

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

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# A Chance To Shape The Future

This Manual is one of several products from a two-year project undertaken by the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) called *Picture It Better Together: Taking Transportation Goals From Policy To Reality*. Partners in the project were the Capitol Region Council of Governments, the City of Hartford, the Parkville Revitalization Association (a Hartford neighborhood organization), and the Towns of Suffield and West Hartford.

The Federal Highway Administration funded the project through its Transportation and Community and System Preservation (TCSP) program. The TCSP program supports research and planning to investigate the relationship between transportation and community preservation.

CRCOG is an organization of local Chief Elected Officials who work together to expand voluntary cooperation among the Capitol Region's municipalities and address many of the region's governmental and public challenges. The Capitol Region of the State of Connecticut consists of the capital city, Hartford, and 28 surrounding towns totaling 760 square miles in area. The full labor market adds another 29 municipalities for a total of 58 municipalities with a population of 1.2 million.

Yet, despite the municipal sense of affinity to the region, development has been and still is locally driven and lacks a regional perspective. This has led to concerns such as:

1. Continuing consumption of land despite slow population growth. While the Capitol Region population grew less than two percent from 1990 to 2000, some of our more rural communities have grown between 15 and 22 percent. Since 1988, Connecticut has lost more than 100,000 acres of active farmland.
2. Increasing separation of people by income. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Connecticut has the second highest median household income while at the same time Hartford is the second poorest city in the nation. The median household income in New Haven (\$29,604), Bridgeport (34,658), and Hartford (\$24,820) is one-half to two-thirds the state's median household income (\$53,935).
3. Greater pressure on highways. Between 1987 and 1997, the percentage of miles of state highways over capacity during peak hour grew from six percent to twenty percent. At the same time, public comments received during recent corridor studies conducted by CRCOG clearly indicate that there is an increasing demand for solutions to traffic congestion other than road expansion.
4. Air quality problems. U.S. EPA rates the Hartford region a "serious nonattainment" area.

The *Picture It Better Together* project had two distinct components: a regional component led by CRCOG that researched local and regional growth policies and a neighborhood component led by the Parkville Revitalization Association<sup>1</sup>. Both of these components solicited the public’s perspective and input into what makes a livable community. In the regional component of *Picture It Better Together*, CRCOG used a variety of methods, including image-based and conventional surveys, to ask the public what the necessary elements of a livable community are. Our goal for this project is to promote good growth, conservation, and preservation practices and contribute to the discussion of social equity as it relates to local, regional, and state development-related policies.

### WHERE DO WE GROW FROM HERE?

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Like regions throughout the country, the Hartford region has farms and forest lands, habitats and rivers, small villages and mid size towns, urbanized areas and a core city. Each is unique, yet also interdependent. To ascertain a diverse public’s views on growth, CRCOG worked with three communities as examples of their type: the rural town of Suffield, the suburban town of West Hartford, and the urban Parkville neighborhood. We sought to discover what people thought about their own community type as well as other community types and the region as a whole and we wanted to find out the public’s priorities on growth-related issues. Over 2,000 people gave input on transportation, development, and preservation issues and the public policies that impact these areas. Through this project, we engaged people in important discussions about our region’s next 20 years.



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<sup>1</sup> The Parkville project was a very successful neighborhood-led community planning effort that significantly impacted ConnDOT’s New Britain/Hartford Busway Environmental Impact Study and initial plans for the project’s two planned stations in Parkville. In addition, two sets of Urban Design Plans were prepared—one for key neighborhood streets and the other for a piece of Pope Park that was “orphaned” 30 years ago when I-84 was constructed and had since become an eyesore. For more information on the Parkville component of the TSCP project, contact Gerry Maine, Hartford Planning Department (757-9044).

Most importantly, *Picture It Better Together* provided us with the opportunity to talk directly with hundreds of citizens. The public replied eagerly when we asked, “Where do we grow from here?” It took little to no prompting for people to share their thoughts with us. One of the most important concepts for us to uncover was whether residents think about growth beyond their own municipal boundaries. They do. We found evidence of a regional identity, support for key regional issues, and indications that people’s concerns do not stop at their own town line. Based on responses to visual preference surveys, discussions with the public, and a phone survey conducted by the UConn Center for Survey Research and Analysis, we identified four themes in citizens’ responses. People want:

- 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.

