Sustainability Planning White Paper

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability can mean different things to different people, groups, and organizations, and is often defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."[1] Another common way of understanding sustainability is through the interrelationship between the three pillars of sustainability: environment, economy, and social equity. It is understood that a society cannot maintain its quality of life and ultimately continue to exist if it does not protect its natural resources, generate economic activity and living wages, and provide opportunities for all of its citizens. In this framework, sustainability regards the total wealth of society as natural, human, and man-made capital.[2] These definitions, which are not mutually exclusive, can shape how different groups approach the concept of sustainability and sustainability planning processes.

This document underscores the importance of planning for sustainability at the local level and measuring progress toward goals, and also offers readers a road map for determining the type of planning process and indicators that will suit their individual objectives. Depending on local priorities, needs, and context, some jurisdictions may want to emphasize certain elements of sustainability planning. This white paper focuses largely on the environmental aspects of sustainability, but also provides some broad guidance on how to address socioeconomic issues.

[1] Brundtland Report, Our Common Future, 1987.

[2] CMAP Sustainability Regional Snapshot, 2007.

Sustainability in Local Planning

The ability for local governments and other community taxing bodies and institutions to influence development patterns, building and site design, land management, and zoning regulations, among other important levers of change, make them critical leaders in advancing sustainability. Putting sustainability into practice can mean a range of actions for local governments, including developing policies and regulations, creating programs, providing financial support, and implementing demonstration projects. Local governments can also advance sustainability by focusing on best practices relating to public assets that advance one or more of the three pillars of sustainability. Adopting sustainable practices in campus planning and facilities maintenance not only underscores a community's commitment to sustainability by "walking the walk," but also helps to highlight the practices that local residents and businesses can employ on private property.

What is a Sustainability Plan?

Many communities in the region are interested in the merits of sustainability-related programs and policies, and pursue them on an ad-hoc basis as interest or opportunity arises. It is valuable for communities with significant interest in advancing sustainability to create a sustainability plan to serve as a comprehensive roadmap for long-term decision-making that is supportive of achieving a sustainable community. Such plans are robust documents that typically inventory existing policies, practices, and programs; identify gaps and opportunities; and provide forward-thinking goals, strategies, and commitments across a number of topic areas. They address a wide range of sustainability issues and present detailed strategies and implementation guidance.

Sustainability plans come in various types and sizes, but typically include the following components:

- An assessment of existing conditions related to sustainability.

- The creation of goals, strategies, and indicators for each sustainability topic.

- A strategy for plan implementation.

- Guidelines for monitoring and reporting.

Many sustainability plans emphasize tracking quantitative indicators to assess baseline conditions and establish targets (goals) for improvement. The type of plan and set of topics that a municipality or county chooses to pursue are dependent upon its objectives, funding availability, staff capacity, and political support, among other considerations.

For instance, communities that have less staff capacity, limited experience with sustainability, and/or less political momentum may opt to develop a "lighter" plan with more limited content and less aggressive recommendations to test the waters and lay the foundation for a full-fledged planning process down the road. These plans, which are typically used for marketing or public awareness, may provide broad goals and strategies, but may not go into significant detail about specific strategies and implementation. Corollary sustainability-related guiding documents include sustainability checklists or report cards.[3, 4]

Another alternative is for a local government to develop a plan that is specific to a particular sustainability topic area, such as a climate action plan[5] or water management plan. Topical plans can still address interconnections across sustainability issues, but do so through a specific lens. For example, climate action plans often provide recommendations for transportation, energy, and other common topics, but focus on a narrower goal of mitigating and adapting to climate change. Yet another option is to incorporate sustainability topics or even an independent sustainability chapter into the community's comprehensive plan (see Chapter 4: Integrating Sustainability into Comprehensive Plans for more information).

[3] One lighter plan example is Village of Lombard Sustainability Framework.

[4] For reference, more extensive plans include Chicago Sustainability Action Agenda, Elgin Sustainability Action Plan, Oak Park / River Forest PlanItGreen, and Park Forest Sustainability Plan.

[5] See Evanston Climate Action Plan.

Sustainability in the GO TO 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is the official regional planning organization for the northeastern Illinois counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will. CMAP developed and now guides the implementation of GO TO 2040, metropolitan Chicago's comprehensive regional plan. To address anticipated population growth of more than two million new residents, GO TO 2040 establishes coordinated strategies that help the region's 284 communities address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality-of-life issues. The plan contains four themes and 12 major recommendation areas:

Livable Communities

1. Achieve Greater Livability through Land Use and Housing
2. Manage and Conserve Water and Energy Resources
3. Expand and Improve Parks and Open Space
4. Promote Sustainable Local Food

Human Capital

5. Improve Education and Workforce Development
6. Support Economic Innovation

Efficient Governance

7. Reform State and Local Tax Policy
8. Improve Access to Information
9. Pursue Coordinated Investments

Regional Mobility

10. Invest Strategically in Transportation
11. Increase Commitment to Public Transit
12. Create a More Efficient Freight Network

The emphasis of sustainability on planning for future generations makes it a necessary consideration of long-range planning. Sustainability is not addressed as a standalone chapter, but as a cross-cutting theme within the GO TO 2040 plan. CMAP promotes sustainability in the region through those recommendation areas in the following ways:

- Long-term land use and development planning promotes walkable, affordable, and diverse communities.

- Effective natural resource management practices are needed to maintain thriving ecosystems.

- Transportation programs that support low-carbon transportation investments promote healthy and active lifestyles and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

- Access to resources, such as jobs, education, and natural resources, are a necessary part of building an equitable and sustainable region.

Community sustainability plans should use GO TO 2040 and other relevant regional-scale planning documents as a reference throughout plan development to generate alignment between regional goals and local strategies.

Reasons to Develop a Sustainability Plan

Communities can carry out sustainability activities through general municipal programs and other initiatives, or through the development of a sustainability plan. A formal sustainability plan provides the following benefits:

- Brings together existing ad hoc initiatives and policies under one cohesive framework.

- Provides guidance for prioritizing and carrying out actions in a concerted manner.

- Engages multiple community stakeholders in strategy development, which will increase the likelihood of implementation across sectors, budget allocations, resource efficiency, and collaboration.

- Raises public awareness through community engagement processes during plan development.

- Provides an impetus for encouraging certification through programs such as Sustainability Tools for Assessing & Rating Communities or Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development.

- Sets the foundation for attracting additional grants, awards, and funding opportunities, such as capital improvement funds like the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), federal and state grant programs for sustainability-related improvements, and philanthropic funds to support new programs and activities.

Undertaking sustainability activities outside of the umbrella of a sustainability plan increases the likelihood that sustainability activities will be based entirely upon external factors, such as funding availability or elections. Defining and formalizing priorities within a sustainability plan helps to ensure longevity of the plan recommendations and facilitates the implementation of those recommendations in a strategic and interconnected way.

How to Use this White Paper

This white paper was designed for planners and other municipal or county staff who have some background and familiarity with planning processes. For the sake of brevity, rather than explaining the sustainability planning process from soup to nuts, this white paper assumes a base of fundamental knowledge about comprehensive planning and builds upon that base by identifying specific points of divergence that make sustainability planning unique. The white paper provides guidance on every step of the sustainability planning process, but offers enough flexibility in its recommendations to be applicable to a wide variety of users. Local governments and leaders of community-wide planning processes may use this white paper to map out a tailored sustainability planning process that addresses how to begin, who to engage, what to include, and how to move forward. Alternatively, local governments might use this white paper to generate sustainability strategy ideas to move forward with even if they are not ready to develop a full plan.

