SUSTAINABILITY IN COMPREHENSIVE PLANS WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Monday, December 5, 2016

Attendance:

The workshop was attended by approximately 50 planners from across the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) region and beyond, speakers, and COG staff.

Opening Remarks

Stephen Walz (Council of Governments)

COG's environmental and planning programs collaborate on issues such as sustainable communities, smart growth, linking land use and transportation planning, renewable energy, and opportunities to reduce greenhouse gases in the built environment. COG is revising its Climate & Energy Action Plan, which contains goals and targets on crossover issues such as multi-modal transportation planning, concentrating development in Activity Centers, incentivizing green buildings, and preserving green space.

Paul DesJardin (Council of Governments)

Region Forward is COG's vision for a more prosperous, accessible, livable, and sustainable metropolitan Washington. The vision includes voluntary goals and targets for the following topics: land use, transportation, environment, climate & energy, economic, housing, health, education, and public safety. Accessibility targets involve increasing the square footage of new commercial construction and new households in Activity Centers, increasing affordable housing and transit access in Activity Centers. Sustainability targets include green building design standards and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

COG conducted a study of opportunities in Activity Centers called Place + Opportunity. The report identified the following Activity Center place typologies: Urban centers, Dense Mixed-Use Centers, Suburban Multi-Use Centers, Close-In & Urbanizing Centers, Revitalizing Urban Centers, and Satellite Cities. Opportunity types include Transforming, Transitioning, Connected Core, and Stable. The report contains strategies and tools to lead to a more sustainable region.

Expert Guidance and Tools

David Rouse (American Planning Association):

Mr. Rouse presented the APA's Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places, which aims to help planners and communities reach their full sustainable potential. Mr. Rouse noted that the plan is suitable for all type of communities, from the small town of Savona, NY, with a population of 822, to large cities and regions, such as Seattle, Washington, and the Greater Memphis Region in Tennessee. Mr. Rouse explained the Sustaining Places *Principles,* (Livable Built Environment, Harmony with Nature, Resilient Economy, Healthy Community, Responsible Regionalism), the recommended planning *Processes* (Authentic Participation, Accountable Implementation) that

communities should take to prepare for and implement the comprehensive plan, how the *Attributes* (Consistent Content, Coordinated Characteristics) shape the content and characteristics of the plan, and the detailed *Best Practices* that guide all of the characteristics above.

Lacey Shaver (Sustainable Tools for Accessing and Rating Communities "*STAR*"):

Ms. Shaver noted that the STAR (Sustainable Tools for Accessing and Rating) Community Rating System is intended to be the "operations manual" for the urban sustainability movement. The system provides a national standard for local actions that should be aspired for and enacted to help communities innovate to create positive impacts. The STAR system has seven different categories, with 6-7 subcategories, that are summed to provide a score that illustrates how "sustainable" the community is. The seven categories include: 1) Built Environment, 2) Climate & Energy, 3) Economy & Jobs, 4) Education, Arts, & Community, 5) Equity & Empowerment, 6) Health & Safety, and 7) Natural Systems.

Questions:

A. *How do these two systems interact with each other?*

Mr. Rouse: The APA system applies to comprehensive plans while STAR Community is a broad sustainability system that applies to the whole community.

Ms. Shaver: The STAR system is used for performance management and to measure communities' progress.

B. *How can planners expect to sequence the two frameworks?*

Ms. Shaver: Planners should use the STAR certification before using APA's Sustaining Places. This will allow the planner(s) to be able to use STAR as a baseline.

Mr. Rouse: You can do both plans simultaneously, or each individually. It is better to do the STAR comprehensive plan first though, but both systems are compatible with each other.

C. *Climate Change is the dominant issue facing communities today and in the future. Why not use this as a guiding principle and make it the central issue for planners to address?*

Ms. Shaver: The STAR system does focus broadly on climate and energy, but municipalities must prioritize other issues as well as climate change. There are other issues that the communities care about now, and need to be addressed as well.

Mr. Rouse: I agree that it's an important issue that needs addressing, and one that the APA standards address without being obvious. The APA standards allowed a conservative community in North Carolina to address climate change without bringing it up to central focus, which allows for these issues to be addressed without specifically stating that they are.

Montgomery County: We want to frame our plan not as a climate only plan, but an overall broad plan that addresses more than just 'green' issues.

Mr. Rouse: It's good to address quality of life, economic equality, and green issues together.

