

Transportation and Housing Alliance Toolkit

HOUSING CHAPTER OF COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

What is THA

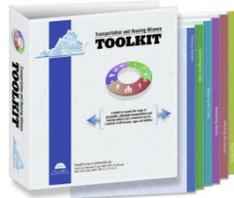
The Transportation and Housing Alliance was established by the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, with funding from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD), as a way to help meet the housing and transportation needs of people with disabilities. THA is established as a standing committee of the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions, with the goal of providing information, resources, technical assistance and education on accessibility and the interconnection between housing and transportation.

Planning in Virginia

The comprehensive plan is a guiding document that addresses multiple aspects of the community, providing a "comprehensive" vision for the future. This is typically a 20-year plan for the community, which addresses housing, transportation, land use, economic development and other topics. The State Code requires every jurisdiction (town, city and county) to adopt a comprehensive plan, which must be reviewed every five years.

According to the State Code, a Comprehensive Plan must address:

- The location of housing
- Affordable housing
- The housing needs of people with disabilities and the elderly



Refer to the THA Toolkit when developing the Housing Chapter of your Comprehensive Plan

The THA Toolkit is a complete catalog of resources that can assist with developing or updating the housing chapter of a comprehensive plan. It refers to several web based sources and provides guidance that can help you collect necessary data, determine the ideal location for housing and include people that are typically left out of the planning process.

Getting to Know the THA Toolkit

THA developed the *Toolkit* to help provide a better understanding of the transportation and housing needs of people with disabilities and others who may otherwise be excluded from the planning process. It is a catalog of tools with instructions and tips on how to collect and analyze information on your community. The *Toolkit* was expanded in 2007, when THA added a section that focuses on analyzing employment and economic market conditions.

While the Transportation and Housing Alliance recognizes the importance of employment and transportation, their biggest focus is on how they are related to housing issues. The *Toolkit* offers a holistic approach to addressing these relationships, which is helpful for developing or updating the housing chapter for a comprehensive plan.

State Code Requirements

The State Code requires that all governing bodies adopt a comprehensive plan for their jurisdiction. These plans must address several key topics, with housing as one of the most fundamental. There are also requirements that the comprehensive plan must include "the designation of areas and implementation of measures for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of affordable housing." The Code says the plan must determine "the need for affordable housing in both the locality and planning district within which it is situated." The General Assembly also adopted legislation that required localities to consider the housing needs of people with disabilities and the elderly in their comprehensive plan, which was effective July 1, 2008.

Typical Tasks and Components to Housing Chapters

Conducting work on the housing chapter of a comprehensive plan can be a challenging process, both in terms of finding accurate information on existing conditions, incorporating that data into the plan and formulating the appropriate policy responses to current or future challenges. The following are the essential tasks and components of a housing chapter. Subsequent pages discuss how the THA *Toolkit* assists with these items.

Data Collection

One of the basic and most important steps in developing a housing chapter or plan is collecting raw data. With correct figures and trends, staff can assess the existing conditions of the area's housing supply. By having this data, decision-makers can have a clear and accurate understanding of the current issues, challenges and opportunities with housing.

Location of Housing

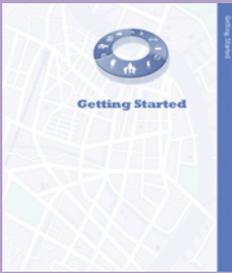
An important part of developing a comprehensive plan is designating locations for various land uses, typically illustrated through a 'Future Land Use Map.' Identifying the ideal location for housing can be a delicate process, trying to avoid those areas that would be undesirable and find places that are convenient to employment centers and transportation services.

Affordable Housing

Shelter is a basic need for everyone, although the cost of housing makes finding a home difficult for many people, particularly those with few means or resources. This is an important topic for nearly every community and must be addressed within the comprehensive plan, according to State Code.

Accessible Housing

People with disabilities and the elderly have special needs with housing. The location, design and cost of homes are critical for these individuals. Despite being a requirement in the State Code, comprehensive plans typically lack attention to this topic.



Getting Started:

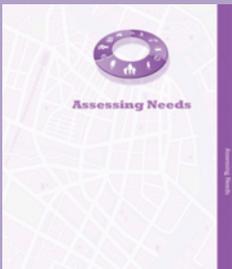
A good place to begin with the *THA Toolkit* is under its first tab, **“Getting Started.”** This provides further background on tools and resources found throughout the document, helping to build familiarity and a basic understanding of the *Toolkit*. The following are tips on how to use those sections of the *Toolkit* to conduct work on the housing chapter of a comprehensive plan.

Public Involvement:

While the State Code requires public hearings for comprehensive plan updates, the common practice with this planning process is to include the public as early and frequently as possible. Over the last several decades, the planning profession has placed a great deal of emphasis on public involvement. Considering the influence and scope of a comprehensive plan, it is important that citizens are included in a significant way. There are several different techniques and approaches to public outreach, all with their own costs and benefits. The *THA Toolkit* has a sample of strategies for involving citizens, which can be helpful for developing a housing chapter or similar projects.



