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Town of Barrington Open Space, Recreation, Town Center Plan

Strafford Regional Planning Commission

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Town of Barrington

Open Space, Recreation, Town Center Plan

A Final Report to

The New Hampshire Estuaries Project

Submitted by:

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December 2001

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New Hampshire
Estuaries Project

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1. Executive Summary

Ask residents of Barrington what makes it a good place to live and they will be likely to respond, "the rural character of the town and the large amounts of open space". The town's natural environment, with its large tracts of open space, farmlands, scenic views, water resources, country roads and historic and cultural landmarks, and its location near many of the larger towns in the southeastern New Hampshire, have made Barrington one of the most attractive small towns in the area.

Over the last forty years Barrington has been one of the fastest growing towns in Strafford County. Population growth rates have been several times higher than those of other towns in the county. Derived from this, the amount of developed land has been increasing and the amount of agricultural and forested lands decreasing. In the survey that was conducted in autumn 2001 to elicit residents' opinions on open space, recreation and the development of a town center in Barrington, many respondents indicated that Barrington is on a fast track to losing its rural, natural environment and becoming a suburban bedroom community. As the process of development inevitably occurs and the town expands into one of the major bedroom communities in the Seacoast area, additional planning is needed if the Town is to realize its community aspirations with regard to promoting a good quality of life for its residents.

The conservation of open space, the provision of recreational activities and facilities, and the establishment of a town center have become priorities for the Town and citizens concerned about the growth of Barrington. Recent efforts by the Town and groups of concerned citizens have aimed to manage the growth of the town, conserve open space, and provide for recreational opportunities in these spaces. The recent establishment of the Barr Trail and acquisition of the Tamposi Lands are signs of the success that Barrington has had in the conservation of open space and development of recreational opportunities.

The information provided in this document is a starting point for addressing the Town's future open space and recreation systems and the establishment of a town center. The Plan is to serve as a policy guide for decision-making regarding the development of the community.

Executive Summary of Recommendations

The following section is intended to give the reader a general picture of the content and recommendations written in the Plan.

Open Space Summary and Recommendations

The existence of large tracts of open space in Barrington is important to the quality of life in and the long-term sustainability of Barrington. Many respondents to the 2001 Open Space, Recreation, and Town Center Survey (hereafter referred to as Survey) were concerned with growth and development of these large tracts of land and indicated that they would support efforts to preserve these spaces.

It is recommended that the Town initiate an ongoing process to:

- Identify and define prime open space, farmlands, scenic views and cultural historic resources;
- Raise awareness of the benefit of open space conservation and the success that Town has had in open space conservation;
- Review existing land use regulations, ordinances and policies to ensure their support of open space conservation and consider the establishment of zoning ordinances, such as conservation/ open space subdivision or agricultural overlay districts for residential development to help protect farmlands and open space;
- Create a financial strategy for protected area management and seek out funding resources;
- Promote the conservation of open space and encourage the development of civic volunteer groups to get involved in the conservation efforts;
- Encourage private land owners to place land under conservation easements;
- Raise public awareness of the benefits of conservation easements;
- Encourage the provision of park areas or gathering spaces for public use;
- Coordinate the activities and efforts of all those involved in open space conservation, watershed and river protection, and the development of recreation;
- Monitor the amount of land in protected status.

Recreation Summary and Recommendations

The opportunity for individuals to pursue unstructured recreational activities is a crucial aspect to a person's quality of life. Access to parks, common areas, walking, biking, and cross country ski trails, and water bodies benefit both individuals and entire communities. Currently, there are few public places in Barrington where people can go to pursue their unstructured recreational interests. Many respondents to the Survey expressed particular interest in the efforts of the recreation department and in having a community green or town common, a town beach, and walking paths.

Recommendations:

- Use the "recreational potential" section of the Natural Resources Inventory created by the Barrington Natural Heritage Committee and the Barrington Conservation Commission as a resource for ideas on the development of specific lands;
- Consider the development of a town common area as a site where residents can gather and participate in informal, unstructured social and recreational activities. This proposal has been highlighted by the Barrington Recreation Department as its top priority for development;
- Coordinate efforts of recreation organizations with those of watershed protection and open space planning to ensure the development of appropriately located parks, bikeways, and hiking trails;
- Maintain existing and continue to establish new types of recreation facilities and programs that respond to that needs and desires of Barrington residents;
- Consider the establishment of an indoor recreational facility and programs that would satisfy needs expressed in the Survey, such as the provision of teen and elderly activities;
- Continue the publication of the *Town Common* newsletter and the pursue further promotion of the recreational activities available in town.

Town Center Summary and Recommendations

The Survey recently conducted by the Town in preparation of this study, revealed that a significant number of the respondents are interested in maintaining the rural agricultural character of the town. However, they also identified the need for some type of town center. They wanted a town center with not only businesses, but a center that has a gathering place. Ideas included a park, recreational field, community center, a museum, post office, or bandstand. The survey also revealed that, although not the geographic center of the town, most people feel that the crossroads of Routes 125 and 9 are the traditional "center" of Barrington.

