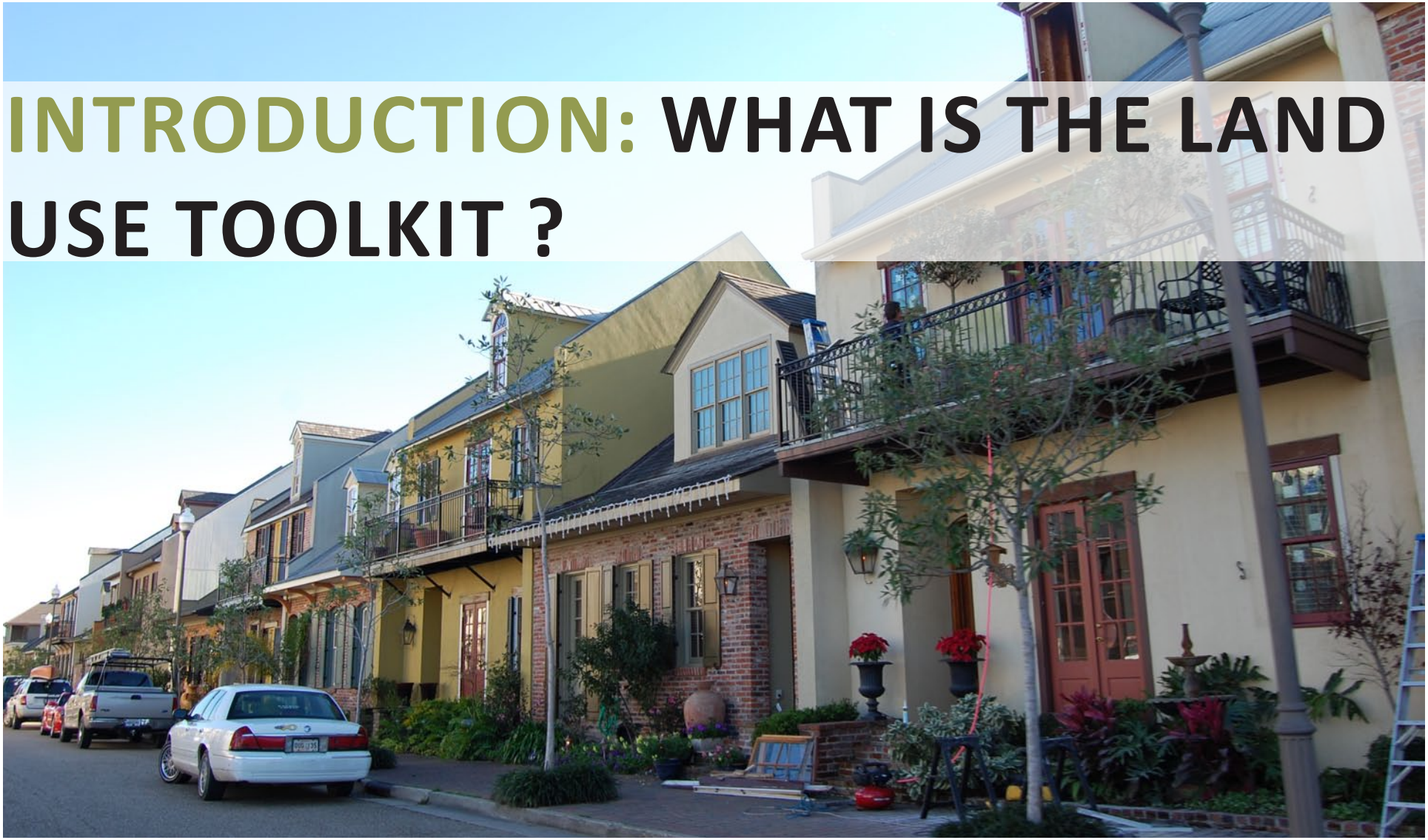
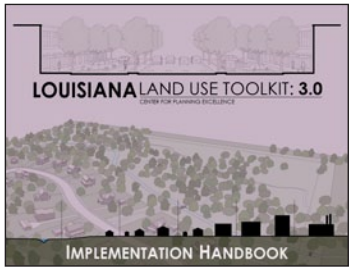
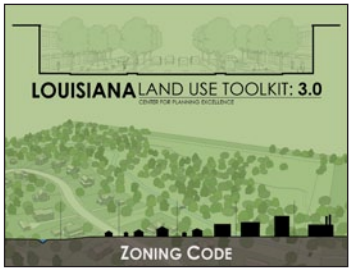
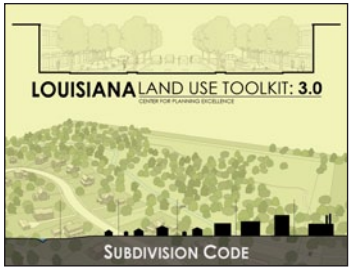
INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE LAND USE TOOLKIT ?

