

# 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 state law that sets this planning requirement](#) for local government also requires the Metropolitan Council to review the updated plans.

Under this law, called the Metropolitan Land Planning Act, local plans must conform to the Council’s Metropolitan Development Guide and its plans for managing the state-designated regional systems of transportation, aviation, water resources, and regional parks and open space. However, within the system plans, citizens and local officials

decide how they want their community to develop and what measures to take to reach community goals.

## Planning cycle nearing close

The current planning cycle began, in a sense, with the 2000 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 deadline for submitting updated comprehensive plans was Dec. 31, 2008. A total of 106 communities met the deadline; many others requested an extension to May 29, 2009.

One purpose of the required update is to extend the local plan’s view forward another 10 years, from 2020 to 2030. This enables planning for important regional systems – like regional wastewater collection and treatment – to continue. The update process also allows communities to revisit their growth plans and strategies, but assumes most communities will retain the basic features and policies in the 1998 plans.

## Council applies regional perspective

The Metropolitan Council reviews a jurisdiction’s plan, and amendments to it, from the perspective of the state law and the regional system plans. The review is designed to determine how a community’s planned actions relate to the interests of the whole region over the long term. In this way, the comprehensive plan updates can provide information and strategies needed to accommodate growth, provide infrastructure in a cost-effective manner, protect vital natural areas and preserve the region’s prized quality of life – for individual communities and the Twin Cities region.

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.

With the 2010 U.S. Census, the cycle will begin again.

### **Council offers planning tools**

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

The first is the web-based [Local Planning Handbook](#). It is concise, readable and 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, recommended and optional. The handbook received an Outstanding Planning Award from the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association in 2006.

Other resources and planning tools offered by the Council include:

- Planning grants to small communities. For the 2008

planning update cycle, the Council made grants totaling just over one million dollars to 48 communities.

- The [Natural Resources Digital Atlas](#), a CD of geographic information to help communities protect significant natural resources.
- [Make-A-Map](#), a new online mapping tool. An interactive map 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.

**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.

### **Plan review in the digital age**

The Metropolitan Council implemented a new Electronic Content Management System

(ECMS), 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, such as an Adobe PDF file saved on a CD. 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 will quickly be able to enter the document into the ECMS 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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