

# **Regional Action Plan to Implement *Region Forward* and Develop Priorities for Complete Communities**

## **Purpose**

This *Region Forward* work plan provides a series of integral next steps COG will undertake to implement *Region Forward* and guide the transformation of regional centers into Complete Communities.

## **Background**

### **HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant**

For the first time, the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant process galvanized local governments and multi-stakeholder groups to identify a clear regional process for implementing *Region Forward*. At the heart of this proposal, the region and its stakeholder groups sought to create a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development by embracing and promoting Complete Communities for regionally identified centers and prioritizing regional infrastructure investments and actions for housing, transportation and the environment. In the absence of a \$5 million grant from HUD, this action plan proposes to create a strategic regional plan through a series of integral projects necessary to implement *Region Forward* and guide the transformation of regional centers into Complete Communities.

### ***Region Forward***

In 2010 the COG Board of Directors and all 21 of COG's member jurisdictions approved and endorsed the region's first comprehensive vision framework, *Region Forward: A Comprehensive Guide for Regional Planning*, marking a historic first-step for the National Capital Region. *Region Forward's* vision reflects shared regional goals, identifies targets to measure regional progress, and includes a compact for addressing common regional goals. The regional vision identifies critical next steps that will require a new approach to regional planning and prioritization. The first next step includes completing a baseline analysis for the metrics and indicators used as part of *Region Forward's* targets and indicators to help the region measure progress toward its regional goals. Additional next steps include launching a *Region Forward* website, updating MWCOC's Regional Activity Centers, preparing a focused strategy toolbox to prioritize specific local and regional actions to implement *Region Forward* and publishing progress reports in combination with a public survey to understand progress towards regional goals.

## Future Regional Planning and the Federal Government

HUD has indicated applicant regions will be scored for Preferred Sustainability Status, and thus qualify for benefits such as additional capacity building resources and potential points for future funding opportunities managed by federal agencies such as HUD, DOT, and EPA. HUD has indicated that a second competitive round of funding for regional planning grants will be available in the future; however, as of the date of this publication, appropriations have not been approved by Congress.

## Region Forward's Chronological Implementation Projects

The next steps listed below each have an integral role for implementing a strategic regional planning process around *Region Forward*.

Plan Timeline	2010			2011										2012				
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
RF 1 Create Regional Sustainability Coalition	→																	
RF 2 Launch Media and Outreach Campaign	→																	
RF 3 Performance Analysis	→																	
RF 4 Create Complete Communities					→													
RF 5 Complete Communities Implementation Strategies																	→	

### Region Forward Project 1: Create New Regional Sustainability Coalition

Timeframe: November 2010 – March 2011

Budget: \$35,000

#### Primary Goals:

- 1) Foster partnerships to implement *Region Forward* and develop a regional sustainability coalition comprised of multijurisdictional and multi-sector stakeholders to transform regional activity centers into Complete Communities
- 2) Enhance future comprehensive regional planning coordination and performance monitoring
- 3) Improve regional integration of land-use, housing, environmental, transportation, and equitable development planning and decisions

COG Staff will reengage stakeholders that helped shape *Region Forward* and the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant to foster new partnerships that advance the implementation of *Region Forward*. The HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grant process engaged new and existing regional stakeholders committed to completing a number of implementation projects associated with *Region Forward*. COG Staff will continue to work with many of these stakeholders and examine which projects can still be completed and supported through alternative resources.

COG Staff proposes to expand cross-cutting regional policy capacity and coordination to advise the COG Board on future *Region Forward* implementation projects and initiatives. This new regional sustainability coalition will be shaped through the reorganization of the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee (MDPC) with the purpose to improve regional coordination of housing, land use, transportation, environmental, and economic issues at the regional level and undertake future comprehensive regional planning and implementation initiatives recommended in *Region Forward*.

This project is consistent with COG Board Resolution R9-10 recommending enhancing the advisory capacity of MDPC by creating multi-sector and multijurisdictional partnerships to implement *Region Forward*.

