
Urban Design

The Urban Design working group has focused on promoting an urban design framework for a sustainable Elgin that is more livable, more respectful of nature, more interconnective, more prosperous, more compact, safer, and with a stronger sense of place.

The Urban Design working group's vision for a sustainable Elgin includes the following:

More Livable: Elgin's urban form will make the city a desirable place to experience, offering a variety of places in which to live, work, shop, and play as high-quality environments. This means Elgin will:

- Offer quality urban environments that are healthy, safe, attractive, and which meet residents daily needs
- Ensure capacity direct growth and development to areas where it is most sustainable
- Encourage quality development that provides a range of housing options, employment opportunities, retail facilities and recreational amenities throughout the community
- Design the environment to serve function and aesthetics primarily for human use and scale, while secondarily for vehicular use and expediency

More Respectful of Nature: Elgin's urban form will support efficient and sustainable rural, natural and recreational resources. This means Elgin will:

- Protect, maintain, steward, and expand a 'green infrastructure' network of parks and open spaces throughout the community
- Reduce its ecological footprint by applying low impact design principles in all aspects of urban design and urban living
- Carefully assess the proposed development of rural land, and support its use for local food supply and other agricultural pursuits
- Provide for limited agricultural uses within the city
- Achieve a sustainable balance between the natural environment and the built environment
- Enhance existing natural resources and maximize natural assets within the urban setting
- Develop and build utilizing natural, renewable, recyclable and recycled materials

More Interconnective: Elgin's urban form with its highly interconnected street and transit networks will make it be easy to move about, and be bicycle and pedestrian friendly. This means Elgin will:

- Become an increasingly bicycle and pedestrian friendly community
- Ensure that local and regional transit systems function effectively for people movement
- Provide for freight movement
- Incorporate more green corridors

More Prosperous: Elgin's urban form with its focus on centers, corridors, neighborhoods, and districts will contribute to economic growth and prosperity. This means Elgin will:

- Build on a compact form
- Promote mixed-use centers at a variety of scales as the focus for activities serving various sized geographic areas
- Allow commercial, office, recreational, civic, institutional and residential uses as a matter of right within centers and along transit supportive corridors
- Reserve land for employment centers
- Ensure capacity for growth and economic development

More Compact: Elgin’s urban form will be compact, with an intensification of land uses structured on a framework of centers, corridors, neighborhoods and districts. This means Elgin will:

- Focus and encourage more intensive growth and development in centers and along corridors where mixed land use can provide the services, shopping, jobs, and housing for a growing population
- Increase the intensity of development and activities in centers and along corridors to support public transit
- Encourage the development of complete, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that provide for life-long living
- Encourage infill development and/or redevelopment in areas that can be or are well-served by infrastructure, services and public transit; and discourage it in areas that may need to be constrained
- Pursue quality of space over quantity of space in development

Safer: Elgin’s urban form will make it a safer place to be with well-designed buildings, outdoor spaces, and the connections between them. This means Elgin will:

- Promote the arrangement of land uses and the design of buildings to encourage neighborly attention to activities on the street and on other outdoor spaces
- Apply the principles of crime prevention through environmental design in all development
- Calm traffic speeds, and encourage improvements to make the community bicycle and pedestrian friendly

Stronger Sense of Place: Elgin will be a beautiful and memorable city, celebrating and building on its sense of place, regional city status, natural features and parks, arts and culture, and its architecture and heritage. This means Elgin will:

- Protect and enhance the elements and characteristics that contribute to its sense of place ... its neighborhoods, downtown, landmark natural and built features, heritage buildings and places, and arts and cultural amenities
- Build on its status as a strong regional city in the greater Chicago metropolitan area
- Coordinate the relationship of buildings, corridors and urban spaces to each other
- Establish a contextual identity for each neighborhood
- Create physical environments that promote social interaction and unification in neighborhoods and in the larger community



Urban Design Goal I Foster a Livable Community

To strengthen our community by creating viable public spaces, and promoting the creation and restoration of compact, walkable, safe, interconnected, mixed-use neighborhoods throughout.

Approaches to urban development since the advent of Euclidian zoning controls have typically had an emphasis on land use segregation and hierarchical street systems, and designs focused on engineering, surveying and lot yield efficiency. This approach to neighborhood and community design inhibits social interaction; community formation; forces auto dependence; discourages walking, bicycling and transit ridership; denies easy and equitable access to community facilities and resources; and prevents opportunities for locally based business and employment. Today there is greater emphasis on the social, economic and environmental aspects of neighborhood and community design. Recent neighborhood design concepts have been given titles such as transit oriented design, traditional neighborhood design and urban villages.

