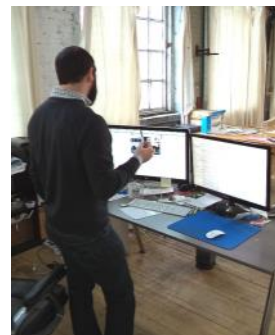


# Nashua Region: A story worth telling







# INSIDE COVER PAGE

## **The Nashua Region: A story worth telling**

*An introduction to, and key issues and trends, from the Nashua Regional Plan*

**Adopted December 17, 2014**

**Nashua Regional Planning Commission**

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*Value yesterday. Enhance tomorrow. Plan today.*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The Nashua Regional Plan represents a true regional collaboration. Residents and stakeholders from the business, government, community, social services, philanthropic spheres all provided valuable input to the development of the plan.*

*To all those who lent their time and guidance, the commission is indebted. And while too many individuals contributed to acknowledge properly in this document, we would like to recognize all those, listed below, who participated on sub-committees active in guiding the direction and publication of the plan. This document is a testament to their involvement and dedication to their communities.*

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*An excellent example of successful regional coordination, Souhegan Valley Rides is a dial-a-ride demand response bus service. In 2014, the service was extended to six communities. Above, Deborah Daniels of Wilton catches a ride, surrounded by Wilton and transit officials.*



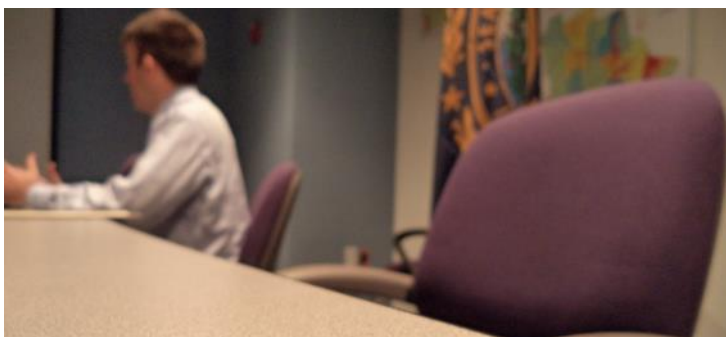
## A Primer

*Pull up a comfortable chair. Grab a cup of coffee (preferably one of those frothy ones with an overly complicated name) and settle in. We have a story we would like to share with you.*

*This document is a plan for your region, or more specifically a blueprint for the future of the Nashua Region. Chances are you work in, shop, or go to school in a community outside of your own. A regional plan is helpful because it recognizes that many issues, problems and opportunities aren't confined by municipal boundaries. Transportation networks, housing and economic opportunities, and environmental issues know no borders. When one community suffers, all communities in a region feel the effects, and when one succeeds, all reap the benefits.*

*To develop this plan, we pored over a lot of data. But more importantly, we spent a lot of time talking to you, to your neighbors and to your local and state officials. If you are like most of the people we talked with, you really like living here. And at its most basic, this plan strives to protect and enhance those qualities that make the region so special. It also offers strategies for addressing concerns or potential shortcomings, both current and forecast, and seeks to ensure that all residents, regardless of where they live, enjoy access to opportunities to prosper and participate fully in community and regional discussions.*

*This plan recognizes that government alone can't solve problems. Indeed, communities work best when citizens themselves are empowered to effect positive change. In recognizing that the most successful places are those where government works together with members of the business and philanthropic communities and residents of all backgrounds to accomplish shared goals, the planners behind this document engaged with all of those partners to craft regional goals and strategies.*



## Your seat is ready.

*While this plan includes a vast amount of information, we do hope that one particular message resonates above all others. There is always a seat for you at the table. Whatever your skills or interests, and irrespective of your education, background, or politics, your community benefits, and your region benefits, when you step forward and contribute your time, talents and input. This plan does not claim to have a monopoly on good ideas nor should it signify a break or cessation in the dialogue.*

*This conversation is not ending; it's just beginning.*

Amherst  
Brookline  
Hollis

Madison

Merrimack

Landborough

Mason

Milford

Mont Vernon

Nashua

Pelham





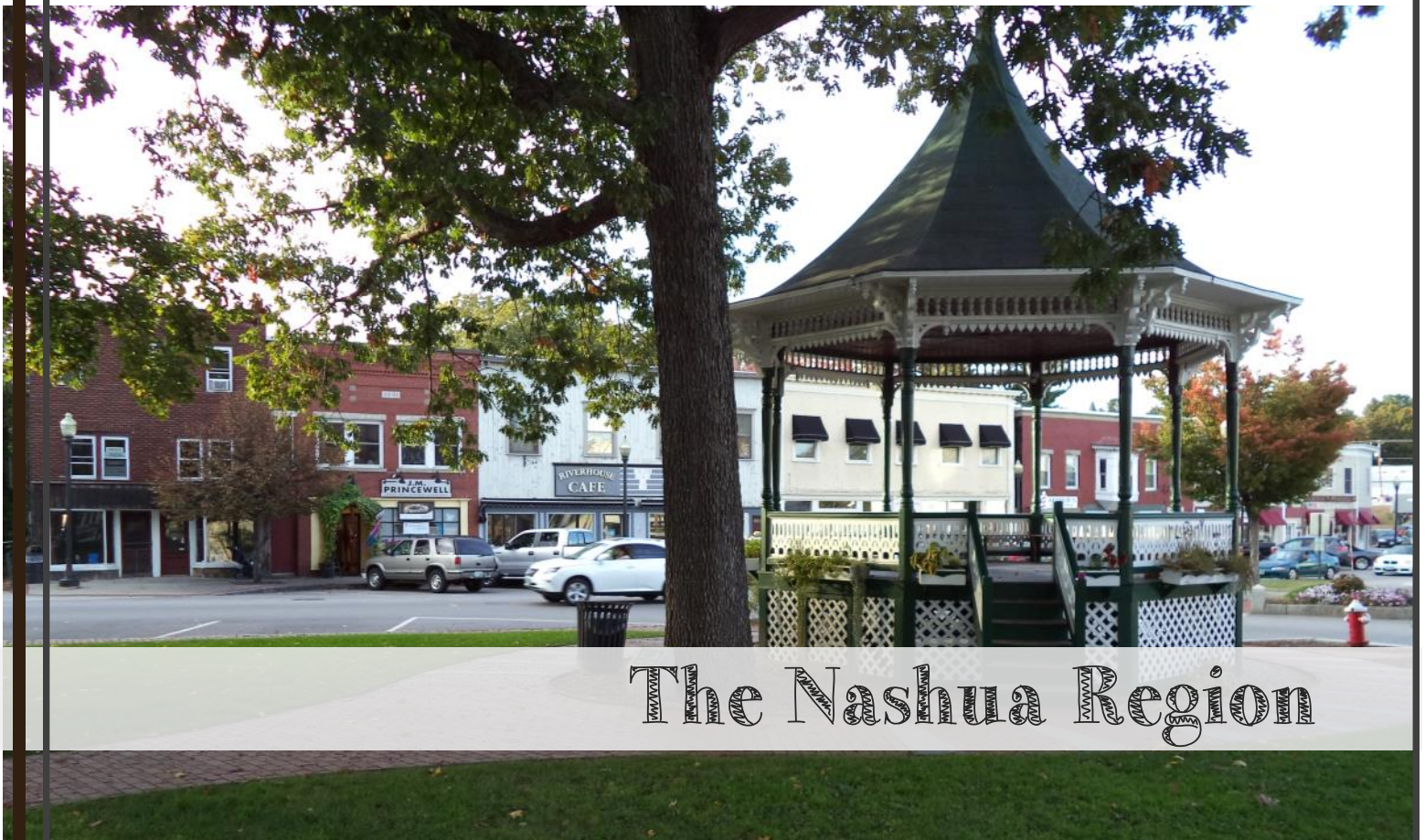
## Why Plan?

New Hampshire has a long and storied tradition of planning at the local level. Planning efforts in the state are often characterized by local residents, most serving in a volunteer capacity, meeting and rolling up their sleeves to help draft a community master plan, adjust a zoning boundary, or review a development proposal. But many important planning issues transcend municipal boundaries and require regional partnerships and coordination, including important issues related to housing, transportation, economic development, natural resource protection and energy efficiency.

Recognizing the value of regional planning to the well-being and development of municipalities, the New Hampshire State Legislature passed legislation requiring the creation of a comprehensive development plan for regions (NH RSA 36:45). While funding constraints have limited these efforts in the past, this plan represents a fulfillment of those responsibilities. More importantly, it provides an accurate and impartial portrait of demographic, environmental, and economic conditions in the region and offers goals and strategies for moving forward based on that information as well as a vast body of public input gathered over a two year period.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus is credited with the passage “Everything changes and nothing stands still.” This observation is true of our region. While our community values and institutions remain durable, the region has undergone, and continues to undergo, significant and lasting changes in its demographic and economic profiles. This plan is dedicated to helping residents and municipal officials, as well as state and regional partners, understand those changes and use that knowledge to plan accordingly for a prosperous future.

