

Chapter 1:

COMMUNITY CHARACTER: The Character of Milford and The Community's Vision for the Future

I: INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the Town of Milford recognized in its *Master Plan Update* that the Town's greatest attributes are its strong sense of place, its distinct identity, and its responsible and caring citizens. The Update acknowledged the importance of being vigilant in creating and enforcing land use policies and planning strategies recognizing that:

- The community's strengths must be protected and not taken for granted,
- The community must share a sense of responsibility and stewardship to insure that all changes in the community meet the needs of present residents without compromising the opportunities for future generations;
- The community must steer itself in a positive direction that is not subject to outside forces that determine a negative direction of change;
- The community is influenced by regional growth and development and in turn influences regional growth and development;
- A conservation, recycling, historic, cultural, and resource protection ethic is necessary to sustain natural and historic resources for future generations;
- A strong and diversified economic base is necessary for the continued health and prosperity of Milford's citizens, businesses, and neighboring communities.

Since the adoption of the 1999 *Master Plan Update* the Town has continued to experience a steady rate of population growth and commercial development that seemed to outpace efforts to implement strategies to manage the impacts of this growth. However, most of the recommendations for action included in the *1999 Update* have been addressed. A synopsis of these actions follows.

II: STATUS OF 1999 MASTER PLAN UPDATE ACTIONS

The Planning Board, with the help of interested citizens, carried out several of its recommendations from the last Update. Following is a brief description of the status of each action item as of April, 2007:

2.01 HIGH PRIORITY – ACTION: A

Revise the Town Sign Ordinance

A committee was established by the Planning Board in 2002 to undertake the task of reviewing and revising the 1993 Sign Ordinance. A draft regulation was developed, and was presented for public hearings in the fall of 2003. At that time there was significant public input that identified areas of concern in the ordinance. The Planning Board, in December 2003, decided not to present a revised sign ordinance to the Town on the 2004 warrant.

After obtaining public input at that time, the Board decided that it would continue to refine the ordinance based upon input from the public. This effort was sidetracked soon after as the Board decided to instead tackle the issue of residential growth management.

In the fall of 2005, the Planning Board revisited the sign ordinance prepared in 2003, made modifications, held public hearings, and presented it to the Town for a vote on the March 2006 warrant. After adoption of the 2006 sign ordinance the Board received feedback from the community and legal counsel suggesting a new ordinance would need to be crafted. In the fall of 2006 the Board held a public hearing to decide how to proceed with a new ordinance. The Board formed a subcommittee and developed a new ordinance in conjunction with an attorney to better meet the needs of the community and recent legal precedent. Public hearings were held in January of 2007 and a new ordinance was adopted by voters in March of 2007.

Status: *The voters approved the new ordinance presented on the 2007 Warrant.*

2.02 HIGH PRIORITY – ACTION: B

Develop and Implement an Open Space and Conservation Zoning Overlay District and Subdivision Design Criteria

In March 2000, based upon committee work spearheaded by the Conservation Commission, Town voters approved a new section to the Zoning Ordinance entitled %Open Space and Conservation Zoning District, Section 6.040+ (OSPD) with the intent of creating residential developments that promoted preserving of environmental resources, minimizing negative impacts on environmental resources, preserving natural and historic features, providing recreational opportunities, promoting flexibility of subdivision design, and discouraging sprawling, land-consuming development. The ordinance received minor amendments in 2004.

Since its adoption in 2000 through December of 2006, 13 major single-family home residential developments were approved subject to the OSPD. This has resulted in the permanent preservation of over 343 acres of open space.¹

The Planning Board continually reviews the implementation and effectiveness of the Ordinance.

