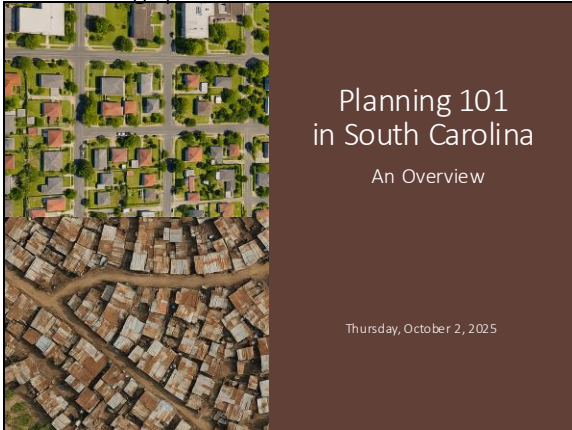


The information provided here is for informational and educational purposes and current as of the date of publication. The information is not a substitute for legal advice and does not necessarily reflect the opinion or policy position of the Municipal Association of South Carolina. Consult your attorney for advice concerning specific situations.




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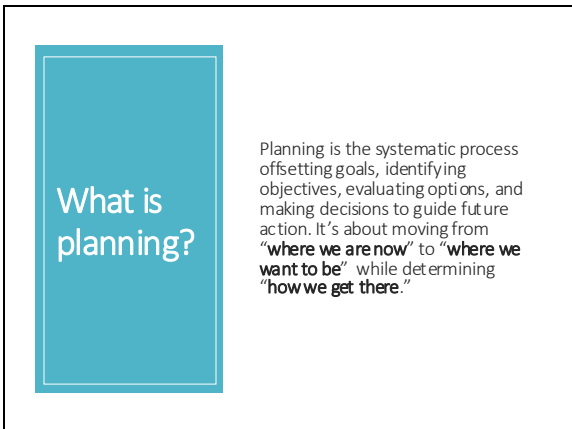
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## Why do we plan?



Industrialization



Public Health



Urbanization



Automobile



Suburbanization/ Sprawl



Climate Change



Pandemic

Technology and  
innovationEconomic and Geopolitical  
Uncertainty

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## Types of Plans

- Comprehensive Plans
- Strategic Plans
- Capital Improvement Plans
- Hazard Mitigation Plans
- Smaller/Specialized Plans




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## Legal Basis for planning in South Carolina

Comprehensive planning in South Carolina is governed by the state's Local Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act of 1994, which provides the legal framework for how municipalities and counties manage their growth and development.

A **comprehensive plan** serves as a blueprint for a community's future and is built on a process of evaluating existing conditions, identifying needs and goals, and strategizing for implementation.

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## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a long-term guiding document that outlines a community's vision for growth, development, and preservation over 10 to 20 years.

### Key Functions:

**Roadmap:** Serves as a guide for decision-making by local officials.

**Vision-Setting:** Creates a shared vision for future growth and development.

**Legal Basis:** Provides the foundation for implementing local zoning ordinances, land development regulations, **Capital Improvement Plans, and Infrastructure Investments.**

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## The South Carolina Planning Mandate

**Requirement:** Any South Carolina municipality or county that wants to enact zoning or land development regulations must first adopt a comprehensive plan.

### Timeline:

**Re-evaluation:** Plans must be reviewed at least once every five years.

**Update:** A full update and adoption of a new plan is required at least every 10 years.

**Document is Fluid:** Can update as conditions dictate.

**Process:** The local planning commission is responsible for developing and maintaining the plan.

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## Required Plan Elements

State law requires every comprehensive plan to address ten specific elements, ensuring a holistic approach to planning.

### List of Elements:

**Population:** Trends, projections, and demographics.

**Economic Development:** Labor force, economic base analysis, and strategies.

**Natural Resources:** Preservation of wetlands, forests, agricultural lands, and scenic areas.

**Cultural Resources:** Protection of historic sites, unique districts, and cultural assets.

**Community Facilities:** Plans for infrastructure like water, sewer, solid waste, and public safety.

**Housing:** Analysis of housing stock, needs, and affordability.

**Land Use:** Existing and future land use considerations.

**Transportation:** Road improvements, transit, and pedestrian facilities, and coordination with MPO/COG Long Range Plans.

**Priority Investment:** Analysis of funding for public infrastructure over the next decade includes the Capital Improvement Plan and coordination of investments with local and regional partners.

