### Smart Growth Self-Assessment for Rural Communities *Section III: Engage and Connect Community Members This tool is part of the Smart Growth Self-Assessment for Rural Communities, developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA suggests that communities using this tool complete Section I: “Revitalize Village and Town Centers,” before filling out other sections. For more information and the tool’s other sections, see* [*https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-self-assessment-rural-communities*](https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-self-assessment-rural-communities)*.*

Well-designed roads, sidewalks, buildings, public spaces, and other elements of the built environment support interaction among community members. New communications tools, cultural events and festivals, and opportunities to participate in local government can also build capital, creating a sense of ownership and pride in a community.

| Goal: Engage and Connect Community Members | Adopted? | Add or Improve? | Context [[1]](#footnote-1) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Engaging the Public in the Planning Process* |  |  |  |
| Are public participation activities required during the planning process? |  |  |  |
| Strategy 1: The City/Town establishes a formal group and a robust and meaningful public engagement process to provide good planning advice to elected officials.[[2]](#footnote-2),[[3]](#footnote-3),[[4]](#footnote-4) *[Enter optional notes in gray boxes for all strategies]* |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 2: A public design meeting or charrette is required for planned unit development projects.[[5]](#footnote-5) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 3: Codes require abutting property owners to be notified about potential rezoning, subdivision, or redevelopment proposals so that they can attend the public meetings if they have opinions or concerns.[[6]](#footnote-6) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 4: A public review process is required for rezoning.[[7]](#footnote-7) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 5: Public participation is required in development of neighborhood plans, comprehensive plan updates, and long-range transportation plans.[[8]](#footnote-8),[[9]](#footnote-9) |  |  | 1 |
| *Using Design Elements That Encourage Interaction* |  |  |  |
| Do codes require design elements that promote community interaction? |  |  |  |
| Strategy 6: Zoning includes a traditional neighborhood zoning overlay district that requires design elements that encourage interaction such as sidewalks, front porches, and community parks.[[10]](#footnote-10) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 7: Subdivision regulations require sidewalks on new streets.[[11]](#footnote-11) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 8: Subdivision regulations ensure good street connectivity by requiring connections in and between neighborhoods.[[12]](#footnote-12) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 9: Codes establish minimum standards for parks and open space in new developments, which includes developing around existing civic gathering spaces.[[13]](#footnote-13),[[14]](#footnote-14),[[15]](#footnote-15) |  |  | 1,2 |
| *Engaging and Connecting Community Members Through Planning and Policies* |  |  |  |
| Do planning documents or local government policies support development of community-shared spaces? |  |  |  |
| Strategy 10: Plans identify potential areas for traditional neighborhood development.[[16]](#footnote-16) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 11: Plans encourage a mix of uses and space for social gatherings, such as parks, churches, community centers, schools, and other facilities, in new neighborhood developments.[[17]](#footnote-17) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 12: The community owns or has a long-term lease on properties for a centrally located venue such as a stage, farmers’ market, park, or other gathering space. |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 13: Identify or provide public space for a community garden.[[18]](#footnote-18) |  |  | 1,2 |
| **Do planning processes or government policies promote strong community engagement?** |  |  |  |
| Strategy 14: Hold regular community meetings, in locations and at times that allow people on different schedules and in different parts of the community to attend, to encourage public participation in developing plans and other land use regulations.[[19]](#footnote-19) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 15: Translate public meeting materials into the languages used by predominant minority populations in the community. |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 16: Translation services are available for meetings where attendees speak English as a second language. |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 17: The local government or a partner conducts community assessments, such as walking audits, to collect information about local needs and opportunities.[[20]](#footnote-20) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 18: Form citizen advisory councils community-wide, or for individual neighborhoods to provide input on development review and policy decisions.132 |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 19: Surveys elicit feedback from residents on various community issues.[[21]](#footnote-21) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 20: Websites, social media tools, or public access television stations provide broadcasts or recordings of community meetings for those unable to attend in person.[[22]](#footnote-22) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 21: The local government or a partner distributes a weekly bulletin of community meetings via email, local paper, direct-mailers, or others forms of communication accessible to everyone.[[23]](#footnote-23) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| *Engaging and Connecting Community Members Through Programs and Services* |  |  |  |
