



Nashua Regional Planning Commission

Statement of Strategy

2016-2020

Final

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INTRODUCTION

The Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) Executive Committee commenced a major strategic planning initiative in the fall of 2015. At this time, NRPC had recently undergone a shift in agency leadership including a new chairman and executive staff. The agency had just weathered a major budgetary transition associated with the conclusion of several large federal grants. Furthermore, a proposal to route a very large natural gas transmission pipeline across the region was prompting a reexamination of NRPC's fundamental role and responsibilities to its member communities.

The process began with data gathering, brainstorming, and conversations that involved all the Commission's stakeholders.¹ NRPC had begun conducting meetings with the boards of selectmen to assess regional needs and expectations, and added an online staff and commissioner survey to further gauge strategic needs. NRPC hosted an all-day, professionally-facilitated strategic planning retreat for Commissioners and staff. Internal meetings involving staff and/or the Executive Committee continued over the winter. These conversations were also informed by a cross-RPC strategic planning discussion which occurred at both the New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions (NHARPC) annual meeting and at the annual RPC Directors' Retreat.

Activity		Timeframe
Online Survey to Staff and Commissioners		September – October 2015
NRPC Commissioner and Staff All-Day Strategic Planning Retreat		November 13, 2015
Internal NRPC Staff Meetings	Kickoff Discussion	September 9, 2015
	Implementation Brainstorm	February 2, 2016
	SWOT Brainstorm	May 26, 2016
BOS Meetings with NRPC	Mason, Amherst, Lyndeborough	September 2015
	Pelham, Merrimack, Litchfield, Wilton, Brookline	October-December 2015
	Mont Vernon, Milford, Hudson, Hollis	January 2016
Executive Committee Meetings	Regular Exec Committee Meeting w/Staff Attending	Feb 17, 2016
	Executive Committee Meeting	April 20, 2016
	Executive Committee SWOT Work Session	July 13, 2016
NHARPC Commissioner Convening: SWOT analysis, strategy discussion		May 12, 2016
RPC Directors' Retreat Discussion on Strategic Planning		July 7, 2016

The main purpose of this document is to provide a high-level strategic roadmap for the next five years. It discusses the historical and current mandates that define the Commission, its governance structure, its mission, vision, values, and core competencies and the current operational realities.² These various factors influenced the articulation of an overarching strategic principle, key outcome describing success, and several critical inputs upon which that success relies.³ The intent of this framework is to support the prioritization of goals and to help organize these goals within the broader strategic picture.

This document can serve several functions. Very simply, the descriptive overview may be useful to new staff, Commissioners, stakeholders, and the public who are seeking a better basic understanding of the agency. As an articulation of strategic priorities it can help employees align their efforts where they will make the most impact and help guide the development of scopes of work to better address agency and member community needs. Lastly, it provides a benchmark against which all Commission progress may be compared through time.

¹ Bryson, John M., "A Strategic Planning Process for Public and Non-Profit Organizations."

² Applied Geographics, Inc, "Strategic Plan Guidelines."

³ Kenny, Graham, "A List of Goals Is Not a Strategy."

WHAT ARE WE?

The Nashua Regional Planning Commission is the oldest of New Hampshire's nine regional planning commissions. It was formed in 1959 by the City of Nashua and the Town of Hudson to address highway congestion and coordinate land use development. The NRPC assumed primary responsibility for regional transportation planning in 1973 when it was designated by Governor Meldrim Thomson as the MPO for the Nashua-Hudson Urbanized Area.

