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COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
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Comprehensive Planning based on Sustainability: A Model for Ohio Communities

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This Bulletin provides an overview of methods and a process to incorporate sustainability principles into comprehensive community planning. It is intended for local leaders, public officials and citizens so that they can use these concepts in their own community planning efforts. In order for the intended audience to understand how the theory of sustainability has influenced community planning, a definition of sustainable development and the key cornerstones of this theory are summarized. Finally, useful techniques and tools to incorporate these cornerstones into planning initiatives as well as a step-by-step outline of a process that can be used by a community is presented.

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Introduction

Sustainability is rapidly becoming the “issue of our age” (ICMA, 2010). An increasing number of communities are seeking to incorporate sustainability concepts into their development plans, but understanding what this means and how to do it effectively can be a challenge. This Bulletin will share with community leaders, planners and residents a model for the incorporation of sustainability into their comprehensive planning efforts. The goal of the bulletin is for the reader to be able to develop a long-range, balanced plan linking social, economic and environmental goals that are broadly supported by community residents and implemented by local leadership through initiatives, policies and procedures.

What is Sustainable Development?

The most frequently cited definition of Sustainable Development is “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Bruntland Commission, 1987, p. 8). Central to this definition are a few key concepts:

- Intergenerational fairness and equity: as community leaders and residents we must be aware that the choices we make today must not negatively impact on the quality of life for our future generations;
- We must seek to balance and interconnect economic vitality, ecological health and social equity so that one area does not thrive to the detriment of another;
- Sustainability is about taking a long-term perspective, looking out generations to seek a consensus vision of the community’s desired future;
- Sustainability requires inclusion and engagement of all stakeholders in visioning, planning and implementation.

Sustainability is often pictured as three circles – one for social/social equity, one for environment/ecology, and one for economic – all intersecting in the middle to form the *triple bottom line*, or “sweet spot” of sustainability. It is within this area of overlapping circles that the interests of all three come together and can lead to the articulation of multidimensional goals. This schematic is useful in helping stakeholders visualize and understand sustainability’s emphasis on finding areas of agreement and consensus that reflect the community’s shared values.

The Three Spheres of Sustainability

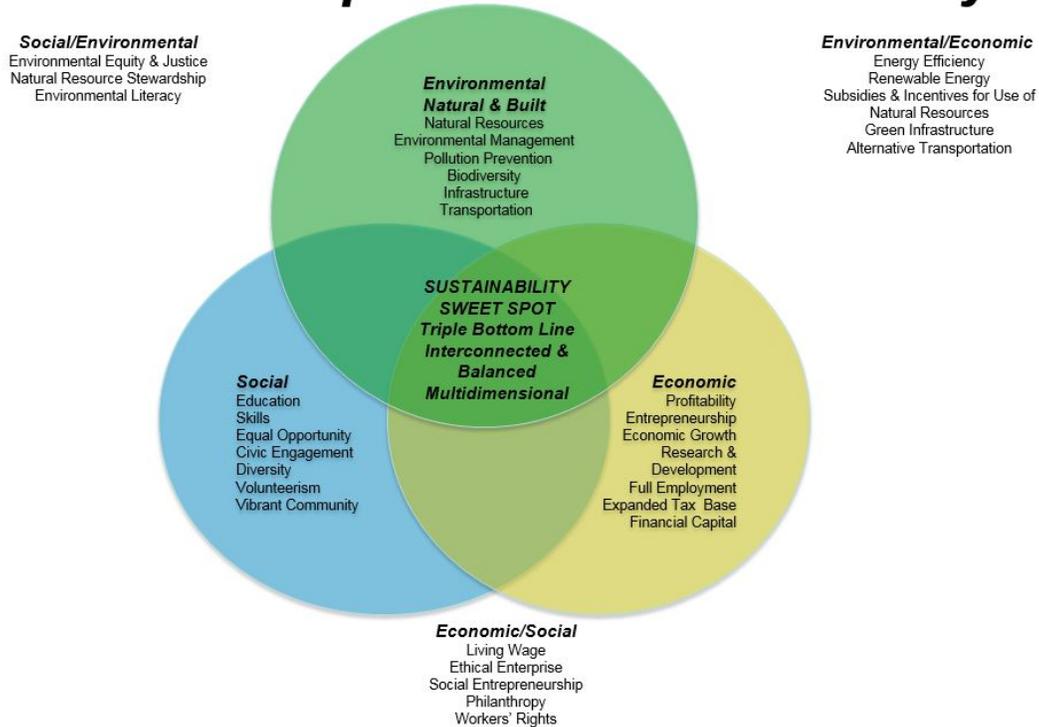


Figure 1 – Adapted from A Framework for Sustainability Indicators at EPA (2012)

