Objectives

The Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) for Buffalo Niagara will be rooted in a process that **empowers a diverse cross-section of the public** to develop an overall vision for a sustainable Buffalo Niagara, **coordinates planning** and its mechanisms at the local level to embrace sustainable concepts and **focuses public and private investment dollars** in a way that maximizes projects’ potential to advance sustainability. A series of key activities will be performed over the three-year grant period to advance these objectives.

Background

Once an industrial powerhouse, the Buffalo Niagara region – encompassing Erie and Niagara Counties and the urban cores of Buffalo and Niagara Falls – has experienced significant socioeconomic transformation over the past several decades. As Buffalo Niagara shifts toward a knowledge-based economy dominated by the health care, education and business services sectors, it is also left with the legacies of population decline, sprawling development, geographic segregation and isolation of its low-income and minority populations, a glut of vacant and aging housing stock and one of the highest average housing utility costs in the country.

Compounding and contributing to these challenges has been the region’s lack of effective regional planning and decision making. With 64 municipalities in the two-county region each with its own planning powers, and no regional planning authority, the region has been defined more by fragmented development than by sustainable development over the past half century.

In recent years, however, regional leaders have begun to coalesce around a new model of development, as evidenced by creation of the **Framework for Regional Growth** (2006), a collaborative effort of Erie and Niagara Counties designed to inform public actions, promote community livability and economic vitality, and conserve sensitive natural and cultural resources. Adopted by Erie County and accepted by Niagara County, the **Framework** provides a baseline analysis of growth conditions and patterns, identifies development areas and recommends policies for a more livable, sustainable region. In 2011, Erie and Niagara Counties, in partnership with three rural counties to its south, created a Regional Economic Development Plan.

It is in this context that the Buffalo Niagara Consortium, a partnership of government, not-for-profit and academic organizations, seeks to develop a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development to build on the region’s momentum toward sustainable development, fill key gaps in planning and set the stage for a more vital future for Buffalo Niagara. The Consortium seeks to pursue a RPSD through a process that **empowers a diverse cross-section of the public** to develop an overall vision for a sustainable Buffalo Niagara, **coordinates planning** and its mechanisms at the local level to embrace sustainable concepts and **focuses public and private investment dollars** to maximize project sustainability.
**Key Partners**

**Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC):** The Project will be led by the GBNRTC, the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization. GBNRTC staff will coordinate transportation planning with the emerging regional vision and will lead a cooperative, comprehensive process to develop transportation plans and programs for the region through the Metropolitan Long Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Plan.

**Regional Sustainability Team:** A Regional Sustainability Team (RST) with the experience, skills and capacities to support the RPSD process will serve as dedicated staff to the project. The RST consists of a team of technical specialists from the University at Buffalo’s Regional Institute / Urban Design Project, both directed by Robert G. Shibley, Dean of the UB School of Architecture and Planning. Also advising and serving on the RST will be faculty from the School of Architecture and Planning. The RST will execute many of the specific planning activities of our regional planning process and will, in concert with staff from GBNRTC, provide day-to-day management of the planning process.

**Buffalo Niagara Partnership (BNP):** Incorporating the region’s former Chamber of Commerce, BNP is the region’s largest employer organization representing 2,500 companies with more than 200,000 employees. BNP has a long history of involvement in urban and regional development. BNP was a member of the steering committee that oversaw development of the Framework for Regional Growth; initiated and managed a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) to promote housing in the urban core; and led the review, eventual adoption and local implementation of changes to the New York State building code to encourage development in urban centers. Most recently, BNP convened the Buffalo Building Reuse Project, aimed at improving the competitive stance of downtown Buffalo by finding new uses for vacant buildings and promoting investment there. BNP also helped develop and adopt a uniform tiered incentive policy for six Erie County IDAs that made compliance with the Framework for Regional Growth the principal criterion governing granting IDA incentives.

**Consortium Steering Committee:** The Consortium Steering Committee is a partnership of government, nonprofit and academic organizations positioned to advance regional planning for sustainability in the Buffalo Niagara region. Collectively, the members possess the capacity and experience in transportation, housing, economic development, community health, public engagement and regional planning to create a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) to meet the needs of the region and set the stage for a more sustainable future. Specific members include: Erie and Niagara Counties; the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls; Local Initiatives Support Corporation Buffalo; Belmont Housing Resources for WNY; Western New York office of Empire State Development; the University at Buffalo Regional Institute / Urban Design Project; the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus; the Buffalo Niagara Partnership; GBNRTC; and the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority.
Specific Grant Activities to Develop a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Activity 1: Forging a Partnership

Create a governance structure comprising the Consortium Steering Committee (a group of key decision makers to guide grant activities and implementation), quarterly guidance of the GBNRTC Policy Committee and regular consultation with other key stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors.

Livability Principles Addressed: All six of the Livability Principles will be addressed through this partnership, but especially ‘Coordinate policies and leverage investment.’

Long Term Outcome: While building awareness and support for sustainability in our regional decision-making process will not overcome legal barriers to regional governance rooted in state law, the process of building stakeholder engagement and support will lay the groundwork for long-term institutional support for advancing regional stewardship and decision-making toward sustainability in our region.

Key Tasks of Forging a Partnership

Task 1.1: Formalize Consortium agreement and review/adopt work plan

The initial consortium members included in our grant application will formalize their partnership and serve as the effort’s Steering Committee. This partnership of government, nonprofit and academic organizations collectively possess the capacity and experience in transportation, housing, economic development, community health, public engagement and regional planning to create a RPSD that meets the needs of the region and sets the stage for a more sustainable future.

 Deliverables:

- Consortium Agreement Document, signed by the designated signatories from each of the initial Consortium partners
- Official Work Plan (this document)

 Responsibility: GBNRTC

 Due: Q2 2012 (Consortium Agreement - June 15, 2012; Work Plan – April 15, 2012)

 Measures: All members of Consortium who applied for the program will adopt the Work Plan and Consortium Agreement, thereby agreeing to participate in the Steering Committee.

