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# **TOWN OF STRAFFORD MASTER PLAN 2001**

## **Strafford, New Hampshire**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

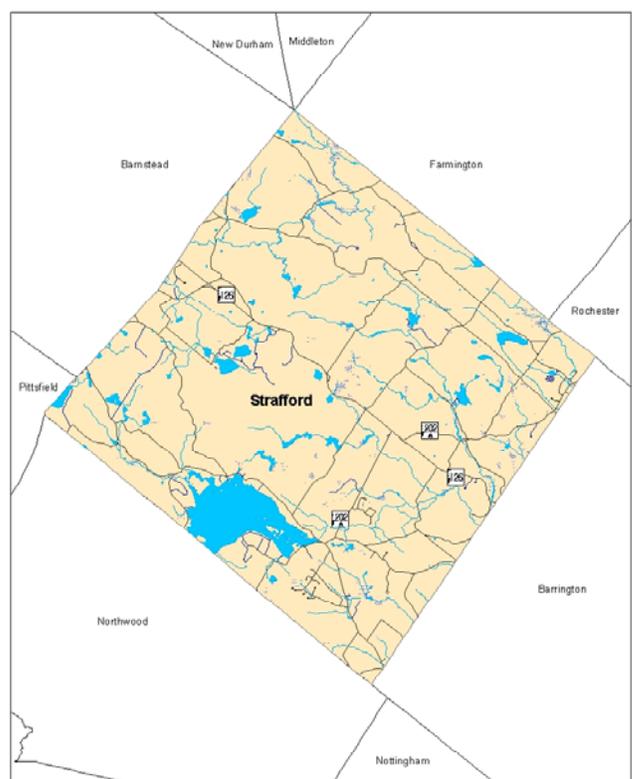
A master plan is a document intended to be a reference guide for a town's decision makers as they make, interpret, and implement laws and procedures in the town. Though authored and adopted by the Planning Board, the master plan attempts to reflect the public's desire on how the community should grow and face the challenges of growth in the region. The document can, and should be effectively used by everyone in the town to ensure consistency in policy and actions. The current Master Plan was written in 1978 and has served the Town well for the past 23 years. However, with rampant growth occurring in areas around the town, the Planning Board felt it necessary to update the Plan by re-affirming the sections that are still pertinent today and addressing and articulating goals and objectives for future development in the town.

The Town of Strafford began discussion on updating their Master Plan in 1999 and sought the help of Strafford Regional Planning Commission to assist them in the endeavor. In the fall of 2000, a community forum was held to solicit ideas and comments from the citizenry on how the town should grow and change over the next five years. The response from the community was excellent and several issues were raised during the discussion. As a result of the forum, four topic sub-committees were established in order to meet and discuss in more detail the issues and concerns raised at the community forum. These committees began to clarify goals and objectives and brainstorm ideas for action and recommendations.

The Strafford Planning Board would like to thank all of the many residents who made time in their busy schedules to work on this important policy document. Your efforts make this a more accurate account of how the community wants to grow and evolve in the coming years.

## 1.1. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Town of Strafford was officially incorporated on July 17, 1820 but had been



settled long before that when it was part of the Town of Barrington. Bow Lake Village, for example, had a store, gristmill, potash factory, blacksmith, hotel, and tavern all by the 1790s. Hotels and small services also existed at Crown Point, North Strafford, and Center Strafford. While farming and timber harvesting were the primary businesses in town, there were several other industries that operated through the nineteenth century. Granite was quarried in some parts of town, and Parker Mountain was widely known for its excellent mica deposits. Mica was widely used in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and mica from Strafford was shipped all over the country. When the Barrington Railroad was constructed just prior to the Civil War, some farms expanded since their dairy products could be shipped to the nearby larger cities.

After the Civil War, the regional shoe industry had an impact on the town with several small shoe shops operating around the community. These were support facilities that made shoe components, which were sent to Rochester or Dover for final assembly. In addition, there was a large shoebox factory that made boxes for the shoe factories in the region.

By the early twentieth century, most of these small industries had closed and the town's business focus reverted to agricultural production. After World War II, the town began to see gradual residential development on some of the agricultural land as family farms continued to decline through the latter half of the century. However, it is this rural, agricultural character that the community has identified as important and its protection, as a primary goal.

