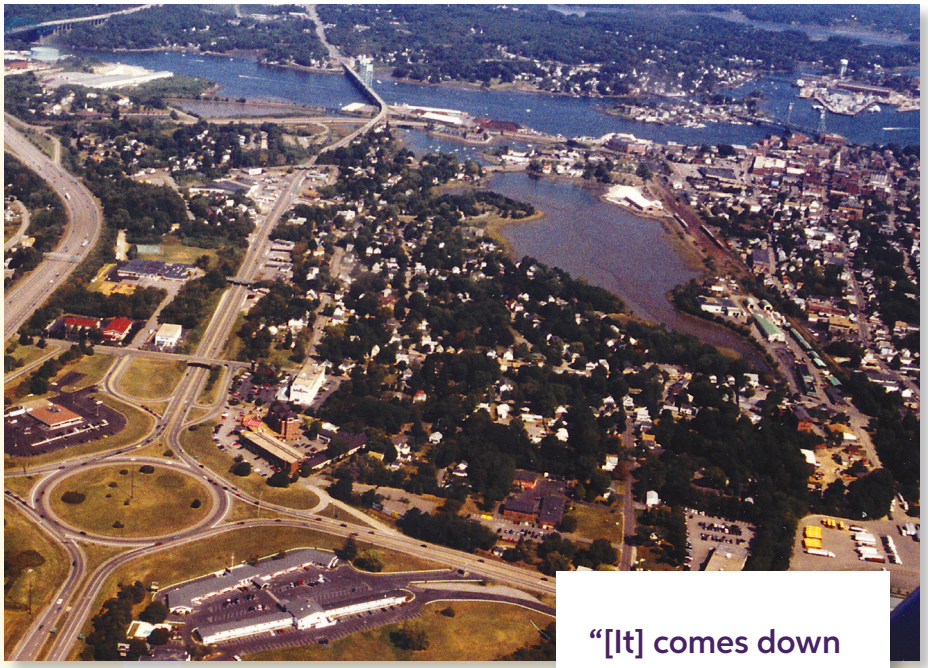
FACT SHEET 11: DRIVERS OF LAND USE DECISIONS

New Hampshire's Changing Climate, Land Cover, and Ecosystems

Land use planning practitioners (planners, regulators, managers) have a unique vantage point in understanding what drives change. In tandem with understanding projected ecosystem changes resulting from changes in climate and land use, understanding perceptions of the drivers of land-use decisions provides insight into how decision makers could adjust and react to future changes in population, demographics, and economics in the context of a changing ecosystem. Learning from those who deal with these issues daily in their professional lives provides examples for others to better support the information needs of communities facing changes projected in other portions of this research.



KEY RESULTS

Initial analysis of interview transcripts showed several themes reflected in the perceptions of land-use planning practitioners based on their lived experiences:

- There are extensive "tools" (laws, regulations, policies, funding) available to guide land-use decisions, but they are applied differently in different places and times
- There are different perceptions of the relative environmental impact of different land-use decisions/approaches
- Perceived costs of services to support specific population groups influence land-use decisions (in particular concerns over the perceived tax implications of services)
- Local influence and control over land-use decisions is prime
- Individuals and events have influenced land use in the state of New Hampshire (at the site level and state-wide)
- Perceptions of water play a large role in thinking about land use decision-making

> **"In order to keep their taxes down, [towns] may need to make really poor land use decisions to boost property taxes."**
>
> *– State agency specialist*

> **"[It] comes down basically to the powers at the local level – that's a New Hampshire tenet."**
>
> *– Regional planning expert*

Understanding these perceptions can support communities in their efforts to account for ecosystem services while balancing their needs in the face of demographic and economic change.

Understanding past drivers of change provides insight to prepare for the future, in particular to support land-use planning in a non-crisis mode. This information can be used to support the needs of community sustainability efforts in the face of economic and demographic change as populations grow.

METHODS

We conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with land-use planning practitioners (identified through snowball sampling) in the fall of 2015. All respondents had lived and/or worked in New Hampshire for upwards of ten years. Respondents worked throughout the state and represented broad expertise (town councils and planning boards, regional planning commissions, research groups, state agencies, private planners/consultants, non-profits, etc.). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

DATA/ OTHER RESOURCES

Due to the confidential nature of the interviews, transcript data is not available to the general public. If you are interested in discussing our data, findings, or analysis (or ideas for further analysis), please contact Lindsey Williams or Curt Grimm directly.

Williams, L, C Grimm, C Wake (In Review) "The Tool Box is Full": Understanding land-use planning professionals' perceptions of the impact of policies, demographics and economics on land-use decision making in New Hampshire. *Ecosystems and Society.*

RELATED RESOURCES AND DATA SOURCES INCLUDE:

- EPSCoR Data Discovery Center provides data and products from NH and Maine EPSCoR: **ddc.unh.edu**
- NH Citizen Planner provides resources for volunteers working on community planning: **nhcitizenplanner.org**
- NH GRANIT is the statewide Geographic Information System (GIS) Clearinghouse: **granit.unh.edu**

NOTE: Further analysis related to the above initial findings is underway. Additional analyses are also possible, please contact the researchers with questions or ideas of what you might want us to analyze further in our interview data.

CONTACTS: Lindsey Williams, **lcw1002@wildcats.unh.edu**

Curt Grimm, UNH Carsey School of Public Policy: **curt.grimm@unh.edu**

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