

# LINKING SCHOOL SITING TO LAND USE PLANNING

## I. Introduction

### A. Problem Statement

In 1999, according to the U.S. Department of Education, public and private K-12 school enrollment reached a record 52.7 million students. Student populations are projected to continue rising for the next six years, with public school enrollment increasing to a 54.3 million by the year 2008. In Georgia, this trend is mirrored, with growth expected to climb 7 percent between 1999 and 2010.

With millions of additional students entering our schools, a determined effort is being made to reduce class size in order to give children more individualized attention in the primary grades. Similarly, current research suggests that overall school populations of more than 800 may be detrimental to the learning process. The result is the growing need to build more and more classrooms and schools to meet the demand of the “baby boom echo.” However, this need for additional space comes at a time when school districts nationwide are faced with the challenge of replacing, repairing and updating existing facilities that are crumbling due to overuse and constant delays in regular maintenance. In 1996, the U.S. General Accounting Office put a price tag to this problem when it identified a \$112 billion need to repair and or renovate the existing national school facilities infrastructure just to achieve a “good overall condition.”

*“With thousands of schools needing to be built and modernized in the coming decade, communities across this nation can design schools in ways that can make an enduring difference for generations. These buildings will have a profound impact not just on students, but on entire neighborhoods.”*

*Al Gore,  
Vice President of the  
United States  
October 5, 1988*

The need to build more classrooms has resulted in a disconnect between the location of new schools and the communities they serve. In suburban areas, new schools are being built on inexpensive land in greenfields, office and industrial parks. While these sites are affordable and readily available, they are often located on the edge of established communities and thus create a sprawling pattern of development that undermines the notion of neighborhood schools and smart growth.



This tool is intended to provide insight into the link between school siting and land use planning. Typically, decisions affecting school siting are made by semi-autonomous school boards acting independently of local governments and planning departments. This can result in a missed opportunity to use new schools as catalysts for balanced development in sustainable communities. Working together, local school boards and planning

departments can make long-range land use decisions that create a win-win for the school district and the community by setting aside key development sites in strategic locations within a community instead of where the land is least expensive or most readily available.

## B. What is the Link Between School Siting and Land Use Planning?

The provision of community facilities, particularly schools, can play a key role in shaping future growth and development patterns. In Georgia, the challenges faced by the State's diverse school planning districts vary by their geography, age, student population and instructional focus. While some districts struggle with small sites and dated facilities, others fight to stay ahead of exploding growth in largely rural landscapes.

The Georgia Department of Education requires each local district within the State to complete and update a Local Facilities Plan every five years. These plans establish an outline of local plans for the next five years and provide the framework for state funding of capital improvements. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs requires a description of Community Facilities, including schools, as part of its requirements for state-mandated Comprehensive Plans, which must be updated every five years as well. While these requirements provide a baseline emphasis for thoughtful and coordinated planning, the specifics of school siting and comprehensive school district planning require detailed local efforts far in excess of minimum state requirements.

Not unlike roads, sewers and other community facilities, schools are a vital element of local infrastructure and they have a direct impact on how communities function. The decision-making factors that initially determine how and where to site school facilities are primarily economic. However, building new schools, particularly smaller, neighborhood-oriented schools, has important land use implications for residential growth patterns. Good schools are an important determinant in where people choose to live. By building smaller schools close to where people live, communities can encourage smart growth policies that lead to better neighborhoods and more livable communities.

This physical connection between school facilities and the community is well documented throughout planning literature. For instance, in their book The Urban Pattern (1980), Gallion and Eisner refer to one of the earliest definitions of a neighborhood developed in 1929 by Clarence Perry. Perry's definition identifies one of the key factors of the "neighborhood unit" as that populated area that would require and support an elementary school. The school would be located so that it would be unnecessary for any child to walk a distance of more than a ½ mile to school. The authors further document the idea of a school being the building block of a community in referencing N.L. Englehardt's definition of a neighborhood. Englehardt echoes Perry in stating that the neighborhood unit includes the elementary school, a small shopping district, and a playground. These facilities are grouped near the center so that walking distance between them and the home does not exceed a ½ mile.

A school that is physically located in the center of a community is more than just a convenient location for the school population. Robert Crowson, in his book School-Community Relations, Under Reform (1992), states that a school should strive to make an investment in the social capital of its immediate environment. The interests and purposes of the school are well served if the schools themselves create a sense of community and develop solid linkages with the families. In her book Designing Places for Learning (1995), Anne Meek states that one of the important new educational directions is making the school community a hub. Meek recounts that "the *American School Board Journal* reported that the construction of community recreation centers as part of schools is a solution for building community support for public education among a growing number of community residents who do not have children in school." The new educational centers should be designed to

provide programs for the entire community, including childcare, job training, youth programs, and town hall meeting facilities. This community relationship encourages the use of the school year-round for both primary education and community functions. Neighborhood schools give the community an identity and cohesiveness that housing and recreational facilities alone cannot.

Traditionally, school architecture placed walls between the school and the outside environment. In both a literal and a metaphorical sense, the new focus is on collaboration and cooperation between the school and the community. Schools should be viewed as having an ecological relationship with the surrounding families and neighborhoods and, therefore, should strive to integrate services to benefit the entire community (Crowson 1992).

The Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) has developed a valuable resource for the location and planning of educational facilities. Simply titled The Guide for Planning Educational Facilities (1991), this document identifies the steps and considerations for educational facility planning from conception of needs through occupancy and use. Some of the recommendations related to school siting, land use and the community include:

- Because the design and use of the land on which a facility is located is as important as the facility itself, the site's potential as an educational and community resource should be understood and used.
- Sites for educational facilities should be located as near as possible to existing and proposed community facilities, including parks, recreational centers, galleries, libraries, and health centers for easy access to resources.
- Sites should be located near the center of the probable student population.
- It is desirable to locate school facilities within walking distance of the greatest number of students. Reasonable walking distances are:  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile for elementary schools, 1.5 miles for middle and high schools.
- Locations where future zoning might permit construction of factories, congested business centers, and noisy/hazardous transportation systems should be avoided.
- In urban areas, the educational facility and the neighborhood are intimately related. The school should not attempt to isolate itself from the community. When developing new school facilities, planners should determine needs and develop a site plan that is responsive to those needs.

### **C. What is the Role of School Siting in Achieving Smart Growth?**

A common theme in current educational planning is the notion of the school as the center of a community. A school achieves this either by serving a more integral role within the context of the whole community, or by extending the learning environment to take advantage of the full range of the community's resources. Indeed, according to Steven Bingle, a New Orleans architect who specializes in helping communities plan for new schools, the most successful schools of the future will be integrated learning communities, which accommodate all the needs of the community's stakeholders. They will be schools that are open later, longer and for more people in the community. They will be utilized by everyone from senior citizens using the gym and health facilities during off-hours to immigrants taking evening English classes after work.

