



# Country Fiche on Terrestrial Spatial Planning

## ESTONIA

Updated March 2024

## 1. Current situation and main challenges

The Estonian [Planning Act](#) came into force in 01.06.2015. The planning procedures concerning the plans initiated prior to that will be concluded in accordance with the previous law. However, all the new plans will be created in accordance with the new Act. It has been an intensive adaptation and learning process for both national and local governments.

The last decades have brought many changes. There are notable developments for example in our economy, technology, communication and lifestyle. There are changes also in our legal framework: some regulations initiated by EU, some by national government. Climate change, energy crisis, green transition, and adapting to population shrinkage are additional topics that have seen significant changes in the past years. Furthermore, Estonia's national security systems have become a crucial topic to take into consideration in recent times. However, this puts a pressure on the field of planning. How do we make decisions about the use of space and what is the role of planning in this – those are the questions that need to be answered. The debate on this is active. These issues have been discussed both in a dedicated expert group set up in 2018 within the Government Office and more broadly across ministries based on the results of this work. It has been decided to set up the Land and Spatial Planning Board as a sub-agency in 2024/2025.

Already as a result of the local elections in October 2017, a large-scale merging of the municipalities across Estonia took place with [the Administrative-Territorial Reform](#); instead of 213 now only 79 local governments remain. The merged municipalities are obliged to draw up new general plans for their substantially extended boundaries. This is also a legal requirement that will be facilitated by the increased planning capacity of the consolidated administrations. As of March 2024, less than half of the new general plans have been enforced.

Additionally, there has been decisive restructuring in the regional level in Estonia. Starting from 2018 the activities of the County Governments were terminated. Some functions were transferred to the ministries and other government agencies, and some were transferred to the municipalities to fulfil those either autonomously or jointly. This calls for significant changes in the future planning system as a whole and in the distribution of the roles and responsibilities more specifically. As a first step, the ministry responsible for spatial planning in Estonia (Ministry of Finance until 2023, then Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture) ensured the completion of country-wide

spatial plans and the harmonisation of the relevant action plans in all 15 counties.

Estonia has launched a database of spatial plans for the whole country in October 2022 called **PLANK**. Corresponding changes in the Spatial Planning Act were made to ensure that the enforced plans are included in the database, and that the plans contain the digital information needed. At the same time, most of the attributes remain descriptive text data. We also limit the file format in which the work can be submitted. To ensure geographical data quality, we introduce requirements for spatial data based on business needs and international standards. The main goals are to access all spatial plans in force from one place. It will also be a digital archive of spatial plans. It is possible to link other national databases information with spatial plans. In this project, we used the already existing e-Estonian infrastructure; for example, authentication with the help of electronic ID and data exchange with other information systems in the country via the X-Road.