Education was always highly regarded in Strafford as evidenced with the creation of the Strafford Union Academy in 1834. For over one hundred years the academy offered educational opportunities in a private setting, but also was the official school of Strafford until the present public school was constructed in the 1960s. The school was renamed for its primary benefactors, became Austin-Cate Academy, and eventually built a small campus of buildings not far from its original location on Strafford ridge. The school closed its doors in the 1980s and the property was purchased as a training academy for the New Hampshire National Guard. Despite this, the academy has a long history in the community and retains a strong visual presence in the town.

Strafford is now primarily a bedroom community with few commercial or industrial enterprises. The historic neighborhood

centers are still recognizable with churches and former grange halls intact. Development has occurred within close proximity of major commuting routes to Concord, Portsmouth, and Rochester, as well as around Bow Lake.

## **1.2. MASTER PLAN STRUCTURE**

The Strafford Planning Board has identified the goal of keeping this Master Plan a succinct, user-friendly document that will be readily used by all of the Town decision makers and citizens. As a result of the community meetings process, the Plan has evolved into three major chapters. These include: Community Character, Natural Resources, and Town and Community Services. While RSA-674: 2 suggests that a Master Plan have chapters on land use, housing, transportation, recreation, utilities and public service, conservation, and gravel mining, most of these topics will be addressed in these three chapters. The chapters reflect the important goals and concerns for the future of Strafford that the community has identified.

## **2. VISION STATEMENT AND POLICY GOALS**

### **2.1. VISION STATEMENT**

We, the residents of Strafford, value the distinct rural character of our town and the unique geographic centers that comprise our community. We want the town to grow in a way that is sensitive to, and supportive of, this historic rural character, as well as our natural resources, community services, and housing opportunities.

### **2.2. POLICY GOALS OF THE 2001 STRAFFORD MASTER PLAN**

1. Sustain and enhance the agricultural and sylvan character of the town by protecting the natural, historic, and archeological resources of the landscape.
2. Allow for a range of housing opportunities in a manner that protects the environment and enhances the town's rural and agricultural character.
3. Promote and manage growth that sustains an agricultural and cottage industry economy in keeping with the town's rural character.
4. Protect the community's significant open space areas and natural resources through initiating conservation practices, promoting sensitive development, supporting and utilizing tools for land protection, and encouraging public awareness.
5. Protect the community's water resources through careful study and monitoring of the water quality, developing effective yet reasonable water protection regulations, and encouraging conservation practices and sensitive development.

6. Protect the Town's natural resources by providing adequate and economical disposal facilities with minimal environmental impact for residents' use
7. Enhance the distinct identity of each of the town's four geographic centers, and investigate creating a new town center for community wide services, cultural and recreational events and activities.
8. Enhance, strengthen, and encourage collaboration between the school and the town's government to include elected officials, boards and programs.
9. Provide efficient and effective means of communicating Town information to Strafford residents in an effort to create a well-informed citizenry.
10. Think creatively when planning school facilities with the purpose of giving the children of Strafford a more than adequate educational opportunity and creating facilities that benefit the entire community.
11. Work towards implementing the recommendations in the Master Plan by enacting regulations, ordinances, and procedures, and by frequently revisiting the plan to evaluate the results of our efforts.

### 3. COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Throughout the community involvement process, residents expressed concern for the preservation of the town's rural character. The agricultural roots of the town continue to characterize the community with historic architecture, open fields, stonewalls, hedgerows and wood lots, despite the closure of most of the working farms in the town. Each of the topic sub-committees carried this concern in their discussions and it is reflected in many of the recommendations put forth by each group.



Strafford is a town that is fortunate to have many substantially intact buildings and houses dating from the nineteenth century. These historic structures give the town a character typical of New England farming communities. These resources not only include farmhouses and outbuildings, but also social structures such as rural churches, grange halls and small hotels. Since the town has avoided widespread development during the last century, these resources remain remarkably intact and retain much of their traditional settings. As development takes place in the future, there is a desire in town to protect this historic rural character.

In addition to the architecture, the town has an abundance of rural roadways lined by stonewalls, mature trees, open fields, pasture land, and woodlands. Many of the roads are maintained in an unpaved state, which adds to their historic character. While sometimes it is more costly to maintain in this way, many of the residents identified these unpaved roadways as a unique characteristic of the town and worth preserving.