Under the **“Meeting the Needs”** tab, the *Toolkit* discusses how to facilitate community-based charrettes, to gain input from area citizens and stakeholders. The *Toolkit* also provides tips on building partnerships and offers a ‘Best Practices’ section for looking at land use and transportation. The *Collecting and Digitizing Data* section, under the **“Collecting the Data”** tab, has audit forms with several questions that may be useful for getting started with the public. These are basic questions that can be presented directly to citizens or function as ideas for focusing public comments. Under the **“Assessing Needs”** tab, there are additional questions that may be helpful, once again, either to grasp the public’s needs or to serve as questions in public meetings.



Data Collection:

Data collection is one of the most basic and important steps in developing a housing chapter or conducting work on one’s comprehensive plan. Without accurate data, it is nearly impossible to identify current issues, challenges and opportunities with housing or other topics that are under review. This step is typically one of the first tasks in the planning process, conducted before meeting with the public. It provides information for citizens and other participants, educating them on existing or potential issues. The *THA Toolkit* references several resources that maintain information on housing and related topics, which can satisfy the need for data in this process. These web based resources provide data on households, population, demographics, income, people with disabilities and other housing related topics.



The first place to begin with collecting data is under the *Toolkit*’s second tab, **“Collecting the Data.”** The introduction section provides a list of websites, labeled **“Resources for Data on the Web.”** The first resource listed is the [U.S. Census Bureau](#)’s website, which has population, demographic and other figures for any jurisdiction in Virginia. For more detailed directions on finding and retrieving census data, refer to the *“Collecting US Census Data”* section of the *Toolkit*, which is also located under the **“Collecting the Data”** tab. The **“Resources for Data on the Web”** also lists the [Weldon-Cooper Center](#). In terms of finding data on housing, this website is particularly helpful. It contains a large amount of data on population, employment, demographics, housing and other topics. The Weldon-Cooper Center typically has more current figures and estimates for these topics, filling in the gaps between the decennial census. It also contains links to several other resources that may be helpful with developing a housing chapter. The [Virginia Economic Development Partnership](#) website is another useful resource for conducting research on your community. From their homepage, click on the ‘Community Profiles’ tab. This displays detailed information for any city or county in Virginia, including profiles on regions and metropolitan areas. These reports include a great deal of data on employment, population, community amenities, commuting, transportation and more. All of these topics are useful for determining the current state of housing and its accessibility with needed destinations.

Location of Housing:

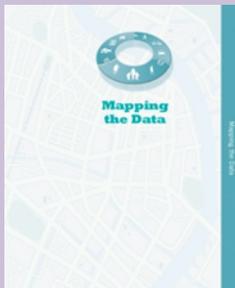
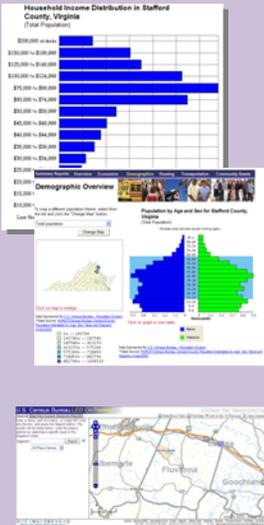
Designating areas of the community for specific land uses is another basic and important part of developing a comprehensive plan. The 'Future Land Use Map' typically illustrates where the community envisions certain uses to be located. The comprehensive plan and associated land use map usually identifies several different categories, such as agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, municipal, mixed-use, and open space uses. Determining the ideal location for these uses, particularly for housing, can be a delicate process of trying to avoid those areas that would be undesirable and find places that are within a convenient distance to employment centers and transportation services. The *THA Toolkit* recognizes the inherent relationships between where people live, where they work and how they get there. This accounts for its guidance on housing, employment and transportation. In order to address the location of housing, all of these considerations must be taken into account.

To focus on identifying existing employment centers, the last section, called "*Economic Market Conditions*," under the "**Collecting the Data**" tab is particularly useful. This section references the [HotReports](#) website, which can provide a general overview of a community's market conditions by using charts, maps and tables. This includes information on how people get to work, indicating the count and percentage of people who drive alone, carpool, take transit, bike, walk, or work from home. The Toolkit also refers to [Workforce Indicators](#), which is a site that provides further detail on an area's employment opportunities, such as turnover rates, new hires, etc. This section of the *Toolkit* also references the [OneTheMap](#) website, which is maintained by the U.S. Census Bureau. This is a mapping program, which identifies residential and employment centers with online maps and tables. This can be an effective way of examining land use patterns within a region and the associated commuting patterns. Under the "**Resources for Data on the Web**," There are three sites that provide information on labor markets throughout the state. These include the [Virginia Employment Commission](#), [Virginia's Workforce Connection](#), and the [Virginia Economic Development Partnership](#) website that was mentioned previously.

