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UPDATING YOUR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

*50 Recommendations for Making Plan Updates
More Effective*

**State Planning Office
April 2003**

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PREFACE

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a number of Maine communities began updating comprehensive plans that they had developed or last revised earlier in the '90s. About this same time, the State Planning Office (SPO), as part of concerted efforts to curb sprawl and promote smart growth, was advocating the need for “bolder” comprehensive plans that were more effective at guiding growth and addressing other local and regional issues.

This handbook grew out of a perceived need for better guidance on how plans could actually be made more effective. Originally presented as a concise listing of recommendations, the document has been fleshed out in an effort to provide more substance and direction. SPO viewed the handbook as an opportunity to highlight some of the lessons learned from the collective experience of over 10 years of comprehensive planning in Maine under the Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, commonly known as the “Growth Management Law.” The handbook was also seen as an occasion to pose new ideas and challenge conventional wisdom. This emphasis was consistent with the agency’s focus on formulating “smarter” approaches to addressing development sprawl and promoting a more sustainable growth pattern.

The handbook also complements a comprehensive plan update grant program that SPO began offering in 2001. This program has a fundamentally different slant than the planning grants that have been regularly offered over the years to provide first-time state funding for comprehensive plan development. The selection process for update grants is highly selective, focused on providing support to communities that are most committed and best positioned to take a critical look at their growth patterns and to develop stronger plans. The thinking is that these plans will not only help better serve their communities, but act as valuable demonstration projects, setting a high standard for the next generation of comprehensive plans in Maine.

Consistent with this approach, the handbook sets a “high bar” for plan updates. If Maine communities are to successfully address the difficult planning challenges of the 21st century, they must be ready to

discard approaches that don’t seem to be working. They also must devise forceful strategies and ways of measuring progress.

It is recognized that setting a high bar has some risks, not the least of which is that planning committees may develop plans that get too far ahead of a skeptical or indifferent general public. Bold proposals mean little if the public is not willing to get behind them.

That is why this handbook emphasizes the importance of coupling the development of a stronger plan with a more effective public participation process. This process should involve listening carefully and being responsive to citizen concerns. It should also inform, educate, and make the case for stronger courses of action.

As originally conceived, the “target audience,” both for the update grant program and for this handbook, were communities that largely recognized the merits of planning and reasonable land use regulation – and were ready to apply lessons learned from their 1990s planning experiences. It was assumed that the handbook would be most helpful to professional and lay planners who are familiar with comprehensive planning and its common pitfalls, and was written with that audience particularly in mind.

The perspective of the handbook, however, has broadened somewhat as it has evolved and expanded. It is hoped is that most of its recommendations will be helpful to a wide-range of communities, including ones that are developing their first comprehensive plans. Even for communities that are initially hesitant to embark on strong planning efforts, the recommendations on improving your public participation process deserve strong consideration.

Ultimately, the most critical ingredients to forging a stronger comprehensive plan, for any community, are a willingness to form and articulate a compelling vision for the future, a readiness to take a hard look at current policies and future trends, and a commitment to effective approaches likely to achieve positive, measurable outcomes consistent

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with the overall vision. This process requires a subtle shift of perspective that builds local accountability for effective planning and implementation, rather than focusing on a determination of “consistency” from the State Planning Office as the test of a successful plan. While a consistency finding is desirable for a variety of reasons, it should be viewed, not as an end in itself, but as a by-product of a community-motivated effort to effectively address existing and future planning challenges.

We would like to thank all of those who contributed to the development of this handbook. As many of its principles and ideas are the result of an ongoing dialogue, both within state agencies and statewide, it is difficult to assign individual credit. Under the leadership of Evan Richert, SPO Director from 1995-2002, the agency focused strongly on the pattern of development in Maine and its implications for the future. A number of recommendations are reflective of Evan’s innovative thinking. Perhaps more importantly, he created an atmosphere at SPO in which program teams and individual staff members were encouraged to question conventional wisdom and to think creatively – but always with an eye toward pragmatic solutions and measurable results. The agency’s Land Use Team, supervised by Beth Della Valle, has worked tirelessly to promote effective comprehensive planning in Maine, and this handbook incorporates many suggestions generated from individual team members and collectively.

The handbook’s principal researcher and author was Will Johnston, a member of SPO’s Land Use Team

from 2000 to 2002. We thank Will for his willingness to take on the challenge of assembling this document. The handbook has benefited greatly from his experience with comprehensive planning in Maine, his ability to distill complex issues and his organizational skills. His high work standards and perseverance in seeing the project through to completion deserve acknowledgement and expression of our gratitude.

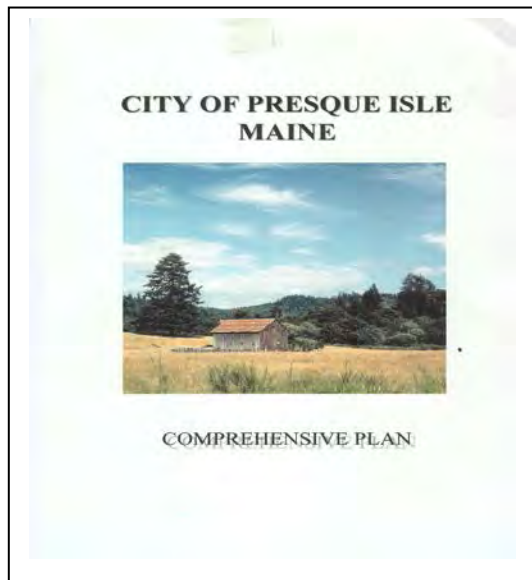
We’d also like to thank all of those who reviewed various drafts of the document as it evolved. Reviewers included members of SPO’s Land Use Team, other state agency personnel, and regional planning commission staff. The handbook also underwent a final peer review by a selected group of town planners, planning consultants and other professionals. The final document has greatly benefited from their insightful comments and suggestions.

Comprehensive planning is a difficult but essential undertaking. While a basic theme of this handbook is that plans can be more effective, this is not to minimize the staunch efforts of Maine’s cities and towns in developing plans during the 1990s. The handbook attempts to draw lessons from, and build, on those efforts. No easy answers exist, but we can endeavor to ask the right questions. Our hope is that the document contributes to the ongoing, cooperative process of making comprehensive plans work better for Maine communities.

PART I: INTRODUCTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

THE 1990s GENERATION OF PLANS



The 1990s were busy and exciting times for comprehensive planning in Maine. Over 300 communities developed or updated comprehensive plans pursuant to the Planning and Land Use Regulation Act (30-A M.S.R.A. §4301 et seq), commonly referred to as the “Growth Management Law.” This groundbreaking law established a program that, for the first time, provided state funding for comprehensive plans, and set forth goals and other criteria that all plans were challenged to address.

For many municipalities, the development of plans in the 1990s was their first experience working with a broad group of citizens to create a planning document that was truly comprehensive. It was also the first time that the state directed local comprehensive plans to address growth management and other state goals. The result was a new generation of comprehensive plans, most of which designated “growth” and “rural areas,” recommended measures for managing and directing growth relative to these areas, and included an array

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of other policies and strategies aimed at addressing local issues and state and regional goals.

Now, as we move into the early 21st century, many of these plans are approaching and surpassing their 10th anniversaries. So it is timely to evaluate how these plans have performed and to consider updating and upgrading them.

A common rule of thumb is that plans should be evaluated every five years (and revised, if necessary), and thoroughly updated every decade. Using an outer limit of 10 years also makes sense because this is the length of the planning period as defined in statute, and most plans use that time frame in making projections and identifying issues. Beyond a decade, plans become particularly outdated, as projections, identified issues and proposed strategies become less accurate or relevant.

An update, however, may be sorely needed in less than 10 years. The real issue is not the age of the plan, but its effectiveness. Many communities that developed comprehensive plans in the 1990s have

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effective at guiding growth and meeting other planning objectives. In some cases, plans have been overtaken by accelerated development pressures or changes that were not anticipated in the early 1990s. In other instances, plans may have been too timid or vague to begin with, resulting in ineffectual strategies or poor follow-through.

THE NEED FOR BOLDER PLANS

The State Planning Office (SPO) believes that the update of comprehensive plans in the early 2000s provides a golden opportunity to improve their relevance and effectiveness. While the efforts in the 1990s resulted in many success stories and moved communities forward in planning for their futures, this next generation of plans can, and should, provide a “bolder” approach to guiding future growth and addressing other community issues. By bolder, we mean plans that provide stronger policies and implementation strategies which address the major issues facing the community in a manner likely to yield positive and measurable results. Recognizing that these enhanced policies and strategies can only be realized as the result of an effective public process,

the term bolder also refers to an approach that places greater emphasis on leadership, citizen participation, education and vision.

By bolder, we mean plans that provide stronger policies and implementation strategies which address the major issues facing the community in a manner likely to yield positive and measurable results.

SPO also believes that updated plans provide an opportunity to incorporate some of the *smart growth* principles and strategies now being discussed in Maine and nationwide that address development sprawl and promote a sustainable,

fiscally sound growth pattern (see focus box below). While many elements of smart growth echo the long-standing goals of the current Growth Management Law, they also reflect some of the wisdom gained over the last decade regarding the costs of sprawl and alternative growth patterns.

What is Smart Growth?

Smart Growth refers generally to efforts to invest and grow in a wiser, more sustainable manner as an alternative to sprawl and its attendant negative impacts on our fiscal health, environment and community character. Although the term is subject to varying definitions, it encompasses the following principles:

1. Maintaining Maine’s historic settlement pattern of compact villages and urban centers separated by rural countryside, and sustaining a unique sense of place in every community by respecting local cultural and natural features;
2. Targeting economic and residential growth to compact, mixed use centers in areas with existing or planned infrastructure and services at a scale appropriate for the community and region;
3. Preserving and creating mixed use, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that incorporate open areas, landscaping and other amenities which enhance livability;
4. Investing public funds and providing incentives and disincentives consistent with principles 1, 2, and 3 above, as well as other principles below where applicable;
5. Providing choice in the mode of transportation, and ensuring that transportation options are integrated and consistent with land use objectives;
6. Protecting environmental quality and important natural and historic features of the State, and preserving large areas of unfragmented wildlife habitat and undeveloped land;
7. Encouraging and strengthening agriculture, forestry, fishing and other natural resource-based enterprises, and minimizing conflicts of development with these industries;
8. Reinvesting in service centers and in downtowns and village areas, and supporting a diversity of viable business enterprises and housing opportunities in these areas;
9. Establishing and maintaining coalitions with stakeholders, and engaging the public in the pursuit of smart growth solutions; and
10. For municipalities without significant growth pressures and/or small rural communities with minimal infrastructure, smart growth involves consideration of the above principles to the extent that they are applicable, and ensuring that the development that does occur is accomplished in a manner that enhances community values, avoids incremental negative impacts, and is consistent with a sustainable and fiscally sound growth pattern.

[Go to Appendix E for additional details regarding smart growth](#)

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook provides guidance for making your comprehensive plan update more effective. It is not intended as a step-by-step guide, nor as a toolbox of specific strategies. The publication *Comprehensive Planning: A Manual for Maine Communities*, published by the State Planning Office (SPO) in 1992, remains the best overall guide on the subject.

This handbook focuses on selected areas of comprehensive planning, with an emphasis on improving elements that were trouble spots in 1990s planning efforts, and applying some new thinking to better address 21st century challenges. It offers some modification in approach and emphasis to the 1992 manual, but is best used as a supplement to that document and other resources that describe all the steps and elements involved in comprehensive planning.

The handbook contains 50 recommendations. Part I, *Introduction and Recommendations*, provides a relatively concise explanation of each one. Part II, *Additional Background and Guidance*, offers more detailed information and direction on most of these recommendations.

The first 15 recommendations are overarching ones that SPO views as most crucial to creating a stronger comprehensive plan. They include suggestions that pertain to both the planning process and particular plan components. These recommendations are applicable to most communities and planning efforts.

The second set of 15 recommendations focuses on improving your planning process – which SPO believes is key to developing stronger plans. A number of these suggestions are geared to creating an effective planning committee and public participation program. All comprehensive planning processes can benefit from the recommendations of this section.

The third group of 15 recommendations concentrates on how to devise stronger approaches to guide growth. This was a weak link of many 1990s planning efforts and their subsequent implementation, and significant lessons can be learned from this decade of collective experience. The goal of guiding growth was a central component of the original Growth Management Law, and the goal remains pertinent today for most communities.

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The last five recommendations are general tips and reminders; most of them reiterate important points made in previous recommendations.

In addition to the 50 recommendations, Part I provides guidance on how you might organize and format your updated plan, on cost considerations and on how updates will be reviewed under the Growth Management Law. The Appendices contain a listing of specific tools to guide development relative to growth and rural areas, as well as other useful information.

Many of the goals and topic areas that are part of comprehensive planning are not covered in this handbook. This does not mean that they are not important. Updated plans should meaningfully address natural resource protection and management, public facility and recreational needs, historical and archaeological preservation and other issues that relate to state and local goals. In general, most 1990s plans did an adequate job covering these elements, but your plan update provides an opportunity to approach them in a more forceful and accountable manner. Many of the process-related recommendations of the handbook are applicable to a range of issues, and should help you forge bold strategies in addressing them.

Good luck and good planning.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

The 50 recommendations that follow are aimed at helping you forge a bolder, smarter comprehensive plan. They are presented here in relatively concise form, with an emphasis on why each recommendation is important and general guidance for how it can be applied to your plan. Part II, Additional Background and Guidance, provides more specific direction on most recommendations.

The first grouping of recommendations provides background and principles that serve as a foundation for understanding common plan weaknesses and subsequent recommendations. While all 50 recommendations are important, we urge you to thoroughly review and carefully consider this “Top 15.”

TOP OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Take a hard look at your existing plan*

A critical first step of any comprehensive plan update process should be a rigorous and objective evaluation of your existing plan. This evaluation will indicate the degree to which an update is needed and provide valuable insights that will help make your revised plan more effective. Planning is an iterative process in which we build on past successes and failures. Your existing plan should be viewed as an indispensable building block in your ongoing community planning efforts.

This evaluation, which the State Planning Office (SPO) terms an *Update Needs Assessment*, should focus on your plan’s policies and implementation strategies, with an accounting of which strategies were accomplished and whether they resulted in the desired outcome. The most useful part of this exercise is extracting what lessons can be learned from the plan’s successes and failures. The analysis of why certain strategies were not successful in achieving your planning goals provides clues about whether aspects of your updated plan need to be strengthened or made more explicit – or whether alternative approaches are needed.

A major component of most 1990s plans is the designation of growth and rural areas, and a set of policies and strategies aimed at directing growth toward growth areas and away from rural areas. As part of the exercise of evaluating your existing plan, you should determine the extent to which actual growth patterns in your town are following the

desired pattern. To do this effectively, you must determine how much development has occurred in your designated growth and rural areas since the plan was adopted – or at least over the last five years.

If this analysis shows most development going into designated growth areas, major changes in growth policies may be unnecessary. On the other hand, if it indicates that most development is occurring in designated rural areas, you should reconsider the town’s growth policies and strategies as part of the plan update.

Even if your community has not been experienced significant development, this exercise is often revealing. More often than not, it indicates a spreading out of the existing population to rural areas, prompting a focus on whether this pattern is one you wish to perpetuate or change as the plan is updated.

The results of the evaluation of your existing plan should be clearly summarized, and used in developing the work program for the update process. They should also be shared with the general public (in conjunction with relevant data from your updated inventory and analysis section) as a means of building community support for why a stronger comprehensive planning effort is needed.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

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2. *Aggressively and creatively engage the public*



A bold comprehensive plan requires a bold planning process that engages the public in a meaningful way. Without a strong public participation component, you run the risk of developing a bold plan that lacks broad community support, or a timid one that elicits little debate but which is so cautious as to be ineffective.

The planning processes of the 1990s, for the most part, involved a significant level of public participation and outreach. Many communities, however, still struggled with sustaining public interest. Despite their efforts to be inclusionary, planning committees often encountered poorly attended meetings and attrition of committee members. In some cases, it wasn't until the vote on the plan at Town Meeting that a large segment of the citizenry voiced its views in support – or in opposition.

No simple formula exists for increasing the level of citizen participation in plan updates. If anything, promoting involvement is even more of a challenge in the 2000s as the pace of everyday life quickens and many municipal governments struggle to fill volunteer boards. Through creativity, persistence, and strategic focus, however, your community can design a more effective public participation process.

Following are some general suggestions:

- ♦ Allocate significant resources toward the public participation component. It may be tempting to skimp on this area of the plan and put resources into other areas. But time and money devoted to soliciting the public's views and building support for the plan are resources well spent.

- ♦ In general, consider a more strategic, activist approach to public participation that takes the planning effort to the citizens rather than a more passive one that relies on citizens to take initiative to become involved.
- ♦ Recognize that an effective public participation program should include not only soliciting and responding to the views of the citizenry, but an educational and advocacy component aimed at informing the public and building support for the plan's policies and strategies.
- ♦ Seek alternatives to public meetings and questionnaires. Planning in the 21st century warrants 21st century technologies. If available, broadcast forums over local public access television to reach people in their living rooms. Set up a comprehensive plan webpage that is easy to access and use to inform residents and solicit views.
- ♦ Don't forget old-fashioned grass-roots efforts. Some of the best techniques for soliciting input or getting the word out have less to do with new technologies than with creative thinking and hard work. At least in smaller towns, consider individual phone calls or door-to-door visits. In 1990s planning efforts, some towns promoted involvement by holding workshops in conjunction with raffles, church suppers or other popular events.
- ♦ Use your schools. Integrating aspects of comprehensive planning into the local school curriculum is a wonderful way of both educating your community's next generation of decision-makers, and gaining insights from a group who may provide fresh viewpoints.
- ♦ Don't wait for key people, constituencies or organizations in your community to weigh in on the plan as it nears completion. Involve them early in the process, either as committee members, or as targeted interview candidates.

Because of the importance of process in forging a stronger update, Recommendations 16-30 provide additional guidance on improving public participation and other process considerations.

[☑ Go to recommendations for the Planning Process \(#16-#30\)](#)

3. *Shift emphasis from inventory to policy*

Many of the plans that were developed in the 1990s suffer from “inventory overload” – compilations of huge amounts of background information on the community, often at the expense of the critical policy and strategy portion of the plan. Updates provide an opportunity to shift this emphasis to portions of the plan that are key to making it more effective.

Plans can be updated in a manner that allows inventory and analysis needs to be met, consistent with state law and rules, while leaving significant resources for upgrading the policy sections.

This focus on inventory is understandable. Inventory elements are prominently featured in the Growth Management Law, and newly formed planning committees have a natural tendency to plunge into the task of information gathering. But a common complaint heard from 1990s planning efforts was that by the time committees reached the policy and implementation stages of the process, they were low on energy, low on attendance and low on budget.

Updated plans must be grounded in accurate information, projections and analysis, and reflect current conditions and issues. Your plan, however, can be updated in a manner that allows inventory and analysis needs to be met, consistent with state law and rules, while leaving significant resources for upgrading the policy sections. Avoid recreating information from your existing plan that is still relevant and accurate. Aim for making your inventory “leaner and meaner,” focusing on the information and analyses that are most pertinent to the major planning issues facing the town.

The process of strengthening the policy component¹ of your update begins with the previous step of carefully evaluating your existing plan. Look at what has worked, what hasn’t worked and why, and what policies and strategies are still relevant. You will then be in a good position to formulate more effective policies and strategies for the next 10-year

planning period. Try to beef up the policy components that are most relevant to your community or for which your previous plan provided inadequate guidance. On the other hand,

keep your policy sections focused and easy to follow. Avoid creating so many policies and strategies as to make implementation unwieldy.

Recommendations should be written in forceful and clear language that commits to action (see focus box below), and provides for regular follow-up on the status of implementation – preferably on an annual basis.

Watch Your Language

In crafting new and revised policies and strategies, avoid non-committal or ambiguous language. Overuse of words such as “consider,” “may,” “explore,” and “study” can lead to inaction or confusion when it becomes time for implementation. Even words such as “encourage” or “discourage,” which may be appropriate for overall goals or policies, generally provide inadequate guidance when used in implementation strategies.

In the give-and-take of committee discussions and in response to public feedback, it is easy to understand how these words find their way into plans. Faced with opposition to strong terms such as “shall,” “prohibit,” “enact,” and “purchase,” communities often resort to less directive words as a way of making plan provisions sound less threatening. Certainly occasions exist when policies or strategies need to be modified in order to gain crucial public support, and instances when further study or consideration makes sense before additional action is taken.

But it is difficult to create a strong plan with vague or weak directives. If your planning committee feels that a particular strategy is warranted, it should be given the opportunity to make the case for why this is so. If the public clearly remains unsupportive, it may be better to eliminate a recommendation altogether and consider a different one, rather than watering it down to a point that will make effective follow-through unlikely.

[**Go to Part II for additional guidance**](#)

¹ This document uses the term “policy component” or “policy sections” in a broad sense to include the section of the plans that includes goals, policies, implementation strategies, the future land use plan and a capital investment strategy.

4. **Concentrate on State Goal #1**

Although all 10 State Goals of the Growth Management Law are important, the first goal is central to the original purpose of the law – that of guiding growth. The state’s recent initiatives aimed at combating sprawl and encouraging smart growth also relate strongly to the first state goal.

This goal is most crucial in areas of the state with significant growth pressures. But it is also relevant in communities with static or declining growth. Even these towns have experienced dispersion of people and housing to rural areas, increasing municipal costs and adversely affecting natural resource and community character.

While State Goal #1 is particularly important, it is also particularly challenging to address. It was a sticking point in many plans that were determined by the State to be inconsistent with the Growth Management Law. Many 1990s plans tout the importance of guiding growth and realizing other benefits – but then propose relatively timid implementation strategies.

It helpful to bear in mind that the forces that drive sprawl are formidable, and operate both on the local and regional levels. Rural areas, by virtue of their open spaces, scenic qualities and other attributes, are attractive to homebuyers – creating a significant demand for new homes there. Comprehensive planning can be used as vehicle to promote better regional coordination (see Recommendation #7), but it is generally not effective at stemming the spreading out of residential and commercial development from service centers into outlying communities.

Comprehensive planning, however, can be effective at addressing the sprawl that occurs on the local level. Regional factors may strongly influence the

amount of growth pressure in your community, but local policies and strategies can strongly influence the location, type, appearance and impacts of growth in your community.

State Goal #1

“To encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of each community, while protecting the State’s rural character, making efficient use of public services and preventing development sprawl.”

A starting place for forging bolder growth-directing strategies is the process step of engaging your community in a discussion of sprawl, the state goal aimed at addressing it, and its relevance to your

community. Unless the public feels that sprawl is a problem, it will ultimately be hesitant to support proposed solutions. As part of this discussion, vigorously publicize the results of your update needs assessment regarding growth issues, particularly the tracking of recent development.

Given the importance of this issue and the mixed results communities have had addressing it, this handbook provides considerable guidance on it. The Top Recommendations for Managing Growth (#31-#45) provide a number of suggestions, based on lessons learned from 1990s plans and smart growth principles.

These recommendations focus on making designated growth and rural areas work better as mechanisms for directing growth. In

addition, Appendices A, B and C list a number of tools designed to guide and manage development relative to designated growth and rural areas.

It is important to recognize, however, that there is no “silver bullet” for success. Consistent with the view of planning as an iterative process, work to build on past approaches that seemed to work or show promise, and try some new approaches as well.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

[☑ Go to recommendations on managing growth](#)

5. *Incorporate performance measures*

If plans are to address major community issues in a manner likely to yield positive results, they must more clearly identify desired outcomes. They must also establish a means of measuring performance relative to these outcomes.

In the lingo of strategic planning, many 1990s plans are strong on proposing *outputs* – activities or programs aimed at achieving planning goals, but much weaker on articulating *outcomes* – the desired results, and means to accurately measure them. Without a strong focus on outcomes, a tendency exists to equate success or failure mainly with effort rather than result. This emphasis not only hampers current planning efforts, but can result in the long-term perpetuation of strategies that are ineffective or even counterproductive. The implementation of strong land use measures, for example, is an output that may or may not result in the desired outcome: that of most future development occurring in designated growth areas.

Without a strong focus on outcomes, there is a tendency to equate success or failure mainly with effort rather than result.

For your plan update, try taking a fresh look at your policies and strategies with an emphasis on identifying positive outcomes. As you evaluate your existing plan, think about how progress might be better measured this time around. In many instances, you may find it helpful to establish targets or benchmarks to strive for, rather than prescribing a make-or-break outcome for judging success or failure.

Setting benchmarks relative to designated growth and rural areas is essential if your community is to be able to gauge its success at guiding growth. You can also establish benchmarks for other important plan goals such as affordable housing, water quality, economic growth, and the overall livability of your community. Part II provides examples of such benchmarks. Even for plan goals that are not amenable to precise measurement, the exercise of discussing how success will be evaluated is an extremely valuable one.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

6. *Try a visioning process*

Visioning is the process by which your community defines how it wants to look at a specified date in the future – typically 20 or more years from the present. A visioning process gives citizens the opportunity to express what they value about their community and to develop a consensus on what they would like to create, change or preserve.

The process usually involves a town-wide forum or series of workshops structured in such a way to stimulate discussion on what elements of the community citizens most treasure and what changes they would like to see. The product of this process is a vision statement that clearly summarizes the community's aspirations.

Visioning is an excellent way to begin your comprehensive planning process. It starts things off on the high road with an effort to reach out to the whole community and to find common ground regarding its vision for the future. And it sets up

the comprehensive plan and its subsequent implementation as the primary instrument of achieving the vision. The vision statement itself, which is best incorporated into the plan, keeps the community's broad goals in the forefront as specific elements of the plan unfold. It helps to maintain an overall sense of purpose, direction and coordination.

Visioning has not been part of most comprehensive planning processes in Maine, and is not a required element of plans as set forth in the Growth Management Law. But a visioning process can help make the overall planning process more meaningful and productive, and foster a stronger, more forward-looking comprehensive plan.

SPO has available on-line a new handbook on community visioning, based on a pilot project involving 10 Maine communities. Part II provides additional details on this project and handbook.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

7. *Think regionally*



All politics may be local, but many of the factors affecting growth, our natural resource and infrastructure systems, as well as a range of other planning considerations, are regional.

In Maine, thinking beyond municipal borders doesn't always come easily. The tradition of local home rule is especially strong. While municipalities often cooperate in areas such as fire protection and solid waste disposal, their approach to other important regional issues can be disjointed, or even in conflict.

Comprehensive plans and local growth management programs are limited in their capacity to solve many regional problems – at least as typically developed and implemented by a single municipality. While they have the potential to significantly improve a community's approach to guiding growth within its borders, comprehensive plans should not be viewed as the solution to the sprawl that occurs at the regional level. On the other hand, comprehensive plans can play an important role in better regional coordination, and this role can be enhanced in plan updates. Even when regional forces are beyond your community's control, comprehensive plans can be improved to better anticipate and respond to those forces.

Under state statute and rules, comprehensive plans are required to have a *Regional Coordination Program*. Most 1990s plans identify shared resources and facilities, and include some policies and strategies that involve working together with neighboring communities. But a stronger regional perspective and approach should be considered

mainly because it is in your community's best interest to do so. Your town can develop an otherwise exemplary plan, but if it does not recognize the impact of regional forces and incorporate strategies for working with your neighbors on pressing common issues, the plan may prove ineffective at achieving your planning objectives. On a very practical level, the consequences of not cooperating effectively can be higher municipal costs and taxes, as well as disjointed management of significant natural resources shared with other towns. On a more global level, it may jeopardize the realization of your community's vision for the future.

If your plan does not recognize the impact of regional forces and incorporate strategies for working with your neighbors on pressing common issues, it may prove ineffective at achieving your planning objectives.

Here are some general pointers for strengthening the regional component of your plan. More detail on each of these steps can be found in Part II.

- ◆ In the regional coordination portions of your plan and elsewhere, assess and consider forces, developments and trends occurring in your region – and likely to occur during the planning period. Even as you seek to make your inventory and analysis section “leaner and meaner,” try to widen your focus to the region as a whole.
- ◆ Work to strengthen your plan's inventory and analysis of natural resources that span municipal borders.
- ◆ As part of the review of your existing plan, evaluate the success of existing policies and strategies pertaining to regional coordination. If there was poor follow-through or a lack of positive outcomes, identify what lessons can be learned as you try to strengthen your approach to addressing interlocal issues.
- ◆ Incorporate into your planning process ways of engaging in discussions with neighboring communities. As part of a formal or informal arrangement, consider conducting joint planning, at least on portions of the plan.
- ◆ Finally, based on lessons learned from your existing plan, your current analysis of regional issues and implications and your preliminary feedback from your regional cohorts, discuss and formulate strategies for a more effective regional coordination program.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

8. *Meaningfully address housing needs*

For many 1990s comprehensive plans (and subsequent implementation efforts), addressing the state goal of encouraging and promoting “affordable, decent housing opportunities,” with a target of 10% of new residential units being affordable, has proven to be difficult. Plans often struggled with how to address affordable housing. During the late 1990s, housing prices and rents in many Maine cities and towns have continued to rise steadily, making this goal even more daunting.

For plan updates, communities with a well-identified affordable housing problem may want to spend less time on inventory and analysis and more on discussing and developing possible solutions. As part of your overall strategy, it may be necessary to first assess and build support for this goal in your community – without a strong public commitment, you may find it difficult to develop forceful strategies.



Next, consider a range of regulatory and non-regulatory measures aimed at increasing housing opportunities, and provide some benchmarks to allow progress to be measured. You may also find it helpful to create a standing committee on housing that is charged with tracking trends, evaluating successes and failures, and possibly recommending stronger measures, if necessary. Part II provides several other suggestions.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

9. *Plan for permanence*

The focus of most comprehensive planning has been on accommodating change. Since change will inevitably occur, it makes sense to plan for it. The emphasis has rightly been on managing growth, rather than preventing it.

Many 1990s plans, however, ignore the consideration of planning for *permanence* – targeting for long-term or permanent protection of lands and features paramount to the community’s economic well-being, its essential character and livability, and/or the integrity of its natural resource systems. Unfortunately, many of these essential or defining features are lumped into general areas in the document’s land use plan, and typical implementation strategies focus on blunting major impacts rather than affording permanent protection.

The idea of planning for permanence has particular merit for addressing your community’s most valued rural lands. As discussed in Recommendation #35, the designation of critical rural areas (now recognized in the Growth Management Law) provides a way of distinguishing lands that are particularly valuable or vulnerable to change.

“The trouble with land is that they aren’t making it anymore.” – Will Rogers

Permanent protection measures can then be then targeted at these lands.

Within your town’s designated growth areas, there may also be features, both natural and built, that are defining elements of a downtown, village or neighborhood, and which deserve permanent protection. Noteworthy buildings, green spaces, street trees or outstanding vistas may be deemed indispensable as well.

In general, planning for permanence involves a commitment beyond proposing strategies that simply blunt the impacts of new development on these special places. In many cases, non-regulatory and investment approaches may prove to be the most appropriate protection mechanisms. While the apparent cost of such strategies may initially raise eyebrows, the investment may be viewed as increasingly worthwhile when the costs of permanently *losing* the area or feature are considered. Your challenge is to effectively identify, quantify and communicate this choice to the public.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

[☑ Go to recommendations on defining “rural”](#)

10. Focus on the fiscal

Many of the arguments against a sprawling growth pattern have centered on its adverse impacts on natural resources or on overall community character. Perhaps an even more compelling argument for managing growth is that sprawl is expensive. A dispersed development pattern, which may appear less costly in the short-term, ultimately requires more infrastructure and services than a more compact pattern – and these added costs are ultimately borne by citizens in the form of higher taxes and fees.

Comprehensive plan updates provide an opportunity not only to identify some of the consequences of a dispersed development pattern relative to your community's financial resources and the delivery of services, but to adjust local fiscal and investment policies in an effort to grow in a less costly fashion.

Comprehensive plan updates provide an opportunity to adjust local fiscal and investment policies in an effort to grow in a less costly fashion.



Although the Growth Management Law requires communities to analyze their fiscal capacity and to develop a Capital Investment Plan (CInP), most 1990s plans missed an opportunity to make crucial linkages between investment and growth policies. In the development of its CInP and other fiscal strategies, your town can target investments to growth areas, and avoid investments in outlying areas likely to spur development and further increase costs. All fiscal policies should be evaluated as to their impact on future growth patterns, with an eye toward avoiding unanticipated consequences.

