TOWN OF WILTON MASTER PLAN

CHAPTER VII: Community and Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 30 years the Nashua area developed as a regional economic hub in Southern New Hampshire and New England. Two defining features of the regional economy are the large manufacturing and retail bases. Growth of the Nashua region in recent decades is in many ways a reflection of a productive and highly trained workforce. Regional growth is also tied to the development occurring around greater Boston. The result has been that employment levels have increased dramatically in many communities within the region for much of the past three decades.

As the most western of the 12 municipalities in the NRPC planning region, Wilton developed as a mill and farming town somewhat independent of the urban center in Nashua. In the civil war era Wilton was a regional employment center with an employment base in textile industries. During the 1850s to 1900s Wilton had the third largest municipal population in the Nashua region next to Milford and Nashua. The economy during this period consisted of manufacturing firms and farms. Wilton dairy farms used local rail to ship products to markets as far away as Boston; however, by the 1960s farming was on the decline due to factors such as high taxes, increased land development pressure, and poor market prices. Also, after World War II many Wilton manufacturing industries closed as a result of social and market changes. Many businesses supported by manufacturing industries also closed.

Today Wilton is one of the smallest municipalities in the region in terms of the resident population. The local economy is more integrated into that of the rest of the region, although it is somewhat isolated from the highest concentrations of employment and other economic activities, partially as a function of distance. But Wilton is not strictly a bedroom community. In 1996 Wilton ranked 7th in the region in terms of total number of local jobs. Although economic change has occurred in Wilton, a manufacturing base is still evident today despite the fact that 90 percent of the region's jobs are located in Merrimack, Hudson, and Nashua. With a good quality of life and large amounts of undeveloped land, it is reasonable to assume that regional growth will influence future economic growth in Wilton.

As discussed in the Community Profile chapter of this Master Plan, key characteristics of Wilton population and housing include:

- Relatively slow population growth;
- Moderate income levels;
- Low to moderately priced housing; and
- Relatively slow growth in housing supply.

This chapter elaborates on the Community Profile to define spatial and fiscal workforce characteristics, the economic base and the overall business environment in Wilton.

CHARACTER OF THE WORKFORCE & PRODUCTIVITY

A traditional method of tracking employment and productivity is according to Standard Industry Classification (SIC) codes defined by the US Department of Labor. One source of New Hampshire employment information collected by SIC for geographic places is NH Division of Employment Security (hereafter NHES) statistics for 'covered' employment and wages. This represents data gathered for employers who participate in the federal unemployment compensation insurance program.

Two slightly different definitions are used to describe aggregate demographic trends underway in greater Nashua. The Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) Region constitutes Wilton and

10 other municipalities grouped around Nashua: Amherst, Brookline, Hollis, Hudson, Litchfield, Lyndeborough, Merrimack, Milford, Mont Vernon, and Pelham. The US Census includes most of the NRPC region within the Nashua Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (hereafter PMSA). The exception is Pelham, which is in the Lowell MA-NH PMSA. In addition, the Nashua PMSA includes New Ipswich and Mason. Therefore, when Nashua PMSA data are presented, it is slightly different than aggregate data presented for the NRPC region.

Table VII-1 compares jobs by economic sub-sector in the Nashua PMSA to the state. The data presented for the PMSA includes only the municipalities within New Hampshire. It shows that there were at least 541,000 private industry and government jobs in the State in 1996. The 86,000 jobs in the Nashua PMSA represent 16 percent of all New Hampshire employment. These figures for private industry and government jobs do not include self-employed persons.

TABLE VII-1
TOTAL EMPLOYMENT IN INDUSTRIAL SECTORS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE & THE NASHUA REGION
GROUPED BY MAIN SIC SECTORS – 1996

Standard Industrial Class (SIC) Sector	*SIC Code Range*	*NRPC Region Jobs*	%	*NH Jobs*	%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries & mining	0100-1400	667	1	4,923	1
Construction	1500-1700	2,741	3	20,221	4
Manufacturing – nondurable goods	1800-2200	20,788	24	32,743	6
Manufacturing – durable goods	2300-3900	6,200	7	71,539	13
Transportation, commun. & public utils	4000-4900	2,159	3	19,127	4
Wholesale trade	5000-5100	3,726	4	26,695	5
Retail trade	5200-5900	18,166	21	116,258	21
Finance, insurance, and real estate	6000-6700	3,300	4	27,961	5
Services	7000-9900	20,919	24	150,405	28
Public administration	9900	7,469	9	71,281	13
Total Number of Jobs		**86,185**	**100**	**541,153**	**100**

Source: 1996 Profile of NH and Its 18 Labor Market Area (NHES, 1998).

The ten economic sectors identified in the table represent the most common way of classifying the main types of economic activity based on aggregate business characteristics. Most (92 percent) of the 86,000 Nashua Region jobs were in private industries (NHES, 1998). The largest sector of employment in Nashua in 1996 was in 'Services' and 'Retail Trade' (combined 39,085 jobs or 45 percent of all jobs in the PMSA) followed by a combination of durable and non-durable goods manufacturing (26,988 jobs or 31 percent of all jobs in the PMSA). Together these four sectors account for more than 75% of all employment in the region.

FIGURE VII-1

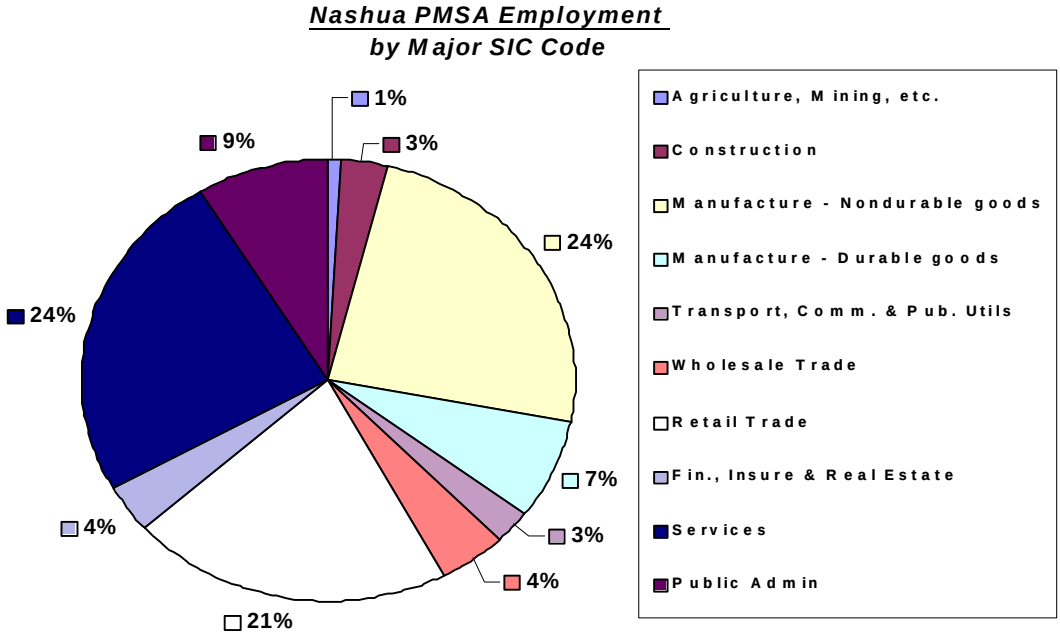

Figure VII-1 shows the percentage distribution of jobs by SIC code in the Nashua PMSA. The Nashua region which represents 15 percent of New Hampshire population accounts for more than one fourth of all manufacturing jobs statewide, including more than 1/3 of all state industrial and commercial machinery and manufacturing jobs and half of statewide employment in instrument manufacturing (NHES, 1998). Relatively high wage rates are often associated with this manufacturing and spending on goods and services by manufacturing firms typically support a high proportion of service firms in the region. Durable goods production jobs are also often high-tech and typically involve a skilled labor force. Conversely, one negative aspect of many jobs in the service and retail sectors is the low prevailing wage rates associated with certain occupations.

