

Land Use Advisory Committee

Meeting date: January 20, 2022

Subject: 2040 Debrief of Comprehensive Plan Review Process (2040 Debrief Project)

District(s) Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.864 Subd. 2 and § 473.867 Subd. 1

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Division/Department: Community Development, Regional Planning

Proposed Action

None. This is an information item for discussion.

Background

On July 15, 2021, Local Planning Assistance staff conducted a focus group activity with LUAC members to solicit their feedback and insights into the comprehensive plan review process.

As a reminder, the 2040 Comprehensive Plan Debrief Project (Project), initiated a review of technical assistance initiatives and evaluated the 2040 Plan review process by engaging with local governments and other stakeholders. Feedback on the decennial comprehensive plan review process will inform recommendations for improvements to the review process and technical assistance efforts. This report is to share the Project's preliminary summary findings and recommendations with the Committee.

Preliminary Recommendations

Following is a summary of the preliminary recommendations and examples of actions that could contribute to improvements to the Plan review process categorized as follows:

- **Improve Communication**
- **Evaluate Planning Resources**
- **Expand Technical Assistance**
- **Focus on Quality Assurance / Quality Control**

To accomplish the “**Improve Communication**” action, recommendations focus on improving verbal and written exchanges both with our local partners and internally among Council technical staff. For example, below are recommended actions to improve communication during the Plan review process:

- Both Sector Representatives and Council members should meet with jurisdiction staff and elected or appointed officials more often during the planning process.
- Explore opportunities to improve efficacy of incomplete letter communications to best support local governments in addressing completeness, consistency, and conformance issues.
- Convene an advisory group of local planners and consultants to provide feedback on the checklist of minimum requirements for the 2050 comprehensive planning cycle.

“**Evaluate Planning Resources**” includes recommendations templates, data, and other guiding documents to best support local governments in their comprehensive planning efforts. For example:

- Identify opportunities to improve the Local Planning Handbook to ensure it is easy to use and navigate including adopting metrics to evaluate ongoing effectiveness.

- Develop a resource for both internal and external stakeholders that outlines the review process and explains completeness, conformance, consistency, and compatibility.
- Update existing resources with information on the Metropolitan Council and comprehensive planning for local staff to share with community members and elected officials. Develop new resources or add information as needed.

“**Expand Technical Assistance**” recommendations address areas of improvement related to engagement between Council staff and regional partners including local governments, consultants, and state agencies. They represent ideas that combine ways to improve effective communications with technical assistance to result in proactive, personalized, and reliable technical assistance. For example:

- Encourage more local governments to participate in preliminary reviews.
- Sector Representatives should engage one-on-one with local governments and consultants after issuance of 2025 System Statements and before plan writing begins to talk through the comprehensive planning process, Council requirements, and other essential information.
- Provide more examples to local governments during the comprehensive plan development and review process. Annotate examples to explain why they are good examples.

The “**Focus on Quality Assurance / Quality Control**” (QA/QC) recommendations suggest evaluation of existing and future processes to allow for continuous improvement before, during, and after comprehensive plan reviews. For example:

- All reviewers should understand and be able to communicate the “why” behind each requirement in their technical area.
- Explore why checklists were seen as “overly complex” and how to address this for the 2050 planning cycle.
- Evaluate individual staff capacity needed to conduct reviews and develop work plans that allow Sector Representatives and technical reviewers to prioritize reviews.

Next Steps

Building on these preliminary recommendations, the Project team is engaged with Metro Cities to identify further improvements to the Plan review process. Together, we are coordinating a longer-term technical work group focused on regional planning and comprised of local government technical staff. This work group will review and assess the findings and recommendations from this Project as one of their first tasks together. This technical work group is expected to be organized in early 2022.

The Project team will also re-engage with partners that contributed throughout the past year to share and solicit additional feedback.

After these upcoming efforts, the Project team will finalize a report that incorporates feedback from these engagements. The final report will include a summary and a list of detailed recommendations. The implementation of priority recommendations will begin in 2022 and this will be treated as a second phase of the Project.