



Sustainable Community Plan - Vision Statement and Goals

For more information, see www.sustainablejersey.com.

A “Sustainable Community Plan” sets goals for the future that help communities realize a Sustainable Community vision, uses indicators to track progress towards these goals, and includes action plans that have roles for government, citizens, businesses, schools, and civic organizations. Each plan is created through a dialogue that incorporates local residents’ desires for the future and an understanding of the impact every community has on regional and global sustainability issues, such as sprawl and global warming. In creating a Sustainable Community plan, municipalities are strongly encouraged to include:

- a vision statement,
- a comprehensive set of goals for becoming a sustainable community,
- indicators to track progress toward each goal
- targets for achievement, and
- an action plan.

While creating a vision statement and goals prior to accomplishing other elements is suggested, points will be awarded separately for each of these components, just as they will be awarded for the following planning-related Sustainable Jersey actions that can be organized as components of a Sustainable Community Plan:

Community Visioning
Municipal Carbon Footprint
Community Carbon Footprint
Natural Resource Inventory
Community Asset Mapping
Climate Action Plan

A vision is a broad statement of the desired outcome for a target community or audience. It should be specific enough to describe what life might be like if the vision were implemented and to guide goal-setting activities, but broad enough to encompass

many goals and implementation strategies. It often encompasses organizing themes like sustainable development, healthy communities, or quality of life.

Goals refine a vision down into its component parts and further define the desired outcome in a number of categories, such as health, natural resources, equity, transportation, etc. A goal should be broad enough to show relationships with other goals, and be able to act as an umbrella for a bundle of related issues, implementation strategies, and indicators. The goals are the organizing framework for the plan and the community's efforts as well as a description of desired ends.

Sustainable Community Plan vs. Municipal Master Plan

Actions under the umbrella of the Sustainable Community Plan address a broad community planning process separate from the municipal Master Plan that directs the future development of the municipality. A Master Plan typically focuses on issues related to land use, while a Sustainable Community Plan may include actions related to energy use or influencing individual behaviors. Although the Sustainable Community Plan tracks a variety of conditions and guides actions to improve those conditions, it may also include elements regarding community development. For this reason, after developing a Sustainable Community Plan, municipalities should ensure consistency between their Sustainable Community Plan and municipal Master Plan.

Who should lead and be involved with this tool?

The Green Team, as described in the Create a Green Team action, or some other high level broad-based commission or task force, should coordinate the development of a Sustainable Community Plan and the associated visioning and goal-setting process.

Sustainability planning is most effective with the involvement of community stakeholders including:

- Government (elected officials, appointed commissions, and department heads)
- Business community (Chamber of Commerce, industry reps)
- Labor (unions, trade associations, workforce training providers)
- Nonprofits and civic organizations
- Education (K-12 school leaders, colleges and universities)
- Neighborhood, homeowner, and condo associations
- Individuals and families

Timeframe

A comprehensive community engagement process to develop a vision and goals is likely to require 4 months or more.

Project Costs and Resource Needs

The development of a sustainable community plan is an intensive process. It can be accomplished by municipal staff and volunteers or through hiring a consultant. Consultants can cost from \$10,000 to \$100,000 or more depending on the size of the municipality and the scope of the plan. The cost of implementing the plan will vary based on the scope of the stakeholder process, the actions chosen, and the strength and skill of volunteer participation.

Municipal Staff/Liaison: Such plans require coordination with municipal government so there must be a competent municipal employee that participates on the Sustainability Plan team. This employee can act as staff support to a Sustainability Plan commission, or if there are strong volunteers, just a liaison.

Departments: The Sustainability Plan should have specific actions for most or all of the municipal offices and departments. Therefore each department should anticipate setting aside some time to participate. In the start-up phase of the plan, this will be new work in addition to existing work, and will consist of 2-5 meetings and reviewing documents. Once the plan is created, updating the plan could be integrated into the regular workload; however, ongoing implementation costs will vary.

Why is it Important?

Any community can benefit from the development of a Sustainable Community Plan. For those municipalities considering sustainability for the first time, this planning process is a logical step. Communities that have already undertaken important initiatives toward sustainability can gain advantages from a Sustainable Community Plan by highlighting existing achievements, evaluating past programs, and coordinating future efforts.

Sustainability requires local action. While the major issues of pollution and climate change transcend national boundaries, it has been estimated that as much as 60% of efforts to achieve environmental sustainability will need to be addressed at a local level.¹ International, federal, and state initiatives for sustainability cannot succeed without the active leadership of local communities.

