2. VISION

Purpose: The Central NH region supports its foundations of natural beauty, growing economic development, transportation network, municipal capacity, community character, and spaces for people by adapting to challenges. The goal is to apply careful stewardship and decision making to ensure the region remains successful and attractive to future generations.

WHY A VISION?

Like the 2015 Regional Plan, this 2026 Regional Plan is a visible statement of where the Central NH region is now, where it should be in the future and what is required to get there. Having flexibility remains important as data and community input changes over time. The CNHRPC's work with communities gives it an understanding of the changes and opportunities in the Central NH region as a whole.

Vision can also be applied to how the Regional Plan is assembled. The Regional Plan contains chapter topics on Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Natural Resources, Community Facilities and Land Use. Chapter Fact Sheets provide an overview, serving as Executive Summaries for the chapters. Importantly, Tool Sheets are featured for many chapters which are short guides to implement some of the strategies noted for improving communities. Maps are available for chapters which display the region's assets and demographic profiles. A Regional Plan that contains actionable recommendations, wherein people can visualize and connect ideas and projects to realistic goals and expectations is a more useful approach than a data-heavy tome. With the vast number of datasets and changing figures available from extensive, valid sources, it became necessary to pare down the traditional Regional Plan content into a shorter, more actionable document by referencing the data within the chapters, but not including it specifically.

WHAT THE GREATER CENTRAL NH REGION ENVISIONS

The preservation of historic Village Centers, Downtowns, and Main Streets is paramount to communities. Growing interest in denser, clustered developments that would include walkable villages while preserving the outskirts of the communities for conservation and agricultural purposes can help to reduce sprawl. Communities are facing the need for more affordable housing options for people of all ages. The region is seeking to develop in a different way than traditional subdivisions or site plans, by applying adaptive reuse or clustering around the dense village areas. These planning techniques can enable unique community character to remain while providing needed economic growth and new housing. The natural environment – rivers, conservation lands, woods, wildlife habitat, and recreation – will continue to define the region for residents and visitors.

CHAPTER PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the topic chapters serve as both actionable strategies for communities and touchstones for how the Central NH region could approach long-range planning within the next 15 years.

Housing

Purpose: The purpose of the Housing Chapter is to: 1) understand changes in the region's housing market and situation since the adoption of the previous regional plan; 2) understand demographic trends that influence housing; and 3) identify potential barriers and solutions to ensure that housing demand meets the needs of the population. The chapter is intended to help Central NH municipalities consider approaches to housing that best fit their community.

Housing Recommendations for the Region through 2040

- ☐ **Continue to implement housing recommendations from the previous Regional Plan.** Locating housing near services and jobs, allowing home occupations, and capitalizing on cluster developments were previous recommendations that are still valuable. These efforts should be continued and tailored to the current housing, demographic, and economic environment.

- ☐ **Maximize cluster and mixed-use ordinances.** Finding ways to capitalize on cluster ordinances and mixed-use ordinances such as planned unit developments can address several housing issues at once, including housing stock type, affordability, and community character. The use of incentives is a driving force behind such ordinances and a community's creativity can prove vital to such efforts.

- ☐ **Encourage ordinances that allow for reuse or rehabilitation of larger, older, historic properties into multi-family or condominium developments**. Old Victorian homes, including farmhouses and their barns, are often underused. At the same time, they represent the historic character of the community. Encouraging their reuse as multi-family or condominiums, while maintaining the exterior appearance can address housing, reuse existing roads and infrastructure, and encourage historic preservation of these properties.

- ☐ **Explore and encourage other housing types such as townhomes, cottage ordinances, or tiny homes**. Zoning ordinances can provide more clarity for working with non-traditional housing which can include townhouses, cottage developments, or tiny homes. Finding ways to permit or even encourage such housing options could address affordability as well as housing choice.

- ☐ **Continue to monitor and respond to changes in the state's legislative framework**. In recent years, the New Hampshire State Legislature has sought to address the housing challenges with a series of legislative actions. These have included everything from accessory dwelling units, to building on Class VI roads, to allowing apartments in all commercial zones. Individual communities, and the Central NH region as a whole, should continue to monitor and respond to these changes to ensure that zoning ordinances comply with the evolving legal framework.

- ☐ **Limit the costs to communities to expand infrastructure and minimize tax impacts into the future.** Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts, Capital Improvement Programs (CIPs), potential Impact Fees, and Exactions are all ways to limit the fiscal impacts of growth to a community. While there are other factors that contribute to tax and infrastructure expansion in a municipality, a community can take steps to limit those as much as possible.