In response to this, the emerging planning agenda focuses on the idea of an urban design structure based on walkable mixed-use neighborhoods with interconnected street patterns to facilitate movement and to disperse traffic. Daily needs may be in walking distance of most residents. With good design, more people will actively use local streets, enhancing safety. Local employment opportunities are facilitated in the neighborhood structure, providing the community with a firmer economic base and enhancing self-containment of neighborhoods and towns. Safe, sustainable and attractive neighborhoods are sought with a strong site responsive identity supportive of local community. This model promotes better community, economic and environmental sustainability than conventional planning practice.

Objective 1

Focus on the development of complete neighborhoods organized on a framework of centers, corridors, and green infrastructure.

Neighborhoods function well when residents can easily meet their daily needs, such as getting to work and shopping. This means having the right neighborhood mix of housing, retail, open space, and transit, with new housing located near reliable transit lines. We need to accommodate cars without having to rely on them. A great neighborhood also needs a full range of City services, safe and vibrant streets, gathering places, and an appreciation for its special character.

Objective 1 Continued

Tasks/Metrics

Short Term Initiatives (1-5 years)

1. Update the 2005 Comprehensive Plan and Design Guidelines (participate in & monitor on-going work in Community Development Department & Congress for New Urbanism (CNU)/ Institute for Transportation Engineers (ITE)/Elgin Project)
2. Update 2000 Parks Master Plan (participate in & monitor on-going work to update the Parks Master Plan)
3. Update 2000 Riverfront Center City Master Plan
4. Adopt a 'complete streets/context sensitive solutions' policy
5. Adopt an 'inclusionary housing' policy
6. Adopt conservation codes for natural, cultural and architectural resources
7. Utilize a concept plan for the arrangement, use and appearance of buildings, structures and exterior spaces within neighborhoods, including how they relate to recreational parks, working lands and natural systems to show citizens how neighborhoods could be. The concept plans can be used in outreach and charrettes to facilitate discussion about the built environment.
8. Update development codes and ordinances
9. Adopt form-based development regulations
10. Develop a targeted and strategic approach to infill development and Redevelopment

On-Going & Long Term Initiatives (>5 years)

1. Brownfield/greyfield redevelopment
2. Focus on centers and corridors
3. Focus on green infrastructure
4. Focus on transit supportive development and the redesign of the commuter bus system
5. Promote the development of complete neighborhoods, which contain a variety of uses and building types
6. Maintain a good balance of jobs, housing and public services

Eight Key Elements of a Great Urban Neighborhood:

Walk to Shops: A great neighborhood has stores and shops that satisfy everyday needs within an easy walk from home. Everyday shops and services include corner groceries, day care, cafes and restaurants, banks, dry cleaners, bakeries and the like. An easy walk is about five to ten minutes.

Safe Streets: A great neighborhood has safe and friendly streets. In a great neighborhood people can walk without fear of crime, being threatened by traffic, or being disturbed by excessive noise. People feel like they "belong" on neighborhood streets. Residential streets feel public, and more like open space than a space reserved just for motor vehicles. Streets are a pleasant part of the neighborhood.

Get Around Easily: A great neighborhood has many choices for moving to, from, and within it. Great neighborhoods make it easy to move about on foot, by bicycle, transit, and auto. They accommodate the car, but allow people to live easily without one.

Housing Choices: A great neighborhood has a variety of housing types. A mix of housing choices of various sizes to meet different needs and preferences.

Gathering Places: A great neighborhood has places for people to meet, talk and be neighborly. Public gathering places include parks, plazas, sidewalks, and shops.

City Services: A great neighborhood has a full range of public services for residents. Public services include parks, schools, police and fire stations, libraries and other amenities.

Special Character: A great neighborhood has its own special character. Their physical setting, streets, buildings, open spaces, history, culture and the people who live in them shape all neighborhoods. In great neighborhoods these attributes combine in unique and memorable ways.

Part of the Whole: Great neighborhoods make great cities. Great neighborhoods stand out on their own, yet are connected to the city. They can be a refuge for their residents, but also a part of the city's wider community.

Urban Design Goal II Foster Sustainable Transportation

To advance mobility alternatives consistent with human and ecosystem health, and with equitable accessibility for all.

The more we drive, the further we move away from sustainability. While we are finding other ways to get around, Elgin residents strongly favor an auto-dependent lifestyle more than walking, biking or public transit use.

