



Country Fiche on Terrestrial Spatial Planning

FINLAND

Updated December 2024

1. Current situation and main challenges

Reform of the Land Use Act

The comprehensive reform of the Land Use and Building Act was initiated in the spring of 2018. The background for the reform includes numerous amendments to the law and significant shifts in the operational environment, such as climate and energy issues, biodiversity loss, urbanization, changes in mobility, and digitalization.

During the previous government term, the comprehensive reform was suspended, and only the section concerning building was approved by the parliament. The Building Act came into force on January 1, 2025, and the name of the Land Use and Building Act was changed to the Land Use Act. No substantive changes were made to the provisions concerning land use, except for those related to digitalization.

With the new government, the preparation of the Land Use Act was restarted in late 2023. According to the government program's objectives, the law is being reformed to promote appropriate land use, a good living environment, smooth planning processes, the growth of cities and municipalities, sufficient housing production, regional vitality, business competitiveness, and Finland's attractiveness as an investment destination. Sustainable development, strengthening biodiversity, and adapting to climate change are also emphasized.

In the autumn of 2024, a working group set up by the Ministry of the Environment made a proposal for a new Land Use Act. The intention is that after the consultation round and parliamentary consideration, the Parliament would decide on the new law in 2025, and it would come into force in 2026.

According to the draft law, the land use planning system would remain largely unchanged. It would still include national land use guidelines, regional plans, and local master and detailed plans. The law proposes changes to streamline planning and updates to the objectives and content requirements of plans to meet the challenges of changes in the operational environment and international obligations.

Streamlining planning would involve reducing the detail and legal impact of regional plans. Additionally, the law proposes adding provisions for initiating the preparation of local master and detailed plans and for preparing these plans in cooperation with landowners. A new procedure is proposed for the joint processing of local master and detailed plans, allowing them to be prepared and approved simultaneously.

Changes are proposed to the content requirements of plans, such as utilizing comprehensive security, preserving biodiversity and preparing for extreme weather events and flood risks. These changes would be particularly significant for mitigating and adapting to climate change and preventing biodiversity loss.

The provisions concerning the content, preparation, and legal effects of national land use guidelines would remain largely unchanged. The guidelines would explicitly include climate change mitigation and adaptation, security of supply, and overall security. The Ministry of the Environment is proposed to be obligated to monitor national land use needs and the relevance of the guidelines in cooperation with other ministries. Additionally, a parliamentary review is proposed, allowing the parliament to comment on the proposed guidelines before the government makes a decision.

Challenges in Land Use

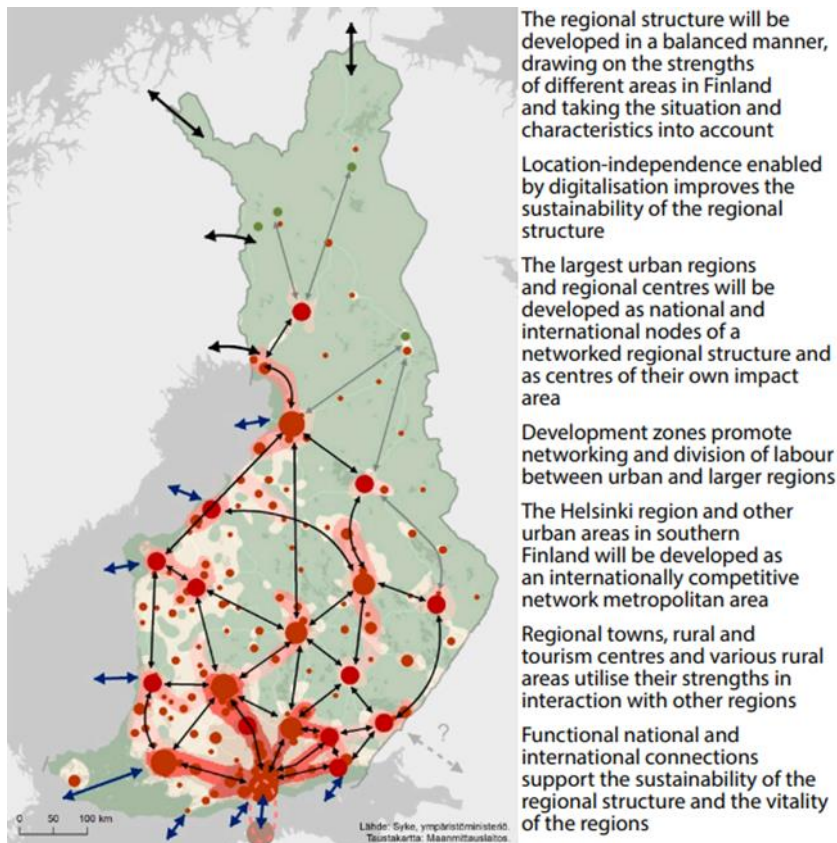
The first Development Perspectives of land use was published in January 2024. This perspectives are a continuously maintained tool by the Ministry of the Environment and the Finnish Environment Institute, providing up-to-date information on the current state and future of Finland's regional and community structure. It is based on extensive research and stakeholder collaboration, aiming to support planning and decision-making by offering insights into key changes and future developments. The perspectives serve as a foundation for assessing the relevance of national land use guidelines and preparing new objectives.

