



A GUIDE TO FORMING REGIONAL COOPERATION

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**Prepared by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission in
connection with the Williamstown and Egremont/Mount
Washington Master Planning Projects**

Why Consider Regional Planning at Local Level?



How would the region be affected and your community react if;

- ▶ 600 medium to high paying jobs were cut?
- ▶ 200 acres of prime agricultural land were subdivided into high-end, large lot residential units?
- ▶ A rural dirt road is upgraded and traffic is directed along this road into your community?
- ▶ Vacation homes continued to be developed on the shores of the lake in which your community is fighting to protect as your water source?

No community is an island unto itself. Land use, economic shifts and open space decisions often have regional implications. The above examples may seem extreme however many Berkshire communities do not have a handle on what current and future threats and/or opportunities exist in their community and the region.

Think Regionally, Act Locally

As the Berkshire region moves into the new millenium, municipalities must diligently work together to preserve the present combination of traditional New England atmosphere and small town community spirit, steeped in history, culture, and diversity. Residents, civic leaders, and organizations must continue to foster adaptation that will promote social diversity and economic prosperity while protecting and preserving important historic and cultural features. Communities must continue to provide the high quality services, facilities, and opportunities necessary to meet the social and economic needs of present and future generations.

Regional cooperation on planning, land use, transportation, economic development and environmental issues important to municipalities and communities is a component of local and regional planning. Lack of effective regional planning results in sprawl, competition for desired development, NIMBY disputes, and threats to natural and scenic resources. Without cross-border and regional planning insights, the area is left with no means to comprehensively address regional developments with multi-jurisdictional impacts.

GUIDING PRINCIPALS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE BERKSHIRES

- ◆ Spatial Efficiency in Land Use Development and Management
- ◆ Preservation of Sensitive Environments and Open Space
- ◆ Economic Development and Fiscal Responsibility
- ◆ Social Equality and Quality of Life



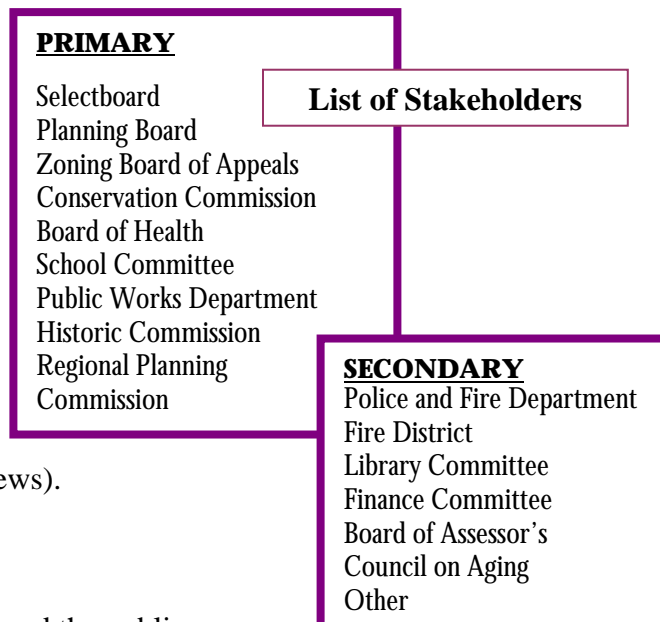
So how does a community incorporate a regional context into their local planning efforts? Chapter 40, §4A gives “government units” the ability to enter into agreements to perform services jointly with one or more other “governmental units.” As such a community must identify which “government unit(s)” will play a role in the regional planning project and communicate a mutual interest to investigate and strategize on in-town, cross-border and regional issues. In some instances a formal cooperative agreement is useful in detailing anticipated outcomes and responsibilities (see attached).

Getting Started

Berkshire area communities should evaluate their role in the region and determine what impacts and opportunities they provide and what impacts and opportunities their surrounding towns and cities provide. Communication among municipalities, should occur in order to reconcile comprehensive plans, local regulations and its implementation in order to facilitate and reinforce each community's long-term goals. In doing this communities can develop stronger relationships that prove useful for sharing of information to meet in-town goals, cross-border goals, and sub-regional goals.

Develop leadership

- ◆ Determine what communities should take part in your regional cooperation project.
- ◆ Determine who from those communities should play a part in the decision making process.
- ◆ Hold a meeting with designated stakeholders to formulate planning process for identifying town-specific, cross-border, and regional issues and strategies.
- ◆ Determine how to generate the needed information (i.e. surveys, workshops, or interviews).



Identify Common Issues

- ◆ Hold a brainstorming session with stakeholders and the public.
- ◆ Determine where there are shared or a reliance on resources.
- ◆ Define priority items by topic areas.
- ◆ Develop goals for enhancing or enabling these issues.