Status: *To develop and implement an Open Space and Conservation Zoning Overlay District has been accomplished.*

¹ Subdivisions of 5 or more single-family lots approved in the period between March 2000 and December 31, 2006 and the corresponding area of open space approved as part of each subdivision includes the following: LeAnn Drive, 16 lots, 6.6ac.; Trombly Terrace, 6 lots, 4 ac.; Riverlea Estates, 8 lots, 9.6 ac.; Federal Pointe, 40 lots, 54.9 ac.; Christmas Tree Farm Estates, 18 lots, 9 ac.; Wallingford Place, 24 lots, 48 ac.; Rotch Subdivision (Melendy Road), 6 lots, 40.4 ac.; Elite Construction (Boynton Hill), 7 lots, 6.3ac.; Patch Hill, 37 lots, 34.7 ac.; Falcon Ridge, 45 lots, 68.9 ac.; Wyman Farms, 12 lots, 14 ac.; Singer Brook, 11 lots, 19 ac.; and The Reserve at Federal Hill, 73 lots, 27.8 ac.

2.03 HIGH PRIORITY - ACTION: C

Develop site design, architectural, and landscaping design standards that include mechanisms to protect and enhance Milford's historic heritage, established neighborhoods, major arterials, new neighborhoods, scenic roads, and entryways into the Town

Since the 1999 Update, the Planning Board found that undertaking the task of developing site plan and subdivision standards, guidelines and regulations to better protect and enhance Milford's character is a major endeavor. The Planning Board has incorporated minor amendments to the Town's development regulations to better regulate signage, exterior lighting, snow storage, and dead-end road specifications. Scenic road regulations were developed by staff in 2004 and presented to the Board, but growth management initiatives were deemed a higher priority. A subcommittee is in the process of a comprehensive overhaul of the Subdivision and Site Plan Regulations.

Status: *To develop new site design standards to protect and enhance Milford's character and heritage is in process with a goal completion date of early 2008.*

2.04 HIGH PRIORITY – ACTION: D

Develop additional avenues to enhance communication between town government and boards, the school district, community organizations, and private citizens

During the master planning process leading up to the *1999 Update*, there was much discussion within the citizen committees working on the plan that there was not enough communication between the various stakeholders in the community. Issues such as facility maintenance, management, and joint use, property taxes, duplication of effort, and the need to create better avenues of communication were identified.

Since 1999 there have been significant efforts made to provide better avenues of communication between various entities which have manifested themselves in such ways as establishing a joint School/Town/Recreation interests committee to review the state of recreation facilities in Town and provide recommendations within a short-term recreation facility plan; the establishment of a Town website; the use of a quarterly newsletter as a communication piece for both Town government and the School District; continual refinements in the annual voters' guide; community signage at the Transfer Center; 5th Monday forums with the Board of Selectmen; the implementation of a community cable channel, and in general increased efforts between boards, departments, commissions, and citizens' groups to better communicate.

Status: *To establish additional avenues of communication between Town stakeholders as been significantly achieved and continues to be implemented.*

2.05 HIGH PRIORITY – ACTION: E

Develop an ordinance regulating adult entertainment businesses

At the time of the 1999 Update, there was no ordinance in Milford that defined and regulated what is commonly referred to as "adult entertainment" and "adult business". To be proactive rather than to wait for potential negative *public* reaction to the location of adult businesses in Town, an ordinance was developed, presented for Town vote in 2000, and adopted.

Status: *to develop an adult entertainment business ordinance was accomplished.*

2.06 HIGH PRIORITY – ACTION: F

Review, and revise where necessary, existing Town regulations governing wireless communications to reflect changing trends and technology

At the time of the *1999 Update* was being developed, the telecommunications industry was moving at great speed in its technological advancements and in its efforts to provide ever-increasing service to customers. This resulted in pressure from the communications industry on the community and the region to allow construction of cell towers. Milford did not have a regulation in place in 1999 that could adequately address the many issues associated with the construction of telecommunications facilities, and a goal was set to develop and enact regulations that balanced the Town's desire to protect its environment and character with the need to stay current with the technological advances in the telecommunications industry. An ordinance was subsequently developed and presented for Town vote in 2000.