For comparison, five years earlier in 1991 there were 81,500 jobs in the Nashua area labor market (NHES, 1993). At that point, manufacturing employment accounted for 29,000 jobs (36 percent), Trade accounted for 19,500 jobs (24 percent), and Services accounted for 17,500 jobs (21 percent). Together these three sectors accounted for 80% of all employment in the ten major SIC sectors. In the five years 1991 to 1996 there was regional job growth (5 percent), despite residual effects of the early nineties recession; however, some (2,000) jobs were lost in manufacturing.

Despite the manufacturing job losses during the period 1991 to 1996, the largest part of all manufacturing jobs retained was in the durable goods sector. These are goods produced with a useful life of three years or more. Examples may be a refrigerator or a calibration device. Nationwide there is a historical trend demonstrating a decline in the manufacturing sectors. While that trend is also evident in the Nashua region, the manufacturing sector in the region is apparently somewhat more versatile than that of the State and Nation in retaining and possibly creating jobs.

Largest Employers in the Region

Table XIX shows the 15 largest employers in the planning region in terms of number of employees. The more than 20,000 employees of these organizations represent a workforce employed in a variety of sectors, but concentrated around manufacturing of electronics such as computer parts and

precision instruments. These employers represent nearly a quarter of the total employed workforce in the region.

TABLE VII-2
NASHUA REGION LARGEST EMPLOYERS
PUBLIC & PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS IN 1996[1]

	Firm Name	*Employs*	*Product or Service*
1.	Compaq Corporation	5,069	Computers and systems
2.	Sanders- A Lockeed Martin Co.	4,300	Electronic systems and components
3.	Fidelity Investments[1]	1,688	Investment services
4.	Nashua School District	1,500	Education
5.	Southern NH regional Med. Center	1,400	Health care
6.	Teradyne Connection Systems, Inc.	1,100	Circuit Bd test/connection sys.
7.	St. Joseph Healthcare	1,055	Health care
8.	Oxford Health Plans	900	Health plan provider
9.	City of Nashua	750	Municipality
10.	Hitchiner Manufacturing Corp.	715	Investment casting
11.	Fleet Bank – NH	697	Financial Services
12.	Nashua Corp.	677	Business materials manufacture
13.	Lockeed Martin Commercial Electronics	611	Elec.equip contract manufacture
14.	Merrimack School District	600	Education
15.	Kollsman, Inc.	540	Avionics electro-optical
	TOTAL	**22,252**	

Source: Greater Nashua Chamber of Comm, 1996; Fidelity Investments, 1999.

Note 1: Data for 1996 is the most recent figures located. Fidelity is not listed among larger employers in 1996. June 1999 employment is listed as 2,338 by the Fidelity public relations. Fidelity was beginning Merrimack operations in 1996 and expanded facilities with 650 new expected employees in 1997 (PSNH, 1998). Fidelity figures are not directly comparable with other firms listed for 1996. It is likely that employment levels changed at other firms since 1996; however, more up to date information on total employment for the NRPC region is not available.

It was noted in the 1991 Mount Auburn Associates study Nashua at the Crossroads: A Strategic Plan for the Future that much of the regional job growth in the early 1980s was attributed to two firms – Sanders (now Lockheed-Martin) and Digital Equipment (now Compaq Corporation). That study noted that these firms have a significant influence on the regional economy. Nearly a decade later these firms continued as the largest area employers, although both were involved in mergers of multinational corporations headquartered outside of the region.

One reason for focussing on the economic status of large employers is that these firms are likely to demonstrate many links with other area businesses. The hiring and fiscal practices of these firms may have a noticeable impact on the regional economy, such as labor supply and demand. Similarly, clusters of other businesses may arise in activities that complement or are related to the industries that the largest firms concentrate in. Also, other businesses may be sustained by providing goods and services to these very large firms.

Wilton Economic Base

The Wilton economy is best characterized as a mixture of manufacturing, service, retail and resource-based businesses. Service, retail and professional businesses are concentrated in the downtown and to a lesser extent along Route 101. Manufacturing businesses are in the Downtown, in old mill centers that evolved around abundant hydropower and in low-density industrial zones established within the last 40 years. Resource extraction, such as forestry, gravel excavation, and limited farming, such as in orchards and nurseries, occurs throughout the community.

The following sections do not present the full picture because there appears to be economic activity in Wilton that is not captured in the aggregate statistics. For example, many residents appear to

have ultra-small home-based business, sometimes informally organized, or perform second jobs, such as in services, construction trades, or craft production. These economic activities may not be identified within the more formal economic monitoring detailed below; yet, these do appear to represent a significant part of the local economy.

Firm Types and Firm Sizes

The NHES also provides information on 'Covered Employment and Wages' broken down by community. In 1996 there was an average of 1,835 total private and public sector jobs in Wilton. This represents two percent of the 86,000 jobs in the region and is comparable to the approximately two percent of regional residential population that lives within the community.

At the municipal reporting level in the NHES program, there are often fewer than three firms reporting within a specific SIC code. Data in these instances is not public in order to keep the wage information for individual firms confidential. Table VII-3 shows examples of common business in Wilton; however, many local firms, including some of the largest and most influential, are not displayed for reasons of business confidentiality. Generally, it shows that a subset of medium sized Wilton businesses are engaged in retail, professional services, and manufacturing.

TABLE VII-3
MAJOR INDUSTRIES IN WILTON BY SIC CODE

Industry Title	*SIC Code*	*# of Local Firms*	*# of Employees*
Business Services	7300	8	269
Industrial Machinery and Equipment	3500	6	78
Educational Services	8200	3	71
Wholesale Trade – Nondurable Goods	5100	3	46
Social Services	8300	6	37
Miscellaneous Retail	5900	4	32
Food Stores	5400	4	31
Eating and Drinking Places	5800	3	16
Engineering / Accounting / Research Services	8700	4	15
Special Trade Contractors	1700	5	13
Subtotal	**-**	**46**	**603**

Source: NHES – 1996 Covered Wages.

Table VII-4 compares Wilton employment to that of the City of Nashua, the PMSA and the County. For private sector jobs the information is isolated for manufacturing versus non-manufacturing jobs. There are a number of reasons why the manufacturing sector is monitored separately: it often has high wage rates; there are high proportions of manufacturing employment in New Hampshire; there has been a history of transition in the sector; and manufacturing firms often have high income and employment multipliers. This last item means that spending and employment practices of manufacturing business often have disproportionate impacts on community economies. Altogether in Wilton in 1996 there were 23 manufacturing firms and 84 other private businesses that participated in the NHES program. Table VII-4 shows the 542 employees (30 percent of the Wilton-based workforce) employed in manufacturing industries. This is about the same level of manufacturing as the rest of the Nashua region.

TABLE VII-4
PRIVATE AND PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT IN WILTON AND LARGER REGIONS, 1996

Place	*Manufacturing*	*%*	*All Other Private*	*%*	*Government*	*%*	*Total*
Wilton	542	30	784	43	508	28	1,835
City of Nashua	11,808	24	33,195	68	3,779	8	48,781
PMSA	26,988	31	51,728	60	7,469	9	86,185
Hillsbor. Co.	40,304	23	116,223	67	6,980	4	173,792

Source: 1996 NH Counties, Towns & Places – Employment & Wage Data (NHES, 1998).

A major difference between Wilton employment and regional employment is the low proportion of private sector non-manufacturing jobs. There is a higher proportion of public sector (government) jobs located in Wilton. While there are many retail and professional businesses in Wilton, as a group in Wilton these firms are often small in size and represent a small part of all local jobs. An example of one of the local public sector organization is Wilton-Lyndeborough Cooperative High School.

Table VII-5 shows the five largest employers in 1998 as cited in the Town Main Street Program grant application. The 714 employees covered by the largest firms represents 40 percent of all Wilton employment. It is likely that many Wilton residents occupy positions within these organizations.

