

Information Item

Community Development Committee



Meeting date: May 5, 2025

Topic

Local Planning Handbook Update

District(s), member(s):	ALL
Policy/legal reference:	Minn. Stat. §473.191
Staff prepared/presented:	Emma Dvorak, Senior Planner, Local Planning Assistance (651) 602-1399
Division/department:	Community Development

Background

The [Local Planning Handbook](#) is a web resource designed to support communities across the region as they update their local comprehensive plans. It provides clear guidance on Met Council process, policies, and the minimum requirements for comprehensive plan authorization, while also offering tools, maps, technical assistance, and training resources to help communities get more value from their planning process. The Local Planning Handbook provides important community specific data and resources for local governments and includes information such as growth forecasts, affordable housing need requirements, sewer allocation projections, and required maps. It also supplies a checklist to help communities track their progress. The Local Planning Handbook is undergoing a comprehensive update to align with Imagine 2050 system plans and regional policies. The updated Local Planning Handbook is scheduled to launch in August 2025.

Engagement and Updates

Website Testing to Improve User Experience

To ensure the updated website meets the needs of users, usability testing was conducted on the original site, and will be conducted on the new site before launch. By observing and recording users completing activities on the site, approximately 80% of usability issues can be identified. In addition to task-based observations, conversations with users about their work environment, preferences, and most valued resources have helped inform improvements.

Focus Groups for Minimum Requirements Feedback

As part of the update process, focus groups were held to gather feedback on the draft 2050 minimum requirements. These discussions were intended to ensure that new requirements were aligned with the Imagine 2050 regional vision, assess the clarity and accessibility of guidance materials, and identify any gaps in the available tools and resources. Participants shared their experiences utilizing the minimum requirements checklist from the 2040 planning cycle, and had the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Imagine 2050 requirements. Sessions were evaluated and summarized to document feedback and inform revisions.

During the 2040 planning cycle, communities found the Local Planning Handbook and checklist helpful but expressed a need for clearer guidance. Local governments want better distinctions between required and recommended elements, more clarity on projections, and improved coordination across policy areas. Concerns were raised about residential use guidance feeling like zoning, and more

support is needed on understanding Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and flexible density staging policy. Communities also valued Sector Representative support and want ongoing engagement and outreach.

The Local Planning Handbook project team continues to build on the feedback received to enhance the updated website and ensure it's as clear, useful, and accessible as possible. A schedule for rolling out technical assistance resources - like updated tools, training, and guidance - that communities can rely on throughout the 2050 planning cycle will be developed in accordance with the feedback provided by the focus groups.

