



2022 Strafford, NH **MASTER PLAN**

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Introduction



Community Profile



Vision



Land Use

Strafford is known for its small town, rural atmosphere and for its conserved land, scenic views, and abundant natural resources. The community is warm, close-knit and friendly. While the Town isn't projected to grow rapidly, planning for smart growth that respects environmental protection and the Town's rural New England feel that is generated by its abundant viewsheds and historic resources is an important concern. This chapter addresses how residents feel about the state of the Town now, and how its well-liked qualities can be maintained and enhanced for existing residents and expected newcomers.

Key Trends, Needs, Considerations

All outreach participants echoed a similar sentiment: Strafford is a welcoming community where word-of-mouth is still the most effective form of communication—a clear indicator of a tight-knit community. When asked in the Strafford Master Plan Survey what residents love most about Strafford 94% of respondents consider community either very important or important, and written 1/3 of the responses included the word “community.” This exemplifies the strong sense of community present in town and guiding this master plan update.

Many residents moved to Strafford because of the community's character; residents love the small-town, rural atmosphere. Strafford embodies classic New England aesthetic with beautiful rural landscapes, abundant and protected natural resources, and vernacular architecture and historical buildings. The town is also marked by its agricultural roots, which can be seen by the rolling pastures and farmland across town; many of which could benefit from farm stands and local vendor outlets. Residents hope to maintain these quaint qualities while addressing today's through effective land use policy, and projects which enhance and protect natural areas, agricultural businesses, classic architecture, and social gathering spaces.

Beyond socializing at home or with neighbors, the Beach at the Dam and on the lake are local favorite places. Other gathering spaces include the Grange Hall, library, and school. There were many mentions that Strafford could benefit from a central community gathering space, like a community or recreation center. Other suggestions included walking trails, eateries, and a place for public arts, vendors, and local produce and goods. In recognition that the town is small, the ideal solution would be an all-in-one facility located in: center Strafford, a neighborhood village center, or a multi-purpose location.



Goals and Actions

Goals	Actions
A. Maintain Strafford's rural character while allowing opportunities for growth.	1. Add building design criteria to land use regulations.
	2. Establish a local heritage commission that would assist the Town in inventorying historic resources.
	3. Change site plan review to include historic markers.
B. Promote development patterns that support walkability and happenstance interactions while maintaining town character.	1. Review the Zoning Ordinance to implement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A mixed-use development policy that considers building design and dimensional restrictions to promote managed growth. ii. A sidewalk/complete streets policy that protects vegetative buffers while allowing multi-modal transportation in areas planned for managed growth.
	2. Focus mixed-use development in Center Strafford and Bow Lake Village.
C. Promote small businesses and home occupations, encourage farming and forestry industries.	1. Maintain or enhance policies that allow home businesses
	2. Maintain or enhance policies that protect and encourage farm and forestry uses
	3. Define home occupation in the Zoning Ordinance, revisit definition for home produce and products.



The population of Strafford has been growing steadily over the past two decades. Luckily, the quality and quantity of natural resources have been unaffected by this growth. The community remains rural and rich in natural resources including lakes, ponds, wetlands, large areas of open undeveloped space, rivers, farmland and forests. All of these land resources provide wildlife habitat for a number of animal species that contribute to the overall ecosystem health and biodiversity. Strafford residents pride themselves on the amount and quality of the available natural resources that define the character of the community and are in favor of land conservation to protect these features for future generations. This section serves to identify and plan for these lands in an effort to preserve the natural resources, wildlife habitat and enhance recreational opportunities and scenic sites that improve the quality of life for Strafford residents.

Key Trends, Needs, Considerations

The significance of Bow Lake as an important resource in town was mentioned repeatedly during the forum session. People enjoy the amenities the access to the lake provides such as boating, fishing, swimming and other leisure activities and would like to see increased access to and protection of the lake. However, many people also expressed concern with the water quality of the lake and other water bodies and waterways, which can be affected by boat activity, tree clearing, faulty septic systems, excessive use of fertilizers and runoff and increase of invasive species. In addition, there are many more natural resources to focus on throughout the rest of town and residents would like to leverage these ‘hidden gems’ with the understanding that not every open space needs to be built out. The benefit of a rural, low-density community is that the resources can be more evenly spread out and recreational spaces such as trails and scenic vistas are usually not overcrowded, however, better trail mapping and marketing are desired. Increased recreational programming as well as education opportunities on the importance of natural resources and best practices to protect them were also seen as an opportunity. The town having a persona as a farming community plays an important role as well and participants saw opportunities to make it easier to farm in their community and expand sustainable agriculture practices. The fairly large areas of undeveloped and unfragmented slightly sloping and rolling wooded lands as well as wetlands that provide a perfect habitat for the local fauna and flora. There are several animal species that thrive in the area ranging from amphibians, insects, a variety of birds, waterfowl, fish, furbearers to small and medium-sized mammals. The local flora, providing wildlife habitat to fauna, has an increasing susceptibility to invasive species especially on disturbed and newly cleared lands.

Finding the right balance between leveraging the use natural resources in the area and protection and conservation of the land is crucial for maintaining the rural character and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the existing resources. Conservation and preservation of Strafford’s land resources has received strong support from the residents who view the natural resources as the main feature defining the rural character of their community.





Goals	Actions
A. Support existing nature-based recreational opportunities in town	1. Increase education about proper resource management and availability by developing 'best practices' handbook for Strafford residents and visitors to raise awareness.
	2. Improve signage at trailheads.
	3. Expand the trail network on conservation land and improve the visibility of existing trail networks.
	4. Continue working closely with land conservation organizations in the region.
	5. Improve access to Bow Lake by exploring options to add parking. Specifically, explore the potential for use for the Planned Unit Development mechanism to make efficient use of limited space near Bow Lake.
	6. Collaborate with organizations such as PREP to implement goals related to natural resource management.
B. Protect designated land areas by preserving them for future generations in an undeveloped state	1. Support existing farms and encourage agricultural uses on prime farmland soils.
	2. Conserve additional land in town and continue to protect Strafford's natural resources through the Zoning Ordinance and through sensitive development.
	3. Update and promote an existing inventory of natural resources and continue monitoring their health and quality. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Make the inventory available on town's website and integrate resources in town planning.
C. Encourage strengthening of regulatory measures that safeguard the quality of natural resources	1. Incentivize upgrading septic systems that lie within 500 feet of surface waters.
	2. Protect drinking water supply and recreational resources by monitoring and maintaining water quality levels.
	3. Strengthen buffer zone requirements along wetlands, perennial streams, rivers, great ponds and lakes.



