Information Item

Community Development Committee

Meeting date: November 16, 2026

Topic

Livable Communities Evaluation Framework Update

District(s), member(s):	All
Policy/legal reference:	Minn. Stat. § 473.25
Staff prepared/presented:	Emily Seddon, Livable Communities Manager, 651-602-1023; Sarah Rodman, Business Analyst II, 651-602-1953
Division/department:	Community Development/Regional Planning

Update to the Livable Communities Program

In 2026, following a multi-year effort,[1] the Met Council launched an update to the Livable Communities program in response to feedback from local government partners, developers, and Council Members and to align the program with the regional vision and objectives established in Imagine 2050. This update also coincided with the Council-wide implementation of a new grant management system, Fluxx.

Early feedback from applicants and partners has been positive. Participants report that the updated program has simplified the application process, replaced technical program terminology with clearer outcome-focused language, and better communicates that creating a livable region requires a wide range of projects tailored to different community contexts.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Compliance Framework

As part of the program update, and in response to Council interest in understanding and demonstrating program impact, staff committed to developing a formal Monitoring, Evaluation, and Compliance (MEC) Framework. The framework is intended to promote transparency, accountability, continuous improvement, and alignment with both statutory requirements and Imagine 2050.

The framework builds on existing monitoring and compliance activities that have been strengthened in recent years through the development of the Grant Administration team. It also introduces a structured evaluation and learning component designed to help the Council better

[1] Staff presented information items and held discussions with the Community Development Committee (CDC) on March 18, 2024, July 15, 2024, September 3, 2024, October 7, 2024, November 18, 2024, December 16, 2024, April 21, 2025, and July 7, 2025, before presenting the Fund Distribution Plan for adoption on September 18, 2025.

understand the outputs and outcomes achieved through Livable Communities investments and how future grantmaking can be improved.

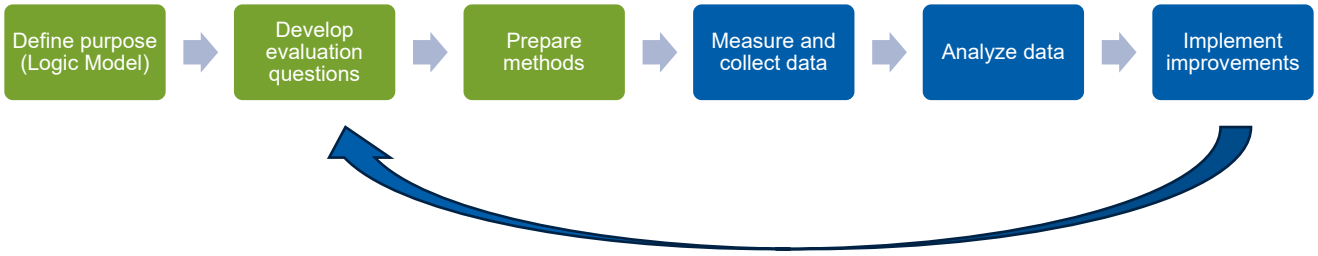
This Information Item focuses on the draft logic model and evaluation and learning plan, which is one component of the broader MEC Framework.

> **Monitoring:** Ensure grant funds are used as intended, that projects progress within a reasonable time frame, and that activities align with grant objectives. This allows the Met Council to communicate expectations more clearly and identify early indicators of success, potential need for amendment, or potential non-compliance. Monitoring primarily occurs through the grant payment (reimbursement) and semi-annual reporting processes.
>
> **Evaluation and Learning:** Systematically answer questions about the success or challenges of the Livable Communities grants and apply those insights to improve grantmaking. Monitoring data may be used as part of this assessment.
>
> **Compliance:** Ensure funds are being spent in accordance with statute and the Met Council policy governing grantmaking. Current compliance activities include grantee orientation to the Met Council grant agreements; grant payment (reimbursement), amendment, and semi-annual reporting processes; and annual risk assessments.

To support the development of the evaluation and learning component of this framework, the Met Council engaged the Improve Group to facilitate the creation of a logic model (the program's theory of change) and evaluation plan.