## 2. Contacts

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## General information

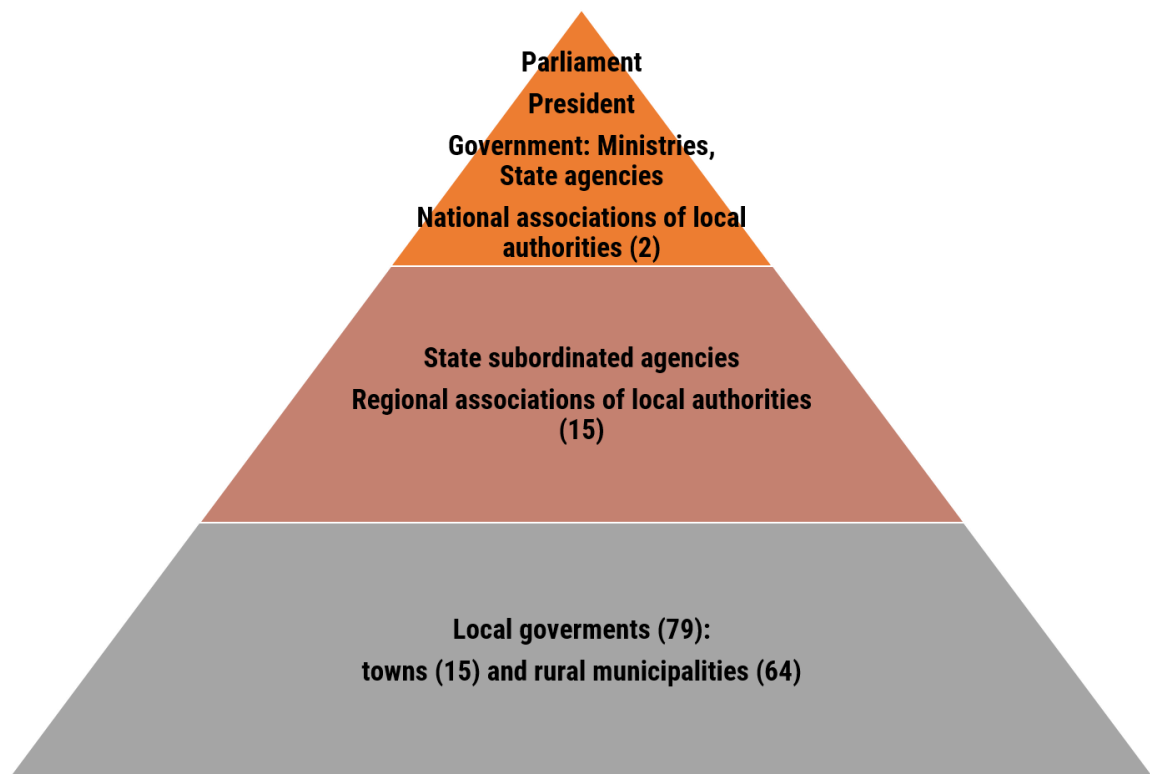
State administrative organisation in Estonia consists of the national governmental institutions and the local governmental institutions, which operate on different levels – national, regional or local. Depending on the specification of a particular spatial plan, most of them could be involved in a planning process, as well as the relevant political bodies.

National administration consists of the Government of the Republic of Estonia (supported by the Government Office), ministries and different government agencies. Those operate on the national level, but the ministries and the government agencies might have also regional offices and operate on a regional level. Those regions are delineated and governed very differently, agency by agency. National governmental institutions have adopted some of the functions previously fulfilled by the County

Governments (terminated from 2018), such as regional spatial planning, land reform management, state supervision over local governments, schools, welfare agencies and libraries.

Local administrations are governing both urban and rural municipalities. Local administration operates on the local level, but there are also activities performed on the regional and national levels. The municipalities have adopted the following functions previously fulfilled by the County Governments: regional public transport, regional development, and regional health promotion. The municipalities must exercise those activities jointly through the Regional Associations of the Local Governments, the Regional Entrepreneurship and Development Centres, Public Transport Centres or other forms of cooperation. The Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities is representing the local governments on a national level.

*A general structure of political and administrative system in Estonia:*



In general, the planning responsibilities in Estonia are divided between national and municipal levels. The authorities that carry out planning responsibilities are the Ministry of Finance, other relevant government agencies and local authorities. Starting from 01.01.2018, the activities of the state's regional administration (County Governments) were terminated, and the regional planning responsibilities were transferred to the Ministry of

Finance. As of July 2023, the portfolio will be transferred to the Ministry of the Regional Affairs and Agriculture.

**A new national spatial plan (NSP)** is being prepared for the entire territory of Estonia. The aim of the NSP is to define the spatial development principles and directions for the whole country. The current NSP "[Estonia 2030+](#)" has been in force since 2012, and the action plan for its implementation was last updated in 2020. On 05.01.2023 the Government of the Republic initiated the NSP "Estonia 2050" together with the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture arranges the preparation of the NSP. The plan is prepared in cooperation with ministries and national associations of local authorities.