PRIMARY MANDATES

REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Nashua Regional Planning Commission is a political subdivision and public agency under New Hampshire state law. New Hampshire's nine regional planning commissions (RPCs) receive their legislative authority from RSA 36:45-53⁴. The RPCs primary duties are advisory in nature and include:

- Preparation of a **comprehensive master plan** for the development of the region. Regional plans are advisory documents intended to assist communities in developing their own plans and in coordinating with one another on issues that cross municipal boundaries such as transportation, environment, and economic development. The Nashua Regional Plan was adopted in December 2014.
- Compilation of a **regional housing needs assessment** every five years. Through an examination of relevant demographic and housing data for each of the region's municipalities, a regional housing needs assessment examines existing housing inventory and future housing needs for people of all levels of income. A regional housing needs assessment assists the region's municipalities in complying with the state master plan statute, and provides specific assistance to municipalities as they seek to plan for the anticipated housing needs of the region.
- Facilitate **review of developments of regional impact**: i.e., provide timely notice to potentially affected municipalities concerning proposed developments which are likely to have impacts beyond the boundaries of a single municipality; provide opportunities for the regional planning commission and the potentially affected municipalities to furnish timely input to the municipality having jurisdiction, and encourage the municipality having jurisdiction to consider the interests of other potentially affected municipalities.

⁴ The New Hampshire General Court, *NH RSA 36: Regional Planning Commissions*.

- Advise on the **impact of energy facilities on orderly development of region**. The New Hampshire Site Evaluation Committee (SEC) was established by the NH legislature for the review, approval, monitoring and enforcement of compliance in the planning, siting, construction and operation of energy facilities. NH RSA 162-H:16, IV (a)-(c)⁵ compels the NH Site Evaluation Committee to determine that a project will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the views of municipal and regional planning commissions and municipal governing bodies. To that end, NRPC has formed an **Energy Facilities Advisory Committee (EFAC)** to conduct fact findings regarding the impacts and benefits of construction and operation of energy facilities in the region on local land use, environment, and economic development, and the effects on the orderly development of the region; and to report findings and recommendations to the full NRPC Commission.

A regional planning commission is also empowered under state law to conduct the following activities:

- Undertake studies and make specific recommendations on economic, industrial and commercial development within the region and carry out, with the cooperation of municipalities and/or counties within the region, **economic development programs** for the full development, improvement, protection and preservation of the region's physical and human resources.
- Enter into contracts with municipalities for **local technical assistance and/or special planning work**.
- Conduct **other studies** as needed to implement the provisions of the regional plan.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION – TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT AREA

NRPC serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Nashua NH Urbanized Area (UZA). The MPO is the transportation planning organization for the region. It is made up of representatives from local government, NRPC Commissioners and transportation authorities, including the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NH DOT), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Nashua Transit System (NTS). The purpose of the MPO is to administer the federal transportation process and ensure that investments in transportation projects and programs are based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (“3-C”) planning process. The MPO must successfully administer this process in order to acquire and spend federal money on transportation improvements in the region. The MPO provides individuals and communities a voice in how transportation resources are prioritized and allocated in the region.

In 2012 the Nashua MPO was designated as a Transportation Management Area or TMA. As a TMA the Nashua MPO is afforded the opportunity to program Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds and

⁵ The New Hampshire General Court, *NH RSA 162-H:16, IV (a)-(c) Energy Facility Evaluation, Siting, Construction, and Operation*.

Transportation Alternatives (TA) funds which are sub-allocated to the region. In addition, the Nashua MPO must administer a Congestion Management Process (CMP).

The core MPO functions are as follows:

- Provide a forum for effective regional decision-making. The MPO provides individuals and communities a voice in how transportation resources are prioritized and allocated in the region. The **Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC)**, made up of representatives from all municipalities as well as state and federal agencies helps MPO staff guide transportation policies in the region and prioritize projects of regional importance.
- Evaluate **transportation alternatives** for the region. In order to ensure transportation investments are cost-effective, environmentally sustainable and best leverage existing resources, the MPO evaluates a number of alternatives, and their costs and impacts, before recommending a solution.
- Develop and maintain a **Long-Range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)**. The MTP is a comprehensive, multimodal “blueprint” for transportation systems and services aimed at both meeting the mobility needs and improving the overall quality of life of residents in the region through the next 25 years.
- Develop and maintain a **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**. The TIP is a four-year work program that lists all regionally significant and federally funded projects, as required by federal transportation legislation. The TIP contains an agreed-upon list of specific transportation improvement projects and associated financial information for the NRPC MPO.
- Ensure that the TIP and MTP comply with **air quality requirements**. Emissions from motor vehicles significantly impact air quality and must be considered as part of the transportation planning process. The MPO works to ensure transportation investments reduce or minimize emissions in the region.
- Every MPO must develop, adopt and implement formalized procedures for effective **community participation** during transportation planning processes. NRPC has developed an inclusive process intended to ensure effective public involvement in the transportation planning activities that meet or exceed applicable federal rules.

