Building a more sustainable Buffalo Niagara depends in large part on how we get things done – changing minds about what needs to be done and moving ideas into action.

The fourth and final session of the One Region Forward Citizen Planning School will address those topics: how active citizens – including our Champions for Change – can bring new issues to the forefront of public attention and put new ideas on the agenda for action – and how they might work through our system of land use planning and development regulation to make real change.

But first, there’s one more “building block” of sustainability to learn about. Housing and neighborhoods make up the majority of our built environment. They are the places we live in every day and a big factor in determining the overall quality of our daily lives. Making neighborhoods into great places is a cornerstone of sustainable development.

Previous sessions have dealt with what sustainability is and why it is important for our region. They also addressed many of the other building blocks for sustainability: transportation systems, our food system, urban design, land use, energy and climate change. In this fourth and final session we attempt to pull it all together.
Housing and neighborhoods

Our homes are the foundations of our lives. Typically, a home is our biggest investment or our largest monthly expenditure. The home is essential to maintaining our health, keeping our families together, and succeeding in school or work. Neighborhoods, more broadly, provide us with access to the things we need on a daily basis: access to shopping, transportation, economic opportunities, recreational facilities, social contacts and more.

Buffalo Niagara is often said to have “great housing stock.” This is generally true, but only part of the story. The challenge before us – and an important element of One Region Forward – is how to preserve and maintain what we already have while we attempt to meet the housing needs and preferences of a changing population.

In particular, we need to make our homes more energy efficient, more flexible to meet the needs of the elderly, new generations of renters and home owners, persons with disabilities, immigrant communities, and more. We also need to work together to preserve those neighborhoods undergoing disinvestment and to resurrect those that have been badly damaged already. And we need to work better to bolster the connections between neighborhoods and places of employment to improve access and drive down energy consumption.

We must strive to promote choice in housing options and neighborhood character. Different people want different things. That includes promoting choice for those who typically have few choices – people of color, families with low incomes, and other disadvantaged groups. Achieving housing equity – choices for all – is a central goal in the One Region Forward process.

The way we plan today

Building a more sustainable region will have a lot to do with the way we plan and regulate land use and development in Buffalo Niagara. Only if we understand that system and how it works can we really influence what happens for the better. Learning will be the key to success.

New York State is a “home rule” state. That means that the primary responsibility for planning, zoning, and building regulation resides at the municipal level – with cities, towns and villages across the state. County governments have an advisory role in the development process. New developments are typically governed by the State Environmental Quality Review Act which requires environmental impact statements to be produced for some projects. Other state and federal regulations sometimes apply.

But most of the action happens at the local level. Municipalities may adopt comprehensive plans for their jurisdiction, which are enforced, in part, by zoning ordinances, which regulate where various land use may be located, how big buildings may be, how they are situated on the land and so forth. Some municipalities – like Buffalo – are adopting zoning codes that focus on regulating form more than use. Specific application of these ordinances is governed by local planning boards and zoning boards of appeal.

Other entities make plans, too. The Greater Buffalo Niagara Transportation Council is the federally recognized “metropolitan planning organization” for Erie and Niagara Counties and establishes the region’s transportation improvements plan. Public authorities like the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority or public institutions like the University at Buffalo also make plans that help shape our region. But so do not-for-profit community based organizations like PUSH Buffalo like the one for their “Green Development Zone.”

Making the system work

Understanding the way the system works is only the first step towards making it work. There is a requirement – or an expectation, at least – in all layers of this complex system that citizens will be involved in decision-making processes.

Agencies conducting formal environmental impact reviews are required by law to hold public hearings to provide an opportunity for citizens to comment. Other agencies hold events where citizens are invited to participate in more interactive or workshop sessions. Some agencies solicit feedback on proposals on websites or via e-mail. Don’t assume that planning sponsors don’t take such input into consideration. Frequently, they do.