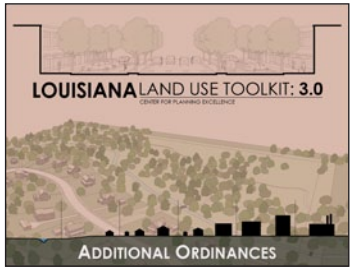


RIVER RANCH, LAFAYETTE. WIDELY RECOGNIZED AS A MODEL SMART GROWTH COMMUNITY, A BUILT NEIGHBORHOOD THAT EXEMPLIFIES THE PRINCIPLES OF THE TOOLKIT.









WHAT IS THE TOOLKIT?

The Louisiana Land Use Toolkit (Toolkit) is a model development code rooted in Smart Growth principles. The Toolkit is a shared resource from which parishes and municipalities can adopt a complete development code or select cafeteria-style from individual tools that meet their specific needs. The components of the Louisiana Land Use Toolkit include the:

1. **Implementation Handbook;**
2. **Zoning Code;**
3. **Subdivision Code; and**
4. **Additional Ordinances.**

The Toolkit web site (www.landusetoolkit.com) contains up to date drafts of the modules in both PDF and InDesign as well as administrative forms that can be downloaded and adapted to your community's specific requirements.

The Toolkit recognizes that each Louisiana community has a unique vision for how it will grow and change over time. As a result, each community has distinct needs for land use regulation and varying levels of tolerance for placing controls on private property. The Toolkit provides a basic regulatory framework that allows the community to use additional modules to build up to the degree of controls that are appropriate for their conditions.

The Toolkit may be downloaded free of charge and custom-tailored to provide the right rules for the specific needs of Louisiana communities. With the right planning and Toolkit customization, the resulting development code will help guide future Louisiana growth in a more resilient and sustainable manner.

History

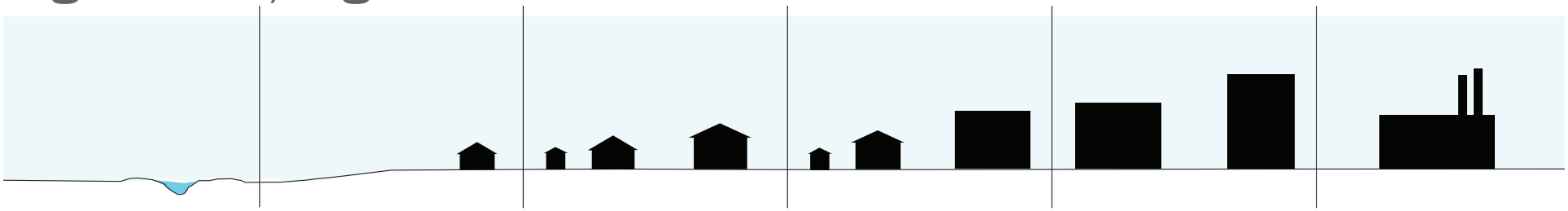
The Louisiana Land Use Toolkit is supported and funded by the Louisiana Department of Economic Development (LED) and the Center for Planning of Excellence (CPEX). The origin of the Louisiana Land Use Toolkit is Louisiana Speaks. In the wake of the destruction caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Louisiana Speaks was initiated to work towards the development of a sustainable, long-term vision for Southern Louisiana.

