

PE6 Action: Comprehensive Plan with Sustainability Elements

3 — 21 Points



BRONZE PRIORITY



SILVER PRIORITY

A. Why is this action important?

Local governments are responsible for planning in a number of areas, including housing, transportation, water, open space, waste management, energy, and disaster preparedness. In New York State, these planning efforts can be combined into a comprehensive plan that steers investments by local governments and guides future development through zoning regulations. A comprehensive plan provides communities with a strong defense for regulations adopted in conformance with the plan. Almost 70% of the cities, towns, and villages in New York State have a comprehensive plan, according to a [survey](#).

A comprehensive plan also provides a vision for how a community wants to grow over a 10- to 20-year period and recommends steps for how to achieve that vision. As part of that vision, the comprehensive planning process offers an opportunity for communities to consider how to balance the three “Es” of sustainability: environment, economy, and equity. Because moving toward greater sustainability is often in alignment with mitigating and adapting to climate change, the Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program encourages local governments to integrate sustainability into their comprehensive plans.

B. How to implement this action

Local governments should incorporate sustainability elements throughout the comprehensive plan. Alternatively, they may add sustainability as a standalone chapter to the plan or as a separate plan incorporated by reference, though integration is preferable. These approaches may be taken for a new plan or adopted as an amendment to the existing comprehensive plan.

The steps listed below can be followed to incorporate sustainability into the comprehensive plan, whether as a new plan or as a plan amendment (though the scope of an amendment might be focused on a particular topic, such as a bike and pedestrian plan). As with all planning processes, public outreach and engagement are essential throughout the creation of the plan. The local government should seek diverse participation, ensuring that the process actively involves all segments of the community, and should use a variety of communication channels to inform and engage the public.

1. **Public Outreach and Engagement:** Develop communications strategy. Identify stakeholders from all segments of the community. Launch outreach (i.e., social media, public meetings). Define what sustainability means to the community.
2. **Baseline Assessment:** Analyze existing conditions for land use, economic development, housing, energy, transportation, and natural, cultural, and historic resources.
3. **Develop Goals:** Use media and survey tools to capture the community’s vision. Set goals with stakeholders and subcommittees. Ensure goals address the three “Es” of sustainability: environment, economy, and equity. Determine goals to address the community’s sustainability definition.
4. **Identify and Evaluate Strategies and Actions:** Conduct research on national best practices. Facilitate strategy and action identification process. Develop evaluation criteria and evaluate strategies. Prioritize strategies and actions. Determine strategies to achieve sustainability goals and detail implementation actions.
5. **Integration:** Develop draft plan for review by the community. Integrate comments from community. Assign implementation responsibilities. Finalize the plan.

Local governments should ensure that responsibilities for carrying out the plan are clearly assigned. This will be key to the successful implementation of the newly incorporated sustainability elements. Wherever possible, strategies should also

identify funding sources and should be connected to the community’s annual budgeting process.

Local governments are encouraged to contact the [New York State Department of State Division of Local Government Services](#) for training, technical assistance and legal guidance on comprehensive planning and the [New York State Department of Transportation](#) for guidance regarding transportation projects.

C. Timeframe, project costs, and resource needs

If the local government is starting from the beginning with its comprehensive planning process, it can take up to 18 months to complete the plan. Local governments often hire a consultant to undertake a comprehensive plan. Project costs can range from tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars to facilitate a full comprehensive planning process. An amendment to an existing comprehensive plan is likely to cost less than a new plan and in some cases, an amendment may be completed by local planning staff.

D. Which local governments implement this action? Which departments within the local government are most likely to have responsibility for this?

Any local government can complete a comprehensive plan that includes sustainability and climate change concerns. Town boards, village boards, and city or common councils authorize the development of comprehensive plans. Most communities appoint a comprehensive plan committee to coordinate the development of the plan and work with a planning consultant who will facilitate the planning process. If the local government has a planning department, it would certainly be involved as well. Other municipal committees, such as the CSC task force, conservation advisory councils or environmental commissions, can be included to help gather data or provide recommendations on natural resource issues.