It is important to remember, however, that the citizens who are most successful in influencing planning are those who are organized. Groups like the Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper or coalitions like the Western New York Environmental Alliance are involved in planning issues all the time – not just when some other agency is doing a plan. Whether the issue is improving a village Main Street or protecting an entire watershed, you’ll be much more effective if you work together with others who share your concerns.

Knowing how to frame your message and how to use the news media to get your message across is also crucial to making the system work. Increasingly, using the internet, social media and other new technologies is just as important. Organizations that are successful often organize and mount campaigns that combine all of these tactics and aim at all of these points of influence in the system.

Ultimately, one of the most important factors in building sustainability is an active and aware citizenry.
Planning in Our Region

One Region Forward isn’t the beginning of planning in Buffalo Niagara. It’s an extension of a broad and growing body of work by local and regional government, community-based organizations, business and citizens to imagine a better future for our region and make it happen. The regional plan for sustainable development will build on that work and align its policies and program of action on existing regional plans that are already in place for economic development, land use, transportation, energy, environment and more.

One Region Forward took its initial direction from a careful review and analysis of more than 160 plans created by cities, towns, counties, regional authorities and others. We looked for the core values embedded in each of those plans and summarized those as a starting point for a community conversation about where we want to go as a region.

Some of the significant and current plans that are guiding our development and with which the plan for moving One Region Forward will align are featured below.


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**PLANS/PLANNING PROCESSES**

**Buffalo Billion Investment Development Plan**

**Description:**

The 2013 Buffalo Billion Investment Development Plan was developed by the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council (WNY REDC) at the request of Governor Andrew Cuomo. The plan includes an analysis of the factors that drive Buffalo and the overall region’s growth within a global context, investment strategies based on Buffalo’s unique assets, and early implementation efforts. The plan was created by a broad consortium of stakeholders, including members of the Buffalo Billion Advisory Group, partners at Empire State Development, and hundreds of residents.

**Type:** Economic Resource

**Why you should check it out:**

The Buffalo Billion Investment Development Plan provides a good overview of Buffalo’s economic strengths and how to capitalize on these. Its market analysis of Buffalo Niagara’s assets is in-depth, the strategies are specific, and each recommendation is accompanied with a summarized business plan for how to implement the action. Overall, these characteristics make the plan credible and realistic.

**Link:** [http://www.oneregionforward.org/plan/the-buffalo-billion-investment-development-plan/](http://www.oneregionforward.org/plan/the-buffalo-billion-investment-development-plan/)

**Live NF**

**Description:**

An initiative to attract urban pioneers, especially young professionals, to reside in and dedicate their energy to maximizing the potential of Niagara Falls. Urban pioneers are individuals who commit their efforts and resources to revitalizing a city. Niagara Falls attracts these people by reimbursing their student loans if they live in specific neighborhoods within Niagara Falls for at least two years. Participants may also be eligible for first time home-buyer, housing rehabilitation, or homeownership investment assistance.

**Type:** Housing Strategy

**Why you should check it out:**

Live NF is an innovative approach at bringing density and life back to an urban center. It has even earned national attention from organizations such as ABC News, The Huffington Post, and Fox Business News. Those interested in new ways of retaining talented young professionals in our region should check out this site.

**Link:** [http://live-nf.com/](http://live-nf.com/)
Blueprint Buffalo

Description:
Blueprint Buffalo (2006) is a policy brief and action plan that recognizes the barriers that vacant and blighted properties impose on redevelopment efforts, as well as the opportunities they present to the traditional communities that they are located in. The plan presents four actions that public, private, and nonprofit leaders can pursue to address these challenges and take advantage of opportunities. It also describes four key strategies for achieving these goals, that can be tailored to the needs of each community and neighborhood within Buffalo. Blueprint Buffalo also gives the larger Erie County a policy framework with which to tackle the issue of vacancy at a regional scale.

