



BEST PRACTICE AREA 4: LAND USE

Vision

The Joint Planning District is a vibrant area that sustains and regenerates itself by using land in a manner that simultaneously protects the area's natural resources, ensures a high quality of life for all residents, and strengthens the area's economy.

Background

How the Joint Planning District chooses to use land greatly affects the extent to which the area is moving toward sustainability. Once developed, land use is generally slow to change. For example, if prime agricultural land or a significant natural area is cleared at the outskirts of a community for development of a shopping center, it is highly unlikely that the land will ever be restored to its former natural state or agricultural use. Furthermore, the development of the shopping center may spur additional development in the area, which could exasperate sprawl and move the community away from sustainability. Therefore, it is critical that the community and region carefully plan the future use of land so that it moves the community and region closer to sustainability.

Goals

- A. Conserve and enhance significant natural areas and functional open space as interconnected corridors, emphasizing the benefits for wildlife, for multi-modal transportation, and for outdoor activity and community health (see also Best Practice Area 9: Community Health).
- B. Promote sustainable agricultural practices, permaculture, and the preservation of productive agricultural land.
- C. Promote and strengthen compact development in areas with existing infrastructure. Encourage mixed-use in selected high-activity areas.
- D. Encourage land uses that provide a range of housing opportunities, choices, and locations to meet the needs of residents.
- E. Model the use of land after natural processes by considering the various inputs and outputs (such as water and energy use) associated with healthy ecosystems and promote land uses that support functional natural ecosystems (see also Best Practice Area 11).





Initiatives and Action Steps

The following three initiatives for initial action were identified through public input and reflect local stakeholders' views of which goals would have the most profound effect on moving the Joint Planning District toward sustainability.

The first initiative recognizes that a sustainable community starts with a functioning natural environment and that humans are an integral part of the natural environment. Therefore, if we contribute to the degradation of nature, we are not only hurting or destroying countless plant and animal species and other resources, but we are also affecting our ability to sustain our communities and ourselves. Consequently, this first initiative recognizes the importance of conserving, enhancing, and connecting significant natural areas in the region. It recognizes natural areas as a legitimate and important land use in the region.

The second initiative focuses on promoting compact, mixed-use development in high activity areas where existing infrastructure exists. This initiative is intended to discourage sprawl into rural areas. Sprawl not only uses potentially valuable natural areas and productive agricultural land, but it also contributes to the need for more roads, sewers, and other infrastructure. In addition, it results in more vehicle miles traveled to get to services and places of employment. In contrast, compact, mixed-use development in high activity areas where existing infrastructure exists does not require extension of costly infrastructure and it allows people to more easily walk, bike, or use mass transit to access services and places of employment.

The third initiative focuses on meeting the Joint Planning District's housing needs. A sustainable community must provide ways to meet basic human needs, including providing adequate shelter for its residents.

1. **Connect with nature:** Conserve and enhance significant natural areas and functional open space as interconnected corridors, emphasizing the benefits for wildlife, for multi-modal transportation, and for outdoor activity and community health (see also BPAs 11 & 14).
 - a. Work with neighboring and overlapping jurisdictions, property owners, and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to conserve, enhance, and connect significant natural areas throughout the region. Develop, adopt, and implement a green infrastructure plan.
 - b. Identify opportunities to connect fragmented natural areas by restoring natural systems in areas that have been degraded or developed in a manner that hinders the proper functioning of the natural system. This action does not require government acquisition of private land. The government can work with private landowners to





