

TOWN OF WILTON MASTER PLAN
CHAPTER IX: Future Land Use

INTRODUCTION

The Future Land Use Section is the most important element of the master planning process. It is a synthesis of all of the master plan sections which are based on an inventory and analysis of trends, existing conditions, and future needs with respect to population, housing, community facilities, transportation, natural resources, land use, and the community's goals and objectives.

Future land use is a comprehensive policy statement of desired land use which can be used as a guide for future growth and development of Wilton. Future land use decisions and local ordinances, regulations, and policies should be generally consistent with and supported by the Town's Master Plan. To implement this Master Plan, existing ordinances, regulations, and programs must be changed and new ones must be created.

The Planning Board realizes that the impact of any single or "minor" development may be relatively small, but that the cumulative impacts of growth may be substantial. The Planning Board should strive to manage the cumulative impacts of growth on community facilities, natural resources, and existing land uses.

RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

The growth in Wilton's population and housing levels have historically developed together - the new residents that move into town have either occupied existing or newly constructed housing. As discussed in Section I, there has been a steady increase in both the Town's population and housing levels since 1970. Using the best available population projection figures, Wilton can expect *and should plan for* an annual growth in population of anywhere from 2 to 4.5 percent. This growth rate is the "norm" for most of the communities across southern New Hampshire (Wilton's "fair share" growth rate has been estimated to be 3.4%). The Town may feel a substantial impact from this amount of growth should it decide not to plan accordingly. As mentioned previously, the new residents that will make up the Town's future population levels will either be occupying existing housing or building their own new housing. The ultimate impact will be an increase in the number of families that will require community facilities and services (schooling, roads, etc.). Unless planned for, future growth may overtax the Town's ability to provide adequate levels of facilities and services to existing residents and to new residents entering the community in the near future.

The analysis of Wilton's population in Section I presented three points that are important to repeat here and for the Town to consider in future planning efforts. First, Wilton's older residents (55+ years) make up a greater percentage of its total population than is found for the region. Second, household incomes appear to be lower than for the region as a whole. These two facts relate to a very important future land use problem — affordable housing for elderly, low-to-moderate income families and young adults. Third, the smaller percentage of young adults (18-29 yrs.) compared to the region's county's and state percentages could be related to the limited housing options available for one and two person households. Without affordable housing, the Town's older and low-to-moderate income families (this includes existing and future resident families) will not be able to reside in Wilton.

Another factor that the Town should address is that of residential sprawl and "premature" development. The existing land use analysis provided in Section V shows that residential development has taken place not so much within and around the Town's center, but more so in outlying rural areas. This development has occurred amongst the Town's agricultural, forest, and other natural resources, within environmentally sensitive steep slope and poor soil areas, and farther away from town facilities and services. Whether this pattern is allowed to continue in the future is something that needs to be addressed in the Town's future planning.

To increase the prospects for elderly and low-to-moderate income families to remain in Wilton without being priced out of housing, two approaches should be considered. One is to increase residential densities in acceptable areas of the Town presently served by public water and sewer. This allows the greatest increase in housing options at the lowest expense. In order to do this, some re-zoning of residential areas would need to occur. A second possibility is to encourage mixed-use developments (residential with commercial) that can provide relevant services and retail shopping opportunities to serve nearby residents. Special incentive or bonus options can make these developments possible. Again, changes in zoning regulations will be necessary to allow such flexible land use.

Recommendations

- Consider allowing higher density housing development where public water and sewer are provided.
- Consider adjusting zoning and other regulation requirements where they will reduce housing costs without sacrificing public health and safety.
- Consider adopting lower density development where natural resources, soils, roads, etc., require, in order to protect these resources and preserve rural character.
- Consider innovative zoning techniques to provide elderly housing.
- Continue the enforcement of development standards for setbacks, minimum lot sizes, structure heights and access.
- Explore opportunities for low income and elderly housing.
- Locate potential areas that could accommodate low income and elderly housing.