Recommendations:

- Study the open land within one mile of the intersection and identify land that may be suited for a Town sponsored project. Whether the Town is considering creating ball fields or a town green and bandstand, there are similar aspects to consider:
 - ease of access
 - cost of construction for converting the property
 - adequate size for the proposed use
 - sufficient area for parking
 - accessibility from other parts of the center by vehicles and pedestrians
 - connection to efforts to preserve open space and protect natural resources in other areas of town;
- Identify a priority list of projects for which the Town could initiate purchase proceedings, if and when the appropriate land parcels become available;
- Review Capital Improvement Plan to identify future needs that would be appropriate for the town center and enhance the core development in this area;
- Review the Town's zoning ordinance and consider creating a new zoning district that supports and requires new construction to maintain more traditional setbacks and building orientation;
- Consider revising the zoning ordinance or site plan regulations to reduce the parking requirements in the town center district;
- Require new construction to consider and provide for pedestrian access to the site and not just vehicular flow (e.g. sidewalks);
- Inform the state and regional transportation planners of the town center goals and request that any improvements along each of the major roads have pedestrian and/or bicycle amenities;
- Continue the Recreation and Open Space committee's work with the recreation director on identifying potential sites for community facilities such as ball fields, parks, and community centers;
- Contact NHDOT to inform them of the town's goal and work to establish a Memorandum of Understanding between both parties regarding development and road improvements. This MOU would serve to meet the goals of the Town Center by practicing limited access to the highway and improved pedestrian enhancements and safety;

- Create an inventory of vacant land in the vicinity as well as any parcels that currently on the market. Identify parcels likely to be part of, or enhance the project;
- Investigate funding sources for acquisition and development of park and public lands;
- Consider establishing a business improvement district (BID) to provide revenue for improvements in the area and to promote the center as a resource. BID resources could enhance recreation funds needed to sponsor events at the town center;
- Bonding for acquisition of public space – There has been discussion in the past and warrant articles proposed for the purchase of lands in the area to be used for a village green/town center. This continues to be one of the better options for acquiring land that will be used for parks and public spaces to be used for recreation;
- Dedication of penalty monies from lands going out of current use – This money can be used for land purchases for parks, recreation, and conservation. It is an excellent way to raise cash that is needed to match funds from the Land and Community Heritage Program (LCHIP, see below);
- LCHIP, Land and Community Heritage Program – This state program can provide up to a fifty percent match for funds for the acquisition of conservation land, easements, and publicly owned historic structures.

2. Project Goals and Objectives

Goals

To develop an approach to preserve through recreational and land use planning the Town's most important natural resources, while promoting a high quality community living environment for its residents.

Objectives

To identify and prioritize the Town's most important natural resources and to encourage the retention of appropriate open space in the face of unprecedented commercial and residential development. Confronted with current trends, there is widespread concern about the town's future and growing support for both more planning and community action.

To elicit resident opinion on the future of open space and recreation and on the possibility of establishing a town center in Barrington.

3. Methods

The Town established a Project Leadership Team, comprised of town officials as well as concerned residents with an interest in the development of an Open Space, Recreation, Town Center Plan. The Plan was established from an agreed upon methodology. This methodology included a survey to elicit resident opinions, a natural resources inventory, and a recreational inventory, all in discussion with the Project Leadership Team of Barrington.

The Survey

Stafford Regional Planning Commission worked with the Town's Project Leadership Team to design a survey of residents that elicited their opinions and preferences about open space, recreation, a town center, nodal commercial development in relationship to the Town's future needs and development of policies. The survey solicited suggestions about the location of important views, historic sites, natural resources, and recreation sites that should be preserved for present and future generations.

The Commission staff met several times with the project Leadership Team in July and August to determine the type of survey instrument, and then developed the survey. Once the Project Leadership Team and the Commission agreed upon the survey questions and format, 3,300 surveys were printed and distributed as an insert to the Recreation Department's September Newsletter at the end of August. The return postage was paid for by the survey respondent and the deadline for the surveys to be returned to SRPC was October 1st. However, due to the somewhat slow return rates in the beginning and middle of September, surveys were accepted through the 31st of October 2001. In total, 216 completed surveys, or 6.5 % of the surveys, were returned to the Commission. Commission staff tabulated survey results through the month of November.

Natural Resources Inventory

The Commission staff assisted the Barrington Natural Heritage Committee in mapping their inventory of current recreational facilities and projected future needs. Specific resources identified were:

- lands appropriate for acquisition for future recreational use;
- lands appropriate for additional access points on lakes ponds, waterways, and scenic areas;
- specific scenic areas and view corridors;
- unfragmented lands for wildlife habitat and corridors and recreational activities;
- important historic and natural sites critical to the preservation of the town's rural character;
- key lands in the four watersheds within the town that are critical for water supply protection;
- potential areas for a town center.

The Commission staff met with the members of the Natural Heritage Committee to prepare a map for the Committee. Survey results were used in the final preparation of the maps.

Recreational Inventory and Future needs

The Commission staff met with the Town Recreation Director several times throughout the planning process to discuss the present situation and the goals of the recreation department and the findings of the survey. Recreation priorities were established based on the Recreation Director's experiences, the goals of the department, and the survey results.

Open Space, Recreation and Town Center Plan

Based on the findings of the survey and the inventories, the Commission staff developed a plan for the Town that maximized the protection of the Town's natural resources with integration of community facilities in a central location. The Town Center Plan would establish commercial development options integrated with open space, community service, and residential needs within a defined area along Route 125 and Route 9, centered at the intersection of the two corridors. The plan's aim is to encourage balanced and thoughtful development within the town, based on the conservation of open space, provision of recreational facilities and establishment of a town center.

4. Open Space Plan

4.1. Overall goal

To protect and preserve open spaces in Barrington and thereby support long-term sustainable development in the town.

4.2. Protected area establishment

Issue

The existence of large tracts of undeveloped land, the natural resources on these lands and the protection of these open spaces and resources were repeatedly expressed in the 2001 Open Space, Recreation, Town Center Survey (hereafter the Survey) as important attributes to Barrington. Recently, the Town has had some success in gathering widespread support for the protection of open space (for instance, the acquisition of the Tamposi lands). Though the Town has identified other areas for potential protection, in general, development pressures continue to threaten the remaining open spaces, the natural and cultural resources within these spaces, and their attributes associated with the quality of life in Barrington.

