CHAPTER 1

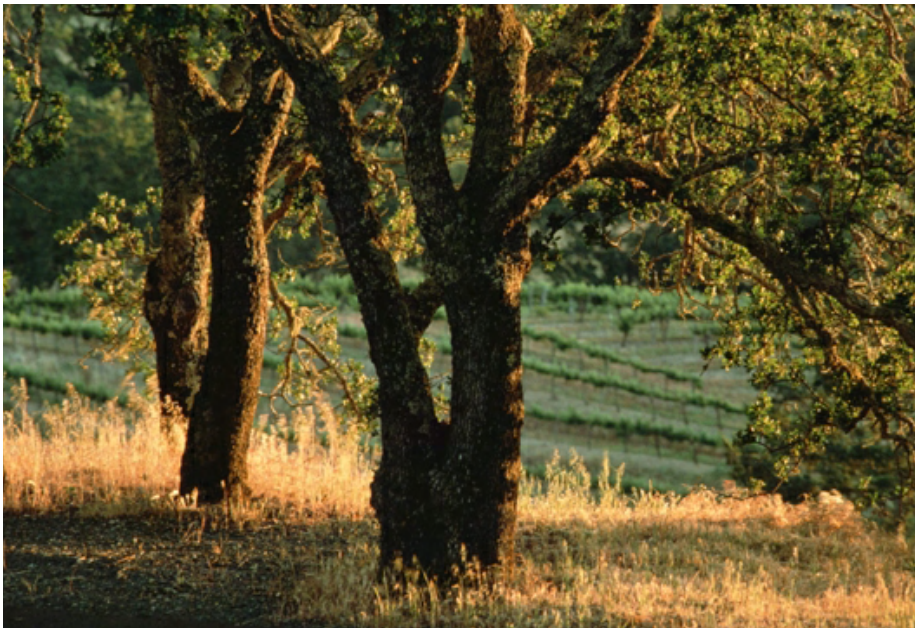
Introduction

Purpose of Handbook

This handbook is designed to assist planning board members, planners, and volunteers in the process of preparing, updating, adopting, and implementing a master plan. It provides a comprehensive overview of the master planning process, so that it can be easily applied in communities of all sizes and characteristics. The master planning process, legal requirements, data analysis, and techniques, as well as the latest planning concepts and themes, are described in easily followed terms, tables, and interactive tools.

The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

- William James



Most planning guides are one-dimensional, in the sense that they are descriptive only. *Preparing a Master Plan for Your Community* is different. The CD-ROM makes it interactive. It includes links and menus that enable the user to browse or maneuver directly to the information most useful to them. Plus, it provides users instructional and analytical capabilities for carrying out a variety of master planning processes, including community visioning and the developing of existing and future land use maps. It also includes a checklist for conducting a smart growth audit.

Preparing a Master Plan for Your Community is designed to help communities understand the planning process by putting it in simple terms. In demonstrating that planning is neither difficult nor complicated, it shows that energetic volunteers can do it. The process, however, requires a grasp of the basic planning tools and techniques employed by professional planners and consultants. It also requires a high degree of community involvement, a willingness among local leaders to become stakeholders in the process, and an attitude of caring and respect.

Organization/Contents of Handbook

This handbook is divided into twelve chapters. Each chapter is identified and briefly described below.

1. Introduction – Explains the purpose of the handbook.

2. The Master Planning Process – Begins with a brief history of master planning in New Hampshire. It defines what a master plan is – its basic purpose, characteristics, and legal significance. There is a summary of the roles and responsibilities of those preparing a plan and the eight basic steps of the master planning process. Those eight steps are organized into five phases, and the elements that make a good plan are identified. Also included is a summary of the organizational steps involved in preparing a master plan. Using the CD-ROM, you should be able to click on any step in this summary and obtain immediate information on how to proceed.

3. What Should Be Included in Your Master Plan – Lists the two mandatory elements of a master plan, the vision and land use sections. It also describes the other thirteen sections that may be included.

4. PHASE I: Getting Started – Focuses on the first part of the master planning process – how to begin preparing a plan and what should be considered during its development.

5. PHASE II: Community Visioning – Defines community visioning and explains how to go about undertaking a community visioning process. A guide showing how to conduct a visioning process is also included on the CD-ROM.

6. PHASE III: Building the Information System – Focuses on the steps of data collection and analysis. Information about how to conduct a community assessment, as well as how to formulate future land development scenarios, is provided. A summary of the maps and data needed to conduct a natural resource inventory is also included, as well as a step-by-step guide on how to prepare an existing land use map.

7. PHASE IV: Building the Plan– Describes how to evaluate data, consider future development scenarios, and select a preferred development scheme. It outlines the procedures for preparing and adopting a master plan. Also included is a step-by-step guide on how to prepare a future land use map.

8. PHASE V: Implementation – Describes how to implement your plan once it has been adopted. It explains how to monitor the plan's success, as well as how to amend and update it in the future. Implementation tools, land use regulations, and the capital improvement program (CIP) are described, along with a number of strategies for involving the general public.

9. The Basics of Planning Theory – Provides an overview of planning theory – what it means to plan, why communities plan, how much it costs to prepare a plan, how long it will take, and whether hiring a professional consultant is necessary. It concludes with a summary of helpful hints, a description of when an existing plan should be updated, and a review of the various approaches to planning and the different types of master plans that can be prepared.

10. Tools and Techniques– Provides and overview of a number of planning tools and techniques that are useful in the development of a master plan. Also included is a guide on how to conduct a build-out analysis. Information about community surveys, how to get people involved, publishing and printing, maps, visioning models, and innovative land use controls are also identified.

11. Planning Concepts and Themes – Provides an overview of new trends in master planning, growth management, smart growth, compact growth, urban growth boundaries, and other master planning concepts and themes. Also included on the CD-ROM is a checklist for conducting a smart growth audit.

12. Bibliography/Resources – Provides an interactive-bibliography. Numerous publications and resources are listed under topics such as land use, housing, and transportation. Also included is a guide to various agencies and websites that may be helpful to you when developing your master plan.