

Introduction

This chapter is intended to guide the Town's development of long term strategies for land use planning. A well-conceived land use plan allows for new growth and development while protecting and preserving the integrity of neighborhoods, businesses, transportation routes, and the environment.

This chapter also provides guidance for future land use development by considering a variety of information including; existing land uses, development constraints, the Master Plan Survey, and discussions throughout the Master Plan update process.

The development of a land use plan forms the basis of land use regulations, which are effected through zoning ordinances, subdivision and site plan review regulations. The land use plan considers the goals and objectives outlined in each chapter. The regulations are the means to implement these goals and objectives. As an example, if supporting expanded commercial activity is an accepted goal, zoning ordinances should be structured to achieve this goal. The land use plan might also recommend that the zoning ordinances be designed to be made more restrictive in particular areas, for the purpose of protecting and preserving certain natural features in town.

The Land Use Plan is that section of the Master Plan required by RSA 674:2 that "takes into account natural conditions and which shows the existing conditions and the proposed location, extent and intensity of future land usage." The natural conditions to be taken into account include such features as wetlands, steep slopes, aquifers, surface water bodies, and any other natural features considered to be particularly significant. Existing conditions refer to the actual land uses found in town at a time, e.g., residential development, commercial uses, etc. Both the man-made conditions and the natural features impact the future development in the town.

As discussed in preceding chapters, the prevalence of steep slopes, water and wetlands, and conservation land in Dublin present significant challenges to future development. The Development Constraints map illustrates how little easily-developed land remains in Dublin. Coupled with this limited supply of land is the concern of Dubliners, as reflected in the results of the Master Plan Survey, for the preservation of our environment, rural character and historic charm. Accordingly, it is especially important for us to consider carefully how and where future growth should occur. As indicated in the Population chapter, the greatest period of growth in Dublin was between 1970-1990. This growth was guided by a regulatory scheme that favored a sprawling type of development which spread houses out over long stretches of road in the Rural District, while minimal development occurred in the Village or Mountain districts, and businesses remained located primarily along the two state highways running through town.

In response to the unsustainably rapid growth during this period, and concern regarding development west of Route 101 from the Amherst/Milford area, the Town imposed greater restrictions on development, including a doubling of lot sizes in the Rural and Mountain zones, which comprise most of the land in town. In addition, a somewhat complex open-space subdivision ordinance was adopted that provided for a more environmentally-friendly type of residential development. The new ordinance imposed a number of requirements on developers, including an extensive inventory of the property to be developed with topography, wetlands

delineation, aerial photographs, vegetative cover conditions, soil types, geologic formations, and viewshed analysis. The ordinance required that 50% of the useable (non-wet, non-steep) land be put in permanent conservation easement, and gave the Planning Board the authority to decide which portion of the property could be developed and which part would be conserved. It also allowed smaller lots (as small as 2/3 acre) both to create a neighborhood effect and to limit the amount of disturbed land and the length of roadways.

Due to the downturn in the economy in 2008, including the large decrease in home values, there was little incentive for developers to attempt navigation of our new subdivision ordinance. The expected wave of development never arrived, and over the past decade Dublin has seen little development or population growth, and no major subdivisions. As referenced in the Population and Housing Chapter, a population projection prepared by the NH Office of Energy and Planning forecasts that Dublin will lose population over the next two decades. This loss will be due to the inability of Dublin to attract a commercial base and the general population trend of smaller families.

Future Land Use Plan

The proposed future land use plan for Dublin has been developed using the following information: results of the Master Plan Survey, the goals and objectives for each chapter, data, maps, and input provided by SWRPC, and input, analysis, and discussion by the Planning Board.

The future land use plan will attempt to achieve the following:

Maintain the rural character of the town while accommodating the need for residential and commercial development;

- Steer the majority of residential development to the Village District and to Conservation Subdivisions in the Rural District;
- Protect Dublin's valuable natural resource areas by supporting conservation of important properties and leaving in place current restrictions on development in the Mountain District;
- Protect Dublin's aesthetic and historic values to insure its continued rural beauty and village character;
- Encourage some limited commercial development in the Village and Neighborhood Commercial District as for appropriate the proposed location;
- Guide growth so that fiscal impact on town services and environmental impacts are minimized.

The development of vacant land depends in part on the physical capabilities and development constraints, and in part on the regulatory restrictions. The following future land use plan addresses the town's specific zoning districts.

The Village District

Dublin's village has a unique history and mix of land uses and has vital role to play in Dublin's future just as it has in the past. The rural New England village is an important part of the heritage of a town like Dublin and needs to be protected. Villages can assimilate new development and actually benefit from it if land use regulations are designed appropriately.

The Village District is located along Route 101 from East Harrisville Road to Upper Jaffrey Road, and extending 1000 feet north and south of the highway. This district contains the portion of town that was densely settled in the 1800s, and is seen as an appropriate place for some denser housing in the future. This is why the minimum lot size here is only one acre, and back lots lacking frontage can be used for residences. Regulations for the Village District should promote the same type of development.

Residential development in the Village District would have less of an environmental impact on Dublin as a whole and would make the Dublin a livelier and welcoming place to live, with neighbors, schools, and services nearby. The current conservation subdivision regulations could minimize adverse visual impacts, since the Planning Board can require developers to screen developments from the road and from other properties if the Board deems the development not in keeping with the visual appeal of the Village.

As was the case in our previous Master Plan, it is hoped that some, if not most, of the growth will take place in the Village District, which has retained its one-acre zoning, and is seen as the appropriate place for denser development that would use considerably less land than development in the other zones. Given the small size of the district, the main obstacle to steering development to the Village District has been, and still is, the lack of available land. A potential solution here is to increase the size of the district so as to provide more opportunities for development. This expansion could be accomplished by extending the district further to the east and west, and/or by increasing the depth from 1000 feet to 2500 feet or to the next roadway (i.e. Windmill Hill Road).