TABLE VII-5
WILTON NH LARGEST EMPLOYERS
PUBLIC & PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS IN 1998[1]

	Firm Name	Employees	Product or Service
1	PVA-EPVA, Inc.[1]	309	Greeting cards/address labels
2	Label Art	225	Pressure sensitive labels
3	Bur-bak Machine	80	Injection molding
4	Wilton-Lyndeb. Jr./Sr. High School	50	Education
5	Chalet Suisse	50	Hotel lodging firm headquarters
	Total	714	

Source: Wilton Main Street Association Grant Application (April 1998).

[1]The figure for this firm is 1999.

The downtown is a geographic and economic center of Wilton. In the current four block Main Street target area there are 36 businesses employing nearly 100 persons. This includes retail, service and professional businesses in addition to the Town Hall Theatre, post office and local government. In the commercial and industrial areas adjacent to the downtown core there are also many more employers, such as Label Art and the high school, that add to the high density of jobs downtown. In addition, many businesses in the core are locally owned, as opposed to franchise type businesses, which is a factor that may promote revenues to cycle through the local economy for a longer period before leaking into the outside economy.

Judging from information above and an estimate that there are approximately 75 sole proprietor business operations in Wilton, it is estimated that overall there are a total of 182 private businesses in Wilton.

Employment

According to the Census in 1990,the Town's workforce, residents who were 16 years and over, consisted of 1,529 persons, or 49 percent of the total resident population of 3,122 persons. A vast majority, 1,289 persons, or 84 percent of residents work in private for profit wage and salary positions or are self-employed. One hundred forty one, nine percent of workers, are employed at the local, state or federal government level in Wilton. Another 99, or 6 percent, are employed by non-profit organizations.

Wilton Residents -- Industries of Employment

As noted earlier, the Nashua area economy has a large manufacturing sector with relatively high wages. The region also has large retail and service sectors, driven in part by the population growth in the region, but apparently also as a result of the tax-free sales environment within the State of New Hampshire. The Wilton resident workforce reflects the characteristics of the overall regional workforce. Table VII-6 shows among the most prevalent categories 36 percent of the resident workforce is employed in a manufacturing and 12 percent in retail.

TABLE VII-6
COMMON INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT FOR WILTON RESIDENTS, 1990

SIC Group	*Number*	*%*
Manufacturing, Durable goods	387	25
Retail Trade	178	12
Manufacturing, Nondurable goods	157	10
Professional & Related Services (Other Prof. & Related)	115	8
Professional and Related Services (Educational Services)	96	6
Subtotal	933	61
Total Employment in All Industries	1,529	100

Source: 1990 Census.

Occupations

The Census also tracks residents' occupations through surveys. Table VII-7 shows the five highest categories of employment for the 1,529 resident workforce. Nearly 32 percent of residents are managers or workers in professional disciplines, 20 percent are in administrative and sales roles, and 16 percent actually perform manufacturing arts.

TABLE VII-7
COMMON OCCUPATIONS FOR WILTON RESIDENTS, 1990

Occupation	*#*	*%*
Managerial & Professional Specialty (Professional Specialty)	302	19
Precision Production, Craft and Repair	238	16
Managerial & Professional Specialty (Executive, Admin, and Managerial)	200	13
Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support (Admin & Clerical Support)	165	11
Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support (Sales)	143	0 9
Subtotal	1,048	69
Total Employment in All Industries	1,529	100

Source: 1990 Census.

Home-Based Business

In 1989 69 Wilton residents (nearly 5 percent) reported that they worked at home. During the late 80s and early 1990s many people shifted to consulting and working out of their homes as a result of corporate downsizing during the recession. The 2000 Census may provide clarification as to whether this group remained independent or rejoined larger firms during the current economic expansion. It is useful to understand characteristics of home-based businesses as these often represent firms in the early stages of corporate development. Sometimes businesses started as 'cottage industries' mature and expand providing an engine for job creation and economic enhancement. The Planning Board could perform an inventory of existing home-based business if it seeks further information on the types and extent of this type of commerce. The zoning ordinance currently provides for home occupations by right for small operations and by special exception for larger ones that employ people who live outside of a residence or for home-based businesses that generate substantial traffic.

WORK TRAVEL PATTERNS

As indicated in Table VII-8, data on journey to work patterns of residents confirms Wilton is not a bedroom community. A significant number of residents are employed right within the community judging from the fact that 538 persons (36 percent) reported a commute of 14 minutes or less. The 1990 Census figures for travel time to work and place of work also show that the Wilton workforce is closely tied to Nashua and surrounding Hillsborough County.

TABLE VII-8
JOURNEY TO WORK COMMUTING DESTINATIONS FROM WILTON
FOR THE WILTON RESIDENT WORKFORCE IN 1990

	Journey to Work Location – Destinations from Wilton	***In 1990***	***Percent of all work trips***
1.	**Wilton**	**363**	**24.4**
2.	Milford	303	20.3
3.	Nashua	251	17.0
4.	Merrimack	90	*6.0*
5.	Boston and Greater Boston	*58*	*3.9*
6.	Amherst	56	*3.8*
7.	Manchester	56	3.8
8.	Peterborough	42	2.8
9.	Concord, Bedford-Goffstown, and Concord Area	***37***	***2.5***
10.	Worcester and Acton-Fitchburg-Lowell Areas in Ma	***35***	***2.4***
Sub-total for 10 most common journey to work destinations		***1,280***	***85.9***
Percent of Journeys to Work to Wilton and Adjoining Places		***722***	***48.5***
Total Trips		***1,489***	***100.0***

Source: US Census 1990.

The strong connection between the Wilton workforce and the central city is evident from the 76 percent of the Wilton workforce that makes trips to work places within the region. This represent 1,127 trips out of the total of 1,489 work trips per day in Wilton in 1990. Fifty four percent of the workforce commutes times were less than one-half hour in 1990. Another 355 persons, 24 percent, had commutes of 30 to 44 minutes. A full 85 percent of Wilton residents work in Hillsborough County, further confirming the regional nature of employment.

Seventeen percent of the workforce, 255 persons, had trips to work of 45 or more minutes and 10 percent, 154, worked out of State. The proportion of commutes to other regional employment centers was the same or smaller than those traveling to the Boston area. Examples of other important employment centers for Wilton residents were: Manchester, Peterborough; Fitchburg-Leominster, MA, and Keene. It is surprising that the proportion of people traveling to these locations are this low considering these are often more than 10 miles closer to Wilton than the Boston area.

The 3.9 percent of the Wilton labor force making daily work trips to the Boston area represents 47 trips to Greater Boston and 11 trips to the City of Boston. Boston is 57 miles from Wilton. Greater Boston is a major regional employment center and it appears that job availability and higher wages draw people to commute the long distance from Wilton. This mobility reflects a national tendency for people to commute longer distances to work. The 2000 Census should confirm whether there is an increased tendency for residents to commute to jobs further outside Wilton. Higher mobility rates may result in increased residential development pressure in the more remote suburbs, such as Wilton. Higher levels of residential development in the future may translate into negative fiscal impacts in the Town.

Wage Rates

Table VII-9 shows the average weekly wage rates in Wilton and the region in the manufacturing sector, all other non-manufacturing private industries, and government. The 1996 average employment in all sectors was 1,835 persons with an average weekly wage of $468. This equates to $24,336 on an annual basis. This compares with a range with a high of $766 per week in Merrimack and a low of $335 per week in Mont Vernon. Wilton is in the middle of average weekly wages within the 12 municipalities in the NRPC region. The table data shows that wages for Wilton-based manufacturing jobs are significantly lower than the region as a whole.

TABLE VII-9
PREVAILING WAGES IN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR, 1996

Place	*Manufacturing*		*Private Non-Manufacturing*		*Government*		*All Average*
	Firms	*Average Weeks Pay*	*Firms*	*Average Weeks Pay*	*Firms*	*Average Weeks Pay*	
Wilton	23	$602	84	$465	-	$329	$468
Nashua	175	$922	2,366	$497	30	$720	$617
Nashua PMSA	469	$869	-	-	110	$618	$627
Hillsbor Co.	767	$800	9,492	$591	235	$622	$594

Source: NH DES, 1999.