*The sign at the entrance to Greeley Park in Nashua, pictured above, reads “A Place to Rest and Enjoy Nature” and residents of the region have clearly taken that axiom to heart. The park serves as regional recreational and gathering place, particularly during warm summer days.*



## The Nashua Region

Home to more than 200,000 residents, the Nashua Region is a dynamic and thriving part of the Southern New Hampshire landscape. Situated among the rolling foothills of the Merrimack River Valley and located just 50 miles from Downtown Boston and the Atlantic Coast, the region enjoys an enviable location that provides residents urban amenities while retaining quality of life benefits common to rural areas.

Embodying both the second largest city in New Hampshire as well a number of very rural communities, the Nashua Region is perhaps best characterized by its diversity of landscapes. Thriving employment and commercial corridors pave way to charming and historic town and village centers, while scenic lakes, major rivers, hilltops and several tracts of undeveloped land remain protected and accessible to population centers.

Commitments to resource protection and conservation, education, arts and cultural promotion as well as industry and Yankee efficiency help characterize the unique nature of the region and its people. Home to a thriving community of technological, financial and manufacturing companies, the region commands the highest average wages in New Hampshire. Major retail corridors attract streams of visitors, while residents and visitors alike enjoy access to several cultural amenities, including one of the largest annual sculpture symposiums in the nation. Students in the region's public primary and secondary schools routinely outperform their peers in the state and nation, while post-secondary institutions prepare pupils for the economy of the 21st century. All of these attributes coalesce to provide residents of the Nashua Region a high quality of life in an attractive and strategically positioned natural environment.

*Residents consistently pointed to Downtown Nashua and the Milford Oval area, pictured above, as models for vibrant, mixed-use and walkable neighborhoods. The Oval serves as a local business hub and is home to 10 restaurants, four barbershops, and several offices, shops and residences.*



The regional plan is a coordinated blueprint for the future of the Nashua Region. It takes into account present conditions with a view toward encouraging communities to continue to grow in a manner that accommodates the needs of the future. Chapters were drafted in an integrated manner, recognizing that policy decisions in one arena can often significantly impact other areas.

The plan consists of this vision document as well as a number of technical chapters. The Vision tells the story of the Nashua Region. It provides a human perspective on major issues through individual interviews with residents of the region.

The technical chapters focus on particular topics and present data, analysis and mapping for each:

- **Existing Conditions and Needs** – assesses the region’s demographic trends, as well as needs and opportunities
- **Community and Economic Vitality** - evaluates economic conditions and trends and proposes strategies for advancement
- **Environment** - examines the region’s natural resources including water infrastructure and climate change and energy
- **Housing** – examines the range of existing and projected housing need by type that is available to all ranges of family income
- **Transportation** – examines regional transportation networks, sets priorities for transportation projects in the region
- **Scenario Planning** - evaluates several potential growth scenarios and their land use impacts to the region

*The Nashua Regional Plan is unique in the history of the commission, in that planners were able to draft chapters concurrently in a coordinated and integrated manner, and with the benefit of a diversity of data analytics and scenario planning tools.*



## A listening process.

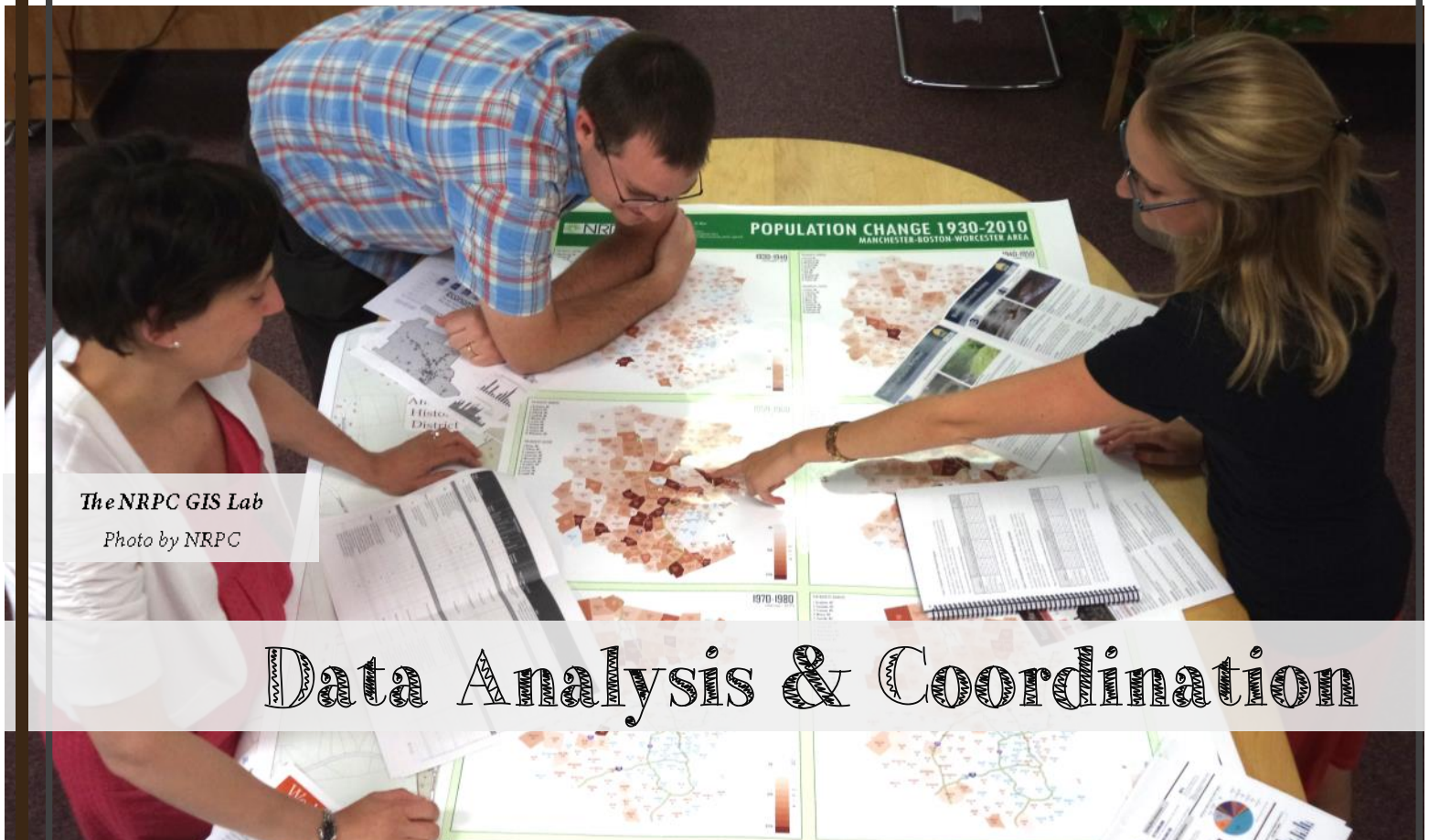
Over the past 55 years, the Nashua Regional Planning Commission has developed a vast collection of regional plans on subject areas as varied as broadband infrastructure, transportation, solid waste, water infrastructure, and open space. These plans were completed individually as funding permitted, and were never integrated into a single comprehensive document. In 2011, NRPC received a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to draft a true comprehensive plan; one that examines the

region holistically, integrating all subject areas and aspects of the planning process to draft a blueprint for the future.

The largest public engagement effort ever undertaken at the regional planning level began with simple questions like “What do you like best about the Nashua Region,” and “What could make it even better?” These questions helped form the foundation of an expansive public outreach effort, described briefly below, unprecedented in the history of the commission in both scope and duration.



*The commission spoke to residents at community events in all corners of the region, from pumpkin festivals, agricultural fairs and Old Home Days to business expos and neighborhood block parties. Public open houses were hosted as well as well-publicized regional workshops on major topic areas featuring guest speakers and facilitated group conversations. NRPC conducted interviews with individual residents and hosted ‘community conversations’ aimed at targeted audiences, including chambers of commerce, veterans groups, healthcare workers, Rotary Clubs and after-school groups for children. Opportunities were also extended to offer public input both electronically via social media sites and an Internet-based mapping platform and through conventional comment cards left at major community gathering places. Finally, NRPC commissioned a comprehensive telephone poll to measure residents’ opinions based on a statistically-weighted sample of the population.*



The NRPC GIS Lab

Photo by NRPC

## Data Analysis & Coordination

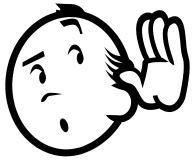
Public outreach was conducted in coordination with an intensive data analysis effort – NRPC staff pored over U.S. Census records, employment, environmental, and housing data, as well as relevant municipal, regional, state, and national plans and reports. Staff members also regularly consulted with state and municipal departments, as well as over three dozen philanthropic and educational organizations, in helping draft the plan.