Economic Development

Purpose: The purpose of the Economic Development Chapter is to identify opportunities to grow the region's economy within the context of our community character. The chapter seeks to find ways to capitalize on our economic assets and address economic challenges in the face of changing state, national, and global economic trends. Job growth, business growth and retention, and the expansion of the non-residential tax base within the context of the region's community character is what this chapter seeks to do.

Economic Development Recommendations for the Region through 2040

- ☐ **Implement the goals and objectives outlined in the 2015 Regional Plan**. The passage of time saw a macro-scale global issues, including a pandemic, political upheaval, and inflation that impacted the country, State of NH, and its communities. Remaining, relevant strategies can be reviewed again once readiness is obtained.

- ☐ **Establish and support Economic Development Committees**. An EDC is a vital advocate for, and conduit to economic development in a community. EDCs can connect the municipality to the needs of businesses, help with zoning development, event coordination, and grant applications.

- ☐ **Consider the use of available tax incentives to encourage economic growth and development**. Tax incentives, such as RSA 79E, ERZ Tax Credits, and the Commercial/Industrial Tax Incentive are all ways that communities can help foster economic growth through tax relief. Adopting – and, when possible, "stacking" these incentives on top of one another – are great ways to attract economic growth.

- ☐ **Consider TIF Districts to fund infrastructure needed for growth**. A TIF district is a way to fund needed infrastructure, ranging from sewer, water, to roads, as well as other facilities needed to support economic development. Often paired with a developer's agreement, at TIF can make development happen where it may not otherwise occur. A TIF can also be "stacked" upon other tools such as tax incentive zones.

- ☐ **Review and update zoning ordinances and land use regulations.** Communities should review their zoning ordinances to ensure that it works in the current economic climate while protecting community character. Additionally, the permitting and land use regulations (Site Plan and Subdivision Regulations, building permit process, ZBA process) should be assessed for clarity and ease of use. Municipal contacts and a clear fee schedule are also vital to this effort.

Transportation

Purpose: The Transportation Chapter's purpose is to provide a guide for addressing transportation challenges in the region. It does so by providing a range of information related to local and regional transportation matters, highlighting pertinent issues, and discussing opportunities and challenges. It also navigates the process for planning and implementing transportation infrastructure and operations.

Transportation Recommendations for the Region through 2040

- **Continue ongoing work with the Technical Advisory (TAC) to identify and prioritize transportation projects in the region**. Among the primary responsibilities of the CNHRPC TAC are to evaluate and rank regional priority transportation projects on a two year cycle in conjunction with the NHDOT Ten Year Plan. Many projects have worked their way through the process to construction. Continuing to solicit, review, prioritize, re-evaluate and re-prioritize transportation projects will help ensure there is a pipeline of projects ready to go, and that these projects are best suited for meeting current and future transportation needs.

- **Continue collaborations with NHDOT on the I-93 Bow-Concord project**. This project is likely to be the most impactful transportation project in the region in a generation. Host communities should continue their engagement with NHDOT and the project team to refine project details and minimize impacts during construction. The project is not fully funded, so it is important to track the project timeline and be prepared to engage on revenue options.

- **Identify and implement roadway improvements in conjunction with routine road work**. Communication and collaboration between multiple parties including NHDOT Districts, NHDOT Safety, Municipalities, and Regional Planning are needed to make connections between needs and opportunities. Advanced knowledge and documentation of deficiencies, matched with maintenance schedules, can lead to collaborations to implement cost effective improvements. Past examples include Hopkinton Village improvements at NH9/NH103 completed during routine paving, as well as all way stop conversions in Chichester and Salisbury that addressed long-standing safety concerns. With a backlog of Ten Year Plan transportation projects in the queue, innovative implementation opportunities such as these are more important than ever.

- **Complete a Safe Streets and Roads for All Action Plan and Work with NHDOT partners and others on implementation**. One roadway fatality is too many. A Safe Streets for All Action Plan will use a data-driven approach to identify issues and locations. An updated action plan matched with a proactive and opportunistic implementation approach are needed. The above-mentioned low-cost improvements in Hopkinton, Chichester, and Salisbury are a result of an approach that can be expanded using a safety action plan and safe systems approach.

