

Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Program

Program Overview

The Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Process (The Program) is a three-year planning program funded largely by a highly competitive, first of its kind, \$4.25M federal grant from the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, an interagency collaboration among the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the US Department of Transportation. The Northeast Ohio Program was one of 45 communities from across the United States to be funded to develop a coordinated and integrated approach to planning efforts for land use, transportation, economic and workforce development, and infrastructure investments in a manner that empowers jurisdictions to consider the interdependent challenges of: 1) economic competitiveness and revitalization; 2) social equity, inclusion, and access to opportunity; 3) energy use and climate change; and 4) public health and environmental impact.

The Northeast Ohio grant application was developed by an inclusive Steering Committee comprised of representatives from local, county and state government offices, research institutions, and non-profit agencies. The application was formally submitted by a 21-member Application Consortium including four Metropolitan Planning Organizations, six counties, five cities, three housing authorities, a coalition of municipal governments, philanthropy, and an educational research institution. The application defined its region-specific Objectives, Process, and Expected Results.

The federally funded, three-year work plan will begin immediately and be managed by a newly-formed non-profit organization. Work will be led by a small staff, participating members of the consortium, consultants and other leaders in the community. The Program will be governed by the organization's Board of Trustees that will be comprised of regional leaders and sustainability experts.

Objectives

The Steering Committee collectively defined the Program's Objectives:

- 1) To advance sustainable development in the Northeast Ohio region
- 2) To support the six HUD Livability Principles as guides for sustainable development, with an additional principle added: Preserve and Restore Natural Systems
- 3) To use further the scenario planning and visioning process utilized in Northeast Ohio as part of the Voices & Choices program
- 4) To deeply engage stakeholders throughout the Region in examining and achieving balanced improvements across the three components of sustainability, Economic, Environmental, and Social

Process

Increase Depth and Breadth of Stakeholder Engagement

To ensure success, The Program will quickly engage additional state, county, city, and township governments, transit, housing, and environmental authorities, private industry, research institutions, non-profits and foundations, a variety of civic planning organizations, and numerous residential interest groups. The Program will also include local, regional, and national professionals and experts in the areas of land use, transportation, housing, community and neighborhood development, economic and work force development, environment and energy use to ensure that the region adopts innovative strategies and leverages best practices from within and beyond Northeast Ohio.

Ensure Work is Comprehensive and Integrated

The Program will be organized across five Work Streams. These working groups will incorporate the perspectives, knowledge, and work of professional planners, resident and community stakeholder groups, as

well as local, regional, and national experts. The staff of the Program Management office will facilitate ongoing collaboration among the Work Streams to ensure the strategies and recommendations for achieving the Program's Objectives are integrated across their specific areas of focus:

- 1) Built Environment and Natural Systems Integration
- 2) Regional Mobility and Transit Options
- 3) Equitable Housing Access and Quality
- 4) Community-Focused Economic Development
- 5) Place-Based Community Design

Execute a Shared Work Plan

Over three years, The Program will execute a four-phase work plan to 1) establish the Program Management Office; 2) assess and validate the current context of the challenges and opportunities throughout the region and identify best practices from within the region and nationally; 3) conduct scenario planning based on desired sustainability goals defined by the Work Streams, not just on existing growth patterns or data; and 4) align stakeholders for implementation at the local level and to establish:

- 1) Shared policies where a common governing authority can be identified
- 2) Regional guidelines where local governments will retain authority
- 3) Ongoing forums for continued feedback, dialogue, and collaboration

Additionally, throughout the three-year program, ongoing work will focus on engaging and educating the planning bodies across the region to ensure that the approach developed over the three years will be adopted and refined in future years. The Program's success will be dependent on its ability to impact the fundamental way Northeast Ohio's individual communities work independently and collectively to plan and implement sustainable development practices.

Expected Results

- 1) Enhance Economic Competitiveness:
To Identify and leverage critical industry clusters; Support efforts to cultivate a 21st century workforce to lift up economically disadvantaged communities; Engage residents and businesses in planning that establishes Northeast Ohio as a place of choice to live and work; and Coordinate land use planning to foster a sustainable tax base in all communities through ongoing collaboration and dialogue across functions and political boundaries
- 2) Coordinate Policies and Leverage Investment:
To Establish a set of shared policies, priorities that incorporate a holistic, sustainable view of development alternatives to guide local action; Leverage existing planning expertise and institutionalize a framework to facilitate ongoing collaboration and dialogue across functions and political boundaries; Establish a repository of state and federal investments in the region; Plan infrastructure growth and reinvestment to align with optimal population and economic patterns; and Develop a planning protocol based the EPA's definition of smart growth principles.
- 3) Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing:
Adopt a "fix-it first" housing strategy that minimizes blight and creates affordable alternatives for all income brackets; Provide mobility counseling for low-income residents to promote zip codes of opportunity; Implement strategies that facilitate "aging in place" for seniors; Affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH) initiatives and support the development of housing opportunities near job opportunities especially for lower income brackets; Support housing strategies that prioritize the proximity of mixed use development and multi-modal transportation centers; Create a comprehensive Housing Information System to increase the transparency of affordable housing and home maintenance alternatives across the region to both residents and housing authorities.

- 4) Support Existing Communities:
Identify all sources of investment in communities and increase alignment of housing, transportation, land use, infrastructure, and environmental priorities and policies among agencies; Incorporate long-term analysis in all urban, suburban, and rural planning that looks beyond trends and projections to better understand the true impact of decisions; Inventory assets of the built environment to develop a plan for restoration; and Create incentives for “fix-it first” strategies and development
- 5) Value Communities and Neighborhoods:
Identify , document, and celebrate the distinctive assets and legacy of place of each community; Increase mixed use and higher density development; Create a set of criteria by which to evaluate the needs existing neighborhoods and communities within the context of specific growth characteristics; implement strategies for “right-sizing;” and Develop a region-wide toolbox to inform planning decisions and support the implementation of policies that can be leveraged locally such as land banking
- 6) Provide More Transportation Choices:
Create a systematic link among land use, housing, and transportation policy and planning; Encourage policy that drives clustered development around transportation nodes; Create land use patterns that support the use of public transit and non-motorized transportation to reduce VMT and greenhouse gasses.; Improve reach, accessibility and appeal of public transit for all ages and income brackets; Proactively link multimodal transportation for leisure, commuting, and inter-regional travel; Minimize spatial mismatch of housing and job opportunities especially for low-income and minority communities; and Expand the “Ride Share” model to create a multi-county online transportation portal
- 7) Preserve and Restore Natural Systems:
Create additional system processes based on successful watershed-based planning; Incentivize innovative land use strategies for environmental protection and restoration that promote equitable, health-oriented economic development; and Identify issues of environmental use, protection, and restoration that will benefit from regional policy and guidelines