

Community and Economic Vitality in the Nashua Region

A DISCUSSION GUIDE



Welcome to the Community and Economic Vitality Workshop! Today's workshop will explore several topics critical to continued economic prosperity in our region with a concentration on cultivating the best possible environment in which to live, work, and play.

Live



There is no single definition of a livable region. Livability is shaped by the preferences and perspectives of community members. Some value solitude and rural areas while others place a higher emphasis on amenities and vibrant public spaces. Many of us value aspects of both.

Because there is no one size fits all solution to livability, the region may wish to focus on providing a diversity of environments and options for residents. Thus, downtowns and village centers are nurtured, while rural and natural areas are protected; traffic congestion is limited, while facilities are provided to make walking, bicycling and transit use accessible; the character of single-family home neighborhoods is maintained while efforts are made to accommodate more compact housing units.

What other strategies can we adopt to ensure that our region remains accessible for all generational groups?

Work



With the national economy continuing its gradual recovery, efforts have turned to not just maintaining existing jobs in the region, but attracting new ones. At the same time, the nation's labor force participation rate continues to decline as more workers reach retirement age. As a result, regional competition for workers has never been more intense.

Demographic trends indicate that the region is aging faster than the nation and that many residents are at or approaching retirement age. This presents some concern regarding our ability to maintain a strong and diverse workforce that will sustain continued economic development. The health of the regional economy is vital to maintaining housing values and a high quality of life.

As we envision the economy of the future, what infrastructure investments both support economic development and contribute to truly vibrant communities?

Play



Many workers live by the basic creed of "work hard, play hard." For them, the ability to enjoy a multitude of after work and weekend activities is critical to gauging the attractiveness of a region.

With its beautiful surrounding natural environment, the Nashua Region enjoys a significant built-in advantage in providing recreational offerings to residents. The region can also work to attract and maintain arts and cultural offerings - including artist studios, theater groups, and museums, and promote its restaurant and nightlife options.

Having too many weekend options for residents - from youth soccer games and concerts, to hiking trips and theater performances - is a much better problem to encounter than offering too few.

How can we foster a dynamic economy with a strong foundation in arts, cultural and recreational venues?



Nashua Regional Planning Commission



Redevelopment Opportunities



Putting a new spin on old developments

In many communities, old automobile-oriented developments like gas stations, drive-through restaurants and strip malls, long the hallmarks of suburbia, have closed shop and left abandoned structures behind. When left vacant for long periods of time, these sites can deteriorate and devalue adjacent properties.



A vacant Shaw's Supermarket in Merrimack.

These old sites offer municipalities an excellent chance to redevelop the spaces into more dynamic, pedestrian-friendly, livable developments.

Big-box stores across the country have been transformed into libraries, schools, or mixed-use centers. Redevelopment is much more environmentally friendly than traditional greenfield development and is less taxing to municipalities as the land is already serviced by infrastructure and utilities.

From Wal-Mart to SPAM Museum



Many economists believe retail uses have been significantly overbuilt. Left, a vacant Wal-Mart has been redeveloped into a museum celebrating the precooked meat product of SPAM in Austin, Minn.

Examples in the Nashua Region



The headquarters of IT-provider P.C. Connection occupies an old shopping plaza in Merrimack.



Final curtain for theater in Milford?

Stage Festival will summer in Nashua again

When the former American Stage Festival went bankrupt in Milford in 2002, local officials worried about the effects of a large abandoned theater in an area near downtown. But a successful fundraising effort helped transform the structure into the Souhegan Valley Boys and Girls Club and Amato Performing Arts Center.

Gas station turned beer garden...



The aptly named Station Beer Garden operates out of an old gas station in Portsmouth. Today the site is planned for a mixed-use development.

Car dealership turned steakhouse and offices



Regeneration Park operates out of an old Jeep dealership on the Seacoast. The structure houses offices and an upscale steakhouse. The site features environmentally friendly features like rain gardens and flooring from the old basketball court of the Detroit Pistons.

