

**From:** [Michael Holt](#)  
**To:** [Regional Policy Plan Update](#); [Truro Representative](#); [Michael Holt](#)  
**Subject:** Comments on RPP  
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Dear Cape Cod Commission,

I'm a full time resident in Truro, a musician, and an activist interested in ecology, economy, culture, and local community-building. I've read two synopses of the RPP and attended your very informative presentation about it at the public hearing in Truro on October 17.

Firstly, I really appreciate your efforts to create dialogue with the public while drafting this plan. I also appreciate the strong focus on systems thinking, and the clear and well-organized structure – in both the plan itself and how it was explained to us during the hearing.

My comments are broad, applying to the visions and basic conceptualizations behind the plan.

### **Integration**

As I said in person at the hearing, I appreciate the effort to balance such things as functionality and character, or economic growth and ecological footprint. Still, I think it would be ideal to shoot for more than balance. The goal of balancing ecology and economy, for example, implies that those two things are intrinsically opposed. True, they may currently have separate interest groups advocating on their behalf. But if we look a little deeper, we see that they are actually very interdependent. Our economy relies, for example, on our fisheries, our tourist-attracting environment, the waste-absorbtion capacity of our water table, the storm surge-absorbtion capacity of our wetlands, and the natural beauty that allows us to remain healthy, functional members of society. Conversely, our ecosystems depend on us feeling economically prosperous enough to be able to afford to protect and restore them.

Rather than attempting to give our economy and environment an equivalent set of concessions, therefore, I think our goal should be finding solutions that help both at

the same time, and weeding out measures that help one at the other's expense. In an RPP, that would mainly mean avoiding development projects that fail to meet certain criteria, while approving and assisting those that do. For example, anything the CCC can do to incentivize green retrofits of buildings will help both our construction trade and the reduction of our CO2 footprint. Anything that incentivizes the use of local contractors will profit our economy while reducing the number of off-Cape, smog-emitting trucks on our roads.

### **Economic improvement**

To encourage this kind of win-win thinking, it would be helpful to find verbal frames that integrate as many goals as possible. Two terms I suggest are "economic improvement" and "green economy."

I suggest "economic improvement" in place of "growth." What I believe we actually want is not a bigger, but a *better* economy: *one that supports the livelihoods and wellbeing of all members of the Cape community – part time and full time, rich and poor, short-term and long-term.*

That is economic improvement. Economic growth has been shown in localities all over the world to be at best only a spotty way of achieving it, and at worst quite detrimental. It tends to feed debt, centralization, harmful boom-and-bust cycles, and income inequality. Our obsession with it has led to social disintegration, environmental neglect, and rampant short-term thinking.

Economic improvement is something everyone can get behind. It includes concepts like:

- Smart growth – expansion of elements of the economy that produce real benefits for all
- Conversion – helping workers and businesses retrain and retool so they aren't left behind as we encourage the growth of beneficial industries
- Economic justice – measures ensuring that prosperity does not exclude the poor, women, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, the elderly, etc.
- Localization – when more dollars stay on the Cape, we all benefit, yet in ways not shown by simple growth metrics.

How would the RPP change if, wherever "economic growth" appears in it, it were replaced by "economic improvement," as defined three paragraphs above? It might trigger some good, new insights.

### **Green economy**

Instead of the term "economy," I suggest "green economy." This phrase recognizes that the real Cape community – the one I think we actually want to benefit – includes all beings who live and come here, both human and nonhuman. It recognizes the deep interconnectedness between our economy and the ecological systems (both local and global) on which it depends.

I believe we want a system of livelihood that operates in harmony with our non-human neighbors for three reasons: 1. We love and care about them for their own sakes, just as we love and care about our human neighbors for their own sakes. 2. We depend on their wellbeing for our survival and prosperity. 3. We depend on their beauty for our sanity and quality of life.

I recommend exploring replacing the word "economy" with "green economy" wherever possible, and seeing what other changes that might spark in the plan.

I know some people bristle at the word "green." But a green economy isn't one that prioritizes nature over people. It's one that enriches people while protecting and restoring nature. Furthermore, I think we all know that it is the way of the future. Let the Cape be a leader rather than a follower in that inevitability.

### **Natural resources?**

Another problematic term is "natural resources." Its overuse reinforces the view that nature is a bunch of stuff that's there for us to take. "Conserving natural resources" encourages us to protect nature only in ways that are obviously beneficial to humans, ignoring the non-obvious and longer-term ways we rely on healthy ecosystems, and discounting our desire to protect nature for its own sake.

Again, I would suggest going through the plan, replacing "natural resources" with "nature," seeing what problems and assumptions that would reveal, and trying to fix them.

When "resources" must be used, it should be defined to include not only the things we take from nature, but nature's capacity to absorb our garbage, sewage, pollution, and greenhouse gases, before problems are caused for it, or for us. The atmosphere's ability to safely act as a repository for a certain amount of our CO2 emissions, for example, is certainly a valuable resource for us.

### **Trackability**

The plan's emphasis on trackable measures will encourage evidence-based analyses, and help us to feel good about goals achieved. At the same time, more important than measurement per se is what we choose to measure.

For example, one very trackable factor we should definitely be monitoring is the CO2 emissions of individuals, towns, sectors, businesses, and industries on the Cape. However, choosing to focus on emissions alone ignores another trackable factor, carbon *sequestration*, which, as new research shows, is very important in reducing climate change. Healthy ecosystems, particularly forests and wetlands, absorb large amounts of carbon. By protecting them, we can help prevent the situation from getting worse, and by incentivizing projects that actively restore them, we can actually help it get better. We can also incentivize new "**regenerative agriculture**" practices such as **management intensive rotational grazing** and **regenerative analog forestry**, that greatly improve land's carbon sequestration.

Furthermore, we must not prioritize trackable factors over things like character, beauty and wellbeing, that are important, yet not easily measured. A healthy economy does not just bring us quantifiable dollars, but also supports strong communities, culture, social cohesion, and fulfilling work. And a healthy environment does not just measurably sequester carbon, but also provides us with beauty and a sense of interconnectedness with all life.

Thanks very much for inviting my thoughts.

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