



SECTION 2:

The Vision in Practice: Community Criteria for a Systems Approach



WHAT IS A SYSTEMS APPROACH?

The Town continually works to improve internal and external communications to coordinate services, programs, and projects. Cooperation and collaboration between departments, commissions, boards, and other entities, such as the business community, nonprofit organizations, neighboring towns, regional organizations, developers, public private partnerships, and the like already take place, the Envision Concord plan takes the idea of collaborative decision-making further by offering an alternative, formalized approach to increase partnerships between departments, commissions, boards, nonprofit organizations, and private entities to more effectively leverage the Town's financial resources and meet multiple goals wherever possible.

“Silos” versus “Systems”

When an idea or issue is reviewed and resolved individually, not taking into consideration impacts on, or relationships with other ideas or issues, it is often labeled as “silo” thinking. This approach is not uncommon in municipalities where staffing resources, and time and budget constraints compel departments, agencies, commissions, boards, and staff to act quickly to resolve an issue, unintentionally limiting participation to only those with known direct interest.

A broader “systems” approach attempts to consider an idea or issue at the outset for its potential to be part of a larger solution, emphasizing efficiency across Town departments, commissions, boards, and initiatives, as well as groups external to town government, to identify common interests and propose resolutions in order to meet multiple, rather than singular, goals.

A hypothetical example of a more traditional “silo” approach:

What does silo thinking look like in practice? This example explores what might happen if the Town decides to have a small pocket playground within a five-minute walk of every neighborhood in Concord to improve livability, health, and equity:

The request has been directed to Department “X” to study and implement the creation of additional small playgrounds. Department “X” would need to:

- Make an assessment through mapping exercises with GIS mapping software and data to identify neighborhoods that would need a pocket park.
- Procure six to ten ¼-acre parcels in all underserved parts of town.
- Finance from taxes or Department “X’s” budget the necessary funds for acquisition and redevelopment of each parcel at cost of ~\$1 million each.

In the example above, Department “X” is acting independently within its mandate area to achieve the stated goal of the Town. The process moves fairly quickly, involves minimal complications, and follows a clear linear path from stated goal to achieved outcomes. The expenditures to achieve the stated goal might reach upwards of \$10 million to acquire and develop all parcels and these neighborhood parks would serve the singular goal of improving recreation opportunities and health for all Concord residents.

In the context of constrained financial budgets, limited staff, and difficulty in identifying, negotiating, and acquiring land, a “systems”-type approach would start with Department “X” having a (hypothetical) directive to increase the number of small playgrounds, but would continue with the Department reaching out to other divisions, departments, commissions, external organizations, etc., to find needed, compatible uses and shared interests. In this approach, the Town would be able to meet multiple goals through one or two projects that would require the same processes of land identification, negotiation, and acquisition. Purchase and development of parcels that achieve multiple strategic goals simultaneously may offset some of the costs with multiple benefits and distribute any remaining cost burden across departments or sectors, compared with addressing each goal separately.

A hypothetical example of a “systems” approach: Improved livability, sustainability, economic resilience, health, and equity

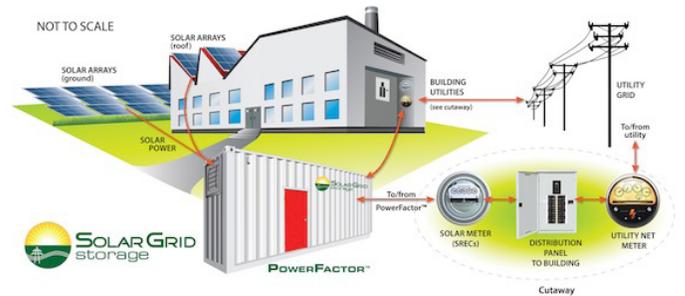
What does systems thinking look like in practice? This example explores what might happen if the Town decides to study and implement the creation of additional small playgrounds in underserved neighborhoods under a “systems” approach:

- Department “X” would gather input from all other departments, commissions, boards, and potential partners such as local nonprofits and businesses, etc., regarding their goals and interests to map overlapping or compatible/complementary interests.
- Complementary interests might highlight multi-use options for parcels to improve livability, sustainability, economic resilience, health, recreation, and equity.
- A GIS mapping study may be prepared to identify one or two locations to accommodate multiple uses, such as:
 - Playground
 - Mini-grid distributed storage and control
 - Historic landmark and cultural kiosks
 - Affordable smaller homes
 - Public transit hubs/autonomous electric vehicle (EV) charging stations/ bike racks
- The Town would work with identified partners such as local nonprofits and businesses to move the effort forward. The Departments, Commissions, and a local nonprofit “X, Y, Z” may work together to:
 - Procure one or two 3-5-acre parcels in underserved parts of town.
 - Finance from taxes or equitable portions of multiple departments’ budgets for acquisition and redevelopment of each multi-use concept.

In the example above, collaboration and information sharing between public entities, as well as outreach to nonprofit and private business and other stakeholders yields a more inclusive strategy and mutually beneficial solutions that make better use of resources and achieve multiple goals. This CLRP embodies a systems approach to planning and provides guidance on how to encourage even greater collaboration and information sharing than the current Town model.



