

Commentary: Human Services Planning

In the 1960s, local plans increasingly began to reflect concerns for social issues by addressing provision of human services, especially to disadvantaged groups in the community.²⁴⁸

This area continues to be addressed in a number of contemporary local comprehensive plans. Human services include a broad range of activities that state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector provide to help meet health, welfare, employment, or other basic needs of groups in the community such as the poor, the elderly, youth (especially children), or the disabled. Human services programs may address alcohol and drug abuse, crisis management, day care, teenage pregnancy, family violence, nutrition, job training, mental and physical health (including infant, child, and adolescent health programs), consumer protection, and tenant rights, and include a variety of counseling services.²⁴⁹

The human services elements or policies of these plans typically define the local government's role in the delivery of human services among a diverse group of providers.

These roles can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Provider – the local government directly provides the service itself.
- (2) Regulator – the local government oversees and regulates other agencies who directly provide services.
- (3) Funder – the local government uses its own funds or funds from federal programs like community development block grants and enters into contracts with service providers. It may exercise performance control over contracts through contract monitoring and evaluation.
- (4) Capacity builder – the local government provides advice, consultation, and technical assistance to build up the planning, management, and coordination capacities of other agencies. For example, it might use its tax or grant funds to assist a local citizens council in mental health planning or to build a network of emergency services.
- (5) Facilitator/coordinator – the local government may focus on providing the mechanism by which local service providers, client groups, and others may come together and negotiate goals, policies, programs, and activities.²⁵⁰

The nature of the local government's role depends on the capacity of the governmental unit itself, the interests of the community, and the authority of the local government for such activities. Some local governments may operate public health departments, but in other areas these services may be provided by special districts. Counties will tend to have broader authority for human services activities than cities, but this may vary over states and regions.

The health and human services element of the Palm Beach County, Florida, comprehensive plan addresses the role of the county in providing a broad array of services including public health program services (including health education, school, environmental, and mental health); services for people living with AIDS; services for adults, families, children, and the elderly (including abuse and neglect prevention and emergency food and shelter); and support of information and referral services.²⁵¹

Assistance in updating the element and coordinating of the element's implementation are the charges of a citizens advisory committee on health and human services created by the county commission.²⁵² The committee makes program and budget recommendations, identifies annual service and funding priorities, and determines and recommends service outcomes and measurements in the context of the comprehensive plan's policies.²⁵³

The Howard County, Maryland, General Plan describes the priority citizen needs for the county (e.g., family support, affordable child care, in-home services such as home care and nutrition for the elderly, adult day care, and equal opportunity and consumer services) and describes the county's approach to support such services. These include developing human services needs assessments, establishing multi-service centers throughout the county, and devising a funding distribution system for grants and contracts.²⁵⁴

The City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan contains a "human development element" adopted in November 1995. It describes a series of broad goals and policies that address vulnerable populations, education and employability, health, community safety, and service delivery. Here the element places the city in a coordinative/facilitator role rather than a direct provider role.²⁵⁵

A "human services strategic plan" for the City of Tacoma, Washington, establishes strategic priority areas that include a reduction in and prevention of violence and abuse, provision of basic services for food shelter, and clothes, and basic health care. Tacoma will provide funds for these, based on an annual application process by provider agencies. The plan is intended to help the city annually maintain and monitor some 120 separate contracts for human services activities.²⁵⁶

The 1990 Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, Comprehensive Plan states that it is the plan's goal "[t]o facilitate, sustain and improve the health, education and well-being of all persons on Nantucket by providing those public and private human services which improve the quality of life for all age groups."²⁵⁷ The plan proposes the development, for public distribution, of a comprehensive directory of existing human service providers on Nantucket for health and medical services, support services such as emergency shelter and substance abuse, and emergency services. The plan also recommends establishing a formal program of assessment and evaluation of the Island's human services programs.

Section 7-213 below describes an optional human services element of a local comprehensive plan. The model statute is drafted broadly to accommodate the different roles that a local government might define for itself in the human services area. One feature of the model is language that provides for the appointment by the local legislative body of an advisory task force to help formulate the element; this is similar to the approach used in Palm Beach County, described above.

Appointing an advisory task force ensures that the human services element draws on the experience and expertise of those in the human services field as well as those who are the direct beneficiaries of the services. The model emphasizes the development of an inventory of human services providers and programs in the community, an assessment of the existing needs being addressed by these providers, and an identification of any gaps in service and future needs. The model also stresses setting

benchmarks by which human services programs may be evaluated for funding by the local government as well as other entities. It also emphasizes new human services programs or changes in or the elimination of existing human services programs, as appropriate.

7-213 Human Services Element

(1) A human services element may be included in the local comprehensive plan. The legislative body of the local government may appoint an advisory task force of persons with interest in or expertise in human services to assist the local planning agency and local planning commission, if one exists, in the preparation of this element.²⁵⁸

(2) The purposes of the human services element are to:

- (a) integrate consideration of human services issues with other planning undertaken by the local government;
- (b) coordinate programs of human services providers, whether they are the local government, other government agencies, or nonprofit or for-profit organizations and determine roles, if any, in addition to coordination, that the local government may assume in relation to provision of human services;
- (c) identify deficiencies in existing human services programs;
- (d) establish benchmarks by which human services programs may be evaluated for funding by the local government as well as other entities; and
- (e) propose new human services programs or changes in or the elimination of existing human services programs, as appropriate.