Consistent with the smart growth principle that “healthy places don’t die,” also look at how your community might

enhance the economic well-being of downtowns, neighborhoods and rural lands as an inoculant against some of the destructive forces of sprawl.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

11. Anticipate unintended consequences

As you update your plan, be mindful of the “law of unintended consequences.” Some policies and implementation strategies can not only be ineffective, but actually work against your community’s larger goals and vision – or those of the region.

Starting with the evaluation of your existing plan, be on the lookout for policies and strategies that may be having counterproductive results. Use this step as an opportunity to strongly question conventional wisdom and “sacred cows.” You may find, for example, that policies regarding improvement or acceptance of rural roads are having the unintended result of encouraging growth in these areas. Or you may find that large road setback requirements in your village area are resulting in new development

that doesn’t fit in well with the existing streetscape and overall character of that area.

Starting with the evaluation of your existing plan, be on the lookout for policies and strategies that may be having counterproductive results.

As your community considers new policies and strategies, take a hard look at potential benefits and liabilities in the context of your overall goals and future vision.

And as you monitor implementation of your plan, be on

the alert for unintended consequences and be ready to make mid-course corrections if necessary.

Ultimately, no course of action is entirely risk free, and most policy decisions do have an effect on other issues. Applying a degree of foresight and critical appraisal to proposed policies and strategies, however, can help you weed out some approaches that may do more harm than good.

12. *Integrate transportation planning considerations*

Transportation and land use are inextricably linked. Road and other transportation improvements generally spur development; the location and pattern of development, in turn, greatly affects our transportation networks.

This transportation-land use link is essential to understanding the dynamics of sprawl that occurs on a regional level. Your region's approach to road and other transportation improvements can either complement or hinder efforts to curb development sprawl. And the land use policies of your town and its neighbors have a strong bearing on needs, options and issues relating to your local and regional transportation system. While successfully integrating transportation and land use policies takes much more than strong comprehensive planning, updates can help forge better connections between policies on the local level and improve coordination on the regional level.

First, recognize that the location and layout of roads in your community strongly affects its growth pattern. In your plan update, work to better integrate these considerations, both by reexamining your community's road policies and by improving coordination with the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT).

In general, towns have much more authority to influence the creation, location and layout of roads than they currently exercise. In making road improvements and regulating the design, layout and acceptance of new roads, your town can greatly affect the accessibility of areas – making them more or less attractive for development. Whether you decide to maintain or revise your town's road policies and strategies as part of your plan update, make sure that they support, rather than work against, your efforts to guide growth.

Use your plan process and strategies as a means of working more closely with MDOT regarding improvements to roads over which it has jurisdiction. While that agency is charged with maintaining and improving the road networks that



In general, towns have much more authority to influence, the creation, location and layout of roads than they currently exercise.

traverse your town, it endeavors to be responsive to local needs and concerns. Both as part of MDOT's long-range planning process and as projects are proposed, opportunities exist for improved coordination with the agency. This process is facilitated if your community, as part of your updated plan, can articulate a clear position on how these roads and possible improvements relate to your growth policies and other planning objectives.

Second, evaluate the impact of your town's land use and fiscal policies – both existing and proposed – on transportation issues and options. Where public facilities, such as new schools, or new businesses are located can greatly affect the flow and volume of traffic. Strategies that encourage compact development within well-conceived growth areas generally result in reduced congestion, opportunities for alternatives to automobile travel, and lower costs for infrastructure improvements and services to outlying areas.

Third, use your plan update process to look beyond your town's borders at how transportation and land use planning might be better coordinated at the regional level. Form partnerships with other towns in your region, your regional planning commission, state agencies and other organizations in addressing immediate problems and planning for the future. Consider formulating a vision for your region that establishes an ideal growth pattern and complementary transportation network, and sets forth principles that might be applied locally and regionally to work toward that vision.

Finally, use your plan update to thoroughly address the management of access points along your town's major roadways, consistent with state rules and local needs. While the integration of access management into your permitting procedures is a likely plan implementation step, your plan itself is an excellent place to provide background and policies that will support your anticipated approach.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

13. *Strengthen your plan as an economic development tool*



Comprehensive plans and efforts to guide growth are sometimes perceived as anti-development. In economically depressed areas of the state, some view

comprehensive planning – at least its emphasis on growth management – as irrelevant or with suspicion.

For communities in areas that have struggled to attract development and maintain current populations, an initial response to talk of smart growth and the call to forge bold plans may well be “give us some of that sprawl!” Behind such statements often lies the sentiment that growth on any terms is better than no growth at all, and that towns and regions that have been experiencing sprawl may not fully appreciate some of its benefits – at least compared with the ills of a stagnant economy.

This is, to a large degree, a false choice. Sprawl is not synonymous with growth; it is rather a form and pattern of growth that typically results in counterproductive costs and impacts that are avoidable. A premise of growth management and smart growth efforts is that an alternative model to economic development exists – one in which growth occurs not only without the high costs and negative impacts of sprawl, but in such a way that enhances rather than erodes community values.

Comprehensive plan updates provide an opportunity to reiterate this point. They can also include a stronger economic development component. Most 1990s plans contain extensive information and policies on protecting natural resources, municipal facilities and other topics, but the sections on the local and regional economy tend to be far less extensive and meaningful.

Following is some general advice for strengthening the economic development portions of your plan:

- ♦ As part of improving your plan’s regional perspective, include a thorough analysis of how

your community fits into the regional economy, what trends are likely to affect your town during the upcoming planning period, and what opportunities and challenges exist.

- ♦ Either as part of your update planning process or as an implementation step, work with other towns to create a regional vision, with a strong focus on economic development considerations. Examine the region’s economic assets and challenges holistically. Aim not only at setting forth an ideal future vision, but agreeing on principles to guide towns on working together to pursue a common economic agenda.

- ♦ Consider other approaches aimed at avoiding an “every town for itself” approach to attracting and siting desirable businesses.

Investigate opportunities for tax base sharing and cooperative promotion of business parks and other regionally sited facilities.

- ♦ Recognize the important role played by resource-based enterprises – farming, forestry and fishing – not only to your local economy, but in keeping land in production, enhancing rural values, and helping to preserve community character. To the greatest extent possible, ensure that current and proposed town policies are supportive of these enterprises.
- ♦ Even as you pursue the previous suggestion, be realistic about the future of these enterprises in light of recent trends and projections. Investigate how your town and region might better promote natural resource-based tourism, and allow farming, forestry and fishing operations to add value to their products and diversify into other areas.
- ♦ If your community has an existing downtown or a distinct commercial area, devise policies and strategies to better accommodate and revitalize development there, while enhancing it as an attractive, “livable” place.
- ♦ If your downtown area has been economically stagnant, make it a focal point of discussion and analysis in your update process. You may decide either to include your downtown strategy in your updated plan, or continue working on a comprehensive downtown plan as an implementation step.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

14. *Balance tradeoffs*

Planning for the future is rife with tradeoffs:

- ◆ Accommodating change while planning for permanence.
- ◆ Promoting new development in some places while limiting it in others.
- ◆ Providing affordable housing while discouraging rural residential sprawl.

A supreme challenge of comprehensive planning is negotiating these tradeoffs in a fair, coherent and politically acceptable manner.

Some 1990s plans include discussions of the potential conflicts and tensions among different goals and policies, and provide guidance on resolving competing issues. But many plans exhibit a lack of integration among goals and policies, leaving towns the difficult task of sorting out conflicting directives as they try to implement steps or react to new developments.

When updating plans, give strong consideration to how your goals and policies relate to one another and to your community's larger vision for moving forward. This exercise is related to anticipating unintended consequences as described in Recommendation 13. But the task is more daunting because the goals and policies you are considering may all be desirable and intentional. Hard choices must be made regarding community priorities and the extent to which one objective overrides another – in a particular situation or a particular area of town.

Following are pointers for addressing conflicts and better integrating goals and policies in your updated plan:

- ◆ As part of your plan process, identify areas of conflict among your community's identified planning issues and among goals and proposed policies. If you are conducting a visioning process, use it to ascertain the public's priorities and overarching values. Use the resulting vision statement as guidance as your planning committee continues to discuss ways of resolving conflicts and pursuing a balanced course of action.

- ◆ As these conflicts are discussed, try to foster an understanding among your

planning committee and the public at large that some tradeoffs and compromises will need to be made. Don't let the pursuit of one planning objective hold all others hostage. Strive for a deliberative process in which even staunch advocates of a particular issue or position recognize the need for give and take.

- ◆ In your plan itself, summarize potential conflicts among primary planning goals and, if necessary, provide guidance to how priorities might be set and tradeoffs made. If the competing issues are controversial or complex ones, some of the analysis might best be left to individual discussion papers that are disseminated throughout the plan process. Key points from these papers and the ensuing public discussion could then be incorporated into your final plan.

A supreme challenge of comprehensive planning is negotiating tradeoffs in a fair, coherent and politically acceptable manner.

15. Pay attention to plan format

Most of the recommendations of this handbook involve improving the substance of comprehensive plan updates. But careful attention also needs to be given to how this substance is put together into a coherent, readable whole. Some 1990s comprehensive plans with otherwise excellent content suffer from poor organization, confusing formats or a lack of focus on the most critical elements. Other plans are just too long. A plan with strong policies and strategies will not be effective if policy makers and the general public don't read it.

Early in the update process, discuss what format and organization will make the plan most accessible and easy to use. As part of the review of your existing plan, evaluate not only the effectiveness of its strategies, but how its organization and format seem to work. In some cases, you may decide to consider refinements; in others, you may decide to try an entirely new approach.

Some points to consider:

- ♦ Keep the plan to a reasonable length. No matter how compelling the text, most readers will not wade through a document that is over 100 pages. Aim for a plan that is concise without sacrificing attention to important planning issues. Discuss optimal length as you consider formatting options early in the process, and remain focused on this target as individual sections are developed and edited.
- ♦ Consistent with Recommendation #3, don't let inventory elements dominate your plan. Even as you strive to address elements identified in state law and rules, be selective in what additional information and analysis is included.

No matter how compelling the text, most readers will not wade through a document that is over 100 pages.

Use findings that summarize pertinent information and its implications. Consider putting background information supporting these findings in a plan appendix or in a separate plan volume.

- ♦ Highlight the policy portion of your plan to the greatest possible extent, including goals, policies and implementation strategies. Consider putting policy sections at the front of your plan, or begin with an executive summary of the plan's most important policy elements. Give prominence to policy-related sections such as the land use plan (and future land use map) and capital investment plan. If your plan uses a format in which inventory and policy sections are integrated on a topic-by-topic basis, keep the inventory portion succinct, if necessary, referencing background information to be covered later. In general, avoid an approach in which the first half of the plan is taken up by inventory and the policy sections get lost at the end of the plan.
- ♦ Add images and graphics to your plan to emphasize important points and to provide relief from text. Use charts and graphs to summarize information. Pay attention to page composition and readability. In addition to graphics, use focus boxes and quotes to highlight important points, and leave adequate "white space" to make pages more readable.

The extent to which you use the policies and information of your

existing plan presents an issue that has a bearing on organization, cost, continuity with past planning efforts and ease of future updating. A number of different approaches exist, each with pros and cons, which are discussed in [Section III. Approach to Integrating Existing Plan.](#)

TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLANNING PROCESS

The next group of 15 recommendations is focused on improving your planning process. A number of these recommendations are geared to the beginning of your update process when it is essential to

establish an effective committee approach and set a positive tone. Commitment to a sound process, however, is essential throughout the entire project schedule.

16. *Select a strong planning committee*



The heart of any comprehensive planning effort is the local planning committee. While the appointment and orientation of members seems straightforward,

how it is handled can have a strong bearing on the ultimate success of the planning process and product. Rather than rushing to accomplish this first step, give careful consideration to the composition of your group.

In general, avoid creating a planning committee based solely on the interest of individuals who want to be involved. Having an enthusiastic membership is certainly an asset, but it is more important to have a balanced committee that is truly representative of the diverse viewpoints

and interests of your community. Without such diversity, your committee may develop a plan that lacks community understanding or support.

There is no formula for the best committee composition or size, but aim for a balance of views and include important “stakeholders.” The committee should be large enough to reflect this diversity, but not so large as to make discussion or decision-making unwieldy. Many experts maintain that 7-11 participants is an optimum number for effective group processes, but you may find more

members are needed to assure broad representation and account for some attrition.

In general, avoid creating a planning committee based solely on the interest of individuals who want to be involved.

Committees of over 20 should be avoided, unless additional members are delegated to serve on subcommittees.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

17. *Appoint the right chairperson*

Behind every effective planning committee is a strong chairperson. The right committee chair can do much to keep a comprehensive planning process on track, maintain momentum and build consensus. Leadership can be a contagious quality. The chair can set a tone of professionalism, fairness and inclusion that will positively influence both the committee’s deliberations and the tenor of the dialogue within the community.

Following are some suggestions for the selection and role of a chairperson:

- ♦ Choose a chair who is a good facilitator, is well organized and is respected in the community. Avoid selecting a chair based solely on his or her interest in serving or as an honorary position for long service on other boards.

Choose a chair who is a good facilitator, is well organized and is respected in the community.

- ♦ Although it may prove advantageous to choose an individual who is viewed as politically “middle of the road,” the most important attribute is a commitment to a planning process that is fair and open.
- ♦ Find a person who has enough time to commit to the process. Also, appoint a vice chair with similar qualities who can fill in and provide additional assistance.

- ♦ Make sure your chair obtains the necessary support he or she needs to do the job well. Contact your regional council or the State Planning Office

about obtaining orientation materials. If your chair has the interest and time, consider covering the cost of a training course in facilitation and group processes.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

18. *Build an effective committee*

A carefully chosen committee with a strong chair does not ensure success. Your planning committee, like any team, must learn to work effectively as a group and accommodate differing styles and perspectives.

Your planning committee, like any team, must learn to work effectively as a group and accommodate differing styles and perspectives.

Early on, spend time discussing and agreeing upon the committee's role and set up ground rules for how it will function. Establish a realistic meeting schedule and a policy regarding meeting absences. Try to make your committee meetings productive yet fun. Determine how your committee will conduct its decision-making; for instance, will it be by majority, supermajority, or consensus of all committee members? A consensus approach to decision making requires more lengthy

deliberations, but may result in decisions that have stronger overall support.

Conduct team-building exercises early in the process to acclimate committee members to working together on difficult issues, with a focus on building

leadership skills and fostering trust. An outside facilitator can be a great help in enhancing your committee's strengths as an effective team. But with or without outside assistance, the focus should be on creating a positive environment in which everyone respects individual differences, yet is committed to the overall process and the decisions that come out of it.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

19. *Understand the different roles involved in public participation*

An effective public participation program requires that your planning committee play a number of different roles. They include:

- Actively soliciting the public's viewpoints on a range of issues, and its vision for the community's future;
- Listening to the public's feedback on the plan itself, as it evolves;
- Vigorously publicizing the comprehensive planning project – both regarding opportunities for public involvement and progress on the plan itself;
- Educating the public about comprehensive planning and important planning concepts and principles, including the costs of sprawl;
- Providing the public with the information and analysis it needs for good decision-making, including the pros and cons of different approaches;
- Mediating between competing ideas and viewpoints, striking compromises and providing creative alternatives;
- Challenging the public regarding planning myths and misconceptions;

Committees may be less familiar, or comfortable, with the roles that involve education and advocacy. These roles, however, may be the most crucial ones as your community tries to formulate a bold plan.

- Advocating particular courses of action and articulating why these actions are proposed for the plan;
- Familiarizing the public with the plan document that will be proposed for town approval; and
- Overseeing the final public hearing and adoption process, and conducting post-approval follow-up activities, unless this latter step has been delegated to another group.

Planning committees generally understand the role of soliciting the public's views and responding to comments on the proposed plan – and most 1990s planning processes were strong in these areas. Committees, however, may be less familiar, or comfortable, with the roles that involve education and advocacy. These roles, however, may be the most crucial ones as your community tries to formulate a bold plan.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

20. Foster leadership

An overarching theme for several of this section's recommendations is that of fostering leadership. Effectively carrying out your planning committee's diverse functions requires members, both individually and collectively, to take a strong leadership role. And a carefully conceived and conducted public participation program can do much to foster constructive dialogue and leadership qualities among the general public.

The term *leadership* as used in this handbook differs from the traditional view of a leader as someone who directs others and assumes final responsibility for tough decision-making. Strong leaders in a planning process play a number of roles: listener, teacher,

advocate and consensus builder. Their primary motivation for involvement is public service, not self-interest. They may have different viewpoints and philosophies, but are committed to working together, solving problems and moving forward in a positive manner.

Being an effective leader involves both listening carefully and providing thoughtful guidance.

Being an effective leader involves both listening carefully and providing thoughtful guidance, being both receptive to people's ideas and opinions and influential in expressing one's own viewpoints. A good leader is ultimately less concerned about who is actually leading and following at a particular moment than to the greater goal of forging ahead together.

21. Develop a creative and effective public participation strategy

A central point of this handbook is that an improved planning process is a key to creating stronger plan updates. Although an effective committee, well versed in its multiple roles, is an excellent starting point, an improved process requires diligent planning itself, with a focus on the best use and timing of methods for creatively engaging the public.

As part of its planning grant programs, SPO requires submission of a *Public Participation Plan*. This component is aimed at getting towns to think early on about how they will engage the public.

But regardless of whether you are applying for a state grant, you should develop a plan for public participation and put considerable thought into it. Your aim should be carrying out your committee's diverse roles in a manner that best involves, engages and challenges the public.

An improved process requires diligent planning itself, with a focus on the best use and timing of methods for creatively engaging the public.

Begin by examining the process used in developing your 1990s plan, in a fashion similar to the evaluation of the plan itself. You may need to conduct a bit of research on that process and pose questions to some of the participants. Was the planning committee balanced? Was the chair

effective? Did the committee have a good understanding of its multiple roles and work well as a team? Did it stay together until the end of the process, or did it suffer from attrition?

It would also be helpful to get an idea of how the 1990s process unfolded. Was there a coordinated strategy or was it handled in a more piecemeal manner? Were meetings well attended? Was there a high response to the survey? Did the committee effectively respond to misconceptions about the plan and planning process? Were there complaints that the public was not adequately consulted in the development of the plan? Was the final vote on the plan a ringing endorsement or did it just squeak by? Conversely, if the plan was rejected, was it soundly or narrowly defeated?

The assessment of your previous planning process may help you avoid problems the second time around, or it may help identify elements worth repeating. Even if the earlier effort went reasonably well, take a fresh look at how the process for your update can be enhanced.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

22. *Avoid over-reliance on meetings and surveys*

For most 1990s plans, the principal means of public outreach were public meetings/hearings and public opinion surveys. While these approaches have merit, also be aware of some of their limitations in considering your overall strategy for public participation.

When it comes to public meetings, more is not necessarily better. Several well-attended sessions at which critical policy matters are discussed is vastly preferable to many poorly attended ones. In today's society, people are especially busy and protective of their free time. You may have a limited window of opportunity to engage them. Avoid losing their interest by holding meetings solely to present information that could be posted on a website or made available elsewhere.

A visioning exercise is an excellent way to engage the public early regarding issues important to your community. For additional public forums, give thought to how they can best be used to engage the public and what topics will elicit maximum interest and feedback. You may find that neighborhood forums focusing on concerns and issues of a

You may find that neighborhood forums focusing on concerns and issues of particular areas of your community are more productive than town-wide sessions.

particular area of your community are more productive than town-wide sessions.

Public opinion surveys can be a valuable tool for soliciting the opinion of the citizenry. But they should be used carefully with clear recognition of their strengths and weaknesses. Unless they are conducted in a competent and statistically valid manner, they can provide skewed or incomplete results. Even an accurate survey can yield knee-jerk responses that might have been answered differently if the respondent had more background or options to choose from.

A professionally developed and conducted survey is an asset to any comprehensive plan update process, but is not a necessity. It can involve significant expense (typically costing more than \$3,000, for even a small community). If your funds are limited, you may want to explore other means of soliciting public input.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

23. *Create "buy in"*

People will rarely embrace change unless they think that a problem exists in the first place. Your committee may be stymied in its efforts to address important local and state goals unless a strong case is made for why these goals are pertinent to your community – and important to pursue. Such early "buy in" by your planning committee and the general public is necessary before your community can focus squarely on the problem with a sense of common purpose.

For 1990s plans, the State's involvement in comprehensive planning was often a double-edge sword when it came to fostering such community buy in. On one hand, the availability of State funds and the directives of the Growth Management Law were important factors in motivating towns to undertake meaningful planning. On the other hand, some towns struggled to build a sense of public ownership for goals and

"Men often oppose a thing merely because they have had no agency in planning it, or because it may have been planned by those whom they dislike." – Alexander Hamilton

planning concepts that were viewed as state-imposed. Even when these elements were adopted in the final plan, support for them was sometimes only "skin deep," leading to poor implementation.

The argument that your town should plan or address particular goals because "the state says we should" may be alluring as a motivational tool. This approach, however, is generally not effective in the long run. It short-circuits the necessary process of building awareness of how planning in general and addressing particular plan goals can benefit your community. Creating public ownership of your plan and its approaches is essential if it is to be truly embraced. This is rarely possible if the plan is viewed primarily as a response to state requirements rather than to your community's own needs.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

24. *Overcome problem issues*

In some instances, the main challenge may be breaking impasses over particular issues that have been perennial sources of community debate. The issue may be as central as how your community wants to grow, approach a particular form of commerce such as tourism or retail trade, or respond to serious traffic congestion. Or, it may be division over particular land use strategies, such as zoning, or whether to invest in an important public improvement.

If your community has one of these issues, you probably are well aware of it. It may dominate most discussions and divide your community into different camps. It may create an atmosphere of distrust or frustration, and defy efforts to exert leadership or strike compromises.

Such issues, if left unresolved, can make it difficult to move forward in planning for the future. They

can also hijack your planning process, consuming valuable time and resources and making it difficult to meaningfully address other issues.

As you design your public participation process, pay careful attention to such problem issues. They may deserve a specialized approach if you want to achieve breakthroughs that will benefit your entire

planning process. Also make provisions for the possibility that the issue may continue to defy resolution. Set upfront parameters for how much time you can

reasonably afford to devote to it. You may need to settle on making tangible progress on the issue as part of your update – and continue to work on it as part of ongoing planning and implementation activities.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

Problem issues can hijack your planning process, consuming valuable time and resources and making it difficult to meaningfully address other issues.

25. *Seek professional help*

Although most communities who developed plans in the 1990s solicited and obtained assistance from regional planning commissions and private planning consultants, some towns and cities chose to “go it alone.” In some instances, these efforts resulted in good plans, especially in communities with full-time staff or volunteers who could devote considerable time and professional talents to the endeavor. But in general, these unassisted efforts resulted in weaker plans, either for lack of adequate technical guidance, or problems with organization.

Some towns hesitate to seek assistance due to fear that a planning consultant may push an agenda that is out of step with the views and aspirations of local citizens. If your community has such concerns, the answer lies not in shunning outside assistance, but managing and guiding it in an effective manner.

In the role of facilitator and technical advisor, a consultant can challenge the community to make tough policy decisions that are mostly likely to achieve local goals and address state requirements. But it is the responsibility of the local planning

committee to provide guidance to the planning consultant and to accept, modify or reject the work products that are generated. If consultants get too far out ahead of a community, it is the duty of the planning committee to rein them back in.

Even if your community has the resources and expertise to devote to a mostly homegrown effort,

consider getting some professional assistance. An outsider can provide fresh perspective and may not be constrained by real or perceived hurdles that have hampered planning efforts in

the past. Besides collecting data and performing analysis – freeing up committee time for public outreach and policy discussions – consultants can provide expertise on what has worked in other towns, and help hone the final plan into a product that is well organized, clearly written and easy to use. Trying to write a plan by committee rarely leads to a fluid document. A consultant who can lend a degree of polish and professionalism is likely to be well worth some added expense.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

Even if your community has the resources and expertise to devote to a mostly homegrown effort, some outside professional assistance should be considered.

26. *Maintain enthusiasm and momentum*

Anyone who has ever been involved in the development of a comprehensive plan knows it can be a long and arduous process. For first-time plans, a typical time frame was 1½ to 2 years, but some plans took even longer. Even for the most energized planning committee and enthused citizenry, this is a long time to sustain interest and momentum.

For plan updates, give particular thought to your project schedule, weighing the pros of spending more time to more fully develop plan sections and engage the public, and the cons of losing committee members and the public's collective attention if the process drags on too long.

Even if you are contemplating a complete rewrite of your plan, try to keep the entire process to under 18 months. For more selective updates of your plan, a process that takes a year or less should be doable.

On the other hand, avoid setting an unrealistically compressed schedule, unless your revision is a minor one that involves mostly the updating of information rather than policies.

Tackle the tough issues like guiding growth and affordable housing at the front-end rather than the back-end of the process.

Planning committees and the general public often begin the process with a high level of interest and motivation. Avoid squandering this enthusiasm by focusing

solely on the collection and presentation of information. Begin discussing policy-related issues early. Hold a visioning session. Tackle the tough issues like guiding growth and affordable housing at the front-end rather than the back-end of the process. Keep public meetings lively and engaging with use of maps and other visuals as discussed in the next recommendation.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

27. *Get visual*

The adage that a picture is worth a thousand words seems lost on many comprehensive planning efforts. Other than selected maps and charts, most 1990s plans are devoid of images. And for the accompanying planning processes, the visual component was often limited to posting colorful arrays of maps on walls at meetings, as a prelude to getting down to business in reviewing the plan text.

Posting maps on walls is a fine technique, and as people invariably bunch around them excitedly, it should tell us something. People love maps.

They love to see images of their own neighborhoods and the special places in their communities. These images possess a power and clarity that can be more compelling and convincing than hours of talk or volumes of text.

As you begin your plan update, give serious thought to how you can better use images and graphics to improve your planning process. Discuss how charts, graphs, maps, survey plans, sketches, photographs, slideshows and computer software can



be used by your committee in its work and as tools to inform and engage the general public.

Mapping using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has evolved considerably since the early 1990s, and use of this technology should be considered in your update. If your town does

not already use GIS, contact your regional council for suggestions on how to best proceed.

"The soul cannot think without a picture." – Aristotle

With or without GIS, consider use of *visualization tools* to help your community better evaluate future alternatives

and impacts. Some of these techniques are best accomplished with the help of a consultant. With equipment such as a camcorder, a digital camera and a slide projector linked to a computer, your committee can create compelling video or PowerPoint presentations itself. You may find that committee members or other citizens have advanced skills in computers or audio-visual technologies that can greatly aid your efforts.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

28. *Coordinate with SPO staff*

For many 1990s plans, the primary mechanism for feedback from the state was the final review of the plan for consistency with the Growth Management Law. This situation was less than ideal in fostering constructive dialogue on plans. For communities that spent years toiling over the project, and weary committees eager for the process to end, the litany of *objections* and *suggestions* typically compiled by state reviewing agencies were often viewed negatively.

A vastly preferable approach is for communities to submit preliminary drafts to SPO's land use staff for informal feedback and comment – both regarding consistency with state law and improving the effectiveness of the plan in general. In light of difficulties that communities have had in devising effective growth-directing strategies, it is strongly suggested that you submit early drafts of your land use plan, including growth and rural area

It is strongly suggested that you submit early drafts of your land use plan, including growth and rural area designations, for review and comment.

designations, for review and comment. A member of SPO's Land Use Team has been assigned to your community and is available to answer general questions and conduct these informal reviews.

Bear in mind, however, that SPO's Land Use Team is a small staff, and its role is to facilitate and advise. The amount of time a staff planner can devote to your project, and the timing of reviews, must be factored against other work demands and commitments. The role of staff is to facilitate and advise, not provide consulting services. Your regional council may be able to provide some assistance (for planning grantees, SPO has contracted with them to provide help with troubleshooting and general questions). But SPO and regional council support is no substitute for hiring professional help for at least portions of your plan.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

29. *Bring your plan to successful closure...*



town well for the next decade. Your committee has met once or twice a month for over a year, and members have put in countless additional hours making presentations to local groups and reviewing plan sections. All that's left to do is hold a few more public meetings and then vote on the plan. Your committee's role is almost over – right?

Wrong! The steps leading to final plan adoption are crucial ones in your planning process. Yet these steps proved to be stumbling blocks for a number of 1990's planning efforts. In some cases plans were never adopted, or key elements that had been painstakingly developed were dropped in response to last minute opposition.

The steps leading to final plan adoption are crucial ones in your planning process.

Your planning committee has worked tirelessly to engage the public and to craft a forward-looking comprehensive plan that will serve the

In other cases, committees failed to address inconsistencies identified as part of state review.

The end of a comprehensive planning process can be a difficult time, with committee members often eager for the project to end. But this is the time when your proposed plan may be most in need of a strong and articulate booster. Your committee is the group most knowledgeable about the plan and how it has evolved as part of the public participation process, and most capable of responding to constructive skepticism and misinformation. While remaining responsive to divergent opinions, you should also be ready to

explain the reasoning behind recommendations, and how previous public debate and comments were factored into their formulation.

On this home stretch, do all you can to ensure an informed final debate and vote on the plan that does justice to all the hard work that went into developing it.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

30. ...And effectively follow through on its implementation

Once your plan has been adopted, either on the first or subsequent attempts, you are immediately faced with another daunting task – effectively implementing it. Adopting a wonderfully bold and innovative plan will mean little if its recommendations are quickly forgotten and it gathers dust on a bookshelf. Even if there is a move to begin implementing some measures, an uncoordinated effort without a strong commitment to following through and evaluating progress can lead to poor or counterproductive results.

Judging from the sampling of communities that have applied to SPO for comprehensive plan updates, and general anecdotal evidence, effective implementation of 1990s plans was spotty. Communities were generally most successful following through on concrete steps involving proposed capital improvements and expanded programs. Many towns also moved purposefully in

the development and revision of zoning ordinances and other land use provisions.

One hundred percent implementation of your plan is rarely possible; circumstances change and the public always has the right to change its mind about the wisdom of a particular course of action. But for updated plans, an opportunity exists to significantly improve the track record of

implementation.

A number of different options exist, but all involve creating clear mechanisms for follow-through and regular tracking of progress. The key is trying to institutionalize implementation-related tasks into the fabric of municipal affairs so that they remain fully in the limelight. Part II provides a number of specific suggestions for improving plan follow-through.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

Adopting a wonderfully bold and innovative plan will mean little if its recommendations are quickly forgotten and it gathers dust on a bookshelf.

TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGING GROWTH

The following 15 recommendations focus on how your plan update might more effectively respond to growth issues. In particular, it provides guidance on how your plan might more successfully address State Goal #1 of encouraging “orderly growth and

development in appropriate areas of each community, while protecting the State’s rural character, making efficient use of public services and preventing development sprawl.”

31. *Give greater consideration to non-regulatory approaches*

A pervasive characteristic of 1990s comprehensive planning efforts was a focus on regulatory tools to manage growth –

particularly zoning. Many of these plans ignored, or gave short shrift to, non-regulatory factors that affect the pace and pattern of growth, and policies that might positively affect these factors.

A plan that focuses solely on regulatory approaches to guide growth is less likely to be successful.

As the legal basis for local land use regulations, the comprehensive plan should provide a clear rationale for your municipality’s regulatory approach. But a plan that focuses solely on regulatory approaches to guide growth is less likely to be successful.

Consistent with the recommendation of focusing on fiscal considerations, examine your community’s infrastructure-siting policies, including the location and improvement of roads, schools, other public buildings, and utilities, and how these factors work in favor of, or against, your growth policies.

Also examine your community’s fiscal and taxation policies relative to its growth objectives. Increasing fees for public sewer or water, for instance, may have the effect of encouraging development outside these service areas. On the other hand, innovations such as tax increment financing and tax base sharing may help to finance needed infrastructure and promote investment in downtown and neighborhood areas.

If your community has an existing downtown or village, consider policies and strategies that will make the area more attractive to new growth and development. Work with downtown merchants and residents, pursue grants and develop a strategy for marketing these areas as desirable places for living, working, shopping and community life.

If concerns exist about the design of new development and how it might fit into historic

village areas or along major road corridors and gateways, but there is resistance to adopting

additional regulations, consider developing voluntary design guidelines. Many developers are sensitive to community design

considerations, and such provisions provide valuable guidance about what your community is looking for.



