>.
- New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Albany, NY:  
<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/>.
  - *Funding Opportunities*, "Current Funding Opportunities"—offers grants of up to \$25,000 to assist municipalities in developing the agriculture and farmland protection portions of their comprehensive plan:  
<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/RFPS.html>: scroll down to "Municipal Agricultural and Farmland Protection Planning Grant."
- Pace University School of Law: <http://www.law.pace.edu/>.
  - Land Use Law Center for Sustainable Development, Pace University School of Law, 78 North Broadway, White Plains, NY, 10603, (914) 422-4262, [landuse@law.pace.edu](mailto:landuse@law.pace.edu); <http://www.pace.edu/school-of-law/centers-and-special-programs/centers/land-use-law-center-0>.
- The Community Planning Website, Nick Wates Associates, Creative Media Centre, 45 Robertson Street, Hastings TN34 1HL, United Kingdom; phone: +44 (0)1424 205446; fax: +44 (0)1424 205401; [info@communityplanning.net](mailto:info@communityplanning.net). Planning principles, information, case studies, tool box, policy and law, publications, films and videos, and more: <http://www.communityplanning.net/>.
- Partners for Livable Communities, 1429 21<sup>st</sup> Street NW, Washington, DC, 20036, (202) 887-5990— *Aging in Place Initiative*, "Developing Livable

Communities for All Ages." Workshops, information, and resources.

<http://www.livable.org/program-areas/livable-communities-for-all-ages-a-aging-in-place/overview>.

- Division of Local Government Services (2009), *Local Government Handbook*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Albany, NY: New York State Department of State. A concise resource for municipal officials, teachers, students, and residents to gain a better understanding of our complex state and local governments:  
[http://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/publications/Local\\_Government\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/publications/Local_Government_Handbook.pdf).