Status: *To review and revise existing Town regulations governing telecommunications facilities was accomplished. An ordinance was approved by Town voters on the 2000 Warrant.*

2.07 MEDIUM PRIORITY – ACTION: G

Examine and implement measures to change the Milford governmental form from a Board of Selectmen to a more responsive representative form of government

Citizen committee discussions during the formulation of the *1999 Master Plan Update* identified the need to evaluate Milford's form of government and its ability to serve the needs of the Community. These discussions were based on concerns resulting from the Town's growing population and whether the recently enacted Senate Bill 2 provisions replacing the traditional town meeting form of government with a deliberative session and ballot voting provided an adequate governmental structure.

The Planning Board made it a goal to encourage the Board of Selectmen to appoint a citizen committee to review this issue. The Selectmen formed a committee in 2003 and charged it with a study and assessment of the various forms of government including changes that could be made to our existing form of government allowed in New Hampshire and determination of whether the current form (RSA 40:13) is suitable for the Town now and as it continues to grow, including both town and school government in the study and analysis. Note: Based on the Nashua Regional Planning Commission projections, the population of Milford stands to grow from approximately 14,000 now to approximately 18,000 over the next twenty years.

The Government Study Committee issued a report to the Board of Selectmen dated July 12, 2004 and the conclusion was that the committee does not recommend significant changes in the form of government for the town of Milford at the present time.

Status: *To examine the Milford form of government was accomplished.*

2.08 MEDIUM PRIORITY – ACTION: H

Develop and implement a long-term management plan for Osgood Pond

The maintenance of Osgood Pond, particularly the dredging of the Pond to maintain its integrity as a surface water, storm drainage, historic, and recreational resource has been an ongoing priority for the Town. As of December 31, 2005, the Town had set aside \$88,705.85 in a capital reserve fund to provide at least a portion of the required Town match for federal funding to dredge the Pond.

Since 1999, the Town has been working with the Army Corps of Engineers to design and implement a plan to dredge Osgood Pond. Currently, the Osgood Pond plan incorporates as part of the Town matching fund requirements earth materials from the Town-owned BROX property to be mixed with dredged materials to then be used to reclaim disturbed wetland areas at another location on the BROX property. Final details of this project are still pending, and the project is on hold at the Army Corps of Engineers level due to lack of funding due to competing federal priorities.

Status: *To develop a long-term management plan for Osgood Pond has been partially accomplished and not yet implemented.*

III: CURRENT COMMUNITY CHARACTER ISSUES

As stated in the Introduction, since 1999 the Town has continued to experience a steady rate of population growth and commercial development. This growth has also brought about increased public awareness that the Town still faces threats to maintaining its community character. The Planning Board, with the approval of voters in March 2005, implemented an Interim Growth Management Ordinance (IGMO) to afford the Town time to develop a formal growth management ordinance for Town vote in 2006. One of the over-riding reasons for this action was to determine what Milford's character is, and what actions to take to insure that future land use policies protect it. As a basis for laying the foundation for the GMO, the Planning Board distributed a Community Vision survey in May 2005 to find out

"...why you live here, what is important to preserve and make better, and what you want Milford to be like in 10 years or more."

The simple survey, seeking to get a general view from residents on how they perceived the character of the Town and what they hoped the future character would be, was widely distributed in *The Granite Town Quarterly*, a newsletter from the Board of Selectmen. Three hundred and sixty surveys were returned, representing a 5% response rate. Results of the Community Vision Survey indicated the following:

- People live in Milford because of its rural character, community feel, and it's a good place to raise a family.
- Residents feel it is important to *preserve* and *protect* the rural character, the historic character, and a clean environment.
- Residents feel it is important to *enhance* and *improve* the rural character, a clean environment, the historic character, and the Town's natural resources.

- In 10 years, people want Milford to look the same as it does now, presuming this means protecting the existing rural and historic character, and have less traffic and less signage.
- Residents feel Milford is now a %large town+.
- Milford residents overwhelmingly have community pride.
- Milford citizens believe the Town needs stronger regulations to control and enhance development, presumably to protect and enhance rural character, and protect the environment.
- Milford citizens believe that there should be stronger regulations, even if private property rights are affected.
- Milford citizens are evenly divided on their support of stronger regulations if it means housing becomes unaffordable.