COG staff recommends examining best practices locally and in other regions to create a successful multi-sector and multijurisdictional coalition to implement and oversee future integrated regional planning activities. This work would take three or four months and COG staff would submit recommendations to the COG Board in February 2011 for an enhanced coalition charged with overseeing the implementation of *Region Forward* and developing recommendations for guiding the transformation of Regional Activity Centers into Complete Communities. This new sustainability coalition will be supported through supporting subcommittees such as the Planning Directors Technical Advisory Committee and the Housing Directors Advisory Committee.

## ***Region Forward* Project 2: Launch Media and Outreach Campaign**

**Timeframe: November 2010 – Ongoing**

**Budget: \$ 100,000**

### **Primary Goals:**

- 1) Generate additional public awareness and support for *Region Forward***
- 2) Mobilize residents to participate in the implementation of *Region Forward* and create long-term capacity for guiding the transformation of regional centers into Complete Communities**

## **Public Awareness**

Generating public awareness and support for *Region Forward* is one of our most important tasks for sustaining momentum towards achieving our regional vision. To achieve this goal, COG is officially launching a new web site, [www.RegionForward.org](http://www.RegionForward.org) on November 10<sup>th</sup>. The website is being promoted through advertising, contests, and outreach campaigns to target audiences, including young adults and students. COG will support both efforts with the use of social media outlets and traditional media.

During November and early December, COG will advertise the web site by using strategically placed ads in Metrorail stations, along with print ads and coverage on radio and TV talk shows. A raffle for an iPad is expected to attract interest in the site, along with a series of guest bloggers and the opportunity for residents to submit their own creative pieces – such as poster art, poetry or “raps” – that promote *Region Forward*. These outreach efforts will continue on a regular basis as an integral part of a strategic regional planning process to implement *Region Forward* and guide the transformation of regional centers into Complete Communities.

## **Public Engagement**

Engage residents and community groups by creating new forums for public participation that inform regional policies designed to transform regional centers into Complete Communities. This public engagement will occur during the process of either defining Complete Communities or examining action strategies to support Complete Communities. Regional partners, COG and a new sustainability coalition will launch a more effective network of civic and community engagement around sustainability by refocusing existing groups, stakeholders, and partners around a regional equity network focusing on implementing *Region Forward* and creating guide the transformation of regional centers into Complete Communities.

## ***Region Forward* Project 3: *Region Forward* Performance Analysis**

**Timeframe: November 2010 – May 2011**

**Budget: \$ 175,000**

### **Primary Goals:**

- 1) Establish a comprehensive regional performance analysis to measure periodic progress towards the regional goals and targets adopted in *Region Forward***
- 2) Capitalize on future opportunities and partnerships to conduct additional assessment work that could include climate change, stormwater, human health, access to food and affordable housing**

COG and regional partners will prepare a performance analysis which will examine the metrics for *Region Forward's* targets and indicators. This analysis will serve as the first comprehensive regional performance assessment demonstrating how close our region is to meeting our common goals and targets adopted in *Region Forward*. This analysis will serve as a basis for

measuring progress when these metrics and indicators are evaluated comprehensively every 2-3 years.

In COG's grant proposal for the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, staff proposed including additional analysis work in the areas of health, climate, the environment, and green infrastructure. At this time COG staff will examine additional opportunities for analysis work that could potentially include climate change, stormwater, human health, access to food, and affordable housing. At the time of this publication, only one of these additional analysis projects has secured funding. This includes the climate change analysis work awarded to COG through a technical assistance grant by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Smart Growth Office.

On October 21, 2010 EPA announced that the metropolitan Washington region is one of eight regions nationwide that will receive technical assistance from the agency to promote sustainability growth and development issues. COG's winning submission was largely based on *Region Forward* and the *National Capital Region Climate Change Report*.

EPA will assist COG and its members integrate climate change adaptation in local and regional planning by 1) assessing climate change risks to the region, 2) identifying smart growth strategies that will improve the region's capacity to adapt to climate change, and 3) facilitating the sharing of those strategies among local decision-makers.

