

# Shaping Our Future: Nashua Region 2030



## Important Issues Report

Over the past few months, the Nashua Regional Planning Commission has been going out into the community and asking citizens to become active participants in our regional planning process. Public input meetings, open to all citizens in the Nashua Region, were held in Milford, Hudson, and Nashua during February and March. Personalized presentations were also delivered to local boards and civic groups. Those who could not attend a public input meeting were invited to provide feedback through our online issues survey. In the end, we conducted eight presentations throughout the region and received surveys from 80 individuals. The following is a summary of their input on the issues that matter most.

## Regional Plan 101: An introduction to the regional planning process

“What do you think are the most important issues facing our region in the next 20 years?” This is the question NRPC has been asking citizens as part of its regional planning effort, Shaping Our Future: Nashua Region 2030.

Public input is a key component of the Shaping Our Future project. During the past few months, NRPC has traveled throughout the region conducting public meetings designed not only to introduce Shaping Our Future and the regional planning process, but also to solicit public input on the most important issues facing the region. A series of three public meetings were held in Milford on Feb. 6, in Hudson on Feb. 15, and in Nashua on March 7. Citizens from all NRPC member communities were invited to attend and share their thoughts on the issues they felt would be critical to the region in the coming years. In addition, NRPC met with several local boards and civic groups to conduct personalized presentations on the project, including the Regional Resource Conservation Committee, Hudson Rotary, Merrimack and Litchfield School Boards, and the Litchfield Selectmen.

To help better inform citizens and encourage their participation, NRPC created a website dedicated exclusively to Shaping Our Future: [www.nashuarpc.org/regionalplan](http://www.nashuarpc.org/regionalplan). There citizens can find public meeting schedules, educational materials, facts & figures on the region's growth patterns, and much more. In addition, Shaping Our Future has received press coverage from several area newspapers, including the Amherst Citizen, Hippo, Union Leader, Broadcaster, and the Nashua Telegraph.

Shaping Our Future is one of many regional plans that will be produced throughout the state in the coming year. New Hampshire's nine regional planning commissions are mandated to prepare and adopt Regional Plans by October 2007. The purpose of these plans is to define the challenges that will confront the region in the next 20 years, identify and prioritize regional issues, and develop strategies that can be implemented at the regional level through partnerships & cooperation. NRPC's final report will address these issues by answering 5 key questions:

1. Where does the region stand & where is it going in the next 20 years?
2. What are the most important issues facing us in the next 20 years?
3. Which of these issues can we impact as a region?
4. What strategies could be used to address these issues?
5. How can we work together to implement these strategies?

# Public Input Process

Public input is a critical component of NRPC's regional planning process. As such, we have provided citizens with several opportunities to express their views and opinions and to take an active role in Shaping Our Future.

Our main source for gathering public input has been through public outreach meetings, which were held across the region. During these meetings, participants were first provided with a general overview of NRPC and the work we have completed to date for the regional plan. This included a summary and discussion of our Growth Trends Analysis and Region-wide Buildout Impact Analysis. Town specific buildout and growth figures were also presented.

After this introduction, participants were divided into breakout groups to brainstorm issues they felt would be most important in the coming years. At the end of the discussion, groups voted on their top 3 to 5 issues and reported back to the rest of the attendees. Finally, all participants completed a written survey, which asked them to assign levels of importance to a list of issues in the following categories: **People, Government, Economy, Quality of Life, Transportation, Housing, and Natural Resources**. The results of these surveys, as well as input from the brainstorming sessions, have been summarized and appear on the following pages.

Finally, it should be noted that while three issues—Quality of Life, Natural Resources, and Transportation—clearly emerged as the most important, citizens were at least somewhat concerned with almost all of the issues presented. When asked to rank the overall categories in order of importance, one survey respondent wrote, "It is hard to do this—they ALL have to be addressed."

## Issues that Matter Most

### 1. QUALITY OF LIFE

#### Quality of Life Issues:

- ◆ Town Character
  - ◆ Maintaining/promoting town centers
  - ◆ Connection with neighbors, community, sense of belonging
  - ◆ Preserving rural/historic character
  - ◆ Safety, crime, and drug concerns
- ◆ Growth Management
  - ◆ Linking growth to resource capabilities
  - ◆ Ability to craft change & manage growth
- ◆ Recreation Opportunities
  - ◆ Neighborhood parks
  - ◆ Hiking/x-country ski trails in town
  - ◆ Recreation opportunities along the Merrimack River
- ◆ Cultural Offerings
  - ◆ More opportunities within the region
- ◆ Higher Education
  - ◆ Improved offerings within the region
  - ◆ Impacts on local economy