NRPC staff also worked with a Regional Advisory Committee, as well as Transportation, Housing, Natural Resources and Community and Economic Vitality sub-committees to examine the intersection of data and public input in order to develop visions, goals and strategies for the region. Staff members met regularly to ensure integration in the planning and development of chapter content.

In addition, NRPC Commissioners, who represent the thirteen regional communities, provided guidance and will oversee adoption of the plan. What has emerged is a clear picture of where the region currently stands and an educated analysis of where it might be headed moving forward.

All nine of New Hampshire's regional planning commissions worked cooperatively and met regularly to share ideas and information in drafting their respective regional plans. Core metrics were developed to ensure basic consistency and accuracy in data development and analysis. The design and implementation of interactive platforms for analyzing data electronically will allow municipal and state partners, as well as members of the public, to evaluate progress on a number of regional metrics well after the plans are formally adopted.

*Data analysis was an important part of the regional plan. This effort included GIS mapping analysis, demographic analysis of historical, current and forecast conditions and reviews of relevant state, regional and municipal reports. Pictured above, NRPC GIS planners strategize during a staff meeting.*



# What we heard (in a nutshell)

## A commitment to a continuing conversation

For months, NRPC staff asked, coaxed, and attempted to charm residents and policymakers to share their thoughts about the region and its future. The response was overwhelming. After lending our collective ears for over 24 months, that input, fused across communities and topic areas, has been synthesized under the six following major theme areas designed to provide a platform to continue this important conversation.

1

### Residents Love it Here

*Perhaps the most dominant theme to emerge from the region's residents is that they genuinely love where they live. Whether based in an urban center or a rural community, residents and municipal leaders agreed that the region's natural environment, as well as vibrant downtowns and town centers, a diverse economic base, historic character and community institutions are all critical components of what makes the Nashua Region a special place to live, work, learn and play. One Nashua resident extolled the "socially engaging" nature of the city, while a Litchfield resident noted "I love living in a small community where you get to know so many people."*

2

### Build on Existing Assets

*Residents consistently noted that they would like policymakers to focus on distinctive attributes of the region, both current and historical, and leverage those assets to improve the region's quality of life and economic profile. In that spirit, residents advocated preserving historic features and supported keeping undeveloped areas pristine while focusing development in town and neighborhood centers. In a similar vein, residents advocated leveraging the region's underutilized riverfronts – one Nashua resident noted "You forget we have rivers here unless you're driving over them" – and returning them as the recreational and economic centerpieces of communities.*

3

### Flexible Regulations

*Noting that positive change in communities so often comes from the ground up, residents asked policymakers to consider reforming some regulations which might stifle innovation, positive expression or creative solutions to persistent challenges, including those related to community events, public art, local businesses, housing, zoning or land uses. Many residents noted that many of the best community ideas originate among small groups of residents often unaffiliated with traditional government bodies. A Nashua resident noted that while municipal ordinances are well meaning, they can occasionally squelch good ideas. "I don't know if [communities] understand how intimidating it can be for the average person to navigate government, to cut through the bureaucracy. It's not easy." One Merrimack mother noted, "My children want to stay here [in the region], but the way the zoning is, it's hard to find a house that's affordable."*

## 4

*Balanced Choices*

*Residents consistently advocated the development of the region as one that allowed for all residents to have a fair shot at advancement. In that vein, residents noted support for a diversity of housing options, including affordable units and more modern and high-quality rental options. Residents consistently noted support of a multi-generational region and encouraged policymakers to address challenges unique to younger generations including high education costs and student loan debt burdens. Many also encouraged local governments to be proactive in addressing future challenges, including those related to mobility. One Litchfield resident noted, “We keep building senior housing, but I don’t know if we’ve planned how they’re going to get around as they age.” An Amherst resident noted “My daughter lives in Portsmouth, and when I visit, we walk everywhere. And it’s just wonderful to have that option.”*

## 5

*Community Character*

*Residents often noted the region’s historic foundations in advocating change, particularly regarding transportation infrastructure. Noting that streetcars once rumbled through Downtown Nashua and bicyclists pedaled along a dirt paths on what is currently Route 101A, residents consistently advocated investments in alternative travel modes, including in pedestrian and bicycle facilities and passenger rail service. Sentiment in favor of historic preservation was very strong and many noted the very localized foundations of the region’s retail and agricultural economy. One Milford resident noted “Years ago, you used to be able to hop on a train to Boston, and it took about the same time as it does today [when driving].” An Amherst resident “You used to know exactly which farm your milk and eggs came from, and with [the growth of] the farmers markets, that’s really coming back again.”*

## 6

*Changing Conditions*

*Though governments can often be risk-adverse and driven by process, residents encouraged policymakers to adopt innovative approaches to problem-solving and consider creative and even experimental solutions to major challenges. Many noted that some traditional mechanisms to tackle municipal issues were ineffective and that community leaders might be very cautious or slow to respond. Many residents noted that a number of current developments, including climate change and a rapidly aging population, are very contemporary issues and challenge policymakers to adopt long-term, visionary solutions. One Milford resident noted, “I think it’s much easier for government to be short-sighted and focus on the current issues and the next meeting. It’s a lot harder to look down the road 20 to 30 years.” A Litchfield resident said simply “We need more ‘outside the box’ thinking.”*

Able Ebenezer Brewing Co., Merrimack

Used with permission



## Community & Economic Vitality

The Nashua Region enjoys a vibrant and diverse economy with both a thriving small business network and several very large employers. Data markers confirm a healthy economic environment and residents consistently extolled the region's community centered business environment. A well-trained workforce, consistently low unemployment and poverty rates, an engaged citizenry, very strong health and well-being indicators, and a rich built and natural environment contribute to make the region an attractive one in which to live and conduct business. The region benefits considerably from its location within commuting distance of the Boston Metropolitan Area as well as surrounding employment markets.

Despite its many advantages, the region is likely to encounter some challenges on the horizon. The region's labor force is aging and its population of young people is contracting. Deferred infrastructure maintenance and limited transportation options represent potential barriers to continued economic development. Persistently high utility and higher education costs may deter companies with significant energy or human capital needs from considering the region. Like many parts of the country, the region's economy is changing, manufacturing employment is contracting while health care and services jobs are growing, and it's important that the region adapt to those changes moving forward.

To support a healthy economic environment moving forward, it is important that the region remain an attractive, livable and affordable place to live for all age groups. Workers are more mobile and more likely to base their relocation decisions on quality of life and livability characteristics than previous generations. During public outreach, residents consistently advocated quality of life investments, including the development walkable and amenity-rich communities firmly rooted in the region's built and natural landscape. The region may also consider adopting strategies to help spur business startup activity, including investments to reduce energy costs, and improved connections between neighboring cities and employment centers.

**VISION:** *The Nashua Region will foster economic growth by maintaining a high quality of life for residents, including preserving rural character, incentivizing innovation and entrepreneurship, supporting vibrant town centers and downtowns, and promoting a creative economy.*





At the height of the recession, the Nashua Region lost over 8,000 jobs, disrupting many and forcing some unemployed workers to work in different industries, commute longer distances or to seek out job training opportunities.



## OUR STORIES

# Grant Morris, Nashua

A native of New Orleans, Grant Morris, 31, was drawn to the Nashua Region shortly after his college graduation to take up a photography job at a local newspaper. Morris quickly settled in, finding the region small enough to be community-centered while maintaining convenient access to amenities.

“It feels like a community, you can get involved here and really carve your own niche, but Boston is only an hour away,” he said.

A successful photo-journalist, Morris enjoyed the work and quickly established contacts throughout the area. He met his wife, a city schoolteacher, and moved to a house in the city’s north end neighborhood. But just as he was beginning to get comfortable, Morris lost his job thanks to a newspaper downsizing. He described it as a devastating personal and professional development.

“When you get laid off, it’s like getting thrown in the middle of the ocean without a life jacket,” he said. “You really question yourself and what is certain around you. It changes how you look at the world.”

In need of a break and a new direction, Morris set out on a month-long road-trip with a long-time friend to plot his next move. Morris and his wife ultimately decided to stay in the region.

“I was happy here, my wife was happy here” he said, “I had established so many great contacts here and I didn’t want to throw all that away.”