 Evaluation: Participation at Steering Committee meetings will be measured by attendance and tracked through the grant period. If attendance problems persist, the Steering Committee will act collectively to address any identified issues.
Task 1.2: Address any identified capacities missing from the Steering Committee

While every effort was afforded to build a robust and diverse Consortium Steering Committee in the grant application process, the Steering Committee recognizes that key areas of representation may be missing or under-represented. In the initial few months of convening the Steering Committee, efforts will be made to recruit additional stakeholders, with specific emphasis on filling representation voids respective to minority and suburban and rural communities.

**Deliverables:**

- Consortium Agreement partnership amended to include additional members via existing “joinability” clause

**Responsibility:** Coordinated by GBNRTC, with input guidance from all Steering Committee members

**Due:** Q2 2012 (July 2012)

**Measures:** Final core membership of Consortium represents an even stronger balance of local governments, equity partners, economic development agencies, non-profits and educational institutions.

**Evaluation:** The Steering Committee will continue to evaluate potential missing key stakeholders from its membership and will seek to expand if additional deficiencies are identified.

---

Task 1.3: Convene Consortium Steering Committee monthly to guide development of regional planning process

On a monthly basis throughout the 3-year grant period, the Consortium Steering Committee will meet to review progress, set priorities and guide the overall process for creating a RPSD. Leadership and staff from the GBNRTC, governed by a board of key locally-elected officials, will convene this body with the support of the Regional Sustainability Team.

**Deliverables:**

- Pertinent materials provided to members; review of grant work plan, progress reports and work group activities
- Meeting agendas and summaries

**Responsibility:** GBNRTC; all members of Steering Committee

**Due:** Q1 2012 – Q1 2015

**Measures:** Progress meeting milestones of deliverables of Work Plan.

**Evaluation:** Regular review of Work Plan timelines to gauge if responsible parties are meeting deadlines.
Task 1.4: Provide status updates of the project on a bi-annual basis to the GBNRTC Policy Committee, informing key stakeholders representing municipalities from the region

Executive-level leaders of the region’s largest municipalities will be provided updates on the project through the GBNRTC Policy Committee meetings, typically held twice a year (in summer and winter). Guidance provided by municipal-level stakeholders at such meetings will inform the overall direction of the RPSD process.

Deliverables:

✓ Pertinent materials outlining program progress will be provided to Policy Committee members

Responsibility: GBNRTC

Due: 2012 - 2014

Measures: Meeting agendas and summaries

Evaluation: The Steering Committee will receive updates on reports to Policy Committee and tailor strategies for outreach, planning or policy development based on feedback provided.

Task 1.5: Create and convene a Local Government Council with representation by municipal-level elected officials, planning commissioners or town board members who can provide guidance to the project and take ownership of its results.

Achieving the goal of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development – significant shifts in policy, program and practice in the regional development process – will require organizing broad support for substantive changes in the way Buffalo Niagara grows. Creation of a Local Government Council to reinforce the central role of county, city, town and village elected officials in the development and implementation of changes in regional development policy. No effort to manage growth and development in the metropolitan region can ever succeed without strong support from municipal officials. To this end, the Consortium will reach out to representatives from local governments and invite them to participate in these conventions at critical points in the planning process.

Deliverables:

✓ 4 sessions of the Local Government Council throughout the planning process

Responsibility: Facilitation by the Regional Sustainability Team; outreach support by Steering Committee members

Due: Q3 2012 - Q4 2014

Measures: Participation levels by local governments

Evaluation: Participation levels will be evaluated by the Steering Committee and if they are deemed to be insufficient to meet the consensus-building function of this task, expanded outreach will occur.
Task 1.6: Convene Sustainability Congresses periodically through the planning process to expand the forum for public review and comment on the evolving work of the planning team

Sustainability Congresses will aim to convene representatives of organizations – business, faith-based, environmental, neighborhood, professional and other— to help shape the community-driven voice of the project. These “community champions” will help expand the engagement of the process by sharing information with their organizational members. Sessions of the Congresses will roughly correspond with the timing of both large-scale public meetings and Local Government Council sessions.

**Deliverables:**

- 4 sessions of Sustainability Congresses throughout the planning process

**Responsibility:** Facilitation by the Regional Sustainability Team; outreach support by Steering Committee members

**Due:** Q3 2012 - Q4 2014

**Measures:** Reach of participation, both in terms of involvement in the Congresses and the number of people they collectively share information with and represent.

**Evaluation:** Participation levels will be evaluated by the Steering Committee and if they are deemed to be insufficient to meet the consensus-building function of this task, expanded outreach will occur.

Task 1.7: Create a platform for private sector stakeholders (i.e. developers, business owners, architects, real estate professionals, etc.) to expand the forum for public review and comment on the evolving work of the planning team

As a parallel body to the Local Government Council and Sustainability Congresses, a forum of private sector stakeholders will be convened to allow their voices are represented in the visioning process and overall direction of the plan. This group will be convened by the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, the region’s largest employer organization, and will meet four times throughout the planning process.

**Deliverables:**

- 4 sessions of the Private Sector Council throughout the planning process

**Responsibility:** Buffalo Niagara Partnership

**Due:** Q3 2012 - Q4 2014

**Measures:** Participation levels by key sectors that influence the development process.

**Evaluation:** Participation levels by key sectors (i.e. real estate professionals, developers, etc.) will be evaluated by the Steering Committee and if they are deemed to be insufficient to meet the consensus-building function of this task, expanded outreach will occur.
**Activity 2: Understanding our Situation**

Perform baseline analysis of our regional context as it relates to our planning and policy framework, patterns of development and investment, and general outcome-based performance in regional livability. This analysis will serve as a preliminary basis for the RPSD’s performance indicators. Final indicators will be developed through feedback from the public and vetting by the proposed Sustainability Working Teams.

**Livability Principles Addressed:** All six of the Livability Principles will be addressed through this baseline analysis.

**Long Term Outcome:** The Buffalo Niagara region will have established an up-to-date, objective analysis of how existing policy and investment priorities are shaping our community in relation to key indices of sustainability. This assessment will serve as a baseline for a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development and will help inform an outreach strategy that can shape the trajectory of planning decisions and public perception on sustainability.