Determining the location of housing is mostly a mapping exercise, making it easier to grasp demographic trends, land use and the transportation system. As discussed earlier, the "**Collecting the Data/Collecting US Census Data**" section provides instructions on how to extract data from the U.S. Census Bureau's website. The "**Mapping the Data**" tab, under the "**Mapping Census Data**" section, provides guidance on how to map that information. This section shows how to insert census data into GIS maps, which can help to identify important patterns across the community, based on race, age, income, or people with disabilities. This information is helpful for determining housing needs throughout the community and where to encourage certain types of housing. For example, these maps may illustrate where there is a greater need for affordable or accessible housing units.

The second section, "**Geocoding Place**," of the mapping tab shows how to map important locations, such as medical, educational, recreational, civic, and employment centers, along with other community amenities. This can be useful information for assessing where new or existing housing is accessible to important destinations, which is particularly important for those with limited mobility. Section three, "**Geocoding Employment Centers**," can also illustrate the proximity of housing to essential destinations, such as job opportunities. Section four, "**Mapping Residential Growth**," shows how to map trends in residential growth throughout a community. The user can overlay this information with employment or other destinations, to determine if housing construction is taking place in areas that have convenient access to those areas.

With transportation considerations, refer to the sixth section, "**Proportion of Persons served by Transit**." This sections helps overlap transportation services in certain areas with existing or potential residential areas. Both fixed-route and para-transit services may influence decisions on where to plan for residential growth. By overlapping the transportation information with housing, employment and other important places, there will be a clear understanding of existing gaps in your transportation network with existing or proposed housing centers.



Personal Mobility

When the average person thinks of those with disabilities, they typically imagine someone in a wheelchair. While there are many individuals that rely on those devices, there are many other forms of disabilities. These include additional types of physical limitations, sensory, mental and self-care disabilities.

Affordable Housing:

Shelter is a basic need for everyone, regardless of income, creed or social status. While this is a fundamental need, the cost of housing makes finding a home difficult for many people, particularly those with few means or resources. Those households and families typically have to pay a considerable portion of their income on housing, representing a cost burdened that may limit their ability to afford necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care. Given the high cost and demand of housing, affordability is an important topic for nearly every community. The Virginia General Assembly recognized the importance of this topic, requiring that every jurisdiction must address affordable housing in their comprehensive plan. The *Toolkit* can aid with meeting this legal requirement and need for affordable housing.

Determining the need for affordable housing in your study area is a fundamental first step. The *Toolkit* provides direction for making this determination. The [U.S. Census](#) data offers the opportunity to cross-reference data. For example, a table or map can be made that includes both the incidence of people with disabilities against the number of people paying more than 30% of their income for all housing costs. These high need areas may then be selected for additional research. Under the **"Assessing Needs"** tab, the *Toolkit's* Study Area Checklist can help with this research. This Checklist helps determine the resources available to assist residents not living in affordable housing. These include down payment and closing cost assistance and the extent to which Housing Choice Vouchers are available to those in need.

The first tab of the *Toolkit*, **"Getting Started,"** discusses the creation of a Steering/Advisory Committee. This group may be a good place to conduct discussions for improving affordable housing. The Committee can develop recommendations, founded in the data collection and public process described previously.

Accessible Housing:

People with disabilities and the elderly have special housing needs. The location, design and cost of a home are critical for these individuals. The Transportation and Housing Alliance developed the *Toolkit* to bring attention to these needs, with a planning process that is meant to give those individuals an opportunity to participate. The resources discussed in this fact sheet and throughout the *Toolkit* can all help provide information for determining the best locations for providing homes to these individuals. The web based resources, like the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) and [Weldon-Cooper Center](#) sites provide some of the raw data for these topics. The **"Mapping the Data"** tab gives guidance on mapping that information, helping to better understand where these people may work or visit and how they would get there. These maps also help illustrate concentrations of people with special needs, helping to determine where additional services are needed. Further information on this topic is found under the **"Appendices"** tab of the *Toolkit*. This provides information on accessibility guidelines and universal design principles.

Using the Toolkit:

The *THA Toolkit* is a large document, which can be intimidating for anyone considering to use it to help with a given planning project. The guidance in this fact sheet calls out those areas that would be most useful or applicable for developing the housing chapter of a comprehensive plan. While this directs the user to those specific sections, skimming through the entire document is also recommended. The *Toolkit* as a whole represents an inclusive approach to planning that is particularly important for work on these plans. This approach may be difficult to grasp when selectively reading certain sections. With this said, this fact sheet refers to the most critical sections for developing a housing chapter.



Virginia Board for People with Disabilities
202 N. 9th Street, 9th Floor • Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 786-0016 • www.vaboard.org



Thomas
Jefferson
Planning District Commission
401 E Water St Charlottesville, VA 22902
(434)-979-7310 www.tjpd.org