Morris quickly rebounded, developing his own fledging video production company, New Sky Productions. He has acquired studio space in mill space located along the Nashua River in the city and built up a roster of clients.

Morris worked on Nashua’s branding campaign and produced for a number of non-profit organizations, businesses, and political campaigns.

Moving forward, Morris said he believes it’s long past due that passenger rail service be extended to the city. He would also like a stronger focus on pedestrian and transit investments and the nurturing of a vibrant arts and cultural community.

“I think we’re here for the long haul,” he said.



# Key Issues and Trends



## A Changing Economic Landscape

43%

Growth in healthcare and education services employment, 2000-2013

-38%

Change in region's manufacturing employment, 2000-2013

13

Average number of employees per private business in the region

## Highly Skilled, Aging Workforce

66%

Share of NH four-year graduates who plan to move out of state

59%

Percent of NH college seniors who would like to stay or are considering staying in NH

21%

Share of workers in region over age 55.

The Nashua Region is home to a diversified and healthy economy. Residents command the highest median wages of any planning area in the state and some of its largest industries, including finance and manufacturing, are also some of the best paying in the state. The region's employment profile continues to experience significant change as manufacturing declines and healthcare and professional and service-based jobs grow. More than a quarter of residents commute to Massachusetts, but a significant majority work within the region. Employment has slightly intensified along the Everett Turnpike corridor and Nashua and Merrimack now house 71 percent of all jobs in the region. The region will be challenged to ensure that infrastructure is supportive of business growth and to strengthen connections between neighboring cities and employment centers.

*"We need to make sure we're planning for what the economy will look like in 20 years and not just next year."*

-Hollis resident

Nashua Region residents are well prepared for a skills-based economy. Residents are more likely to have earned a four-year or professional degree than their state and national counterparts. This trend is likely to continue as the region's public school students outperform their state and national peers in standardized test scoring. One major continuing challenge will be attracting younger workers to fill jobs left by retiring ones. More than 20 percent of workers in the region are approaching retirement age, including a major concentration in manufacturing. Census data indicates that South Nashua, with a large assortment of multi-family housing options, is home to one of the state's largest concentrations of residents age 25-34, highlighting the importance of affordable and rental housing in maintaining young adult populations.

*"My kids want to stay here, but I'm worried they won't unless we have good jobs and housing that is affordable for young people."*

-Merrimack resident

## A Focus on Quality of Life

86%

Share of residents who indicated that small business and retail stores were important to have in their community

80%

Share of residents who indicated that farms and cultural/recreation facilities were important part of community

46%

Share of residents who indicated they would like to live in or near a downtown or town center (28% currently do).

Making the region a great place to live also represents an economic development strategy. Residents are more likely to stay in the region and contribute to economic growth if it offers an unbeatable quality of life. Livability and quality of life issues were a dominant source of discussion during public outreach. Residents consistently advocat-

ed focusing commercial and residential development around downtowns, making riverfronts active destinations and minimizing strip or sprawl patterns of development. Businesses like coffee-shops, restaurants, farms, galleries and microbreweries were frequently cited as ideally suited for the region.

*"I like all the one-of-a-kind small businesses."*

-Mason resident

*"Make the riverfronts destinations."*

-Nashua resident



GOAL	OBJECTIVES	PROJECTS
<b>JOB CREATION &amp; WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leverage education and job training resources to support development of a highly trained workforce</li> <li>Promote an environment that encourages additional entrepreneurial activity and innovation, for both continued community vitality and balance in municipal tax bases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of Milford Commerce and Community District, Bon-Terrain Industrial Park in Amherst and Front Street riverfront district in Nashua</li> </ul>
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan for a diversity of transportation options</li> <li>Support continued enhancements in broadband access and speed</li> <li>Consider shared municipal facilities as well as innovative land use controls to reduce long-term infrastructure costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the expansion of passenger rail service to region</li> <li>Incorporate broadband needs and opportunities into municipal master plans</li> <li>Expand transit service to communities surrounding Nashua</li> <li>Expand water and sewer service in Amherst and Pelham</li> </ul>
<b>QUALITY OF PLACE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incentivize economic development in strategic areas</li> <li>Partner with community organization to market destinations in the region, including historic places and arts and cultural attractions</li> <li>Focus development in town centers, downtowns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wilton Town Hall Theater digital conversion</li> <li>Draft Complete Street frameworks for municipal consideration</li> <li>Review zoning and land use requirements to ensure consistency with long-term community vision and goals</li> <li>Expand community event offerings and attendance</li> </ul>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preserve sensitive undeveloped lands</li> <li>Enhance region's rural character</li> <li>Promote alternative travel modes to improve air quality</li> <li>Improve water quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cleanup and redevelopment of Superfund sites in central Nashua and Milford</li> <li>Pursuit of brownfield grant funding to support redevelopment</li> <li>Keyes Park expansion, Milford</li> <li>Expand public access to riverfronts in manner that doesn't impair water quality</li> </ul>
<b>REGIONAL COORDINATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with non-profit business and community organizations to better market and brand the region</li> <li>Establish a regional forum to promote and discuss issues related to economic development on the regional level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan livability enhancements to Route 101A, region's major east-west transportation corridor</li> <li>Support the development of a statewide economic development plan or strategy.</li> </ul>

Woodmont Orchard, Hollis

Photo by NRPC



## Environment

The Nashua region is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. There is a plethora of surface and groundwater supplies, over 50,000 acres of forested lands and many parks and open spaces. Agriculture remains an integral part of the region, helping both to maintain rural character and to provide widespread access to locally grown fruits and vegetables. One of the region's greatest strengths is the careful stewardship residents show for the land. Municipal and grassroots efforts to preserve existing natural resources, reduce energy consumption and ensure adequate water supplies for all residents in the region have proven largely successful.

Sustainable funding for preserving existing natural resources, conducting technical studies, implementing adaptation strategies for natural hazards and completing energy efficiency projects remains a challenge for the region, as it is in many areas of the state. While not a new challenge, sustainable funding is a consistent obstacle to implementation. There are many funding sources for energy efficiency projects, however, most have a limited time span or can be programmatic in nature. Communities are also beginning to implement adaptation projects to cope with increases in precipitation and other natural disasters, but competing demands in town budgets can leave many projects unimplemented, though in many cases, the long-term costs of not taking action are even greater.

There are many opportunities in the Nashua Region for communities to collaborate and pool resources. Regional coordination was a consistent theme heard among municipal officials and residents and there are many excellent examples where it has saved communities time and money. The NRPC Electric Supply Aggregation saved over \$165,000 in energy costs for nine municipalities and 4 school districts across the region in 2014. The Nashua Region Stormwater Coalition has supported communities with technical assistance and resources to meet federal stormwater requirements. There are future opportunities for communities to participate in regional coordination projects such as culvert assessment, household hazard waste and watershed planning.

**VISION:** *The natural resources in the Nashua region provide access to recreation opportunities, good water quality and abundant open space for residents and wildlife. The region's natural resources enhance and protect the rural, small town character while ensuring a positive quality of life.*



Agriculture lands, like the Wilton Temple Community Farm (pictured above) which houses Hilltop Cafe, are treasured by residents. But the flat, scenic nature of farmlands make them vulnerable to development.



## OUR STORIES

## Ben Reed, Wilton

Located two miles off the state highway on a bumpy local road in an agricultural corner of Wilton, even the most intrepid traveler would be surprised to find a coffee shop.

Ben Reed, 30, runs the Hilltop Café, a cozy coffee shop and bakery, with his wife-turned-business-partner Christie. Situated along a very rural stretch of the Issac Frye Highway in Wilton, the café shares space with the Temple Wilton Community Farm and is surrounded by farmland and forests. Nestled in a circa 1765 Colonial home attached to the farm, the location evokes a quintessential New England image. “We’re definitely off the beaten path,” Reed said. “This isn’t really a place you stumble on, you have to go looking for us.”

But Reed said it’s exactly that rural location, as well as the nearby High Mowing School – a source of steady business – that attracted the pair to the farm. The only business of its kind in the area, the café now has seven employees and appears to have quickly established itself as a staple of Wilton’s landscape. And despite its secluded location, the café drew a steady stream of customers on a recent frigid winter afternoon, with many clearly using the spot to meet friends to chat. “We saw the potential right away,” he said. “It’s unique and I think that helps make it appealing. I think it’s a great gathering place for a rural community.”

