

Indicators, Benchmarks, Targets

Packet Synopsis

The packet folder is entitled **Indicators**, but an indicator is just a data point. However, the same data collected over time can be plotted and used for analysis.

Indicators are often used in conjunction with a **benchmark** or a reference point that is used to evaluate performance.

Indicators are generally used in conjunction with a **target** or the value one is striving for. A **benchmark** can be a **target**.

In land use planning, **indicators**, **benchmarks** and **targets** are used as means of measuring performance in attaining the goals a community has established in its comprehensive land use plan.

An excellent Minnesota example of the use of **indicators** is *Minnesota Milestones 2002*. *Minnesota Milestones* began in 1991 in the belief that a shared vision, clear goals and measurement of results would lead to a better future for Minnesota. The report uses 70 progress indicators to determine whether the state is achieving 19 publicly determined goals. The goals are grouped in four broad areas: People, Community and Democracy, Economy and Environment. The report is available in PDF format at

<http://www.mnplan.state.mn.us/mm/>

As a starting point, readers are encouraged to read the summary of *Minnesota Milestones 2002*. This document provides a brief history and background on *Minnesota Milestones* as well as an overview on how Minnesota is progressing toward each goal. *Minnesota Milestones* also demonstrates the range of purposes where **indicators** can be used.

The following items in this packet have been selected because of their pertinence and informative content regarding the subject.

“Performance Measures: Tools for determining success”, Griesmer, Dr. James R., *Minnesota Cities*, April 1997 – addresses more than just land planning and management issues. For-profit organizations have the **indicator** of “the bottom line” or the profit or loss statement by which to judge performance. The author makes the point that not-for-profits, i.e. governments do not have such a clear cut measure and in order to develop and/or maintain public trust, performance measures are the way to help guide decision makers in the performance of their duties.

“Land Use and Planning Indicators”, *Creating Communities of Place*, Office of State Planning, Trenton, NJ, August, 1996 – first gives brief and understandable definitions of **indicators**, **targets** and **benchmarks**. It then goes on to explain how they can be used

and finally the importance of and criteria for selecting **indicators** and finally how to get started.

“Benchmarking: Finding Out How Your Community Measures Up”, Starn, Michael L., *Alabama Municipal Journal*, August 1997, Alabama League of Municipalities - is a reprint from the *Maine Townsman*. This a good description of **benchmarking** from the process to identifying what to **benchmark**, collecting information, determining performance gaps, communication, establishing improvement goals (**targets**), developing action plans, implementation and evaluating results.

“Neighborhood Indicators: A Review of the Literature and Assessment of Conceptual and Methodological Issues”, Sawicki, David S. and Patrice Flynn, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Spring 1995, Chicago, IL. – is a technical paper which literally is as its title describes. In the article’s sidebar, it notes that “recent developments in desktop GIS capabilities with the devolution of social programs to the local level have created the technology and the need for such indicators”. The sidebar then lists the four lessons that have been learned to date: 1. It is imperative that the numbers selected have public purpose; 2. Geographic indicators have special roles because policy is administered through geographic units; 3. One must differentiate between indicators that measure neighborhood wellbeing and those that measure its individuals’ wellbeing and 4. Indicators must be unbundled, i.e. not be tied to an overall index, or in quantitative analysis parlance, they must be independent variables.

“Monitoring Sustainability in Your Community”, Izaak Walton League of America, Gaithersburg, MD, 1995. - is a “how to” and a “what to” guide for measuring environmental sustainability. Sustainability is a major purpose of good land use planning. An updated and expanded version, published in 1998, is available by contacting the Izaak Walton League.

“Going by the Numbers: Using indicators to know where you’ve been – and where you’re going”, Andrews, James H., *Planning Practice*, September 1996, American Planning Association, Chicago, IL. – describes how community indicators have been used to measure a community’s quality of life which in turn has been used a community promotional tool. It makes the important point that “**Indicators** do not change policy. An **indicator** is nothing more than a signal.” and “Only with an action plan and action is an **indicator** likely to move.” Of interest is that all the examples describe began as non-official initiatives. Community quality of life is an essential rationale for land use planning.

INTERLIBRARY LOAN MATERIALS

The following on **indicators** can be borrowed via MnLINK.

2000 Hennepin County Community Indicators, Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development, Minneapolis, MN 2001.

Guide to Sustainable Community indicators, Maureen Hart, Hart Environmental Data, North Andover, MA, 1999.

LEGAL NOTES

There is nothing in Minnesota Statutes that require or preclude a county, city or township from employing or using these tools.

The **Local Planning Assistance Center at the Department of Administration** helps local governments with planning efforts, including comprehensive planning, zoning, hazard mitigation planning, GIS applications and development issues.

Upon request, this document will be made available in an alternate format, such as Braille, large print or audiotape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay Service at 800-627-3529 and ask for the Department of Administration.

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