

Comment submitted by Richard Forman, Concord resident, 32 years

The following are four key goals I mentioned (during the 11/7/17 Conservation Coffee) that seem compelling for Concord's Long Range Planning. All points assume that actions are over the long term, and that they start now.

1. Improve the heart of Concord, from Heywood Meadow to Millbrook Tarry. Mill Brook slicing through this center is currently all but invisible, yet remains an enormously valuable resource upon which to capitalize. For instance, step behind Tuttle's Livery and envision the remarkable history that took place along there. Suppose this stretch became an attractive walkable, shopable, edible, and livable place, rather than a "back-alley trough." For a town of our size, three-story buildings, for example, provide needed apartments in town which increases day and evening activity plus a financial boost at the core. The brook at the core becomes ecological and aesthetic. It becomes visibly tied to equally valuable enhancements around Heywood bridge, the walkway and bridgelet between the two downtown churches, Milldam on both sides of Main Street, Chamberlain Park, and Millbrook Tarry. Walking along, and often across, an appealing brook at the heart of our town will be a joy and a boon.
2. Address the water of Concord in view of climate change. Warmer air holding more water vapor promises more severe flooding. I once paddled to Concord Lumber, and wonder how far I'll paddle in the future. When were flood zones calculated, and how accurate are they for our future? More severe weather events also mean prolonged droughts. Many wetlands and brooks dry out late summer and in droughts, probably especially where town wells pump groundwater (a lot for residents with sprinkler systems), and where residents with their own wells pump the groundwater too often maintaining green lawns. What happens in severe droughts when neighboring towns, or even Concord, run out of water supply? Working in town, and with surrounding towns, can surely head off an increase in flooded basements, flooded driveways, and malfunctioning septic systems, as well as the drying out and loss of our wetlands, streams, and associated biodiversity.
3. Protect land so that key native species can readily move across town. The rich protected lands of Concord are fundamental resources providing enviable water, wildlife, and walking. A few large areas such as Estabrook Woods support an array of forest-interior species scarce elsewhere, and thus of high importance. But, as a Google Earth image makes clear, Concord's land is fragmented by buildings, roads and other features. To survive or thrive, animals "need to" move. Think of amphibians/reptiles moving along soil. Establishing, and protecting, spatial patterns across our town that provide connectivity for wildlife in different directions is critical to maintaining valuable biodiversity in the face of both climate change and ongoing urbanization.
4. Mitigating Route 2, the giant bisector, is needed to remain one town. So many problems...a wide strip of traffic noise, a source of traffic clogging streets during the morning and afternoon rush-two-hours, the frequent accidents, too dangerous to walk or bike across...all familiar. Traffic noise is not only a health hazard but inhibits sensitive wildlife over wide areas. Road modifications have a long planning stage and often a short implementation phase. Transportation budgets are so large that compelling small projects may be readily funded and dovetailed in, like Concord's wildlife underpasses. A series of mitigation solutions for short sections of the highway probably produces results sooner. Progressively solving this giant splitting problem will be welcomed by drivers of the Concord-headache through traffic, and will happily stitch our town back together.