

Current Trends in Planning System in Sweden

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1. Introduction

Currently, we are witnesses of large scale high-speed urban changes. These new conditions require changing the planning culture and international cooperation among planners. Nowadays the integrated and multi-disciplinary urban planning is seen as one of the most important tools to achieve a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable, low-carbon society. Consequently planners have to shape organizational processes, work out planning strategies and controls, and identify key implementation actions. In this connection it is useful to turn to the international best practice in urban sustainability, in designing and implementing projects.

A greatest interest is the experience of urban planning in the countries which even in spite of rapidly changing conditions and crises that affect the world on a global scale, the planning system helps to create a sustainable urban development. These countries include Sweden, where planning has a strong tradition. A Swedish policy to promote best practice and new technology through conscious, goal-oriented, integrated urban development has resulted in a number of interesting projects in terms of considering them as responses to the challenges of modern urban development. The new concepts and approaches of the Swedish planning system have been widely spread in the world. For example, the Sustainable Cities concept (now named as SymbioCity concept) is currently being applied in a number of urban development projects in China. The planning concept has also been the inspiration for other urban development projects around the world, such as Buffalo City in South Africa, Toronto Waterfront in Canada, and Pune in India. The Sustainable Cities concept has also been used in Europe, for instance in Narbonne in France, Cork South Docklands in Ireland, and London Olympic Village in the UK.

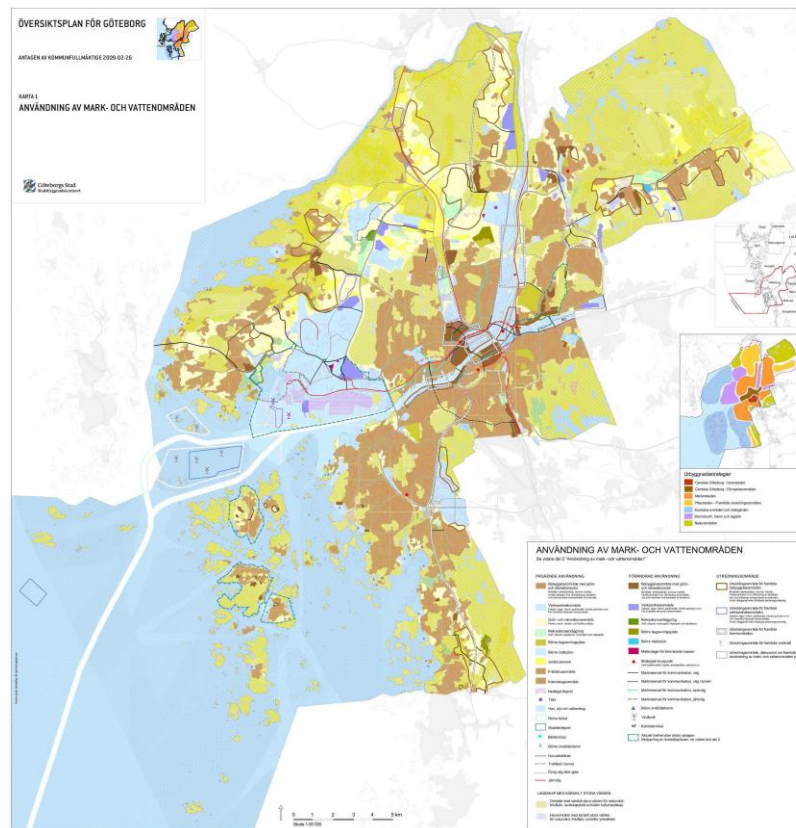
The purpose of this article is to reveal features and current trends of the Swedish planning system and the results of its operations in recent decades.

2. From model master plan to “municipal planning monopoly”

The Swedish planning system has a long tradition of comprehensive planning which formed a rich experience of various planning methods and techniques. Current planning system was launched and developed in the period of 1960-1970s years, when the era of planning based on the master plan concept has ended. Generally master plans were the planner's illustrated vision of the future and often consisted of static pictures. This was a reason why the municipalities had little use of master plans in practice. Municipal planning guidelines became the new planning instrument which in practice replaced the former master plan for cities and towns in 1970-1990s.

