

# Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission

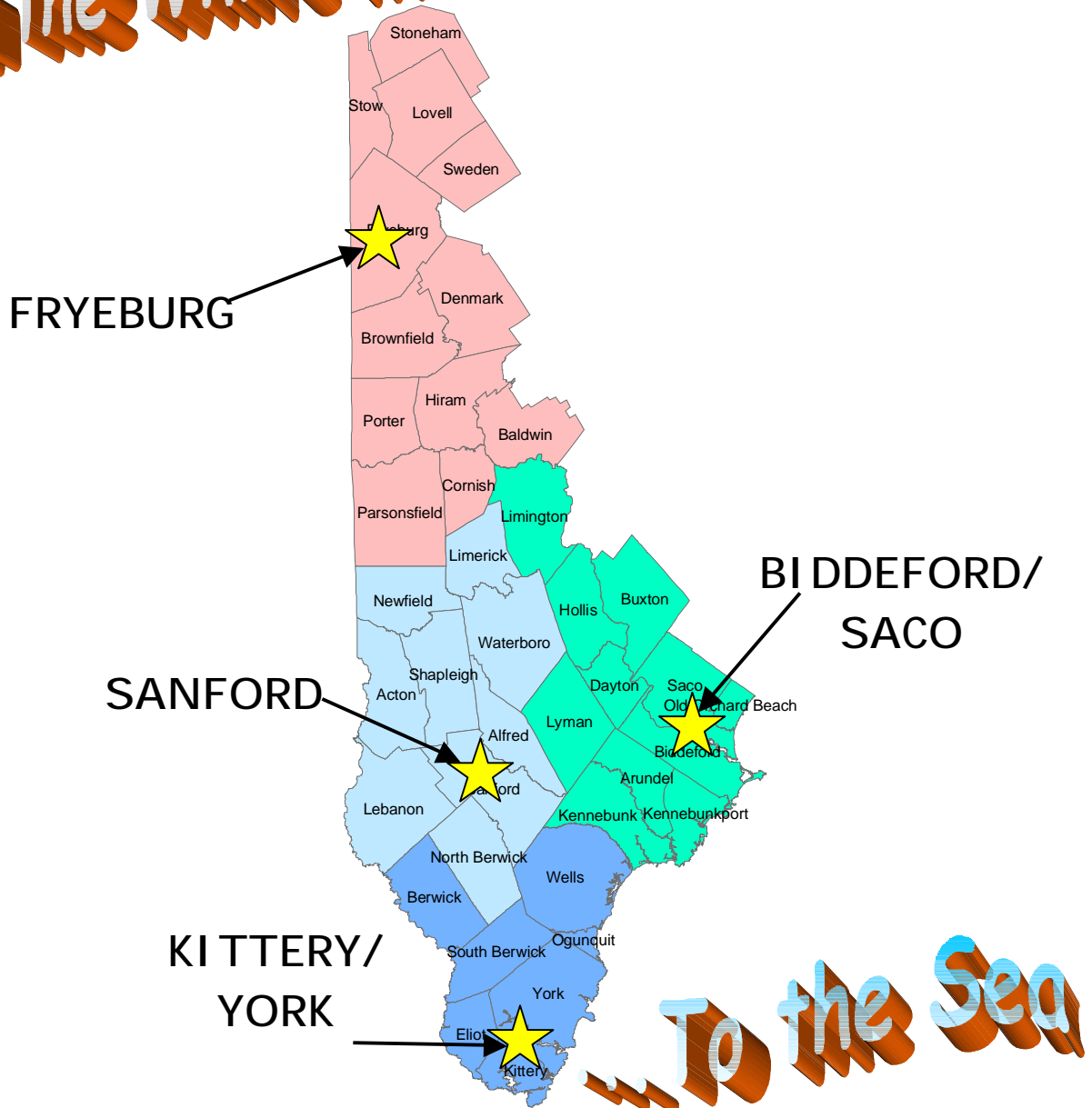
## CONNECTING COMMUNITIES:

### Planning in Southern Maine

A Report on Regional Visioning

June 2004

From the White Mountains



To the Sea

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# Introduction and Background

## Trends Since 1990

The first Regional Plan for the Southern Maine region was published in 1990, nearly 15 years ago. Much of the visioning and big-picture thinking that went into the region's original plan was actually done earlier, as part of the "York County 2000" exercise done in 1988.

Since its last regional plan was completed in 1990 the 39-town SMRPC region has experienced tremendous growth and change. From 1990 to 2000 the region added over 15,000 housing units and more than 23,000 new residents. While growth was fastest in outlying areas of the region that are becoming bedroom communities, there was also growth in service center towns and rural towns. In fact, all 39 towns in the region added population from 1990 and 2000 and it appears that all are continuing to grow.

