

plansmart nj

Strategic Business Plan 2012-2014

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1. Introduction

Welcome to PlanSmart NJ's 2012 through 2014 Strategic Business Plan. Our 2012-2014 Strategic Business Plan sets forth our vision and mission, describes what we believe, and explains our unique approach to the land use planning issues confronting our state. Through this document, we anticipate that you will gain an appreciation for PlanSmart NJ's core strategies and recent accomplishments. And you will learn what we plan to do next. The Strategic Business Plan sets forth our strategic direction for the coming three years.

Our initiatives have been selected by our Board of Directors with consideration for our organizational capacity and ability to deliver on our commitments, our ability to obtain the resources necessary to carry out these initiatives, and our assessment of the political viability of moving these initiatives forward. The initiatives we will undertake may fall under a particular heading, such as transportation or economic development, but are all linked through the nexus of land use planning.

We invite you to become partners in our efforts to strengthen our economy and environment to make New Jersey a better place to live, work, and play for all.

2. Defining the Land Use Challenges Facing New Jersey

Consider these sobering statistics:

- During the two decades 1986-2007, NJ's urban growth rate was nearly twice as fast as its population growth rate. NJ grew by 14% in population but added 27% to its urbanized footprint. (Source: Rowan University)
- New Jersey residents have the third longest commutes in the nation, despite being a relatively small state of approximately 7,500 square miles. (Source: US Census)
- In April 2011, New Jersey's employment levels were at the same level as they had been in September 1998. (Source: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey)
- In 2010, only 23 new corporations started or expanded facilities in New Jersey, compared with 168 in New York, 337 in Pennsylvania, and 424 in Texas. (Source: Conway Data Inc)
- A net of 53,744 households left the state in 2009, as part of a net out migration. (Source: US Census)
- New Jersey has 116 superfund sites, the most in the nation. (Source: US EPA)
- In 2010, New Jersey ranked as the fourth most expensive state in the nation for rental housing, after Hawaii, California, and Maryland. (Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition)
- New Jersey has the highest tax burden in the nation. (Source: Tax Foundation)
- New Jersey received a "C-" on a report card measuring the condition of the critical components of the State's infrastructure by the American Society of Civil Engineers

Yet New Jersey also has a wealth of assets:

- Strategic access to local and global financial markets
- World-class sea and airports
 - New Jersey is a major seaport state with the largest seaport in the east coast located in Elizabeth. (Source: New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium)
- Expansive Public Transportation Infrastructure
 - NJ TRANSIT, the largest statewide public transportation system in the nation
 - NJ's commuter rail, light rail and bus systems take more than 800,000 trips off the highway system each weekday.
 - Almost one in ten workers in New Jersey uses public transit to get to work, twice the national average.
- State-of-the-art energy and communications infrastructure
- A highly trained workforce
- Top-notch Educational Systems
 - New Jersey leads the nation in high school graduation rates. For bachelor's and advanced degree attainment, NJ ranks 5th in the nation. (Source: US Census)
 - New Jersey has over 70 colleges, universities and institutes for higher learning
- New Jersey has the second highest personal income per capita in the nation. (Source: US Census)
- The New Jersey Shoreline (127 miles of beach) is within 100 miles of major population centers, and is accessible to approximately 90 million people. (Source: VisitNJ.org)
- Wildlife diversity: New Jersey hosts over 894 species throughout its five distinct ecosystems: forest, beach, grasslands, wetlands, and forested wetlands.

PlanSmart NJ believes that our state's challenges in the areas of economic development, transportation, housing, regional equity, and the environment are linked -- and most holistically addressed -- through the common nexus of land use. Through more sensible land use planning, we can mobilize and build upon our tremendous assets. PlanSmart NJ adopts a regional planning approach to foster balance between environmental and economic interests, with the goal of creating a sustainable future for all New Jersey residents.

3. Our Vision

PlanSmart NJ aims to revitalize New Jersey's landscape so that our state's citizens benefit from a sustainable economy and environment, based on resource efficiency and social equity.