The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan sets out three vision goals: (1) Recover Sustainably; (2) Grow Smarter; and (3) Think Regionally. Each of the three vision goals is supplemented by a series of key strategies each with action items that must be addressed to fully implement the Louisiana Speaks vision. One of the most important action items repeated throughout Louisiana Speaks is a call for model development codes for community development.

Model development and zoning codes were seen as fundamental tools needed to enable communities to grow smarter. A key intent was to develop these codes so they could be tailored to the conditions of Louisiana, including addressing reinvestment in existing communities and development in the coastal environment. Too find out more about Louisiana Speaks see www.cpex.org/work/louisiana-speaks.

The Louisiana Land Use Toolkit is the model code response to this and other similar action items in the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan.

Right Rules, Right Place



Natural | Rural | Suburban | Urban | Center | Special

Why is the Toolkit Special?

There are two attributes of the Toolkit that set it apart from other model land use ordinances. The first is that it has been put together with the unique culture and nuances of Louisiana development patterns in mind. It considers and works with the traditional development patterns and building types in Louisiana and moves new settlement patterns toward a Louisiana version of Smart Growth. Also, the procedural elements of the Toolkit are consistent with the requirements of Louisiana law.

In addition to being Louisiana specific, the Toolkit is organized around an intuitive system of context areas that help communities refine their development patterns to reflect the existing or planned character of the surrounding area.

What are Context Areas?

Context areas help communities get the right rules in the right place. A commercial building in an urban setting is different in character from a commercial building in a suburban setting and streets in rural areas are different than streets in urban areas. These differences create the need for different rules in different places.

The Toolkit responds to this with six context areas: Natural, Rural, Suburban, Urban, Center and Special. Articles within the Toolkit contain specific rules for each context area. This organization allows rural areas to stay rural, while urban areas become more compact.

Who Needs the Toolkit?

The Toolkit was designed with a wide range of users in mind. Obviously, the end users will primarily be Louisiana's parishes, towns, cities, and other municipalities. Further, elected officials, public planners, and planning commission members may find the Toolkit to be a valuable resource when considering planning decisions or as a benchmarking tool when a development is proposed under their existing code.

In addition to these more traditional Toolkit users there is a long list of non-governmental stakeholders who can benefit from the contents of the Toolkit. Private sector developers may use the standards or concepts in the toolkit to help them think about how to propose smarter projects. Neighborhoods may use the Toolkit to help them identify and ask for certain development protections from their governing bodies. Bicycle advocates may use the street design standards or bicycle parking standards to better advocate for bike friendly infrastructure and bike facilities.

RIGHT RULES, RIGHT PLACE. THE TOOLKIT CONTAINS DIFFERENT RULES FOR URBAN PLACES AND FOR RURAL PLACES. THIS ALLOWS A DIVERSE GROUP OF USERS ARE ABLE TO FIND TOOLS TO BENEFIT THEIR COMMUNITY.

WHAT IS SMART GROWTH?

Communities in Louisiana are increasingly concerned that current development patterns — dominated by "sprawl" — are no longer in the long-term interest of our communities. This concern unites them with others throughout the United States who are devoting themselves to growing smarter. Smart Growth is based on ten development principles to cultivate long-term prosperity for our communities.

1. Create a Range of Housing Opportunities;
2. Create Walkable Neighborhoods;
3. Encourage Community Collaboration;
4. Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities;
5. Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective;
6. Mix Land Uses;
7. Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental;
8. Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices;
9. Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities; and
10. Take Advantage of Compact Building Design.

These principles are introduced briefly on the following pages. Whenever possible, these principles should be considered together as a unified whole, not as a checklist of individual goals. The Smart Growth movement advances alternative growth strategies focused on restoring vitality to city centers and older suburbs. Its leaders believe in growth – yet they reject the dominant sprawl growth patterns because they are too costly: the economic costs of abandoning infrastructure in the city only to rebuild it further out, the loss of working forests and farms through uncontrolled rural development and the time and money lost to traffic congestion and car dependence represent significant burdens for our communities. Whether you live in a northern parish or a coastal city, the ten principles of Smart Growth can help your community grow more prosperously.