Type: Vacancy and Housing Action Plan

Why you should check it out:
Vacancy is a huge issue in our region and Blueprint Buffalo outlines necessary and practical steps in addressing this problem. It also highlights that the problem of vacancy is spreading from the inner-city into first ring suburbs. Furthermore, it presents vacancy as a product of other connected and systematic issues that should also be addressed.

Link: http://www.oneregionforward.org/plan/blueprint-buffalo

Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan 2030

Description:
The first plan that proposes a collaborative, multi-municipality approach to planning and development in Niagara County over the next 20 years. The plan identifies challenges, as well as assets and opportunities in 5 key areas: land use, economic development, service delivery, capital improvements, and quality of life. In addition, the plan offers several actions for improving these sectors and ways to obtain financing for these projects.

Type: County Plan

Why you should check it out:
This plan offers a countywide perspective that is often lacking in other planning initiatives that are focused on more specific areas or projects, but would still benefit from an idea of what the county in general wants to accomplish in the future. It also consolidates countywide planning efforts into one plan, while acknowledging the good work that has been occurring under smaller government and community-based organizations.


Data Resources and Tools:

Management guru William Deming said “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.” We agree. Planning efforts that do not quantify goals and obtain the data to determine whether they have been met lack credibility and effectiveness. The below data tools are helpful for transforming raw data into understandable, useful formats.

HOUSING

Smart Location Database

Description:
The Smart Location Database includes 90 different indicators used to measure the quality of the built environment and social efficiency. Indicators include development density, diversity of land uses, street network design, and accessibility to destinations, as well as various demographic and employment metrics. Most attributes are available for all U.S. block groups.

Type: Place Database

Why you should check it out:
The Smart Location Database is a great resource for measuring the efficiency of locations. This user-friendly, indicator-rich database allows participants to easily determine the efficiency of their neighborhood.

Link: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smartlocationdatabase.htm

Vacant Property Pattern Book

Description:
This handbook offers a variety of vacant land management strategies to create amenities, increase access to green space, and improve property values. Furthermore, these actions can be adapted to the conditions of a specific site and the preferences of local stakeholders. In addition, preliminary costs of each strategy are included.

Type: Vacancy

Why you should check it out:
Vacancy in neighborhoods can be an eyesore, which negatively affects social and economic activity in a community. This handbook outlines strategies and designs that tackle vacancy through creating attractive places and stimulating public interaction. It also features practical financial calculations for redevelopment strategies.

**HUD Data Sets**

**Description:**
HUD Data Sets provide raw data and research from various housing organizations from around the country associated with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. A variety of information, including rental estimates, geospatial data, and housing affordability data is provided through this website.

**Type:** Federal Housing Data

**Why you should check it out:**
Housing is a transdisciplinary topic, affecting a variety of subjects and stakeholders. This website pulls together a wide range of research and data from a variety of sources that collectively describe a national perspective on housing.

**Link:** [http://www.huduser.org/portal/pdrdatas_landing.html](http://www.huduser.org/portal/pdrdatas_landing.html)

**ArcGIS Online Public Account**

**Description:**
The ArcGIS Online Public Account is a free tool that you can use to create, store, and manage maps, apps, and data, and share them with others. These maps can show geographic, demographic, and social data spatially. You can also get access to maps and apps shared by ESRI and GIS users throughout the world.

**Type:** Mapping

**Why you should check it out:**
Many municipalities and community leaders organize and present spatial and geographical data through GIS, such as zoning, municipal boundaries, and other parcel information. Having an understanding of how this program works allows one to represent an idea spatially, adding an additional layer to analysis or assessment.

**Link:** [http://www.esri.com/software/arcgis/arcgisonline/features/free-personal-account](http://www.esri.com/software/arcgis/arcgisonline/features/free-personal-account)

**Kids Count Data Center**

**Description:**
This is the premier source for data on child and family well-being in the United States. Access hundreds of indicators, download data, and create reports and graphics on the KIDS COUNT Data Center to support smart decisions affecting the welfare of children and families. Based on the data found on this website, various research and policy reports are published every year featuring topics related to public health and children. Healthy City provides these data and mapping tools to help build better communities. The Healthy City team also partners directly with organizations to develop research strategies and web tools that fuel social change.

