

October 12, 2017

To the Members of the Concord Long Range Planning Committee:

The ConcordCAN! Steering Group commends the CLRPC for their thoughtful and thorough work so far in *Envision Concord – Bridge to 2030* and the update of the Town's long-range plan. Our organization, an affiliate of the Massachusetts Climate Action Network (MCAN), has been active in Concord since 2007 with a mission of educating the community about climate change, promoting sustainability and resilience and working in cooperation with Town government and other local organizations on these important issues. For these purposes, we maintain a website and newsletter and bring speakers, documentary films, and newspaper columns to local residents.

As advocates for local sustainability, ConcordCAN! put a warrant article before Town Meeting in 2011 that called upon the Town to adopt sustainability principles to guide its policy and decision-making. After an affirmative Town Meeting vote, the Select Board adopted the four sustainability principles recommended by the American Planning Association and charged Town Manager, Chris Whelan, with implementing their use. Subsequently, ConcordCAN! worked with Mr. Whelan to arrange a special training workshop for himself and his Senior Management Team led by Sarah James, an internationally known expert on the application of these principles to municipal decision-making.

The four sustainability principles that we adopted by the BOS on July 25, 2011, are:

- 1) Reduce dependence upon fossil fuels, underground metals and minerals;
- 2) Reduce dependence upon synthetic chemicals and other manufactured substances;
- 3) Reduce encroachment upon nature;
- 4) Meet human needs fairly and efficiently.

In addition to our commitment to the four sustainability principles, ConcordCAN! heartily endorses the six principles of APA's "Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places" that CLRPC has already adopted:

1. Livable Built Environment: Ensure that all elements of the built environment—including land use, transportation, housing, energy, and infrastructure—work together to provide sustainable, green places for living, working, and recreating, with a high quality of life.
2. Harmony with Nature: Ensure that the contributions of natural resources to human well-being are explicitly recognized and valued and that maintaining their health is a primary objective.
3. Resilient Economy: Ensure that the community is prepared to deal with both positive and negative changes in its economic health and to initiate sustainable urban development and redevelopment strategies that foster green business growth and build reliance on local assets.
4. Interwoven Equity: Ensure fairness and equity in providing for the housing, services, health, safety, and livelihood needs of all citizens and groups.
5. Healthy Community: Ensure that public health needs are recognized and addressed through provisions for healthy foods, physical activity, access to recreation, health care, environmental justice, and safe neighborhoods.

6. Responsible Regionalism: Ensure that all local proposals account for, connect with, and support the plans of adjacent jurisdictions and the surrounding region.

In our view, these combined principles are invaluable tools for creating a long-range plan that reflects Concord's values and character and we urge you to apply them creatively and proactively.

Sustainability, as defined by these principles, is not an alternative to other important priorities. It is an over-arching, holistic way of thinking about all municipal plans and actions. The SWOT analysis completed by CLRPC clearly reflects an excellent understanding and acceptance of this way of thinking, often referred to as "systems thinking." The SWOT analysis and the Concord Journal articles spun off from it are impressive documents; and we anticipate that the ideas contained in them will be strongly reflected in the final draft of the plan.

There are many different ideas for "sustainable" action that were included in the SWOT analysis and which may also be part of the data now being collected by the committee's consultant, Civic Moxie. Rather than focusing on many specifics, we would like to highlight one issue that we believe is a central challenge to Town planners and Town officials as we move forward into the next decade.

That issue is that while Concord has been very proactive in preserving open spaces, conservation land, and local agriculture, there is increasingly limited land available that has not already been developed. Developers are always pushing to acquire more land for new and profitable developments. Their development projects may impinge upon wetlands and upon natural ecosystems and habitats which, for the future of all life, need to be preserved. We believe that strict limits on such expansion must be imposed by the Town; and, if new zoning regulations are required to accomplish that, then the Town should take the initiative to make those changes. Applying the third sustainability principle, we are required to take very seriously any "encroachments upon nature" that might accompany growth and development.

Since little new land can be acquired, developers have been doing what they can to expand the built structures on existing private properties. Small, relatively affordable houses are demolished and replaced by much larger ones, or even mansions. The push to put in place large, expensive houses is changing the character of the town; and it is going in precisely the wrong direction. A sustainable community is one that meets the needs of people in it for a diversity of homes that are truly affordable for a diverse population. To reduce the stock of modest, affordable housing is to violate the fourth sustainability principle, which calls for meeting human needs in a fair and equitable way.

Similarly, when considering the villages and commercial areas of town, we think that the fourth sustainability principle should lead to prioritizing commercial development that meets the variety of needs of *town residents*.

Turning from substantive suggestions to the process that CLRPC has followed to date, we commend the committee for making a variety of options available to citizens for communicating their ideas. We especially favor open, public meetings, but also appreciate the value of statements submitted in writing, including comments on the website, and the online survey.

We feel compelled to add, however, that we have concerns about the consultant, Civic Moxie. Their online survey, in particular, strikes us as flawed and leading. For example, this survey asks citizens whether they rate sustainability as equally important as accomplishing other goals – an either-or proposition.

Also, at a recent presentation, Gary Kleiman pointed out that Civic Moxie had a slide which attributed several negative consequences to sustainability, but not any positive ones! We hope that his comment about this bias is taken seriously. We also hope that the consultants will not use preconceived ideas to drive our planning process. Concord is unique and deserves more than boilerplate.

Finally, we would argue that Concord's unique character and historical significance are intrinsically tied to its long-standing tradition of responsible care for our land and environment. *The home of Thoreau should be a leader in sustainability because it's part of our tradition.* Concord's character is not merely its historical sites and physical buildings; it is also a living legacy of ideas, a culture. And two important elements of Concord's culture are sustainability and civic engagement.

In recent years, Concord's values of responsible stewardship have been repeatedly expressed by its Town Meeting votes. In 2011 there was strong support for the sustainability principles. Last year, the Town passed an ambitious low carbon energy plan through Article 51. And we shouldn't forget the enthusiasm for initiatives dealing with fossil fuel divestment, and disposable plastic bags and water bottles.

Throughout the Town's history, Concordians have engaged with current problems. Some of the most serious problems of today are climate change, wetlands, water and soil degradation, and loss of biodiversity and open space - all issues that our tradition of stewardship and engagement should address by applying our sustainability principles to the Envision Concord – Bridge to 2030 Long Range Plan. Even rising inequality and lack of affordable housing can be viewed and addressed through a sustainability lens. Therefore, we urge you to follow the principles closely and strongly recommend that they be systematically applied to all Town policies and actions recommended in the final draft of the new plan.

We look forward to seeing what you do with the analysis stage of your work and with the drafting of the plan. We will be sure to provide input at all stages, both as individuals and as an organization. We are grateful to CLRPC for your excellent work and thinking and for your significant contributions of time. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Robert Andrews, Brad Hubbard-Nelson, and Janet Lawson on behalf of ConcordCAN!  
Steering Group.