



## COMMISSIONERS' HANDBOOK

2/21/02; revised 8/15/04

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### **WHAT IS THE UPPER VALLEY LAKE SUNAPEE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION?**

#### The Commission

The Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC) is a regional planning commission organized under the provisions of NH RSA 36:45-53. A political subdivision of the state, UVLSRPC is a public, not-for-profit, voluntary association of cities and towns. Each town and city annually appropriates funds for the Commission's operation. The Commission consists of official representatives from member communities and a professional staff. The Commissioners elect officers, adopt the annual work program and budget, and develop policies and positions on issues that are important to the UVLSRPC communities.

#### Our Region

The Region encompasses 27 communities on the New Hampshire side of the Upper Valley, including Grafton County's Lebanon-Hanover job center, the Claremont-Newport socioeconomic center and most of surrounding Sullivan County, and the Lake Sunapee area on the border between Sullivan and Merrimack Counties.

#### Regional Plan

A regional planning commission's powers are advisory. Our primary purpose is to provide the communities of the Region with a mechanism to work together toward balanced growth, in part by developing and implementing a comprehensive Regional Plan. Regional planning enables communities to take a coordinated approach to planning for future needs relative to the development of the area.

#### Assistance to Member Municipalities

UVLSRPC has been providing professional planning assistance to municipal boards since 1963. By pooling their resources, member communities have access to a highly trained and professional staff providing a wide variety of services. Our current staff's areas of expertise include comprehensive planning; land use regulations; GIS mapping, development suitability and build-out analysis; transportation planning; environmental and natural resource planning; community and economic development; public participation, including community surveys and workshop facilitation; capital improvement programming; and affordable housing. The Commission also serves as a collective voice for its towns and cities in dealings with state and federal governments, thereby protecting and promoting the needs and interests of our communities.

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## HISTORY OF UVLSRPC



The UVLSRPC had its beginning in 1963 as the Upper Valley Development Council, a locally-supported, economic development agency serving the communities in and around the Hartford, Vermont and Lebanon and Hanover, NH job center.

In 1968, as part of a statewide regional planning initiative by the NH Governor's Office and the NH Office of State Planning, the already operational Upper Valley Development Council was established as a regional planning commission for the Upper Valley Region. This agency was renamed the Upper Valley Planning and Development Council (UVPDC) and continued to include several towns in Vermont.

In 1972 the number of planning regions in New Hampshire was reduced from 17 to 6 by Executive Order of Governor Peterson. This meant that former Planning Region 9 (Lake Sunapee Region) was annexed to the former Region 8 (Upper Valley Region). The new organization was named the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Council (UVLSC).

In the early 1990s the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Council's Board voted to change the name of the regional planning commission to the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC) which it remains today.

On July 1, 2004, per order of Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development Kevin Dorn, the Commission's Vermont communities became part of a neighboring Vermont-only regional planning commission, and so the UVLSRPC became a NH-only regional planning commission for the first time.

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## WHO GOVERNS THE UPPER VALLEY LAKE SUNAPEE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION?

Representation on the Commission is set at two Commissioners for each member municipality with a population 10,000 and under as of the most recent U.S. Census. Municipalities with a population over 10,000, currently Claremont, Hanover and Lebanon, are entitled to a third commissioner. In addition to these community representatives, at the Annual Meeting the Commissioners may elect individuals that they feel have special skills or knowledge to offer for the benefit of region-wide planning. These members at-large serve a one-year renewable term. Other Commissioners serve up to a four-year term with no limit on the number of terms.

The Commissioners have overall responsibility for the direction of the Commission. The Commission's Bylaws state that..."The Commissioners of the Commission shall have and may exercise all of the powers of the Commission."

Your responsibilities as a Commissioner extend to your relationship with the UVLSRPC professional staff. Through the Executive Director, the Commissioners direct the staff by establishing goals, formulating policies, and setting priorities. While the staff handles the day-to-day administrative details and technical tasks, the resolution of policy matters is the Commissioners' responsibility.