Sustainable Communities

The circles in Figure 1 represent the *three spheres of sustainability* within community, each with its own values, interests, concerns and goals. Also depicted are the overlapping spheres with some shared values as well as the

The values of each sphere are expressed and upheld by individuals, organizations and groups, often called stakeholders. For example, the different spheres of a particular community might look as follows:

I. Economic Sphere:

The economic sphere encompasses commerce, finance, wealth and economic conditions of the community.

- **Values:** self sufficiency, economic opportunity, private enterprise
- **Stakeholders:** Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, small business owners, local workforce, industry leaders, Retail Merchants Association, Economic Development Director
- **Goals:** community economic vitality, full employment, profitable locally owned businesses, high median income, economic diversity, capturing outside dollars, attraction of new business and industry, expanded tax base

II. Social Sphere:

The social sphere encompasses personal and community relationships, equality, diversity, wellness, history and culture.

- **Values:** social equity, universal education, inclusion, citizen engagement, economic opportunity, health and safety, equality
- **Stakeholders:** Social Service Agencies, not-for profit service organizations, Fire and Police, health care providers
- **Goals:** excellent schools, lifelong learning, low crime rate, healthy residents, reduced poverty, access to healthy foods

III. Environmental Sphere:

The environmental sphere is made up of two elements – natural environment and built environment. Natural environment includes open spaces, natural areas, water, air, habitat, trees, unique features (bogs, wetlands, etc.) and other natural amenities. The built environment includes buildings, infrastructure and other things that have been constructed by human and placed on the land.

Natural Environment:

- **Values:** preservation of agricultural, open space and natural areas, biodiversity, clean water and air
- **Stakeholders:** Farm Bureau, farmers, environmental organizations and not-for-profits, watershed coordinators, Audubon Society
- **Goals:** expand/improve county parks/nature areas, preserve agricultural lands through land use planning, clean waterways and streams, protect watersheds, reduce CO2 emissions

Built Environment:

- **Values:** walkable/bikeable community, history, livable community
- **Stakeholders:** Historic Preservation organizations, local bike clubs, downtown residents, City Engineer, housing developers, City Planner
- **Goals:** compact development, bikeways throughout community, promote transportation alternatives to car, reuse existing buildings, preserve historic properties, target development to areas with existing infrastructure

Differing perspectives within a community can lead to disagreement and conflict when residents approach current issues from values that may be in opposition. Many a community development project has been derailed at the eleventh hour by community resistance. “Because development ideas so rarely arise from a shared vision of what the community wants and needs, nearly every development decision results in conflict” (Goldberg, 2005, p. 1). A sustainable approach to community

building seeks to find common connections and balance between the community's resident's social, economic and environmental concerns. It does this by discovering the community's shared vision of what they would like to be based on broadly held values that bridge stakeholder's interests. Building a shared community vision of the future becomes a critical first step in planning based on sustainability principles. Once articulated, this shared vision is used to guide the development and direction of the community's plan, resulting in more widespread support and faster implementation.

Incorporating Sustainability into Comprehensive Planning

"Comprehensive planning, also known as master planning, is the foundation from which all decision-making, regulating, capital expenditures and program execution should be made in a community." (Clark, Sharp, Irwin & Libby, 2003, p. 33). The authors propose that comprehensive planning "should be the basis for growth management strategies in Ohio (p.36)." A comprehensive plan provides a broad overview and direction, or umbrella, under which more specific plans can be included such as transportation, zoning, economic development, education, social services and so forth.

