Land Use Planning CoP Optimization Work Plan

Background
Over the past several years the eXtension Land Use Planning CoP has begun to make a positive contribution nationally as a “go-to” source for cutting edge knowledge related to sustainable community planning. With over 100 members primarily from land grant institutions throughout the nation, the depth and breadth of the membership has begun to make meaningful contributions at the local and state levels. Many Extension professionals have begun to rely on the CoP for information and education about land use planning and sustainable development.

Yet, despite the powerhouse of expertise available through the CoP there is a need to reach a greater number of Extension professionals, local officials, citizen advocates, non-profit groups, government agencies and the general public using innovative technology, activities and products. To achieve full optimization based on the identified gaps will require new investments in infrastructure, web applications, marketing, and membership and partnership development. This optimization plan outlines the values and activities that will drive the work of the Land Use Planning CoP over the next several years and provides an opportunity to achieve financial sustainability with new products and services.

Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Mission
The Land Use Planning Community of Practice (CoP) focuses on providing timely and relevant information to citizens and Extension professionals interested in land use planning, public participation in the planning process and best practices for planning and zoning including sustainable community development.

Vision
We help empower citizen leaders who want to shape the future of their communities with useful tools and education for positive land use decisions: those who are interested in the basic concepts of public land use and development regulation and in the best practices of community development and smart growth.

Values
Our strategy of service to the land use planning community of interest incorporates the following values:
- creating the leading web site for trustworthy, land use resources starting with frequently asked questions;
- enhancing and facilitating social networking among land use advocates using the extensive resources on the eXtension.org website;
- providing value-added learning products and information that can be accessed directly through eXtension or through CoP partners outside of academia;
- partnering with national associations and leveraging resources to distribute information they have created;
- knowing and serving individual citizen needs as they move through client support services such as Ask an Expert;
- building and enhancing the professional development of eXtension educators;
- enhancing collaboration in product development, joint ownerships and peer-review; and
embracing the land-grant philosophy of broadening outreach and helping people put
knowledge to work, empowering them and enriching their lives.

Accomplishments
In a few short years the CoP has created and disseminated cutting-edge knowledge and
resources with meaningful articles, webinars, FAQs, and Ask an Expert assistance across the
U.S. while continuing to recruit new members and collaborate with new partners. Below is a list
of the major accomplishments of the CoP.

Content
The Land Use Planning CoP has successfully published useful content for our membership and
the general public. To date, 208 articles have been published on 4 main content areas (i.e. Zoning and Land Use Regulation; Public Participation in Planning; Best Practices for Planning and Zoning; and Sustainable Community Planning). In addition, 126 FAQs and 116 answered
questions under the Ask an Expert function have been executed.

Webinars and Communication
About 5 times a year the CoP hosts a free professional webinar with expert guest speakers from
across the nation. To date the CoP has hosted 10 webinars. One recent webinar on “biodiversity subdivisions” attracted over 225 participants. The following is a list of topics covered.

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Online Courses
In 2012, the CoP launched two online Moodle-based courses – “Living Sustainably: It’s Your Choice” and “Sustainable Communities: A Local Systems Approach to Planning.” Each of these courses has 8 modules with audio/video presentations, assessment activities, supplemental materials and offer certificates upon completion. They were developed in partnership with national organizations.
Annual Meetings and Leadership Team
In addition to monthly update conference calls, the CoP Leadership Team annually meets with partnering organizations to collaborate on content development and delivery. In 2012, this meeting was held at the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) Conference in Park City, Utah. In 2011, the meeting was held in Washington DC. This allowed for face-to-face meetings with government agencies and NGOs to discuss and foster potential partnerships. The agencies visited included the following:

- USDA: National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)
- USDA: Forest Service
- USDA: Rural Development
- Smart Growth America (SGA)
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Urban Land Institute (ULI)

Gaps Identified by Optimization Scorecard
After completing the Optimization Scorecard in spring, 2012, the Land Use Planning Leadership Team identified gaps in the way the CoP has been operating. These gaps were identified as any category that scored under 3. The identified gaps show the areas in which the Land Use Planning CoP will strive to improve. Full results for the optimization scorecard can be found at: http://create.extension.org/node/92377

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Proposed Activities and Products
The Land Use Planning Community of Practice will participate in the following activities/products to address the gaps identified above. Specifically, the plan of work will focus on four major areas:

- Learning Resource and Curriculum Development
- Business, Program Development and Evaluation
- Social Media Marketing, Promotion and Membership Development
• Advising, Networking and Technical Assistance