Many respondents to the Survey expressed a concern for growth or unmanaged growth in Barrington. Nearly half of those who responded to the question *how would you best describe Barrington* described Barrington in terms of its growth. Though a small number of these descriptive comments, such as, *a growing community*, and *a small town that is rural friendly and growing* are neutral in their tone, the majority of the descriptive comments from this group illustrate disapproval of the type and level of growth in Barrington. Samples of these comments include: *a beautiful New England town in serious danger of losing its identity to overpopulation, over development and poor planning; wonderful town that is being overrun by people who want Barrington to look like that city they just escaped; was once remote, now too many subdivisions and posted property; on the verge of being a pricey, overbuilt suburb of Boston; growing too quickly in an uncontrolled manner; lacking proper regulations to control explosive growth while moving forward in many areas we are still more reactive than proactive in terms of long term planning and a true version of what the town should be.*

This concern for growth was also expressed in reaction to the question *what is the town's biggest challenge for the future* where over 60% of the respondents described the greatest challenge as managing growth or preserving the rural nature of Barrington. Sample responses include: *sprawl, uncontrolled depletion of rural residential areas; at the rate we are going, Route 125 will look like Plaistow in 10 years; to stop the over-developing; maintaining open spaces and large undeveloped tracts of land; regulating development that does occur to make sure that it's done responsibly; managing growth and keeping Barrington's identity alive; to not look like Northwood: keep Route 4 and Route 9 from having businesses one after the other; to bite the bullet to control growth by purchasing open space and encouraging perhaps financially conservation easements.*

Goal

To establish corridors of protected open space that have broad-based community support.

Recommendations

a. Identify lands

- Prepare an ongoing inventory system that identifies and prioritizes lands for potential purchase or conservation easements to ensure their incorporation into the long-term open space plan. Use the document "An Inventory of Natural Resources for the Town of Barrington" prepared by the Barrington Natural Heritage Committee and Barrington Conservation Commission as a starting point for identification.
- Lands identified for potential protection (identified and categorized into sectors by the Barrington Natural Heritage Committee and Barrington Conservation Commission):

Sector 1

- Along the Isinglass River*
- Helfgott Farm near Locke Falls
- Locke Falls
- Land between Oak hill (north and Route 125)
- Winkley/Barr Farmhouse and River Land
- Hussey Land
- Fogg Farm
- Major Waldron
- Bellamy Reservoir Headwaters
- B&M Railway right of way

Sector 2

- North River Lake
- Old Canaan Chapel*
- Canaan Back Road Area*
- Western segment of Isinglass River and tributaries*
- Nippo Lake area*
- Long Pond and Berry River area
- Ayers Lake and Ayers Lake Farm*

Sector 3

- Round Pond area*
- Stonehouse Pond area*
- Area around Town Forest*
- Mendums Pond outlet*
- Land between Mendums Pond and Swains Lake*
- Peach farm on Youngs Road
- Greenhill Chapel*
- Land behind Calef's Store and new post office*

Sector 4

- Pierce Road/ Old Bellamy River Dam area
- Winkley Pond*

* These areas or locations were also highlighted by Survey respondents as being significant for Barrington.

- b. Develop a detailed checklist for reviewing possible acquisitions or conservation easements on priority lands.
- c. Monitor properties on priority list for availability, and review for possible acquisition when threatened.
- d. Focus development within core areas designated for residential, commercial, and industrial uses.
- e. Review existing land-use regulations, ordinances and policies to ensure their support of open space conservation.
 - Review existing land use development within Barrington and explore ways to establish more effective open space protection standards within the town.
 - Establish open space/conservation subdivision regulations to ensure the provision of quality open space while allowing development of private land. Elements may include (these concepts are taken from Randall Arendt's *Growing Greener: Putting Conservation into Local Plans and Ordinances*):
 - design for quality open space
 - design using natural landscape features
 - design to protect natural features as views
 - design using loop lanes, neighborhood parks, or greens for connections

- encourage the use of current use assessment that would provide tax incentives to qualifying landowners
- f. Research and create a database of grant opportunities and apply for grants that support open space conservation (such as LCHIP, NHDES, EPA, OSP, DRED, other private sources).
- g. Increase community awareness and understanding of the cost-benefits of environmental conservation (open space, historic/cultural resource conservation, and scenic vistas) and possibilities for open space conservation.
 - Create and maintain educational programs to inform landowners, young adults, and children of the benefits and importance of stewardship, the economic, social and environmental benefits of open space, such as the enhancement value open space can have on the land market, and the various tools that are available to implement the plan. Promote Barrington's existing walking trails and the Town's recent agreement with the University of New Hampshire, which permits Barrington residents' use of the UNH Mendums Pond land.
 - Provide information on estate planning and the tax benefits of donations of land and easements.
 - Take advantage of the resources offered by NH organizations that have open space conservation as their goals such as, the Statewide Program of Action to Conserve Our Environment, Strafford Rivers Conservancy, the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, NH Lakes Association, the Nature Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land.
 - Create and maintain programs that involve youth and schools in the process of open space conservation.
 - Encourage the creation of new trails where appropriate and feasible through acquired easements.
 - Coordinate efforts for trail creation with the recreation department.
- h. Monitor protected properties and prepare stewardship and management plans.
- i. Continue to involve residents in the decision-making processes pertaining to the protection of open spaces. As many respondents in the survey expressed gratitude that the Town is interested in their opinion, continued elicitation of participation from residents is recommended.

4.3. Protection of scenic areas and views

Issue

Natural areas of beauty and scenic views in Barrington, two of the most defining qualities of the town, are under threat from unmanaged and sprawling growth. Several areas along Route 125 both north and south of Barrington have been developed with strip-style shopping centers, making the lands along Route 125 in Barrington particularly vulnerable to this type of development.

