

# STRAFFORD

## Regional Planning Commission

### MEMO

To: Durham Planning Board  
From: Kyle Pimental, Principal Regional Planner  
Autumn Scott, Regional Planner  
Date: May 18, 2023  
Re: SRPC Responses to Resident Comments  
Cc: Michael Behrendt, Durham Town Planner

Throughout the development of the Climate Action Chapter to Durham's Master Plan, a comprehensive public engagement process was conducted to gather input on the draft chapter and recommendations. This process included two stakeholder workshops, two public input sessions, and a follow-up survey. Additionally, the draft chapter was posted on the Town's website and promoted through the Town's Friday Updates to allow for added opportunities for public involvement. To the greatest extent possible, input from residents was included in the final draft chapter, which was presented to the Planning Board for adoption.

During the adoption process, several residents submitted comments for consideration; however, given budgetary constraints SRPC was unable to address all suggested revisions. Those comments that were editorial in nature were incorporated into the draft, while larger, more substantial comments have been identified as the next steps for the Town to review and implement as appropriate.

Below is a summary of the comments received and how they were addressed.

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Commenter Name: John Parry  
Date Received: April 26, 2023

Comment:

Suggest including a short section to discuss the benefits of urban forests and to develop some basic goals and recommendations to improve management of Durham's existing urban forest to help adapt to climate change.

SRPC Response:

This is a good suggestion. Mr. Parry provides examples of urban forest benefits related to climate change and the need for improved management in Durham. The Town should consider adding a paragraph or two within the "Natural and Working Lands" section to include a more detailed



discussion on urban forests. Mr. Parry provided several links to resources that provide additional information that may be useful. SRPC also suggests the Town look at the Central Business District Street Tree Plan, developed for the City of Dover in 2021, as an example of a NH community that is taking steps to improve resilience to climate change by improving their urban landscape through planning. Lastly, Mr. Parry provided a list of goals and recommendations to improve urban forest management. These should be reviewed by staff at the Public Works Department prior to inclusion in the plan.

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Commenter Name: Robin Mower

Date Received: April 12, 2023

Comment:

Would it make sense to bring the Goals and Recommendations to the front, or at least after a SHORT summary, to better engage readers?

SRPC Response:

This suggestion is entirely up to the Planning Board. The layout of the chapter is purposely structured to be consistent with the other adopted chapters. If the Board would like to move the goals and recommendations to the front portion of the plan, it would be a relatively easy lift.

Comment:

Have the Energy Committee and Conservation Commission been provided an opportunity to comment?

SRPC Response:

Yes. There were two public input sessions held in October 2021 that specifically targeted participation from members of the Agricultural Commission, Energy Committee, Conservation Commission, and the Land Stewardship Committee. Additional participation included those from the Heritage Commission, Town Council, and Planning Board. The draft chapter was also posted online for several months in which there was an opportunity to provide comments.

Comment:

I am concerned about overreach for REGIONAL goals and recommendations vs an understanding of Durham's needs and constraints -- including the size of Town staff. I therefore caution against codifying in THIS document some of these goals that have yet to be honed and supported by the Housing Task Force and then by the Planning Board or Town Council, for example. I also perceive the last section to be the input of the Agricultural Commission. It will be the role of the Planning Board and/or Administrator to sift through these recommendations for their appropriateness for Durham, specifically.

SRPC Response:

While there may be some recommendations that are regional in nature (i.e., increase the number of local destinations connected by sidewalks, safe bike routes, and accessible public transportation), many of the draft's actions were generated to be specific for Durham based on the chapter's findings. Several examples include: implementing emission reduction strategies in the Town's Carbon and Nitrogen Inventory; supporting actions in the University's Climate Action Plan; accomplishing goals set forth in the Global Covenant of Mayors agreement; evaluating options to reduce future flooding on Back River Road and Cedar Point Road; and prioritizing culvert replacements using the C-RiSe assessment and NH Tidal Crossing Project to name a few. We feel that these recommendations were not created as boilerplate language to be used by any coastal community, and instead were thoughtfully put together with input from residents, town staff, and local boards. Regarding the last section, we agree with Ms. Mower that those goals and recommendations came directly from input we received from the Agricultural Commission. They felt strongly that the plan did not do enough to address specific concerns with food systems, security, and production. We made a significant effort to try and address their concerns and include their input into the plan. Lastly, this document falls under the authority of the Planning Board and if they would like any specific recommendations to be reviewed by another entity, whether that is the Housing Task Force or Town Council, that is entirely at their discretion.

