



Country Fiche on Terrestrial Spatial Planning

FINLAND

Updated January 2018

1. Current situation and main challenges

The Ministry of the Environment has initiated the preparation of a comprehensive reform of the Land Use and Building Act. The revised Act will be completed in the beginning of the 2020s. The existing Land Use and Building Act 2000 includes land use planning and building regulations, construction and use of buildings.

Within last decades there have been numerous changes in the land use and living environment that requires reform of the current land use planning system, and in the future there will be even more changes and phenomenon. These include digitalization, climate policy and energy issues, changes in the regional structure and larger demographic changes, growth of the metropolitan areas and urbanization, changes in the means of transportation and changes in the structures of the governance. These days land use planning is required to respond quickly to different and changing needs. On the other hand, the people's demands of the high quality land use planning and their sensitivity to the changes in their surrounding environment have also increased.

Many of the current Land Use and Building Act's objectives are still up to date, but some of its aspects have become more obscure after many previously made partial changes in the current Act. Therefore, the larger context could be lost due to numerous changes in the Act. The most recent changes have been the abolition to approve the Regional Land Use Plans in the Ministry of the Environment and to transfer all land use permissions and decision making to the local authorities in 2016, as well as the change to streamline planning and construction permits in 2017.

The major challenge for the current planning law is the inefficiency of planning of those urban areas that are previously planned and constructed, and are now going through review and regeneration. Good management of these changes is the main question of the land use planning system review. Furthermore, the current law does not identify the growing metropolitan or urban areas as well as it should.

The hierarchy of the current land use planning system is often challenged by the growing need to plan from bottom to up – from the intended development proposal to planning the larger context. In addition, there is a need to develop planning system to more strategic direction.

Finland is undergoing a massive regional reform, where the regions will get new autonomous status. That creates the need to look at the land use planning system from the new angle. The key role of this review is again, to decide how to organize planning of those growing urban areas in the future.

In addition, the links between the Land Use and Building Act and many other Acts and laws should be reviewed same time while renewing the Act.

International agreements have also their effects to development of new legislation in Finland. The most recent of these is the Paris Climate Agreement, which further emphasizes the mitigation of climate change as a main starting point for land use development.

2. Contacts

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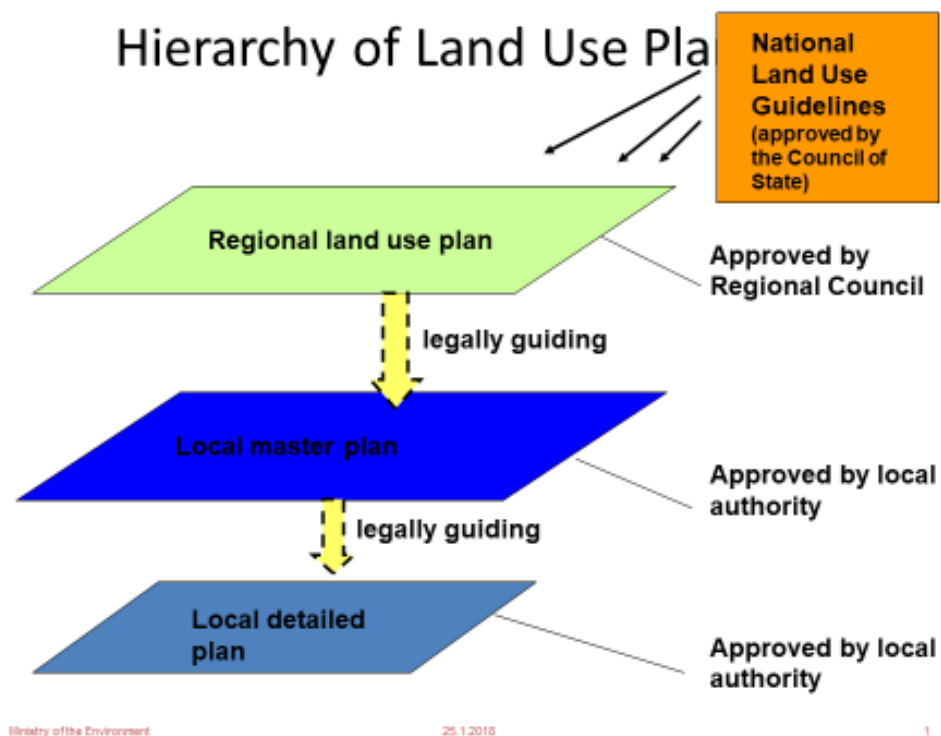
General information

The Land Use and Building Act (2000) is the most important act to steer land use, spatial planning and construction in Finland. The Land Use and Building Act aims:

- to organise land use and building to create the basis for high quality living environments;
- to promote ecologically, economically, socially and culturally sustainable developments;
- to ensure that everyone has the chance to participate in open planning processes;
- to guarantee the quality of openly published planning decisions and participatory processes, and to ensure that a wide range of planning expertise is available.