During the course of time planning system continues to change subject to new requirements, new planning methods have started to be used. A system has been developed. Today there is a so-called municipal planning monopoly in Sweden; the planning system is basically designed for the municipalities. All municipalities must have a comprehensive plan (översiktsplan) that covers the entire municipality (fig.1). This plan shall indicate the main ways in which land and water areas are to be utilized and how development should take place. The comprehensive plan is not binding on either authorities or individuals. Also there

is a detailed comprehensive plan (fördjupad översiktsplan) that has the same status as a comprehensive plan but only covers a part of a municipality. The comprehensive plan must be considered by the municipal council at least once during each term of office (4 years).



*Figure 1: The Comprehensive plan for Gothenburg, 2009. Map 1: Use of Land and Water.
Source: Comprehensive plan for Göteborg. <http://gbg.yimby.se/tag/%F6versiktsplan>*

The control of land use and development within municipality takes place through the detailed development plan (detalplan), which is the implementation instrument of the municipality. It is legally binding and gives, among other things, the municipality the right to expropriate land for public use (fig.2). The detailed development plan has to set an implementation period of a minimum of 5 years and a maximum of 15 years. During the implementation period, the rights, that the plan accords, are economically protected. After the end of the implementation period the municipality can change the plan so that unused rights expire, without compensation. However, investments that have been made during the implementation period are protected.

The detailed development plan also has to show public places for streets, roads, squares and parks. The municipality can also set requirements for the execution of the buildings. In certain cases matters such as color and materials are also stated.

Special area regulations are another planning instrument which is used within limited areas to guarantee compliance with certain comprehensive plan goals. A property regulation plan is used to facilitate implementation of the detailed development plan.

So there are basically two planning instruments which the municipalities use for their planning tasks, namely the comprehensive plan and the detailed development plan.



Figure 2: The detailed development plan for Östra Eneby (Östra Ryssnäs), Norrköping, 2010.
Source: <http://www.norrkoping.se/bo-miljo/stadsutveckling/detaljplaner/svartinge/detaljplan-for-fastighete/index.xml>

3. Legal framework of planning

The Planning and Building Act and the Environmental Code form the legal basis of urban planning in Sweden. The past 10-15 years have meant great changes to the values and preconditions of the Swedish state. The new Planning and Building Act (2010) replaced the old law (1987 issue). The Planning and Building Act regulates the planning process. Measures on the land or to buildings that demand permission have to be tried in accordance with the rules contained in the Planning and Building Act. This applies to all new development, most cases of reconstruction, the change of use of land and buildings, demolition, etc. The municipalities are responsible for examining the case and assessing whether the measures are in accordance with different plans. Significant improvements to the Act include: planning permission within ten weeks, attention to be paid to climate and environment, better controls of construction. The process of producing a new detailed development plan is now simpler and shorter since the construction plan requirement has been dropped. The provisions of the new Planning and Building Act are simpler and clearer, better enabling easier and more uniform application of the law. The process of exhibiting detailed development plans will be simplified and known as a “review”. It will be compulsory to notify property owners when someone other than the property owner applies for planning permission or provisional approval. The county administrative boards will, at their own initiative, present overall documentation concerning central government interests once per term of office. This will help the municipalities when they review how up-to-date the comprehensive plans are. Under the new Act municipalities are to take account of environmental and climate aspects in their planning work. This means both reduced climate impact and adaptation to climate change. In their planning, municipalities are to take account of the environmental quality objectives, regional climate and energy strategies, county plans for transport infrastructure and transport policy objectives.

The Environmental Code (1999) constitutes an “umbrella” for the Planning and Building Act as well as other special laws that have an impact on the physical environment. The aim of the Environmental Code is to promote sustainable development. An environmental quality standard is a regulation relating to the quality of land, water, air or other aspects of the environment (fig.3).