OTHER OFFICIAL DESIGNATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

With the exception of the Nashua Regional Solid Waste Management District (NRSWMD), the following designations and roles have no designated and sustainable funding source; they do, however, contribute to the identity of NRPC and help explain the origins of NRPC’s core competencies and associated stakeholder expectations.

NASHUA REGIONAL SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Under New Hampshire state law municipalities may join together to create a separate authority for the management of solid waste.⁶ The primary duty of the Nashua Regional Solid Waste Management District (NRSWMD) is to sponsor household hazardous waste (HHW) collection events to member community residents. The District's program objectives include:

- Provide convenient options for residents to safely and properly dispose of HHW.
- Utilize contractor services in the most cost-effective manner possible.
- Maximize first-time participants and minimize repeat participants through education efforts.
- Accept a wide array of HHW while encouraging alternative disposal methods for universal wastes.
- Discourage actions that lead to unsafe disposal of HHW.

NRSWMD is funded by municipal assessments, user fees, and grant funding from the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES). NRPC staff administers the organization, but the NRSWMD have separate appointed governing boards, separate bookkeeping systems, and operate in separate accounting and regulatory environments.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION AREA/REGIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL

New Hampshire is divided into nine Community Transportation Regions. Each region has an associated Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), which is composed of local transportation providers, human service agencies, funding agencies and organizations, consumers, and regional planning commission staff. The RCCs work to develop information that is helpful to transportation service users, identify opportunities for coordination between service providers, and advise the Statewide Coordinating Council (SCC) as to the state of coordination in the region.

Regional coordinating councils are enabled under Section 3a of New Hampshire RSA Chapter 239-B.⁷ In 2008 the NRPC requested that the Locally Coordinated Transportation Committee be recognized as an RCC. The RCC is staffed by NRPC but is not a formal subcommittee of the NRPC.

⁶ The New Hampshire General Court, *NH RSA 43-B: Solid Waste Management Districts*.

⁷ The New Hampshire General Court, *NH RSA 239-B: State Coordinating Council (SCC) for Community Transportation in New Hampshire*.

NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE DATA CENTER AFFILIATE

Established in 1978, the State Data Center (SDC) is a cooperative program between the states and the US Census Bureau. Its intended purpose is to make census information available locally to the public through a network of state agencies, universities, libraries and regional/local governments. The Office of State Planning (now Office of Energy & Planning) was designated by the governor on February 1, 1982 as the lead agency for New Hampshire's program, and the regional planning commissions, along with university libraries such as Plymouth State and UNH, were designated at that time as affiliate organizations.⁸ The NRPC does not receive any state or federal support in its role as an SDC affiliate.

GIS REGIONAL SERVICE CENTER

In 1989, through a special act of the legislature, the State of New Hampshire provided one-time funding of \$40,000 total for geographic information system (GIS) hardware, software and training to the nine RPCs.⁹ The bill required the office of state planning, in cooperation with other state and regional planning agencies, to provide technical guidance and assistance to municipalities interested in utilizing geographic information technology for planning and growth management purposes. This investment launched the RPCs into the role of regional GIS service centers to provide some level of GIS access to every community in the state.¹⁰

At NRPC service offerings related to GIS and demographics has been supported and perpetuated through funds allocated to the MPO. For this reason, NRPC currently offers GIS and demographics services (usually analysis and/or ad-hoc custom maps) that are related transportation-related mapping and analysis; they can be occasionally broadened to include general base mapping and some land-use, demographics, and environmental applications as they specifically relate to transportation planning.

⁸ Gallager, Ken, "Communication Regarding History of State Data Center Affiliates Program."