All of the Commission's authority comes from local or state action, and is controlled by the region's government officials. As the representative of the local government, you must make regional policy decisions and help implement these decisions within your community. Your role is that of a diplomat as well as that of a representative. You must serve your local interests on a "committee of equals" and try to balance local concerns with what is best for the regional community as a whole. You must work to reach a consensus with other Commissioners and then work to gain the support of your local community as well as throughout the region-wide community. If a presentation on an issue does not provide enough information, please request additional information from the Executive Director before making a decision.



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## WHAT ARE YOUR DUTIES AND TIME COMMITMENTS AS A COMMISSIONER?

As a Commissioner, you are expected to:



- Attend monthly and any special Commission meetings.
- Review agenda materials sent to you before the meeting and prepare to discuss and/or decide questions before the Commission.
- Serve on one or more standing or ad hoc committees. Commissioners generally identify issues or projects they are interested in and volunteer to serve on the appropriate committee(s). Standing committees are Personnel, Planning, Finance, Program and Safety. Ad hoc committees are formed for a limited time frame to address specific issues.

Your responsibilities also include keeping in touch with your community's officials and citizens, and bringing issues identified by these groups to the attention of the Commission as appropriate.

- Report to the Commission regularly on planning issues, priorities and projects in your community.
- Keep community officials and citizens informed on regional issues and the activities of the Commission. For example, town representatives should meet with their Selectboards and Planning Boards at least quarterly, and be prepared to answer questions about the UVLSRPC at Town Meeting.
- Make sure to keep the Executive Director informed on any special concerns your local leaders have.

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## WHAT WILL YOU, AS A COMMISSIONER, ACTUALLY DO?

Your UVLSRPC tasks and responsibilities will vary depending upon the programs in which you participate and, of course, upon the interests and skills you bring to the Commission. All Commissioners contribute to directing the professional staff through policy decisions. Some of the decisions Commissioners make are:



- Developing and revising regional policies with the Executive Director and committees, including those incorporated in the Regional Plan.
- Approving the UVLSRPC budget and work program and electing officers (President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer) at the Annual Meeting.
- Hiring an Executive Director.
- Approving contracts when opportunities for substantial new projects arise during the year.

Decision-making is only part of the job, however. After Commission decisions are made, they must be implemented. Regional planning commissions must rely on negotiations in order to implement their decisions. This means you have a responsibility to explain a regional decision to your local leaders.

Your role as a Commissioner is a challenging one. Effective regional planning commission work requires prominent leadership, and it calls for a much broader and region-wide focus than your local city or town. Intermunicipal cooperation requires attention and time. Commissioners need to be innovative and flexible, to experiment with new approaches and new ideas. Veteran commissioners and UVLSRPC staff provide a wealth of resources to help.

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## WAYS TO BE AN EFFECTIVE COMMISSIONER

- ***Participate***

Attend as many UVLSRPC meetings as possible and participate in discussions. Help new commissioners to become acquainted with each other and with the Commission's purpose, structure, and policies.

- ***Use Two-Way Communication to Build and Maintain Support in Your City or Town***

Always keep an open door between yourself and your local government, as well as between yourself and the UVLSRPC.

- ***Strengthen Relationships with State Officials***

Become acquainted with state officials in your region and build working relationships. Make sure they are aware of the importance of regional planning to your community. Work through the UVLSRPC to strengthen ties with state government to further local and regional objectives.

- ***Contribute to a Group Spirit Among Commissioners***

Pay attention to the relationships among Commissioners. To work well, any board requires good group process.

- ***Stay Informed***

Keep up with the activities of the Commission and staff to know what is going on around the region and on state-wide issues affecting your community and area. The Commission maintains an extensive and useful library that is available for your use as well. Never be afraid to ask questions!