In preserving rural areas, recognize that often the best inoculant against residential sprawl is a healthy resource-based economy, in which farming, forestry, fishing and other related uses continue and expand. To the greatest extent possible, your community should support these enterprises, and avoid policies that impede their viability. Publicize the right-to-farm law, establish a local or regional farmers’ market and ensure that your zoning codes allow for existing businesses to diversify operations and enable innovative rural-based enterprises to be established.

To preserve key open spaces and physical features, consider pursuing conservation easements, selected land acquisition and other investment strategies that serve to provide permanent or long-term protection of these lands.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

32. *Embrace growth areas...*



The concept of designating growth areas is a central component of the original Growth Management Law, and it remains a key ingredient of effective

comprehensive planning for most communities.

The purpose of this exercise is to identify locations in the municipality where most of the development that occurs during the upcoming 10-year planning period will ideally occur. This development pattern allows for efficient delivery of service and avoids the costs of sprawl in rural areas.

The concept of designating growth areas remains a key ingredient of effective comprehensive planning for most communities.

In its recent smart growth initiatives, the State Planning Office (SPO) has been giving this topic particular attention, focusing on how existing downtowns and old and new neighborhoods can be made more viable and attractive to homebuyers and businesses.

The track record of 1990s plans in designating viable growth areas has been mixed. Rural towns

With no clear village center struggled with where they should put one – or even if they wanted one. Communities with existing centers often designated them as growth areas without fully considering whether they were appropriate for compact development based on land availability, soils and existing zoning restrictions.

In towns concerned about the impacts of growth, designation of growth areas is sometimes resisted as an unwelcome inducement of additional development. But the intent is not necessarily to

spur development in the town, but to guide the growth that is projected to occur to the most appropriate areas.

While growth areas need to be balanced with an effective approach for managing growth in designated rural areas, plan updates should focus on making designated growth areas workable and desirable as locations for substantial future development.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

33. *...And make them viable*

Most 1990s plans do designate growth areas. The real issue is whether these areas and the policies that apply to them result in viable places that can attract and accommodate a substantial share of the community's future development.

A growth area ultimately needs more than density to work. It needs to be "livable" – a place where people want to move to and stay, or run a business.

In making growth areas "work" as viable locations for new development, SPO's primary recommendation is to embrace a compact development pattern in these areas. This requires overcoming some of the negative perceptions associated with greater density. Many of the places that we admire for their "character" are often villages or neighborhoods developed on small lots. Ironically, the land use policies of most communities effectively ban this type of development. While these land use policies are often adopted and maintained in a well-meaning effort to *preserve* community character, they often lead to the opposite effect – creating a non-descript

landscape of suburban homes on large lots, both in growth and rural areas.

Ultimately, a growth area needs more than density to work. It needs to be "livable" – a place where people want to move to and stay, or run a business. Many village areas have these qualities:

nearby schools and public facilities, attractive concentrations of residences or neighborhoods, sidewalks with shade and street trees, parks and green spaces and small-scale commercial uses that provide services and jobs.

An essential ingredient of fostering successful growth areas is to pursue policies and investments that foster these qualities. Part II provides additional background and guidance on creating viable growth areas, including more discussion of the issue of density.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

34. *Think neighborhood*

The term “growth area” has sometimes worked against the notion of creating or reinforcing a development pattern that is desirable in the community. For rural communities, the term may conjure up images of an unwanted urban environment. For some communities, even the term “village” may seem undesirable.

The term “neighborhood,” on the other hand, usually has a favorable connotation. Many of us grew up in neighborhoods, within walking distance of schools, stores and other residences – even in small towns. New and existing neighborhoods can help accommodate growth in a way that builds, rather than erodes, a sense of community.

As part of its smart growth initiative, SPO has been promoting the merits of traditional neighborhoods (also referred to as Great

American Neighborhoods) as an alternative to the type of sprawling development pattern that has prevailed for much of the late 20th century. These traditional neighborhoods can vary considerably from town to town, but are characterized by a compact development pattern, interconnected streets, a human scale and pedestrian orientation. Sometimes they are intermixed with commercial, public and institutional uses.

As you consider growth areas, it may be helpful to view at least some of them as places where such



neighborhoods can be developed or expanded. You

may in fact want to use the term “neighborhood development or expansion area,” and propose a mix of uses and densities conducive

New and existing neighborhoods can help accommodate growth in a way that builds, rather than erodes, a sense of community.

to their creation and growth. Before dismissing the concept of the traditional neighborhood as irrelevant, unpopular, or unmarketable in your community, try conducting a side-by-side comparison of this model versus the predominant development pattern – including slides and other visual-aides that allow the public to clearly see the differences. You may be surprised at which option the public says it prefers.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

Characteristics of Livable Neighborhoods

The best neighborhoods have all or most of the following characteristics:

1. ***Walkability*** from one end to another. In general, a walkable neighborhood is defined by the distance a person can walk in 10 minutes or less.
2. ***A civic core*** and a mix of neighborhood uses. This can be a simple green area, or a crossroads with civic buildings such as a library or school, and/or local retailers nearby. The core needs to be in a central location and proportional to the size of the neighborhood.
3. ***An interconnected street network***. The challenge is to avoid cul-de-sacs, but avoid high volumes of through traffic that can divide the neighborhood and diminish livability.
4. ***A sensitivity to human scale***. Neighborhoods with a human scale are enjoyable places to linger, walk in, or interact with other residents. Streets tend to be narrow with sidewalks and shade trees. Buildings are generally close to the street.

Neighborhoods also tend to have distinct boundaries and a good overall balance between privacy and opportunities for public interaction. In Maine, a strong connection to nature enhances neighborhood values.

35. Define/refine “rural”

At least on the surface, most 1990s plans exhibit much less ambivalence toward the flip side of creating viable growth areas – identifying rural areas and trying to guide inappropriate development away from them. While protecting rural character is an element of the State goals, the prominence of this objective in many plans seems to reflect a strong emotional response on the local level to preserving something that residents feel is an essential part of their communities, and which they fear is being lost.

For all the emphasis given to preserving rural character, effectively accomplishing this objective, however, has proven to be much

easier said than done. During the 1990s, development continued to consume rural lands. Increasingly the designated rural areas of communities are assuming the characteristics of a suburban growth pattern. This was most true for the southern, central and coastal areas of the state. Even in areas with substantially less growth pressure, however, the pattern of existing populations spreading out into rural areas is the trend.

Developing better strategies and tools is certainly key to more effectively preserving rural lands and rural character. But even before considering specific strategies, give more attention to the type of rural areas that remain in your town or city. Make distinctions between the level of protection that might be warranted, and work toward consensus on what the term “rural character” means to your citizenry.

In 1990s plans, the rural area was often defined by what was left after the community had designated growth areas. Some of these lands lacked particular resource values and were included mainly because they had lower development density than the community’s built-up area. Some of these areas might be better incorporated into growth areas; in other cases they might be more appropriate as *transitional areas*, as discussed in Recommendation #38.

While under the Growth Management Law and SPO rules, the definition of rural areas is quite broad, try refining your classification of rural lands

based on their importance to your community and their vulnerability to change. For instance, by creating a distinction between *critical rural areas* and other rural lands, you can hone in on what resources are most valued and devise more targeted protection strategies. The Growth Management Law, as revised in 2002, now recognizes the benefits of such an approach. It defines critical rural areas as places “deserving maximum protection from development to protect natural resources and related economic activities...”

Try refining your classification of rural lands based on their importance to your community and their vulnerability to change.

Under state statute and SPO rules, particular attention must be paid to protection of “productive” rural lands that provide, or have potential to provide, food, fiber and other products to local and

regional economies. In general, these resources belong in a critical rural area category. Even if your community has only a few working farms or other resource-based enterprises, consider including undeveloped expanses of prime agricultural soils and other lands that might have productive uses in the future – recognizing that once these areas are carved into houselots that option is likely forever lost.

Critical rural areas should also include other lands or features that are deemed most significant, due to documented high resource values, environmental sensitivity, or a close connection to other aspects of rural character defined by the community.

In many communities, “ruralness” is largely defined by the retention of large blocks of undeveloped land. These unfragmented lands are increasingly recognized for the valuable role they play in preventing the loss of animal species that require significant home ranges (as opposed to typical suburban “edge” habitat), protecting intact ecological systems and environmental buffers, and preserving and enhancing public access opportunities for recreation. The *Beginning with Habitat* initiative (described under Recommendation #37) can help your community to visualize the extent and role of large undeveloped blocks in your community – and to integrate them into your approach to designating and protecting rural areas.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

36. **Take strong steps to protect rural lands**

More refined classification of rural lands helps in establishing priorities and promoting better tracking of their overall “health.” But unless your community pursues strong measures to protect rural areas, you may find that the trends of the 1990s are repeated in the next 10-year planning period, with most of your town’s development going there in the form of 2-5 acre houselots, resulting in fragmentation of large land blocks.

It may be helpful to do some additional visioning about what you want your rural areas to be in 10, or even 20 or 30, years. Compare this vision to what you are likely to get as a result of your existing policies and market forces. Such discussions often bring to light a “disconnect” between a community’s aspirations for its rural areas and its actual policies.

There often is a “disconnect” between a community’s aspirations for its rural areas and its actual policies.

As you reevaluate your existing approach and consider possible changes, recognize distinctions between types of strategies. Some serve to direct growth away from rural areas or permanently protect special lands. Others aim to accommodate rural development but to reduce its impacts.

As previously mentioned, no silver bullet exists for effectively protecting rural lands. An important first step is ensuring that your existing policies are not having unintended consequences. Then, by pursuing a combination of non-regulatory and regulatory strategies – coupled with an ongoing commitment to track development relative to established benchmarks – you are in a much better position to make positive strides.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

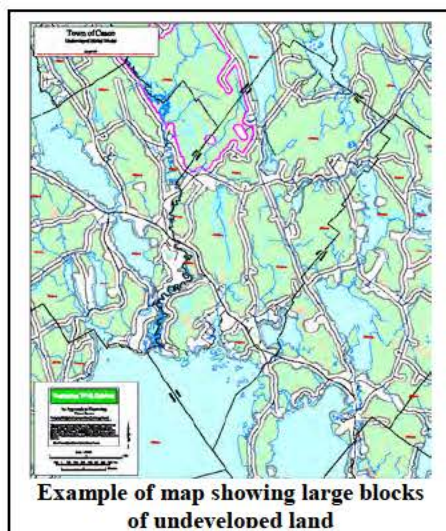
37. **Incorporate Beginning With Habitat data and approach**

A recent initiative of several state agencies, in cooperation with other organizations, shows great promise in helping communities to better define and protect open space – particularly in rural areas. The program, called *Beginning With Habitat*, is a landscape-based approach that employs a series of map overlays to inform and guide conservation efforts.

The first layer of maps identifies *riparian habitats*, located along waterbodies. This layer provides the skeleton of the habitat system, which is then overlain by a map identifying habitats for high-value animal and plant species. The final layer is a map delineating blocks of undeveloped lands, which can serve as habitat for species that require larger blocks of forest and grasslands.

The maps are now available for most towns, and you should strongly consider incorporating them into your update process and product. They are especially valuable as you begin to designate or refine growth and rural areas.

The map depicting large undeveloped blocks provides a revealing picture of what unfragmented lands remain – and what linkages exist between these areas, and which are in danger of being



severed. This map has value, not only in delineating growth and rural areas, but as a tool that can help your town better envision its future and consider the ramifications of development sprawl. It can also serve as a foundation for a focused open space plan as recommended by your update. Further, it can be used in development reviews to identify open space connections and promote design alternatives that minimize loss of these lands.

The two lead state agencies working on the project are the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the Maine Natural Areas Program. Staff from these agencies has been meeting with interested communities and regions. Future presentations are being targeted at towns that are developing or updating their comprehensive plans.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

38. Consider transitional areas

As a result of amendments made in 2002, the Growth Management Law now sets forth *transitional areas* as a middle ground between growth and rural designations. Transitional areas are defined as medium density areas suitable for a share of growth projected for the planning period.

Transitional areas may be appropriate for areas with a rural residential pattern of development or other parts of town that do not fit well into either a growth or rural area designation. They may include some of the areas that were classified as rural in the existing plan, but which, upon further consideration, are found to lack the values and qualities that define truly rural lands.

The challenge in delineating and devising strategies for these areas is to prevent them from becoming

de facto growth areas, where most future development occurs. A strategy of designating an expansive transitional area with large lot zoning is unlikely to be consistent with the Growth Management Law. More importantly, this pattern may be inconsistent with your community's vision for its future growth pattern.

Transitional areas may be appropriate for rural residential and other areas that do not fit well into either a growth or rural area designation.

At least in some communities, transitional areas may provide a means for better planning for emerging suburban development in select locations. In most cases, transitional areas are best situated in the vicinity of growth areas, where the cost of delivering services can be reduced. Effective use of these areas also requires a commitment to setting growth benchmarks, tracking development and making mid-course adjustments if most new housing seems to be going there.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

39. Address commercial strip development

For some communities and regions, the issue of commercial strip development has been as intractable as that of residential development sprawl. Many 1990s plans proposed relatively weak measures managing commercial development along highways, and this was often a bone of contention in state review of local plans. But even communities that have tried to specifically address this development pattern through planning and land use controls have had mixed results.

The most common weakness of plans struggling with this issue is a lack of focus on where and what types of development will be allowed along particular stretches of highway – as opposed to just improving its look and design. More than a few 1990s plans express strong citizen concern about an emerging strip commercial pattern and then recommend establishing a linear highway commercial zone for all or most of their major roadways (or other approaches that have the same effect). It should be no surprise that towns using such an approach often get the strip pattern that their comprehensive plan and zoning sanction.

The most common weakness of plans regarding this issue is a lack of focus on where and what types of development will be allowed along particular stretches of highway

The arterials that traverse our communities serve multiple functions. While they provide opportunities for well-planned commercial development, their primary function is to carry traffic efficiently. They also serve as “windows” through which residents and visitors view a cross-section of our towns. A challenge for plan updates is to reconcile these functions in a more balanced way. Both as part of your visioning process and in subsequent discussions, establish a clear direction for the future of these areas.

If you share a busy arterial with neighboring towns, formulate a common

vision as part of your plan's regional coordination activities. Looking at the road corridor holistically can help ensure that the collective visions of the towns it serves are not in conflict. Discussion of regional economic strategies is essential, as competition for development among communities often contributes to a strip development pattern.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

40. *Avoid minor lot size distinctions as a strategy for directing growth*

Although 1990s plans vary in the degree to which they embrace density in their designated growth areas, most exhibit the common trait of recommending somewhat lower densities in their designated rural areas.

For a community with public sewer and water, a typical approach is recommending ½-acre lots or smaller in the growth areas, and lots in the 1-3 acre range in the rural areas. For areas without public water or sewer, a typical approach is recommending acre or acre-and-a-half lots in growth areas and 2-5 acre lots in the rural area.

If the primary purpose of such approaches is to guide growth and protect rural character, most available evidence now suggests they are not working; in fact, a strong case can be made that the resulting large rural lot sizes are actually accelerating the loss of rural lands in communities. Each additional lot consumes more land and leads to a more spread out pattern of development over the landscape. If your town's existing plan and land use policies establish such approaches, you should at the very least examine them closely and discuss whether they are fostering a development pattern that is consistent with your community's vision for these areas.

Over the past several years, SPO staff has been making a concerted effort to steer communities away from the approach of proposing minor distinctions in standards for growth versus rural areas – at least as the primary means to direct growth – and suggesting alternative ideas. This handbook, however, provides an opportunity to unequivocally state this viewpoint. It is our belief that unless your community is willing to embrace *substantial* differences in densities between its growth and rural areas, this approach will not succeed at directing growth.

What are substantial differences? No precise standard exists – only that the densities contrast sufficiently to effectively “pull” development toward growth areas and “push” it away from rural areas – while promoting the preservation of large blocks of undeveloped rural lands. Part II provides some additional guidance on this point. But the approach

generally requires setting very low densities in designated rural areas.

If your city or town is interested in pursuing such an approach, additional information is available from other communities across the country that use it. In Maine, the best example is the city of Auburn that sets a minimum one-unit-per-10-acre density in its Agricultural Protection District and requires new residential uses to be related to farming operations. Several other communities require similar densities for rural areas that are enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax Program.

Proposing a very low rural density standard may be controversial in many communities. Some of the process tools described in the last section can be used to make a compelling case for why such a strategy is necessary. You may find the most support for applying this approach to the lands you have designated as critical rural areas.

While your planning committee should not underestimate the willingness of the citizenry to embrace strong measures, it is also important to have your finger on the pulse of community attitudes. Proposals that are viewed as overly sweeping or radical could hurt the credibility of your planning effort. As your committee considers the pros and cons of the approach described above, endeavor to be visionary – but also be realistic.

If it is clear that there is not political support for such low densities in your community, consider putting energy into investigating other growth-directing strategies, such as a rate of growth limitation in your rural area.

Part II provides additional background and guidance on this issue. In addition, Appendices A and C contain a listing of possible strategies and other ideas that hold promise.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

If the primary purpose of minor lot size distinctions is to guide growth and protect rural character, most available evidence now suggests they are not working.

41. **Promote conservation subdivisions but recognize their limitations**

One of the more misunderstood approaches to land development is “clustering” or, as referred to in this handbook, *conservation subdivisions* (see focus box). Conservation subdivisions can be simply defined as development in a rural setting that is characterized by relatively compact lots and common open space, and where the natural features of land are maintained to the greatest extent possible. Typically, lot sizes are smaller than what would be required for conventional subdivisions, but, in return, the residual land is protected as common open space. The result is a development that may not exceed the overall density of a conventional project, but which can conserve a significant amount of land – depending on the size of the project and the density standard the community has set in its local ordinances.

The conservation subdivision model offers some distinct advantages over the conventional subdivision approach – both in the short and long term. But it is also important to understand its limitations as a growth management strategy, and to be aware of common pitfalls in actual application of the concept.

First and foremost, requiring conservation subdivisions is not a strategy for directing growth away from rural areas and it will not stem sprawl. Rather the approach can be a means of accommodating rural development in a manner that is less erosive of rural values than conventional subdivisions. If the majority of residential development is occurring in your community’s rural areas, requiring conservation subdivisions is unlikely to reverse this trend.

Conservation subdivisions are also not an alternative to strategies aimed at keeping agricultural and forestlands in production. In some cases, the conservation subdivision approach might be used in conjunction with efforts to maintain working landscapes. But a preferable scenario is that rural enterprises remain viable enough so that land development is unnecessary. For example, a conservation subdivision approach may result in protection of attractive hayfields, but purchase of development rights or other strategies may help the farm stay in business in the first place.

What’s in a Name?

The term “clustering” is often used to describe conservation subdivisions, or at least some of their elements. While this term seems to have a strong foothold in Maine, it can work against efforts to build public understanding of the value of this concept as a rural land protection strategy. It can create the impression of high-density development and an urban landscape being promoted in the town’s rural area.

Words have power, and you may find that the term “clustering” creates a negative perception that resurfaces with each discussion. At least when this concept is applied to rural areas as an approach to retain blocks of open space, our recommendation is that you use the term “conservation subdivision.” Use the new name as an occasion to take a fresh look at the approach, to dispel myths and discuss evolving refinements.

In light of these limitations and challenges, are conservation subdivisions an approach that is worth advocating in your comprehensive plan? In most cases the answer is “yes,” especially if your community is pursuing an approach of setting very low densities in your

designated rural areas. Conservation subdivisions and other approaches that allow for flexible lot sizing and compact location are essential to avoiding a counterproductive layout of sprawling houselots. Even with more moderate rural densities, they can facilitate better-designed subdivisions. But there should be a clear understanding that they are not a substitute for strong strategies aimed at directing residential growth away from rural areas to begin with.

Although the details of a conservation subdivision approach would be worked out as part of subsequent ordinance development, it is important that citizens truly understand and support the approach if you are to propose it as a plan strategy. Use effective visual aids to show the benefits of the approach, and be ready to reference some examples of successful projects on the ground.

[Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

42. *Integrate growth policies into a well-developed Land Use Plan*

A challenge for plan updates is not only formulating effective strategies for managing growth, but integrating them into a coherent, coordinated whole.

The appropriate place to do this in the plan is the *Land Use Plan* and associated policies and strategies.

In many 1990s documents, Land Use Plans were a weak link, often poorly understood and drafted as an afterthought near the end of the planning process.

Simply put, a Land Use Plan is a graphic and written summary of your community's growth policies. It includes: a future land use map that delineates growth and rural areas (and possibly transitional areas – see Recommendation #38), and subcategories of land or districts within these major classifications; a narrative that explains the rationale or purpose behind the classifications and the uses and characteristics that define them; and a description of the strategies that will be used to direct development relative to these designations.

An effective Land Use Plan serves both as a foundation for zoning and other regulatory approaches, and as a clear vision for how your town wants to grow. It does not need to be nearly as specific nor as comprehensive as a zoning ordinance, but it should be detailed enough to provide adequate support and direction to the

drafters or revisers of those ordinances.

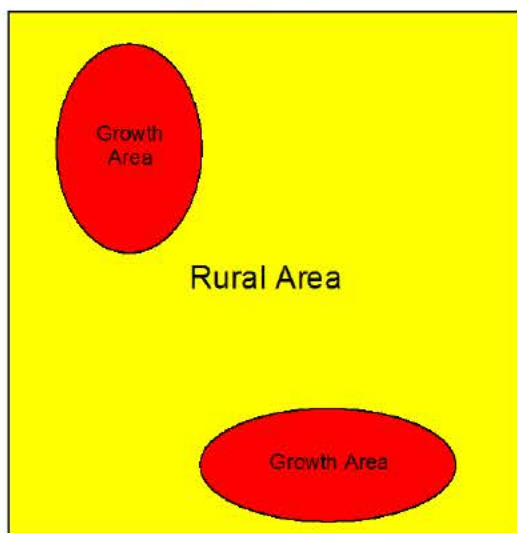
In many 1990s documents, Land Use Plans were a weak link, often poorly understood and drafted as an afterthought near the end of the planning process. Not surprisingly, this plan component was frequently a stumbling

block in plan reviews for consistency with the Growth Management Law. For plan updates, you should carefully consider this component including its content and format, and devote significant energy to its development.

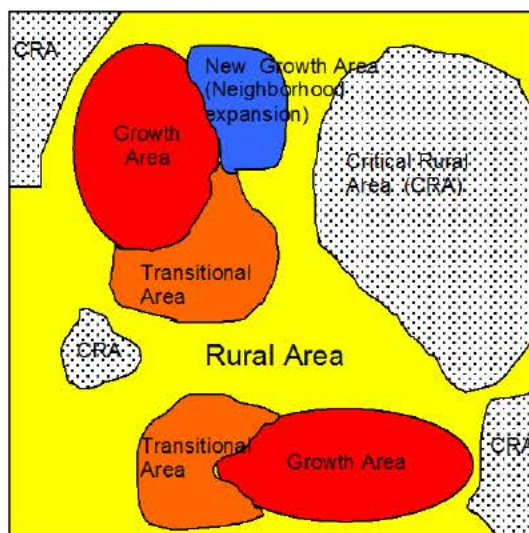
Some of the more effective 1990s Land Use Plans included a chart summarizing major implementation measures for different land use districts (see Part II). This approach may be most appropriate if you are proposing your first townwide land use ordinance or major changes to it. But even if your community has a long-standing zoning ordinance, it is a good idea to provide clear justification for its major provisions, and other strategies that will be pursued by the town.

Simplified graphic showing how a land use plan might be updated to provide a more refined approach

Original Plan



Updated Plan



43. *Design matters*

This handbook gives considerable attention to strengthening your plan's approach to guiding the location of development in your community. Too often, communities mistake strategies that focus on improving the design and rendering of new development as an antidote for the sprawl that occurs within their borders.

On the other hand, the issue of design – used here in a global sense to describe the way that spaces and forms are organized on a site or area of town – deserves strong consideration in your plan update. Preserving and enhancing a “sense of place” in your community involves careful attention to design. Whether it is protection of existing design and visual assets or creating new ones, your plan can both identify threats and opportunities for improvement. A detailed approach to design and visual issues may well deserve special treatment in an implementation step in your plan, for example, a focused village study or a set of commercial design guidelines. But your plan update can provide a basis and beginning for meaningfully approaching design issues.

A visioning process is an excellent starting point for this discussion. Participants can be asked to

identify what community features they like and dislike, and asked to rank different design alternatives for new development through visual preference surveys and other techniques. The resulting vision statement can provide valuable guidance on the design and visual attributes that citizens prize most highly.

Whether it is protection of existing design and visual assets or creating new ones, your plan can both identify threats and opportunities for improvement.

In the subsequent planning process, continue to discuss design concerns, with the aim of providing additional overall guidance and more

direction to implementation efforts. Also evaluate your existing plan and land use provisions to see if they are facilitating your overall vision for well-designed and visually appealing development. You may find, for instance that standards pertaining to building setbacks, parking and new streets are serving to erode rather than enhance visual qualities, walkability and a sense of place.

Part II provides a number of more specific suggestions for how your plan might better approach visual and design matters.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

44. *Don't ignore incremental development*

It is a scenario that has been played out more than once in Maine communities: a proposed subdivision evokes strong local opposition, and board meetings become a forum for impassioned speeches about dire consequences of the proposal on the town and its character. Yet over a relatively short time, the same number of lots proposed for the project are developed on individual lots, often stripped out along major roads, without comment or incident, but with considerable impacts.

While it is human nature to react more strongly to something that comes all at once than to something that happens more gradually, it is important to consider the incremental impacts of lot-by-lot development. Single lot development typically occurs without any planning board review. Conformance with dimensional requirements and the plumbing codes are often the only factors

considered; cumulatively, this pattern results in the stripping out of existing road frontage with no provision for permanent open space or the “neighborhood” amenities that can be promoted through subdivision review.

Addressing lot-by-lot development in an effective manner is a challenge. A first step, however, is evaluating the extent and impact of this trend in your community. The exercise of determining recent development patterns provides a good opportunity – distinguishing not only between building permits issued for homes in growth and rural areas but between those that occurred within and outside subdivisions. You are then in a better position to evaluate the impacts of these development patterns on rural values and service delivery.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

45. *Use rate of growth ordinances with caution*

A number of municipalities in Maine have adopted rate of growth ordinances, also known as building or growth caps. Although the particulars vary, most of these ordinances establish a ceiling for the number of building permits issued annually in the community. The stated aim is usually to avoid spikes in growth – usually residential – and provide a measure of predictability for municipalities as they struggle to provide services and facilities to a growing population.

When they are applied town-wide on an ongoing basis, these ordinances have potential for a number of negative consequences. They generally focus on a first-come-first-served approach to development as opposed to a more appropriate emphasis on the location of new growth. They tend to drive development to neighboring communities that do not have such ordinances, and create a regional ripple effect for other communities to enact caps. By potentially reducing housing supply, they can drive up housing costs, both locally and regionally. More generally, they foster an every-town-for-itself mentality that runs counter to cooperatively addressing regional problems and responsibilities.

Under Maine law, rate of growth ordinances must be supported by a consistent comprehensive plan – recent changes in the Growth Management Law make this requirement explicit. If your community has such an ordinance or is considering one, your

plan update should provide a strong rationale for why it is necessary and how it will affect other plan

goals. SPO's current position regarding ongoing town-wide rate of growth ordinances is that they are justified only when the community has laid out a

clear and feasible approach for expanding services and facilities to meet its fair share of regional growth, and the rate of growth ordinance is linked to this overall strategy (see Part II for additional guidance).

SPO is generally supportive of *temporary* rate of growth ordinances that can give communities a chance to catch up on planning or meeting infrastructure needs. Such provisions should be limited in duration, and clearly tied to an action plan for addressing the identified problems or deficiencies.

Finally, SPO views a *differential* rate of growth limits as an underutilized, but effective, means for guiding growth. Under this approach, no limitation would be set for the rate of development in designated growth areas, but thresholds would be established in rural (or possibly transitional) areas based on your plan's benchmarks for growth in these areas. This approach, however, should be carefully considered and clearly supported in your comprehensive plan.

[☑ Go to Part II for additional guidance](#)

Rate of growth ordinances generally foster an every-town-for-itself mentality that runs counter to cooperatively addressing regional problems and responsibilities.

FINAL TIPS AND REMINDERS

The final five recommendations are tips and reminders that relate to numerous aspects of your comprehensive planning process. In most cases,

these suggestions reiterate or reinforce advice that runs through many of the previous 45 recommendations in the handbook.

46. *Don't put all your eggs in one basket*

As an iterative process, planning involves not only learning from past mistakes, but approaching future efforts with the knowledge that some ideas will fare better than others. There is no "silver bullet" that will address the major issues facing your community. Even if there were, it is always prudent to have a Plan B in case Plan A runs into problems. Avoid putting all of your eggs in one basket.

There is no "silver bullet" that will address the major issues facing your community.

In many cases, taking a number of modest, incremental steps, each building on the other, may be a more effective strategy than trying to enact a grand scheme for change. If it can be clearly demonstrated that a step is working well, the public is much more willing to take additional steps. Establishing a program for measuring your progress is key to this process (see Recommendation #47 below).

47. *Measure by measure*

A central ingredient of many of the recommendations in this handbook is instilling accountability and a focus on outcomes. This cannot be done without devising better ways of measuring progress toward plan goals and the effectiveness of particular plan strategies. In their ongoing efforts to address difficult issues, communities cannot be faulted with periodically taking wrong turns and detours. But with a road map that clearly lays out the best course, and a means of determining where you are on that course, you are much less likely to drive in circles.

With a road map that clearly lays out the best course, and a means of determining where you are on that course, you are much less likely to drive in circles.

Besides fostering an emphasis on positive outcomes (as opposed to positive *effort*), integrating ways of measuring performance into your planning process has the effect of making your comprehensive plan a stronger instrument for addressing difficult issues. It may be that initially your planning committee is unable to convince the general public that a particular strategy is warranted. With a system in place to monitor and report progress on achieving outcomes, however, you may find that the next time around there is considerable support for taking stronger steps.

48. *Discard ideas that aren't working and think out of the box*

A major obstacle to moving forward can be the staying power of outdated ideas. The planning field has its share of old ideas that continue to exert undue influence people and communities. It is clear, for example, that requiring lots to be 2-5 acres in size does not protect rural character or preserve farmland, yet some continue to cling to this thinking.

In some cases, the power of such ideas can be overcome by the use of visualization and forecasting techniques that illustrate the consequences of certain policies or actions. In other cases, these ideas may continue to hold sway until the demonstrated inability to achieve defined outcomes clearly indicates failure. Although it is not always easy, an important role of your planning committee is to challenge the credibility of ideas

that don't work, and to redirect energies into new (or revamped) concepts that hold promise.

The expression "thinking out of the box" is perhaps overused, but it does effectively convey the value of shifting one's perspective as a way of solving entrenched problems. Some of the smart growth planning tools now being discussed represent a significant departure from the planning and zoning

ideas being touted a decade ago. Tools continue to evolve as communities such as yours experiment and innovate. For issues that have historically defied resolution, try a novel approach.

With a system in place to measure progress, you will be in a much better position to respond to skeptics if the new approach is working, to make adjustments, or to change direction if necessary.

49. *Agree how to disagree and stand by your plan*

Not everyone will agree as you proceed with your plan update – both among your committee members and the public at large. But your process will be much more civil – and ultimately more effective – if you can agree on how to disagree.

For your committee meetings, set ground rules for how discussions are to be conducted and decisions made. When engaging the public, make it clear how comments will be received and considered. Choosing a meeting moderator with good facilitation skills can do much to make public forums effective and constructive. Work to set an overall positive tone, and an emphasis on coming

together to solve problems. Keep your sense of humor.

Remember that public meetings are both a time to listen and to showcase the good work that your committee has done. Remain responsive, but also stand by your plan when appropriate. Avoid overreacting to perceived opposition or to a few negative comments. Before watering down or dropping language, consider taking straw polls to engage the often-silent majority. In some cases, opposition is the result of misunderstanding. With better information, the public may come to appreciate the reasoning behind a policy or recommendation.

50. *Don't shelve it*

A complaint often heard from communities is that their comprehensive plans get written, approved, and forgotten – languishing in a municipal office bookshelf or drawer.

Save your plan from such a fate.

Save your plan from such a fate. Consider creating an executive summary that can be sent to all citizens and used as a desk reference. Post the entire plan on your website, along with supporting documents and opportunities for continuing public feedback. Give full plans to all existing and incoming municipal officials and board members. Have plenty of copies available for the public, including new residents, and file plans at your public and school libraries.