Much of the Town's valuable natural resource land comprises the Town's scenic vistas. These include the views of Parker and Blue Job Mountains, lands along the Isinglass and Mohawk River corridors, and areas around the several lakes and ponds. Much of this land is in private hands, making it vulnerable to development. The Town needs to develop land use controls that help protect these community assets while also preserving the property owner's rights.

Land development should be sensitive to adjacent historic resources, setback and screened (if necessary) from rural roads, be designed and constructed of materials that are compatible

with the existing structures, and sited in a way that is sensitive to rural vistas and mountain tops that distinguish the community.

### **3.1 HISTORIC RESOURCES**

#### **3.1.1 GOAL:**

Protect and enhance the town's historic character and agricultural heritage by identifying, recognizing, and encouraging the preservation of historic resources and scenic areas.

#### **3.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Establish a local heritage commission that would assist the Town in planning for the protection of historic resources.
2. Encourage the Heritage Commission (or other local organization) to undertake measures such as the following to protect historic resources:
  - Develop an inventory of local historic structures and sites. This would include buildings and accessory structures, site features such as stonewalls and fences, and archaeological sites.
  - Establish a preservation fund and explore grant and/or foundation opportunities to protect historic sites.
  - Coordinate inventory and preservation activities in the community.
  - Assist Town Boards on matters involving historic resources
3. Consider ways to reduce the impacts of new development on historic resources through effective land use policies.
4. Establish a permit procedure and review process prior to the issuance of demolition permits for historic structures.
5. Encourage and promote the involvement and assistance of Strafford School teachers and students in projects supporting these objectives.

## **3.2 LANDSCAPE AND SCENIC AREAS**

### **3.2.1 GOAL:**

Protect and enhance the town's rural character by protecting the natural and scenic elements of the landscape.



### **3.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Make a "visual vista" assessment inventory to designate these areas. Identify key areas with input from the community.
2. Review and modify site plan review regulations to protect scenic features, such as trees, hedgerows, stonewalls, and limit hillside/roadside development.
3. Adopt a natural resource review of each parcel that comes before the planning board (Similar to the Randall Arendt approach in his book *Growing Greener*).
4. Target key parcels for long-term protection.
5. Establish a telecommunications ordinance for the protection of important landscapes and scenic areas.
6. Continue to identify roads that may be appropriate to designate as scenic roads.
7. Encourage the placement of underground utilities in new developments.
8. Establish a lighting ordinance or modify site plan regulations to limit excessive light pollution that detracts from our rural character.
9. Encourage and promote involvement of Strafford School Teachers and Students in projects supporting these objectives.

## **3.3 SAFETY AND MOBILITY**

### **3.3.1 GOAL:**

While ensuring the roadways in Strafford are safe and passable, thoughtful planning for road improvements should be done to preserve the rural character.

### **3.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Consider the Town's rural character when upgrading existing roads

2. Whenever possible, investigate introducing walking and biking paths on town roads.
3. Where safety allows, consider alternative road design to preserve rural character.
4. Review zoning and subdivision regulations regarding setbacks; to preserve the rural road character in the town.
5. Require a landscape plan and good vegetative buffer for developments subject to site plan and/or subdivision regulations
6. Conduct a roadway inventory to help in the development of a policy on road maintenance, improvement and abandonment.

### **3.4 CONSERVATION**

#### **3.4.1 GOAL:**

Ensure that conservation and preservation of natural resources and elements that contribute to Strafford's character are priorities of town planning regulations

#### **3.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Conduct an intensive natural resource inventory/assessment, which covers unique natural habitats, watersheds, wildlife corridors, and forests (as described in Natural Resource section.)
2. Allow for a more thorough and structured natural resources review/assessment of plans presented to Planning Board.
3. Investigate augmenting a fund to assist in purchase of conservation easements to preserve environmentally significant areas.
4. Maintain Strafford zoning as agricultural and residential.
5. Promote conservation planning as the community addresses the pressures of development in the coming years.

## **4. NATURAL RESOURCES**

Despite a rapidly growing population, Strafford has significant open space areas. These include some of the largest blocks of open space unfragmented by active roadways in southeastern New Hampshire. In addition, there is considerable undeveloped frontage on great ponds and rivers as well as significant farmland resources. There is little doubt that these resources will be threatened in the near future as the community's population expands.