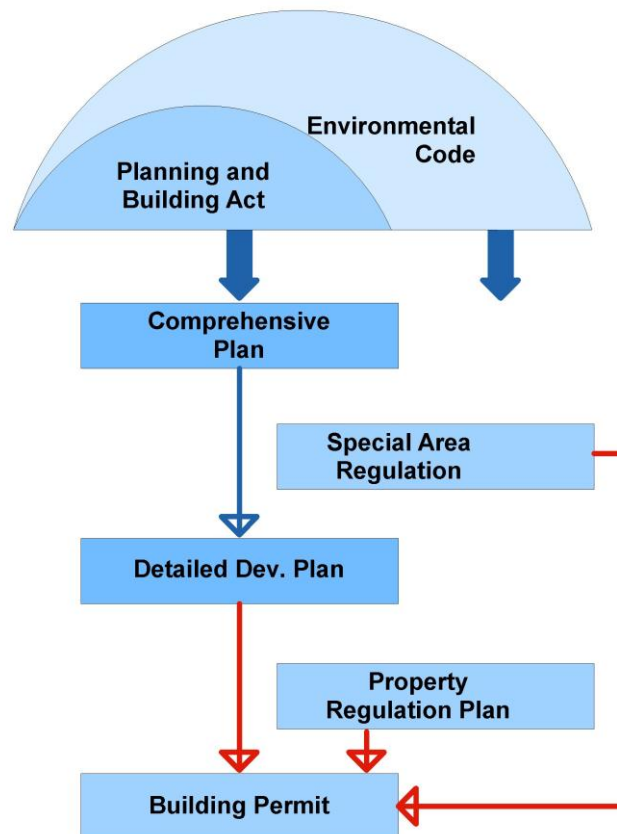


Figure 3: Legal framework of the Swedish planning system.

So the Environmental Code contributes to the comprehensive plan specific requirements regarding national interests and environmental quality standards. I am going to explain its action in the planning process as an example of the City Plan of Stockholm. Current municipal planning monopoly means that the City of Stockholm has the exclusive right to draw up and adopt detailed development plans within its boundary. However, the government may overrule a municipality's decision if certain aspects have not been considered in the planning process, for instance with regard to national interests and environmental quality standards. According to the Environmental Code, national interests are interests of national importance that municipalities must take into account in their planning. Therefore the City Plan deals with national interests under each focus area and urban development strategy. The city also has to show how the City Plan meets the environmental quality standards set by the government regarding issues such as air quality.

4. A new city planning process: the City Plan for Stockholm

The municipalities of Sweden are now being preparing the comprehensive plans of the third generation. Increasingly they are evolving to become municipal development programs, a real strategic navigation tool than a traditional land use plan. The new comprehensive plan of Stockholm illustrates new approaches and current trends in Swedish planning.¹ A major challenge for urban planning in Stockholm is to embrace the city's metropolitan dynamism while also meeting demand for a long-term plan (fig.4).