**Type:** Maps, Data, Public Health, Publications

**Why you should check it out:**
This site provides data and mapping tools that geographically display the demographics, economic well-being, health, education, safety, and environments of communities, which all affect the quality of life for children and their families. It is also a frequently used, highly respected source of information for public health experts and planners.

**Link:** [http://datacenter.kidscount.org/](http://datacenter.kidscount.org/)

**New York Department of State**

**Description:**
The New York State Department of State has provided a summary of how local laws are adopted for private citizens who are interested in improving local government. This document provides an overview of legislative powers in New York State, the Home Rule policy, and the processes of developing, drafting, filing, and adopting a local law.

**Type:** Public Process, Legal

**Why you should check it out:**
This document is a good technical resource for understanding how policies and plans become enforceable laws in New York State, and the general legal context of planning in our state. For additional information about local governance in New York State, check out the Department of State’s Division of Local Government Services website at [http://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/publications.html](http://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/publications.html)


**Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth Mapping Application**

**Description:**
View natural systems, centers and corridors, heritage areas, and policy areas throughout Buffalo Niagara using this tool. You can also zoom into sections of the map using a point, address, coordinate, or lot number. In addition you can make reports from this tool and calculate measurements on maps.

**Type:** Mapping System

**Why you should check it out:**
This mapping system has data and features to make your own map that shows a problem you want to fix as well as how to fix it in the specific area you are interested in.

**Link:** [http://gis2.erie.gov/GC/ErieCountyNY/default.aspx](http://gis2.erie.gov/GC/ErieCountyNY/default.aspx)
**ORGANIZING FOR ACTION/EQUITY**

**Policy Link**

**Description:**
PolicyLink is a national research and action institute that advances economic and social equity. The PolicyLink website has information on how to increase equity in the areas of the economy, health, infrastructure, policy, and food, among others. It also features practical information on how to achieve equity through advocacy, as well as its Equitable Development Toolkit. The latter contains 27 tools to fix trends of segregation and neighborhood deterioration, avoid displacement, and foster equitable revitalization in the areas of affordable housing, economic opportunity, health, and land use. In addition, the website has an extensive library of resources on accomplishing community equity.

**Type:** Tool Kits

**Why you should check it out:**
PolicyLink features a comprehensive set of pragmatic tools, publications, and articles on how to achieve equity in a variety of areas in your neighborhood. PolicyLink also has a history of legislative successes that have increased the equity of hundreds of communities, making their information trustworthy.

**Link:** http://policylink.org/

**PPG Citizen Tool Kit**

**Description:**
The Partnership for the Public Good provides research and advocacy support to a broad array of partners that share a community-oriented vision of a revitalized Buffalo-Niagara. Thus, community empowerment through education is one of its main goals. The PPG Citizen Tool Kit consolidates resources from various organizations on topics such as how to understand Buffalo, learn about the issues, get involved, work with the government, collaborate with media outlets, and get additional information to stay involved.

**Type:** Toolkit

**Why you should check it out:**
The PPG Citizen Tool Kit offers strategies for anyone who wants to become more informed and engaged in addressing local problems. It explains how to leverage Buffalo Niagara’s assets—diversity, historic neighborhoods, and natural resources—to solve Buffalo Niagara’s problems—poverty, inequality, and pollution. The toolkit also encourages greater accountability and democracy of the local government, by training citizens on how to demand these things from their officials.

**Link:** http://www.ppgbuffalo.org/citizen-power/citizen-tool-kit/

**Communicating With Public Officials**

**Description:**
The National Council of Jewish Women has provided a document on how to communicate with public officials to move forward with a cause. The document includes tips for calling members of Congress, emailing and writing to public officials, making personal visits to officials, following up, addressing correspondence, and more.