Establish a strong plan follow-through process by appointing an implementation oversight committee or similarly accountable group. Endeavor to institutionalize ongoing evaluation of your implementation efforts.

Highlight your plan's implementation schedule and performance measures, on your website and in your town report. Generate periodic implementation status reports, and schedule a public forum every two years after plan adoption to assess overall progress. If you are staying on task and moving in a positive direction relative to your measures of performance, celebrate your successes. If not, use the assessment as an opportunity to reenergize your implementation efforts – and to possibly revisit certain plan recommendations that don't seem to be working.

III. APPROACH TO INTEGRATING EXISTING PLAN

Many communities that developed comprehensive plans in the 1990s already had some form of plan document on the books. Some of these documents were revised and updated both to meet the requirements of the Growth Management Law and to reflect current issues and opportunities. But for the numerous towns whose existing comprehensive plans were modest in scope and detail, the typical approach was to scrap the earlier document and to start from scratch.

Now, with much more substantial comprehensive plans in place, these communities are faced with an important decision regarding the extent to which their existing plan should be revised as part of an update process. A number of different options exist, each with pros and cons regarding cost, organization, continuity with past planning efforts, ease of future updating and other factors.

Option 1: Selectively Revised/Updated Plan

Even with a 10-year-old plan, you may find that much of its material is still relevant. Rather than writing an entirely new plan, you may opt to selectively revise and update specific sections.

This approach has the advantage of focusing the plan update project on those portions of the plan that truly need updating. It is generally more cost-effective and less time consuming than a total rewrite. Inventory sections or maps that still provide accurate information can be left intact or given minor updates. For the inventory, the focus should be on providing an up-to-date analysis of current and projected issues. For the policy component, the emphasis should be on determining which policies and implementation strategies should be retained or revised in the updated plan, as well as what new policies and strategies are needed.

Even with a 10-year-old plan, you may find that much of its material is still relevant.

This approach works best when the plan being updated is a well-written and organized document that lends itself to easy modification and addition. If, on the other hand, the original plan has significant weaknesses in organization or content, using it as a template for an updated plan may

merely perpetuate the earlier plan's weaknesses.

Be aware that the approach of selectively revising an existing plan may have the

effect of hampering efforts to take a fresh look at issues or problems, or embrace new policies. Sometimes a tendency exists to leave existing language alone, even when it is of limited usefulness or relevance. And there are instances when selectively updating and revising existing language can be more cumbersome than rewriting – and lead to a less coherent product.

Option 2: New Policy Section/Updated Inventory

A variation in the approach described above is to make necessary updates to the inventory sections, but to restructure and rewrite the policy sections of the plan. This approach may lend itself best to a format in which the policy section is distinct rather than integrated with the inventory section. The selectively revised inventory section might constitute one volume of the plan, and the rewritten policy section, which could include a review of major inventory findings, another. To retain a degree of connection to the earlier plan, this section might also include a discussion of what policies and

strategies were revised from the previous plan and why.

This approach has the advantages of allowing a selective update of the inventory section, while providing an opportunity to take a fresh look at the policy section. Most of the recommendations of this handbook pertain to the policy section of the plan, and their consideration may substantially change the content and emphasis of this section. A rewrite also provides for more flexibility in reorganizing this most crucial section of the plan in a way that seems most effective and user-friendly.

Option 3: Plan Supplement

Some communities may evaluate their comprehensive plans and determine that they are working quite well. Instead of substantially revising the existing plan or writing a whole new one, your community may choose instead to develop a plan “supplement” that highlights the information and policies that have been changed from the existing plan. Under this approach, the previous plan would be retained essentially in its current form and serve as a compendium or appendix to the supplement.

This may be the “easiest” and least costly approach to an update project. It allows the community to build on its current plan, but avoids the need to integrate new information into an existing document or to create an entirely new comprehensive policy section. The supplement may lend itself well to a discussion of how the existing plan can be strengthened by considering some of the recommendations of this handbook and other refinements.

A possible disadvantage of this approach is that, unless carefully handled, it may result in an overall format that is difficult or confusing to use. The reader may need to jump back and forth between the supplement and the previous plan to ascertain what information is still current and what policies are still in force. This limitation might be overcome by making the supplement a more comprehensive distillation of relevant policy-related components from the previous plan. At this point, however, the supplement would begin to more closely resemble the format of Option 2 described above.

A supplement may be most appropriate if the existing plan is relatively recent and effective, but the community wishes to make adjustments or to focus in on a particular issue or topic area. In light of the weaknesses of the Land Use Plans and their linkages to Capital Investment Planning in many 1990s plan, a supplement that concentrates on these areas may allow for a relatively clean mid-course adjustment.

Option 4: Entirely New Plan

For a variety of reasons, a community may decide that it wants its plan update to be an entirely new document – one that references and uses some information from the previous plan, but which otherwise starts again from scratch in integrating the old and new into a coherent whole. This approach would likely involve a review and update of the inventory and analysis section to focus on the most pertinent information. The policy and implementation section would integrate existing, revised and new policies and strategies, with some sort of discussion of what changes were made from the current plan’s approach and why.

This approach has the advantage of providing a comprehensive update of the previous plan. Although it may involve significant additional writing, it avoids the time-consuming and sometimes tedious task of trying to revise existing

plan language and structure new components so that they work with existing ones. This approach may have particular merit when the community feels that its existing plan lacks a coherent organization or has other major problems.

This approach has the disadvantage of making the plan update into a major undertaking that may exceed the financial and time resources of some communities. The reinvention of the inventory section may itself prove to be an expensive and time-consuming exercise – a scenario that runs counter to the recommendation of this handbook to de-emphasize that component. In taking this route, communities should be careful that the strengths and lessons of the earlier plan are not lost, and that the emphasis should remain on the policy section of the plan.

IV. COST CONSIDERATIONS

While SPO views the periodic update of comprehensive plans as an important and necessary investment that communities should make in their futures, it believes the process should not be so expensive and time-consuming as to make it impractical for the average community to undertake. Some larger communities may be willing and able to put \$30,000 or more into update projects, and their plans will likely be the better for it. But for many communities, an update that incorporates the recommendations of this handbook can be accomplished for significantly less.

On the other hand, it is unrealistic to think that a plan can be effectively updated for a few thousand dollars. The

comprehensive plans funded by the State in the 1990s generally cost \$17,000 and up (state grant amount plus required local match), depending on the size

and growth rate of the community. SPO's Comprehensive Plan Update Grant Program has awarded State funds of up to \$10,000, with most communities raising local funds in excess of the minimum local match requirement (which was 50% for the 2002 round).

Of the approach/format options outlined in Section IV, the fourth option of essentially writing a new plan is likely to be the most expensive, the third option of developing a plan supplement the least expensive. For a small community, Option 4 may still be affordable if the inventory component is accomplished efficiently. Larger communities may

find that developing an entirely new plan requires over \$25,000.

In general, the proposed Option 2, of developing a new policy section and selectively updating the inventory, may provide the best combination of cost-effectiveness, flexibility and focus for older plans. But for communities with relatively recent plans or plans that are in need of adjustments, the plan supplement approach (Option 3) may prove to be the most cost-effective and appropriate option.

A number of communities that have updated or are in the process of updating their plans have devoted

substantial resources toward the project – either by financing the entire update or

Consistent with the adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, it is helpful to consider the costs – both financial and otherwise – of not planning when weighing the relatively modest costs involved in periodically updating your plan.

substantially exceeding the match requirement under SPO's Update Grant Program. There seems to be a growing recognition that planning is a good investment that deserves ongoing financial support. Consistent with the adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, it is helpful to consider the costs – both financial and otherwise – of *not* planning when weighing the relatively modest costs involved in periodically updating your plan. And if your updated plan incorporates stronger measures and better ways of measuring success, the value of planning will become increasingly apparent – and hopefully deemed worthy of continued and enhanced financial support.

V. UPDATED PLANS AND THE “GROWTH MANAGEMENT LAW”

In challenging communities to consider not only updating but *upgrading* their comprehensive plans, the State Planning Office (SPO) is aware that its view of plans, and its review of plans under the Growth Management Law, may need to undergo a shift in emphasis and consideration of new ideas as well. SPO recognizes that it must evaluate updated plans within the framework of the existing statute and rules that govern the review of comprehensive plans. But even within the existing laws and rules, there is room to “raise the bar” regarding plan updates. In light of the mixed performance that many communities have had in addressing the state goal of guiding growth, SPO, in its review of updated plans, will be looking closely at each town’s track record and approach regarding this central goal.

SPO has the highest expectations for plans that have received funding under its Comprehensive Plan Update Grant Program ([see Appendix F](#)), as a primary purpose of that program was fostering stronger plans. Communities applying for this program had to make compelling cases for how their planning process and product would be enhanced, and grantees are expected to follow through on their proposals. The hope is that updated plans developed under this program will set a high standard that goes beyond the minimum criteria set forth for plan consistency with the law.

The Growth Management Law itself has undergone a number of revisions over the past several years,

some which have a bearing both on plan content and review, and the consequences of not having a “consistent” plan. While this handbook alludes to a

few of these changes, it does not attempt to summarize them and their implications. The issue of the “2003 deadline” in the statute, and how it might affect your community is a particularly important

one. An excellent discussion of the issue from the perspective of SPO’s Land Use Team can be found on the agency’s webpage ([see Appendix D](#)).

Before undertaking a comprehensive plan update project, your community should be well acquainted both with the [current statute and the related rules](#). The Land Use Team staff member assigned to your community can also help to highlight recent changes in the law and their implications for plan content and review.

While it is hoped that this handbook will help communities achieve better consistency with the Growth Management Law, this is not the focus of the document. The primary aim is to foster more effective plans that lead to positive and measurable results. The main motivation to develop such a plan should derive from a local desire to learn from past experiences and more effectively plan for the future. The ultimate measure of the success of a plan is not a finding of consistency by the State, but whether your plan works better – at guiding growth and meeting other community challenges, consistent with your overall vision for the future.

In light of the mixed performance that many communities have had in addressing the state goal of guiding growth, SPO, in its review of updated plans, will be looking closely at each town’s track record and approach regarding this central goal.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The view that we can create stronger comprehensive plans is based on some common-sense notions: that we can learn from our past experiences; that improved planning processes will yield improved plans; and that by adopting an attitude of creative problem solving and “thinking out of the box” we can more successfully address ongoing and new planning challenges. The recommendations of this handbook involve looking both backward and forward: to the past for lessons and perspective, and to the future for vision and foresight.

Communities that have had the experience of developing a comprehensive plan in the 1990s and learning from that process are in a strong position to move forward in developing more effective plans. But many of the recommendations of this handbook are equally relevant to communities who are embarking on their first comprehensive planning effort. These towns, by and large, are located in

areas of the state with significantly less growth pressure. But they face significant planning challenges as well, and a strong comprehensive plan is integral to successfully meeting these challenges.

Whether you are embarking on your community’s first truly “comprehensive” plan, or updating your 1990s document, our hope is that this handbook will help you avoid some common pitfalls and improve the effectiveness of your plan. But with each new and updated plan there are additional lessons to be learned and new approaches to be considered. We view this handbook as part of an ongoing and evolving effort to evaluate the effectiveness of comprehensive planning in Maine, and to explore ways of making plans work better for your communities.

The recommendations of this handbook involve looking both backward and forward: to the past for lessons and perspective, and to the future for vision and foresight.

PART II: ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND AND GUIDANCE

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TOP OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Take a hard look at your existing plan*

Additional Guidance on Update Needs Assessment

As part of the Update Needs Assessment², ask and answer a number of probing questions regarding your existing plan's policies and implementation steps, such as:

- Were the plan's overall goals and policies achieved or are they in the process of being achieved? If not, why not?
- Which implementation strategies have been accomplished, which are in progress, and which have not been accomplished?
- For strategies that were carried out, are they leading to the desired outcome?
- If strategies were not implemented or did not lead to positive outcomes, what factors were involved? Was there confusion about who was responsible for carrying them out? Were they too vague or timid? Or were they the wrong strategies to accomplish the related goal or policy?
- Were there political factors involved in failure to successfully implement them?
- Are these same factors likely to stymie future efforts at implementing these or similar strategies, or are efforts being made to generate additional public support for them?
- What other strategies might have been more effective in accomplishing the desired outcome or policy?
- For implementation strategies that were successfully implemented, are there lessons to be learned that can benefit the update of the plan?

The purpose of such questions is to go beyond a simple assessment of whether an implementation step was taken or not. The focus should be on whether it effectively served its purpose and what valuable lessons are to be gleaned from the plan's successes and failures. This exercise will provide invaluable clues as to whether certain aspects of your updated plan need to be strengthened or made more explicit – or whether an alternative approach is needed.

Additional Guidance on Assessing Recent Growth Trends

There are a number of ways to approach the analysis of recent growth trends. Probably the simplest is to determine how many building permits were issued for the respective growth and rural areas over a particular time frame. Tracking the number of new building lots created in growth versus rural areas may be easy to do as well. For communities with significant amounts of commercial development, tabulating the square footage of new developments in each area may also be useful. Ideally, development should be tracked from the time the plan was adopted – or from when major land use strategies were adopted – to the present time. But if that information is not available, using the most recent five years provides a reasonable snapshot. Additional refinements in the data and analysis – for instance showing what development occurred on older lots versus newly created lots – will improve the usefulness of this evaluation.

A result that showed most new development (>70%) occurring in the rural area should be a loud wake up call that leads to a major reconsideration of your community's growth policies as part of the update process.

² An Update Needs Assessment is a required component of applications for Comprehensive Plan Update Grants from the State Planning Office (SPO). However, communities – whether applying for a grant or not – are encouraged to go beyond the minimum requirements for such assessments as laid out in the program statement, particularly in investigating in detail why certain strategies were never implemented and what lessons are to be learned.

Results showing most of your community's development (greater than 70%) going into growth areas would indicate that the desired growth pattern is largely being realized, and that major changes in growth policies may be unnecessary. A less decisive result that still shows a majority of development occurring in the growth area would suggest that some refinements in approach may be warranted. If less than a majority of the new growth is conforming to the desired pattern, you should carefully evaluate the effectiveness of your plan's strategies and consider stronger measures. A result that showed most new development (greater than 70%) occurring in the rural area should be a loud wake up call that leads to a major reconsideration of your community's growth policies as part of the update process.

Example of Recent Growth Assessment for a Small Community

Year	Number of New Dwelling Units		
	Designated Growth Areas	Designated Rural Areas	Total
1992	9	25	34
1993	12	28	40
1994	13	30	43
1995	10	32	42
1996	12	38	50
1997	8	40	48
1998	14	36	50
1999	19	30	49
2000	10	25	35
2001	8	24	32
Total Number	115	308	423
Percent of Total	27%	73%	

The overall results of this evaluation exercise should be clearly summarized, and used in developing the work program for the update process. They should also be shared with the general public in conjunction with relevant data from your updated inventory and analysis section as a means of building community support for why a stronger comprehensive planning effort is needed.

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2. *Aggressively and creatively engage the public*

[☑ Go to Recommendations for the planning process \(#16-#30\)](#)

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3. *Shift emphasis from inventory to policy*

Streamlining Inventory Work

The advice to avoid "inventory overload" is not meant to imply that you should cut corners in providing an accurate and up-to-date assessment of current and projected conditions and issues in your community. It is intended rather as a prompt to take a hard look at what information is most essential to your planning effort, and to approach the inventory component of your plan with an eye toward efficiency and focus. As you consider what areas to cover and emphasize, review the state's rules governing inventory elements, but also highlight the types of information and analysis that are most relevant to your community's major planning issues.

Before launching into information collection – or hiring a consultant to do so – thoroughly review the inventory sections of your existing plan. Much of the inventory may still be accurate and up-to-date, especially information pertaining to natural, historic and cultural resources and public facilities. Selective updating of these sections may be needed – particularly to reflect changes in public facilities and services or the availability of new data.

Before launching into information collection – or hiring a consultant to do so – thoroughly review the inventory sections of your existing plan.

In some cases, the primary task may be summarizing and presenting this information in a more concise fashion. Information on demographics, development trends and the municipality's fiscal capacity will require the most substantial overhaul. All plans should have up-to-date population and housing projections and an assessment of

capital and infrastructure needs during the 10-year planning period. Many 1990s plans were developed early in the decade before complete 1990 U.S. Census information was available, and some communities expended considerable time and expense projecting current population and housing numbers. Most 2000 Census information is now available, and updates can take advantage of information that is readily available on-line both on SPO's and the Census Bureau's websites.

In reviewing your existing plan, identify planning issues that were addressed or are no longer relevant that can be eliminated from consideration. On the other hand, don't forget to include in your update new issues that have arisen or are likely to arise during the upcoming planning period, whether it is invasive species in your lakes, loss of a major employer or an aging population base.

Once you have a good idea of the extent that inventory elements need updating, give thought how to best accomplish it in an efficient and timely manner. One approach is to leave most of the job to a hired planning consultant, freeing up your committee to focus on the implications of the identified needs and issues and on policy development. On the other, if you are on a tight budget, avoid paying your consultant to generate information that is readily available from SPO and other sources. If you decide to have your committee do the information gathering, consider establishing an inventory subcommittee that can focus on that component, perhaps enlisting the energy of other community volunteers who are more inclined toward data collection than policy discussions.

An inventory element that proved useful in many 1990s plans was *findings* – statements summarizing the issues and implications illuminated by the analysis of data. In some cases, these findings were used to conclude or summarize individual inventory sections. In other cases, they were included in the policy sections to provide a context and rationale for action.

Findings can be used to hone in on the essence of particular issues, helping to make your inventory and analysis section “meaner and leaner.” They help focus on what information is most pertinent, and wean your plan of data that might be interesting, but are non-essential from a policy standpoint. Inventory sections can be further streamlined by including some of the data that supports findings in a technical appendix.

Findings can be used to hone in on the essence of particular issues, helping to make your inventory and analysis section “meaner and leaner.”

As you pursue a leaner inventory section, don't miss opportunities to integrate new information that can improve the effectiveness of your plan. The *Beginning With Habitat* maps and data described in Recommendation #37, for example, deserve strong consideration as part of all plan updates. If your town now uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS), or has access to them, consider how maps and analyses from them can help to better summarize trends and illuminate issues.

Strengthening the Policy Sections

The upgrading of the plan's policy sections should build on the efforts of the update needs assessment described in Recommendation #1. But in addition to evaluating the effectiveness of existing plan policies, you should assess whether they are still relevant to your community's current needs and vision for the future. In some cases you may decide to eliminate policies; in others you may decide to clarify, strengthen, or develop new ones.

The upgrading of the plan's policy sections should build on the efforts of the update needs assessment described in Recommendation #1.

In many 1990s plans, it is not the policies, but the strategies proposed for implementing policies that are the weak link. For this reason, the reassessment of implementation strategies deserves particular attention in plan updates – again building on the preliminary findings of the update needs assessment. As you determine which strategies have been ineffective or never acted upon, consider revising them, or replacing them with alternatives likely to result in more success. Strategies should be forcefully written and clearly indicate who will be responsible for implementation, along with a reasonable time frame for beginning and completing action.

Many 1990s plans included implementations schedules in the form of tables that summarized the “who, what and where” involved in plan follow-through. This tool proved to be extremely helpful, and opportunities exist for improving it. The schedule can be maintained and disseminated as a spreadsheet much as municipal budgeting information is now handled. Items can be clearly checked off as they are accomplished, and the information can be posted on your community’s web page and annual town report to show the status of how the implementation effort is proceeding. Recommendation #30 provides additional pointers on how the implementation of plan strategies can be improved.

Additional Resources ([Go to Appendix D for weblinks](#))

Three helpful SPO sites:

- ♦ Census webpage. Contains valuable information and links, including “find it yourself” Census link.
- ♦ Economic and Demographic webpage. Includes town level social and economic data.
- ♦ Land Use Data webpage. Includes additional planning data and links for towns undertaking a planning effort.

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4. Concentrate on State Goal #1

Additional Background

For the reasons cited earlier, communities developing plans in the 1990s often approached this and other difficult policy issues with diminished resources and momentum. Planning committees found that the strategies aimed at meaningfully addressing this goal were often the most contentious parts of their plan. Not surprisingly, this goal was the sticking point on many of the plans that were determined by the state to be inconsistent with the Growth Management Law.

Communities with consistent plans have struggled with this goal as well. As part of SPO’s Comprehensive Plan Update Grant Program, applicants are required to indicate the location of recent development relative to the growth and rural areas designated in their current plans. Of the applications reviewed to date, most indicate that the majority of development is occurring in a sprawling pattern outside designated growth areas – despite efforts of communities to stem this tide.

For some communities, the actual delineation of growth and rural areas was problematic, with areas improperly sized or located to serve their stated purposes effectively. But a more universal weakness in 1990s plans was lack of strong growth-directing strategies. Approaches were typically timid: perhaps proposing

Make It Fit

While guiding growth is relevant to most communities, the goal should be applied in a way that fits your community’s circumstances and role in the region. Many of the communities that are now embarking on plan updates are fast-growing or emerging suburbs outside of service centers, and a number of the recommendations of this handbook are geared to guiding growth in this setting. But if your community doesn’t fall into this category, don’t dismiss the goal – make it work for you.

If your community is a service center, with a static or declining population, you may be most concerned with attracting development and less concerned about growth occurring outside your urban core. Efforts to preserve rural character may be more focused on permanent protection of selected blocks of remaining undeveloped land.

On the other hand, some service centers have extensive land areas that are relatively undeveloped. A strong approach to guiding growth may be needed to avoid the costs of a dispersed development pattern and to help focus investment in struggling downtown areas.

If your community is a slow-growth rural town, the initial reaction to the goal of guiding growth may be that it is irrelevant. Presenting the results of the recent growth analysis can be a revealing exercise, as it often shows a dispersion of housing to rural areas even as overall population has stagnated. The cost of providing services to this development and its impacts on agricultural lands may produce converts to the goal of guiding growth. But in light of the relatively slow pace of development, your community may opt for a growth-guiding approach that is focused strongly on keeping rural lands in production, creating some opportunities for relatively compact development in appropriate areas, and carefully tracking the location and impact of new development during the planning period – making adjustments in strategies as needed.

For communities that have experienced little or no development over the last decade, and which expect more of the same during the planning period, the Growth Management Law contains an exemption from the requirement of designating growth and rural areas. Contact the SPO Land Use Team staff for details.

relatively minor variations in allowable densities between growth and rural areas and allowing cluster subdivisions as a development option. The Land Use Plan, which should be a well developed and highly visible plan component that clearly lays out the town's overall growth strategy, was more of an afterthought in many 1990s documents, characterized by a lack of boldness, specificity or commitment.

For some communities, this timidity was born out of a lack of citizen buy-in for this goal; guiding growth may have not been viewed as a major issue, or at least one that warranted strong approaches. In other instances, the issue may have been identified as a significant one, but towns hesitated to pursue strategies perceived as overly burdensome on rural landowners. Or in still other cases, there may have been a sincere belief that the status quo or relatively mild approaches were all that was needed to realize the community's desired development pattern.

Additional Guidance

Following are some suggestions for the essential task of building public support for addressing this goal:

- ♦ Publicize and discuss the results of the update needs assessment, especially the evaluation of recent growth trends. Discuss whether the growth pattern exhibited in the last 5-10 years is one you want to perpetuate in the next decade.
- ♦ Take advantage of visualization techniques (see Recommendation #27) such as "buildout" scenarios that map the extent and location of future development under your community's land use policies and likely trends. While this technique was used in a number of 1990s planning processes, a typical approach was to depict a worse-case situation – filling up a town map with a dense pattern of lines and dots. In some cases, these maps were viewed scare tactics rather than a sincere effort to show future development trends. With use of Geographic Information Systems and other computer tools, build-out scenarios can be used more effectively – allowing for a range of scenarios to be shown based on different time frames, growth rates and other assumptions.
- ♦ Use other approaches described in the next section, *Top Recommendations for the Planning Process*. Recommendation #23 provides some additional pointers on promoting buy in and support.

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[☑ Go to Recommendations #31-#45](#)

5. Incorporate performance measures

Additional Guidance

The centrality of the goal of effectively guiding growth (as discussed in Recommendation 4) makes incorporating ways of assessing your progress on this goal essential. Your updated plan should make provisions for continuing the process of assessing the location of new development that was described in Recommendation #1, and setting growth targets. For example, your community might set a benchmark that 70% of new residential development that occurs during the next 10 years will ideally be located in designated growth areas. If, after a reasonable trial period, it is found that the established target is not being met, your plan could call for the consideration of additional strategies aimed at providing a mid-course correction.

Such benchmarks should reflect your community's specific growth objectives as set forth in your future land use plan and other policy sections. For example, if your community has designated a primary growth area around an existing downtown, village or neighborhood, a secondary growth area in a new area of town, and some *transitional areas* as well, you may wish to establish specific growth targets for each area. If an objective of your plan is to avoid a commercial strip development pattern, you should consider establishing a benchmark that a high percentage of new commercial square footage will occur in designated growth areas.

Use of such benchmarks requires an ongoing commitment to tracking development, and, in particular, noting its location relative to growth and rural areas.

Use of such benchmarks requires an ongoing commitment to tracking development, and, in particular, noting its location relative to growth and rural areas. Such effective tracking means that the municipal officials or staff

involved with issuing development permits or maintaining assessing records must be familiar with your community's growth/rural designations as depicted on your future land use map.

In its simplest form, a development tracking system would involve an annual tally of the amount of development occurring in growth and rural areas as gleaned from permit or assessing forms. The system could be considerably enhanced by linking the permit or assessment information to a computer database that allows for ongoing evaluation and ease of reporting. A number of Maine communities and most regional councils are beginning to take advantage of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and this technology can be a highly effective way of tracking development and depicting trends.

In addition to tracking the location of new structures, you may wish to incorporate other indicators to help assess progress on guiding development. Some examples include:

- ♦ The mileage of new public roads created/accepted in designated growth vs. rural areas;
- ♦ The number and acreage of new lots created in designated growth vs. rural areas, with a possible distinction made between subdivision and non-subdivision lots; and
- ♦ The percentage of new development that is served by public sewer and/or water, if these facilities are available in your community.

Performance measures should be considered for other aspects of your plan as well. The following chart provides some examples of outcomes for selected plan goals and some ways they might be measured.

Plan Goal/Policy	Performance Indicator	Example of target or benchmark (to be met by end of planning period)	How target is measured
Protecting Lake Water Quality	Change in transparency levels (as measured by observation of "secchi desks").	No reduction in transparency of some lakes; improvement in transparency for others.	Use of volunteer lake monitors.
Promoting Affordable Housing	Percent of new units affordable to low-to-moderate income households.	20% of new units affordable to those making 80% to 150% of the median household income.	Tracking sale prices relative to local income levels.
Meeting Senior Housing Needs	Number of new housing units constructed for senior citizens during planning period.	At least 5% of new residential units will be senior housing (accessory apartments included).	Tracking of development.
Preserving Open Space	Percentage of town lands permanently protected.	At least a 10% increase in amount of land in the community permanently protected. At least 50% of key parcels/features identified as "critical" successfully protected.	Tracking of development.
Reducing Public Infrastructure Costs	Percentage of new road construction that occurs in designated growth and transitional areas.	At least 70% of new public roads constructed are located in designated growth areas.	Tracking of development/road acceptance.
Improving Access Management Along Road Arterials	Posted speed limit along rural arterial roads.	No reduction in posted speed limits of roads with speed limits 50 mph or higher.	Tracking posted speed limit reductions.
Protecting Active F Farmlands	Change in number of active farming operations in town or amount of productive farmland.	No decrease in number of active farms. No more than a 10% reduction in the amount of productive farmland.	Development tracking.
Protecting Productive Forestlands	Acreage of land in Tree Growth Tax Program.	No loss in number of acres of land enrolled in Tree Growth Tax Program	Annual municipal valuation returns to Maine Revenue Service.
Strengthening The Local Economy	Number of new jobs created in local economy, or increase in commercial/industrial activity.	At least a 10% increase in the number of local jobs. A 20% increase in amount of commercial/industrial floor area.	Department of Labor statistics. Development tracking.

As you seek to improve follow-through on your plan's implementation strategies (see Recommendation #30), use benchmarks to evaluate progress on achieving positive outcomes, and integrate them into regular reporting back to the communities on the status of plan implementation.

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6. Try a visioning process

Additional Background

In addition to serving other roles, a well articulated vision statement can act as a filter through which to view the policy elements of your plan as they are developed. Used in this manner, the statement can help you to identify approaches that might be inconsistent with, or counterproductive to, your community's overall vision.

SPO recently conducted a pilot project aimed at supporting visioning exercises in selected communities and creating a model approach that would fit well within the budget and framework of a typical comprehensive plan process. A Community Visioning Handbook, based on this project, is now available on SPO's website. The handbook describes what a community vision is, provides a step-by-step guide to creating a community vision, and gives an example of a vision from one Maine town.

Additional Guidance

- ♦ Devote considerable energy to ensuring a high turnout of citizens at the session(s). Tout them as a unique opportunity to come together to shape your community's future over the next several decades. In addition to a strong publicity campaign, identify "movers and shakers" as well as individuals who might be skeptical about the visioning process and planning in general, and try to get their personal commitment to attend.
- ♦ A typical response of participants in visioning sessions is: "we want things to stay the same." The irony of this response is that the status quo of town policies and market forces is often a prescription for significant future change – often in a direction contrary to the desired vision. This tendency can be countered by providing information – visual and verbal – that shows participants what the future holds under current trends and town policies. Holding a panel discussion in which local realtors, planners and other "experts" weigh in on the subject is one approach. Visualization techniques, including buildout scenarios (see Recommendation #27) are another. What often becomes apparent after such presentations and discussions is that in order for things to stay the same, town policies may have to change – and the comprehensive planning process is touted as an instrument for examining what changes are necessary.
- ♦ Encourage participants to "think big" and to be visionary. Tell them to put concerns about cost, politics and other barriers aside, at least for now – those issues will be debated as part of the comprehensive planning process.

Excerpts from Waterboro Vision Statement

***South Waterboro** is the gateway to Waterboro, the primary road entrance to the south. In the future it shall have renovated homes and businesses, and a sidewalk and bike path along Route 202 ...*

***Waterboro Center** is the civic and cultural hub of the community. A new library and new post office would be located near to the Town Hall. Other possible civic/cultural buildings in the area would include a community center, a senior center, an ecology education center, or an arts center... Finally, this is a place where additional elderly housing or assisted living units could be built. The village will be easily walkable, with sidewalks and safe intersections and new landscaping... Outside of the village area, the rural character of the farms and open space will be preserved.*

***East Waterboro** is the shopping/retail center of the community. The intersection of Routes 202 and 5 is the best place to concentrate retail uses. A grocery store is there now. Other large stores, or an office/business park, could be located right next to or behind the existing development... Outside of this intersection, East Waterboro should remain rural and residential... Housing may be clustered near to the school.*

This area, with its lakes and Pine Barrens, has a wilderness feel. It is rich in wildlife and natural features. Traditional logging, farming, hunting, and fishing activities should continue. Any new housing that is developed should be small in scale and in a cluster arrangement, thus allowing large blocks of open space to remain protected. Roads should not be greatly improved, remaining dirt where possible, so as to discourage trucks and through traffic. The Pine Barrens conservation area should be expanded and linked to Ossipee Hill, creating one large nature preserve. This area must retain its wilderness character.

- ♦ Include an exercise in which participants identify the areas or features of the town that are most treasured, and whose permanent protection or maintenance is viewed as integral to the community's future vision. Maps and photographs can be used to make this exercise both fun and illuminating.
- ♦ The task of articulating what your community wants to be in the future can be a daunting one. Sometimes it is easier to reach consensus on what the town *doesn't* want to be. Participants may identify certain types of development that they don't want to see or even neighboring towns that they do not wish to emulate. This exercise can be helpful in finding common ground, and the feedback can be valuable to your comprehensive planning and implementation committees as they consider strategies to limit uses that citizens feel are inappropriate.
- ♦ Challenge participants to identify positive examples of what they'd like to see in the community. The visual preference survey technique described in Recommendation #27 can be an effective way to provide the public with a range of development and design options to consider, and to ascertain its views on what alternatives fit and don't fit in with its larger vision for the community.