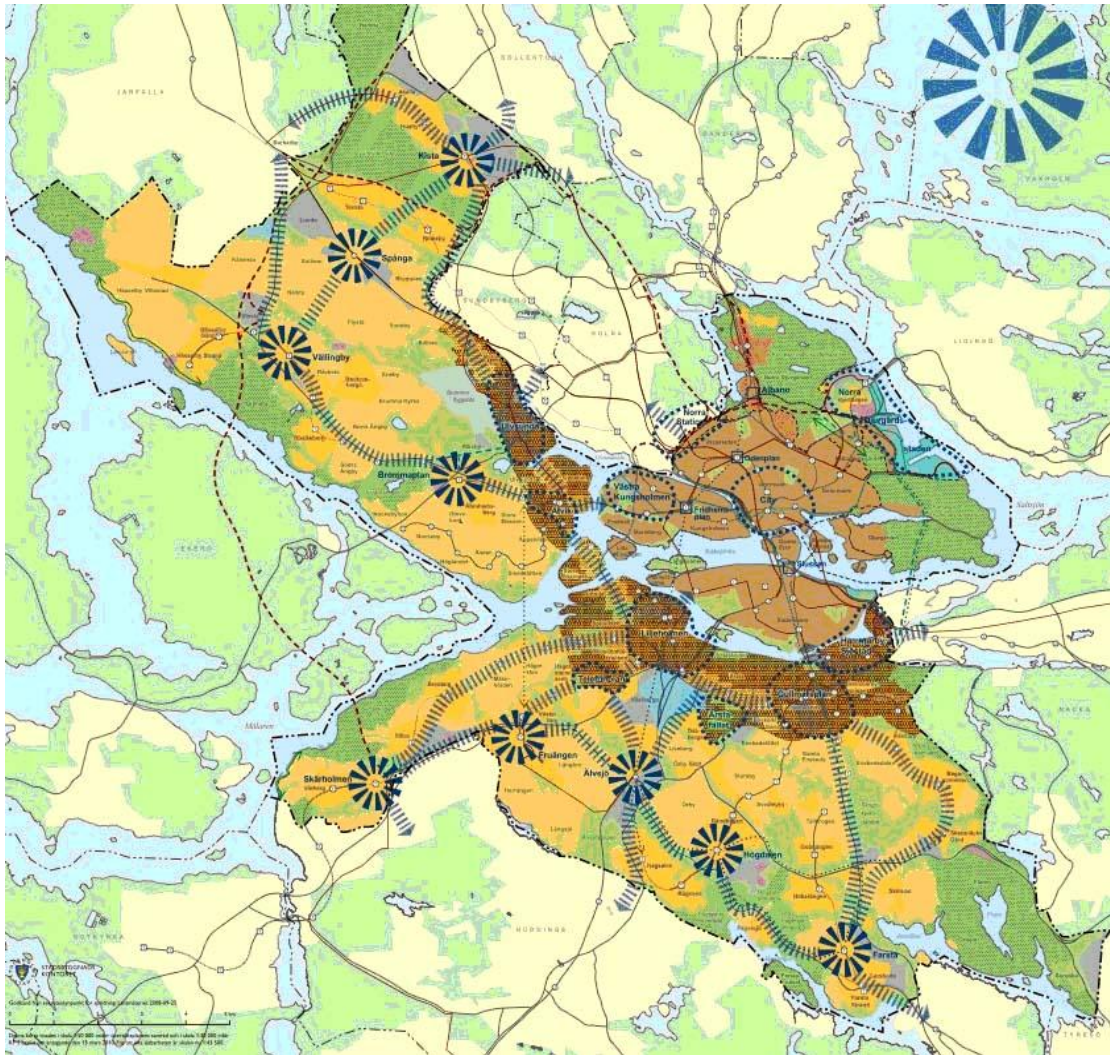


Figure 4: The City Plan of Stockholm, 2010. Source: Stockholm City Plan Summary, May 2009.

4.1 Vision 2030

The City Plan shows how Stockholm will meet its Vision 2030 goals and provide guidance regarding the city's intentions and objectives for sustainable development.

The project named "Vision Stockholm 2030" was started in 2006. All of the city's departments, administrations and companies, along with several external partners took part in formulating a long term, complete vision for Stockholm's development and sustainable growth.

The vision presents coherent themes for the city's development, as well as a number of essential characteristics that show what it will be like to live in, work in and visit Stockholm in the year 2030. There are three themes that are the long-term target status of the comprehensive plan. So Stockholm will be versatile and memorable; innovative and growing. Third theme is "Citizens Stockholm".

The vision aims to create an innovative city, more versatile and full of experience through different development projects spread across the city. To make Stockholm a world class region, several transformations of the city have already begun.

4.2 Four strategies for sustainable growth

Planning strategies presented in the comprehensive plan have four components which together are about creating a denser and more interconnected Stockholm, investing in attractive strategic nodes, connecting the different parts of the city and to promote an attractive, vibrant and safe urban environment across the whole of the city.