Specifically, Bingler suggests that there are two ways of integrating schools and communities: cohabitation and adaptive re-use – both of which are consistent with smart growth principles.

- Cohabitation – Within a community, there are numerous users that share similar needs. By providing for these needs in a central location or public facility such as a school or community center, a local government can reduce duplicative services. Take the city library for example. Consider including the library, or part of the library in the new school building. Perhaps the local YMCA could incorporate into the school building and operations (a recent concept successfully accomplished in two Atlanta city schools). This concept is discussed in greater detail in the Appendix – refer to Case Study #4, which describes a strategic partnership between a Michigan school district, the Ford Motor Company and the Henry Ford Museum.
- Adaptive Re-use - Another way of integrating schools and communities is to find existing space in the community that can be adapted for school use, such as an empty hospital wing, a section of a museum, or a portion of a corporate campus, to give students a sense of the wider world that includes the community. This strategy looks upon the entire community as an educational resource. Why pay for new, freestanding school buildings when students can share space with libraries, museums and zoos? Bingler call this the “hermit crab” approach: Fit the school into a structure that already exists.

Both approaches to school design and facilities planning can contribute to many of the goals of smart growth, including:

- Reducing consumption of land;
- Making better use of existing infrastructure and lowering the costs of public services;
- Strengthening real estate markets and property values and renewing existing neighborhoods;
- Supporting unique cultural, arts, educational and civic functions.

#### **D. Schools as Centers of Community: Six Design Principles**

The link between school siting and land use planning was formally enunciated in June 1998, when a group of educators, facilities planners, architects, government leaders and interested citizens were invited to Washington D.C. by the U.S. Department of Education. They convened to discuss the process of planning and designing schools that would best meet students’ needs as well as serve as centers of their communities. A product of that gathering was a set of planning and design principles for learning environments. These principles have since been confirmed by the National Symposium on School Design sponsored in October 1998 by the Vice President of the United States Al Gore, the U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley and the White House Millennium Council. They have also gained the endorsement of The American Institute of Architects, The American Association of School Administrators, The Council of Educational Facility Planners International, and The Construction Managers Association of America.

The six design principles assert that, in order to meet the nation’s needs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must design learning environments that:

1. Enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners.
2. Serve as centers of community.

3. Result from a planning/design process involving all stakeholders.
4. Provide for health, safety and security.
5. Make effective use of all adaptable resources.
6. Allow for flexibility and adaptability to changing needs.

## **II. What are the Alternatives?**

Inherently, most school districts are established as distinct and separate organizations charged with serving the needs of the local student population. Too often, school siting decisions are therefore made independently of land use decisions. In these cases, the chance to shape new development by the provision of school facilities is lost, and the local government must frequently follow the lead of school-generated development by extending sewer, roads and other infrastructure at great cost. As a result, the opportunity to plan for relationships and partnerships between schools and the immediate community is shortchanged.

## **III. Things to Consider When Linking School Siting to Land Use Planning**

The emphasis of this tool is the need for coordination between local planners, elected officials, and school boards in the decision-making process related to school site selection. In many ways the challenges faced by these community representatives represent a classic “chicken and egg” dilemma. Locating a new school in a previously undeveloped area can serve as a catalyst for future growth. Similarly, residential development creates an inherent demand for new school facilities to serve a growing student population. At a minimum, the relationship between school siting and land use can be seen as integral to the long-term sustainability of a community.

A related issue is the need for ongoing comprehensive planning for school districts to ensure that educational facilities meet the constantly evolving needs of a community. Schools are not static institutions and thus must be assessed and evaluated regularly to determine that they serve the local population by providing state-of-the-art facilities and up-to-date instructional programs.

### **A. What You Need To Do First**

The Facilities Services Unit of the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) publishes “A Guide to School Site Selection” (a copy of the guide can be obtained from their website located at [http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/facilities/site2\\_a.pdf](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/facilities/site2_a.pdf)). This document is designed for use by local school systems in making preliminary determinations concerning the acceptability of school sites. The guide is useful in identifying the key criteria for site selection, such as site size, availability of utilities, safety hazards, environmental issues, geographical and related factors. However, the guide does not emphasize the basic need for coordination of the site selection process within the context of local land use planning.

Fundamentally, there are numerous players that have a significant impact on local land use and development patterns, not the least of which are boards of education. Yet school boards do not typically participate in the local planning process and their absence often results in undermining the process of developing and implementing a local comprehensive plan. Imagine the following scenario: Due to a recent influx of new families with young children into a particular county, the local school board builds a new elementary school. Within three years the new school is adding trailers for overflow classes because the school

board did not size the school based population projections in the County's comprehensive plan.

When school boards act independently of local governments it is inevitable that mistakes will be made and resources wasted. A joint planning process in which goals are formed by consensus is one way to avoid this problem. So, where do you begin? The following recommendations are intended to provide a starting point for coordinated planning between boards of education and local governments.

#### Establish the Need for a Plan

The challenge of providing effective educational facilities to serve the nation's youth in the decades ahead offers an incredible opportunity to enhance the surrounding communities as well. However, before a school district embarks on this endeavor, it is critical to establish within the community a strong consensus that a coordinated plan is necessary. This might seem too fundamental to warrant mention, but establishing the need for systematic site selection and a comprehensive planning process involving a wide range of stakeholders is important for long-term "buy-in" by the community in what can be a long and arduous process.

#### Involve the Public

Involving educators, parents, students, local government planners and other stakeholders in the process of school site selection, comprehensive school planning and school design can help ensure that schools support student learning and address community needs in the best ways possible. Such involvement also can strengthen community support for education.



Shared problem-solving and decision-making lead to the creation of a common vision and purpose that binds divergent parts of the community together.

#### Timing Is Everything

It is important to allow sufficient time necessary to forge a shared vision and collective commitment to the plan. Too often, communities wait until conditions have reached crisis proportions – until overcrowding has become unmanageable or major deterioration threatens safety – before they consider remodeling existing facilities or building new schools. When this is the case, time for sufficient planning does not exist. It becomes practically impossible for all ideas and solutions to be considered carefully, or for the kind of meaningful dialogue to occur that can lead to respectful, informed consensus.

#### Gather All Available Data

Accurate data related to existing conditions of school facilities, student population projections, concurrent local planning efforts, existing and future development patterns, and instructional programming are essential components in the planning process. It is important to establish a centralized repository for this data so that it can be managed, kept current, and disseminated as needed to the planning team and the public. While it should be the responsibility of local school boards to update and maintain this data, it should be mandated

that school boards and local governments share this information with one another at regular intervals to provide the basis for informed and coordinated decision-making.