Growth in the Southern Maine region has been driven largely by wealth from outside the region, with many new residents either commuting to jobs in Portland, Portsmouth or even Massachusetts, or coming from out of state to retirement or vacation homes. A simple illustration of how the Southern Maine region is changing comes from looking at the Census Bureau's definition of the Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). In 1990, just five towns in the SMRPC region were counted as part of the Portland MSA. In 2002, the Portland MSA was redefined to include 17 towns in the region. The SMRPC portion of the Portland MSA now includes every town from Kennebunk to Parsonsfield.

Looking at the character of the residential growth that has occurred, it has been almost entirely single-family development on isolated lots or in small subdivisions. As the region grows in piecemeal fashion, it is very difficult for local and regional planners to exact much control over the nature and the pace of growth. The end result is that transportation routes, public schools and municipal budgets are being strained, but little has been done in response.

As residential development has continued in Southern Maine, commercial development has followed as well, leading to increasing suburbanization of small towns and rural areas. There has been substantial strip and big box development in recent years in corridors such as Route 111 in Biddeford, Route 109 in South Sanford, Route 202 in Waterboro, and several sections of Route 1 from Kittery to Saco. The recent announcement of plans to build a 500,000 square foot retail power center on Route 111 in Biddeford further illustrates how the region continues to change.

There have been two major outcomes of the continued development pressure in Southern Maine. First, spiking land values have driven up housing prices and tax bills, leading to growing concerns about affordable housing and tax base. Second, most of the growth has been on large lots in rural areas, leading to the rapid consumption of land and to ever more contentious battles over new developments.

Even as development has occurred in the region, there have been mounting concerns about economic growth, particularly in its inland areas. Southern Maine has been hit hard by declines in the manufacturing and forestry sectors, and the region's economy has rapidly been transforming into more service-based industries that tend to pay lower wages. The region also faces the specter of the possible closing of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, which is the largest employer in the region and draws commuters from all over the area.

The sub-area with the greatest economic need is Sanford, which has had a far higher unemployment rate than the rest of Southern Maine for many years. In response to its continuing economic struggles, Sanford was the only town in Southern Maine that voted "yes" to a non-binding referendum in 2002 on whether or not it would consider being the host community for Maine's first resort casino. This vote triggered one of the most contentious periods in Southern Maine's recent history. However bitter, the debate did bring to the surface many regional planning issues that had been ignored for far too long.

### **The Lessons of the Casino Debate**

The Casino debate of 2003 produced a variety of arguments for and against the proposed project. Proponents touted the project's economic development potential and the large amount of tax dollars that it would deliver to the state. In the end, though, these strong arguments were not nearly enough to convince the voters of Maine to allow the project to go forward, and a statewide referendum in November 2003 came down strongly against the idea. More significantly, Southern Maine, where the casino was to be located, was even more against the proposal than the state as a whole. Many towns in the region voted the referendum down by margins of 80-20 or higher, in fact.

How casino opponents were able to soundly defeat the proposal offers a great deal of insight into the problems faced by Southern Maine. To be sure, the hazards of introducing large-scale casino gambling to the region were a part of the "Casinos No" argument—it was argued that gambling was immoral, that a casino would lead to widespread addiction problems, that kids would be allowed to gamble, et cetera. Leaving aside issues that were specific to casino gambling there were three key planning related issues raised by the casino's opponents that cut right to the heart of Southern Maine's present condition:

1. The region already faces mounting traffic congestion, housing shortages, and the pressures of sprawl and the casino would have made these situations worse
2. Neighboring towns had no voice in the decision-making process despite the fact that the casino would have had substantial impacts on these towns; and
3. Even though the region does need jobs and economic growth, there are more responsible and sustainable means of accomplishing these goals.

The first two points are largely indisputable statements of fact about the realities of planning in Southern Maine. The first point addresses the region's present condition and underscores the point that the fundamental nature of the region is changing. The second point highlights how Maine's home rule laws that grant land use authority to individual municipalities—no matter how large the project—gives nearby communities that will be affected very little power to affect new developments.

As for the final point, even most casino opponents agreed that some type of economic development was needed in the Sanford area, but few put forth alternative suggestions to the casino. In other words, they may not have known what they wanted, but they were quite sure about what they did NOT want.

## **The Need for a New Regional Vision**

In the aftermath of the casino the opinion was voiced by many people in Southern Maine that the region lacked direction. The “No” vote that carried the day in November 2003 was just the latest example of the region’s recurring attitude of “we know what we don’t want.” Over the past five years, Southern Maine has seen several other large developments shot down as well—an outlet mall in Kittery, a liquefied natural gas facility in Wells, a Great American Neighborhood in Scarborough (less than two miles from the edge of our region), and, most recently, a “racino” in Saco. These projects all promised things (jobs, tax revenue, a better way of life) that apparently were not compelling enough to override citizens’ fears of the unknown.