Additional Resources [\(Go to Appendix D for weblinks\)](#)

- ♦ SPO Community Visioning Handbook
- ♦ A bibliography of visioning resources

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7. Think regionally

Additional Background

The recent statewide dialogue on smart growth has highlighted both the regional nature of sprawl and other forces that affect our communities. It has also highlighted the need for more coordinated interlocal approaches. There is increasing discussion of how communities can better work together to solve problems and how the state, through its policies, investments and initiatives, can promote a smarter growth pattern and encourage regional solutions. Ultimately, a stronger framework for regional coordination may need to be created, either by enhancing existing regional entities, creating new ones, or institutionalizing coalitions and relationships among communities.

On a very practical level, the consequences of not cooperating effectively with communities in your region can be higher municipal costs and taxes, as well the disjointed management of critical natural resources you share with other towns. On a more global level, it may jeopardize the realization of your community's vision for the future.

As highlighted in Part I, comprehensive plans are limited in their ability to address many regional problems. They can, however, play an important role in better regional coordination, and plan updates provide an opportunity to enhance this role. Even when regional forces are beyond your community's control, comprehensive plans can be improved to better anticipate and respond to those forces.

The Regional Coordination components of 1990s plans were typically not well developed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they did not result in a groundswell of cooperation between communities. For plans being reviewed by the state, objections were sometimes raised when regional issues were ignored or policies of neighboring towns were in conflict. In general, the state did not press hard on the regional coordination component, probably in recognition of the difficulty of this undertaking and the challenges of achieving consistency on other plan elements. In the review of plan updates, a more rigorous evaluation of the regional coordination component is likely.

To reiterate a major point from Part I, a stronger regional perspective and approach should be considered mainly because it is in your community's best interest to do so. Your town can develop an otherwise exemplary plan, but if it does not recognize the impact of regional forces and incorporate strategies for working with your neighbors on pressing common issues, the plan may prove ineffective at achieving your planning objectives. On a very practical level, the consequences of not cooperating effectively can be higher municipal costs and taxes,

as well the disjointed management of significant natural resources you share with other towns. On a more global level, it may jeopardize the realization of your community's vision for the future.

Additional Guidance

Improving Understanding of Regional Trends

- ◆ Even as you seek to make your inventory and analysis section “leaner and meaner,” try to widen your focus to the region as a whole.
- ◆ Especially for the inventory sections on economy, land use, housing, public facilities and transportation, be sure to include findings on how regional trends in these areas are likely to affect your community. If a nearby community is home to a major employer who is “downsizing,” is planning a major road bypass or has a town-wide growth cap, highlight those facts and their implications.
- ◆ Conversely, as you proceed with the planning process, consider the impact of your community's policies on your neighbors and on the region as a whole. As part of this two-way analysis, take note of areas where potential exists for your community to cooperate regionally to reverse counterproductive trends and embrace opportunities.

Even as you seek to make your inventory and analysis section “leaner and meaner,” try to widen your focus to the region as a whole.

Inventorying Shared Natural Resources

Most 1990s plans did identify natural resources that spanned municipal borders, along with a description of shared facilities and cooperative services. But enhancing this component in updates provides a stronger foundation for proposing meaningful joint management strategies.

- ◆ Include more up-to-date region-wide information, some of it now available in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) format.
- ◆ Contact your regional council to see what information pertaining to regional resources is available.
- ◆ As part of incorporating the *Beginning With Habitat* approach into your planning process (see Recommendation #37), analyze your community's wildlife habitat resources and unfragmented expanses of land relative to those of the larger region.
- ◆ Examine the development patterns and land use controls that effect shared resources in both your community and your neighbors.
- ◆ Take a holistic perspective by looking at watersheds, distinct ecological systems or large, undeveloped tracts that cross municipal borders.
- ◆ In your analysis, ask tough questions that will yield insightful findings: Is your neighboring town's approach to protecting shared resources more or less stringent than your own? Where are your neighbor's growth areas relative to these shared resources? If some degradation of the resource is identified, is the likely source located in your community or your neighbors'?

As part of incorporating the Beginning With Habitat approach into your planning process (see Recommendation #37), analyze your community's wildlife habitat resources and unfragmented expanses of land relative to those of the larger region.

Evaluating the Regional Component of Existing Plan

Return to the evaluation of your existing plan with a focus on regional coordination strategies, subjecting them to tough questioning.

- ◆ Were the recommended actions carried out?
- ◆ If so, did they lead to positive results, either in directly addressing the issue or leading to a productive ongoing dialogue?
- ◆ If there was poor follow-through or a lack of positive outcomes, what lesson can be learned that might be applied as you try to strengthen your approach to interlocal issues?

Obtaining Feedback from Neighboring Communities

Many 1990s plans proposed meeting with other communities as an implementation step, but the process itself included limited interactions with them. By engaging your neighbors, sooner rather than later, your community can gain revealing insights and begin the process of building a productive relationship.

- ♦ Hold a regional visioning session. This might be done as part of the local visioning process or as a separate exercise at the front-end of the planning process. Participants from the involved communities would forge a general vision for their region in the year 2020 or some other agreed-upon extended time frame, and agree on follow-up meetings.
- ♦ Invite officials from one or more adjacent communities to attend a meeting of your comprehensive planning committee, both to answer questions and provide their perspectives.
- ♦ If neighboring towns are developing or updating comprehensive plans, discuss opportunities for coordination and cooperation.
- ♦ If your committee is truly committed to planning cooperatively, consider conducting a joint comprehensive planning process. Under the Growth Management Law you may conduct a joint planning and regulatory program if details pertaining to procedures, representation and the cost of such programs are mutually agreed upon and a formal written agreement is approved by the legislative bodies of the participating municipalities.

Formulating Regional Strategies

- ♦ Make distinctions between different types of regional coordination efforts. Some may be exploratory in nature and aimed at establishing a dialogue with other communities on issues of mutual concern. Others may involve hammering out the details of specific implementation measures.
- ♦ Consider a targeted effort to work with neighbors on the protection and management of shared natural resources. You may want to delegate to your conservation commission or a subcommittee the task of creating a joint management strategy for the resource. But either as part of your plan update or a separate resource management plan, provide clear steps that each community is responsible for taking and benchmarks for measuring performance. In some cases, you may find there is a need to create a separate intermunicipal entity to be responsible for ongoing management (e.g., some communities have established watershed districts). In other instances, you may find that some management and stewardship responsibilities can be delegated to an existing lake association, or by creating a new grassroots organization (e.g., “Friends of” the resource group).
- ♦ To address issues involving regional sprawl, economic development, transportation and other challenging issues, create ongoing forums for discussion and problem-solving. For instance, in Cumberland County, a number of communities that share road corridors have been meeting on a subregional basis to discuss common issues and approaches.
- ♦ In your regional coordination section, include a discussion of how your community fits into the region and subregion. An opportunity exists to identify roles that each municipality can play, fostering a complementary rather than competitive relationship. SPO, in conjunction with regional councils, has been promoting the concept of *Extended*

Extended Communities

Our “communities,” as defined by where we work, shop and play, generally extend well beyond the borders of the municipalities in which we live. The expression “no town is an island” is particularly apt, as even the state’s island communities typically are linked closely to mainland town that provide jobs, services and other amenities.

Building on past studies and background data, SPO has identified 36 “extended communities” in the state composed of municipalities that are linked by proximity, but more importantly, by function. As originally conceived, an extended communities consisted of an urban center or cluster surrounded by a number of mostly residential communities, which were, in turn, ringed by towns that were predominately rural. Since that time, many of the rural communities have become more suburbanized. But the model still provides a helpful way to view how the communities in a region or subregion function and relate to each other.

As part of their contract work with SPO, most regional councils have developed reports on the extended communities in their region, and the roles played by cities and towns within them. For more information on the concept and how it might be used to strengthen your plan’s regional coordination component, contact your respective regional council or council of government.

Communities, which is aimed at building such relationships.

- ♦ Consider developing a regional or subregional economic development strategy based on your communities' collective assets and the principle that new large-scale projects should not result in "winner" and "losers." Investigate opportunities for creating a regional business park (e.g., *First Park* in the town of Oakland) and tax base sharing (see Appendix C).
- ♦ Work with, and utilize the services of, your regional council or council of governments. These organizations possess a wealth of information, and are well-positioned to assist in organizing regional coalitions to address planning issues. SPO contracts with councils on some regional initiatives, including interlocal presentations for planning grant recipients. But these organizations deserve continued municipal involvement and support to allow them to serve their regions effectively.
- ♦ Recognize and support the role played by other multi-town or regional groups in addressing regional issues, such as economic development and housing organizations, land trusts, Regional Transportation Advisory Committees (RTACs) and environmental groups that focus on watersheds or other regional natural resource systems.
- ♦ Finally, establish benchmarks that can be used for measuring progress on important joint goals. For example, benchmarks might be used to assess suburban sprawl patterns, establishing a target for the amount of future development in the region that will ideally occur within the primary service center and the designated growth areas of outlying areas. For housing, the benchmark might be that each community in the region provides a reasonable share of affordable housing for low and moderate-income families, with a commitment to implement a joint strategy to meet regional housing needs for very low-income families. Formalize periodic interlocal meetings at which performance regarding these benchmarks is evaluated, and additional measures proposed, if necessary.

Work with, and utilize the services of, your regional council or council of governments. These organizations possess a wealth of information and are well-positioned to assist in organizing regional coalitions and planning efforts.

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8. *Meaningfully address housing needs*

Additional Background

For plans submitted to the state for review, the affordable housing component has probably triggered the most "objections" (findings of inconsistency with state law), next to the Land Use Plan section and associated strategies for directing growth. Even communities that have adequately addressed this plan element have struggled to meet their affordable housing goals. Like the goal of guiding growth, there is no simple formula for success. But your plan update process can serve both as a forum for serious discussion of this issue and a means of approaching it in a more systematic fashion.

Additional Guidance

- ♦ All plans should include an objective analysis of housing needs in your community – both currently and 10 years into the future. Strive to use up-to-date information on income and housing prices, but avoid getting too bogged down in numbers.
- ♦ A comprehensive assessment of housing may involve more resources than you can reasonably afford for your immediate update process. If there seems to be agreement that your community suffers from an affordable housing problem, and this perception is supported by moderately detailed examination of available data, consider forging ahead on a number of fronts to address the problem. A separate housing committee can be charged with providing ongoing analysis of housing needs and tracking of progress.
- ♦ How aggressive an approach you actually pursue in your plan should be based largely on your assessment of the degree of your affordable housing problem, and the degree of public support for addressing it. For southern and coastal communities with soaring real estate values, forceful measures may be needed to approach the 10% target. In other areas, lack of affordable housing may be less of a problem – although it is important to remember that just maintaining the current level of affordability may require more actions in the future.
- ♦ As with the goal of guiding growth, it is also important to recognize the strong market forces that drive housing affordability. In most communities, new housing is provided by the private sector, and real estate

prices are determined by supply and demand. Your community's land use strategies and other policies can certainly affect this market. Use your plan update as an occasion to investigate what changes might be made to improve or maintain affordability. For at least the southern and coastal portions of the state, providing housing opportunities for residents who make less than 50% of the median household income may also require creative public/private partnerships and some level of subsidy.

Guidance on Housing Strategies

Below are listed some strategies your community might consider to increase opportunities for affordable housing. Your consultant or technical assistance provider should be able to provide additional help on these and other strategies. The Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) and local/regional housing organizations may be able to provide guidance as well.

- ◆ In designated growth areas, recommend density standards that allow for the construction of more affordable housing, and allow a variety of housing types – including duplexes, multi-family units and senior housing.
- ◆ Allow the creation of accessory “in law” apartments within single family homes.
- ◆ Require new subdivisions, at least those over a certain size, to provide a certain percentage (e.g., 10%) of affordable units.
- ◆ Comply with state laws regarding mobile home parks and manufactured housing. At least some of your growth areas should allow for mobile home park development at densities meeting state requirements.
- ◆ Streamline your permitting process to reduce the time, and expense, for project approval, with a focus on expediting subdivision approval in designated growth areas.
- ◆ Form partnerships with MSHA, non-profit organizations, employers, developers and other groups with the aim of working together to expand housing opportunities, locally and regionally.
- ◆ Where an unmet need is identified regarding “very low income” households (making less than 50% of the median family income), investigate subsidies and creative approaches to providing housing opportunities.

Additional Resources [\(Go to Appendix D for weblinks\)](#)

The **Maine State Housing Authority's** website provides a wealth of information on housing issues and programs.

A number of useful publications can be downloaded including:

- ◆ The State of Maine Housing, 2002.
- ◆ *Houses, Jobs and Maine People*, 2001. Excellent overview of affordable housing problem.
- ◆ Description of the Affordable Housing Subdivision Program.
- ◆ Memo from the Director describing programs and initiatives likely to result from \$19 million affordable housing bond approved by voters in 2001.

SPO also has available a publication on meeting the requirements of the mobile home park law.

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Build Community Support

As part of your overall strategy, educate and inform the public about why this issue is important. Many myths and misconceptions exist concerning affordable housing, and it will be difficult to garner support for aggressive strategies without a clear public commitment to solving the problem. Below are points to consider as you seek to foster community buy in for addressing affordable housing:

1. *Effectively respond to negative public perceptions of affordable housing. Cast the issue as one of providing housing that is affordable to a range of wage-earners – including young adults who grew up in the community and are interested in settling there, as well as teachers, municipal workers or others who are employed locally.*
2. *Make the connection between housing and economic development – particularly if your community has a significant local economy. Lack of workforce housing is both an impediment to new businesses seeking to locate in your area and to the growth of existing local businesses.*
3. *Do not assume that new housing is a net “loser” when it comes to paying its share of municipal expenses. In cities and towns with declining school enrollments and fixed costs, new housing may actually help to keep taxes down. Even if your community doesn't fit this profile, beware of overstating the costs of serving new housing – especially if this housing is located in neighborhoods close to existing facilities and services.*

9. *Plan for permanence*



Additional Guidance

In planning for permanence and pursuing other conservation objectives, the concept of *green infrastructure* can be an extremely useful one. We are most familiar with the term infrastructure to allude to the roads, utilities and other elements of our built environment that help sustain our communities. But green infrastructure constitutes the natural support system essential to our communities as well – providing vital ecological functions, sustaining water and air resources and contributing to our health and quality of life.

The concept of green infrastructure is a helpful way of viewing the benefits of wetlands, waterways, working landscapes, wildlife habitats, trails, parklands and the green areas of municipal centers. It emphasizes setting priorities, and establishing interconnections among these resources and other community elements. As you plan for permanence, consider what features and resources are essential to the future good health of your green infrastructure network and what opportunities exist for enhancing this network.

The community visioning process described in Recommendation #6 provides an excellent opportunity to begin planning for permanence. As citizens identify the features or areas of their community that they want to see protected in 20 years, they can be queried as to the extent of their commitment to permanent protection. This feedback can be extremely valuable as you later consider specific strategies as part of your plan update. Either in conjunction with the plan update process or subsequently, consider developing a specific open space plan that prioritizes valuable lands and features. Such plans help give strategic focus to permanent protection efforts and the targeting of limited resources.

As stated in Part I, planning for permanence generally involves a commitment beyond perusing regulatory measures that blunt the impacts of new development on the features deemed most critical to your community. In fact, these measures can sometimes work against the objective as they create the impression that areas are being protected – without the need for additional expense or effort. Some innovative regulatory strategies can be used to effectively preserve key open spaces as part of the development review and approval process, including the use of conservation subdivisions as described in Recommendation #41. But in many cases, non-regulatory approaches may prove to be the most appropriate protection mechanism.

In general, planning for permanence involves a commitment beyond perusing regulatory measures that blunt the impacts of new development on the features deemed most critical to your community.

These strategies generally involve seeking donation or bargain sale of key properties, outright fee purchases, buying development rights, negotiating conservation easements and making direct investments on improvements to enhance your community's green infrastructure network. A growing network of local and regional land trusts are available to help your community pursue such approaches. Programs such as the Land for Maine's Future program provide an ongoing funding source for efforts to permanently protect exceptional lands.

Additional Resources ([see Appendix D for weblinks](#))

- ♦ **Maine Coast Heritage Trust website.** Includes information on conservation easement and other land protection approaches, and well as a listing of local land trusts.
- ♦ **Land for Maine's Future webpage.** Contains information current projects and upcoming funding.

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10. *Focus on the fiscal*

Additional Guidance

A major premise of Maine's recent smart growth efforts is that, while people should have the freedom to choose where they live, they should also bear the true costs of their decisions. Unfortunately, many federal, state, regional and local policies effectively subsidize the costs of sprawl, which has the effect of further promoting this development pattern and passing the costs onto the larger population.



A major premise of Maine's recent smart growth efforts is that, while people should have the freedom to choose where they live, they should also bear the true costs of their decisions.

As a result of recent legislation, the state has been reexamining how its investments, regulatory policies and programs may be contributing to sprawl. Counterproductive approaches have been identified and a number of policies have been altered to promote a less costly growth pattern. There are positive signs that the federal government is starting to reexamine some of its policies as well.

As stated in Part I, your plan update provides an opportunity to conduct a similar process relative to your community's investments and policies. Following are some suggestions for better addressing this issue:

- ♦ Use your planning process as an opportunity to document and raise awareness regarding the costs of sprawl, both to your community, to your region and to Maine taxpayers as a whole.
- ♦ Focus on how the collective policies and investments of the communities in the region affect development patterns, service delivery costs, traffic and other issues. Propose measures and forge coalitions aimed at avoiding counterproductive practices and fostering a less costly regional development pattern.
- ♦ Investigate opportunities for better apportioning the costs of residential development in outlying areas of your community. For example, a requirement that sprinkler systems be installed in new buildings in these areas may avoid the need for construction of a new fire station.
- ♦ Carefully evaluate your existing plan and your community's ongoing investment policies and practices as to their impact on growth patterns. Identify approaches that may be undermining your overall vision for the future – and ones that support it.
- ♦ Based on these lessons learned, provide clear direction in your plan update on how your community's fiscal and investment practices can best support your desired growth pattern. To the greatest extent possible, try to link your plan's fiscal and land use policies.
- ♦ Use the formulation of your Capital Investment Plan (CInP) as an occasion to highlight the basic principle that improved facilities and infrastructure generally spur development. Make this a strong factor in your decision-making. In your CInP itself, make a distinction between growth and rural area investments, and/or include a column to describe how the investment might impact growth.
- ♦ As part of your overall fiscal analysis, do not forget that recurring capital expenses and service costs that do not show up in your CInP may also have a bearing on growth issues and other considerations. For example, your decision to plow private camp roads may not only be expensive to the town, but may promote seasonal conversions. Be sure to identify such issues and provide clear policy guidance regarding them.

Carefully evaluate your existing plan and your community's ongoing investment policies and practices as to their impact on growth patterns.

Example of Capital Investment Plan With Strong Connection to Land Use Plan

Item	Location	Cost Estimate	Timing Estimate	Possible Funding Source	Relationship to growth plan
Road and sidewalk improvements	Growth Area	\$50K	2003-5	General Fund	Will help improve livability of growth area and improve village street network.
Sewer line extension	Growth Area	\$200K	2005-10	Patient Sewer Loan Fund, Hookup fees	Will help accommodate expected growth.
Village landscaping	Growth Area	\$5 K	2003-4	Grants, General Fund	Will help improve livability of growth area.
Village school improvements	Growth Area	\$1 million	2005-6	State Education Funds, local funds: general funds and bonding	Will alleviate projected overcrowding without construction of new school in adjacent community.
Fire station addition	Growth Area	\$100K	2005-10	General Fund	Will improve fire protection services to growth area.
New tanker truck	N/A	\$50K	2005-10	General Fund	
Road reconstruction	Mostly Rural	50K (local share)	2008-12	MDOT, General Fund	Improvement needed to address safety and traffic problems.
Purchase of development rights: Smith Farm	Critical Rural	\$100K	2005-10	LMF, private donations	Will help keep working farm in operation.
Selected land and easement purchases	Critical Rural	\$100-200K	2005-13	Donations, private funds, reserve funds	Will help to permanently protect high-value rural lands.

Additional Resources ([Go to Appendix D for weblinks](#))

The Cost of Sprawl. An SPO publication that provides a compelling analysis of the costs of sprawl on Maine taxpayers, the environment and community character.

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11. *Anticipate unintended consequences*

No Additional Guidance.

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12. *Integrate transportation planning considerations*

Additional Background

Transportation planning in Maine in the 1990s underwent some profound changes. These changes have affected how road and other transportation improvements are planned, and given more attention to alternative forms of travel and pollution reduction. The federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and Maine's Sensible Transportation Act, both enacted in 1991, as well as the Clean Air Act (1990) marked a shift toward a more holistic perspective, including more consideration of the relationship between land use patterns and transportation.



These changes have had the general effect of improving opportunities for working constructively with the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) on local and regional transportation issues. MDOT has broadened its focus to a more integrated view of transportation modes and options. At the same time, the agency has become more assertive in efforts to preserve the efficiency of the state's arterial road system by promoting better land use practices, as evidenced in the recent adoption of statewide rules governing access management.

Additional Guidance

Better cooperation and coordination with MDOT as part of your update can be pursued through the following avenues.

- ♦ Familiarize yourself with the agency's programs, plans, projects and staff by visiting MDOT's website. Information most pertinent to your update can be found under the Bureau of Planning, particularly under the Community Services Division and Plan and Program Development Division. A recently updated guide on how municipalities can work with MDOT is also located on the webpage.
- ♦ Become acquainted with the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) for your area, established by MDOT as a vehicle for better coordination with regions and localities. Investigate opportunities for improved participation.
- ♦ Try to integrate aspects of your update with MDOT's ongoing planning efforts. MDOT develops a 6-year capital improvement plan in which the agency sets priorities for upcoming transportation investments. Communicate with MDOT about identified transportation needs in your town, which might be addressed in the agency's upcoming plan. Review MDOT's current 6-year plan to see what improvements are slated for your region and community. Consider the possible impacts of these improvements and how you might better plan for them in your update.

In addressing the state's new access management rules, consider the following:

- ♦ Familiarize your community with these rules and what roadways in your community are covered by them. Excellent guidance on the agency's access management program can be found on its website.
- ♦ In your plan update, provide some background on access management and the state's rules, identify the roadways covered under the rules, and provide direction on how and when the rules can best be coordinated with your existing permitting and review process.
- ♦ Consider controlling the location of driveways and entrances on roads not covered by the new state rules. If appropriate, recommend that access management provisions be applied to these roadways as well.
- ♦ MDOT views its driveway and entrance rules as one component of an effective access management program aimed at maintaining capacity and improving safety on major road corridors. The agency is in the process of identifying "high risk" arterials, and it intends to form partnerships with municipalities, property owners and other stakeholders to promote a more integrated management approach to these corridors. Following MDOT's lead, consider taking a similar broad approach to overall road corridor management on any

highway classified as an arterial in your community. Recommendation #39 on addressing commercial strip development provides some additional guidance on this point.

As you seek to broaden your perspective on transportation and land use issues to the region as whole, consider the following suggestions.

Work closely with your regional council. Most of these agencies are actively engaged in transportation planning, and seeking ways to foster a more integrated regional approach.

- ♦ Work closely with your regional council. Most of these agencies are actively engaged in transportation planning, and are seeking ways to foster a more integrated regional approach. Some councils, such as the Greater Portland Council of Governments, have formed subregional coalitions based on major road corridors that serve them.
- ♦ Collaborate with one of the state's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (based in Portland, Lewiston/Auburn, Bangor and Kittery), if your community is within or adjacent to their planning regions. These agencies are responsible for prioritizing the use of federal highway funds within federally designated urbanized areas.
- ♦ Keep abreast of the activities of your Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC). Review its Regional Advisory Report to ascertain regional priorities, policies and programs.

The transportation sections of most plans tend to focus on road and automobile travel. While this is understandable in light of the rural nature of the state, don't overlook opportunities for promoting other forms of transportation in your community.

- ♦ Even rural communities are recognizing the value of bicycle and pedestrian paths, both as a means of getting people around and improving the livability of their communities. Whether it is reuse of an abandoned railroad right-of-way, preserving accessways as land is developed or investing in bike paths, your plan can foster better mobility and recreational opportunities. MDOT has a program aimed at fostering opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian travel; information on it is available on the agency's webpage.
- ♦ If your community is served by bus, train, ferry or some other form of mass transit, or has potential for such service, consider possible implications and impacts in your update. Familiarize yourself with likely transit improvements during the upcoming planning period by reviewing MDOT's 20-year plan, and the funding priorities of your area's Metropolitan Planning Organization, if it has one.

Finally, as you look closely at the relationship between your community's road investment and improvement policies and your proposed growth area and land use plan, consider the following points:

- ♦ In general, avoid creating new growth areas along arterials that carry high-speed traffic. Even on segments with lower speeds, give careful consideration before establishing new village or residential growth areas. For commercial growth areas along arterials, keep them compact, avoid creating a linear strip and control access.
- ♦ In growth areas, promote the creation of new local roads, of interconnections between existing ones, and sidewalks or other pedestrian connections. This will better accommodate development in these areas and make your village areas more walkable, accessible and vibrant. One promising approach, used by communities in the past, is to proactively "plat out" interconnected road networks in growth areas, creating an overall plan for how the network should evolve as property is privately developed. [Appendix C](#) provides more information on this approach.
- ♦ In rural areas, new roads and improvements to existing ones spur development. Consider limiting the amount of new road building (except land management roads not used for development purposes) in designated rural areas. Set a maximum length for new rural subdivision roads.
- ♦ Road acceptance policies also can have the effect of promoting rural road development. Consider a policy that new rural subdivision roads must be privately owned and maintained.

Additional Resources ([Go to Appendix D for weblinks](#))

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13. *Strengthen your plan as an economic development tool*

Additional Resources ([Go to Appendix D for weblinks](#))

- ♦ **The Department of Economic and Community Development** offers a number of programs and initiatives that should be considered as you beef up your plan's economic development sections. Visit the agency's website. The Community Development pages may be most helpful.
- ♦ **The Maine Downtown Center** serves as a clearinghouse for information related to Downtown development. The center provides funding, training and technical assistance to help communities revitalize their downtowns by fostering economic development, business growth, job recreation, housing revitalization, historical preservation and cultural enhancements in downtowns.
- ♦ A number of state agencies administer programs and provide assistance aimed at promoting resource-based enterprises, such as farming, fishing and forestry. For more information, contact the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources, the Department of Marine Resources, and the Maine Forestry Service. A listing of these and other state agencies can be found at the Maine state government webpage.

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14. *Balance tradeoffs*

No additional guidance.

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15. *Pay attention to plan format*

No additional guidance.

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TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLANNING PROCESS

16. *Select a strong planning committee*

Additional Guidance

- ♦ In aiming for a balance of views and inclusion of important “stakeholders,” make sure that a range of private, public and non-profit interests are represented, as well as a diversity of income, age, gender and length of residency among individual members. If it is anticipated that particular constituencies or prominent individuals may be skeptical about planning or land use regulations, try to get them to serve on the committee.
- ♦ Strive to get at least some elected officials to serve. If this is not possible, establish a formal mechanism for communicating with your elected officials (getting on their regular meeting agenda or setting up specific workshops).
- ♦ As you consider committee membership, try to identify the “movers and shakers” in your community – the people who often assume leadership roles on projects and issues, and who are frequently agents of change.
- ♦ In most instances, avoid an approach in which your planning board alone is designated as the official planning committee. Even if the composition of your planning board is sufficiently diverse, it may be unrealistic to expect your board to devote the time and energy needed to update your comprehensive plan, while fulfilling its ongoing responsibilities of reviewing development proposals that come before the town. Instead, consider appointing planning board representatives to the committee, and/or scheduling regular meetings between the committee and the planning board to update progress and discuss issues.

As you consider committee membership, try to identify the “movers and shakers” in your community.

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17. *Appoint the right chairperson*

Additional Guidance

- ♦ Some towns have appointed co-chairs to lead their planning committees. This approach may be worthwhile if you have two excellent candidates who otherwise will not serve independently. Having two chairs can make committee decision-making less efficient, and requires the two individuals to establish a close and trusting working relationship.
- ♦ Some chairpersons are good facilitators, but have difficulty cracking the whip when it comes to getting through agenda items in a timely manner. If this is the case, try designating a committee member as the official “timekeeper” who will regularly keep the group apprised of time limits.

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18. *Build an effective committee*

Additional Guidance

- ♦ In establishing a set of ground rules for the running of your committee, provide enough guidance to keep the process moving forward without stifling openness and spontaneity.
- ♦ Discuss and implement ways of making your committee’s meetings as productive as possible. Set realistic agendas that not only set forth discussion topics but pose questions to resolve before adjourning.
- ♦ Different models exist for running effective meetings. Some involve a fairly structured approach aimed at staying on task and

Discuss and implement ways of making your committee’s meetings as productive as possible.

building consensus. Others are more informal, but still adhere to defined principles and objectives. Some of these models have developed as part of efforts to improve corporate decision-making, but you may find many of the guiding principles helpful as you work to improve the productivity of your meetings. For a sampling of some of these models, trying surfing the internet using the keywords “effective meetings.”

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19. *Understand the different roles involved in public participation*

Additional Guidance

An effective public participation program is a two-way street that involves a flow of information from the public to the committee, but also from the committee to the public. On one hand, your committee needs to know what the public is most concerned about before getting very far into the process. On the other hand, information and analysis presented to the public can have a strong bearing on the latter’s priorities and how it views possible solutions.

Committees may be less familiar, or comfortable, with the roles that involve education and advocacy. These roles, however, may be the most crucial ones as your community tries to formulate a bolder plan.

At its most basic level, your committee’s educational role is to inform the public about what comprehensive planning is (and what it is not), and provide facts and figures to help citizens better understand the issues facing the town. You should also find ways of sharing your evaluation of the existing plan, the recent growth analysis and your committee’s preliminary findings – some of which may be more value-laden. For example, if your committee has found that more than 70% of recent residential development has occurred in designated rural areas, foster awareness of this finding and use it as a starting place for a candid discussion of the effectiveness of your community’s existing growth policies. In this role, you may find it necessary to challenge approaches that don’t seem to be working or which appear to have negative unintended consequences – supported by visualization techniques (see Recommendation #27) and compelling analysis.

Used selectively, the role of devil’s advocate can be valuable for your committee. It can be an effective way to challenge conventional wisdom and address common misconceptions. Often you will find people on your committee who are good at playing this role in good humor without creating defensiveness.

What about advocacy itself – having your committee strongly endorse a course of action – even in the face of initial public skepticism or even opposition? While this role needs to be performed with sensitivity, it is essential in creating a bold plan. Your planning committee is ultimately responsible to the public. But as the lay specialists appointed to help chart your community’s future (and a group that is being asked to devote considerable time and effort in an often thankless job), your committee should be prepared to fully explore the issues, make meaningful proposals and explain the thinking behind them. For the general public that is not immersed in the update project, some of your committee’s suggestions may on first blush seem unnecessary or even radical. You may find, however, that once you have laid out the background for your decision-making and pros and cons of the proposed strategy, opposition may shift to support.

Your committee’s understanding of these different roles, and an appreciation of these roles by the public, is crucial, and should be discussed early in the process. Initial outreach efforts should focus on describing the planning committee’s multiple roles, and its overall approach to public participation.

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20. *Foster leadership*

No additional guidance.

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21. *Develop a creative and effective public participation strategy*

Following is an example of a Public Participation Program. The sample program proposes only three community wide meetings (not including the required public hearing) and no town-wide survey, but includes a variety of other components aimed at soliciting views and informing the public.