COMMERCIAL LAND USE

Wilton's commercial land use has historically developed within the downtown area and along the major thoroughfares in order to utilize the available transportation network and concentrations of people.

Existing commercial development need good roads and a sizable market in order to continue operation. Future commercial development will also consider a good road network and a potential high volume traffic in any consideration for locating and starting a commercial business in Wilton.

In recent years, there has been a change in the composition of the downtown area and an increase in commercial development along NH Route 101 and NH 3 1. This has been particularly noticeable in the trend of fewer shops and more office uses in the downtown area. Despite this trend, the downtown continues to serve a viable function for the local residents and its future vitality should be preserved. At the same time, allowance is made for further commercial development on NH 101 where future demand for retail activity will expand. To minimize the incidence of strip development along the highway, minimum frontage and setbacks are required in order to retain the scenic and attractive character of the Town and to avoid challenging the downtown's basic role and function as the community's focal point.

One way to approach the future of Wilton's town center is to create a team or committee that could explore various options for town center development. This team, composed of local merchants, property owners and residents of the town center, would be encouraged to develop a "wish" list of town business owners and a "needs" list of prospective interests who are considering location in Wilton. From such lists could be developed a prioritized listing that would suggest ways the Town might better accommodate present businesses and attract desirable future business. The team could also: examine possible funding sources such as grants and innovative financing arrangements; develop design standards or criteria for all renovations and new construction in the commercial area; and recommend areas for special treatment such as the placement of a bench or street trees.

Recommendations

- Develop a downtown revitalization plan as part of any future master plan updates. Consider working towards a renewal or revitalization of this area by seeking state, regional, local, and private support and funding.
- Consider enlarging existing commercially zoned lands to better utilize available land resources for “cluster” or “mall-type” commercial development.
- Identify and preserve Wilton’s historic structures and sites.
- The Town should restrict signage along the Main St. that is inconsistent with Wilton’s old New England character. Moderately sized, well-designed and easy-to-read signs should be encouraged.
- Increase the number of scope of special events in the Town, Such events can attract potential customers to local businesses and can provide a positive impression for visitors. It also allows an opportunity for people in the region to find out about Wilton.
- Encourage home occupation that complement or support local businesses. With proper restrictions (such as not allowing retail sales) such endeavors can serve as incubator businesses by reducing start-up costs and overhead.
- Continue to utilize the site plan review process for new commercial structures or expansions of old ones. Such review enables the Town to better prepare for the Town’s developments and helps to ensure that new commercial ventures are consistent with the community’s desired growth pattern.

INDUSTRIAL LAND USE

Industrial land use has located in Wilton where there has existed both access to a major highway and large tracts of land. At one time industry played more of a role in supporting the Town (tax revenues and jobs) than it does at the present time. Should the Town desire increasing industry’s role in the future, it will need to make sure that sufficient land area (large tracts serviced by public water and sewer with little or no incompatible residential and commercial land uses) is available with adequate transportation access in order to entice potential industries to locate here.

Recent expansion of the industrial district by re-zoning is intended to increase opportunities for attracting industrial and commercial users to the Town. This change is intended to support and maintain Wilton’s rural character by encouraging development which is complimentary to the Town’s desires and values. Building setback standards, lot coverage, access and parking requirements should all be prescribed in such a manner that the Town’s needs are met while allowing a new industrial user to achieve an economy of scale in it’s operation that is feasible and workable.

Recommendations

- Consider enlarging the existing industrial zone to include lands along NH Routes 101 and 31 and Main Street that have few natural limitations, and are free of in compatible residential and commercial land uses.
- Encourage the consolidation of industrial land parcels to provide a greater variety of industrial opportunities.
- Explore options for attracting new industrial users that are non-polluting and will have a low impact on the Town’s quality of life.
- Actively recruit industrial enterprises that would be able to employ predominantly local workers.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Not unlike the majority of New Hampshire’s communities, Wilton expends a sizable portion of its annual budget on providing residents with community facilities and services. These include: schools; public water and sewer; roads; fire, police and ambulance protection; library; and recreational activities. In order for the Town to provide all these facilities and services in an effective and efficient manner, it must continually plan ahead (as is done with the Town’s CIP). Without proper planning,

future growth can drastically impact the Town's ability to provide adequate facilities and services by making the Town divert funds and efforts to areas that are "premature" for development.

