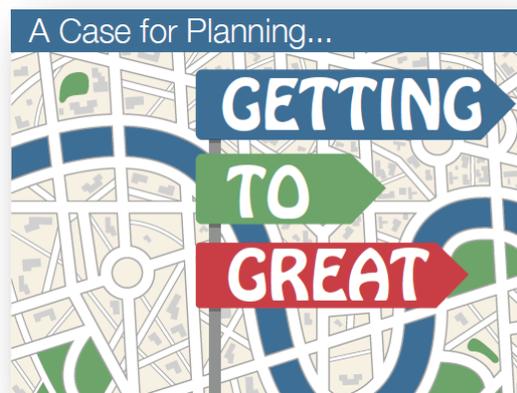




American Planning Association
New Jersey Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen



“Getting to Great” Discussion Guide

About the Video

“Getting to Great” is a video presentation developed by Professional Planners and sponsored by the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA-NJ) to offer a perspective on how good planning can help New Jersey’s communities become more prosperous and desirable places. The 23-minute presentation explores trends in the local economy, the built environment, public health and demographics to pinpoint key variables challenging our communities now and in the near future. With so many changes occurring at the local level, it is likely that many communities will need to adopt new approaches to position themselves for renewed or continued prosperity.

New Jersey’s great downtowns, streets, neighborhoods and public spaces - four essential building blocks of great communities - illustrate the results of good planning and offer valuable case studies for local officials and residents seeking to revitalize their municipalities. By following the strategies described in the presentation, you can set the framework for creation of a shared vision that responds to the issues your municipality is facing, and nurture that vision to fruition. Your community can be great!

How to Use the Video

“Getting to Great” is recommended for viewing by a wide range of audiences, including local governing bodies, boards, or commissions; nonprofit organizations; neighborhood associations or other citizens’ organizations; business owners and operators; or informal gatherings of citizens interested in local issues. In fact, anyone with an interest in the future of their community and a desire to help shape it would be a good audience.

The presentation can be shown as part of a regularly scheduled meeting or featured at a special meeting reserved for this purpose. A successful showing will allow sufficient time for attendees to reflect upon the information, consider how it coincides or conflicts with their own preconceived ideas, assess the current conditions in their community, and consider how they might proceed. The presentation is available for viewing at APA-NJ’s website @ www.njplanning.org.

Discussion Topics

The topics and questions in this section are recommended for use in a group discussion that follows the video presentation. Tips for handling the discussion appear in the next section.

Get Started

- What did you see in this video that you’ve seen or read about elsewhere? Did the presentation confirm or challenge your way of thinking?
- What surprised you in the video? Describe and tell why.
- What issues would you like to learn more about?



Explore the Issues in Our Community

- What challenges shown in the video reflect our community? Refer to Slides 7 - 30 in the “Getting to Great” narration appearing in the Appendix to refresh the audience’s memories.
- What initiatives are already underway to address these challenges?
- What else can be done to make things better? What are the challenges? What resources are needed? What are the priorities? What is the highest priority? What are the consequences of not acting?

Move Forward

- What steps should our community take to tackle the highest priority? If we don’t know what to do, how can we find out?
- Who makes the decisions that are needed to launch our community planning initiative? How can we access these decision makers? What groups would be valuable partners to strengthen our case?

Depending on the composition of the audience, it may be appropriate to revise some of the discussion items or even remove them from the list. For instance, members of the municipality’s governing body would not likely need to consider the question about who makes the decisions, unless there is uncertainty as to which government entity holds jurisdiction on a particular matter.

Tips for Leading a Discussion

The discussion should be led by someone viewed by the group as neutral. This group leader or moderator needs to make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak while keeping the discussion on topic and moving. Some Professional Planners are familiar with community visioning processes such as this, in which the community defines the future it want.

Here are some suggestions for a productive dialog:

- Establish a time limit at the start.
- Have someone on tap to record notes of the participants’ responses, preferably on an easel or blackboard that is large enough for everyone to read.
- Don’t allow anyone to dominate the discussion. Call on quieter people to solicit their views. If someone relates a personal experience, assist them with connecting it to the discussion topic.
- Avoid discouraging discussion by appearing to judge reactions to the video content or suggestions.
- Summarize as you finish each of the three discussion sections. Stop to ask, “What have we said so far?” Pause momentarily for people to gather their thoughts. Confirm with the audience that what they said has been captured accurately.
- A few minutes before the end of the meeting, or when people seem restless:
 - Briefly summarize what’s been covered and any conclusions reached.
 - Identify people in attendance who will volunteer to make any needed contacts or conduct further research.
 - Set a date for the next meeting when the volunteers will give reports and specifically identify further steps.





