

Plan-it sustainably

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The role of the comprehensive plan

This past September, APA's *Sustaining Places Initiative Task Force* (see <http://bit.ly/mU7oU2>) completed its first report, *Sustaining Places: The Role of the Comprehensive Plan*. The report is being published as a Planning Advisory Service (PAS) report this fall. The Task Force, led by co-chairs David Godschalk, FAICP, and Bill Anderson, FAICP, surveyed current best practices, identified evolving needs and practices, and explored how practices must change. This column summarizes and paraphrases the report's executive summary.

The report opens with a rallying call for the profession — "Planning for sustainability is the defining challenge of the 21st century" — and notes the key characteristics of the comprehensive plan that make it an important planning tool: It "has the legal authority to act as the vehicle for guiding community development, the scope to cover the necessary functions and facilities, and the history of practice to inspire public acceptance of its policies." The comprehensive plan is especially important in light of its "long view, established standing, and ability to integrate other plans and decisions into a comprehensive framework for sustainability that works across policy silos."

Planning for *sustaining places* changes planning in two ways.

- It shifts the "mindset from planning for business as usual to planning for a future of significant global economic and environmental challenges," and
- It shifts the approach to "a truly integrative [one] that links human-made and natural systems."

Sustaining places planning includes new topics such as "renewable energy, greenhouse gas emissions, climate change adaptation, local agriculture and food security, green business development, and healthy living." It promotes innovative plan structures to increase integration across the typically separate plan elements. *Sustaining places planning* also requires integration across different scales of comprehensive planning so they reinforce each other. The Task Force report identifies top planning challenges such as creating multi-jurisdictional management capacity to effectively integrate planning for environmental, social, and economic systems.

The Task Force distilled a set of guiding principles for *sustaining places planning* from existing comprehensive plans that have a strong commitment to sustainability:

1. A livable built environment
2. A resilient economy
3. A healthy community
4. Authentic participation
5. A harmony with nature
6. An interwoven equity
7. A responsible regionalism
8. Accountable implementation

The report concludes that "American planning practice is at a critical turning point" where planners using "the comprehensive plan can take a leading role in shaping our response to the 'make or break' forces now affecting the planet." Toward that end, the Task Force proposes "a bold new agenda for the planning profession," and calls on the APA and AICP to:

- Establish a professional culture that recognizes and fosters the growth of *sustaining places applications* in planning practice and education;
- Conduct research and development aimed at building our repertoire of *sustaining places knowledge*, concepts, and techniques; and
- Develop education and awareness activities aimed at widening public and professional understanding of the potential and importance of *sustaining places planning*.

The Task Force report is a valuable summary and synthesis of best practices for comprehensive *sustaining places planning*. It advances the APA's Sustaining Places Initiative and launches an agenda of programs to deepen, expand, and accelerate the profession's response to the defining challenge of the 21st century.

Committee update

- We are developing a half-day strategic sustainability workshop for members. <http://bit.ly/rmFz04>
- Visit our temporary web home, find resources, and send feedback. <http://bit.ly/oOgi1W>
- Review the Northern Section/SFSU Report — *Leveraging Leading Edge Sustainability Planning*. <http://bit.ly/r7D21g>
- Join the email list for news, updates, and resources: email scott-e@sustainability2030.com

Upcoming events

- On December 8, the Sustainability Committee will co-host a half-day workshop with the new North American Sustainable Transportation Council, featuring the Council's Sustainable Transportation and Access Rating System (STARS), a LEED-like voluntary program. <http://bit.ly/pjigy3>
- For progress and the latest advances from one of the leading edges of sustainability planning, check out the EcoDistricts Summit, Oct. 26–28. <http://bit.ly/qpv4ID> ■

GLOSSARY

Sustaining places is the APA's new moniker — launched in Spring 2010 with its Sustaining Places Initiative — devised to distinguish planning's domain and contribution to the larger sustainability arena.

Sustaining places planning is "planning places that sustain their communities and the ecological systems that support them . . . [it] demands plans that balance and coordinate the environmental, economic, and social needs of current and future generations."

Sustaining places practice is "a dynamic, democratic process through which communities plan to meet the needs of current and future generations without compromising the ecosystems upon which we depend by balancing social, economic, and environmental resources, incorporating resilience, and linking local actions to regional and global concerns."