CAPITOL REGION PLAN
of CONSERVATION and
DEVELOPMENT


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2014-2024
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.
Creating a More Sustainable Capitol Region

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.

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.
Trends Shaping the Region

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,¹ 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 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.² 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 Emissions³ 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.)

² U.S. Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/acs
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.

A report entitled Together We Can Grow Better: Smart Growth for a Sustainable Connecticut Capitol Region 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.)

Transportation

The 2011 Capitol Region Transportation Plan 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 that in 2000 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. 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 Project 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 household’s combined housing and transportation costs and mitigate congestion.

(For more information see Chapter 10 – Transportation.)

Public Infrastructure

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, the Hartford area Metropolitan District (The MDC) is undertaking a 15 year, multi-phase Clean Water Project in response to an EPA Sanitary Sewer Overflow (SSO) federal consent decree and a Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) consent order to achieve the Federal Clean Water Act goals by 2021. The Clean Water Project will work toward combined sewer overflow reduction as well as sanitary sewer overflow elimination and nitrogen removal.

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 Water Pollution Control Facility (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 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.8

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

---

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 2006.

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.)
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\(^9\) 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 tracts and block groups in the Capitol Region are moderately to highly vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters based upon a combination of variables 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. (Footnote Regional Plan Association, 2007, Northeast 2050, http://bit.ly/1nYL4fH)

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.)

---

The Capitol Region Today

The facts in the tables below describe the demographics of the Capitol Region as it exists today. The goals and policies of this Plan 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.
The following conservation and development goals will guide the Capitol Region’s planning and policy work over the next ten years.

Conservation Goals

Natural Resource Conservation
• Protect air, water, and soil quality in the region
• Grow and develop in harmony with natural resources
• Promote active natural resource stewardship

Watersheds and Water Quality
• Improve and maintain water quality
• Protect water supply and increase water conservation efforts
• Reduce non-point source pollution
• Continue combined sewer overflow and point-source pollution discharge reductions
• Use innovative wastewater treatment techniques for new developments

Open Space and Farmland Preservation
• Support protection of more open space in the region
• Encourage preservation of farmland in the region
• Encourage preservation of declassified water company land as open space
• Coordinate and prioritize open space preservation throughout the region
• Expand and protect open space along major rivers

Food Systems and Food Security
• Preserve and look for opportunities to reclaim the Capitol Region’s working lands
• Improve regional residents’ access to food resources
• Improve the health and nutrition of the region’s population
• Reduce environmental impacts of the food system

Development Goals

Climate Change
• Connect communities with tools and resources to address climate change
• Strengthen and broaden CRCOG’s network of partnerships to address climate change
• Bolster the regional approach to climate change planning
• Continue to work toward greater transportation options in the Capitol Region in an effort to mitigate the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels in the state

Sustainable Land Use and Zoning
• Guide growth to regional centers and areas of established infrastructure
• Increase sustainable redevelopment and infill development efforts
• Revise zoning and subdivision regulations to address local and regional land use concerns

Public Water and Sewer Service
• Ensure an adequate and high quality water supply
• Continue reduction of environmental impacts of sewage discharge
• Use existing water and sewer infrastructure to guide future growth
• Balance water supply and ecosystem considerations

Transportation
• Provide a range of viable transportation options within the region
• Improve interregional and interstate transportation
• Coordinate land use, environmental, and transportation efforts
• Anticipate and plan for future transportation needs

Housing
• Increase the range of choice in housing for people of all incomes and all ages, but especially for those who have the least choice in achieving their locational preference
• Enforce Federal and State fair housing laws and promote fair housing through the creation of housing opportunities
• Encourage and support the maintenance of viable residential neighborhoods
• Support preservation of the region’s rental housing stock, and the expansion of housing opportunities for renters
• Continue to improve the Capitol Region transportation system in order to better link housing, jobs and services, thus expanding individuals’ housing choices
Conservation and Development Policy Maps

Conservation Focus Areas
(Full Size, Readable Map in back of Plan)

The areas highlighted on the map below represent lands currently preserved, or worthy of some consideration for conservation/preservation based on their natural resource or historic value. The conservation corridors represent areas where there is potential to link larger parcels of environmentally sensitive and preserved land in order to protect significant natural features and habitat that span municipal boundaries.

CRCOG will use this policy map, along with the Plan’s goals and policies and site-specific information, to support proposals consistent with the conservation/preservation of these important historic and natural features.

The Conservation Focus Areas Map is located in the back of this Plan.

Economic Development Areas of Regional Significance
(Full Size, Readable Map in back of Plan)

The areas highlighted on the map to the left represent lands that can best support large, regional-scale commercial and industrial development. In order of priority, these areas are:
1. Areas of Regional Significance, due to their current status as major employment centers and projected employment growth;
2. Transit Corridors;
3. Interstate Highway Areas; and
4. Water and Sewer Service Areas.

CRCOG will use this policy map, along with goals and policies from the Plan, to support plans and development proposals that are consistent with these priority areas.

The Economic Development Areas of Regional Significance Map is located in the back of this Plan.

The Conservation and Development Policy Maps illustrate our vision for the region’s future. These maps translate our goals and policy recommendations into visual form.
Municipal Focus Areas Map
(Full Size, Readable Map and Matrix in back of Plan)

The Municipal Focus Areas represented on this map have been identified by town planners and include existing or potential conservation greenways, open space connections, commercial retail or mixed use centers and corridors, traditional neighborhood developments, village greens, village centers, historic areas, transit-oriented developments, technology or business centers and brownfield redevelopments. These Municipal Focus Areas represent existing conservation and development efforts that are in keeping with the goals and policies of the Plan.

CRCOG will use the map at left along with the Plan’s goals and policies and site specific information to support proposals consistent with the goals and policies identified by municipalities for these important focus areas.

The Municipal Focus Areas Map is located in the Appendix of this Plan, along with the Municipal Focus Area Matrix and Municipal Focus Area Narratives.
Conservation and Development Policy Matrices

Land Use Policy Matrix
(Full Size Readable Matrix in back of Plan)

The Land Use Policy Matrix further defines the CRCOG Priority Conservation Category and the Development Intensity Categories of the Land Use Policy Map. Along with each verbal description of what characterizes each category, a pictorial representation is provided to help visualize the scale and form of development for each land use category.

The Land Use Policy Matrix is located in the back of this Plan.

Sustainability Goals Matrix
(Full Size, Readable Matrix in back of Plan)

The Sustainability Goals Matrix demonstrates not only the cross-cutting nature of the goals and policies in this Plan, but also the areas in which the goals and policies address social equity, a key factor in creating a more sustainable region. Symbols represent each topic covered by its own chapter in the Plan and are placed on each specific goal that addresses that topic. The matrix provides a clear visual representation of the multifaceted approach we must take to meeting the goals of the Plan.

The Sustainability Goals Matrix is located in the back of this Plan.
Photographers,

MANY THANKS!

Many thanks to the photographers for use of their beautiful images of our Capitol Region. Photos are listed by page number.

Heather Brandon  
Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.  
Covers

Vallerie Perrault  
4

Barbara Steele  
7, 8, 14

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.