Connecticut’s Capitol Region encompasses the City of Hartford, our State Capital, and the 29 surrounding suburban and rural communities. It is a region rich in history, rich in human resources, and rich in natural resources. Our rivers, hills and farms combine with our town centers, village greens and historic city neighborhoods to form our New England character.

Our success in maintaining the character of our individual communities, and the entire region, is often measured by how well we preserve our important historic and natural resources, while at the same time allowing for compatible new development that serves human needs. Our continued strength as a region will depend upon our ability to maintain the high quality of life and opportunities that many of our citizens now enjoy, while working to extend these opportunities to all current and future residents of our region.
Defining Sustainability

The Capitol Region Plan of Conservation and Development: Vibrant. Green. Connected. Competitive encourages the creation of a more sustainable region - a region made up of urban, suburban or rural communities that have more housing and transportation choices, are closer to jobs, healthy food, green space, shops or schools, are more energy independent and help protect clean air and water.

The Sustainable Communities Task Force Report further defines what we mean by “sustainable development” and “sustainable communities.” Sustainable development has been described as the integration of the three e’s — environment, economy, and equity. In addition, a variety of themes have become closely associated with the concept of sustainable development. For development to be sustainable, it must satisfy five criteria. Decisions must consider and account for:

- **Long-term impacts and consequences** — Sustainable development requires the use of a long-term horizon for decision making in which society pursues long-term aspirations rather than simply making short-term, reactive responses to problems. By keeping an eye out for the long-term, sustainable development ensures that options for future generations are maintained if not improved.
- **Interdependence** — Sustainable development recognizes the interdependence of economic, environmental, and social well-being. It promotes actions that expand economic opportunity, improve environmental quality, and increase social well-being all at the same time, never sacrificing one for another.
- **Participation and transparency** — Sustainable development depends on decision making that is inclusive, participatory, and transparent. It recognizes the importance of process and decision making that includes the input of the stakeholders who will be affected by decisions.
- **Equity** — Sustainable development promotes equity between generations and among different groups in society. It recognizes the necessity of equality and fairness, and it reduces disparities in risks and access to benefits.
- **Proactive prevention** — Sustainable development is anticipatory. It promotes efforts to prevent problems as the first course of action.

Therefore, sustainable development challenges us to envision a society superior to today’s society, and to make it a reality for our children and grandchildren.

According to the Sustainable Communities Task Force Report, sustainable communities are cities and towns that prosper because people work together to produce a high quality of life that they want to sustain and constantly improve. They are communities that flourish because they build a mutually supportive, dynamic balance between social well-being, economic opportunity, and environmental quality. Generally speaking, they integrate the five concepts outlined above and demonstrate their application locally. Some communities have adopted sustainable community principles through legislation, executive order, or other actions.

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1. The President’s Council on Sustainable Development, Fall 1997
Creating a More Sustainable Capitol Region

This Plan presents some of the challenges and choices facing our region as we move through the new millennium. While our region has many strengths and assets, it also faces challenges that could hinder our continued progress. How we respond to the challenges and choices will determine our future.

Toward the goal of creating a more sustainable region, the CRCOG Policy Board endorsed the Sustainable Capitol Region Initiative in September 2009. The mission of this initiative is to develop and support integrated, regional approaches to planning, projects and investments that will promote vibrant, healthy communities, protected natural resources and open spaces, equitable access to opportunities and an economically competitive Capitol Region to serve all our citizens today, and in the future.

Subsequently in October 2010, the Capitol Region Council of Governments along with two partner agencies, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) of Springfield, MA and the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency (CCRPA) of New Britain, CT received a $4.2 million Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The broad set of projects funded by that grant seek to implement sustainable communities projects and capacity building tools to create a bi-state Sustainable Knowledge Corridor Region in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

The following brief summary presents some of the challenges that we face as a region in key topic areas. Through Sustainable Capitol Region, the Sustainable Knowledge Corridor Project and other CRCOG efforts, we will need to examine and address these challenges with comprehensive, cross-cutting policies. The policies and decisions we make now will create the legacy we leave to future generations.

