

CHAPTER IX

FUTURE LAND USE

A. INTRODUCTION

Planning for the future use of land within Hudson is the main component and culmination of the Master Plan. Each chapter in this Master Plan is essentially an element of a comprehensive land use plan that is implemented through the local zoning ordinance and land use regulations. Based upon an analysis of existing land use patterns and projected community needs, this chapter encourages land use patterns that will address the community's needs for the next twenty years. The chapter describes where those preferred land uses should be located, how they should function and how they might be implemented in Hudson. Future land uses are defined within the context of: 1) Residential Land Uses; 2) Natural Resource Protection; 3) Commercial and Industrial Development and Redevelopment; and 4) Economic Development.



B. FUTURE LAND USE ISSUES

1. Residential Land Use



Lower-density residential dwellings, which are predominately single-family houses, presently occupy 28% of the town's total land area and represent 74% of the total housing units in the Town. Multi-family residential development accounts for 707 acres, or approximately 4% of the town's 18,773 acres, and represents approximately 13% of total housing units (see Table VI-1 on page VI-2).

Opportunities are limited for the development of additional multi-family residential units in the Business District and higher density single family units in the Town Residence District. In 2003, multi-family residential developments, with the exception of housing for older persons, are permitted only in the town's Business District, if served by public water and sewer. Much of Hudson's multi-family development is now non-conforming with the greatest percentage located in the Residential-2 (R-2) District. Only 75.7 acres (10.2%) of the town's Business District is developed for multi-family residential use and there are 82 acres of developable land remaining in this District. Assuming the current ratio of multi-family residential to non-residential uses in the Business District remains constant, 8.4 acres of this developable land is likely to be developed for multi-family dwellings in the future.

Similarly, opportunities for the development of additional high-density single-family residential units in the Town Residence District are limited, as this district is fully developed and the original intent of this district is not to extend it beyond the existing boundaries.

With the balance shifted toward lower density residential development and single-family dwellings in particular, Hudson may experience relatively modest growth in total population as higher-density housing opportunities for small households and single individuals remain static or decline.

In addition, as land is consumed at a high rate due to low density residential development, increasing pressure will be placed on the remaining rural lands in town.

The buildout analysis (Chapter 6) indicates that there is a potential for a maximum of an additional 2,270 new single-family residential housing units or 1,570 duplexes in Hudson before all remaining appropriately zoned land is developed. These units would be primarily single family dwellings, together with a modest number of senior housing units and duplexes.

A variety in Hudson's housing stock has direct as well as indirect benefits. For example, every employee who works in Hudson but lives elsewhere needs transportation in and out of town. Since most people prefer driving their own vehicles to and from work, this places greater demand on the Town's street network, especially at peak hours. Maintaining reasonably priced housing in town will have the side-benefit of distributing traffic demand more evenly through the street network.



While considering the types of housing stock available to current and future residents in Hudson, it is important to take actions to ensure that Hudson does not become a transient community. Maintaining the community strengths and values through participation in community life, such as through schools or through community facilities that encourage community "roots", like the library, is important to a healthy community. Increasing housing costs and the decline in housing quality are two factors that can cause residents to seek housing elsewhere after a few years. Housing and other land-use regulations should reflect the community benefits that come from a stable base of long-term residents.

Any land area that is considered for multi-family housing should have municipal utility services available as well as reasonable access to local roads with capacity for projected additional traffic. The Town might consider creating sub-area plans for specific developable areas. Sub-area plans are well suited to determining whether specific locations should be designated high-priority for development, or whether constraints such as access or infrastructure availability place limits on housing potential.

