



Community and Economic Vitality Regional Workshop



What We Heard

On May 31, 2013 the Nashua Regional Planning Commission hosted a Regional Community and Economic Vitality Workshop to gather community input regarding economic development and community revitalization efforts in the region. Members of the public were invited, as well as planners, planning board members, and representatives of local business, community vitality, and economic development groups. Participants were divided into three breakout groups where they focused on cultivating the best possible environment to *live, work, and play*. NRPC Executive Director Kerrie Diers presented a brief introduction before presentations by Kate Luczko, executive director of Stay Work Play New Hampshire, and Carolyn Radisch, co-founder of ORW Landscape Architects and Planners. Ms. Luczko discussed efforts in New Hampshire focused on attracting and retaining young people and Ms. Radisch discussed strategies to encourage the retrofitting of existing development to into more livable places. Participants then brainstormed and identified *what worked* in the region, *what needed improvement*, and *regional needs* related to living, working and playing here. Staff facilitators noted this input in writing as well as in a shared spreadsheet through the use of iPads.



Top: Kate Luczko;
Below: Carolyn Radisch

In a Nutshell



Across all breakout groups, several dominant issues emerged. Participants expressed satisfaction with the region's highly educated workforce, the safety of area communities, the strength of local school systems and the accessibility of local conservation and recreational lands. Participants also noted many areas of concern, including the affordability of state universities, a lack of entertainment and activity options for young adults, and several unmet infrastructure needs. Participants expressed concern that many visitors simply shop in the

region or drive through entirely on their way to other destinations. Participants noted the need for a stronger regional approach to economic development, greater promotion and marketing of arts, cultural and historic resources and investments in job training and higher education programs. Asked how the planning commission could assist economic and community vitality efforts in the region, participants suggested NRPC serve as an information and communications hub for planning and economic development, implementation of an economic development coordinating committee, a regional economic development plan, land use and transportation plans for major regional corridors, a regional bicycle and pedestrian master plan, and more assistance in planning for community events.

LIVE

Workshop participants discussed aspects they valued about living in the region and strategies to improve livability.

What Works:

- Good shopping options
- Region is safe and great place to raise a family
- Low cost of living
- Excellent school systems
- We are 'Boston light' (enjoy brain power of the metropolitan area, with a lower cost of living)
- Some towns have great livable downtown models
- Excellent recreational opportunities, including integrated trail systems across communities
- Close proximity to mountains, coast and Boston
- Existing arts community (Andres, Nashua Sculpture Symposium)

LIVE, Continued

What Needs Improvement:

- Not enough transportation options
- Lack of quality housing options in downtown areas
- Lack of rail, public transit one reason young people leave
- Safe biking options, education programs

Regional Needs:

- Need more pocket parks in downtowns
- Need to embrace and capitalize on waterways as regional assets and economic development tools
- Regional public transit, bike/pedestrian investments
- Redevelop parking lots into 'vertical development'
- Continued education and crime prevention investments

- Not enough 'new urbanist' development in region
- No marketing of existing destinations—'staycations'
- High rate of prescription addictions
- Housing is too expensive, especially with student loans
- Region lacks significant ethnic diversity

- Need to provide free Wifi in Downtowns
- Need to focus development closer to downtowns
- Region needs to market destinations better
- Better east-west travel options, north bridge
- Region should focus on renovating existing buildings not developing open space areas

WORK

Workshop participants discussed strengths and weaknesses of the regional economy and job market.

What Works:

- No state sales tax
- Many home-based niche businesses
- Overall, strong internet accessibility
- Lots of startups and technology companies in Nashua
- Strong education and community college programs

- Population is highly educated and work oriented
- Region does business networking very well (strong organizations like chambers and Rotaries)
- Manchester Airport is regional asset
- Lots of retail businesses

What Needs Improvement:

- Lack of low cost offices/incubators for startup businesses
- Lack of entry-level positions
- State universities are not affordable
- Lack of employment opportunities for the mentally ill
- Intermodal transportation, transit to Manchester Airport

- Zoning regulations stymie growth
- Region lacks talent pool, infrastructure to attract new large businesses
- Limited housing choices and diversity
- Communications, lack of major regional website