Please Contact Us!

Please contact the “Getting to Great” authors with any questions or comments about the presentation or the information provided in this discussion guide:

David M. Kutner, PP, AICP, dkutner@njfuture.org

Linda E. Wills, PP, AICP, lewills@optonline.net

In addition, we hope that will share your experience with using the presentation, and what steps you and your organization are taking to create a better community.



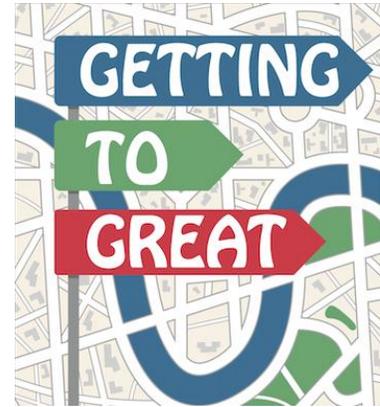
The American Planning Association-New Jersey Chapter is a not-for-profit educational organization that provides leadership in the development of vital communities. APA-NJ and its parent organization, the American Planning Association (APA), are dedicated to advancing the art, science and profession of good planning -- physical, economic, and social -- so as to create communities that offer better choices for where and how people work and live. Members of APA help create communities of lasting value and encourage civic leaders, business interests and citizens to play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives. For more information, visit planning.org and njplanning.org.

Appendix – “Getting To Great” Narration

Slide 1

New Jersey’s communities aren’t frozen in time. Some grow and prosper; others, not so fortunate, stagnate or even decline.

The more prosperous communities support a high quality of life for their residents, with attractive places to live, work, visit, and operate businesses. These places have neighborhoods that are safe and encourage social activity, streets alive with shops and restaurants, and parks and other public spaces that form the heart of the community



Slide 2

The truly Great Places are where people want to be. They attract new businesses, support their local economies, and add value to their communities. They’re visually interesting and memorable, and they promote active, healthy lifestyles. Great Places inspire.

Slide 3

New Jersey has its share of great places, but our communities also face many challenges, and more lie ahead. Some municipalities are likely to fade over time. Others will flourish. What happens to your community need not be left to chance. And through careful preparation, you’ll be in a better position to weather any storm – whether it’s caused by the economy or the natural environment.

Slide 4

You can stack the odds in your favor by taking the right steps, and community planning is an invaluable guide.

The American Planning Association is a not-for-profit educational organization that provides leadership in community planning and the professional planners affiliated with the organization strive to create livable, prosperous communities. New Jersey’s Chapter, with 1,100 professional planners, public officials, citizens and students who are engaged in community planning issues, is a great resource for municipalities seeking direction.

Slide 5

This presentation, on behalf of the Chapter, tells you about:

1. The major challenges facing New Jersey communities now, and additional challenges that will soon surface;
2. Why communities need good planning, and how planning has helped some communities address challenges to enjoy relative prosperity and a high quality of life; and
3. Strategies to help your community become more prosperous and livable for the long-term.

Slide 6

Let’s start by looking at the key challenges.

Slide 7

The national recession officially ended in June 2009; but global economic conditions remain largely unfavorable, even alarming, and New Jersey municipalities still feel the effects.

Slide 8

As vacancy rates for commercial properties rise and property values decline, cash-strapped communities are increasingly challenged to maintain quality services. From 2008 to 2013, the equalized value for all property in New Jersey, a measure of the true value of all real estate, dropped by a staggering \$197 billion, just over 14.5%.

Slide 9

Meanwhile, state aid to municipalities declined by almost 55% over the last dozen years, while municipal budgets increased by almost 16% to meet the climbing costs of emergency services, clean-up from weather-related events, and the overall cost of doing business. Budget cap limitations challenge municipalities to balance their budgets.

Slide 10

Although housing sales in the state have started to modestly accelerate since the low point in 2011, the total sales price of housing in New Jersey is still 130% below its 2006 peak, while the annual number of housing units sold has plummeted by over 156% since 2005.