2. Natural Resource Protection



A consistent focus in the Town of Hudson is the need to conserve the natural environment and open space, including forests, the remaining agricultural land, water bodies and wildlife. The view often expressed is that the natural environment must be protected to prevent irreversible damage that would forever change the character and quality of life within Hudson. Yet some level of development is inevitable, and measures must be taken to facilitate reasonable development. Following are a series of measures that the Town can undertake to ensure that development has minimal negative impacts upon the natural environment.

a. Open Space Planning

Conservation of open space protects air and water quality and wildlife habitat, and can preserve prime agricultural soils and other soils of importance. For all development, the use of buffers and integrated open space, with respect to environmental constraints, should be considered. The Town should strive to manage its present municipal lands by developing an open space plan that

would include recommendations on the use of Town-owned parcels, priorities for acquiring privately held land from willing sellers/owners, and incentives for private landowners to voluntarily place conservation easements on their land. A main goal of the plan would be to develop a connected array of green spaces, for the benefit of both wildlife and Town residents; an example might be protecting additional land in the Musquash Swamp area along the Hudson and Pelham town-line. A concurrent goal of the Town should be to maximize the size of other connected open space areas for the purpose of conserving and preventing further fragmentation of wildlife habitat.

To facilitate this planning approach, the Planning Board will need to undertake a cost-of-community-services study to demonstrate the relative value of open space based on a comparison of municipal service expenditures between land use categories. To further enable the acquisition of priority land, the Town should consider devoting 100% of the Land Use Change Tax (Current Use penalty) to the conservation fund. The Town should explore using the conservation fund or other monies to assist landowners who are interested in placing conservation easements on their lands.

b. Habitat Map/Natural Resources Inventory

A map identifying key habitat areas within Hudson should be developed, especially for rare, endangered, or protected species, as well as for other important habitats, for example, wildlife corridors and deer yards. This map, or set of maps, could be produced as part of a natural resources inventory. A natural resources inventory lists and describes important natural resources, such as wetlands, farmland and forestland, water resources, and geologic resources. Ideally, a natural resource inventory includes maps, associated data and information sources, and descriptive elements. The inventory would provide the Town and municipal boards with a strong foundation for more informed decision-making on land use issues. As a general rule, the section headings in Chapter III can serve as a category list for the natural resource inventory planning process.

c. Development Constraints Review

The Town's most current constraints overlay maps (delineating wetlands, waterways, special soils, steep slopes, and other sensitive areas) should be an integral part of the review of all development proposals. By using these maps early and routinely in the development process, all parties can evaluate and mitigate potential negative impacts, and conserve valuable resources more effectively. The Town should also be working with the Lower Merrimack River Local Advisory Committee to coordinate developments with the potential to impact (positively or negatively) the Merrimack River.

d. Site Disturbance Standards

Standards to restrict site disturbance during construction would assist with preserving the ecological integrity and scenic appearance of the landscape. More consistent and stricter enforcement of current landscaping and lighting requirements will ensure compatibility and attractiveness, and diminish the potential for sky glow and lighting impacts to others. Greater



enforcement efforts will require additional Town planning and zoning staff. The principles of conservation design should also be applied to industrial and commercial developments.

e. Water Resources Management Plan

The development and adoption of a water resources management plan would provide the tools to create ordinances and protect Hudson's surface and ground waters, and would help to locate and protect additional water supplies for future need. The Town should coordinate its efforts internally, among Town departments and land use boards, as well as with those towns that share the Merrimack River watersheds and ground water resources (i.e., Litchfield and Pelham). A Water Resources Management Plan would include "sustainable development" principles, often defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."¹ As Hudson continues to grow and demand on resources increases, the Town should ensure that development does not outstrip the environment's capacity for renewal.

f. Shoreland Protection District



Lands along water bodies must be protected against encroachment of buildings as well as from spills or releases of hazardous or toxic substances to maintain and improve water quality. The adoption of a shoreland protection district ordinance with appropriate development and use standards, such as building setbacks and vegetated buffers, would facilitate this process. Additionally, the update of the Lower Merrimack River Corridor Management Plan will provide a series of recommendations for communities to undertake to protect the Merrimack River. When the

update has been completed to its satisfaction, the Hudson Planning Board should, ideally, formally adopt the management plan as part of the Town's Master Plan.

