

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. MASTER PLANNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire RSA 674:2, *Master Plan; Purpose and Description*, states: "The purpose of the master plan is to set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning board, to aid the board in designing ordinances that result in preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture of New Hampshire, and to guide the board in the performance of its other duties in a manner that achieves the principles of smart growth, sound planning, and wise resource protection."

The statute affirms that, "The master plan shall be a public record subject to the provisions of RSA 91-A, *Access To Public Records and Meetings*. The master plan shall include, at a minimum, the following required sections:

- (a) A **vision section** that serves to direct the other sections of the plan. This section shall contain a set of statements, which articulate the desires of the citizens affected by the master plan, not only for their locality but also for the region and the whole state. It shall contain a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision.
- (b) A **land use section** upon which all the following sections shall be based. This section shall translate the vision statements into physical terms. Based on a study of **population, economic activity, and natural, historic, and cultural resources**, it shall show existing conditions and the proposed location, extent, and intensity of future land use."

The master plan may also include the following sections:

- (a) A transportation section,
- (b) A community facilities section,
- (c) An economic development section,
- (d) A natural resources section,
- (e) A natural hazards section,
- (f) A recreation section,
- (g) A section which identifies cultural and historic resources,
- (h) A regional concern section,
- (i) A neighborhood plan section,
- (j) A community design section,
- (k) A housing section, and
- (l) An implementation section.

B. LITCHFIELD'S MASTER PLAN

1. Vision

The Overall Goals from the 1991 Town of Litchfield Master Plan are still appropriate and properly frame the VISION for the Town. These remain as Overall Goals in the 2002 Master Plan:

- Identify, protect and enhance the principal natural and man-made features of the Town which, collectively, define Litchfield's physical character and cultural heritage, and which constitute the basis for future planning actions.
- Direct change and promote development consistent with community goals and within the constraints of natural and built environment.
- Foster and enhance a sense of community spirit in Litchfield.

Litchfield's rural and agricultural history continues today, despite being located in close proximity to the states two largest cities, Manchester and Nashua. This presents a challenge as Litchfield works to protect and preserve its character. Today's decisions go beyond local, regional and state boundaries. Vision, innovative planning, protection of the land, environment and encouraging feedback from residents are important in realizing the vision and goals of the master plan.

Expressing a town's vision through the voting process and citizen interaction with the planning board is very difficult. Although consensus is difficult to achieve, the following statements closely reflect stated goals and seems to capture a sense of the vision for Litchfield:

- Maintain balance in community development of residential, agricultural and commercial land. This includes protection of structures and lands of historical importance.
- Preserve forest blocks, fields, farmland and provide opportunity for a variety of passive and active conservation and recreational uses.
- Maintain, enhance and encourage traditional Town Center development.
- Provide adequate protection of individual property rights, while creating the necessary regulation to protect our environment, protect citizens from harm and provide the necessary infrastructure to maintain the desired quality of life for Litchfield's residents.
- Control and stabilize taxes required for schools and Town government through responsible budgeting, which utilizes impact fees and control of capital expenditures.
- Provide adequate and diverse housing to meet the needs of residents, while maintaining the character of the Town. This includes adequate spacing, appropriate scale and resonable opportunity within the Town and region for affordable and adequate housing stock for our children and those on fixed incomes.
- Maintain and enhance the quality of education in local schools through sound planning and adequate facilities.
- Provide safe and adequate access to public roadways and public transportation alternatives. Properly plan for the Airport Access Road construction anticipated to the north and the Circumferential Highway that will eventually be built to the south.

The Introduction, Goals and Objectives chapter provides further guidance to the Planning Board.

2. Content

The 2002 Master Plan includes the following chapters:

- Introduction, Goals and Objectives,
- Population and Housing,
- Natural Resources,

- Community Facilities,
- Transportation,
- Economic Development,
- Historic Resources, and
- Land Use.

This update has progressed over three years. As a result, some data are more current than others. Additionally, studies, reports and 2000 Census data have been released throughout the master plan process. Due to timing of this update, some references are made to both the 1990 and 2000 Census and various reports in between. The next update will fall before the 2010 Census, providing for more consistent and uniform data, however the Census data will be dated. Despite delays, the 2002 Master Plan brings data much more up to date than the 1991 plan which refer back to 1980 census data.

3. Progress

The following are chapters found in both the 1991 Master Plan and the 2002 Master Plan update. Goals, accomplishments and some outstanding objectives are listed below. This points out many common goals and the process of clarifying some goals in subsequent master plan updates.

a. Population and Housing

Rapid growth has expanded Litchfield's population from 4,150 residents in 1980 to 7,360 residents in 2000. Goals for this chapter in the 1991 Master Plan included: provide for moderate growth in order to maintain the Town's ability to plan and provide the necessary services and facilities; provide for the changing needs of Litchfield's population due to demographic changes; and accommodate a fair share of regional growth.

The Town has been successful in managing this growth over the past decade. The 2002 Master Plan reaffirms the goals and expands upon their theme. An additional goal is to promote high quality residential development with opportunities for people of all income ranges and that does not have a negative financial impact on the Town.

b. Natural Resources

Goals for this chapter in the 1991 Master Plan include: protection of natural resources to provide a safe and attractive community into the future; maintaining a pollution free environment; and protection of the Town's water supply.