Though all of these proposals have gone away, the underlying reasons for their backers to want them—job losses and high taxes—have not gone away. The things that casino opponents felt were already bad—traffic, not enough housing, sprawl—are still problems as well.

As the Southern Maine region seeks to move forward, no regional vision or coordinated strategy exists to address these and other problems. Creating a vision would allow to region to get out of the habit of simply reacting to large proposals and into the habit of working in a proactive and cooperative manner to shape its future.

Such a vision has not been clearly expressed for the region in nearly 15 years, with the last major effort being the *York County 2000* vision plan that was begun in 1988 and resulted in the creation of a regional plan in 1990. Unfortunately few of the broad goals and strategies laid out in the 1990 regional plan have actually been achieved in the Southern Maine region. The following are of some of the regional plan’s goals that have not been met:

- Joint administration of public utilities and other infrastructure
- Clear distinction between infrastructure growth areas and non-growth areas
- Encouraging downtown redevelopment instead of strip commercial development
- Having balanced commercial and residential growth and a mix of housing within each municipality
- Provide greater flexibility for development of affordable housing units
- Implementing a regional TDR/land bank system

There have been some successes from the 1990 plan, though. SMRPC has implemented a cooperative purchasing program for its municipalities. A regional septage and sludge disposal plan was undertaken. Great strides have been made in protecting open space, promoting trail development, expanding transit options, and expanding recycling programs. In general, though, most of the plan’s goals have not been met and many new planning issues have emerged since that time. For these reasons, the Southern Maine region needed to begin anew and craft a regional vision that takes it forward to the year 2020.

## **Connecting Communities: Planning in Southern Maine**

In January 2004, following the defeat of the casino referendum, the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC) secured funding from the Maine State Planning Office (SPO) to conduct this much-needed regional visioning exercise. The exercise was aimed at laying the groundwork for positive change on a regional level well into the future.

Some of the questions that SMRPC hoped to answer during this process included:

- What types of economic development do we want to attract?
- How much capacity do we really have to accommodate new growth?
- How can many towns work together to address the impacts of large-scale projects?
- What is the proper balance between preserving our character and ensuring our economic survival?
- Why doesn't the state take a more active role in issues that affect many towns?

The visioning exercise was conducted over the period of February to May of 2004 and was given the name *Connecting Communities: Planning in Southern Maine*. In all, SMRPC staff convened eight different visioning meetings covering many different topics at locations all over the region. These sessions engaged many different constituencies in our region and provided an education on a variety of planning topics including Growth Management, Public Services and Transportation. In all, about 150 government, community and business leaders participated in these meetings and provided us with tremendous insight into the prospects for regional collaboration as we attempt to solve our planning problems.

The first product of *Connecting Communities* is this report, which lays out the region's Vision Statement for the future. SMRPC's hope is that this document will lead to many coordinated regional and sub-regional planning efforts including, potentially, a new regional plan.

## Summary of Visioning Meetings

The following visioning meetings were held by SMRPC as part of the *Connecting Communities* effort:

### **Session #1: Southern Maine Housing Roundtable**

*February 25, 2004, Saco City Hall  
Led by David Versel, Senior Planner*

This roundtable assembled more than 60 leading housing professionals from the entire Southern Maine region (York and Cumberland counties) to discuss current housing problems and strategize about potential solutions. Attendees at the Forum heard about a variety of statistics and findings regarding the housing situation and participated in a discussion about the most important problems we face and some potential solutions to them. Participants were also treated to a presentation by developer Peter Bass and City of Saco Economic Development Director Peter Morelli on the Park Street Lofts live-work project in Saco.

A brainstorming exercise at the end of the session identified 11 potential efforts and then prioritized them. These efforts are listed below in priority order:

- Review/eliminate retroactive citizen referendum process (e.g., Dunstan Crossing)
- Educate the public/policymakers
  - use “attainable” or other word instead of “affordable”
  - identify subregional pockets of success
  - develop a database of successful projects
  - showcase successful projects
  - develop visual techniques to illustrate density
- Enact a system for regional land-use planning, including authority, regulations, and review protocol
- Create a regional Housing Trust Fund
- Introduce a regional benchmarking program
  - Track data on vacancy rates for market v. affordable rental units
- Create a regional Transfer of Development Rights program
- Authorize pre-permitted “neighborhoods” that meet state standards
- Floating overlay zone for a Great American Neighborhood
- Draft a regional Fair Share Housing Agreement
- Support Employer Assisted Housing
  - Construction of units by employers as done in Damariscotta, Rockport
  - Waiver of security deposits, like Portland Chamber of Commerce program
- Develop incentives for landlords to maintain rents at affordable levels
  - Regional subsidy system for repairs
- Draft model deed restrictions for home ownership units to preserve affordability