Chapter 2 describes the overall sustainability planning process, including advice on defining the scope of the planning process and how to determine which topics should be addressed within the plan. Chapter 3 provides guidance on creating the plan, such as considerations for conducting an existing conditions assessment, ways to structure the plan, and a series of strategy matrices, which define a menu of specific sustainability recommendations for a set of core topics. Chapter 4 discusses ideas for integrating the principles of sustainability planning into a community's comprehensive plan. Lastly, Chapter 5 includes guidance for long-term implementation of a sustainability plan, including practices for monitoring and reporting.

Clearly identifying and defining the steps to create a sustainability plan at the outset of the project serves to avoid unnecessary confusion and can greatly streamline the process and shorten the overall timeline. The planning process that is typically used to create a sustainability plan document is largely analogous to the processes commonly used to create comprehensive plans and other planning works, but there are some key differences that this chapter will discuss.

Defining the Scope of the Planning Process

This white paper assumes that the reader is somewhat familiar with comprehensive planning and the typical tasks that are undertaken in a comprehensive planning process. With that in mind, Table 1 compares a typical process for a comprehensive plan with a typical process for a sustainability plan, and highlights the key differences between the two. The processes outlined in the table were generalized from a sampling of project scopes from CMAP's Local Technical Assistance program for comparison's sake, but there are many other potential approaches to such processes. In practice, the ordering and scope of tasks may be changed based on the needs of the project and additional tasks can and should be added to make the process more robust. In some instances, it may be appropriate to scale back the planning process for communities that are looking to create a less intensive document or internal guide. For example, an internal planning document created for use primarily by municipal or county staff may not require a rigorous public process, so those elements should be modified accordingly.

Table 1 illustrates that the six overarching phases of the two planning processes — Project Initiation, Public Kick-off, Existing Conditions Assessment, Develop Key Recommendations, Develop the Plan, and Refine and Adopt the Plan — typically follow the same structure. The table notes some variations among the specific tasks within the phases, which stem from inherent differences between comprehensive plans and sustainability plans. As discussed earlier, these differences include additional emphasis on citizen and organizational engagement to provide a vehicle for implementation of the sustainability plan as well as incorporation of data and indicators to assess existing conditions and measure future progress toward sustainability goals. More detail on these key differences may be found in Chapter 3.

Table 1. Generalized sustainability and comprehensive planning processes

Sustainability Plan (SP) Tasks	Comprehensive Plan (CP) Tasks	Notes
Project Initiation		
Board / Council presentation	Board / Council presentation	
Staff kick-off meeting	Staff kick-off meeting	
Steering Committee (SC) kick-off meeting	Steering Committee kick-off meeting	It is particularly important to engage community citizens and organizations in SP development. They are typically included on the SC or separate advisory committee
Public Kick-off		
Initial SP engagement efforts include both issues / opportunities & visioning discussions, while CP process typically splits these two discussions into separate meetings (see "Develop Key Recommendations" below)		
Public kick-off workshop — sustainability visioning	Public kick-off workshop — issues and opportunities	SP workshop focuses on identifying areas of community interest for sustainability-related initiatives, programs, & policies, and visioning
Stakeholder interviews	Stakeholder interviews	
Focus groups	Focus groups	Organize SP focus groups to discuss key SP topic areas
Draft vision statement	(Happens later in process)	Vision statement summarizes public input and sets direction for plan development
Existing Conditions Report (ECR)		
Review existing documents	Review existing documents	Ask staff to provide a list of existing sustainability-related programs, policies, and initiatives
Collect and analyze data and calculate baselines	N/A	Gather data from staff and external agencies, and calculate baselines for inclusion in ECR
Draft the existing conditions report	Draft the existing conditions report	Data analysis is included in draft CP ECR, but typically does not result in baselines
Staff & Steering Committee review	Staff & Steering Committee review	
Develop Key Recommendations		
(Happens earlier in process)	Public visioning workshop	CP processes often add another public engagement step specific to visioning at this point in the process
(Happens earlier in process)	Draft vision statement	CP processes may offer a draft vision statement at this point in the process, rather than earlier as with a SP
Draft key recommendations memo	Draft key recommendations memo	
Staff & Steering Committee review	Staff & Steering Committee review	
Develop the Plan		
Draft the plan	Draft the plan	
Set targets	N/A	Work from baselines to extrapolate reasonable but progressive targets in conjunction with stakeholders and plan recommendations
Focus groups	N/A	Focus groups on specific SP topic areas are brought back at this point to discuss plan recommendations and indicators
Refine and Adopt the Plan		
Staff & Steering Committee review	Staff & Steering Committee review	
Public open house	Public open house	
Adoption meetings	Adoption meetings	

Notes: SP = Sustainability Plan; SC = Steering Committee; CP = Comprehensive Plan; ECR = Existing Conditions Report. Task names have been modified slightly to facilitate comparison. Highlighting indicates a task with significant differences between the two processes.

Determining Key Topics to Address

As mentioned earlier, "sustainability" is a somewhat amorphous term that means different things to different people, organizations, and communities. Figure 1 illustrates a range of sustainability-related topics that could be considered for inclusion in a sustainability plan. This is not an exhaustive list, but gives a general sense of the breadth of topics that could fall underneath the umbrella of "sustainability."
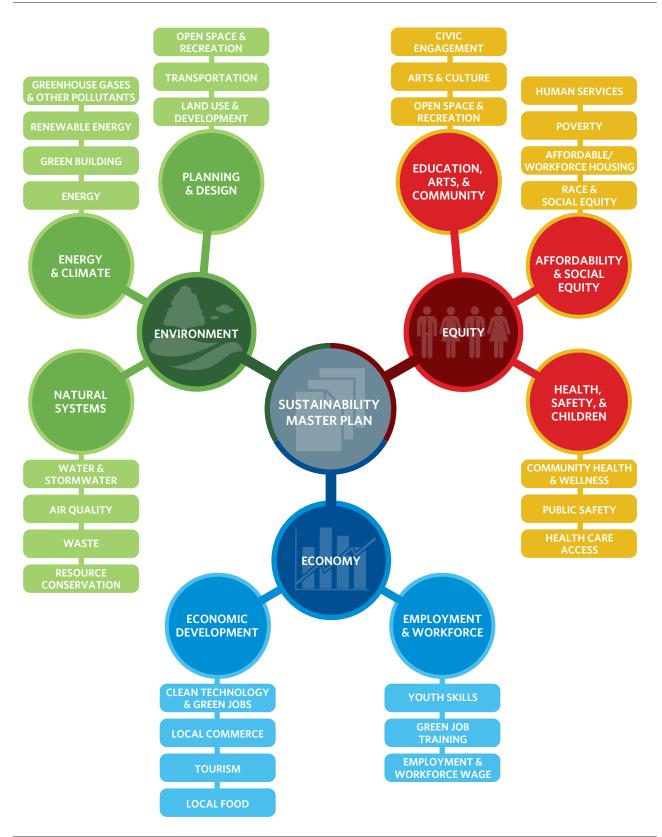
Figure 1 includes over 30 sub-topics beneath the "three e's" of environment, economy, and equity. While each sub-topic is important in its own right, it would be very difficult and time-consuming to adequately address all of them in one plan. Some sub-topics, such as public safety or community health, may even deserve their own independent plans. It is critical to the success of the sustainability planning process to clearly define the topics to be addressed at the outset of the project to avoid ambiguity, unnecessary work, and scope creep.

