



# Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

## Creating Complete Communities

Complete Communities are mixed-use, compact and walkable centers of activity. They welcome people from diverse backgrounds and incomes by providing a variety of places to live, including affordable housing, and convenient access to good jobs, multi-modal transportation options, educational and social services, recreation and entertainment, green space, and healthy local food. Complete Communities concentrate growth in order to reduce auto-dependency, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and improve water quality. Recognizing the diversity of the National Capital Region, each Complete Community will vary slightly, but as a transcending theme, all Complete Communities are ideal places for growing up, and for growing old.

**National Capital Region**

**Sustainable Development Consortium**

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Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant

Category 2 Funding

## Application Abstract



The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), on behalf of the National Capital Region Sustainability Consortium and representing a large metropolitan region, is applying for \$5 million in Category 2 grant funding from the HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grant Program to produce a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD). The RPSD will define, embrace and promote the concept of Complete Communities for regionally identified centers, and build on a recently adopted vision, *Region Forward*, which outlines broad goals and targets for an accessible, livable, prosperous, and sustainable National Capital Region. The RPSD will identify regional centers, corridors, and preservation areas throughout the region. Finally the RPSD will prioritize regional infrastructure investment and actions in housing, transportation, and the environment by government, business and civic interests, and thus, serve as an action-oriented guide for regional and local plans as well as new, competitive federal grants from HUD, DOT and EPA.

This planning process will identify current and future regional centers and determine specific elements such as affordable housing, transit, or green infrastructure needed to transform centers into Complete Communities. The Complete Community concept is an evolution of COG's regional activity centers, which were defined by employment forecasts. Complete Communities will be characterized as mixed-use, compact and walkable centers of activity. They 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, recreation and entertainment, green space, and healthy local food. Complete Communities concentrate growth in order to reduce auto dependency, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and improve water quality. Recognizing the diversity of region, each Complete Community will be different, but as a transcending theme, all Complete Communities are ideal places for growing up, and growing old.

Complete Communities will provide a vivid and aspirational description of the centers prioritizing scarce public and private sector investment and seek ways to leverage and maximize that investment. Informed by a robust planning process, Complete Communities will be strategically located, planned and developed to reduce economic disparities, affirmatively further fair housing, and bring prosperity to diverse areas of the region. Each Complete Community will meet 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 advances the economic competitiveness of the entire region and values the existing community context. Local communities will be encouraged to think regionally and act locally by adopting a tailored approach to implementing RPSD. This will be accomplished through extensive public outreach – particularly to racial/ethnic minorities, as well as multigenerational and disabled households and communities – that facilitates alliances between regional and local interests.

The Complete Communities approach recognizes that where you live often defines how you live. In the *State of Metropolitan America*, the Brookings Institute characterizes the National Capital Region as a Next Frontier Region: one that exceeds national averages for population growth, diversity, and educational attainment while attracting immigrants, families and educated workers from other regions. The price of this success has been increased inequality among communities, with disadvantaged neighborhoods clustering geographically throughout the region and experiencing fewer educational and job opportunities. This disparity between neighborhoods is not limited to educational, wage, and economic conditions such as employment. Many of these same neighborhoods also contain deficiencies in transit access, affordable and HUD-subsidized housing, public health and access to fresh food. These deficiencies impact socioeconomic advancement, health, the environment, quality of life and mobility for many families in the region. The goal of the RPSD is to ensure that Complete Communities are fostered in regional centers across the region.

In many ways, the timing of this grant could not be better. This year, the MWCOG Board of Directors and all 21 MWCOG local jurisdictions approved *Region Forward: A Comprehensive Guide for Regional Planning*, marking a historic first-step for the National Capital Region. It reflects shared regional goals, identifies targets to measure regional progress, and demonstrates benefits that occur when neighboring jurisdictions work together. However, the plan identifies critical next steps that must be addressed in order to implement the vision and goals. *Region Forward's* broad consensus lacks many specifics, such as prioritizing where and how future infrastructure investments can be made in a way that serves the region's goals for housing, environment, quality of life, and transportation. This next level of integrated planning and prioritization is necessary to guide regional leaders and stakeholders to make decisions that will promote a more inclusive and sustainable future.

The National Capital Region's RPSD will include extensive outreach and public involvement, integrated data analysis, scenario building, development of an implementation toolbox, and major regional policy actions, in order to address the region's growing challenges. The proposed work program will include the following actions:

- Extensive and inclusive public involvement including capacity building and grassroots outreach to engage non-traditional stakeholders in advancing long-term regional priorities to implement the plan outcomes;
- Assessment of local, state and partner agency plans and data sources – such as the forthcoming Census 2010 data – to provide an integrated picture of baseline conditions for transportation, land use, housing, environment, health, the economy and other related areas;
- Scenario planning using visualization tools to identify activity centers that create Complete Communities with jobs, affordable housing, accessible transit connections, walkable streets, recreation opportunities, and access to healthy foods that are sensitive to local context and linked to surrounding areas;
- Creation of an implementation toolbox prioritizing housing, environmental and transportation needs, including common elements needed in regional centers to create Complete Communities, and the development of a series of “big ideas” to move the region toward implementing the RPSD that achieves the goals of *Region Forward*; and
- Fully integrate *Region Forward* into the work of MWCOG, TPB, local governments and partner agencies such as the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), community development agencies, local housing authorities, and state departments of transportation

MWCOG and the National Capital Region Sustainable Development Consortium will create and launch a more effective network of civic and community engagement around sustainability, not by creating a new organization, but by better focusing existing groups, stakeholders and partners around regional sustainability priorities, linking them through improved use of grassroots community development campaigns, social media and other technological, community engagement, and communication tools. This effort will also embrace the participation and strategies of grassroots community development organizations to engage and connect area populations that have too often been left out of regional planning and sustainability discussions. The broader, inclusive network developed through the regional planning process will keep people engaged in long-term regional housing, transportation, and environmental priorities necessary to enhance the region's quality of life for all residents.