**Key Tasks of Understanding Our Situation**

Task 2.1: Review of existing plans; analyze for shared values and goals; and develop baseline measurements and performance indicators on how policies, plans and regulations are meeting sustainability goals

A reconnaissance of existing plans, strategies and planning mechanisms (i.e. zoning codes) will be performed as an initial assessment of current conditions. Through this process, the Regional Sustainability Team will identify shared values and goals to be used in initial visioning sessions (see Task 4.1); adopt criteria to evaluate how local plans and regulations meet the Livability Principles; and develop a baseline assessment of how well local planning processes and tools are equipped to achieve long-term sustainability.

**Deliverables:**

- Plan reconnaissance methodology
- Summary of shared values and goals and baseline assessment

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q3 2012 (September 2012)

**Measures:** Successful adoption of measurement methodology and preliminary shared values by Steering Committee.

**Evaluation:** The Steering Committee will provide guidance and input to ensure this analysis is comprehensive.
Task 2.2: Perform baseline assessment gauging how recent federal, state and local investments advance sustainability

A quantitative assessment will be performed of recent public investments to create a baseline understanding of how investments in our built environment are shaping our region. The RST will collect and map out notable public investments made in the region, adopt criteria for measurement based on the Livability Principles and evaluate how each investment meets these criteria. This will establish a baseline for how our current investment patterns are coordinated to advance sustainability.

Deliverables:

✓ Investment “scorecard” methodology
✓ Summary of analysis findings

Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team

Due: Q3 2012 (September 2012)

Measures: Successful adoption of measurement methodology and performance metrics by Steering Committee.

Evaluation: The Steering Committee will provide guidance and input on the scorecard methodology.

---

Task 2.3: Develop a baseline analysis on a range of sustainability outcome metrics to assess how settlement, land use and transportation patterns in our region are in line with the livability principles and social equity

A quantitative assessment of current performance will inform the public and stakeholders of where we are today and shape goals and indicators for the future. During this process, the Regional Sustainability Team will use the metrics established by as mandatory outcomes in the Notice of Funds Availability as well as additional provided by EPA Sustainable Communities Technical Assistance in 2011. Through data collection and analysis efforts, these metrics will be fine-tuned as they relate to conditions unique to our region.

Deliverables:

✓ Baseline analysis of how livability is manifest in land use, settlement and transportation patterns

Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team

Due: Q3 2012 (September 2012)

Measures: Number of HUD-defined outcomes analyzed in baseline assessment.

Evaluation: Steering Committee will review and provide feedback on results and how they are leveraged in the planning process.
Task 2.4: Develop "build out" analysis to illustrate what kind of region we will have if we continue our existing path of planning and development

Weaving together current development and population trends with our existing local comprehensive plans and zoning code, a scenario-modeling analysis will be conducted that illustrates where our current patterns of investment will lead us if we do not chart a different course. This piece of analysis is part of our baseline understanding of the region and will inform the scenario-planning guidebook for local decision-makers (See task 5.6) and the scenario-planning that will be integrated into our RPSD.

**Deliverables:**

- Build-out analysis maps and supporting information

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q1 2013

**Measures:** Number of municipalities zoning and planning documents integrated into the build out analysis.

**Evaluation:** Steering Committee will review work products and task schedule to guide methodology and analysis.

---

**Activity 3: Engaging the Public**

Engage the public to guide the vision for a sustainable future and educate stakeholders, opinion leaders and the public at-large about the importance of pursuing policies and guiding investments to promote sustainability.

**Livability Principles Addressed:** All six of the Livability Principles will be addressed through this strategy.

**Long Term Outcome:** Our Regional Plan for Sustainable Development will be shaped by a broad cross-section of stakeholders and communities, including populations that are traditionally excluded or disadvantaged. Broad-based participation is expected to lead to strong public “buy-in” and sustained support for implementation.

**Key Tasks of Engaging the Public**

**Task 3.1:** Create a project communications and outreach strategy, including a branding initiative and website that conveys the six Livability Principles in a regionally-sensitive context.

As an initial step of the overall public engagement strategy, the communications and graphic design staff from the Regional Sustainability Team will work with the Steering Committee to develop an overall communications strategy for the project. This will include a website, project brand and logo and title for the effort. These materials will be supplemented...
with a suite of social media vehicles and hard copy outreach materials that will be used to engage the public and communicate the purpose and goals of the planning process.

**Deliverables:**

- Project website
- Project brand/logo/title and other communication vehicle templates

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q3 2012 (*September 2012*)

**Measures:** Approval and adoption of communications and outreach strategy by Steering Committee.

**Evaluation:** Steering Committee will receive regular updates on implementation of the communications strategy and will provide guidance when needed.

---

**Task 3.2: Launch the project to the public by laying out where we are today, outlining the project process and generating public feedback on the overall direction of the work**

During the fourth quarter of 2012, the project will be formally launched to the public via a series of two or three public sessions. At these events, the Regional Sustainability Team will provide an overview of the project to the public, outline ways to get engaged throughout the planning process and introduce preliminary analysis on our collective regional vision. The public will be invited to provide feedback to help us refine a vision for the RPSD. Leading up to this meeting, the RST will perform widespread outreach to bolster turn-out and participation at this event. These outreach activities will focus on engaging persons from disadvantaged communities throughout the region.

**Deliverables:**

- Two or three conveniently located interactive public sessions

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q3 2012 (*September 2012*)

**Measures:** Attendance numbers of public events, including demographic details of participation.

**Evaluation:** Participation levels will be reviewed by the Steering Committee based on geographic representation and involvement of persons from disadvantaged communities.
Task 3.3: Activate interactive features on the website to generate public input on the planning process

Coinciding with the fall 2012 launch of the program to the public, the project website will be equipped with interactive features that allow visitors to provide input to help shape the regional vision and inform the process. Information gathering by this source will reinforce information gathering at face-to-face engagement.