- **Use available tools to support municipalities in planning and programming local transportation infrastructure**. Municipal public works departments are tasked with maintaining local roads and transportation facilities within their municipal budgets. Therefore, it is important to have systems for

prioritizing investments and making cost effective decisions. Tools like Road Surface Management Software (RSMS) and the NH Stream Crossing database can help develop maintenance and construction programs. These must then be programmed into municipal CIPs and fit into municipal budgets.

- [ ] **Leverage both land use and transportation planning expertise**. Interactions between land use and transportation go both ways and cover a range of issues. These include development on class VI roads, driveways and access management, matching traffic demand with infrastructure that can support it, context sensitive solutions, and induced demand. Land Use and Transportation planning decisions are often made by different people and different institutions, but the issues must be addressed together.

- [ ] **Continue applying a Complete Streets approach, especially in downtowns and community centers**. Our aging roadways often reflect a time and philosophy that prioritized car and truck traffic to the detriment of walking, bicycling, and other community goals. Thoughtful design, maintenance, and operation can keep traffic of all modes safely moving while enhancing our town centers and the economic activity and community vitality they bring.

- [ ] **Continue making trail connections both regionally and locally**. The Central NH region has a growing multi-use trail network that serves both transportation and recreation purposes. These trails should continue to increase connectivity within and across their communities. Prominent examples include the Merrimack River Greenway Trail, Concord-Lake Sunapee Rail Trail, and the Northern Rail Trail. Trail planning must continue at the local and regional levels to ensure the systems meet community needs.

- [ ] **Continually monitor public transportation needs and support the systems that provide it**. The State and Regional Coordinating Councils and transportation providers such as the Community Action Program of Belknap and Merrimack Counties are continually working to meet the transportation needs of the region's population. This requires constant effort and collaboration, and an ongoing search for funds to match Federal dollars.

- [ ] **Continually monitor emerging technologies for challenges and opportunities.** A number of innovations have affected transportation systems in the past several years, particularly battery technologies that enable Electric Vehicles, Electric Bicycles and other electrified mobility devices such as scooters. Self-driving or semi-autonomous vehicles is another technology that may increasingly travel the region's roads. Other technologies are available to help transit riders find their ride, and yet others may provide new insightful data to help with transportation planning. The challenges and opportunities associated with such technologies must be continually monitored for potential infrastructure or policy changes.

- [ ] **When evaluating regional transportation priorities, emphasize safety, state of repair, and complete streets projects in villages, main streets, and neighborhoods.** Based on public input received as well as various interactions with the public and municipal officials on a range of issues, areas of emphasis for future project prioritization have come into focus. An increasing emphasis on safety has been noted. State of repair and maintenance is also a notable priority. There has been increasing interest for Complete Streets-type improvements and trail access to villages, main street areas, and neighborhoods. These areas stand to benefit most from calm traffic and pedestrian and bicycle friendly

environments. Congestion issues have been a relative lower priority, with exceptions in cases where traffic delays result in cut-through traffic on roadways that are not suited for it.

Natural Resources

Purpose: The purpose of the Natural Resources Chapter is to: 1) review and inventory existing conditions of natural resources, water infrastructure, open spaces, recreation areas, and agricultural lands; 2) understand trends in conservation, climate, and threats to natural resources and ecosystems; and 3) identify tools and opportunities to support sustainability in the Central NH region and protect natural resources for future generations. The chapter is intended to help Central NH municipalities consider approaches to natural resource conservation, preservation, and protection that best fit their community.

Natural Resources Recommendations for the Region through 2040

- **Continue to implement many of the recommendations from the previous regional plan**. A key focus of many actions in the previous regional plan was to support collaboration and coordination of efforts to conserve and protect natural resources in the region and it continues to be an effective goal in decision-making processes. Collaboration between boards and commissions in the same community, across communities, or watersheds is vital when the impacts of natural resource protection are far-reaching.

- **Continue to develop Natural Resource Inventories and Open Space Plans to prioritize areas for future conservation and protection**. Natural resources cannot be protected if they are not documented and valued within a community; natural resource inventories and open space plans fill this purpose and allow for residents to learn more about natural resources in their community, as well as provide support for the cultural benefits of natural resources such as special recreational sites or scenic vistas.

- **Develop and maintain trail networks and recreational areas**. Walking and hiking are key parts of outdoor recreation in the Central NH region, and its trails are highly valued by residents. Collaboration between landowners and community volunteers are necessary to continue to develop and maintain trail networks in communities.