These general objectives are supplemented by more specific objectives relating to controls over land use planning and construction. All of these objectives have been designed to help make living environments healthy, safe, attractive and socially functional, with the needs of different groups fully considered.

Spatial planning system



The principle of the land use planning system is moving down the hierarchy towards more specific plans, so that national land use guidelines steer regional and local master plans, which, in turn, control local detailed plans.

Local master plans and local detailed plans are drafted and approved in municipalities. Regional land use plans are drafted and approved by regional councils. Municipalities may also cooperate in drafting a local master plan.

The plan covering the leisure housing on the shore zone is called a detailed shore plan. Detailed shore plans can be drafted by landowners, although the handling and approval of the plans is the municipalities' responsibility.

National land use guidelines

The national land use guidelines are drafted by the Government and a part of the land use planning system. The guidelines must be taken into account and their implementation must be promoted in regional planning, municipal land use planning and the activities of the state authorities.

The purpose of the land use guidelines is to:

- ensure that the issues that are important on the national level are taken into account in regional and municipal land use planning as well as the activities of the state authorities;
- help with achieving the objectives of the Land Use and Building Act and land use planning, the most important of which are a good living environment and sustainable development;
- act as a tool in the advance guidance of land use planning in nationally important land use issues and promote the coherence and consistency of advance guidance;
- promote the implementation of international agreements in Finland;
- create land use planning preconditions for implementing national projects.

The national land use guidelines include the following themes:

1. a functioning regional structure;
2. a more coherent community structure and the quality of the living environment;
3. cultural and natural heritage, recreational use and natural resources;
4. functioning connection networks and energy management;
5. special issues of the Helsinki region;
6. specific regions as natural and cultural environments.

Regional land use planning

Regional land use plans are drafted and approved by regional councils, whose members are representatives from the municipalities. Individual citizens and non-governmental organizations are fully entitled to participate in the planning process.

The regional land use plan transfers national and regional land use goals to the local level. Each of Finland's 18 regions is covered by a regional land use plan. These general plans set out medium-term and long-term objectives for regional land use strategies that guide regional development and steer decisions on issues that are of a trans-municipal or regional nature.

The regional land use plan sets out a general framework for more detailed local plans, which are prepared by municipalities. When a plan is being drawn up, special attention is given to the following:

- appropriate regional and community structure of the region;
- ecological sustainability of land use;
- environmentally and economically sustainable arrangement of transport and technical services;
- sustainable use of water and extractable land resources;
- operating conditions for the region's businesses;
- protection of landscape, natural values, and cultural heritage;
- sufficient availability of areas suitable for recreation.

Regional land use plans are legally binding, but nevertheless they leave plenty of scope for the municipalities to resolve local land use and development issues. To ensure that regional land use plans provide suitable guidelines for the local plans, they are reassessed and updated regularly according to the changing conditions.

Local land use planning

Local master plans are drafted by municipalities and approved by city councils or municipal councils.

They are general land use plans of municipalities, and they give general directions on land use, for example the location of residential areas, places of employment and traffic routes. They outline general development in municipalities and direct the preparation of local detailed plans. Local master plans can cover entire municipalities or parts of them, in which case they are called partial master plans. Municipalities may also draft a local master plan jointly. The plan is displayed on a map, appended with notations, regulations and a description.

Local master plans are flexible. They can be very strategic and give instructions on a general level, similarly to regional land use plans. On the other hand, they can also be very precise in their steering of construction. Local master plans of shorelines and villages are typically of the latter kind. The role of local master plans has also become more pronounced in directing wind power building.

The following must be taken into account when a local master plan is drafted:

- the functionality, economy and ecological sustainability of the community structure;
- utilisation of the existing community structure;
- housing needs and availability of services;
- opportunities to organise traffic, especially public transport and non-motorised traffic, energy, water supply and drainage, and energy and waste management in an appropriate manner which is sustainable in terms of the environment, natural resources and economy;
- opportunities for a safe and healthy living environment which takes different population groups into equal consideration;
- business conditions within the municipality;
- reduction of environmental hazards;
- protection of the built environment, landscape and natural values;
- sufficient number of areas suitable for recreation.