Table 2.
Frequency of topics addressed in select sustainability plans

Topic	Frequency
Energy	12
Land Use and Development	12
Transportation	11
Open Space and Ecosystems	9
Waste	9
Water	9
Climate and Greenhouse Gases	7
Environmental Education	6
Civic Engagement	6
Green Economy and Jobs	6
Local Commerce	6
Renewable Energy	6
Air Quality	4
Resource Conservation	4
Green Building	4
Local Food	3
Arts and Culture	3
Community Health and Wellness	3
Tourism	2
Housing	2
Human Services	1

*Note: Thirteen plans total were reviewed, topics addressed were derived from chapter headings. Highlighting indicates core topic.

Figure 1. Sustainability planning topics universe

ENVIRONMENT

PLANNING & DESIGN
- OPEN SPACE & RECREATION
- TRANSPORTATION
- LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT

ENERGY & CLIMATE
- GREENHOUSE GASES & OTHER POLLUTANTS
- RENEWABLE ENERGY
- GREEN BUILDING
- ENERGY

NATURAL SYSTEMS
- WATER & STORMWATER
- AIR QUALITY
- WASTE
- RESOURCE CONSERVATION

SUSTAINABILITY MASTER PLAN

EQUITY

EDUCATION, ARTS, & COMMUNITY
- CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
- ARTS & CULTURE
- OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

AFFORDABILITY & SOCIAL EQUITY
- HUMAN SERVICES
- POVERTY
- AFFORDABLE/ WORKFORCE HOUSING
- RACE & SOCIAL EQUITY

HEALTH, SAFETY, & CHILDREN
- COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLNESS
- PUBLIC SAFETY
- HEALTH CARE ACCESS

ECONOMY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- CLEAN TECHNOLOGY & GREEN JOBS
- LOCAL COMMERCE
- TOURISM
- LOCAL FOOD

EMPLOYMENT & WORKFORCE
- YOUTH SKILLS
- GREEN JOB TRAINING
- EMPLOYMENT & WORKFORCE WAGE

Source: ICLEI.

CMAP conducted a review of the types of topics addressed in sustainability plans in our region and beyond in order to identify common themes that sustainability plans in our region should seek to include (see Table 2). This work was informed by a series of engagement activities with sustainability practitioners representing local communities as well as work performed by the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, which reviewed and analyzed 31 sustainability plans in the region to identify common themes and align goals and strategies for implementation. CMAP's review culminated in the selection of eight "core topics" — topics that should be addressed in all sustainability plans in our region — and four "other popular topics" — topics that many communities have strong interest in but that typically have less impact on the environmental component of sustainability. Communities may wish to add other topics from Figure 1 or Table 2, or topics identified as particularly important for the community at hand. This white paper will give the most guidance on strategies for the core topic areas and some starting points for exploring strategies for the other popular topics.

Core Topics

1. Land Use and Development

2. Transportation and Mobility

3. Open Space and Ecosystems (includes resource conservation/ management, tree planting)

4. Water

5. Waste

6. Energy (includes renewable energy)

7. Air and Climate (includes air quality, greenhouse gas mitigation, and adaptation)

8. Education

Other Popular Topics

1. Green Economy (includes workforce and economic development)

2. Local Food Systems

3. Municipal Policies and Practices (includes greening municipal assets)

4. Community Health and Wellness

3. CREATING A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

After clearly defining the overarching planning process that plan development will follow, the project is ready for initiation. This chapter provides guidance and resources pertinent to the major tasks associated with the creation of a sustainability plan. It includes an overview of the nuances in approach to the existing conditions analysis that should be considered, potential targeted public engagement strategies, tips on structuring a sustainability plan, ideas for plan recommendations via strategy matrices for the core topics, and guidance on implementation information to include within the plan that will set future efforts up for success.

Assessing Existing Conditions

Assessment of existing conditions is an important step in the planning process, as it sets the foundation upon which all of the plan's recommendations and outcomes are based. A sustainability planning process uses an approach to existing conditions assessment that is akin to that of a typical comprehensive planning process, but with a couple of key differences. First, one of the initial steps in the assessment for a sustainability plan should be conducting a thorough inventory of the municipality or county's existing sustainability-related programs, practices, and policies and reviewing existing planning documents for references to sustainability and/or environmental topics. Some of the existing conditions elements commonly undertaken for a comprehensive plan, such as a land use inventory or transportation network assessment, may be useful background information for a sustainability assessment as well. These elements should be considered and undertaken for their potential to inform the project team's understanding of sustainability-related issues.

Additionally, the existing conditions phase may serve to create baselines for various topic areas; alternately, this could be undertaken later in the process after priority areas of focus have more firmly been established. Data collected during the existing conditions assessment may also simply lay the foundation for the eventual creation of indicators down the road. It may take some time and coordination to obtain some of the data needed for typical sustainability indicators, so it is beneficial to begin data collection early in the process if possible. See CMAP's Sustainability Indicators Guide for more information.

Engaging the Public

Public engagement is a vital component of the sustainability planning process, as ultimately a local government depends upon the actions of its citizenry for many implementation items. Whether community stakeholders are engaged in a lengthy input process, or they are brought in at pivotal points during plan development, up front engagement will pay dividends when it comes time to involve stakeholders in implementation. The ultimate plan should be "owned" by a wide variety of groups within the community, including residents, property owners, sector groups (businesses, non-profits, and faith-based congregations), taxing bodies, community organizations, and institutions. Some sustainability planning processes are even managed by a group of major stakeholders through a neutral institution or non-profit specifically created for the project to ensure that the right groups are equally engaged and invested in the process. Use of this type of structure also helps to minimize the odds that implementation will be stalled due to changes in elected officials. The input of these groups will make the plan stronger and more contextual. Ideally, the final plan will be formally approved by multiple institutions to encourage stakeholder implementation, budget allocations, and further collaboration in the long run.

This section focuses on some of the potential components of a public process for sustainability plan development. There are a variety of ways that communities might choose to approach the public process for this type of plan, and additional ideas should be tailored to the needs of the community at hand.

Steering Committee

Many planning efforts include the involvement of a steering committee to provide feedback and direction throughout the course of the project, review key deliverables, and spearhead the implementation of the plan once it's adopted. Sustainability planning processes work in much the same way, but may benefit from some special consideration for contributors who have more technical backgrounds (such as municipal staff and industry experts) separately from those representing the community at large who can also help to ultimately implement plan recommendations (such as leaders from institutions and community organizations, residents, business owners, and others). Some communities opt to create separate committees for the two groups, with the former named a "technical advisory committee" and latter named a "citizen advisory committee" (or similar). This is a best practice for more involved sustainability planning efforts, but may not be necessary for less involved processes.