A Sustainable Community Plan showcases commitment to a green future. By articulating a forward-thinking vision, a Sustainable Community Plan raises the green profile of a municipality and prepares the community to better compete in the 21st century economy.

A Sustainable Community Plan builds public support. Creating a Sustainable Community Plan enables citizens to learn about sustainability issues and captures community spirit. A participatory process encourages individual commitments to sustainability while building support for public initiatives.

¹P.H. Selman, *Local Sustainability: Managing and Planning Ecologically Sound Places*. New York, NY: St. Martin's, 1996.

Participatory planning expands community capacity. A thoughtful planning process engages community stakeholders to build a common vision and enhance local capacity for action steps.

A Sustainable Community Plan can stabilize local budgets. Many actions toward sustainability will generate long-term cost savings. Energy, waste management, and water use, for example, are areas in which judicious policies benefit the citizens of the future and budgets of today.

A Sustainable Community Plan facilitates tracking and accountability. Building indicators, targets, and reporting into a plan allows citizens to monitor community progress toward sustainability and holds government and private stakeholders accountable for action steps.

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

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

1. The Plan must be officially adopted by the municipal government prior to your certification application date. It may have been adopted at any time as long as it is currently being implemented and has been updated or reexamined in the five years prior to your certification application date.
2. The Plan must be developed with significant stakeholder involvement. Both municipal staff as well as community stakeholders should participate.
3. The Plan must include a vision for the community as well as goals that address the economic, environmental, and social aspects of the community.

We have provided extensive 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.

The following steps are one way to organize the creation of a sustainable community plan. Each municipality will need to customize the details to meet their needs; however, the basic elements will likely remain the same. A summary of the steps is as follows:

Work with local leadership to convene a core project team and outline a process for creating the Sustainable Community Plan, institutionalizing it, and implementing it. Solicit public input through outreach efforts such as a Community Visioning Workshop. Before or during this process, conduct municipal and community assessments related to sustainability and collect data from outside sources. Develop goals, indicators, and targets for the Sustainable Community Plan. Assemble implementation teams for each topic area to identify action steps and strategies for reaching sustainability goals. Codify the actions and strategies in the Sustainable Community Plan. Establish a system for implementing actions, tracking indicators, and reporting progress.

I. Plan Objectives

Develop a strategic Sustainable Community Plan that:

Includes a comprehensive set of goals, indicators, and targets for achieving sustainability;

Is developed through a high-profile community process;

Identifies a comprehensive set of policies and actions to achieve the goals and targets and improve the sustainability of the community;

Is institutionalized within the community so that it can guide coordinated action in and out of municipal government on an ongoing basis, and

Provides multi-tiered education and guidance for implementation activities aimed at municipal officials, individuals, civic organizations, condo and homeowners associations, and other actors within the community that have a role in achieving sustainability.

II. Planning Framework

Beyond adopting specific policies, sustainable communities are those places that recognize that preserving local quality of life and long-term viability requires constant planning and adaptation to dynamic changes in regional and global conditions. Therefore, a strategic planning framework should foster ongoing evaluation and course corrections. Although plans should be customized to meet local needs, a basic framework is shown in Figure 2.

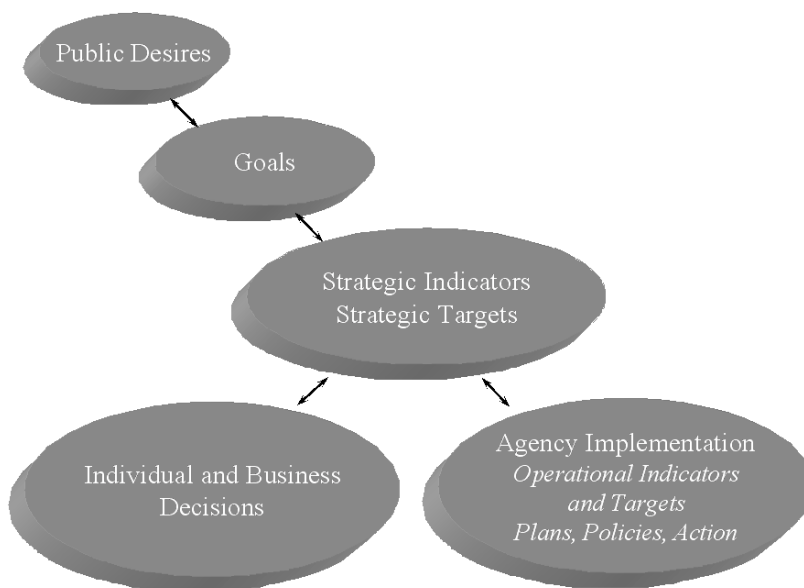


Figure 2. Sustainable Community Plan Framework.

