

Hanover, New Hampshire has built one of the more **formally structured, community-driven sustainability governance systems** in small-town New England. The city organizes its sustainability decision-making around **three major pillars**: (1) a Sustainability Master Plan with legal standing, (2) a cross-sector Advisory Committee guiding deliberations, and (3) integration of sustainability into core municipal planning functions.

Below is a structured breakdown of how Hanover organizes itself around sustainability decisions, grounded in the sources you requested.

1. Sustainability Master Plan as the Central Decision-Making Framework

Hanover adopted a **Sustainability Master Plan** on April 2, 2024. This plan is not a side document—it is the **primary policy basis for municipal decision-making**, created under New Hampshire’s master-planning statute (RSA 674:2).

Key features:

- Serves as the **guiding document** for all long-term town decisions.
- Establishes a **Vision Statement** and **sustainability principles** that all departments must align with.
- Integrates sustainability into **land use, housing, economic development, transportation, climate, health, and governance**.
- Provides a **10-year planning horizon** with explicit goals and policies.

This means sustainability is not treated as a standalone initiative—it is embedded into every planning and zoning decision.

2. Advisory Committee Structure

The Sustainability Master Plan was developed and is overseen by an **Advisory Committee composed of diverse community representatives**.

Composition includes:

- Residents

- Local business representatives
- Civic leaders
- Dartmouth College community members
- Stakeholders from environmental, housing, and transportation groups

Role of the Advisory Committee:

- Guides the planning process
- Ensures **broad and inclusive public engagement**
- Reviews draft policies
- Helps integrate community values into decision-making

This committee functions similarly to a resident advisory group—something directly relevant to your work in Sandpoint.

3. Planning Board as the Formal Decision-Making Body

The **Hanover Planning Board** formally adopted the Sustainability Master Plan and uses it as a **decision-making tool** for:

- Zoning changes
- Development approvals
- Transportation planning
- Housing policy
- Natural resource protection

The Planning Board is the **legal authority**, but the Advisory Committee and public engagement process shape the content and priorities.

4. Topic-Based Organization of Deliberations

Hanover organizes sustainability deliberations around **11 thematic chapters**, each with goals, policies, and implementation actions.

These include:

- **Future Land Use**
- **Expanding Housing Opportunity**
- **Inclusive Economic Resilience**
- **Character & Natural Resources**
- **Multi-Modal Transportation**
- **Downtown Vibrancy**
- **Climate Change**
- **Health & Well-Being**
- **Accountability & Collaboration**
- **Implementation**

Each topic area becomes a **decision lens**—any proposed project or policy is evaluated against these sustainability criteria.

5. Sustainable Hanover (Community-Facing Arm)

Hanover also maintains a public-facing sustainability initiative called **Sustainable Hanover**, which:

- Communicates progress
- Hosts workshops and events

- Engages residents in climate and energy initiatives
- Supports renewable energy goals (100% renewable electricity by 2030; renewable heating/transportation by 2050)

This creates a **feedback loop** between residents and municipal decision-makers.

6. Decision-Making Culture: Transparency, Collaboration, and Data

Across all sources, Hanover emphasizes:

- **Transparency** in planning
- **Collaboration** between government, residents, and institutions
- **Data-driven decision-making**
- **Equity and resilience** as core values
- **Long-term accountability** (Chapter 10 of the plan focuses on this explicitly)

This culture is as important as the formal structure.

Summary: How Hanover Organizes Sustainability Decisions

Governance Model

- **Planning Board** = formal authority
- **Advisory Committee** = community-driven guidance
- **Sustainable Hanover** = public engagement and implementation support

Decision Framework

- A legally recognized **Sustainability Master Plan** integrated into all municipal planning
- Topic-based chapters that structure deliberations

- Clear goals, policies, and implementation steps

Process

- Broad public engagement
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Sustainability embedded in every municipal decision