Focus Groups

Typical planning processes involve reaching out to specific stakeholders for input through stakeholder interviews. For sustainability planning, it can also be helpful to create focus groups on particular sustainability topics of interest, such as alternative transportation, local food, or education. Focus groups comprised of technical experts on various strategy ideas or key institutions and organizations may also be of special utility. These focus groups can function similarly to the steering committee(s) but provide targeted feedback centered on their respective topics at key points in the process. For example, it might be helpful to engage with focus groups at the outset of the project to hear initial thoughts on the topic at hand, again at the midpoint to discuss recommendation directions, and finally at the end of the process to share the plan's draft recommendations. The extent to which focus groups are involved should be catered to the needs of the project. These groups are often strong advocates for the resulting plan and can also assist with implementation efforts after the plan has been adopted.

Public Kick-off Workshop

The public kick-off workshop for a sustainability planning process serves similar goals as kick-off workshops for other planning processes—to introduce the public to the project and gather initial feedback and ideas. Since the umbrella of sustainability is so amorphous, the public kick-off meeting can also provide an opportunity to define what sustainability means to the community and publicly vet the key topics to be addressed within the plan. This vetting can serve to educate community members about the topics to set the stage for future behavioral modifications and other actions that can help implement the plan.

One potential meeting structure might be to review the key topics in small groups to discuss how each topic relates to a sustainable future; what activities, programs, and policies currently exist in the community relating to the topic; and what strategies and actions might be appropriate for the community to prioritize within its sustainability plan. Another approach could be to define existing programs, policies, and practices for the groups, as well as potential future strategies, and have a conversation about the benefits and costs associated with choosing strategies; it might be prudent to pursue this type of activity after a significant amount of existing conditions research has already been completed. Keypad polling and other interactive activities, such as dot voting, can be helpful to prioritize brainstormed strategies as a group. These conversations generally lead to creative ideas and sustainability solutions that might not have emerged otherwise, and can cultivate ownership among community members for implementation.

Choosing Plan Recommendations

Once the planning team understands previous sustainability-related programs and policies and the overall sustainability vision of the community, the stage is set to choose recommendations for inclusion in the sustainability plan document. As with any planning process, many factors influence the selection of appropriate strategies for a particular community, which the planning team should take into account when crafting plan recommendations. These factors may include:

- The community's previous approach to sustainability issues. Plan recommendations should build on past efforts and priorities in a logical fashion.

- Preferences on the part of the community toward some sustainability topics, resulting in willingness to "push the envelope" for those topics while remaining more tentative on others. This preference may neglect the overall importance of addressing certain sustainability topics in a time-sensitive fashion. For example, despite strong scientific evidence that proactive planning for climate adaptation is necessary to ensure a sustainable future, a community may be reluctant to focus on that topic for various reasons.

- The need to ensure that the recommended strategies are diverse in type and include policies, systemic changes, programs, events, and education.

- The community's palate for incentives (carrots) versus requirements or penalties (sticks).

- Governmental leadership and top-down direction on the importance of sustainability (or lack thereof) can influence how aggressive recommendations can be.

- Budgetary constraints may make it difficult to recommend strategies that impose new or increased budget line items, even if those strategies will result in long-term cost savings.

Strategy Matrices

To aid in the development of plan recommendations, this section provides a series of "strategy matrices," which can be thought of as a menu of potential strategy options that could be pertinent to a sustainability plan. The strategy matrices do not represent a comprehensive list of items to include in every community's sustainability plan; rather, they present a jumping-off point for planners who are looking for impactful ways to address the core topics identified in this white paper. Other plan recommendations may be brainstormed during the planning process, and it may be helpful to review other sustainability plans to devise additional recommendations as needed.[7]

The matrices are organized into a series of columns that provide different types of information meant to help the reader decide whether the strategy might be appropriate for the community at hand. The purpose of each column is as follows:

- Issue: groups strategies into broader topical categories

- Strategy: brief description of the strategy itself

- Resources Needed to Implement — Cost: order of magnitude estimate of the anticipated cost of the strategy

- Resources Needed to Implement — Staff: order of magnitude estimate of the staff capacity that may be needed to implement the strategy

- Resources Needed to Implement — Complexity: other considerations or challenges that might be associated with the strategy

- Leader(s): potential municipal departments, external organizations, or others who might be responsible for moving the strategy forward

- Learn More: additional resources and case studies that could be of interest

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[7] Appendix A includes a list of sustainability plans from our region (from the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus).

Land use and development strategy matrix

Issue	Strategy	Resources Needed to Implement			Leader(s)
		Cost	Staff	Complexity	
Ensure that regulations facilitate sustainable development patterns	Assess and update **codes and ordinances** to require, incentivize, and/or allow sustainable practices	Low if done in-house; moderate if consultant-led	Low if consultant-led; moderate if done in-house	Board/Council approval, potential political challenges	Community development and public works departments
	Create a **mixed-use zoning district** to apply to key commercial areas, such as downtowns and neighborhood commercial nodes	Low if done in-house; moderate if consultant-led	Low if consultant-led; moderate if done in-house	Board/Council approval, potential political challenges	Community development and public works departments
Integrate planning for transportation and land use	Coordinate between public works and community development departments (or equivalents) in evaluating development proposals and designing roadways to ensure **context-sensitive design**	No cost	Moderate	Ongoing, requires coordination	Public works and community development departments
	Prioritize redevelopment projects and infrastructure funding for **transit-served locations**	No cost	Low	Board/Council approval, potential political challenges	Finance, public works, and community development departments
	Update **parking requirements** in the zoning ordinance to reduce impervious coverage and increase developable area, and establish **performance-based parking pricing** for on-street parking*	No cost; low if parking meters installed	Low to moderate	Board/Council approval, potential political challenges	Community development, public works, and engineering departments
	Provide incentives for or require **design features that enhance walkability** in commercial areas, such as incorporation of clear glass storefronts, functional street side entries, and limited curb cuts	No cost; potentially low with incentives	Low	Board/Council approval, potential political challenges	Community development department
Protect agricultural land and natural resources through land use policy	Provide incentives for or require **conservation design** to protect natural resources for both residential and non-residential areas	No cost; potentially low with incentives	Low	Board/Council approval, potential political challenges	Community development department
	Create a supportive framework for the **retention of agricultural land uses** through regulatory protection or policy measures	No cost	Low to moderate	Board/Council approval, potential political challenges	Community development department

*See CMAP's parking toolkit, Parking Strategies to Support Livable Communities.

Refer to these indicators from Sustainability Indicators Guide: New developments in areas with existing infrastructure and services; residential density of areas with transit service.