## **Session #2: Evaluating Regional Transportation Impacts**

*March 11, 2004, Saco City Hall*

*Led by Tom Reinauer, Transportation Director*

This meeting brought together key state and municipal officials for a focused discussion on how to develop a process for reviewing large developments that have a regional impact on highway capacity, mobility, maintenance, and other transportation issues. About 15 transportation professionals attended this session.

Comments on the need for a stronger regional review included:

- MaineDOT conducts regional review of traffic impacts. Any additional or new regional review process will need to utilize specific, defined criteria.
- One large development could use up a large portion of an area's transportation network capacity, leaving surrounding communities with less development options.
- The Biddeford Mall retail development proposal will likely decrease regional mobility. Surrounding communities rely on the highway infrastructure in that area as a conduit to the Greater Portland area, which provides jobs and services for many southern Maine residents.
- Host communities do get increased tax revenue, but not necessarily enough to offset the cost of local impacts, such as the need for increased police and fire/rescue personnel.
- Parking requirements do not promote transit or non-motorized transportation options.
- Improvements required and made as part of large developments will often change surrounding land use. These land use changes are not currently looked at as impacts.
- Regional land use impacts are not and should not be reviewed by MaineDOT, but somebody should review them. Likewise, MaineDOT should not regulate "Quality of Life" issues.
- MaineDOT does not currently envision the RTAC taking a more prominent role in reviewing regional projects. The RTAC will likely continue to focus on long-term planning, corridor planning, policy issues and public participation.

Comments on the potential for a regional transportation impact fee system included:

- Cumulative impacts of multiple smaller developments can be as bad or worse than those from one large development. Should regional impact fees be considered?
- Rural towns may not look favorably upon regional impact fees because of the desire to protect "Home Rule" and because of local budget concerns.
- Regional Impact fees should apply to large developments and subdivisions only – not to individual houses.
- A change in State Law would be needed in order to create a regional impact fee system.
- The potential for a regional impact fee system will likely be examined as part of a Route 236 Corridor Study.
- A regional collaborative system that can control land use impacts, taxes, and spending is a potential solution that may be worth investigating further.
- Many rural towns have shown a willingness to regionalize for obvious cost savings, but are slow to give up their identity to be part of a region.

- However, the tide is turning on regionalization. Cultural shifts are evident in sprawl development patterns and the increasing number of two-income families that have limited time to be involved in public decision-making. Therefore, there may be more acceptance for regionalization.

### **Session #3: Ten Town Group Discussion**

*March 15, 2004, Waterboro Town Hall*

*Led by Paul Schumacher, Executive Director and J.T. Lockman, Planning Director*

The Ten Town Group was formed in 2003 to allow a forum for 10 rural communities in northern York County to discuss common issues and pursue regional efforts. The towns in this region are Acton, Alfred, Buxton, Dayton, Hollis, Limerick, Lyman, Newfield, Shapleigh and Waterboro. As part of the *Connecting Communities* effort, SMRPC attended this group's March meeting to discuss its position on regional planning issues and its potential role in future initiatives. Key findings were:

- The focus needs to be on practical matters that can demonstrably save towns money.
- All 10 towns already have largely met their capital needs for the time being, so it will be many years down the road before major joint purchases will be possible.
- This is a purely voluntary effort—towns are reluctant to be forced into regionalism.
- Existing regional purchasing programs run by SMRPC are popular and should continue.
- Towns feel very strongly about maintaining local control over planning and land use decisions, and would not be receptive to letting land use decisions be made at the regional level.

### **Session #4: Regional Environmental Planning Forum**

*March 17, 2004, Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve*

*Led by Paul Schumacher, Executive Director*

This forum brought together local, state and non-profit officials to discuss the need and desire to work regionally to identify and protect critical environmental resources from the effects of development while respecting municipal home rule. Around 20 attendees participated in a roundtable discussion on the issue.

Comments on the role of the DEP Site Law included:

- Need to legislate towns to contact one another—most will not volunteer
- Use COG enabling statute to address developments of regional impact (DRIs)
- After thresholds were raised a few years ago far fewer projects now actually undergo Site law review (although many may require DOT, stormwater, NRPA reviews).
- New rules are being written for Site Law review for cumulative impacts
- Inter-local agreements may be better way to provide regional review mechanism
- Put something in ordinances requiring notification to abutting towns and possibly RPC review
- Legislated review authority will be almost impossible to attain.