g. Wetlands Inventory

Protection of wetlands is vital to the integrity of the water supply, as well as providing flood protection and conserving irreplaceable wildlife habitat. The Town should conduct an inventory of its prime wetlands to strengthen special protection from encroachment by development. Some of the data are already available, with baseline information in the EPA Region I document *Priority Wetlands in New England*. This should be complemented by additional wetland resource identification in order to have a Town-wide prime wetlands database.

h. Access Points to the Merrimack River and Other Recreational Water Bodies

Rivers, streams, lakes and ponds are often commodity-type resources, but they are also valuable visual and recreational amenities. One way for a community to enhance the visual and recreational opportunities of our rivers, especially, is to provide public recreational areas adjacent to shoreline developments. By considering the Merrimack River

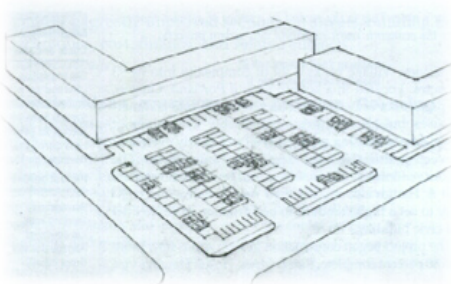


¹ World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 p. 43.

an asset to every shoreline development, while also respecting it as a natural resource which should be protected, numerous recreational opportunities will be created for residents and visitors alike. Hudson has a number of water features that are worthy of recreational protection, such as the Merrimack River. It is recommended that a Shoreland Protection District ordinance be created to protect the ability of citizens to access and enjoy the Town's water resources, while protecting water quality and recognizing their hydrologic values and functions. Traditionally this has meant protection of existing access points (docks, etc.), but the plan should identify future points as well.

3. Commercial and Industrial

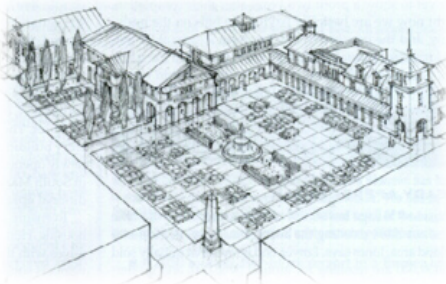
a. Redevelopment of Commercial Uses



Before Redevelopment



There are approximately 82 acres of undeveloped land remaining in the Business District, mostly located in narrow corridors along NH 102, 111, and 3A. The majority of the Business District was developed in the 1970's through 1990's with retail, automotive and restaurant uses typical of late 20th century strip development.



After Redevelopment?



Given the limited availability of undeveloped land and the relatively short design life of existing commercial buildings, there is opportunity for redevelopment in the next 20 years, especially along the aforementioned highway corridors.² Specifically, an access management plan may assist with maintaining the capacity of the roadways and improving access

for all modes of transportation. The plan should include best practices for vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian circulation, urban design and stormwater management techniques such as Low Impact Development.

In addition, development of urban design guidelines for the Town of Hudson and amendments to the sign ordinance may assist in improving the aesthetics and function of the state highway corridors in Hudson. The Town might wish to consider adoption of urban design standards. Design standards are guidelines for private-sector property owners, to assist them in making decisions about how to develop or redevelop property in ways that make them compatible with neighboring land uses and in keeping with an overall conceptual framework and community character. Standards are different from regulations in that compliance would be encouraged rather than uniformly required, so private-property decision-making is respected; however, they are a good method to ensure that a business district or highway corridor is more than a collection of mismatched buildings and landscaped areas.

² Graphics courtesy of Congress for the New Urbanism, 2001. Photo courtesy of Mashpee Commons, MA website.

Current zoning permits a mix of multi-family and various commercial uses, in the Business District; however, existing development tends to be single use. Amendments to the District should be considered to encourage true mixed uses such as retail and service uses in industrial parks and, where feasible, multi-family housing.

b. State Highway Commercial Corridors

Redevelopment of commercial properties on Hudson's major state highways (NH 3A, 102, and 111) is a feasible alternative to expanding the Business District. Site development along these corridors should not be considered in isolation. There may be multiple opportunities for shared parking, shared access, façade improvements and mixed residential/retail/office uses as applications for redevelopment are received. Corridor property redevelopment is a specific example of how design standards might be effectively used by the Town and the private sector, working together.