Elgin is located in one of the most rapidly urbanizing regions in the country. Creating walkable, compact neighborhood centers around existing or planned transit nodes, and transportation corridors, is key to managing this growth in a sustainable way, as is helping people live closer to where they work. Critical to this effort is developing a complex, interconnected, 'complete streets' network which accommodates all modes of travel – walking, biking, public transit, and the motor vehicle.

Streets have a significant role to play in relation to social interaction, public safety and amenity, but require development to face the street to do this effectively. Development facing onto streets provides surveillance, activity and visual interest and, on busier streets, exposure which can assist commercial viability. Provision of frontage helps build community focus and enables streets to act as an integrating element in neighborhoods and towns, rather than as a divider, which has often happened in conventional development.

Design of the street network can assist the potential for energy conservation through reduced vehicle travel, facilitating climate-responsive house positioning, management of natural features, provision of business and commercial opportunities, and adaptability to changes in land use.

A more sustainable transportation system, focused on bicycling, carpooling, clean and efficient public transit and, maybe most important, walking, will also have far-reaching benefits for personal health. Alternative transportation modes are linked to greater physical activity, which is a key factor in maintaining healthy weights. And fewer vehicle miles traveled reduce the risk of motor vehicle deaths and injuries.

Objective 1

Focus on the development of a highly interconnected 'complete/context sensitive' streets network that will provide acceptable levels of safety and convenience for all street users, and convenient linkages to activity centers and other destinations.

The network of streets is a great public resource. It functions well when it is designed, constructed, maintained and managed so that it safely accommodates multiple modes of travel, provides universal access as well as access to private property, enhances a place's character, protects and where practical enhances or restores environmental resources, and allows for safe and efficient delivery of freight and utility services.

Tasks/Metrics

Short Term Initiatives (1-5 years)

1. Update the 2005 Comprehensive Plan and Design Guidelines (participate in & monitor on-going work in Community Development Department & CNU/ITE/Elgin Project)
2. Adopt a 'complete streets/context sensitive solutions' policy
3. Utilize a concept plan for the arrangement, use and appearance of buildings, structures and exterior spaces within neighborhoods, including how they relate to recreational parks, working lands and natural systems to show citizens how neighborhoods could be. The concept plans can be used in outreach and charrettes to facilitate discussion about the built environment.
4. Update development codes and ordinances (street design standards)
5. Adopt form-based development regulations

On-Going/Long Term Initiatives (>5 years)

1. Brownfield/greyfield redevelopment
2. Focus on centers and corridors
3. Focus on transit supportive development and the redesign of the commuter bus system

Urban Design Goal III Responsible Land Use

To promote responsible development ensuring careful thought prior to large-scale development of agricultural lands, the preservation of connected habitat and open space, and small-scale conservation of environmentally sensitive sites.

A sustainable community strives to use its land resources wisely. While adopted public policy seeks to channel higher density growth into neighborhood centers and along transportation corridors, this has not always been realized. As Elgin develops to accommodate the demands from significant population growth, it is simultaneously losing its farmlands and natural habitat.

Sprawl development is associated with greater water and energy use than more compact patterns of development, as well as, more runoff and water pollution. In short, sprawl development impacts our natural resource areas as well as the accessibility and quality of our connection to these natural areas.

Urban parks and open space present a particular challenge since they compete with many other needs that cities must accommodate within a limited land mass, such as housing, transportation and commerce. Since parks are usually not considered on the same economic scale as these other uses, it takes vision, community support and political will for new parks to be created.

Objective 1

Focus and guide development of the built environment in a manner that discourages the premature development of prime agricultural lands, creates opportunity for locally grown foods, and conserves important natural resource and cultural features on the landscape.

“Premature” for the purposes of this goal means the conversion of agricultural lands that are non-contiguous to the existing built environment (i.e. avoiding “leap frog” development). This goal strives to ensure that land is developed in a compact and contiguous manner.

Implicit in this goal is the understanding that not all development occurs in a logical manner and in some instances other developmental forces prevail. This goal is not meant to serve as “road block” to the westward expansion of Elgin but merely a “speed bump” to ensure careful thought is put into planning decisions.

Planning for a sustainable approach to urban development requires the integration of planning for the built environment with planning for conserving important elements of the green infrastructure system. Green infrastructure is our natural life support system - an interconnected network of waterways, wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitats, and other natural areas; greenways, parks and other conservation lands; working farms, forests; and other open spaces that support native species, maintain natural ecological processes, sustain air and water resources and contribute to the health and quality of life for our community and people.