- **Support public education opportunities to encourage practices that protect natural resources.** Public education opportunities can encourage best practices management of tree stands and agriculture, help hikers, trail users, and campers to be responsible while recreating on trails or campgrounds, and advise residents of local warnings for water sources or how to prevent pollution of local water bodies through proper use and disposal of potential contaminants

Community Facilities

Purpose: Community facilities are the heart of the region's towns and city, and the region's character is present in all its facilities. The purpose of this chapter is to identify facilities and amenities and recommend improvements. The buildings, public spaces, recreational amenities and infrastructure of the Central NH region's communities support the activities and services available to residents and businesses and they connect neighborhoods with the places where people shop and conduct business.

Community Facilities Recommendations for the Region through 2040

- [ ] **Update municipal long-range planning documents to ensure the needs of municipal facilities and services are met over the next 15 years.** These include Master Plans, Capital Improvement Programs, Asset Management Plans, Energy Audits, Hazard Mitigation Plans, and more.

- [ ] **Monitor water quality and quantity trends and their effects on water and sewer infrastructure as new development occurs and more information on emerging contaminants becomes available.** Water and sewer infrastructure will grow and be upgraded as new development occurs and in compliance with regulations. Regular spot checking of private wells as well as municipal water supplies and river outtakes above what is required can help determine the long term outlook and identify any new contaminants. Report this information back to consumers along with mitigation suggestions. Capacity assessments should be undertaken to ensure the region's groundwater supplies remain viable for generations while serving growing development needs.

- [ ] **Work to reduce solid waste and increase recycling opportunities, including enhanced public outreach and education.** The solid waste issues will eventually need to transition into more recycling and local processing of materials. Getting people to reduce the amount of organic matter entering landfills and stopping the wrong materials from entering the recycling stream is important. Reducing the waste stream through heavy public education and legislative advocacy may become more critical over time.

- [ ] **Hold community discussions about how the changing needs of different population groups will affect municipal and school facilities and services**. With fewer children of school age and an aging population, the repercussions impact the entire community. Consider the interconnected issues of housing affordability, the lack of affordable daycare, and the need for more senior services and facilities.

- [ ] **Enhance the recreational facilities enjoyed by residents and visitors by expanding public access to waterways and connecting trails across the region.** There is tremendous community support for enhanced recreational opportunities in the region. These range from hiking trails, public beaches, boat launches, parks, bicycling travel ways, off-highway recreational vehicle access, snowmobile trails, rail trail connection, and conservation lands for enjoyment.

- [ ] **Upgrade the road network and drainage systems to ensure they remain safe for travel during everyday conditions and severe weather.** Every major storm event involving precipitation carries the risk of road or culvert washout. Communities should continue to upgrade their gravel roads which are more prone to erosion. Locating grant funding to help with some of these projects has proved more competitive as systems age and require upgrade, so watch for those opportunities.

- [ ] **Support renewable energy programs and make them more accessible to landowners through clear permitting and approval procedures.** Solar energy has taken an incredible turn in the region and remains the most easily accessible renewable energy alternative for municipalities and consumers alike. Consider benefits of hydropower and wind systems, and determine how to promote the choices in the community as greater support becomes available for renewable energy.

- [ ] **Expand cellular and internet coverage within communities and pursue legislation or grants to lower costs for customers.** To attract providers, update old telecommunications ordinances and encourage placement of more cellular towers. These benefits should be communicated with the community, especially in areas with low coverage. Internet expansion will continue with its customer base expansion, yet long term affordability of cellular and internet service may require legislative advocacy.

Land Use

Purpose: The Land Use chapter serves as the practical guide for community development. Land use controls in the form of Zoning Ordinances and a Planning Board's Site Plan or Subdivision Regulations guide development in a community based on the recommendations of the Master Plan. The purpose of this Land Use chapter is to synthesize the elements of the other chapters relevant to land use into a clear set of recommendations for communities to consider in the zoning and regulatory framework, in addition to a few other strategies such a studies, data collection, and land conservation.

Land Use Recommendations for the Region through 2040

- ☐ **Encourage ordinances that allow for reuse or rehabilitation of larger, older, historic properties into multi-family or condominium developments.** Reusing these structures can provide housing at more affordable rates and limit the need for additional infrastructure.

- ☐ **Maximize the utility of cluster-type ordinances, including Planned Unit Developments, Cluster Subdivisions, and Cottage Housing.** Clustering housing can lead to economies of scale to keep costs down, and mixing in various housing types and commercial uses can create sense of community in a neighborhood. Lastly, the act of clustering can protect land and natural resources.