**Deliverables:**

- Project website and engagement tools

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q3 2012 (September 2012)

**Measures:** Number of users interacting with the website.

**Evaluation:** Website input will be evaluated as part of the overall qualitative information gathering that will occur through engagement process. Website analytics will allow us to gauge the geographic and socioeconomic balance of input being generated.

Task 3.4: Recruit and train a cadre of citizen champions and advocates to talk about planning and development issues in their home communities

The primary goal of this task is to educate the general public about sustainability and how the metropolitan development pattern supports or hinders regional sustainability. Broad based change in development and management policies and practices must be supported by broad public understanding of why such change is necessary.

At this point a comprehensive body of knowledge already exists about why the prevailing pattern of spatially dispersed, auto-dependent, energy-intensive, segregated uses is environmentally damaging, economically inefficient, and socially inequitable. Indeed, there are numerous examples of organizations that have already developed public-education curricula and have developed similar materials (i.e. Redmond, WA, Philadelphia, PA, etc.). We propose to survey these materials, take the best from each, and adapt them to our regional context.

Some of the issues we plan to address include transportation and land use concepts such as the impact of housing-jobs imbalance, costs of travel induced by sprawling patterns of development, land-use and transportation interrelationships including the link between density and the viability of transit, and more. Other “costs of sprawl” issues to be addressed include loss of farmland, inefficient use of physical infrastructure, and more. Related planning and urban design issues would include pedestrian friendly design, “complete streets,” and the value of mixed-use development. We would also develop curriculum about the planning and regulatory process and the role of citizen participation therein as well as to address the specific history of metropolitan development in the Erie Niagara region.

We will develop four to six discrete, theme-based curricular modules to be delivered over a period of as many months. One of these will provide education and training for citizens to support the public participation process as meeting
facilitators. All of these will be made available throughout the region with special emphasis on involving members of disadvantaged populations and a general effort to reach all elements of the region – center city, suburban, and rural.

Candidates for the citizen planning school will be recruited in large part through the governance structure of the consortium, especially those municipalities represented on the Local Government Council, participants in the Sustainability Congress, and members of the Private Sector Council. Once having completed their training, the RST will work with those same stakeholders to identify and schedule opportunities for graduates to speak before local community organizations, church groups, school associations, and others to deliver a standard content package.

**Deliverables:**

- Curricular modules for educational sessions
- Course roster and participation

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q2 2013 (Curricular modules - October, 2012; Roster and Participation – April, 2013)

**Measures:** Participation will be measured based on overall enrollment, geographic balance and inclusion of persons from traditionally disadvantaged groups.

**Evaluation:** The Steering Committee will review participation levels and utilize network contacts to ensure participation represents disadvantaged populations and the overall composition of our community.

---

**Task 3.5: Conduct public education to the broader regional public via multimedia methods to create greater awareness of planning and development issues**

Achieving the goal of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development – significant shifts in policy, program and practice in the regional development process – will require organizing broad support for substantive changes in the way Buffalo Niagara grows. The Regional Sustainability Team will employ diverse engagement strategies throughout the planning process that advances the region toward this goal. This will include the use of social media and multi-media visualizations and videos to convey the impacts of common development approaches and the opportunity provided by a more sustainable model.

**Deliverables:**

- Multi-media tools (i.e. videos, interactive visualizations, web games, etc.)

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q3 2012 – Q4 2014

**Measures:** Number of persons reached as measured by web-based hits, social media shares, etc.
**Evaluation:** Performance measures will be shared with the Steering Committee and if expectations are not met, strategies will be revised to bolster outreach.

---

**Task 3.6: Engage the public at three additional points through the process – a “mid-point” check-in to review on preliminary directions of the plan, at the first draft review stage and at the end prior to adoption of the plan by the MPO.**

Throughout the planning process, the Regional Sustainability Team and other Consortium members will check in with the public to receive guidance and feedback on the overall direction of the plan. The first will be at the “mid-point” of the process to present the final vision of the plan and share initial input and findings of the Working Teams (see Task 4.2). The second session will be held during the last year of the program and will share with the public a first draft of the plan and allow the opportunity to provide feedback and comment. The final session will occur toward the end of the process and will present the final plan to the public. The Local Government Council, Sustainability Congresses and Private Sector Council will also be convened to “check in” with the process at these milestones as well.

**Deliverables:**

- Two or three interactive public sessions at the “mid-point” of the planning process
- One large region-wide meeting to review and provide feedback on the first draft of the RPSD
- One large region-wide public session to present the final draft of the RPSD

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q4 2013; Q1 2014; Q4 2014

**Measures:** Attendance numbers of public events, including demographic details of participation.

**Evaluation:** Participation levels will be reviewed by the Steering Committee based on geographic representation and involvement of persons from disadvantaged communities.

---

**Activity 4: Charting the Course**

*Develop and implement a planning process that produces component plans around housing, climate change and food access and an overall Regional Plan for Sustainable Development that aligns with our Long Range Transportation Plan and regional economic development strategies.*

**Livability Principles Addressed:** All six of the Livability Principles will be addressed through this strategy.
**Long Term Outcome:** Create a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development that sets the stage for a more sustainable regional future, provides a road map for aligning local land use and comprehensive planning with a regional vision, coordinates and focuses federal and state investments toward regional strategies and provides a guide for transportation, housing, economic development and land use.

**Key Tasks of Charting the Course**

Task 4.1: Develop a unified vision for our region that reflects our extensive public engagement process, builds on other major regional planning initiatives and integrates the Livability Principles.

Buffalo Niagara is not starting from scratch to create a vision for its future. We are building on an extensive and increasingly convergent body of planning supported by continuing public engagement and concerted technical research and analysis. The Regional Sustainability Team will lead the effort to develop, clarify, and operationalize the region’s vision building on current or recent planning initiatives, continuing the public engagement process, and aligning the work with HUD’s Livability Principles. This will include:

- Integration of the products of Task 2.1 in a preliminary vision statement for the metropolitan region. This will include incorporation of the vision, goals, policies, programs and projects found in The Erie Niagara Regional Framework for Growth, the WNY Regional Economic Development Plan (which has a strong “smart growth” focus), the WNY Sustainability Plan (a NYSERDA-funded five-county climate change-oriented plan), a Buffalo-Amherst transit corridor alternatives analysis by the NFTA, the Buffalo Green Code zoning ordinance rewrite and Buffalo’s comprehensive plan Queen City in the 21st Century, among many others.