Incorporating sustainability into comprehensive planning requires the use of a framework that can be used to guide the planning process. Four cornerstones that have emerged from discussions on sustainability help to provide this framework. They are:

1. Sustainable comprehensive planning is an ***inclusionary*** process, going beyond most citizen participation efforts by actively seeking to "reduce barriers to participation". Inclusion is built in at the very beginning by building a guidance structure (steering committee) that balances the involvement all sectors of the community. In this way, all voices are heard and no one perspective dominates. Inclusion is also critical to determining a consensus vision. By *going to where people gather*, in contrast to inviting residents in to public meetings in central locations, residents feel more comfortable and more likely to honestly share their input.

Sustainable comprehensive planning seeks to promote ***interconnectedness***, finding balance among the social, environmental and economic interests of the community. Comprehensive planning without a sustainable perspective can focus on planning topics independently, not drawing upon the synergy that results when they are interconnected and balanced. Sustainable comprehensive planning is unique because it promotes balance from the very beginning, taking an *intentional*, not *causal* approach to community development. Causality is "the belief that the improvement to one basic factor in a community will result in an automatic benefit to all other related factors. Causality is a "spillover effect" approach where the argument is presented as; if you create manufacturing jobs (economic) residents will

have greater income, automatically resulting in increased funding for schools (social) and greater support for parks (environmental). In contrast, *intentionality* is the “purposeful design of equitable benefit for each factor in connection with all other factors” (Moss & Grunkemeyer, 2004). Through intentionality you consider, up front, the potential impacts of each initiative upon all three sectors of community, helping to avoid unintended consequences of actions. Reviewer #1: I’d probably introduce the overlapping spheres after this paragraph – it seems to fit better here than earlier in this document.

2. **Long range:** sustainable comprehensive planning urges planners and residents to look out to future generations. While traditional planning often uses a window of 10-20 years, sustainable planning pushes the process out 50 years or more, considering the impact of the decisions we make today upon future generations. Sustainable planning considers what we value about our community and want to preserve, and what we dream our community to be for our grand and great-grandchildren. This causes participants to think more about what is possible rather than getting caught up in existing disagreements and conflicts and focus on solutions, not barriers.
3. Utilizes **multidimensional indicators:** sustainable comprehensive planning incorporates the development of clearly stated indicators, or measurements, of progress, helping the community to determine how well they are progressing toward reaching their shared goals and vision. Indicators intentionally link the three sectors, the environmental, social and economic so that what is to be achieved in one area has an intentionally positive impact upon and benefit to another. An example of a single dimensional economic indicator would be “the creation of agricultural enterprises.” This would evolve into a two dimensional indicator by adding a social dimension, i.e. “the creation of agricultural enterprises that provide adequate income to support families.” To be an effective multidimensional indicator, a third dimension, that of the environment, would need to be added resulting in “the creation of agricultural enterprises, providing adequate income to support families, and not harming the aquifer.” Indicators would then be chosen that would measure the progress in all three areas in relation to one another. This is a “triple bottom line” approach, using social, economic and environmental benchmarks of success as applied to community development.

Some general differences between traditional comprehensive planning and sustainable comprehensive planning are outlined in Figure 2 below.

Traditional Comprehensive Planning	Sustainable Comprehensive Planning
Decade Planning – 10 to 20 years is common timeframe	Generational Planning – look out 50 years, or two generations
Citizen participation conducted through public meetings and forums, usually held in central locations in community and at times specified by plan leadership	Inclusionary – engages community in development of plan by “going to where people gather” and reducing barriers to participation
Leadership directed	Vision directed – community consensus vision guides plan
Sections of plan are often not interconnected and might unintentionally work at cross purposes	Intentionally balances and interconnects social, environmental and economic goals of community
Evaluation may or may not examine interconnectivity between social, environmental and economic goals	Multidimensional indicators used to evaluate accomplishments to insure balance and interconnections

Figure 2 - Differences between Traditional and Sustainable Comprehensive Planning

The Sustainable Comprehensive Planning Process

Sustainable comprehensive planning usually takes a longer time from initiation to completion than more traditional comprehensive planning approaches. The formulation of a consensus vision can take up to twelve months depending upon the community’s size and diversity. However, it is important to give this step the needed attention because it sets the stage for the goal identification and planning process to follow. Also, the time spent reaching out to the community in the beginning, gathering broad based input, results in community ownership and support of the plan leading to much faster implementation.