⁹ New Hampshire State Senate, *SB70 1989: Establishing a Pilot Program to Test the Application of the Office of State Planning's GRANIT System*.

¹⁰ Applied Geographics, Inc, "State of New Hampshire Geographic Information System (GIS) Strategic Plan."

CORE COMPETENCIES

Regional planning is an integrated discipline and requires cross-over in expertise between various fields; nevertheless, for administrative purposes NRPC activities are generally organized under functional areas: MPO and Transportation Planning, Land Use Planning, GIS & Mapping, and Energy & Environmental Planning. The following table gives examples of the services NRPC provides under these broad headings:

MPO & Transportation Planning	Land Use Planning	GIS & Mapping	Energy & Environmental Planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic Data Collection • Travel Demand Forecasting • Intersection Analyses • Corridor Studies • Road Surface Management • Parking Studies • Road Safety Audits • Federal Grant Assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated Planning Services • Community Planning Consultation • Local Planning Support • Maintenance of the Regional Plan & Housing Needs Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs Assessments, General GIS Planning • Tax Mapping • Custom Mapping & Analysis • GIS and GPS Technical Support • Demographics • Custom Apps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy Aggregation Services • Household Hazardous Waste Collection • Hazard Mitigation Planning • Stormwater Management Consulting

GOVERNANCE

As provided under RSA 36:46, each member community is entitled to the representation of at least two and up to four volunteer Commissioners as determined by the total community population. Commissioners represent the official interests of the community from which he or she was appointed.

The Executive Committee is an elected subset of all Commissioners and serves as the NRPC policy board. The Executive Director, NRPC's chief executive and fiscal officer, takes direction from the Executive Committee and supervises the professional staff.

Agency priorities are typically set at several key points: on an annual basis the Commission adopts an annual programmatic work program and budget that reflects the current lines of funding and associated deliverables. Separately, the NRPC Executive Committee identifies major annual priorities and administrative action items for the agency's leadership staff. These items involve, but are not limited to, operations, resource and fiscal management, and marketing. This activity expands the scope and importance with any major shift in agency leadership. NRPC has incorporated individual goal-setting into the annual performance appraisal process for staff. Each staff person has annual goals and performance measures that are jointly specified by the employee and his/her manager.

WHO ARE WE?

NRPC MISSION

NRPC's mission is to provide leadership, facilitation and coordination for member communities in implementing the regional vision.

To do this, NRPC serves as a resource to support and enhance local planning, provides a forum for communities to share information, and coordinate land use, environmental and transportation planning at the regional level, and provides a clear voice for the region at the state and federal levels. NRPC provides its member communities with comprehensive planning services addressing environmental, land use, transportation, and regional planning issues as well as offering mapping and data services that utilize the latest technologies.¹¹

NRPC REGIONAL VISION

The following regional vision statement is taken from the NRPC Regional Plan as adopted in December 2014.¹²

Maintain a high quality of life characterized by the Region's small-town feel and suburban setting. Economic prosperity is based on well-functioning public infrastructure, including a robust multi-modal transportation system, as well as diverse and affordable housing options, vibrant town centers and downtowns with thriving arts and cultural amenities, and easy access to natural resources and recreational opportunities.

The following vision statements are also taken from the NRPC Regional Plan:

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

The Nashua Region will foster economic growth while maintaining a high quality of life for residents, including preserving rural character, supporting vibrant town centers and downtowns, and promoting a creative economy.

ENVIRONMENT

Natural resources in the Nashua region provide access to recreation opportunities, good water quality and abundant open space for residents and wildlife. The Region's natural resources enhance and protect the rural, small community character while ensuring a positive quality of life.

¹¹ Nashua Regional Planning Commission, "About NRPC."

¹² Nashua Regional Planning Commission, "Regional Plan: A Story Worth Telling."

HOUSING

The Nashua Region supports a housing climate that promotes quality housing choices that are diverse and affordable, and situated within reasonable access to amenities, employment, and conveniences, while remaining a region that protects its rural, small town character, and suburban setting. The Region's housing will enhance quality of life and the ability for all residents of all ages, incomes and abilities to thrive for years to come.