- Focused work on developing and clarifying the regional vision through the public engagement process of the plan including the working groups, the Local Government Council, the Sustainability Congress, the Private Sector Council, and involvement of the general public through public meetings, the website, and otherwise.

- Review by the Regional Sustainability Team of evolving statements of regional vision as refined through the public engagement process in the context of the HUD Livability Principles to ensure alignment of the vision and plan with same.

- Development of a regional visioning document for review by steering committee, working groups, Local Government Council, the Sustainability Congress, the Private Sector Council, and the general public. This document will be refined and sharpened for inclusion in the final Regional Plan for Sustainable Development.

**Deliverables:**

- Regional Visioning Document
- Regional Vision integrated into final RPSD

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q2 2013 (June 2013)

**Measures:** Participation in regional visioning process.
**Evaluation:** Steering Committee will guide the development of major stakeholder and public engagement strategies to ensure participation is represented throughout the process.

---

**Task 4.2: Convene Working Teams around five functional areas: Land Use/Economic Development; Transportation/Infrastructure; Climate Change; Housing; and Food Access.** Regional experts and stakeholders will work to fine-tune performance metrics, establish goals for the future and develop implementation strategies aimed at reaching those goals.

Working Teams comprising regional stakeholders and subject matter experts will be organized around major functional areas to generate content and direction for the plan. The Consortium intends to organize these groups around five areas: (1) housing; (2) transportation & infrastructure; (3) food access; (4) climate change readiness; and (5) economic development & land use.

- **How the Working Teams will be established:** Working Teams will be composed of subject matter experts and issue-based stakeholders. As a first step in identifying candidates, working group rosters for similar ongoing projects and initiatives will be aggregated (i.e. NYSERDA WNY Sustainability Plan, WNY Regional Economic Development Council Smart Growth working group, Western New York Environmental Alliance working groups, etc.) during summer 2012. Building on this initial pool of candidates, Steering Committee members will be encouraged to nominate additional members for consideration. And during the fall of 2012, a call for nominations will be made to the general public through public meetings, on the project website, and through information shared to stakeholder groups of the Sustainability Congresses, the Local Government Council and the Private Sector Council.

  Based on the extensive list established through this process, the Steering Committee will vote on membership for the Working Teams. To ensure representation is both diverse and cross-cutting, the selection process will use interests of social equity and the Livability Principles as key selection criteria in evaluating membership.

- **How the Working Teams will function:** The chairpersons of each of Working Team will be drawn from the Consortium Steering Committee to facilitate cross-pollination of these concepts in the overall direction of the RPSD. Meetings will occur monthly, starting in early 2013 and spanning a period of approximately 15 months. Meetings will be facilitated by staff from the Regional Sustainability Team.

- **Goals and Activities of the Working Teams:** The primary tasks of the Working Teams will be to develop performance metrics around baseline analysis, establish goals for changing the trajectory of these metrics as a region, and developing implementation strategies – policies, programs and catalytic projects – that can impact these conditions. Working Teams associated with a specific project component (i.e. Fair Housing Equity Assessment, Food Access Study, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy) will serve as an advisory committee to those planning processes.

**Deliverables:**

- Finalized performance indicators and goals established for the future
- Implementation strategies for realizing a more sustainable Buffalo Niagara
Responsibility: Facilitation by the Regional Sustainability Team; outreach support by Steering Committee members

Due: Q1 2013 – Q1 2014

Measures: Participation and results produced at Working Team meetings.

Evaluation: Steering Committee will review participation and progress of Working Teams.

Task 4.3: Perform technical planning analysis for regional food access.

A region’s sustainability is intricately connected to the sustainability of its food system. A sustainable regional food system has several features, including: a) Residents are food secure, i.e. they have access to healthful, affordable, and culturally-appropriate foods, b) Environmentally-friendly practices are used to minimize any negative impact on natural resources, and c) food system businesses, especially farming, remains an economically viable enterprise. This sustainability initiative will be one of a handful of regional planning efforts in the United States that will address food access. As part of the technical planning analysis for regional food access, the team will document disparities in food access in the Buffalo-Niagara region, and identify strategies for minimizing these disparities through the regional plan. The technical analysis will include the following key tasks:

1. Documentation of spatial disparities in food access in Erie-Niagara Region--The team will use a combination of quantitative, qualitative, and spatial methods to determine the populations and neighborhoods greatest at risk of food insecurity in the region. Key methods include:
   a. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis documenting food deserts (i.e. areas underserved by traditional food retail) in the region
   b. A digital survey of residents assessing their level food insecurity, and the challenges they face in accessing healthful and affordable foods
   c. A digital survey of farmers in Erie-Niagara assessing their ability to serve local residents and the challenges they face
   d. Interviews with residents, food advocates, and other food system stakeholders regarding challenges and opportunities for promoting food access

2. Review of national best practices – The team will conduct a review of regional and municipal plans in the United States – such as the Delaware Valley Regional Commission Plan - that promote food access.

3. Identification of policy strategies to increase food access – Drawing on the results of the survey, GIS analysis, and interviews, national best practices, and in consultation with the working groups on food access, the team will identify policy tools to increase food access in the Erie-Niagara region. The policy tools will serve as a basis for a checklist that municipal governments can use to adopt and implement policies that promote food access in their municipalities.

Deliverables:

✔ Technical plan for regional food access accompanied by a municipal checklist toolkit
✔ Integration of food planning into RPSD
Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team with assistance from The Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, UB)

Due: Q1 2014

Measures: Approval and adoption of the food access plan by the Steering Committee.

Evaluation: Updates on the regional food access planning will be provided to the Steering Committee at a minimum on a quarterly basis.

Task 4.4: Perform technical planning analysis for climate change adaptation.