4. Our Mission

PlanSmart NJ is an independent, non-profit planning and research organization committed to improving the quality of community life through the advancement of sound land use planning and regional cooperation.

5. What We Believe

PlanSmart NJ believes that thoughtful land use planning can strengthen our economy and environment to make New Jersey a better place to live, work, and play for all. We work with state, county and local officials who are struggling with land use decisions and how best to optimize the use of New Jersey's scarce resources.

We help refocus the debate away from whether New Jersey should grow, to how best we can grow. We believe growth must balance both the environmental and economic needs of the state.

6. Our Focus Areas

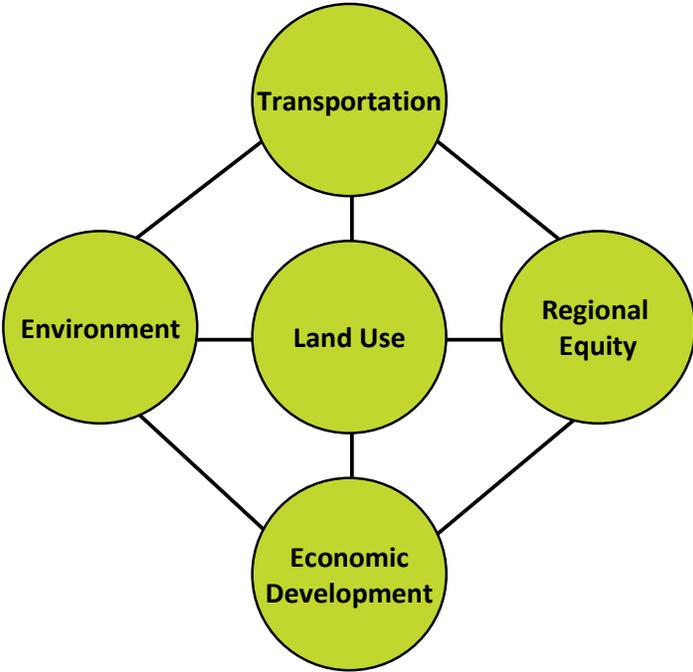
As New Jersey looks to the future, PlanSmart NJ presents a clear vision for comprehensive sustainability and stability for the state's economy, environment, and communities. The impacts of aging infrastructure, inefficient land use patterns, loss of environmentally sensitive land, disinvestment in urban areas and inner ring suburbs as well as global economic shifts are taking their toll on statewide prosperity.

A regional approach to land use decisions can turn these trends around – resulting in compact livable communities, an attractive climate for business investment, well-maintained infrastructure, a state-of-the-art public transit system, and a range of housing opportunities located near jobs.

The chart below illustrates the components of New Jersey's land use system and the linkages between them. Here we set forth New Jersey's key challenges and

opportunities: economic development, the environment, transportation, and regional equity.

Our Land Use Matrix



PlanSmart NJ is well positioned to address these challenges and work towards comprehensive reform.

7. Our Unique Approach

PlanSmart NJ brings the following strengths to our work:

- **Regional Perspective**
We work with public and private sector leaders to facilitate regional projects of significance. We help state, county, and local officials weigh the issues across all audiences, while keeping a keen focus on New Jersey as a whole. We take positions on regional issues, but we are not one-

sided. Our public policy advocacy, education, and research are grounded in real life examples.

➤ **Thoroughness**

We are able to address complex issues. We bring expertise in land use planning to all of our work.

➤ **Balanced Approach**

We take a holistic, fact-based approach to land use decisions. We bring all parties to the table. We balance the environment, equity, economy and resource efficiency.

➤ **Consensus Builder**

We cut through the stagnation and political lethargy to make things happen. We have the leadership and experience needed to build consensus. We understand there are many different perspectives in the land use arena and we work hard to make people feel we understand their point of view.