Outreach Component	Description of Activities	Timing
Internet Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Create a comprehensive planning page on the town's website, and advertise its availability to the community. ◆ Post general information on comprehensive planning, committee composition and role, and the anticipated update process in the form of FAQ (frequently asked questions), as well a listing of useful weblinks. ◆ Announce all plan-related activities. ◆ Post slideshow focusing on evaluation of existing plan, major issues facing town and preliminary plan findings. ◆ Post vision statement and draft plan sections as they become available. ◆ Provide e-mail address for comments/suggestions. 	Ongoing
Public Opinion Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ No town-wide survey to be conducted. Focused surveys to be handed out and collected at neighborhood forums. Provocative quick-response survey questions posted on website. 	Ongoing
Computer Slideshow Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Create computer slideshows using existing and new digital images that can be presented at scheduled formal meetings, "taken on the road" by committee members or loaned out by local organizations, and posted on the website.³ 	Ongoing
Visioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Session #1: Setting an overall vision for the town. ◆ Session #2: Preliminary discussion of growth and rural areas. ◆ Resulting vision statement disseminated on website, in town newsletter and in local newspaper. 	Early in process
Town-wide Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Schedule a tour of town, focusing on areas most treasured by citizens and those subject to the most change: e.g., waterfronts; villages or suburbanizing rural lands. Use school buses or a convoy of vans, depending on level of interest. ◆ Take video footage of the tour that can be shown at public forums. 	Between first and second visioning session
Neighborhood Forums (to be held in 5 defined neighborhood areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Present slideshow on existing plan evaluation, recent growth trends, buildout analysis and preliminary plan findings. ◆ Present and discuss vision statement. ◆ Solicit views on town-wide and neighborhood issues, on implications of recent and future growth trends, and on growth and rural areas. (Use both written questionnaires and general discussion.) 	After visioning sessions and formulation of preliminary growth and rural areas
Town-wide Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Meeting# 1: Present plan findings relating to growth and development, and preliminary growth/rural areas. Solicit views. 	After neighborhood forums
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Meeting #2: Present draft policies and strategies, including revised growth and rural areas. Explain rationale behind approaches. Solicit views. 	After meeting #2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Meeting #3: Present revised draft plan. Solicit views. 	After meeting #3
Town Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Include a regular column on comprehensive planning news and events in the town's bi-monthly newsletter. 	Ongoing

³ You may want to create several different slideshow variations depending on your audience, the stage you are at and other factors. Computer slideshows can be easily modified. At a minimum, you should consider creating at least two presentations: one to provide background and initial findings at the front-end of your process; and the other to highlight major components of the plan as it evolves.

Outreach Component	Description of Activities	Timing
Coordination with News Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Announce all upcoming events in local newspapers. ◆ Contact media about publicizing major comprehensive planning events. 	Ongoing
Local Cable TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tape and broadcast visioning sessions and all town-wide forums. ◆ Tape neighborhood sessions for broadcast later. ◆ Tape and broadcast weekly program devoted to plan-related issues and events. 	Ongoing
School Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Involve students in visioning process, either in separate sessions or as a segment of town-wide session. ◆ Integrate comprehensive planning into curriculum. 	Ongoing
Public Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Informal afternoon workshop for questions and answers. ◆ Formal evening public hearing to receive testimony. 	After town-wide meeting #4
Town-wide Mailing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Send out goals, policies and strategy section as insert in bi-monthly town newsletter. Also include a summary of what changes were made in the public hearing draft (or not made) and why. 	After public hearing
Town Meeting or Council Vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Have response team ready to address last minute question. Have final FAQ ready for voters. 	At town meeting

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22. *Avoid over-reliance on meetings and surveys*

No additional guidance.

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23. *Create “buy in”*

Placing more emphasis on planning as a local need, rather than a state imposition, does not mean that the Growth Management Law should be disregarded as you develop your plan. While the Law has been modified since its inception to remove some of its mandatory elements, developing and adopting a plan that is consistent with the Law is still the best course of action for your community. With a plan that has received a finding of consistency from SPO, and with ordinances that are clearly supported by that plan, you are on the strongest footing in the event those ordinances are subjected to a legal challenge. Having a finding of plan consistency from SPO is also a requirement for a number of state grant, loan and investment programs, and a scoring preference for others.

If your community is ready to embark on a bold planning process, with the aim of formulating a plan and implementation program that effectively responds to identified issues and needs with a focus on measurable outcomes, your plan should have little problem achieving consistency. Ultimately, a consistency finding by the state, although advantageous, does not guarantee an effective plan and successful implementation. Building a sense of ownership in the process and product, and local accountability in moving forward, on the other hand, is likely to yield positive and lasting results.

Some state goals and directives face initial resistance, not because they are irrelevant, but because they involve difficult issues and decision-making.

Most of the elements of the Growth Management Law do relate strongly to issues and needs that affect communities and their regions. Some provisions, such as those requiring the designation of growth and rural areas and the setting affordable of housing targets, challenge communities to confront difficult issues. These elements sometimes face initial resistance, not because they are irrelevant, but because they involve difficult issues and decision-making. For these and other elements, make an informed assessment of their pertinence to your community, based on your inventory findings, evaluation of your existing plan, and analysis of recent and

future trends. After conducting such an assessment, your planning committee will be in a much stronger position to advocate certain concepts and strategies – not as something alien to your community, but as something that is needed. Using the full array of approaches laid out in your public participation plan, engage the public in a meaningful dialogue aimed at achieving common ground.

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24. *Overcome problem issues*

Tackle problem issues early in your planning process while people are most energized. If these issues relate to the community's larger goals, make them a focal point at your visioning sessions. Provide the public with accurate information relating to these issues and try to dispel myths and misconceptions that may be contributing to the impasse.

For extremely stubborn issues, consider a structured process aimed at conflict resolution. In some instances, it may be worthwhile to hire a facilitator who is trained in consensus building to oversee the exercise. Consider alternative participatory methods that might move your community toward resolution.

- ♦ *Charettes* bring stakeholders together in an intense effort to reach common ground on solutions. While charettes are often used to reach consensus on conceptual plans and design issues, the approach of focused sessions devoted to problem-solving can be applied to a range of situations.
- ♦ *Collaborative efforts* generally involve a more drawn out process in which major stakeholders methodically work through their differences, often with the help of a trained facilitator. This model has been used successfully in both the public and private sectors.
- ♦ *Interest-based negotiations* involve a process in which parties focus on their combined interests. Through an exchange of information the parties gain a greater understanding of their own, and the other party's, needs. The problem is defined in a way that allows the parties to approach a mutually satisfactory solution.

If the issue continues to resist resolution, don't let it take over your update process. Either make a strategic decision to defer additional debate on the issue, or set up a separate process devoted to its ultimate resolution.

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25. *Seek professional help*

Additional Resources

A listing of Regional Planning Commissions. [See Appendix G.](#)

SPO's webpage has [a partial listing of land use consultants.](#)

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26. *Maintain enthusiasm and momentum*

A major challenge in maintaining momentum can be committee burnout. Burnout often becomes evident as members resign or begin to regularly miss meetings. Burnout can also manifest itself in a shift of attitude among remaining committee members, who may become frustrated with lack of progress or disheartened by a feeling that the public is hostile or indifferent.

No planning committee can inoculate itself from burnout, but here are a few suggestions for keeping it at bay.

- ♦ Set a focused, but realistic schedule for completion of the project, and select committee members who can commit themselves to regular attendance for its duration.

If signs of burnout begin to occur, confront the issue directly with a discussion of what is causing it and how it might be counteracted.

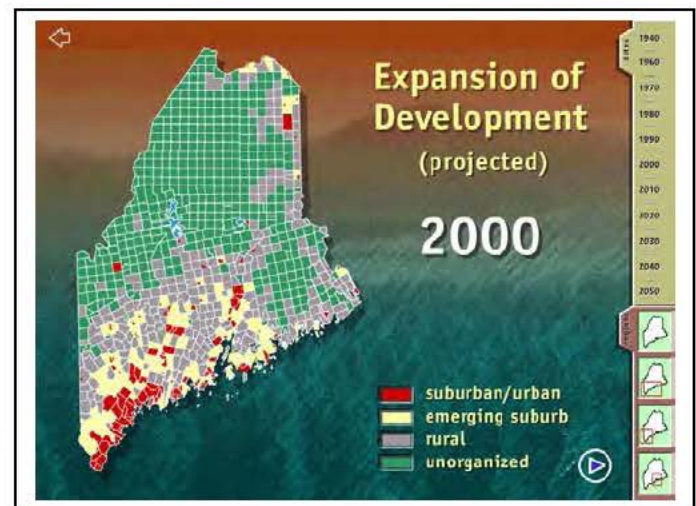
- ♦ Establish a mutually agreeable meeting time early in the process, and have members reserve this time slot for the length of the project.
- ♦ Set a maximum time for committee meetings, and stick to it. Meetings longer than 2 hours can be tedious, regardless of how compelling the subject matter, especially if you are meeting in the evening.
- ♦ Establish a policy that it is the responsibility of members missing meetings to inform themselves about what transpired, either through debriefing with attending members, reviewing minutes, or viewing videotapes or audio recordings of the meetings.
- ♦ Consider ways to make committee meetings more enjoyable, and even fun. Have refreshments and snacks available. Take advantage of audio-visual aides. Devote a few meetings, or portions of them, to alternatives to the typical discussion approach, such as role playing, mock debates, field visits and team-building exercises. Consider holding a few recreational outings.
- ♦ If signs of burnout begin to occur, confront the issue directly with a discussion of what is causing it and how it might be counteracted. If members begin to miss meetings, approach them one-on-one to determine what the problem is.
- ♦ If members do resign, have ready an approach for appointing replacement members, orienting them to the committee's charge and ground rules, and getting them up to speed on the plan-in-progress. If the resigning member represented a particular constituency or viewpoint, you should generally try to appoint a similar replacement.
- ♦ Do all you can to make comprehensive plan committee members (as well as all other board members and volunteers) feel valued and appreciated for the long hours they put into the project. Give them credit in the town report and other publications. Hold cookouts and awards suppers in their honor. At public hearings and Town Meeting votes, applaud their time and effort, and encourage the public to do the same, even if they don't agree with everything in the plan.

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27. Get visual

Use of *buildout scenarios* that depict the possible extent and location of future development under your community's land use policies and likely future growth trends can be a powerful planning tool. Use of GIS technology and computer software now allows you to plug in different scenarios and growth assumptions, and to instantly view the resulting future growth pattern. Combined with computerized slideshow software, these different growth scenarios can be seamlessly presented at public forums.

Visual preference slideshows and surveys are an effective way of eliciting feedback on planning and design alternatives. Contrasting images are presented and participants are then asked to indicate their preferences, serving as an excellent springboard to discussion. For example, an image of a classic village streetscape with small lots and minimal setbacks is juxtaposed to a new neighborhood with expansive lots and setbacks. Or an aerial photograph of a conventional subdivision is contrasted to a "clustered" conservation subdivision. In some instances, generic images can be used; in other cases, you may want to use local photos.



Use of digital photographs and computer software that allows images to be electronically altered can also yield a variety of planning and design alternatives to which participants can react. These techniques generally involve use of computers and software beyond the usual standard fare. Many planning consultants are well versed in visualization techniques, and you may want to make this capability a strong consideration in your consultant selection process. The professional planning community is beginning to embrace innovative software that allows images to be created and altered to allow the exploration of various "what if" scenarios. As mentioned in Part I, technological developments over the last decade have also made it possible for planning committees to create powerful audio-visual presentations.

Additional Resources ([Go to Appendix D for weblinks](#))

- ♦ Background Information on Visual Preference Surveys.
- ♦ Community Viz™, developed by the non-profit Orton Foundation, provides advanced visualization software programs.

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28. *Coordinate with SPO staff*

In an effort to improve early communication, SPO now requires planning grant recipients to agree to an early orientation session with a member of the agency's Land Use Team. Either at a regularly scheduled meeting of your planning committee or a special session, the team member will describe SPO's expectations for updating plans, highlight relevant smart growth principles and typical pitfalls of the 1990s planning processes, and be available for questions and answers. The person most likely to make this presentation and to provide other planning support on your project is the person listed in your contract with SPO as the contract administrator.

If your community is updating a plan without state financial assistance, SPO staff can provide an orientation session upon request – as long as you provide them with adequate lead time for scheduling purposes. If you are interested in such a session, contact SPO, and you will be referred to the planner who serves your region.

Bearing in mind the previous caution regarding SPO staff limitations, keep your representative at the agency informed on your progress. E-mail provides an excellent mechanism for providing updates and posing questions. It is suggested that you designate your committee chair or staff planner as the official liaison with SPO staff to simplify communication. In general, you will find SPO staff responsive to your needs – especially when this feedback can help avoid problems that would otherwise likely surface when your final plan is formally reviewed for consistency.

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29. *Bring your plan to successful closure...*

Additional Background

A number of factors can make the end of a comprehensive planning difficult. Committees may be diminished both in number and enthusiasm as signs of burnout appear. Members of the public who have been heavily involved in the planning process to date may grow weary of the process as well, or assume the plan no longer needs their help and support. Your planning budget may be depleted, and your consultant may have moved on or have limited hours remaining. On the other hand, groups or individuals that have been difficult or unwilling to engage in the planning process may now come forward with strong objections to particular provisions.

Faced with these developments, your planning committee may be inclined to pass the plan off to other town boards, or to assume a passive role as the public debates the merits of the plan. Resist this temptation. At this critical juncture, your plan needs a strong advocate who can clearly explain the rationale behind what is being proposed. While remaining open to additional comments and criticisms, be ready to make the case for key provisions and to clear up misconceptions.

Additional Guidance

If your community is planning to submit the plan for formal state review, consider this as you design your overall process and schedule. The review period set under statute is 60 days. Scheduling the review prior to your community's final approval process often makes sense as it affords more flexibility in responding to state comments prior to plan adoption. On the other hand, you may decide that the timing is right to forge ahead with a vote on the plan rather than losing momentum while the state conducts its review. If your community has followed Recommendation #28 in requesting informal review of plan sections throughout the planning process,

you are likely to find that fewer revisions (if any) will be needed to achieve consistency with the Growth Management Law.

Holding a formal public hearing prior to a Town Meeting or Council vote is a legal requirement of a comprehensive plan process. Although public hearings an important source of public input, consider comments in the context of the feedback you have received throughout the entire planning process.

Remain vigilant and responsive even as the plan is approaching a final vote. This is a time when the town rumor mill can undermine a good faith planning effort.

In some communities, public hearings are highly structured affairs in which the public offers testimony with little opportunity for questions and answers or clarifying responses from the committee. If this is the case, consider holding an informal workshop prior to the hearing to allow for constructive debate and discussion.

When revisions are complete and you have a final proposal, consider ways of widely disseminating the plan that will on voted at Town Meeting or by your Council. Mailing a copy of the entire plan out to citizens may be feasible in some communities, but cost-prohibitive in others. A reasonable approach may be to post the entire plan on your website, have full copies available upon request and mail a summary of plan policies and strategies community-wide.

Finally, remain vigilant and responsive even as the plan is approaching a final vote. This is a time when the town rumor mill can undermine a good faith planning effort. Consider creating a crib sheet for voters or councilors that highlights major plan recommendations and addresses any last-minute questions or misconceptions that seem to be afoot in the community.

The degree to which your planning committee or supporters work to promote a positive vote on the plan is a strategic decision that deserves careful consideration. In light of all the hard work that went into the plan – ideally with extensive public outreach – it makes sense to do some practical head counting regarding who is likely to attend and vote for the plan. On the other hand, efforts to “pack the hall” or lobby behind the scenes can backfire. You may ultimately have the most success with an approach aimed at getting out the vote (both pro and con), and working tirelessly to sell the plan on its merits right up to the final vote.

If the plan is rejected, don’t take it personally. If the plan was narrowly defeated, determine what aspects of the plans were problematic. If opposition seems to have been based on a misunderstanding, consider additional public outreach and clarification. If the public seems squarely opposed to particular provisions, examine how the related plan goal might be achieved in a more acceptable fashion. Effectively communicate with the public on how the plan has been revised to address its concerns, and consider scheduling a revote on the plan while momentum and familiarity with the plan are still high.

If your plan is soundly rejected, a quick revote is probably ill-advised – even with significant changes. Such a circumstance may indicate inherent weaknesses in your public participation process – or deep divisions within your community on particular issues. Although it may be initially difficult to cast the result positively, view it as a valuable learning experience that you can build upon. Do a thorough post-mortem, and decide whether it is best to forge ahead or take a break before reengaging the public and the process.

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30. ...And effectively follow through on its implementation

Additional Background

Some insights on improving the effectiveness of plan implementation can be gained by further examining typical problems experienced by communities in the 1990s. In some towns, certain plan recommendations were ignored, or they were implemented in a manner that either contradicted elements of the plan or were so watered-down as to be ineffective. In some cases, confusion existed about who was responsible for follow-through, or the schedule

The ultimate success of an implementation program should be determined not by the amount of effort put into it, but by the positive results it achieved.

that described responsible parties and time frames was unrealistic in light of available time and resources. For other communities, the problem lay mostly in a lack of strong commitment to the plan itself, and of public buy in for its approaches. When actually faced with pursuing certain policies, some towns got cold feet, or found that opposition to particular strategies resurfaced as the details became apparent. More than a few communities voted to reject land use ordinances that had been developed or revised in accordance with plan directives, or eliminated key provisions in order to make them politically palatable.

For communities that dutifully checked off most items in their implementation schedules, a larger question remains: Were the steps taken effective in achieving the desired end? The ultimate success of an implementation program should be determined not by the amount of effort put into it, but the positive results it achieved.

Additional Guidance

Below are a number of suggestions for improving the implementation of your plan.

- ♦ As you develop the implementation schedule, consider not only what group or individual seems best qualified to implement the strategy, but their actual capacity to do so in light of other work responsibilities. Before assigning tasks, interview prospective parties about their availability and interest, and what a realistic time frame might be for them to complete the task. In general, avoid giving too many tasks to one individual or group, and consider the best timing of actions in light of your community's overall resources and interest.
- ♦ After approval of the plan, don't allow your planning committee to slip away without a clear handoff. Schedule a workshop to discuss the logistics of implementation and to reiterate the respective roles different parties will play in the process. Allow the planning committee to debrief these parties on plan specifics and its views how to best proceed.
- ♦ Find ways of "institutionalizing" follow-through on your plan and assessing progress. Publish the plan's implementation schedule and tracking of positive outcomes in your town report, newsletters and municipal website, with an accounting of what progress is being made. Put an enlarged version of these documents on the wall at your municipal office.
- ♦ Establish an oversight committee that is charged not only with prompting follow-through by the respective responsible party, but reallocating the assignment if the party is unable to complete the task. While this group might be assigned specific tasks, its primary role would be ensuring that the plan's overall implementation schedule is being followed. In addition, the group can evaluate whether implemented policies are leading to positive outcomes, and specifically track progress on particular steps relative to benchmarks established in the plan.
- ♦ In appointing members to committees charged with plan implementation (i.e. oversight committee or an ordinance development committee), consider some of the recommendations made in this handbook regarding committee selection and process. If possible, try to get at least some members of the original planning committee to serve on these committees. They can help provide important background information on the planning process and the intent behind certain recommendations.
- ♦ With or without an implementation oversight committee, schedule an annual workshop to discuss progress on the plan. If it is determined that implementation of certain steps is lagging or key benchmarks of performance are not being met, develop a plan of action.

Establish an oversight committee that is charged not only with prompting follow-through by the respective responsible party, but reallocating the assignment if the party is unable to complete the task.

With your plan adopted and a strategy for strong implementation in place, your planning committee and the community as a whole deserve a hearty pat on the back for bringing the comprehensive plan update to successful closure. But bear in mind that the planning and implementation process should be an ongoing one, not a once-a-in-decade event. Even if your community is a small one with a limited staff, find ways to actively use your plan, to evaluate its effectiveness and to make adjustments if necessary. With a strong plan in place that is regularly used and refined, you will also find that updating it in 5 or 10 years will be a much easier process.

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TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGING GROWTH

31. Give greater consideration to non-regulatory approaches

No additional guidance.

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32. Embrace growth areas...

Additional Background

The concept of growth areas is based on recognition that growth is happening in most communities, and that it is sensible to direct it to appropriate areas. Planning committees, however, may have to confront a prevalent “disconnect” between what some residents say they want, slow or no growth, and what has been actually happening on the ground, and will continue to happen – hundreds of additional dwelling units each decade, mostly in the town’s rural areas. Resistance to the idea of growth areas and other concepts is often based on the false impression that the status quo is serving the town well. That is why it is so important to inform the public about the location of recent development and critique the town’s existing planning and regulatory strategies. Illustrating likely future trends through the use of visual techniques such as build-out analysis and other approaches (discussed in Recommendation # 27) are also effective in combating complacency.



Resistance to the idea of growth areas and other concepts is often based on the false impression that the status quo is serving the town well.

market research SPO has conducted indicates that there is a significant market for those who prefer a village environment, closer to services and neighbors, to an isolated houselot. For one identified segment of homebuyers, the knowledge that new rural residences contribute to sprawl and have adverse impacts on wildlife and natural resources, makes this group less likely to want a home there. Unfortunately, many towns do not offer much of an alternative to the large rural lot, so potential homebuyers often don’t have much of a choice.

Few proponents of growth areas would assert that every dwelling unit constructed there is one less built in a rural area. The extent of this tradeoff is largely a function of the viability of your growth areas, the effectiveness of your rural lands strategies and the actual supply and demand for rural and village lots in your community. But making your growth areas hospitable to infill development and new neighborhoods provides at least a share of homebuyers with an attractive alternative the large lot in the country. Some of the recent



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33. ...And make them viable

Growth Area Size

As far as the actual delineation of growth areas, two pitfalls are common:

- ♦ The growth areas of some 1990s plans are tightly drawn around existing villages and development concentrations, with little room to accommodate a significant amount of new development;
- ♦ Other 1990s plans contain expansive growth areas that seem disproportionately large in light of likely growth pressures.

If your community is experiencing a healthy growth rate, make sure growth areas include a significant amount of vacant land with development potential, even if it means expanding its outward limits. If soils or other constraints make it difficult to do this, consider establishing a new growth area in appropriate locations.

On the other hand, while growth areas should be generously sized to accommodate anticipated growth, don't make them so large as to promote a sprawling development pattern, or string them along major arterials in a manner that will facilitate a strip development pattern. Avoid including in your growth area *rural residential* areas on moderately sized lots. The use of *Transitional Areas* as described in Recommendation #38, may be an appropriate designation for select medium-density areas.

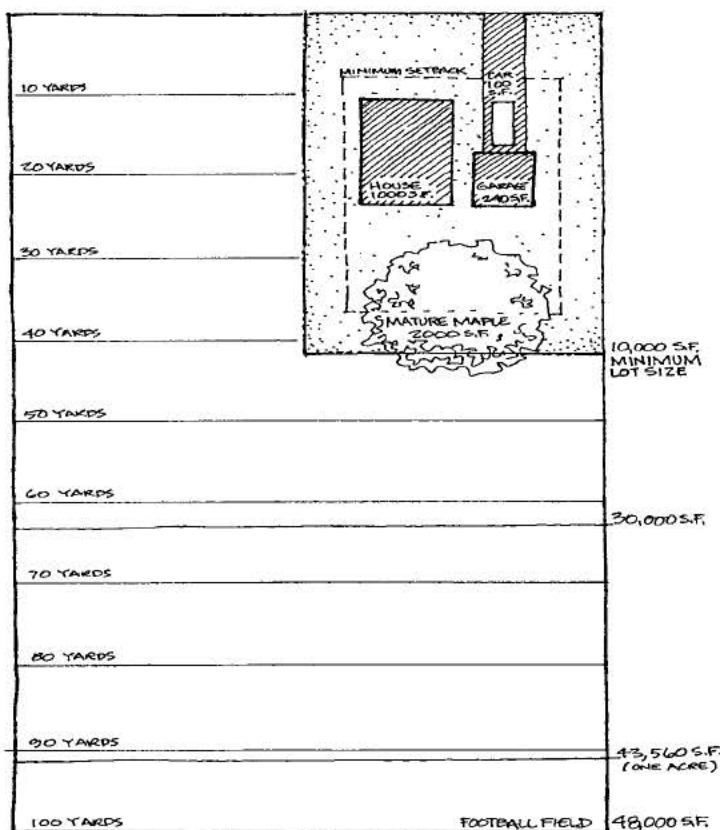
Density

For growth areas that are, or can be, served by public water and sewer, examine opportunities to encourage higher densities and more infill development. At the very least, you should consider allowing for a density similar to the historic development pattern in your built-up area. Unless your sewer system is at capacity, or other valid land use issues exist, you would do well to reexamine an approach, for example, that requires ½-acre lots or larger in a village area where the historic development pattern was mostly on lots of 10,000 square feet or less.

Even if your community now allows densities in the range of one unit per 10,000 square feet in sewered areas, consider recommending higher densities – at least in appropriate portions of growth area. For multi-family apartments, recommend a minimum land area per unit standard that promotes rather than discourages this housing type. Concerns of existing neighborhoods about infill development can sometimes be allayed by setting aside some vacant areas as parkland – either through acquisition or a condition of development approval. In cases where no additional development is preferred in an existing built-up area, plan for the development of a new neighborhood in adjacent undeveloped lands.

For communities with growth areas that can be served with public water (but not public sewer) consider allowing new lots in the ½-acre range – the state minimum for lots with on-site septic. For new lots that might

Graphic showing a 10,000 square house lot and other lot sizes relative to the size of a football field



be sited near existing development on private wells or near sensitive natural resources, this lot size standard could be supplemented with additional buffering requirements.

For areas without public sewer and water, valid concerns exist regarding small lot sizes and potential contamination of wells and groundwater. But don't let this concern hold your planning process hostage. Proceed with a well-informed discussion of how your community might accommodate a more compact development pattern in selected, appropriate areas of the community. On good soils, carefully rendered new housing can often be accomplished on the ½-acre lot minimum required under state law for onsite septic systems. A one-acre minimum may be a more appropriate standard in some instances, but avoid creating excessively large lots in your growth areas. One option is to generally allow lot sizes in the ½ acre-1 acre range, but to add a provision for requiring larger lots depending on soil characteristics. Even if you stick with acre or larger lot sizes in growth areas, avoid the 200-foot frontage and 50-foot front setbacks thresholds that so often find their way into ordinances. These standards often result in new housing that erodes rather than enhances the character and overall cohesiveness of existing villages or neighborhoods.

If your community is committed to the concept of creating viable growth areas, but remains concerned about smaller lots and potential for drinking water problems, consider the development of small-scale community water systems. Some communities may decide that it is in their long-term interest to invest in such systems, seeking grants and loans for their initial construction, and proposing a fee system in which future users help defray capital and operating costs (particularly in light of the significant expenses involved in on-site well-drilling). Communities not yet ready to develop their own water system may instead allow for density increases for developers who install community systems for their projects.

If your community is committed to the concept of creating viable growth areas, but remains concerned about smaller lots and potential for drinking water problems, consider the development of small-scale community water systems.

In addition, a growing number of alternatives exist for small-scale sewage waste disposal systems that can accommodate multiple residences/businesses, and which would allow for higher densities. For small towns, the most likely option is getting developers to front the cost of such systems in exchange for a density bonus. But in some cases, communities may find that viable options exist for funding centralized systems through creative financing and public/private partnerships.

Livability

The other components of viable growth areas involve maintaining and enhancing their overall livability and attractiveness. Some communities have enacted policies that have undermined the very qualities that made their villages and neighborhoods appealing. Other towns that lack town centers are hesitant to make investments or pursue policies that might change the status quo. Creating a livable growth area often requires attention to details, but within the context of a larger vision or plan for the areas. Here are some additional pointers:

- ♦ Recommend that your annual municipal budget contain generous funding for downtown or village improvements: sidewalks, landscaping, park/playground improvements.
- ♦ Adopt a policy that public facilities will be located in growth areas (with exceptions such as your transfer station). Be ready to stand by that policy when proposals surface to move your grade school or post office to an outlying rural site with plenty of land.
- ♦ Work to prevent the loss of services and institutions that serve practical needs and help preserve a sense of community.
- ♦ Reconsider parking standards and other regulations that unnecessarily hamper existing businesses and scare off new ones that would otherwise be assets to your village or neighborhood.
- ♦ Recommend changes in standards for new village streets that avoid excessive widths and promote interconnection with other streets, as opposed to dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs.
- ♦ Provide for easy pedestrian access to adjacent natural areas.
- ♦ Consider creating a village master plan that, among other things, serves as a template for future road interconnections and open space systems.

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34. *Think Neighborhood*

Additional Resources ([Go to Appendix D for weblinks](#))

- ♦ *Markets for Traditional Neighborhoods*, an analysis of a survey of recent homebuyers in Maine.
- ♦ Information on SPO's Patient Sewer Loan Fund.
- ♦ Soon to be released: *A Guide to Livable Design: The Great American Neighborhood and Other Contemporary Design Principles for Building Marketable Residential Communities*. Contact SPO for more information.

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35. *Define/refine "rural"*

Some comprehensive plans of the 1990s included considerable discussion of what the term "rural character" meant to the citizens of the community; most did not. Plan updates provide an opportunity to create a more explicit characterization of this term relative to the community's values. In determining what rural lands and features are viewed as most indispensable for maintaining the community's rural character, it may be helpful for the planning committee to conduct town tours, or to present slideshows at which specific features and landscapes are discussed and ranked.



As explained in Part I, the rural areas in many 1990s plans were often defined by what was left after the community had designated growth areas. This balance area was typically comprised of a diverse array of lands with different attributes and vulnerability to change. The areas included: working farms and forests; inactive farms or lands with prime agricultural soils; significant wildlife habitats and unique natural areas; wetlands and other important components of the regional and local ecosystem; and open fields and other landscapes considered to be defining elements of the community's character. Some lands were classified as rural just by virtue of their undeveloped state or distance from roads and easy access.

In many plans, however, the designated rural areas include lands with none of the attributes described above. They were included mainly because they were located outside the designated growth area and generally had a lower development density than the community's built-up area. The main impact of a sprawling development pattern in these areas may have less to do with erosion of rural character, and more to do with fiscal impacts involved with servicing a dispersed development pattern. In some instances, portions of these areas might be better incorporated into growth areas. In other cases they might be more appropriate as *transitional areas*, as discussed in Recommendation #38.

As explained in Part I, the concept of critical rural areas, now recognized in statute, is a helpful one in making distinctions between rural areas with different values. On the other hand, there needs to be a recognition that rural areas that lack the "critical" label are valuable as well, and that the placement of lands in this category is not an indication that they are expendable or worthy of a less-than-diligent protection strategy. The process that your community uses in designating rural areas can have a bearing on how their values are ultimately viewed and protected. In general, it is recommended that you first designate the lands in your community that qualify as rural areas. This selection process should be based on a thorough assessment of resources and environmental constraints and an application of agreed-upon criteria that considers both state definitions and local priorities. Then you should consider which of these rural areas deserve maximum protection by inclusion in the critical

category. On your future land use map (and ultimately your zoning map), these critical areas could be shown as an overlay on your designated rural areas.

If a large percentage of your community's land area is composed of large undeveloped blocks, you may find it challenging to determine which of these lands should be classified as "critical rural" versus "rural" areas. (There may even be cases in which portions of these areas are appropriate as growth or transitional areas.) In general, a more refined approach to classifying rural areas requires a willingness to make tough choices in deciding which rural lands are most essential to the community's future.

In some communities, the term rural character is also identified with features and qualities that are not necessarily linked to preserving particular tracts of land. It may be more associated with a landmark, a narrow rural road with a tree canopy, or even a prevailing attitude such as landowners keeping their lands open for hunting and recreational uses. These attributes are also important to specifically identify in your plan – but it is important to recognize that strategies for preserving them may be quite different than for protecting rural lands.

Measuring Rural?

Better defining what is meant by rural is one thing. But is it possible to measure *ruralness* in order to more accurately assess what we have and what we may be losing? The subjectivity of the term makes this challenging, but there are ways to quantify some of the common characteristics of rural lands.

One of these characteristics is very low housing density. Densities lower than one dwelling per 100 acres are typical in the rural areas of many Maine communities. As you define your rural and critical rural lands, calculate their respective densities: for your designated rural area, you might, for instance, find a density of one dwelling per 80 acres; for your critical rural area, one dwelling per 200 acres. These numbers provide you with a baseline against which to view future changes. Increases in these densities are inevitable during the planning period and beyond, but the pace of the increase is a telling indication of how threatened these lands are and the success of your growth-guiding efforts.

Perhaps an even better rural indicator is the existence of large blocks of undeveloped lands – both visible fields and woods fronting roads and unfragmented backland blocks. In some Maine towns, these large blocks comprise a significant percentage of the total land area; in other communities, only a few large blocks remain. By generating baseline data on these blocks, your community can better track trends regarding these lands.

Table A provides an example of how information can be compiled for large lots in individual ownerships. Such a table is generally easy to assemble and update using tax records. The value of this analysis can be improved by locating these parcels on a composite town tax map to highlight contiguous parcels that create larger blocks.

Table B is an example of a large land tract inventory that identifies contiguous undeveloped blocks, regardless of ownership. A good source of this information is the *Beginning with Habitat* maps and data described in the Recommendation #37. These maps identify remaining large blocks by highlighting all lands that are 500 feet or more from existing roads and development.