Because of the deep dip in property values, many owners have successfully appealed to lower their tax assessments, and the corresponding reductions to property taxes have strained municipal coffers.

Slide 11

As municipalities have been forced to cut budgets, private investment has fallen off. Statewide, new construction of all types - residential, office, retail and industrial - has dropped steeply since the first half of the decade. The number of new construction permits rose sharply from 2012 to 2013, reflecting rebuilding activity from Sandy. But even with this increase the total number of permits is 200% less than the number issued in 2004. And the total value of new construction fell over \$3 billion, or almost 37%, since its 2005 peak.

Slide 12

The built environment, the form and layout of buildings, streets and public spaces, unquestionably shapes a community's quality of life and its ability to attract investment.

Slide 13

And for the past 125 years, the pre-eminent factors influencing the shape of our built environment have been the automobile and the highway system. Together, they paved the way for the sprawling shape of the vast majority of communities throughout the U.S. and most certainly those in New Jersey.

We've paid a high price. Our reliance on the automobile has been linked to loss of community character, environmental degradation, inaccessible jobs and services and a number of health issues.

Slide 14

Many of our buildings, whether public or privately owned, will need major renovation or replacement over the next 30 years. Rebuilding will come with a high price tag, and also with the questions of what to build, where, for whom.

45% of New Jersey households are challenged by high housing costs that exceed 30% of income. And a shortage of affordable housing forces families to live farther from centers of employment and services.

Slide 15

As a consequence our trips to work are long and getting longer. New Jersey's average travel time to work is presently more than 30 minutes, the third highest in the nation. This translates into more money spent on commuting costs, and less time for family and fitness.

Slide 16

Our sprawling communities isolate increasingly large segments of the population, from the elderly and disabled to younger people who can't, or prefer not, to drive.

Nationally, 1 in 5 people over age 65 don't drive, and almost 600,000 lose their licenses annually because they've outlived their ability to drive. By 2030, 1 out of 4 U.S. drivers will be older than 65.

And younger people who can drive increasingly prefer not to. According to the Federal Highway Administration, only 46.3% of potential drivers age 19 and younger had drivers licenses in 2008, compared with 64.4% just 10 years earlier.

Slide 17

The capability to help our communities grow and change will largely depend upon the condition and availability of the roads, power and water supplies, telecommunications, and other infrastructure needed to support them. Even before Superstorm Sandy swept across the state, the American Society of Civil Engineers reported that the Nation's infrastructure is seriously deficient and, in some instances, unsafe.

In 2013, two-thirds of New Jersey's roads were considered in poor or mediocre condition, costing each motorist \$601 a year in vehicle repairs and operating costs. 651 of our bridges, that's 1 in 10, are structurally deficient.

Slide 18

It's still too early to foresee the long-term financial implications of Sandy, but they will, unquestionably, be profound. The storm made it abundantly clear that all communities need long-term strategies to help assure that they're less disaster prone in the face of future severe weather-related events, sea level rise and other hazards. And although there's little comfort in devastation, events such as Sandy underscore the need to rethink how and where we develop, and the costs of recovery suggest an enormous value in community collaborations and sharing services.

Slide 19

Unfortunately, New Jersey is not immune to the public health crisis resulting from the nation's obesity epidemic.

Slide 20

Currently, 6 out of 10 of New Jersey's adults are overweight or obese, and 1 out of 4 is obese. We simply eat too much, sit too long in the car, in front of the TV or computer, and exercise too little.

Slide 21

Over the last 10 years, statewide rates of adult obesity increased 40%, with Cumberland, Salem, and Gloucester counties having the highest rates. If these rates continue at this pace, nearly half of New Jersey adults will be obese in 2030.

Slide 22

One out of four New Jersey children ages 10-17 is overweight or obese, which puts them at greater risk for diabetes and other serious illnesses. Sadly, these children are on course to live shorter lives than their parents, who are often obese and overweight, as well.

Slide 23

And the medical costs of obesity may break our health care system. New Jersey residents spent \$2.2 billion on obesity-related health care in 2008, and spending may quadruple to \$9.3 billion by 2018 if obesity rates continue to increase.

Slide 24

Both adults and children need more healthy food choices and active lifestyles. Although our children need safe routes to walk to school, federal Safe Routes to School projects must compete against other alternative transportation programs. After-school recreation programs are in decline at many locations.

