Citizen Planning School
Location - Sessions 2-4:
University at Buffalo Gateway Center
77 Goodell St.
Buffalo, NY 14203

Upcoming Session Dates:
Session 2: May 3
Session 3: May 17
Session 4: June 14

Contact:
Cristina Delgado, MUP - Program Coordinator
info@oneregionforward.org

One Region Forward
Buffalo Niagara’s Plan for Sustainable Development

One Region Forward is Buffalo Niagara’s effort to create a regional plan for sustainable development – helping us meet the 21st-century challenges of economy, land use, transportation, housing, food, energy, and climate change.

Fundamentally, planning is about deciding how we face the future together. Many of our decisions we make as individuals. Others – like where to build roads, how to provide energy, where to put public facilities, how to regulate construction, and much more – we must make together.

One scholar has described planning as “persuasive story-telling about the future.” Plans not only describe a vision we share about a better future, but they specify what we need to do to get there.

Plans also help us reduce risk and leverage effort by letting us know what everyone else is going to do. So, we might also think about plans as promises we make to one another.

The American Planning Association (APA) describes good planning as a process that helps us create “communities that offer better choices for where and how people live. Planning helps communities to envision their future. It helps them find the right balance of new development and essential services, environmental protection, and innovative change.”

Good planning marries knowledge and community values. It’s important that plans be based on strong research and reliable data about the substance of a plan – population, housing, transportation, energy, food, health, land use, and more.
It’s just as important that plans be based on a clear expression of what we value as citizens, which is why successful planning processes include the views of a broad array of stakeholders – elected officials, business people, and citizens in general.

Ultimately, plans become public policy – the “principles guiding any level of government or its representatives expressed in legislation, administrative practices, regulations, funding priorities, and executive or judicial orders.”

One Region Forward links ongoing local and regional efforts to shape a more sustainable Buffalo Niagara with work at the federal level to promote sustainability across the nation.

It follows the ongoing effort to implement the Erie Niagara Regional Framework for Growth as well as current work on a regional economic development strategy, a long-range regional transportation plan, and dozens of local municipal efforts to shape our future.

One Region Forward also draws support from a broader federal effort to create a more sustainable future. In 2009 the administration formed the Partnership for Sustainable Communities as a collaboration of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This partnership coordinates federal investments in housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure to create sustainable neighborhoods, communities, and regions.

The partnership formulated six “livability principles” to help guide the creation of federal funding programs, policies, and legislative proposals:

1. Provide more transportation choices
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing
3. Enhance economic competitiveness
4. Support existing communities
5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment
6. Value communities and neighborhoods

One Region Forward is funded by $2 million from the highly competitive Sustainable Communities Regional Planning (SCRP) Grant Program. Buffalo Niagara was one of only 29 applicants nationwide to win a grant in 2011.

The project is guided by a broad-based 22-member steering committee with representatives of state, county and local government, regional agencies, higher education, community based organizations, and others.

The community engagement process also features organized representation by business through a Private Sector Council, local elected officials through the Local Government Council, citizens at large through a series of Community Congresses, and a wide array of subject matter experts through working teams focused on land use, housing, transportation, food, and climate change.

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) administers the funds of the program through the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC).

Ultimately One Region Forward will produce a federally recognized Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) that will give Buffalo Niagara priority status for funding opportunities today and in the future.

This plan will be a roadmap for improving mobility, promoting efficient land use patterns, strengthening basic infrastructure, growing a 21st century economy, ensuring access to healthy food, protecting housing and neighborhoods, and mounting our region’s response to climate change.

One Region Forward will develop more than just a plan, however. It is building capacity to support local decision-making, conducting public education, and launching implementation campaigns.

Another key component of One Region Forward is fostering the creation of local programs or plans. The Citizen Planning School and Champions for Change programs help residents leverage planning processes, tools, and resources to identify community issues and propose alternatives at various scales of planning. In particular, these programs will equip citizens to be change agents in their local communities and to implement a tailored version of One Region Forward’s evolving vision.
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.

Visit http://www.oneregionforward.org/data-tools/planning-library/ for a complete, up-to-date list of plans in our region.

