



Goshen College was an important partner during the city of Goshen, Indiana's comprehensive plan update process.

## Leveraging Resources: How We Can Plan More with Less

### PLANNING TOOLS

**PLANNING STAFF** are often forced to do more with less. Many departments are understaffed, overcommitted, and underfunded. Managing day-to-day commitments can be a challenge, in addition to developing the long-range plans necessary to set the vision and goals of the community. This is often the case for smaller communities that do not always have funding available to bring in outside expertise to develop planning documents. In updating their 10-year comprehensive plan, the city of Goshen, Indiana, used a number of resources to enhance public outreach, improve the planning process, and strengthen plan content.

Goshen is a small, growing city in north central Indiana, about a half-hour southeast of South Bend, Indiana, and two hours east of Chicago. The city has a population of about 33,000 residents and is demographically diverse, with 29.1 percent of the population Hispanic or Latino. The area has a strong agricultural and industrial heritage; the Elkhart-Goshen Metropolitan Statistical Area is known nationally as a hub for recreational vehicle manufacturing. But despite the community's manufacturing base, Goshen continues to attract members of the creative class and young entrepreneurs, and has one of the most vibrant downtowns in Indiana.

In 2013, planning staff began the process of updating the city's former *Comprehensive Plan & Community Vision: 2004–2013*, as profiled by APA in an on-demand video

case study ("New Visions for Community Planning," [planning.org/events/course/9112838](http://planning.org/events/course/9112838)). Because funding was not available to hire a consultant to assist with the development of the plan, staff had to be strategic in how they approached the update, leveraging past planning efforts and finding resources to enhance the planning process.

### State chapter resources

In August 2013, the Goshen Plan Commission passed a unanimous motion to authorize planning staff to update the comprehensive plan. Included in the planning commissioners' monthly packet was a copy of the *Indiana Citizen Planner's Guide on Comprehensive Plans*. The Indiana Chapter of APA developed the guide



to serve as a training tool for the planning commission and board of zoning appeals members, neighborhood organizations, and residents. The guide contains 10 chapters, including “Plan Commission Basics,” “Ethics,” “Zoning Ordinances,” “Subdivision Ordinances,” and “Comprehensive Plans.”

The “Comprehensive Plans” chapter of the guide contains information about the importance and role of the comprehensive plan, its contents, the planning process, and effective planning principles.

The guide proved to be a valuable resource in providing context for new planning commission members. It also helped staff identify speaking points for educating the public on the history and role of the comprehensive plan.

## Public participation

Many planners spend countless hours planning and coordinating public meetings and are often disappointed with the turnout. To optimize public participation efforts, staff developed a written strategy for the plan update, identifying opportunities for engagement through traditional meetings, community events, printed materials, radio, social media, and other avenues.

Goshen held four traditional public meetings. Locations, days of the week, and times were intentionally varied to accommodate diverse schedules. Locations included a local retirement community, the public library, the chamber of commerce, and a city-owned nature interpretive center. Notices of the public meetings were read on The Globe, Goshen College’s radio station. A planning commission member also arranged an interview between the radio station and planning staff on La Raza, a Spanish language radio station.

Advertisements for all public meetings ran on Redpost, digital screens located throughout the community that highlight local events. Planning staff worked with Goshen Community Schools to place a flyer with information on the public meetings in a weekly informational packet sent home to students and parents. Finally, staff

regularly reached out to local newspapers, including the Spanish-language *El Puente*, to secure press coverage and place advertisements for public meetings.

In addition to the public meetings, staff used popular public events as an opportunity to reach more community members. Some of these included a local Green Drinks meet-up, a monthly discussion group at Goshen College, and a neighborhood leadership brunch at a local community development and housing organization. Staff also set up tables with surveys, available in English and Spanish, and informational materials at the local farmers market and on a First Friday event at a local bookstore.

Planning commissioners played an integral role in public participation as well. In addition to serving as discussion facilitators at the public meetings, many planning commissioners attended community events alongside staff, urging community members to comment on draft chapters, complete a survey, or attend a public meeting.

## Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places

In 2013, 10 communities were selected by APA to participate in the Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places pilot program. The role of the pilot communities was to refine and finalize the plan standards, a set of principles to integrate sustainability into the comprehensive plan. Goshen’s participation as a pilot community seemed natural, as the 2004 comprehensive plan had a focus on sustainability, highlighting the importance of well-managed growth, promotion of sustainable living and business practices, and strong protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

One of the first steps staff undertook after selection as a pilot community was to review the existing comprehensive plan against the plan standards. Though the 2004 plan focused on sustainability, a number of standards were only loosely discussed or missing altogether.

Of the 53 total best practices, 17

scored “Low,” and seven were not present. Staff decided that the standards scored as “Medium” or “High” were sufficiently represented in the plan and would be carried forward into the plan update. Missing and low-achievement standards were integrated into the public engagement process.

Community members were asked if the standards should be included in the plan, and staff facilitated discussions at Green Drinks and an event at Goshen College to invite participants to develop specific actions and strategies for each practice.

## Graphic design

Many planning departments lack the staff time and skills—or the funding to hire an outside organization—to lay out their plans.

To get professional assistance with graphic design, planning staff worked with a local graphic designer to create templates for the cover, chapter covers, general plan content pages, and appendices. The staff then inserted the text, photos, and graphics and completed the final layout. This partnership allowed planning staff to get professional design assistance at a lower cost.

## Planning commissioners

Planners and planning commissioners can use tools to leverage their efforts to improve the planning process and strengthen planning content.

Planning commissioners can also take advantage of the resources available through their state and national chapters to broaden their knowledge. They play an integral role not only in plan development, but in public participation, working alongside planners to facilitate public meetings and enhance outreach for plans and projects.

When planning commissioners stay current on best practices and strategies, they can ensure they are integrated into the community’s planning processes. ■

—Abby Wiles, AICP

Wiles is the assistant director of Community, Economics, and Redevelopment for the city of Elkhart, Indiana



By the end of 2016, 24 million American homes were powered by wind energy.

## Sustainability for Planning Commissioners

### BEST PRACTICES

*Many of us wonder if society can find a path that provides for our needs, allowing people to reach their full potential, permitting us to live comfortably, and permitting our culture to flourish—without creating deserts and toxic waste dumps in our footsteps or without turning our skies into grimy smears across the horizon.*

— VOICES FOR THE EARTH, EDITED BY DANIEL D. CHIRAS AND THE SUSTAINABLE FUTURES SOCIETY

**SUSTAINABILITY IS A BROAD CONCEPT.** The root “sustain” means “provide with nourishment, keep going,” as defined by Webster. The United Nations’ Bruntland Commission defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The concept of sustainability is a goal that can be applied at all scales of planning, from global to municipal jurisdictions and down to corridors and individual sites.

There are many interpretations and applications of the term, but it should not be defined too narrowly. While sustainability of the natural environment is basic, the concept also includes social and economic components. For instance, a diversity of housing in proximity to daily needs or public transportation can have an impact housing opportunities and air quality. Similarly, a lack of diversity in the economic sector can have impacts on the tax base and employment opportunities.

A variety of concepts and principles can be followed to achieve sustainability. Planners have smart growth, green infrastructure, complete streets, and transit-oriented design. Architects have LEED design, and landscape architects have the sustainable sites initiative. Engineers apply strategies for carbon emission reduction, alternative energy systems,

and low-impact design. Biologists have strategies for protection and enhancement of endangered habitats and biodiversity. There are also solutions relating to solid waste and hazardous materials.

We share a common desire to make human communities more sustainable. But sometimes what is comfortable and familiar can affect the sustainability of our community.

### What does sustainability have to do with planning commissioners?

Planning commissions are typically charged with advising elected officials on the development of a comprehensive plan and the application of its core values, policies, and recommendations in the review of development projects. Professional staff and consultants should translate the general guidance of the plan into working standards within the zoning and subdivision ordinances.