Topic Areas:

Land Use, Economic Development, Natural Resources, Transportation, Housing, Capital Investment, etc.

Determine a Mechanism for Action

- ◆ Review local policies to determine whether they advance or hinder these issues.
- ◆ Develop strategies for moving these issues forward.
- ◆ Identify specific departments, boards or commission responsible for carrying out the action strategies.

Putting Plan into Action

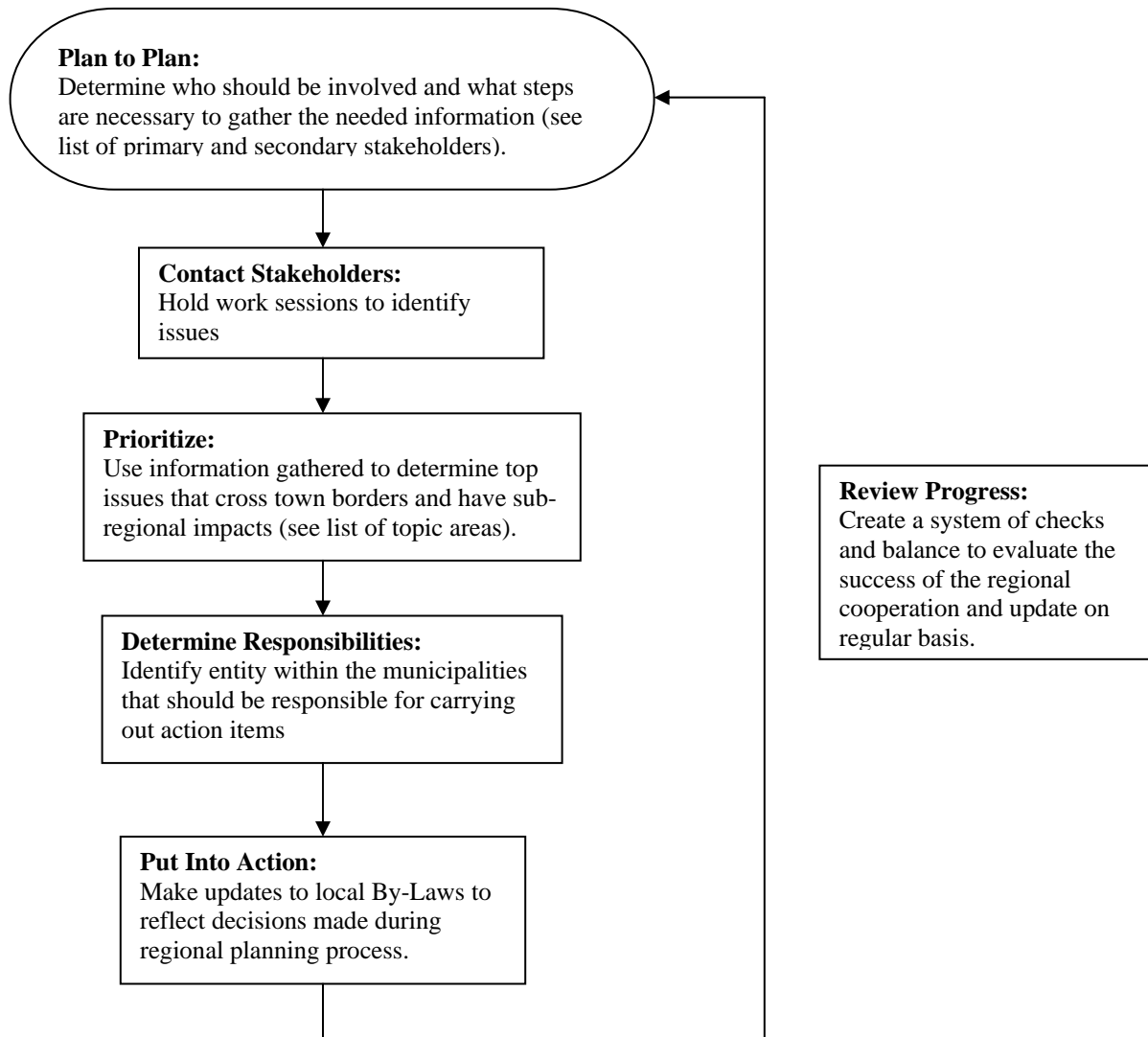
- ◆ Update By-Laws to reflect decisions on sharing of information (i.e. proponent pays the cost of additional postage and legal ads).
- ◆ Develop a system to share public notices and project information to abutting community.
- ◆ Encourage on-going discussion and participation on projects that have cross-town and/or regional significance.
- ◆ Create a system for checks and balances to determine what is working and what needs refinement.