Comment:

The recommendations do not clearly recognize a distinction between Municipal, i.e., government, vs. community, i.e., residents and business-owner authority and resources.

SRPC Response:

As stated earlier, the goals and recommendations section are structured to be consistent with other chapters. If the Planning Board would like to provide more detail, they may do so.

Comment:

The chapter should also be updated for what may have been perceived to be the low probability event of politics/human behavior on future sustainability. Please note the current challenging situation vis a vis the Town of Epping and the Lamprey River, a major drinking water resource for Durham residents and businesses.

SRPC Response:

Ms. Mower raises an interesting point that was not included in the chapter. At the discretion of the Planning Board, a paragraph or two could be included in the "A Call to Action" section of the plan that discusses the need for political will, leadership, and the impact of human behavior on making significant progress on addressing issues surrounding climate change.

Comment:

As with earlier Master Plan chapters, what about including a \*Connections to other chapters\* section at the end?

SRPC Response:

This was not completed as the topic of climate change has an overwhelming connection to all the other chapters. In future iterations, it may be useful to take this chapter and incorporate the findings into the other chapters.

Comment:

Regarding affordability and density, Ms. Mower states that by changing affordability, it will also change the attractiveness of the Town and asked whether that is the goal.

SRPC Response:

As an agency that has been tasked with trying to help address the region's housing affordability problem, we are not aware of any existing reports or studies that confirm increasing affordability will result in a community becoming less attractive. If there is reputable data to support a claim such as this, it should be considered by the Planning Board.

Comment:

By incorporating 2,000-ish student beds since 2008, Durham has made hundreds of apartments regionally available for other renters.

SRPC Response:

It may be interesting to conduct a housing analysis to look at the impact from the significant increase in student housing over the past decade, specifically how those rental units that were previously occupied by students are responding to the current housing market.

Comment:

Consider adding the following actions under the goal: lower total amount of greenhouse gas emissions:

- 1) Review of our site plan regulations vis a vis parking MAXIMUMS vs MINIMUMS
- 2) Clear distinction between municipal and non-municipal authority and goals, as well as UNH authority

SRPC Response:

The Planning Board may wish to add an action to review their existing parking regulations at their discretion. We agree that many communities are looking more closely at these regulations, and in some cases eliminating minimum parking requirements all together. An alternative suggestion is to consider the intensity and the turnover rate of the use to determine parking requirements. This may lead to parking plans that more accurately meet the needs of the site while reducing impervious surfaces and allowing more green space.

Comment

Regarding transportation alternatives, Ms. Mower states that Durham does not have access to public transit.

SRPC Response:

While the Town does have access to the Downeaster and Wildcat Transit, the successful implementation of this action may be outside of Durham's control. If the Planning Board feels the Town has no feasible way of working with UNH or Amtrak to improve transit opportunities, this action should be removed.

Comment:

Suggest adding that the Planning Board should review the Town's subdivision and site plan regulations that are key to climate change adaptation.

SRPC Response:

This has been added.

Comment:

Asked whether ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Town's working land was already underway or incorporated into other Master Plan chapters.

SRPC Response:

The overarching goal may cross over into other chapters, specifically the natural resources and agricultural chapters; however, the actions are more climate focused, which may not be the case in the other chapters.

Comment:

Asked whether it is the role of Town government, particularly one with a small staff, to support local businesses to assess supply chain impacts and vulnerabilities and identify strategies to improve resilience.

SRPC Response:

Many of the actions identified in the plan are not necessarily meant for Town government and could be taken on by a volunteer board or commission. For example, if the Town decides to re-establish the Economic Development Committee, this could be a task they could assist with. Supporting local businesses is an important aspect of a community and working to ensure they are more resilient remains a worthwhile goal.