In addition to the support that was shown in the Survey for the protection of open space, support for the importance of and protection of scenic views was also expressed, and specific locations of scenic beauty were identified by Survey respondents. Sixty-five percent of the respondents to the question *would you support the use of your local tax dollar to purchase easements to preserve scenic views*, indicated yes with only 13% responding no (remainder of responses were either uncertain or left blank.) Similarly, 74% of respondents indicated that they support the Town taking steps to preserve identified areas of natural beauty and scenic views. Despite this, when questioned on the current state of the protection of scenic vistas in Barrington the majority of respondents, or 42%, indicated that they *did not know*, while 36% indicated that they are *in need of additional protection*. The high number of *do not know* responses illustrates a need for improving awareness of both the importance of preserving scenic views and the various conservation efforts that are currently taking form in Barrington. Specific scenic views that were commonly identified as impressive or of importance are:

- Town Forest
- Stonehouse Pond
- Isinglass River
- Swains Lake
- Mendums Pond
- Ayers Lake
- Lakes and ponds (unspecified)
- Open spaces and views along Route 125
- Country roads
- Open farmlands

The challenge is to develop a strategy that effectively protects these scenic views. Since a view can include hundreds of acres of land, it may not always be practical to purchase control of the land in order to protect it. However, there are ways that allow the land to be developed without destroying the significant components of the scenic view.

Goal

To preserve and protect the areas of natural beauty and scenic views that have come to characterize Barrington.

Recommendations

- a. Prepare an inventory on scenic views that are important to the character of Barrington. Define the components on these views as well as their exact location and extent. A sample list of scenic attributes can be found in Vermont's *Mad River Resource Protection Plan*. These key attributes may include:

Physical features

- hills and hillsides, tops, and ridgelines

- rivers, streams, wetlands, bays, and estuaries
- agricultural lands
- vegetation, greenery, foliage, and wildflowers
- elements of a working landscape such as animals, farm buildings, crops, etc.
- wildlife
- cultural focal points where the historical setting of Barrington remains in tact, such as the mills along the Isinglass River and the Calef's Corner complex

Important aspects of views

- diversity and contrast within a view such as a patchwork of open and wooded land, location of open space adjacent to historic New England housing, hedges, rows, stonewalls, etc.
- continuous views that sweep along the road or are dimensional views
- lack of scattered development or other disturbances in views
- vantage points- the point or area that provides access to the view

Particular views that were highlighted by the Barrington respondents include:

- views along the country roads
 - open lands and farmlands
 - views along Route 125
 - views of the lakes, ponds, and rivers (commonly cited specific responses were Stonehouse Pond, Swains Lake, Ayers Lake, Mendums Pond, and the Isinglass River)
 - buildings and stone walls
- b. Consider the components that distinguish the scenic corridors and views through the acquisition of conservation easements.
 - c. Adopt open space/conservation subdivision regulations that requires buffering along country roads and allows clustering of homes to create protected open space.
 - d. Consider limiting construction on designated hilltops.
 - e. Prohibit telecommunication towers within identified scenic views
 - f. Consider an increase to the percentage of current use tax to go toward the conservation of open space.
 - g. Establish a mechanism to improve the ease of accepting donations towards open space conservation.
 - h. Establish locally based scenic road designation.
 - i. Support the initiation of the access management design strategies in the regulating of driveways, landscaping, parking lots and signage, in particular along Routes 9 and 125, so as to minimize the negative impacts that excessive, unmanaged driveways can have on scenic views.

4.4. Protection of Cultural Resources

Issue

Barrington has a rich culture and history. Evidence of this can be seen in the large number of cultural and historical properties, artifacts and monuments that exist in Barrington and in the activities in which the community members participate. The existence of these cultural resources is central to the character and quality of life of Barrington. These are important resources for the Town and their preservation is a vital part of the overall goal to promote long-term sustainable development in Barrington. Resources such as the older cemeteries, country roads, stone walls, farmhouses and mills along the Isinglass River, Calef's and the Green Hill Chapel were highlighted by respondents of the Survey as being impressive and positive aspects of the character of the town. Despite this fact, awareness on the current state of the protection of these resources was not strong.

Community support for the preservation of these resources is strong. Of the respondents to the Survey, 56% indicated that they support the Town taking specific steps to preserve cultural landmarks, and 71% indicated that they would support specific efforts to preserve historic structures. However, there needs to be an effort to raise awareness of the town's historic resources and protection. When asked to comment on the current state of the protection of historic and cultural resources in Barrington, 49% of respondents indicated that they *do not know*, 28% indicated that the resources are *in need of additional protection* and 20% indicated that the resources are *currently over-regulated and protected*.

Goal

To protect, promote, and enhance the cultural, historical and archaeological resources of Barrington and thereby sustain its historic New England character.

Recommendations

- a. Consider establishing a Heritage Commission in town. Similar to the Conservation Commission, they are a resource for the town leaders and boards when asked to comment on the impact of decisions on historic resources. They also have the ability to accept funds for survey and research, acquisition, and restoration of historic resources in the community.
- b. The Heritage Commission or similar entity would prepare an inventory of historic resources. From this an evaluation of their historical significance and original integrity would be made and identification of properties that are:
 - eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places
 - a priority for protection
 - endangered by sale or development

- c. Coordinate efforts of various commissions and organizations with those of the Town to promote the preservation and conservation of cultural and historic resources.
- d. Raise public awareness of the economic, social, and cultural benefits resulting from the conservation of these resources using both short and long-term educational campaigns. As stated above, there are mixed levels of support for the preservation of cultural/historical resources and an explanation for this may be found in the high number respondents who indicated they *do not know* about the current state of protection.
 - Active campaign: volunteer group activities, preservation event days, school based projects, etc.
 - Passive campaign: promotional and educational materials, brochures, etc.
- e. Connect with local schools and UNH to promote education on this issue and seek involvement from students on projects.
- f. Review existing land use ordinances and explore ways, by ordinance, to enact feasible historic protection standards.
- g. Work with developers to let them know that preservation of the historic structures and cultural resources of the town are important values to the community.

4.5. Protection of farmlands

Issue

Farmlands and the structures located on those lands are important to both the character and economy of the town. Many respondents to the Survey indicated support for the protection of farms and farmlands in Barrington. These farms and farmlands are perceived as some of the most scenic areas of natural beauty in Barrington.

