

Providing Workforce Housing

while Preserving Natural Character in New Hampshire Communities

By Michele Gagne

Situation

New Hampshire communities recognize that in order to remain vital socially, economically, and physically, they must commit to maintaining a strong agricultural and natural resource base, as well as provide affordable housing opportunities for diverse income levels of individuals and families. In spite of this inherent recognition, the predominant approach to land-use planning in New Hampshire over the past three decades has been the incorporation of large-lot subdivisions. The result is that conservation interests and affordable housing interests often compete for the same lands and each party claims that the other drives up the price of land, making acquisition of land for either purpose more difficult.

Effective July 1, 2009, Senate Bill 342 will go into effect for municipalities in New Hampshire. SB 342 provides a series of definitions, including:

- “Affordability” (30% cost burden),
- “Workforce housing” (affordable for renters at 60% area median income or owners at 100% area median income),
- Multi-family housing (five or more units per structure), and
- “Reasonable and realistic opportunities.”

It mandates that “all municipalities provide reasonable and realistic opportunities for the development of workforce housing, including rental and multi-family housing; essentially, its ‘fair share’ (Frost, 2008).



New Hampshire Growth and Development Roundtable and its Solution

A statewide collaborative called the Growth and Development Roundtable was formed in 2005 to bring together the interests of affordable housing and land conservation with the goal of identifying creative solutions to meeting the needs of both interests. It is a group of prominent leaders from several of New Hampshire’s housing, conservation, planning, business and municipal interest groups that created the Housing and Conservation Planning Program (HCPP).

HCPP’s goal is to provide a small amount of funding to municipalities through a competitive application process to “purchase technical assistance related to planning for future housing growth needs, including the need for affordable and workforce housing, while preserving quality of life, using land efficiently, and identifying key natural and historic areas to conserve.” Six communities were selected in 2008, the first year of funding. This article will demonstrate a current case study of one of those communities.

Chichester: A New Hampshire Case Study

Chichester, New Hampshire, has utilized a range of activities to get public input into how to conserve open space, while at the same time preserving its rural character with agricultural lands/open space and historic preservation. With a population of about 2500, Chichester is a rural community just outside of the state capitol of Concord.

HCPP funding is supporting the assistance of University of New Hampshire

Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) to work with a community Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC) and Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission (CRPC) to create a build-out scenario so that citizens could visualize what their community would look like if they didn’t plan proactively. Educational programs were conducted in the community to prepare residents for the process, including workforce housing, agricultural commissions and historic preservation, with about 35 participants attending each program.

Approximately 80 residents completed a Master Plan survey between December 2008 and January 2009, asking them to outline their preferences for conservation and preservation in the community while at the same time maintaining their tax base with residential and small commercial development. Preliminary results were shared at a public forum facilitated by UNHCE in February 2009, where about 50 residents were asked to think about what they’d like to see Chichester look like 5-10 years in the future in the areas of housing, business

Visioning Session Results 2/14/09

Where should growth be directed? Where are the priority open space areas?

Red, Yellow, Orange Sticker = More suitable for development
Green, Blue Sticker = Less suitable for development

Forest Block:
This Forest block as well as the floodplain area to the East did not have a cluster of Green Stickers. Either this area is not a priority to residents at the visioning session, or possibly the large areas of non-buildable OSW zoning made this area appear less vulnerable to development. It should be recognized that it may not be possible to depend on the OSW zoning as a long term conservation strategy due to potential legal variances, challenges in court, etc.) issues in the future, and because Zoning is not a permanent conservation tool such as deed restrictions, easements, or conservation lands. Because of this, conservation efforts in this part of town should not be ignored. In addition, much of this area was highly valued by the NRI.

Forest Block:
It appears that this forest block is the most valued open space to the residents at the visioning session. This block appears to be currently subject to more development than others in town because there is less area classified as the OSW zone which prohibits development. Much of this forest block was highly valued in the NRI. This area may be a suitable area for a sending zone in a TDR.