**Resilience:** Added in 2020 to address natural hazards and climate impacts.

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## The Planning Process

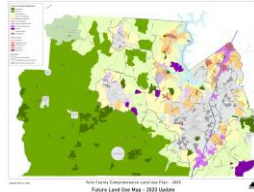
### The Comprehensive Planning Process

**Step 1: Inventory of Current Conditions:** A thorough study of existing conditions, including data on the population, economy, and resources. **Where we are now?**

**Step 2: Needs and Goals:** Engaging the public to create a community-wide vision and identify goals and objectives. **Where we want to be?**

**Step 3: Implementation:** Developing strategies, establishing timeframes, and assigning responsibility for meeting the defined goals. **How do we get there?**

**Step 4: Public Engagement:** Ensuring community voices are heard through public meetings, surveys, and workshops.




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## Why Comprehensive Planning Matters

- Provides vision and direction for communities
- Encourages economic vitality and quality of life
- Enhances eligibility for grants and state/federal funding
- Manages Growth: Helps communities direct and manage growth in an organized framework.
- Protects Resources: Safeguards natural and cultural heritage.
- Guides Investment: Ensures public funds are invested wisely in infrastructure and services.
- Promotes Public Welfare and Quality of Life: Creates a convenient, attractive, and harmonious community.




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### Who Oversees the Comprehensive Plan Process?

#### Role of the Planning Commission and Council

##### Planning Commission/Staff:

- Prepares and periodically revises the comprehensive plan.
- Presents an affirmative recommendation to the local governing body.
- Oversees the planning program.

##### County/Municipal Council:

- Considers the plan and can accept, modify, or return it to PC for further action.
- Holds a public hearing. (PC can hold Public Hearing)
- Adopts the plan by ordinance.

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## Establishing Planning Process



### Understand the Legal Framework

- Review the SC Local Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act of 1994.
- Confirm the authority of the municipality to establish planning and zoning.



### Establish Political & Community Support

- Town Council votes to initiate planning efforts.
- Hold public meetings to build support.
- Engage the local Council of Governments (COG) for technical help.



### Create a Planning Commission

- Adopt an ordinance establishing a Planning Commission.
- Appoint members representing community interests.
- Charge the commission with preparing plans, ordinances, and the Capital Improvement Plan.



### Develop a Comprehensive Plan

- Hire staff or contract with the COG or a planning consultant for plan preparation.
- Conduct public input sessions.
- Adopt the plan via the Planning Commission's recommendation and Council approval.

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## Establishment Planning And Zoning Process



### Draft and Adopt a Zoning and Land Development Ordinance

- Hire staff or contract with the COG or a consultant for preparation.
- Engage Municipal/Town legal professionals.
- Create zoning districts and an official zoning map.
- Hold public hearings as required by law.
- Adopt ordinance by Municipality/County Council.



### Establish Administrative Framework

- Hire/Contract and designate a zoning administrator and/or planning staff.
- Form a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) to hear appeals, variances, and special exceptions.
- Ensure all Boards and Commissions, and staff receive annual required state training.



### Establish Implementation and Procedural Functions

- Establish processes/protocols for review of permits, subdivisions, and zoning compliance.
- Establish Code enforcement function.
- Regular process to review the comprehensive plan every 5 years and update every 10 years.
- Maintain regular public engagement.

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## Strategic Plan

A strategic plan is a guiding document that provides the community's long-term vision, goals, and priorities—usually over a 5- to 10-year period. It serves as a roadmap for decision-making, resource allocation, and measuring progress. Unlike a comprehensive plan (which is more focused on physical development and land use), a strategic plan is typically broader, more flexible, and tied to organizational priorities and community services.

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## Strategic Plan

### Key Elements:

#### 1. Vision and Mission

A statement of what the community aspires to be (vision) and how it intends to get there (mission).

#### 2. Core Values

Shared principles that guide local government decisions (e.g., transparency, equity, accountability, innovation, sustainability).

#### 3. SWOT

May include community input, demographic/economic data, and benchmarking against peer cities.

#### 4. Strategic Goals and Objectives

Broad goals broken into measurable objectives.

#### 5. Action Strategies

Specific initiatives or projects the town or city will undertake (e.g., updating zoning codes, expanding parks, launching a workforce training program).