Comparative matrix of sustainability governance structures

City	Core governance body	Main plan / framework	Formal authority & placement	How deliberations are organized	Public engagement structure
Hanover, NH	Sustainable Hanover Committee + Planning Board	Sustainability Master Plan (2024)	Master Plan under NH RSA 674; guides all land-use and policy decisions	Topic-based chapters (land use, housing, climate, health, accountability); Planning Board uses plan as decision lens	Standing citizen committee (Sustainable Hanover), broad public comment on chapters, workshops, online feedback
Burlington, VT	Office of Sustainability / Climate staff + City Council	Climate Action Plan; Climate Emergency declaration	Council-adopted plan; integrated into city budgeting and departmental work programs	Organized around emissions sectors (buildings, transport, waste, industry); staff prepare options, Council decides	Formal stakeholder processes, community-based plan, ongoing reporting via Global Covenant of Mayors & CDP
Bozeman, MT	Sustainability / Climate Program within city + advisory board	Community Climate Plan / Sustainability Framework	Council-adopted policy; implemented via staff and departmental work plans	Sector-based working groups (energy, buildings, transportation, waste); advisory board reviews and recommends actions	Public workshops, online surveys, targeted stakeholder groups (business, university, NGOs)
Ashland, OR	Climate Policy Commission (citizen body) + city staff	Climate & Energy Action Plan (CEAP)	Council-adopted; Commission has formal advisory role on climate-related ordinances and budgets	CEAP organized into focus areas (buildings, energy, urban form, consumption); Commission deliberates and sends recommendations to Council	Regular commission meetings, subcommittees, public comment at meetings, project-specific engagement

Hood River, OR	Energy / Sustainability Council or task force + city administration	Energy / Climate Strategy (resolution-based)	Resolution and implementation plan; less “master-plan” and more programmatic	Focus on energy, resilience, and transportation; deliberations often tied to specific projects (e.g., EV, efficiency)	Ad-hoc committees, partner-driven engagement (utilities, nonprofits, county)
Typical NH small town model	Sustainability or Energy Committee (citizen) + Selectboard/ Council	Sustainability or Energy Chapter in Master Plan	Committee chartered by Selectboard; Master Plan chapter guides decisions but is advisory	Committee organizes work by topic (energy, waste, resilience) and brings proposals to Planning Board / Selectboard	Volunteer committee outreach, events, surveys, and hearings during Master Plan updates

Patterns you can borrow for Sandpoint

1. Two-tier structure: citizen body + formal authority

- **Citizen advisory body:** Sustainable Hanover Committee, Climate Policy Commission (Ashland), Energy/Sustainability Committees in NH towns. They:
 - **Frame issues**, draft recommendations, and host public conversations.
 - Provide continuity and subject-matter focus that councils often can’t sustain.
- **Formal decision body:** Planning Board or City Council:
 - Adopts plans, ordinances, budgets.
 - Uses the sustainability plan as a **decision filter**, not just a feel-good document.

For Sandpoint, that’s essentially what you already are—your question is how to sharpen that role.

2. Plan as a decision lens, not a brochure

- Hanover’s Sustainability Master Plan is legally a **Master Plan**, so every land-use or zoning decision is supposed to be consistent with it.
- Burlington’s Climate Action Plan is tied to **net-zero targets** and reporting frameworks (Global Covenant of Mayors, CDP), which forces departments to treat it as a performance contract, not a pamphlet.

For Sandpoint, you could push for: **“Any major policy, capital project, or land-use decision must include a short ‘Sustainability Consistency Statement’ referencing the plan.”**

3. Topic-based or sector-based deliberation

Cities tend to pick one of two organizing logics:

- **Place/people oriented (Hanover):** chapters like land use, housing, health, accountability.
- **Sector/emissions oriented (Burlington, Bozeman, Ashland):** buildings, transport, waste, energy, consumption.

For your committee, that translates into how you structure agendas and subgroups:

- **Option A (Hanover-style):** Standing subcommittees on:
 - Land use & housing
 - Transportation & access
 - Climate & resilience
 - Community well-being & equity
- **Option B (climate-sector style):**
 - Buildings & energy
 - Mobility

- Materials & waste
- Natural systems & resilience

Either way, it gives your deliberations a **repeatable structure** instead of one-off topics.

4. Built-in accountability

- Hanover has an explicit **“Accountability & Collaboration”** chapter—naming who tracks progress, how often, and with what metrics.
- Burlington reports through external frameworks (Global Covenant of Mayors, CDP), which forces regular data updates and public transparency.

For Sandpoint, you might propose:

- **Annual Sustainability Report to Council**, authored jointly by staff and the advisory committee.
- A short **dashboard**: 8–10 indicators (GHG, mode share, tree canopy, housing near transit, etc.).

5. Engagement as an ongoing loop, not a one-time workshop

Across these cities, the pattern is:

- **Plan development phase**: heavy workshops, surveys, focus groups.
- **Implementation phase**: standing committees (Sustainable Hanover, Climate Policy Commission) keep the conversation alive and adjust course.

For Sandpoint, your committee could explicitly claim this role: **“We are the standing public forum where sustainability trade-offs are surfaced before Council has to vote.”**