The wage rates for government jobs based in Wilton are low compared with other places in the region. This would appear related to financial constraints in the municipal budget. A dependence on property taxes for municipal operating revenues may have caused depressed wages rather than raising an already relatively high tax rate. Recent changes in school funding formula may free-up funds to increase the public sector wages so that these are more in line with the current cost of living. If the local cost of living rises faster than the wage rates in this sector, it could create a problem of local public sector employees being unable to live within the community.

In the 1990 Census, 961 (37 percent) of 2,585 responses listed wage or salary income as a source of household income. The average wage and salary figure per household reporting was $42,600. This would appear to indicate that in many family situations there are two working parents.

TABLE VII-10
HIGHEST AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE AMONG WILTON-BASED BUSINESS, 1996

Industry	*# of Firms*	*Avg. Weekly Wage ($)*
Electronic and Other Electric Equipment	14	$850
Engineering / Accounting / Research Services	4	$806
Industrial Machinery and Equipment	6	$791
Miscellaneous Repair Services	4	$688
Wholesale Trade – Durable Goods	5	$678
General Building Contractors	3	$565
Business Services	8	$512
Wholesale Trade – Nondurable Goods	3	$511
Special Trade Contractors	5	$430
Real Estate	3	$371
Subtotal	**46**	**-**

Source: NH DES, 1999.

Unemployment

As Table VII-11 shows, unemployment rates in Wilton are at a ten-year low. Low local unemployment rates are occurring in the context of the lowest unemployment rates nationwide in 30

years. New Hampshire and the Nashua regional labor markets are unique because local unemployment rates are typically a percentage point lower than averages for the rest of New England. Today in many parts of New Hampshire labor markets are constrained by high employment levels. Labor markets are even tight enough to stimulate people not formally participating in the labor force to reenter it due to the ready availability of work. Wilton reflects these larger cyclical trends, although the municipality does usually demonstrate unemployment rates approximately a half a percentage point higher than the region overall. This would appear to be a function of the more rural nature of Wilton and the fact that the resident workforce is slightly less educated. The fact that unemployment varies consistently across all local regions is further confirmation of the regional nature of the economy. The Nashua area labor market is defined as all municipalities in the region, excluding Pelham, plus Mason, New Ispwich and Temple.

TABLE VII-11
LABOR MARKET SUMMARY
WILTON, NASHUA PMSA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW ENGLAND & US

					Unemployment Rates (%)				
Year	*Wilton Town Labor Force*	*Number Unemp.*	*Nashua PMSA Labor Force*	*Number Unemp.*	*Wilton*	*Nashua PMSA*	*NH*	*NE*	*US*
1988[1]	1,575	-	99,850	2,800	-	2.8	2.5	-	-
1989[1]	1,547	-	98,980	3,690	-	3.7	3.4	-	-
1990	1,704	96	103,260	5,180	5.6	5.0	5.6	5.7	5.5
1991	1,635	119	98,230	6,490	7.3	6.6	7.2	8.0	6.7
1992	1,626	135	97,260	6,940	8.3	7.1	7.5	8.0	7.4
1993	1,609	117	97,510	6,580	7.3	6.7	6.6	6.8	6.8
1994	1584	85	95,390	5,090	5.4	5.3	4.6	NA	6.1
1995	1,583	62	96,380	4,310	3.9	4.5	4.0	NA	5.6
1996	1,575	62	95,300	4,020	3.9	4.2	4.2	NA	5.4
1997	1,658	50	101,44	2,820	3.0	2.8	3.0	4.2	5.2
1998	1,675	52	102,360	2,830	3.1	2.8	2.9	3.5	4.5

Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics Report, NH Department of Employment Security.

Note 1) the 1988-1989 period is not comparable with 1990 to 1998.

COMMERCIAL BUILDOUT & FISCAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Build-out analysis and fiscal impact analysis are two planning tools used to forecast physical and economic impacts of new development. This section examines commercial development scenarios (non-residential development such as retail, commercial or industrial uses) to forecast the potential affects on land use patterns and public sector finances. Included is a description of the spatial characteristics of commercial land use and physical development trends within the commercial sector. One main question examined is whether tax revenues generated from new commercial development is adequate to cover the cost of the public services these uses consume.

This study is based on existing conditions; a model of current policies and existing land use patterns are used to project the future financial impacts of development. The buildout analysis characterizes spatial development trends. The fiscal impact analysis quantifies the revenues generated if all possible new construction occurs according to the tax and development policies in effect today.

WILTON BOUILDOUT ANALYSIS

Patterns of Commercial Development

Using geographic information system (GIS) analysis, two forms of development restrictions were quantified for all town lands: 1) parcels with existing development; and 2) lands with physical constraints:

a) wetlands;
b) steep slopes, 25 percent or greater; or
c) 100-year floodplain.

Lands with either class of restriction are constrained from future development. Unconstrained or unrestricted commercially zoned land is potentially developable in the future. The Developable Land Area (hereafter DLA) equals the unconstrained area determined likely to receive development at some point in the future.

There is a total of 16,444 acres of land in Wilton. According to NRPC (1997) land use and natural features coverage displayed in **Map VII-1**, 64 percent of the total land area (10,522 acres) contains existing development or is constrained from development due to natural features. This means that 2/3 of Town lands are restricted from significant new development due to existing building development and/or the underlying natural features within these areas. The remaining 36 percent (5,924 acres) represent potentially developable lands.

The findings are broken down in Table x-1 by zoning district. The 940 acres covered by all three non-residential zoning districts represents 6 percent of town. The DLA for all commercial zones is 306 acres, or 33 percent of all nonresidential lands. Overall, this means that about 2 percent of Town lands could currently host new commercial development. For comparison, residential zones cover 15,456 acres, with a 36 percent of DLA. Thirty-six percent of all Town lands could currently receive new residential development. Generally, it appears that future residential development will convey a more profound physical influence on the Town.

TABLE VII-12
DEVELOPED & UNDEVELOPED AREAS IN THE WILTON ZONING DISTRICTS

Zoning District	*Total Area*	*Developed and/or Constrained Areas*		*DLA = Undeveloped & Unconstrained Areas*	
	(Acres)	*(Acres)*	*(Percent)*	*(Acres)*	*(Percent)*
Commercial	61	49	80	12	20
Industrial	861	617	72	244	28
Office Park District	66	18	27	48	73
Non-residential Sub-total	988	684	69	304	31
General Res. & Agriculture	15,006	9,486	63	5523	37
Residential (High Density)	450	402	89	48	11
Total	16,444	10,522	64	5924	36

Source: NRPC 1997 Land Use database for Wilton, with limited updates June 1999.

The DLA figures are generalizations. Potential for future development through subdivisions on already built lots is not discussed in this study. Development restriction coverages are coded to show whether or not land is developed at the parcel level. The natural features coverages are presented independent of parcel configurations. Parcel maps were also consulted in the process of making observations.

Buildout Statuses in the Different Commercial Districts

Some non-residential areas are approaching full build-out. A commercial DLA of 306 acres means that an area half the size of current existing commercial development demonstrates potential for conversion into active commercial uses.

The most developed zoning district with the smallest DLA is the Commercial District (coded as CD on the map). The Commercial District is located within 7 sub-areas: 1) the downtown core, 2) four locations on NH Route 101; and 3) two locations on the Burton Highway. Eighty percent of CD parcels are constrained from future development, apparently by wetlands. It would appear that a very small part of the Commercial District DLA is available in the downtown core. An issue that may arise as efforts are made to bolster the economy along Main Street is that there are no vacant, unconstrained areas available for commercial expansion. In addition, at 80 percent buildout, some CD parcels with DLA, such as a subset along Route 101, appear to be constrained from development by zoning requirements. Permissible nonresidential uses in the Commercial District are variety of retail uses, including business and professional offices and wholesale establishments in connection with permitted retail establishments.