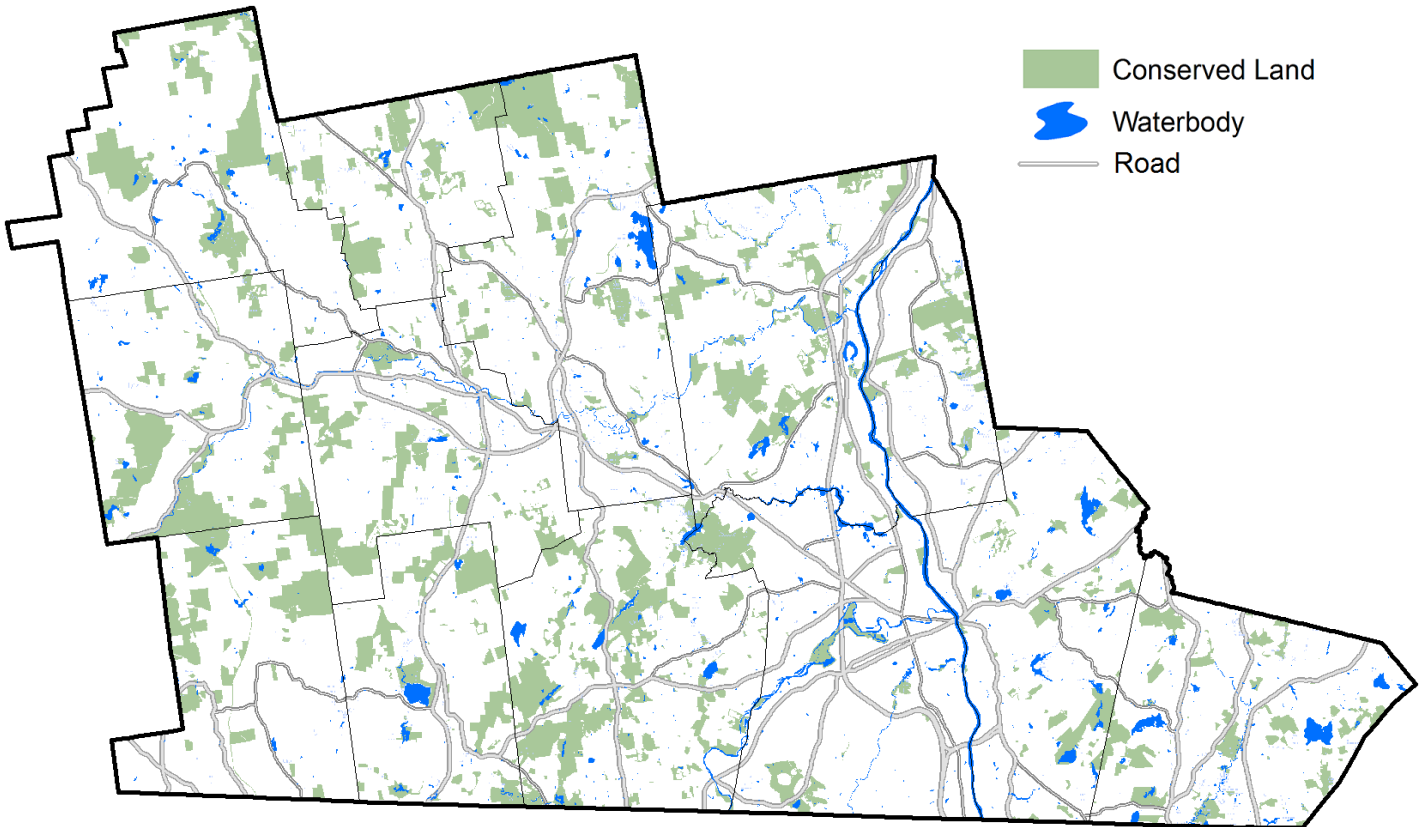
Page Sources

Suburban Redevelopment graphics from Regeneration Park and the Station Beer Garden .

What are some key attractions in the region? *A few ideas...*



Recreation and Conservation Lands - *Creating Regional Connections*



Live



Nurturing town centers and improving accessibility



In public outreach efforts for the regional plan, residents of the Nashua Region have consistently noted a desire for more diversity in travel options. In many communities in the region, automobile travel remains the only viable travel mode to accomplish basic errands and trips. In some cases, destinations like grocery stores and schools are located far from residential areas, while in others, a lack of pedestrian or transit infrastructure makes such trips unpleasant or entirely impossible.

Additionally, every community in the region notes the importance of their downtown or town center as the center of activity or community life in their respective master plans. Therefore, when it comes to walkability and accessing amenities, it is natural that we turn first to our town center.



Meeting the region's housing needs

No discussion could accurately explore the livability of a region without some discussion of the affordability, supply and demand, and accessibility of the region's housing stock. In March, the Nashua Regional Planning Commission conducted a Regional Housing Workshop to present housing data and gather public input regarding the current state of the region's housing supply and its ability to meet future demands.