Transportation and mobility strategy matrix

Issue	Strategy	Resources Needed to Implement			Leader(s)
		Cost	Staff	Complexity	
Improve transit service and ridership, as well as multimodal linkages	Work with transit agencies, such as RTA, Metra, Pace, and/or CTA, to **assess and enhance transit service and amenities**, such as stations, shelters, and real-time arrival information	Low; moderate if a local match is required	Moderate	Requires long-term coordination	Public works, engineering, and community development departments
	Facilitate **multimodal linkages with transit** via bicycle and pedestrian path connections to transit stations	Low; moderate if property acquisition is required	Moderate upfront staff capacity	Requires coordination, property acquisition may be required	Public works, engineering, and community development departments; private property owners; Metra, CTA, RTA
	Implement a **shuttle bus system** to provide transit riders with transportation for the "last mile" to get to employment centers or other major destinations	High	Moderate	May require coordination with other municipalities; moderate upfront and ongoing cost	Public works, engineering, and community development departments; other municipalities; RTA, Pace
	Engage in **transit-oriented development planning** for station areas; include minimum density and streetscape recommendations. Update regulations as necessary to allow TOD and transit-supportive density.	Low if done in-house; moderate if consultant-led	Low if consultant-led; moderate if done in-house	Requires Board/Council approval	Community development and public works departments; RTA, Metra
Elevate the importance of bicycle and pedestrian facilities	Adopt a **bicycle and pedestrian plan**	Low if done in-house; moderate if consultant-led	Low if consultant-led; moderate if done in-house	Requires Board/Council approval	Community development and public works departments
	Connect on- and off-road bicycle facilities with existing and planned regional and sub-regional **trail networks**	Moderate	Low to moderate	Property acquisition may be required, ongoing maintenance	Community development and public works departments
	Require **bicycle parking** in the zoning and subdivision ordinances, and provide at municipal facilities and transit stations	Low	Low upfront staff capacity	Requires Board/Council approval	Community development and public works departments
	Create an **educational program** for motorists and cyclists on how to safely share the road	Low	Low	Ongoing effort, requires coordination	Community development department; non-profit organization
	Create a **Safe Routes to School** program	Low	Low	Ongoing effort, requires coordination	Community development and public works departments; school district
Plan for sustainable transportation infrastructure	Adopt a **complete streets ordinance** that includes template street sections with bicycle facilities and sidewalks. Apply street sections to roadway reconstruction projects and Subdivision Ordinance	No cost; low if consultant is needed	Low; moderate if done in-house	Requires Board/Council approval	Community development, public works, engineering departments
	Update the **subdivision ordinance** to include standards that are supportive of walking and biking, such as reduced maximum block lengths (recommend 800') and street sections that require bicycle facilities and sidewalks	No cost; low if consultant is needed	Low; moderate if done in-house	Board/Council approval, potential political challenges	Community development and public works departments
	Incorporate sustainable streets into **capital improvements planning**; proactively plan for major transportation infrastructure improvements	High	Moderate	Ongoing, requires significant coordination	Public works, engineering, and community development departments
	Install fueling stations for **alternative fuel vehicles** on municipal sites and/or require their incorporation into new developments	Low	Low	Requires Board/Council approval	Public works, engineering, and community development departments

*See CMAP's Complete Streets Toolkit and Parking Strategies to Support Livable Communities.

Refer to these indicators from Sustainability Indicators Guide: Commuting trips by transit, bicycling, and walking: vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per household.

Open space and ecosystems strategy matrix

Issue	Strategy	Resources Needed to Implement			Leader(s)
		Cost	Staff	Complexity	
Increase the amount of open space and protect natural resources	Preserve and restore existing community **open spaces** and identify areas for future open space	Varies	Moderate	Potentially large acquisition costs upfront, requires ongoing labor, maintenance	Community development department, park district
	Create a open space and/or **parks master plan**	Low if done in-house; moderate if consultant-led	Low if consultant-led; moderate if done in-house	Requires adoption	Park district, community development department, Forest Preserve District, conservation/ environmental NGOs
	Use available data and resources, such as the Green Infrastructure Vision 2.0 and Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, to help **prioritize protection of natural resources** in development decisions	No cost	Low to moderate	Potential development pressure	Community development department
	Evaluate the potential to expand **park dedication requirements** for subdivisions to ensure that new residents have adequate access to open space	Low	Low	Requires Board/ Council approval	Community development department
Improve ecosystem service functions of open space	Increase the **green infrastructure network** to better manage stormwater and provide habitat	Varies	Low to moderate	Potentially large cost	Public works department, park district
	Prevent and manage terrestrial and plant **invasive species**	Low to moderate	Low	Low	Public works department, park district
	Encourage **native landscaping** by incorporating it into municipal/ roadway landscaping and allowing through ordinances	Low	Low	Low, potential for some opposition to aesthetics of natives	Public works and community development departments
	Ban or discourage the use of **chemical pesticides**	No cost	Low	Low	Public works department
	Develop an **urban forest management plan** to increase tree canopy and diversity	Moderate	Low to moderate	Requires ongoing effort	Public works department, park district, municipal staff, conservation and environmental NGOs

Refer to these indicators from Sustainability Indicators Guide: Acres of park space per capita; acres of protected lands.

Water strategy matrix

Issue	Strategy	Resources Needed to Implement			Leader(s)
		Cost	Staff	Complexity	
Improve stormwater management to minimize pollution and flooding	Install **green infrastructure** on municipal sites, such as bioswales, native landscaping, rain barrels, sidewalk planters, and permeable pavers, to reduce runoff and pollution of waterbodies	Moderate	Low	High upfront capital costs with lower, steady ongoing maintenance costs	Public works and engineering departments, IDOT
	Enact a **stormwater ordinance** to require and/or encourage stormwater best practices on private properties	No cost; Low if consultant is needed	Moderate upfront	Requires Board approval; potential political challenges	Public works, community development, and engineering departments, county
	Establish **stormwater utility fee** to help finance necessary infrastructure upgrades and other costs of managing stormwater	No cost	Moderate upfront	Requires Board approval; potential political challenges	Public works and finance departments
	Upgrade **water and sewer infrastructure** to meet current and anticipated system costs and needs and minimize water loss	High	Moderate	Costly; requires significant coordination	Public works, engineering, and finance departments
Promote water efficiency and reuse	Permit **native landscaping** via updates to weed ordinance and/or zoning or subdivision ordinance	No cost	Low	Requires Board approval	Public works and community development departments
	Review CMAP's **Model Water Conservation Ordinance** and enact related programs and ordinances	No cost	Moderate upfront	Requires Board approval	Public works and community development departments
	Enact **water metering**	Low	Low	Requires significant coordination	Public works and finance departments
	Permit **rainwater harvesting** for non-potable reuse within buildings (toilet flushing, cooling towers, etc.) in plumbing code upon state adoption of standards	No cost	Moderate upfront	Requires Board approval	Public works and community development departments
Engage in long-term planning to ensure sustainable supply and quality of water	Engage in sub-regional **watershed planning**	No cost; Moderate if consultant is needed	Moderate	Staff capacity required	Public works, engineering, and community development departments, surrounding municipalities in watershed, county
	Engage in sub-regional planning efforts regarding **water supply and source protection**	No cost	Moderate	Staff capacity required	Public works, engineering, and community development departments, surrounding municipalities, county
	Protect **sensitive aquifer areas** via land use regulations	No cost	Moderate	Requires Board approval; potential political challenges	Public works, engineering, and community development departments, surrounding municipalities in watershed, county

Refer to these indicators from Sustainability Indicators Guide: Presence and/or rating of local waterbodies on IL EPA 303(d) list; new developments that incorporate green infrastructure BMPs; water use intensity.