- help restore natural functions and to allow for the connection of fragmented natural areas.
- c. Where appropriate, coordinate with property owners and others to encourage the preservation of existing, privately owned natural areas. Consider the use of conservation easements, purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, and other tools.
 - d. Ensure that new and planned development provides for the connection of natural open space corridors throughout the region.
 - e. Continue updating and enforcing environmentally sensitive areas ordinances as an environmental overlay zoning district to help protect and manage significant natural areas.
 - f. Where appropriate, sensitively integrate bicycle and pedestrian trails into green corridors as a means to promote community health and as an alternative mode to the use of automobile transit.
 - g. Require land subdivisions and development projects to identify existing natural features and how those features will be protected or mitigated. Local ESA ordinances have prepared inventories and identified best management practices for many of these features.
2. **Stop sprawl:** Promote and strengthen compact development in areas with existing infrastructure. Encourage mixed-use in selected high-activity areas.
- a. Encourage infill development, redevelopment of brownfield sites, and combination of underutilized parcels.
 - b. Promote the renovation and reuse of existing buildings where feasible. Encourage measures to increase energy efficiency through LEED, B3, or other programs.
 - c. Promote high-density housing near transit.
 - d. Where appropriate, reduce or eliminate minimum lot size requirements as a means to encourage compact development in areas with existing infrastructure.
 - e. Provide innovative opportunities to reduce the need for onsite parking.
 - f. Promote new civic facilities in areas of existing development, rather than in greenfield areas.
 - g. Update the Comprehensive Plan and Small Area Plans, as necessary, to encourage a mix of land uses in appropriate areas of the community.
 - h. Use innovative zoning techniques (such as form-based zoning or design guidelines) to help achieve quality mixed-use development.





- i. Where appropriate, consider providing incentives for ground-floor retail and upper level residential uses in existing and planned development.
 - j. Explore the possibility of converting declining or vacant strip shopping centers into mixed-use developments.
 - k. Encourage more creative site design as an alternative to the existing large lot residential development in the region. Encourage a greater range of housing types and common open space.
 - l. Provide incentives to promote mixed-use development that enhance walkability and community health.
3. **Meet housing needs:** Encourage land uses that provide a range of housing opportunities, choices, and locations.
- a. Use a variety of tools, such as an inclusive housing ordinance that mandate or incent a variety of housing values/styles in each development or a streamlined review process, to promote the development of affordable housing.
 - b. Promote opportunities to modify or renovate existing housing units and/or property in a manner that enables residents to stay in their homes and that provides an affordable way to provide additional housing for others. For example, consider allowing accessory dwelling units outright or as a conditional use. Also, consider allowing duplexes or twinhomes in single-family districts.
 - c. Explore opportunities with others to meet community housing needs. For example, help facilitate the acquisition of land for organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. Also, ensure that ordinances do not unnecessarily prohibit or prevent house sharing.
 - d. Update the Comprehensive Plan and Small Area Plans to ensure that housing relates to existing and planned employment in the immediate area.
 - e. Provide greater flexibility in the ordinances to allow a variety of housing types and smaller housing units on smaller lots. Identify ways that this can be done without using the Planned Unit Development approach.
 - f. Strive for economies of scale so that infill development and mixed housing types can compete in the market.

General Actions

The following general actions have been identified as key steps to allow the Joint Planning District to move toward the goals for this Best Practice Area that were not selected as “initiatives” above.





- I. Using zoning and other tools (such as, large minimum parcel sizes, conservation developments, urban growth boundaries, and purchase of development rights) to help ensure the preservation of productive agricultural land.
- II. Recognize the value of agriculture to the region. If conflict arises between agricultural uses and other adjacent uses, work to resolve the conflict in mutually acceptable ways that allow continued appropriate use of agricultural land.
- III. Encourage relatively small acreage sustainable farming enterprises at the urban edge. Promote enterprises that are likely to be profitable over the long term by helping meet the demand for local foods.
- IV. Promote low impact development standards that reflect how natural systems function. For example, use rain gardens to help handle storm water runoff onsite.
- V. Update the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations to reflect the principles of sustainability. For example, allow for reduced road widths, where appropriate.
- VI. Use community facilities as a showcase for sustainable land use development.
- VII. Establish new resident campaign focusing on educating residents of rural and urban developments in natural settings about living in unison with wildlife and plant communities.