## **B. Relationship to Comprehensive Plan**

Under the Georgia Planning Act, only general purpose city and county governments are required to participate in comprehensive planning in order to maintain eligibility for certain state grants and loans. Furthermore, the majority of grant and loan awards and facility location decisions made by state agencies are not required to be consistent with the applicable local government comprehensive plans. In light of this apparent disconnect between local governments and other entities, such as school boards, affecting the way a jurisdiction develops, the Georgia Growth Strategies Reassessment Task Force has made several recommendations to encourage coordination among key players on local planning matters. In their report, "Georgia's Future: Beyond Growth Strategies," published in December 1998, the Task Force suggests that the state should:

1. Require any local or regional agencies that are recipients of state financial assistance (including school systems) to participate in the local comprehensive planning process and develop joint comprehensive plans with all city or county jurisdictions in which they operate.
2. Withhold state-administered funding and permits for any activities of local or regional agencies that are inconsistent with the local comprehensive plans for affected jurisdictions.
3. Require that state agencies make reasonable and prudent efforts to make funding and facility siting decisions that are consistent with applicable regional and local plans.

On a positive note, Georgia's Comprehensive Plan legislation requires an element on Community Facilities, in which schools are included. While this is a good starting point for information sharing, it by no means addresses the comprehensive issues associated with a school district plan. However, the Comprehensive Plan is useful in identifying the goals, objectives, policies and implementation strategies that will affect future growth in a community and thus can influence school siting decisions. More specifically, several of the elements within the Comprehensive Plan are helpful in providing baseline data, such as demographic projections and concurrent local planning efforts, which will form the backbone of a school district plan. Since Comprehensive Plans are required to be updated every five years, it is sensible to initiate school district plans, including future school site selection, on a compatible schedule to ensure coordination between local planning efforts.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs allows local governments to adopt optional elements in their comprehensive plans. This could include a school facilities element that would outline future growth objectives in terms of renovation and expansion of existing facilities and the siting and construction of new schools. Local governments and planning departments should work proactively with their school boards in the effort to create a schools element in the comprehensive plan to ensure compatibility and coordination related to desired future development patterns and growth strategies.

## C. Administrative and Enforcement Issues

### 1. Legal framework

Only a few states, namely Florida and New Jersey, have taken the legislative actions necessary either to require a schools element in their comprehensive plans or to stipulate that a long-range educational facilities master plan be a prerequisite for state funding. In Florida, for example, the Public Schools Facilities Element enables local districts to establish the legislative basis for dealing with more controversial issues such as concurrency. Combined with other efforts, such as a school siting ordinance and impact fees, the public schools facilities element can address land development issues associated with education, including neighborhood schools as a basis for building community, compatibility and supporting infrastructure.

### 2. Political concerns and public acceptability

Because schools so often form the heart of a community, the decision-making process surrounding them can be lengthy and controversial. This is particularly the case when issue of redistricting arises, causing stakeholders to become embroiled in socio-economic and sometimes racial debates. The process can become very politicized when individual school board members approach the plan with a narrow view of what the threats and opportunities are to their specific jurisdiction rather than planning for the good of the entire district.

Another challenge is that it can be difficult to sustain a long-term planning project in the education field where the players change constantly. School board members can change with each election, and administrators move on to other things. However, strong plans based on a consensus vision can transcend the limits of political terms of service.

The sheer cost to create innovative plans and schools design that result from months of dreaming-by-committee can also prove to be a daunting obstacle for school districts without deep pockets. Similarly, the community-planning process can also run the risk of raising people's expectations a little too high. Communities need to understand from the outset that it is unlikely that their dreams will all come true at once. However, a good plan with prioritized implementation objectives will help to manage expectations and provide a roadmap for systematic and coordinated decision-making.

### 3. Administrative complexity

The administrative complexity involved in school site selection and comprehensive school district planning is a function of the size of the district and the scope of the plan. The number of facilities in the district and the amount of students served by those facilities are key determinants in the composition of the staff necessary to plan for the district. However, a benefit of the planning process will be to identify areas of overlap and redundancy within the district in order to streamline staffing needs and the delivery of basic services in the future.

One of the outcomes of a school site selection process that could lead to administrative complexity is the decision to implement a redistricting plan in association with new school construction. This strategy may be employed to manage school enrollments more effectively or address system-wide equity issues. Given the political challenges

associated with school redistricting, it is inevitable that such a strategy will add to administrative complexity. The most tangible aspect of this will be felt in the need for multiple internal briefings and public meetings to review the proposed new districts and discuss their impact both instructionally and politically. A professional facilitator can greatly smooth this process by ensuring that it is inclusive and focused on consensus building.

#### 4. Cost to implement

How much does it cost to implement a school site selection decision? The physical characteristics of the site should be such that the cost of grading, drainage and development will be relatively low. This leaves the primary expense as the acquisition cost. However, undue consideration given to the value or acquisition cost of a potential school site can be false economy, and often have proven to be expensive in the long run. The evaluation of a potential school site as it related to physical development is a technical task, requiring the knowledge and experience of a qualified professional. The investment required to obtain professional evaluation for physical development may result in considerable future savings.

Furthermore, coordination between the school board and local government can result in the identification of mutually beneficial future development sites, which might provide opportunities for collaboration in the delivery of community services such as education and recreation. By joining forces and combining resources, school boards and local governments can maximize their options and find the best locations for new community facilities rather than limiting their search to the most affordable and readily available.

A related concern for school boards and local governments is the cost of implementing a school district master plan? This master plan can serve as the formal link between a jurisdiction's comprehensive plan and the ongoing need to maintain, update, and expand its educational facilities. The answer to this question depends on the size of the school district and the number of facilities affected. School districts faced with implementing a facilities master plan are typically faced with two kinds of costs:

- Administrative costs
- Capital improvement costs

*Administrative costs* are the costs of salary, benefits and related office expenses for additional program staff that are necessary to initiate and support the plan. For instance, there may be consultants needed, such as architects and engineers, to prepare design and construction documents to renovate, expand or build new school facilities. There may also be the need for a program manager to oversee the implementation of the facilities master plan.

*Capital improvement costs* are the financial outlays to accomplish the recommended facilities improvements for the district. The more renovated and new schools needed the higher the cost. Even when a facilities master plan recommends upgrading existing facilities without a lot of new construction, this can be even more costly than building several new facilities from the ground up. Many districts choose to fund this type of initiative through a bond referendum or special purpose local option sales tax (SPLOST) initiative.

## **IV. Implementation Guidelines**

There are several key guidelines to consider when implementing a school site selection process, particularly with regard to maintaining the critical link between school siting and land use planning. Fundamentally, a site selection process should occur within the framework of a comprehensive school district plan. A comprehensive school district plan provides the basis for rational decision-making and contains much of the baseline data that will assist a site selection committee in evaluating the strengths and weakness of various site options. It is a school board's blueprint for future growth and development and as such shares many similarities with a state mandated comprehensive plan.

Given the importance of a comprehensive school district plan as the foundation for future school site selection initiatives, an outline of implementation guidelines is provided below. This section is followed by an accompanying list of implementation guidelines related specifically to a school site selection process.

