

## 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 utility and public service section,
- (h) A section which identifies cultural and historic resources,
- (i) A regional concern section,
- (j) A neighborhood plan section,
- (k) A community design section,
- (l) A housing section,
- (m) An implementation section,
- (n) An energy section, and
- (o) A coastal management section.

## **B. LITCHFIELD'S MASTER PLAN**

The 2017 Master Plan update is the product of several years of data collection, analysis, review and public input. This chapter provides an overview of the plan and a series of goals and objectives for each plan topic. The goals and objectives were developed by the Planning Board from the previous Master Plan and careful analysis of the strengths, limitations and goals of the community. The Master Plan is designed to guide growth and development in Litchfield over the next ten to twenty year period. However, changing conditions will require an update of the Plan's basic components at five year intervals.

### **I. Purpose**



Prepared in accordance with New Hampshire RSA 674:1 through 674:4, the 2017 Litchfield Master Plan is a policy statement intended to guide local land use regulation, transportation improvements, environmental protection and capital improvements for the 2017 to 2030 period. The Plan is also a resource for Litchfield citizens, private business and for state and regional officials. The chapter topics include: 1) Population and Housing; 2) Natural Resources; 3) Community Facilities; 4) Transportation; 5) Economic Development; 6) Historic Resources and 7) Land Use. Each chapter contains data and analysis, information from a variety of sources presented in tables, illustrations or maps, and specific policy recommendations.

As a political entity, the Town of Litchfield does not exist in isolation, and must therefore consider the external forces, which influence the community. Wherever possible, the information presented for Litchfield in the document is done so within the context of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission region, Hillsborough County, the State of New Hampshire and other areas or regions as appropriate. The Master Plan represents a consensus of the community in addressing the issues and concerns, which confront Litchfield today and are anticipated to do so in the future. This document is intended to guide Litchfield in logical and thoughtful growth with respect for and preservation of it's past while providing the necessary vision and planning for future growth and prosperity. The 2017 Master Plan represents the final result of the Town's ongoing long-term planning efforts.

### **2. Content**

The Master Plan includes the following chapters:

- Vision, Goals and Implementation (2017),
- Population and Housing (2017),
- Natural Resources (2002),
- Community Facilities (2002),
- Transportation (2002),
- Economic Development (2002),
- Historic Resources (2002), and
- Land Use (2017).

Chapters updated in 2017 progressed over three years and the Planning Board intends to revise the remaining chapters on an ongoing basis. As a result, some data are more current than others. Additionally, studies, reports and Census data have been released throughout the master plan process. Due to timing of this update, some references are made to both the 2000 and 2010 decennial Census and various releases of the American Community Survey. Despite delays, the 2017 updates and 2002 Master Plan brings data much more up to date.

### **3. Progress**

The following are chapters found in both the 1991, 2002 Master Plans and the 2017 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.

#### **Population and Housing**

Rapid growth 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 was successful in managing this growth during the 1990s. The 2002 Master Plan reaffirmed those goals and expanded upon their theme. An additional goal was 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.

As of 2017, growth in Litchfield and across the region has significantly slowed. However, the population is still slowly increasing, and has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest projected growth rate in the region. Litchfield is also one of the youngest communities in the region and is home to many families. As a result, housing stock is predominantly single family detached homes. There are some rental units and newly developing multifamily units, but availability is low. Litchfield's family income is high compared to the region and has more population that falls under higher income brackets compared to the region as well. Overall, housing is relatively affordable in Litchfield compared to residents' income.

Future updates to this chapter look at the impacts of a slowing economy and stable or limited population growth. Goals for this chapter include: examining local issues such as housing affordability and community services as well as maintaining the current mix of development of housing affordable to residents with moderate and low incomes; evaluate regulatory methods and incentives to stimulate production of housing that is affordable, of good quality and does not detract from the community's rural character; maintain the rural/agricultural character of the residential community; and to promote non-motorized connections in new developments and re-developments to connect residential areas to recreation and community amenities.

#### **Natural Resources**

Goals for this chapter in the 1991 Master Plan included: 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 included: 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.

### **Community Facilities**

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

### **Transportation**

Goals for the 1991 Master Plan included: 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 included: 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.

### **Economic Development**

Goals for the 1991 Master Plan included: 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. The now complete Airport Access Road and long term plans for Circumferential Highway or an additional bridge crossing present the potential for rapid development. Smart Growth techniques can aid in managing growth in a positive manner. Goals for the 2002 Master Plan included: 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.

### **Historic Resources**

Goals for the 1991 Master Plan included: 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 included 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.

## **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 2002 Master Plan included:

- Promote well balanced land use patterns capable of meeting present and future community needs in an efficient , environmentally sound, economical, equitable and asthetically 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 prominant 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.

As of 2017, the lull of development over the past 10 years allowed the Planning Board to make significant progress in implementing the 2002 master plan land use recommendations. Many of the same goals still hold true today including the desire to maintain the agriultural character and to balance natural resource protection with future growth and development. Recommendations for future land use in the 2017 Master Plan include:

- Advance wellhead protection
- Provide a strategy for adopting a town center zoning district within the next three to eight years.
- Set aside a small budget to make low cost, highly-visible improvements to the town.

- Encourage the institution of transfer of development rights or lot size averaging to help achieve farmland preservation and provide incentive mechanisms necessary to help establish market conditions that will result in the development of village-scale mixed use style development within limited areas of the community.
- Have a dialogue with the area communities, the NRPC, the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission, State officials and other stakeholders to establish regional-level collaboration to achieve common goals relative to growth and open space protection and mitigate impacts on neighbors.
- Improve communications with other local boards and regional organizations.
- Research incentives for creating through connections and improving road connectivity.
- Research opportunities to rethink lot sizes, enable smaller lots, and ensure starter sized homes are more feasible.
- Consider form-based zoning codes in order to shift the emphasis from what can't be done to what development should look like and fit into its environs.
- Consider joining or working with a regional land trust to prioritize land conservation efforts and support easement monitoring.
- Identify locations to improve access to rivers and streams for fishing, boating and swimming.
- Work with the Board of Selectmen and CIP Committee to identify opportunities to meet local capital facility needs including: a new Town Library and expanded fire station(s).
- Develop multi-family design guidelines to be incorporated into the Site Plan Review Regulations.
- Identify ways to improve the pedestrian environment in commercially zoned nodes.
- Similarly, creating a small village commercial node near the town offices would create another destination point for residents that live off of Albuquerque and those that regularly walk or bike along the trail.
- Consider extending sidewalks to connect the schools to Albuquerque as well – along Pinecrest, between McElwain Drive and Albuquerque, and other strategic locations as appropriate.
- Pursue grant opportunities and meet with the Conservation Commission to establish accessible public access to the Merrimack River including a boat launch.

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.

## **C. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The current Litchfield Planning Board would like extend their appreciation to the current and former Board members who contributed both significant time and knowledge in developing this Plan. The Board's appreciation also goes to Nashua Regional Planning Commission for their guidance and experience in the development of this Master Plan update. Finally, our appreciation to our elected officials and citizens of Litchfield that participated both directly and indirectly on the 2017 Master Plan.