It is hard to overemphasize the importance of having a good, up-to-date plan that is a basis for infrastructure- and development-related decisions. The cumulative impact of many small decisions can greatly affect the sustainability of any planning jurisdiction.

### Sustainability in the comprehensive plan

Some communities will adopt an entire sustainability plan, such as Baltimore’s *Sustainability Plan*. In other cases, an agency such as the Oregon Department of Transportation may adopt a plan that impacts transportation systems in all the local communities.

Planning commissioners should find out if a sustainability plan that involves their community is under way and explore ways to connect the plan to the work of the planning commission. (For more information, see APA’s Policy Guide on Planning for Sustainability at [tinyurl.com/gt5er7l](http://tinyurl.com/gt5er7l).)

The planning commission should be actively involved in the development of a comprehensive plan, with professional staff and consultants responsible for its



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technical analysis and production. The process should incorporate effective two-way communication with all stakeholders and the public. Consider sustainability during all developmental phases of a comprehensive plan, including:

**THE IDENTIFICATION** of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

**THE FORMULATION** of objectives and goals.

**THE DEVELOPMENT** and evaluation of alternatives.

**STRATEGIES** for implementation, including measures of progress and criteria for updating the plan.

It is important to realize there are no perfect or permanent sustainability plans. Each community has its own set of circumstances that shapes what is desired, needed, and appropriate.

Secondly, due to the complex interrelatedness of a huge number of variables—history, culture, ecology, location, resources—circumstances and priorities constantly change. Sometimes factors beyond local control significantly impact plans for sustainability, such as regional, national, and international markets; automation; and competition.

There are principles that urban planners can champion to achieve these objectives:

**BALANCING** jobs and housing.

**CREATING** multimodal transportation opportunities.

**REDUCING** and filtering stormwater runoff and recharging aquifers.

**PRESERVING** natural and cultural resources and open space.

**IMPLEMENTING** efficient and mixed land-use patterns in proximity to municipal services and facilities and relating housing

to daily needs within walking distance.

**REDUCING** carbon emissions and support of renewable energy applications.

## Implementation

First, keep the comprehensive plan up-to-date and make it a basis for planning and development decisions, particularly in capital budgeting and project review. Sustainability should be a shared goal and approach coordinated with all agencies; for instance, sustainability planning can help connect and integrate grants and programs in public health, housing, infrastructure, and transportation.

Also, publicizing good examples and compelling elements from the comprehensive plan can help the public understand and participate in the development of goals and actions for the betterment of the community.

Zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations are also concrete implementation tools. Plan commissions can recommend amendments to the zoning and subdivision ordinances that provide a basis for development recommendations.

Here are some elements you can consider in your zoning ordinance to further sustainability:

**PURPOSE STATEMENT.** Identify sustainability and comprehensive plan compliance as goals in the purpose statement.

**DENSITIES.** Establish permit density bonuses for special efforts to preserve natural resources and create mixed use and transit-oriented development.

**AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION.** Refer to county or regional plans and resources and foster contiguous development related to existing communities.

**IMPERVIOUS SURFACES.** Control by land-use type.

**TREE PRESERVATION AND GRADING.** Maintain the existing trees and character of a site.

**SOLAR PANELS AND WINDMILLS.** Grant permits to reduce carbon footprints and foster renewable energy.

**GREEN ROOFS.** Grant permits to reduce stormwater runoff (this may be a building code issue).

**LANDSCAPING.** Set minimum requirements for native species appropriate to uses, functions, and microenvironments.

**PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENTS.** Grant exceptions from rigid standards to achieve large-scale sustainability objectives.

The subdivision ordinance governs specifications for public improvements that can also contribute to the comprehensive plan's sustainability goals. Some key elements include:

**PARK AND SCHOOL DONATIONS.** Refer to the overall plan for open space and plan objectives.

**STREET WIDTHS.** Consider the minimum size to meet safety and operational requirements in accord with functional classification and land uses of the comprehensive plan, as well as the principles of complete streets that accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.

**BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.** Create bonuses to reduce and filter stormwater.

**STORMWATER AND WETLANDS.** Establish standards to integrate these considerations into natural systems and achieve habitat, esthetic, and recreational objectives.

We must consider sustainability from every angle: environmentally, socially, and economically. The cumulative impact of many small actions can have an enormous influence on the environment. ■

—Pete Pointner, FAICP

Pointner is an independent consultant with over 50 years of experience. For information on the concepts mentioned here, read his free e-book at: [readingsinurbanplanninganddesign.blogspot.com](http://readingsinurbanplanninganddesign.blogspot.com).

# Land-Use Policies and Planning in the Wake of Rising Sea Levels

## LAW

*Energy, land use and infrastructure decisions made now will determine how vulnerable our children and grandchildren will be to rising sea levels.*

—NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

**MOST AMERICANS LIVE IN COASTAL STATES**, and many have personally felt the impacts of sea-level rise, whether through the increased nuisances of flooding or coastal erosion, more frequent and severe storm events, or loss of coastal habitats. Accounts vary by source and location, but most studies predict that sea levels will continue to rise—and at an accelerated rate. *National Geographic* reports that the annual rate of sea-level rise over the past 20 years has been 0.13 inches per year, which is approximately twice the average rate of the previous 80 years. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, coastlines along the Gulf of Mexico and in the mid-Atlantic region have seen more than an eight-inch increase since 1960.

### Defining sea-level rise

An important question is how the state or local government defines sea-level rise—if at all. Definitions of sea-level rise are by no means uniform. Sometimes a state or local jurisdiction adopts its own definition; others expressly adopt the federal government's current definition. Given that sea-level rise is accelerating and not constant, to avoid having to amend the definition in the relatively near future, it may be defined in a way that can adapt over time.

For example, Connecticut's Coastal Management Act defines "rise in sea level" according to the historic data published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: "Rise in sea level" means the arithmetic mean of the most recent equivalent per decade rise in the surface level of the tidal and coastal waters of the state, as documented in National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration online or printed publications for said agency's Bridgeport and New London tide gauges."

Lacking a standard definition for sea-level rise makes implementing state policies much more difficult, and implementation is likely to be far less uniform. Definitions are key in land-use planning for making clear which activities are regulated—and the world of sea-level rise is no exception.

### Rolling sea-level rise into land-use policies and planning

In response to sea-level rise, and in order to adapt to, mitigate, or rebuild from its impacts, states and local governments have been enacting a variety of policies and regulatory measures.

States are increasingly incorporating sea-level rise into state policy. One approach is to establish enforceable standards or requirements related to land-use planning or development. For example, in 2012, Connecticut incorporated sea-level rise into its Coastal Management Act's goals and planning policies. The Connecticut General Statutes establish a policy to "consider in the planning process the potential impact of a rise in sea level, coastal flooding and erosion patterns on coastal development so as to minimize damage to and destruction of life and property and minimize the necessity of public expenditure and shoreline armoring to protect future new development from such hazards."

Other states take a softer approach and set only aspirational goals or guidelines. For example, in 2009, New York established the New York State Climate Action Council to create a climate action plan. (See Georgetown Climate Center's Overview of New York's Climate Change Preparations: [tinyurl.com/zgxjymb](http://tinyurl.com/zgxjymb).) The

following year, an interim report was released that included goals for preparing for climate change impacts.

Similarly, the California Coastal Commission's *Sea-Level Rise Policy Guidance* ([tinyurl.com/jqw2rrz](http://tinyurl.com/jqw2rrz)), published in 2015, provides guidelines for cities to address the impacts of sea-level rise on coastal development. This includes determining the expected range of sea-level rise and impacts in a given community and adopting strategies to mitigate risks, including protecting water quality, water resources, and coastal habitats.