### **A. Comprehensive School District Plan**

1. Assemble available information on school facilities, maintenance history, floor plans, etc.  
Part of the initial challenge in getting a comprehensive school district plan underway is simply compiling all of the relevant data necessary to provide the planning team with an accurate picture of current conditions within the system. It is advantageous for school districts to begin this step in the process prior to hiring a planning consultant so that they can identify any areas of deficiency in their current data which may need to be added to the consultant's scope of work. For instance, school districts often have trouble keeping demographic records up to date and thus might ask the planning consultant to revise their current statistics and make projections about future enrollment trends. Similarly, few school districts keep current facility assessments on hand, tending to respond to maintenance and renovation needs more often on a case-by-case basis. Thus, a district would want to ask for facility assessment services from their consultant up front so that this data can provide the foundation for a comparative analysis of all facilities in the district to determine priority improvements.

Regardless of the specific data needs, it is helpful to know where the shortfalls are ahead of time, so that these areas can be developed or expanded as part of the planning process.

2. Create a multi-disciplinary team  
No matter the size of the district, it is important to designate a team with the professional expertise to address all of the disciplines required to make a plan successful. In addition to architects, engineers, and educational planners, a comprehensive school district plan may require the services of a professional demographer, real estate consultant, and public relations specialist among others. However, even with this level of professional expertise, a plan's ultimate success is dependant upon the strength of the partnership between the school officials, the local community and the planning team.
3. Define a community engagement process, including Oversight Committee, public workshops and detailed school briefings. Define effective mechanisms for communication, utilizing print and video media, school newsletters, etc.  
The most successful plans are typically the most inclusive from the standpoint of public involvement. Community engagement not only ensures that the plan will be accepted

once completed, but often enhances the content of the plan in terms of bold ideas. The key to a successful community engagement process is to offer multiple opportunities for public involvement and communication. Do not rely on a single workshop to engage your constituents. Plan a workshop and promote it on a website or via a public newsletter and ask for feedback. Give the community several opportunities to provide input, not just at an initial public kick-off meeting. By designating an Oversight Committee with representation from a broad range of stakeholder groups, the plan can benefit from community partnerships that allow the school district to maximize local resources. Consider inviting a member of the local press to participate on the Oversight Committee to assist with effective communication and promotion of the plan.

4. Define planning assumptions and issues

In addition to a thorough assessment of the physical conditions in the district, it is critical to define the planning assumptions that will guide the process. For example, it is important to establish basic guidelines such as:

- Maximum/minimum class size by grade level
- Maximum/minimum school size for elementary, middle and high schools
- Maximum/minimum site size
- Will the system operate with “neighborhood schools” or with “school choice” policy?
- What methods will be used to achieve/maintain diversity
- What is the policy regarding “shared space” with neighboring facilities
- What community uses or functions should be considered in the schools?
- What criteria will be used to dispose of properties that are no longer needed?
- What criteria will be used to decide when to open or close a school?
- What administrative functions need to be “centralized” vs. “decentralized”?
- What funding mechanisms should be considered?
- What changes in organizational structure should be considered?

5. Conduct facility assessments for each site

An up to date inventory of facility assessments must be prepared by qualified architects and engineers, if not already available. Assessments should include facility history, maintenance records, current warranties, site size, floor plans, etc. The goal is to provide the planning team with an accurate snapshot of existing conditions at each site in the system. In addition, records of all land holdings owned by the system are critical, including site size, topography, zoning and adjacencies.

6. Assemble, prepare demographic projections

An important tool used by planners to determine the future needs of a school system will be reliable demographic projections for a ten-year horizon. Many school systems track their enrollments on a yearly basis, but few have accurate demographic projections or the ability to compile them. Thus, it is important to make sure that a planning team has a professional demographer under contract to generate the baseline data and future projections necessary for effective system-wide planning. The demographer will not only utilize the school system’s enrollment database to assess historical trends, but also will rely on census data and other local, regional and national population statistics to determine the anticipated future student growth in the system.

7. Assimilate other plans for their impacts on the school system, including revitalization, new development, and redevelopment

While demographic projections are a good indicator of future enrollment trends, they should be considered in conjunction with an assessment of concurrent planning and development efforts that may impact the school system. It is helpful to form a partnership between the school system and the local planning authority to ensure that efforts between both entities are coordinated.

8. Create list of alternatives by school “cluster”

Providing detailed planning recommendations/alternatives for the school district is the ultimate goal of any comprehensive school district planning process. However, it can be overwhelming and daunting for school administrators, parents, and other stakeholders to be presented with an exhaustive laundry list of system-wide recommended actions. Thus, it is helpful to provide alternatives based on school clusters (elementary, middle and high schools which serve a particular geographic area and feed into each other) as well as for the district as a whole. In this way, those affected by the recommended changes in a particular cluster can zero in on the specifics, rather than getting bogged down in the overall intent of the district plan. The intent is not to undermine the district level plan, but to compliment it by providing a smaller sub-set of local alternatives that can be reviewed and discussed in greater detail by constituent groups.

9. Present school recommendations; allow time for debate and review

As with many planning initiatives, comprehensive school district plans have the potential to be controversial based on their ability to impact district lines and raise issues of socio-economic equity. It is critical to allow time in the planning process for thoughtful review, debate and, if necessary, modification. Without this critical step in the process, it is impossible to ensure local support for the plan.

10. Conduct property analysis for excess properties

Often it is the case that a school district will have excess holdings in the form of discontinued schools or vacant land. These properties can offer good alternatives for temporary relocation during renovations or as potential sites to meet growing demands throughout the district. However, sometimes these holdings are nothing more than surplus real estate that, if sold, could generate valuable resources for the district. It is critical that the planning process address these sites to determine the best short and long-term strategies for their use. If it is determined that the district has excess properties that need to be disposed of, it is helpful to retain the services of a qualified real estate market firm to assist in the marketing and sale of such holdings.

11. Create implementation strategy

A realistic implementation strategy can determine the overall success of the plan. The strategy should identify key partnerships, timing, and funding sources. It should also provide the district with a departmental breakdown of who is responsible for what action. The strategy should be developed with the input of those charged with bringing it to fruition.



## B. School Site Selection Process

### 1. Assemble a site selection committee

A site selection process should be guided by a committee of community stakeholders. The committee should include members of the local school board, faculty and administrative representatives (ideally the future principal if known), parents, students, neighborhood representatives, area business leaders, local government representatives from the jurisdiction's planning department, and any institutional liaisons from adjacent entities such as a housing authority, YMCA, public library or other community facility. While this might seem like an unwieldy number of people to manage, it is critical to include a broad cross-section of interest groups to ensure support for the ultimate site recommendation and to maximize the sharing of valuable planning and development information among all affected parties.