The Industrial District occupies five sub-areas. In descending order of size, the main industrial lands are: 1) by the intersection of NH 31 and 101, 2) off NH Route 31 North of Town; and 3) downtown. With a gravel excavation permit pending on 50 acres south of Route 101 on Route 31, this means that the Industrial DLA is 28 percent of the entire district. Most of the industrial DLA is on about 190 acres by Routes 101/31, with approximately another 40 acres downtown. Many of the parcels by Routes 101/31 appear relatively unconstrained by zoning restrictions, making this the commercial sub-area with the highest development potential. A defining feature of existing industrial development in the downtown is its high density with many mill type buildings and high floor area ratios. The Downtown DLA appears tied to a very small number of parcels. Permissible nonresidential uses in the district are: manufacturing, warehousing, research and testing, offices and commercial uses.

The Office Park District along the western part of Route 101 contains one developed parcel and a larger vacant parcel. This district is characteristic of open space development. The building on this site is of a high quality. Higher quality development is assessed at a higher rate and therefore pays a higher total tax than another equal size development with a lower assessed value. This DLA is within a very small number of parcels. Permissible nonresidential uses in the district are corporate offices, research facilities and farming.

Recent Commercial Development

An interview with the Building Inspector (June 1, 1999) and a review of annual reports identified new commercial development in Wilton during the last five years. Most new commercial buildings were facility expansions. Examples of recent non-residential developments and renovations are:

- A small addition to an existing manufacturing facility;
- Construction of a cellular communications tower;
- Expansion of an existing storage facility on Route 101; and
- Construction of a new machine shop near Routes 101 and 31.

It was not possible to obtain total building area or total commercial buildings for this study. A rough estimate of existing commercial density downtown was derived using figures from the 1989 Wilton Downtown Improvement Plan. In addition, figures from a site plan to expand a major industrial facility currently before the Planning Board was used to show an example of building density in a district developed predominantly since 1950.

The 1989 downtown target area, which was at least four times larger than the current Main Street focus area, consisted of approximately 92 acres. The gross floor area of all buildings in 1989 was 410,309 ft^2. At that point, 296,244 ft^2 were commercial buildings, representing 72 percent of the 1989 target area. Excluding 55 acres for: roads (5 acres), railroad (5 acres), open space (1 acres), vacant industrial land (40 acres) and wetland (4 acres), it is estimated that the average downtown building densities are approximately 11,000 ft^2 per acre. There does not appear to be significant new commercial construction downtown since 1990.

Except around historic mill villages, there appear much lower commercial building densities in Wilton. An example comes from the proposed site plan amendment for one of the largest existing industrial facilities in Wilton situated on 24 acres. With 133,000 ft² of buildings, this site demonstrates a building density of 5,500 ft² per acre.

A buildout study performed for the Town of Merrimack by NRPC in April 1999 confirms that this figure of 5,500 ft² per acre may be representative of contemporary developments, depending on facility parking needs and the prevalence of wetland soils. Based on plans submitted to Merrimack, it was calculated that light industrial development, such as a campus style office park, occurred at a density of 4,573 ft² per acre. The Merrimack buildout also estimated that commercial development occurred at a density of 5,243 ft² per acre and industrial development at 6,503 ft² per acre. It is possible that similar commercial building densities would be demonstrated in Wilton, although lower per unit land costs could also promote lower densities since it is not as costly to purchase land.

Commercial Buildout Potential

Based on the estimated densities discussed above, it is reasonable to assume that future Downtown development will demonstrate around 5,000 ft² of buildings per acre. Since actual density figures are not available, 5,000 ft² per acre average densities are also assumed for future commercial development outside the downtown. It is assumed that new commercial parcels developed will have an average parcel size of three acres. Three acres could reasonably accommodate 10,000 to 20,000ft² of building, plus parking and a septic system. This equates to an average of 5,000 ft² of building per acre. A lower density figure was selected because soil constraints are common throughout Wilton. This figure is applied in the fiscal impact calculations performed below.

Table VII-13 takes the DLA for all commercial areas and presents an estimate of the amount of existing commercial buildings in all zoning districts along with a building area that possibly could be constructed within each sub-area at full-buildout. There appears potential to nearly double the building space. This would especially be the case if high-density building (such as 10,000 ft² per acre) were to occur downtown.

TABLE VII-13
ROUGH ESTIMATES OF COMMERCIAL BUILDING SPACE & FUTURE BUILDING DEVELOPMENT

Estimate of Building Potential in ***Zoning District***	***Acres[1]***	***Assumed Density (ft²/acre)***	***Building Estimate (ft²/acre)***
Commercial	12	5,000	60,000
Industrial			
Downtown	40	5,000	200,000
Other Industrial Zones	204	5,000	1,020,000
Office Park District	48	5,000	240,000
Subtotal	**304**		**1,520,000**
Estimate of Existing Building			
Existing Downtown Commercial Development	50	11,000	550,000
All Other Existing Commercial Development – Outside of Downtown	250	5,000	1,250,000
Subtotal	300		1,800,000
Total	**604[1]**		**3,638,000**

Source: NRPC DLA figures of June 1999.

[1]It is assumed 300 acres of commercial lands are constrained by natural features.

This section defines physical patterns of commercial land uses and future land development potential. The next subsection examines potential fiscal impacts of 300 acres of new commercial development.

Fiscal Impact Analysis of New Commercial Development

As described by Burchell and Listokin in The Fiscal Impact Handbook, 1978, the Proportional Valuation Method is an average costing approach used to project the impact of nonresidential (commercial) development on local public sector operating costs and revenues. The proportional valuation method assigns municipal costs attributable to the share of real property value that new commercial uses would add to the Wilton real property tax base. Essentially, the method involves using ratios and correction factors to project the potential fiscal consequences of future development based on current land use and municipal spending patterns.

The main question that fiscal analysis of commercial development in Wilton seeks to answer is whether commercial development is a local fiscal benefit or detriment? To define spending within different economic sectors, the sum of parcels and real property values is used to derive estimates of the costs of public service provision and revenue collection in the residential and non-residential land use categories.

A main component of Town revenues and expenditures are property taxes. Residents pay income to property taxes and the Town in-turn spends these funds on programs. Public sector operations represent a significant revenue stream in the local economy. As noted earlier, government activity represents a higher proportion of local employment in the Wilton economy than is apparent at the regional level.

Property taxes composed about 68 percent of all revenues according to the Wilton 1998 Town and School Reports. In 1998 87 percent of local property taxes emanated from the residential sector. Table VII-14 shows the 1998 Wilton tax rate of $47.50 per $1,000 of real property valuation as compared to surrounding communities. Wilton's rate is higher than the surrounding towns. Besides property taxes, other sources of local revenues were permit, registration, and license fees, as well as resource extraction tariffs. Property taxes are by far the largest source of revenue; therefore, estimates of the

direct fiscal impacts of a new development use the property taxes generated by the new use and the unit costs of the public services supplied to the use.

TABLE VII-14
1997 AREA PROPERTY TAX RATES

Place (1998)	Tax Rate (in Dollars)
Wilton	***$47.50***
Lyndeborough	$43.40
Milford	$27.80
Mason	$37.92
Temple	$27.59
Hillsborough County	$28.27

Source: Annual Reports, 1998 and NHDOR, 1998.

Public sector revenues underwrite education, public safety and public works. Education is by far the largest outlay. Revenues collected should match local government expenditures; otherwise, tax increases or deficit spending may be necessary to finance the provision of public services.

One factor that may account for a relatively high tax rate in Wilton is relatively low property values. In addition, Wilton and Lyndeborough have incurred costs for school facilities expansion. Education reform may provide some degree of local property tax relief, although it is too early to speculate how much relief may occur. It may also be the case that a constrained budget over the last decade has resulted in deferral of necessary capital improvements and postponement of wage increases, meaning that a cost (spending) shift may occur rather than a tax decrease.

