

**MEETING SUMMARY**  
**Regional Opportunities for the Borderlands**  
**November 29, 2005**  
**6:00 to 8:00pm**  
**Hilltop Inn & Suites**  
**North Stonington, CT**  
**Convened by The Nature Conservancy & the RI Economic Policy Council**

A group of 40 individuals gathered on the evening of November 29, 2005 to discuss potential next steps stemming from the May 2005 Regional Collaboration Clinic (see Appendix A for November meeting participants). The May Clinic, facilitated by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, focused on regional land use trends in the Borderlands and began a process of a collaborative approach to these issues. Following a summary presentation on the Clinic, participants broke into three groups to consider the following issues, which were highlighted as potential areas for action at the Clinic:

- Further exploration of the definition of the region,
- Ways to improve land use decisions to protect the unique nature of the region, and
- Ways to foster a vibrant place-based economy.

Following the small group work, facilitators from the three groups presented key points from the discussions.

***The Definition of the Region (facilitated by Michael Rauh)***

This group began from the premise that, in defining the region, the goal was to protect as much of forested landscape (the “Pac-Man” shape) as defined by The Nature Conservancy’s eco-regional analysis. With this as a point of departure for discussion, the group went on to develop five potential ways to define the region and outlined the pros and cons of each (see Table A).

<b>Table A: Definitions of the Region</b>		
<b>Possible Regions</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
“Pac-Man” (core forested area)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scale is right for people who live there</li> <li>• Ecologically sound</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not connected to other things</li> <li>• Too exclusive/isolated</li> </ul>
Ten Towns (those w. portions of the “Pac-Man”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Natural political” boundary</li> <li>• Provides a “buffer” zone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The “Pac-Man” is only a small portion of some towns</li> </ul>
Greater Borderlands (the “Dark Region” – illustrated by satellite photos of the region at night)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could tie into other existing regional efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unwieldy – hard to manage/collaborate at such a large scale</li> </ul>
Multi-level Region w. ecological, political, and developmental layers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible – could use different layers based on issue at hand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusing</li> </ul>
Watershed, Land, Other Organization Consortium/Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds on strengths of mature, existing organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No natural identity or “marketing” value</li> </ul>

Following the group's identification of these five potential regions, its participants took a straw poll to see which had the most support. The Greater Borderlands received the most votes (11), followed closely by the Ten Towns (9), Organizational Alliance (6), Multi-level Region (5), and no votes for the "Pac-Man" (within the small group, each participant could cast a votes for two regions).

This group identified the following next steps:

1. Clearly define what we are trying to accomplish
2. Analyze the region's use by residents and visitors
3. Develop a plan for adding new towns/constituencies if the "region" is expanded

### ***Ways to Improve Land Use Decisions (facilitated by Ariana McBride)***

This group began by reviewing the list of potential actions to improve land use decisions identified at the May Clinic (Appendix B). Participants identified key actions from that list as well as new ideas that they felt would be very important to improving land use decisions (Appendix C). From that list, they focused on two critical areas for improving decisions:

- **Education & Outreach**: Develop a variety of tools to help inform and educate decision-makers (local/state), landowners and the public on land use decisions. Key elements of this effort could include:
  - ◆ Mapping information such as zoning and protected open space, illustrating these features for the full region to foster a shared understanding of how they complement and/or conflict with one another.
  - ◆ Studying the economic impacts of conservation and development, complementing traditional approaches to this issue with shared experiences from similar communities.
  - ◆ Analyzing existing regulations and their effectiveness, as well as determining differences in state laws which affect what regulations are possible.
  - ◆ Analyzing parcel size/ownership patterns in order to help target efforts.
- **Policy Implementation** – Help towns implement the policies necessary to achieve better land use outcomes. This would include:
  - ◆ Providing information on most effective land use techniques and stories of successful implementation.
  - ◆ Sharing techniques/experiences among the region's communities.
  - ◆ Working with existing organizations that have success in different elements of land use planning (e.g. Washington County Regional Planning Council).
  - ◆ Assisting with any necessary efforts to change enabling legislation.
  - ◆ Potential for launching a pilot project in a few communities who may be more receptive based on efforts to date and/or planning capacity.

These actions would help foster a broader regional understanding and more consistent land use policies. In addition, they would shift greater analysis to the policy-making stage versus having most done at the project stage. The group agreed that they would be interested in meeting again to flesh out some of these ideas.