### 2. Define planning assumptions and issues

As mentioned previously, a comprehensive school district plan is useful in identifying some of the basic planning assumptions and issues that will guide a site selection process (refer to item #4 in previous section). Fundamentally, one of the most important relationships to consider in the context of a site selection process is consistency with the jurisdiction's future land use plan and comprehensive plan. Additional issues for consideration include:

- *Site size* - There are certain minimum requirements mandated by the Georgia State Board of Education particularly with regard to site size:  
Elementary Schools – five acres plus one acre for each 100 children in full time enrollment (FTE).  
Middle Schools – 12 acres plus one acre for each 100 children in FTE.  
High Schools – 20 acres plus one acre for each 100 students in FTE.

These acreage requirements can be challenging when trying to locate a new school within an already developed urban area. Thus, deviations from minimum acreage may be made by the site selection committee if the reduced acreage is considered appropriate. Although minimum acreages are established, large acreages are highly desirable. Also, those responsible for selecting sites must remain aware of development limitations imposed by certain physical factors of the acreage being considered. The size of the school may not be the only criterion affecting site size. The possibility of expansion, anticipated community use of the school or the area, and the school program are other factors to consider.

- *Availability of utilities* – Utilities essential to the operation of a modern school plant (such as electricity and telephone service) must be accessible to the proposed site. The desirability of public water and sewerage service to a school site cannot be over emphasized. The cost of installing private systems, along with continuing maintenance costs, plus environmental considerations all but eliminate consideration of private installations. This is a key coordination issue between the school board and the local planning department to determine where to develop new school sites consistent with the intended land use plan of the community.
- *Safety hazards* – The school site should be free of conditions and installations that endanger the life, safety and health of children. In making this determination, it is helpful to review the Georgia Department of Education's list of potential hazards, which may exist on or near a proposed school site (the list is

provided on page 5 of their document “A Guide to School Site Selection”). If one of these is located on or near (up to a three mile radius) a proposed school site, then a “Risk/Hazard Analysis” completed by a registered, professional engineer shall be required.

- *Environmental factors* – The school site should possess physically desirable characteristics and be located so surrounding areas reflect characteristics conducive to the development of attitudes and responses in children considered to be socially, culturally and economically desirable. Whenever possible, the selection of a school site in an area zoned for commercial or industrial development should be avoided. The routes to and from the school site should not expose children to hazardous environmental materials or safety hazards. Thus, the list of potential school sites should be informed by the jurisdiction’s future land use plan and consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in their comprehensive plan.
  - *Geographical and related factors* – The school site should provide convenient accessibility, be supportive to an efficient transportation system, be accessible to community services needed by the school and be appropriately located with respect to other schools and the population to be served. A letter of assurance that the site is not in a flood plain or the Coastal High Hazard Area must accompany all school site approvals.
  - *Site development* – The physical characteristics of the school site should be such that the cost of grading, drainage and development will be relatively low. The evaluation of a site as it relates to physical development is a technical task, requiring the knowledge and experience of a qualified professional. The site selection committee may wish to retain the services of an architect or planning firm to make an initial evaluation as to the feasibility of site development among the preferred future school locations.
  - *Acquisition cost* – Undue consideration given to the value or acquisition cost of a school site can be false economy, and often has proven to be very expensive in the end. However, given that school boards and local governments are working with limited funding for capital improvements and new development projects, there are some inherent advantages to the formation of a partnership between these two entities:
    - Maximization of limited financial resources by combining available funding
    - Opportunities for shared facilities serving multiple user groups
    - Integration of key community services within a specific development area
3. Review relevant planning documents (future land use plan and comprehensive plan)  
Coordination between the site selection committee and the local planning department is essential to ensure consistency between preferred site options and the jurisdiction’s future land use plan and comprehensive plan. Ideally, this level of coordination should occur at the macro-level within the context of the jurisdiction’s comprehensive school district plan. When this is accomplished, it makes it easy for site-specific decisions to flow from the preliminary recommendations included in that document. However, in the absence of a comprehensive school district plan, it is still necessary to evaluate potential school sites in terms of their appropriateness based on desired development patterns outlined by the local planning department.

4. Identify a list of potential sites  
The site selection committee should compile a preliminary list of preferred sites for further evaluation. This initial list should identify sites that are consistent with the jurisdiction's future land use plan and comprehensive plan, if applicable.
5. Conduct a feasibility assessment of each site  
Once a list of potential sites has been determined, then a more detailed evaluation should be conducted based on the criteria outlined in items 2 and 3 of this section.
6. Review existing and proposed development plans that may impact site selection  
The site selection committee should work with the local planning department and business leaders to review any existing or proposed development plans that may affect the land use pattern or future population of school-age children near the proposed school site. This step is intended to eliminate the possibility for any future "surprises" in terms of unanticipated development projects that might undermine the preferred location and size of the proposed new school facility.
7. Present site recommendations; allow time for debate and review  
Based on a thorough evaluation of the various site selection criteria, the committee should make a site recommendation to the school board. In addition, the committee should present their methodology and final recommendation to the public for review and comment as well.
8. Revise future land use plan to reflect approved school site  
Once the local school board has approved the recommended new school site, then the board of education and local planning department should work together to revise the jurisdiction's future land use plan to reflect the new school site and any proposed related development occurring within the vicinity of that site. This partnership should be indicative of ongoing cooperation the jurisdiction's board of education and its local government representatives.

## **V. Lessons Learned**

This tool has provided the rationale and implementation guidelines for linking school siting initiatives to local land use planning. Fundamentally, this tool suggests that a school siting initiative benefits from two conditions in particular:

1. A strong partnership between the board of education and the local government (specifically the planning department), to ensure consistency and coordination between the growth objectives of the school board and the desired development patterns for the community.
2. The presence of a comprehensive school district plan to provide the baseline data and planning context for rational decision-making regarding the size, location and design features of new educational facilities within the district.

In addition to these guiding principles, below is a summary of other key issues addressed in this review of the relationship between school siting and land use planning:

Planning assumptions are a critical first step – Establishing a baseline of guiding principles or planning assumptions is critical to keeping the site selection process on track. This can be

achieved by developing a clear picture of existing conditions (i.e. the current status of the district, shared beliefs, and a collective vision). To achieve a common knowledge based on current conditions, it is helpful to review such information as:

- Community demographic studies
- A district-wide strategic plan
- Local land use plan
- Comprehensive plan
- Learning goals, student achievement data, and graduation requirements
- State and national standards
- Attitudes and perspectives of stakeholders

Consider the vision. To achieve a common “future focus,” review such information as:

- Current research and best practices on effective schools and effective practices
- Future development trends and potential implications for students, schools, and communities
- Changing workplace needs and expectations
- Innovative models from other districts and communities

Rational data objectifies decision-making – As mentioned previously, nothing stirs impassioned debate quite like issues related to our children. School site selection and facilities planning can bring to light many of the most challenging and complicated issues facing our children and society as a whole. Issues such as equity, socio-economic status, race, class, and gender are among the minefields waiting to derail the process. The most effective way to address these issues is to objectify them as much as possible through the lens of rational data. Decisions made on the basis of fact are much easier to accept than those that stem from personal opinion or emotional response.