A strategy for climate change adaptation will prepare the region to respond to the impacts of climate change, both proactively and reactively. Our regional strategy will be based on the anticipated environmental and socio-economic impacts of climate change. Policy and planning implications for the various stakeholders, identified through the participatory process, will be analyzed in detail. The specific project sub-components will include; i) a visioning process, ii) local climate change impact analysis, iii) policy analysis, iv) system vulnerability analysis, v) social vulnerability analysis, vi) risk assessment, and viii) recommendations along with a prioritization matrix. This effort will be led by Himanshu Grover, PhD., of the University at Buffalo Department of Urban and Regional Planning, whose practice focuses on planning policies of resilient and sustainable communities and the use of web-based Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as a strategic tool for communicating planning information.

Visioning Process and On-Going Community Engagement: Visioning for tackling anticipated climate change will parallel the visioning process for the entire project. Specifically, the public will provide input via:

- Large scale public meetings in Fall 2012 (Task 2.1)
- Fall 2012 meetings of the Sustainability Congresses, Local Government Council and Private Sector Council
- Brief community surveys issued on the project website (made available during the last quarter of 2012)
- Climate Change Working Team meetings of subject area experts and key stakeholders (Q1 2013 – Q1 2014)

The results of this public input survey will feed into the subsequent technical analyses and recommendations in the climate change adaptation plan.

Local Climate Change Impact Analysis: We will use the best available regional climate change impact models to assess the physical vulnerability of the region. The regional impact models will be downscaled using statistical and geographical techniques to identify study area relevant impacts. Specifically we will analyze:

- What impacts are possible and where will they be?
- Likelihood of impacts?
- Confidence in prediction of these impacts?
- What are the Critical Climate Change Impacts that are of concern?

Policy analysis: Existing policies and plans will be evaluated on the basis of their anticipated impact on local climate change adaptive capacity. Standard evaluation protocols will be developed on the basis of existing research in the field
and earlier experience with climate change adaptation planning. Community stakeholders and decision makers will be involved in this process through the Climate Change Working Team.

**System Vulnerability Analysis:** Using input from the visioning process, technical assessment, and user group surveys we will identify infrastructure systems or other local (physical) systems that are sensitive to disturbances/changes in the local environment (demand side and supply side analysis). We will identify the climate change impacts of concern to each of these systems (with attention to severity, likelihood and confidence assessments outlined above)? An overall System Vulnerability Matrix will be prepared to identify critical concerns in the region.

**Social Vulnerability Analysis:** We will analyze the existing community characteristics and attributes to identify distribution of vulnerable population in the study area. We will identify community groups that are most likely to be more sensitive to the local environmental disturbances/changes. Total Site Heat Integration (TSHI) analysis will help identify sections of the society that will require active community/institutional/governmental support to adapt to climate change impacts.

**Risk Assessment:** Based on the preceding analyses we will identify the critical climate change impacts (ranked in terms of their assessed potential to negatively impact the region – systems as well as social impacts). This analysis will lead to policy and operational response strategies. Locations of concern (planning/policy zones/jurisdictions) will also be ranked in terms of their assessed system and social vulnerability to climate change impacts. This analysis will lead to design and location based response strategies.

**Recommendations along with a prioritization matrix:** The climate change risk assessments will lead to strategic policy and operational response recommendations as well as design and location based response strategies. These recommendations will be developed through an iterative process in consultation with the Climate Change Working Team and members of the steering committee. Recognizing the need to manage limited resources and balance competing demands a prioritization matrix will be prepared to identify important actions necessary to ensure continued sustainability and avoidance of future harm from climate change.

**Deliverables:**

- Technical plan for climate change adaptation
- Integration of climate change planning into RPSD

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q1 2014

**Measures:** Approval and adoption of climate change adaptation strategy by Steering Committee.

**Evaluation:** Updates on the climate change adaptation planning will be provided to the Steering Committee, at minimum, on a quarterly basis.
Task 4.5: Create a regional housing plan that includes a Fair Housing Equity Assessment (FHEA) and integrates key equitable housing strategies into the RPSD

A Regional housing plan will be developed based on quantitative and qualitative assessment of current conditions, our regional vision and the Livability Principles. The strategy will seek to provide policy guidance and implementation strategies for developing more sustainable housing. As part of this strategy, the Regional Sustainability Team will perform a Fair Housing Equity Assessment and will explore leveraging that research to create a Regional Analysis to Impediments.

**Community Engagement:** Public and stakeholder input on the planning process will occur via our broad engagement strategy. Specifically, input on the process will be made available via:

- Public meetings in the Fall 2012, Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 where the general public will be afforded the opportunity to express their values regarding future housing development and provide feedback on the plan development
- Fall 2012, Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 meetings of the Sustainability Congresses, Local Government Council and Private Sector Council where these stakeholder groups can respond to and provide input on the housing plan and FHEA
- Community input via interactive features of the project website (made available starting in late fall 2012)
- Housing Working Team meetings of subject area experts and key stakeholders (Q1 2013 – Q1 2014)

**Deliverables:**

- Fair Housing Equity Assessment (or Regional Analysis to Impediments)
- Regional Housing strategy to be built into the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q2 2014

**Measures:** Adoption of the FHEA/Regional AI and integration into the RPSD.

**Evaluation:** Steering Committee and Working Team on Housing will guide the project and integration with the RPSD.

Task 4.6: Align Long Range Transportation Plan (BuffaloNiagara2050) with Regional Plan for Sustainable Development.

GBNRTC is in the process of updating the region’s 2035 Long-Range Transportation Plan. With a vision of creating a more efficient, smarter and sustainable transportation system and slated for completion in 2014, the Buffalo Niagara 2050 Plan is focusing on future transportation forecasts, regional trends, system management and finance to guide spending for future transportation programs and projects. The findings from the key focus areas of the Buffalo Niagara 2050 Plan will serve to inform the RPSD process. Likewise, the RSPD effort in the arena of performance measurement, scenario
planning, and outcomes of public engagement will inform the Buffalo Niagara 2050 Plan to ensure that identified strategic transportation initiatives and investments for enhanced regional sustainability are consistent across both plans.