- ☐ **Continue to implement many of the recommendations from the previous regional plan.** The trends that led to these recommendations still exist, and the intervening pandemic and inflation rates have delayed much of their implementation. Continuing to pursue these recommendations will support this regional plan as well.

- ☐ **Continue to monitor and respond to changes in the state's legislative framework.** The flurry of new state laws over the past three years has led to many changes at the local level. As housing affordability challenges continue to plague the state, additional changes can be expected.

- ☐ **Limit the costs to communities to expand infrastructure and minimize tax impacts into the future.** TIF Districts, infill, reuse, and developer-funded improvements can help to minimize future municipal costs for infrastructure expansion.

- ☐ **Participate in CNHRPC traffic counts.** The CNHRPC traffic count program is an essential tool for transportation planning at the local level and should be an annual priority.

- ☐ **Consider transportation corridor studies.** Transportation corridor studies can shed light on challenges but also identify solutions for local traffic concerns. Engaging in these study efforts is encouraged.

- ☐ **Adopt Economic Development Committees.** Economic Development Committees are vital to steering the economic development of a community. Ensuring they are in place and engaged is an essential tool for focused economic development.

- [ ] **Ensure Community Master Plans are current and up to date.** A master plan provides the basis for a community's zoning ordinance, but more importantly, it defines where a community is, and where it wants to go over the next ten years. Updating these plans are a vital process for shaping community growth and development.

- [ ] **Consider using a land use build out analysis to test the current zoning framework.** A buildout analysis is an excellent way to see how a community's zoning ordinance impacts the community if all lots are built out. Engaging in such studies on a periodic basis is a useful tool when updating master plans or considering zoning changes.

- [ ] **Consider zoning ordinances to protect natural resources.** Natural resource protection can serve many purposes, and considering zoning ordinances that achieve these goals can be a crucial tool.

- [ ] **Protect natural resources through the preservation of land and conservation easements.** Land conservation is the best way to preserve land as open space. Finding willing landowners and funds to do so can directly contribute to conservation efforts.

THE FUTURE STORY THROUGH 2040

While the region is constantly changing and evolving alongside its communities and residents, the opportunities, ideals, and goals portrayed in the 2015 Regional Plan continue to relate to CNHRPC communities today. In the previous regional plan, this continuity was expressed through four key themes: **Connect**, **Invest**, **Partner**, and **Sustain**. While this 2026 update has not incorporated these themes as directly, they remain present within and throughout the document. Regional Plan chapters regularly have key areas of overlap and connection, providing emphasis on some of the more complex issues facing communities.

To this end, the Vision Chapter ends by reestablishing these themes as both a means of reflecting on the past and planning for the future. Regardless of how the region shifts and what issues it confronts in the coming years, these principles will continue to underpin local and regional planning efforts in Central NH.

Connect

The importance of connections as the region moves forward is a valued asset that needs to be a central focus of the vision and implementation strategies. A region where people have more choices on how they connect to the places where they live, work and recreate is highly desirable. The term is used in its broadest sense here as it addresses connections for the transportation system, natural resources, economic development, schools, and housing.

Invest

There is a challenge to be met regarding the need for a clearer regional identity and how to develop economically in ways that are strategic and focused on what already works in this region. Quality of life is an asset that can attract and retain workers, employers and visitors. Capitalizing on this asset and investing in what is currently valued is an important strategy as businesses want to operate in an area that has a readily available, talented workforce. As we focus on the trends of today, it is important to look forward to fostering a climate that is attractive to investment and opportunity.

Partner

There is a strong history of successful partnerships in the region, and this trend needs to be continued and improved in the future. Addressing regional issues such as watershed management and economic development with a collaborative response from the region's communities, actively coordinating regional efforts such as transportation and natural resource protection, cooperating locally and regionally to improve energy efficiency and costs, fostering collaboration on response to weather disasters, and creating a culture of collaboration that encourages innovation and sharing of resources are all key partnerships today.

Sustain

The theme of sustainability has its roots in public outreach throughout all Central NH region planning processes, both local and regional. How the region adjusts to an aging population, including potential impacts to volunteerism, will need to be addressed. How the region sustains a balance between protecting our natural resources and meeting housing needs in the region is a key issue. How the region enhances what residents value about the region and its communities is a challenge to be met.