Smart Growth Resources for Louisiana Communities

If you are new to Smart Growth and would like help applying its principles to your community, you're in luck! The Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX) provides services that assist communities with initiating and creating Smart Growth plans at the neighborhood, community, town, city or parish-wide scale. CPEX initiated the Louisiana Community Planning Program in the fall of 2006 after receiving a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Smart Growth grant, secured by Senator Mary Landrieu. The program's mission is to build local capacity in community planning throughout Louisiana using the Smart Growth principles.

Smart Growth Principles

1

Create a Range of Housing Opportunities

Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any Smart Growth strategy. Growing families, single adults, young couples, senior citizens, all demand a variety of housing types and price points—a strong community should offer all of these options.

2

Create Walkable Neighborhoods

Walkable communities are desirable places to live, work, learn, worship and play. They include safe, attractive streets and interesting places to visit.

3

Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities

Smart Growth emphasizes cultural heritage, activities and events and aesthetic styles that make each community distinct and attractive. Smart Growth encourages communities to set design standards that reflect its collective values and common vision.

4

Encourage Community Collaboration

Growth can create great places to live, work and play—if it responds to a community's own sense of how and where it wants to grow. The best laid plans will likely fail unless they have broad community support.

5

Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair & Cost Effective

Thriving communities make it easy and profitable for developers and property owners to "do the right thing." No one wins when development plans sit on the shelf gathering dust or when the rules of the game change constantly.

Smart Growth Principles

6

Mix Land Uses

By mixing compatible land uses together, communities can create more vibrant, walkable, safe and prosperous places to live, work and play.

7

Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas

Open space preservation supports Smart Growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, improving our quality of life and guiding new growth into existing communities.

8

Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

Providing people with transportation choices to meet all of their weekly needs is a key aim of Smart Growth. Transportation by foot, bike, public transit and personal car should all be viable options in a community.

9

Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities

Smart Growth directs development towards existing communities already served by infrastructure, using the resources that existing neighborhoods offer and conserving open space and irreplaceable natural resources on the urban fringe.

10

Take Advantage of Compact Building Design

Smart Growth provides a means for communities to incorporate more compact building design as an alternative to conventional, land consumptive development.

WHY DO I NEED THE TOOLKIT?

Louisiana's parishes and municipalities are competing with each other and with communities in other states to attract industry, businesses and the best and brightest workers from around the region and the country. These assets are attracted to vibrant communities that are willing to implement a shared community vision, place an emphasis on promoting transparent and predictable policies, foster an environment of low-risk investment opportunities, exhibit sound, public, fiscal and growth management, balance the interest of the community and build great places.

If your community is not doing these things then you are in danger of being left behind. While the Toolkit is not a "silver bullet", if properly implemented it is capable of playing a major role in the creation of vibrant, sustainable and resilient communities throughout Louisiana.

Implement Shared Community Vision

Investors in a community want to understand what direction the community is headed. They want to know if the community is planning on staying a predominately rural place with a collection of small villages or if the community vision calls for building complete neighborhoods around an energized town center or some combination of both?

Regardless of the specifics of the community vision, the Toolkit is capable of providing the rules to implement it. One strength of the Toolkit is that it has been developed to be able to respond to a variety of different environments. The Toolkit can be adjusted as necessary, based on the level of tolerance for regulation in your community. The Toolkit's Zoning Code and Subdivision Code provide the contextual framework to organize the model standards, but it is up to your community, with the help of local planning professionals, to customize the final development code.

Transparent, Consistent and Predictable

When a new business or resident relocates and invests in a Louisiana community they should be able to look at the community's regulations and know in advance exactly what is expected of them. They should be able to quickly tell where they can locate, what they can build, how they can build and, if necessary, what steps they must follow if they want to deviate from the rules.