| Are community, cultural, or business coordination events supported through programs or services? |  |  |  |
| Strategy 22: Local school clubs or groups engage in civic activities to build interest in and commitment to improving the community.[[24]](#footnote-24) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 23: The local government designates a special events coordinator to support seasonal community activities.[[25]](#footnote-25) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 24: The local government works with local civic youth groups (e.g., YMCA or Big Brothers) to identify community health and social needs.[[26]](#footnote-26) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 25: The community provides programs and incentives to help residents share resources, co-produce, and create their own jobs through a sharing economy.[[27]](#footnote-27),[[28]](#footnote-28) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| **Are there programs to facilitate better community interaction?** |  |  |  |
| Strategy 26: The local government or a partner hosts periodic community meals to bring together residents to discuss topical local issues.[[29]](#footnote-29) |  |  | 1,2, 3 |
| Strategy 27: Local events such as fairs or school sports games include a kiosk or information booth to provide information about upcoming planning activities or other community issues.[[30]](#footnote-30) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 28: Bulletins and newsletters of local organizations, such as churches, provide information about upcoming planning activities or other community issues.[[31]](#footnote-31) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 29: The community has walking tours to inform residents about community history and assets.[[32]](#footnote-32) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 30: Coordinate with downtown merchants on seasonal or locally relevant downtown window display themes.[[33]](#footnote-33) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 31: The community has buy-local and community gardening educational programs.[[34]](#footnote-34),[[35]](#footnote-35) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 32: The community hosts monthly cleanup days.[[36]](#footnote-36) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| **Does the local government have an online presence to educate residents and visitors about available services and foster communication?** |  |  |  |
| Strategy 33: The local government offers online information such as agendas, meeting minutes, contact information, and land use information through multiple platforms (e.g., website or Facebook) and formats (e.g., PDF documents or GIS map application).[[37]](#footnote-37),[[38]](#footnote-38) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 34: The local government uses social media and a website to communicate with the public and solicit feedback.[[39]](#footnote-39) |  |  | 1,2,3 |

1. *Self-assessment topics and recommendations apply to one or more of the following scales: 1 – large town/small city (population of approximately 10,000 or greater); 2 - village/small town (population typically under 10,000); 3 – rural (very low density places, working lands, and natural areas outside of towns, villages, and cities).* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. New York’s Department of State, Division of Local Government Services has developed a set of local government planning guidance documents. One provides information on conducting public meetings. Another describes establishing a Zoning Board of Appeals. They are available at: (<http://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/publications.html#Planning>). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jacksonville, Florida Citizens Planning Advisory Committee (<http://www.coj.net/departments/housing-and-neighborhoods/neighborhood-initiatives-(1)/citizen-planning-advisory-committees-(cpacs).aspx>). The Mayor appoints CPAC members. Members are nominated through a variety of community, civic, or government organizations located in their district. Eligibility for appointment is determined by the Chief of the Housing and Community Development Division, Planning and Development Department. Committee chairs meet with and advise the Mayor. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Primer on Local Government Citizen Advisory Boards (<http://mrsc.org/getmedia/72061479-9BA8-48B4-AB1F-CFA62CF7D4F1/lgcab08.aspx>). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bartlesville Metropolitan Planning Area Planned Unit Development Procedure (<http://www.cityofbartlesville.org/page.php?page=1150>). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Fayetteville Code of Ordinances: Notification and Public Hearings (<http://www.cityoffayetteville.org/planning_department/rezoning.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gwinnett County Rezoning and Special Use Permit Application Process (<http://www.gwinnettcounty.com/portal/gwinnett/Departments/PlanningandDevelopment/Rezoning-SUP/Process>). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Public Participation Plan for the Town of Farmington Comprehensive Plan Process (<http://www.co.washington.wi.us/departments.iml?Detail=281&Detail=290&Detail=289>). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Southeastern Wisconsin RPC: Public Participation in the Transportation Planning Process (<http://www.sewrpc.org/SEWRPC/Transportation/PublicParticipationintheTransp.htm>). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The town of Dryden, New York’s zoning ordinance includes a traditional neighborhood development overlay district. The zoning ordinance is available at: (<http://dryden.ny.us/departments/planning-department>). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Model Sidewalk Regulations – Zoning & Subdivision (<http://www.pvpc.org/val_vision/html/toolbox/Part%20III%20Strategies/Model%20Bylaws/Model%20Sidewalk%20Regulations.rtf>). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Street Connectivity: Zoning and Subdivision Model Ordinance (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/processes/land_use/land_use_tools/page04.cfm>). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Model Conservation Subdivision / Open Space Development Ordinance (<http://www.sewrpc.org/SEWRPC/communityassistance/ModelOrdinancesGuides.htm>). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Madison County, Idaho: Open Space Development Ordinance (<http://www.co.madison.id.us/index.php/depts/planning-a-zoning/41-ordinances>). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Open Space Incentive Zoning in Saratoga Springs, New York (<http://www.saratoga-springs.org/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=67&func=startdown&id=1345>). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Madison, Wisconsin: Pumpkin Hollow Neighborhood Development Plan (<http://www.cityofmadison.com/planning/pumpkinhollow.html>). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Parkville, Missouri: Master Plan: Park, Civic and Open Spaces (<http://parkvillemo.gov/departments/community-development-department/master-plan/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Williamson, West Virginia, has provided public land for a community garden through its Sustainable Williamson program (<http://cityofwilliamson.org/Projects.html>). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Clackamas County Land Use Meetings Best Practices (<http://www.clackamas.us/citizenin/communicating.html>). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center provides information on walking audits (<http://www.walkinginfo.org/problems/audits.cfm>). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Benson Hill Community Plan and Survey Results (<http://rentonwa.gov/uploadedFiles/Business/CED/planning/2013/1120_BensonPlan_DRAFT_2013-03-11.pdf>). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Plan 2040 Public Outreach will Utilize Online Public Meetings (<http://landmatters.wordpress.com/2010/04/22/plan-2040-public-outreach-will-utilize-online-public-meetings/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Kirkland Planning Public Meeting Calendar with email updates (<http://www.kirklandwa.gov/depart/planning/Planning_Public_Meeting_Calendar.htm>). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In Brownsville, Pennsylvania, the Students in Action club at the high school is leading a project to transform a vacant lot downtown into a community park with a performing arts space. Many small towns and rural communities are concerned about retaining younger residents. Groups like Student in Action can help young people feel invested in their community (<https://sites.google.com/site/ofrstudentsinaction/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Examples of seasonal community activities include Trail Days in Damascus, Virginia; Rib Fest in Salamanca, New York; and the Johnny Race in Independence, Virginia. A coalition of groups often supports such events that include the local government and the chamber of commerce. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ann Arbor YMCA: Youth in Government program (<http://www.annarborymca.org/youth-government.php>). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Local Governments and the Sharing Economy Project (<http://www.oneearthweb.org/local-governments-and-the-sharing-economy.html>). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Policies for Shareable Cities: A Sharing Economy Policy Primer for Urban Leaders (<http://www.shareable.net/blog/new-report-policies-for-shareable-cities>). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Richmond, California Dinner Dialogue (<http://bbk-richmond.org/iron-triangle-residents-engage-in-crucial-conversations-at-dinner-dialogues/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Lawrence, Kansas Farmers’ Market Community Booth (<http://www.lawrencefarmersmarket.com/community_booth.php>). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Gleason Public Library Community Bulletin Board (<http://www.gleasonlibrary.org/displays.htm>). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Orange Community Historical Society: Historical Walking Tours (<http://www.historicalorange.org/historical-walking-tours/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ambler Main Street Annual Window Display Contest (<http://www.montgomerynews.com/articles/2014/12/09/ambler_gazette/news/doc548735df3cc3b135054104.txt>). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Sullivan County Shop Local Campaign (<http://sullivancountynyprod.weblinkconnect.com/shop-local.html>). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Somerville, Massachusetts Community Gardens (<http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/concom/gardens>). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Bethlehem, New York Community Cleanup Days (<http://www.townofbethlehem.org/317/Community-Clean-Up-Days>). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. A Local Official’s Guide to Online Public Engagement (<http://www.ca-ilg.org/public-engagement-technology>). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Institute for Local Government Public Engagement and Technology (<http://www.ca-ilg.org/PEandTechnology>). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Chapel Hill, North Carolina Social Media (<http://www.townofchapelhill.org/town-hall/news-events/social-media>). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)