D. *How does the APA system balance a community's desire to attract young workers with the need to keep aging and current residents in place?*

Mr. Rouse: You cannot address these issues with tax incentives, you need to address quality of life issues, which will attract young workers, as well as making the community attractive to current residents to not move away. Communities will need different solutions since no jurisdiction will have the same issues and conditions.

E. *The APA guidance applies to small and large communities. How does STAR address large and small communities?*

Ms. Shaver: STAR works with urban and rural, with a tilt to a more urban focus. It works with small communities, as small as 5,000 residents, to as big as Houston, Texas. Sometimes smaller communities have an easier time with data gathering since they know exactly where to find the information needed.

Mr. Rouse: We found small and mid-sized communities benefited the most from APA system since they previously did not have the resources to address this, with APA providing the opportunities.

Local Roundtable Helpdesk

Dawn Hawkins-Nixon, Prince George's County Department of Environmental Protection

Ms. Hawkins-Nixon spoke about the Natural Environment Element of Prince George's County Plan 2035. Prince George's County experiences sea level rise and coastal flooding. The Natural Environment Element spurred a coastal analysis study. The Element also addresses forest and tree canopy, water quality, and green buildings.

Tanya Stern, District of Columbia's Office of Planning

Ms. Stern spoke of the Washington D.C. *Comprehensive Plan* for a 20-year vision for the District's future planning and development. The Comprehensive Plan focuses on a wide variety of planning topics, ranging from land use, economic development, housing, environmental protection, historic preservation, and transportation. The D.C. Office of Planning updated the plan to ensure that the city's projected growth will evolve in line with the city's own future vision. In putting together the groundbreaking Resilience element, the Office of Planning gathered their idea of the city's future vision through an advisory workgroup and public outreach.

Dyan Backe, City of Gaithersburg

Ms. Backe presented the City of Gaithersburg's *Environment and Sustainability Master Plan*. Ms. Backe explained the implementation strategies that the city used to fulfill their Sustainability Master Plan. The key strategies that the City of Gaithersburg targeted were, 1) establishment of policies or guidance's by City officials to ensure a *Policy Action*, 2) *Code and/or Regulatory Action* that must be adhered to, 3) dedication funding of a specific project or program that will accomplish the plans recommendations in a *Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and/or Budget*, 4) dedicate resources to allow *City Staff* the opportunity to accomplish the plans goals, 5) ensure *Interagency Cooperation* among public and quasi-public organizations, 6) explore opportunities available in *Public-Private Partnerships*, and 7) encourage *Private Involvement and Action* from local residents and organizations.

Tina Schneider, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission - Montgomery County used STAR and EcoDistricts in forming the Bethesda Sector Plan. This was the first time a master plan incorporated metrics such as miles of bike lanes. Ms. Schneider shared that it was crucial to communicate to policymakers that sustainability is broader than "hugging trees" – it is a way to address economic, social, and environmental equity for all residents.

Planners had to overcome challenges to include energy in the master plan since it is usually considered a Department of Permitting responsibility. The plan requires Bethesda development to maintain a LEED silver certification at minimum. The master plan lists the benefits of reaching this certification through economic examples.

Radhika Mohan, City of Alexandria explained that the city's Eisenhower West small area plan has a broad reach and allows for innovative approaches. The plan includes 900 ft2 of new development. The plan won an APA excellence of planning award, and excellence in planning award for Virginia.

The 25-year growth plan is meant to transform the area into a transit oriented development centered around the metro station. The plan identifies a neighborhood innovation district, neighborhoods for mixed residential and industrial zoning, and a making spaces district. The plan includes revitalizing Backlick-run stream to help manage storm water naturally, and trails to connect to the region. Another part of the plan involves develop a waste-to-energy facility. The plan includes map of potential distributed energy resources.

Alexandria's Eco-city charter is central to driving its sustainability mission. It drives multiple interdependent small area plans throughout the city.

Questions

A. *The Eisenhower West plan is a perfect example of integrating sustainability into a master plan. What were the challenges in mixing these plans?*

Ms. Mohan: It was not as challenging as people might believe. It was not set out as a sustainability plan, but it came about as a result of thinking about how the community should be developed. We believed new development should include District heating and cooling. There was no real pushback from community or city with plan.

B. *How was the D.C. Office of Planning able to merge sustainability and resiliency into their plans?*

Ms. Stern: We brought stakeholders together to see how they think DC should bring resiliency and sustainability into city plan. We needed to do a lot of public education to get the public up to speed with everything that has been happening thus far.