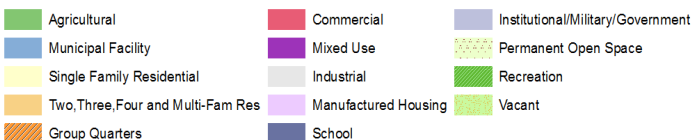
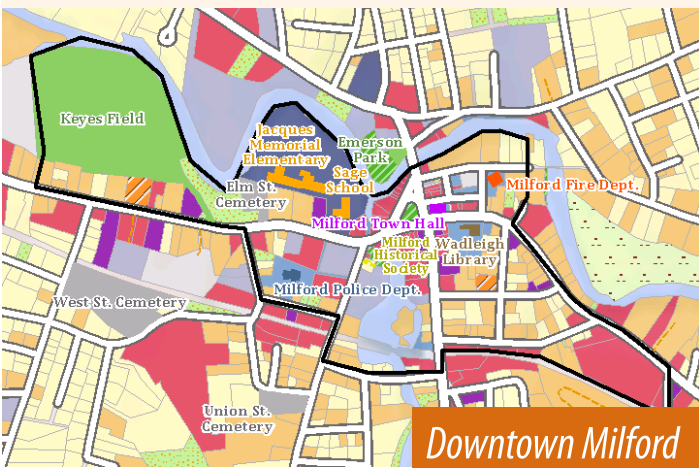
If you weren't able to participate, you can find more information on the workshop, and lend your voice to the discussion by visiting <http://granitestatefuture.org/regions/nashua-region>.

We look forward to hearing your input!

Page Sources

Map and chart data was obtained through a GIS buffer analysis. Walk Scores were calculated for each community at www.walkscore.com.