A complete Toolkit implementation helps erase this uncertainty by clearly establishing the land use rules everyone must play by. Further, the Toolkit clearly articulates the procedural requirements any applicant seeking relief from the rules must follow and the review criteria that any final decision is based on.

Risk Reduction

Closely related to predictable land use decisions is the idea of reducing risk for those who have already invested. Why is this important? It is important because when you know what might locate around you, your level of risk decreases, making your investment more secure.

Take for example a community that has few or no land use regulations. If you were to invest your money in a business or a home in this community you might be at risk regarding what could possibly be built on the property next to you. It might be a home or business that complements your investment or it might be a development that decreases the value of your property. What do you think would happen to the value of your property if someone built a crawfish processing plant, a gun range or a gravel mine right next door?

The Toolkit reduces this risk by creating predictability for how the property surrounding your land might be developed in the future. This increased predictability decreases risk and increases security in your investment.

Sound Fiscal and Growth Management

Louisianans want both low taxes and a high quality of life. When a community lacks appropriate growth controls, it often develops into a pattern of sprawling, low-density residential development (½- to 5-acre lots). Over time this pattern will require significant expenditures to extend and maintain sewers, water, utilities, streets, police and fire protection and other expected services to these sparsely settled portions of the community. This expenditure of public dollars often results in one of two things: higher taxes and fees; or lower investment in things like parks, public art, public landscaping, streetscapes and other assets that give a community character, charm and generally make it a desirable place to live.

The Toolkit asks communities to plan and make decisions about their future growth. It asks communities to designate growth sectors and then applies specific rules to help manage where and how growth occurs. Successfully managing growth helps to ensure a balance between low taxes and providing citizens with assets that contribute to a high quality of life.

Balancing Interests

Louisiana's communities must enhance their ability to balance the shared public interests of the community (water and air quality, fiscal stability and attractive places) with private landowner interests. The balance will differ in every community. In some places, "private property rights" are foremost and individual owners are allowed to do what they want with their land even when it negatively impacts the community. In other places there is greater tolerance to promote the interest of the entire community, even if it means placing some controls of what individuals can do with their property.

To have the type of communities that Louisiana deserves, private property rights must be balanced against the need to pay for public services, the need to maintain our environmental resources and our quality of life. When these interests get out of balance, the result can be fiscal insolvency, environmental damage and abandoned communities. The Toolkit, and the associated planning which must occur to implement the complete Toolkit, provides a sound policy basis for community discussion about this balance of private and community interests.

Making Places

The next generation of young employees are mobile. Many choose where they want to live and find a job once they get there. They are looking for places that focus on providing a high quality of life through the built environment. They are choosing vibrant, mixed use, walkable places over the sprawl-focused "anywhere USA" development patterns of many suburban communities. Ultimately, they are looking to invest and live in complete neighborhoods and not just a subdivision.

The hallmark of a quality development code is to provide the rules that make real places and curb sprawl patterns. The Toolkit accomplishes this by providing communities with a selection of model rules that make great places while allowing existing suburban areas to grow more compact over time.

HOW DO I USE THE TOOLKIT?

The Toolkit was written to be used in two ways. At its simplest, the Toolkit is a resource for a community to adopt a zoning code, a subdivision code, or an individual ordinance. In its more complete form, the Toolkit can be combined and customized to build a complete development code. Both of these approaches are discussed below.

Partial Toolkit Implementation

A significant number of Louisiana's communities do not have any land use regulations and many of the regulations that do exist were written 30, 40 or even 50 years ago. These regulations are often out-of-date with current development trends. Worse yet, many create sprawling, single-use, auto-dominated development patterns.

Despite the lack of effective land use regulations in Louisiana, many communities may not have the tolerance for the degree of private property regulation required to implement local land use plans. For these communities, the Toolkit provides independent regulatory pieces, which may be customized to fit into an existing regulatory framework.