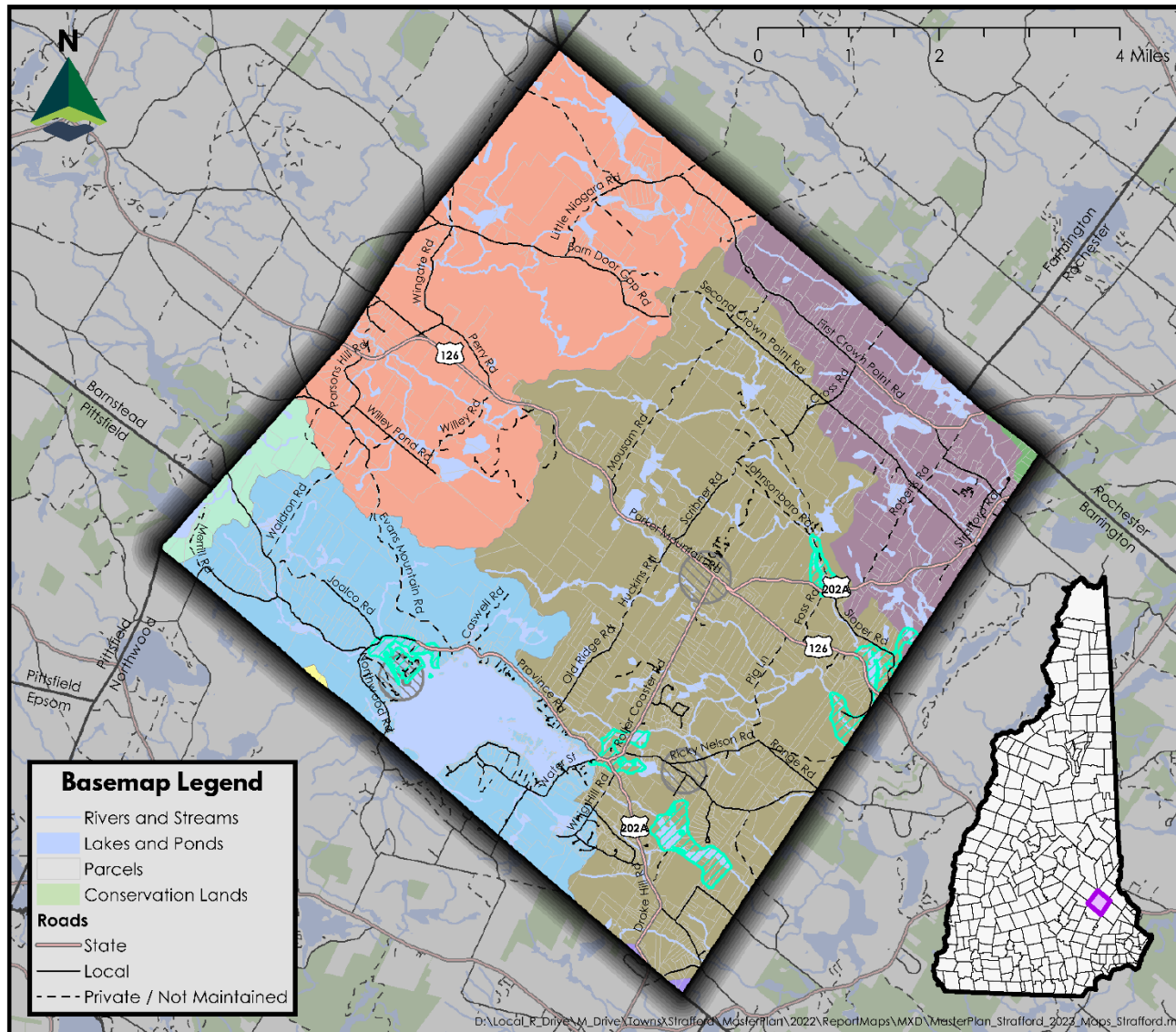
Legend

- Appalachian Oak Pine
- Cliff and Talus
- Floodplain Forest
- Grassland
- Hemlock Hardwood Pine
- Open Water
- Peatland
- Rocky Ridge
- Temperate Swamp
- Wet Meadow/Shrub Wetland

SRPC Information
150 Wakefield Street #12
Rochester, NH 03867
603-994-3500

Map Author and Date
Author: Jackson Rand
Date: 1/24/2023

Base data layers, generally from ESRI, NH GRANIT, NHDOI, NHDES, MEGIS, US Census, USFWS, USGS, and/or the 18 municipalities represented by SRPC. These agencies and organizations have derived this data using a variety of cited source materials, at different time frames, through different methodologies, with varying levels of accuracy. As such, errors are often inherent in GIS data and should be used for planning purposes only. The presented data are sometimes not at the same scale as the data. Please visit the original location of the data, contact the original host source, or contact SRPC for information on the full data set.