According to the Development Perspectives the key future challenges in land use include:

- **Climate Change:** The need to adapt to the impacts of climate change and reduce emissions requires sustainable solutions in land use and construction.
- **Urbanization:** The growth of cities and the depopulation of rural areas demand balanced regional development and the availability of services.
- **Aging Population:** An aging population imposes new requirements on housing, mobility, and services.
- **Digitalization:** Technological advancements are changing work and living patterns, affecting space needs and infrastructure.
- **Energy Issues:** Increasing the use of renewable energy and improving energy efficiency are central goals.
- **Regional Changes:** The unique characteristics and needs of regions are becoming more diverse, requiring flexible and locally adaptive planning.
- **Security and Resilience:** The ability of society to adapt to and recover from various disruptions and changes is a crucial factor in land use planning



Change factors affecting the development of regional and urban structure in Finland



Development needs for a polycentric and networked regional structure in Finland

2. Contacts

Responsible authority at national level: Ministry of The Environment

Contact person: Timo Turunen, Senior Ministerial Advisor

Telephone: +358 295 250 303

E-mail: timo.turunen@gov.fi

3. General information

The Land Use and Building Act (2000) was separated into the Land Use Act and the Building Act at the beginning of 2025. The provisions of the Land Use and Building Act concerning land use and its planning will continue to be based on the Land Use and Building Act until the reform of the Land Use Act has been approved and has come into force.

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.

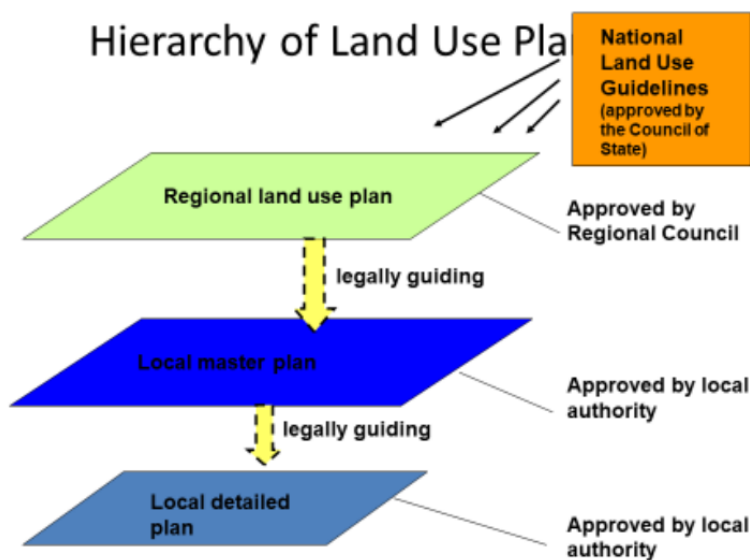
These general objectives are supplemented by more specific objectives relating to controls over land use planning and construction. All of these objectives have been designed to help make living environments healthy, safe, attractive and socially functional, with the needs of different groups fully considered.

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.

Spatial planning system



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;
- To reconcile the interests of different state sectors into a single national perspective and create land use planning preconditions for implementing national projects.

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.

Figure 25. Needs to develop urban structure in declining areas.

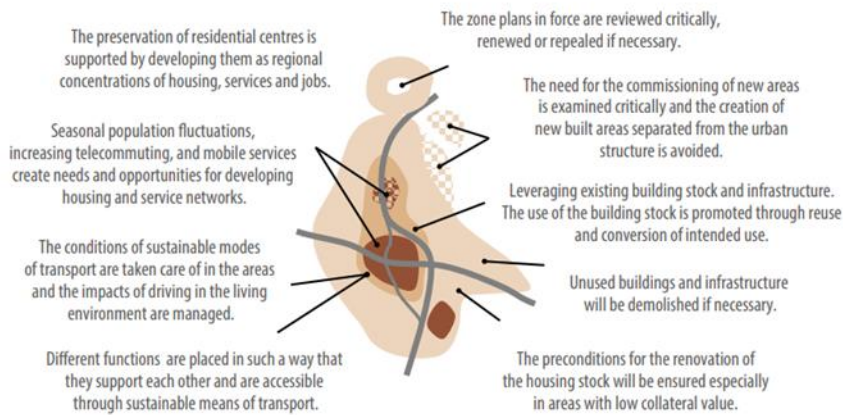


Figure 24. Needs to develop urban structure in growing areas.

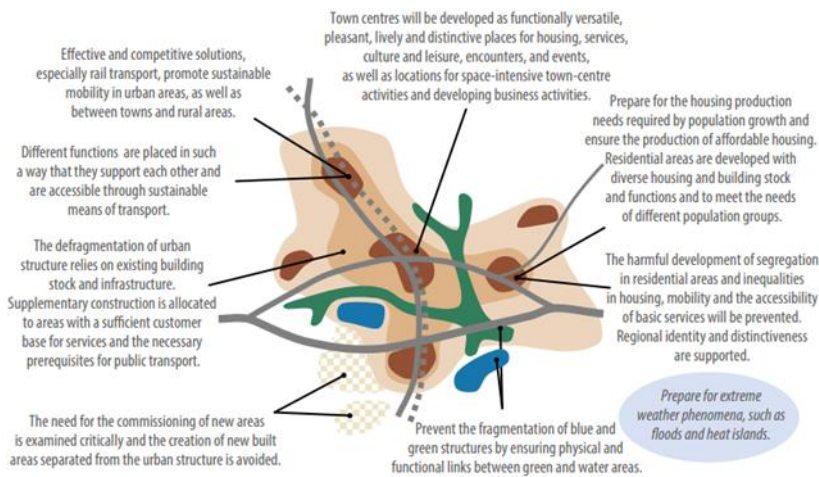


Figure 25. Needs to develop urban structure in declining areas.

