

Regional Forum Summaries

Introduction

Shaping Our Future: Nashua Region 2030 kicked-off in 2007 by asking citizens to identify the most important issues facing the region in the next 20 years. In March, NRPC's Commissioners defined these issues more narrowly, placing special emphasis on those we could impact as a region. Six key issues emerged: Energy & Green Building, Water Resources, Transportation, Community Infrastructure, Regional Cooperation/Funding, and Higher Education. NRPC then developed a range of potential strategies to address these issues and held a series of open house workshops over the summer to gauge the public's response.

In November 2008, NRPC invited community leaders, experts in the field, and interested citizens to participate in a series of forums designed to generate strategies and provide additional feedback on how best to address Energy & Green Building, Water Resources, and Transportation issues at the regional level. As an added feature, NRPC utilized interactive TurningPoint technology to generate instant feedback from participants. TurningPoint works through the PowerPoint platform, allowing participants to contribute to the Forums by submitting responses to interactive questions using a hand-held keypad. The real-time responses to these interactive questions were then used to stimulate facilitated discussions within groups that delved deeper into specific topics.

Energy & Green Building Forum Recap

On November 1st, 36 individuals gathered for the Energy and Green Building Forum. Participants represented local and regional non-profit organizations, a local church, state and federal agencies, municipalities, businesses, energy providers, and NRPC Commissioners. The evening began with a series of brief presentations designed to introduce many of the initiatives currently underway on the local, regional, and state level. Forum participants then responded to a series of interactive questions and engaged in group discussions on specific issues related to meeting energy needs, green building, reducing our carbon footprint, and developing a regional energy program. The following is a summary of key findings from the Energy and Green Building Forum:

- ◆ Many of the challenges and obstacles are linked to large lots and rural development patterns in parts of the Nashua Region. Overcoming these obstacles was thought to happen through cooperation among citizens and local governments as well as by encouraging development that focuses on better land use planning and increased alternative transportation infrastructure.
- ◆ Energy needs at the local and regional level will be met most effectively through education, increased state and local funding, incentives (ex. financial, reduced permitting times), regulation of new construction, and energy efficient land uses.
- ◆ More education is needed for school children, citizens, businesses, and politicians on the advantages of green building, including cost savings and health benefits. While some believe we need regulation to achieve green building goals, others say that self regulation and incentives for the building industry will be just as beneficial and effective.
- ◆ There are numerous ways to reduce our environmental footprint. NH communities and businesses are realizing tangible economic benefits from doing so, which should be highlighted. Businesses and residents need "how-to" guides to lead them in the right direction.
- ◆ A regional energy program would be most effective if it focused on education, energy programs, facilitation, and collaboration among a variety of stakeholders including municipalities, individuals, businesses, local land use boards, and organizations. Participants identified several stakeholders that were not represented at the forum, such as schools, private sector businesses, builders and building industry leaders, real estate professionals, assessors, and regional business leaders.

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Water Forum Recap

One week later, on November 8th, 19 participants took part in the Water Resources Forum. Participants represented watershed associations, municipalities, state agencies, water providers, local river advisory committees, and NRPC Commissioners. Once again, brief introductory presentations were given summarizing the current state of affairs at the state and regional level. Participants then answered a series of interactive questions and engaged in group discussions on drinking water quality & quantity, sustainability, stormwater management, flooding, and taking responsibility. A summary of key findings from the evening is below.

- ◆ There is a high level of concern regarding the quality of our surface water resources and the future quantity of groundwater supplies in the region.
- ◆ While responsibility for managing water resources needs to be shared by all levels of government, individual municipalities are ultimately most responsible for water supply protection. Regional entities may provide great promise in collaborative efforts to streamline water resource protection issues between neighboring municipalities and other regional governments.
- ◆ A variety of methods must be used to achieve better water resource protection including education, regulation, and use of incentives & disincentives.
- ◆ Funding is a barrier, particularly in the realm of stormwater management.
- ◆ There is a strong link between land use practices and water resource management; good water quality and quantity cannot be achieved without managing adjacent and nearby land uses.

Transportation Forum Recap

Finally, on November 15th, 23 participants took part in the Transportation Forum. Participants included chambers of commerce, state representatives, municipalities, watershed councils, transit providers, state agencies, and NRPC Commissioners. NRPC's Executive Director, Steve Williams, began the evening with a look back at transportation plans in the Nashua Region from the 1980's and 1990's. NH DOT Acting Commissioner Charles O'Leary then gave a presentation on current transportation and funding issues before taking questions from the attendees. Participants then answered interactive and discussion questions on decreases in state and federal funding, deferred maintenance and an aging transportation system, prioritizing funding to meet increased demand, auto-dependent land use patterns, and changing our cultural norms (ex. moving away from dependence on the automobile; encouraging bike, pedestrian, and transit use). The following is a summary of the group's finding:

- ◆ The most important issues shaping the future transportation system are deferred maintenance and aging of the existing transportation system as well as the need to change cultural norms.
- ◆ Maintenance and preservation of the transportation system is the top priority for utilizing existing funding. If any new funding was available, investments in infrastructure for alternative modes and maintaining & preserving the system would receive top priority.
- ◆ The best way to preserve roadway capacity and reduce auto-dependent land use patterns is to enact land use and economic changes that reduce the need to drive. This includes workplace changes that encourage telecommuting and flexible schedules.
- ◆ Changing land use development patterns will help reduce dependence on the automobile.
- ◆ Enhancing the infrastructure of alternative modes of transportation would encourage greater use.
- ◆ Public education is key to changing behavior and cultural norms.
- ◆ NRPC should take the lead in identifying new transportation policies and affecting change.