TRANSPORTATION

The Nashua region has a comprehensive and reliable multi-modal transportation system that enables universal access for all travelers, including disabled, youth, and seniors, to all points within and beyond the region. Our transportation system enables a highly mobile community and promotes economic growth, public health, and enhances the natural environment. The Transportation system is adaptable to changes in demographics, economic conditions and energy related forces. Sufficient funding supports the operations maintenance and expansion of our transportation infrastructure to continuously meet the needs of the region.

ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-CONCEPT AND CORE VALUES

The following sections summarize some points of consensus across staff and commissioner responses to questions posed in a brief online survey.

QUESTION: WHO ARE WE?

- NRPC is a **resource, forum, advisor and facilitator** for member communities, providing a variety of services focusing on transportation, land use and the environment.
- NRPC's planning professionals are driven to provide the **highest standards** of services to municipalities within the region and partners at the state and federal government.
- The RPC exists to enhance inter-community **sharing of information** and education on common planning issues, **aggregate and share relevant data**, and **strengthen the visibility** of individual communities perceived needs to state and federal agencies.

QUESTION: HOW DO WE WORK WITH OTHERS (OUR RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS)?

- NRPC's relationships tend to be community specific and **ebb and flow** with local politics, needs and funding.

- NRPC is **able to adapt** easily to be a willing and active partner for new and existing initiatives alike, bringing state, regional and local partners to the table where missions and goals align to support member communities.
- There is always a need to build relationships and **trust** with member communities. **Proactive local communication** of the outcomes NRPC achieves and the value of and savings generated through services is essential to maintaining and building key relationships.

QUESTION: WHAT DO WE DO?

- NRPC provides up to date **data, resources and guidance** to municipalities in order to support the **orderly development** of the region. This often includes serving as a **convener, facilitator or aggregator** of services and/or staff time.
- Communities value a full range of NRPC programs from **day-to-day municipal planning** support to advanced **GIS and technical services**.
- NRPC member communities expect NRPC to function as an **information clearinghouse** and provide a venue to quickly and **collectively mobilize** around regional issues, e.g. hosting committees such as the EFAC, providing grant writing, or mapping and outreach. Collectively, these services **increase the capacity** of our communities and partners.

QUESTION: WHAT DO WE VALUE?

- **Good planning is essential.**
- **Fair and open communication and technical support** should be available to all member communities.
- Often **local issues are common** from one community to the next. Regional strength and effectiveness is achieved when working toward **shared goals**.
- With **adequate resources**, NRPC can be an **empowered champion** for the communities it represents.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

STRENGTHS

- Compared to some other governmental organizations, RPCs in New Hampshire are small and relatively unencumbered by internal bureaucracy, allowing them to be **nimble and responsive** to changing community needs and expectations and to flex in response to grant and funding opportunities. NRPC and other RPCs can often carry out services on behalf of communities that would otherwise go unaddressed.
- Some of NRPC's most broadly popular service offerings include "**niche**" **data and analytical services** such as traffic counting, GIS, custom demographics and mapping, **services to the public** such as household hazardous waste collections and online information apps, and services with obvious and immediate **return-on-investment** such as energy aggregation.
- NRPC recognizes the value of a large network of colleagues and community partners, especially in a state with a small government footprint and in a climate of shrinking budgets. NRPC has successfully **cultivated relationships** among state agencies, other RPCs both in New Hampshire and in Massachusetts, board members and staff in member communities, and community-based organizations. Being that NRPC's jurisdiction covers only thirteen local communities, NRPC is afforded the opportunity to provide further personalized outreach to its members.
- NRPC is situated in the relatively populated southern tier of New Hampshire that is widely regarded to offer a high standard of living. Proximity to the cities of Manchester, Nashua, and Lowell as well as greater metro Boston affords advantages with respect to successful **employee and volunteer recruitment**.