Dublin should encourage a compatible mix of land uses in the Village including residential, commercial, and public. Care must be taken, to ensure development would not adversely affect the visual charm of the Village, and would not create undue noise, traffic, or other issues that would have a negative impact

The Rural District - By far the largest district, the rural zone has seen most of the growth in recent years, and still has more easily developable land than any other. The density of development here was halved on March 14, 2006 when the minimum lot size was increased from two to four acres. Given that most of the developable land is located there, it is likely that the majority of development over the next decade will take place in the rural zone. With the

exception of existing buildable lots and minor subdivisions that create only one or two lots, future residential development will be governed under the Conservation Subdivision Ordinance, which will minimize the environmental impacts, limit sprawl, and create permanently conserved open space in amounts equal to (or greater) than the amount of land that is developed. It can also minimize the visual impacts, as screening can be required between the development and roads or neighbors.

The Town should also consider protecting important natural resources located in the rural district, especially those areas identified in the Conservation Plan. One particular area that should be addressed in the near future is the land over and around the large aquifer near Mud Pond. Activities that present a danger of harming the aquifer should be forbidden and rules should be adopted banning or limiting large-scale water withdrawals for commercial purposes lest the aquifer be depleted or reduced to the point that ground pollutants can be drawn into the aquifer.

The current rules restricting high-impact commercial uses in the Rural District to lots on the two highways should be retained to prevent adverse impacts to residential areas. To the extent that commercial uses do seek to locate along the highways, appropriate controls should be enforced so as to minimize any visual impact to the town and any adverse impact upon abutters.

The Neighborhood Commercial District – This small district is located at the intersection of Routes 101 and 137. The current ordinance currently allows commercial uses, cluster housing, and mixed use (commercial/residential). Given its prime location at the intersection of Dublin's two state highways, the zone should be preserved for the type of commercial development that may not be appropriate in the Village. Given that there are commercial uses on both 101 and 137 in all directions from the intersection, the Planning Board should consider whether enlargement of the district would provide additional economic growth in a location that would not adversely affect the esthetic appeal of the Village.

The Mountain District is comprised of the land nearest Mt. Monadnock, and has the most restrictive zoning, allows the least number of nonresidential uses, and requires an eight-acre minimum lot size. There seems to be a strong consensus among Dubliners that areas around the mountain should not be heavily developed. Accordingly, the current restrictions should remain in place.

Specific Types of Housing

Single Family Homes - This is the type of housing we are most likely to see in the coming years, and the type most favored by townspeople. Under our Conservation Subdivision Ordinance, any major subdivision will be subject to regulations requiring at least half of the parent lot to be placed in permanent conservation, with the remainder to be divided into small building lots, with roughly the same number of homes as would be allowed under the old subdivision rules. This requirement results in less impact on the natural environment and significantly less need for new roadway construction. Screening of the development from the road and from neighboring properties reduces the aesthetic impact.

Affordable Housing—In response to evidence that zoning schemes used by a number of towns in New Hampshire made it difficult or impossible to build affordable housing, the NH Legislature passed a law requiring every municipality to provide opportunities for affordable housing. Dublin addressed this obligation by enacting a 2010 Workforce Housing Ordinance that allowed a developer of housing units that were considered affordable under the statute to obtain waivers of some of the regulations that would otherwise apply, including density limits.

To date, no affordable units have been built due largely to the relatively high cost of land, and to the lack of municipal water and sewer. These factors make building affordable housing more expensive than in some other local towns. These factors also make it difficult for developers to keep the price of the units low. Dublin also has fairly liberal provisions regarding accessory living units, which helps in providing affordable housing. In addition, more affordable manufactured housing is allowed in Dublin.

Accessory Housing – Although a recent state law requires all towns to allow accessory apartments, Dublin has been ahead of the curve in allowing this type of housing, as it can provide convenient and affordable housing that uses existing building stock and has a very little impact on the natural environment compared to building new housing. It also allows for more efficient use of large older homes at a time when fewer people have large families: Dublin now has an average of just over two residents per living unit.

Retirement Housing – Dublin also has provisions in the Land Use Ordinance for Retirement Housing. As with Affordable Housing, the rules would allow a Retirement Community to be built. The number of allowable units is tied to the density allowed if the land were subdivided. As with workforce housing, the cost of land and the absence of town water and sewer makes this type of development less attractive than in towns with town services.

A significant portion of respondents to the Master Plan Survey identified retirement housing as an important need, as many of our residents have reached retirement age and would prefer to stay in Dublin if such facilities existed. Unfortunately, the factors militating against retirement housing being built in Dublin are unlikely to change in the future.

Specific Initiatives:

- Develop a plan to expand the dimensions of the Village District and Neighborhood Commercial District.
- Consider and implement incentives that may be necessary to increase development potential in the Village District.
- Simplify the Conservation Subdivision Design procedures, without affecting the protections underlying the regulations.
- Change the Retirement Community Overlay District regulations to make senior housing more achievable.
- Amend the Workforce Housing Ordinance to provide incentives for more affordable housing consistent with Dublin's character.
- Work with public and private entities to protect strategic properties, such as those identified as especially valuable in the Open Space Committee's Natural Resource Inventory.
- Pursue funding for land conservation in Dublin; continue to search for grants and aid, both financial and advisory; cooperate with local organizations, such as the Monadnock Conservancy, to help the Monadnock region achieve conservation goals.
- Amend applicable ordinances to limit large-scale commercial water withdrawals that could adversely impact Dublin's aquifer
- Review the utilization of town-owned properties.
- Recommend installation of alternative energy systems to power town-owned properties.