III. Vision Statement and Goals

A. Scope Project and Assemble Core Project Team

1. Before undertaking a Sustainable Community Plan, municipalities should complete the action “Create a Green Team.”

2. The Green Team should organize several small meetings with key officials and local leaders to scope the project and address key questions:

What process will be used to get public input into creation of the plan and spur ongoing implementation?

Who will have the authority to choose the final goals, indicators, and actions?

What will be the institutional home of the final plan? Who will have the authority to update and change it? Who will have the responsibility of updating the indicators and reporting them to the community?

Ideally this scoping should include local officials (Planning and Zoning Boards, Environmental Commissions, main street/downtown development boards, Council, Mayors, administrators, and others), leaders from the business community, civic organizations, congregations, and other stakeholders.

3. Establish a core project team, which may include the Green Team, that is vested with authority to select the goals and indicators and oversee the public process. This decision-making body should include as many of the above actors as possible.

B. Solicit Public Input

1. Hold a large public seminar to educate stakeholders about sustainability and solicit public input regarding the creation of a sustainable community plan. (See the separate action for “Community Visioning.”)

An option at this point is to encourage citizens or official designees to begin forming task forces focused on making change in specific areas of interest (e.g., energy, agriculture, green purchasing). Ideally, developing implementation committees follows the creation of the goals and indicators, but this alternative sequence allows citizen enthusiasm to be immediately captured and applied constructively.

2. As a point of departure for creating the plan, review the goals and building blocks of current planning documents: a) municipal planning documents, b) non-profit and other community planning documents, and c) precedents from other communities. See the “Resources” section for links to Sustainable Community Plans from New Jersey and

across the country.

Consider state, regional, and global sustainability imperatives that relate to activities in the community.

C. Create Goals

Once the Community Vision has been established and assessment data collected, the core project team should create a Sustainable Community Plan framework that includes draft goals.

Goals refine a vision down into its component parts and further define the desired outcome in a number of categories, such as health, natural resources, equity, transportation, etc. A goal should be broad enough to show relationships with other goals, and be able to act as an umbrella for a bundle of related issues, implementation strategies, and indicators.

Since this is a “Sustainable” Community Plan, the goals must address the economic, environmental, and social aspects of sustainability. Goals set by sustainable communities often include:

- Economic vitality
- Redevelopment
- Sustainable community design
- Efficient transportation
- Carbon neutrality
- Reduction of pollution and waste
- Good government
- Healthy, equitable communities
- Affordable housing
- Support of local farming
- Preservation of environmentally sensitive lands
- Protection of drinking water sources

D. Public Review and Institutionalization

Hold a second public seminar to solicit feedback on draft goals and finalize them. Review the vision and goals with municipal officials, key leaders, and stakeholders and incorporate them into current programs and practices.

What to submit to get credit/points

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

1. The Plan must be officially adopted by the municipal government prior to your certification application date. It may have been adopted at any time as long as it is

currently being implemented and has been updated or reexamined in the five years prior to your certification application date.

2. The Plan must be developed with significant stakeholder involvement. Both municipal staff as well as community stakeholders should participate.

3. The Plan must include a vision for the community as well as goals that address the economy, environment, and social aspects of the community.

Submit the following documentation to verify 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 officially adopted Plan.

3. In "upload file 2," submit verification that the Plan was officially adopted by the municipal government. This may include a resolution or meeting minutes.

3. In "upload file 3", submit documentation of significant stakeholder involvement. This may include meeting minutes with a list of participants and their affiliations and meeting advertisements.

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

City of Summit

Report and Recommendations on Developing a Sustainable Master Plan for Summit (June 2007) and Action Plan for a Sustainable Summit (June 2008)

The City of Summit Mayor's Sustainable Community Task Force was formed in January 2007 with the task of developing a "Green" Master Plan for the community, initially envisioned as a six month project. The task force issued a report in June 2007 outlining sustainability goals. Indicators in six topic areas identified sustainability trends in Summit and provided a baseline assessment. The report also discussed potential actions including a survey of "best practices" in each of the six topic areas. Citing the need for public engagement, the task force was granted an additional year to conduct community outreach and use a consensus building process to develop a comprehensive action plan. An \$8000 Smart Growth Planning Grant was secured from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) to partially

support the work of the task force. Hundreds of residents, including an advisory group of 60 community leaders, participated in the plan development through 25 community meetings and a public opinion survey. The 84 page Action Plan for a Sustainable Summit was released in June 2008 with specific objectives, targets, and action steps that cover nine sustainability topic areas.