Regional Needs:

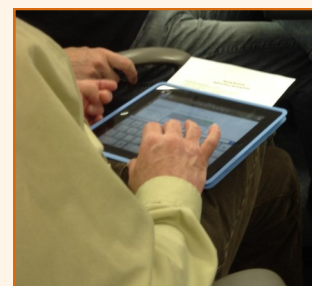
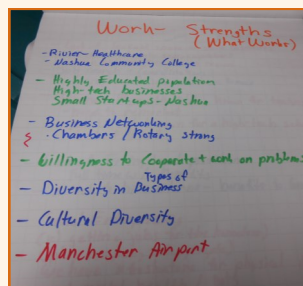
- Incentivize green building for new developments
- Build more mixed-use developments to allow residents to live closer to jobs and commercial options
- More affordable daycare options
- Need for a regional startup incubator

- Advertise region's 'reverse commute' advantage
- Commuter rail to Boston
- More incentives to commute green — bike paths
- More internship and apprenticeship programs
- Need to diversify regional economic base

Missed the Workshop?

Don't worry, there are still opportunities to lend your voice to the regional discussion on issues relating to community and economic vitality. You can highlight your favorite regional destinations on an interactive map and sound off on what you like, or dislike, about living, working and playing here.

Visit granitestatefuture.org/regions/Nashua-region. We look forward to your input!



PLAY

Workshop participants discussed strengths and weaknesses of the regional economy and job market.

What Works:

- We are a destination for shoppers
- Enjoy kayaking on the Nashua and Souhegan Rivers
- All of the towns have great community events
- Great, accessible parks, trail systems in region
- Great dining options in Downtown Nashua, Milford
- Chunky's - dinner and a movie at same place
- Great youth programming options
- Great local sports clubs and leagues
- Nashua Sculpture Symposium
- Hidden gems like Monson Village and Baboosic Lake
- No state sales tax
- Region supports the arts

What Needs Improvement:

- Region doesn't market or tie our historic destinations together very well for visitors
- People drive through here on way to other destinations
- After work options limited, businesses shut down early
- Lack of marketing for arts organizations and events
- Seacoast, Boston and White Mountains draw people from region on weekends
- Lack of entertainment venues
- Region is resistant to change - casino debate
- Lack of safe places to bicycle
- Region is too disconnected—have to drive everywhere

Regional Needs:

- Region needs larger cultural venues
- Meeting places, attractions oriented for young adults
- Need to highlight riverfronts, focus redevelopment there
- Community events are well attended, need to have more
- More activities for non-shoppers/men
- Need to better tie in parks with downtown areas
- Need coffeshops, acoustic nights, high energy activities
- Water-focused venues like rowing- and crew-houses
- Need a big draw like Newport Jazz Festival
- Marketing and communication of arts and cultural events

How can NRPC help ?

Attendees were asked how the Nashua Regional Planning Commission could best aid communities in economic development and community revitalization efforts.

- Hire an events planner
- Help towns mitigate major corridor issues - develop land use and transportation plans for major corridors - 101A
- Develop a bicycle/sidewalk master plan for entire region
- Form a coordinating economic development committee
- Draft a regional economic development plan
- Start an electronic newsletter with community event news
- Start planning a new Merrimack River bridge crossing
- Start a roundtable to stimulate regional discussion
- Hold workshops and seminars on planning trends
- Help towns with marketing and funding issues
- Regional coordination help with farmers markets

Best Practices



Building a Creative Economy:

Peterborough, NH



Capitalizing on Historic Resources:

Lowell National Historic Park



Providing Transportation Options:

Minuteman Bikeway Bedford, Mass.

Attendees pointed to several examples outside the region for their unique approaches to economic development. Attendees noted Peterborough, N.H. as a community that has successfully integrated its arts and cultural offerings into its local economy. Others pointed to the Lowell National Historic Park in Lowell, Mass. as an example of successfully incorporating historic resources into economic development. Finally, the Minuteman Bikeway, running from Cambridge-Bedford, Mass., was highlighted as an example of providing more transportation options.