



## Integrating Climate Resilience into Local Planning

### **What are typical local planning documents and why do they matter?**

Communities undergo a variety of planning processes that are driven by local needs and/or federal or state requirements. Local planning documents help municipalities strategically prepare for and envision current and future circumstances, and often inform policy decisions and funding priorities. Maintaining updated and relevant plans is also typically a prerequisite for receiving funding through grants or helps make grant applications more competitive. There are many different types of local planning documents, which are outlined in the table below.

The process of preparing and adopting these local plans typically includes stakeholder and public outreach and engagement, including hearings, meetings, charettes, surveys, and in many cases, final approval from elected or appointed officials. Stakeholder and public engagement during plan development is critical to the plan's success and longevity.

### **How can communities strengthen local planning documents in the face of a changing climate?**

Climate change is already impacting our communities, causing flooding, drought, and extreme temperatures and weather. The best available information about climate resilience should be incorporated into each local planning document as it is developed, reviewed, and/or updated.

Nature-based solutions are effective (and cost-effective) climate resilience measures that should be incorporated into local planning wherever feasible. For specific recommendations, see "Implementing Nature-Based Solutions and the Building Blue Framework" in CRWA's Policy Toolkit.

Recommendations for Incorporating Climate Resilience into Local Planning Documents:

1. *Ensure that planning documents include information about climate change predictions and impacts relevant to the community*
  - This could include targeted areas of flooding, environmental justice or climate vulnerable populations, sensitive environmental resource areas, etc.
    - For example: an open space plan may include an area of potential future flooding that should be targeted for a permanent easement or acquisition, while an economic development plan may address an area with concerns about heat island impacts and provide recommendations for nature-based solutions such as green infrastructure.
2. *Ensure that information related to climate change is consistent across all planning documents and that climate resilience measures like nature-based solutions are included.*
  - This shows that a community has built consensus and is aligned on its priorities, which can be particularly helpful when applying for grant opportunities to implement goals.

3. *Incorporate regional climate considerations into plans or develop plans in collaboration with neighboring communities.*
  - The region may be a county, geographic area (like a watershed), or a political district.

**Steps to take to stay engaged in municipal policy and planning processes:**

1. Take time to read and familiarize yourself with local municipal code and planning documents.
2. When local code or plans are developed or updated, attend meetings, write comments, fill out surveys, etc. and encourage other community members to do the same.
3. Urge community leaders to coordinate local policy and planning efforts to improve efficiency and consistency among different local entities and plans.
4. Ensure that local plans incorporate and prioritize climate resilience, nature-based solutions, and equity.
5. Meet with municipal leaders and staff to talk about plans, goals, and actions.
6. Talk with leaders at the state and federal level about plans and priority goals and action

**Resources to assist with implementing climate resilience priorities:**

CRWA

- We are here to help communities adapt to a changing climate by providing technical assistance and [policy solutions to municipalities](#)

Community Preservation Act

- [Funding mechanism with dedicated revenue](#) for preserving open space, improving recreation, affordable housing, and historic preservation
- Can be used to pay for climate resilience projects; proposals should consider climate change

Regional Planning Organizations

- Regional planning organizations like [MAPC](#) provide technical assistance to municipalities when developing local plans

Resilient MA

- [State website](#) with resources on building resilience, including statewide tools and plan

### Examples of Local Planning Documents That Should Incorporate Climate Resilience

Plan Title	Purpose	Update Timing	CRWA Recommendation
<b>Capital Improvement Plans</b>	List priority capital projects for various departments/divisions, boards, and commissions; may include infrastructure, buildings and facilities, transportation, and various other projects	N/A	Project benefits discussion for each project should consider climate resilience; incorporate nature-based solutions and stormwater management best practices
<b>Economic Development Plan</b>	Identifies areas for development and infill redevelopment; often includes transportation, communications, energy and other infrastructure	N/A	Should consider climate change and nature-based solutions to identify areas for growth
<b>Hazard Mitigation Plan<sup>1</sup></b>	Identify hazards to minimize threats from natural disasters	5 years; annual status to FEMA	Should consider climate change and nature-based solutions in adaptation solutions
<b>Infrastructure Plans (Water/Wastewater/Stormwater/Transportation)</b>	Master or comprehensive plans may be prepared for specific utilities or systems to inventory the system, evaluate the condition, identify improvements, define maintenance, and plan for long-term operations and/or growth of the system	N/A	Consider how specific infrastructure will be impacted by climate change and plan for resiliency of these systems; incorporate nature-based solutions and stormwater management best practices
<b>Master Plan</b>	Identify growth opportunities for the municipality and infrastructure improvements	10 years	Identify conservation and recreation opportunities; ensure consistency with climate resilience goals outlined in other planning documents

<sup>1</sup> Hazard Mitigation Plan allows communities to qualify for [certain non-emergency federal disaster assistance programs and grant opportunities](#).

<b>Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Plan<sup>2</sup></b>	Identify climate-related hazards and implement projects to increase climate resilience	N/A	Should prioritize nature- based solutions in adaptation solutions
<b>Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)<sup>3</sup></b>	Identifies all open space and recreational areas in the municipality; prioritizes improvements, including acquisitions of property and development of trails	7 years	Should consider climate resilience and nature-based solutions; identify conservation and recreation improvements for environmental justice communities
<b>Sustainability and/or Climate Action Plan</b>	Identifies priority sustainability actions, such as ways to reduce carbon emissions, increase clean zero emissions transportation, improve energy efficiency, build climate resilience, and reduce waste	N/A	Should identify actions for incorporating nature-based solutions into climate resilience

*Notes:*

*Risk-based and cost-benefit planning analysis can help communities more broadly and effectively manage various funding sources.*

*Many plans are not required to be updated within a certain time period; it is up to the discretion of the municipality.*

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<sup>2</sup> MVP Plans allow communities to be eligible for [State MVP action grants](#).

<sup>3</sup> OSRPs allow communities to be eligible for grants from [MassTrails](#), [PARC](#), [LAND](#), & [Land & Water Conservation Fund](#).