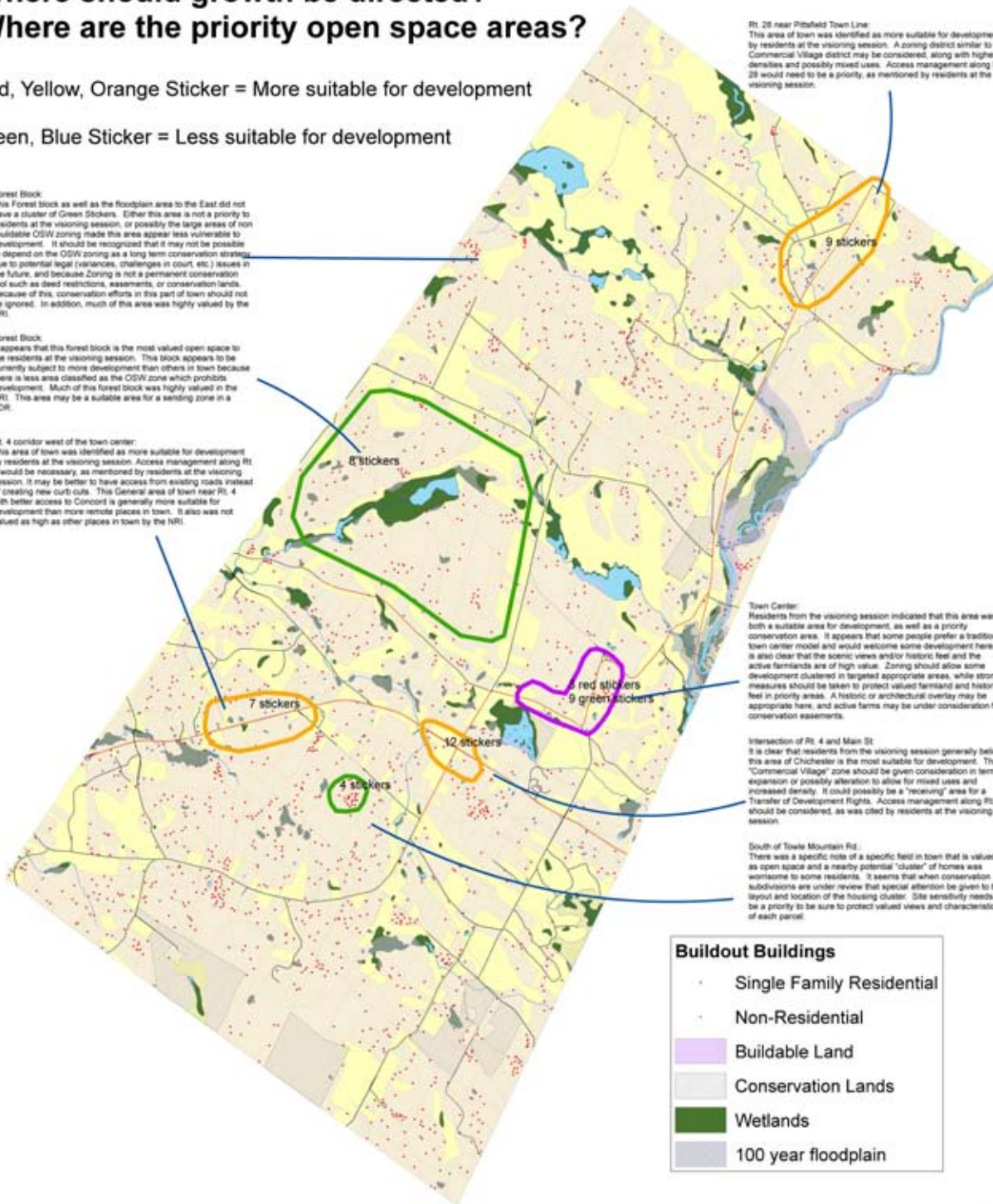
Rt. 4 corridor west of the town center:
This area of town was identified as more suitable for development by residents at the visioning session. Access management along Rt. 4 would be necessary, as mentioned by residents at the visioning session. It may be better to have access from existing roads instead of creating new curbs cuts. This General area of town near Rt. 4 with better access to Concord is generally more suitable for development than more remote places in town. It also was not valued as high as other places in town by the NRI.