The sustainable comprehensive planning process can be broken into five major steps, as depicted below:

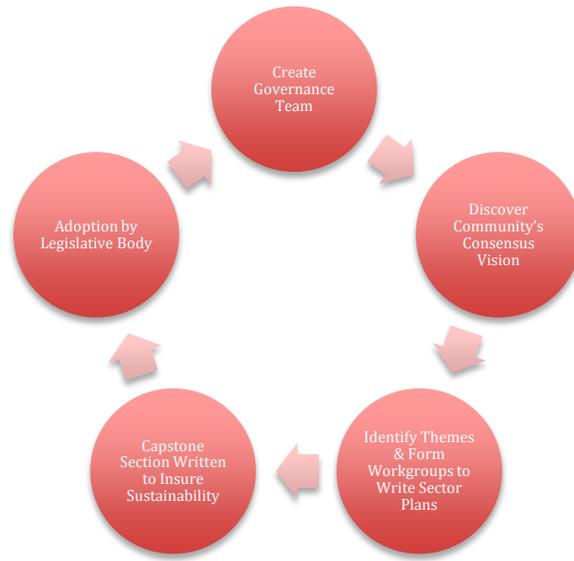


Figure 3 - Steps in the Sustainable Planning Process

Step 1: Create an Inclusionary Steering Committee

A steering committee is created that is made up of representatives from all sectors of the community. This committee's task will be to provide guidance throughout the development of the plan and to insure that a broad range of interests in the community are encouraged to engage. A tool, Lasswell's Values and Institution Categories, can be used to help build balance and inclusion in guidance.