### ***Options for Creating a Vibrant Economy***

This group discussed a variety of ideas related to fostering a vibrant rural economy in the Borderlands. Many of their ideas tied into issues identified in the land use group as well. The following summarizes some of the key points from their conversation:

- The Borderlands - Independent and Wild: Today the economy is elsewhere and people just sleep in the Borderlands. The independent and wild villages of the Borderlands surrounded by agriculture and conservation lands are a rare asset and one of increasing value as formula retail takes over the full urban to rural spectrum. The economic agenda of the Borderlands is to find the types of small to medium size businesses that would be attracted to, and enhance independent and wild villages thus enabling the conservation of the rural land and revitalization of mills paired with a dedication of keeping agriculture viable.
- The Village Cookbook: Develop the design and financial recipes for fitting modern employers, retail, and services into the fabric of enhanced villages to retain their independent and wild identity. Concentrate development in villages (both existing and maybe some new) and do not give anything away in terms of zoning changes or waivers. How can new denser development in villages achieve the conservation that defines its value? Use upzoning in villages to achieve conservation of agricultural, working forest, and wilderness areas through the transfer of development rights. Address the myth that more housing is always bad for the municipal balance sheet by analyzing the fiscal implications of various development and conservation patterns in the context of the Borderlands. Think of the Southern New England village as an open system innovation platform – outward looking incubator of the creative economy. With the villages, create the modern infrastructure for small start-ups and artists. Villages in the Borderlands have both proximity to large NY and Boston Metros and the ability to serve global markets. Do not lose the village names, identities, and cultures. Build the strategy on differentiating from the big box, national brand, formula development and retail.
- Keep Agriculture Viable: Market local produce through diverse channels including slow food restaurants featuring locally grown produce. Explore ways to reveal existing value of the forests – getting everyone to help pay for the conservation of lands that provide them vital ecosystem services. Enhance forest revenue through more active management and novel ideas like eco-cemeteries.
- Create Regional Identity by Creating a Map: Our map is how we see the world. It is also a tool for collective marketing. The map would define the identity of the villages and highlight the trails, rivers, outdoor opportunities recreation and heritage assets of the region. Make rural lands accessible to urban residents through the map and webpage so they can appreciate the value of this regional asset.
- Support Community Decision-makers with Information: Pro-active market making rather than reacting to development proposals requires more information and resources than planners and town councils have today. The Village Cookbook would begin to address the need for information. In addition, we need to identify a resource to answer the best practice questions of the members of local boards. This could be a job for statewide planning or the local planning association chapters. Maybe the village cookbook needs an expert chef –

someone with expertise in village development and conservation tools who would work for the towns and their board members as a resource.

### ***Full Group Discussion***

Following the smaller group presentations, the full group discussed the ideas and potential next steps that came out of the smaller group discussions. Participants discussed the proposed definitions of the region and questioned the implications of each in terms of next steps. When the full group was polled as to their preference for the definition of the region, the order was similar to the smaller group, but not quite the same: Greater Borderlands (12), Ten Towns (10), Multi-level Region (9), Organization Alliance (2), and the Pac-Man (0). In addition to these definitions, the group that focused on the economy brought up the potential of defining the region based on a network of villages defined in part by the surrounding farms and forests.

Participants discussed the need to have consensus on the region and a related vision. For instance, if the land use group had held the same regional vision as economy group, its participants might have discussed different ways to improve local decision-making.

In all three groups, participants emphasized the value of mapping different features of the region and some folks indicated the existence of other maps that could serve as models for this effort. Beth Ashman Collins requested that folks send her any of these ideas via email ([beth@ripolicy.org](mailto:beth@ripolicy.org)).

The full group agreed to the following next steps:

- 1) The Nature Conservancy and Policy Council will develop a series of maps illustrating different features/scales of the region along with additional background context. Along with these, they will draft potential propositions that would speak to different visions for the region and then solicit feedback from others who are interested/engaged in this effort.
- 2) The Conservancy and Policy Council will hold meetings to flesh out some of the ideas generated by the land use and economy group, ideally framing those by the feedback on the region and related propositions discussed above.
- 3) Reconvening of the larger group to discuss regional propositions and potential actions related to those different visions.

## **Appendix A: Meeting Participants**

Kip Bergstrom, Jerry Bertrand, John Bolduc, Tim Bowles, Harvey Buford, Beth Ashman Collins, Tim Crandall, Jane Dauphinais, Scott Dawley, Rick Diehl, Thomas Dupree, Kevin Essington, Peter Gengler, Vilma Gregoropolous, Don Henne, Blanche Higgins, Madeline Jeffery, Courtland Kinnie, Marnie and Peter Lacouture, Amy Lerner, Ariana McBride, Timothy Mooney, Nic Mullane, Rick Pace, Jenny Paquette, Robert Peret, Ralph Pratt, Larry Quick, Michael Rauh, William Roper, Howard Russ, David Schweid, Demian Sorrentino, Liz Swenson, Eric Thomas, Diana Urban, Lori Urso, Kathleen Wainwright, Harold Ward, and Margaret Welch.