Vibrant and Vital Villages, Town Centers and Downtowns

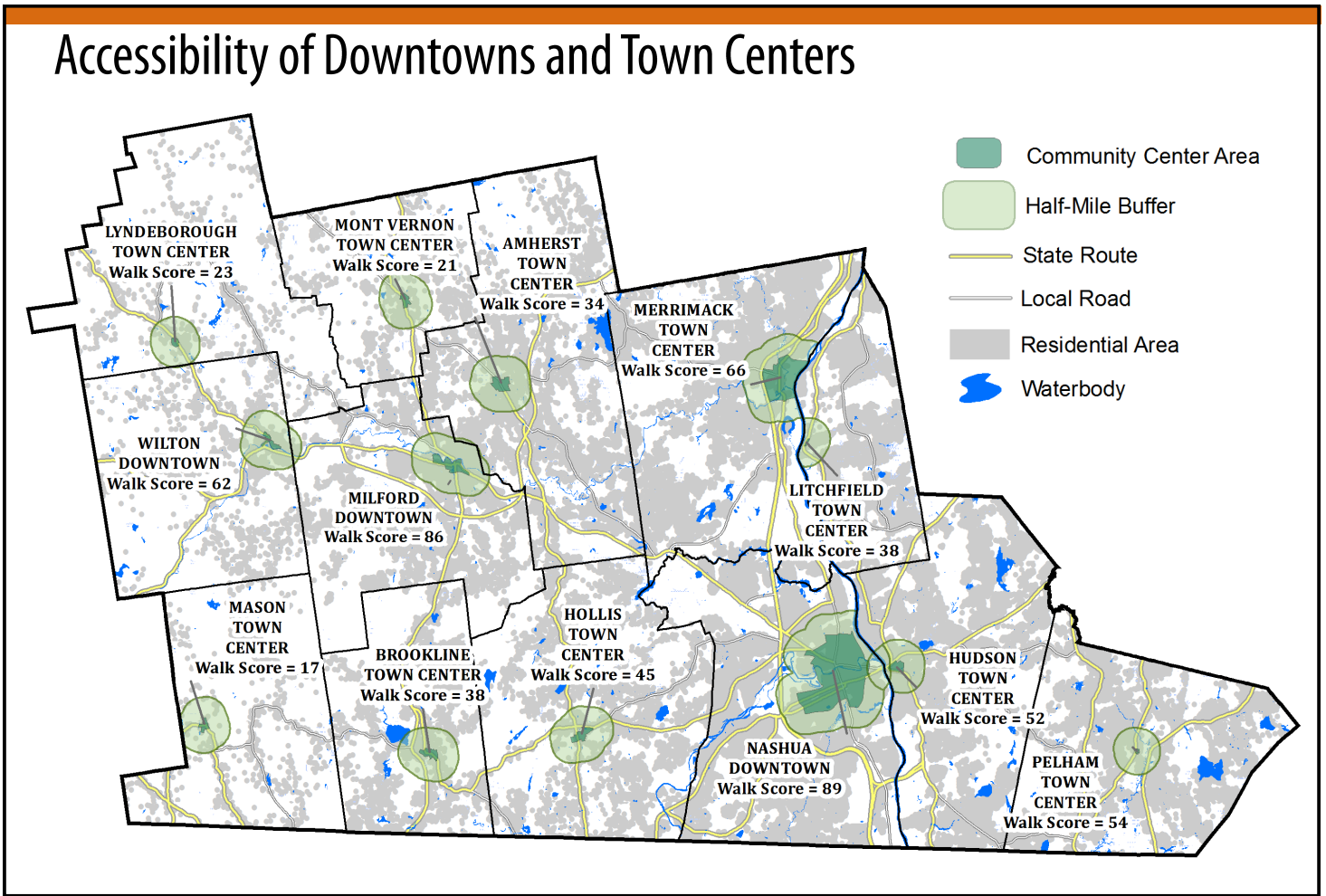


"It's hard to build a community around parking lots and subdivisions."

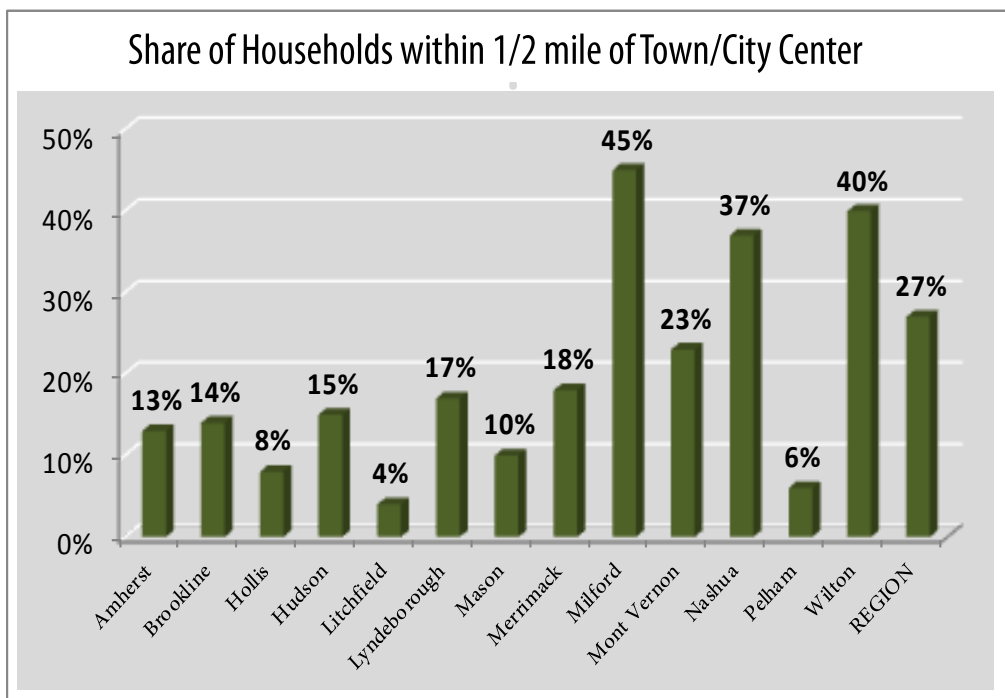
- Ed McMahon

Every town and city center in the Nashua Region is unique. For some communities like Nashua and Wilton, mixed-uses proliferate downtown, while in others, like Litchfield or Mont Vernon, uses are limited to residences and a few civic structures. Many communities, including Merrimack and Pelham, have set a goal of introducing more uses in their town centers to promote their vibrancy. Downtown Milford is a good example of a community with a significant mix of uses downtown, as shown to the left, with a high share of residences within walking distance of the town center.

Accessibility of Downtowns and Town Centers



The map above indicates where households are congregated in the region and how close residential areas are located to town centers. Walk Scores, measuring distances to amenities, were calculated for every town or city center. The chart below shows what share of households within a community are located within walking distance of the town center.