**Deliverables:**
- Summary document that combines and clearly articulates key transportation findings from two planning efforts to ensure the alignment of strategic transportation initiatives and investments in the Long Range Transportation Plan and Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

**Responsibility:** GBNRTC with assistance from the Transportation Working Team

**Due:** Q2 2012 - Q4 2014

**Measures:** Areas of compatibility and integration between the Long Range Transportation Plan and the RSPD.

**Evaluation:** Updates on long range transportation plan will be provided to the Steering Committee, at minimum, on a quarterly basis to ensure cross integration and the creation of shared transportation elements with the regional plan for sustainable development.

---

**Task 4.7: Compile regional vision, performance indicators, goals, technical studies and implementation strategies into a draft regional plan for sustainable development.**

Each of the deliverables above will contribute to creation of a regional plan for sustainable development that is coordinated with past and ongoing efforts to advance the region for a sustainable future. The plan: will incorporate technical planning in housing, transportation, climate change adaptation and food access; develop a series of performance indicators for future development and consensually developed goals for our future; and implementation strategies for how we meet these goals.

**Role of Community Engagement in drafting the RPSD:** Engagement of the general public, local government officials, private sector representatives and sustainability advocates will be critical to the formation of a draft RPSD and will occur at key milestones in the process:

- **Setting the stage and the vision:** A series of public meetings and convening of the three stakeholder councils will occur in Fall 2012. At these sessions, the general public and stakeholders will review the preliminary vision statement and provide feedback and guidance to the planning process. The opportunity to provide input on the regional vision will continue through subsequent meetings and via the project website.
- **Working Teams:** Regional issue-based stakeholders and subject matter experts will work to develop performance metrics and regional goals for the future, as well as implementation strategies for inclusion into the plan.
- **Fall 2013, community check-in:** Public meetings and convening of the stakeholder conferences will occur again in the Fall 2013 to provide an update on the overall status of the plan development. An updated vision and preliminary work produced by the Working Teams will be made available to the public and stakeholder groups, allowing them to provide feedback.
- **Spring 2014, Presentation of Draft Plan:** The draft plan will be presented to the public and the stakeholder groups in the Spring of 2014 for a review of the draft plan. These groups will be afforded the opportunity to comment and make additional suggestions at these public sessions and via the project website.
Deliverables:

- Draft of Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team

Due: Q2 2014

Measures: Support by the general public, and endorsement by the Steering Committee, Local Government Council, Sustainability Congresses and Private Sector Council.

Evaluation: The general public, Steering Committee, Local Government Council, Sustainability Congresses and Private Sector Council will have an opportunity to review the draft plan.

Task 4.8: Produce a final draft of a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development to be adopted by the GBNRTC and supported by local, county and other regional public sector entities.

Based on feedback from the public, the Local Government Council, the Sustainability Congresses and the Public Sector Council, a final draft of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development will be produced. This plan will be approved by the Steering Committee and adopted by the GBNRTC which will seek to garner the support and buy-in from local, county and other regional governments as a road map for our regional future.

Deliverables:

- Final Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team (production); GBNRTC (adoption)

Due: Q4 2014

Measures: Approval and adoption of the plan by the MPO; support expressed by other public governing entities

Evaluation: GBNRTC will provide updates to its Policy Committee throughout the process to ensure that their input will be reflected in the plan, thereby paving the way for its adoption in 2014.

Activity 5: Taking Action

Supplement the planning process with project-specific implementation management, inter-agency plan coordination, technical assistance, data for decision-support, staff training and stakeholder education to bolster regional capacity for planning and implementation overall.
Livability Principles Addressed: All six of the Livability Principles will be addressed through this strategy.

Long Term Outcome: Technical assistance, tools and project-specific planning will provide regional stakeholders with resources and capacity to advance sustainability at the local level while implementation management produces results that build credibility for the whole effort.

Key Tasks of Taking Action

Task 5.1: Develop project prioritization criteria and a “Sustainability Scorecard” that can be used by to evaluate projects within the Transportation Program Development Process (PDP), assessing a Smart Growth score for the Regional Economic Development Council process and in the long term, other potential public investment decisions by local, county and regional entities.

During the spring and summer of 2012, the Regional Sustainability Team will work with the Steering Committee and other regional stakeholders to develop a beta version of a Sustainability Scorecard that leverages the Livability Principles as criteria for objectively evaluating projects (i.e. transportation, housing, infrastructure, etc.) in the region. Criteria will be developed in concert with data collection and analysis in Task 2.2, “Perform baseline assessment gauging how recent Federal, state and local investments advance sustainability.”

To help guide the development of the scorecard, a group of regional stakeholders and land use/economic development experts of the Regional Economic Development Council’s Smart Growth Working Group will serve as a focus group and provide input and feedback on the tool. Leveraging this group not only allows for stakeholder and expert input, but it also allows the Scorecard to be recommended and adopted for use in the Regional Economic Development Council’s process of assessing scores to regional projects funded by New York State.

Through the three-year project timeline, the scorecard will be refined as needed to address identified deficiencies and to reflect emerging values of the planning process.

Deliverables:

- Sustainability Scorecard
- Summary reports outlining how the Scorecard is being used and any adjustments made to it

Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team

Due: Q3 2012

Measures: Number of Livability Principles captured in the Scorecard; number of processes that use the scorecard.

Evaluation: The Steering Committee will provide input and guidance on Scorecard content and methodology and will assist in expanding its use in additional project and funding evaluation or prioritization processes.
Task 5.2: Select a series of local demonstration projects to receive "implementation council" facilitation – project specific scenario-modeling and focused planning support.

One of the keys to developing support for the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development will be to take action and produce results that show the value of the plan. The Regional Sustainability Team will work to build on a locally-proven implementation management model that will select projects with catalytic potential for focused support from agents with the capacity to act. Prioritization of projects for implementation council support will be provided through the public and stakeholder engagement process outlined elsewhere in this work plan. The RST will provide additional support in the form of quantitative, geographic, and visual scenario modeling to estimate the impact of projects, policies, and programs. Sub tasks include:

- Identification and prioritization of projects with catalytic potential – ideally clusters of projects that might have concentrated impact. This process will be conducted through the public forums, Public Sector Council, Sustainability Congress, Local Government Council, and steering committee. Previously identified clusters of projects included those related to the Buffalo-Amherst transit corridor and strategic investment target and the Downtown Niagara Falls district.