While our region has many strengths and assets, it also faces challenges that could hinder our continued progress.
Housing

A key component in building a sustainable region is providing housing for people and families with a range of incomes. According to the Partnership for Strong Communities’ report *Housing in Connecticut 2011: The Latest Measures of Affordability*, in 96 cities and towns a family earning the median household income in a given town in 2010 could not qualify for a mortgage to purchase the median sales price home in that same town. In 2009, the number of towns was 86. This change reflects a modest 4 percent increase in housing prices in 2010, with a 3.5 percent decrease in 2010 state median household income. In addition, according to the American Community Survey 2010 1-Year Estimates, 51 percent of renters and 35 percent of owners in Connecticut spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. These households have less money for other necessities, like food, clothing and healthcare.

The report goes on to say that economists and housing experts largely agree that increasing fuel and energy costs, the difficulty in obtaining mortgages, the aging of the state’s population and other factors will result in a market shift: larger homes and those far from transit with high energy or transportation costs may no longer have broad appeal. Connecticut’s housing future may look more like this: many smaller, more affordable energy-efficient homes in town centers and other walkable locations with access to transit. Reducing size along with transportation and energy costs can make more homes affordable for all, including the skilled labor Connecticut needs.

The Regional Plan Association’s (RPA) report *Growing Economy, Shrinking Emissions* concurs that in the Hartford area, demographic projections signal a coming market shift away from single family detached developments and toward a demand for denser, transit accessible housing as the population ages. The RPA report found that there is an increase in the non-traditional family types such as empty nesters, retirees, roommates and singles. However, areas in Connecticut like the Capitol Region will be unable to meet the needs of this growing market if there is no change to current zoning that would ultimately allow 94,000 new housing units region-wide, but only 20 percent of those units within a reasonable walking distance of existing or proposed transit.

(For more information see Chapter 11 – Housing.)
Economy and Workforce

The region faces the dual challenges of low projected population growth coupled with a retiring workforce. The population is projected to grow by only 2 percent in Hartford County and 3 percent in Tolland County through 2030. Connecticut’s working age population is also expected to start decreasing after 2015. The state and region can expect more retirees on fixed incomes and fewer workers. Furthermore, existing demographic trends show younger, less educated, low-income workers replacing older, more educated, high-income workers in Connecticut. Due to the recession and the slump in housing prices, many baby boomers have remained in the workforce, however, when the economy and housing market rebound the region will be faced with a potential workforce shortage which could hamper economic growth. Key overarching challenges for workforce in the region going forward are: 1) increasing the skill levels and career readiness of the region’s workforce to fill the middle skill jobs that are available and will become vacant upon baby boomers retiring; 2) addressing the educational attainment gap among low income and minority communities to improve the access of these residents to job vacancies and new jobs; and 3) attracting and retaining the highly educated and mobile workforce by creating places where they want to live.5

A report entitled Together We Can Grow Better: Smart Growth for a Sustainable Connecticut Capitol Region6 commissioned by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in partnership with the Capitol Region Council of Governments in 2009 states that market projections indicate retaining the young professional workforce needed to keep the economy competitive will mean providing compact, walkable communities, denser, more affordable housing and more efficient, better designed homes.

(For more information see Chapter 12 – Economic Development.)


6 http://bit.ly/1n6toyk
Transportation

The 2011 Capitol Region Transportation Plan\(^7\) states that in 2010, total travel in the Capitol Region was about 21,000,000 vehicle miles per day (VMT) and is expected to grow to about 27,490,000 vehicle miles per day in the next 30 years. Additionally, approximately 115 miles of the freeway in the Hartford metropolitan area are congested on a daily basis which causes 2,225 vehicle hours of delay per day. Adding to this congestion is the fact that 98 percent of the freight moving in, out and through the region is carried by truck according to the Global Insight study.

In addition to congestion, the daily costs of transportation in the Capitol Region are burdening household budgets. A 2008 analysis by Jonathan Rose Companies on annual household gas expenditures for the Hartford area showed, in 2010, that the majority of households spent up to $2,400 per year on gasoline, but by 2008, the majority spent between $3,000 to $3,800 per year on gas. The same analysis showed that in 2000 the majority of households in the Hartford area spent 20 to 28 percent of their monthly household expenditure on gas and that majority grew even larger by 2008.

Despite delays on the roadways and the high price of fuel, only about 3.4 percent of all workers in the region take the bus to work.\(^8\) There are two major transit and rail investments in the Capitol Region that will offer commuters more mode choice, the New Haven – Hartford – Springfield Rail Program and CTfastrak, formerly known as the New Britain – Hartford Busway. These investments coupled with land use decisions that bring higher densities and a mix of housing types and uses with walking distance of transit will provide commuters with accessible transit options which will lower households’ combined housing and transportation costs and mitigate congestion.