Comments on regional data collection and planning included:

- Beginning With Habitat (BWH) data is already being used effectively for land acquisition
- Encourage towns to work jointly on strategies regarding shared resources
- Have natural resource planner at SMRPC to implement standards and strategies for BWH and other data
- Look at Transferrable Development Rights (TDR) program
- Need a person devoted specifically to using BWH data and trying to implement changes to regs (i.e., shoreland zoning)
- Need standards that can be used to protect habitat

## **Sessions #5 and #6: Justifying Growth Caps**

*April 12, Massabesic High School, Waterboro*

*April 14, South Berwick Town Hall*

*Led by David Versel, Senior Planner*

Residential growth caps have become a widely used tool by rural municipalities in Southern Maine to slow the pace of growth within their borders. While many citizens applaud their use, growth caps are coming under increased criticism on many fronts, and many towns' caps may now be illegal due to recent changes in state law. These two parallel sessions were aimed at having an honest dialogue about the pros and cons of growth caps, and what alternatives may exist. Beth Della Valle from the Maine State Planning Office was on hand to offer the state's perspective on this issue.

Since this issue is so central to housing and land use issues in Southern Maine, two sessions were held to allow more people to attend in case of conflict or an unwillingness to travel far away. In all, 55 people attended the sessions (25 in Waterboro, 30 in South Berwick).

### **The following comments were made at the Waterboro session:**

- Prevailing attitude in many towns: “They can’t make us grow.”
  - Many towns are cutting budgets to make financial situation look more dire than it really is
  - Towns are opening themselves up to lawsuits by doing this.
- Even if towns have the fiscal capacity to accommodate growth, they are unwilling or unable to say so.
  - If fiscal analyses are done at the regional or state level, towns will be forced to be more honest about their capacity levels
  - Towns often truly unaware of their fiscal situations as they don’t have a handle on what their benchmarks are.
  - If predictable benchmarks are created, towns would have a better handle on what needs they have for capital facilities and public services.
- School Funding is the “killer” issue that makes towns anti-growth. If school funding issue is solved, other costs of growth would be manageable for towns.
  - Growth caps need to be about more than schools, though. Towns need to have realistic expectations about other costs of growth and how to pay for them.

- Resistance to capital investments in schools is partly due to the process for getting state aid for a new facility—it requires districts to invest \$500,000 just to be considered, and many smaller districts can't afford to do that.
- There is growing disenchantment with SADs—towns don't like being told what the bill is each year and having to pay it without question. Also, it's hard to coordinate varied philosophies among towns in a SAD.
- Towns cannot estimate fair share of the region's growth without more information.
  - In order to monitor change and determine fair shares of growth, towns need to understand what is happening, both locally and regionally.
  - SMRPC needs to do annual report on growth in the region to allow towns to gain a greater understanding of the bigger picture.
- Towns do not do long-range fiscal planning and therefore do not understand their ongoing capital investment needs that may inform growth cap decisions.
  - No rural towns in attendance tonight do more than a 1-year CIP.
  - Volunteer governments are already burned out with annual budgeting and simply lack the resources to take on long-range fiscal planning.
  - Only towns with full-time managers or financial directors are able to do multi-year CIPs.
- Question: What do you consider a “large development” to be?
  - 20 lots is considered “large”
  - 100 lots is considered “frightening”
  - Small towns simply cannot conceive of growing more than 15 lots at a time, so trying to understand the impacts of hundreds of new lots is scarier to towns than looking at each small project in an incremental way.
- Process is set up to force all towns, no matter how small, to grow. Small towns wonder if they can be linked to service centers and larger towns as purely rural areas.
  - Can Acton and Shapleigh's growth area be Sanford?
  - Why do all small towns need their own land use plans?
    - § Answer: they don't. Towns can do multi-jurisdictional plans, they just haven't.
  - SPO wants to see multi-town groups do three types of joint planning:
    - § Development/Land Use
    - § Conservation
    - § Capital
- Regional planning will require support from the private sector, both non-profit and for-profit.
  - Conservation planning is being done regionally—by private land trusts. They are and can play an important role in broader regional issues.
  - Developers are a crucial part of regional growth strategies, as they are the ones actually moving the dirt and creating the lots.
    - § If regional land use initiatives allow developers to still make money by doing creative projects, they will be willing partners.
  - Developers are aware that growth caps are suppressing development and are putting increased pressure on the legislature to act—more lawsuits may also be forthcoming if things do not change.
- Only a very small percentage of residents take an interest in growth and planning issues. Most are commuters who spend little time at home.