The Town has been successful in land acquisitions and receiving land gifts. Litchfield is on the right path to protect its natural resources. Enhanced Wetlands buffers and setbacks have strengthened this effort. Further efforts to protect aquifers and source waters are important for future generations. A renewal of the Farmland Committee and contact with Litchfield's congressional delegation are all efforts to move forward in the preservation of these dwindling natural resources. Goals for the 2002 Master Plan include: preservation of old growth forests and associated habitats; preservation of agricultural lands and promote maintaining agricultural soils; establish benchmarks to measure the state of the environment and monitor change over time; and promotion of open space development to preserve land.

c. Community Facilities

Goals for the 1991 Master Plan include: provide cost effective, centrally located facilities consistent with demand and the Town's ability to pay; encourage developer to pay their fare

share of improvements required as a result of new development; encourage underground utilities; extension of sewer and gas lines; and greater public access to the Merrimack River.

The enactment of impact fees has placed the proportional burden of facilities costs on developer. Underground utilities are now mandatory. The Planning Board may study sewer and gas in the commercial district. A new Town Hall and police complex was constructed, with available land to develop a new or second center. Goals for the 2002 Master Plan include: further access to the Merrimack River; capital investments that will result in savings over the long term; expansion of Town parks and recreational facilities; and maintaining a high level of quality in Town services.

d. Transportation

Goals for the 1991 Master Plan include: working with the State to maintain and improve their network of roads that affect Litchfield; encourage development that promotes safe and effective flow of traffic; and develop the proper hierarchy of streets and roads needed to service both Town and through traffic.

- Continued development of Albuquerque Avenue, State improvements on NH 3A, future highways to the north and south of Litchfield and a roadway maintenance plan all support these goals. Use of modern techniques, such as access management with help in controlling traffic flows in and out of commercial and residential sites. Goals for the 2002 Master Plan include: promoting preservation of the rural character of NH 3A; preserve road capacity through coordinated transportation and land planning; and expansion of bicycle and pedestrian networks on existing and new roadways.

e. Economic Development

Goals for the 1991 Master Plan include: encouragement of appropriate commercial development and uses on well planned sites, which provide a variety of employment options for residents and promote uses that will strengthen the Town's economic base.

The northern and southern commercial districts are ready for development. Further refining through potential extension of sewer and gas would encourage development. Commercial activity has taken place to the north with an approved office/warehouse complex and mini-storage facility. As the Airport Access Road and Circumferential Highway become reality, the potential for rapid development exists. Smart Growth techniques can aid in managing growth in a positive manner. Goals for the 2002 Master Plan include: promoting balance in economic, social and environmental needs; use of innovative technologies in future economic development activities; promote industries that broaden the tax base and provide ample job opportunities and discouraging strip style development through design standards that support the desired development.

f. Historic Resources

Goals for the 1991 Master Plan include: preserve, protect and enhance historic buildings, structures, sites and areas; and preserve and enhance the open, rural character of the land as well as its natural, historic and scenic resources.

Current subdivision and site plan regulations have provisions for identifying historically significant features or structures during the application process. An inventory of historic structures was performed and documented and has been utilized in plan review. Goals for the 2002 Master Plan include the above-mentioned goals and the following new goals: promote awareness and understanding of the various techniques available to achieve historic

resource preservation at the private, local, state and federal levels, to insure that Litchfield retains its historic assets; promote preservation of the historical and visual character of the community along the main transportation corridors and throughout the community.

g. Land Use

Land use is the section on which all others shall be based. The importance of land use practices is demonstrated by the State through its enabling statutes and by local legislative bodies through adoption of ordinances and regulations. Goals for the 1991 Master Plan include:

- Promote well balanced land use patterns capable of meeting present and future community needs in an efficient , environmentally sound, economical, equitable and aesthetically pleasing manner.
- Promote land use patterns based on developmental limitations imposed by prominent natural and man-made facilities of the community.
- Provide for a diversity of zoning districts to meet the community's need to broaden the tax base while retaining the rural/residential character of Litchfield.
- Provide a transition buffer between incompatible land uses.
- Encourage the preservation of active agricultural lands.
- Discourage "strip development."
- Discourage scattered or premature development.

The 1991 and 2002 Master Plan goals listed in full above and below, respectively provide an opportunity for comparison of the vision for Litchfield over time. There are many common goals demonstrating continued agreement on the direction that Litchfield should take. Goals for the 2002 Master Plan include:

- Promote well balanced land use patterns capable of meeting present and future community needs in an efficient , environmentally sound, economical, equitable and aesthetically pleasing manner.
- Encourage open space preservation and conservation zoning.
- Protect, enhance and promote public spaces, including commons, trail networks and parks.
- Promote land use patterns based on prominent natural and man-made facilities of the community.
- Encourage preservation of large tracts of land, forest blocks and wetland (riparian) corridors through innovative land use controls.
- Encourage development that is in keeping with local character.
- Provide for a diversity of zoning districts to meet the community's need to broaden the tax base while retaining the rural/residential character of Litchfield.
- Pursue proactive commercial site plan design standards in advance of proposed major highway projects being completed.
- Provide for a transition buffer between incompatible land uses.

- Encourage the preservation of agricultural lands, utilizing both traditional and innovative strategies.
- Discourage “strip development” and scattered or premature development.
- Continued strategic land acquisitions and protective easements by the Town.

Protecting, preserving our land and maintaining community character are difficult to balance with personal property rights. The Town’s responsibility to pass on to the next generation an affordable and vibrant community with appropriate land use, preservation of community character and is free from environmental degradation will require continued adjustment and review in order to maintain balance.

While this a tool for planning and support document for land use planning and regulation, all residents should become familiar with this document. Through understanding the goals, objectives and the data supporting the Master Plans conclusions and citizen input, a document representative of Litchfield residents vision for the future will follow.