**Type:** Publication, Advocacy

**Why you should check it out:**
This document is a good resource to help effectively communicate with public officials. Persuasive and professional communication with elected officials is key in order to gain their support.

**Link:** http://www.ncjw.org/media/PDFs/SPA/III.bSPAKitCommunicatingwithPublicOfficials82011.pdf

**Organizer’s Toolbox**

**Description:**
The New Organizing Institute’s Organizer’s Toolbox is created for organizers by organizers. The toolkit contains downloadable videos, slideshows, templates, and resources for organizing, campaigning and training other organizers. These resources offer essential tools that are needed to build momentum for your cause and accomplish meaningful results. There are ten Resource Centers to draw from: Organizing and Leadership, Campaign Management, For Trainers, Online Organizing, Voter Registration, Organizing Your Career, Data Management, Voter Contact, Election Administration, VAN and GOTV. Thus, there is inevitably something for any organizer in this toolkit.

**Type:** Online toolkit

**Why you should check it out:**
It contains several lessons on various essential topics, such as “Tactics & Timing”, “Building Relationships”, and how to use the Microsoft Excel and Access programs. Also, the fact that it was actually created by organizers means that the information and recommendations are credible.

**Link:** http://neworganizing.com/toolbox/

**Public Policy Advocacy: A Grassroots Guide**

**Description:**
The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network has written this guide to provide organizations and individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to become grassroots advocates. This guide discusses what advocacy is and how it works, how change happens, how to develop and implement a strategic action plan, and how to reach out to public policy makers.
Tools || Data Sources & Tools

Buffalo Erie-Niagara Land Improvement Corp
**Description:**
This organization is aimed towards alleviating issues found in distressed neighborhoods through revitalization efforts and strategically acquiring, improving, assembling, and selling distressed, vacant, abandoned, and/or tax-delinquent properties. In other words, the organization serves as our region’s “Land Bank.”

**Type:** Land Bank

**Why you should check it out:**
Vacancy has become a major issue in our region. The Erie County Department of Real Property Tax Services has stated that there is an excess of 73,360 tax liens within Erie County worth more than $53,529,325 in taxes owed to Erie County. This corporation is working on addressing this issue.

**Link:** http://www.benlic.org/

Empire State Future
**Description:**
Empire State Future (ESF) is New York’s first and only statewide smart growth advocacy and education organization. It mainly consists of a coalition of organizations from across the state. To advance its mission, Empire State Future works on policy and governance, conducts communications and outreach, and engages in specific smart growth projects and initiatives, such as transit oriented development, regional planning, and infill development.

**Type:** Smart growth advocacy and education

**Why you should check it out:**
This organization publishes several links, videos, and reports on its site related to smart growth. It is considered a go-to source of information for land use and development issues in New York. Besides checking out their extensive resources, you can also contact them with questions, send in interesting and relevant articles they should post, or get involved in one of their numerous advocacy campaigns, related to brownfields, complete streets, and infrastructure, among other topics.

**Link:** http://www.empirestatefuture.org

Organizations for Action:
There are lots of local and national organizations who have opportunities for you to engage with issues related to sustainability. Many of these organizations are also a wealth of information and are great resources for Citizen Planners. Here are a few featured organizations to get you started...

MapBox
**Description:**
MapBox is an open and crowdsourced build-it-yourself mapping service. It provides street, terrain, and satellite maps that are easily customizable. You can change the style of maps, upload data layers, and mark points, lines, and polygons on maps. The maps can then be saved and used in various platforms, including mobile and web applications.

**Type:** Build-it-yourself mapping system

**Why you should check it out:**
The maps are easy to make and can be highly tailored to your specific needs. Also, data displayed visually on a map is in general more compelling than data presented through text or other means.