Just like our built infrastructure, green infrastructure should be carefully planned, designed, and invested in far in advance of development. Green infrastructure planning should be the first step in the land use planning and design process. Green infrastructure planning should also be coordinated with planning for the built infrastructure — roads, bike trails, water, electric, telecommunication and other essential community support systems. Integrated planning and design should connect the two in a more effective, economic and sustainable network.

A sustainable approach to urban development – one that integrates the built environment with those features worthy of conservation in the natural environment – should accomplish the following:

- Protect key natural and cultural assets, and incorporate them into the design of a neighborhood.
- Ensure that the design of neighborhoods takes into account environmental constraints including soil erosion and flooding, and protects areas of natural or cultural significance.
- Ensure that new urban areas incorporate best-practice urban water management techniques relating to storm water quality and quantity, water conservation and reuse, and ecosystem and public health.
- Balance provision of a sustainable and efficient urban structure with protection and enhancement of environmental attributes, and rural and urban agricultural activities.
- Protect and conserve margins of water courses, water bodies and wetlands.
- Ensure the provision of adequate land to protect and to provide public access to the Fox River and its tributary streams.
- Protect the built environment from flooding, inundation and storm water damage.
- Prevent adverse impact to valued natural environments sensitive to changes in the natural water cycle.
- Provide a network of well-distributed parks and recreation areas that offer a variety of safe, appropriate and attractive public open spaces.
- Provide a more integrated approach to the design of open space and urban water management.
- Enable minor adjustments to streams, wetlands and marginal flood plains to ensure that urban forms can be compact, walkable and efficient. The adjustments must have minimal environmental detriment and minimize disturbance caused by draining or filling natural streams and wetlands.

Objective 1 Continued

Short Term Initiatives (1-5 years)

1. Update the 2005 Comprehensive Plan and Design Guidelines (participate in & monitor on-going work in Community Development Department & CNU/ITE/Elgin Project)
2. Update 2000 Parks Master Plan (participate in & monitor on-going work to update the Parks Master Plan)
3. Update 2000 Riverfront Center City Master Plan
4. Adopt conservation codes for natural resources
5. Make zoning provisions for urban agriculture
6. Utilize a concept plan for the arrangement, use and appearance of buildings, structures and exterior spaces within neighborhoods, including how they relate to recreational parks, working lands and natural systems to show citizens how neighborhoods could be. The concept plans can be used in outreach and charrettes to facilitate discussion about the built environment.
7. Update development codes and ordinances, as they relate to the relationships between the built environs and the natural environs

On-Going/Long Term Initiatives (>5 years)

1. Focus on conserving the green infrastructure network
2. Develop and implement a biodiversity protection plan

Urban Design Indicators

Indicators provide the “hard data” to monitor and make the case for sustainability related initiatives. Below are some indicators that relate to the Urban Design group’s recommendations. For more information on sustainability indicators please see Appendix B.

- Access to Fresh Food
- Acres in Woodland and Farmland
- Acres in Parks and Open Space/1,000 Population
- Average Commute Time
- Urbanization and Impervious Surface Change
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Counts
- Carbon Footprint
- Infill Development
- Land Use Mix
- Median House Size, New Construction
- Neighborhood Gathering Places
- Net Residential Density w/in ¼ to ½ mile of a Activity Center
- Ratio of Housing Units to Population
- Ratio of Land Consumption to Population Growth
- Vehicle Miles Traveled
- Walkability Index

Additional Resources/Best Practices

Alternative Farming Information Center

<http://afsic.nal.usda.gov>

Around 15 percent of the world's food is now grown in urban areas. City and suburban agriculture takes the form of backyard, roof-top and balcony gardening, community gardening in vacant lots and parks, roadside urban fringe agriculture and livestock grazing in open space.

City of Charlotte, NC

<http://charmeck.org/city/charlotte/Transportation/PlansProjects/Pages/Urban%20Street%20Design%20Guidelines.aspx>

Charlotte Mecklenburg General Development Policies

<http://charmeck.org/city/charlotte/planning/AreaPlanning/Plans/GDP/Documents/GDP.pdf>

The Charlotte Mecklenburg General Development Policies are used to provide direction in developing future land use plans as well as in making rezoning decisions. They give direction in updating zoning and subdivision ordinances, and for integrating land use planning with capital facilities planning, particularly transportation planning. In addition, they guide future efforts to further integrate transportation and land use, particularly in developing an integrated, long-range plan.

