

What: The Purpose of Grant Program

Congress authorized the multi-agency Sustainable Communities Initiative to improve regional planning efforts that integrate housing and transportation decisions, and increase the capacity to improve land use and zoning. As part of this initiative, grants of up to \$5,000,000 are available for large metropolitan areas, such as the National Capital Region, to help complete a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. The grant program is highly competitive. It is likely that there will be many more metropolitan areas applying for grants than there are funds available.

There are two important requirements for the grant program. First, the application requires the formation of a multi-jurisdictional consortium including the COG, MPO, local jurisdictions representing at least 50 percent of the metropolitan area population, and at least one non-profit or educational institution to administer the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. Second, the consortium must provide a minimum of a 20 percent funding match in the form of cash or in-kind contributions.

A Regional Plan for Sustainable Development is a regional planning effort that integrates housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation, and infrastructure investments in a manner that empowers jurisdictions to consider the interdependent challenges of: (1) economic competitiveness and revitalization; (2) social equity, inclusion, and access to opportunity; (3) energy use and climate change; and (4) public health and environmental impact. The Regional Plan will be created with the purpose of guiding regional and local decision making to allocate more efficient use of limited infrastructure resources, enhance the quality of life and support the economic competitiveness of the region.

Why: The Benefits of Grant Program:

Federal funding to complete a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development that implements the *Region Forward* is anticipated to have the following benefits:

Uniting the Region by Planning and Allocating Resources More Efficiently

Administrative silos, redundant processes, and political challenges too often prevent the region from reaching its full potential –a potential that can only be achieved through collaboration and cooperation. Regional planning is both the forum and the tool for uniting diverse interests in the common pursuit of improved quality of life and economic competitiveness. To be competitive at the national level for scarce federal resources and private sector investment, the region must think and act strategically in how it creates first class infrastructure and communities that attract high-paying jobs and new residents.

The federal, multi-agency Sustainable Communities Initiative has recognized this fact. The Initiative has noted that there are clear opportunities to make major efficiency gains through improved regional planning and coordination. For this reason, the Initiative made the regional planning grants available to encourage coordinated regional planning efforts.

These efficiency gains are needed now more than ever. This region, like many others, has suffered from the current economic recession. High rates of foreclosures and unemployment are overburdening local governments in a period of sharp declines in local revenues. In an environment of scarce funding, public

agencies throughout the region are attempting to apply creative solutions that make the most efficient use of public dollars and still improve the region's quality of life.

Healthy Communities, Improved Economies, and Quality of Life

Where you live defines how you live. Access to opportunities- fresh food, public transit, education, affordable housing, jobs, and recreation- all the things that define one's quality of life, differ dramatically by community and neighborhood. These factors dramatically affect human health and quality of life. The metropolitan Washington region's economy ranks 5th nationally and yet, we have significant socioeconomic disparities that cut across jurisdictional boundaries. With the region's population is projected to grow exponentially over the next 20 years, we can and must do better. Without a strategic regional plan for sustainable development, gaps among the haves and the have-nots will continue to widen resulting in ongoing public health, economic and social impacts affecting our residents' quality of life.

Building a Sustainable Future and Resilient Energy Economy

The coming decades will continue to be a time of uncertainty with dramatic changes in the environment and the cost of energy. Energy, climate, and environmental concerns are already having profound effects on our region. The National Capital Region is a growing region, which recognizes its role in transitioning our built environment and scaling new reliable low-carbon energy alternatives to build a sustainable future. By planning and channeling future growth and development into sustainable centers and corridors, improving infrastructure, and improving housing, zoning, development and building codes, the National Capital Region can reduce carbon emissions and dependence on imported fuels, improve water and air quality, and maintain land available for agriculture, recreation, and sensitive environmental needs.

Preferred Sustainability Status and Eligibility for Future Funds

All applicants achieving a specified threshold score in their submission for the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program will qualify for Preferred Sustainability Status, which signifies that the region is ready to advance planning that prioritizes sustainability and inclusion as core outcomes of community development. Applicants will qualify for a broad spectrum of benefits, including access to capacity building resources, and secure potential points in a number of funding opportunities managed by other federal agencies such as HUD, DOT, and EPA. Applicants receiving the Preferred Sustainability Status that do not receive funds in this funding round will be able to preserve certain aspects of their application for next year's competition.

How: The National Capital Region's Grant Application

In many ways, the timing could not be better. The National Capital Region has just finished a regional goal setting process to articulate accessibility, livability, sustainability, and prosperity targets as part of *Region Forward: A Comprehensive Guide for Regional Planning*. *Region Forward's* recommended next steps include additional regional planning and consensus building that can be achieved through HUD's Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant requirements.

If successful in its application, a consortium of local governments, nonprofits, educational institutions, foundations, public authorities, business leadership groups, and other key stakeholders headed by the

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments will use the funds to create a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development that implements the next steps identified in *Region Forward: A Comprehensive Guide for Regional Planning*. This Regional Plan for Sustainable Development will build on the work already completed as part of *Region Forward*. The primary framework for implementing *Region Forward* is to develop complete communities across the region through sustainable centers and corridors.

These sustainable centers and corridors will emulate the successful transit oriented developments in the region. They will take the activity centers identified in the *Region Forward* to the next level by enhancing existing centers and creating new ones. They will be strategically located, planned and developed at the regional level to reduce economic disparities and bring prosperity to diverse areas of the region.