Table VII-15 presents the number of tax parcels, real property values, and property tax commitments in Wilton for all types of land uses, as well as for the subset of existing commercial parcels. The data in the table help define the relationships between building values in the residential versus the commercial sectors, as well as for all existing versus recent development. This information is the basis for defining the respective cost allocations for local public service delivery for existing commercial versus residential land uses. Using baseline information in the table, the estimated value of all new commercial development expected at full-buildout is used in a proportion to allocate the cost of public services that these uses would consume.

TABLE VII-15
FACTORS FOR CALCULATING PROPORTIONAL VALUATION ALLOCATION OF COMMERCIAL LOTS

FIA Steps	*Factor and Ratios*	*1998*
Step 1	Net Municipal Property Tax Commitments[1]	$4,651,825
Step 2	Total local real property value[1]	$98,127,900
Step 3	Total Number of Land Parcels[2]	1,738
Step 4	Total commercial real property value[1,3]	$12,914,367
Step 5	Total Number of Commercial Parcels	131
Step 6	Average real property value per parcel (Step 2 divided by Step 3)	$57,442
Step 7	Average Commercial Real Property Value per Parcel (Step 4 divided by Step 5)	$98,583
Step 8	Assumed Real Property Value of an Average New Commercial Parcel[4]	$337,500
Step 9	Value of Average Commercial Property to Average Property (Step 7 divided by Step 6)	1.7
Step 10	Ratio of Real Property Value of Average New Commercial Parcel to Average Commercial Parcel (Step 8 divided by Step 7)	3.4

Notes:
1) Source is 1998 Annual Town Reports
2) Source is 1997 NRPC Town of Wilton parcel/landuse database
3) Source is Annual Report. This is sum of all nonresidential, including utilities and current use.
4) This figure was derived based on expansion of the storage facility (estimated cost of $500,000) and development of a new machine shop (assumed value $175,000).

The figure $98,127,900 (step 2) is the aggregate market value of all tax paying properties in Wilton. The total of 14 percent commercial property value includes land classified in the Town Annual Report as 'utilities'. The six percent of town lands that are commercial represent 13 percent of total property value. The sum of commercial parcels (step 5) is derived from the NRPC GIS database initially coded in 1997.

Table VII-16 shows the part of the total municipal budget ($736,000) attributed to servicing commercial business in 1998. It was derived using 1998 local government expenditures of $4,651,825. This represents 8.5 percent of the local budget. In other words, existing businesses in Wilton consume about $736,849 worth of public service per year. This is derived figuring that 13 percent of the $98 Million property value is commercial (the 0.132 figure), multiplied by all municipal expenditures, and a refinement coefficient (1.20).

TABLE VII-16
ANNUAL COST OF PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION FOR ALL EXISTING COMMERCIAL BUSINESSES

Total Current Municipal Expenditures Attributable to Existing Businesses	=	*Total Municipal Expenditures in 1998 (Step 1 above)*	*Proportion = Commercial Properties Value to Total Local Real Property Value*	*Refinement Coefficient*
$736,849	=	$4,651,825 X	0.132 X	1.20

Public service cost relationships between existing and new nonresidential and commercial uses are non-linear. Businesses consume different types and levels of public services than residential uses. Different scales of development require different increments of service. The refinement coefficient represents findings from studies of other communities compiled by Burchell and Listokin. Applying the coefficient provides for a more accurate estimate of the likely scenario in Wilton regarding the cost to provide public services to commercial properties.

TABLE VII-17

ADDITIONAL COST TO PROVIDE PUBLIC SERVICE TO COMMERCIAL BUSINESSES AT BUILDOUT

Estimated Municipal Costs to Supply public Service to All Future Business Facilities	=	*Estimated Cost of Public Service to Current Businesses*	*Estimate of Total Future Commercial Development Value Versus Existing Commercial Development Value*	*Refinement Coefficient*
$1,388,234	=	$736,849 X	2.26 X	.83

The next step is to undertake a calculation to assign or project the total municipal operating costs induced by future nonresidential uses. It is assumed that the value of recent new commercial development, namely expansion of a storage facility and construction of a new machine shop, is representative of future development. This analysis also assumes that the size of new commercial parcels being developed averages 3.0 acres. With a DLA of 304 acres this represents 101 new commercial developments. The total value of 101 new developments valued at $337,500 each is $34,087,500. The property tax assessed to businesses from this $34Million figure is $1,619,156.

Assuming that all future development occurs at a density of 5,000 ft2/acre, it would appear that these commercial uses will pay property taxes at a slightly higher rate than these businesses will consume public services. In summary, at full buildout the average projected tax revenue is $1,619,156 and the cost to provide services to that same facilities is estimated at $1,388,234. This means that there would be an overall revenue surplus of $230,922.

TABLE VII-18
ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO: 40 ACRES OF HIGHER DENSITY COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT -- ADDITIONAL COST TO PROVIDE PUBLIC SERVICE TO ALL COMMERCIAL BUSINESSES AT BUILDOUT

Estimated Municipal Costs Allocated to All Future Business Facilities	=	*Estimated Cost of Public Service to Businesses*	*Estimate of Total Future Commercial Development*	*Refinement Coefficient*
$1,525,130	=	$736,849 X	***2.62 X***	0.79

If the density of development doubled and the new commercial property values also doubled on the traditionally higher density DLA downtown, this would appear to more clearly confirm that future businesses will pay their own way. Table VII-18 shows an alternative development scenario whereby development occurs worth $9,000,000 on 40 acres of industrial land downtown. This equates to 13 developments on 3 acre lots with densities of 10,000ft2/acre and values of $674,000 each. Under this scenario, future commercial development would likely convey a revenue surplus to the community of an additional $208,098 per year at the point of full buildout.

Based on averages from around the Country cited in Burchell and Listokin, most public sector service costs for commercial businesses (approximately 90 percent) go to provision of public safety and public works and the remainder to general government. Examples of public services that businesses directly demand are:

- public safety protection/prevention (fire dept. prevention and emergency response and police law enforcement);
- public water;
- public sewers;
- streets and roads;
- solid waste management;
- libraries;
- health inspections;

- parks, recreation, cultural, and
- other aspects of town general government administration, such as tax collection and community development.

The calculations above show that new development will probably not be a fiscal detriment to the Town; however, the research literature shows that contrary to popular notion, in fiscal terms it is not always intrinsically better to develop open land. Cost of community service studies routinely show that undeveloped land, farmlands and forests are economic assets that often contribute to fiscal stability. Because open space uses typically demand little in the way of public services, the uses rank high in terms of the net fiscal benefits conveyed to municipalities. It is worthwhile for the Town to investigate the feasibility of assisting the preservation of open space in order to promote fiscal stability.

Types of commercial developments that could convey adverse fiscal impacts are ones that trigger sudden, large public expenditures that are different from existing tax spending and which may not be recaptured from development. For example, if a large, new drinking water or wastewater treatment plant had to be constructed to only service business, this type of pattern may not be captured in existing tax policies and spending.

Promoting more compact development in commercial zones would likely promote fiscal balance and preserve community character. Compact commercial developments may provide a fiscally beneficial land use arrangement because new commercial development would provide revenues to offset deficits accompanying residential development. If public infrastructure investment is used to promote commercial development, compact development itself presents a strategic advantage. Cost-of-sprawl studies consistently show disperse, low-density development is more expensive to construct and service. Not only is it costly to keep up with routine operation and maintenance on larger, spread-out systems, but initial construction costs are higher for the added materials needed to develop road or pipe networks, covering large, geographic areas. Finally, well-designed commercial development located on or near open spaces, or within communities where the local character is not detracted by sprawl, should command higher market rents and higher real estate assessments

One common response by governments attempting to balance budgets are efforts to stimulate non-residential (commercial) development to equalize revenues and expenditures. The 1998 Strafford Regional Planning Commission Research Report The Land Development Property Tax Issue notes that the relationship between the impacts of land development and property taxes are unclear and incomplete. The study goes on to note that promoting non-residential development does not uniformly convey property tax benefits. Land use policy does not directly translate into land development, and the relationship between land development, property taxation, and fiscal equilibrium is very uncertain.