Waste strategy matrix

Issue	Strategy	Resources Needed to Implement			Leader(s)
		Cost	Staff	Complexity	
Minimize solid waste	Create a **waste management plan or approach** that sets targets and establishes strategies to achieve solid waste reduction	Low	Moderate	Moderate, requires coordination	Public works department, environmental groups
	During the bid process, require haulers to conduct **waste assessments** to obtain and track data on waste collected and diverted and waste program participation rates	Low	Low	Low	Municipal leadership, public works department
	Pursue a **zero waste goal** for municipal facilities or community-wide	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Public works department
	Adopt **product bans** (such as styrofoam or plastic bag bans) that reduce materials sent to landfill	Low	Low	Potential political challenges, may necessitate enforcement	Public works department, waste haulers
	Create a **public education campaign** that informs residents and businesses about ways to reduce waste	Low to moderate (depending on extensiveness of campaign)	Moderate	Low	Community development and public works departments, school districts
	Implement **pay-as-you-throw pricing (PAYT)** to disincentivize landfill-bound waste	Low	Low	Requires Board approval; potential political challenges	Municipal leadership, public works department
Increase waste diversion	Provide **curbside recycling services** for single family and smaller multifamily buildings, and encourage commercial and larger multifamily properties to contract for such services	Moderate, less if PAYT is enacted	Low	Requires Board approval; moderate cost implications; requires significant coordination	Municipal leadership, public works department
	Install **public recycling bins** at all public facilities and community centers (schools, parks, library, etc.)	Moderate	Low	Low	Public works department
	Organize recycling and disposal drop-offs to **address hazardous and special waste**, such as e-waste, light bulbs, and construction/demolition materials	Low to moderate	Low	Low	Waste hauler, public works department, Chamber of Commerce (for commercial waste collection), residents
	Adopt a **construction and demolition** debris recycling ordinance	Low	Low	Requires Board approval; potential political challenges	Municipal leadership, public works department
	Provide opportunities to **compost food scraps** via composting drop-off locations or a pilot curbside compost pick-up program	Moderate to high	High upfront and moderate ongoing capacity	Requires significant outreach and education, as well as coordination with waste haulers	Municipal leadership, public works department

Refer to these indicators from Sustainability Indicators Guide: Waste diversion rate; solid waste generated; residential and/or commercial recycling participation.

Energy strategy matrix

Issue	Strategy	Resources Needed to Implement			Leader(s)
		Cost	Staff	Complexity	
Reduce energy consumption and increase energy efficiency	Provide information or solicit financial resources for home and business **energy audits**	Low	Low	Low	Public works, community development, and building departments
	Develop **retrofit program** for existing buildings	Moderate	Low to moderate	Low	Public works, community development, and building departments
	Develop incentives or regulations for new buildings to meet recognized **green building standards**	Low	Low to moderate	Board/Council approval; potential political challenges	Building and community development departments
	Ensure that the municipal **energy code** is up to date and in alignment with state requirements; provide training to staff for implementation	Low	Low to moderate	Board/Council approval; potential political challenges	Building and community development departments
	Encourage replacement of obsolete, inefficient appliances with **energy efficient appliances** through third-party rebate programs	Low	Low	Low	Building and community development departments
	Participate in **energy efficiency programs** provided by utility companies and others	Low	Low	Low; not as useful if community participates in electricity aggregation	Building and community development departments
Increase the use of renewable energy sources	Pursue options for **renewable energy purchasing** through municipal aggregation	Low	Low	Low	Municipal leadership, finance department
	Create and adopt onsite **renewable energy generation** ordinances	None if done in-house; Low if consultant-led	Low if consultant-led; moderate if done in-house	Board/Council approval; potential political challenges	Building and community development departments
	Develop a **renewable energy demonstration project** on a municipal site	Moderate	Low to moderate	Initial cost may be high, but grants are available	Public works, community development, and building departments

Refer to these indicators from Sustainability Indicators Guide: Renewables in mix of energy supply; therm and kilowatt-hour of energy use per capita; energy use intensity.

Air and climate strategy matrix

Issue	Strategy	Resources Needed to Implement			Leader(s)
		Cost	Staff	Complexity	
Adapt to impacts of climate change	Adapt **building codes, stormwater/floodplain ordinances, zoning codes, and other standards** to account for future climate projections	Low if done in-house; moderate if consultant-led	Low if consultant-led; moderate if done in-house	May require adoption	Planning or zoning board, elected officials
	Conduct a **climate vulnerability assessment** to guide retrofits of existing facilities to be more resilient to climate impacts	Low to moderate cost	Moderate	Requires coordination among many departments and facility mangers	Community development and public works departments, elected officials
Improve outdoor air quality	Adopt an **anti-idling ordinance**	No cost	Low	Requires adoption	Community development and public works departments, elected officials
Improve indoor air quality	Require advanced **ventilation standards** for new facilities	No cost	Low	Requires adoption	Community development and building departments
	Provide or subsidize supplies to **test and monitor IAQ**	Low	Low	Requires outreach to make people aware of program	Municipal staff, IEPA, landlords, tenants, and property owners

See CMAP's Climate Adaptation Toolkit for further resources; Refer to this indicator from Sustainability Indicators Guide: Greenhouse gas emissions generated.

Education strategy matrix

Issue	Strategy	Resources Needed to Implement			Leader(s)
		Cost	Staff	Complexity	
Cultivate sustainability knowledge in municipal staff	Create an internal staff **"Green Team"** to shepherd plan implementation	None	Low to moderate	Low	Municipal leadership to establish team
	Provide sustainability-related **training and educational opportunities** to staff	Low	Low to moderate	Low	Municipal "Green Team"
Provide sustainability-related resources to the public	Create a **citizens advisory committee or environment commission** to advise on environmental issues	None	Low	Low	Municipal leadership to establish group, staff liaison
	Create a centralized **depot of sustainability-related information** that is readily accessible to the public	None; low if a website is created	Low	Low to moderate	Municipal "Green Team"
	Provide workshops, "green bag" events, and other educational opportunities for the public; launch **outreach campaigns** to promote awareness and action on specific sustainability topics, such as energy efficiency	Low	Low to moderate	Moderate; requires significant coordination	Municipal "Green Team"
	Develop and showcase **demonstration projects** related to sustainability objectives; provide interpretive signage to communicate sustainability benefits to the public	Varies	Varies	Moderate to high; requires significant coordination	Municipal "Green Team"
	Conduct a review of local **school curricula** to incorporate sustainability lessons when possible	Low	Low to moderate	Requires significant coordination between municipality and schools	Municipal "Green Team," school district(s)

Other Popular Topics

This section identifies a series of strategies for sustainability topics that communities have shown interest in (see Table 3). The right-hand column of the table identifies further resources for additional research on the topic. If the community at hand has interest in including one or more of these topics in its sustainability plan, it may be helpful to review other sustainability plans that have addressed the topic to gain a deeper understanding of it and brainstorm other potential strategy approaches.