Strafford Master Plan

Figure X: Groundwater



Legend

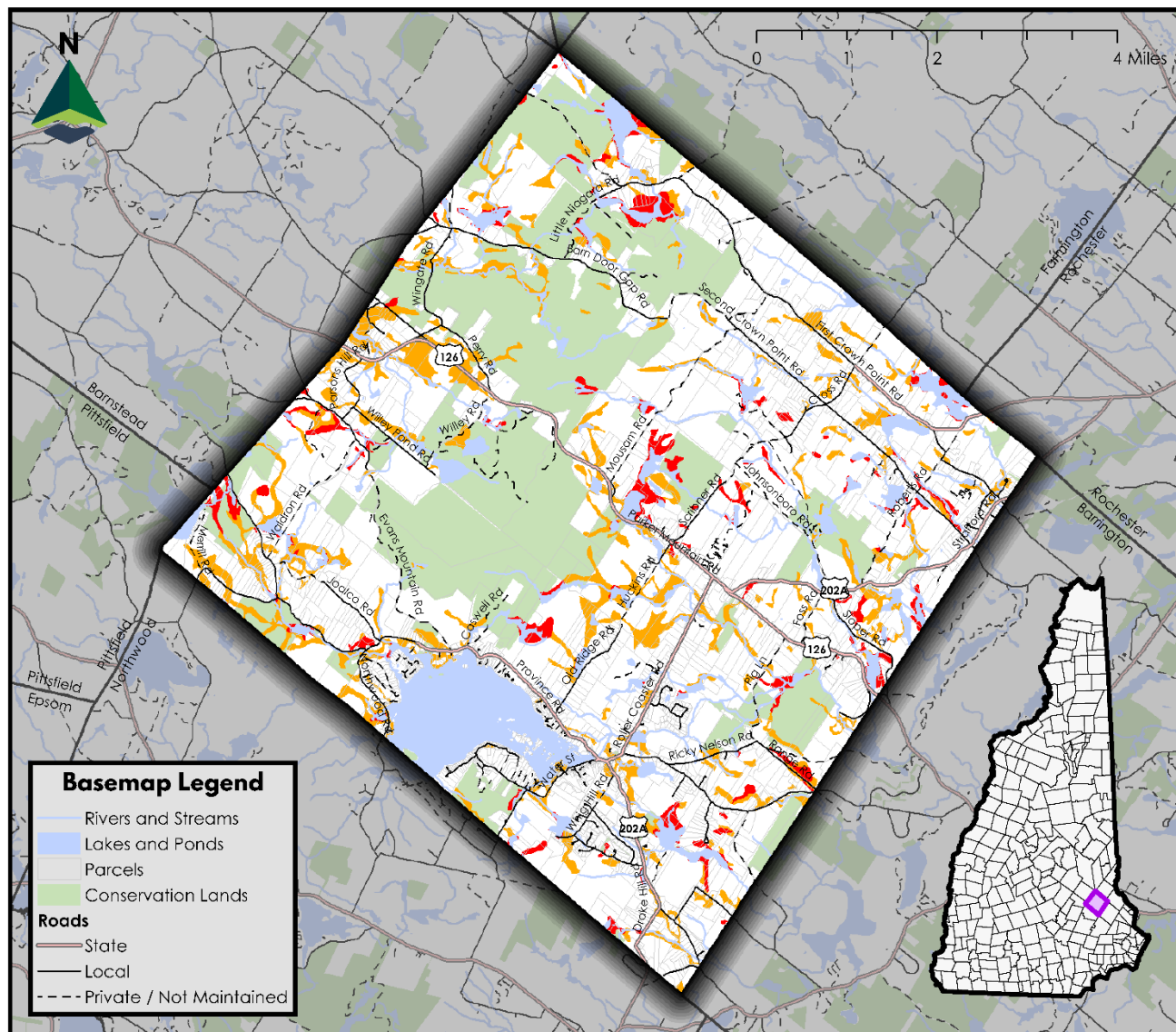
- Stratified Drift Aquifers
 - Wellhead Protection Areas
- Watersheds**
- Axe Handle Brook
 - Bean River-North River
 - Big River
 - Bow Lake
 - Little Suncook River
 - Long Pond
 - Nippo Brook-Isinglass River
 - Perry Brook-Suncook River

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Strafford Master Plan

Figure X: Soils
(Drainage Type)

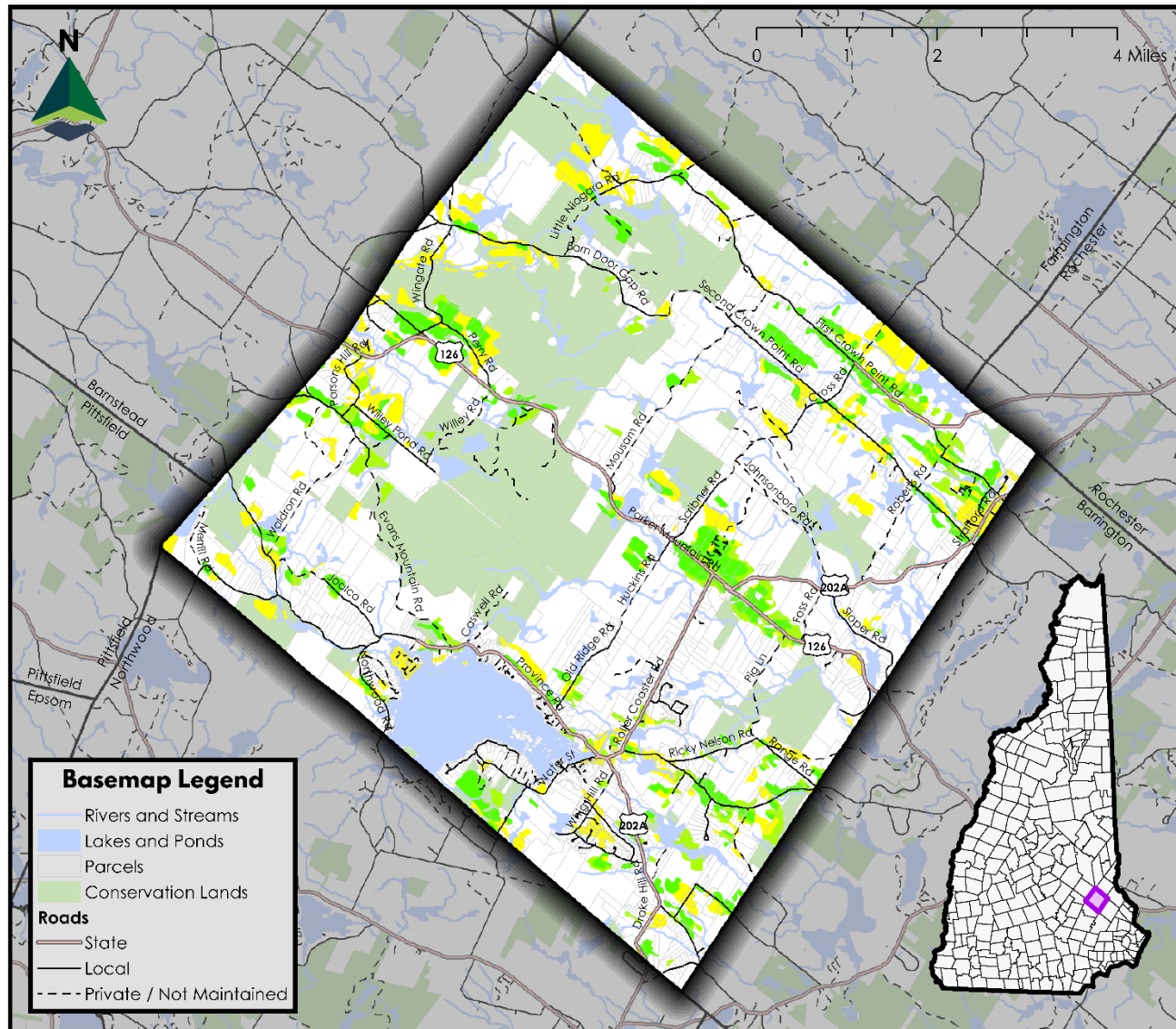


Legend

- Poorly Drained Soils
- Very Poorly Drained Soils

SRPC Information **Map Author and Date**
 150 Wakefield Street #12 Author: Jackson Rand
 Rochester, NH 03867 Date: 1/24/2023
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Strafford Master Plan

