

Long-range Planning - Use effective data collection and analysis processes to identify and plan for municipal and educational needs for the next decade. Collaborate with town and school agencies to update and refine existing plans and incorporate this information into a long-range vision for Newtown.

On Planning....

The starting point for discussion on what kind of municipal planning efforts are needed in Newtown should begin with a review of what is currently in place.

The most significant and overarching plan is Newtown's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), 2004. That plan offers a vision of the community and provides guidance for municipal decision-making. Goals are prioritized and, in most cases, implementation strategies are identified. A close read of that plan identifies most of the capital needs we are addressing or plan to address in the near future. Further, an examination of the imbedded action plans illustrates that the plan has had some influence on financial and political decision making.

Many other long-term plans exist at other levels. The EDC, Park and Rec, Board of Education, and Board of Finance, to name just a few, all have plans and operate within a planning review cycle. Those plans are crafted by the folks who know and understand the work of their organization and who provide the necessary expertise and insight. *All* municipal planning, whether at the POCD or 'agency' level is conducted so that the public has multiple opportunities to provide input into the priorities and strategies.

So what is the problem and what we do need to do to improve our planning functions? Let's look again at what is currently in place through the lens of: Data, Communication, Integration, and Leadership. The Plan of Conservation and Development, while well written and comprehensive, feels dated in some aspects. Much of the underlying information was gathered in 2003 and while not everything has changed, periodic updating would lend greater relevance and power to the POCD as a tool to inform municipal decision-making. The ten-year gap in updating the municipal POCD allowed for in state regulations is just too long. Further, updating the specific action plans would help to inform the community about the status of those plans. And, perhaps most important, an expectation that the plan be regularly updated reconnects those separate boards and commissions to their own plans of action. Result = Less drift from the central mission, better benchmarking and accountability, better relationship to current data, more clarity about needs and plans, earlier identification of gaps. Case in point: there is no reference to the needs of Hook and Ladder in the Facilities section of the POCD.

The 2004 Plan of Conservation and Development is available on-line via the town's web site. It is well organized and very informative. The plans of all those other agencies referenced in the POCD are not as easily accessed. Using tools of technology such as live links embedded within the POCD through which readers may follow-up planning activities of specific agencies would help the community become better informed. Cases in point: the strategic plan recently developed by the Board of Education, the long-range plan of Park and Rec., the Police Department 5 year plan.

It is difficult to integrate and prioritize all the existing planning information into a meaningful whole and form a vision for our community's future without first agreeing on a common, central planning platform. The Plan of Conservation and Development is one possible platform. Integrating the separate plans will help create a comprehensive whole and address, in part, the perception that decisions are ad hoc and unrelated to each other or not connected to an overall vision for our town. Case in point: plans for Fairfield Hills, reviewed and revised as necessary, should and will be incorporated into our overall town plan of development.

And, finally, leadership. A plan alone has no power or influence without leaders who are able to use that tool effectively to implement its strategies, align resources, and engage others, including the community. Many of us have experienced planning initiatives that result in shelf-sitting documents. Leadership is what makes the difference. Newtown needs an experienced consensus builder like me to give life to our community's vision. Let's remember that people and families are drawn to Newtown because of its qualities, its character, its beauty, its schools, its parks, its people and its possibilities.

Examine my record as an open-minded, fair and considerate legislator, board and commission member. Look at the progression of my professional life before I retired as a respected executive and project director in leadership development. Come meet me and learn of my experiences using planning tools to guide organizations in their growth and response to changing conditions, and to institutionalize professional practices and policies.

Will Rodgers, Pat's running mate and a candidate for Board of Selectmen, concurs with Pat's points. "Newtown's planning problem is not a failure to develop plans, but rather a failure to integrate and implement those plans developed. One strength Pat and I share as proven leaders is the ability to forge consensus and bring different groups together towards a common goal. That is a central responsibility of the executive branch of government and we're looking forward to that challenge. The difference between us and our opponents is that we don't want to simply graft a new level of planning on top of existing levels, nor do we want to throw out all existing plans and start over from scratch. Also, we're not coming at planning with any preconceived notions or disguised agenda; instead, we'll go where common sense and the majority process dictate.