

# Comprehensive Planning

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## Communities set vision for future

Once every 10 years, city councils, town boards and county boards throughout the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area have a very important job – to update their local comprehensive plans. A city’s plan represents a community vision of how the city should grow – of how it will develop or redevelop, ensure adequate housing, provide essential public infrastructure and services, protect natural areas and meet other community objectives.

## State law sets stage

[The Metropolitan Land Planning Act](#) requires local governments to update their comprehensive plans. It also requires the Metropolitan Council to create a Metropolitan Development Guide and specific plans for managing the region’s transportation, aviation, water resources, and regional parks and open space systems.

The Land Planning Act requires that the Council review local comprehensive plans to ensure that they conform to the regional

system plans. The Council’s review is designed to determine how a community’s planned actions relate to the interests of the whole region over the long term. It helps ensure that costly public infrastructure, like roads and sewers, are built in an economical and timely fashion, so that public resources are used wisely.

Within the framework of the system plans, citizens and local officials decide how they want their community to develop and what measures to take to reach community goals.

Once a city adopts its plan and the Council finds the plan in conformance with regional plans, a city may change, or amend, a portion of its plan at any time. The Council must also review these changes.

## Planning cycle begins with Census

The planning cycle begins with the release of the decennial U.S. Census. The Census provides a starting point for the Metropolitan Council’s forecasts of regional household, population and job growth for a 20-year time frame, and for an update of the regional system plans. Once

these updated system plans are adopted, the Council issues an individualized system statement to each of the 189 jurisdictions in the metro area, which informs these townships, cities and counties how they are affected by the system plans.

By law, local officials have up to three years after receipt of a system statement to submit an updated local plan to the Council for review.

The current planning cycle is nearing a close. As of September 2010, the Council had completed review of more than 90% of the submitted plan updates.

The planning cycle will begin again when 2010 Census data is released, starting in 2011. The new data will provide the basis for the Council’s regional forecasts for population, household and employment. In turn, the forecasts will inform the development of updated regional system plans – and ultimately the next generation of local comprehensive plans.

Council staff continues to work with communities as they implement and amend their plans.

## Council offers planning tools

The Metropolitan Council and communities work as partners to carry out the requirements of the Land Planning Act. The Council offers several tools to assist communities with their local comprehensive plans.

[Sector representatives](#) serve as liaisons between the Council and local governments. Each sector representative serves a specific group of communities. Additional staff, with expertise in issues such as water resources or transportation planning, serves communities that are updating, amending and implementing their comprehensive plans.

The web-based [Local Planning Handbook](#) is a guide to the comprehensive planning process. The concise guide features numerous links to online resources, including the latest forecasts and data.

The handbook has downloadable forms, worksheets and templates, and clearly indicates which plan elements are required, which are recommended and which are optional. The handbook received an Outstanding Planning Award from the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Other resources and planning tools offered by the Council include:

- Planning grants to small communities. For the planning cycle just concluding, the Council granted a total of one million dollars to 48 communities.
- [Make-A-Map](#), the Council's on-line mapping tool. The interactive tool allows users to build their own maps about the population, demographics, land use, resources and infrastructure for a city, county, or the metro area as a whole.
- The [Guide for Transit-Oriented Development](#), a description of key TOD elements and how they work in different urban and suburban settings. The online guide profiles 16 TOD projects in the region.
- The [Natural Resources Digital Atlas](#), a CD of geographic information to help communities identify and protect significant natural resources.

## Plan review in the digital age

The Metropolitan Council implemented an Electronic Content Management System,

which allows for electronic storage and easy viewing of planning documents. The Council requires jurisdictions to submit planning documents, like comprehensive plans, in an electronic format.

Electronic submittals reduce the number of paper copies a community needs to provide to the Council, thus reducing a community's mailing cost and paper use. Electronic submittals also speed up the review process, as Council staff are able to quickly enter the document into the system and proceed with reviewing a community's plan.

## For more information

- [Learn more about planning assistance to communities on the Council's website](#) or call 651-602-1312.
- You may also call 651-602-1312.
- See related fact sheets:
  - [2030 Regional Development Framework](#)
  - [Livable Communities](#)
  - [MUSA](#)
  - [Twin Cities Population](#)

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