What's a Walk Score?

Walk Score is an Internet-based platform which calculates the walkability of a location on a numeric scale (from 0 to 100) by measuring the number of amenities, including restaurants, stores and schools, within walking distance. Walk Score has been found to be an accurate basic measure of walkability, but is subject to some shortcomings, including that it cannot measure the existence or condition of sidewalks.

Play



Promoting recreational and social activities for all



The Nashua Region offers a myriad of recreational and outdoor activities for residents and visitors alike. Shoppers enjoy access to quaint downtown shops, the Pheasant Lane Mall, and the Merrimack Premium Outlets. And every community offers significant swaths of conservation land, parks and some theater offerings.

Of course there is always more to do. Some argue that the region could do more to promote cultural activities and nightlife options. What do you think? How can we make the Nashua Region the best possible place to play?



Nashua Region Residents Value Rural and Conservation Lands

More than any other single topic, residents of the Nashua Region noted the area's "rural character" as the best part of living in the region based on public outreach efforts associated with drafting the Regional Plan.



Ponemah Bog, Amherst

Among those highlighting the region's rural qualities, respondents noted the area's quiet and solitude, recreational opportunities and natural scenery. At the same time, residents noted that the region enjoys easy access to many amenities like services, restaurants and shopping. Among those noting areas in need of improvement, the expansion of transportation options, including more bicycle and pedestrian paths, was consistently highlighted.

Promoting a Creative Economy



A barnyard concert in Wilton.

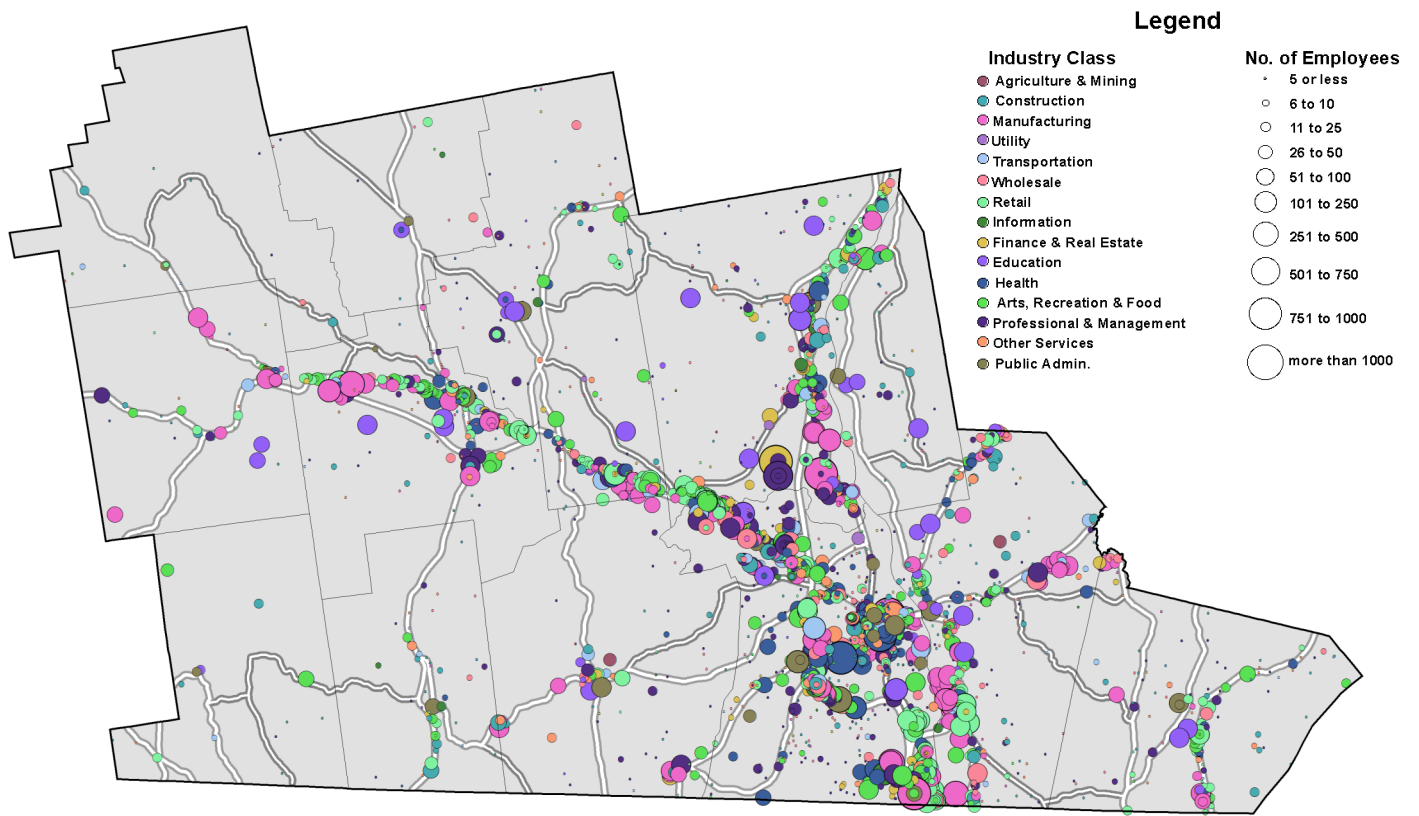
A recent report by the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts found that arts related organizations employ more than 13,000 people directly in the state. Additionally, more than 3,500 additional jobs are made possible in New Hampshire through spending by arts and culture organizations. Finally, patrons of the arts spend more than \$22 every time they attend an arts or cultural event, excluding the cost of admission. This provides a steady stream of revenue to restaurants, shops and hotels who depend on such spending.

