TOWN OF CONCORD

Department of Planning & Land Management
141 Keyes Road – Concord, MA - 01742

TO: Christopher Whelan, Town Manager

FROM: Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning & Land Management

DATE: May 14, 2015

RE: Process to integrate sustainability principles into the next Comprehensive Plan

The next Comprehensive Planning process will allow Concord to integrate the adopted sustainability principles into the future plan by holistically problem solving, blending the best scientific understanding of existing conditions and available technologies with the public's resolve to act. In a report dated January 2015 and titled 'Sustaining Places: Best Practices for Comprehensive Plans', the American Planning Association suggests that "Planning for sustaining places is a dynamic, democratic process through which communities plan to meet the needs of current and future generations without compromising the ecosystems upon which they depend by balancing social, economic and environmental resources, incorporating resilience, and linking local actions to regional and global concerns". Planning Division staff recommends using this document to guide Concord's comprehensive plan process.

The comprehensive plan standards are organized into a framework of related components: a) six principles; b) two processes; and, c) two attributes. Each component is implemented through a set of best practices. Collectively, these principles, processes, attributes and supporting best practices define what the comprehensive plan for sustaining places should do.

Principles are the normative statements of intent that underlie the plan's overall strategy, including its goals, objectives, policies, maps and other content. Processes are the planning activities that take place during the preparation of a comprehensive plan and define how it will be carried out – public participation and plan implementation. Attributes are plan-making design standards that shape the content and characteristics of comprehensive plans. Best practices are the planning action tools employed by the community to activate the desired principles, processes and attributes of the comprehensive plan.

Prior comprehensive plans have organized information into stand-alone categories, or silos, which has resulted at times in competing goals or a lack of an integrated approach to solving problems. For example, the 2005 Comprehensive Long Range Plan was organized by topic: Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Cultural and Historic Resources, Natural Resources, Open Space,

Recreation, Facilities and Services, Transportation and Circulation, Fiscal Resources and Governance. This has resulted in specific committees being assigned responsibility for broad categories and no direction provided to work in collaboration with other committees.

The organizing principles identified by a review of leading comprehensive plans by the APA Sustaining Places Task Force are the following:

1. Livable Built Environment
2. Harmony with Nature
3. Resilient Economy
4. Interwoven Equity
5. Healthy Community
6. Responsible Regionalism

Livable Built Environment – ensures 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 recreation with a high quality of life.

Harmony with Nature – ensure that the contribution of natural resources to human well-being are explicitly recognized and valued and that maintaining their health is a primary objective.

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.

Interwoven Equity – ensure fairness and equity in providing for the housing, services, health, safety, and livelihood needs of all citizens and groups.

Healthy Community – ensure that the public health needs are recognized and addressed through provisions for healthy foods, physical activity, access to recreation, health care, environmental justice and safe neighborhoods.

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

There are two processes for involving the public and for carrying out plan objectives and proposals are key requirements for developing and implementing comprehensive plans for sustaining places:

- Authentic participation – involve all segments of the community in analyzing issues, generating visions, generating plans, and monitoring outcomes
- Accountable implementation – clearly state responsibilities for carrying out the plan and provide metrics for evaluating progress in achieving desired outcomes.

To be most effective this process should be carried out jointly with community representatives, planning board members, stakeholders, and town staff. This collaboration will help to develop a shared understanding of the framework's contribution to increasing community sustainability, along with support for meeting the framework requirements.