The Improve Group facilitated the evaluation planning process (green in Figure 1), and staff capacity will be dedicated to the implementation (blue in Figure 1):

Figure 1 Evaluation Planning Process



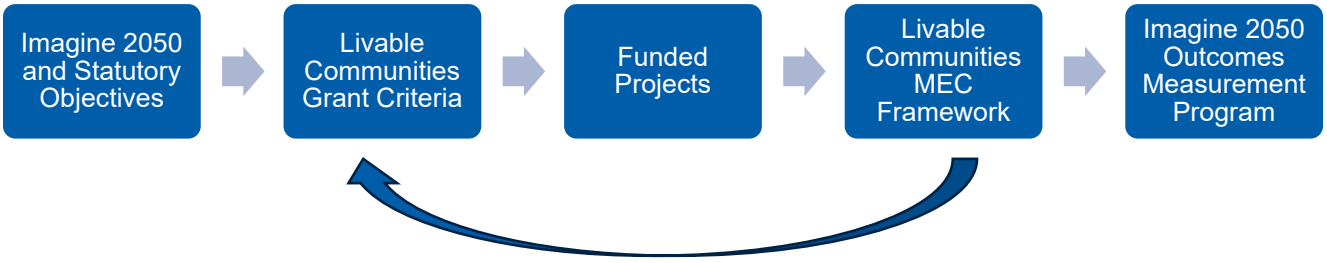
The process is cyclical, as once program improvements are implemented, the entire process can be repeated with the same or new evaluation questions.

Imagine 2050 Connections

The MEC Framework is a key mechanism for understanding how the Livable Communities program contributes to the outcomes of Imagine 2050 and statute, as well as the barriers to achieving those outcomes and the effectiveness of Met Council grantmaking.

The 2026 Livable Communities program updates incorporated Imagine 2050 objectives and statute directly into grant program design and scoring criteria, as described in Appendix A in the 2026 Fund Distribution Plan. The MEC Framework examines to what extent the Livable Communities program achieves Imagine 2050 and statutory objectives (see Appendix A: Logic Model Outcome, Imagine 2050, and Statute Matrix), and uses that information to inform future changes to the Livable Communities program. The Livable Communities MEC Framework also feeds into the broader Imagine 2050 Outcomes Measurement Program, an outcomes-focused monitoring effort designed to inform dialogues about the region's progress toward realizing Imagine 2050's intended outcomes (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Livable Communities MEC Framework in Context



Draft Logic Model

A logic model establishes the theoretical connections between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes for a particular program. It guides work within the program, supports communication of program elements, and was staff's first step in developing an evaluation plan because it focuses attention on what could be evaluated, even though not everything in the logic model will be evaluated. The logic model staff developed with support from the Improve Group contains four elements, defined in Table 1.

Table 1 Logic Model Elements

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Resources invested in the program. Funding, staff time, technology, etc. In this case, the Met Council's investments in the Livable Communities program.	Actions that take place within the course of the program. In the case of Livable Communities grants, these are the actions grantees and sub-grantees take with the grant money Met Council awards.	What is produced as a result of the activities. Put another way, evidence that the activities took place. In this case, the deliverables grantees are tasked with under the grant agreement.	Changes or benefits the program desires to influence. For Livable Communities, these correspond to Imagine 2050 and statutory objectives.

Table 2 Draft Livable Communities Logic Model

Inputs	**Activities**	**Outputs**	**Outcomes** (See Appendix A for Imagine 2050 references)