Table 3. Strategy direction for other popular sustainability topics

Topic	Strategy	Learn More
Community Health and Wellness	Develop and promote health-related events and programs	Park Forest
	Utilize Health Impact Assessments for larger developments	Park Forest
	Promote healthy eating through programming and outreach	Elgin
Green Economy	Create a green business certification program	Park Forest, Oak Park River Forest
	Explore green skills vocational training opportunities	Illinois Green Economy Network, Elgin
	Encourage businesses to adopt green purchasing & practices	Park Forest, Lake County
	Attract and promote green businesses and jobs	Park Forest, Lake County, Elgin
Local Food Systems	Establish a community garden program or farmers market	Park Forest, Evanston
	Incorporate healthy eating and farm-to-school curriculum at every school	Oak Park River Forest
	Complete a community food assessment, inventorying local food resources and community access	Evanston
	Investigate the establishment of a food co-op	Park Forest, Evanston
	Promote local food activities as a productive transitional or permanent land activity	Lake County, CMAP Local Food Toolkit
Municipal Policies and Practices	Create an environmentally preferable purchasing policy and/or facility maintenance policy	Park Forest, Oak Park River Forest
	Conduct a fleet study to guide fleet purchase and operating decisions	Park Forest, Evanston
	Create a "green team" to guide plan implementation and incorporate implementation tasks into staff work plans	Park Forest, Niles
	Provide educational and training opportunities for staff	Park Forest, Niles

Setting Sustainability Targets

Measuring the environmental impacts of sustainability-related programs, policies, and practices is one of the hallmarks of sustainability planning. The CMAP Sustainability Indicators Guide, a companion guide created alongside this white paper, speaks broadly about the role of indicators, including baselines and targets, and directly about the methodologies for establishing such indicators in the course of a sustainability planning process. Defining sustainability indicators during the plan development stage can help to ensure that the indicators correspond to the specific strategies and objectives identified in the plan. The recommended sustainability indicators included in the Sustainability Indicators Guide are reflective of the strategies outlined in the strategy matrices above. Once implementation of the sustainability plan has begun, indicators should be used not only to assess progress, but also to inform whether any policy or programmatic changes are needed to better meet sustainability goals.

Implementation Guidance

Providing the right amount of guidance within the plan itself can kick-start implementation efforts and serve as a future resource as well. It is helpful to identify the leader(s) and potential partners for implementation, an estimate of when various strategies should be pursued, potential external funding sources (or whether an operating budget should be used), and further resources that can point staff in the right direction. Ground truthing this information with municipal or county staff is an essential part of the planning process to ensure that the correct leaders are identified and timeframes for implementation efforts are realistic. Aligning implementation priorities with the objectives of partner institutions and organizations can also be a key way to advance the goals of the plan. Ideally, such partners will be involved throughout the process and their interests reflected in the ultimate recommendations to give an avenue for continued collaboration.

Monitoring and Reporting

Continued communication, including monitoring progress made toward the plan's goals and reporting that progress back to the community, is a hallmark of sustainability planning. It helps to hold a municipality or county accountable to the plan's recommendations; inform residents, business owners, elected officials, and other stakeholders about sustainability-related activities and resources; bring recognition for the work being done to implement the plan; and provide a framework for the course corrections necessary to respond to changing conditions. Publishing a sustainability report card[8] or other formalized document to report progress on a regular basis (such as annually) is a great mechanism for communicating sustainability achievements and next steps. The report card can contain information about the previous year's activities and activities for the coming year, as well as quantitative indicator updates to measure progress toward targets. The document may be especially useful as an educational tool, to identify work plan items for municipal or county staff for the coming year, and/or to align budgetary decisions with plan implementation objectives.

[8] See PlanItGreen report card: https://sevengenerationsahead.org/sustainability/planit-green.

4. INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY INTO COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

Some communities may want to adopt sustainability goals, policies, and strategies as part of a comprehensive plan instead of creating a standalone sustainability plan. As the primary guiding document for a local government, a comprehensive plan articulates a collective vision for a community and identifies both short- and long-term actions to achieve goals. A community may elect to address sustainability within the framework of a comprehensive plan for a variety of reasons.

First, a community may choose to integrate sustainability into comprehensive planning for reasons of efficiency. If a community is already embarking on a comprehensive plan update, it may make sense to address sustainability issues within the existing planning effort. Beyond process efficiency, a community may face financial, staff, or other resource constraints that would make it difficult to carry out two full planning processes. A community also may prefer to consolidate planning recommendations into a single guiding document. When a community has multiple plans that address overlapping topics, it sometimes can be unclear how various plans relate to one another. In some cases, planning documents might even offer contradictory goals or strategies. Consolidating sustainability strategies with other broad planning recommendations can result in greater ease of implementation for public officials, planners, and other stakeholders.

Communities may also see conceptual advantages to embedding sustainability throughout a comprehensive plan. Treating sustainability as an overall theme can provide an overarching framework or lens to articulate environmentally-sensitive goals within the comprehensive plan. This can be particularly effective if the community is interested in tackling the three pillars of sustainability more comprehensively. In fact, many regional and local comprehensive plans use this conceptual approach.[9]

While integrating sustainability within a comprehensive plan can be beneficial for the reasons described above, there are also potential drawbacks to such an approach. Sustainability-related policies and recommendations may be limited in their level of detail since they will be presented alongside other broad comprehensive plan recommendations. Sustainability plans and comprehensive plans also differ in the way that they typically address long-term evaluation and monitoring. Sustainability plans have a strong emphasis on quantitative monitoring, and usually establish baselines and targets to assess progress made toward sustainability goals. Comprehensive plans commonly include implementation strategies to ensure a clear path forward for undertaking plan recommendations, but most do not include indicators for progress evaluation.

As a community decides how it will address sustainability, it should weigh these trade-offs based on its local capacity and context. The sections of this chapter provide guidance for communities seeking to build sustainability strategies into a comprehensive planning process.

9 See, for example, GO TO 2040, Fort Collins City Plan, San Diego Regional Comprehensive Plan, and the Philadelphia Comprehensive Plan.

Structuring Sustainability Recommendations within a Comprehensive Plan

Although specific strategies that comprise sustainability plans vary community by community, most sustainability plans share common overarching goals, such as reducing energy consumption or improving water quality. The sustainability-related recommendations included within a comprehensive plan, however, should be developed to fit within other priorities identified in the plan. Some micro-scale sustainability strategies, such as green building retrofits that are narrowly focused or very site-specific, may not be appropriate as comprehensive plan recommendations when considering the scale or level of detail given for other recommendations in the plan.

Table 4 cross-references common comprehensive plan chapters with the sustainability topics included in this white paper. Planners should refer to the pertinent strategy matrices included in Chapter 3 for potential strategy ideas that could be integrated into comprehensive plan recommendations.

The American Planning Association (APA) provides a scoring matrix for assessing how well a comprehensive plan addresses sustainability in its recommendations and engagement process. The matrix can be used during the plan development phase to provide additional ideas about specific sustainability strategies a community might adopt, and can also be used in the plan evaluation phase to gauge how well a plan has met sustainability goals.