The aim of a **national designated spatial plan (NDSP)** is to erect a building or an infrastructure, which has a significant spatial impact and a significant national or international interest. A NDSP is prepared to express interests concerning issues of national defence and security, energy supply, transport of gas, waste management, which transcend the county borders. Also express such interests in public water bodies and in the exclusive economic zone. The Ministry of Regional Affairs arranges the preparation of NDSPs. Where appropriate, the Government may decide that the preparation of NDSPs concerning matters of national defence and security may be arranged by the relevant government agency, mostly the Ministry of Defence or the Ministry of the Interior. Both the pre-selection of the location and the preparation of the detailed solution are carried out in cooperation with the relevant ministries and other government agencies.

The aim of a **county-wide spatial plan (CSP)** is to define the principles and directions of spatial development of the entire county or a part it, or several counties. A CSP is prepared primarily in order to express interests that transcend the boundaries of local authorities, in order to balance national and local spatial development needs and interests. The Ministry of Regional Affairs arranges the preparation of CSPs. The plans are prepared in cooperation with the ministries, local authorities within the planning area and the relevant government agencies.

The aim of a **comprehensive plan (CP)** is to define the spatial development principles and directions in the entire rural or urban municipality or in a part of the municipality. By agreement, a CP could be prepared for the territory of several municipalities. The local authority arranges the preparation of the CP.

The plans are prepared in cooperation with the relevant government agencies and with the bordering local authorities.

**A local government designated spatial plan (LGDSP)** is prepared in order to erect a building or an infrastructure that has significant spatial impact, in case the location is not determined in the CP. The LGDSP is prepared on the territory of the respective municipality. The local authority arranges the preparation of LGDSP. Both the pre-selection of the location and the preparation of the detailed solution are carried out in cooperation with the relevant government agencies respectively.

The purpose of a **detailed spatial plan (DSP)** is to implement the comprehensive plan and to create a spatial solution for the planning area. The DSP forms the basis for issuing the building rights. The local authority arranges the preparation of the DSPs. The plans are prepared in cooperation with the relevant government agencies.

### Spatial planning system

**Estonian spatial planning system** consists of the plans that are of national responsibility and the plans that are the responsibility of the municipalities. The spatial plans prepared by the national authorities are the national spatial plan (and the respective thematic plan), national designated spatial plans, and county-wide spatial plans (and the respective thematic plans). The spatial plans prepared by the local authorities are comprehensive spatial plans (and the respective thematic plans), local government designated spatial plans, and detailed spatial plans.

*A general structure of planning system in Estonia:*



The spatial planning system in Estonia is a hierarchical one: the more general plan always directs the preparation of the more detailed plan and provides essential input into those. However, the system is not strictly one-directional: in justified and motivated cases, the more detailed plan may contain a proposal to modify the more general plan. Although this last one does not concern all types of plans.

The aim of **the national spatial plan** (NSP) is to define the spatial development principles and directions for the whole country.

The functions of a NSP are:

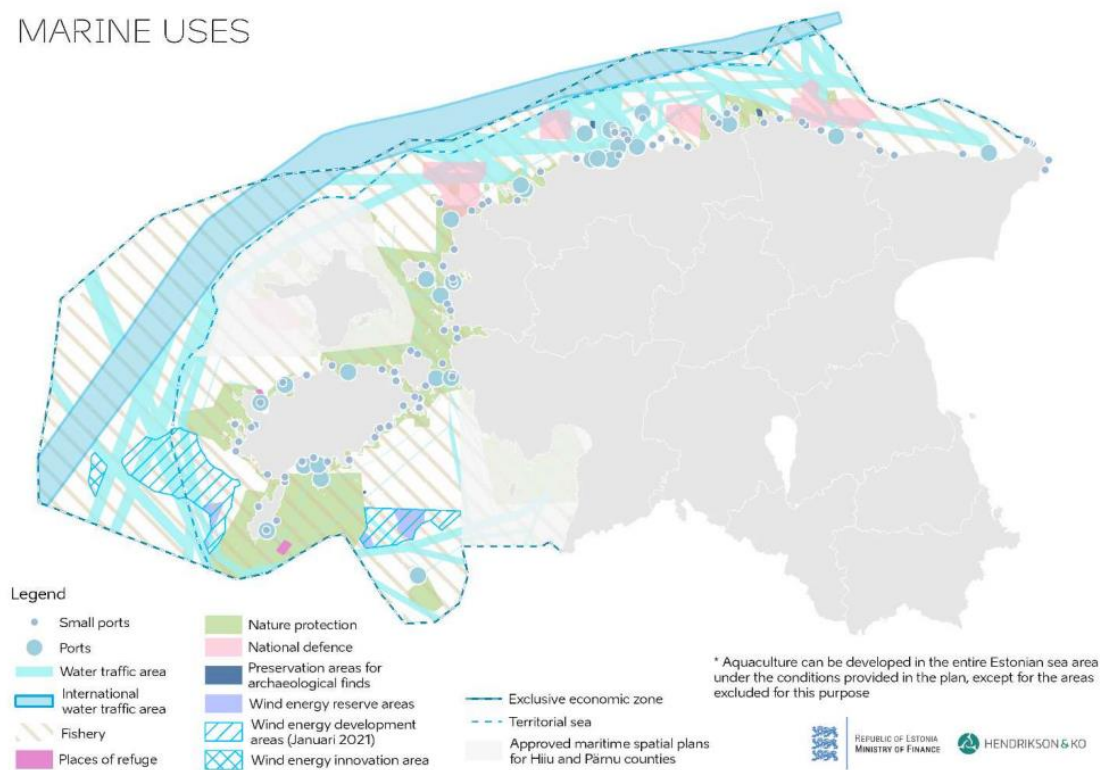
1. determining the development principles and directions of the human settlement,
2. determining the development principles and directions of the national and international transport network,
3. determining the principles and directions of other infrastructure (incl. energy, gas, communications),
4. determining the general principles and exploitation directions of the ground below surface,
5. determining the preservation and supportive measures for valuable landscapes, valuable arable land and the green network.
6. Determining thematic spatial plans extending to sea and coastal areas.

Additionally, with the validation of the **Maritime Spatial Plan** (MSP) in 2022, the long-term principles and vision of planning the total Estonian sea area were set down in a [strategic document](#) of spatial development. The planning solution was provided by an expert group of planning authorities, together with cooperation with other countries, agencies and stakeholders. A function of the NSP through a thematic spatial plan is to determine the principles and balanced development of the Estonian sea area. There are also two maritime spatial plans in effect in the Estonian sea area – the Hiiu and Pärnu maritime spatial plans. The purpose of these plans was to carry out, for the first time in Estonia, a maritime spatial planning process in accordance with the Planning Act, and to define the prospective use of the sea area and the necessary conditions. The spatial plans serve as a basis for planning the rest of Estonia's sea area.



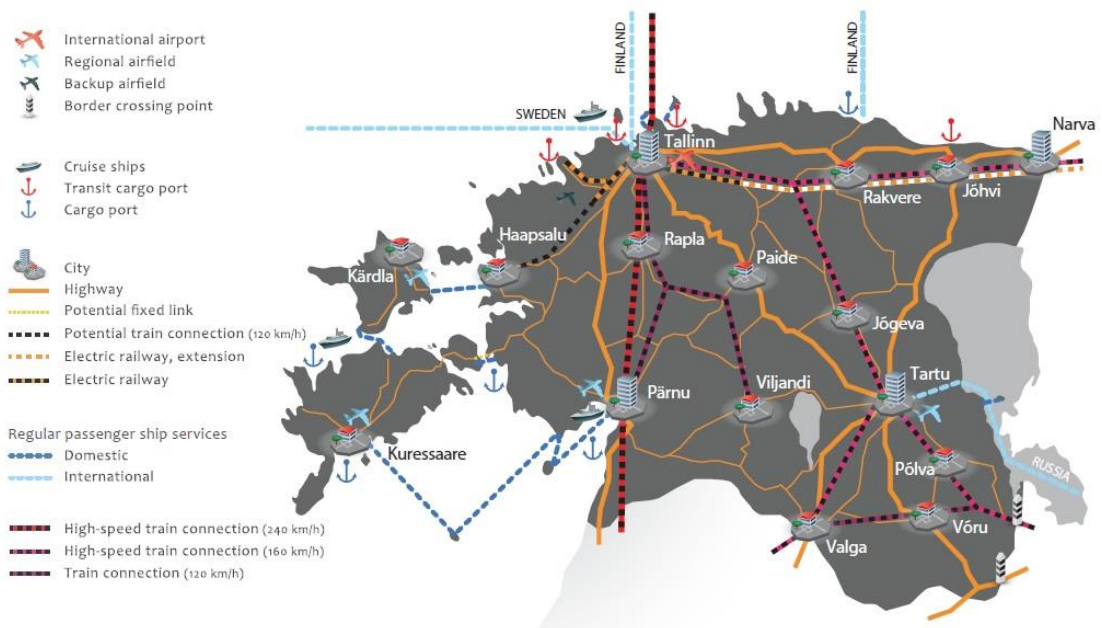
## The planning solution of the combined use of the marine area:

### MARINE USES



The NSP forms the basis for the preparation of county-wide spatial plans, providing guidelines for the preparation of those plans.

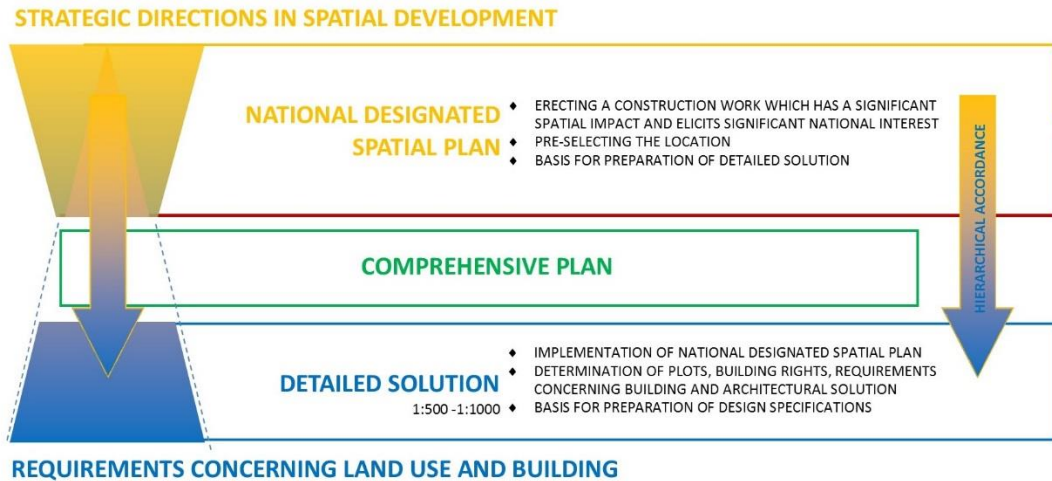
### An extract from NSP Estonia 2030+:



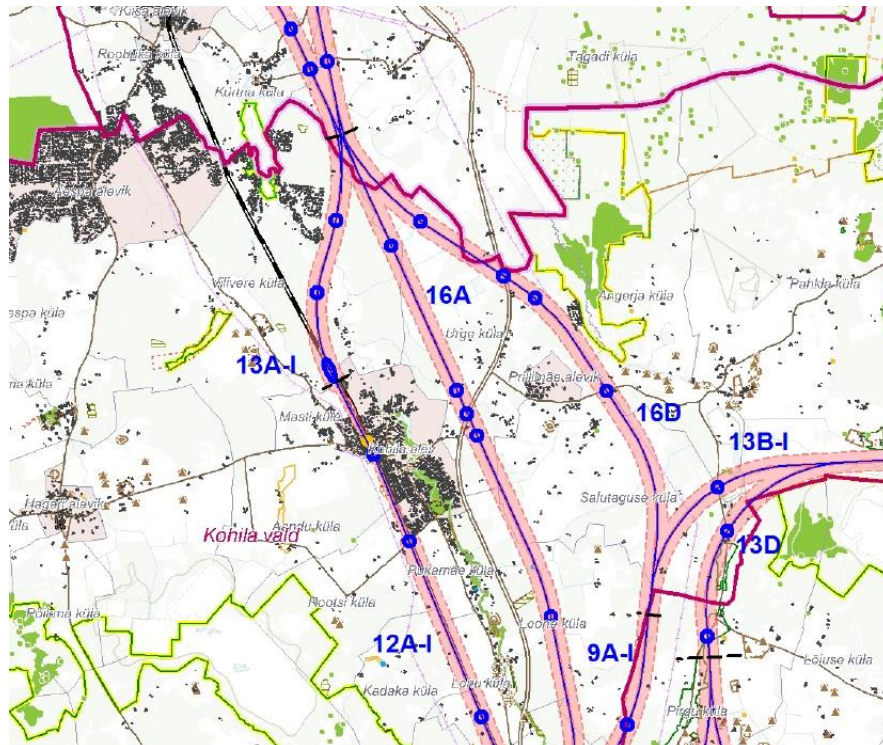


The preparation procedure of a NDSP is two-phased: pre-selecting a most suitable location and after that, preparing the detailed solution. The NDSP is the basis for the issuing of building design specifications. The NDSP expires within five years if its implementation has not started.

*A position of the NDSP in the planning system:*



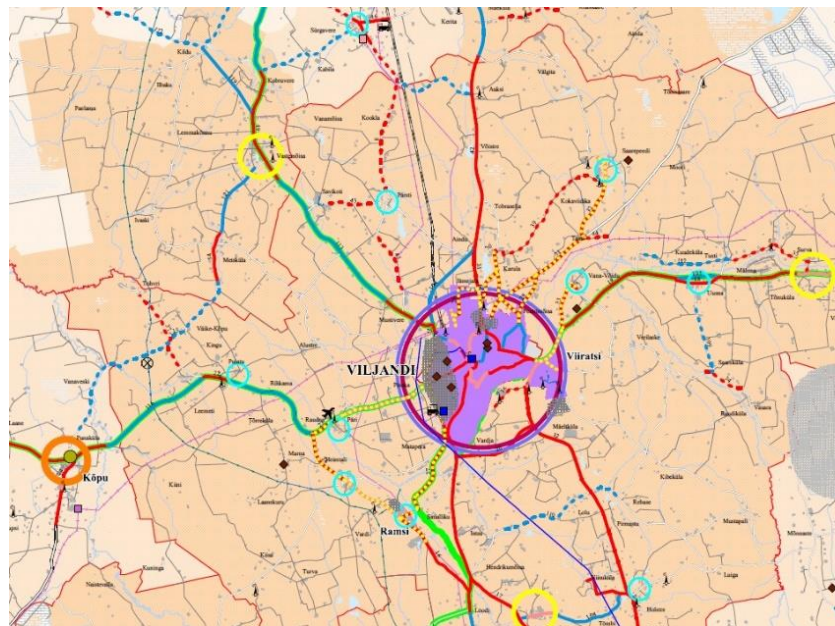
*An example of pre-selection process in NDSP (Rail Baltic):*



