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

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


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.