**Link:** https://www.mapbox.com/editor/#welcome

Shareabouts
**Description:**
Shareabouts is a customizable tool for collecting citizen feedback. You can gather information on various topics, collect information about participants, create categories for submissions, and ask different types of questions. Furthermore, the results of these surveys can be displayed on a highly customizable map.

**Type:** Surveying and mapping

**Why you should check it out:**
Shareabouts allows for the collection of public input from diverse participants at the neighborhood or state scales. It can also be used in collecting feedback in several municipalities, for topics such as transportation planning, participatory budgeting, and resiliency mapping, among many others.

**Link:** http://openplans.org/shareabouts/

Link:

Link:
https://www.mapbox.com/editor/#welcome

Link: http://openplans.org/shareabouts/

Link: http://www.empirestatefuture.org

Link: http://www.benlic.org/
Partners for a Livable Western New York

Description:
Partners for a Livable Western New York is an all-volunteer group that works to bring about more livable communities through Smart Growth concepts and practices. It does so by supporting regional and local policies and regulations that promote cohesive neighborhood development through the stabilization of existing neighborhoods, preservation of environmentally sensitive areas, municipal coordination, and effective implementation of land use decisions. It also sponsors educational programs encouraging practices that support Smart Growth policies. It is composed of a diverse set of individuals, including lawyers, architects, planners, builder-developers, traffic engineers, public officials, and other concerned citizens.

Type: Smart Growth, Education, Advocacy

Why you should check it out:
Composed of a wide variety of participants, Partners for a Livable Western New York is a good example of a diverse grassroots organization that advocates for building neighborhoods according to the high design and quality standards of the Smart Growth movement. The partnership also serves as a center for the collection and dissemination of policies and practices designed to facilitate more livable communities.

Link: http://www.empirestatefuture.org/geography/state/partners_for_a_livable_western/

ReNU Niagara

Description:
ReNU Niagara engages, empowers and educates a diverse community of stakeholders to mobilize their collective capacity and resources to improve Niagara Falls and the surrounding areas based on a collaborative vision consistent with the mission and core values of Niagara University. It has several initiatives, including the GreenRoots Leadership Development Program, Highland Community Greening, Vacant Lot Initiative, and Niagara University Campus Garden.

Type: Grassroots revitalization

Why you should check it out:
ReNU Niagara has completed projects that have contributed to the resurgence of Niagara Falls. For example, it has created two community vegetable gardens, provided tax preparation assistance, and offered resident and organizational training for residents. This is appealing to those who want to work with an organization with a successful track record.

Link: http://www.niagara.edu/renu

Online Resources:
There are many excellent resources on sustainable development online. Below, we have identified and described those that discuss the general concept of sustainable development we feel are particularly useful.

Developing a Comprehensive Plan

Description:
The New York State Department of State has created a general presentation that broadly describes what a comprehensive plan is, how it can incorporate smart growth concepts, reasons for creating it, the public’s role in forming these plans, and steps for completing such plans.

Type: Presentation

Why you should check it out:
This presentation provides a general but useful overview of the opportunities and challenges of comprehensive plans, as well as how to make one. It is useful for both professional and citizen planners.

Link: http://www.co.oswego.ny.us/planning/comp%20plan%2012-03-08.pdf

The American Planning Association

Description:
The American Planning Association (APA) provides leadership in the development of vital communities by advocating for excellence in planning, promoting education and citizen empowerment, and providing the tools and support necessary to meet the challenges of growth and change. The site features exhaustive information on events, training, publications, research, outreach efforts, career development, and job opportunities.

Type: Planning education organization

Why you should check it out:
This is the leading source of planning information for both planners and non-planners alike. It is essential for anyone interested in planning issues to review this site, as it provides broad and detailed information about a variety of topics.