Table 4. Cross-reference of sustainability and comprehensive plan topics

Typical Comprehensive Plan Chapters	Relevant Sustainability Topics
Community Development	Community Health and Wellness, Education, Local Food Systems
Economic Development	Land Use and Development, Green Economy
Image and Identity	Education, Municipal Policies and Practices
Land Use and Zoning	Land Use and Development, Transportation and Mobility
Housing	Land Use and Development, Energy
Natural Environment	Open Space and Ecosystems, Water, Waste, Energy, Air and Climate, Local Food Systems
Transportation	Transportation and Mobility, Land Use and Development

Incorporating Sustainability into Zoning Recommendations

Comprehensive plan recommendations often give insight as to how a community might update its zoning ordinance to best achieve the objectives set forth by the plan. A zoning ordinance provides the building blocks for comprehensive plan implementation by regulating fundamental aspects of land use and development standards, such as permitted land uses, bulk and yard standards, parking and landscaping requirements, and other aspects of the built environment. However, in many cases, traditional zoning regulations were not designed to accommodate sustainable land use and development practices, and antiquated ordinances have often become barriers to implementing sustainability strategies and encouraging reinvestment. Facilitating the use of certain sustainability practices, such as encouraging the use of native plantings, renewable energy systems, or rain barrels, may require communities to revisit their zoning ordinances.

There are many comprehensive plan recommendations relating to regulatory updates that can ultimately help to green a community's zoning code (see Table 5). These recommendations can be included specifically within the plan or as a corollary appendix, and may be adopted as part of a larger effort to update the community's zoning code or through a series of standalone ordinance amendments.[10]

10 Another code assessment resource, more specific to green building, may be found in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Sustainable Design and Green Building Toolkit (June 2010). Retrieved 2/22/15 from http://www.epa.gov/region4/recycle/green-building-toolkit.pdf.

Table 5. Green zoning recommendations

Comprehensive Plan Chapter	Potential Green Zoning Recommendations
Land Use and Zoning	Establish a mixed-use zoning district
	Permit a wide variety of home-based businesses
	Require conservation design for new developments
	Reduce parking requirements by revisiting minimum parking ratios and providing parking credits (i.e. for uses close to transit, public parking, on-street parking, etc.)
	Allow smaller lot sizes for more compact development
Housing	Allow a range of single- and multi-family housing units, including accessory dwelling units, to maintain housing diversity and affordability
	Support district heating and cooling systems
Economic Development	Require design features in commercial districts to enhance walkability, such as glass storefronts, parking in rear, limited curb cuts, and human-scale signage
	Create a fast track permit process to streamline the approval of green developments
Transportation and Mobility	Permit minimum densities to support transit near station areas and/or bus stops
	Update the subdivision ordinance to reduce maximum block lengths and require street sections that include bicycle facilities and sidewalks
	Require bicycle parking for certain uses
	Require fueling stations for alternative fuel vehicles
Natural Environment	Permit on-site renewable energy generation, such as rooftop solar panels, solar thermal systems, and wind turbines
	Require energy efficient/LED lighting and signage
	Establish lighting standards that limit light pollution
	Expand park dedication requirements to make sure that new residents have adequate access to open space
	Develop list of allowable or recommended plant species
	Expressly permit the use of green infrastructure and native plantings
	Ensure sufficient setbacks for landscape and buffer requirements, including riparian setbacks
	Protect sensitive aquifer areas through land use restrictions
	Protect natural areas in conservation zoning districts or overlays
Image and Identity	*(not applicable, recommendations in this chapter typically do not pertain to private property)*
Community Development	Permit urban agriculture and community gardens
	Utilize Health Impact Assessments for larger developments

After the plan has been adopted, the implementation phase begins. Implementing a sustainability plan requires effort and continual course corrections based on ever-changing community conditions and budgetary and political realities, and assessment of the effectiveness of previous sustainability efforts. City and village governments often have the most capacity to influence sustainability within a community. However, when sustainability is viewed as "extracurricular" by elected leadership and no mandate is given to prioritize sustainability plan implementation efforts, the municipality's ability to move forward with implementation may be severely hampered. For this reason and many others, ensuring that municipal staff and elected officials are on board from the beginning of the plan development process is critical.

Establishing a municipal sustainability coordinator and/or green team comprised of key staff can greatly help to shepherd plan implementation, but implementation tasks need to infiltrate all departments and areas of municipal responsibility to be effective. As mentioned in the public engagement chapter, citizen advisory committees and focus groups can also help municipal governments with implementing sustainability priorities, and can support outreach to the broader community.

The involvement of community institutions can serve to further expand the reach of plan implementation. Collaboration across institutions within a community can lead to idea sharing, efficiencies with implementation, and the motivation that comes with working together toward achieving common goals. Providing opportunities for institutional leaders to share successes, discuss collaborative projects and grant opportunities, and compare notes on projects is invaluable. Taking institutional collaboration to the level of developing an organizational and financial infrastructure to support the long-term implementation of a sustainability plan increases "skin in the game" and the potential for achieving sustainability goals.

Periodic Plan Update

All sustainability plans should be revisited and revised regularly (every five years at a minimum) based on new community conditions, successes or failures with implementation, and the nature of a changing world. Measuring progress against key indicators can help inform whether new strategies should be considered as a revision or complement to the existing plan. Indicators will also need to be revisited as communities determine which indicators are most accessible and helpful in measuring sustainability success. An annual priority implementation work plan should be developed within the context of the full plan, and can be determined by available resources, scores on key indicators, gaps in implementation, and new opportunities to build on successes, create collaboration, and acquire new resources.

Ongoing Communication

If key stakeholders and the community at-large are not aware of progress made toward the goals of the community's sustainability plan, they will lack the ability to engage in implementation. Communication through a periodic community "report card," newsletters, website, social media, community board presentations, and institutional leaders and community stakeholder forums provide opportunities for ongoing communication and engagement. Regular communication helps to build the case for budgetary, policy, and strategy decisions – and the support needed to influence political will on any given issue. Educational campaigns on particular issues also serve to generate interest and engagement, which can support specific goal attainment.

Common Challenges and Lessons Learned

Guiding a range of stakeholders toward a common goal is never easy, particularly with competing pressures for time, money, and influence. Players often change, and successful projects will need to figure out ways to integrate new players and retain institutional history and momentum. Plan development and implementation processes can bog down when institutions do not feel recognized for their individual efforts, and when they don't perceive the value in participating. Both of these issues need constant attention, which requires assuming that people regularly need to be educated about the issue and its return on investment related to environmental, economic, and social goals. Successful projects will ensure that credit is shared, and that institutions are affirmed, included, and challenged to achieve a broader community goal. To achieve "whole community" sustainability, it is important to make sure that a project is not perceived to belong to one institution. The inability to generate regular funding or staffing to sustain a plan development and implementation project will easily thwart success. Lastly, projects will fail once they lose relevancy – which underscores the importance of bringing in new people, engaging top down and bottom up leaders and institutions, and infusing new ideas, funding, and strategies into the effort.

Municipalities with sustainability plan

Algonquin	Naperville
Aurora	Niles
Batavia	Normal
Buffalo Grove	Northbrook
Chicago	Oak Park
Chicago Heights	Orland Park
Elburn	Oswego
Elgin	Park Forest
Evanston	Peotone
Glencoe	River Forest
Glenview	Robbins
Hainesville	Round Lake
Highland Park	Schaumburg
Hoffman Estates	Sleep Hollow
Homer Glen	South Chicago Heights
La Grange Park	St. Charles
Lake County	University Park
Lombard	Wheaton
Mettawa	Wheeling
Millbrook	Winnetka
Monee	Woodstock
Montgomery	

Source: Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, "The Greenest Region Compact: Opportunities and Impact" report