- Longer commutes are enabled by continued road expansions. Broader regional transportation planning would help towns understand this context.
- Many rural landowners do not participate in the planning process and then are upset when towns want to rezone their land.
- To most towns, lot size is immaterial—it’s the number of units that matter.
  - Large-lot development may use more land, but 100 units on 3-acre lots are seen as no worse (and in some cases, better) than 100 units on half-acre lots.
  - Even towns with cluster ordinances never see proposals for cluster developments.
- Why don’t service centers have growth caps?
  - Attitudes—less resistance to growth
  - Balanced tax bases allow for residential growth to be accommodated
  - Capacity is available in schools
  - Growth rates are much slower—new development doesn’t cause a townwide “shock” like in smaller communities.

**The following comments were made at the South Berwick session:**

- Caps alone are not restricting affordable housing
  - Units that would be built without caps would still be expensive, especially in coastal areas
  - The state funding formula creates fiscal disincentives to build affordable housing
- Impact Fee issues
  - Need to justify impact fees in three-step process:
    - § Assess situation
    - § Analyze what growth will do to it
    - § Determine “fair share” costs to new development
  - Can there be differential impact fees for rural/growth areas? Need to check into it
  - Towns need to understand their own unique relationships of public school enrollment growth to housing growth—varies from town to town
- Many towns’ fiscal situations are far worse than they look on paper, as residents tend to be land rich but cash poor
- Many towns don’t have public water or sewer and it is extremely expensive to build new system.
  - Allowing larger developments would potentially pass burden of creating systems to developers
  - For smaller developments, shared/package systems may be the answer
  - Public water is cheaper to establish than public sewer
- Question: What do you consider a “large development” to be?
  - 25 lots is considered “large”
  - 50-200 lots is considered “frightening, depending on size of town
- People come to rural towns looking for 2+ acre lots. What can towns do to make developers create smaller lots?
  - Make cluster ordinance the rule, not the exception and force applicants to prove hardship in order to get around it
  - Growth caps on subdivision lots stifle clustering, as they cause developers to pursue smaller projects—growth caps become disincentives for responsible development

- Stronger requirements for clustering may have negative effect of encouraging more unplanned, single-lot development
- Value of exempting affordable housing from caps
  - Positives – allows more diverse housing, encourages larger projects and better planning, shields from legal challenges
  - Negatives – seen as fiscally irresponsible, restricts ability of buyers to increase their investments
    - § These issues can be partially addressed by Affordable Housing TIF
- Defining growth areas can be extremely difficult to do
  - Perception that putting certain parcels in growth areas gives an unfair advantage to those landowners
    - § Density transfers (TDR, PDR, etc.) can address this inequity
  - Forcing each town to have growth and rural areas is a recipe for disaster. Land use planning would be much more effective at the regional level
    - § Towns can do multi-town plans, they just haven't as of yet
    - § SPO is now giving multi-town plans priority in its Comp Plan grant decisions

## **Session #7: Economic Development Focus Group**

*April 27, 2004, York County Community College, Wells*

*Led by Charles Lawton of Planning Decisions, Inc. (consultant to SMRPC)*

More than 20 economic development and business leaders attended this focus group, which was moderated by Charles Lawton of Planning Decisions, Inc. The purpose of the session was to identify ways that Southern Maine can capitalize on its strengths and promote quality economic development while retaining its character. Following a presentation on the regional economic situation by the moderator, a discussion was held to help answer these questions.

There were three key findings that emerged from this focus group. These are listed below, along with supporting comments for each.

1. There are many business development opportunities
  - Health/Bio-tech and marine research have strong potential in the region
  - Mill buildings have great value for niche manufacturing and creative economy businesses
  - Quality of life is major asset of the region
  - Need to improve speed at which commercial and industrial buildings go through the development/redevelopment process
  - Need more incentives/assistance programs for attracting businesses
2. There is a need for closer cooperation between business and education
  - Educational institutions need to be more positive about manufacturing and technical education programs
  - Need more continuing education programs to help older workers stay current
  - Develop more distance learning opportunities
  - Improve networking opportunities for young professionals/recent graduates

- Encourage young entrepreneurs to invest in/move to Maine
  - Make better use of York County Community College—design more programs to serve businesses
3. There is need for greater collaboration among economic development organizations
- Regional approach is not a “natural” in Southern Maine like in Northern Maine, as many communities don’t really want to see economic development
  - Efforts should focus on bringing together pro-growth communities instead of shoehorning all communities into one effort
  - Promote importance of bringing jobs closer to home and stopping the brain drain
  - No need for new entity—SMRPC can be the conduit

## **Session # 8: Rural Economic Development Forum**

*April 28, Parsonsfield Town Hall*

*Led by Paul Schumacher, Executive Director and Chuck Morgan, Economic Development Director*