E. How to obtain points for this action

Local governments are eligible for CSC points through completing and adopting a comprehensive plan within the last 10 years that addresses the required and optional (point-based) sustainability elements in the bulleted list below. The plan must identify goals, strategies, and implementation actions for each of the required elements (individually) and for any of the point-based elements. This is the case whether an applicant is adopting a new comprehensive plan or amending an existing plan.

In addition, the plan must describe the public outreach process including information on the variety of communication channels used, the diversity of stakeholders, how stakeholders were meaningfully involved in the plan’s development, and how their involvement is reflected in the implementation of the strategies.

Points are awarded according to the number of point-based elements that are part of the plan, over and above the five required elements. At minimum, the plan must include all of the sustainability elements listed below as required *and* at least one point-based element from the list; such a plan would be eligible for the lowest tier of three points.

	POSSIBLE POINTS
Support alternative modes of transportation (including strategies for bicycles, pedestrians, public transit, and electric vehicles)	Required
Promote smart growth principles in land-use policies	Required
Conserve natural areas (including strategies to designate open space and protect it from development)	Required
Promote a healthy and safe community	Required
Foster equity (including strategies for housing, schools, transportation, recreation, food, and environmental exposures)	Required

Foster green economic development	3
Decrease dependence on fossil fuels and support energy efficiency and renewable energy production	3
Foster the efficient use of natural resources (e.g., water conservation)	3
Promote the development of (or the conservation of) local food systems	3
Minimize solid waste (including strategies to promote recycling and composting or anaerobic digestion of organic materials)	3
Protect drinking water sources from pollution	3
Promote adaptation to climate change (including strategies related to land use and public education and engagement)	3

F. What to submit

Submit the following documentation to apply for points for this action:

- A copy of the approved comprehensive plan with sustainability elements, adopted within ten years prior to the application date
- A copy of the meeting minutes where the plan was formally approved by the local governing body, or where the amendments were approved
- A memorandum explaining how the plan reflects the sustainability elements, including the specific page numbers where the relevant information can be found (The memorandum should provide details on all of the required sustainability elements and any elements for which points are being requested. It should also note the page number(s) in the plan where the required public outreach description can be found.)

All CSC action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submittals should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

G. Links to additional resources or best practices

- [City of Albany, NY - 2030 Plan](#)
- [Town of Cortlandt, NY – Sustainable Master Plan, Envision Cortlandt](#)
- [City of Ithaca, NY - Comprehensive Plan](#)
- [Town of Southampton, NY – Sustainability Element Update to the Comprehensive Plan](#)
- [Buffalo, NY – Comprehensive Plan](#)
- [American Planning Association, Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places](#)
- [American Planning Association, Pilot Program for Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places](#)
- [New York State Department of State. 2004. Guide to Planning and Zoning Laws of New York State. James A. Coon Local Government Technical Series. New York State Department of State. Albany, NY.](#)
- Church, D., and C. Traub. 2002. A Practical Guide to Comprehensive Planning, 2nd edition. New York Planning Federation. Troy, NY. Book available via www.nypf.org
- McElfish, J. 2004. Nature-Friendly Ordinances. Environmental Law Institute, Washington, DC. Book available via www.eli.org/
- New York State Department of State. 1998. Creating the Community You Want: Municipal Options for Land Use Control. James A. Coon Local Government Technical Series. New York State Department of State. Albany, NY.
- Nolon, J. 2002. Well Grounded: Using Local Land Use Authority to Achieve Smart Growth. Environmental Law Institute, Washington, DC.
- Van Tine, J. [ed.] 2003. Local Environmental Strategies. Starting Ground Series. Pace University Land Use Law

Center. White Plains, NY. Book available via www.law.pace.edu/landuse

H. Recertification requirements

The recertification requirements are the same as the initial certification requirements.