Community involvement is important – A successful site selection process draws on expertise from a range of professional disciplines and community representatives. At the professional level, it is important to include educators, architects, planners, engineers, demographers, and developers. However, the site selection committee must involve community stakeholders in the process from the beginning. These individuals would include: parents, students, business leaders, clergy, local government officials, community organizations and the media. By encouraging respectful and productive communication among diverse constituencies, a broad-based site selection process can result in a superior result than one developed solely by the local school board or any other single group. Furthermore, an inclusive planning process can forge renewed commitment to our schools. People tend to support what they help create.

Planning raises the profile of public education and the involvement of affected parents, students and communities with the school system – A coordinated school planning and site selection process is a very effective mechanism for engaging the public and creating a sense of ownership in the educational system and network of public facilities that serve the community. When school siting is consistent with land use planning, it reinforces a community’s awareness of the value of precious resources and the benefits of collaboration between local entities. The amassed synergy of shared decision-making, problem solving and goal setting can build a strong foundation for collective responsibility and enduring support for schools. It can be a model on a small scale of how our society itself might become.

Planning facilitates partnerships for community use, joint facilities – When schools are viewed as centers for the whole community, a wide range of possibilities emerges and, along with these

possibilities, a new set of needs. If, for instance, the school is to become a resource for lifelong learning – for retraining dislocated workers, teaching computer skills to seniors, connecting families to the information highway – then provisions will be needed, among other things, for ensuring that school facilities can be accessible “after hours.” The site selection committee should be encouraged to think broadly about land use conditions within the community as well as specifically about conditions in classrooms and schools.

School district plans can set the framework that allows site-specific planning and modification – The best plans are flexible and dynamic. A school district plan will provide the framework in which specific facility-based or site decisions can be made. While the district plan may not achieve a level of specificity that will prescribe unique individual actions at every school in the district, it should provide the decision-making framework for ongoing site specific planning and modification.

School facility planning can help shape development patterns – School facility planning should be considered a smart growth tool by virtue of the fact that locating a new school in a community or renovating and expanding one that is already there makes a physical investment in that place that will attract residents and all of the commercial support and services they require. Thus, school siting decisions and investment strategies should be coordinated with the future land use plan of a community. Good schools are often the single most important factor in determining where a family will live. Schools can be used to reinvigorate deteriorating neighborhoods and create a strong foundation for new communities.

Plans must be updated and monitored – Just as plans should be flexible and dynamic, they must be updated and monitored in order to remain valid roadmaps in an ever-changing environment. Most school district plans have a five-year lifespan, which is consistent with the schedule for comprehensive plan updates. These two planning documents should inform each other so that school siting decisions are supportive of a community’s growth and development objectives and visa versa.

## **VI. Additional Resources**

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## **VII. Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Case Studies**

#### **Case Study #1: Statewide Efforts – Florida and New Jersey**

*The following case study discusses two examples of state level requirements for school districts and local governments to consider the relationship between school planning and growth management.*

Recently two states, Florida and New Jersey, have approved legislation requiring local school districts to complete comprehensive school facilities plans in order to be eligible for state funding to meet the current and future educational needs of students and community. In Florida, this action is the result of a report prepared in February 2001 by the Florida Growth Management Study Commission. Their report made 89 recommendations for revisions to the state's growth management laws including those addressing school facilities planning. Specifically, their recommendation was to require that each local government adopt a financially feasible public schools facilities element, within the context of their comprehensive plan, to reflect the integration of school board facilities, work programs, and the future land use element and capital improvement programs of the local government (school concurrency). This exceeds typical comprehensive plan requirements in most states, which necessitate only a community facilities element (including school facilities among others), rather than a stand-alone document on school facilities.

Similarly, in New Jersey, the state legislature passed a law known as the "Education Facilities Construction and Financing Act" (EFCFA) during their May 2000 session. The intent of this law is to mandate that each district prepare and submit to the Commissioner of Education a long-range facilities plan that includes an educational adequacy inventory of all existing school facilities in the district, the identification of all deficiencies in the district's current inventory of school facilities, and the district's proposed plan for future construction and renovation. The plan must be prepared and submitted every five years. Furthermore, the law recognizes the fundamental connection between land use planning and school siting as referenced in passages such as, "The location of school facilities in the context of the communities which they serve is important to both the educational success of the schools and the development of those

communities. It is highly desirable, particularly in urban communities where the State has indicated a particular concern respecting local development efforts, that the planning and construction of schools be integrated where possible into the economic and community development efforts of local governments and community redevelopment entities in order to promote more effective and efficient use of land, resources and expertise and to better assure the future viability of local neighborhoods and communities.”

New Jersey and Florida are ahead of the game in terms of strengthening their administrative, regulatory, and reporting requirements related to schools facilities planning. They recognize that the needs of local school districts are overwhelming and that the funding for billions of dollars in capital improvements is simply not available. In an attempt to respond to this, some states have passed bills allowing local school districts to place a half penny local option sales tax on the ballot. While this offers an effective mechanism to raise the funds necessary to support aggressive capital improvement programs, voters are more likely to offer their continued support if districts can demonstrate success based on community involvement in comprehensive facilities planning initiatives that are monitored and updated on a regular basis.

### **Case Study #2: Large District Case Study – Atlanta Public Schools**

*The following case study discusses the implementation of a comprehensive school district plan in a large urban area.*



The Atlanta Public Schools (APS) serves approximately 58,000 students dispersed throughout a system of almost 100 school facilities of widely varying age and condition. In addition, the system owns over 30 discontinued schools, 13 vacant properties, and 12 administrative and support buildings.

In light of these conditions, along with concerns about declining student performance and escalating operations and maintenance costs, APS recognized in 1998 the need to embark upon a comprehensive facilities master plan for renovation/construction of all instructional facilities. The fundamental goal was the creation of positive learning environments for every student in the system.

Previously, APS had established a strategic plan for improving student performance including whole school reform, annual performance targets and accountability measures. However, the initiation of a comprehensive facilities master plan provided a practical mechanism whereby the system could engage the community in a planning and decision-making process to address the serious challenges facing the system, including:

- A wide disparity in school facilities and facility conditions.
- An oversupply of undersized schools and small school sites resulting from the system’s commitment to neighborhood-based schools.
- Higher than average operations and maintenance expenses due to numerous aging facilities.

- A condition of excess capacity in some locations and overcrowding in others due to the fact that schools and attendance zones were not aligned with current population patterns.
- In many cases, school attendance zones did not correspond to natural geographic boundaries and the zones failed to provide a feeder system that would allow children to remain together as they matriculate.
- Scattered administrative and support facilities.