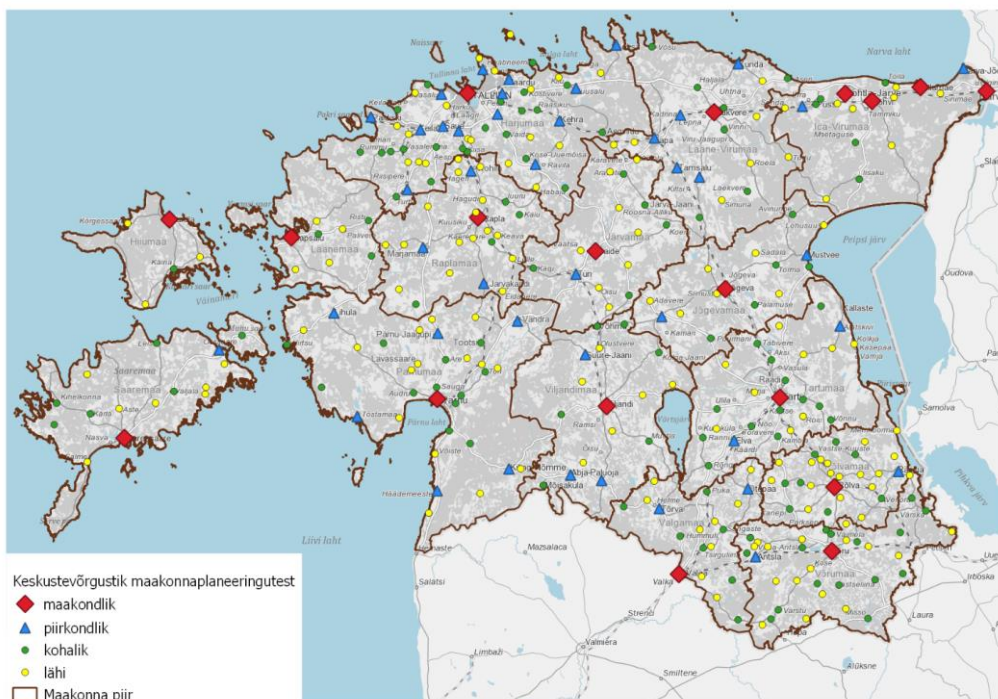
The NDSP replaces all the relevant plans existing at the same location. The corresponding modifications are to be made to those plans.

The aim of a **county-wide spatial plan (CSP)** is to define the principles and directions of spatial development at the regional level. In addition to balancing national and local spatial development needs, the CSP must fulfil the functions that emanate from the national spatial plan. The functions of the CSP can be found in the Planning Act ([Paragraph 56](#)). The CSPs are the basis for the preparation of comprehensive plans and formulating directions for the preparation of the those plans.

*An extract from Viljandi CSP:*



A four-level network of work and service centres designated by CSPs:





The aim of a **comprehensive plan (CP)** is to define the spatial development principles and directions in the municipality. In addition to addressing the local spatial development needs, the CP must consider the county-wide spatial plan. The detailed functions of the CP can be found in the Planning Act ([Paragraph 75](#)). CPs are the basis for the preparation of local government designated spatial plans and detailed spatial plans and, in cases where the preparation of a detailed spatial plan is not mandatory, for the issuing of building design specifications. If necessary and justified, the CP may contain a proposal to modify the county-wide spatial plan.

*An extract from Viimsi CP:*



A **local government designated spatial plan (LGDSP)** is used in case of the buildings or infrastructure objects with significant spatial impact. The detailed functions of the LGDSP can be found in the Planning Act ([Paragraph 95](#)). The buildings and the infrastructure objects considered are listed in the regulation adopted by the Government. The preparation procedure of a LGDSP is two-phased: pre-selecting a most suitable location and after that, preparing the detailed solution. The LGDSP is the basis for the issuing of building design specifications. The LGDSP expires within five years if its implementation has not started.

*A position of the LGDSP in the planning system:*



The location, selected in the preparation process of the LGDSP is entered into the earlier adopted comprehensive plan. The LGDSP replaces all the previously adopted LGDSPs and detailed spatial plans existing at the same location. The corresponding modifications are to be made. If necessary and justified, the LGDSP may contain a proposal to modify the county-wide spatial plan.

The purpose of **the detailed spatial plan (DSP)** is to implement the comprehensive plan and to create an inclusive spatial solution for the planning area. Where a DSP exists or where the preparation of a DSP is mandatory, the plan is the basis for the issuing of building design specifications. The tasks to be fulfilled by the DSP can be found in the Planning Act ([Paragraph 126](#)). If necessary and justified, the DSP may include a proposal to alter the adopted comprehensive plan.