Link: https://www.planning.org/

The National Center for Smart Growth

Description:
Operating through the University of Maryland, the National Center for Smart Growth is a non-partisan center for research and leadership training on smart growth practices in metropolitan regions around the world. It offers publications, news, and educational opportunities related to multiple fields, including the environment, sustainable practices, housing strategies, transportation policy, and planning and design.
Resource | Online Resources

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type: Research and Leadership Training on Smart Growth</th>
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**Why you should check it out:**
This center utilizes the diverse resources of the University of Maryland and a network of leading national experts to determine solutions to issues related to land use and the environment, transportation and public health, housing and community development, and international urban development. Thus, it features some of the best and most innovative ideas for addressing various planning problems.

**Link:** [http://smartgrowth.umd.edu](http://smartgrowth.umd.edu)

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<th>Center for Community Progress</th>
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**Description:**
The Center for Community Progress exists to help meet the growing need in America’s cities and towns for effective, sustainable solutions to turn vacant, abandoned and problem properties into vibrant places. The site features technical assistance tools, policy development resources, research, leadership and education opportunities, media, publications, the Building American Cities Toolkit, and the Community Progress Blog.

**Type:** Vacancy, technical assistance, research, education, media

**Why you should check it out:**
Offers technical assistance on areas such as strategic code enforcement, tax foreclosure reform, and land banks. Also assists governments with the creation of new ordinances, programs, and statutes. In addition, the site hosts applied research reports on areas such as: state and local property tax enforcement systems; land banks and land banking; and vacant property registration ordinances. Furthermore, the toolkits help practitioners think through strategies, identify specific tools to carry out those strategies, and learn about communities elsewhere that have used those tools, to improve the land, buildings, neighborhoods and other areas that make up a city’s built environment.

**Link:** [http://www.communityprogress.net/](http://www.communityprogress.net/)

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<th>Spur</th>
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**Description:**
SPUR is a non-profit organization that promotes good planning and government through research, education, and advocacy in the San Francisco bay area. Their work spans eight program areas: Community Planning, Disaster Planning, Economic Development, Good Government, Housing, Regional Planning, Sustainable Development, and Transportation. SPUR also produces a monthly publication titled, “The Urbanist” that covers a wide range of planning topics.

**Type:** Planning, Non-Profit Organization

**Why you should check it out:**
SPUR’s resources and monthly publication cover a wide range of topics in planning that would be of interest to anyone interested in planning; not just those living in the San Francisco Bay area. Also, SPUR was created in 1910, meaning that it has a long and successful history with developing creative solutions to pressing urban issues.

**Link:** [http://www.spur.org/](http://www.spur.org/)

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<th>Smart Growth America</th>
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**Description:**
This national smart growth education, research, advocacy, and policy development organization features information on various issues related to smart growth, federal policy priorities, smart growth programs, technical assistance, research, how-to guides, blogs, and ways to get involved in promoting smart growth.

**Type:** Smart growth education, research, advocacy, and policy development

**Why you should check it out:**
The Smart Growth America website is an important source of information about smart growth. You can learn about a variety of topics, including local community workshops, best practices for creating complete streets and measuring sprawl, manuals for public transportation advocates, and a brownfields blog.

**Link:** [http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/)

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<th>Abandoned America</th>
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**Description:**
Photographer Matthew Christopher has documented the stunning beauty and history of America’s abandoned places on his website “Abandoned America” through exceptional photographs. Besides simple documentation, Cristopher also strives to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of these historic and structurally significant buildings, as well as increase civic pride and participation in protecting and improving these places.

**Type:** Photo galleries

**Why you should check it out:**
The photographs will captivate and inspire you to join the effort in protecting and restoring these beautiful and historic abandoned places throughout the country.

**Link:** [http://www.abandonedamerica.us/](http://www.abandonedamerica.us/)
Stay Current...

NPR Cities
Description:
The special National Public Radio series “NPR Cities: Urban Life in the 21st Century” is composed of articles, twitter roundtables, audio reports, and user contributions on existing trends and expected obstacles of cities throughout the world. Contributions to this series have not been made since 2013, however, many discussed topics are still relevant, such as how cities are using technology to increase responsiveness to citizens and decrease waste.