Deliverables:

Regional cooperation enables an area better articulate a shared vision of how they would like to be in the next 10 to 20 years prescribe mechanisms that guarantee implementable action strategies.

A Systematic Approach

The following is a suggested approach for formulation regional cooperation.



Results of Regional Cooperation

Local planning officials will find that a regional cooperation and its goals and policies can be used as a regional guideline for local planning efforts. Towns and cities are encouraged to develop plans that reflect the goals and objectives of that community, but consistent with adjacent towns' efforts and plans. With the understanding that a plan is not static in nature, a municipality should continue to update the information and refine policies contained within as new strategies and technologies emerge.



MODEL AGREEMENT

*Memorandum of Agreement
For Voluntary Exchange of Information and Input Concerning Land Use Issues*

By and among the Municipalities of:

_____, Massachusetts and _____, Massachusetts.

WHEREAS, the municipalities support the concept of cooperative planning for the purpose of ensuring the continued capability of the community to meet the present and future needs of their residents; and

WHEREAS, the municipalities recognize that land use issues, particularly those arising near border areas, can have impacts across borders; and

WHEREAS, the municipalities recognize that a mechanism for establishing and maintaining sub-regional cooperation and communication on land use issues is necessary to promote a higher overall capability of each community to meet their present and future needs; and

THEREFORE, be it resolved, that the municipalities do hereby agree to foster joint and cooperative action concerning growth, development, and land uses or activities within the area affected by this agreement; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Agreement Participants shall operate in accordance with the following provisions:

A. AGREEMENT SCOPE & FUNCTIONS

Unless otherwise indicated, this agreement shall cover the area from the shared border of both municipalities extending ¼ mile within the territory of each municipality.

Parties designated to oversee and carry out this agreement shall have the following functions relatives to the participating municipalities:

1. To assist and advise local boards, agencies and authorities in their actions as they relate to growth, development, land use and resource use;
2. To develop and promote coordinated growth management, land use, and development review, resource protection, and cross-border cooperation;
3. To review and comment as appropriate on proposed developments and land uses or activities in the area affected by this agreement.

B. APPOINTMENT OF SUB-REGIONAL OVERSIGHT OFFICIALS

The Chair of the Planning Board or Community Development Board of each participating municipality shall appoint, and when necessary reappoint, a Sub-Regional Oversight Official. This Official must be a member, associate member, or employee of the Planning Board or Community Development Board.

C. ADVISORY SUB-REGIONAL REVIEW PROCEDURES

To assure that the functions of this agreement are carried out in an effective, organized manner, the following action shall be taken:

1. All sub-regional communication will occur between, or under the direction of, the Sub-Regional Oversight Officials. The Oversight Official for the municipality in which the Land Use Activity described in this paragraph is taking place shall send to their counterpart Oversight Official: a) notice and information of all proposed and adopted zoning amendments; and b) immediately upon receipt of application or referral for comment during review proceedings, information regarding any proposed site plan approval, special permit, subdivision requiring approval under subdivision control law, or the intended addition, removal, conversion and sale of property from M.G.L. Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B, within the area affected by this agreement. Said notice shall be accompanied by note of comment periods and meetings or hearings to be held regarding the proposal.
2. Sub-Regional Oversight Officials shall notify the Applicable Organizations (Board of Selectmen, Planning Board or Community Development Board, Conservation Commission, and Zoning Board of Appeals) within their own municipality of the existence and objectives of this Agreement and shall thereafter send copies of all pertinent information concerning Land Use Activity items stated above.
3. When specifically requested by an Applicable Organization listed in the paragraph above, the Designated Sub-Regional Oversight Official may send information to the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission for review and comment on any Land Use Activity items stated above.
4. Following receipt of any Land Use Activity items stated above, the Sub-Regional Oversight Official may collect advisory comments from the Applicable Organizations listed above and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission as stated above, and submit to their counterpart Oversight Official those comments which recommend measures to minimize or mitigate foreseeable significant overall impacts of any such proposal.
5. The Sub-Regional Oversight Official in which the Land Use activity is taking place shall seek and use the authority of the Planning Board or Community Development Board to appropriately recommend measures to minimize or mitigate foreseeable significant overall impacts of any such proposal.

D. AUTHORIZATION, TERM AND EFFECTIVE DATE

This agreement has been authorized by votes of the Board of Selectmen or approval of the Mayor in each municipality. This Memorandum is valid for a period of two (2) years, and is self renewing thereafter, unless action is taken to modify or discontinue it. This Memorandum will become effective for participating communities when it is signed by participating parties.

_____ Date _____
 Chair, Board of Selectmen
 Town of _____

_____ Date _____
 Chair, Board of Selectmen
 Town of _____

_____ Date _____
 Chair, Board of Selectmen
 Town of _____