As with housing density, some reduction in the size or number of these large land blocks is inevitable during the planning period – at issue is the degree of this conversion. But don't assume that successfully slowing down the rate of growth in rural areas will necessarily protect the integrity of these large tracts. Selective permanent protection efforts and careful siting of development relative to these blocks is needed as well.

A primary impetus for preserving rural lands is to keep them in active production (or keep this option open for the future), so you may want to consider rural indicators that measure farming and forestry activity. Calculating and tracking the amount of acreage actively farmed (including hay fields) is one possible indicator. The amount of land enrolled in the Tree Growth tax program is an easy way to measure lands being actively managed for timber production.

TABLE A

Lot Size	Number of Lots	
	Rural	Critical Rural
10-50 acres	50	2
50-100 acres	20	2
100-200 acres	10	4
> 200 acres	6	5

TABLE B

Block #	Size of Block	# of owners
Block 1	5,000 acres	5
Block 2	2,500 acres	3
Block 3	1,000 acres	6
Block 4	600 acres	2
5 other blocks between 200-500 acres		

36. *Take strong steps to protect rural lands*

As you conduct additional visioning about what you want your rural areas to be in 10 or even 20 years, consider asking the following questions: What is the ideal in terms of overall density, retention of large blocks and continuation/expansion of resource-based enterprises? Is there a bottom line regarding these factors or retention of specific parcels or features at which point the community's rural character would be deemed lost or severely degraded?

Retention of large blocks of undeveloped land is commonly identified as a crucial component in preserving rural character. Unfortunately, typical strategies treat these areas as empty vessels, awaiting new roads, lots and dwellings. The focus of many strategies is not on promoting the survival of remaining large rural land tracts, but on whether a house lot containing 5 acres is more "rural" than one containing 3 acres.

To help you avoid a counterproductive approach to rural lands, Appendix A begins with a list of 10 things *not* to do as you review existing strategies and consider new ones. You may find that municipal officials and the public cling to some of these ideas despite their drawbacks. In its roles as advocate and devil's advocate, your planning committee can play a vital role in questioning the benefits of policies and strategies that don't seem to be working.

Promoting productive uses in rural areas and discouraging land division and development that fragment remaining large land blocks.

As you consider what you *should* be doing, concentrate first on non-regulatory approaches. And for all approaches, recognize the important distinction between strategies that direct growth away from rural areas or result in permanent rural lands, and strategies that serve to accommodate rural development in a manner aimed at reducing impacts and fitting better into the rural landscape.

Consistent with the smart growth adage that healthy places don't die, promote productive uses in rural lands, and discourage land division and development that fragments remaining large land blocks. Rather than reacting to development proposals from large landowners who feel compelled to sell, solicit their input on how town policies and other factors make it easier or more difficult to hold onto their land. Make sure your town is facilitating rather than hindering efforts to keep land in production. Encourage participation in property tax reduction programs like the Tree Growth and Farm and Open Space laws. Encourage these landowners (or delegate this role to a local land trust or other entity) to consider alternatives to developing their properties, including permanent or long-term protection measures such as purchase or lease of development rights or selected fee acquisition.

In considering regulatory approaches for these areas, focus first on measures that guide growth away from critical rural lands (e.g., a rural rate of growth limitation). Beware of the pitfalls of using large minimum lot sizes because it generally does not work as a tool for directing growth (see Recommendation #40). For the limited amount of growth that ideally would occur annually, pursue strategies that minimize the impact of development on the values of critical areas, and maximize opportunities to preserve undeveloped land blocks and particular features.

For land identified as critical rural areas, your strategies should focus on ensuring a continuation of productive uses and on permanent or long-term protection. If your community's vision for these areas is that they remain essentially intact and unfragmented, you may need to pursue a strong, targeted approach, which requires expending public and private financial resources. For designated rural areas without the *critical* label, devise strong protection measures as well. But recognize that if significant dollars are being devoted to protecting critical rural lands, the purchase of land and easements may have to be used more selectively in rural areas. Other non-regulatory and regulatory approaches may need to fill the gap.

For both critical rural and rural areas, set clear benchmarks regarding overall density, retention of large blocks of undeveloped land, amount of actively farmed land or land in tree growth and other indicators developed as your community tries to better quantify its rural values. Regularly monitor trends in these areas relative to these benchmarks, and refine your strategies if these targets are not being met.

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[☑ Go to Appendix A: Selected Strategies for Managing Growth in Designated Rural Areas](#)

37. *Incorporate Beginning With Habitat data and approach*

Additional Resources ([Go to Appendix D for weblink](#))

The Maine Natural Area's Program (MNAP), has an informative webpage devoted to the *Beginning with Habitat* Initiative.

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38. *Consider transitional areas*

Transitional Area as defined under revised statute: "Transitional area" means an area that is designated in a municipality's or multi-municipal region's comprehensive plan as suitable for a share of projected residential, commercial or industrial development but that is neither intended to accept the amount or density of development appropriate for a growth area nor intended to provide the level of protection for rural resources afforded in a rural area or critical rural area. [2001, c. 578, §6 (new).]

Other new statutory language regarding transitional areas: "A municipality or multi-municipal region may also designate as a transitional area any portion of land area that does not meet the definition of either a growth area or a rural area. Such an area may be appropriate for medium-density development that does not require expansion of municipal facilities and does not include significant rural resources."

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39. *Address commercial strip development*

The issue of commercial strip development is a complex one, and possible solutions depend on a number of factors: whether your community is a service center or an outlying town; whether a strip or potential strip is self-contained within your community or shared with others; whether a strip already exists, is emerging or is not yet in place; and whether travel is relatively high-speed or already slowed by congestion.

What many 1990s plans lacked was a real vision for how development should unfold along major road corridors. Beyond including policy statements that strip commercial development should be discouraged, few plans articulated a positive vision for these areas.



Following are some additional general suggestions:

- ♦ As part of your community visioning sessions, or more general public dialogue, devote considerable time to discussing the future of major road corridors that pass through your town. If possible, try to reach a general consensus not only on what citizens *don't* want to see along them, but what they *do* want. Articulate these views in your vision statement.
- ♦ If you share a busy arterial with neighboring communities, try to formulate a common vision as part of your plan's regional coordination activities. Use your update both as a vehicle to improve ongoing communication with neighboring towns, and make specific recommendations, e.g., securing resources to pursue a corridor master planning effort.
- ♦ In formulating a vision and working to realize it, recognize that a major function of highways is to efficiently carry traffic through your community and the region. As your community considers the future of the lands that border these roads, always keep this vital function in mind. Ensure that your planning

approaches support, rather than work against, this function and other aspects of your larger vision for the roadway.

- ♦ If your plan sanctions a commercial growth area along or near a major road corridor, avoid delineating a liner strip. Create distinct “nodes” or centers at appropriate roadway locations with adequate depth to accommodate a concentrated cluster of commercial development.
- ♦ If your community already has a well-established commercial strip, resist pressure to allow its continued linear extension. Plan for lateral growth by creating new interior roads and better utilizing backland. Also reexamine the type of commercial uses allowed along the corridor consistent with your overall vision. For example, one area might be zoned for small retail uses; another primarily for office uses; still others for larger retail establishments.
- ♦ Plan to permanently preserve select stretches of land along major highways. This can be done through outright purchase or conservation easements. In others cases, undeveloped frontage can be protected in conjunction with residential conservation subdivisions. A variation of the latter approach is to require clustering of commercial development on one portion of a property, leaving the remaining frontage permanently protected
- ♦ Consider selected areas bordering your highways for inclusion in your rural or critical rural designations.
- ♦ Once you have meaningfully addressed issues of location and development type along your major road corridors, turn your attention to issues of design and access: the spacing and layout of entrances, the location of parking, landscaping, building setbacks, pedestrian access, and architectural design and other matters.
- ♦ Use your plan process to inform the public and roadside landowners about access management – both the state’s new rules concerning accessways along selected arterials, and measures your community may be considering for other road segments.

Create distinct “nodes” or centers at appropriate roadway locations with adequate depth to accommodate a concentrated cluster of commercial development.

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40. Avoid minor lot size distinctions as a strategy for directing growth

Additional Background

This recommendation runs counter to the conventional wisdom that has long been dominant in Maine and other communities across the country. Even early technical assistance information from Maine’s Growth Management Program recommended such a strategy. Past discussions of whether comprehensive plans were “consistent” with

state law sometimes focused on relatively modest lot size distinctions between growth and rural areas. But as it is hoped that communities will develop stronger plans by examining past mistakes and successes, SPO is committed to this learning process as well.

As it is hoped that communities will develop stronger plans by examining past mistakes and successes, SPO is committed to this learning process as well.

Additional Guidance

What are *substantial* differences in density? One school of thought suggests a “1 to 20” rule: that allowable densities in a community’s truly rural areas should be at least 20 times lower than in growth areas to effectively guide growth. For a community that allows ½-acre lots in its growth area, this rule would mean a density no higher than one unit per 10 acres in the rural area. Another viewpoint is that to actually preserve large blocks of select rural lands, densities lower than one unit per 20 acres are needed, even for communities that allow dense development in their growth areas.

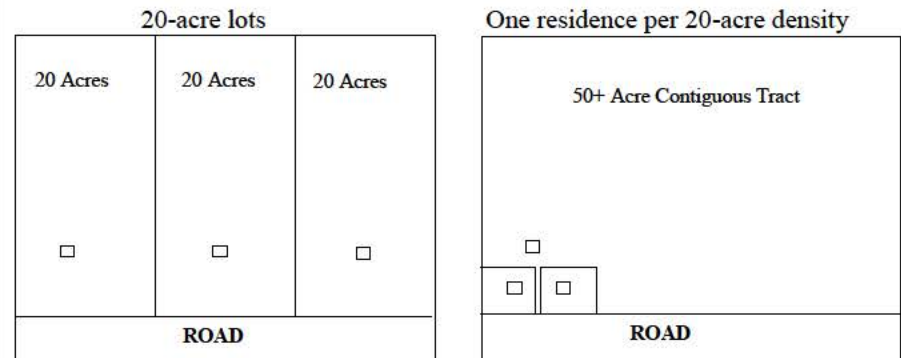
In considering this issue, it is essential that your committee and the public-at-large recognize the difference between *minimum lot sizes* and *density*. Strict adherence to a minimum lot size standard means that each lot in a new land division must consume a prescribed minimum amount of land. Density, on the other hand, focuses on the overall intensity of development, and usually is expressed as how many dwelling units are allowed for a certain land area – regardless of whether it is composed on individual lot area or protected open space.

This distinction is important both in terms of formulating a rural lands strategy that is effective and also making it palatable to landowners. Requiring all rural subdivision lots to be 10-acres in size would have the effect of sprawling new residences across the very fields and forestlands that your community may be trying to preserve. For the farmer who wants to create an adjacent lot, but keep as much land as possible in production, a 10-acre lot requirement would be counterproductive as well.

A density standard of one dwelling unit per 10 acres, on the other hand, allows flexibility regarding how lots are located and sized. For the farmer with a 100-acre lot, this approach can allow for a modestly sized house/lot on the edge of the field, as the overall density with both the existing and new home would be well below the required threshold.⁴ Setting low densities, while allowing lot size reductions also facilitates conservation subdivisions (discussed in

Recommendation #41). In conjunction with low densities, this approach can be especially effective at preserving the large undeveloped blocks that most citizens closely associate with rural character.

Example of the difference between homes sited on 20-acre lots and an enclave of three homes that maintains a one unit per 20-acre standard



Your planning committee should not underestimate the willingness of the citizenry to embrace strong measures. It's also important, however, to have your finger on the pulse of community attitudes. Proposals that are viewed as overly sweeping or radical could hurt the credibility of your planning effort. As your committee considers the pros and cons of setting very low densities in rural areas endeavor to be visionary – but also be realistic.

If it is clear that in your community there is not political support for such an approach, consider other growth-directing strategies, such as a rate of growth limitation in your rural area. Avoid a bargaining process in which the proposed lot area per dwelling unit is successively dropped from 10 to 5 to 3 acres. When it comes to setting a rural density standard that is likely to be effective, it is generally not the case that half a loaf is better than none. Appendices A and C contains a number of alternative strategies.

If a very low rural density is not tenable in your community, what is an appropriate standard? Standards that allow densities higher than one unit per 10 acres are generally not effective at directing growth, but may serve other purposes. For instance, if your community is ready to truly embrace the concept of conservation subdivisions, a moderately low density standard in conjunction with flexible lot sizing still can result in protection of significant amounts of open space.

Lower densities may also be justified for areas with development constraints – e.g., poor soils, steep slopes, underlying aquifers – especially for areas that depend on on-site septic and sewage disposal. Many Maine communities effectively use a *net area* approach, in which unbuildable and marginal lands are deducted from total area in setting an appropriate overall density.

If your community is not ready to require or strongly encourage conservation subdivisions (e.g., just making them an option), avoid requiring low rural densities. As described above, large lots result in a more sprawling development pattern and are generally counterproductive to protecting rural values. Although lots should be sized appropriately to address environmental constraints and handle on-site septic and water, resist the “bigger-is-better” mindset. In many cases, a rural lot size in the one-acre range may be most appropriate, perhaps coupled with a net area provision for subdivision development. This approach, however, assumes that you have other strategies in place to effectively guide growth and preserve protection of large blocks of rural land.

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⁴ This type of approach requires keeping track of the number of dwellings relative to the original land parcel, particular if the new lots are created outside of subdivision review. Deed restrictions are probably the simplest approach.

41. *Promote conservation subdivisions but recognize their limitations*

Additional Background

Conservation subdivisions cannot be blamed for failing to guide growth away from rural areas. They were never intended to do this. However, they have often been applied in a way that has minimized their value as a tool for preserving valuable rural open space. Typical problems have included:

- ♦ Lack of attention to location of relative to significant site features, e.g., putting houselots in the middle of fields rather than around the edges;
- ♦ Protecting relatively small amounts of open space relative to project size (e.g. 5 acres of open space for a 30 acre parcel);
- ♦ Creating fragmented open space areas within a project rather than contiguous blocks;
- ♦ Designating as open space land with physical limitations, such as wet areas, or ledge that would be difficult to develop anyway;
- ♦ Failing to consider how open space areas might converge and interconnect with existing adjacent undeveloped land blocks; and
- ♦ Not making adequate provision for the long-term management of the common undeveloped areas.

Conservation subdivisions have too often resulted in the creation of relatively small islands of open space – 5 acres here, 10 acres there, some of it of marginal value, in an uncoordinated fashion.

Interestingly, while many 1990s plans advocated “clustering” as a growth management technique, many planning boards and developers have been reluctant to embrace the concept. Some reasons are:

- ♦ A widespread perception that conservation subdivision projects won’t sell or appreciate in value;
- ♦ Resistance to the more rigorous design and review process that conservation subdivisions typically are required to undergo;
- ♦ Concerns pertaining to the ownership and management of the permanently protected areas, and of commonly owned infrastructure such as sewer and water systems; and/or
- ♦ Discomfort with allowing lots smaller than the required rural lot size standard – even when the overall density of the project conforms to that standard.

While some of these concerns are based on false perceptions or could be satisfactorily addressed, they have had the effect of discouraging widespread use of conservation subdivisions.

When used carefully, conservation subdivisions have the following advantages:

Coupled with a relatively low rural density standard, conservation subdivisions can be used to retain the large land blocks (50 acres or more) that help to define the rural character of many communities.

- ♦ Coupled with a relatively low rural density standard, they can be used to retain the large land blocks (50 acres or more) that help to define the rural character of many communities;
- ♦ They can be used to protect individual features or resources that contribute to your community’s ruralness;
- ♦ They can be used in conjunction with the *Beginning With Habitat* approach (see Recommendation #37) to enhance protection of riparian areas, significant habitats and large blocks of undeveloped lands that help support a diversity of wildlife, as well as serving other vital functions;
- ♦ They can be used as a tool to avoid incursions into the remaining large undeveloped blocks of land in the community and to permanently protect portions of these areas.
- ♦ They create opportunities for interconnected trails;
- ♦ They enable the community to have early involvement in decisions regarding the layout of roads and lots, thereby facilitating protection of significant site features and assets (as opposed to traditional subdivisions, in which layout and design are typically determined prior to most public input); and

- ♦ The development portion of the project can be designed to avoid significant features (e.g., homes located on the edge of fields rather than in middle of them), reduce the length of roads and utilities, and create a cohesive residential enclave adjacent to the protected lands.

Additional Guidance

The effectiveness of a conservation subdivision approach is largely determined by the details of your implementation efforts. But as part of your planning process, consider the following suggestions as you discuss the approach.

- ♦ Use conservation subdivisions in conjunction with an overall open space planning process, rather than as a stand-alone element.
- ♦ Emphasize the shift in the design and review process that is required for such projects to be successful. Identification of lands worthy of protection is the initial step, and lots, roads and other improvements are designed around these conservation areas. Excellent materials exist on the essential steps in this approach, some of which are listed below under additional resources.
- ♦ Plan to set high standards for the open space component of conservation subdivisions regarding its quality and quantity and potential interconnections with adjacent open space areas.
- ♦ If you determine that conservation subdivisions are integral to your overall rural management strategy, avoid the timid approach of just making them a development option. Either require them or provide enough incentives or disincentives to make their application the rule rather than the exception.
- ♦ Towns that want to avoid setting low rural densities (and which plan to focus on a strong growth-directing approach such as a rural growth cap) may find conservation subdivisions less valuable as a tool for protecting large land blocks and better at preserving select site features and promoting good design.
- ♦ The conservation subdivision approach can also be used to advantage in your growth and transitional areas as well to selectively preserve elements that contribute to your green infrastructure network. For your transitional areas, conservation subdivisions may help to retain a rural “feel” and promote a sensitive approach to site design aimed at reducing the amount of infrastructure (e.g., shorter interior roads and utility runs).



Additional Resources [\(see Appendix D for weblinks\)](#)

- ♦ Overview from Natural Lands Trust.
- ♦ Information from Center for Land Use Education

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42. *Integrate growth policies into a well-developed Land Use Plan*

An effective Land Use Plan serves as a foundation for zoning and other regulatory approaches, and as a clear vision for how your town wants to grow. It does not need to be as specific nor comprehensive as a zoning ordinance, but it should be detailed enough to provide clear direction to the drafters or revisers of those ordinances, and legal support for specific provisions. Some of the more effective 1990s Land Use Plans included a chart summarizing major implementation measures for different land use districts (see below). This approach may be most appropriate if you are proposing your first town-wide land use ordinance or major changes to it. But even if your community has a long-standing zoning ordinance, it is a good idea to provide clear justification for its major provisions and other strategies that will be pursued by town.

Example of Matrix Showing Standards/Measures in a Land Use Plan
(For towns with public water, but no public sewer in growth area)

	Growth Areas		Transitional Area	Rural Area	Critical rural area
	Village area	Neighborhood development			
Maximum density for residential development	1 unit per 20,000 square feet		1 unit per acre	1 unit per 10 acres ⁵	1 unit per 25 acres or more ⁵ . Residential uses allowed as special exception.
Uses allowed	Most residential, public and small-scale commercial uses.		Single-family residential. Floating commercial/ industrial zone with siting criteria.	Resource-based enterprises. Also single-family dwellings within rate of growth provisions.	Resource-based enterprises. Single-family dwellings allowed only as special exception, with siting criteria, and within rate of growth provisions.
Approach to subdivision review	Streamlined review			10-lot limit per project. Maximum lot size 1-2 acre range.	5-lot limit per project. Maximum lot size 1-2 acre range.
Residential growth benchmark for next 10 years	At least 60% of residential development that occurs during planning period		Less than 30% of residential development that occurs during planning period	Less than 20% of residential development that occurs during planning period	Less than 5% of residential development that occurs during planning period.
Annual rate of growth provision	No limit.		No limit. Limit to be considered if benchmark exceeded after 2-year evaluation	No more than 20% building permits issued annually.	No more than 5% of building permits issued annually.
Approach to roads	Sidewalks required in most cases, but reduced road widths allowed. Cul-de-sacs strongly discouraged and connecting streets encouraged. Acceptance automatic for roads meeting town standards.		Amount of new road building and acceptance closely monitored.	Length of new roads limited, except for land management roads. Public road acceptances either not allowed or strongly limited.	Length of new roads limited, except land management roads. New roads must be privately owned and maintained.

⁵ If there is not support in your community for such low densities, consider a relatively small minimum lot size (and a maximum lot size threshold for subdivision lots) coupled with a strong rural rate of growth provision and other growth- directing strategies.

Following are some additional suggestions for improving land use plans:

- ♦ Begin the section with a concise description of the purpose of the Land Use Plan, and how to use it;
- ♦ Make your future land use map easy to decipher and understand. If your printed plan has only one page that has color and departs from an 8½" x 11" letter size format, let this be it. Either as part of your GIS system, or basic graphics software, have this map available in electronic form, allowing for simplified revision of

drafts, e-mailing or posting on your website, printing of large versions on a plotter and ease of overlaying with other electronically generated maps;

- ♦ Clearly reference the major classifications described in the Growth Management Law (Growth, Rural, Critical Rural, and Transitional). If you delineate areas based on your existing or proposed zoning (e.g. Village, Rural Residential, Farm and Forest, Shoreland), be sure to also identify them as growth, rural or transitional areas;
- ♦ If you have a separate shoreland zoning ordinance, or are proposing distinct shoreland zones within a town-wide zoning framework, pay close attention to the different types of shoreland zones and waterfront areas, and how they might be classified. Most Resource Protection subdistricts are appropriately classified as rural or critical rural areas. But your Limited Residential/Recreational subdistricts may not neatly fit into one land use classification. You may, for instance, decide to classify some of these areas as growth areas, and others, as rural areas – affording them additional protection beyond the state-minimum shoreland setback and buffering standards.

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43. *Design matters*

Additional Background

How things are designed and look matters to people. When asked what they prize most about their communities, citizens invariably cite visual elements: stunning views; the allure of a historic village center or narrow rural road; or fondness for a particular natural or built landmark. When asked to identify elements or trends they are concerned about, residents often focus is the visual as well – whether it is an expanding commercial strip or new homes placed in the middle farm fields.

Despite the strong sense of pride that citizens often have regarding their communities' visual assets, this consideration sometimes gets lost in the shuffle as committees get further into the comprehensive planning and implementation process. In comparison to other plan concerns, a focus on how things look can be viewed by some as subjective or arbitrary. Even when significant visual resources or considerations are clearly identified, a tendency exists to view regulatory protection measures as the only possible implementation strategy – an option, which many towns quickly dismiss as politically or administratively unworkable. People often resign themselves to loss of attractive landscapes and less-than-visually-appealing development as the price of growth and progress.

Good design entails more than just how things look – it involves attention to form and function. How new development “works” on a site and in a neighborhood is a paramount consideration. A new project that is just visually appealing may fail to address other issues pertaining to safety, circulation, and other impacts, both on and off site. A more common problem, however, is for the design of projects to be driven by function (often narrowly focused on traffic and parking) at the expense of other important considerations. By reevaluating the issue of design in your community as part of your update process, you can work toward a more balanced, integrated approach.



Additional Guidance

Following are some approaches to consider:

- ♦ Through use of visual preference surveys and other visualization techniques, attempt to ascertain the public's aesthetic and design preferences, and consider identifying in your plan some of the general principles and values on which there seems to be a consensus. As part of this process, identify specific design issues that residents are most concerned about. For example, your community might have strong concerns about how the generic building and site design typical of commercial retail chains might affect the character of your town. As a general principle, you can establish that new commercial development will respect the scale and appearance of your existing villages and commercial area.
- ♦ As part of your capital investment planning process, consider improvements and amenities that will enhance the appearance of your community, including provision for street trees, landscaping, other "green infrastructure" and uniform signage. Town signs may appear to be a small detail, but if well designed and located they can be a unifying force, identifying your town's gateways, facilities and services and resources.
- ♦ Evaluate how your community's existing regulatory approach affects the appearance and design of development, and whether this approach is giving you what you want to see. In particular, evaluate setback and parking standards, and requirements on landscaping and retaining natural features.
- ♦ As part of your visioning and inventory processes, clearly identify and map scenic vistas that are most highly treasured in the community. Consider selectively pursuing permanent protection measures such as securing "viewshed" easements from the owners.
- ♦ A typical design issue identified by residents is the practice of new homes being located in the middle of fields in rural areas. How buildings and roads are sited relative to existing fields, woodlands and other physical features can make huge difference, both on their visual impacts and interference with productive lands. The conservation subdivision approach can help to significantly reduce these impacts. To address single lot development, you may want to consider making new structures a special exemption or conditional use in select high-value areas (e.g., a critical rural area or scenic overlay designation), subjecting them to siting criteria and building envelope requirements.
- ♦ If your community is concerned about the appearance and design of new commercial development, but not ready for a strong regulatory approach, consider recommending the development voluntary design guidelines. Your plan would be used to set forth some general principles and elements for consideration that would be addressed as an implementation step.

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44. *Don't ignore incremental development*

Some possible approaches to consider:

- ♦ Create incentives for landowners to use the subdivision process rather than doing lot-by-lot development (e.g., reduced frontage requirements for subdivision lots);
- ♦ In critical rural areas and other select lands with high resource values, require planning board review of individual housing units as part of special exception or condition use approval;
- ♦ Work proactively with large landowners in conceptual planning for their parcels to promote a more coordinated approach to future development and conservation; and
- ♦ Adopt access management provisions that discourage residential strip development along rural roads.

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45. Use rate of growth ordinances with caution

SPO believes that rate of growth ordinances that are ongoing and administered community-wide are justified only in select situations. Comprehensive plans supporting such measures should include, at minimum, the following components:

1. Identification of existing or projected capacity problems regarding municipal facilities and services, a description of the nature and extent of these capacity problems and inclusion of strategies in the Capital Investment Plan (CInP) for addressing them in a timely manner;
2. An explanation of how the proposed rate of growth provisions are linked to an allocation of existing and future capacity regarding municipal facilities and services;
3. A description of how the rates of growth set forth in the ordinances are related to municipalities' historic growth rates and the community's reasonable share of future growth anticipated in the region;
4. An analysis of the impact of the rate of growth ordinance on housing affordability; and
5. General consideration of the impact of the growth rate ordinance on neighboring communities.

SPO's current position regarding ongoing town-wide rate of growth ordinances is that they are justified only when the community has laid out reasonable approach for expanding services and facilities to meet its fair share of regional growth, and the rate of growth ordinance is linked to this overall strategy.

As it reviews the justification for town-wide rate of growth provisions in comprehensive plans, SPO will be asking hard questions regarding local and regional considerations. For instance, if a town claims it cannot "afford" to make needed capital investments, it should be prepared to discuss its tax burden relative to other communities in the region, as well as other financial management strategies that it might pursue to provide the necessary resources. SPO has other information on town-wide rate of growth ordinances; guidance on the topic is available from the office upon request.

SPO views rate of growth limits that are applied strictly to a community's designated rural areas as a legitimate tool for guiding growth. This approach, however, should be clearly supported in your comprehensive plan. The plan should demonstrate that your designated growth area has the land, density allowances and infrastructure capable of accepting a substantial share of future development.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SELECTED STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING GROWTH IN DESIGNATED RURAL AREAS

First, Ten Things Not To Do

- 1. Do not rely solely on zoning strategies to guide development away from rural areas.**
- 2. Do not designate as your rural area everything outside of your existing village or built-up areas unless you feel these areas truly qualify as significant rural areas in their own right, and you are ready to enact strong measures (both regulatory and non-regulatory) to prevent most growth from going there.**
- 3. Do not advocate moderate-to-large minimum lot sizes (2-9 acres) in your designated rural areas as a means of discouraging growth and protecting rural character.** Setting densities in this range may be appropriate in selected areas due to environmental constraints or to facilitate *conservation subdivisions*, but this approach will not help to protect large rural land blocks or direct development to growth areas.
- 4. Do not site new public facilities such as your town office, schools, fire station, community center, library or post office in your designated rural areas.**
- 5. Do not adopt or continue policies that promote public investments that have the effect of encouraging development in your designated rural area.** For example, a policy of paving all your rural town roads is likely to spur development there.
- 6. Do not adopt or continue policies that make it difficult for resource-based enterprises (farming, forestry, fishing and gravel extraction) to remain economically viable in designated rural areas.** Also avoid creating impediments on associated activities that either support or augment these enterprises (e.g., lumber mills, farm stands, machinery repair shops).
- 7. Do not oversell clustering or conservation subdivisions as the primary means of protecting rural lands.** The approach actually accommodates development, while mitigating some of its impacts, rather than directing it away from designated rural areas.
- 8. Do not propose Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) as a strategy, unless you have done considerable research and discussion as to its feasibility in your community or as a regional strategy.** (Some approaches that use some TDR concepts may hold more promise – see Appendix C.)
- 9. Do not assume that shoreland zoning guides development away from waterfront areas within your designated rural area.** The so-called Limited Residential area within the shoreland zone requires 75- or 100-foot setback, but otherwise generally accommodates the demand for seasonal and year-round homes that typically exists there.
- 10. Do not view lands enrolled in the Tree Growth or Farm and Open Space tax programs, or publicly held conservation lands, as a tax liability.** These lands usually more than pay for themselves by needing few municipal services, and also provide a valuable public benefit.

Ten Non-Regulatory Approaches

1. **Consider a more refined approach to classifying lands outside of designated growth areas.** Designate suburban or developing lands lacking rural attributes as *transitional areas*. For your remaining rural lands, create a new category of *critical rural areas*, composed of your most cherished rural resources and landscapes, and for which future growth will be mostly strictly managed.
2. **Strategically protect high-value rural lands through fee purchase, bargain sale, donation, purchase of development rights and conservation easements.** Include in your plan guidance on what lands should be given highest priority for permanent protection. Create a dedicated land acquisition fund or form a local land trust. (You may also wish to consider developing a more detailed and targeted strategy through the development of a specific open space plan – see Strategy #10 below.)
3. **Avoid infrastructure improvements that promote growth in designated rural areas, especially critical rural lands.**
 - ♦ Do not allow sewer and water extensions into designated rural areas.
 - ♦ Adopt a road policy that limits new road construction and acceptance of town roads in rural areas, and considers the impact of road improvements on rural development.
 - ♦ Do not locate new schools, post offices and other public buildings in designated rural areas.
4. **Pursue policies that support and preserve working rural lands.** Involve existing farming, forestry and other resource-based interests in your planning process. Solicit their views on how to enhance the local climate for their businesses. Support farmers' markets, publicize the Right-to-Farm law, promote "buy locally" efforts, and work cooperatively with businesses trying to expand and diversify their markets. Form partnerships with relevant state entities (i.e., Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources, Extension Services, University of Maine, Maine Forest Service and Department of Marine Resources) and federal agencies (i.e., U.S. Department of Agriculture) on these and another efforts.
5. **Promote enrollment in current use taxation programs (Tree Growth and Farm and Open Space).**
6. **Work cooperatively with large landowners as part of the planning and on an ongoing basis.** For owners planning to periodically sell off houselots, encourage submission of predevelopment concept plans to facilitate orderly land division. For owners with extensive landholdings, consider opportunities to include some of their land in designated growth areas as an incentive for stronger land protection strategies in the rurally designated areas.
7. **Avoid fiscal policies that drive development to rural areas (e.g., high fees for sewer and water service).**
8. **Incorporate the *Beginning With Habitat* landscape approach into your planning process for rural areas.** Use the maps (riparian areas, high-value habitats and large, undeveloped blocks) to help you to define rural areas and to further define critical rural areas. Give careful consideration to the map showing large undeveloped, unroaded blocks of land. It provides a revealing look at the remaining areas in your community that function as unfragmented ecosystems, serve as habitat to non-fringe wildlife species and provide other valuable functions.
9. **Publicize your growth/rural area designations. Inform municipal officials and developers about them, and have your land use map clearly posted as you consider preapplication conferences and sketch plans of new projects.** If your community has made a good faith effort to designate viable growth areas, you may find that many developers will voluntarily choose to propose projects there instead of in designated rural areas.
10. **Develop a targeted open space plan.** Such plans typically provide a detailed inventory of rural lands and open space resources, identify potential interconnections, establish priorities and fully explore protection mechanisms. Although the open space plan might be developed concurrently with the overall update of your plan, it is more often developed as an implementation step.