8. Our Strategies and Accomplishments

PlanSmart NJ undertakes a host of complementary strategies to achieve its vision and mission. We have over 40 years of experience as an organization in conducting research, education and outreach, public policy advocacy, and training and technical assistance.

a) **Research**

PlanSmart NJ undertakes original, in-depth research grounded in reliable data to support changes to New Jersey's land use patterns and policies. We prepare reports, studies, and maps to educate and inform policymakers and practitioners with the goal of effecting changes to land use systems to improve the quality of life for all New Jersey residents. We have expertise in land use, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, and housing, among other areas. PlanSmart NJ also creates new planning tools, strategies and conceptual frameworks to be used by policymakers, planners, and the public to better inform land-use decision-making. Our focus is on applied research that leads to implementation.

Recent achievements. We have authored or co-authored several studies and well-received reports, including:

- *What's Land Use Got To Do With It?: Examining the Connections Between New Jersey's Economic Prosperity and Its Land Use Patterns.* (2011, Produced for PlanSmart NJ's Spring 2011 Conference)
- *Out and About: A Guide to Sustainable Local Circulation Planning* (2011, Produced for NJ Office for Planning Advocacy)
- *Transit Score: New Jersey's Unique Planning Tool* (2011, Produced with URS for NJ Transit),
- *How Much Growth? Where? To Do What? Finding and Planning Receiving Areas for the Highlands Transfer of Development Rights Program* (2010, Produced for The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council)
- *Protecting New Jersey's Natural Capital Through Land Use Planning: Opportunities and Challenges* (2009, Produced for NJDEP).
- *Housing the Vulnerable in Mercer County Report* (2008, Produced for Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness)

b) Education and Outreach

PlanSmart NJ conducts education and outreach to inform a broad audience about the benefits of sound land use planning. We host an annual conference in the Spring and an Annual Dinner in the Fall to engage various constituencies and provide cutting edge ideas, information and implementation strategies to planners, government leaders, private sector leaders, the non-profit community, and the general public. We host regional forums around the State to engage local leaders in thinking strategically about the future of their region. We foster partnerships and dialogue between non-traditional partners to achieve better land use outcomes. We also produce a regular blog to educate and inform our members and supporters about timely land use issues.

Recent achievements. PlanSmart NJ has built a reputation around hosting informative and well-attended events and forums around timely themes:

- We hosted a **conference** in Spring 2011 attended by approximately 100 participants, "Impacting Economic Expansion and Retention in New Jersey: A Land Use Perspective".

- We co-hosted a **conference** in 2010 around the theme of regional equity, attended by 400 people: “Building ONE New Jersey: State Planning for Inclusion, Sustainability, and Economic Development.” Deputy Secretary of HUD, Ron Sims, was the keynote speaker.
- In 2007/2008, we hosted three **regional forums** in Newark, Atlantic City, and New Brunswick to engage regional stakeholders in a conversation about the unique land use, transportation, and infrastructure challenges and opportunities facing these regions.
- PlanSmart NJ’s Annual Dinner recognizes and **highlights the work of individuals or organizations that have promoted smart growth initiatives** by presenting six awards – Regional Planning Achievement, Outstanding Individual in Regional Planning Achievement, Economic Development Achievement, Environmental Achievement, Regional Equity, and Resource Efficiency Awards.

c) Public Policy Advocacy

PlanSmart NJ advocates for better land use planning, more effective legislation and regulations, and more efficient and targeted infrastructure investments to revitalize the landscape and improve New Jersey residents’ daily lives. We conduct public policy advocacy on issues such as the State Plan, economic development strategies, redevelopment policies, environmental regulations, farmland preservation, and transportation policies, among other areas. We build coalitions with other non-profit organizations with allied missions and with private sector partners.

Recent achievements.

- Participated in **Common Ground**, a coalition of environmental and planning organizations advocating for effective implementation of State Planning concepts (2011).
- PlanSmart NJ’s participation in the **Smart Growth Economic Development Coalition** led to the passage of the Smart Growth Economic Development Stimulus Act of 2008. The Act created new financing mechanisms for redevelopment in targeted smart growth locations.
- PlanSmart NJ was the first to tell DEP to **throw out the Wastewater Management Rules** and start over to better protect the environment and

promote economic development in growth areas. DEP has met with us to discuss how to revise the rules.

