



THE LIVABLE COMMUNITIES ACT (S 1619/HR 4690) **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

Q: What is a common definition for or understanding of livability?

A: Livability is the combined environmental, social and economic quality of a community or region. Livability is offering opportunities for communities of all sizes and make ups to become better places to live, work and raise families. It is about fostering governmental partnerships that provide communities choices for comprehensive planning, investments and development that are cost effective and efficient, reduce congestion, generate good-paying jobs, meet environmental and energy goals, provide affordable housing, protect rural areas and green space, and revitalize Main Streets and urban centers. A benefit of livability is that its definitions, goals, strategies and outcomes are flexible and locally derived through community stakeholder and citizen input, providing the ability for any given community to grow and change based on local characteristics, history, needs and wants. Actions and progress are usually defined by community indicators, local government activities and community involvement and improvement.

Under the LCA, a livable community is defined as one that provides safe and reliable transportation choices, and affordable, energy efficient housing; supports public health and economic development; and, preserves natural, agricultural, and environmental resources.

Q: What is the Livable Communities Act (LCA)?

A: Both chambers of Congress have introduced the Livable Communities Act (S 1619, HR 4690) to encourage livability through comprehensive regional planning and implementation. These bills would provide competitive funding to rural, suburban and urban consortia of local governments working through their regional planning organizations to develop and implement comprehensive regional plans that meet identified federal goals, address local needs in crosslinking transportation, economic development and the environment, and work towards building livable communities.

Q: What are some of the goals of the LCA?

A: The overarching goal of the LCA is to help local communities plan for and create better and more affordable places to live, work and raise families. Through comprehensive regional planning and implementation, communities of all sizes will be able to:

- Reduce traffic congestion and provide a variety of transit options
- Provide affordable housing and connect where people live to where they work
- Create good jobs and promote economic development and competitiveness
- Support public health and improve the quality of life for residents and workers
- Preserve vital environmental and natural resources, including agricultural, rural, and open space

Q: Who is eligible for grant funding under the LCA?

A: The Comprehensive Planning Grant offers \$400 million in competitive funding over four years and the Sustainable Challenge Grant offers \$3.75 billion over three years. Eligible recipients of this funding would be a consortium of local and state government units through their regional planning organizations – urban, suburban and rural.

The LCA defines three main regional sizes in relation to grant funding:

1. Micropolitan and Small Metropolitan with population not exceeding 200,000
2. Mid-sized Metropolitan areas with populations between 200,000 and 500,000
3. Large Metropolitan areas with population exceeding 500,000.



Q: What kind of projects can be funded under the LCA?

A: The LCA would fund:

1. The coordination of land use, housing, transportation, and infrastructure planning processes across jurisdictions and agencies
2. The identification of potential regional partnerships for developing and implementing a comprehensive regional plan
3. The creation or updating of housing, infrastructure, transportation, energy, and environmental assessments to determine regional needs and promote sustainable development
4. The development or updating of a comprehensive regional plan or the goals and strategies to implement an existing comprehensive regional plan
5. The implementation of local zoning and other code changes necessary to implement a comprehensive regional plan and promote sustainable development
6. The promotion of integrated transportation, housing, energy, and economic development activities carried out across policy and governmental jurisdictions
7. The promotion of sustainable and location-efficient development
8. The implementation of projects identified in a comprehensive regional plan

Q: What are some LCA misconceptions?

A: Concerns may be raised that LCA will add yet another layer of rules, regulations or policies that inhibit or interfere with community-based decisions. On the contrary, the LCA does:

NOT place mandates on local governments or regions, but is a competitive opportunity to engage in federal funding for comprehensive regional planning and implementation.

NOT have stringent requirements on local governments and regions, but is inclusive and flexible, and recognizes the diversity inherent in communities and regions throughout the nation. This opportunity allows regions and communities to identify and plan around their own capabilities, resources and needs.

NOT promote anti-growth, but rather supports prosperous, healthy communities that utilize sustainable land-use strategies through comprehensive regional planning and implementation for future transportation, housing, environmental, and economic development that looks at communities in a holistic fashion. The LCA encourages programs that make use of existing infrastructure and resources, as well as plan for future regional growth, changing demographics and needs.

NOT make exclusions, but is focused on comprehensive, inclusive planning that is adaptable to local community needs. Through flexible goals, the LCA provides a framework through which regions can engage in collaborative efforts and strengthen their communities without adhering to strict policies about what constitutes livability, and is open to communities and regions of all sizes and capabilities – large and small, urban and rural.

Q: Will the LCA take money away from other important federal programs?

A: No, the LCA does not affect the funding of important federal revenue streams or programs like the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) or Highway Trust Fund (HTF). The LCA is an opportunity to tap into new funding and opportunities.

Q: How can the LCA enhance livability in my community?

A: This is entirely up to your local elected officials, community stakeholders and citizens. The LCA establishes two grant programs, the Comprehensive Grant Planning Program and the Sustainability Challenge Grant Program. These grant programs will provide regions with the opportunity to develop comprehensive regional plans that incorporate transportation, housing, community development, economic development, energy, and environmental needs and goals; and assist communities in the implementation of “ready-to-go” livability projects. The funding opportunities can either get communities jump started into these efforts, or assist communities already in the process.



Q: How is the LCA related to the federal interagency Sustainable Communities Partnership?

A: The LCA reinforces the federal interagency collaboration developed through the Sustainable Communities Partnership, and provides a substantial increase in funding for local governments and regions to pursue comprehensive livability goals.

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities is a collaborative effort between HUD, EPA, and DOT to support better coordination across the agencies to meet national housing and transportation goals, protect the environment, promote sustainable development, and help address the challenges of climate change.

For FY2010, Congress allocated \$150 million to HUD for the Sustainable Communities Initiative, under which is \$100million for the Sustainable Communities Planning Grant Program. The grant will provide funding for regional, integrated planning and implementation activities related to increasing livability and sustainability. For FY2011, President Obama has requested \$687.9 million for the Partnership and related activities.

Q: How will the LCA increase opportunities for regionalism?

A: Through the two funding pots, the LCA requires applicants to demonstrate regional collaboration between local governments, regional planning organizations and citizens, and encourages partnerships with local business, philanthropic, non-profit, and other community organizations. In fact, the granting mechanisms require advances in comprehensive regional planning and implementation by working through the established regional planning organizations such as regional Councils of Governments (COGs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs).

Q: What is NARC doing on livability?

A: NARC is working this effort on all fronts to ensure livability is structured to best meet the needs of regions, their local governments and communities, placing comprehensive regional planning and implementation at the core of these discussions and federal activities. NARC is working with the appropriate Members of Congress, their staff and Congressional Committees, as well as the White House, relevant federal agencies, association partners and members to cement regional approaches as core elements to building livable communities. NARC staff welcomes comments, questions or suggestions on how livability should be positioned at the federal level, and encourages direct education to Members of Congress on the importance of efforts like LCA.

Q: What can I do to help?

A: NARC recommends that local elected officials and executive directors of regional planning organizations contact and/or meet with their Congressional Members to discuss the benefits of the LCA, how it would positively impact your region, and encourage their Congressional Members to become active supporters or co-sponsors of the bill.

Draft easy to read, concise information about the comprehensive planning or implementation activities your region is undertaking, citing the benefits, anticipated outcomes and successes. The more this can be showcased with on the ground examples, the more opportunity for moving the legislation through Congress.

Q: Who at NARC can I contact for more information?

A: Fred Aoulosleman, Executive Director at fred@NARC.org or 202.986.1032, x216
Shannon Menard, Policy Manager at shannon@NARC.org or 202.986.1032, x217