#### 6. Performance Measures

Metrics to track progress (e.g., reduction in crime rate, number of new jobs created, miles of sidewalk built).

#### 7. Implementation and Accountability

Assignment of responsibility.

A timeline and process for reviewing and updating the plan (often annually).

#### 8. Should Align with the Comprehensive Plan Goals

Strategic Plans can be completed by staff, Consultant, or COG

## Capital Improvement Plan

A Capital Improvement Plan or CIP is a rolling plan—commonly covering **5 to 10 years**—that lists large capital projects, their costs, potential funding sources, and the years when they are expected to be designed, constructed, or purchased. It is typically updated annually.

Reviewed and approved by The Planning Commission

**Capital projects** usually include:

- Streets, sidewalks, and bridges
- Water and sewer infrastructure
- Stormwater and drainage systems
- Parks, trails, and recreation facilities
- Public buildings (city hall, libraries, police/fire stations)
- Large equipment or vehicles (fire trucks, sanitation trucks, transit vehicles)

## Capital Improvement Plans

### Key Components

1. Project List
2. Program Timeframe
3. Cost Estimates
4. Funding Sources
5. Prioritization
6. Annual Update Process

### Function and Purpose

1. **Aligns with Community Goals** – Ensures infrastructure investments support long-term vision and growth.
2. **Supports Fiscal Responsibility** – Helps avoid surprises by forecasting future costs and revenues.
3. **Improves Grant/Bond Applications** – Demonstrates readiness and planning when seeking outside funding.
4. **Enhances Transparency** – Lets residents see how tax dollars are planned to be invested.
5. **Connects to the Budget** – The first year of the CIP typically becomes the capital budget for that fiscal year.

## Hazard Mitigation Plans

A **Hazard Mitigation Plan** is a required planning document that identifies natural hazards that could affect a community and outlines long-term strategies to **reduce risks to people, property, and infrastructure**.

In South Carolina, every **county** (sometimes in partnership with municipalities through their Council of Governments) must adopt and maintain an HMP that complies with the **Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000)** and guidelines from the **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** and the **South Carolina Emergency Management Division (SCEMD)**.

Without a FEMA-approved plan, a county and its municipalities are **not eligible for federal mitigation funding** after disasters (like hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, or winter storms).




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## Hazard Mitigation Plans

### Cycle and Requirements in South Carolina

- **Every 5 years**, each county (with municipalities participating) must update and re-adopt its HMP.
- SCEMD reviews local drafts before they are sent to FEMA for approval.
- Local governments adopt the plan by resolution once FEMA approves.
- Should be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan Resilience Section.

### Why it Matters?

- **Funding Eligibility:** A FEMA-approved plan is required for post-disaster mitigation funds and competitive resilience programs.
- **Risk Reduction:** Guides proactive steps (buyouts, stormwater improvements, building codes) to reduce future disaster losses.
- **Local Coordination:** Brings together emergency management, planning, public works, utilities, and elected officials to prepare a unified strategy.




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## Hazard Mitigation Plans

### Key Elements of an HMP

#### Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA)

Identifies hazards most likely to occur (e.g., hurricanes, flooding, dam failures, wildfires, earthquakes, winter storms, droughts).

Evaluates the probability and severity of each hazard.

#### Vulnerability Assessment

Examines which populations, critical facilities (schools, hospitals, utilities), and infrastructure are most at risk.

#### Mitigation Goals and Strategies

Broad goals (e.g., "Reduce flood risk to vulnerable neighborhoods") supported by actionable strategies like elevating homes, updating floodplain maps, or hardening emergency shelters.

#### Mitigation Actions / Project List

Specific projects prioritized for implementation, often tied to grant opportunities (e.g., FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, BRIC program).

#### Plan Maintenance

Describes how the plan will be updated, monitored, and integrated into other local plans (like comprehensive plans or capital improvement plans).




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## Smaller Individualized Plans

- Downtown Master Plan
- Streetscape Plan
- Sidewalk Master Plan
- Bike/Pedestrian Plan
- Trail Plan
- Utility Plan
- Master Park Plan
- Individual Park Plan
- Small Area
- Regional Housing Plan
- Solid Waste Management Plan
- Long Range Transportation Plan

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## Resources

Municipal Association of South Carolina  
South Carolina Association of Counties  
South Carolina Department of  
Emergency Management  
South Carolina Comprehensive Planning  
Guide (2024)  
American Planning Association  
Local COG

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