Unfortunately, farmlands are often highly desirable for residential development due to the high quality agricultural soils that are usually good for on-site septic systems. As more and more farms continue to go out of business, developers stand poised to turn them into residential subdivisions.

The current use program has been somewhat successful in giving property owners tax relief on their undeveloped land. Conservation easements are also effective and can provide the property owner with some monetary compensation. However, development will continue to occur and needs to be directed in a way that preserves the farm's historic setting and character.

Another challenge for active farms is the encroachment of neighboring residential development. When this occurs, some standard agricultural practices, such as spreading manure on fields or spraying crops, suddenly becomes a nuisance to the residential neighbors. Protection of the right to farm is an important component to encouraging the continuation of agriculture in the town.

Goal

To preserve the town's agricultural character and retain tracts of agricultural lands in Barrington, work to maintain the viability of farming and meet the needs of the agricultural segment of the town's economy.

Recommendations

- a. Conduct an inventory of the existing agricultural lands and farmsteads, their current status and condition.
- b. Establish a system of evaluation and designation of prime or unique, which are to be considered a priority for protection.
- c. Consider establishing zoning regulations, such as conservation/open space subdivision or agricultural overlay districts for residential development, to help protect farmlands and farming operations.
- d. Search for ways to keep farming profitable through programs that enhance the economics of agriculture, such as marketing of farms or the promotion of agri-tourism that is tied to existing commercial business.
- e. Formally adopt the state definition of agriculture; review town ordinances to ensure that municipal regulation does not inadvertently adversely affect agriculture.

4.6. Institutional and Organizational Development

Issue

The preservation of open space and its resources will require coordination amongst Town government, independent and government agencies, developers, and concerned citizens. Protection of open spaces is not something that is realized overnight but takes a concerted and continual effort on the part of all stakeholders.

Goal

To establish open space planning as a priority for organizations, citizens groups, and Town boards and departments.

Recommendations

- a. Establish consistent policy and directives.
- b. Create ways to coordinate and communicate the activities of all those who are responsible for decisions affecting open space.
- c. Create a financial strategy for the protected area management plan and develop annual budget.
- d. Seek funding resources in the form of grants from individual and non-profit agencies.

5. Recreation Plan

5.1. Overall Goal

To provide a variety of structured and unstructured recreational, social, educational, and cultural opportunities and thereby improve the quality of life for all in Barrington.

5.2. Provision of Structured Recreational Activities and Facilities

Issue

Many Barrington residents presently participate in structured recreational opportunities. Appreciation of the efforts of the recreation department and the Barrington Youth Association were expressed by numerous respondents who wrote comments such as, the best thing about Barrington are *the BYA, the recent offerings by the recreation department* and that there is a *good emphasis on community recreation and education*. Sample responses to the question *how would you best describe Barrington* include: *the school and the recreation department provide a sense that a real town is hiding and Barrington is a town that is becoming increasingly more desirable place to be because of the addition of a recreation department and a renovated library*. Several people also stated that continued support of the recreation department as their biggest hope for recreational opportunities in Barrington.

There is a strong interest in the development of organized activities and facilities to house such activities for particular groups of people. Particular interest in the development of more activities and facilities for youth or teens was noted in a number of questions throughout the Survey. Survey respondents also commonly highlighted organized activities and facilities for elderly residents as something they would like to see made available. In general though, the interest for a center to house a variety of recreational activities for all age groups was supported.

Most commonly cited activities that already exist in Barrington that respondents would like to see expanded are:

- Soccer
- Basketball
- Library/library readings
- Baseball/softball
- Scouts

The most commonly cited structured activities and facilities that the respondents would like to see made available in Barrington are:

- Youth/teen activities/after school activities

- Recreation center/mini YMCA/ to offer after school activities
- Senior activities
- Karate/tai-chi/aerobics/ yoga
- Special events
- Arts and crafts classes
- Group outings/bus trips
- Concerts and theater productions
- Swimming/lifesaving classes

Goal

To encourage the development of recreation programs and facilities that aim to meet the needs and wants of all residents of Barrington year round.

Recommendations

- a. Continue to support the efforts of the recreation department in a manner that provides for and is accessible to the greatest number of Barrington's residents while respecting the natural environment.
- b. Pursue the establishment of an indoor recreational center with recreational facilities, such as a fitness equipment room, aerobics studio/dance hall/auditorium, swimming pool, tennis courts, or classrooms for instructional purposes.
- c. Pursue the development of this indoor recreation center in conjunction with the development of the town center or the new school.
- d. Pursue the development of a town common area as a place to host structured recreational activities such as special events days, which were highlighted by many Survey respondents as an activity they would like to have more of in Barrington.
- e. Continue to establish new types of recreation facilities and programs that respond to the needs and desire of the residents of Barrington.
- f. Continue the publication of the *Town Common* newsletter and pursue further promotion of the recreational activities available in town.

5.3. Provision of unstructured recreational opportunities

Issue

The opportunity for people to pursue unstructured recreational activities is a fundamental aspect to a person's quality of life. Access to parks, common areas, walking, biking, and cross country ski trails, and water bodies benefit both individuals and entire communities. Two important components of unstructured recreational activities are the provision of facilities and the awareness of these facilities. In Barrington, both the provision and the awareness of unstructured recreational opportunities need added attention.

Provision

Over the past several years the Town and other interested citizens groups have supported the development of unstructured recreational opportunities. The number of places people can go to participate in activities such as hiking and snowmobiling has increased, due to efforts such as the establishment of the Barrington Trail, the acquisition of the Tamposi Lands and the Town of Barrington-UNH agreement on the use of the UNH Mendums Pond Recreational Area. There are few public park facilities where people can gather and trails on which people can walk from one destination to another. Many Survey respondents repeatedly expressed their desire to have public amenities such as a community green or town common, a town beach, and walking paths throughout town. It is hoped that the land behind Calef's will be used to fill the expressed need for a town common, and the Barr Trail and the Samuel A Tamposi Water Supply Reserve (SATWaSR) plus additional trail systems will fill the need for pedestrian access as they are developed.