WEAKNESSES

- There remains no **clear consensus on the scope of the Commission's advisory role**, i.e. should the Commission remain a neutral, fact-finding body versus become an outspoken advocate for member community interests. Particularly with respect to controversial or high-profile issues, challenges include how to reach consensus on the Commission's role and defining appropriate action/implementation of that role.
- The **RPC's quasi-governmental status can be confusing**. The general public and even some new community board members are generally unfamiliar with the Commission's role and basic functions. Even the most involved and supportive community stakeholders may be unsure how to engage the Commission on new or on-going initiatives. NRPC may often be incorrectly viewed as a for-profit consultancy.
- There currently exists a large **disconnect between the Commission's mandates, community expectations, and the current budgetary reality**. The large majority of the Commission's budget

is dedicated towards transportation programming. Through grants or contracts NRPC strives to meet community needs and expectations as well as its regional planning responsibilities and unfunded mandates.

- NRPC is primarily a grant-funded organization, but like all the NH RPCs it **lacks dedicated resources for grant-writing**. Presumably, NRPC suffers from a competitive disadvantage due to this resource gap and misses important opportunities to communicate value.
- The Commission does not have any formal program of **general marketing** beyond periodic social media posts and the email newsletter. The absence of proactive, positive communication is a missed opportunity to broaden NRPC's audience and influence.
- As a knowledge-based organization, training, education, and professional development opportunities are critical to maintaining a high performing staff. The NRPC budget and some grants allocate resources for staff training and development, **but it has been increasingly difficult to justify and support all recent staff-requested off-site travel and training requests** within these line items.

OPPORTUNITIES

- As a **Transportation Management Area** the NRPC now has programming authority over the allocation of Surface Transportation Program funds and Transportation Alternatives funds. Once a coordination process with neighboring MPOs is defined, the NRPC would have a more immediate influence on the spending of these dollars which would usher in a new era of community empowerment and commissioner engagement.
- Broadly speaking, NRPC recognizes there are three particularly active areas of funding opportunity relevant to the Commission's mission and goals:
 - **Economic Development:** Support for economic development initiatives was a recurrent theme throughout the present strategic planning process. Commissioners voiced this municipal need with near unanimity. Economic development programming is explicitly mentioned in the enabling RPC legislation, making it a sensible strategic area for NRPC. Lastly, economic development is aligned with the strategic goals of the NH DOT.
 - **Energy and Climate:** Energy and climate planning is a logical extension of NRPC's current suite of services and represents a priority action area of the current federal administration. NRPC's recent successes in this area include a Climate Change Water Resiliency project from the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) and a NH Charitable Foundation funded project to develop a municipal "Renewable Energy Tool Belt." Future direction in this area could be directed by NRPC's Energy Facilities Advisory Committee.
 - **Public Health and Integrated Planning:** Well-planned communities foster public health in many ways and NRPC has partnered successfully with colleagues on several large public health projects including the Milford Health Impact Assessment, Plan4Health

Nashua, and the Planning for Parks and Playgrounds grant through the HNH foundation. It is also fortuitous that the boundary of the NRPC region exactly aligns with that of the Greater Nashua Public Health Network.

- Given the parallel nature of work across the nine NH RPCs there are opportunities to **collaborate and cost-share**. For example, professional staff such as a grant writer or engineer could “float” between the RPCs who would share the staffing costs. Similar opportunities exist for information technology infrastructure and management and other procurements.
- As demonstrated by the NRPC energy aggregation, **municipal collaboration** can add up to impressive cost-savings. NRPC is well-positioned to facilitate additional similar opportunities with respect to a diverse set of community needs including group purchasing of office supplies, GIS software and services, and MS4 technical and educational outreach.
- **Opportunities exist in the grant writing process** to indirectly address some of the resource constraints surrounding staff training and program marketing. Wherever possible, NRPC grant scopes of work should include project outreach in the form of press releases, conference attendance and presentations, social media communications, etc.
- During strategic brainstorming GIS and technical assistance was identified as a service with high mission impact. NRPC’s early involvement in **state-level technical initiatives** affords unique training opportunities. NRPC’s well-regarded approach to bicycle and pedestrian level-of-stress analysis was born out of a state pilot project, and NRPC’s early participation in the SADES asset management system allowed for NRPC staff to become proficient with emerging cloud-based GIS technologies. As technology rapidly evolves the Commission’s participation in these activities should be encouraged as “low hanging fruit.”
- NRPC could explore creation of a **501.C3 independent organization** that supports and enhances the efforts of the NRPC and its member municipalities. Creating a 501.C3 would presumably offer more opportunity to seek grant funds from philanthropic foundations interested in supporting the mission of NRPC, but a more detailed analysis relative to the benefits and implementation path would need to be conducted.