The information presented above shows that assuming current patterns hold, future commercial development would appear to cover the cost of the public services that these uses consume. Commercial development appears to provide a source of supplemental tax revenue for the community. These funds can help offset the deficits that new residential development is expected to cause. Our understanding of the impacts of land development on municipal finance are incomplete; therefore, while it is important to forecast future municipal budget situations, it is also important to consider the wide range of quality of life influences that future commercial development may impact.

INFRASTRUCTURE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

In addition to the existing labor force, firm base, and natural resources, numerous public sector capital facilities can serve as resources for economic development. This section describes some of the main assets of the Town physical plant as it concerns community and economic development.

Public Sewer

A portion of the downtown is served by public sewers. A 1988 NRPC study of Wilton water resources notes that treatment is provided by the Town of Milford on a contract basis whereby Milford guarantees Wilton a percentage of Milford Wastewater Treatment Facility capacity. In 1988 there were

33 commercial and 6 industrial users among all sewer facility users, with a total average daily consumption of 135,000 GPD, or 42 percent, of total Wilton capacity. Judging from the fact that there has been little new construction in the commercial or industrial zones downtown since 1990, it is assumed that some excess facility capacity remains. These facilities may provide a valuable resource for new or expanding commercial or industrial businesses.

A large portion of the remaining developable property in the Town is marginal for septic systems due to soil conditions or steep slopes. Given these limitations, it is advised that any future analysis of the feasibility to expand commercial and industrial zoning districts include an examination of the potential to tie new commercial development into existing sewer facilities. Future analysis should also examine whether there is potential to expand existing facilities in Milford.

Public Water

The public water supply and associated facilities may be a resource that could be used by business; yet, it should be cautioned that water resources are not an infinite resource. Without controls on commercial operations water withdrawal, it is possible to adversely impact the rates of aquifer recharge, the potential operation of local wastewater treatment facilities and diminish a reserve of water resources intended for future residents. The current zoning ordinance requires that a new commercial use will not require more than 10 percent of the available public water supply capacity.

In the mid-1980s Wilton started utilizing groundwater as a source of public water supply with development of the Abbott Well. The water from this well is of a very high quality. Support for the quality and taste of this water supply is the fact that a commercial operation involved in the bottled water business has sited a plant in the vicinity. The Abbott well has an average a yield of greater than 500,000 Gallons Per Day (GPD). Of the 210,000 gallons per day (GPD) of water consumed in 1986, approximately 15 percent was consumed by commercial businesses and 5 percent was consumed by Industry.

Route 101 and Route 31 Corridor

The main transportation spine in Wilton is NH Route 101 – the major west-east route through Southern New Hampshire. Although this is a state road, highway capacity in Wilton is an economic resource that requires planning and management in collaboration with the NH DOT. Local roles in managing highway resources consist of promoting access management and guiding the character of commercial development within the corridor, such as through site planning and the adoption of design guidelines. The Transportation chapter of the Master Plan discusses these subjects at greater length. As it concerns economic development, it appears that most non-residential zones are situated along the main roads. An example of an industrial area well isolated from adjacent residential uses with direct highway access is the large industrial zone North of Route 101 near the intersection with Route 31. The Planning Board should continue to ensure that the layout of local roads and driveways to commercial areas provide a high level of service. Requiring development proponents to perform comprehensive traffic impact analyses would be one way to inform the Board of the adequacy of such designs.

Community Character

One feature not yet identified as important for economic development is the visual and scenic character of the community natural environment and historic architecture. A great deal of the economic development literature suggests that amenities and quality of life directly contribute to economic development success. Wilton natural beauty emanates from viewsheds, rolling topography, forests, and the Stony Brook and Souhegan River valleys. Future economic initiatives should emphasize the preservation of environmental quality as inherently important to economic development strategies. Similarly, the character of the community's neighborhoods and quality of its social and civic institutions is likely to impact the potential success of future economic development initiatives.

Compatibility guidelines are more commonly being used in the region to assist communities with promoting growth and development that is in character with, and sensitive to, the existing conditions. Compatibility guidelines are a tool to help articulate acceptable site and architectural design

principles to promote New England style development. This represents a tool that can be used to address the negative aspects of development. Guidelines may also be used as a reference to examine the relationship between the elements of one site to the surrounding community.

Rail

Downtown Wilton is bisected by a rail line that connects with Nashua in the east and Greenfield to the Northwest. Rail infrastructure could potentially provide a source of transportation for industries situated near the line, such as by the Industrial and Commercial zones in the downtown and by northern segments of NH Route 31. If rail is used to service industrial operations, it is typical for businesses to construct rail spurs to enable service. Further study is required to determine the feasibility of utilizing rail infrastructure to aid industrial development. Also unclear is whether rail could be used over the long range to bolster the tourism in the downtown economy, or provide transit within Nashua if very high rates of growth and congestion were to occur in Wilton, the region and along the NH Route 101 corridor.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN WILTON

Wilton Main Street Downtown Revitalization Program

The most significant organized economic development effort underway in Wilton is the Wilton Main Street Association program (hereafter WMSA). Led by the Wilton Business Association, and joined by numerous volunteers and financial donors, in 1998 the Town applied to the New Hampshire Main Street Center for grant funds to partially underwrite a downtown revitalization initiative. That Fall Wilton was one of three municipalities in the State awarded three years of technical support and financial assistance to develop the main street organization's capacities and enhance the downtown physical appearance.

One factor that stimulated people to apply for the grant was that there has been an adverse impact on the viability of many downtown businesses as commercial development has extended West along Route 101. Residential activity patterns have come to consist of more trips and vehicle miles traveled outside the community to obtain goods and services. Through collaboration between businesses, citizens, public officials and regional level economic development organizations, the WMSA is defining and implementing a strategy to enhance the viability of the business district and restore its role as an engine for growth and development. Goals of the Main Street initiative are to bolster the economic competitiveness of the downtown area by:

- Restructuring the economy;
- Defining strategic infrastructure investment;
- Providing cultural activities and marketing; and
- Promoting awareness of the importance of a viable downtown to community character.

At the point of developing this document, the WMSA was involved with finalizing its 1999 – 2001 work program, the three-year strategy for the organization.

(INSERT DOWNTOWN TARGET AREA MAP HERE)

The downtown area is the economic and civic center of the community. As shown in Map x, the current target area is four blocks centered by Wilton Town Hall, extending on both sides of Main Street, Northwest to the intersection with Route #31, and East to Prince Street. The industrial districts and residential areas adjacent to Main Street contain many local businesses as well as a large portion of the Town population.

Existing physical conditions, including the architectural character of the area, provide an important resource and basis for future development. The target area alone contains approximately 70,000 square feet of commercial buildings and much of the downtown building stock is historic, with nearly 75 percent of the buildings built between 1800 to 1900. The downtown is situated at a unique location at the confluence of Stony Brook and the Souhegan River and also has fixed sewers, public water, close proximity to local schools and easy access to Route 101.

One main goal of the Main Street program is to improve the physical appearance and design of the downtown. In 1999 the WMSA Design Review Team has been collaborating with local stakeholders through design charettes and routine meetings to articulate a physical landscape master plan for the downtown. Overall, instituting downtown sidewalk improvements appears to be one of the most pressing priorities for Main Street stakeholders. This plan has attempted to identify the key features of the downtown with an objective of promoting a more unified streetscape design through such strategies as:

- Promoting improvement and renovation of building facades and commercial signs, possibly through a low interest loan or grant program to assist property owners and merchants;
- Enhancing and bolstering downtown physical amenities such as curbs, sidewalks, lighting, natural plantings and park facilities;
- Enhancing motorized and non-motorized vehicle transportation, through parking and circulation improvements, including the possible development of a river walk;
- Promoting a more vibrant visual environment through public art installations, development of festival spaces and by providing for civic activity and business marketing in character with the area.