That’s not to say that the location doesn’t have some drawbacks. The café has had to wrestle with frozen pipes and storm-induced electrical outages since opening in 2010. “Snow storms kill business,” he said. “Nobody wants to drive up a hill on a country road with 10 inches of snow on the ground.” During brutal winter storms, Reed says it’s not uncommon for the café to close for two to three days or even longer during extended power outages. “People tend to kind of hunker down in the winter here, and I don’t blame them,” he said

However, Reed added that the café’s location, at the farm from which it sources most of its food, more than makes up for some of the site’s drawbacks. The freshness of the café’s food and the lack of processing help make the spot a community draw, he said. Reed said the Wilton community has embraced the couple as well as the business. Residents helped him and his wife find an affordable house to rent and Ben now works part-time tutoring at the High Mowing School for supplemental income. “There’s overwhelming support and really devotion to the business,” he said. “Our customers are really passionate in support of us and they really look out for us.”

“When you can enjoy a meal right at the farm from where it was grown, that’s something that people here really treasure,” he added.

## Recreation and Open Space

65%

Share of residents who live near a park or open space

55000

Acres of forest lands in Nashua Region

38%

Share of NH residents who are overweight or obese

*The Nashua Region's parks and natural areas offer a wealth of recreation opportunities and contribute significantly to the region's attractive rural and suburban aesthetic that is so prized by residents. In addition to recreation, open spaces help protect the region's ecosystem by minimizing flood impacts, allowing for aquifer recharge, and absorbing ozone and other harmful gases. Publicly accessible open spaces provide valuable opportunities for active recreation. However, obesity remains a challenge in the region, and not all communities benefit from the region's vast open spaces and recreational offerings.*

*"The Souhegan River is great for kayaking and tubing."*

- Milford resident

## Rural Character

688

Number of farms in Hillsborough County

\$5

Amount, in millions, in farmer's market sales in Hillsborough County

-34%

Loss in region's agricultural lands, 1974-1998

*Agriculture is a strong tradition in the Nashua region. Historically, local economies were based on farming, logging and small manufacturing. Many historical farms still exist which provide local produce. Residents expressed the desire to retain the agricultural landscapes of the region. The soils of the Merrimack River Valley are unique from other regions in New Hampshire. The floodplains and river lands contain nutrient rich soils with minimal rocks and stones decreasing the damage to farming equipment and reducing labor costs. However, it is the flat land and well drained soils which make the region's agricultural lands vulnerable to development.*

*"The best thing about Litchfield is the agricultural resources and local farming."*

-Litchfield resident

## Aging Water Infrastructure

03

Number of wastewater treatment plants in region

\$19.6

Amount, in millions, of stormwater infrastructure needs in region

81%

Share of dams in the region that are privately owned

*Water infrastructure in the region has historically relied on private well and septic systems from groundwater sources. Residents enjoy good water quality but voiced concern about declining water tables and groundwater contamination. Aging water infrastructure will be a major priority for communities as the existing infrastructure nears its end of life. Needs will grow over time as climate change impacts water quality and water flow patterns due to increasing storm events, and maintenance and replacement costs to infrastructure increasing with age. Communities should consider water infrastructure planning in capital improvement plans to prepare for the maintenance and replacement cost of infrastructure.*

*"Public sewer would help bring more businesses to town."*

- Pelham resident

## Preserving Water Quality

74%

Share of water bodies with water quality issues related to stormwater

28%

Share of stormwater needs related to roadway drainage issues

05

NRPC municipalities that address shoreland protection in their master plans

*The Nashua region contains more than 54 bodies of water including three major rivers. Water is a key feature of the region that residents and tourists value. Unfortunately, less than half have been assessed for water quality standards and for some only partial data exists. Stormwater carrying excessive nutrients combined with a lack of water quality data has deteriorated some water bodies in the region. Homeowners have been working diligently to educate other homeowners on proper fertilizer use and pet waste disposal to prevent further degradation. Residents and municipalities can collaborate to gather updated information to provide trends analysis of water quality in the region.*

*"I like the scenic qualities, including animals, trees and the calming sounds of water."*

-Wilton resident

## Increasing Temperatures

**9.5**

Projected increase, in degrees, of extreme summer temperatures

**2.9**

Number of degrees the average temperature has increased since 1970

**23**

Projected normal winter temperature by the end of century

The Nashua region enjoys four seasons which is part of the quintessential character of the region. Residents value the plethora of recreation opportunities afforded seasonally.

However, historical temperature trends have been increasing across Southern New Hampshire for the past 100 years with the largest increases occurring in the winter of the last four decades. Regionally, residents will experience an increase in daytime temperatures with a larger increase in nighttime temperatures. There will also be an increase in extreme daytime temperatures. Municipal officials will need to be mindful of an increase in cooling costs and public health concerns such as asthma and heat stressed populations.

*“Climate change and its economic impacts [represent] a real challenge...”*

- NRPC workshop participant

## Increasing Precipitation

**-6.1**

Reduction in snow-covered days in region every decade since 1970

**20%**

Annual precipitation increase in region since 1970

**13**

Number of extreme precipitation events projected per year by 2020

Precipitation helps support the abundant ground and surface water resources in the region.

Damage from historical extreme precipitation events has been relatively modest compared to other areas of the state. Municipalities expressed the need for adequate size culverts to handle increased storm events and prevent road washout. Southern New Hampshire experienced a threefold increase in average precipitation over the last four decades. The largest increase in precipitation occurred as rain falling in December instead of snow. Communities will need to address erosion and make drainage improvement to handle more flooding events and less snow pack.

*“Pelham has every intention of complying with tall future requirements to maintain their participation with the National Flood Insurance Program.”*

-Pelham Master Plan

## Lack of Sustainable Funding

**40%**

Share of residents who indicated energy efficiency is a major priority for public investment

**36%**

Share of New Hampshire's energy consumption from transportation sources

**150**

Amount, in thousands of tons, that region could produce of biomass products

The region has made significant progress in improving energy efficiency and reducing costs. Energy efficiency remains a top concern for residents who expressed the desire for more incentive programs. A number of residents and businesses have taken advantage of energy efficiency rebates, however confusion regarding different efficiency incentives, and inconsistent program stability hamper fuller participation. Additionally, a lack of sustainable funding sources overall limits the ability to implement long range projects. Local Energy Committees and other municipal planning boards can encourage energy efficient development and retrofits for existing buildings.

*“Encourage and support businesses that are working to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and other non-renewable resources...”*

-Nashua Master Plan

## Heating Costs

**19%**

Savings achieved through Nashua Energy Aggregation in 2014

**78%**

Share of residents who support expanded incentives for home energy efficiency improvements

**72%**

Share of heating that occurs through fuel oil and utility gas

Fuel heating sources are dominated by utility gas and fuel oil in the region which is consistent with the rest of the state. Renewable energy sources such as wood and biomass products were cited by residents as an opportunity for improved energy efficiency due to volatile fuel pricing.

*“The region needs better clustered, energy efficient housing.”*

-Mont Vernon resident

Costs are especially a concern for vulnerable populations and low income residents, and while there are a number of energy efficiency programs offered for such populations, inadequate advertising limits fuller participation. Communities can play a role in energy efficiency programs and educate home owners on the benefits of energy efficiency rebates.



<b>GOAL</b>	<b>PRESERVATION OF EXISTING NATURAL RESOURCES</b>	
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Preserve the quintessential small town feel of the region through the protection of natural resources such as water, river corridors, open space and agriculture for generations to come.</i></li> </ul>	
<b>PROJECTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize NRPC GIS department, website, social media, and other outreach tools to assist municipalities with the development and dissemination of trail maps and trail condition information.</li> <li>• Identify vacant lots that could support small farming and community garden projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with the Nashua River Watershed Association to update their watershed plan and file appropriate documentation to classify the Nashua River as a NH Designated River</li> <li>• Draft model language for incorporating agricultural, historic and river corridor management considerations into site plan and subdivision regulations</li> </ul>