Recommendations on these themes can be found in each of the work products. The topic of “Where do we grow from here?” is something about which people are thinking. In fact, one of the surprises was the strength of the public’s desire for more choices—whether in development patterns in general or specifics, such as our transportation system.

## **WHAT IS A LIVABLE COMMUNITY?**

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Throughout our materials, we use the phrases “livable communities” and “smart growth”. For many they are interchangeable though we think that the phrase “livable communities” better captures what people want. “Smart growth” is, however, a phrase that is used across the nation. What smart growth means and includes is a matter of debate, though we do list what we think the qualities of smart growth are in Chapter 1 of this manual.

In addition, work on this project has led to an important distinction between what could be called “smart growth” and “smart development”. The distinction, outlined in the table on the next page, is important because we will need to use growth and conservation policies and practices from both concepts to comprehensively address current development patterns.

There is overlap between the two concepts. However, relying solely on smart development policies and practices may yield only “pretty sprawl”. That is, the use of land on a regional basis is not changed, just the look of some developments. We will still continue to consume land at a faster rate than our population grows while previously developed sites sit vacant or underutilized. Conversely, smart growth on its own will not look at the changes to policies and practices that must happen at the neighborhood scale in order to make neighborhoods more connected to each other and commercial centers, more comfortable to get around by foot, transit, or bicycle, and more conducive to community interaction whether on front porches or town greens.

The topic of livable communities has captured national interest. The *Picture It Better Together* project was one of three focus projects in New England for the Region I Federal Task Force on Livable Communities. Our innovative partnership and outreach efforts are two of the reasons why our project was chosen. In October 2000, 11 Federal Region I agencies (including U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of

Agriculture and others) toured the Hartford region. The agencies have signed an agreement to support concerted, cooperative, and collaborative livable communities initiatives.

<b>Smart Growth</b>	<b>Smart Development</b>
<u>What</u> and <u>Where</u> things happen <i>regionally</i>	<u>What</u> and <u>How</u> things happen <i>locally</i> :
Preserves a diversity of community types: rural, suburban, urban	Permits a diversity of uses integrated with each other
Environmental aspects consider such needs as protecting regional water, habitat, and forest systems	Environmental aspects consider such items as the amount of greenspace, street trees, and impervious surfaces
Examples of the Public Role: -Local land use regulations: zoning map and integration of permitted uses -State policies such as priority funding areas and purchase of development rights program	Examples of the Public Role: -Local land use regulations: design and performance standards as well as zoning map and integration of permitted uses
Economic development aspects view regional quality of life as a tool for attracting major employers	Economic development aspects support full use of existing infrastructure, such as encouraging the appropriate local land uses adjacent to transit systems
Emphasizes a balanced transportation system including good public transit, freight movement, airports, and highways as well as transportation funding for bicycle and pedestrian facilities	Supports a balanced transportation system by creating and adhering to traffic calming design standards and a local street plan that provides connections for autos, bicycles, and walkers (see Ch. 6, p. 9 for more on this)

## **TOOLS FOR COMMUNITIES AND CITIZENS**

Our project provides information that can assist citizens and municipal officials in advocating for more livable communities. Toward this goal, we produced four separate products.