Health, Food access and affordable housing are also key new metrics for assessing quality of life and establishing benchmarks for measuring local and regional progress towards creating Complete Communities. Major programmatic research in this area includes a detailed analysis of the region's affordable housing stock, a regional health indicators baseline assessment, and a green infrastructure inventory.

## ***Region Forward* Project 4: Complete Communities Identification and Prioritization**

**Timeframe: April 2011 – April/May 2012**

**Budget: \$200,000**

### **Primary Goals:**

- 1) Define new or existing regional centers for targeted growth using a broader set of attributes such as quality of life and economic advancement opportunities, environmental infrastructure, transportation and housing choices**
- 2) Leverage and maximize investments by positioning these centers and priority places for competitive funding opportunities**

Based on the Complete Communities concept incorporated into the HUD Regional Planning Grant, the planning process to update the Regional Activity Centers update will focus on a

broader set of attributes that make places more sustainable and complete. This process will seek to take COG's Regional Activity Centers to the next level by beginning to prioritize local needs in regional centers that contribute to a regional issue. The process will identify current and future regional centers and determine specific elements such as affordable housing, transit, or green infrastructure needed to transform regional centers into Complete Communities.

The Complete Communities concept is an evolution of COG's Regional Activity Centers, which were defined mostly by employment forecasts. Complete Communities will be characterized as mixed-use, compact and walkable centers of activity. They will welcome people from diverse backgrounds and incomes by providing a variety of places to work and live, including affordable housing, and convenient access to good jobs, multi-modal transportation options, educational and social services, clean water and air, recreation and entertainment, green space, and healthy local food.

Complete Communities will concentrate growth in order to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, auto dependency, and reduce household expenses on transportation and energy bills. Recognizing the diversity of the region, each Complete Community will be different, but as a transcending theme, all Complete Communities are ideal places for growing up, and growing old.

### **Major Milestones Currently under Consideration for Updating MWCOG Regional Centers**

- Examine Regional Centers Best Practices from other regions, including how centers are defined and implementation programs supporting regional centers.

#### **Complete Communities Definition**

- Define Potential Goals for using our Regional Activity Centers
- Examine *Region Forward's* Goals and Targets to understand how to apply them to define RACs and support RAC
- Examine locally adopted centers in Comprehensive Plans
- Develop new criteria and/or a menu of options for designating RAC/Complete Communities
- Examine Center Geographies

#### **Complete Communities Prioritization**

- Examine Existing or Missing Center Attributes needed to Enhance/Transform Centers into Complete Communities
- Identify Common Missing Elements in Centers Across the Region to Define Shared Regional Priorities
- Examine how regional programs can support local and regional growth policies in regionally identified centers

## ***Region Forward* Project 5: Complete Communities Implementation Actions and Programs**

**Timeframe: January 2012 – Winter/Spring 2012**

**Budget: \$75,000**

### **Primary Goals:**

- 1) Prepare a strategy toolbox for transforming regional centers into Complete Communities**
- 2) Identify programs such as the Transportation/Land-Use Connection (TLC) Program or others that have the ability to support the transformation of regional centers into Complete Communities**

Prepare a strategy toolbox and identify programs to support the transformation of regional centers into Complete Communities. The strategies and programs identified to support Complete Communities will be geared towards local governments, nonprofits, businesses, and other regional stakeholders to ensure maximum regional collaboration. This toolbox will include missing elements and recommendations common in many of the region's centers in order to make them Complete Communities and meet *Region Forward's* vision. The toolbox will populate the common needs for centers in areas of housing, transportation and the environment to create focused strategies based on these common needs. These strategies will be reviewed and vetted by several entities, including local governments, COG's technical and policy committees, region's new sustainability coalition and other regional leadership groups in order to solicit the maximum amount of feedback.

## Region Forward Project Staffing

This proposed work program builds on the COG-wide interdepartmental / interdisciplinary staffing proposed in the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant application. The graphic below highlights the key staff from each COG department as well as their program areas of expertise in supporting *Region Forward* / Complete Communities implementation.

