

STRATEGIC PLANNING LEADS TO “FUTURE” IMPLEMENTATION:

Office of State Planning – Smart Future Planning Grant Program

Triad Associates

Municipal planning and zoning provide the foundation for growth and development in New Jersey’s municipalities. Sound planning and zoning set the parameters for this development by minimizing conflicts and incompatible uses; preserving the character of neighborhoods and protecting the quality of life in communities through the enforcement of local statutes and ordinances.

Notwithstanding the need for and value of sound planning and zoning, what is lacking in many cases is a sound implementation component that provides a strategic framework for advancing the plan. Why is strategic planning important?

When applying for regional, state or federal Grants, the more competitive proposal will demonstrate that the project for which funding is sought is an element of an overall strategic plan affecting neighborhoods and/or economic development. Grantor agencies are more inclined to fund projects developed as a result of a strategic planning process and to reward success (performance) by funding additional phases.

Strategies identify projects based on a review of a community’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT); and in the context of Goals and Objectives which are formulated as a result of community engagement. Moreover, a strategic plan offers a practitioner’s perspective to the process of revitalization, redevelopment and growth. In other words, it can and should set realistic and attainable goals and timelines producing results and early successes that serve as catalysts for continued community engagement and support from the public and private sectors.

An integral part of a good strategic plan is the Implementation Agenda. It sets forth capital and other projects in what Triad Associates classifies as a Projects and Funding Matrix. The Matrix contains information about the project, its relationship to goals and objectives, the estimated cost, projected time frame for implementation, potential partners and recommended actions. The Matrix effectively puts into action the premises developed in the strategy which has been built on the solid foundation of planning and zoning at the municipal level.

At the recent New Jersey State League of Municipalities Convention in Atlantic City, the Office of Smart Growth announced its intent to provide another round of “Smart Future” grant funding. The intent of the proposed round of 2008 funding will be to address planning needs in one of six areas:

- Neighborhood Demonstration Planning Grant
- Agricultural Retention and Farmland Preservation Plan
- Reconnecting your Community
- Transit Oriented Design Plan
- Urban Transfer of Development Rights Demonstration Project

- Community Visioning

The grant round is anticipated to open in January of 2008. Typically, past announcements have provided an approximately six week window to prepare and submit applications. The deadline for the pending round of applications has not yet been set.

Smart Future funding however, is only one of several sources of planning money that municipalities can explore. For instance, planning grants are also available from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA). NJEDA funds economic strategies that assess the feasibility of potential projects designed to encourage new private investment, new rateables and new jobs. The Wachovia Regional Foundation invites competitive applications from 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations to develop neighborhood strategies that help strengthen the social, community and economic fabric of a neighborhood through a process of engagement with stakeholders.

Strategic planning is a work in process to methodically address municipal needs and opportunities over time. Strategic planning allows a municipality to focus on issues and identify potential projects and technical and financial solutions. **Smart Future Funding** which will soon be available is worthy of consideration in that it may provide the seed capital to initiate discussions with business and community leaders working together to begin to formulate strategies and an Action Agenda that includes projects and partnerships. A strategy can be the catalyst to move from the status quo and to engender a positive attitude with renewed interest in the possibilities manifested in the strategic plan.

*** * IMPORTANT NOTICE * ***

If you are planning to apply for Smart Future funding through NJDCA, municipalities **must** have an elected official attend the pre-scheduled sessions. The grant guidance clearly states that any application received from an entity that did not have an elected official attend the specified, mandatory pre-application sessions will be disqualified. The pre-application sessions have been scheduled for January 7th, 8th and 9th. Please plan accordingly if you have any intent of submitting an application. Please refer to the Smart Future Flyer sent to you earlier for the appropriate contact at the Office of Smart Growth to register your community for the mandatory training.

Triad Associates is currently the League's Grant Consulting Firm. Their firm, which is known for its expertise in community and economic development, including strategic planning, redevelopment, acquisition, relocation and funding, has brought diverse plans and projects to life by generating more than \$580,000,000 for over 120 public, private and nonprofit clients throughout the Northeast region since 1978. Every member of the Triad team is personally committed and dedicated to the success of its clients and the projects that benefit communities.