Figure X: Soils
(Farmland Type)



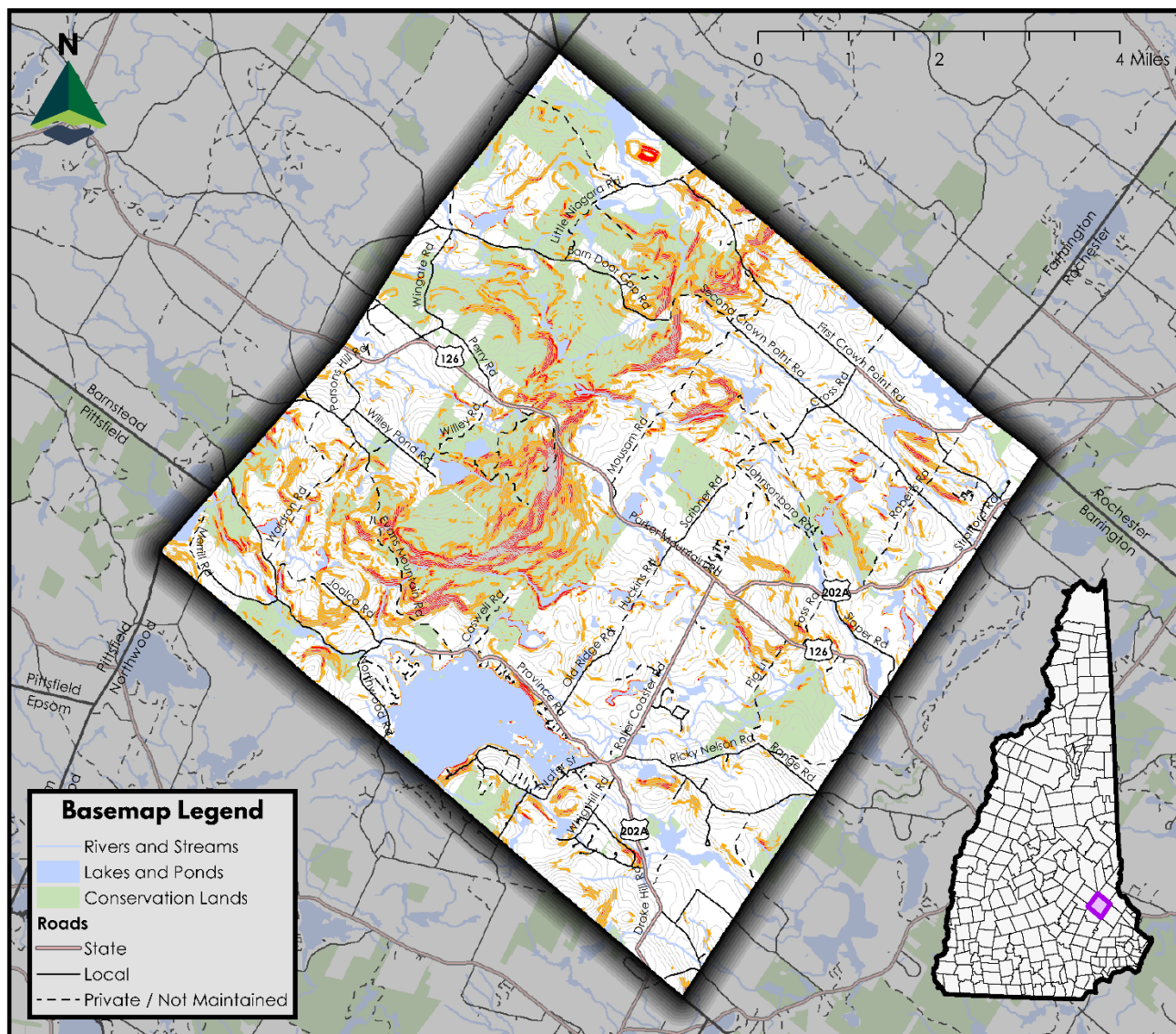
Legend

- Prime Farmland
- Farmland of State Importance
- Farmland of Local Importance

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Strafford Master Plan

Figure X: Topography



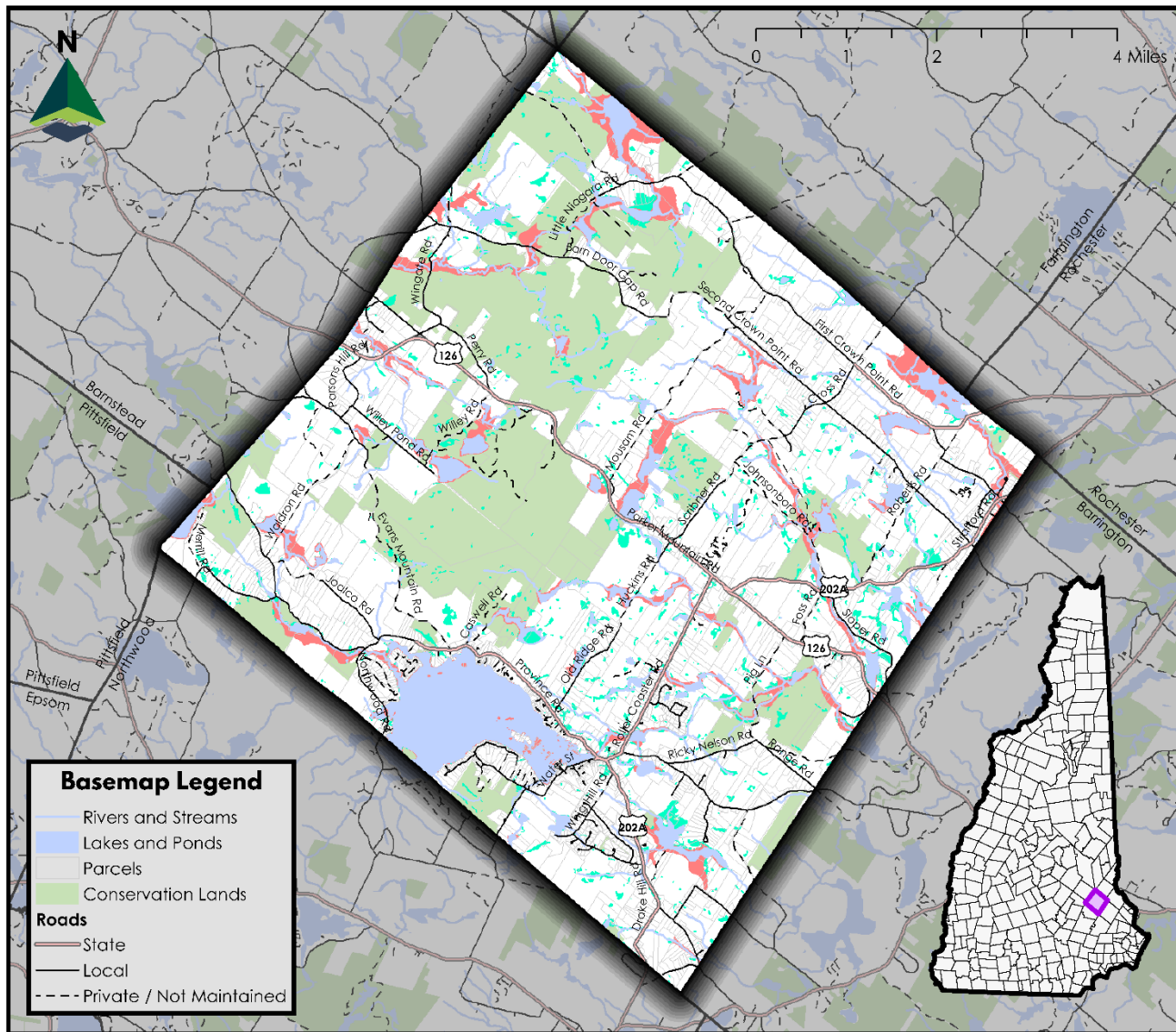
Legend

- Contours (20 Feet)
- Slope**
 - 0% - 15%
 - 15% - 25%
 - > 25%

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Strafford Master Plan

Figure X: Surface Water



Legend

- Rivers and Streams
- Lakes and Ponds
- FEMA 100-Year Flood Zone
- Wetlands

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Strafford is primarily residential with few commercial or industrial properties. The town runs primarily on private well water and septic systems and is unlikely to attract any major commercial or industrial development. Several of the commercial enterprises that do exist tend to operate as home-based businesses and residents have expressed a desire to continue promoting small business types. The Town aims for future development to reflect the current character created by the existing farms and agribusiness enterprises.

Key Trends, Needs, Considerations

Many residents seek services like healthcare, grocery stores, restaurants, retail stores, job opportunities and arts outside of town due to Strafford's rural nature and lack of commercial enterprise. While some folks expressed concern over access to these services as they age, for many, the desire to preserve the Town's natural resources outweighs the desire for additional economic development. Still, residents expressed interest in bolstering the local food economy by attracting more restaurants that have a traditional atmosphere to the Town's central locations. Some ideas included an ice cream shop by Bow Lake or a café near the library. Local farms are cherished by residents of Strafford, and many feel they should be accentuated with on-farm cafes, micro-breweries, or other food purchasing options like a local deli or grocer to avoid large chains like Hannaford.

Should development come to Strafford, small businesses are largely preferred over big-box stores so as to maintain the rural New England feel of the area and protect open space. This sentiment is also reflected where residents envision additional economic activity and non-residential land uses be borne by existing town centers, such as the areas identified on [figure x](#) as Center Strafford and Bow Lake Village. Co-locating businesses and town services in this area provides residents with better access to goods and services and could support future development of pedestrian infrastructure.





Goals	Actions