"Premature" development, defined as development that both lacks the antecedent community services that would compliment the intensified use of land and fails to adequately **provide such** services in the development process, can be avoided if the Town is willing to adhere to the direction it has set forth in the Master Plan. It is also important to provide the Town's future community services and facilities as spelled out in the CIP. The best assurance a community can have in shaping its future development is to be able to guide and direct its growth. Lacking this, uncontrolled growth may occur which would erode the Town's ability to finance and provide desirable levels of service to all its residents.

Recommendations

- Develop an impact fee system that will allow the planned phasing of future development into the Town's program for providing community facilities and services.
- Develop and periodically update an evaluation whereby an area's development is "premature" until certain community facilities and services, or ability to provide a certain level of service, are provided for.
- Annually update the Town's CIP document and every five years update the Town's Master Plan.
- Encourage, where possible, the tie-in of new residential development to the Town's water and sewer system.
- Where possible, provide for greenway/park areas along the Souhegan River to allow for expanded recreation opportunities.

TRANSPORTATION

The planned growth of a community can be very difficult and seriously hampered if there are insufficient or non-existent roads and highways. If the expansion and upgrading of a town's roads does not keep pace with the amount of development, the consequences are very obvious. Roads deteriorate from the impact of too much traffic and/or insufficient maintenance.

Intersections and roads become clogged with traffic that causes long delays and unsafe conditions. In order to avoid having state and local roads become a problem to the Town's planned growth, it should make sure that roads are built, improved, and/or maintained as necessary.

Recommendations

- Require impact review of all major future developments and assess fees for the construction or improvement of any associated roads.
- Work with the state to have state roads, intersections, and bridges properly maintained for safe and efficient travel.
- Develop a program of Town road maintenance to ensure that road conditions do not deteriorate to the point where they become dangerous to travel and/or very costly to improve.
- Strengthen the Town's program for allowing curb cuts onto town roads to ensure that they are not allowed where the number or location raises the risk of unsafe travel or decreases the road's vehicular capacity.
- Consider adopting a traffic impact fee that would require new developments to be assessed for increasing traffic demand on local roads and transportation corridors.
- Actively participate in regional transportation planning efforts.
- Coordinate water, sewer and road improvements.
- Locate road access points (driveways, ingress, egress points, etc.) in the safest possible locations, usually by maximizing site distances.
- Discourage long, dead-end roads and encourage a flow-through road system.
- Work with the NH Department of Transportation on resolving dangerous intersections on state highways (101 and 31) within the Town.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Wilton is fortunate that there are considerable amounts of water, agricultural, forest, soil, scenic and other natural resources within its borders. However, due to the rapid pace of development the Town has experienced over the past decade, there will likely not be the same amount or variety of natural resources available after the next ten-year period. In order to ensure that there is sufficient variety and amounts of these natural resources for the Town's future generations to utilize, the Town should begin protecting these resources now.

Recommendations

- Evaluate and prioritize the various types of natural resources inventoried in the natural resources section of the master plan.
- Consider the various types of protection options available (land and development rights purchase, easements, donations, etc.) that will best protect the Town's variety of natural resources.
- Develop performance standards that will effectively protect the Town's surface water and groundwater resources from development associated contamination.
- Consider rezoning resource areas based on their natural and cultural limiting factors and values (soils, slopes, elevation, wetlands agriculture, forest).
- Preserve vistas and high points within the Town in order to protect the Town's scenic resources.

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|---------------------------------|---|
| TOWN OF WILTON MASTER PLAN..... | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Residential Land Use..... | 1 |
| Commercial Land Use..... | 2 |
| Industrial Land Use..... | 3 |
| Community Facilities..... | 3 |
| Transportation..... | 4 |
| Natural Resources..... | 5 |