- PlanSmart NJ convened a **regulatory roundtable** of land use experts who made recommendations to NJDEP's Permit Efficiency Task Force. A final report from PlanSmart NJ's group of experts was produced and integrated into the resulting DEP Task Force Report (2008).

d) Training and Technical Assistance

PlanSmart NJ provides training and technical assistance programs to professional planners, public officials, private sector leaders, and members of the public around better land use planning strategies, practices and principles, including issues of transit investment, regional equity and environmental justice, circulation elements to promote multi-modal transportation options, and development of regional plans, to name a few. We work with partner organizations to deliver cost-effective training and one-on-one technical assistance.

We work on-the-ground within a regional context to foster innovative and participatory regional plans and to change current land use systems to promote center-based development, strengthen regional infrastructure, enhance transportation corridors, create economic development opportunities, expand housing choice, and foster regional equity. We undertake this work in concert with regional partners to ensure that our work is grounded in reality and has a positive impact on the residents of the region.

Recent Achievements.

- Since inception, PlanSmart NJ has been a leader in fostering regional planning for the **Route One Corridor**. The **Central Jersey Transportation Forum** has been convened by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission for NJDOT to promote a regional approach to project development in the Route One Corridor. PlanSmart NJ completed the Route 1 Regional Smart Growth Assessment and has advocated for the development of a list of next generation transportation projects that will result in better outcomes for the region. We continue to advocate for implementation of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

- Produced several handbooks to assist local officials in planning for housing and transportation. The Guides include: ***Out and About: A Guide to Sustainable Local Circulation Planning*** (2011, Produced for NJ Office for Planning Advocacy), ***Transit Score: New Jersey's Unique Planning Tool*** (2011, Produced with URS for NJ Transit), ***How Much Growth? Where? To Do What? Finding and Planning Receiving Areas for the Highlands Transfer of Development Rights Program*** (2010, Produced for The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council)
- Hosted a **half-day conference** in 2009 on **Transportation and Economic Development in the Route One Corridor**. National development expert Michael Gallis was the keynote speaker and urged the audience of 100 leaders to protect the region's assets by improving the land use decision making process and investing in infrastructure.

9. Our 2012 through 2014 Work Plan

PlanSmart NJ's 2012 to 2014 work plan will combine our strategies of research, education and outreach, public policy advocacy, and training and technical assistance to tangibly improve land use decision-making and lead to better outcomes on the ground.

In this work plan, we place a renewed emphasis on working at the regional level with key private and public sector partners to effect changes in transportation, economic development, housing, and the environment.

PlanSmart NJ will undertake a work program for 2012 to 2014 in the following areas:

a) Reform New Jersey's State and Regional Planning Systems

PlanSmart NJ will engage in education and public policy advocacy to make substantial reforms to New Jersey's state and regional planning systems, with the aim of promoting economic growth, enhancing our transportation infrastructure, promoting social equity, and protecting the environment.

We will work through coalitions to draft recommendations and engage decision-makers to reform the State Planning Act and state agency regulations to foster regional land use planning and implementation of State Planning principles. We will also make recommendations and build coalitions to support changes to other enabling statutes such as the County Planning Act and the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) to further regional planning.

PlanSmart NJ hosted a highly successful and well-attended conference in Spring 2011 on the connections between land use planning and economic development. We invited business leaders to speak directly to our audience of planners and policymakers about their perspectives. A report from a focus group held in April 2011 was released at the conference describing the challenges business leaders believe face New Jersey as we seek to attract and retain businesses. PlanSmart NJ will build upon these efforts in 2012 – 2014 as follows:

- Establish regional working groups in strategic growth corridors with business leaders, planners, and public officials to identify the regional challenges to economic growth, develop recommendations, and advocate for strategic regional infrastructure investments. PlanSmart NJ will host two to three regional forums to begin the process of developing effective regional working groups.
- Publish a report on proposed solutions and recommendations for land use reforms that will foster sustainable economic development, based upon input from stakeholder groups and conference participants.
- Develop a broad coalition to include economic development, planning, and environmental groups to advance needed reforms (legislative, regulatory, structural/programmatic, financing). Communicate ideas for reform to decision-makers, including state officials, and advocate for specific reforms in the areas of housing, transportation, property taxation, wastewater management planning, and regional land use planning.

b) Facilitate Redevelopment and Compact Development

There is broad consensus that much “lip service” is paid to redevelopment and compact development of centers, but too little action is taken. PlanSmart NJ will assess the multiple obstacles to redevelopment in urban areas and inner ring suburbs. We will analyze the state’s aging sewer, water, and transportation infrastructure, and will craft recommendations on strategies and action steps needed to make these areas attractive for development. As part of this effort, we will consider legislative and regulatory changes as well as targeted investments that would facilitate compact development and redevelopment. We will work through coalitions to advance our legislative and regulatory recommendations.

c) Strengthen Our State's Transportation Infrastructure

PlanSmart NJ will advocate for cost-effective regional transportation solutions in selected regions of the State. We will analyze and propose solutions to New Jersey's transportation infrastructure needs in a post-ARC environment. We will study ways to better use New Jersey's existing transportation infrastructure through land use changes that promote compact development around transit stops, maximizing ridership on underutilized lines, investing in Bus Rapid Transit, light rail, and other cost-effective public transportation alternatives. We will examine the importance of freight and advocate for investments that will promote sustainable economic growth through the efficient and effective movement of freight. We will work with counties and regional entities to test ideas and launch new initiatives.

We will also get the word out about PlanSmart NJ's transportation publications, which support public transit investment and multimodal transportation alternatives. We will provide technical assistance and training to municipalities, counties and other interested parties on PlanSmart NJ's Guide, *Out and About: A Guide to Sustainable Local Circulation Planning*, released in Spring 2011, with the goal of expanding multimodal transportation opportunities in communities around the State.

We will provide training and technical assistance to communities on use of the Transit Score, with a focus on land use changes that will expand opportunities for public transit. PlanSmart NJ has just finished a publication: *Transit Score: New Jersey's Unique Planning Tool*, which will serve as the foundation for this effort.

d) Foster Regional Equity

PlanSmart NJ understands that regional equity and opportunity are key to the development of sustainable, thriving neighborhoods and communities, and to the broader success of the state in attracting economic growth, providing quality education and protecting the environment. Regional equity means fostering land use policies that create housing choice in areas with jobs and good schools as well as promoting a more equitable and efficient system of property taxation.

We will undertake a joint project with allied organizations to lay the groundwork for fostering sustainable communities, with an initial focus on older inner ring suburbs. PlanSmart NJ will play a research and coordination

role in this arena, working in partnership with other organizations to foster stable, sustainable, diverse communities.

PlanSmart NJ is a partner in *Sustainable Jersey*, and will chair the Diversity and Equity Task Force. This task force tackles issues of diversity on local Boards, environmental justice, and public health. As part of this initiative, PlanSmart NJ will provide research support for a study of the cumulative effects of air, water, and land pollution and their effects on communities, coupled with proposed strategies and policy reforms to create more livable communities.

PlanSmart NJ will also work with partner organizations to advocate for strategies to reform New Jersey's property tax system to lower costs, foster greater equity and encourage more sustainable land-use policies. We will gather existing research on the subject, and evaluate the effects of New Jersey's current property tax system on business and residential location decisions. We will look at best practices around the country, including regional tax base sharing.

PlanSmart NJ will also continue to engage in the housing debate, drafting recommendations and engage decision-makers to achieve a balanced framework for state affordable housing policy. We will work in partnership with allied organizations in this effort.

Lastly, we will study the mismatch in the supply and demand for housing options at various income levels by region, building upon our 2008 report, *Housing the Vulnerable in Mercer County*. We will also look at the mismatch between location of jobs and housing and recommend policy changes that would create more housing opportunities near jobs to help foster economic growth in the state.