Link: http://www.npr.org/series/155914958/npr-cities

City Lab
Description:
Atlantic Cities’ City Lab features articles, maps, photos, and videos for people shaping, living in, and trying to improve cities. It features both practical and off-beat resources on a broad array of topics, such as commuting, working, housing, and urban design, among others. It also features a “CityFixer” section, that is composed of solutions for urban areas related to: mass transit, economic development, schools, streets, waste, infrastructure, aging, and more.

Link: http://www.theatlanticcities.com/

Planetizen
Description:
Planetizen is a public-interest information exchange for the urban planning, design, and development community. It is a one-stop source for urban planning news, editorials, book reviews, announcements, jobs, education, and more. Planetizen prides itself on covering a wide number of planning, design, and development issues, from transportation to global warming, architecture to infrastructure, and community development to historic preservation.

Link: www.planetizen.com

Words and Concepts In Planning

Buffalo Billion
A plan developed by the Western New York REDC that encompasses an in depth analysis of the levers that drive Buffalo’s and the region’s growth within a global context, promotes strategies based upon Buffalo’s unique assets, and advances early initiatives for implementation.


Business Improvement District
Defined boundary where redevelopment and improvements are planned in order to increase economic operations in that area. Funding for improvements comes either from grants and alternative funding sources from the city, or by increasing taxes for businesses located in the district.


Community Development
Initiative aimed towards providing a high quality of life for residents in a neighborhood through decent housing, diversity, and expanded economic opportunities for low and moderate income people. Collaboration and partnerships with various public and private sectors is a main characteristic of Community Development.


Community Development Block Grant
Program that uses federal dollars allocated by local and state governments to provide adequate resources and services to vulnerable communities seeking decent affordable housing, jobs through the expansion and retention of businesses, and general neighborhood improvements.


Economic Development
A field concerned with creating communities that not only provide jobs but promote equal opportunity, encourage innovation, and reward risk-taking.

Land Bank
An agglomeration of land, ownership, and use in a region, meant for the planning and documentation of current and future land use. Land banks are a useful tool for distressed communities facing abandonment and increased vacancy rates.


Metropolitan Planning Organization
A federally funded transportation planning organization. Located in most urbanized areas in the United States, MPOs serve as a resource for federal aid and funding for urban transportation.


Public Housing
Rental housing funded by the federal government and administered by local housing agencies for eligible low income residents, the elderly, and people living with various disabilities. Rent is determined based on an individual’s income status.


Section 8 Housing
A government housing program offering rental assistance to private landlords who house low income residents. It is usually based on a voucher system. Either a percentage of units in a building is reserved for low income residents or residents choose which housing unit they will use government rent assistance programs for.


Sustainable Housing
Housing that is energy efficient and affordable, and thus prevents gentrification and displacement of residents.


Urban Renewal
Redevelopment tactic aimed towards eradicating blight and urban deterioration due to vacancy or abandonment. Demolition and lack of community involvement are common criticisms of this method, especially around the 1950s and 1970s. There have been many successes and failures of urban renewal, either causing the revitalization of a neighborhood or community wide displacement.


Non-Governmental Organization
NGOs are non-governmental legal entities organized on a local, national, or international level that address public interest issues. NGOs primarily receive funding from the government but generally operate through independent humanitarian motives and often serve as a mediator between the government and public concerns.

Acronyms

BMHA: Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority
MPO: Metropolitan Planning Organization
CDBG: Community Development Block Grant
HUD: Housing and Urban Development
HOME: Housing Opportunities Made Equal
BENLIC: Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation
WNYEA: Western NY Environmental Alliance
MSA: Metropolitan Statistical Area
URA: Urban Renewal Area
CCE: Comprehensive Code Enforcement
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
BURA: Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency
AOC: Area of Concern
APA: American Planning Association
BNR: Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper
REDC: Regional Economic Development Council