Strategy 1 – Continue to strengthen central Stockholm

The planning for the development of the central parts of Stockholm continues with a series of urban areas near the downtown. A dense and diverse city in these parts of the region promotes Stockholm's competitiveness, provides opportunities for sustainable travel and connects areas that were previously separate (fig.5).

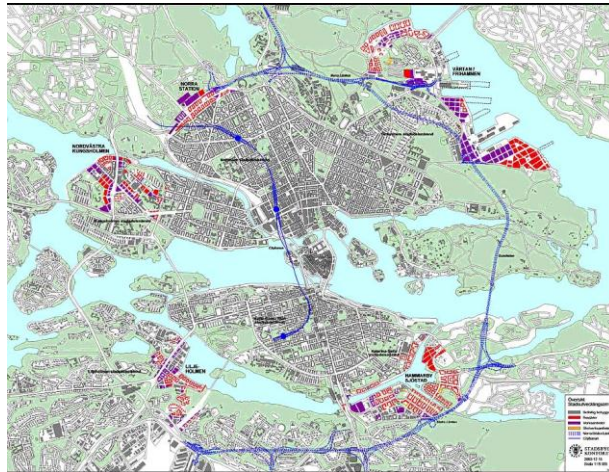


Figure 5: Infill development locations within the City of Stockholm.
Source: http://www.eurometrex.org/Docs/eAtlas/STOCKHOLM_eAtlas.pdf

Strategy 2 – Focus on strategic nodes

The City Plan identifies a number of nodes outside the city centre which have more or less tangible development potential. The comprehensive plan for the Stockholm talks about nine priority areas. The centre of gravity means areas in the suburbs that have good potential to develop into diverse and dense urban environments with great mix of housing, parks, activities and services. All nine priority areas have different starting points and should therefore be developed on its own merits. The common denominator is that they are important nodes in public transport and has good access to services. Another key factor is the development of parks and green spaces, particularly considering that less valuable green areas may have to be sacrificed to urban renewal.

The number of strategically important sites included such areas as Stockholm Royal Seaport (Norra Djurgårdsstaden) (fig.6, 7).

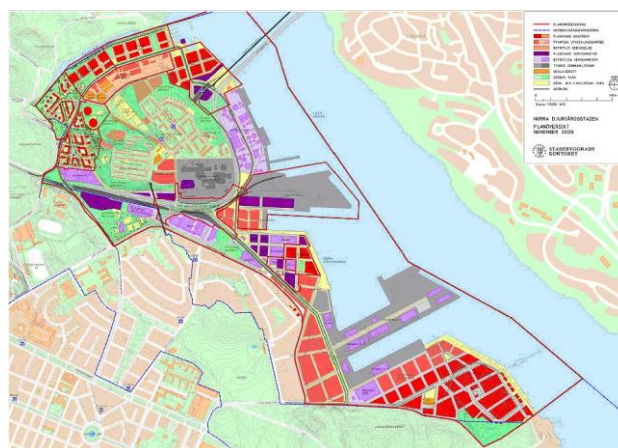


Figure 6: The detailed comprehensive plan. Stockholm Royal Seaport, 2009.
Source: <http://insyn.stockholm.se/insynTransFrame.aspx?nodeid=495863>



Figure 7: Stockholm Royal Seaport-vision. Source: http://www.maritimejournal.com/news101/stockholm_to_pioneer_green_port_regeneration

This area is one of Europe's most extensive urban development areas with a total of approximately 10,000 new homes and 30,000 jobs which will be combined with port operations and other strategic infrastructure. The comprehensive planning program has considered for this strategically important area.

Strategy 3 – Connect city areas

Many areas in Stockholm are poorly integrated with its surroundings. The physical barriers make it difficult Stockholm the opportunity to meet and get to work, education and activities. The combination of parts of the city means better infrastructure, focusing on public transport, cycling and walking as well as new comprehensive settlement. That means even more attractive parks and meeting places between neighbourhoods. The City Plan sets out a number of transport corridors between nodes that should be improved in the short and the longer term (fig.8).