A. Promote local agribusiness and support economic activity in areas suited for mixed-use development such as Center Strafford and Bow Lake Village.	1. Promote small agribusiness and explore ways to support retail options for existing agribusinesses.
	2. Review land use regulations to remove barriers to successful roadside farmstands, such as structural requirements and boundary setbacks.
	3. Develop standards for desirable business typologies within the Site Plan Review regulations.
B. Explore creative financing options that reduce financial stress on the Town and its residents.	1. Identify areas that may meet the requirements for a TIF (Tax Increment Financing) district.
	2. Set up a schedule to periodically examine property tax exempt programs to ensure fairness and equitable distribution across residential property types
C. Engage in creative placemaking activities that support local artisans, build community character, and enhance economic vibrancy.	1. Identify areas suitable for temporary or permanent multi-use art installations that would promote and encourage the use of public spaces.
	2. Identify and promote existing arts and culture opportunities in Town and leverage their use to create other economic opportunities.
	3. Explore options to host a local vendor's market to bring visibility to small businesses and celebrate the local community.
	4. Revisit land use regulations to include language that encourages developers to preserve and add community features to public spaces that create opportunities for economic activities.

Housing in Strafford is dispersed and scattered throughout the town with some higher density development in the various rural neighborhoods. The community has identified their desire to protect the rural character and scenic vistas in town as well as the natural resources but recognize growing development pressures and the need for affordable housing in Town so that residents may age in place and future generation are able to stay in their community. The most prominent housing type is most suitable 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.

Key Trends, Needs, Considerations

A balanced and healthy rental market should have a vacancy rate of 5 to 6 percent, however, in 2022 the average vacancy rate in Strafford County for a 2- bedroom unit was 0.07 percent. Recognizing the growth pressures and challenging housing market facing the region, residents of Strafford are open to the development of new housing units so long as Strafford's rural character is not compromised. Housing development should be done in a reasonable, smart, and sustainable way to make room for new young families and to accommodate existing residents who wish to age in place.

