

## XIV. TRADE-OFFS: MAKING CHOICES

One of the reasons regional growth management is so difficult is that it requires making choices and setting priorities among a multitude of interrelated and sometimes conflicting goods. We want less traffic congestion yet we also want more successful downtowns and town centers. We see the need for more inter-municipal cooperation but are wary of new authorities that might be less accountable to local interests. We think more public transit is a good idea, but it may be a better idea for other people than it is for us. We are worried about too much development in our towns and affecting our neighborhoods, but we want our taxes to stay reasonable. Moreover, potential opposition to certain kinds of growth management efforts is often more significant than advocates realize, because events like the NMCOG growth management charrette tend to attract people who are already more favorably inclined towards growth management measures rather than those who oppose them.

Recognizing this situation, it seems most prudent to pay attention to those issues which attract the most interest and which are relatively less difficult to accomplish. In order to get a reading on the preferences of the charrette participants at the end of the process, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire ranking potential projects as High, Medium, or Low Priority. The focus was on projects that could have NMCOG involvement to convene or assist our member communities.

### Charrette Questionnaire Results

(Note: Not all participants filled out the form, and not all respondents marked all projects.)

<i>Activity</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Regional Open Space Plan	26	3	1	0
Model Zoning Bylaws for Mixed Use Centers	18	10	0	2
Widen Route 3	17	4	8	1
Model Cluster Zoning Bylaws	16	12	1	1
Alliance of Local Land Trusts	15	11	4	0
Design Guidelines for Town Center Revitalization	15	11	3	1
Transportation Planning for Mixed Use Centers	13	14	0	3
Regional Economic Development Council/Authority	13	12	2	3
Voluntary Review/Dev. of Regional Significance	13	11	4	2
Regional Affordable Housing Review	13	10	5	2
Visual Examples of Model Cluster Development	13	8	7	2
Transp. Demand Management and Transit Use	12	12	2	4
Regional Conference on Cluster Development	11	13	3	3
Model Regs for Mixed Res/Bus/Comm Development	11	12	0	1
Guidelines for Telecommunications Infrastructure	10	13	4	3
Regional Forum for Local Historic Comm./Societies	10	12	7	1
Increase Capacity of Bridge Crossings	9	14	5	2

When the rankings for both high and medium priority are combined, the five highest ranking projects are:

- Regional Open Space Plan
- Model Cluster Zoning Bylaws
- Model Zoning Bylaws for Mixed Use Centers
- Transportation Planning for Mixed Use Centers
- Design Guidelines for Town Center Revitalization/Alliance of Local Land Trusts (tie)

These were the issues that attracted the broadest support. Open space preservation -- urban, suburban, and rural -- is clearly a top priority. This issue is related to the question of how better to site and design the development that does occur. The charrette participants wanted to find out how cluster-style

residential development and mixed-use development can be more effectively implemented in the Northern Middlesex region.

Discussion on some of the more complex and difficult economic development and transportation issues was lively. The idea of a regional economic development council or authority with real powers received a positive reception from many participants, despite concerns about creating new levels of government. The proposal was for an entity that could channel growth to appropriate locations in the region yet share some of the tax revenue with all the regional communities. This would mitigate the current sprawl-inducing competition for business development and permit communities that prefer a more residential identity to stay that way. Everyone recognized that the creation of such an entity would be a difficult task, requiring leadership, political coalition-building, and state legislative action.