THREATS

- General regard for regional planning commissions including NRPC is subject to the state and local political landscape. This is coupled with the additional challenge that most regional planning efforts by their very nature are long-range without immediate tangible benefits. Without a program of continued marketing and education, **political support for NRPC is at risk**.
- The RPCs’ multifaceted identity and broad mandates **complicate decision-making**. The Commission must constantly balance the immediate needs of communities with the overarching goals of the MPO and regional plan while also avoiding potential conflicts of interest when engaging the private sector.

- The Commission currently operates in a climate of diminished state funding. Increased competition for grant dollars and projects lost to the private sector further contribute to an overall sense of **budget insecurity**.
- Keeping abreast of the **rapidly-evolving technical landscape** is an ever-present challenge, and NRPC must strategize how best to stay relevant to its member communities. Being “current on tech” is also a factor that will influence NRPC’s retention of employees seeking to preserve their employment potential.
- While all the RPCs strive to “do more with less,” they risk **over-utilization of a relatively small pool of commissioners and program volunteers**. This threat must be acknowledged as NRPC strategizes how to reinforce communications with its member communities beyond the traditional quarterly Full Commission meetings.
- **Communication can become easily fractured** between NRPC and municipal staff, volunteer Commissioners, and members of the community elected boards. A lack of clear, consistent chain of communication would only magnify all aforementioned weaknesses.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The following sections describe what might be called NRPC's strategic mission. It identifies the broad context for success against which the Commission can gauge progress and the factors that are key to NRPC's long-term survival and prosperity. This approach was defined during the present strategic planning process.

DRIVING PRINCIPLE

Driving Principle: Provide excellent services to meet the diverse needs of our member communities.

The Commission exists to serve its member communities, and the Commission depends on active membership to carry out its work. The provision of excellent services ensures member communities have the tools and resources to meet their local planning needs in a manner consistent with their local master plans and the NRPC Regional Plan. Providing communities with high quality tools and resources to meet their planning needs adds value to NRPC membership and can be quantified. It demonstrates our understanding of community needs and supports the orderly development of the region. For all these reasons NRPC must strive to reach the individual and collective expectations of all its member communities.

KEY OUTCOME

Key Outcome: NRPC, its member communities, and other stakeholders have a universal understanding of NRPC's role, programs, and value as well as how NRPC can support community needs.

As a public agency, community support is fundamental to NRPC's success. The public citizens serving in local office and town employees must continue to recognize that NRPC services can help them be more informed, more efficient, more effective in their roles, and help them save their communities money. NRPC, in order to successfully provide high quality services to its members, similarly needs to have a strong understanding of individual community needs and interests. Achieving such universal understanding of regional services and community needs requires active and regular two way communications.

CRITICAL REQUIREMENTS

Critical Requirement #1: Diversified and sustainable funding allows NRPC to match the range of community needs.

Recently, boards of selectmen have expressed interest in local technical assistance from NRPC related to such varied services as corridor studies; school demographics projections; special traffic counts; group purchasing of office supplies; aggregate pricing for propane, alternative energy, and broadband service; and MS4 storm water permitting consulting. NRPC cannot “be all things to all communities,” but a more diversified pool of funding would set the foundation for NRPC to better match its services to address the most pressing or overarching community needs.

Critical Requirement #2: NRPC workplace culture and resources empower employees to excel on behalf of our communities.

As a knowledge-based organization the success of NRPC hinges on the success of its employees. Fostering employee creativity, autonomy and professional development, maintaining competitive compensation and benefits, and supporting employee lifestyles consistent with the ideals of the regional vision are just a few ways NRPC can continue to recruit and cultivate the highest performing workforce possible.