The community forum clearly demonstrated residents' interest in protecting the natural resources in the town. These include agricultural lands, wetlands, water bodies, ground water resources, wildlife habitats, forest resources, and unfragmented open space. As previously mentioned in chapter one, the protection of natural resources contributes to the preservation of rural character that is so important to the community.

### **4.1 LAND CONSERVATION**

Over the last ten years, Strafford has continued to lose active agricultural acreage. This has been caused by a combination of some farms closing and from new development. The soils occupying our prime agricultural lands are deep to bedrock, reasonably well drained, and are located on gentle to moderate slopes. These characteristics also make them desirable from the standpoint of ease of development. Despite this, the town still retains a very rural/agricultural appearance due to the continued presence of rolling, open fields, farmsteads with outbuildings, and tended woodlands, all in fairly large tracts. These large parcels not only contribute to the overall character but also provide important unfragmented habitats for wildlife.

For example, the large wooded areas surrounding Parker Mountain and Blue Hills continue to be fairly sparsely inhabited. Species such as the black bear and bobcat may thrive under these conditions. These unfragmented areas have also allowed for the return of the wild turkey to our area. In addition, these same areas support deeryards that are important to herd survival. Deer and partridge are examples of species that can also make good use of those adjacent woodlots that have been lumbered using sound cutting practices. Agricultural lands provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife species. The edges

of pastures and fields form important habitat for many birds and small mammals.

Strafford also has a significant amount of wetlands that are also important to wildlife. They provide important habitat for waterfowl and furbearers and are natural filters for our groundwater. Although some of the lakes in town receive heavy recreational use, there is still a loon population and the great blue heron can be found in many of the smaller bodies of water. In addition, several of the streams in town are suitable for native trout habitat.

#### **4.1.1 GOAL:**

Protect the community's significant undeveloped land areas through initiating conservation practices, sensitive development, supporting and utilizing tools for land protection, and through public awareness.

#### **4.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Conduct a comprehensive natural resource inventory using current available technology that identifies resources including, but not limited to, farmlands, prime farm soils, soils of statewide importance, water resources, wetlands, unfragmented blocks of open space, viewsheds, protected lands, unique and/or rare plant communities, productive forest land, wildlife habitats, and co-occurring natural resource features
2. Work to obtain adequate annual revenues in the Strafford Conservation Fund through a variety of funding sources; consider dedicating 100% of the Current Use Penalty Tax to the fund.
3. Establish regulatory controls that consider conservation subdivision design concepts and processes such as those developed by Randall Arendt that place a priority on natural resources/features and attempt to minimize the impacts of development.
4. Enact regulatory controls to protect key viewsheds.
5. Promote the benefits of conservation planning by publicizing the economic importance of open space to the community and the roles that Current Use Assessment and permanent land conservation measures play in retaining it.
6. Encourage community-based land conservation outreach efforts to work closely with land conservation organizations in the region. Encourage educational outreach to key

landowners in town regarding voluntary permanent land conservation tools such as conservation easements and basic estate planning.

## **4.2 WATER QUALITY**

The Blue Hills range in Strafford forms a major divide between the Suncook-Merrimack watershed to the west and the Isinglass, Cocheco and other watersheds that flow east to the seacoast. The headwaters of these streams lie along the flanks of the Blue Hills, which have a base elevation of 600- 800 feet above sea level (Parker Mountain peak elevation, highest in the range, is over 1,420 feet). Some streams rise in the numerous wetlands scattered throughout town. Strafford is fortunate in having an abundance of wetlands. They act as sponges during periods of high rainfall and runoff and help regulate stream flow during drier periods.



Strafford has regionally significant surface water features that include Bow Lake, the second largest lake in Strafford County and the source of the Isinglass River. All surface waters in Strafford are currently classified by the State as Class B (fishable, swimmable and unpolluted by untreated wastewater or septic effluent). While currently the water quality and supply is relatively good, as continued new development and redevelopment of existing seasonal dwellings takes place here and in the region, water quality has been raised by residents to be a topic of major concern.

### **4.2.1 GOAL:**

Protect the community's water resources through careful study and monitoring of the water quality, developing effective yet reasonable water protection regulations, and encouraging conservation practices and sensitive development.

### **4.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Continue to provide community financial support for water quality monitoring of Bow Lake.
2. Encourage the Strafford Conservation Commission to play an active role in implementing measures to protect the community's water quality.