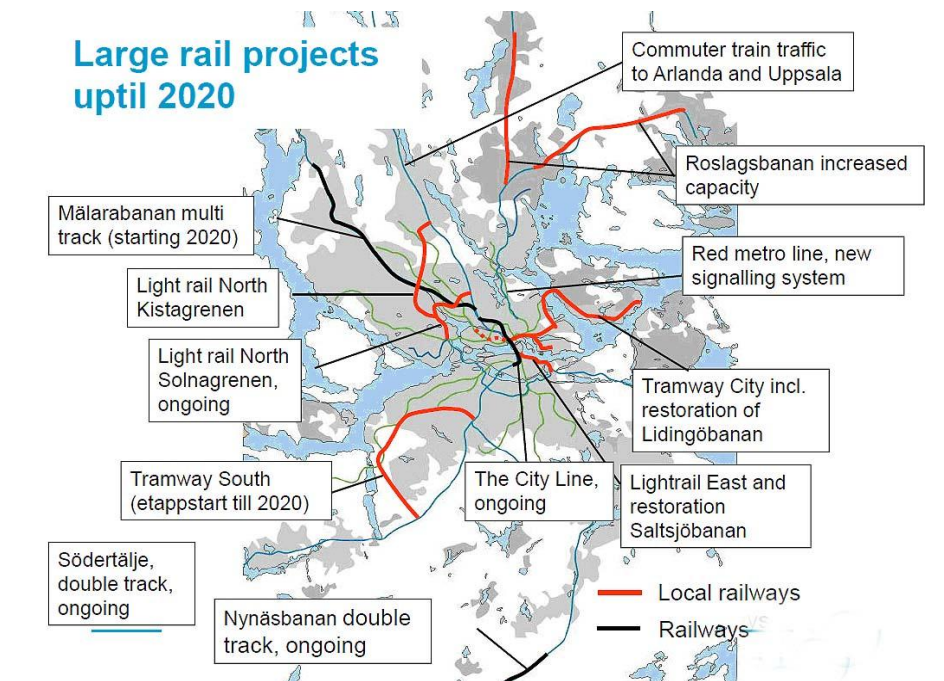


Figure 8: Large rail projects in Stockholm till 2020. Source: Stockholm Transport: Facts on SL and Stockholm County, Stockholm, 2009.

Strategy 4 – Create a vibrant urban environment

A safe and vibrant urban environment requires the progressive development of urban settlements across the city to meet local needs. Supplementation Buildings should be possible in many places in Stockholm, while the city's beauty and variety of character traits are preserved. An increasingly dense urban environment based on the existence of good public spaces. One important element in local development work is deriving benefit from the growth taking place in Stockholm's more expansive areas. This is possibly particularly justified in certain socially disadvantaged districts in the outer city, for example, Järva (fig.9).



Figure 9: Vision Järva 2030. Source:
<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=449245&page=148>

4.3 A rolling urban development process

A major challenge for urban planning in Stockholm is to embrace the city's metropolitan dynamism while also meeting demand for a long-term game plan. This City Plan is seen as the first experience towards more rolling, flexible comprehensive planning in Stockholm. According to the authors of the City Plan the planning system will be better able to manage the needs of a rapidly growing population, a changing business atmosphere and the interaction between the various regional stakeholders, not least with regard to infrastructure improvements (fig.10).

The aim of this City Plan is to act as a long-term urban development program that provides support for priorities in the shorter term. The City Plan contains a large number of areas and links with development potential. However, flexible implementation is important, with planning able to adapt to new conditions and changes in the world around us. The City Plan is a comprehensive steering document for the committees and companies in the City of Stockholm which are responsible for different aspects of the city's development. It needs to be linked to the city's management and follow-up system where the annual budget and Vision 2030 take precedence. The forms in which this can be achieved should be developed. The starting point should be that ongoing follow-up of the City Plan will provide the City Council with a wide-ranging remit for making decisions on annual priorities for urban development within the city's budget. The illustration shows how the City Plan should be coordinated with the city's system for integrated management and follow-up of operations and financing.