• Funding: Livable Communities Demonstration Account (LCDA), Local Housing Incentives Account (LHIA), and Tax Base Revitalization Account (TBRA)
• Time and Expertise:
  • Livable Communities and Housing and Grants Administration teams
  • Livable Communities Advisory Committee and staff advisors
• Technology: website, email, phone, software, Fluxx, etc.
• Relationships: with city and county government partners, nonprofit staff, and developers
	• Cities, Counties, and Development Authorities set the conditions for development that aligns with regional goals through policy and program development and small area planning
	• Cities, Counties, and Development Authorities direct funding to build projects that are the implementation of regional goals through pre-development activities, environmental investigation, cleanup, and construction
	• Cities, Counties, and Development Authorities hire technical advisors and fund developer navigation consulting to strengthen local capacity and broaden the development ecosystem to include emerging and BIPOC developers
		• Number of plans, studies, assessments, investigations, and design documents completed
		• Number of policies, programs, or partnerships adopted or updated
		• Number of development projects, environmental cleanups, and new or renovated housing or commercial units constructed
		  ○ Number of homes by tenure, type, and size
		• Number, experience, and diversity of developers, businesses, and community organizations participating in funded projects
		• Number of projects and housing units within 0.5 miles of a transit connection
			• Expand housing choices across the region.
			  ○ Reduced barriers and shorter timelines for housing development.
			  ○ Increased production and long-term preservation of affordable housing across the region.
			  ○ Increased stability and reduced housing cost burden.
			• Everyone can meet their needs in their community.
			  ○ Increased development in amenity-rich areas without displacement.
			  ○ Increased access to transit, cultural assets, services, commercial opportunities, and public spaces, especially for groups that have historically been excluded.
			• Improve safety.
			  ○ Increased health and environmental quality through cleanup and remediation of contaminated sites and sustainable building practices.
			  ○ More underutilized or vacant sites are redeveloped.
			• Build wealth.
			  ○ Expanded participation and leadership by emerging developers and developers of color in real estate development.
			  ○ Increased homeownership rate among BIPOC households.

Draft Evaluation Plan

The Met Council seeks to understand the grant program's broader impact on the region and optimize grantmaking practices to achieve the desired results defined in the logic model. The Draft Evaluation Plan supports the Livable Communities program staff in testing and building out evaluation processes, including measurement expectations for future grants.

Evaluation constraints

Constraints drive the evaluation strategy and give us the opportunity to shape the plan in ways that we can address some of the constraints.

Table 3 Evaluation Constraints

Constraint	Strategy to Address
Livable Communities grants are spent over multiple years, work may continue after grant funds are fully expended, and benefits may not be realized until years later.	Start with a manageable-sized sample of recently completed grants to build internal processes within complex system before expanding scope
Projects may not be directly comparable; there are too many variables or variety.	Include qualitative data
After the grant term ends, there is currently no contractual obligation for grantees to continue reporting on most grants	Use third-party data Update grant agreements/requirements to define longer-term reporting relationship
Livable Communities funding is often a small percentage of overall project funding	Refrain from asking causal questions
Staff capacity	Scale scope and timing to fit into staff work plans Met Council considers broader evaluation capacity

Draft evaluation plan design

The draft evaluation design accounts for the evaluation constraints. The draft evaluation plan takes a mixed-method, retrospective approach. Data collected and analyzed will be descriptive, setting a foundation for the Met Council to tell a story about what is known about the Livable Communities Grant program and track that story over time. Data will be gathered from a sample of recently completed grants and key partners to better understand potential grant outcomes and test processes for collecting and reporting evaluation data.

The evaluation plan design articulates areas of inquiry, describes who and where data will come from, and documents how data will be gathered to answer the questions and contribute to learning. With support from the Improve Group, staff drafted a high-level plan design that will continue to be refined based on feedback from Council Members and staff and with the expertise of the Improve Group.

Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions identify the elements of the program to be evaluated and narrow the scope of investigation. The preliminary research questions, subject to refinement based on feedback, are:

1. How effective is the Livable Communities program at grant-making?[2]
    - Are awarded grants aligned to the Imagine 2050 Equity Framework conditions for success?
2. What are the obstacles (within Met Council influence) grantees face in advancing outcomes?
    - To what extent is the practice of making partial awards creating obstacles to advancing outcomes?
3. To what extent are grant outcomes being achieved?
    - Is it easier for emerging developers of color to access Livable Communities funding?
    - Is the supply of affordable housing increasing?

Measures

Specific, quantifiable measures, or data points, will be identified for each evaluation question. These may include some of the Imagine 2050 Outcomes Monitoring measures listed in Appendix A, as well as additional measures specific to the evaluation questions. Sources may include administrative data from grant applications, status reports, and closeout reports, other Met Council datasets such as the Building Permit Survey and Housing Policy and Production Survey, data from the State of Minnesota, third-party data such as CoStar real estate data, and surveys or interviews with stakeholders of the program.

Methods

Data collection methods will vary based on the proposed measures. In the first step of implementing the evaluation plan, staff will take a retrospective approach by selecting three to six recently closed grants as a convenience sample to test the evaluation plan. Staff will collect data on the identified measures and run preliminary analyses towards answering the evaluation questions. The learnings from this test run of the evaluation plan will be used to formalize a process for evaluating current and future grant awards.