- Convening an implementation council comprising those agencies, companies, and organizations that have the capacity to “put a shovel in the ground,” or which have authority to permit or deny project activities. The implementation council provides a regular forum to report on progress, solve problems, and exert peer pressure on everyone with a responsibility to get things done. The implementation council is an action-facilitating body – not a policy making one.

- Constructing targeted opportunities or mechanisms for involving affected stakeholders – especially members of disadvantaged or under-represented groups – to inform both prioritization and implementation activities. This is in addition to the overall public engagement process.

- Providing technical support to the public engagement and project implementation processes in the form of scenario modeling including build-out analysis, geographic impact modeling, investment impact analysis, transportation impact assessment, and urban design visualization as well as use of a prototype sustainability scorecard.

- Aligning the project prioritization and implementation work with HUD’s Sustainability Principles through review and analysis by staff from the Regional Sustainability Team.

**Deliverables:**

- List of demonstration projects, with at least one from each county
- Summary reports of progress achieved via Implementation Council support

**Responsibility:** Regional Sustainability Team

**Due:** Q4 2012 – Q4 2014
Measures: Modeling and Scorecard results of each project.

Evaluation: Steering Committee members will evaluate projects based on the degree that they can be advanced during the grant period and best catalyze sustainability (via Scorecard assessment). Once projects are selected, Regional Sustainability Team staff will provide updates on implementation projects at monthly meetings.

Task 5.3: Integrate planning process and sustainable criteria into transportation project prioritization through Program Development Process (PDP)

Running parallel to the planning process, the MPO will incorporate policy priorities of the regional vision into their Program Development Process. This will allow the MPO to deliver projects that are consistent with and can reinforce sustainability in the region.

Deliverables:

✓ Transportation Project prioritization and selection criteria

Responsibility: GBNRTC

Due: Q2 2012 – Q4 2014

Measures: Number of projects prioritized that score favorably on the Sustainability Scorecard.

Evaluation: GBNRTC will provide updates to the Steering Committee on the progress of this process

Task 5.4: Develop and deliver a series of smart growth development forums and technical assistance programs targeted at private sector parties – i.e. developers, real estate professionals, economic development practitioners, etc. – on ways to integrate sustainability into development practices

The Buffalo Niagara Partnership will host a series of forums on smart growth and sustainability and provide technical assistance programs to private sector stakeholders in the region. Partnership staff will seek national, state, and regional subject matter experts to speak at these sessions to highlight and discuss best practice smart growth initiatives, policies and resources. These sessions will be supplemented with technical assistance programs that seek to engage and educate private sector stakeholders on both tools and benefits of pursuing private development along smart growth principles.

Deliverables:

✓ Approximately 3 Smart Growth Forums
✓ Approximately 12 Smart Growth Technical Assistance sessions

Responsibility: Buffalo Niagara Partnership
Due: Q3 2012 - Q4 2014

Measures: Number and variety of participants.

Evaluation: BNP staff will report to the Steering Committee on participation levels at monthly meetings and present engagement strategies.

Task 5.5: Update existing Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth GIS site with current data, metrics and analysis tools

To correspond with the comprehensive data collection, analysis and planning through the process, the Erie Niagara Regional Geographic Information System (GIS) will be expanded with platforms to incorporate a range of metrics, provide capability to share data, and create tools for stakeholders to visualize and analyze physical, social, and economic characteristics of the region. As part of this process, the Steering Committee and other regional stakeholder GIS users will provide input and guidance on how an expanded GIS can best assist them in decision-making and planning for sustainability.

Deliverables:

✓ Enhanced GIS website

Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team

Due: Q2 2014

Measures: Number of added functions, datasets to site; user input captured in shaping functionality; number of users measuring the site.

Evaluation: The Steering Committee will receive quarterly updates on these measures and provide feedback and guidance.

Task 5.6: Deliver technical assistance programming to public sector stakeholders – e.g. local planners, zoning board members, nonprofit agents, etc. – on ways to integrate sustainability into planning and programming

Key public sector stakeholders, such as local planning staff and board members, will be offered technical assistance in the form of a series of webinars or workshops that outline strategies to prepare localities to implement sustainable principles into their regulatory work. These will allow the region to apply planning resources directly where decisions are occurring, at the local jurisdictional level. These offerings will be occur primarily in late 2013 and in the first half of 2014 so that the topics can be fully informed by data collection, scenario-planning, Work Team products, etc. Approximately six – eight sessions will be offered, depending on major issues that emerge through the planning process.

Deliverables:
✓ Approximately six – eight technical assistance sessions
✓ Webinar or workshop modules

Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team

Due: Q4 2013 – Q2 2014

Measures: Participation of individuals and the organization type they represent.

Evaluation: The Steering Committee will assist in outreach and will track participation through the process.

Task 5.7: Develop a guidebook targeted at local land use and development decision-makers that illustrates the various benefits (fiscal, aesthetic, livability, etc.) of adopting sustainable approaches to investments

A guidebook, published in print form and on the website, will examine a range of typical modes of development and public investment (housing development, commercial plaza, etc.) and examine the alternative outcomes that could be realized if they were pursued using sustainable strategies. This tool will demonstrate to decision-makers and the public both the qualitative and quantitative benefits of implementing projects in line with the Livability Principles. To make these examples relatable to audiences in the region, past development decisions in the region will serve as case studies for this scenario planning exercise. The examples chosen will be drawn from a range of regional locales (urban centers, developing suburbs, rural village centers, etc.) so that different community types can see how these concepts could be integrated into their local communities.

Deliverables:

✓ Scenario Planning Guidebook

Responsibility: Regional Sustainability Team

Due: Q2 2014

Measures: Number of key regional stakeholders who are distributed the guidebook; online feedback on usefulness of guidebook.

Evaluation: Steering Committee will review distribution and utility data several months following completion/distribution.