The issues and concerns of rural York and southern Oxford County are somewhat different than the more urbanized parts of the region. This forum, which was attended by about 15 community and business leaders, discussed opportunities for economic growth in Southern Maine’s rural areas and the unique challenges faced by these towns. Among the key findings were:

- The geographic isolation of the rural towns means that economic development will need to focus on entrepreneurship and attracting people based on quality of life decisions.
- Industrial development is desired, but will have to occur on a small scale
- Redeveloping village areas is a major priority, as they provide a source of community identity and pride.
- There may be opportunities for recreational tourism, but they will need to be balanced with the region’s more traditional economic development objectives

## **Key Findings from Visioning Meetings**

Following the visioning sessions, SMRPC staff compiled notes from each one in order to gain a complete understanding of the key findings about the Southern Maine region’s past, present and future. These notes were then organized into six different topic areas:

1. Land Use Planning
2. Housing
3. Economic Development
4. Transportation
5. Natural Resources/Environment
6. Regional Collaboration

Findings by topic area follow.

## **Land Use Planning**

- Most municipalities will only control the volume of growth (i.e., growth caps) and are reluctant to institute ordinances that truly direct growth to identified growth areas.
- The public at large needs to be more knowledgeable about sprawl, planning issues and the costs of unplanned growth.
- Service center towns are much more open to large residential developments than are non-service center towns—there may be opportunities for multi-jurisdictional planning.
- Attempting to manage growth at the individual town level is failing for two reasons:
  - Most towns lack the capacity to do so.
  - Different attitudes in neighboring towns result in incongruous development across borders.

## **Housing**

- Most towns are reluctant to accept their “fair shares” of the region’s affordable housing need. Many are not even aware of what their fair shares even are.
- Large-lot zoning is the norm in most of the region, leading to higher per-lot costs of housing.
- Land values in the region have become prohibitively high, making the development of affordable housing units very difficult.
- There is very little public sector or non-profit capacity in the region to develop affordable housing, especially rental units.
- Land preservation efforts are having the unintended consequence of limiting the ability to develop affordable housing, as they result in higher land values

## **Economic Development**

- Southern Maine’s unique natural characteristics and historic communities are an essential part of its appeal for economic growth
- Each town must be more realistic about its capacity to attract commercial and industrial development—every town cannot have its own business park.
- Towns must compete against each other for tax base right now—regional solutions would be less combative.
- There are widely varied attitudes towards the need for economic growth within the region, as many towns want to attract economic development but others do not.
- There is agreement that downtown/village center revitalization, no matter the scale, is healthy.
- The region must be prepared for the possibility that the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard could be shut down by the federal government.

## **Transportation**

- Corridor plans are proving to be a good entre to regional planning, as the public sees transportation issues as being of a regional nature.
- Existing processes emphasize increasing capacity over reducing trips.
- Existing design standards and review processes do not take into the account the relationships between transportation and land use.

- MDOT/RTAC6 are squarely focused on transportation and have no authority over land use or quality of life issues related to growth.

### **Natural Resources/Environment**

- Land conservation opportunities exist at the regional level and cannot be limited to town boundaries.
- Beginning With Habitat and other statewide data exercises are very instructional, but there is no funding available to adapt these datasets into municipal ordinances.
- Consistent, region-wide models are needed for local land use ordinances—there is too much variation from one town to the next.

### **Regional Collaboration**

- Regionalization of public services will only work if towns actually do save money—many are not convinced.
- Current service delivery units are so small that many will need to combine to truly realize economies of scale—two or three isn't enough.
- Municipal governments are overburdened and have only enough resources to address current issues—planning for the future is nearly impossible.
- Property taxes are the only major direct form of revenue available to municipal governments, so there are few options for increasing revenue.
- Funding structure of SMRPC makes it very difficult to give “tough love” to municipalities on issues of regional and statewide importance—we risk our funding by getting too strongly involved in local issues.
- Regional capital planning will have to occur over a very long time frame, as most towns already have substantial investments in equipment and infrastructure—only when existing resources need replacing can large-scale regional sharing take place.

### **Creating The Regional Vision Statement**

The above notes were circulated among SMRPC staff. On May 20, 2004 a staff workshop was held at SMRPC's offices in Springvale to assemble a regional vision statement, using these notes as a basis. The statement was written up and circulated throughout our region in SMRPC's quarterly newsletter and posted on the [www.smrpc.org](http://www.smrpc.org) website for comments.

The vision statement that resulted from this process, including policies and strategies for each topic area can be found on the following pages.

# A Regional Vision Statement for Southern Maine, 2004

## Land Use

Vision Statement: “The Southern Maine region promotes effective and proactive growth management policies that are spatially consistent among all municipalities.”