(For more information see Chapter 10 – Transportation.)

\(^7\) [http://bit.ly/1mIK0e2](http://bit.ly/1mIK0e2)

\(^8\) U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, American Community Survey, [http://1.usa.gov/1l1SG3w](http://1.usa.gov/1l1SG3w)
Public Water & Sewer Infrastructure

Properly functioning public water and sewer systems in more densely settled areas of the region are crucial to a sustainable Capitol Region. They help ensure public health, a clean environment, and economic vitality for the region. Public water and sewer can allow higher density development which can support public transit and reduce sprawl. In areas of small lot or multi-story development, individual wells and septic systems are not feasible.

In the Capitol Region, a myriad of organizations provide public water and sewer. The Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) is the largest such organization. The MDC provides water supply, water pollution control, mapping, and household hazardous waste collection to eight member municipalities -- Bloomfield, East Hartford, Hartford, Newington, Rocky Hill, West Hartford, Wethersfield and Windsor. The MDC also provides water and/or sewer services to portions of several other towns in the region. Beyond the MDC’s service area, sanitary waste treatment is generally handled by municipal public works or wastewater treatment agencies or through private septic systems. The Connecticut Water Company is another major provider of water service in the region.

Improvement and expansion of sewer infrastructure in the Capitol Region are necessary to support the public health of existing populations and improve the water quality of rivers, streams and lakes, but these improvements come at a very high cost. Sewer infrastructure capacity issues are the single, largest negative factor influencing the water quality of the Connecticut River which flows through the Capitol Region from the northern to the southern border, and in turn on to Long Island Sound. Significant capital investment is required to correct this issue. For example, in the greater Hartford area, the MDC is undertaking a 15 year, $2.1 billion multi-phase Clean Water Project to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSO), eliminate sanitary sewer overflows, increase Nitrogen removal, and upgrade the Hartford Water Pollution Control Facility (WPCF). In combination, these projects will ultimately help to eliminate sewage overflows to area waterways during an average year, thus significantly improving the region’s water quality.

Phase I CSO projects target six areas in Hartford to relieve the problems of combined sewage overflow and to channel sewage to an upgraded Hartford WPCF. SSO reduction will eliminate structural SSOs in Wethersfield, West Hartford, Windsor, Rocky Hill and Newington. Nitrogen removal will require modifications and additions to the WPCFs in Hartford and Rocky Hill as well as the wastewater collection and sanitary pumping facilities that convey water to these WPCFs. The cost of the entire project is $2.1 billion, of which $800 million has already been approved and committed for Phase I. An additional $800 million referendum to fund Phase II work passed in November 2012.

In combination, these projects will ultimately help to eliminate sewage overflows to area waterways during an average year, thus significantly improving the region’s water quality.

Organizations like the Connecticut NEMO Program (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials), the Low Impact Development Center, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have worked to develop an extensive list of green infrastructure tools to treat storm water. Using gardens, landscaping, and the soil under permeable surfaces to filter and treat water naturally not only reduces excess storm water runoff volumes, but in many cases also helps to beautify streets and neighborhoods. As these systems are natural, maintenance costs are significantly reduced. The EPA states in recent reports that large cities that have comprehensively addressed infrastructure issues by implementing green solutions have reduced costs by hundreds of millions of dollars.9

(For more information see Chapter 9 – Public Water and Sewer Service.)

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Open Space and Farmland Preservation

The Capitol Region is experiencing slow growth. Growing Economy, Shrinking Emissions cites Connecticut State Data Center figures that between 1980 and 2000 the region’s population grew 8 percent and that from 2010 to 2030, it is expected to grow another 4 percent.

Yet, according to a recent report for the Capitol Region by Jonathan Rose Companies, the development patterns of the last 50 years have negatively impacted many of the region’s most precious natural resources such as forests, wetlands, open space and prime agricultural land. In Connecticut as a whole, 160,000 acres of previously undeveloped forest and agricultural land were lost between 1985 and 200610.

During the same time, all of the towns in the Capitol Region lost agricultural land, with nearly 30 percent of the region’s towns losing between 965 and 1,840 acres11. This means that land consumption is outpacing population growth.