Awareness

Though the Town has made progress in the acquisition of lands for recreational use, the subject of awareness of these resources needs to be addressed. The existence of the Town Forest in Barrington is a valuable resource for the maintenance of the rural character of Barrington as well as for the provision of recreational opportunities. The Survey, however, shows that 19% of respondents indicated that they are not aware of the Forest's existence. Cross-analysis with data on the length of residence shows that 50% of those who are not aware of the existence of the Town Forest have lived in Barrington for less than five years, 10 % for five to ten years, 20% for ten to twenty years and 17% for over twenty years. The high percentage of respondents who indicated that they are not aware of the existence of the Town Forest who have lived in Barrington for less than five years is not as surprising as is the 17% of the respondents who have lived in Barrington for over twenty years. Regardless, increased promotion of these resources to all residents is necessary. In addition, though no specific data have been collected on residents' awareness that they are permitted to use UNH-Mendums Pond Outdoor Recreation Area, it can be hypothesized that repeated statements by survey respondents on their interest in having access to a pond or lake show that few residents are aware of this amenity.

Goal

To identify, develop, promote and fund a balanced system of open space recreational lands, developed parks, scenic and natural areas, trails, and historic sites for present and future Barrington residents. The system will be accessible to all, respond to residents' needs, and preserve and enhance the quality of life of the Barrington area at a reasonable cost in fees and taxes.

Recommendations

- a. Use the recreation potential section of natural resources inventory created by the Barrington Natural Heritage Committee and the Barrington Conservation Commission as a resource for ideas on the development of recreation on specific lands.
- b. Pursue the creation of a trail system that connects various locations (such as the Barrington hiking trails and the Tamposi Lands) to the area around the intersection of Routes 9 and 125 (the proposed town center) and to lakes and ponds and historic/cultural resources throughout Barrington. This would give residents more opportunities to walk or ride their bicycles through town and give those who do not live in Barrington more opportunities and reasons to spend the day in Barrington.
- c. Further consider the creation of a pedestrian/bicycle route that would connect to existing routes in neighboring towns.
- d. Pursue the development of a town common area with gazebo on the parcel behind Calef's. This proposal has been highlighted by the recreation department as their top priority for development. Consider a community-based participatory project for the construction of such a gazebo.
- e. Formalize the use of the pond at the Christmas Dove for ice skating.
- f. Complement existing recreation/amenities in developed and developing residential areas.
- g. Upgrade existing facilities that are in high demand, and provide new facilities for desired activities not currently provided for.
- h. Develop strategies to promote the involvement of volunteers to help create new recreational opportunities.
- i. Encourage full cooperation between the school district and the Town to maximize the utilization of school properties as recreation facilities and neighborhood parks.
- j. Coordinate Town recreation with other community recreation activities to avoid duplication and encourage innovation.
- k. Publicize the recreational resources that do exist in Barrington and coordinate the dissemination of information on both public and private recreation programs to better reach community residents.
- l. Consider the creation of an annual comprehensive guide to Barrington so as to better inform both new and existing residents on what is available in Barrington.
- m. Consider the initiation of an impact fee ordinance that would aid the funding of such projects.
- n. Locate various funding sources, such as grants, for recreation development.
- o. Update the Open Space, Recreation, and Town Center Plan at least every five years to plan for appropriate acquisition of new sites for parks and natural areas, particularly in areas where future growth is to be expected or potential for being directed.

6. Town Center Plan

6.1. Overall Goal

There has been discussion about creating a town center for several years. In fact, this interest prompted the presentation of warrant articles to the voters for funds to purchase land near Calef's Country Store that could be used in part as a town center. While the first warrant article was defeated in 2000, voters were not against the idea of a town center, and in the end, the voters approved \$75,000 in 2001 to be used towards the purchase. Several individuals also came forward and raised \$25,000 for the project. It is hoped that the balance needed for the purchase will come from a state matching grant (the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program); however, the program is very competitive and the Town's applications have yet to be successful.

The 2001 Open Space, Recreation, Town Center Survey conducted at the start of this project, hereafter referred to as the Survey, revealed there continues to be great interest for creating a town center. When asked the question, *are you in favor of the Town facilitating discussions about and planning for a Town Center*, over three-quarters of the respondents favored the idea. Other questions asked what types of activities people would like to see in a town center as well as a logical location. This information was used to develop the following overall goal.

Goal

To create a town center for Barrington where the community can gather for special events, entertainment, recreation, have basic services such as a post office, schools, playgrounds, churches, restaurants, and commercial offerings. The center should be cohesive, compact, and characterized by the scale and architecture of a traditional New England village.

6.2. Identifying a town center

Background

Like many rural New Hampshire towns with a strong agricultural tradition, Barrington did not develop a strong commercial core. There were small settlements at crossroads, typically with a general store, small hotel, and perhaps a carriage shop or feed store. Several small mills were located along the Isinglass River, but the town never had a high concentration of commercial structures like the mill towns of Rochester and Dover. Even with the advent of the railroad, running parallel to Route 125, the Barrington station was primarily used to ship goods out of the area for distribution. The rail access did not contribute to the expansion of local retail establishments. While several of these crossroad areas in town have since disappeared, the intersection of Route 125 and Route 9 continues to be what many residents consider the commercial center of the town.

The town has experienced significant population growth in recent years with substantial residential development. This increase has created a demand for more locally available goods and services as well as recreational offerings and opportunities. However, the residents of the town have witnessed the dense commercial development that has occurred along the Route 125 corridor in other communities to the south and north of Barrington and they do not want to see that sprawling commercial development here.