3. Encourage the inspections of all septic systems that lie within 500 feet of surface waters, including great ponds, lakes, perennial streams and rivers. This could occur as a component of the Planning Board approval process for a conversion or change of use or through the building permit/inspection process.
4. Consider adopting buffer zone requirements along wetlands, perennial streams, rivers, great ponds and lakes based on principals found in *Buffers for Wetlands and Surface Waters: A Guide for New Hampshire Municipalities* (1997 - revised edition). Vicki Chase, Laura Deming and Francesca Latawiec. Audubon Society of NH.
5. Adopt “Best Management Practices” requirements in all drainage construction and design based on principles found in *Stormwater Management and Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook for Urban and Developing Areas in New Hampshire* (August 1992). Rockingham County Conservation District and DES.
6. Encourage flow regimes in the Isinglass River that are compatible with a healthy ecosystem.
7. Support the incorporation of the Isinglass River in the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program.

#### **4.4 TOWN GOVERNANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

The fair and consistent enforcement of regulations, cross board cooperation, avoidance of conflict of interest, and communication to residents, though seemingly unrelated, that can be critical to natural resource protection. All of these are important components of a healthy, functioning town government that is truly working toward resource protection and the public good.

##### **4.4.1 GOAL:**

Ensure that the Town’s leaders, staff, and board volunteers work together to effectively meet the goals of natural resource protection in the town.

##### **4.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Encourage a consistent and high level of compliance with regulatory controls based on public input.
2. Hire a code enforcement officer to enforce regulatory controls.

3. Establish periodic cross board meetings to discuss issues of mutual concern.
4. Require training of all new Planning Board and Conservation Commission members.

## **5. TOWN AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

The Town recognizes that it will grow and develop further in the coming years. There is a desire that this new development be directed and managed in a way that will complement the Town's distinct character and rural traditions. Additionally, Strafford has limited municipal services and any sudden increase or premature development could severely impact Town resources.



As previously mentioned, the town is primarily residential with few commercial or industrial properties. The town has no public water or sewer systems and therefore is not likely to attract any major commercial or industrial development. Several of the commercial enterprises that do exist tend to operate as a home business or cottage industry. The residents involved in the preparation of this Master Plan have expressed the desire to encourage this type of community-based, traditional economic development, as long as it maintains a rural residential character and does not adversely impact neighboring properties. It is generally believed that these wholesome, performance-based opportunities to establish and/or expand cottage industries and agricultural supportive businesses would be ideal for the community.

Where there is interest in new commercial development, the Planning Board would like to steer this into the existing settlement crossroads rather than randomly placed in the rural countryside. This way, the existing centers would be enhanced and supported and the rural character of the surrounding countryside would be preserved.

Strafford is slowly approaching a fiscal threshold as its population continues to grow. Municipal services, such as police, fire, road maintenance, recreation programs, and schools are adequate but expansion could push services to their limits. To help offset these new capital expenses, the Town will be looking into the possibility of assessing impact fees on future development.

## **5.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **5.1.1 GOAL:**

Support agricultural and cottage industry through land use controls and policies that help to minimize impacts on adjacent properties and to enhance the town's rural character.

### **5.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Review and revise zoning and site plan regulations so as to support and protect Town's small village character and identity.
2. Review regulations to ensure support for the marketing of farm products, local arts and crafts and historic enterprises.
3. Continue to support home occupation in all districts.
4. Consider developing definitions that distinguish between home business, home occupation, and cottage industries.

## **5.2 DELIVERY OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

The Town of Strafford has minimal municipal services and relies heavily on the residents' willingness to volunteer and accept responsibility for getting things accomplished in town. The Town has an all volunteer fire department and emergency medical squad. Code enforcement is conducted on a part-time basis by the building inspector. Since most departments operate on a part-time basis, communication between departments, committees, and boards is not always clear or timely. It is hoped that the Town can strengthen the good foundation that exists by improving communication amongst the players.

It is also recognized that new development can have a direct impact on the delivery of town services. It is important for the Planning Board and other review bodies in town to consider this fact and maintain good communications with other departments and boards. New development should be designed in a way that supports the delivery of municipal services and protects the public's health, safety, and welfare.

### 5.2.1 GOAL:

To improve communications between Town departments, boards, and committees so as to deliver Town services in an efficient, economical manner and ensure that new development supports this effort.