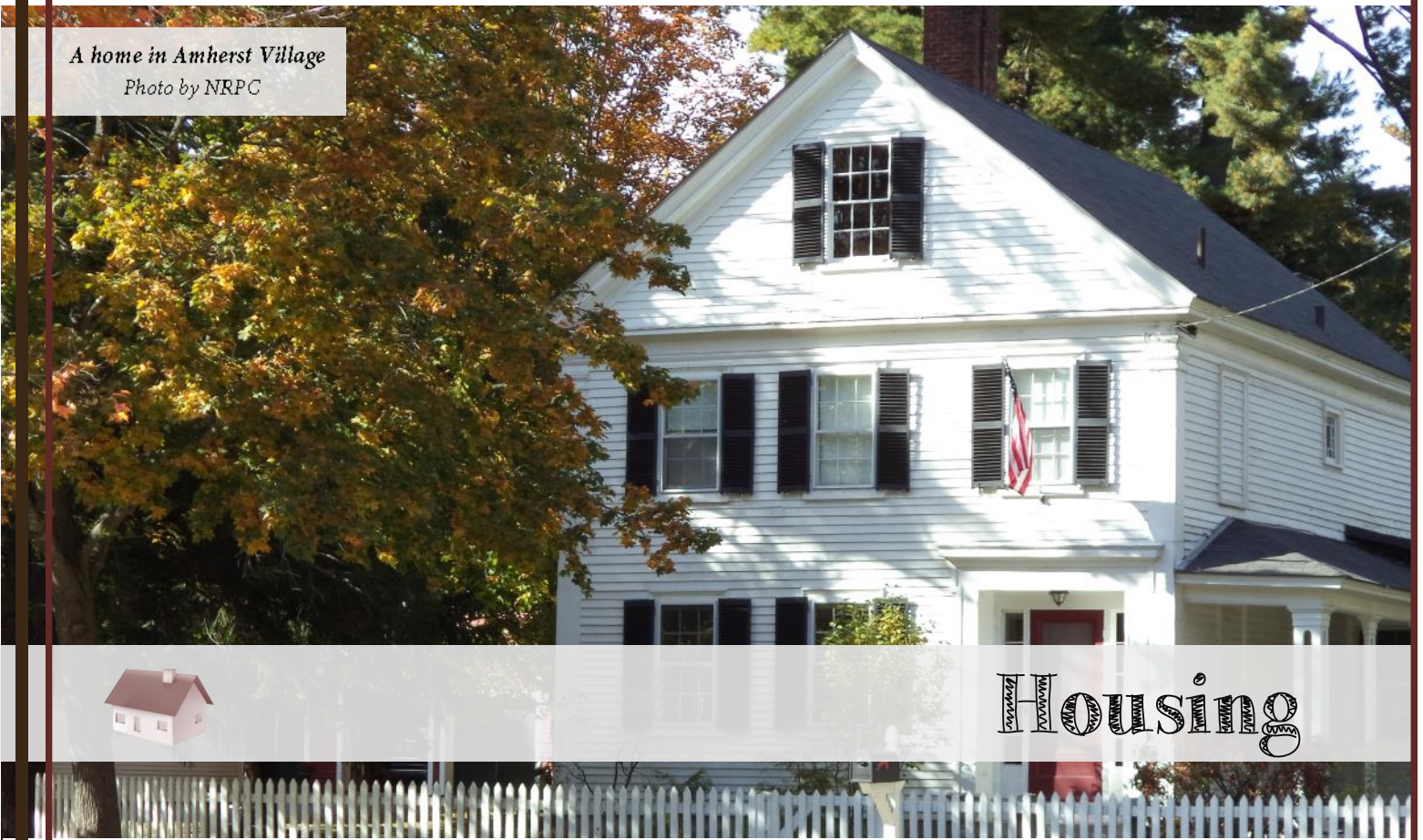
<b>GOAL</b>	<b>PUBLIC EDUCATION &amp; OUTREACH</b>	
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Climate adaptation and mitigation projects for the protection of existing natural resources need comprehensive and effective education for municipal boards and residents.</i></li> </ul>	
<b>PROJECTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and distribute educational materials for reduced and no-salt programs in sensitive areas and sources of pollution within watersheds.</li> <li>• Continue to support the Nashua Region Stormwater Coalition by hosting meetings and serving as a clearinghouse to share MS4 permit resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a workshop for planners, chambers of commerce, and local farmers on establishing farmers markets</li> <li>• Assist state partners in promoting the Volunteer Lakes Assessment Program in the region</li> </ul>

<b>GOAL</b>	<b>TECHNICAL STUDIES &amp; RESOURCE DATABASE</b>	
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Provide towns with the capacity to conduct necessary technical studies to prepare for uncertain hazards in the future and the means to do so through education, staff capacity and technical assistance.</i></li> </ul>	
<b>PROJECTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a study on recycling rates in each municipality and the associated cost savings.</li> <li>• Utilize regional solid waste district to serve as an information source for recycling, composting, and other solid waste reduction programs such as pay-as-you-throw.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to work with NH Geological Survey to conduct culvert assessments in the region</li> <li>• Conduct nutrient loading studies in coordination with river and lake advisory groups</li> </ul>

<b>GOAL</b>	<b>REGIONAL COORDINATION</b>	
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Assist communities with the opportunity to work collaboratively through sharing existing resources and plan for future resource protection.</i></li> </ul>	
<b>PROJECTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a regional natural resources/wildlife committee (similar to storm-water coalition) and facilitate meetings</li> <li>• Conduct a regional vulnerability assessment on transportation and water infrastructure and other critical facilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist municipalities in establishing climate change and adaptation committees as part of their hazard mitigation teams</li> <li>• Work with Local River Advisory Committees in the Region to promote sound management of river corridors and implement River Corridor Management Plans</li> </ul>



*A home in Amherst Village*  
*Photo by NRPC*



## Housing

The Nashua Region boasts one of the most diverse supplies of housing choices in the state with an abundant mix of home types and locations. A large supply of multi-family and rental options, in addition to more conventional single family suburban and rural neighborhoods, coupled with safe and friendly communities creates a desirable place to live. Residents particularly enjoy the convenience of living close to both rural areas with vast recreational offerings and more urban areas with shopping, dining and job opportunities. The effect of the housing crash on market prices has meant that the majority of home purchase prices fell within the definition of affordable under New Hampshire's Workforce Housing Statute.

Though home ownership has become more affordable in the region, rental housing demand has remained strong and costs have steadily increased. Like many areas of the country, the region experienced a significant jump in foreclosures during the recession. While slightly more than a quarter of the region's housing stock is rentals, those units are concentrated in key areas, including the City of Nashua, Downtown Milford, and eastern Merrimack. The remainder of the region's housing stock, generally made up of larger, multi-floor, single-family homes in suburban and rural areas, is well matched to today's households, but may not align with future housing needs as baby boomers age and younger, more financially-strapped buyers enter the market.

To continue to be a great area to live and raise a family, the region needs to ensure future affordable housing options are well located in proximity to transportation and employment opportunities. Regulations need to be flexible and adapt to changing demographics in the region, enabling seniors and young adults alike to find smaller homes of their choosing close by friends and family, and for young adults, near new job opportunities. The region boasts an impressive collection of resources related to home-buying, financial help, and credit maintenance which should be utilized to help both new homebuyers enter the market as well as existing homeowners better manage their assets.

**VISION:** *The Nashua Region supports a housing climate that promotes quality housing choices that are diverse and affordable, and situated within reasonable access to amenities, employment, and conveniences, while remaining a region that protects its rural, small town character, and suburban setting. The region's housing will enhance quality of life and the ability for residents of all ages, incomes and abilities to thrive for years to come.*

Approximately 17,000 New Hampshire children have lived in a foreclosed home or currently live in a home in foreclosure or at serious risk to do so due to delinquent home loans.



## OUR STORIES

### The Hughes, Hudson

Clockwise from top left: STEPHANIE, BOB, BRIA and JORDAN

At the onset of the recession, the Hughes family lost their home to foreclosure, an event that sent them on a five-year ordeal through three communities, two apartments and a transitional living center in search of a home to call their own again.

After the foreclosure, the family found a three-bedroom \$1,100 monthly rental in Nashua. However within six months, the Hughes' landlord sold the property and gave them 30 days to leave. At the same time, the Hughes' income dwindled as the recession set in and much of Bob's home remodeling business dried up.

"It's very hard in the middle of winter, uprooting your family and finding a place to live in 30 days" Bob Hughes said.

With few options, the Hughes moved to Milford, sharing a two-bedroom apartment with Stephanie's parents and brother. The family shared couch and bunkbed space and took over the rent to help as Stephanie's father was seriously ill at the time.

"We're very family-centered, but when you're sharing a 700-square-foot apartment with six other people, it's just not a good situation for anybody," he said.

Desperate to move and with few other options, the Hughes moved to the Anne-Marie House, a Hudson-based transitional living center dedicated to helping end homelessness. Through everything, the Hughes kept making car and debt payments to try to salvage their credit scores.

Bob attended a home financing seminar hosted by Neighborworks Southern New Hampshire, which helped the Hughes enter the Habitat for Humanity program.

After putting in more than 350 hours of 'sweat equity' of home construction, the Hughes moved into their brand new home in Hudson in 2013. The Hughes currently pay a 25-year \$853 monthly mortgage payment, taxes included.

The Hughes are thriving in their new home. Bob earned his associates degree and will graduate this year with a bachelor's degree in computer science. Bria, an Alvirne High honor student, will graduate this year and plans to pursue music or graphic design in college. The Hughes are also thrilled with the support provided to their son Jordan who is autistic.