The Survey revealed that a significant number of the respondents are interested in maintaining the rural agricultural character of the town. They also identified the need for some type of town center. They wanted a town center with not only businesses, but also a center that has a community gathering place. Ideas included a park, recreational field, community center, a museum, post office, or a bandstand. The Survey also revealed that, although not the geographic center of the town, most people feel that the crossroad of Routes 125 and 9 is the traditional center of Barrington.

The primary reason residents consider this area to be the town center is the continued presence of Calef's Country Store, located just west of the intersection. Established in 1869, Calef's continues to function as a general store for the local residents. It also has been able to capture a regional market through its ability to maintain a true country store character. Nearly 40% of the respondents to the survey identified Calef's as one of the town's most significant landmarks.

This corner also serves as the gateway to the town from the east and from Route 125, a long-standing major north-south route. Prior to the development of the interstate highway system, Route 125 was the main route north from the Boston area to the White Mountains. The road continues to be a well-traveled corridor, and this intersection has become a primary entrance to the town.

Some commercial development has occurred along Route 125, and the community is fortunate that it has been done in a fairly sensitive manner. A bank and a gas station occupy the northeast and southeast corners. Just to the north of the intersection, along the east side of Route 125, are a specialty food store, a church, another bank, and medical office building. The west side is somewhat restricted for large scale development due to the proximity of the former railroad bed, but has recently seen the construction of a walk-in emergency care center affiliated with Frisbee Hospital in Rochester. The vacant land south of this new facility could be commercially developed. How it is developed will be critical to achieving an attractive and cohesive town center.

To the west of Calef's along Route 9 are historic residences, the post office, the Christmas Dove gift shop, the former fire station, and a small park-and-ride lot. The Town Historical Society is located in a former one-room school further to the west, as well as the town cemetery, a Christian school, two churches, and some newer residential neighborhoods. The new public safety building is located less than a mile from the Route 125/9 intersection.

South of the intersection on Route 125, on the east side, is an area with the most commercial development containing a one-story strip plaza housing a hardware store and insurance agency. There is a freestanding restaurant as well as a dog grooming business to the north. The west side has three small businesses in the former railroad station, an auto body shop and used car lot, a diner, a restaurant, an elementary school, and a small plaza with some retail space and a six-screen movie theater.

While there is interest in town to support a compact commercial center and avoid the strip development of Route 125, the town's current zoning ordinance allows commercial development along the entire length of the route. That type of extensive development would also seriously compromise the flow of traffic along Route 125 by increasing the need for additional traffic lights.

Issue

There is the desire to have a community-gathering place with one or more focal points. This could include a recreational facility, such as a ball field, a community center, and a Town common with a bandstand for concerts, picnic, craft shows, and other gatherings.

The Town does not own much land in this area, and therefore does not have strong control over the development of the area.

Land use controls are currently limited in their ability to foster a design that would enhance the goal of creating a town center.

The highway zoning district allows for uncontrolled commercial development along all of the Town's major roadways.

As parcels of land become available for purchase, the Town currently does not have criteria for determining which parcels may best suit the Town's needs and which should be developed privately.

There is a concern among residents that the Route 125 area will develop into a commercial strip similar to other sections of the road in other communities. However, the town's current zoning is written to allow this to happen.

Goal

To create a focal area complementing the historic and existing development at the intersection of Routes 9 and 125 that will enhance the perception of this being the town center and gateway to the rest of the community.

Recommendations

- a. Follow through on the purchase of the 12-acre parcel behind Calef's and the post office. This parcel appears to have excellent potential for hosting several uses. It is adjacent to the school property and has access to Route 125 and Mallego Road.
- b. Study other open lands within a 1/2-mile radius of the intersection and identify land that may be suited for a Town sponsored project. Whether the Town is considering creating ball fields or a town green and bandstand, there are similar things to consider:
 - ease of access
 - cost of construction for converting the property
 - adequate size for the proposed use
 - reasonable area for parking
 - accessibility from other parts of the center
- c. Identify a list of project priorities from which the Town could initiate purchase proceedings, if and when the appropriate land parcels become available.
- d. Investigate the purchase of land on the northwest corner of the intersection to protect its undeveloped state and potential for a Town facility.
- e. Investigate formalizing an arrangement with the property owner of the pond next to the Christmas Dove to allow public skating and possible temporary structures.
- f. Modify the use of the Highway zoning district in the Town's zoning ordinance to direct commercial development into nodes or centers rather than commercial strips.
- g. Modify site plan regulations to incorporate access management techniques and goals along Route 125.
- h. Review Capital Improvement Plan to identify future needs that would be appropriate for the town center and enhance the core development in this area.
- i. Investigate establishing a historic district to the west of the intersection along Route 9 to raise awareness of the historic resources in town and encourage their preservation.

6.3 Developing a Cohesive Character

Issue

As described above, the existing commercial core around the Route125/9 intersection has a fairly good variety of businesses and services with a local customer base. Banks, post office, specialty stores, hair salon, movie theaters, flower shop, hardware store, medical services, schools, churches, and restaurants are already in place. What is currently lacking is a sense of cohesiveness and the ability to move from one place to another without getting in a vehicle. Route125 is a major north-south route, and it is a challenge getting across when not at a traffic light. To move from one section of this area to another without getting in your vehicle and driving onto Route125 would help reduce congestion and maintain better traffic flow. If there was a safe route to walk or bicycle to Calef's or the post office or to one of the churches from the residential neighborhoods just north of the

intersection, it is likely more people would make a choice to walk or bike. At the moment there is no safe choice for a pedestrian or bicyclist.

Development on the northwest side of Route 125 has the ability to allow access from the former railroad right-of-way that runs from Calef's to the Rochester city line. While the parcel is still in the ownership of Gilford Transportation (Tax map say B&M RR), the right-of-way has been disrupted below Route 9 making it unlikely that the line would be restored. This pathway has great potential for becoming a bike/hike trail and can provide safe access down to the town center from the north.

