

Tools to Grow By: Powering Regional Planning with Cool Interactive Tools



Regional planning can identify solutions that go beyond political boundaries to foster collaboration on resources, infrastructure, and protection of vulnerable special areas, communities, and ecosystems. A unique example in Massachusetts is the Cape Cod Commission (CCC), which is authorized to set regional policies for the Cape and review and decide upon projects likely to pose development issues and have effects in more than one town. The CCC convenes residents and stakeholders alike around critical challenges to plan for the best version of Cape Cod. Its strong intermunicipal coordination and regional infrastructure enables it to protect the unique values and quality of life on Cape Cod by balancing environmental protection and economic progress.

Having a common understanding of the Cape's challenges, goals, and guardrails is paramount to building consensus and forming creative solutions. Erin Perry, Deputy Director of the CCC, says "The Commission is charged coordinating a balanced relationship between environmental protection and economic progress. The framework for our work is provided by the Regional Policy Plan (RPP)."

The RPP authority to review impacts across town lines enables the Commission to organize itself around a suite of interrelated systems that comprise Cape Cod - natural, built, and community systems – to form goals and objectives that guide the region's planning and development.

The Cape Cod Section 208 Area Wide Water Quality Management Plan is a perfect example of this unique capability. To address the critical challenges that Cape Cod faces, the CCC works with communities to find opportunities to synergize an economically- and socially-sound future for Cape residents and businesses. "Regional planning and water quality are interrelated," Perry said. "Water quality issues are often the result of a lack of appropriate infrastructure," which is also needed in activity centers to support and spur economic opportunities.



A scenic vista on Cape Cod



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While considering needs for more traditional sewerage where appropriate, the 208 Plan emphasizes the implementation of non-traditional strategies such as permeable reactive barriers, innovative and alternative septic systems, and aquaculture. These strategies can go beyond water quality issues alone to enable a more holistic approach that incorporates issues of habitat, water supply, and community and landscape preservation.

To build support for this more holistic system, the Commission has deployed a suite of creative communication tools and interactive planning resources that consider a range of information needs from the general public to municipal decision-makers to technology implementers. One such tool is the Cape Cod Coastal Planner (CCCP), a map-based communication and decision-support tool to help residents and decision makers understand the relative factors and environmental and socio-economic effects of implementing various proposed strategies such as those to address sea level rise, storm surge, and erosion. Other areas addressed by Commission tools include transportation, housing, natural resources, community design, and historic preservation. Most recently, the Commission has responded to COVID-19 by establishing the Cape Cod COVID-19 Dashboard and Municipal Planning Resources page to help guide communities through the pandemic.

Go Deeper: Visit the Cape Cod Commission website at <https://www.capecodcommission.org/> for more information on the Commission's resources, tools, and activities.