Congress for New Urbanism/LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND)

www.cnu.org/leednd

CNU has partnered with the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) and the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) to lay out a coordinated and powerful environmental strategy: sustainability at the scale of neighborhoods and communities. The joint venture, known as LEED for Neighborhood Development (or LEED-ND), is a system for rating and certifying green neighborhoods. LEED-ND builds on USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) systems, the world's best-known third-party verification that a development meets high standards for environmental responsibility. LEED-ND integrates the principles of new urbanism, green building, and smart growth into the first national standard for neighborhood design, expanding LEED's scope beyond individual buildings to a more holistic concern about the context of those buildings.

Congress for New Urbanism/Transportation Networks

www.cnu.org/networks

CNU has long recognized transportation as a key determinant of quality of urban form and community life. Transportation networks not only accommodate a region's access and mobility needs, but also help determine the location, type and form of land development. CNU seeks to create sustainable transportation networks that are planned in coordination with community planning and work to reduce household costs, traffic injuries and greenhouse gas emissions.

Congress for New Urbanism/Urban Thoroughfares Manual

www.cnu.org/streets

A new resource, *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach*, advances the successful use of context-sensitive solutions (CSS) in the planning and design of major urban thoroughfares for walkable communities. It provides guidance and demonstrates how context-sensitive design principles and techniques may be applied where community objectives support urbanism and smart growth: walkable,

connected neighborhoods, mixed land uses, and easy access for pedestrians and bicyclists. The manual is a partnership between the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) and CNU. Under contract to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the two organizations have created a context sensitive design guide dedicated exclusively to major thoroughfares in cities and towns.

Crystal Lake, IL

<http://www.crystallake.org/index.aspx?page=365>

Form Based Codes Institute

www.formbasedcodes.org

Form-based codes use physical form, rather than separation of land uses, as their organizing principle. They foster predictable results in the built environment and a high quality public realm. At best, design guidelines can recommend articulation and openings to the building's facade. In contrast, form-based codes conceptualize a public realm by pulling together the individual elements: the diverse street types, variety of public and private open spaces, and contextual building types into a complete, cohesive, and memorable place.

National Complete Streets Coalition

www.completestreets.org

The streets of our cities and towns are an important part of the livability of our communities. They ought to be for everyone, whether young or old, motorist or bicyclist, walker or wheelchair user, bus rider or shopkeeper. But too many of our streets are designed only for speeding cars, or worse, creeping traffic jams.

Now, in communities across the country, a movement is growing to complete the streets. States, cities and towns are asking their planners and engineers to build road networks that are safer, more livable, and welcoming to everyone. Instituting a complete streets policy ensures that transportation planners and engineers consistently design and operate the entire roadway with all users in mind - including bicyclists, public transportation vehicles and riders, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

Natural England/Green Infrastructure Guidance

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/NE176>

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Guidance articulates our position in relation to green infrastructure planning and delivery, which is increasingly recognized as an essential part of sustainable spatial planning. This is due in no small part to the role of green infrastructure as a 'life support system', able to deliver multiple environmental functions, and to play a key part in adapting to and mitigating climate change.

New York, NY

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/about/streetdesignmanual.shtml>

Sacramento, CA

www.completestreets.org/webdocs/resources/cs-bestpractices-sacramento.pdf

Tacoma, WA

http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/Planning/CompleteStreets/CS_Project_Summary111709.pdf

The Conservation Fund/Green Infrastructure: Linking Landscapes and Communities

http://www.conservationfund.org/pubs_product_list/131

Green Infrastructure: Linking Landscapes and Communities by Mark A. Benedict and Edward T. McMahon is an illustrative review of advances in smart land conservation and large scale thinking that provides a green solution to many of the problems associated with sprawling development.

United States Environmental Protection Agency/Green Infrastructure Planning

http://www.epa.gov/greenkit/green_infrastructure_planning.htm

The Green Communities website is your portal to tools and information on the best strategies, programs and policies to reduce your environmental footprint. A 5-step environmental planning framework leads you to a greener, sustainable future.

Western Australia Planning Commission/Livable Neighborhoods Edition 3

www.planning.wa.gov.au/Publications/26.aspx

The Liveable Neighbourhoods Community Design Code provides an approach to the design of neighborhoods and towns that aims to achieve compact, better defined, and more sustainable urban communities. The Community Design Code encourages a wide variety of housing, a wide variety of local employment opportunity, a sense of community focused on walkable neighborhoods and towns, and support for public transit.