Here in the Nashua Region, residents enjoy offerings like the Northern Ballet Theater, Andy's Summer Playhouse, Nashua Theatre Guild, Nashua Chamber Orchestra, Souhegan Valley Dance Theater, Peacock Players, and Riverbend Theater Company. These organization contribute both to the regional economy and the overall quality of life. What can the region do to strengthen and promote its arts and cultural offerings?



The Nashua International Sculpture Symposium, now in its sixth year, is an annual event designed to elevate the awareness and appreciation of public art in the city. This year, 13 sculptures will be placed around Nashua for members of the public to enjoy.

Employment Distribution in the Nashua Region, 2010

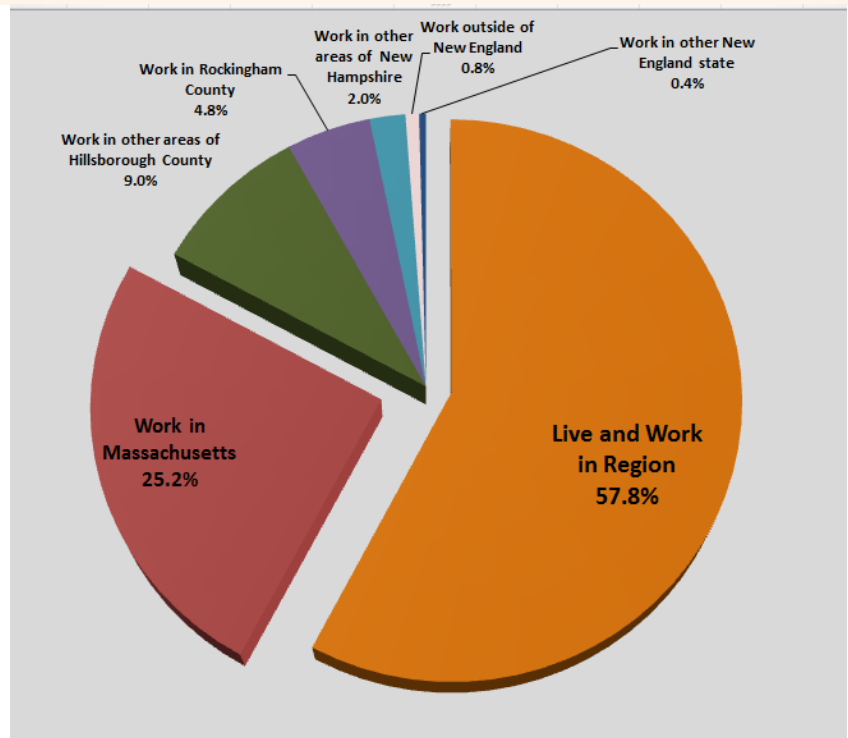


Regional Commuting Patterns, 2006-2010

Commuting Destinations of Nashua Region residents

Approximately 58 percent of Nashua Region residents work within the region. Of the remaining 42 percent of the region's workforce, 25 percent commute to Massachusetts, 9 percent commute to other areas of Hillsborough County, and nearly 5 percent commute to destinations in Rockingham County.

How can the region keep a larger share of its workforce employed here within the region?