Borough of Highland Park

Highland Park Green Community Plan (December 2007)

The Highland Park Green Community Working Group was formed in 2003 to lead sustainability efforts as outlined in the Mayor's 2020 vision statement. The working group coordinated environmental initiatives, including the greening of Borough Hall, and partnered with Rutgers University graduate students to produce a green community audit, community outreach strategy, and some elements of a green community plan. In 2006, a Smart Future Grant from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs enabled the working group to hire the New Jersey Sustainable State Institute to assist with the development of a comprehensive sustainability action plan. Released in 2007, the 101-page Highland Park Green Community Plan focuses on goals related to five sustainability topic areas. Detailed indicators are identified to provide a baseline and enable tracking of the community's progress in each area. Action steps outline the projects, programs, and policies that Highland Park will take to reach the identified sustainability goals.

Resources

Funding Resources

Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) Smart Growth Planning Grants

<http://www.anjec.org/pdfs/SmartGrowthGrants2009Facts.pdf>

A Guide to State Grants and Loans that Support Sustainability Initiatives. New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Office of Planning and Sustainable Communities (2007). Available for download at

http://www.nj.gov/dep/opsc/docs/grants_loans_for_sustainability_initiatives.pdf

**Green Communities: Grants/Funding
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

<http://www.epa.gov/greenkit/finance.htm>

Education/Training Resources

**Green Communities: Smart Strategies for a Sustainable Future
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

This site provides guidance for the creation of sustainable action plans, including sample actions in ten topic areas, strategies for community involvement and detailed information about indicators.

<http://www.epa.gov/greenkit/index.htm>

**Office of Planning and Sustainable Communities
New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection**

<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/opsc/sustcomm.html>

Case Studies

NJ Sustainable Community Plans (completed or in progress)

Sustainable Lawrence

<http://sustainablelawrence.org/agenda.html>

Sustainable Living by the Sea: Belmar's Blueprint for Building a Livable, Affordable and Inclusive Community

<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/bscit/Belmar%20Profile.pdf>

Sustainable Montclair Planning Guide

<http://www.mtcenv.org/sustainability>

Sustainable Princeton

<http://www.sustainableprinceton.org/>

Sustainable West Windsor Plan 2007

[http://www.njssi.org/uploaded_documents/Sustainable West Windsor Plan 2007 Final Draft 09.04.2007.pdf](http://www.njssi.org/uploaded_documents/Sustainable_West_Windsor_Plan_2007_Final_Draft_09.04.2007.pdf)

Other Sustainable Community Plans

Albuquerque Green

Albuquerque, New Mexico

The website for the award-winning Albuquerque Green plan outlines goals, strategies and actions and provides an interactive reporting tool that tracks progress toward sustainability targets.

<http://www.cabq.gov/albuquerquegreen/green-goals>

Chicago Environmental Action Agenda 2006

City of Claremont Sustainable City Plan

Claremont, California

<http://www.ci.claremont.ca.us/download.cfm?ID=25468>

City of Lake Oswego Sustainability Plan

Lake Oswego, Oregon

http://www.ci.oswego.or.us/plan/Sustainability/Sustainability_Plan.htm

Pasadena's Green Action Plan

Pasadena, California

http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us/permitcenter/GreenCity/Home_Green.asp#Green_City_Action_Plan

PLANYC: A Greener, Greater New York

New York, New York

New York City's sustainability plan released in April 2007 and the annual progress report released in April 2008

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/planyc2030/html/downloads/download.shtml>

San Jose's Green Vision

San Jose, California

<http://www.sanjoseca.gov/mayor/goals/environment/GreenVision/GreenVision.asp>

Sustainable Santa Fe

Santa Fe, New Mexico

<http://www.santafenm.gov/DocumentView.asp?DID=702>

Sustainable Santa Monica

Santa Monica, California

<http://www.smgov.net/epd/scp/>

General Resources

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability USA (ICLEI USA)

www.icleiusa.org

International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

www.iisd.org/measure/compendium

International Sustainability Indicators Network (ISIN)

www.sustainabilityindicators.org

Municipal Land Use Center

The College of New Jersey

<http://www.tcnj.edu/~mluc/community/index.html>

New Jersey Smart Growth Gateway

New Jersey Future

<http://www.smartgrowthgateway.org/>

Sustainable Communities Network

<http://www.sustainable.org/>

Sustainable Measures (SM)

www.sustainablemeasures.com/