Slide 25

Significant changes in New Jersey's population are leading to a mismatch between the types of housing and amenities available and the types that residents may prefer or need in the near future.

Slide 26

Baby boomers represent New Jersey's fastest growing age cohort, currently 26% of the population. And they can expect to live longer. Today's average life expectancy of 78 years is projected to increase to 82.6 years by 2050, when the number of seniors will equal the number of youth nationwide.

Households continue to get smaller, and more people than ever are living alone. By 2025, there will be as many single-family households living alone in the US as there are family households.

Other householders are sandwiched between boomerang students returning home and elderly parents unable to live on their own. Today, 30 million households care for an adult over 50, and that number is expected to double in 25 years.

Moreover, young professionals, empty-nesters, and some affluent householders are leaving the suburbs for urban life at greater rates.

Slide 27

With 10,000 people a day turning 65 in the US, we need to decide how to respond to their housing needs. Almost 30% of seniors have lived in their homes for over 25 years, buildings that were never designed to be barrier free. A study by Partners for Livable Communities indicates that 89% of elderly people would rather grow old in their homes. But to do so, they need effective design solutions and adequate support systems.

Slide 28

Over the next 20 years the demand for walkable, mixed use communities with good access to mass transit is expected to double to 15.2 million households (13% of all US households). Unfortunately, that's not what most of our communities look like.

Slide 29

That's part of the reason why our suburbs are growing slower than cities, and cities are growing faster than the country as a whole. It's anticipated that by 2030 there'll be a surplus of 22 million single family homes in suburban areas across the country. That's almost 1 out of every 5 homes in the U.S.

Slide 30

All of these challenges make it clear that the built environment in your community will likely need to change to continue providing a good quality of life and to avoid losing population and jobs. If your community keeps following past approaches, plans and land use ordinances, you can't expect to meet residents' needs and preferences into the future.

Slide 31

With so many changes in the works, your community may need to adopt new approaches to position itself for renewed or continued prosperity. Let's take a look at what works, and how professional planning can help.

Slide 32

In April 2014, the American Planning Association released "Investing in Place for Economic Growth and Competitiveness," a national research poll conducted to determine how community planning may lead the way to stronger local economies.

Slide 33

68% of the poll's respondents believe the national economy is "fundamentally flawed." The respondents also believe the best way to make improvements is through local economies and investments that make communities attractive and economically desirable places to live and work. To quote from the report:

"Two-thirds of those surveyed believe investing in schools and community features, such as transportation choices and walkable areas, is a better way to grow the economy than investing in recruiting companies."

Slide 34

These Americans have it right. Good planning can add value and strengthen your community in a number of ways.

Implementation of a plan for development can work in a coordinated manner with our infrastructure, such as roads, parks, and utilities. New development increases property assessments and ultimately tax revenues while creating new jobs. Projects should be designed to leverage investment by both the public and private sectors.

A stronger economic base means that your community will be more resilient in a recession. Property values are more apt to remain stable.

Carefully planned patterns of development reduce capital expenses, as well as on-going operations and maintenance costs.

Actions taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural hazards also bring economic benefits, with or without a natural disaster.

Slide 35

But how can a community begin the journey to prosperity? In 2012, the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association launched Great Places in New Jersey, a program to recognize special places around the state.

Slide 36

Great Places in New Jersey honors unique and exemplary downtowns, streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces – 4 essential building blocks of great communities. The program is modeled after our national organization’s prestigious Great Places in America program, which has designated 3 Great Places around the state. The successes of these Great Places showcase the outcomes of good planning while providing valuable case studies for local officials and residents looking to revitalize their communities.

Slide 37

The Great Downtowns are truly the centerpieces in the everyday lives of their communities. They have overcome many challenges, even as other downtowns continue to struggle. Their success is no accident. Clearly beloved by their communities, these downtowns reap the benefits from forging effective public and private partnerships and securing the needed investments to attract, retain and grow businesses. As a result, they enjoy reputations for excellence that reach well beyond their communities’ boundaries.

Slide 38

Some Great Downtowns are also Great Neighborhoods. Historic downtown neighborhoods have managed to retain their charm, even as their communities have shaped them into high quality, mixed-use neighborhoods with excellent shopping and dining opportunities and many events throughout the year. The Great Neighborhoods outside the downtown area, some created through redevelopment, reflect local history or culture. They encourage social activity, and they create a feeling of community and neighborliness.