(3) In preparing the human services element, the local planning agency shall undertake supporting studies. In undertaking these studies, the local planning agency may use studies conducted by others. The supporting studies may include, but shall not be limited to:

- (a) descriptions of human service agencies within the jurisdiction of the local government (including the local government itself, if applicable), their programs (including those directed at the support of families and children), and the missions of those programs; an identification of the groups of people served by human service agencies within the jurisdiction of the local government, their approximate numbers, and those people in groups who have priority for receiving service from the provider, either established by law or by the provider;
- (c) projections of changes in the character, composition, or size of those groups anticipated during the term of the human services element;
- (d) analyses of expected changes in the services provided by human services agencies within the jurisdiction of the local government due to existing, pending, or potential changes in federal or state laws or regulations or other factors outside of the control of human service agencies;
- (e) analyses of the resources of the human service agencies within the jurisdiction of the local government to meet current and future needs, including needs that may currently be unmet or may potentially arise in the future, and an estimate of additional resources that may be necessary to meet those needs;
- (f) qualitative assessments and evaluations of existing programs operated by human service agencies within the jurisdiction of the local government; and

- (g) relevant studies completed for other elements of the local comprehensive plan, including those that address population and population characteristics (including income), unemployment, and workforce and skill requirements.

(4) The human services element shall consist of a statement of goal, policies, and guidelines for meeting human services needs within the jurisdiction of the local government. The element shall include summaries of supporting studies identified in paragraph (3) above. The element may include:

- (a) a statement of what the local government regards as important human services needs for the community;
- (b) a statement of the role that the local government will assume with respect to other human services agencies within its jurisdiction; and
- (c) an identification of the priorities of the local government in meeting human services needs with its own resources.

(5) The human services element shall contain actions to be incorporated into the long-range program of implementation required by Section [7-211] above. These actions may include, but shall not be limited to, those that the local government, other governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector may take to achieve the goals and policies of the element, including:

- (a) benchmarks for evaluating the degree to which human service programs are meeting the needs of individuals within the jurisdiction of the local government so that the local government as well as other entities can determine whether or not to fund them;
- (b) human service programs or program changes to better meet existing and projected needs;
- (c) proposed facilities for human services agencies, such as clinics and offices, and/or changes in existing facilities;
- (d) proposals for new ordinances or administrative rules or policies or changes in existing ordinances or administrative rules or policies that may be enacted or adopted by the local legislative body or its administrators to promote the goals and policies of the human services element; and
- (e) implementation agreements entered into pursuant to Section [7-503] below.

Footnotes:

²⁴⁸For a review of thinking about the intersection of physical and social planning as it existed in the 1960s, see, e.g., Herbert J. Gans, "A Memorandum on Social Planning" and "Social and Physical Planning for the Elimination of Urban Poverty," in *People and Plans: Essays on Urban Problems and Solutions* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 82-94 and 231-248; Harvey S. Perloff, "Common Goals and the Linking of Physical and Social Planning," in *Urban Planning and Social Policy*, edited by Bernard J. Frieden and Robert Morris (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 346-359. See also Cleveland City Planning Commission, *Policy Planning Report* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Commission, 1974) (city plan that examined issues of housing, income, job development, transportation, and community development from perspective of the city's disadvantaged citizens, articulating policies to give them wider choice); Norman Krumholz and John Forester, *Making Equity Planning Work: Leadership in the Public Sector* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) (discussion of Cleveland plan).

²⁴⁹Thomas K. MacKeseey, "Human Services" (Ch. 8), in *Managing Small Cities and Counties: A Practical Guide*, edited by James Banovetz, Drew A. Dolan, and John W. Swaim (Washington, D.C.: International City/County Management Association, 1994), esp. 149-160.

²⁵⁰Richard S. Bolan, "Social Planning and Policy Development in Local Government," in *Managing Human Services*, edited by Wayne Anderson, Bernard J. Frieden, and Michael J. Murphy (Washington, D.C.: International City Management Association, 1977), 110, quoting New England Municipal Center, *Opportunities for Municipal Participation in Human Services* (Durham, N.H.: New England Municipal Center, 1975).

²⁵¹Palm Beach County, Florida, *1989 Comprehensive Plan, Health and Human Services*, Ord. No. 90-32, Revised 9/18/90, 1-HS to 21-HS.

²⁵²Palm Beach County, Florida, "Resolution of the Board of County Commissioners of Palm Beach County, Florida, Establishing the Palm Beach County Citizens Advisory Committee on Health and Human Services," Resolution R-90-1978 (November 13, 1990).

²⁵³Palm Beach County, Florida, "Resolution of the Board of County Commissioners of Palm Beach County, Florida, Amending Resolution No. R-90-1978 Dated November 13, 1990, Establishing the Palm Beach County Citizens Advisory Committee on Health and Human Services," Resolution No. 493-317 (March 16, 1993).

²⁵⁴Howard County, Maryland, *1990 General Plan. . . a six point plan for the future* (Ellicott City, Md.: Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning, 1990), 148-155.

²⁵⁵City of Seattle, *Comprehensive Plan, Human Development Element*, adopted November 1995, www.ci.wa.us/planning/humandev.htm.

²⁵⁶City of Tacoma, Washington, *Human Services Strategic Plan* (April 6, 1998), www.ci.tacoma.wa.us/PDS/Community/human%20services/human2.htm.

²⁵⁷Nantucket Planning and Development Committee, *Comprehensive Plan, Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, Goals and Objectives for Balanced Growth*, Article No. 11 (Nantucket Island, Mass.: The Committee, November 1, 1990), 15.

²⁵⁸See Section 7-106(2)(n), Powers and Duties of Local Planning Commission, which addresses the creation and appointment of advisory task forces to assist the local planning commission.

Source of the above information: Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook, 2002 Edition, American Planning Association, pages 7-162 to 7-168.