**Learning Resource and Curriculum Development**  
*Gaps Addressed: Partnerships/User Focused/Customer Driven/Content Teams/Membership*

By expanding national partnerships identified in the gap analysis, the CoP will collaborate with additional national partners to develop innovative content and resources. A new partnership will be developed with the American Citizen Planner Collaborative housed at Michigan State University. The purpose of the partnership would be to collaboratively develop national curriculum for planning officials and citizen advocates throughout the United States. During the past 8 years there has been a “quiet revolution” taking place whereby states have been requiring minimum training standards for locally appointed planning officials. In addition, hundreds of local governments around the U.S. have begun to require minimum training as a condition of re-appointment. Land Grant Institutions and State Extension offices are uniquely positioned to capitalize on this new opportunity for training in partnership with national, regional and state organizations.

**American Citizen Planner Partnership**  
*Gaps Addressed: Customer Driven/Discoverable/User Focused/Fundraising*

American Citizen Planner (ACP) is a program that empowers citizens to shape the future of their communities with useful tools and education for positive land use decisions. A partnership will be made with the Land Use Planning Community of Practice to bring the resources offered by ACP to the public through eXtension.

The two main products that will be offered will be a 10-hour planning basics and 10-hour zoning basics program delivered through an online content management system. This will give participants a basic overview of planning and zoning and will be on-demand and not dependent on instructors or facilities. For those participants wanting more training/education, the CoP will guide them to state specific Citizen Planner affiliates. There they will be able to find a more in-depth training program with planning and zoning specifics for their state. State partnerships would be sought to develop state-specific content. A national exam would be created to offer the credential of “Master Citizen Planner” that could be administered by the state partners.

**Positioning Statement**  
The American Citizen Planner program is currently the leading national citizen education center for online course content geared towards planning officials. The partnership with the CoP would serve to develop a suite of products tailored to meet the needs of two primary market segments: (1) citizen advocates and (2) educational organizations that reach developers, elected officials and planning officials. With the CoP partnership there would be the largest national network of educational organizations for which Extension is the most trusted partner for innovative learning products and tools. Thus, the partnership would secure the most trusted learning partner for helping citizens effectively
participate in their local land-use decisions. The targeted market segments are illustrated below:

**Opportunity**

- More states are requiring training for planning officials and American Citizen Planner is the first with a comprehensive training program and recognized credential.
- The majority of citizens in the United States regularly use the web for seeking information and training, creating an unprecedented opportunity for citizen engagement.
- Currently, there are no significant competitors serving the formal education needs of citizens seeking to participate in and influence local land-use decisions.

**Business, Program Development and Evaluation**

*Gaps Addressed: Attentive & Responsive/User Focused/Partnerships/Evaluations/Fundraising*

The framework for the partnership with ACP would consist of licensing agreements to create and disseminate content and share in revenue generation. A national advisory board would be created consisting of representatives from the CoP, ACP, state partners and national organizations. Assistance would be sought to further develop these relationships and build the network of state partners. A strong evaluation component would be built into all the products and services co-created by the CoP. This will include electronic evaluations, tracking social media and web page hits, pre-tests and post-tests, and follow up interviews where applicable. The Business, Program Development and Evaluation Specialist would assist in building the infrastructure for long term sustainability of the CoP. The framework for this partnership is highlighted below.
Social Media Marketing, Promotion and Membership Development

Gaps Addressed: Attentive & Responsive/Interactive/Actively Listening/Stays in Flow/User Feedback/Social Spaces/Conversations/Marketing/Online Events/Sensemaking

Social Media

Gaps Addressed: Attentive & Responsive/Discoverable/Interactive/Actively Listening/Social Spaces/Conversations/Evaluation/Marketing

A social media presence will be created and maintained for the CoP. Social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter will be used as a way to interact with the membership and keep them updated on CoP matters. Membership development will also include these techniques. Assistance will be sought by a social media/marketing specialist to develop templates and infrastructure to carry out new and innovative marketing, promotion, and membership development techniques.

Facebook and Twitter will be used to spread the word about upcoming events, webinars, online courses and new content for the CoP. Constant Contact can be used to create announcements to post on Facebook and Twitter. Constant Contact can also be used as a free way to occasionally run social media campaigns where other Facebook users will receive some sort of incentive for “liking” our page. Incentives can include a discount off online course modules, or access to exclusive content.

Facebook can also be used as a platform to interact with our audience by posting poll and open ended questions. This can be used to find other interests areas of our membership as well as a
form of evaluation. Our Facebook account will be updated weekly. When there are no major announcements or content releases, we will stay active by posting relevant news articles and videos from websites such as http://www.planetizen.com/.

