Creating an implementable plan
Principles and keys

Success or quality of a plan is measured by its results. Is it implemented? Are its guiding principles used and followed? Do community improvements result because of it?

Plan principles

- Planning should be value-adding, a difference-maker on a community's well-being, not an exercise.
- Planning should produce results and action.
- Planning is not an end itself. It is a part of a continuum, the path to move from problems and opportunities to solutions and improvements.

Use an innovative approach

- Traditional approach – A comprehensive plan is a guide to decisions to be made and actions to be taken after the plan is completed.
- Innovative approach – A comprehensive plan is a record memorializing decisions made and actions committed to and initiated during a planning process.

Keys to an implementable plan

1. *Focus on relevant, real community issues*

   - A plan should be preceded by an assessment of community issues (problems to be solved, needs to be addressed, opportunities to be pursued) which the plan should address.

   - The work scope should go beyond the "conventional formula" and call for consultant attention to these issues, and lead to selection of a consultant most capable of addressing these issues.

   - As the plan is underway, confirm or revise the assessment of issues, and make those a priority for detailed attention in the plan process.

   - Avoid costly generation of information/data not of particular relevance. Focus on "discoveries" and "performance indicators" and "intelligence", not encyclopedic tabulations of data.

2. *Organize the plan the way local officials and citizens think*

   - Plan document should be organized by issues instead of by the MPC template. This is how people think. We have a problem. Here's the data to substantiate it. Here are the best ideas to solve the problem. And, here are the steps, who should carry them out, and how will we pay for them. (It is a misconception that the PA MPC or DCED require comprehensive plans to have segregated chapters for land use, housing, community facilities, etc.)

   - Meetings with consultant and steering committee, elected officials, public, etc. should be work sessions to generate ideas and find solutions for focal issues, not reviews of draft chapters.

   - Be efficient in words, avoid jargon, and use accepted publication layout practices.

3. *Devise practical and workable recommendations*

- Plan recommendations – at least the priority 3-5-10 of them – should include depth and detail – specific action steps, responsible parties, estimated costs and means of financing – to provoke implementation.

- Priorities should consider "workability".

- Plans should provide a small number of recommendations containing practical depth and detail instead of a large number of general recommendations.

- Plans should use "non-traditional" but practical tools – market analysis to support land use and development recommendations, visualizations and concept drawings to help convey design recommendations, pro-forma analysis to support fiscal workability of recommendations, and public involvement techniques, beyond meetings, that reach all ages.

4. *Recruit partners and create capacity to implement the plan*

- Recruit organizations and individuals with expertise and capacity. Involve them in development of the recommendations and action planning. Ask them to take responsibilities and be partners in implementation. Match each others' needs and assets. Create an implementation team.

- Plan process should identify and start implementation of early action steps, even before the plan is finished and adopted.

- There should be a "coordinator" – individual like a municipal manager, organization like a municipal planning commission, or a partners team – to facilitate implementation.

- The planning process should not be considered finished until a structure and capacity for implementation are in place.

5. *Get local ownership of the plan and commitment to implement it*

- Elected officials should be aware of plan's priority recommendations as the plan progresses and not learning of them for the first time or surprised by them at the public hearing.

- Steering committee and elected officials should be able to readily talk about 3-5 priority recommendations called for by the plan.

- There should be community/public presence at the public hearing – and it should be supportive.

- Plan should reflect broad public aspiration and buy-in that politically sustains implementation over time.

- Plan process should promote a commitment to action after adoption.

- After plan is adopted, it should be kept on the elected officials' agenda. There should be conscious effort to track if actions are occurring as recommended in the plan.