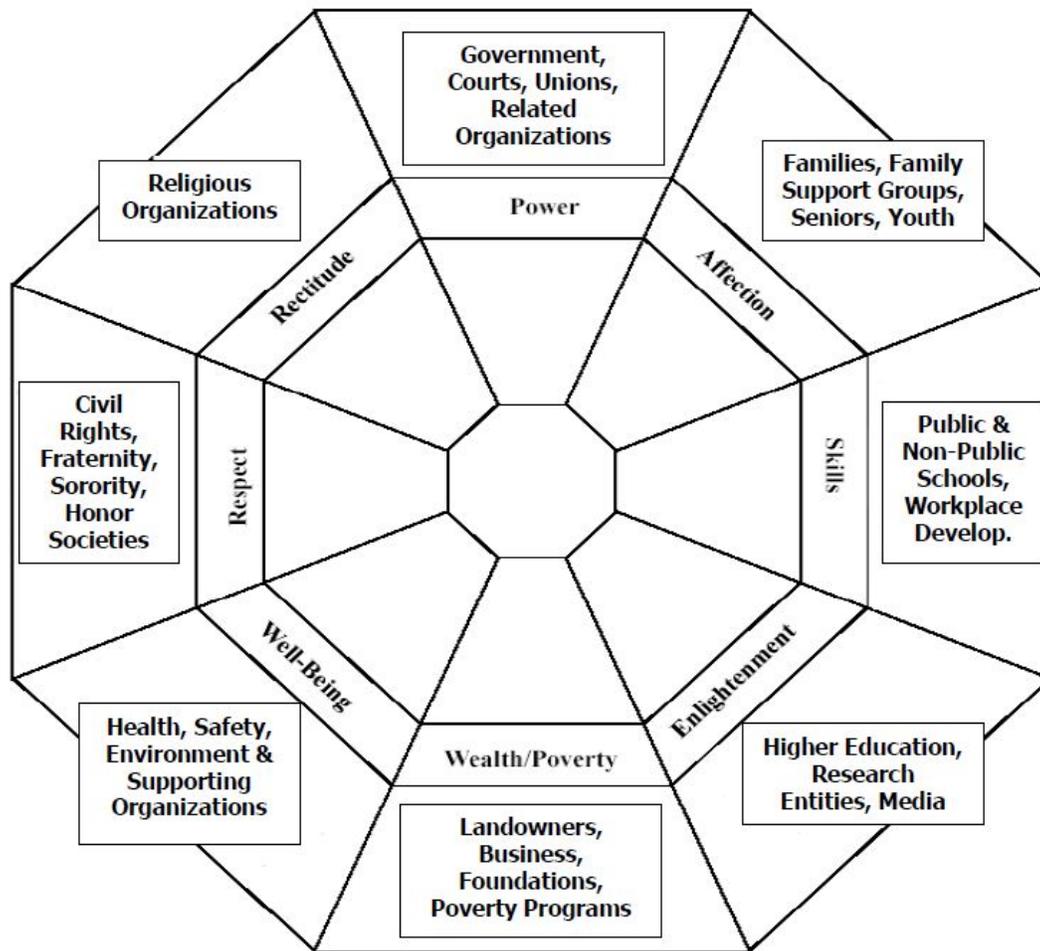


Table I. Lasswell's Values/Institutions Categories

Harold D. Lasswell, *POLITICS: WHO GETS WHAT, WHEN, HOW*, Meridian Books, THE WORLD PUBLISHING COMPANY, Cleveland and New York, 1958, p. 202. Revised by: Myra Moss and Bill Grunkemeyer, OSU Extension Sustainable Development Initiatives, 2009

The inner ring of Lasswell's Wheel includes all of the values (value areas) that exist in a community. There are eight identified: Power, Affection, Skills, Enlightenment, Wealth/Poverty, Well-Being, Respect and Rectitude. The outer ring identifies the organizations and institutions in the community that uphold and promote each of these values. The group initiating the planning effort for the community can use Lasswell's Wheel to make sure they are including all value areas on the steering committee. If they find a value area missing, a volunteer from the initiating group can approach groups/organizations that promote these values and ask them to serve on the steering committee. For example, if there are no youth or religious entities involved, organizations such as 4-H or the Ministerial Association could be asked to send a representative to the steering group. Also important is balance

among the various areas. If a committee is made up of four members from the business community but no one from the local schools, the plan may lean more heavily toward economic interests than educational (social) concerns. Parity among the various value areas should be sought – otherwise the planning process is not inclusionary.

Step 2: Discover Shared Long Term Vision of Community

Sustainable plans are guided by a shared, consensus vision of the community as articulated by its residents. The role of elected and appointed officials is to endorse and initiate the planning process and then formulate policies and procedures and allocate resources in such a manner as to help work toward the community's goals.

Vision sessions are held throughout the community in order to obtain the input from a broad range of residents on two key questions. These questions are designed to enable the identification of long-term community consensus. The vision process itself, with sessions held in “places where people gather,” is designed to be inclusive by reducing barriers to participation.

The two questions are:

What is it that you value about your community and wish to preserve for your grandchildren and great-grandchildren? (treasures)

What do you hope your community will be for your grandchildren and great-grandchildren? (rainbows)

Once again Lasswell's Wheel is used to insure that all of the value areas within the community are reached out to for their input. Once the vision sessions are completed, the input is analyzed to determine consensus themes across environmental, economic and social interests and across the value areas. The themes that are mentioned most frequently and by the widest number of sectors and areas are then used to develop goals.

Step 3: Identify Themes and form Workgroups to Develop Sector Plans

a. Identify consensus themes emerging from visioning. State these themes in terms of goals.

The vision input is analyzed for frequency among major sectors (environmental, economic, social) and by value areas of the groups providing the vision input (youth, businesspeople, environmental groups, etc.). As an example, many communities see their downtown as a treasure and envision it to be a vibrant place economically, environmentally and socially. Downtown redevelopment may be important to businesspeople who envision an economically vibrant downtown as a place with healthy locally owned businesses (economic). Families and youth may mention a

downtown as a place where people can gather for recreation, picnics, entertainment, shopping and the arts (social). Those concerned with the environment may want to reduce automobile emissions through easy access to the downtown by bicycle and walking (environmental). Those concerned with the unique history of the community may want to see existing downtown buildings rehabbed and reused instead of tearing down and building new (social and built environment). Areas of importance then emerge from this broad based input that can then be used to create sector goals.

b. Create Workgroups around each Theme and Related Goals

Workgroups are created around each of the themes. A member of the Steering Committee is chosen as Workgroup Chair. Workgroup members are chosen from the community for their passion and involvement around a particular theme and/or their expertise in that area. So, an economic development workgroup might include local businesspeople and industry representatives as well as Directors of the Economic Development Office and the Chamber. An Infrastructure workgroup might include the head of the local bicyclist’s group as well as the County Engineer. This mix of perspectives helps to formulate *what* the community wants to happen (vision) as well as *how* it can happen (technical expertise).