Each sustainable center and corridor will be a complete community that meets livability goals by supporting affordable housing, job creation, active lifestyles, sustainable development, and transportation access. Each will be planned and developed in a way that supports and values the existing community context and the variety and complexity of the Greater Washington Region. This will be accomplished through extensive public outreach and facilitation of alliances between regional and local interests.

The Regional Plan for Sustainable Development will serve as a guide for local, regional, and state governmental policies and investments that will integrate existing or emergent land use plans, such as consolidated plans; asset management plans; long range transportation plans, sewer, water, storm water, coastal protection, and air and water quality plans; open space plans; food production and distribution plans; environmental conservation elements, pre-disaster mitigation plans; climate change impact assessments; energy reduction strategies; economic development plans; and long-range housing plans. Integrated plan elements will include:

- *A regional housing plan* that addresses the full range of existing and projected housing need that are affordable to all ranges of family income. It will assess impediments to fair housing choice and link transportation, employment, and housing resources in order to promote fair housing and affordable housing in high opportunity areas, and adhere to and promote fair housing law including ensuring maximum choice in housing without discrimination. Efforts will be focused on sustainable centers and corridors as areas of high opportunity that provide employment, educational, recreational, and service opportunities in the area or that are accessible via public transportation systems.
- *A regional transportation plan* that addresses the development of transportation networks tied to sustainable centers and corridors. The plan will address using sustainable centers and corridors to expand transportation choices, including quality bus service, street cars, light rail, regional rail, ridesharing, express bus lanes, shuttle services, complete streets, bicycle and pedestrian pathways, and programs that offer alternatives to driving alone, such as rideshare or public transit incentives. The transportation plan will address aligning and prioritizing needed regional investments that support sustainable centers and corridors in conjunction with the Consolidated Long Range Plan and Transportation Improvement Program. The plan will address how future transportation infrastructure should be designed to ensure improved air quality, reduced per capita greenhouse gas and particulate emissions, reduced travel times, greater transit supportive development (incorporating, to the degree possible, the full range of housing affordable to all ranges of family income), reduced runoff from roads, improved service for historically marginalized populations, viable alternatives to automobile ownership, and access

for the elderly and persons with disabilities, as well as planning for the creation/expansion of appropriate paratransit services.

- *Advance water infrastructure planning* to ensure that investments in drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems support the sustainability of the community over the long term. This will involve a regional evaluation of water infrastructure needs. It will examine how sustainable centers and corridors can be used to improve water quality and infrastructure. Sustainable centers and corridors can become areas where coordinated investments in pursuit of sustainability goals, cost efficiency, and livable communities are put into practice. Key elements such as assessment, alternatives analysis and implementation of programs and practices to improve water use efficiency or appropriately reuse water, and evaluate the surface water quality impacts and environmental requirements of water, transportation, and housing infrastructure solutions.
- *Environmental planning* that includes environmental review systems to evaluate the impact of land use decisions; strategies to avoid adverse environmental impacts on neighborhoods through the careful planning and siting of housing and community facilities; methods to prevent undue damage, unwise use, or unwarranted consumption of natural resources; strategies to mimic natural systems within the built environment so as to minimize environmental impacts; strategies to equalize access to environmental amenities and minimize burdens resulting from development; specific actions to redress persistent environmental justice concerns in communities; tactics for sustainable water, wastewater, and materials management; measures for advanced energy planning and conservation; protection of natural areas; and measures to meet National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related requirements.
- *A plan for economic development* that stimulates the regional economy and creates jobs. This will focus on the creation or expansion of sustainable centers and corridors that: serve as commercial and industrial centers; reuse existing areas such as brownfields; utilize existing structures for new economic development ventures; creatively reuse vacant property; designate underutilized commercial and industrial space to accommodate arts-related enterprises; establish cultural districts or other opportunities for the creative sector to partner with business, civic, and diverse community leaders; create microenterprises and small business incubators; and further the inclusion of underrepresented populations in economic sectors. This planning component will examine full utilization of existing programs to advance economic opportunity, such as the HUD Section 3 program; innovative project financing; and training to support the full range of workforce and worker needs in the region. It will also include scenario planning that allows the RPSD to project a variety of economic growth possibilities and anticipate responses to each of them.
- *A comprehensive climate change impacts assessments* to guide regional planning and implementation strategies. This will address how regional sustainable centers and corridors can be used to both help mitigate and adapt to areas of special concern in the region such sea level rise and watershed impacts.

All integrated plan elements will include recommendations related to the following:

- Identification of immediate and long-term policies including local land use, zoning, building, and energy codes, land acquisition and assembly, infrastructure investment, tax policy, administrative procedures, and legislative proposals that influence where growth and development take place, including the type, intensity, and timing of economic and housing development, environmental protection, and investment in transportation and water facilities

and services. These actions should be focused around implementation in a variety of sustainable centers and corridors representing the diverse development patterns of the region.

- Methods for aligning infrastructure investment with goals to ensure equitable land use planning
- Ways to ensure public decision-making and meaningful resident participation
- Identification of measures to track the progress toward creating sustainable, complete communities
- Structural methods to strengthen regional and local management and decision-making capacities
- Improvements to administrative and regulatory processes
- Potential revisions in state statutes or local government charters or regulations that govern or control local government operations so that the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development can be enabled, financed, and implemented

Support for recommendations will be provided by technical planning studies concerning local development issues, priorities, or suggested new approaches to housing, economic development, capital improvement programming, or community relations to further the integration of local objectives with broader regional concerns consistent with the Livability Principles.