1. 2011 WNY Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan.
   **Description:**
   This initiative led by the WNY Regional Economic Development Council identified key actions to create a stronger workforce, support infrastructure, and foster business creation. These include job readiness initiatives, smart growth principles and entrepreneurship strategies. These actions are the product of an aggressive and broadly inclusive planning process which included stakeholders from the five counties, private sector, public sector, nonprofits, and universities, among others.
   **Type:** Resource, Regional economic development
   **Why you should check it out...**
   The WNY strategic plan helps determine which types of projects in the five-county WNY region should be funded through the State of New York’s Consolidated Funding Application process. If you want to see change in your local community that could benefit from NYS funding support, learning about the strategies and goals is an important place to start.
   **Link:** http://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/content/western-new-york

2. 2013 Western New York Regional Sustainability Planning Initiative
   **Description:**
   The purpose of this planning initiative led by the NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) is to develop a guide to implement integrated, sustainable solutions for improving our quality of life. Issues addressed in the process include economic development, transportation and energy. The creation of the plan was influenced by input from representatives from the five counties, key public agencies and community members. Ultimately the plan will help determine which sustainability projects in our region receive funding from the Cleaner, Greener New York Program.
   **Type:** Resource, Indicators
   **Why you should check it out...**
   This plan provides a baseline assessment of our region’s contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as well as baseline information on a wide range of sustainability indicators. It also outlines strategies for projects that can reduce our region’s contribution to climate change. Learning about this plan and the funding program may help you identify ways to tap this resource locally.
   **Link:** http://www.sustainable-ny.com/
3. Creation of the 2006 Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth

Description:
This effort resulted in the creation of a region-wide vision for conservation, development, and public investment. Prior to the development of the Framework, local and regional stakeholders only had the 1974 regional plan to refer to when making important and wide-reaching decisions regarding the location and pace of development, investments in economic development, the extension of sewer and water service, and investments in transportation infrastructure, among other issues. The process benefited from intensive engagement with community and regional stakeholders—through interviews and focus groups meetings, a web-based survey, dialogues with civic and community groups, and in large-scale public workshops.

Type: Smart Growth

Why you should check it out...
This planning effort laid the foundation of One Region Forward. The Framework for Regional Growth initiative identified the roots of sprawling development, calculated the costs of sprawl to the public, and laid down the guiding principles necessary to make coordinated and consistent decisions about growth and development in our region. We will build on the essential work of the Framework to create practical and potent mechanisms to implement its vision for a more efficient, cost-effective, and ultimately more sustainable pattern of development in our region. 1RF will support those implementation efforts with public education, capacity building opportunities and planning resources to carry it forward.

Link: http://www2.erie.gov/regionalframework/

1. Environment Data Library of the Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA)

Description:
Features databases, summary tables, and a terms glossary on topics such as national marine pollution, air quality, emission trends, toxic levels, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This library is hosted by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, which is part of RITA.

Type: Online database

Why you should check it out...
This database features comprehensive data on a variety of environmental issues for cities and towns throughout the country. Thus, it is useful for learning about both national and local environmental trends. The library also contains links to other databases.

Link: http://www.transtats.bts.gov/databases.asp?Subject_ID=8&Subject_Desc=Environment&Mode_ID2=0

2. Environmental Sustainability Indicators and Trends of NASA

Description:
Features data sets and metrics to determine whether sustainability goals have been met. The site also contains a gallery of maps displaying environmental trends throughout the world, examples of how data on the site has been used by the public, and an interactive map-making tool. It was created by NASA’s Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center.

Type: Online database

Why you should check it out...
This site consolidates several datasets and makes them user-friendly. It also allows users to learn about environmental issues at the local and global scales, just like RITA's Environment Data Library.

Link: http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/theme/sustainability/data/sets/browse
3. U.S. Census Bureau

Description:
Planners heavily rely on the U.S. Census Bureau for the latest, most comprehensive collection of data, tools, and resources related to people, business, and geography. Within these broad topics are a myriad of subtopics of interest to change-agents, from race to fertility information. The site also features research and tips for using data on the site. For more current information, individuals should check out the American Community Survey (ACS) datasets produced by the U.S. Census Bureau every five years (as opposed to every 10 years for the census).

Type: Online database

Why you should check it out...
The U.S. Census and ACS are often the first place that planners go to for reliable, comprehensive information on a wide variety of topics, that are organized in several different ways.