The RPA report also states that the region will grow an additional 18,000 households by 2030. If current zoning is changed to direct this future growth into higher density, mixed use, transit oriented locations and provisions are made for more affordable housing, the region could preserve valued open space while maximizing the return on investments in new development.

(For more information see Chapter 3 – Natural Resource Conservation, Chapter 5 – Open Space and Farmland Preservation and Chapter 8 – Sustainable Land Use and Zoning.)

If current zoning is changed and provisions are made for more affordable housing, the region could preserve valued open space.
Public Health and Safety

Studies show that the Capitol Region’s land use development patterns have led to undesirable trends in public health and safety. Sprawling development has led to an auto-dependent lifestyle in the region. The CRCOG Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan\(^\text{12}\) states that according to the Thunderhead Alliance 2007 Benchmarking Report, between 1960 and 2000, levels of bicycling and walking to work fell 67 percent while adult obesity levels rose 241 percent. At the same time, the number of children who bike or walk to school fell 68 percent as levels of overweight children rose 367 percent. A recent estimate indicates that in the City of Hartford, as many as 52 percent of adults and 32 percent of children are obese.

Poor air quality causes other health risks. According to the American Lung Association, health costs of air pollution are estimated at a minimum of $10 billion a year, much of which comes from cars, trucks, and SUVs. The City of Hartford has extremely high rates of asthma: 41 percent for children.

To ensure the sustainability of the region in the context of mounting risks associated with natural disasters that stem from climate change, the Capitol Region must be prepared to respond. A study by Cox, et. al in 2007, cited in the Regional Plan Association Report, Northeast 2050, showed that a large number of Census tracts and block groups in the Capitol Region are moderately to highly vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters based on a combination of factors that include residents’ poverty and income levels, ability to evacuate, age, and access to information. Vulnerable populations are among those most likely to bear the brunt of flooding because many of these areas also sit within the boundaries of 100-year floodplains.\(^\text{13}\)

Finally, an open ended survey conducted by the Capitol Region Council of Governments for a Regional Roundtable series asked Capitol Region residents and employees to describe the things they liked the most and disliked the most about the region. Crime and Lack of Safety was one of the top responses of things people disliked the most about the region. A sustainable region depends upon attracting new residents and businesses which is difficult to do if there is a perception that the region is unsafe. Existing problems need to be addressed and perceptions altered.

(For more information see Chapter 7 – Food Security, Chapter 10 – Transportation, and Chapter 6 - Climate Change.)


This Plan was prepared under the authority of Section 8-35a of the Connecticut General Statutes. It is not a detailed land use plan, but rather a general guide for the future conservation and development of the Capitol Region. Its individual chapters provide an overview of the many factors that influence our regional development pattern and the choices available to us as we move into the future.

While a complex array of factors influence how we grow as a region, the Plan recommends a future development pattern guided by six major themes:

- Focus new regional development in areas in which existing and planned infrastructure can support that development.
- Support efforts to strengthen and revitalize Hartford, the Capitol Region’s central city, and also support the revitalization of older, urbanized areas throughout the region.
- Develop in a manner that respects and preserves community character and key natural resources.
- Implement open space and natural resource protection plans that acknowledge and support the multi-town nature of our natural systems.
- Support the creation of new employment and housing opportunities, and transportation choices, to meet the diverse needs of our region’s citizens.
- Encourage regional cooperation in the protection of natural resources, the revitalization of urban areas, and economic development.

We believe that through this approach, we can achieve the balance between conservation and development that will keep our region strong. The fruits of achieving this balance include:

- Thriving urban, suburban and rural communities.
- The conservation and preservation of natural areas that provide form and contrast to the man-made features of the region.
- A wide range of housing choices that serves citizens of all ages, incomes, races and ethnic groups.
- Varied transportation options that allow people to move freely throughout the region by private automobiles, buses, trains, bicycles or walking.
- A growing economy that provides goods and services to our region, the nation and the world, and offers good job opportunities to the region’s residents.

This Plan is made up of two parts:

- A narrative plan that presents an overview of issues that influence our regional development pattern, and presents goals and policies to guide our future development.
- Four policy guide maps that present the narrative goals and policies in visual form. They are the:
  - Land Use Policy Map;
  - Conservation Focus Areas Map;
  - Economic Development Areas of Regional Significance Map;
  - Municipal Focus Area Map.