Next Steps

Over the next few months, staff will finalize the logic model and evaluation plan and incorporate the implementation of the evaluation plan into staff 2027 and 2028 workplans. The evaluation results will inform recommendations to improve the Livable Communities program.

The Met Council has approved the current Livable Communities Fund Distribution Plan through 2027, subject to annual funding allocations. Monitoring data and initial observations from the first three Imagine 2050-aligned semi-annual grant cycles will inform recommendations for the 2028 Fund Distribution Plan. However, because the evaluation plan will not begin implementation until 2027, substantive results likely won't be available by the time the 2028 Fund Distribution Plan is adopted. Nevertheless, the evaluation plan will guide staff recommendations in future years.

Discussion Questions

As staff continue to refine the logic model and evaluation plan, staff would like to know from Council Members:

[2] Possible definitions of effectiveness could come from Minnesota Management and Budget's 2023 report on Impactful Grantmaking Best Practices.

Logic Model

- What resonates with you about the logic model?
- Are the outcomes you expect included in the logic model?
- Is the logic strong enough?

Evaluation Plan

- What resonates with you about the evaluation plan?
- Are the evaluation questions what you want to prioritize knowing?
- Is there something missing?

Appendix A: Logic Model Outcome, Imagine 2050, and Statute Matrix

Note: Many Imagine 2050 policies are mutually reinforcing; staff have linked a primary reference below. The Livable Communities evaluation plan will include measures in addition to the Imagine 2050 Outcomes Monitoring Measures. This table includes the Outcomes Monitoring Measures as a reference to the framework already adopted by the Council.

Livable Communities Logic Model Outcome	Imagine 2050 Policy Addressed	Imagine 2050 Outcomes Monitoring Measure	Statutory Requirement
Expand housing choices across the region.			
○ Reduced barriers and shorter timelines for housing development.	Housing Policy Plan – Policy 2, Options to Own and Rent	100: Net change (acreage) in land guided from lower to higher densities for residential development	
○ Increased production and long-term preservation of affordable housing across the region.	Housing Policy Plan - Policy 1, Housing Choices Across the Region	94: Share of deeply affordable housing units produced region-wide with Livable Communities Funding 95: New housing units supported by Livable Communities grant funds 96: Number of housing units preserved by Livable Communities grant funds	Minn. Stat. § 473.25
○ Increased stability and reduced housing cost burden.	Housing Policy Plan – Policy 3, Housing Stability	109: Share of Livable Communities funding going to housing units with "priority characteristics"	
Everyone can meet their needs in their community.			
○ Increased development in amenity-rich areas without displacement.	Land Use Plan – Policy 28, Anti-Displacement	102: Built environment characteristics of new affordable housing developments 103: Average transportation accessibility (by mode) of new affordable housing developments to neighborhood amenities	Minn. Stat. § 473.25

Livable Communities Logic Model Outcome	Imagine 2050 Policy Addressed	Imagine 2050 Outcomes Monitoring Measure	Statutory Requirement
○ Increased access to transit, cultural assets, services, commercial opportunities, and public spaces, especially for groups that have historically been excluded.	Housing Policy Plan – Policy 5, Connected Housing and Neighborhoods	83: Transportation accessibility (by mode) to neighborhood amenities	Minn. Stat. § 473.25
Improve safety.			
○ Increased health and environmental quality through cleanup and remediation of contaminated sites and sustainable building practices.	Land Use Plan – Policy 4, Redevelopment and Infill Housing Policy Plan – Policy 7, Climate Resilient, Healthy Housing	48: Total acreage of contaminated land cleaned up supported by Livable Communities 117: Total annual greenhouse gas emissions from the residential sector	Minn. Stat. § 473.252
○ More underutilized or vacant sites are redeveloped.	Land Use Plan – Policy 4, Redevelopment and Infill	73: Share of vacant infill acreage that is developed	Minn. Stat. § 473.25
Build wealth.			
○ Expanded participation and leadership by emerging developers and developers of color in real estate development.	Land Use Policy – Policy 39, A Just Economy	164: Share of region's workforce employed by small businesses	
○ Increased homeownership rate among BIPOC households.	Housing Policy Plan – Policy 2, Affordable Options To Own and Rent	110: Rate of homeownership by demographic group	