### 5.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Examine the need for expanded EMT service.
2. Investigate ways that new development might contribute to the creation of a community/municipal complex.
3. Review the current building code and update where necessary.
4. Require developers to provide water supply for fire protection on all major subdivisions
5. Review and implement improvements to inspection services.
6. Adequately fund Town boards and positions to permit efficient, informative and effective operation.

## 5.3 SENSE OF COMMUNITY/RECREATION

Similar to community character, sense of community can mean different things to different people. The group that worked to identify issues and discuss recommendations defined sense of community in a social manner; taking into consideration the role that recreation plays in it. They offer the following definitions:



- A ***Sense of Community*** includes the opportunities and facilities to meet and work with other Strafford citizens, the fostering of good neighborliness, a feeling of pride in one's surroundings, and the active participation of citizens to maintain the quality of life in the town.
- ***Recreation*** refers to public and private facilities used for leisure time activities or hobbies and physical fitness that may include sports, instruction, hiking, wildlife observation, and other leisure time activities for all ages.

The community is geographically dispersed and there is no central place to hold town-wide activities or to permanently set up special equipment for activities and instruction. Historically, this need was often fulfilled by activities at the school and social

organizations such as the Grange. There were grange halls in all of the settlements in town but they now either meet sporadically, or are no longer active.

The community has expressed an interest in having more organized activities for not only the youth in town, but also the growing senior population. There are currently few or no organizations/facilities for senior citizens and very few activities for students who do not participate in school sports programs. There is a growing sense in town that a centralized community center would be an important asset in meeting this need and reinforce a stronger sense of community.

Once a physical facility is established, there is the opportunity for social programs and activities for seniors and youth. These might include senior support services such as transportation to appointments, meals on wheels, daily health programs, daily social programs, and respite care. For the youth there could be after-school activities, weekend social activities, in-town sport leagues, counseling services, and a community volunteer program.

As Strafford continues to grow over the next ten years, it is the community's vision to see the town linked together by its cultural and recreational activities and services while maintaining a safe, rural character.

### **5.3.1 GOAL:**

Provide centrally located facilities for community services, cultural events, recreational activities, and group interaction for all ages.

### **5.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Locate Town activities in the central area described above.
2. Consider the use of existing or the purchase of land/building for recreational activities, adult education, senior citizen center, group meeting rooms, etc.
3. Encourage senior housing and/or care facility.
4. Encourage a volunteer group to drive seniors to doctor's appointments, etc.
5. Encourage the provision of a range of activities for senior residents.
6. Encourage the provision of a range of activities for students within their own community.

7. Explore ways to use the 350-acre parcel that the town is purchasing.
8. Determine present and future athletic field requirements

## **5.4 ROADS AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY**

### **5.4.1 ROADS**

Roads are mentioned in each of the chapters since they greatly influence how a town grows and develops, and their appearance helps define the community's character. The town has preserved much of its original rural character due to the fact there are no major regional roads running through the town. Many residents appreciate that fact and some are concerned that new road development will invite more rapid growth. The unpaved roads in town have a tendency to discourage through-traffic and high speeds. Despite this fact, the Town has a road network that provides adequate and convenient access to surrounding communities and services in the region.



Roads also affect natural resources and wildlife habitats in a community through fragmentation of landmasses, polluted runoff and general impacts from development. Strafford is fortunate to have some significant pieces of unfragmented land, which is beneficial to wildlife migration and habitat. While safety and emergency access is always a prime concern of the community, residents identified the “country roads” as an asset and indicated they would like to maintain a nature-friendly, transportation network

#### **5.4.1.A GOAL:**

Carefully plan for a safe and effective road system in a sustainable, environmentally sensitive way that preserves the rural character of Strafford roads.