Page Sources

Commuter data: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2006-2010; Employment distribution: NH Department of Employment Security, 2010

Work

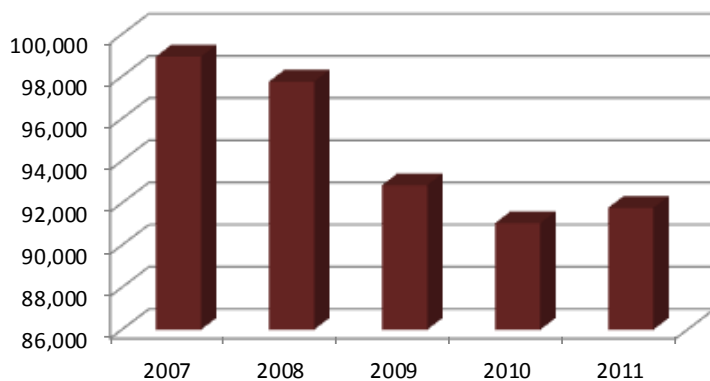


Promoting sustainable economic development

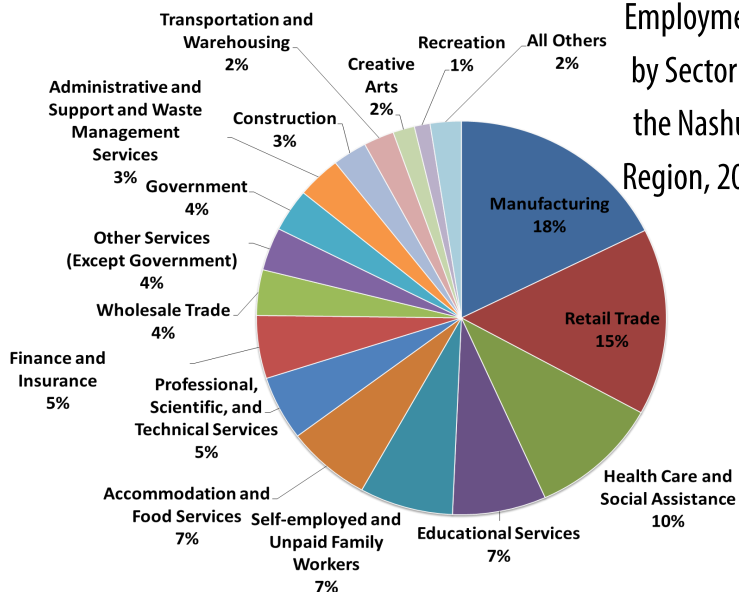
The national financial crisis and ensuing recession dramatically affected economic conditions in the Nashua Region. The region lost over 7,800 jobs between 2007 and 2010. Though the region has recovered some of those jobs, it will take more time to reach pre-recession employment levels. Job losses were particularly concentrated in the manufacturing, construction, information technology and financial industries.

The Nashua Region is aging at a faster rate than the nation. As more workers reach retirement age, the region may struggle to meet future labor needs. This underlines the regional need of attracting and retaining younger workers.

Total Employment in Nashua Region



Employment by Sector in the Nashua Region, 2010



Regional Employment Change

2007–2011

While every part of New Hampshire grappled with job losses during the Great Recession, the Nashua Region was particularly hard hit.

Nashua Region -7.2%

Lakes Region -6.4%

Southwest NH -5.4%

Northern NH -5.1%

Rockingham Region -3.4%

(Portsmouth, Hampton, Salem Areas)

Strafford Region -3.3%

(Dover, Rochester Areas)

Southern NH -3.1%

(Manchester Area)

Upper Valley/Sunapee -2.6%

Central NH -2.6%

(Concord Area)

Nashua Region - Selected Industry

Employment, 2007-2011

Employment losses in the Nashua Region were largely concentrated in manufacturing, construction and administration during the recession. Health care and some small industries added some jobs.

Manufacturing	Government	Healthcare
-17.4%	-3%	+3.7%
3,070 jobs lost	291 jobs lost	380 jobs added
Construction	Finance	Arts/Cultural
-25.4%	-7.3%	+9%
710 jobs lost	394 jobs lost	291 jobs added
Administration	Wholesale Trade	Prof. Svcs
-26.8%	-15.7%	-8.3%
952 jobs lost	595 jobs lost	443 jobs lost

Page Sources

All figures from NH Dept. of Employment Security, 2007-2011