"Nobody thinks [a foreclosure] can happen to them, but all it takes is a few things to go wrong, and everything turns upside down on you," said Bob Hughes.



# Key Issues and Trends



## Big Homes, Smaller Budgets



62%

Share of residents who support cluster residential zoning

75%

Share of region's multi-family housing stock located in Nashua

39%

Share of renters in region who pay more than 35% of income on housing

For many in the region, housing is affordable; household incomes in the region are high compared to other areas and the Great Recession has reduced the purchase price of homes. However, housing costs and availability vary significantly by community, and the region continues to be impacted by national economic trends. Tightening lending standards, increasing student loan debt burdens and a still recovering job market make home ownership a challenge for many. Access to affordable housing in the NRPC region is also limited by transportation and credit issues and many young adults in the region are unable to find affordable rental housing near employment opportunities. Additionally, 10% of residents have a disability, limiting accessible housing choices. Large lot size requirements and restrictive zoning have often been cited as impediments to providing a greater diversity of housing options.

*"We should consider incentivizing other forms of housing the same way we have already with senior housing."*

-Milford resident

## Shifting Demographics



132%

Projected increase in region's senior population, 2010 to 2040

-23%

Decrease in births in region, 2000 to 2012

57%

Share of households in region with two or fewer persons

There is a broad range of housing options in the region, but current housing stock may not match housing preferences or future needs. Elderly residents in the region are looking to age in place as long as possible and for those who can't, new questions arise. Who will buy their larger home? Will they be able to find a supportive living environment? The elderly, young adults, low income families, minorities, and new Americans alike are all in search of opportunities to maximize their home value and maintain access to transportation, supportive services, employment, shopping, and entertainment options. Many in the region called for greater flexibility in land use and zoning regulation to encourage smaller homes or accessory apartments to help meet shifting demands.

*"We keep building senior housing, but I don't know if we've planned how [seniors] are going to get around as they age."*

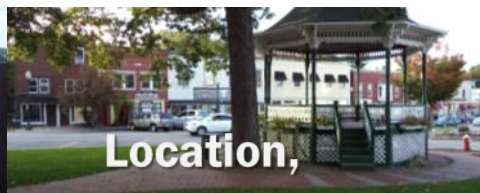
-Litchfield resident



## Location,

28%

Share of households in region located within 1/2 mile of town center or downtown



## Location,

43%

Share of residents who live near a transit stop



## Location

55%

Share of residents who prefer to live in a small house with short commute rather than large house/long commute

Without question, residents love the combination of the region's rural character and small town feel coupled with more urban amenities including businesses, economic development, jobs, and cultural offerings. While many residents want more walkable neighborhoods and mixed use development, more than half wish to live in purely resi-

dential neighborhoods. There is a large share of assisted housing in the region; however, there is concern that is concentrated in a few neighborhoods where crime rates are often higher. That said, the majority of the region's affordable housing is conveniently located to employment centers and transit.

*"I love living in a small town where you get to know so many people."*

-Wilton resident

*"Nashua is a really socially engaging place."*

-Nashua resident

GOAL	OBJECTIVES	PROJECTS
<b>AFFORDABLE &amp; WORKFORCE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage opportunities for affordable and workforce housing development to meet the projected housing needs of the region's rural and urban communities.</li> <li>• Include housing options close to employers with a short commute, have access to transit options, community services and centers, downtowns and stores, and walkable neighborhoods.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop technical resources to help communities measure their regional housing needs.</li> <li>• Develop a template process for communities to audit their regulations.</li> </ul>
<b>DIVERSE HOUSING SUPPLY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage a diverse range of housing choices to enhance community vitality.</li> <li>• Evaluate demographic trends to assess current and future housing needs of residents of all ages, incomes and abilities.</li> <li>• Identify housing needs and existing barriers for the region's young professionals to support a diverse workforce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop model ordinances to help communities meet their regional housing needs.</li> </ul>
<b>MANAGE FISCAL IMPACTS OF HOUSING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify fiscal impacts of low- to no-growth and a deteriorating older housing stock to communities.</li> <li>• Identify strategies to allow for balanced growth that supports the local tax base.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop resources to help municipalities plan for and mitigate future impacts.</li> <li>• Map community key destinations and assets that enhance access to opportunity for residents.</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY CHARACTER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the development or redevelopment of housing that is consistent with neighborhood, town, city, or rural character.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illustrate well designed affordable and multi-family housing and how it can be achieved.</li> </ul>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve the high quality and abundant natural features and open spaces that make our region a desirable place to live, work, and play.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide direct technical assistance to municipalities on conservation open space and infill development techniques</li> </ul>
<b>REGIONAL COORDINATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support continued collaboration across municipalities between municipal officials, members of the housing supply market, business community and other regional and state partners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with the City of Nashua's Urban Programs to share programs of regional interest.</li> <li>• Further existing education and outreach programs to promote affordable housing in the region.</li> </ul>



## Transportation

Residents of the Nashua Region enjoy access to an extensive and well-developed transportation network. Most residents of the region commute by automobile and the region is well-oriented for such travel; highway networks are extensive and provide convenient access to major destinations. Traffic congestion is relatively light relative to nearby metropolitan areas and parking facilities are plentiful in nearly all areas. Pedestrian networks are well developed in many downtown and town centers and bus transit service within Nashua is relatively expansive; the system is one of the very few in the state to provide service during nighttime hours. Human service providers, like Souhegan Valley Rides, represent excellent models of grassroots transportation solutions.

The region does face many transportation challenges. Infrastructure maintenance needs have strained resources at all levels of government as many highway and bridge facilities reach the end of their functional lifespans. The region also faces a backlog of transportation project needs in an era when funding opportunities are limited. Transportation options, particularly outside of Nashua, are very limited; no fixed-route transit service extends beyond the city boundaries, and the region lacks an integrated pedestrian and bicycle network across communities. Slightly more than a quarter of residents commute to Massachusetts for work, but recurrent traffic congestion and a preference for more travel options has spurred many residents to advocate for the extension of passenger rail service to the region. As the population ages, senior transportation needs will remain a major issue.

Moving forward, municipalities will be challenged to identify sustainable funding sources for transportation maintenance needs, particularly before embarking on major expansion projects. Investments in ITS infrastructure (designed to alert drivers of any traffic issues before they encounter them), as well as public-private partnerships and the consideration of pay-as-you-go transportation technologies offer strategies to control or reduce maintenance costs over time. The region will be challenged to defend the need for transportation investments against competing needs and showcase how such projects directly impact the region's quality of life and economic competitiveness.

**VISION:** *The Nashua region has a comprehensive and reliable multi-modal transportation system that enables universal access for all travelers, including disabled, youth, and seniors. Our transportation system enables a highly mobile community and promotes economic growth, public health, and enhances the natural environment. The transportation system is adaptable to changes in demographics, economic conditions and energy related forces. Sufficient funding supports the operations maintenance and expansion of our transportation infrastructure to continuously meet the needs of the region.*



With the region's senior population forecast to increase by 132 percent by 2040, senior transportation needs will remain a major mobility issue in the region in coming years.



## OUR STORIES

## Andrea Mannino, Milford

For years, local businesswoman Andrea Mannino, 72, volunteered actively in her community, helping organize the town's annual Pumpkin Festival Dinner, mentoring area high school students and providing hair care services to cancer patients. A Milford hairdresser whose career spans 50 years, Mannino knows just about everybody in town. In 1994, a local business organization named her "Woman of the Year," for her community and charitable efforts.

After being diagnosed with nasopharyngeal cancer, Mannino's active life changed dramatically. Unable to drive at all during radiation treatments, Mannino relied on rides from friends and family. After regaining her driving skills, Mannino was rear-ended by a truck in a serious crash on Route 101A. Mannino suffered a traumatic brain injury in the crash and the trauma left her with physical and emotional scars, including severe memory loss, an inability to multi-task, post-traumatic stress and depression.

"My life as I knew it was over," she said. "Travelling was such an important part of my life and I couldn't do it anymore."

A very active and independent personality, Mannino said adjusting to a life of relying on others was devastating.

Mannino was able to continue working only because her clients picked her up and drove her home. Family and friends

also helped out. But transportation issues remained a constant source of concern.

When a friend informed Mannino of the Souhegan Valley Rides service, it changed her entire outlook. "It changed my life," she said. "It helped me heal because it gave me back my independence. It makes your life normal again."

Mannino uses the service at least once a week and extolled the professionalism and punctuality of its drivers. "I don't have anything but wonderful things to say about [Souhegan Valley Rides]," Mannino said. "It's outstanding - they're godsend."