#### What people had to say:

- ◆ "All quality of life issues are important, as they encourage people to feel happy where they are and to become involved in preserving the wellbeing of their community."
- ◆ "All impacts to town affect 'quality of life' or community sense of identity—the object should be to manage or craft change to ameliorate these impacts."
- ◆ "We need to maintain the unique character of each town so that we do not become a homogenized conglomeration."
- ◆ "The #1 thing we need to protect is our New England charm and feel."
- ◆ "We need a comprehensive plan to insure that those who come after us can appreciate what we now appreciate and that they will think, 'wow—what forethought to maintain this community.'"
- ◆ "I'm most concerned with recreation opportunities because this provides the most impact on town character."
- ◆ "We need improved recreation opportunities involving trails, open space, and the ability to walk from home to shopping, work, and town centers."
- ◆ "The #1 thing we need to add is recreation infrastructure—everything from trails to parks, particularly in the city cores."
- ◆ "The #1 thing we need to add is cultural amenities, such as museums and performance arts opportunities."
- ◆ "It has been stated that the educational level of the workforce is one of the major reasons why businesses start in an area."
- ◆ "As we go forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, higher education will affect our quality of life in the global world."

## 2. NATURAL RESOURCES

### **Natural Resource Issues:**

- ◆ Water
  - ◆ Drinking water quality
  - ◆ Adequate drinking water supply
  - ◆ Impacts of growth on drinking water—quality & quantity
  - ◆ Potential for drinking water contamination due to accidents
  - ◆ Stormwater mitigation
- ◆ Open Space
  - ◆ Pressure on green space/open space—fragmentation of open space through development of marginal land
  - ◆ Recreation opportunities within natural areas
  - ◆ Wildlife/habitat concerns
- ◆ Sprawl/Development
  - ◆ Requirements for land to be set aside as part of development
  - ◆ Inadequate regulations to control growth and protect natural resources
  - ◆ Energy use/green building techniques
  - ◆ Policy to enforce & encourage low impact development (conservation zoning, cluster development, village plan alternative)
  - ◆ Master Plan for region



### **What people had to say:**

- ◆ “Natural resource issues are a primary concern.”
- ◆ “The #1 thing we need to protect is our water supply—without that foundation everything else is less stable.”
- ◆ “The increase in impervious surface around the watershed is a major threat to the water supply. The quality of drinking water could be seriously impacted in the near future.”
- ◆ “With all the private wells and septic in this area water quality and management is an extremely important issue.”
- ◆ “The #1 thing we need to protect is our natural resources/open space—these are the essential part of life in NH and are the things that attracted many of us to the region.”
- ◆ “We need a statewide and regional smart growth cooperation and a tax system to provide revenue for the needed services.”
- ◆ “We need growth management in this fast growing region before it is all haphazardly paved and built on.”

## 3. TRANSPORTATION

### **Transportation Issues:**

- ◆ Public Transportation
  - ◆ Regional support for mass transit and passenger rail
  - ◆ Protection of existing rail corridors
- ◆ Traffic
  - ◆ Additional cars associated with population growth
  - ◆ Road infrastructure & capacity
  - ◆ Traffic issues on local roads
- ◆ Bike & Pedestrian
  - ◆ Required sidewalks and public spaces
  - ◆ Connected, pedestrian friendly neighborhoods
  - ◆ Walkable communities with mixed uses



### **What people had to say:**

- ◆ “The #1 thing we need to add is a coherent regional transportation plan.”
- ◆ “Future quality of life will depend on an improvement to transportation.”
- ◆ “The #1 thing we need to add is regional mass transit—both to get around the Nashua area and to get to/from Boston metro area.”
- ◆ “This will affect everything and every community needs to be educated as to the colossal benefits of public transportation that runs frequently, dependably, and on time.”
- ◆ “Spend on public transportation and not on highways!”
- ◆ “The #1 thing we need to add is non-polluting transportation.”
- ◆ “Overloaded road networks are a major issue now and will only get worse in the future.”
- ◆ “Traffic issues and public transportation must work hand in hand.”
- ◆ “We need better management and use of overcapacity roads.”

# Overall Survey Results

## Milford Public Outreach Meeting Feb. 6, 2007

### Overall Rankings

(1 = most important, 7 = least important)

1. Quality of Life
2. Natural Resources
3. Transportation
4. People
5. Economy
6. Housing
7. Government

### Specific Category Rankings

(5 = very important, 1 = not important)

- 4.8 Water Quality
- 4.8 Drinking Water Supply
- 4.7 Traffic
- 4.4 Cost of Government Services
- 4.4 Burden on Police, Fire, Emergency
- 4.3 Burden on Public Schools
- 4.1 Recreation Facilities
- 4.1 Sprawl/Loss of Open Space
- 4.1 Population Growth
- 4.1 Diversity in Economy
- 4.0 Habitat Loss/Degradation
- 3.9 Public Transportation
- 3.9 Climate Change
- 3.9 Improvements in Higher Education
- 3.8 Cultural Amenities
- 3.8 Affordable Housing
- 3.7 Historic Preservation
- 3.7 Loss of Manufacturing Jobs
- 3.4 Elderly Housing
- 2.7 Immigration