### **VIDEO**

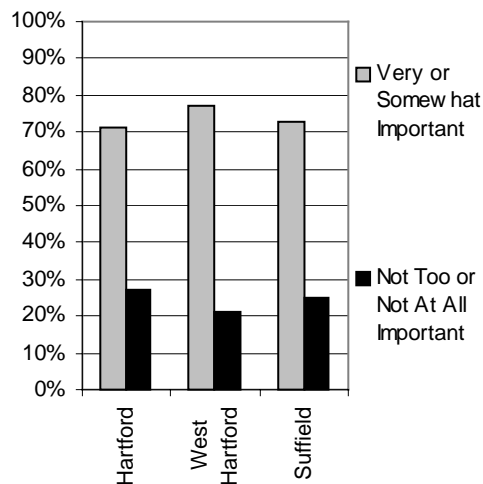
*Together We Can Grow Better.* This is a 12-minute video that introduces some of the many topics associated with growth. Producing a video was very important because it is visual. When we talk about the physical components of development, words alone are not enough. This video allowed us to illustrate some of the physical aspects of growth, present issues, and report back on what the public told us. Woven throughout the video are responses from the survey conducted for us by UConn, which is discussed below. Finally, the places we filmed were very much based on the places that received a strong positive response in the visual preference survey, which is also discussed below. This video has aired on public access cable systems throughout the region. Every municipality in the Capitol Region has the video in its library and town hall. You may also contact CRCOG to order either a VHS or digital version for a nominal fee.

## SURVEY REPORTS

*Regional Development Issues Survey.* This brief report presents the results of the survey conducted by the UConn Center For Survey Research and Analysis. The survey was a statistically valid random sample of residents from Suffield, West Hartford, and Hartford. As such, it provides excellent insight into the views of the citizens of these three communities. And because these communities were chosen as examples of urban, suburban, and rural municipalities, the responses also provide an indication of citizens' views from throughout the region.

At right is an example of one question and response. The full survey is available on the Publications page of CRCOG's website <[www.crcog.org/publications](http://www.crcog.org/publications)>.

How important is it that the region has a mix of rural, suburban, and urban communities?



*Smart Growth Planning and Zoning Recommendations from the Visual Preference Survey.* A Visual Preference Survey is a planning tool that enables us to ask questions about our communities by using pictures. Oftentimes it is difficult to ask questions about development and conservation using words alone. Images can help illustrate what we mean. Furthermore, sometimes people react differently to images than words. Finally, pictures can help educate by illustrating that what one thought a certain development type would look like is in fact quite different. This can even change opinions on what is appropriate and desirable for a community.



The Visual Preference Survey was important for these reasons and because it was a way for us to reach and talk with members of the general public. We attended organizations' meetings, set up tables at community fairs, and posted the survey in libraries and our web site. This survey is significant for the qualitative results we gained from our conversations with so many different people.

This report is also much more than a simple report of the survey outcomes. It provides recommendations on development policies as well as planning and zoning standards. The report has general recommendations and sections applicable to rural, suburban, and urban communities. While much longer than the *Regional Development Issues Survey*, it relies heavily on images and pictures to tell the story. This report is also on the CRCOG website <[www.crcog.org/publications](http://www.crcog.org/publications)> or available by contacting CRCOG.

## BEST PRACTICES MANUAL

*Livable Communities Toolkit: A Best Practices Manual For Metropolitan Regions.* This toolkit has practical approaches to regional and local topics. However, the factors that impact growth, conservation, and preservation are enormously complex. We could not tackle the entire subject in this project. What we did was select topics that reflected some of the public's high priority issues. Our intention is to "grow" this manual as well, so we have designed it to be easily shared and added to.

At the same time, we wanted to use this manual to begin to talk about growth from a broader perspective than local land use techniques alone. Therefore, the toolkit has two sections: *A Region In Balance* and *Tools For Towns*. *A Region In Balance* introduces ideas on regional governance (not government) and regional stewardship, including what other regions around the country are doing. It also provides some steps we might take toward a broader statewide approach to the topic of livable communities.

*Tools For Towns* has eight topics, some simple (shared parking) and some complex (transit oriented development). There is overlap between the topics but each serves a different purpose. For each of the topics we provide a quick and easy-to-read Fact Sheet to introduce the topic and a Detailed Technical Analysis that provides more detail on the "how-tos" of the tool. The Technical Analyses provide information on what the tool can do, what some of challenges may be, information on the tool's use in other places, and a model or sample zoning ordinance for easier implementation.

We hope this toolkit provides guidance for our region and elsewhere. For further information, contact:

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