

Welcome to the Book Corner  
In this issue, Kate Coon,  
Affordable Housing Committee alternate member  
give her insights into

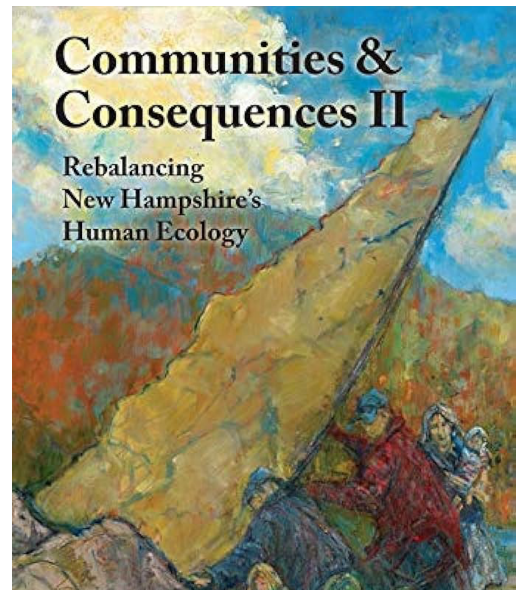
***Communities & Consequences II:  
Rebalancing New Hampshire's Human Ecology***

Peter Francese and Lorraine Stuart Merrill. 2020  
Peter E. Randall Publisher, Portsmouth NH

**Kate's Take**

*Communities and Consequences II* picks up where *Communities and Consequences* left off in 2008. From "The **Unbalancing** of New Hampshire's Human Ecology, & What We Can Do About It" (2008) to "**Rebalancing** New Hampshire's Human Ecology." (2020), problems of many decades in the making have perhaps reached a critical inflection point, inspiring collective action.

People of all ages and walks of life in communities across our state have begun to connect these dots. Workforce shortages, housing shortages, property taxes, education costs, the exodus of young people, and the influx of seniors are all connected. (p.30)



And so towns, cities, state and local governments, and active citizens are coming together, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes with acrimony and deep disagreement, to confront these issues. Francese and Merrill take a decidedly hopeful yet critical point of view. From their Conclusion:

The communities we admire and celebrate are traditional communities, both rural and urban, not only of mixed uses, but mixed incomes and mixed generations. We have more recently evolved housing patterns that are not like that, and we are now frustrated by some of the outcomes. (p.96)

So, what, they ask, can we do to rebalance our human ecology?

High costs for land and homes in New England are a challenge, but local zoning can be revisited to root out obstacles designed to limit development of workforce or affordable housing. Large lot-size minimums can be replaced with science-based lot-size-by-soil-type zoning. Zoning to promote mixed-use development can create desirable, walkable communities, and promote commercial tax-base growth along with denser and more varied residential construction. (p.98)

Chapters are devoted to the towns of Lancaster (population 3,241), Bradford (population 1,662), Pelham (population 14,473), Londonderry (population 26,543), and the Upper Valley's regional collaboration across New Hampshire and Vermont state lines. Peterborough's population is 6,497 (2022 Census estimate).

Lancaster: "Form-Based Codes Defined."

A form-based code is a land-development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. A form-based code is a regulation, not a mere guideline, adopted into city, town, or county law. A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulations. (p.48)

Source: Form-Based Codes Institute <https://formbasedcodes.org>

In 2009, the city of Dover became the first New Hampshire community to adopt a form-based code. In 2014, the town of Lancaster, as described in Chapter 3, voted by a two-to-one vote to adopt form-based code for its downtown revitalization. New Hampshire's Office of Strategic Initiatives reports that in 2018 six communities: Dover, Enfield, Lancaster, Milford, Portsmouth, and Stratham—"have gone a step further and created form-based codes for some or all of their community, which regulate the character and physical form of an area rather than specific uses." (p. 55)

The capital city of Concord continues to be working on Concord NEXT, its new Zoning Ordinance, founded in form-based, 'character-based', code development. (<https://www.concordnext.info/zoning-ordinance-draft-july-2022/>)

In 2018, voters in Peterborough rejected, by a nearly three-to-one margin, a proposed form-based code for the town.

Chapter 4 tells an inspiring story of young returnees to the town of Bradford literally digging in: farming, selling food, creating community and a regional food hub. Then "the two Mikes" (in their forties) bought the old inn building, and in 2018 Sweet Beet Market became their first tenant. Things grew from there, which is a great testament to how a town can embrace intergenerational partnerships and turn things around. Still,

As elsewhere in the state, housing is a major need—more diverse types and sizes of homes in good condition and affordable at varying incomes and life-style stages are still scarce.... Seniors should be able to stay in town, if they choose, and younger generations should be able to live and their families there as well. More apartments or cottage-size homes are needed. (p. 69)

Fast-growing Pelham (Chapter 5) decided in 2019 by a resounding 2/3 majority vote to be the first town or city in New Hampshire to stop any new age-restricted housing from being built. The Planning Board then turned to workforce housing as their top priority. Herein lies a cautionary tale, unfolding in the *Communities and Consequences II* documentary filmed after this book went to print. Major pushback to the proposed workforce housing ordinance ensued, leading to a big shake-up to the Planning Board in the town election. Says ousted former long-term Planning Director Jeff Gowan,

One example, you know, of things that are confusing, is the term “workforce housing.” That ought to be changed, the way it’s described. “More affordable housing available for all ages is really (it).” Now that’s a bit of a mouthful. It’s something everyone understands what is meant. ( minute 45:08)  
(<https://video.nhpbs.org/video/communities-and-consequences-ii-qg75ql/>)

Adds Sarah Wrightsman in the second episode of *Housing Fact or Fiction* (see below),

A generation ago we didn’t need the term ‘workforce housing’ because we had an abundance of housing that was affordable to a wide range of people.

*Communities and Consequences* ends on a positive note:

Everyone has a role in rebalancing our human ecology.... New Hampshire has a long tradition of motivated people in strong, inclusive communities, coming together and finding creative ways to accomplish astonishing things. (pps.98-99)

We invite you to stay current on *Communities and Consequences* by checking out these short, excellent Vimeos on *Housing Fact or Fiction*. They use data, facts, and real stories about local people to debunk myths about workforce and affordable housing.

Watch: *Who Lives in Workforce Housing?* (7:36 minutes)  
<https://www.communitiesandconsequences.org/videos/>

*What is Workforce Housing?* Shot in Peterborough! (4:15 minutes)  
<https://vimeo.com/875733954>