Rt. 28 near Pittsfield Town Line:
This area of town was identified as more suitable for development by residents at the visioning session. A zoning district similar to the Commercial Village district may be considered, along with higher densities and possibly mixed uses. Access management along Rt. 28 would need to be a priority, as mentioned by residents at the visioning session.

Town Center:
Residents from the visioning session indicated that this area was both a suitable area for development, as well as a priority conservation area. It appears that some people prefer a traditional town center model and would welcome some development here. It is also clear that the scenic views and/or historic feel and the active farmlands are of high value. Zoning should allow some development clustered in targeted appropriate areas, while strong measures should be taken to protect valued farmland and historic feel in priority areas. A historic or architectural overlay may be appropriate here, and active farms may be under consideration for conservation easements.

Intersection of Rt. 4 and Main St:
It is clear that residents from the visioning session generally believe this area of Chichester is the most suitable for development. The "Commercial Village" zone should be given consideration in terms of expansion or possibly alteration to allow for mixed uses and increased density. It could possibly be a "receiving" area for a Transfer of Development Rights. Access management along Rt. 4 should be considered, as was cited by residents at the visioning session.

South of Towle Mountain Rd:
There was a specific note of a specific field in town that is valued as open space and a nearby potential "cluster" of homes was worrisome to some residents. It seems that when conservation subdivisions are under review that special attention be given to the layout and location of the housing cluster. Site sensitivity needs to be a priority to be sure to protect valued views and characteristics of each parcel.



Buildout Buildings

- Single Family Residential
- Non-Residential

Buildable Land

Conservation Lands

Wetlands

100 year floodplain



This map is intended for planning purposes only.
Data source: Town of Chichester, NH GRANIT
NH DCC, DATEC

Central New Hampshire
Regional Planning Commission
28 Commercial Street
Concord, NH 03301
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www.cnhrpc.org



Figure 1. Visioning Session Results



and industry, transportation, natural resources, education and community services. Participants were also then asked to use “sticky dots” to indicate where in town they think more development should go (red dots) as well as where they think development is less suitable (green dots) on the build-out map provided by Central NH Regional Planning Commission (see Figure 1).

During Spring 2009, Central NH Regional Planning Commission will be conducting a series of public workshops with town boards/commissions to discuss alternative scenarios for build-outs, while overlaying those results with other current maps developed in Chichester, including the Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) and Wetlands Inventory. Additionally, current zoning will be examined to determine if there should be changes to the zoning ordinances to better suit future development in the community.

Finally, a second community forum will be held in May 2009 to share Master Plan survey results, get input on final build-out scenarios and complete the vision for Chichester’s Master Plan.

Conclusion

This is just one example of how New Hampshire municipalities are trying to balance achieving their fair share of

workforce housing, while at the same time conserving the open spaces that make New Hampshire a beautiful and unique place to live. The state is offering other programs/opportunities to assist communities in balancing growth with housing needs, including the NH Housing Finance Authority’s Inclusionary Zoning Incentive Program, UNH Cooperative Extension’s Community Profiles and Master Plan Visioning Assistance, as well as regional workforce housing commissions’ support through activities like design charrettes and training sessions. 🏠

Author’s Picks for Further Reading

Lennertz, Bill and Lutzenhiser, Aarin (2006). *The Charrette Handbook: The Essential Guide for Accelerated, Collaborative Community Planning*. Chicago: American Planning Association.

Dickerson, Larry (2002). *The Process of Community Discovery*. Anchorage: University of Alaska Cooperative Extension.

References

NH Growth and Development Roundtable
<http://extension.unh.edu/GDR/>

NH Housing and Conservation Planning Program
<http://www.nh.gov/oep/programs/HCPP/about.htm>

NH Inclusionary Zoning Incentive Program
http://www.nhhfa.org/rl_zoning.cfm

UNH Cooperative Extension Community Profile/Master Plan Visioning Assistance RFA
<http://extension.unh.edu/CommDev/CPVMPA.htm>

NH Workforce Housing Council
<http://www.workforcehousingnh.com/>

About the Author

Michele Gagne is a Community Development Training and Planning Coordinator with the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. She assists communities with visioning and planning, provides facilitation and meeting management training to non-profits and other community leaders and teaches an undergraduate course in managing community conflict at the University of New Hampshire.