



## **Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element**

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For more information, see [www.sustainablejersey.com](http://www.sustainablejersey.com).

The Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element (GBESE) is an adopted element of the Municipal Master Plan. In August 2008, the Municipal Land Use Law was amended to include the GBESE in the list of permitted Master Plan Elements. It describes the Element as the following:

*“A green buildings and environmental sustainability plan element, which shall provide for, encourage, and promote the efficient use of natural resources and the installation and usage of renewable energy systems; consider the impact of buildings on the local, regional and global environment; allow ecosystems to function naturally; conserve and reuse water; treat storm water on-site; and optimize climatic conditions through site orientation and design.”*

This Element, like all Master Plan Elements, is intended to guide land-use decisions and provide the basis for ordinances addressing sustainability and land use issues. For many communities, this element is a good first step at introducing sustainability concepts into local planning documents. Ultimately, it is most effective when towns take the additional step of infusing these concepts throughout each of the Elements. Guidance for doing so is under development.

Municipalities also have the authority to adopt laws and regulations to protect public health and welfare and to promote the general welfare in their communities outside of the planning and zoning powers. These types of environmental and health based regulations and ordinances pertain to all property in a municipality. Examples of some environmental regulations include tree protection ordinances, stream corridor protection ordinances, recycling ordinances, wildlife protection ordinances, etc.

**Who should lead and be involved with this action?**

The municipal planning board has the power to adopt and/or amend the municipal Master Plan, so by necessity it must be involved in creating the Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element. It is also “best practice” to work with the Mayor and governing body, as well as the Green Team, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Environmental Commission and any other boards or organizations that do work related to the GBESE. In addition, input from the public should be incorporated at various points in the development of the Master Plan Element, as well as through an official public hearing.

### **Timeframe**

The time needed to adopt a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element is largely a function of local processes, but as an estimate, could take anywhere between 10 and 18 months. A factor in the timing is the amount of available staff, consultant and/or volunteer time, and meaningful public participation necessary for the process. In addition, because the content of the Element includes topics outside the scope of the typical Master Plan Element, some additional research and time may be needed to compile and evaluate the new information.

### **Project Costs and Resource Needs**

Towns that have a planner on staff may be able to develop the Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element in-house, whereby the costs associated with the Element would be limited to the staff time devoted to the project. Many communities hire a planning consultant, which can cost between \$10,000 and \$25,000, depending on the amount of volunteer time dedicated to the project, the scope of the public outreach process and the availability of data. Knowledgeable volunteers, including Green Teams, can save towns considerable money in research and drafting.

The Association of NJ Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) and the Sustainable Jersey program may have small grants available to support this work.

### **Why is it important?**

The Municipal Master Plan creates the foundation for the local zoning and land ordinances that govern development and redevelopment within a community. The Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element is intended to guide land-use decisions and provide the basis for ordinances addressing sustainability and land use issues.

### **What to do, and how to do it (“How to”)**

**Below we have listed the requirements for earning points for this action.**

1. The Planning Board shall adopt a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element. The Element shall be in effect at the time of submission in order for the municipality to receive credit for this action, and may not be more than 10 years old.
2. The adopted Element shall include all of the mandatory topics outlined in the “What to Include in a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element” section below.

**We have provided guidance and recommendations for implementing the action. You do not need to follow this guidance exactly as long as your final product meets the requirements.**

What to Include in a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element:

The following are the basic components of a typical Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element (GBESE). The mandatory topics listed must be addressed in the adopted plan in order to get credit for this action. For more detail on each of these components, view the guidance document [here](#).

### **I. Introduction**

The GBESE should define the term “sustainability” as applicable to your town and explain: 1) the importance of applying sustainability to land-use decisions, community development and redevelopment decisions, and natural resource protection; 2) the importance of the Master Plan in defining and achieving a desired future for the community; 3) the general purpose and focus of the plan, and 4) the need for changes in ordinances and practices that the municipality will need to make in order to become sustainable. Include references to the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) as the authority for the Master Plan adoptions and revisions, and the statutory context for this Element. Towns also have the authority to pass ordinances that are not limited to issues governed by the MLUL. Towns should indicate which sustainability ordinances should be adopted through their planning and zoning provisions and those that will be implemented through the general municipal law and regulatory authority.

### **II. Vision**

The GBESE includes a vision that incorporates sustainability concepts. This vision delineates sustainability’s importance to community development and redevelopment priorities and practices, land-use decision-making and natural resource protection, in order to help achieve a thriving future in every aspect of community life.

### **III. Goals and Objectives**

The GBESE specifies the **goals** of the municipality’s priority sustainability issues (e.g., energy efficiency, protection of open space, promotion of healthy lifestyles), and how it plans to implement sustainability practices within Master Plan Elements and development regulations and other ordinances. Goals shall be further defined and clarified by **objectives**.