Oak Mountain State Park Playground, AL (Source: www.alapark.com)



Solar Grid Storage System (Source: www.greentechmedia.com)



(Left) Wayfinding Kiosk. (Source: www.pinterest.com/craigkeefner/olea-kiosks/) (Right) Harry Potter Shuttlebus at Watford Junction. (Source: www.TripAdvisor.com)

COMMUNITY CRITERIA

Through significant community input and follow-up synthesis by the Committee, specific values important to the Concord community were identified as being important to all planning decisions regardless of planning approach. These values are described as Community Criteria to serve as a framework for decision-making in the CLRP and future implementation. When applied to planning goals, strategies, and Town decision-making, these criteria will ensure that both the recommendations here in the CLRP and future implementation actions are aligned with community values.

Community Criterion 1: History and Character

All elements of the plan preserve the historical, architectural, cultural, and [intellectual fabric](#) of the vibrant village centers and woodland/agricultural environs while enabling [Smart Growth](#) in line with community values. Smart Growth in the context of Concord specifically includes the community's unique perspective on preservation of woodland/agricultural character of surrounding environs, and protection of land and water resources for maintaining and increasing community resilience, with appropriately scaled upper-floor and infill mixed-use development and redevelopment in village centers.

Community Criterion 2: Livability and Values

Plan elements support continued investment in town amenities that make Concord an attractive place to live (e.g., schools, open space preservation/ land acquisitions, public health, recreational resources, superior/ environmentally sustainable infrastructure, resiliency planning, etc.), while any associated increase in tax base also ensures diversity, vibrancy, and socio-economic equity (e.g. tax fairness, affordable senior and workforce housing, social services, etc.).

Community Criterion 3: Mobility/ Accessibility

Transportation investments prioritize access to services for the most vulnerable members of the community with low-carbon options for future mobility needs; infrastructure improvements and location of public facilities and new development considers both the provision of transportation options and additional traffic impacts.

Community Criterion 4: Environmental Sustainability

All plan elements strive to (a) lead by example with carbon-neutral, carbon-sequestering, and water-efficient municipal services and are fully integrated with Town Sustainability Principles; (b) provide a fiscally sound path toward affordable investment in policies to achieve that goal; and (c) provide incentives for all Concord residents to pursue a range of individual choices to further environmental sustainability goals.

Community Criterion 5: Fiscal Sustainability

Decisions about all plan elements are made after (a) careful investigation and understanding of fiscal impact; (b) considering alternative paths for success or implementation; (c) achieving confidence that there is full awareness of unintended or ancillary impacts; (d) including a wide group of departments, boards, commissions, and others in a "systems" analysis, and (e) undertaking necessary analyses of potential or necessary cuts in other areas to offset a possible increase in spending.

USING THE CRITERIA TO SUPPORT A SYSTEMS-BASED APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION:

With plan implementation employing a systems-based approach, each decision will be assessed by the community criteria to evaluate its "fit" with community values and then adjusted if necessary. The cross-disciplinary criteria require various departments, commissions, and boards to collaborate and share information with others to avoid "silo" decisions and actions.

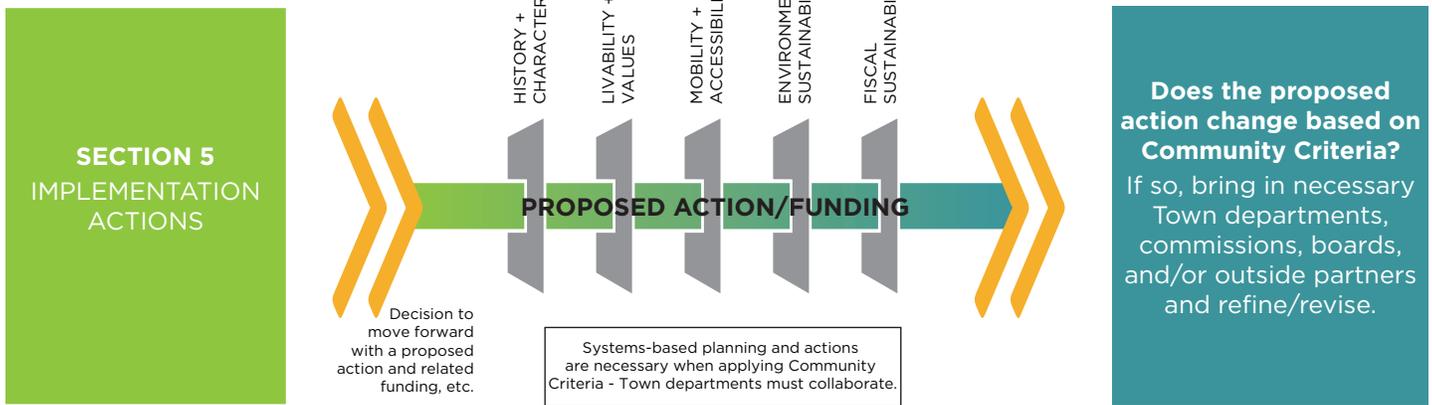


Figure 11. The community criteria are employed in a systems approach to planning with implementation actions to ensure that planning and actions meet the criteria set forth in this plan and that collaboration identifies mutual benefits.