CRCOG will use these policy maps along with the narrative goals and policies to support plans, development proposals and conservation/preservation activities consistent with the Plan’s objectives. While this Plan is primarily used to guide CRCOG’s planning and review activities, it is hoped that local governments will also support it and work toward its implementation.
The Plan’s goals and policies are drawn from independent research and analysis, and extensive work by the Capitol Region Council of Governments and other regional organizations on a range of topics, including: building and sustaining livable communities, reducing municipal fiscal disparities, housing, economic development, transportation, and natural resource conservation and preservation. A matrix is presented in the final chapter of the Plan to demonstrate the cross-cutting nature of the goals and policies of the Plan and the importance of approaching conservation and development in a comprehensive way as we move toward creating a more sustainable region.

The notable projects and initiatives in the Capitol Region that helped arrive at the goals and policies of the Plan are:

- The CRCOG Livable Communities Project which gave us the opportunity to talk directly to over 2,000 people throughout the region.
- The Redesigning the Edgeless Cities Project which analyzed the environmental and economic impacts of transit oriented development in the Capitol Region.
- The Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Project in partnership with the U.S. EPA which produced the Capitol Region’s Smart Growth Guidelines for Sustainable Design and Development.14
- The Sustainable Knowledge Corridor Project which has allowed us to gain input on creating a more sustainable bi-state Knowledge Corridor Region.

In many of these pivotal projects, we found that residents of the region desire many of the same things regardless of where they live and work in the region. Some of the common desires for the region are:

- Growth carried out in a manner that preserves community character and quality of life.
- A strong center and central city.
- Moderate and low-income housing in all communities.
- Better and more balanced transportation options.

CRCOG also consulted extensively with our member municipalities and the State to maintain harmony and consistency with municipal and state planning goals and objectives. Our efforts included conducting regional roundtables to identify strategic issues for the region and CRCOG’s role in addressing these concerns, along with gathering data for inclusion in the Land Use Policy Map and compiling an extensive inventory of municipal focus areas. The Metroquest on-line survey tool15 has also been utilized to gain input on the highest priorities for creating a more sustainable region.

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15 Metroquest is an online survey tool to engage the public on regional issues for the Sustainable Knowledge Corridor Metroquest, go to http://bit.ly/SzUtQK
A Demographic Snapshot of the Capitol Region Today

The facts in Table 1.1 describe the Capitol Region as it exists today. The goals and policies of this Plan found in the following sections, suggest some ways in which we can build on our positive attributes, and change patterns and behaviors that threaten our natural resources, our economic strength, and our overall quality of life.

Table 1.1 Selected Characteristics of the Region

**POPULATION**
- Total Population (2010) 769,598
- Regional Increase (2000-2010) 5%
- Percent Increase in Rural Towns (2000-2010) 12.5%
- Percent Minority (2010) 33.5%
- Percent 19 Years and Younger (2010) 25.4%
- Percent 30-49 Years Old (2010) 27.4%
- Percent 50-74 Years Old (2010) 14.1%

**EDUCATION LEVELS OF THOSE 25 AND OLDER (2010)**
- Bachelors Degree or Higher 35.6%
- High School Degree 88%
- Without a High School Degree 11.9%

**HOUSING (2010)**
- Total Housing Units 319,632
- Total Occupied Housing Units 300,291
- Percent Renter 33%
- Percent Owner 67%
- Median Gross Rent $1,006
- Median Home Value $271,650

**LAND USE (2006)**
- Developed 23.3%
- Agricultural and Grass 22.4%
- Forest 46.9%
- Wetlands 3.6%
- Water 2.4%

**WATERSHEDS**
- Major Basins (the Connecticut River) 1
- Regional Basins Draining to the Connecticut River 8
- Regional Basins Draining to the Thames River 2

**INCOME (2009)**
- Median Household Income $66,457
- Individuals Living Below Poverty Level 69,558
- Percent Below Poverty Level 31.4%

**NATURAL FEATURES (PERCENT OF REGION)**
- Aquifer Protection Areas 5.2%
- Steep Slopes 11.7%
- Floodplain 6.1%
- Upland Wetlands 9.1%
- DEEP Natural Diversity Area 24.5%
- Water Bodies 2.3%

One or more of these features may exist on a parcel of land.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, State of Connecticut DEEP, UConn CLEAR, CRCOG Databases