

# **PLANNING PRINCIPLES FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE**

## **New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions October, 2004**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to articulate the NHARPC's principles for good planning in New Hampshire. Central to these principles is the concept that decisions are made at the local level, in the spirit of regional cooperation, with public participation.

Rather than enumerating specific recommendations, the principles are intended to establish a broad framework to assist communities in making decisions. The planning principles can improve the outcome of development and ultimately the quality of New Hampshire communities in the future.

We have chosen to organize the principles within four general categories: **prosperity, sustainability, mobility and livability**. We recognize that the principles are strongly interrelated and often relevant to more than one category, and therefore they are best considered as a comprehensive framework rather than individual principles.

## ***Prosperity***

The NHARPC believes that planning for economic development should be fully integrated in the planning process. Too often the needs and concerns of economic development are considered separate from, and even at odds with, community planning. Communities need to understand and plan for the development they want, while keeping in mind the development they wish to avoid. Prosperity must be considered both at the broad level of community and region, but also at the individual level of property owner.

Planning objectives must therefore seek to achieve a balance of interests which is effective in achieving community objectives yet fair to the individual. A prosperous region considers long-term costs and non-monetary values in policy decisions, and employment opportunities are in balance with the cost of living.

Principles to achieve prosperity for the regional community:

1. Concentrate development where services and utilities are available or less costly to provide.
2. Actively support the economic and cultural vitality of regional and local centers by channeling growth toward them and providing the ingredients needed for successful mixed use.
3. Prevent costly problems in the future by carefully considering potential environmental impacts of alternative development scenarios today.
4. Ensure that those with limited means have access to affordable housing and have sufficient funds for nutrition, health care, education and other necessities.
5. Work cooperatively in the region to support a sustainable diversified regional economy, and support mechanisms to share the costs and benefits of growth.
6. Seek opportunities to benefit from the economies of scale necessary for cost effective high quality infrastructure and services.
7. Conserve the working landscape of rural areas to maintain rural economy and tourism.
8. Develop a transportation system that supports economic development by being both financially efficient and effective at moving both people and products.
9. Create an environment attractive to employers who offer livable wages.

## ***Sustainability***

The NHARPC believes that a central role of planning is to ensure the long term value and sustainability of the environment that maintains choices for future generations. The dominant form of development we have experienced in the past half century, characterized by sprawl and an inefficient use of land and resources, will not achieve this sustainability. There exists an urgent need, therefore, to redirect future development in ways that conserve land and open space, protect irreplaceable water resources and wildlife habitats, and preserve the basic ecological services that the natural environment provides.

Poorly planned development, whether resulting in too much development too fast, development of the wrong type, or in the wrong place, can have harmful and costly consequences for generations to come.

Principles to achieve sustainability for the regional community:

1. Preserve environmentally sensitive areas and link them together with other undeveloped open space into a network of beneficial corridors and large land areas for a diverse mix of wildlife and plant to flourish.
2. Encourage in-fill development in existing built areas.
3. Promote best forest management practices.
4. Utilize best management practices to minimize construction around prime and important agricultural soils from development so that land will continue to be available for farming.
5. Implement water quality monitoring programs, develop plans to protect those resources, and protect water quantity.
6. Encourage wide ranges of housing opportunities in more urban zones, decreasing the need to look outside of the core developed areas in order to construct multifamily or affordable housing.
7. Use low impact development strategies in retrofitting existing developments and in designing new developments.
8. Design new facilities and retrofit existing facilities to provide for efficient energy use and better air quality.
9. In order to prevent depletion of resources, match the intensity of development with the carrying capacity of natural resources.

## ***Livability***

The NHARPC believes that good planning principles should be applied to local decisions to direct development in ways that maximize public benefit and contribute to quality of life. The communities we plan for and build are the communities we will live with (and in) for generations. Although future development will be mostly determined, as it has been in the past, by private investment decisions, development should be encouraged to create communities that offer such attributes as town centers with mixed uses, walkable neighborhoods, housing affordable to a wide range of incomes, aesthetically attractive buildings that 'fit' the character of the community, the preservation of historical landmarks and scenic landscapes. It also means planning for development that provides ample opportunities for daily interaction and which builds the social and cultural fabric of the community.

Principles to achieve livability for the regional community:

1. Emphasize development of town and village centers to create walkable communities.
2. Encourage building size, architecture, signage and site design that enhances the aesthetics of the built environment.
3. Promote infill development and redevelopment to revitalize town centers and to maximize use of built-up areas.
4. Encourage appropriate mixed use in existing town centers, villages and in new planned developments to increase opportunities for residents to work close to home.
5. Create well integrated network of sidewalks, walking trails and bicycle facilities to create safe alternative modes for short distance travel and for recreational use.
6. Identify and preserve key natural, cultural and scenic resources to help preserve the appearance and character of places even as they grow and change.
7. Work toward growth in housing to match growth in employment, and ensure that new housing includes a balance of styles, densities, and a distribution of prices that are affordable to a range of income levels.
8. Identify and conserve a system of open space and conservation areas in the community and region to protect wildlife habitat, scenic vistas and endorse passive recreational opportunities.
9. Create public spaces such as town greens, markets, pocket parks, and playgrounds to provide for civic and cultural gatherings.

## ***Mobility***

NHARPC believes that to have prosperous and livable communities, we must have a transportation system that provides for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods. Our transportation system creates the connection that makes our regions and communities work. That system also plays a major role in influencing how and where future development occurs. To date, the system consists almost exclusively of roads and highways for the automobile. As our communities have grown larger, more congested and more dispersed it has become increasingly difficult to “keep up” with the need to expand the capacity of those facilities.

We must move toward a more balanced transportation system which makes appropriate use of other modes of travel to meet our needs, such as bus, rail, pedestrian and bicycle modes for moving people, and freight rail for moving goods. We must create and plan development in ways which reduce the need for travel rather than accelerate it. We must also increase investment in local and secondary roads and highways to increase capacity in congested areas and reinforce the existing regional process for prioritizing these needs.

Principles to achieve mobility for the regional community:

1. Advocate and plan for the most efficient use of the existing and future transportation systems.
2. Develop a true multi-modal transportation system with appropriate support for the pedestrian, bicycle, transit and passenger rail modes.
3. Regional decision making processes should have a meaningful role in selecting and prioritizing transportation improvements.
4. Place a high priority on transportation system safety.
5. Make transportation investments and land use decisions that are mutually supportive.
6. Support the implementation of land use codes that encourage the use of bicycle and pedestrian modes and discourage the use of the private automobile for short local trips.
7. Increase roadway network connectivity and provide additional route choices in new development.
8. Implement access management techniques that will preserve existing roadway capacity.
9. Support adequate investment in all modes of transportation within the system.