#### **5.4.1.B RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Develop a town road inventory and plan that includes a composite map, spread sheet and inventory of all town roadways and pertinent information on road class, past and projected improvements, and a history of town votes to aid in developing a strategy.
2. Study all Class VI and Discontinued (Abandoned) roadways and roadway sections and make recommendations to continue them as Class VI or reclassify them as either Class A or B Trails or Discontinued (Abandoned).
3. Establish clear public policies that address the issue of development along Class VI roads.
4. Make provision for adequate and timely supervision of roadway construction and contract work requiring professional skills not available in house.
5. Reassess the subdivision regulations concerning cul-de-sac turnarounds, slope, drainage, erosion control, culverts, and off-road parking.
6. Consider limiting the maximum grade for new driveways so that fire and rescue (emergency) personnel can safely access homes.
7. Consider reducing maximum permitted grades on new roadways to improve public safety, ease of plowing, and reduce the potential for erosion.
8. Adopt new-road design standards that will reflect the scenic qualities of existing roads.
9. Investigate the possibility of charging an impact fee for new subdivisions to help offset the additional cost of town services.

#### **5.4.2 PEDESTRIAN SAFETY**

With increased motor traffic in town, pedestrian safety is a concern and many high-use areas are not safe for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles. This is occurring in several areas in the town. Subdivision and site plan regulations currently do not require that builders provide sidewalks when developing property. While sidewalks are not necessarily the answer in all areas of the town, there are some highly used and densely settled areas that would benefit from better pedestrian access.

There are also some areas in town that are experiencing increased pedestrian and bike traffic that need to be monitored and action taken if the need is identified. These include foot traffic between the school and the library, foot and bike traffic along Rte 202A, the area around the new post office, and Bow Lake Village area along the waterfront.

#### **5.4.2-A GOAL:**

Provide a safe environment for pedestrians and non-motorized traffic.

#### **5.4.2-B RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Modify the subdivision and site plan regulations to require new development to provide paths/sidewalks in and between neighborhoods.
2. Establish a capital fund for the installation of public sidewalks near Bow Lake and other public areas in town.
3. Publicize all known trails, paths, walkways, and bikeways in Strafford through maps and signs.
4. Investigate ways to reduce the traffic congestion around recreation centers.
5. Investigate parking alternatives in Bow Lake village.
6. Upgrade the Old Ridge Road and Cross Road to foot/bike traffic for easier access to the new post office.



### **5.5 SCHOOLS**

The town residents are proud of their local school and value being able to provide a good, locally-based education. However, we recognize that the cost of education continues to escalate and there needs to be careful and thoughtful planning in place to meet the needs of future generations. We also acknowledge that the Town has a limit on the amount of revenue it can generate and we need to be creative in our planning. It is hoped that when public facilities are planned for and built, that they will be able to function in multiple ways and meet the needs of a multitude of users.

#### **5.5.1 GOAL:**

Provide more than sufficient school facilities to give the children of Strafford an adequate educational opportunity.

### **5.5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. To estimate the long range needs and create a twenty-year master plan for school facilities.
2. Investigate the need for instituting an impact fee ordinance that will enable the Town to recoup a portion of the costs for expanded schools and community services required as a result of new development.
3. Encourage the continued use of school facilities for sports and meetings by clubs and residents.
4. Ensure all town residents have access to school recreation facilities but school activities get priority in scheduling (establish playing fields and courts for maximum use).

## **5.6 WASTE DISPOSAL**

The Town operates a transfer station for the disposal of solid wastes and recyclable materials. The community would like to see the facility continue to operate at peak efficiency and encourage the recycling of as many materials as economically possible.

### **5.6.1 GOAL:**

Provide well-managed and economical disposal facilities with minimal environmental impact for residents' use.

### **5.6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Post clearer guidelines for residents as to what can be recycled. (Re-use, reduce, and recycle, rules and regulations posted).
2. Create a best-use layout for the maximum traffic seen on big weekends.
3. Investigate the feasibility of creating/establishing alternative methods for the disposal of septic tank waste.
4. Consider joining a waste cooperative with other towns in order to improve our negotiating position with contractors and to possibly share equipment.
5. Create a composting area for town residents, not necessarily at transfer station location.

## **5.7 COMMUNICATIONS**

When the residents met at the Master Plan community forum, communication among the townspeople was raised as an issue. It is believed by many that there is a lack of communication

between Town leaders and the citizens of the town. Although the “Town Community Calendar” is a source for Town-wide information, it is a volunteer effort and limited funding prevents door-to-door distribution. It is available at various locations around town but it is not always convenient for all to pick up. We rely on out-of-town drop off points for Crown Point and Over-the-Mountain residents to find out what is happening in Strafford. New residents have no convenient way of learning about the Town and its regulations and activities.