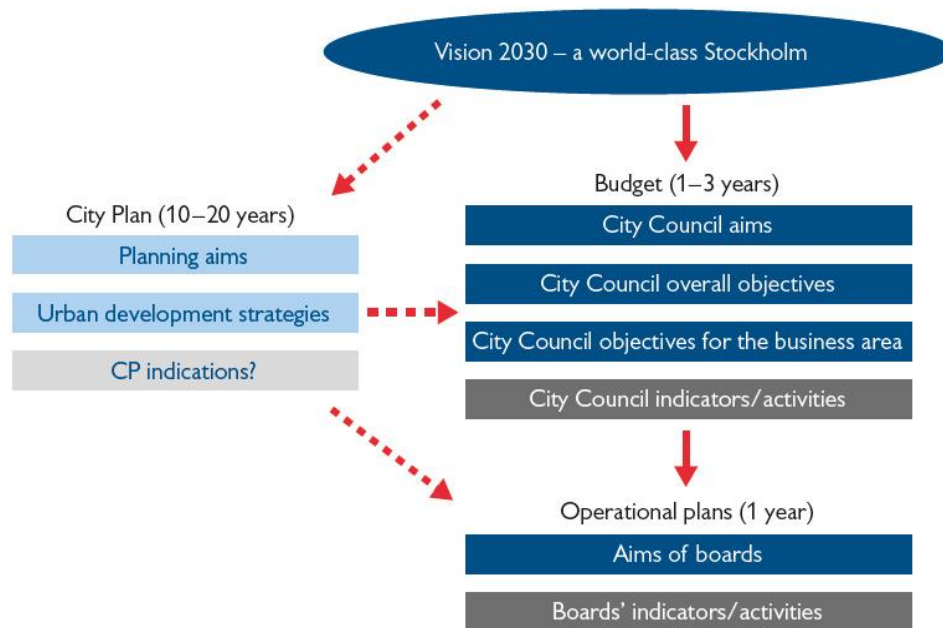


Figure 10: The City Plan in the city's steering system. Source: *The Walkable City, Stockholm City Plan 2010, Stockholm, 2010*

5. Conclusions

The Swedish Planning system has important previous and current achievements and long-term perspectives for good environment. Analysis showed that the Swedish planning system effectively operates in a rapidly changing environment of today. First, the legislation is changed to speed up the process of development and simplification of administrative and planning procedures. Second, there is changing of the content of planning documents. On the example of Stockholm new approaches for working out of the comprehensive plan are identified in the article.

Against the background of the previously described development trends, the following assessment of the Swedish planning system in the aspect of an adaptation of basic principles of this system for creating sustainable urban development in Russia can be made:

1. The division of roles and responsibilities between local (municipal), regional and national planning. Planning system should be characterized by close cooperation between the governing bodies at different levels. Compared with Russia, there is a "mirror" system of spatial planning in Sweden headed by the municipalities. They are responsible for all types of urban planning, including the establishment of a comprehensive plan. Also municipalities are the owners of all public facilities. Residents are provided the current information on construction in their territory. In order to improve the planning system in Russia, one of the most important goals would be to design a transparent planning process that improves the ability to achieve consensus.

2. Urban strategy based on the Sustainable Cities concept. That approach focuses on how urban governance, urban planning, education, public participation and other coordinating

activities can be used to promote sustainable urbanisation. The adaptation of the Sustainable City concept may form a starting point or further development of methods and tools concerning sustainable urban development in Russia.

3. A rolling urban development process. It is imperative that the city plans will be continually updated to reflect new situations and adapt to current issues. Using this principle the Swedish planning system could change the current Russian planning system from dead documents towards adaptive and dynamic planning.

¹ The City Plan was adopted by Stockholm City Council on the 15 of March 2010.

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