The northwest corner of the intersection remains undeveloped. New Hampshire DOT has taken quite a lot of the edges of the intersection for the road right-of-way. Currently, there is a large evergreen tree at the northwest corner, probably in the right-of-way, that the town decorates for the holidays. The parcel that runs along the west side of Route 125 narrows down at the intersection as the old railroad bed is next to it. There is a large billboard sign located on this corner. Continuing west is the park-and-ride lot, and then a small commercial business. Behind these properties (to the north) is a small pond and marsh that is used by residents in the winter for ice-skating.

There is great potential to build upon the gateway concept at this corner. The wooded buffer along Route 125 protects the pond and historic properties to the west and the access that the railroad bed provides will greatly enhance any town facilities located near here. While the corner would likely be too busy for the location of a Town Common or green, it would be a good location for a municipal building or other type of service.

In keeping with New England traditions of a cohesive village and town center, a mix of residences and businesses are allowed to be in close proximity to each other. Barrington has allowed residential uses in its commercial districts, and there are numerous historic homes within the targeted town center. There are also several newer residential developments in the vicinity of the intersection. These residential properties are essential to the success and viability of any town center. Addressing the pedestrian needs and recreation needs of these residents will result in a healthy and vibrant town center.

The residents who responded to the survey indicated a desire for more variety in the type of stores in this area and would invite new construction. When new construction occurs in the private sector, there is a concern among residents that development won't fit in with the existing settlement. The concern is that the development is designed primarily for vehicular access, and it begins to look like a typical highway commercial strip. There is interest in modifying the town's site plan and subdivision regulations to ensure that new construction is compatible in design and scale to existing patterns of development and sensitive to the New England village character they are trying to build upon.

Goal

To encourage pedestrian friendly amenities and to allow new and infill construction that will enhance and complement the traditional development patterns of a town center.

Recommendations

- a. Review the Town's zoning ordinance and consider creating a new zoning district that supports and requires new construction to maintain more traditional setbacks and building orientation.
- b. Review and develop site plan regulations that have design standards for the building and parking areas in order to have the buildings be oriented to foster a human scale.
- c. Consider revising the zoning ordinance or site plan regulations to reduce the parking requirements in the town center district. Require parking areas to be at the side or rear of the building.
- d. Through site plan review, require new construction to consider and provide for pedestrian access to the site and not just vehicular flow (e.g. sidewalks).
- e. Adopt access management policies that limits curb cuts along routes 125 and 9 and encourages internal circulation patterns between properties.
- f. Revise the Town's sign ordinance to enhance the cohesiveness of the town center.
- g. Develop lighting regulations to control style, intensity, and timing of lighting for commercial and industrial uses to maintain night skies, meet needs of residents living in area, and maintain the ambiance of a New England rural town.
- h. Investigate the purchase of the former railroad right-of-way for a bike/hike trail.
- i. Inform the state and regional transportation planners of the town center goals and request that any improvements along each of the major roads have pedestrian and/or bicycle amenities.

6.4 Institutional and Organizational Development

Issue

Implementing the creation and expansion of a Town Center is an imposing task as there are many players involved in making it come together. There are private property owners, commercial developers, state agencies, Town officials, and the residents of the town involved in the creation of this center. Getting all of these interested parties to work in concert with each other is the challenge. Clear communication amongst all parties is key since that ensures that decisions will not be made without consideration of the community's goals. The work that has been accomplished by the Town's existing boards and committees will serve as a cornerstone of the organizational structure and help guide the efforts of all involved.

Goal

To set in place policies, regulations, public awareness efforts, and funding strategies to create and enhance a town center at the intersection of Route 125 and 9.

Recommendations

- a. Incorporate plan into Master Plan.
- b. Review zoning ordinance for consistency with the goals of the plan. Propose changes as needed and post for Town warrant article.
- c. Review site plan and subdivision regulations for consistency with the goals of the plan. Propose changes as needed.
- d. Continue the work of various Town boards and committees with the recreation director on identifying potential sites for community facilities such as ball fields, parks, and community centers.
- e. Contact NHDOT to inform them of the town's goal and work to establish a Memorandum of Understanding between both parties regarding development and road improvements. This MOU would serve to meet the goals of the Town Center by practicing limited access to the highway and improved pedestrian enhancements and safety.
- f. Create an inventory of vacant land in the vicinity as well as any parcels that currently on the market. Identify parcels likely to be part of, or enhance the project.
- g. Investigate funding sources for acquisition and development of park and public lands. See next section for details.
- h. Consider establishing a business improvement district (BID) to provide revenue for improvements in the area and to promote the center as a resource. BID resources could enhance recreation funds needed to sponsor events at the town center.

6.5. Development of Fiscal Mechanisms

Funding a long-term, comprehensive effort such as this requires an on-going effort that taps into private, state, and federal resources that would be used to leverage local dollars. Funds will be needed for acquisition, planning and construction, program development, and maintenance. Some of the options include:

- a. Bonding for acquisition of public space – There has been discussion in the past and warrant articles proposed for the purchase of lands in the area to be used for a village green/town center. This continues to be one of the better options for acquiring land that will be used for parks and public spaces to be used for recreation.
- b. Dedication of penalty monies from lands going out of current use – This money can be used for land purchases for parks, recreation, and conservation. It is an excellent way to raise cash that is needed to match funds from the Land and Community Heritage Program (LCHIP, see below).
- c. LCHIP, Land and Community Heritage Program – This state program can provide up to a fifty percent match for funds for the acquisition of conservation land, easements, and publicly owned historic structures.

7. Maps and Diagrams

- 7.1 Map 1: Barrington Points of Local Interest**
- 7.2 Map 2: Barrington Open Space Inventory**
- 7.3 Map 3: Barrington Recreation Areas**
- 7.4 Map 4: Existing Town Center Area - Town of Barrington**
- 7.5 Map 5: Barrington Town Center Area**
- 7.6 Diagram 1: Town Center Area**

This electronic version of this report is missing maps and appendix. Contact the NHEP for complete document. 6/05