A growth management ordinance was adopted by Milford voters in March 2006 which included findings on the current residential development trends in Town that necessitated the need for tools to manage the rate of residential growth. The ordinance cites that *“new residential development is having a rapid and adverse effect on traffic and open space, and there is a perception that the community is losing its character”*.²

IV: MILFORD’S VISION STATEMENT

According to NH RSA 674:2, the purpose of a Town master plan is to set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the Town. The master plan must incorporate a *vision section* that serves to direct the other sections of the plan, with statements and guiding principles that articulate the desires of the citizens.

Based upon community input, and building on the *1999 Update*, the *2007 Master Plan Update* states as its vision:

Through responsible management and promotion of individual and community stewardship, Milford will be a sustainable community rich in physical, cultural, economic and social diversity, and will be characterized by a small-town atmosphere; a vibrant downtown; an active business community; human scale, interconnected neighborhoods; local agriculture; and the preservation of natural resources, rural landscapes and historic features.

V: ACHIEVING THE VISION: GOALS AND ACTIONS

The *2007 Master Plan Update* has identified the following goals and actions that shall form the blueprint for attaining the Vision:

Goal No. 1: Ensure that downtown Milford (Union Square, the Oval, and adjacent neighborhoods) remains the commercial, social, and community hub of Town by protecting its historic character, promoting and enhancing its economic vitality, and integrating the Souhegan River and its tributaries into the public realm.

² Milford Zoning Ordinance (2006), Article XII, Sec. 12.002.F.1.

Actions:

1. Design and construct the South Street Improvement Project . Phase I from Union Square to the South Street railroad crossing, (2006 . 2008)

This project is a continuation of downtown revitalization efforts begun by the Town in the early 1990s. In 1995 and 1996 the Union Square Revitalization project was accomplished, which included vehicular and pedestrian traffic safety enhancements, period lighting, landscaping, and infrastructure upgrades. The South Street Improvement Project . Phase I is a continuation of a portion of the Union Square Project which was not carried out due to a lack of funding. The South Street Improvement Project will continue safety and aesthetic upgrades with sidewalks and pedestrian components, undergrounding of utilities, and street widening. Funding will include federal, state, and local sources.

2. Promote continued economic revitalization of downtown Milford by:
 - developing and implementing site design standards that reinforce and protect the historic character and human scale of downtown and which allow flexible mixed-use creative redevelopment, (2007 . 2008);
 - continuing support and commitment to the Milford Main Street Program / Downtown Ongoing Improvement Team (DO-IT),(ongoing);
 - developing and implementing strategies to increase public awareness and access to the Souhegan River and downtown parks and green spaces, (2008-2009)

Goal No. 2: Foster the traditional character of Milford's neighborhoods by encouraging a human scale of development that is similar in setbacks, size, and height, and that is comfortable and safe for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles while allowing for an efficient and safe roadway network.

Actions:

1. Review and rewrite the existing zoning ordinance to reflect the intended character of Milford's residential, commercial, and industrial neighborhoods relative to height, lot coverage, setbacks, and allowable uses, (2007-2009);
2. Review and rewrite the existing subdivision and site plan regulations to reflect the intended character of Milford's residential, commercial and industrial neighborhoods (including all entryway corridors and gateways) relative to architectural and historic heritage, landscaping, stormwater management, traffic management, scenic roads, parking, and allowable uses, (2006-2008);

Goal No. 3: Preserve the rural landscape in Town, including views, stone walls, historic structures and sites, forests, farmlands, wildlife habitats and corridors, water features and resources, and scenic roadways.

Actions:

1. Identify and prioritize those components of the rural landscape that are critical to preserve and review, and revise the land use codes to incorporate innovative land use techniques to preserve these components while respecting private property rights.
2. Complete the Osgood Pond reclamation and management efforts by implementing the dredging and wetland reclamation plans developed by the US Army Corps of Engineers.