A newsletter will be emailed to members biannually to highlight major accomplishments and upcoming events. This will be another way to communicate with the membership and keep them informed on matters of the CoP. In addition to the newsletter a member survey will be sent out annually to the membership. This will allow the leadership team to evaluate the operations of the CoP as well as the needs of the membership. Constant Contact can be used as an easy way to send out both the newsletter and the evaluation survey.

Membership Development
Gaps Addressed: Membership/Partnership

Paramount to the long term success of the CoP will be new member recruitment. This will be accomplished in a variety of ways including:

- Attendance at national Extension conferences and related national organizations (i.e. American Planning Association) to speak about the CoP, network with colleagues, and distribute promotional material.
- Coordination with the USDA regional rural development centers to identify Extension faculty with an interest in community planning and zoning.
- Personal contacts made to Extension faculty by CoP Regional Representatives within their respective regions.

Advising, Networking and Technical Assistance
Gaps Addressed: Attentive & Responsive/Actively Listening/Stays in Flow/Values Early Adopters/Conversations/Animations

The CoP Leadership Team will focus on developing new partners and advising on key policies, procedures and activities. Attention will be focused on nurturing collaboration with the following organizations:

Partnerships
Gaps Addressed: Partnerships/Discoverable/Marketing/Membership

The CoP will explore the potential partnerships with the government agencies and NGOs the leadership team met with in Washington DC. There are opportunities for collaboration, content creation and funding. Below is a list of potential opportunities with each agency.

National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP)
- NACDEP is an organization dedicated to improving the visibility, coordination, professional status and resource base of community and economic development Extension programs and professionals. Each year NACDEP holds a conference that provides opportunity for networking and professional development. The annual conference will also serve as the CoP membership and leadership team meetings.
Attendance at this national conference will be important to interact with our membership, recruit new members, form new partnerships and discuss the future of the CoP.

Regional Rural Development Centers
- The NIFA Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) play a unique role in providing research and educational outreach capacity with land grants and local stakeholders. Partnerships with RRDCs would be fostered to assist with recruitment of new Extension educators and creating and disseminating new content.

USDA: Forest Services
- provide basic information to general public and Forest Service employees

USDA: Rural Development
- Network of sustainability officers in each state could help with Ask an Expert within the CoP
- Provide resources for rural case studies
- Rural communities struggle when it comes to grant writing – our CoP could help provide resources

Smart Growth America (SGA)
- Can post CoP link on SGA Coalition page
- Potential access to funding through national/state campaigns run by SGA

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Grant opportunities available
- Could use the CoP as an opportunity to inform public on grant initiatives

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Potential resource for webinar presentations

Department of Energy (DOE)
- Opportunities to fund renewable energy facility siting, research and outreach

Urban Land Institute (ULI)
- ULI generates lots content for its members – could be a resource for collaboration
- ULI advisory service panels could help answer Ask an Expert questions
- Potential resource for webinar presentations

Other agencies to explore further collaboration:
- American Farmland Trust
- American Planning Association
- Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- Center for Neighborhood Technology
- Congress for New Urbanism
- Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities
- Institute of Transportation Engineers
- International City/County Management Association
- Local Government Commission
- National Association of Counties Center for Sustainable Communities
• National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals
• National Association of Realtors
• National Trust for Historic Preservation
• Rails-To-Trails Conservancy
• Scenic America
• Sustainable Communities Network
• The Conservation Fund
• Trust for Public Land

Research Assistant

**Gaps Addressed:** Agile & Flexible/Actively Listening/Stays in Flow/Values Early Adopters/Attentive & Responsive

A student assistant will be hired to help with the implementation of the new optimization plan as well as continue the current operations of the CoP. The student should be tech savvy and able to keep up with the changing trends in the technological world. The primary duties of the Research Assistant are listed below:

- Facilitate content creation and formatting to maximize the level of “discoverability”
- Maintain a social media presence
- Assist with marketing functions for the CoP
- Assist with the biannual membership newsletter which will highlight major CoP updates
- Assist with the annual membership evaluation survey
- Coordinate webinars every other month on timely Land Use Planning and Sustainability Topics
The Land Use Planning CoP will be requesting $49,976.00 for funding the optimization plan. The funding will address major gaps in the current operation of the CoP and will be budgeted for four major areas: Learning Resource and Curriculum Development; Business, Program Development and Evaluation; Social Media Marketing, Promotion and Membership Development; and Advising, Networking and Technical Assistance. Below is a detailed description of the optimization budget.