Link: https://www.census.gov

4. UC Berkeley Carbon Footprint Map

Description:
This is a comprehensive collection of interactive carbon footprint maps for community members, entrepreneurs, and government partners, provided through the Cool Climate Network, a University of California Berkeley initiative. These maps provide models of national demand for energy, transportation, food, goods, and services. Average household carbon footprints for U.S. ZIP Codes, cities, counties, and metropolitan areas are then derived for each place.

Type: Resource, Indicators

Why you should check it out...
These maps demonstrate carbon footprint differences based on place-type and support the idea of tailoring GHG mitigation efforts to areas based on their population sizes, compositions, and locations. Thus, this resource will help you develop a climate action plan geared towards your community.

Link: http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/maps

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Educational Opportunities

One Region Forward is not the only training program available to individuals passionate about sustainability. We have described a few of the other programs below. While they relate to various topics, such as leadership development and the role of women in the sustainability movement, they all produce knowledgeable and empowered change agents.

1. Lois Gibbs Fellowship

Description:
This free fellowship, hosted by the Clean Air Coalition of WNY and the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo, allows successful applicants to participate in an annual community leadership development program. It was founded on the idea that grassroots leaders are essential to a strong WNY environmental health movement. Thus the fellowship builds activists’ skills and encourages networking between grassroots actors and decision makers. Current citizen leaders are encouraged to apply.

Type: Leadership, Training

Why you should check it out...
This fellowship offers practical training and valuable networking opportunities. It includes assistance with creating a policy action plan and monthly skills training and mentorship calls on topics such as grassroots lobbying, media outreach, and corporate research, to name a few. Participants will also have the opportunity to network with other environmental, political, media, and academic leaders.

Link: http://www.cacwny.org/get-involved/online/

2. GreenRoots Leadership Development Program (GLDP)

Description:
The goal of this program is for community members to broaden their participation and create social change in Niagara Falls. This is accomplished by having participants attend workshops, and create and implement their own neighborhood project. The program is hosted by ReNU Niagara, and is free and open to public.

Type: Leadership, Training

Why you should check it out...
GLDP provides knowledge and skills that will allow participants to transform their neighborhood and city into a place they can be proud to call home. Participants also gain hands-on experience designing and executing a community project. Also, the program is designed to be as flexible as possible in order to meet the needs of every type of participant.

Link: http://www.niagara.edu/renu/
Featured Online Resources

There are many excellent resources on sustainable development online. Below, are a few resources that discuss the general concept of sustainable development that you may find useful.

1. GROW WNY
   **Description:**
   This website is a source of information about all things green in WNY. It also acts as an open forum for discussions around our local environment and the successes and challenges it faces. It was created as a vehicle for fulfilling the WNY Environmental Alliance’s (WNYEA) Shared Agenda for Action, which is an inclusive, but focused plan of action for working together to accomplish environmental change in our region. This agenda reflects input from the public and 150 environmental organizations in our region.

   **Why you should check it out...**
   On the website alone, you can find information on everything from living greener, to ways to enjoy the many natural resources our region has to offer. You can also find out how to get involved in the many projects being led by our nonprofit partners around the region. These projects range from beach clean ups to tree plantings to meetings where advocate support is needed to show our policymakers why green votes are important.

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

2. Empire State Future
   **Description:**
   Empire State Future is New York’s first and only statewide smart growth advocacy and education organization. Thus, its website contains valuable information related to smart growth, such as regional projects and coalitions, previous and ongoing campaigns, how to get involved in smart growth efforts, and other resources on smart growth.

   **Why you should check it out...**
   This site will give you a good idea of work happening throughout the state related to smart growth, and how your work, along with the work of One Region Forward, fits into other sustainable efforts. It also consolidates numerous useful smart growth resources.

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

3. HUD’s Sustainable Housing and Communities Page
   **Description:**
   This is the web page of HUD’s Sustainable Housing and Communities Program, which administers the grant that supports One Region Forward. Here are just a few of the things that you can do on this website: apply for a grant, sign up for the program’s mailing list, check out the HUD Sustainable Communities Resource Center, and learn about the program’s Housing and Transportation Affordability Initiative. Check out the page to see what other knowledge and resources it has to offer.

   **Why you should check it out...**
   Offers information on the program that makes One Region Forward possible, case studies of other regional sustainability efforts, and tools to implement sustainability in your community.