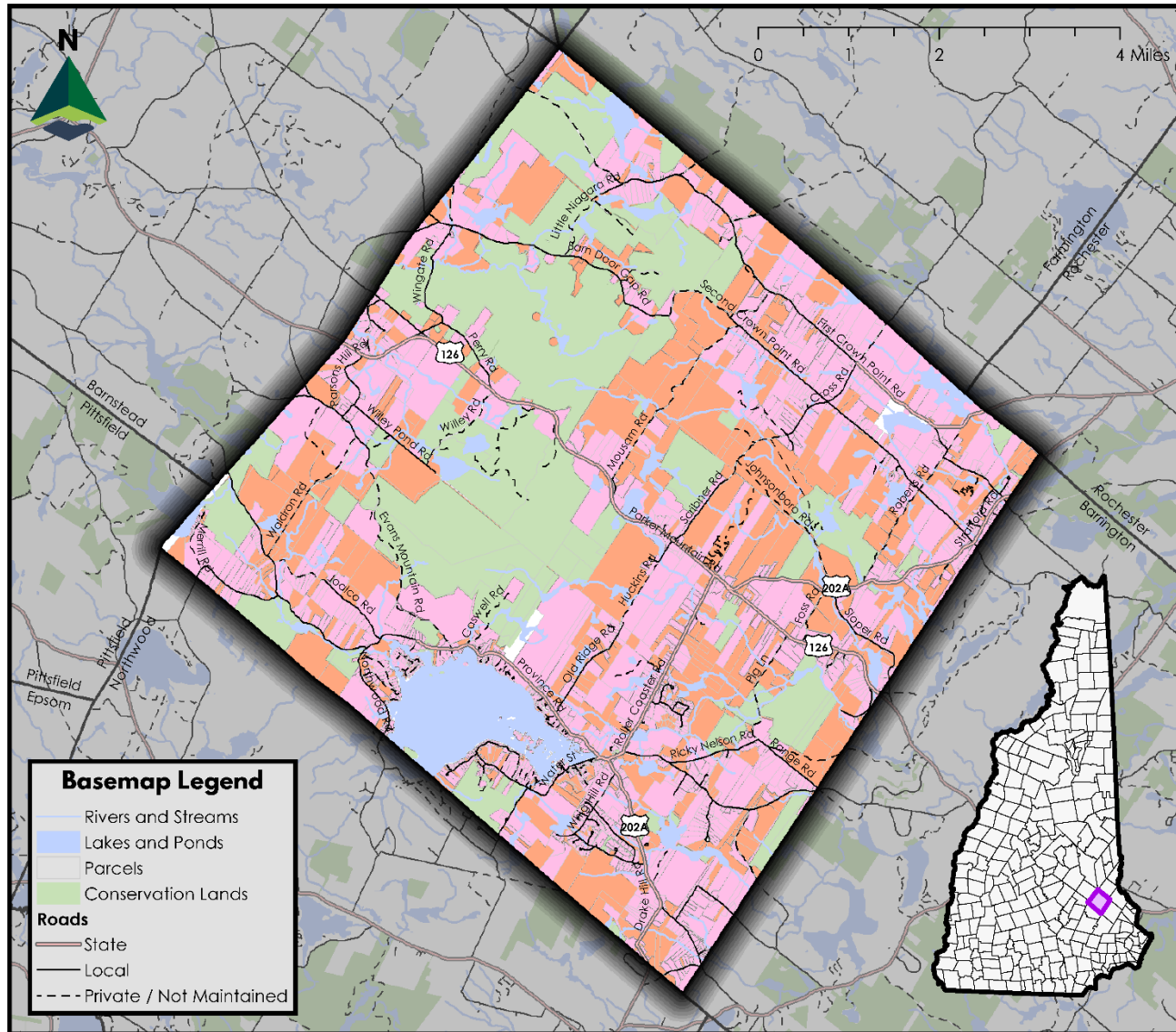
Many would like to adhere to the current zoning and maintain 2-acre minimum lot sizes. Some housing types do not match the current regulations, such as tiny homes, but many think options like this could keep in character with the community while providing more affordable housing options. Accessory dwelling units were mentioned by many outreach participants, but some felt the current regulations were not flexible enough to make this option work for all. Residents did express that walkability between their residences and local businesses would be nice but noted that it is not as high a priority as maintaining the community's rural character. Traditional single-family homes have historically been the most desirable housing type, and many residents echoed this sentiment, but were open to small multifamily developments so long as they are limited to a small number of units and complement the existing housing stock visually. Residents also noted that cluster developments would be preferable to preserve open space as much as possible.

The [Regional Housing Needs Assessment](#) indicates that Strafford's existing housing supply yields a need for a total of 260 homes across by 2040 to support a balanced housing economy; the goals and actions listed in this chapter aim to meet that need.



Goals	Actions
A. Encourage development patterns that maintain rural character and environmental protection.	1. Modify the subdivision and site plan regulations to require new development to provide trails/sidewalks in and between neighborhoods.
	2. Review and revise zoning and site plan regulations so as to support and protect Town's small village character and identity; explore the use of architectural standards for residential development.
	3. Incorporate definitions and provisions for desired missing middle housing types such as tiny homes, multi-family homes, and apartment buildings that align with the current character of the community
B. Guide new housing development to areas with higher housing densities to preserve the Town's natural resources.	1. Revisit the Zoning Ordinance to explore ways to encourage cluster development.
	2. Explore the use of the Village Plan Alternative or the use of village center zoning to concentrate mixed-use development in Center Strafford and Bow Lake Village.
	3. Explore implementing mechanisms like the Neighborhood Heritage District to encourage development that maintains the character of existing neighborhood clusters.
C. Promote strategies that increase affordable housing opportunities.	1. Explore Housing Opportunity Zone program to encourage development of lower cost units.
	2. Explore the NH Housing Toolkit to identify feasible approaches to enable lower cost housing development.
	3. 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.





Strafford Master Plan

Figure X: Housing



Legend

- Parcels with Existing Housing
- Residentially Zoned Parcels without Existing Housing

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Community services such as the school, town hall, fire and police department, post office, cultural and recreational opportunities are all central to community health and vitality. Strafford has been growing steadily over the past two decades and residents envision future growth and development to be consistent with the current community and rural character. This chapter focuses on the significance of the essential services provided by the municipality and valued by community residents, and the maintenance and improvement of those services to meet future needs and demand.

Key Trends, Needs, Considerations

The residents of Strafford value the current variety and quality of services offered by the Town and perceive them to match current demand and town size. Since the writing of the last Master Plan in 2002, the Town has acquired a 350-acre property, 75-acres of which are reserved for a future school, and the rest is conserved land. The school also provides access to recreational and sports facilities for all residents and a number of (non-student) sports clubs and groups use the space.