## Appendix B: Potential Aspirations & Actions

### Create and Promote a Regional Vision

- Create a visioning document
- Provide outreach to inform, educate, mobilize, and engage both local people and those outside the region
- Create a network of state-level and local champions
- Gather for social occasions (e.g. potluck)
- Hold talks on issues affecting the region
- Link this effort to larger multi-watershed river valleys from sea to mountains of Massachusetts
- Connect with other green infrastructure
- Promote traditional livelihoods and lifestyles
- Promote the unique historic architecture of the area – town halls, etc.
- Brand the region (signs, maps, name, etc.)
- Sell the naming rights to the region – e.g., the “Dunkin Donuts Borderlands”

### Improve Land Use Decisions

- Review existing rules, regulations, and policies for planning, zoning, etc. to evaluate their effect/potential impact on the landscape
- Develop model regulations that institutionalize the preservation of the region’s rural character into planning, zoning, and subdivision laws
- Create incentives to develop the landscape consistent with traditional themes
- Create a regional planning/interstate commission
- Have keynote speakers on land use issues/challenges
- Tap into and build on existing networks and partnerships of expertise (e.g., APA state associations, Green Valley Institute)
- Engage university resources and experts
- Create a clearinghouse of information by sharing resources
- Create a list serve
- Highlight current events
- Coordinate municipal services
- Help large landowners create networks to sustain open space
- Teach consensus-building skills to key constituents
- Document the impact of property taxes on growth, and assess who currently pays the cost to maintain infrastructure
- Examine the economic costs and benefits of conservation, development, historic village character, environmental quality, etc
- Provide consistent, objective, efficient, multi-disciplinary, independent information and analysis for local decision-making (GIS, fiscal impact analysis, etc.)
- Coordinate GIS information across state and other jurisdictional boundaries
- Gather and disseminate land ownership data to help determine conservation strategies both for core and periphery areas

- Monitor local assets over time
- Prioritize land acquisition to conserve and protect the most valuable forests, open spaces, and green infrastructure
- Work with land trusts to purchase land
- Use local, regional, and/or state-wide bond issues
- Use public owned lands as a base for further conservation

### **Foster a Vibrant Economy**

- Create economic incentives to sustain regional values – aesthetics, rural character, wildlife and habitat, etc.
- Support and incentivize local large land owners to remain
- Examine the effectiveness of “heritage areas” for strategies that work
- Help towns understand that growth does not always increase revenue, but may increase costs much more
- Map conservation areas and the green infrastructure
- Create an inventory of natural, historic, and recreational resources
- Monitor and evaluate impacts of recreational use on regional values
- Commodify local assets: how can we sell the value of clean water to those who use it or will use it? The value of a landscape that is next to and available for urban users? Selling groundwater as spring water? Forest as economic asset? Example, NYC paying upstate for groundwater protection
- Have non-resident users help defray cost of conservation – e.g. payment by states, user fees, rescue fees
- Examine the potential to leverage the larger tourism marketing area
- Build on the demand for outdoor recreation by providing walking tours, organized activities, awareness, and maps

## Appendix C: Key Actions to Improve Land Use Decisions

- Education/outreach for municipal decision-makers, especially with respect to the economic impacts of conservation and development
- Provide a unified map of zoning of the towns
- Identify large parcels of land
- Education/outreach to broader public – need for diversity of tools to do so and important to repeat the message. Issues could include the “myths” of development. Approach could sometimes be issue focused, sometimes project focused.
- Develop a regional comprehensive plan which could specify future land use – map existing future land use plans, identify similarities/conflicts, target areas for conservation/development.
- Share techniques among towns, such as conservation subdivision standards
- Share land use decision experiences from similar towns
- Potential to enable better growth management tools – explore best practices – determine how to adopt these tools (whether state action/legislation is necessary)
- Open space planning at town level based on a regional understanding of priority areas – potential Green Space Plan
- Review existing policies
- Pursue better financing mechanisms for local services
- Greater analysis done at the planning/policy-making stage (vs. at the project stage)
- Focus on a few communities for a pilot project – potentially those who have more planning resources or are ahead of the game in terms of current efforts and may be receptive to a project
- Study how to integrate affordable housing – work with existing organizations who are engaged on this issue (e.g. Washington County Regional Planning Commission, Southeastern CT Council of Governments)
- Explore innovative patterns of land development from other places/countries
- Assessment fees for review of development proposals so that town can hire technical assistance to review proposals
- Education for local board members