### **IV. Core Topics**

To achieve points toward Sustainable Jersey certification, the GBESE must, at a minimum, address the following mandatory core topics. Communities are encouraged to address additional areas as appropriate to their circumstances. A few optional topic areas are included below as examples. With each topic area, municipalities should include recommendations or action steps which show how they intend to address the issue.

**Mandatory topics:**

- a. **Climate Change/Green House Gas Emissions** – New Jersey has identified climate change as a public health risk and a threat to the public safety and welfare, and has set targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions as codified in the Global Warming Response Act of 2007. Similarly, the adopted GBESE shall consider local approaches to addressing climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions through a coordinated set of policy actions and activities.
- b. **Renewable Energy** – Use of renewable energy in homes, businesses, and in public facilities reduces the use of fossil fuels that contribute to global warming and impair air quality. The GBESE should identify ways to promote the use of renewable energy by retrofitting existing structures, as well as by incorporating renewables in new developments, redevelopment projects and public facilities.
- c. **Green Building & Design** – Green building and design strategies not only improve the environmental and energy performance of buildings, but also lessen the impact of those buildings on the surrounding environment. The GBESE should encourage property owners and developers to utilize green building and design practices in existing buildings and new construction, including energy efficiency, water conservation, use of recycled renewable materials, etc.
- d. **Land Use & Mobility** – Land use plays a critically important role in climate change because it directly affects emissions from the transportation sector. The GBESE should identify smart growth strategies that reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), or the amount each person drives, to address sustainability in the long term.
- e. **Water** – Water conservation and protection of water quality not only protect the environment, they save money in avoided supply and remediation costs. Efficiency in water supply and treatment can also provide efficiency in energy use. The GBESE should identify ways for the community to protect water quality and quantity and support innovative measures to achieve these goals.

**Examples of optional topics:**

- f. **Food Systems** – Food system planning is the process of taking a comprehensive approach to the food supply chain, reducing energy and water consumption at each stage and supplying whole, healthy foods to consumers within a food-shed. The GBESE can consider sustainable food systems planning and policies.

- g. Waste Management – The generation, transport, and disposal of solid waste in New Jersey produces greenhouse gas emissions, including methane from the decomposition of waste in landfills and carbon dioxide from incineration. The GBESE can consider various strategies to encourage waste prevention, reduction and recycling.

### **What to submit to get credits/points**

**In order to earn points, your submission must meet the following standards:**

1. The Planning Board shall adopt a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element. The Element shall be in effect at the time of submission in order to receive credit for this action, and may not be more than 10 years old.
2. The adopted Element shall include all of the mandatory topics outlined in the “What to Include in a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element” section.

**Submit the following documentation to verify that the action was completed to the above standards. (Log in to the password protected webpage where you submit your online application for certification to write in the text box and upload documents).**

1. In the text box, please provide a short narrative (300 word max) to summarize what was accomplished and the general steps taken to accomplish it.
2. In "Upload File 1," submit the Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element as adopted by the municipal Planning Board.
3. In "Upload File 2," submit a certified copy of the Planning Board Resolution adopting the GBESE.

**IMPORTANT NOTES: Please excerpt relevant information from large documents. Please remember that your submissions will be viewable by the public as part of your certified report.**

### **Spotlight: What NJ Towns are doing**

- **Bernards Township**, Somerset County, NJ: Bernards Township updated its Master Pplan in 2010 and included a new Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element.
- **Cherry Hill Township**, Camden County, NJ: Cherry Hill adopted a Sustainability Plan in 2010 that addresses energy, land use, transportation and waste. Cherry Hill views its Sustainability Element as a blueprint for a sustainable future, and essential to maintaining the vitality of the Cherry Hill community for centuries to come. For more information, [click here](#).

- **City of Englewood**, Bergen County, NJ: In 2009, the City of Englewood adopted a Sustainability Element as part of its Master Plan Update. For more information, [click here](#).
- **Flemington Borough**, Hunterdon County, NJ: In May 2011 Flemington Borough adopted its Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Plan which identified 9 goals for the community.
- **Lawrence Township**, Mercer County, NJ: Lawrence adopted a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element in 2010 and has been working on revising the rest of its Master Plan Elements on an annual basis. For more information, [click here](#).
- **Woodbridge Township**, Middlesex County, NJ: The Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Plan adopted in 2009 summarizes Woodbridge's progress to date and identifies three goals for the community. For more information, [click here](#).

## Resources

**Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions**. 2003. *The Master Plan: Smart Growth, the Master Plan & Environmental Protection*  
[http://www.anjec.org/pdfs/SG\\_MasterPlan.pdf](http://www.anjec.org/pdfs/SG_MasterPlan.pdf)

**Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission**. *Implementing Connections: A Guide for Municipalities*  
<http://www.dvrpc.org/Connections/municipality.htm>

**ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability USA**. December 2009. Sustainability Planning Toolkit, <http://www.icleiusa.org/>