   **Link:** http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities

4. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Sustainability Page
   **Description:**
   Offers information on what sustainability is, how the EPA is encouraging sustainable change, and how you can help.

   **Why you should check it out...**
   Citizen Planners can learn in depth about EPA’s numerous programs, including those related to sustainable communities, smart growth, water, safe products, and energy. They can also review the EPA’s Framework for Sustainability Indicators and information about the student sustainability design competition, “People, Prosperity and the Planet”.

   **Link:** http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/
5. The N.Y. Department of Environmental Conservation Sustainability Planning Page

Description:
This page features explanations of what sustainable planning and NY’s Cleaner, Greener Communities program is. It also provides guidance on what a sustainability plan should include, models of effective plans, and other links with information on this topic.

Why you should check it out...
The site takes the broad, unclear concept of sustainability and explains it in simple, concrete terms. It also provides helpful case studies.

Link:
http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/76483.html

6. The Partnership for the Public Good’s Citizen Toolkit

Description:
This free online toolkit created by the Partnership for the Public Good features resources on how to get involved in advocacy, influence policy, obtain data, work with government officials, contact the media, and write press releases, among others. The information is geared towards change agents in Buffalo.

Why you should check it out...
This easy-to-use toolkit is a one-stop-shop for citizen activists.

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

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Words and Concepts in Planning

Climate Change:
Refers to any significant change in the measures of climate lasting for an extended period of time. In other words, climate change includes major changes in temperature, precipitation, or wind patterns, among other effects, that occur over several decades or longer.

Current concern about climate change focuses on changes caused in large part by emission of greenhouse gases leading to an overall warming and instability of the climate.

Geographic Information System (GIS):
GIS integrates hardware, software, and data for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information. GIS allows us to view, understand, question, interpret, and visualize data in many ways that reveal relationships, patterns, and trends in the form of maps, globes, reports, and charts.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHGs):
Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. These include carbon dioxide (CO2), Methane (CH4), Nitrous oxide (N2O), and Fluorinated gases. Human activity contributes to the production of these gases. The gases in turn make the planet warmer and “thicken the Earth’s blanket.”

Master Plan:
An evolving, long-term planning document that establishes the framework and key elements of a site reflecting a clear vision created and adopted in an open process. It combines civic goals and the public’s aspirations for a project, gives them form and organization, and defines a realistic plan for implementation, including subsequent approvals by public agencies.

Mixed-use Development:
Development that blends residential, retail, commercial office, institutional, cultural and where appropriate, industrial uses. It is a commonly used approach to creating urban districts that are both busy round the clock (because different uses are active at different times of day) and efficient (because people need to avail themselves of those uses on a daily basis).

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Neighborhood plans:
Outline a vision, policies and action steps for a limited geographic area. Neighborhood boundaries may be determined by city government or by citizens acting through neighborhood associations. But neighborhood planning processes typically involve a strong role for residents to decide how their neighborhoods will move into the future.6

Regional planning:
Regional planning is planning for a geographic area that may transcend the boundaries of individual governmental units (multiple cities, counties, even states) but that shares common social, economic, political, cultural, and natural resources, and transportation characteristics or functions.7

Sprawl:
A common term used to describe the dispersed pattern of development associated with low-density housing, highway-oriented commercial development, and growth away from urban centers into rural areas. In some cases, suburban sprawl is accompanied by disinvestment or decline in urban centers.8

Sustainability:
In its most general sense, sustainability refers to processes of development that allow for current generations to meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The term is often used to suggest the interconnection of economic, environmental and social values.9

Zoning Code:
A tool used by a locality to implement a master plan. It specifies where which kinds of physical development and what kinds of uses can be placed on land. Historically, American zoning codes have separated residential uses from commercial and industrial uses. More recently, the practice of zoning has evolved to allow mixed uses. Some zoning codes are shifting from a focus on regulating use to regulating the form that buildings may take.10

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Acronyms

1RF: One Region Forward
CFA: Consolidated Funding Application
WNYEA: Western NY Environmental Alliance
BNP: Buffalo Niagara Partnership
NFTA: Niagara Frontier Transit Authority
GBNRTC: Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council
PUSH Buffalo: People United for Sustainable Housing
REDC: Regional Economic Development Council
GIS: Geographic Information Systems