C. *Comment: We need to put CO2 emissions and Climate Change front and center. We need more progress on our least sustainable areas (i.e. single family detached areas, unwalkable areas.) It is a challenge to bring this topic up since it involves potentially changing zoning to allow for more mixed-use, dense development but it is hard to address VMT [vehicle miles traveled] without addressing density at the same time.*

Ms. Rouse: Agrees with what the statement. The City of Austin's plan did merge land-use and transportation element of the plan together to attempt to address this issue. This needs a follow up conversation.

Ms. Schneider: Montgomery County has been looking for Beyond TOD to reach out to suburban communities and attempt to address this. We think that we should attempt to bring back neighborhood small grocery stores for example to make these areas less auto dependent.

D. *Comment: We need to reframe the aging in place conversation. We do not need older residents living alone in four-bedroom homes. Instead, we need a range of housing choices that fits the current needs of an older resident.*

Best Practices from Other Regions

Christina Day – Plano, Texas

Ms. Day reviewed the City of Plano, Texas' comprehensive plan. She noted key details about the City of Plano, such as its plateauing population growth, aging population, and increasing diversity. The key detail about the city is its status as a net employment importer, with roughly 218,000 employees currently working in the city, and another 30,000 in the pipeline. These details presented the city with new challenges that it hadn't faced before. Planners now must adapt to the fact that Plano is a mature city, and that needs to address transportation issues from its daily employee migration, the transit and medical needs of an aging population, and develop ways to attract and retain younger residents, while addressing environmental, social, and economic concerns. The city used the STAR system, and performed social outreach sessions over a 26-month period to gather information to ensure that any plan would meet the needs of the city. The developed plan received a 4-Star score from the STAR system.

A. *How do you reach people in the community that do not have internet access?*

Ms. Day: We provide a hard copy if they are willing to come into the planning office, and libraries allow free internet access.

B. *Are there any challenges or advice for best practices?*

Ms. Day: The planning and zoning commission served as an advisory committee. The plans brought about several zoning cases for multifamily development. Residents attacked the sustainability plan in response to the zoning board's decisions. This made it apparent that a resident advisory committee would have been of great help to calm the residents' concerns.

Jeremy Sharp – City of Norfolk

Mr. Sharp discussed the City of Norfolk's Vision 2100 strategy. Vision 2100 presents the city's strategy for addressing seal level rise in the long-term by focusing on the challenges and the opportunities of the present. It is considered a "Blueprint for aligning decision-making today with the needs of tomorrow". The vision's primary objective was to focus on land use, but the city also looked at economic and social considerations. Mr. Sharp explained how sea level rise is the most pressing issue for the City of Norfolk, due to the city's status of being at sea level, and having valuable assets located in 2-3 feet flood zones. Vision 2100 mapped the city's assets, showing their location in

addition to the value, and used this to analyze the risks expected from sea level rise and flooding. The vision created four district types, based on the flooding risks and the present/future value of the districts assets called Enhancing Economic Engines, Adapting to Rising Waters, Designing New Urban Centers, Establishing Neighborhoods of the Future. These districts help the city determine what course of action needs to be taken to preserve the area's assets, and how the planning should be done for future development.

A. *How did the meeting the City of Norfolk had with the Rockefeller Family Foundation help in developing the Vision 2100?*

Mr. Sharp: The conversation with Rockefeller foundation lead to Vision 2100 to identify ways of dealing with shocks and stressors of climate change, i.e. hurricanes and sea level rise. Residents refused to accept that they live in at-risk locations. The Rockefeller discussion helped to change that conversation into a positive mindset to focus on areas that can drive development while bringing the at-risk neighborhoods along with their growth. We began focusing on the positives for more successful ideas and development rather than the focusing on the negatives.

B. *How did you interact with federal government, since Norfolk has a large U.S. Navy presence?*

Mr. Sharp: We worked with the Army Corps and DOD to help figure out large-scale engineering challenges, and on how to understand risks while accepting that the DOD is not planning to move out of the city. Both agencies are on board with Vision 2100. Going forward they are working on how to address housing concerns from flooding at a regional level.

David Rouse – Wrap-up remarks

The term sustainability has been brought up a lot, is it a good word? It doesn't matter what the word is as long as the residents understand what we are addressing and what needs to be done. APA is open to building local partnerships and being a resource for communities addressing sustainability.