I Just Want a Zoning Code

A small Louisiana community that is just beginning to regulate land use may not be ready for the sophistication of the complete Toolkit. They may want just zoning without the full array of site development standards and additional districts found in a complete development code. The zoning code module provides this basic resource in a framework that can be expanded to accommodate additional tools as a community becomes more comfortable with implementing new planning concepts.

I Just Want a Subdivision Code

Some communities may not be ready to venture down the path of zoning or may have a recent zoning code they are happy with. These communities may choose to customize the subdivision code module. The subdivision code module provides a context-based approach to regulations that promote better connectivity, better streets and guides the right type of infrastructure improvements to the right places. The subdivision code module also provides a streamlined approval process that ensures a community has the infrastructure and public facilities it needs before approving new development.

I Just Want a...

There are other communities that may be satisfied with their existing zoning and subdivision codes but need a sign ordinance, outdoor lighting ordinance, or a historic preservation ordinance. These communities can download these tools from the additional ordinances modules and customize them to fit within their current code of ordinances.

The table on the following page outlines the general content of the Toolkit modules. These modules can be combined and customized to achieve the level of regulation that your community is ready to adopt. This cafeteria approach allows a community to move toward new rules and regulations at a pace they feel comfortable with and can realistically adopt and enforce.

Full Toolkit Implementation

While the Toolkit is designed to allow incremental adoption of its pieces, it performs at its best when all of the individual ordinances work together in a finely-tuned development code. A full Toolkit implementation carefully mapped and calibrated will go a long way towards implementing your community's planning principles and concepts.

What is a Development Code?

A development code combines the zoning code module, subdivision module and additional ordinances module into a one-stop-shop for all development-related regulations. The three Toolkit modules, when successfully integrated will generate a complete development code.

What Do I Need to Use the Toolkit?

While the Toolkit makes the preparation of a complete development ordinance easier, the process will still be challenging. It will take a great deal of time and energy to have the difficult discussions required to right-size the Toolkit for a community. Further, the implementation process will require leadership and support from:

- The community's professional planning staff;
- A dedicated advisory committee; and
- Local elected and appointed officials.

ZONING CODE MODULE

Zoning Code	Full Spectrum of context-based zoning districts including residential, mixed use and industrial districts and administrative process.

SUBDIVISION CODE MODULE

Subdivision Code	Basic requirements for a context-based subdivision ordinance including block, street and utility standards and administrative process.

ADDITIONAL ORDINANCES MODULE

Airport Overlay District	Provides basic standards for regulating height and noise around airports.
Rural Corridor Overlay District	Uses landscaping to protect the character of rural thoroughfares.
Historic Overlay District	A basic historic preservation ordinance, with an overlay district and a procedural component.
Parking	A modern parking ordinance with parking ratios and standards for parking lot design, bicycle parking, site access and off-street loading facilities.
Landscaping	A context-based landscape ordinance, including design and maintenance standards.
Outdoor Lighting	Basic site lighting standards to reduce light pollution.
Outdoor Storage & Display	Basic controls for the storage and display of goods.
Signs	Basic sign regulations that address on-site and off-site signs such as billboards, electronic and digital signs.

TOOLKIT MODULES. THE TOOLKIT MODULES CAN BE COMBINED AND CUSTOMIZED TO ACHIEVE THE LEVEL OF REGULATION THAT YOUR COMMUNITY IS READY TO ADOPT.

WHAT DO I NEED TO GET STARTED?

As with any major initiative, there is a certain amount of preliminary information that must be gathered. If your community has recently adopted a comprehensive plan, then odds are, much of the required information will be present there. In addition to information, there is also a commitment of resources and time that a community must be willing to dedicate. An overview of these required resources is below.

1. Willing Leadership

Any public planning initiative is only as good as the level of support that it receives from the community's leadership. If the leaders of a community do not share the vision established by the public, then it will be difficult to implement with the Toolkit. There are many difficult decisions that need to be made when mapping, customizing and adopting the Toolkit. The community will be asked to carefully balance what is in their best interest and what is in any given property owner's best interest. It will take strong leaders who understand the importance of having these discussions and making the difficult decisions to effectively keep the process on track.

