



# Sustainability District

Create a sustainability district (2030 District).

## WHAT IS IT?

A sustainability district, or green district, is a designated neighborhood to implement district-scale infrastructure, design solutions, and technology to meet sustainability goals. Sustainability districts utilize design and/or rezoning principles to encourage “dense, transit-oriented, mixed-use developments,” integrating renewable energy and green technologies.

District-wide sustainability planning provides key advantages for sustainability goals. At a district level, resource aggregation and efficiency can be optimized through renewable energy projects (such as community-shared solar), district energy systems, or onsite water treatment that share excess water between properties. Compared to a single building scale, community-wide projects have lower development costs and achieve greater reductions in operating costs from energy and water efficiency.

Increasingly, sustainability districts are also being designed to create social diversity and urban revitalization. By zoning residential areas for various sizes and types of housing, sustainability can attract a diverse population and support affordable housing options. The addition of innovative design elements can also revitalize vacant or blighted areas of a city. By encouraging transit-oriented development, sustainability districts can attract new residents.

The City of Cincinnati created the state's first official 2030 District in 2018. The City's built environment currently accounts for 60% of their greenhouse gas emissions; therefore, the City has created a corresponding goal to reduce their buildings' energy use, water consumption, and transportation emissions by 50% by the year 2030. In pursuit of this goal, the district includes 392 buildings with over 26 million square feet as participants in the district. The Cincinnati regional sustainability alliance, the Green Umbrella, is managing this project in partnership with the local government.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- In a study by McKinsey, sustainability districts across the globe saw environmental benefits including:
  - 20-40% reduction in energy consumption
  - 60-65% reduction in freshwater consumption and wastewater production
  - 25% landfill diversion for solid waste
  - 50-80% reduction in distance traveled by private-vehicles
- Sustainability districts provide an opportunity for cities to pilot sustainability initiatives on a larger scale than individual buildings or individual blocks.
- These districts can also proactively combat gentrification unintentionally caused by greening efforts with innovative planning solutions that promote diversity, equity, and regeneration.

## BENEFITS



**Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from energy efficiency, renewable energy projects, and single occupancy vehicle use**



**More efficient resource allocation overall, including energy, water, wastewater, and solid waste**



**Local jobs created by concentrating green development**



**Improve housing stock and diversity in green communities**

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## HOW CAN COMMUNITIES IMPLEMENT THIS POLICY?

Cities can utilize digital tools and inclusive planning processes to set ambitious goals in an actionable Open Space and Recreation Plan.

- **Utilize mapping software to identify existing open spaces or potential sites for conversion.** By visualizing the data on open spaces, the city can understand where increasing access to open space is most needed. Additionally, filters for sites such as vacant lots or brownfields can help transition unproductive space into new sites. When this data is available to the public, it can also encourage grassroots projects to create new open spaces.
- **Engage a variety of stakeholders in planning and implementation.** The city should engage environmental organizations, community-based organizations, private businesses, and academic institutions in the planning and implementation processes. These groups can provide valuable insights into community needs, economic benefits, environmental benefits, and public health impacts. For implementation, these partners can contribute volunteer hours or capital to help achieve shared goals of community development, environmental protection, and equity.
- **Create an Open Space and Recreation Plan for the City.** Cities can create a strategic plan to prioritize strategies to expand open spaces. Policies can include internal processes to convert vacant lands into open spaces or streamline permitting processes for community-based projects that convert brownfields or vacant spaces.
- **Prioritize pilot projects to increase community engagement.** Cities should create internal criteria to prioritize sites for open space development, which may include elements such as reuse of vacant or polluted space, equity, and potential environmental impact. Once the criteria is developed, the city should engage partners to encourage applications for pilot projects and participation in greenlighted pilots.
- **Identify equity-related goals for the Plan.** Through the Open Space and Recreation Plan, cities can identify areas where open spaces will be most impactful. With mapping data, the city can see where access to open space is the lowest and needs to be increased. Additionally, the city can determine where community gardens would be most beneficial for low-income residents or areas with food deserts to increase the availability of fresh foods.