## Hudson Public Outreach Meeting Feb. 15, 2007

### Overall Rankings

(1 = most important, 7 = least important)

1. Quality of Life
2. Natural Resources
3. Transportation
4. People
5. Economy
6. Government
7. Housing

### Specific Category Rankings

(5 = very important, 1 = not important)

- 4.9 Water Quality
- 4.9 Traffic
- 4.7 Drinking Water Supply
- 4.4 Sprawl/Loss of Open Space
- 4.3 Habitat Loss/Degradation
- 4.2 Public Transportation
- 4.2 Recreation Facilities
- 4.2 Burden on Public Schools
- 4.1 Affordable Housing
- 4.0 Cost of Government Services
- 4.0 Burden on Police, Fire, Emergency
- 3.9 Climate Change
- 3.9 Cultural Amenities
- 3.9 Population Growth
- 3.9 Diversity in Economy
- 3.8 Improvements in Higher Education
- 3.8 Historic Preservation
- 3.6 Loss of Manufacturing Jobs
- 3.2 Elderly Housing
- 2.1 Immigration

## Nashua Public Outreach Meeting March 7, 2007

### Overall Rankings

(1 = most important, 7 = least important)

1. Quality of Life
2. Natural Resources
2. Transportation
4. Economy
5. Housing
6. Government
7. People

### Specific Category Rankings

(5 = very important, 1 = not important)

- 4.8 Traffic
- 4.6 Water Quality
- 4.6 Drinking Water Supply
- 4.5 Sprawl/Loss of Open Space
- 4.5 Habitat Loss/Degradation
- 4.4 Public Transportation
- 4.3 Affordable Housing
- 4.3 Diversity in Economy
- 4.3 Burden on Public Schools
- 4.1 Cost of Government Services
- 3.9 Improvements in Higher Education
- 3.8 Cultural Amenities
- 3.7 Burden on Police, Fire, Emergency
- 3.6 Climate Change
- 3.6 Recreation Facilities
- 3.6 Loss of Manufacturing Jobs
- 3.6 Elderly Housing
- 3.5 Population Growth
- 3.4 Historic Preservation
- 2.5 Immigration

# Additional Survey Results

## Merrimack School Board Feb. 22, 2007

- 4.7 Drinking Water Supply
- 4.6 Water Quality
- 4.5 Burden on Public Schools
- 4.5 Population Growth
- 4.4 Traffic
- 4.4 Affordable Housing
- 4.3 Habitat Loss/Degradation
- 4.2 Burden on Police, Fire, Emergency
- 4.1 Public Transportation
- 4.1 Improvements in Higher Education
- 4.1 Diversity in Economy
- 4.1 Elderly Housing
- 3.9 Recreation Facilities
- 3.9 Historic Preservation
- 3.8 Climate Change
- 3.8 Cultural Amenities
- 3.7 Sprawl/Loss of Open Space
- 3.7 Cost of Government Services
- 3.7 Loss of Manufacturing Jobs
- 3.1 Immigration

## Hudson Rotary March 15, 2007

- 4.9 Traffic
- 4.8 Burden on Public Schools
- 4.7 Drinking Water Supply
- 4.7 Population Growth
- 4.4 Water Quality
- 4.4 Burden on Police, Fire, Emergency
- 4.3 Recreation Facilities
- 4.3 Improvements in Higher Education
- 4.3 Affordable Housing
- 4.3 Elderly Housing
- 4.1 Loss of Manufacturing Jobs
- 4.0 Cost of Government Services
- 4.0 Diversity in Economy
- 3.9 Sprawl/Loss of Open Space
- 3.9 Public Transportation
- 3.9 Climate Change
- 3.8 Habitat Loss/Degradation
- 3.7 Cultural Amenities
- 3.7 Historic Preservation
- 3.6 Immigration

## Litchfield School Board/Selectmen March 26, 2007

- 4.8 Drinking Water Supply
- 4.7 Traffic
- 4.7 Water Quality
- 4.7 Burden on Public Schools
- 4.7 Population Growth
- 4.5 Burden on Police, Fire, Emergency
- 4.3 Cost of Government Services
- 4.1 Recreation Facilities
- 4.1 Historic Preservation
- 4.0 Climate Change
- 3.9 Sprawl/Loss of Open Space
- 3.8 Diversity in Economy
- 3.7 Loss of Manufacturing Jobs
- 3.6 Cultural Amenities
- 3.6 Affordable Housing
- 3.5 Habitat Loss/Degradation
- 3.5 Immigration
- 3.4 Improvements in Higher Education
- 3.1 Public Transportation
- 3.1 Elderly Housing