The downtown area physical improvement master plan would improve pedestrian access, and provide extensions to a future riverwalk, local schools, a future community center, Abbot Park, adjacent neighborhoods and the business area along Island Street. The project could:

- Improve sidewalks with granite curbing, concrete sidewalks, and concrete brick bands to define the edge of sidewalks.
- Improve intersections to articulate the entryway and improve pedestrian access.
- Improve motor vehicle access.
- Provide landscaping and plantings and trees on Main Street in bump-outs and in tree grates as part of sidewalk improvements.
- Enhance Cooley Park.
- A central vacant lot is proposed for future access to the river walk, a community gathering space, trees, plantings, seating, and sidewalks (acquisition of this lot may be part of the Tea-21 grant
- Decorative, pedestrian scale lighting is proposed. And
- Aid the burial of existing overhead wiring underground in conduit to improve the area visual appearance.

Wilton Capital Improvement Plan

One technique commonly employed by municipalities to promote economic development is strategically investing in infrastructure development to spur commercial business expansion. Such investment represents the public sector attempting to efficiently and effectively leverage its resources to construct capital facilities likely to encourage private enterprises to expand or site new operations within the community. The community may seek to undertake some infrastructure development to promote

the types of commercial expansion that are most likely to benefit the community over the long run. Although the outcome of such investments are highly uncertain, thoroughly investigating the potential outlay of public funds for infrastructure development within the context of the capital planning process will help maximize the potential for investment to succeed.

The capital improvement program represents a deliberative process that investigates potential infrastructure development in the context of all the potential spending needs and priorities within the community. The resources and organizational capacities of the Wilton Main Street initiative make the downtown a good location for infrastructure development over the next three to five years. It is recommended that future investment in capital facilities emphasize expansion in the downtown or those areas adjacent to it.

Community Development Block Grant Housing Rehabilitation Program

The Wilton Housing Rehabilitation Program is another major current economic development initiative underway in Wilton during the tail end of 1999. The housing rehabilitation program provided technical and financial assistance to rehabilitate 18 homes downtown. The program has been a resource to improve housing quality and the appearance of the downtown.

The rehabilitation program is funded through the New Hampshire Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The federal funds that flow through the State to assist in revitalizing areas that have a fifty percent of people who are low or moderate income, or in areas that demonstrate conditions of slums and blight. The program can be used to:

- aid the redevelopment of areas demonstrating concentrations of people who have moderate or low incomes,
- prevent blighting conditions, or
- assist communities in preventing or eliminating conditions that pose a serious threat to public health and safety.

Wilton is one of the few municipalities in the region eligible to qualify for CDBG funds. Examples of projects which this program can underwrite are ones that:

- Create opportunities for low income families to purchase or rent homes;
- Preserve or develop municipal infrastructure and neighborhood facilities, such as sidewalks, sewer or water infrastructure;
- Create jobs for low and moderate income persons;
- Loan funds to businesses that commit to creating jobs for low and moderate income persons; or
- Assist the purchase and / or lease of commercial property or its rehabilitation.

Regional and Overall Economic Development Programs

Recognizing that contemporary economic systems extend beyond the border of a single municipality, it is important that local economic development officials understand the organization of the regional economic delivery system and actively forge links with economic development experts located outside the municipality. Outside public and private sector economic development entities provide unique services to aid development and address specific problems, and are often sources of financial resources to implement economic strategies within local areas. Collaborating with outside organizations also ensures that the economic strategies selected are feasible to implement and promote the overall development of the region. By working with stakeholders from around the State, it is possible for Wilton to more effectively tie into already established regional economic response systems.

In 1998 the NH Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA) provided a grant to the NRPC to develop a prototype system for small town economic development planning. Collaborating with Greater Nashua Center for Economic Development and Litchfield, the program has educated stakeholders about economic planning and has analyzed how to integrate issues surrounding the local

and regional economy into local planning processes. The process has helped establish a model of economic development that identifies policies that help achieve comprehensive economic development and which are harmonious with community goals for planning and preservation. It is recommended that Wilton investigate if similar funding is available to more formally examine how to institute economic planning in Wilton.

Some other important regional level economic development entities are:

- The NH Department of Resources and Economic Development
- The NH Office of State Planning
- The NRPC
- The Milford-Amherst Chamber of Commerce
- The Greater Nashua Center for Economic Development
- Local and regional financial institutions (banks);
- The United Way; and
- Other nonprofits and government agencies that specialize in a variety of disciplines.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter characterizes the local and regional economy and provides general recommendations for economic development. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail all programs and policies available to promote area economic development. The Planning Board should develop a comprehensive economic development study to further investigate different mechanisms and forms of support, as well as define how to better integrate economic decision-making into the current land use planning program.

Downtown redevelopment is the most important local economic development initiative underway in Wilton. As WMSA succeeds in enhancing retail markets and the Main Street core, there is going to be a need for business expansion. The WMSA is a good vehicle for cultivating business development and recruitment. The Planning Board should investigate land use, infrastructure and policy options available for commercial and/or industrial zoning district expansion near the downtown. Well-planned commercial zone expansion will bolster the downtown retail and service sector markets and provide local jobs. One option is to investigate expansion of mixed-use districts into residential zones or undeveloped areas. It is recommended to analyze the feasibility of district expansion based on current and future sewer and water infrastructure capacity and the potential impact on community character.

General Recommendations

Based on the analysis above, economic strategies that the Planning Board should pursue in collaboration with other stakeholders to promote the overall economic development of Wilton are summarized below.

1) **Commercial Parcel Inventory** - An inventory of commercial parcels, ownership status, and a variety of other characteristics relative to the potential development of sites would enable the identification of commercial sites most likely to be developed. It would aid understanding of the opportunities to coordinate development and guide it to the most optimal locations. If the Planning Board considers it a high priority, this type of information could be used in recruiting business to existing commercial land located outside the downtown, such as by the Route 101/Route 31 intersection.

2) **Wilton Main Street Program** – In addition to improving the streetscape of Main Street, WMSA should focus on finding a new tenant or an adaptive reuse for the former Harwood's Grocery Store. The WMSA should also produce a detailed market analysis to define the local retail trade geography and potential strategies for expanding the current mix of retail and service business. Once the market analysis is complete, WMSA should

attempt to attract one or more businesses (5,000 square feet of commercial building development per year) that match the ideal business characteristics identified.

3) **Potential Zoning Changes and Improvements –** There is limited area for future commercial development. The Planning Board should investigate the feasibility of expanding the downtown commercial zones and also evaluate whether the performance standards for each commercial zone function as intended. The Planning Board should complete its research into the optimal design of a mixed-use district, an addition to the office park district, or development of a campus style research park district.

4) **Commercial Design in the Route 101 and Route 31 Corridors** – The majority of the limited commercial development in Wilton is located in visible locations on the most heavily traveled local roads. The Planning Board should study how site planning and community compatibility guidelines may be used to promote additional commercial development in character with Wilton's rural environment.

#260E-7

TOWN OF WILTON MASTER PLAN 1
INTRODUCTION 1
CHARACTER OF THE WORKFORCE & PRODUCTIVITY 1
Largest Employers in the Region 3
Wilton Economic Base 4
Firm Types and Firm Sizes 5
Employment 6
Wilton Residents -- Industries of Employment 7
Occupations 7
Home-Based Business 7
WORK TRAVEL PATTERNS 8
Wage Rates 9
Unemployment 10
COMMERCIAL BUILDOUT & FISCAL IMPACT ANALYSIS 10
Introduction 10
WILTON BOUILDOUT ANALYSIS 11
Patterns of Commercial Development 11
Buildout Statuses in the Different Commercial Districts 12
Recent Commercial Development 12
Commercial Buildout Potential 13
Fiscal Impact Analysis of New Commercial Development 14
INFRASTRUCTURE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES 18
Public Sewer 19
Public Water 19
Route 101 and Route 31 Corridor 19
Community Character 19
Rail 20
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN WILTON 20
Wilton Main Street Downtown Revitalization Program 20
Wilton Capital Improvement Plan 23
Community Development Block Grant Housing Rehabilitation Program 24
Regional and Overall Economic Development Programs 24
CONCLUSIONS 25
General Recommendations 25