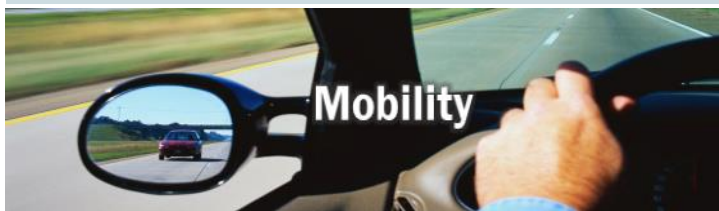
Mannino said she would like to see the service expanded to support social activities, including trips to the movies, to shopping malls or to see plays or performances.

Though her health prevents her from embarking on any major trips today, Mannino said she's thankful she didn't put off trips while she was raising her family. "I was never one of those people who said I was going to wait until I retire to do things," she said. "When I wanted to travel, I'd just go."

"I'm resilient, I'm strengthened by my challenges," she added. "I don't have any regrets."

# Transportation

# Key Issues and Trends



**88%** Share of region's commuters who drive alone to work

**-49%** Reduced buying power of NH & federal gas taxes from 1993 -present, due to inflation and fuel efficiency advances

**55** Approximate time, in minutes, to drive from west end of region (Wilton) to east end (Pelham)



**35%** Share of municipal budgets road maintenance consumes in some NRPC municipalities

**28%** Share of state roads in region in poor condition

**17** Number of red-listed bridges in region

The region's population has consistently spread out among outlying communities over the last several decades and most residents rely on automobiles for their everyday transportation needs. Congestion, though very manageable during most periods can plague some of the region's major transportation corridors during peak travel times. The need for congestion relief along Route 101A and a third Merrimack River crossing were frequently cited by residents. Adopting land use strategies that encourage growth in walkable and transit-accessible areas may reduce long-term road expansion needs. Investments in transit and pedestrian infrastructure will help improve mobility for residents who lack, or prefer to forgo the use of vehicles.

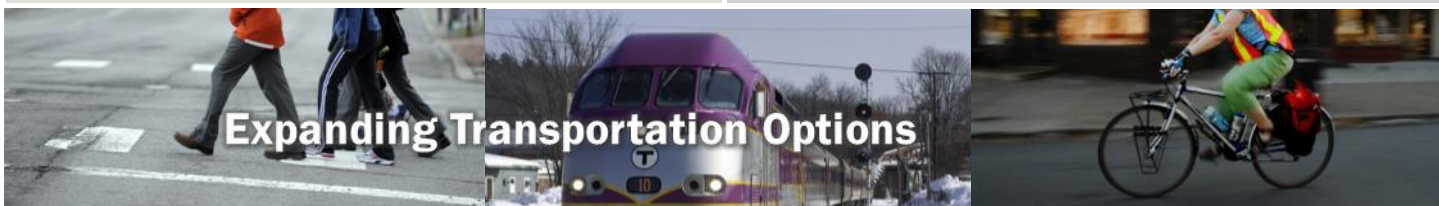
*"The fact that we don't have the traffic that some places do, that really attracts people here."*

- Merrimack resident

The continued maintenance of the region's transportation system is vital to sustaining mobility. In recent years, this has emerged as a major challenge for municipalities as many facilities, built during growth booms in the mid- and late twentieth century, reach the end of their functional life spans. Funding for transportation maintenance has not kept up with needs. Red-listed bridges have grown in number and forced bridge closures in some areas. Communities will be challenged to ensure that limited maintenance funds are being deployed in the most efficient and beneficial manner possible and educate residents on unmet maintenance needs to help build support should budgetary increases be necessary.

*"Nobody really talks about [road maintenance], until you have to close the bridge they use, and then everybody's talking about it."*

- Amherst resident



**10** Number of miles MBTA Lowell passenger rail service stops short of NH border

**477** Annual ridership, in thousands, of Nashua Transit System

**99%** Average weekday parking lot utilization rate for Exit 8 Park & Ride/Boston Express station

During public outreach efforts, residents consistently advocated for more investment in alternative travel modes. More than any other single investment, expansion of passenger rail service to the region was advocated. More biking and walking options, development centered in walkable areas, and the extension of transit service to outlying communities were also frequently cited. Such investments may also help the region tackle persistent public health issues like maintain-

ing air quality and addressing obesity. With the region's senior population projected to grow rapidly and younger residents demanding more travel options, the issue will remain salient. Communities should consider incorporating pedestrian/bicycle and transit upgrades into scheduled road improvements. For major investments in alternative modes, the region will be challenged to build local support and consensus for the provision of local matching funds.

*"Everybody wants to bike and walk places these days"*

- Milford resident

*"I'm from Massachusetts, and I miss being able to hop on buses or trains to get places."*

- Hudson resident

## Transportation Goals, Objectives & Strategies

### GOAL

### MOBILITY & ACCESSIBILITY

### OBJECTIVES

- *Improve the availability of transportation options for people and goods. Support travel efficiency measures and system enhancements targeted at congestion reduction and management. Assure all communities are provided access to the regional transportation system and planning process.*

### STRATEGIES

- Widen key regional routes experiencing congestion including Route 101A and F.E. Everett Turnpike
- Construct Exit 36 South to improve access to South Nashua
- Widen and implement safety improvements to Route 101
- Improve transit connections to nearby metropolitan areas including Manchester and Lowell
- Build new roadways to address congestion areas, including a third river crossing and proposed Hudson circumferential route.
- Provide guidance to communities regarding pedestrian and transit-oriented development

### GOAL

### QUALITY OF LIFE

### OBJECTIVES

- *Preserve and enhance the natural environment, improve air quality, and promote active lifestyles. Encourage livable communities which support sustainability and economic vitality.*

### STRATEGIES

- Restore passenger rail service to the region
- Investigate feasibility of public transit extensions to Hudson, Merrimack and Milford
- Provide guidance to communities regarding 'Complete Streets' policies and frameworks
- Provide guidance to communities regarding trail systems and linkages
- Provide public charging stations for electric vehicles
- Implement sidewalk and bicycle lane improvements where appropriate

### GOAL

### SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY

### OBJECTIVES

- *Ensure adequate maintenance and enhance the safety and reliability of the existing transportation system. Pursue long-term sustainable revenue sources to address regional transportation system needs.*

### STRATEGIES

- Continue conducting Road Surface Management Studies to help communities prioritize road maintenance needs
- Identify sustainable maintenance funds before embarking on major transportation expansion projects
- Expand ITS infrastructure across region, and particularly along major routes
- Investigate feasibility of more sustainable funding opportunities

### GOAL

### IMPLEMENTATION

### OBJECTIVES

- *Provide for timely project planning and implementation. Develop cost-effective projects and programs aimed at reducing the costs associated with constructing, operating, and maintaining the regional transportation system.*

### STRATEGIES

- Work with state and federal partners to minimize delays in project planning and permitting
- Investigate opportunities for public-private partnerships
- Investigate feasibility of regional cost-sharing for major projects that require municipal matching funds
- Ensure ample opportunities for residents to provide input relating to transportation projects at all stages of the planning and construction process





## Regional Resilience

Throughout the public engagement process, residents often advocated, either directly or indirectly, the advancement of a region that is resilient, both environmentally and economically. Recognizing that consumer preferences can swing sharply, that economic conditions are volatile, that the prices of basic goods are unpredictable and inconstant, and that extreme weather events are becoming ever more frequent, regional resilience, in a variety of forms, is increasingly becoming imperative.

The Nashua Region's history is characterized by its resilience in the face of adversity, and its ability to adapt to challenges and changing conditions. When the region's textile mills, once the lynchpin of the regional economy, closed up shop and moved to lower-cost areas, the region's people stayed and built a more resilient and diversified economy. When Digital Equipment Corp. closed its regional operations in the early 1990s, the impacts dealt a devastating blow to the region's tech-based economy. But again, the region's people stayed and built a successful network of start-up companies cultivating an even stronger innovation economy. In both cases, the region's adaptability played a key role in its recoveries.

Real world scenarios are innumerable. If depressed economic conditions force a family to sell a car, or if a spike in gas prices made owning one unaffordable, residents may be able to avoid significant disruption to their lifestyles if practical opportunities are afforded to travel by other modes and housing options in walkable environments are offered. Likewise, recognizing that household sizes are shrinking, a family might be able to convert part of their large single-family home into an in-law apartment without encountering significant zoning and land use barriers. Additionally, municipalities, in conceding that storm events are increasing in severity and frequency, may consider investing in high quality infrastructure to reduce replacement costs over time. As change is constant and often unavoidable, resilience allows communities to respond to a diversity of impacts.

*The Nashua Cotton Mill is an excellent example of the region's resilience. Built in 1905 as a cornerstone of the region's textile manufacturing economy, the cotton building was recently transformed into over 100 apartments. The project also included an extension of the city's riverwalk.*