Critical Requirement #3: Communications between NRPC and communities is constant and mutually productive.

NRPC relies on relationships with municipal officials, staff, community board members and volunteers. To be effective in its advisory role the Commission must maintain a near-constant dialogue with all these community stakeholders in order to understand their challenges and respond accordingly. Fully-informed communities are better positioned to maximize their commission membership benefits and are more effective advocates for NRPC.

IMPLEMENTATION

The following table enumerates areas of action as prioritized by the Executive Committee and NRPC management after considering all opportunities vis-à-vis current operational constraints. Each aligns with one or more critical requirements that support NRPC’s overarching strategy. For each area, initial steps and measures of success have been described. The overall implementation timeline is estimated to be approximately five years.

Further justification for and more specific action steps further described in the Appendix: Strategic Planning Retreat Summary.

Strategic Goal: Provide excellent services to meet the diverse needs of our member communities.

Strategic Outcome: NRPC, its member communities, & other stakeholders have a universal understanding of NRPC's role, programs, and value by supporting their needs.

Opportunity Area	Initial Steps	Measures of Success	Strategic Critical Requirements		
			#1. Funding	#2. High- Performance Workforce	#3. Communica- tions
Transportation Management Area Programming Authority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research opportunities and benefits to exercising the MPO's programming authority as a Transportation Management Area 2. Educate municipalities and stakeholders on the MPO identity, the transportation planning process and associated opportunities 3. Establish a process to identify and prioritize eligible projects for Federal Highway funding 4. Work with NHDOT, FHWA and SNHPC to allocate funding for regional transportation priorities identified by the MPO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of transportation projects completed in a timely fashion. • Increased regional alignment with transportation goals • Increased stakeholder participation in the transportation planning process • Increased frequency of productive NRPC interactions with elected officials 	X		X
Economic Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirm consensus on regional economic vision 2. Assess local needs and interest level in NRPC economic development assistance 3. Inventory how current NRPC planning services support economic development (e.g. broadband planning) 4. Explore opportunities for collaboration with State and Federal economic development agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New program offerings at NRPC • Increased program funding for NRPC and member communities • Progress towards economic development goals as described in Regional Plan. • Increased opportunities for private-public partnerships 	X		
Energy Efficiency, Renewables, Climate, Environmental Public Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey member communities to identify priority needs and interests 2. Convene stakeholder communities and experts for best-practice sharing 3. Seek out grant opportunities that leverage established partnerships and build on past NRPC successes in these domains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New program offerings, educational materials & implementation tools • Increased program funding for NRPC and member communities • Measureable community cost-savings 	X		
Grant Writing, Marketing & Public Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase capacity and/or staff resources for grant writing 2. Prioritize outreach in grants and marketing in indirect cost budgets 3. Continue regular meetings with BOS and municipal staff 4. Strengthen MPO identity through branding 5. 30-second elevator pitch, versatile one-page tear sheet on NRPC 6. Quantify value e.g. in town reports; collect "customer" testimonials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased and diversified grant funding • Increased frequency of NRPC interactions with elected officials • Growth in social media, email marketing, web engagement • Increased number of press releases 	X		X
Staff Training	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quantify training and travel requests, both approved/unapproved 2. Incorporate conference/training participation in grant scopes of work 3. Evaluate alternative budget mechanisms to support staff development 4. Exploit synergies between NRPC and municipal training needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased attendance at conferences and trainings • No lapses in current staff certifications • Staff certifications grow in number 		X	X
Technology & GIS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prioritize continued technology investment 2. Exhaust all opportunities to collaborate and cost-share between member communities, across RPCs, and within the state tech ecosystem (e.g. SADES, MS4, web services) 3. Expand GIS commoditization: establish a commercial labor rate and formalize on-demand custom maps services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRPC's use of technology that support industry best practices and current standards • Staff labor efficiencies and other returns-on-investment are quantified. • Net growth of NRPC tech user base 		X	X

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APPENDIX: STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT SUMMARY