Ten Regulatory Approaches

- 1. Recommend strong regulatory approaches that have the effect of limiting residential development and other forms of incompatible development in designated rural areas – rather than just accommodating it on moderately sized lots.**
- 2. Adopt rate of growth limits in your designated rural areas.** This approach involves establishing thresholds for the number of building permits that will be issued annually for your rural areas, while not setting any limits for your designated growth areas. For example, a community that has been issuing an average of 50 building permits per year might limit the number of permits issued within the designated rural area to 25% of that number. For critical rural areas, you should consider setting an even lower threshold. This approach is recommended only if you are committed to creating and maintaining viable growth areas that can accommodate the majority of growth anticipated for the planning period.
- 3. Limit the amount of new road building (except land management roads not used for development purposes).** Set a maximum length for new rural subdivision roads. Limit “backlot” private road provisions in designated growth or transition areas. Require new rural roads to be privately maintained.
- 4. Limit the number of lots allowed in individual subdivision projects within a specified timeframe.**
- 5. Adopt access limitation provisions along rural road arterials.**
- 6. Require conservation subdivisions that permanently preserve significant amounts of open space.**
- 7. In critical rural areas, including selected shorelands within this category, require planning board approval of all single-family dwelling permits.** Include siting criteria relative to important features.
- 8. Set a density standard for shoreland subdivisions in designated rural areas based on lake frontage, and require a portion of undeveloped shoreland to be permanently set aside.** For example, set an overall density of one dwelling per 400 square feet of shore frontage, but allow 200-foot frontage lots, with the residual shorefront preserved as open space.
- 9. If you decide to pursue density distinctions between growth and rural in an effort to effectively guide growth and protect rural values, consider very low densities in the designated rural area, or at least critical rural areas, coupled with high densities in designated growth areas.** (see Recommendation #40). A one unit per 10-acre density in the rural area is probably a minimum to do this effectively. For critical rural areas, a density in the one unit per 20-30 acre range may be more appropriate. By focusing on *density* rather than *lot size*, you can provide large landowners with opportunities to create much smaller lots in appropriate locations – as long as overall density is maintained. This approach presumes a high level of public and political support to protect these lands, and general buy in by the affected landowners.
- 10. Ensure that your town’s regulatory mechanisms are “friendly” toward resource-based enterprises that keep land open and productive.** Require substantial buffers between new residential development and working farms. Review zoning restrictions to ensure they allow diversification and related commercial uses that keep the businesses profitable.

APPENDIX B: SELECTED STRATEGIES FOR CREATING VIABLE GROWTH AREAS

First, Ten Things Not To Do

1. **Do not make them too small.** Don't draw the boundaries of growth areas too tightly around existing villages or build up areas with little room to accommodate future growth. Expand their boundaries to encompass appropriate lands on the periphery of your existing villages. If additional areas for development are needed, consider establishing a new growth area in an appropriate area of town.
2. **Do not make them too big.** On the other hand, don't designate expansive growth areas that promote a sprawling development pattern. Allow room for relatively compact growth that can be efficiently provided with municipal services. If you want to provide some opportunities for suburban type development on larger lots, consider creating a well-defined transitional area (See Recommendation #38).
3. **Do not "strip out" arterial roads with highway commercial growth areas.** Balance economic development needs with the roles arterials play in carrying regional traffic and serving as community gateways. Consider creating compact commercial growth areas with enough lateral room to accommodate secondary service roads.
4. **Do not promote low densities in growth area.** Avoid proposing or maintaining density standards that discourage a compact development pattern there. While lots in areas without public sewer and water need to be sized adequately to avoid contamination of wells by septic systems, do not overreact to this concern by requiring larger lots than necessary.
5. **Do not recommend or perpetuate standards that make it difficult to create growth areas with a human scale and a sense of place.** Standards requiring large lots, deep setbacks and wide streets often hinder efforts to create more livable villages and neighborhoods.
6. **Do not make development difficult in growth areas.** In general, avoid procedures and requirements that have the effect of making new development more difficult and expensive in your designated growth areas.
7. **Do not limit growth area uses to single-family housing.** Consider multi-family housing and small commercial businesses, even for primarily residential growth areas.
8. **Do not forget how new roads and their configuration influence the viability of designated growth areas.** Your municipality can exert considerable influence over future road decisions.
9. **Do not site important public facilities outside of growth areas.** Don't site or relocate your municipal office, schools, library, post office or other county or state facilities outside your designated growth area.
10. **Do not let parking requirements and standards hold precedence over more global considerations.**

Ten Non-Regulatory Approaches

- 1. Invest to make growth areas more livable.** Plan for improvements that will make your growth areas more livable and attractive to new development. Add or expand sidewalks, build bike paths, plant street trees and landscaping. Preserve select open spaces, both for active recreational use and more passive pursuits.
- 2. Promote an integrated road network.** An expanded and interconnected road system in your growth area promotes development opportunities and improves its function as a place of residence and commerce. In your Capital Investment Planning process, target major road improvement projects to your designated growth areas. Consider opportunities to make interconnections across existing rights-of way. As part of an overall Village Master Planning Process, identify opportunities for new roads and interconnections as development unfolds.
- 3. Add/expand sewer and water service.** While a workable growth area is possible without public sewer or water, the presence of one or both of these services makes it much easier to foster a compact development pattern. If your growth area is already served by public water and/or sewer, consider expanding it to serve lands you have added to your growth area designation (see link to [Patient Sewer Loan Fund](#) in Appendix D). For a small community without these utilities, the addition of a small public water system to serve a growth area may be the most feasible option.
- 4. Promote improvement and retention of basic facilities and services.** Pursue policies that ensure that your designated growth area is home to basic civic services (schools and other public facilities) and to businesses that meet residents needs. Adopt a general policy in your plan that municipal, state and federal facilities will be located in designated growth areas. As your town plans for actual improvements of municipal buildings, work through parking, space or other issues in order to retain these facilities as cornerstones of your growth area. Establish a close working relationship with village merchants, and consider how town policies and programs might contribute to the economic viability of its village area.
- 5. Foster good design.** Efforts to accommodate development in designated growth areas should not be at the expense of the attributes that make living in and visiting these areas attractive. Your visioning processes can be used to highlight design issues and ascertain what elements the community most values. Short of actual regulation, you can pursue a number of meaningful steps, such as developing voluntary design guidelines, working with developers to integrate principles of traditional neighborhoods, and setting high standards of design in new and improved public facilities.
- 6. Confront NIMBYism.** The acronym, NIMBY (“not in my backyard”), refers to uses or developments that residents may oppose – at least in their immediate vicinity – because of concerns that it will negatively affect them. While it is the right of abutters and the community at large to oppose or support particular projects as part of the development review process, “NIMBYism” can present challenges in the designation and management of growth areas. Residents of these areas may be wary of talk of accommodating more development near their neighborhoods, and oppose efforts to increase density standards or allow more mixed uses. Without dismissing such concerns, your update process provides an opportunity for a candid public dialogue on NIMBYism. In some cases it is helpful to separate valid issues concerning traffic and environmental factors from unfounded fears. Use of positive examples as described in the next recommendation can allay fears and build support.
- 7. Present positive examples.** Resistance to the concept of growth areas is sometimes based on a negative view of what development and change can bring. Your visioning and update process afford an opportunity to discuss how inevitable change might enhance the community. Show positive examples of how development has been successfully integrated into growth areas. Use example from other communities, in Maine and nationwide. Use visualization techniques as discussed in Recommendation #27.

8. **Pursue redevelopment opportunities.** Your designated growth area may include buildings or sites that have potential for redevelopment that can, in turn, act as a catalyst for other improvements. Pursue funding and strategies for redeveloping “brownfields” – sites with real or perceived environmental contamination. Identify vacant or underutilized buildings or lands that might be appropriate for commercial redevelopment, or for other projects that might enhance your downtown or village.
9. **Publicize growth area designations.** Your land use plan – particularly the map delineating growth, rural and other land use designations should be prominently displayed and well publicized in your community. If you have made a good faith effort at identifying growth areas, you may be surprised at how many developers voluntarily focus their efforts in these areas, as opposed to rural areas.
10. **Conduct village master planning.** In creating viable growth areas, sometimes the devil lies in the details. As part of your update you may recommend a number of policies and strategies focused on these areas, with the understanding that more information gathering and planning is necessary to overcome particular hurdles or further investigate opportunities. In these cases, consider recommending the development of a village or downtown master plan that provides a detailed future roadmap for the area.

Ten Regulatory Approaches

1. **Be true to your update’s land use plan and policies.** In some communities, the approach to growth areas as set forth the comprehensive plan and as implemented in zoning and land use provisions can be quite different, if not at odds. Aim not only for making your update’s land use plan and subsequent ordinances consistent, but for honing the standards and requirements of the latter to make them better tools for promoting your plan’s growth area objectives.
2. **Allow for density.** Recommend standards in your growth area that will promote the development of compact villages and neighborhoods. If you have an existing village area characterized by relatively high density, consider standards that, at a minimum allow, allow this pattern to be replicated. Recommendation #33 provides some additional guidance regarding density.
3. **Promote mixed uses.** Strongly consider an approach that will allow an intermixing of single-family, multi-family, public and small-scale commercial uses – at least in portions of your growth areas. Changing demographics, including the aging of the population and shrinking household sizes, are increasing the need for housing options other than single-family dwellings in most communities. Mixed use areas also provide more opportunities for residents to have easy access to basic municipal, community and commercial services.
4. **Allow accessory apartments.** Even for growth areas that are targeted for mostly single-family housing, consider permitting accessory or “in law” apartments within existing residences. Allowing such apartments serves a number of purposes: it increases housing supply without consuming additional land area; it provides opportunities for affordable rental units; and it creates semi-independent living situations for aging parents, seniors or residents with disabilities.
5. **Streamline review process.** Consider ways of expediting the review of projects – both residential and non-residential – in your designated growth areas. The process of designating a growth area should be a meaningful exercise that identifies it as a place where well-designed developments are generally appropriate. While all reviews should still involve a thorough consideration of impacts and neighborhood compatibility, as well as opportunities for public comment, examine how your subdivision and site plan review processes might be streamlined for projects proposed for growth areas.
6. **Set high standards for development.** Even as you seek to accommodate development in your growth area by allowing higher densities, mixed uses, and a streamlined review process, set high standards with a focus on sensitive design and enhancement of community values. Develop design criteria based on the traditional neighborhood concept, and require new subdivisions to meet these standards. For commercial development, try looking beyond the typical focus on parking, circulation and buffering, and investigate what types of standards might promote better designed projects. For all types of development, be demanding about what

improvements and amenities will be needed. Require rigorous landscaping, sidewalks and footpaths, where appropriate, and green spaces.

7. **Revise counterproductive requirements.** Other development standards besides lot sizes can work against efforts to enhance development in your growth areas. In particular, minimum setback requirements often have the effect of disrupting the intimate relationship between buildings and streets that makes for an attractive neighborhood. Reduce front setbacks to bring new buildings closer to the street; in older neighborhoods, require infill structures to conform to the setback lines of its neighbors. Examine dimensional and other standards in your land use codes to determine if they help or hinder efforts to foster more livable neighborhood and village landscapes.
8. **Focus on roads.** Review your community's approach to the review and approval of new roads within growth areas. Encourage interconnections with existing streets and discourage cul-de-sacs. In anticipation of future development and street connections, require dedication of rights-of-way. Revise road standards to allow relatively narrow streets within new subdivisions. Require sidewalks in most cases, roadside footpaths in others. Aim for the creation of new road networks that are not only well integrated into the proposed project, but which connect, rather than isolate it from the existing pattern of development.
9. **Encourage infill development.** Growth areas should generally include some room for future development on the periphery of built-up sectors. But also consider how your community might better encourage infill development within the bounds of existing community centers, particularly if your community has public water and/or sewer. Consider downzoning that will free up some vacant parcels for development. Review setback and frontage requirements to see if they are discouraging infill development, and make adjustments as necessary. If you don't already, allow multi-family housing, and avoid requiring large amounts of land area for each additional unit. Allow accessory apartments and apartments over businesses. As you pursue these and other options, also seek opportunities to create open spaces: village greens, small parks, bike and footpaths, water access points and natural features that will help give your growth area valued breathing room.
10. **Promote affordable housing.** Growth areas that allow for relatively compact development and a range of housing types generally provide greater opportunities for affordable housing. As you review your regulatory approach for your growth areas, consider ways of making them even more conducive to the creation of housing affordable to a range of incomes. Require new residential developments to provide a certain percentage of affordable units. Allow multi-family housing, including senior housing and residential care facilities. For commercial redevelopment projects, permit and promote on-site housing.

APPENDIX C: OTHER IDEAS THAT HOLD PROMISE

Following are ten innovative ideas that hold promise for use in Maine as tools for better directing growth relative to growth and rural areas and achieving other desirable objectives. Several of these approaches are relatively untested, and it is highly recommended that you obtain professional planning assistance and legal counsel before proceeding.

- 1. Leasing of Development Rights.** Owners of large rural land tracts are often faced with rising property taxes, which under state law must be based on the market value of the land (unless the owner is participating in the Tree Growth or Farm and Open Space programs). Ironically, these high taxes often lead rural landowners to subdivide or otherwise develop their properties, which in turn, creates more demand for municipal services, often in outlying areas of town where such service is most costly.

For owners of large tracts in designated critical rural areas, your community could offer a program in which a portion of the tax revenues collected on their lands is returned to them in the form of an annual lease payment – if they agree to forgo development options for a defined length of time. Depending on the exact terms of the lease, these payments could have the effect of capping these owners’ property tax liability – or at least significant slowing its increase. And the municipality benefits from avoiding the potential service costs of new residential development in these areas – and from maintaining the character and other qualities of these rural areas.

- 2. Density Transfer Fee.** Resistance to allowing higher densities in designated growth areas is sometimes based on the concern that more development will be accommodated in these areas without any reduction in the amount of growth occurring in designated in rural areas. Residents may be more accepting of higher densities in growth areas if high-valued rural lands are correspondingly taken off the table for development.

A variation on the typical transfer of development rights (TDR) concept has promise in this regard. In growth areas, or in portions of these areas so designated, municipalities with contract zoning provisions can allow proposed developments to exceed the base density established for those areas. In return, the developer would agree to pay a *density transfer fee* that would be dedicated to purchasing development rights of highly valued rural lands, most appropriately in the critical rural area.

This approach may be most feasible for communities that have public sewer and water, and a public that is receptive to innovation and confronting the inherent tradeoffs in effectively managing growth. It is also important to set a base density in designated growth areas that is viewed as an incentive for developing in these areas and conducive to the growth of desirable, compact neighborhoods – without the contract zoning option. In this context, it should be clearly understood that the additional development permitted beyond this base density under this modified TDR program is a significant windfall to the developer, and that the fee should rightly capture a significant percentage of this windfall.

- 3. Sprawl Offset Fees.** One of the major principles of Maine’s recent smart growth initiatives is that people have the freedom to live where they want – but that they also should bear the true costs of their decisions. Unfortunately, many federal, state, regional and local policies effectively subsidize the costs of sprawl, which results in further promoting this development pattern and passing the costs on to the larger population.

Your comprehensive plan update provides a general opportunity to examine which town policies and actions have the effect of encouraging development in rural areas, and the extent to which a sprawling development pattern is creating burdens on the municipality and the taxpayers as a whole. But you may wish to go further in trying to better apportion the costs of sprawl.

One idea that holds promise is assessing fees to help offset the costs, both fiscal and environmental, of new development in outlying areas. For particular services such as trash collection, you could establish a surcharge for service to previously unserved rural sectors. Or in recognition of the loss of rural open space

and recreational opportunities that occurs as development encroaches on rural areas, you could assess an impact fee on new lots in these areas, with revenues dedicated to select purchase of rural lands.

Communities interested in pursuing such strategies should move forward cautiously and seek planning and legal assistance. New taxes require legislative approval – even if they are labeled as “fees,” and impact fees must be consistent with state law that requires, among other things, that the fee be clearly connected to the impacts of the new development (as opposed to impacts caused both by new and existing development). You must also be prepared to challenge the strongly-held viewpoint that all taxpayers deserve the same level of public service regardless of where they decide to build a new home and of the higher costs involved in providing them with services.

4. **Tax Base Sharing.** A weakness of many strategies, including several listed in this Appendix, is they do little to confront the regional factors that drive growth locally. Under the current system, towns often compete for new commercial and industrial development in expectation of strengthening their tax bases and local economy. This competitive environment is often a prescription for sprawl. Faced with the choice of allowing the big new project along the rural arterial well outside of the village or “losing” the project to the next town, it is not surprising that many towns settle on the former.

Tax base sharing has the potential to change this scenario, promoting cooperation rather than competition, and fostering an approach to siting projects that is consistent with both local and regional plans for growth. Under this approach, a portion of one community may be designated as the appropriate location for the project, and the cooperating communities share costs associated with facilitating the development there and subsequently providing it with necessary municipal services. In return, the communities would share in the tax benefits.

At least to begin with, the concept might be best suited for the development of a specific project, such as a regional business park, for which the terms of the agreement can be fully discussed and negotiated. First Park in Oakland is an example of such a cooperative venture. As communities gain confidence and experience in the tax-base sharing technique, however, it might be applied to any large-scale proposal within a defined area in one community – with benefits accruing to other participating towns.

5. Street Platting Plan

A once used, but largely forgotten, planning approach is to create street platting plan, sometimes as referred to an *official map*. This plan essentially serves as a template for the siting of future roads, fostering interconnections and a logical hierarchy of streets. Once such a plan is adopted, proposed rights-of-way would be protected, as land is developed, and new roads and improvements would need to conform to the established grid.

This technique was widely used at a time when many municipal governments were more actively and broadly involved with the development of their communities. Since that time, this role has generally narrowed. Today, the layout of roads (and new development accessed by them) unfolds largely as a result of individual private-sector decisions. Communities, however, have an opportunity to reassert an element of control over the development of street networks by use of this technique.

A street platting plan might be best developed as an implementation step, in conjunction with a village or growth area master plan. But as part of updating your plan, you can discuss the technique and provide valuable guidance on how the approach might be best used in your community.

Gaining public support of a street platting plan may involve some of the same challenges inherent in creating more viable growth areas. Efforts to more effectively set the terms for how future growth unfolds may be viewed by some as promoting unwanted growth. Residents of existing neighborhoods may resist the idea of future road interconnections and more through traffic. And some private landowners may view the technique as preempting their decision-making regarding the future options for their land.

Despite these challenges, the approach is worth considering as you upgrade your plan's strategies. It may have particular merit in newly designated growth areas that are relatively undeveloped, and on municipally owned lands (see Strategy #6). If use of the technique on a broad scale is not feasible, you may find that elements of it can be adapted to your community. For instance, if creating a grid on a map proves unfeasible, you could establish a set of principles to guide the location and configuration of future roads. Even relatively straightforward requirements such as prohibiting cul-de-sacs and retaining rights-of-way between new subdivisions and adjacent undeveloped parcels can help promote a more integrated road network in your growth area.

6. Use of Municipal Lands

Many municipalities own a significant amount of land, developed and undeveloped, within town centers and in outlying areas. Opportunities exist for better utilizing these properties, especially in creating more viable growth areas and enhancing the values of rural areas.

In growth areas, consider how municipally owned lands might be used to promote compact growth patterns, integrated street networks and a more livable neighborhoods. Reserve available lands for the siting and expansion of municipal facilities, rather than moving them to outlying areas. If these sites have space constraints, investigate land swaps to consolidate centrally located holdings. As part of developing a street platting plan, or independently, plan for making future road connections, and identify existing rights-of-way and abandoned roads that might be improved to promote access and circulation. Earmark other parcels for parks, recreational areas and other public amenities.

Communities with extensive growth area land holdings may want to consider an even more ambitious approach in which development of these properties is a central component in realizing the future vision for these areas. For instance, opportunities may exist to create public/private partnerships to develop portions of these properties into compact new neighborhoods that can serve the housing needs of moderate-income households and senior citizens. A long-range plan for such properties might be developed that includes expansion of municipal buildings, creation of centralized recreational facilities and a connecting trail network.

Even for rural towns, options may exist for creating or enhancing modest community centers by strategically developing municipally owned lands. For instance, portions of a centrally located town-owned parcel might be developed into an attractive village housing cluster, with the private developer footing the bill for construction of a community water or sewerage system that could also serve adjacent public buildings. Such an approach might be enhanced by using the contract zoning/density transfer fee approach discussed in Strategy #2. The town could allow the base density for the area to be substantially exceeded, but a portion of the windfall would be recaptured as a fee that would then be used to purchase development rights in the town's critical rural areas.

In rural areas, tracts of municipally owned lands should be considered as you discuss rural and critical rural area designations and target permanent protection efforts. By working to protect lands adjacent to publicly owned lands, you can maximize your efforts at maintaining large blocks of undeveloped lands. Opportunities may exist as well for swapping and selling municipal lands to consolidate holdings, and to enhance these lands for passive and active recreational pursuits.

7. Grassroots Planning Support

Successfully implementing planning strategies, especially innovative ones such as are listed here, may require a degree of nurturing, patience and persistence – qualities that may be lacking if your town government is a relatively small operation that is mainly focused on providing basic services: schools, public safety, road maintenance and solid waste disposal.

One option is to establish a grass-roots organization to serve as an advocate for good planning and a mechanism for pursuing a variety of initiatives. The organization could be initially comprised entirely of

volunteers, or you may find that by securing grants, local donations and membership dues, you can afford to hire part-time or full-time staff. In some cases, establishing a regional organization may allow resources to be pooled, and provide a valuable interlocal perspective. Or you may decide that there is sufficient interest, resources and need to support a local group. The *Friends of Mid-Coast Maine* is a relatively new regional group that focuses on the coastal communities from Bath to Belfast. The *Unity Barn Raisers*, which has been active on a number of initiatives in that town over the last decade, is an example of a local grass-roots organization.

Groups such as these may be able to provide assistance on comprehensive planning processes, mobilizing the public, providing planning committees with resources, and advocating for more effective planning approaches. It is important, however, that the development of your plan remain the province of your local planning committee, and that measures advocated by these or other organizations be fully discussed and debated by your committee – and the public at large.

Grass-roots organizations may be of most assistance in helping your community to actually implement its plan. They could be listed as a responsible party for a number of tasks in your implementation schedule, and as providing assistance on others. They could help your community track development and devise an ongoing tracking system. They could prepare applications for planning and implementation grants for the town. They could pursue discussions with large landowners regarding pre-development planning and other strategies discussed in this handbook that may be more effectively handled.

APPENDIX D: ON-LINE RESOURCES⁶

Growth Management Law and Rules

Planning and Land Use Regulation Act (also known as Growth Management Law)

<http://janus.maine.gov/legis/statutes/30-A/title30-Ach187sec0.html>

(Highlighted Amendments this law adopted at the last session of the legislature can be found at:

<http://janus.maine.gov/legis/bills/billdocs/LD209401.doc>

SPO Rules Governing Review of Comprehensive Plans: Chapters 201 and 202.

<http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rcn/apa/07/chaps07.htm>

FAQ Regarding 2003 Deadline <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs/faq2003.php>

State Planning Office Website

SPO Website: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/>

Land Use Planning page: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/>

Publications page: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs/>

Technical Assistance page: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/techassist/>

Demographic and Economic Information

SPO Census page, including “Find-it-Yourself” census link <http://www.maine.gov/spo/economics/census/>

SPO Economic and Demographics page, including town level social and economic data:

<http://www.maine.gov/spo/economics/economics/>

Visioning

Community Visioning Handbook: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs/>

An excellent bibliography of visioning resources: <http://www.sustainable.org/creating/vision.html>.

Housing

Maine State Housing Authority webpage: <http://www.mainehousing.org/reports.html>. A number of useful publications can be downloaded including:

- ♦ *The State of Maine Housing, 2002;*
- ♦ *Houses, Jobs and Maine People, 2001.* Excellent overview of affordable housing problem;
- ♦ Description of Affordable Housing Subdivision Program; and
- ♦ Memo from the Director describing programs and initiatives likely to result from \$19 million affordable housing bond approved by voters in 2001.

Fiscal Matters

The Cost of Sprawl: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/docs/CostofSprawl.pdf>

⁶ In some cases, these links go to index pages, rather than directly to the document, to provide the user the option of choosing different versions with faster download times.

Planning for Permanence

Maine Coast Heritage Trust Webpage. Useful information and links. <http://www.mcht.org/>. Excellent handbook, *Conservation Options: A Guide for Maine Landowner* is not available on-line, but a free copy can be requested.

A Listing of Maine Land Trusts <http://www.mltm.org/search.asp>

Land for Maine Future's Program page: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/lmf/>

Transportation

- ♦ MDOT website: <http://www.maine.gov/mdot>
- ♦ Guide on how municipalities can work with MDOT: <http://www.maine.gov/mdot/planning/csd/muniguide.htm>
- ♦ Guidance on the agency's access management program:
<http://www.maine.gov/mdot/planning/bureauweb/accesslinks.htm>
- ♦ Bicycle and pedestrian travel website: <http://www.maine.gov/mdot/opt/bike/homepage.htm>

Economic Development

Department of Economic and Community Development website. <http://www.econdevmaine.com>

Report on Reviving Service Center Communities: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs/svccenters.php>

Maine Downtown Center website: <http://www.mdf.org>.

Webpage listing state agency websites: <http://www.maine.gov/portal/government/agencies.html>

Visualization Tools

Information on Visual Preference Surveys: http://www.lgc.org/techserve/cis/cis_tool.html

Community Viz™, website: <http://www.communityviz.com/>

Information on PA Blueprint

Livable Growth Areas and Communities

Indicators of Livable Communities: (7.67 MB) <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs/index.php>

Traditional Neighborhoods

Markets for Traditional Neighborhoods <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/docs/MarketsforTradNeighborhoods.pdf>

Great American Neighborhood description: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs/gandesc.php>

Why Households Move: Two Maine Surveys: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs/index.php>

Information on sewer extension loan program: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/finassist/sewer.php>

Conservation Subdivisions

Overview from Natural Lands Trust <http://www.natlands.org/planning/growgreen3.html>

Information from Center for Land Use Education. <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/tracker/Summer2002/conssubdiv.html>

Miscellaneous

Partial Listing of Consultants: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/techassist>

Beginning with Habitat Info: <http://www.maine.gov/doc/nrimc/mnap/programs/BeginWithHabitat.html>

GIS: Website of Office of GIS:

Brownfield Guide: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs/bfguidevol1.php>

Community Preservation Advisory Committee: First Annual Report: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs>

Note: The SPO document *Comprehensive Planning: A Manual for Maine Communities*, 1992, is still the definitive publication on comprehensive planning in Maine, although it is best used in conjunction with this handbook. The publication is not yet available online, but is likely to be posted to SPO's website in the future. Hard copies are available from SPO for \$5 each. A publication order form is available on SPO's website: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs>

APPENDIX E: SMART GROWTH RESOURCES

Overarching Smart Growth Principles⁷

- ♦ Individuals are free to choose where to live;
- ♦ Individuals bear the costs of their decisions;
- ♦ Healthy places don't die; and
- ♦ Developers are allies in implementing public policy.

Smart Growth-Related Web Sites

- ♦ Smart Growth On-line. <http://www.smartgrowth.org/>
- ♦ EPA smart growth site <http://www.epa.gov/piedpage/>
- ♦ Sustainable Communities Network <http://www.sustainable.org/>
- ♦ The Planners Web <http://www.plannersweb.com/>
- ♦ Vermont Forum on Sprawl <http://www.vtsprawl.org/>
- ♦ What is Smart Growth? <http://www.planning.org/planningpractice/2001/april012.htm>
- ♦ GrowSmart Maine is a new statewide, non-profit organization dedicated combating sprawl and promoting sensible growth. For information, contact Lisa Fahay, Coordinator: Phone: 847-9275. E-mail: lfahay@growsmartmaine.org
- ♦ For additional web resources, the SPO Land Use Team's website includes many links to SPO Publications <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/pubs> and other useful links, <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/links>

⁷ Developed by Governor King's Cabinet Committee on Smart Growth.

APPENDIX F: SPO UPDATE GRANT PROGRAM

In 2001-2002, SPO offered a pilot comprehensive plan update grant program aimed at supporting communities committed to developing stronger comprehensive plans. The application requirements and evaluation criteria for this grant program were consistent with SPO's view that plan updates should focus on enhancing the effectiveness and innovation of comprehensive plans. Applicants were required to perform a rigorous evaluation of their existing plan, analyze the location of recent growth, and explain how the plan will be bolder and incorporate smart growth principles. A substantial local match was required, and communities were encouraged to provide additional leveraging to strengthen their grant proposals.

Under the program, municipalities with plans determined to be consistent with the Law were given a scoring advantage over those with "inconsistent" plans. Applicants with inconsistent plans were also asked

to convincingly demonstrate in their applications how they planned not only to achieve a consistency finding, but to develop a bolder, smarter plan.

Among other contract terms, communities awarded grants were required to cooperate with SPO efforts to track future development relative to growth and rural areas, set future growth thresholds, and to hold an orientation with SPO staff regarding expectations for plan updates.

Comprehensive Plan Update Grant Recipients: 2001-2002

<i>Alfred</i>	<i>Freeport</i>	<i>Raymond</i>
<i>Arundel</i>	<i>Gouldsboro</i>	<i>Sanford</i>
<i>Brewer</i>	<i>Gray</i>	<i>Searsmont</i>
<i>Bucksport</i>	<i>Harpwell</i>	<i>South Berwick</i>
<i>Buxton</i>	<i>Kennebunk</i>	<i>Surry</i>
<i>Caribou</i>	<i>Kennebunkport</i>	<i>Thomaston</i>
<i>Eastport</i>	<i>Millinocket</i>	<i>Turner</i>
<i>Ellsworth</i>	<i>Newry</i>	<i>Waterboro</i>
<i>Eustis</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Winter Harbor</i>
<i>Fort Fairfield</i>	<i>Ogunquit</i>	
<i>Fort Kent</i>	<i>Otisfield</i>	

For the first three grant rounds, 31 communities were awarded grants, out of 49 that applied. The program is being offered again in the Winter/Spring of 2003, contingent on availability of funding. Information on that program can be found at

<http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/finassist> . SPO would like to continue to offer this popular grant program on a periodic basis, as funding and staff resources permit.

APPENDIX G: REGIONAL COUNCILS

Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments

125 Manley Road
Auburn, ME 04210
tel: (207) 783-9186
fax: (207) 783-5211
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [John Maloney](#)

Greater Portland Council of Governments

68 Marginal Way
Portland, ME 04101
tel: (207) 774-9891 or 1-800-649-1304
fax: (207) 774-7149
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Rick Seeley](#)

Hancock County Planning Commission

395 State Street
Ellsworth, ME 04605
tel: (207) 667-7131
fax: (207) 667-2099
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Tom Martin](#)

Kennebec Valley Council of Governments

17 Main Street
Fairfield, ME 04937
tel: (207) 453-4258 or 1-800-731-5019
fax: (207) 453-4264
Land Use Technical Assistance Contacts: [Chris Huck](#), [Bill Najpauer](#)

Lincoln County
High Street
P.O. Box 249
Wiscasset, ME 04578
or
183 Main Street
Lewiston, ME 04240
tel: (207) 784-2617
fax: (207) 784-6118
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Bob Faunce](#)

MidCoast Council for Business Development and Planning

9 Lincoln Street
Brunswick, ME 04011
tel: (207) 729-0144
fax: (207) 729-0989
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Katrina Van Dusen](#)

Mid-Coast Regional Planning Commission

166 South Main Street, Suite 201
Rockland, ME 04841
tel: (207) 594-2299 or 1-800-339-6389
fax: (207) 594-4272
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Eric Galant](#)

Northern Maine Development Commission

302 Main Street
PO Box 779
Caribou, ME 04736
tel: (207) 498-8736 or 1-800-427-8736
fax: (207) 493-3108
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Jay Kamm](#)

Penobscot Valley Council of Governments

1 Cumberland Place, Suite 300
P.O. Box 2579
Bangor, Maine 04402-2579
tel: (207) 942-6389 or 1-800-339-6389
fax: (207) 942-3548
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Dean Bennett](#)

Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission

21 Bradeen Street, Suite 304
Springvale, ME 04083
tel: (207) 324-2952
fax: (207) 324-2958
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Kate Albert](#)

Washington County Council of Governments (formerly

Washington County Regional Planning Commission)
11 Church Street
PO Box 631
Calais, ME 04619
tel: (207) 454-0465
fax: (207) 454-2568
Land Use Technical Assistance Contact: [Judith East](#)

Regional Councils in Maine
prepared for the
State Planning Office