Figure 4

Using again the downtown revitalization example, the Economic Development Workgroup would want to focus on encouraging small, locally owned business development particularly in the area of arts (galleries, museums), entertainment (live music, performance art, restaurants, coffee shops, etc.), and shopping (goods and services). There would be a good offering of family friendly venues. The Infrastructure/Environment Workgroup would want to focus on a walkable, bicycle friendly downtown with sidewalks, bike lanes and bicycle racks in front of local

businesses. They would also want to encourage the reuse of older buildings and development/improvement of downtown parks and plantings.

Each sector plan/chapter include the following components:

1. Overview of Existing Conditions

Brief overview and analysis of what this particular sector of the community looks like and has existing today, for example, existing water and sewer lines, plants, capacities, local recreational facilities and park, etc. Also includes trends identified from past through future data as well as specific plans and projects that are in various stages of planning and implementation. For example, an Economic Development overview might include an identification of the major employment sectors and how they contribute to the current economic base.

2. Summary of Future Recommendations

Summary of key initiatives and recommendations that were identified by the workgroup while engaging in the development of the sector plan. This is an opportunity to describe the workgroup's recommendations and how they will support the community's overall vision of the future.

3. Planning Issues

List of major planning issues that have come out of the workgroup's study and analysis of the chapter topic (for example, economic development) including a review of resident input and consensus relating to this topic.

4. Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Presentation of each goal with a paragraph to describe the purpose of the goal and the planning issues it will address. This is followed by the planned results of the objectives encompassed by this goal and how they will help to achieve the goal. Finally, a list of the specific objectives will then be included

5. Implementation Plan

A template (Action Plan) outlining the objectives, strategies, actions, responsible parties and timeframe for accomplishment for each goal is included as the final section of each sector plan.

Step 4: Develop Capstone Section of Plan to insure Sustainability

Once the individual workgroup plans are completed, the final step is the creation of a capstone section that pulls together the individual sector plans to insure balance, interconnectedness and concurrence with sustainability principles. This last section of the plan focus on growth management and land use practices. A committee of Chairs from each of the sector plan Workgroups drafts this capstone section with assistance from technical experts such as department heads, engineers, or volunteer experts. The Chairs identify the planning issues based on the community's vision

and the resulting sector plans. The technical experts provide expertise to inform strategic approaches to successfully implement these goals. The resulting growth management and land use chapter pulls all of the other chapters together. Geographic Information Systems mapping is included that depicts existing and projected land uses according to the various sector plans and the Growth Management and Land Use capstone section. The final plan is returned to the Steering Committee for input, modification and final approval.

Step 5: Take to Legislative Body for Adoption and Share with Community

The final step in the sustainable comprehensive planning process is to take the document to the community's legislative body for adoption (City Planning Commission, City Council, Regional Planning Commission, County Commissioners, for example). The plan then needs to be widely shared with the community through web sites, libraries and presentations to community groups. Implementation of the plan will take place through action plans developed by each of the Workgroups.

Conclusion

Since 1999, Ohio State University Extension has been helping communities throughout Ohio apply sustainable communities principles to their planning efforts. While sustainable planning does not represent a major change over comprehensive planning processes, it does represent a paradigm shift that seeks to improve planning by including the following elements:

- It seeks a balanced interconnection between the environmental, social, and economic factors defining the community,
- It fosters an inclusionary focus that actively seeks the engagement and guidance of residents,
- It has a long-term planning focus that is based on the needs and desires of future generations,
- It seeks to resolve planning issues by considering implications and expected results from a holistic, multidimensional perspective.

By engaging community residents in setting a community's vision, and developing goals that will help to achieve that vision, sustainable planning builds community buy in and action toward reaching sustainable goals by both individuals and groups. The resulting planning becomes the community's property and moves much more quickly to implementation. This approach has been used effectively to address community challenges that might, without a sustainable planning approach, create conflict and division that can limit the effectiveness of even the best plan. And, it is comprehensive, creating general policy guidelines and recommendations under which regulatory measures and resource allocations plans can be developed.

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Resources

Sustainable Development web site; examples of Sustainable Comprehensive Land Use Plans

<http://comdev.osu.edu/programs/community-planning/sustainable-development>

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