Slide 39

Great Public Spaces are gathering spots that help promote social interaction and a sense of community. They add value by helping their communities retain existing residents and businesses and compete for new employers. Examples of public spaces include plazas, town squares, parks, marketplaces, piers, sites within public buildings, or even concourses or public spaces within private buildings.

Slide 40

Great Public Spaces offer high quality attractions and amenities that encourage interaction among a diverse cross section of the public. A unique or special character makes these public spaces extraordinary and memorable. They are places to meet and to bring out-of-town visitors.

Slide 41

Great Streets have capitalized on their unique historic characters. Many have added pedestrian-friendly wide sidewalks, comfortable benches, window-shopping opportunities, outdoor dining, and entertainment. These streets have helped usher their communities into a new era of prosperity even as the economies of other communities have softened.

Slide 42

Perhaps your community already has a great downtown, neighborhood, public space, or street. If so, let us know! Submit your Easy Suggestion for the next Great Places in New Jersey at njplanning.org.

Slide 43

In the first part of this presentation, we described the emerging economic, demographic and structural challenges facing New Jersey communities. It's clear that the built environment in your community will likely need to change to continue providing a good quality of life.

But attractive and prosperous communities don't happen by accident. They're shaped by a clear and purposeful vision for the future. They're planned for success and, with time and effort, achieve that status.

Here is a set of strategies to create that shared vision for your community.

Slide 44

1. Involve the community in identifying issues, strengths and weaknesses. Residents are the experts. They know the local history. They know what's important to them. And when they're actively engaged, civic groups can be an excellent resource of support.
2. Engage or create partnerships. It takes many individuals, organizations and agencies to design and implement a vision. So get them involved early and keep them engaged in the process.
3. Consider what works elsewhere. Besides being a source of inspiration, the successes of other communities can help explain the possibilities to your community.
4. Don't let existing zoning standards create obstacles. A zoning ordinance should define what uses and development forms should be included in a community, rather than merely indicating what should be excluded. Adjust your land use and zoning standards as necessary to allow the vision to become reality.

Slide 45

5. Develop and design the vision. Create a plan that directly responds to the issues.
 - a. Identify the uses and social gatherings you want to attract or retain.
 - b. Assess your assets: architecture, local history, location, natural features.
 - c. Ensure accessibility for pedestrians, motor vehicles, and bicycles.
 - d. Incorporate visual appeal and comfort.
 - e. Make connections with surrounding neighborhoods.
 - f. Illustrate the vision. People get excited when they can visualize ideas. So draw concepts. It's not merely a cliché that a picture is worth more than a thousand words.
 - g. Aspire to a design that will be truly memorable.

Slide 46

6. Identify and empower a local "champion" to ensure follow-through. Be sure to designate a person with the energy and interest to assume chief responsibility to marshal human and financial capital, promote the vision, and spearhead the action.
7. Map out a clear and realistic implementation strategy.
 - a. Identify who'll be responsible for each action.
 - b. Establish a timetable.
 - c. Determine costs and funding sources for each action.
8. Think about what you can accomplish quickly. Demonstrate immediate successes in order to build support for the hard stuff down the road.

Appendix - “Getting to Great” Narration

9. Don’t let cost be an obstacle. Build on partnerships. Look for grant, loan, and in-kind opportunities.
10. Try to juggle more than one project at the same time. When one project slows down, keep others moving forward. Keep trying.

Slide 47

The future of your municipality may very well be hanging in the balance. Will it fade, or will it flourish? Community planning can tip the scale in your favor.

Municipal officials can start a course of action by talking with a professional planner. And citizens can get involved by becoming knowledgeable about issues, attending meetings where important decisions are made that affect the community, and helping to create partnerships that address your concerns.

Slide 48

If your community lacks the resources to get started, consider applying for assistance from APA-NJ’s Community Planning Assistance Program. CPAP provides pro bono planning assistance to municipalities and community-based organizations that need planning support to address specific problems or challenges. During a 2 to 7 day workshop, local officials, stakeholders and the general public provide input used by professionals to prepare recommendations and plans. For more information, visit njplanning.org/about/community-planning-assistance-program.

Slide 49

Your community can be “great.”

This presentation is sponsored by the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association. Please visit our website at njplanning.org.