Requiring the consideration of impacts on sea-level rise in land-use planning or decision making will have a more immediate effect on land-use planning. Nevertheless, encouraging, but not requiring, such consideration—and establishing specific goals—is still a step forward and could lay a roadmap for further regulation.

Beyond the state level, local governments may have the authority to require that sea-level rise be taken into consideration in land-use decision making, and this can have a significant impact on developments. Local action is critical for identifying areas that are most at risk for sea-level rise and the impacts that are of most concern to the community, which are among the first steps in creating a meaningful action plan.

For example, Miami-Dade County has created a *Climate Action Plan* ([miamidade.gov/info/county-directory.asp](http://miamidade.gov/info/county-directory.asp)) that calls for integrating future climate change impacts into government decision making. This specifically calls for, among other steps, analyzing sea-level rise scenario maps to model livable footprints, as well as studying the implications of sea-level rise on vulnerable facilities such as solid waste facilities and water and wastewater utilities.

### Incentives for coastal protection and resilient development

Coastal states or local governments may



consider enacting laws that favor certain types of development activities or coastal protection measures over others.

For example, certain types of shoreline stabilization measures may be favored expressly as a matter of public policy or by the permitting process. If hardened development or shoreline protection structures are disfavored, there may be additional permitting requirements involved, and the process may be more expensive or time consuming.

Connecticut's Coastal Management Act favors living shorelines over armoring. Living shorelines stabilization "methods involve restoration of waterfront habitats, often using fill to support tidal wetland vegetation." (See the Office of Long Island Sound Programs Guidance on P.A. 12-101, An Act Concerning the Coastal Management Act and Shoreline Flood and Erosion Control Structures: [tinyurl.com/zvde8nc](http://tinyurl.com/zvde8nc).)

Connecticut exempts living shoreline projects that meet certain criteria from additional municipal procedural requirements that apply to "coastal flood and erosion control structures," including a mandatory coastal site plan review.

Key land-use planning strategies should be implemented to directly acknowledge the reality of rising seas for our coastal communities. Responding to these challenges begins by defining the problem and the community's resiliency goals. Establishing these objectives, and the carrots and sticks to get there, is a necessity.

Sticking our head in the sand is no longer an option—the sand is washing away. ■

—Sorell E. Negro

Negro is a lawyer with Robinson & Cole LLP, based in Miami, where her practice focuses on land-use, environmental, and real property law and related litigation.

## HISTORY

### COUNTING AMERICANS



A U.S. Census enumerator collects information during a 1911 visit with Native Americans of the Winnebago tribe in Wisconsin.

**THE CONSTITUTION MANDATES** that an "enumeration" of the American population be completed every 10 years. The first, conducted in 1790 by the U.S. Marshals, collected only basic information to determine how representatives and direct taxes should be allocated. Nationwide surveying has come a long way since. In 1940, the U.S. Census Bureau began distributing two versions of the census: a short form and a long form, which collected data beyond the basics of a household, including income information. This was valuable data, but the response rate was low, so the Bureau created the American Community Survey. Now, the ACS is a yearly occurrence—and an essential source for planners.

—Ben Leitschuh

Leitschuh is APA's education associate.

## RESOURCE FINDER

The American Community Survey and the decennial Census have a wealth of useful information for planners, but how do you access and interpret the data?

### APA RESOURCES

#### ***Countdown to the National Selfie***

Christopher Williamson, AICP  
*Planning*, February 2017  
[tinyurl.com/zkake18j](http://tinyurl.com/zkake18j)

#### ***Demographic Data for a Changing Nation***

Jason Borah and Jonathan Schroeder  
*Planning*, October 2012  
[tinyurl.com/jkbzlb](http://tinyurl.com/jkbzlb)

### WEB RESOURCES

***American FactFinder*** provides community data collated from many U.S. surveys, including the American Community Survey: [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov).

***The National Historic Geographic Information System*** provides free GIS-compatible data files using Census results: [nhgis.org](http://nhgis.org).