Comment:

Concern with adding upcoming local, state, and federal legislation on climate action in the Durham Friday Updates because of lack of capacity.

SRPC Response:

We agree that staying on top of legislation, of any kind, is often difficult and time-consuming. We have revised this action to rely more heavily on sharing relevant climate action legislation highlighted by the Coastal Adaptation Workgroup.

Comment:

Identified that the Town has very limited municipal ownership when it comes to expanding compact, mixed-use, low-impact development in the downtown.

SRPC Response:

This action has been revised to tie it more to land use regulations that would promote such developments as to include private investments.

Comment:

Restated concern with affordable housing.

SRPC Response:

This has been previously addressed.

Comment:

Asked whether Town government should be tasked with improving equitable access to healthy, fresh, locally sourced and produced, culturally appropriate foods.

SRPC Response:

Like a previous response, this may not necessarily be the role of Town government. If the Planning Board feels as though the goal of increasing local food production is in line with what they would like to see in Durham in the future, it should remain. Perhaps the Agricultural Commission would be the appropriate entity to tackle this action.

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Commenter Name: Peter Howd  
Date Received: April 30, 2023

Comment:

Add a sentence or two in the body of the text as well in the Water Infrastructure section on CAC-22, second paragraph where you mention, without being specific at all, multiple hazardous events. Floods from both directions is a really nice example of what that could mean.

SRPC Response:

Language has been added to CAC-22 to address multiple hazardous events, including the example of co-occurring flood instances.

Comment:

Flooding due to SLR and storm surge are presented seemingly independently from the upland flooding due to river flow/stormwater runoff. On page CAC-56: lengthen #1 or add a #5 under the Recommended Planning items with suggested wording, "Investigate the likelihood of increases in severity of flooding due to co-occurring storm surge and river/stormwater runoff flooding on the estuarine shorelines."

SRPC Response:

SRPC agrees that the implications of co-occurring flood risks and multiple hazard events are important to consider. At this time, the SLR projections are the best available data, though there may be additional projections available through the NH Coastal Flood Risk Model project within the coming year. The Board may wish to consider incorporating that data once it is available. Additionally, the Town may wish to reevaluate SLR projections once the Mill Pond Dam is removed and revisit the chapter at that time.

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Commenter Name: Susan Richman  
Date Received: April 25, 2023

Comment:

Prepare for predicted climate changes with adaptation measures and emergency management changes based on projections in the 2022 NH Climate Assessment Report.

SRPC Response:

During the iterative drafting process, SRPC and partners incorporated the best available science at the time into the chapter. Some significant references include the NH Coastal Flood Risk Summary (Wake et. Al), the C-Rise Vulnerability Assessment, the IPCC's Fifth Assessment and the Fourth National Climate Assessment. The existing content and recommendations in the chapter comprise a solid foundation of research and recommended actions. As the chapter is intended to

be a living document, the Planning Board may wish to consult with contributors to the 2022 NH Climate Assessment Report to incorporate any updated information or additional recommendations.

Comment:

Make efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of town buildings, transportation, and energy supply through energy efficiency, and electrification of heating, transportation, and cooking to anticipate a global carbon price on fossil fuels to minimize future costs. Advise residents to do the same.

SRPC Response:

Issue #1 outlined beginning on CAC-54 identifies the need for the Town to reduce its carbon footprint, and the goals and actions that follow broadly address the recommendations mentioned above.

Comment:

Call on state and federal legislators to enact policies to help towns and citizens reduce climate pollution, draw down the excess CO<sub>2</sub>, and hold the polluting companies financially accountable for their pollution to help finance the necessary changes.

SRPC Response:

The Durham Town Council's resolution, and letter to Senator Hassan communicating the Town's endorsement of carbon cash-back legislation, both address this concern. Regulation/Policy recommendation #2 (CAC-56) suggests providing information and resources that encourage developers and residents to implement green infrastructure on their properties. The Board may wish to explore additional actions that would encourage developers to create carbon-zero designs to further address this concern.