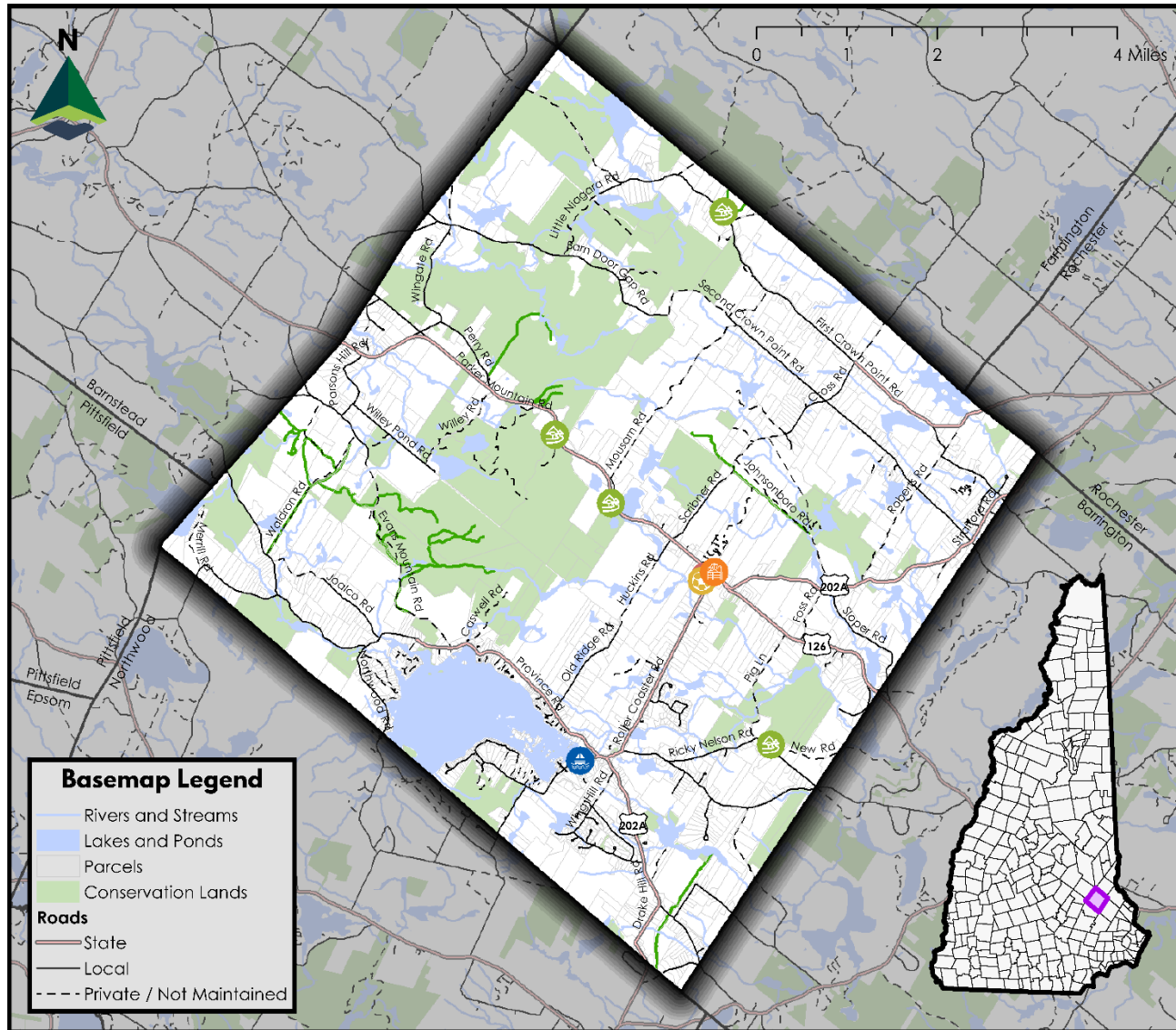
Through the master plan community survey, when asked about the greatest challenges over the next 10-15 years, there were concerns in gaps in town services like recreation programming for children and seniors and a central community space for such activities to take place. Residents involved in the preparation of this Master Plan expressed strong desire to expand the library space or consider looking into other public indoor and outdoor multi-functional space that could be used for gathering, events and other community activities to meet the current demand.

A concern brought up by many residents during the outreach process was access to Bow Lake. Residents enjoy Strafford's outdoor recreation opportunities and beautiful mountain and shoreline views but would like increased access to the lake. The state's ownership of the lake's only public access area has created complications with the Town's 100-year lease ending in 2022. Historically, the Town has maintained and managed the area. As residents continue to express a desire for expanded public access—including safe routes for walkers, significant improvements like expanded parking and boat launch areas will require collaboration with the state or potentially a new beach location to accomplish local goals.





Goals	Actions
A. Form a subcommittee of the Planning Board to study building a multi-use, centrally located community center for indoor and outdoor activities and events.	1. Interface with existing community efforts, such as the Bow Lake Community Center.
	2. Conduct a feasibility assessment that outlines funding opportunities, facility needs, usage and programming, staffing options, tax implications, siting options, design, and overall cost for a new community center.
B. Continue to maintain and provide access to quality municipal services	1. Maintain a position that supports access to medical services as the population grows older; explore ways to enhance transportation to medical services.
	2. Support the town's welfare department by expanding and promoting the welfare department's resource library and uploading it to the Town website.
	3. Adequately fund Town boards and positions to allow more efficient and effective operation of the essential services while planning for growth.
C. In the interim while a community center is planned, establish a Community Programming Commission.	1. Look into existing gathering spaces that could be more frequently used to provide programming and add/expand town facilities to accommodate demand.
	2. Strengthen the community cohesion by expanding indoor recreational and cultural opportunities; focus on creating community events, activities and opportunities that would strengthen the community cohesion for residents of all ages.
	3. Liaise with the historical society to promote the use of historic resources such as Waldron Store and Austin Hall valued by the community.
	4. Improve access to Bow Lake by improving maintenance of the beach facility.
	5. Explore options to purchase land for a new beach facility along Bow Lake.