This also relates to another concern raised by the residents: that Town codes and ordinances do not appear to be consistently enforced or applied. This may only be a perception, but it is believed that if the Town’s ordinances and regulations were easily accessed, that more people may comply and more people may be willing to report a violation if they understand the Town’s laws.

It was also recognized by the group that communication amongst the citizenry is essential in building a cohesive community. It is believed that more people will become involved in Town activities and politics and other activities and events if they were only better informed.

**5.7.1 GOAL:**

Provide Town information to all Strafford residents and provide the network for the Town to be a cohesive entity.

**5.7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Work to establish a Town web site. Include more news from the Town offices and private non-profit groups. Develop informational menu for available resources and times.
2. Widen the flyer distribution points at the store, churches and granges for better distribution.
3. Make information available to all Strafford residents by creative utilization of available facilities and staff.
4. Offer Town service information articles for inclusion in the Community Calendar, e.g. new transfer station regulations, etc.
5. Consider producing a packet of materials to hand out to new residents that includes goals of the Master Plan, trail maps, group meeting times and places, sports opportunities, resources available to Town residents.

## **5.8 HOUSING**

Housing is a land use activity that reflects private decisions in the community, and the Planning Board has little control over what type of homes will be constructed. However, the Board can regulate the densities and location of housing and in turn, can therefore affect the type of housing constructed.

Housing in Strafford is dispersed and scattered throughout the town with some higher density development in the various rural neighborhoods. Some housing development has occurred over the past ten years but the town has been fortunate not to have had the explosive growth that communities to the south and east have experienced. However, the most prominent housing type being built is for middle to upper-income families. Housing for elderly and for young families is becoming more and more scarce. The Town is interested in encouraging a variety of housing types for a range of family situations.

The community has identified their desire to protect the rural character and scenic vistas in town as well as the natural resources. Achieving this with a private developer can sometimes be a challenge without adopting extensive land use controls and ordinances. One tool expressed by one of the citizen committees working on the Master Plan is the conservation/open space subdivision. This could be done as an overlay or as the only residential development option in certain zoning districts.

The conservation subdivision focuses on the conservation of usable, significant open space while allowing development to take place. In the case of an agricultural parcel, efforts would be made to retain the original farmhouse and open space along the road and have the homes be situated at the rear of the lot. In that way, an original farm setting is preserved and Strafford's rural character is maintained along the public ways rather than having the entire parcel chopped-up into two acre lots. These subdivisions also have been shown to effectively slow the sprawl effect of traditional subdivision development, help a community retain more open space, and still provide the land owner the opportunity to develop their property.

### **5.8.1 GOAL**

Allow for a variety of housing opportunities while preserving the rural agricultural character and enhancing the village neighborhoods.

### **5.8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Promote conservation/open space planning in residential development.
2. Draft subdivision and site plan regulations that encourage the protection and appearance of current agricultural/residential land uses.
3. Consider allowing limited mixed-densities in residential subdivisions that would provide affordable housing opportunities.

## **6.0 FUTURE LAND USES**

Future land use, and specifically how the town wants to grow, has been discussed in various ways in the preceding chapters. The over reaching goal of maintaining and enhancing the rural agricultural integrity is key to future land development. Maintaining a cohesive sense of community and neighborhood identity was also raised as an important goal to our community. Finally, acknowledgement and protection of the significant natural resources in Strafford was identified and a critical component and directly related to the first two land use goals.

A proposed land use map showing where it would be desirable to have future development and where important resources should be protected appears in the appendix. This map is not a zoning map nor does it legally bind the town into allowing or denying development in various areas. What it does provide is an overall picture and reference for the Planning Board and community leaders as they consider new development proposals and propose modifications to Strafford's land use regulations.



## **7.0 SUMMARY**

This Master Plan is a result many hours of volunteer time given by the members of the Planning Board and residents in the community. Every attempt was made to involve the public throughout the process in order to establish a sense of ownership and truly be reflective of the community's aspirations. This Master Plan is a policy document that Planning Board hopes will be used by everyone that may be involved with attracting, proposing, reviewing, approving, or supporting development activities in the Town. In addition to directing development projects, the Master Plan also helps to prioritize conservation and environmental acquisition and protection efforts. The Master Plan is a versatile document that will be revisited by the Planning Board every few years to ensure the town is evolving in a way that is reflected in this plan and meets the expectations of the residents of our town.