2. A Local Committee of Dedicated Individuals

Much of the "heavy lifting" of making the Toolkit reflect the community's values will come from the community itself. Prior to beginning the implementation process, the community should appoint an advisory committee. The role of this committee is to review various maps and drafts of the Toolkit that will be produced and serve as a sounding board for whether or not the ideas fit the community.

The advisory committee should be made up of a diverse group of citizen stakeholders. Members should be people from all walks of life with various backgrounds including real estate, planners, architects, developers, attorneys, bankers, business owners and engineers, as well as community and neighborhood representatives. Diverse membership helps ensure that all areas of the community receive ample representation.

3. A Staff Planner or Dedicated Administrator

Once adopted, someone must take ownership of the Toolkit. Ideally, this person will be the planning director or other development administrator. In communities without a planning office, this person may be the town manager or equivalent level administrator. Regardless, the community must be willing to invest staff time for the customization and implementation of the Toolkit, but more importantly, for administration and enforcement of the resulting development regulations.

Additionally, while the Toolkit is an intuitive document, there is a learning curve associated with it. If a community wants to hit the ground running once the Toolkit is adopted, the local project manager during the customization and adoption process should also be the individual serving as the Toolkit administrator. This strategy provides the future Toolkit administrator with a thorough understanding of the intent and legislative history of the locally-customized Toolkit.

4. A GIS System with Parcel-Level Land Use Data

To implement the Toolkit, it will require the creation and amendment of several maps. There will be a regional growth sector map, a context area map and a zoning district map. The Toolkit administrator will be responsible for managing the production and modification of these maps during the implementation process.

For zoning purposes, information must be at the parcel level. So that the zoning can be effectively administered, each separately-owned parcel of land must have its boundaries portrayed on the zoning district map.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are powerful computerized mapping tools that many communities are already using—often in the parish assessor's office. GIS allows a user to quickly create and modify maps and to display multiple layers of information together.

What if I am Missing a Component?

If your community is lacking one or more of these components, the Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX) may be able to help. CPEX has experience implementing the Toolkit in a variety of settings and understands what is required to get the Toolkit adopted in your community. They may be able to help you think through possible solutions or find the resources necessary to get started.

TOOLKIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE. PRIOR TO BEGINNING THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS, THE COMMUNITY SHOULD APPOINT A TOOLKIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HOW DO I USE THE HANDBOOK?

This Handbook is the user's manual and step-by-step guide to the Toolkit. It serves as the instruction manual for converting the Toolkit into a customized zoning code, subdivision code or development code that meets the specific needs of your community. The Handbook identifies what you need to get started, provides an idea of what to expect as you move through the process and allows you to learn from the experiences of the two test communities, West Feliciana Parish and Tangipahoa Parish. The Handbook should be the starting point and should be consulted before beginning the implementation process.

What are the Steps to Implementing the Toolkit?

Once you have the pre-requisites in place then you are ready to begin the implementation process. There are four phases that must be completed for a successful Toolkit implementation:

1. **Adopting a Comprehensive Plan.** If there is any single document that is essential to a successful Toolkit implementation, it is a comprehensive plan. Before you get started, it is important that a community-wide vision for future growth be in place.

2. **Mapping the Toolkit.** As important as the specific rules in the Toolkit are, it is the mapping that ties the rules to the ground. The more accuracy and detail that exists in your mapping, the better positioned your community will be.

3. **Customizing the Toolkit.** It is likely that you will need to make modifications to the standards in the Toolkit in order to "right size" for your community. This chapter helps you through calibration process.

4. **Adopting and Administering the Toolkit.** Adopting and administering a new set of land use and development regulations can be difficult. It will take a coordinated and comprehensive effort as you move forward.

Each phase will elicit difficult discussions about the shared community vision, how to grow, where to grow and property rights. If your community has a recently-adopted parish or town plan, then you may already have most of Phase 1 complete. The following chapters of the Handbook provide a series of suggested steps for navigating the complexities of each phase.