Throughout the 1990's, APS attempted to deal with these challenges by undertaking significant capital investment programs, including the Certificate of Participation for Schools (COPS) Program, Bond Program, and a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) Program. This strategy was not without its share of successes and, as a result, numerous renovation, addition and new school construction projects were completed under the leadership of the in-house division known as the APS Construction Management Team. However, decisions were made on a school-by-school basis rather than within the context of a comprehensive district plan. This resulted in dramatic improvements at some facilities, while others remained neglected. Furthermore, the decision-making and prioritization process associated with these capital improvement programs was ineffective at addressing the City's shifting demographic patterns resulting in inconsistent school enrollments system-wide.

In 1999, APS launched a facilities master plan initiative, known as the *Build Smart Project*, to provide a more comprehensive framework for completing facility improvements and achieving the system's goals over the five-year period from 2000-2005, with built-in flexibility to accommodate inevitable change and respond to financial considerations. The *Build Smart Project* relied on the talents of a multidisciplinary planning team working in close partnership with APS staff. The planning team drew strength from professional expertise in the following areas: architecture, engineering, educational planning, demography, public relations, community participation, and real estate market analysis. The team was charged with the task of providing detailed assessments of all facilities in the system and associated recommendations to support the system's planned program of instruction in first-class facilities outfitted for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The planning process was defined by three distinct phases of work:

- **Phase I: Issue Definition (1½ months)**
  - Appoint Oversight Committee and Engage Planning Team
  - Policy and Process Definition
  - Gathering of Information
  - Facility Assessments
- **Phase II: Analysis (1½ months)**
  - Facility Analysis
  - Space Allocation Analysis
  - Demographic Analysis
  - Real Estate Analysis
  - Financial Analysis
- **Phase III: Evaluation and Recommendations (3 months)**
  - Community Workshops
  - Facility Recommendations
  - School Zone Recommendations
  - School Closure/Consolidation Recommendations
  - Real Estate Disposition Recommendations
  - Financial Packaging

Upon completion, the *Build Smart Project* resulted in detailed recommendations for all facilities within the system, instructional, administrative, and athletic facilities. In total, the number of APS instructional facilities was reduced from 97 to 86 traditional schools, and the number of non-traditional schools was increased from six to eight. The plan recommended up to ten new/reconstructed facilities, up to six new/reconstructed facilities created by school consolidation, and at least 24 major renovation/new construction projects. The plan supports the system's aggressive objective to touch every school facility in order to implement a planned program of instruction in first-class educational facilities with the most up to date technological enhancements. This work is a parallel effort to the system's ongoing capital improvement programs of maintenance and repair.

### **Case Study #3: Smaller District Case Study – Dougherty County School System**

*The following case study discusses the implementation of a comprehensive school district plan in a small suburban community.*

The Dougherty County School System (DCSS) serves approximately 16,500 students residing in and around Albany, Georgia. The system operates 26 facilities, many of which were built between 1952 and 1968. Few schools were renovated in the 1970s and 1980s and most facilities were not maintained to a high level during the last 30 years due to a lack of funding for capital improvements. However, due to an administrative change in system leadership and in anticipation of a bond referendum to be considered by voters in March 2002, DCSS initiated a comprehensive facilities master plan to address system needs over the next five years. If passed, the "Special Tax for Educational Purposes" (STEP) could provide funding for up to \$100 million in capital improvements for the school system.

The planning team for this initiative is led by Urban Collage, Inc., a firm that brings expertise in educational facilities planning based on five years experience working with the Atlanta Public Schools. The multi-disciplinary team also includes Goode Van Slyke Architects, T.W. Tucker & Associates, Butler & Associates, and SOWEGA Engineering. The planning process is based on a three-phase approach over a 6-month period. The phases are:

- **Phase I: Planning Framework**

The planning effort began with an intense two-day schedule of back-to-back interviews with key DCSS administrators and staff, including representatives from the system's facilities maintenance, operations, instruction, and finance departments. The planning team worked with school officials to define the architectural and instructional programs to be addressed at each facility. In addition, teachers, students, parents and school board members were interviewed and asked to describe their expectations and vision for the future of the system. This effort produced a five-page document summarizing a list of 19 key planning assumptions and issues to be addressed in the context of the master plan.

- **Phase II: Facility Assessments**

The second phase of work focused on gathering additional data related to the existing conditions and identified needs at all 26 facilities within the system. Concurrently, a summary of development trends and demographic projections was compiled to provide an accurate context for the planning recommendations. The result is a detailed "System Profile," which provides an inventory and assessment of all DCSS facilities and enumerates the needs and future planning considerations for each.

- **Phase III: Analysis and Recommendations**

The final phase of work will result in specific recommendations related to facility improvements, new construction, redistricting, and operations.

Community outreach is an important component of the process and will occur throughout each phase of the plan. Similarly, an Oversight Committee, of approximately 30 individuals from diverse backgrounds within the community, will guide the process and assist system administrators in informing the public with key information and keeping the plan on track. In addition to prioritizing much needed capital improvements throughout the system, one of the greatest challenges that the DCSS will face is dealing with the issue of redistricting. This is necessary in order to implement a system neighborhood schools, direct feeder patterns for elementary, middle and high schools, and to revise attendance zones that reflect court-ordered desegregation initiatives dating from the late 1960s.

The plan is expected to be substantially complete by the end of March 2002. It will outline the priority improvement projects within the system, including new schools, school consolidations and closings. The plan will also propose revised school attendance zones to address issues of equity and respond to the changing demographic and development patterns in and around the city of Albany.

#### **Case Study #4: Site Study – Henry Ford Academy, Concordia Architects**

*The following case study examines a unique approach to shared educational facilities and the benefits of partnerships between the public and private sector.*

As public school systems throughout the country strive to come up with effective mechanisms to deal with crumbling buildings, declining test scores, shifting demographics and limited educational funding, the latest theories of school design are being turned inside out to tap into local community resources. The educational planner at the forefront of this movement is Steven Bingler, principal of Concordia, a nationally recognized planning and design firm based in New Orleans, Louisiana. In recent years, Bingler has traveled across the country lecturing and writing about his firm's community-based approach to school design.

One of the best examples of this approach is the Henry Ford Academy in Dearborn, Michigan, which opened in 1997. This public charter high school project is run independently under contract with several school districts in the area and is based on a strategic partnership of the Ford Motor Company, the Henry Ford Museum and the Wayne County Regional Service Agency. The partnership resulted in producing a state-of-the-art facility for one-third the cost of a stand-alone school. Located at the 80-acre Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, this innovative 9-12 grade school gives students access to the museum's 26 million documents and one million artifacts, including Thomas Edison's laboratory and a Buckminster Fuller house. The educational program also offers built-in mentorships with some of the most experienced museum curators in the country. Unique in its physical structure, the Henry Ford Academy furnishes students with a tangible hands-on learning environment.