### Policies and Strategies

- Develop a composite regional future land use map depicting growth and conservation areas in each municipality’s comprehensive plan.
- Analyze regional land use map for consistencies and incongruities at municipal borders, along corridors, and relationships to critical natural resources.
- Ensure greater consistency in municipal land use policies by creating and helping towns implement model ordinances and procedures for different land use issues, including:
  - Subdivision review
  - Special overlay districts
  - Cluster development
  - Interlocal agreements
  - Planning and Appeals board procedures
  - Alternative growth management techniques (other than zoning)
- Design and conduct educational programs for both adults and children aimed at informing the public at large about growth and planning issues.

## Housing

Vision Statement: “The Southern Maine region offers adequate housing opportunities to people of all ages, income levels and needs and each municipality accepts its fair share of the region’s housing.”

### Policies and Strategies

- Define fair share for each municipality and determine the “gap” that each needs to fill to meet the fair share.
- Identify and strengthen links between housing and other planning issues (transportation, economic development, natural resource protection, etc.)
- Engage private sector in housing efforts, particularly small businesses.
- Build capacity of local and regional groups to develop affordable housing units
- Develop model standards and ordinance language for housing issues, including:
  - Standards for tourist worker housing
  - Differential growth cap ordinance
  - Calculating municipal capacity for future growth
  - Fiscal impact model to measure costs of growth

## **Economic Development**

Vision Statement: “Economic growth in the Southern Maine region is achieved at the appropriate scale and character for the particular area in which it occurs.”

### Policies and Strategies

- Tailor economic development initiatives to the capacity of individual municipalities and groups of municipalities to accommodate growth.
- Invest in all types of infrastructure on a regional level.
- Increase capacity of smaller communities to attract economic development that respects their capacities for growth and their existing local character
- Eliminate regulatory barriers that may limit redevelopment of older buildings.
- Focus on growing small businesses by providing affordable incubator space in appropriate locations.
- Make use of the unique natural and historic resources of communities to attract appropriate economic growth.
- Update Defense Conversion Study in order to ensure that the region is properly prepared to respond to a possible base closure.

## **Transportation**

Vision Statement: “Southern Maine’s transportation systems are efficient, safe and well balanced, and planning for future needs is done in a proactive and collaborative manner.”

### Policies and Strategies

- Use DOT traffic movement permit process to address transportation issues in larger corridors, not just in immediate vicinity.
- Expand role of RTAC in corridor planning efforts.
- Use corridor studies as points of entry for regional transportation, economic development and land use planning.
- Measure cumulative impacts of smaller developments on regional transportation systems and establish impact fee system to address these impacts.
- Strengthen SMRPC’s role in coordinating municipal road funding application processes on a regional basis.
- Encourage public-private collaboration to fund road and transit improvements that are necessitated by new development.
- Expand transit options in rural areas of the region.
- Create uniform standards for access management that are administered by municipalities (similar to Shoreland Zoning).

## Natural Resources/Environment

Vision Statement: “Critical natural and environmental resources are prioritized and protected through regional cooperation using a balance of regulatory and non-regulatory means.”

### Policies and Strategies

- Define areas of regional critical concern and develop interlocal agreements to protect them.
- Compare composite regional future land use map (see Land Use goals) with regional environmental resources, including Beginning With Habitat and aquifers.
- Coordinate activities of regional land trusts with local planning efforts to ensure mutual benefits.
- Explore feasibility of regional Transfer of Development Rights programs.
- Ensure greater consistency in municipal resource protection policies by creating and helping towns implement model ordinances and procedures for different environmental issues, including:
  - Protecting habitat identified in BWH program
  - Interlocal agreements to protect environmental resources
  - Protecting vernal pools
  - Protecting forested wetlands
  - Establishing Affordable Housing Land Trusts

## Regional Collaboration

### Vision Statements:

- “Municipalities in Southern Maine form interlocal and collaborative arrangements for functional purposes that are both cost effective and respectful of local identity and authority.”
- “Elected officials and appointed board members are up to date with state planning statutes and practice good boardsmanship, thus providing a stable environment for making local and regional land use decisions.”

### Policies and Strategies

- Develop and support regional and sub-regional initiatives based on individual functions, including:
  - Economic development
  - Environmental protection
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Public infrastructure
- Conduct analyses of cost factors for different functions that address appropriate sizes of regions for optimal cost savings.
- Focus regional capital planning efforts on long-term needs, as most municipalities already have sufficiently dealt with short-term needs.
- Determine items for which cost may not be the predominant issue (e.g., community schools, recreational programs, basic town services, etc.)
- Support ongoing efforts being conducted at sub-regional levels