Strafford Master Plan

Figure X: Conservation and Recreation



Legend

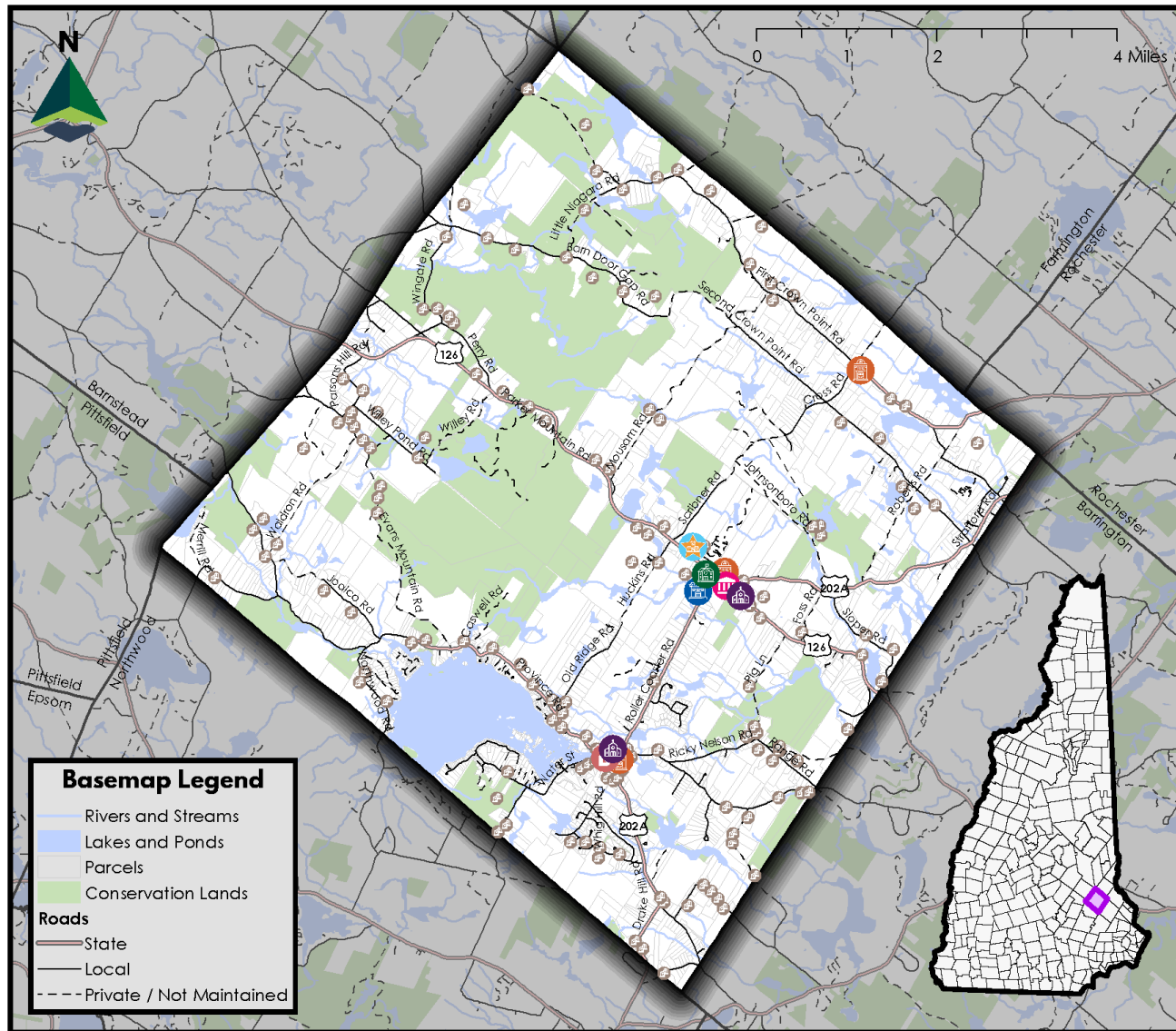
- Trails
 - Conservation Lands
- Recreation Sites**
- Boating Access
 - Community Garden
 - Open Space and Trails
 - Playground
 - Sports Fields and Courts

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Strafford Master Plan

Figure X: Cultural and Historic Resources



Legend

- Town Hall
- Schools
- Police Stations
- Places of Worship
- National Register of Historic Places
- Libraries
- Fire Stations
- Graveyards

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Infrastructure

As part of a regional project, [Communities for Healthy Aging Transitions \(CHAT\)](#), the Town of Strafford partnered with the Strafford Regional Planning Commission to engage residents and examine age-friendliness across the [eight domains of livability described by AARP](#). The project mission was to promote diverse, equitable, inclusive, livable environments where people can grow and thrive, regardless of age. This chapter provides a brief summary of the sentiments gathered through the CHAT project and Master Plan outreach process, and summarizes the needs expressed by residents into a table of goals and actions. While the goals and actions listed in this chapter are focused on the main challenges heard in the outreach process, the goals and actions for each chapter were crafted with age-friendliness in mind. Those that are particularly relevant to creating a space where residents can age in place are listed in the Town's Action Plan.

Key Trends, Needs, Considerations

Many Strafford residents have lived in town for decades or have family ties to the area, demonstrating a clear desire to age in place. The [2021 AARP Community Preferences Survey](#) indicated that at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of adults over the age of 50 have a desire to remain in their current home or community, but concluded that many adults aren't sure if they would be able to in their current residence or community due to a variety of factors. According to [2021 ACS 5-Year estimates](#), at the time of the survey, 63% of the 1,379 occupied homes in Strafford had been lived in for over a decade.

As indicated in the Master Plan survey results, some residents are concerned about the affordability of real estate taxes and whether they will continue to be able to afford to remain in Strafford. In the [2021 Comparison of Full Value Tax Rates](#), Strafford ranked 122 out of 234 municipalities in the state with a full value tax rate of \$16.75.

Residents of all ages appreciate the amenities Strafford has to offer and note the local youth sports and church events such as Trunk or Treat as great assets, but also note a lack of services and activities curated solely for the aging population. Survey respondents leave town to access services like medical offices and healthcare facilities, grocery stores, restaurants, small businesses and retail stores, job opportunities and arts and entertainment; access to medical care as they age was a particular concern for survey respondents and forum participants.

While access to transportation was one of the greatest concerns over growing older in Strafford, [Ready Rides and Community Rides](#) (for individuals over the age of 60) both operate in town and may help fill gaps in transportation for non-emergency medical care. These services are provided by TripLink and funded by the Alliance for Community Transportation, whose partnerships serve 38 municipalities in Southeast New Hampshire. Both services are wheelchair accessible and serve older adults and individuals with disabilities.



Goals	Actions
A. Create affordable housing opportunities that allow residents to age in place and welcome younger generations.	1. Review the Zoning Ordinance to identify and address barriers to developing affordable housing units.
	2. To allow for more rental properties, add a mixed-use development zone.
	3. Promote tax rebate programs through the town's welfare department.
	4. Revisit and revise the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance. Specifically consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Square footage thresholds. ii. Requirements for the primary structure to be attached to the ADU.
B. Develop multi-generational programming.	1. Explore funding to bolster existing activities and programming for the Town's youth.
	2. Designate a member of the Community Programming Commission to focus solely on incorporating age-friendly programming and the specific needs and desires of the Town's aging population.
C. Plan town-wide events, activities, and opportunities that bring all segments of the community together.	1. Improve communications advertising community programs, activities, and events.
	2. Leverage existing gathering spaces and town-wide events to host: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Local health agencies like SCPHN to improve healthcare access in Town by providing basic services and health information. ii. Local businesses, including home-based occupations, to promote economic development in town and expand access to local goods and services.





Implementation Guide