According to Bingler, the Henry Ford Academy is a premiere model of synergy resulting in economy and sustainability. It is a project that came to life through Bingler's participatory design process in which each partner had a significant stake. The Ford Motor Company knows that the success of the future global workforce will require innovation and ingenuity. As for the museum, it was Henry Ford's dream that the artifacts he collected would be used to provide a broad-based education in both the academic and practical disciplines. The Wayne County school district is interested in exploring new models of learning and recognizes the important benefits of working with the corporate community, where most of its students will eventually apply the lessons of their educational labors. By working collaboratively, these partners have produced a compelling and exemplary learning environment at a cost savings to taxpayers of

over \$4 million for facilities alone. This is largely due to Bingler's efforts to utilize what already exists – the museum's employee dining area is now also a cafeteria, and students are also using its restrooms. Of course this powerful idea of two institutions coming together was met with much skepticism early on by museum staff horrified by the idea that the kids would be eating their cafeteria and handling precious artifacts. However, so far their fears have not been realized, as the kids have demonstrated that they are among the best behaved in the cafeteria and that they care about the museum's objects as much as the curators do.

Bingler is a champion of economic necessity leading to innovation – a reminder that some of the most productive and compelling learning environments are not those that stand alone, but those that are integrated, energizing, cooperative and efficient. With bond referendums failing across the nation, Bingler strives to encourage educational planners to stop thinking about buildings as having only a single use. To that end, he has begun talking to the beleaguered Washington, D.C., school system about developing a master plan especially suitable for the nation's capital. Bingler suggests that there could be a school at the Library of Congress, the Department of Justice, and the Museum of American History, and that all of them could be connected to the Henry Ford Museum via the Internet. Such big ideas are likely to encounter resistance initially, but Bingler's aim is to use architecture and planning as a catalyst for change. Though much of his work remains unbuilt, Bingler's approach is promising in that it integrates the school into its surroundings and has potential for restoring a community's faith in its public schools.

#### **Case Study #5: Optional Public School Facilities Element– Orange County, Florida**

*The following case study examines one district's approach to linking school planning and land use through an optional element within their comprehensive plan.*

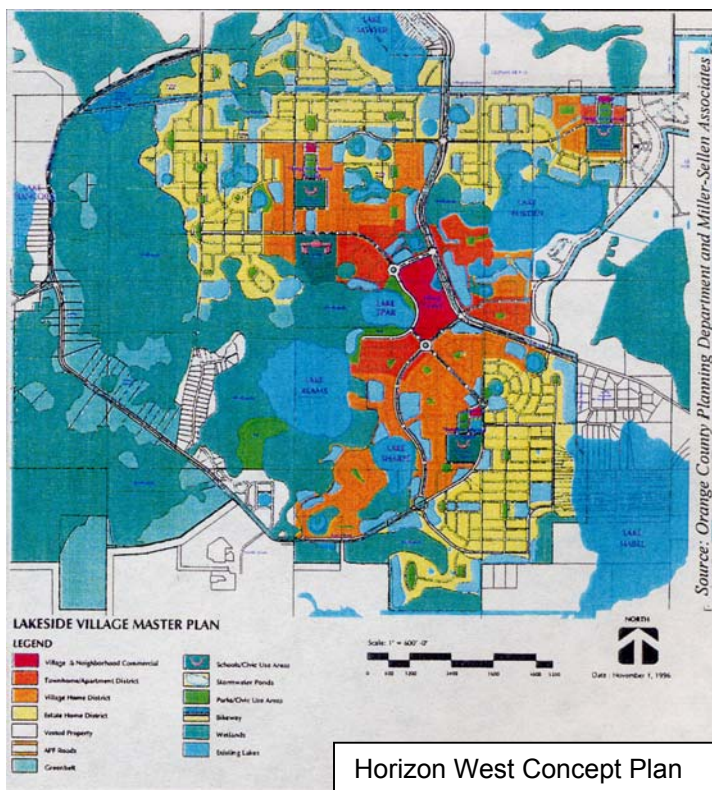
Like many Sunbelt states, Florida enjoyed unprecedented growth during the last three decades. While growth has presented positive opportunities for Florida, it has also brought serious challenges, not the least of which is the overcrowding of schools and the inability to catch up with the booming residential growth of the 1980s. In response to this situation, the Orange County Planning Department, in conjunction with Orange County Public Schools, drafted a Public Schools Facilities Element as an optional component of their 1998 Comprehensive Policy Plan.

The Goals, Objectives and Policies section of the Orange County Public Schools Facilities Element addresses many of the strategic issues related to the important link between school siting and land use planning. A brief summary is provided below:

1. *Goal: Provide a community of support for the positive development and growth of all children.*  
Objective:
  - Strengthen family and children services.
2. *Goal: Make schools a cornerstone of community planning and design.*  
Objectives:
  - Enhance community/neighborhood design through the joint use of educational facilities.
  - Enhance community/neighborhood design through effective school facility design and siting standards.
3. *Goal: Provide safe and secure schools in healthy, well-designed neighborhoods.*  
Objectives:
  - Ensure security and safety of children.

- Coordinate juvenile justice services with educational needs.
4. *Goal: Support School Board efforts to ensure that adequate capital facilities and technology resources are available to support the educational mission of public schools.*
- Objectives:
- Support School Board programs to effectively and efficiently manage existing capital funds and resources.
  - Support supplemental and alternative sources for school capital funding.
  - Manage the timing of new development to coordinate with adequate school capacity.
5. *Goal: Promote and optimize intergovernmental cooperation for effective operation of the public school system in a multi-jurisdictional environment.*
- Objectives:
- Maximize the opportunities to share information.
  - Clearly identify in the Future Land Use Element and in the Land Development Code the land use categories in which schools shall be an allowable use.
  - Establish Expedited School Siting Processes.
  - Ensure Effective Processes for Reserving School Sites.

Orange County realized that the only way to address the problems faced by their schools was to combine the optional Public Schools Facilities Element with other efforts such as a school siting ordinance and updated impact fees. Their strategy acknowledges the critical support and necessary partnerships with the development community, the community at large, the Orange County Board of Commissioners and the Orange County School Board. The result has been a coordinated approach related to land use and school siting which includes encouraging a mix of land uses, including civic uses, and reserving school sites and donating them, if necessary, to attract new schools.



One Orange County project in particular has received numerous accolades for its innovative planning concepts. Known as Horizon West, this project utilizes schools as the cornerstone for its residential neighborhoods. Orange County conceived the Horizon West concept to create a long range planning vision that utilizes the neighborhood as a building block to achieve growth in a complete, compact and integrated urban form. Through a series of public meetings, the Horizon West Village Land Use Classification was created for southwest Orange County. The "Village" concept provides for development within separate, distinct, master-planned villages.

The prototypical village will contain up to four neighborhoods, each with an elementary school located in the neighborhood center. The neighborhoods will be focused around the village center, which may include a middle school. It is anticipated that by 2010 the first Horizon West village will be completed and include three elementary schools and one middle school site.