Aside from the issue of design standards, the overall development standards by which existing properties were designed should be evaluated to determine their effectiveness and applicability. Flexibility in development regulations, such as minimum parking requirements and front setbacks, can result in more efficient land use as well as improve community appearance. The Town might consider conducting a land use study of the commercial areas along each of the three state highways for the purpose of determining better configurations of parking and off-highway traffic circulation. These studies could also evaluate the appropriateness of the zone boundaries, not for the purpose of expansion, but to match the zones with the actual land uses.

Similarly, pedestrian accessibility and safety in the state highway corridors in Hudson should be promoted. Although many people may still choose to use their vehicles, the lack of adequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities leave people no alternative mode of transportation.

c. Other Commercial Areas

The above discussion applies to Hudson's main commercial areas outside the central business area, but many of the same principles will apply to any commercial node or corridor in the Town, new or existing. Each corridor or node should ideally be evaluated in the context of its own plan, and the development of these place-specific plans would be a valuable addition to the Master Plan.

The Town should also address potential commercial development of large tracts of land that are currently used for other purposes but which might become available for commercial use in the future. Typical examples of such landholdings would be gravel-extraction operations or timber-producing tracts. Other municipalities have found that the entire community benefits from

proper advance planning to redevelop these large tracts when they become available. Similarly, the Town should consider planning for any potential major additions to the transportation network—for example, the Circumferential Highway. Hudson should inventory any such possibilities and plan accordingly to ensure that these projects serve as assets rather than detriments to the community character and overall quality of life in the Town.

4. Economic Development

a. Designation of Commercial and Light Industrial Growth Areas

Chapter IV (Economic Development) points out that, despite the perception that Hudson currently has adequate land zoned for commercial and industrial use, there are significant constraints on developing some of these properties. Constraints include: difficult or sensitive environmental features, poor road access, and difficult or costly infrastructure (water and sewer) needs. Two tasks are necessary to address these constraints: 1) the Town should reexamine current parcel zoning to determine whether the constraints of the land necessitate rezoning as open space or low-intensity development; and 2) the Town should identify and properly zone land that lacks these constraints and whose highest and best use is commercial/industrial. These tasks should run parallel with an examination of the zoning ordinance text so that zoning districts can be used to promote the commercial/light industrial mix.



b. Cost-of-Community-Services Study

The Town should consider conducting a cost-of-community-services study to help ascertain the fiscal impact of various types of development in different locations. A common conclusion to similar studies across New Hampshire is that commercial and industrial uses do not contribute any more value to the Town's tax base, on a net basis, than does open space, and that residential development is considerably more expensive.³ The significance of this conclusion is that it supports the public acquisition of open space as a cost-saving measure—by purchasing land that might otherwise be developed, the Town would be reducing the potential services it would be required to provide. A cost-of-community-services analysis could also serve as a basis for calculating impact fees, particularly for school capital facilities.

c. Conserve Existing Sewer Capacity

Hudson should take steps to ensure that the Town's sewer infrastructure can accommodate future commercial and industrial development. The Community Facilities chapter points out that there is limited unused capacity in the system, and little opportunity to increase capacity unless the wastewater-processing agreement with the City of Nashua is revisited. The chapter also recommends that sewer-intensive development be restricted to the area within the existing network. Given these constraints, sewerage is one element for which impact fees or developer-financed initiatives can provide little relief. Conservation of a shrinking existing resource is the key, and specific designation of capacity for commercial/light industrial users will help achieve this goal.

³ *The Economic Impact of Open Space in New Hampshire*, Resource Systems Group (1999); *Does Open Space Pay?*, Phil Auger, 1995; *Saving Special Places: Community Funding for Land Conservation*, 2002.

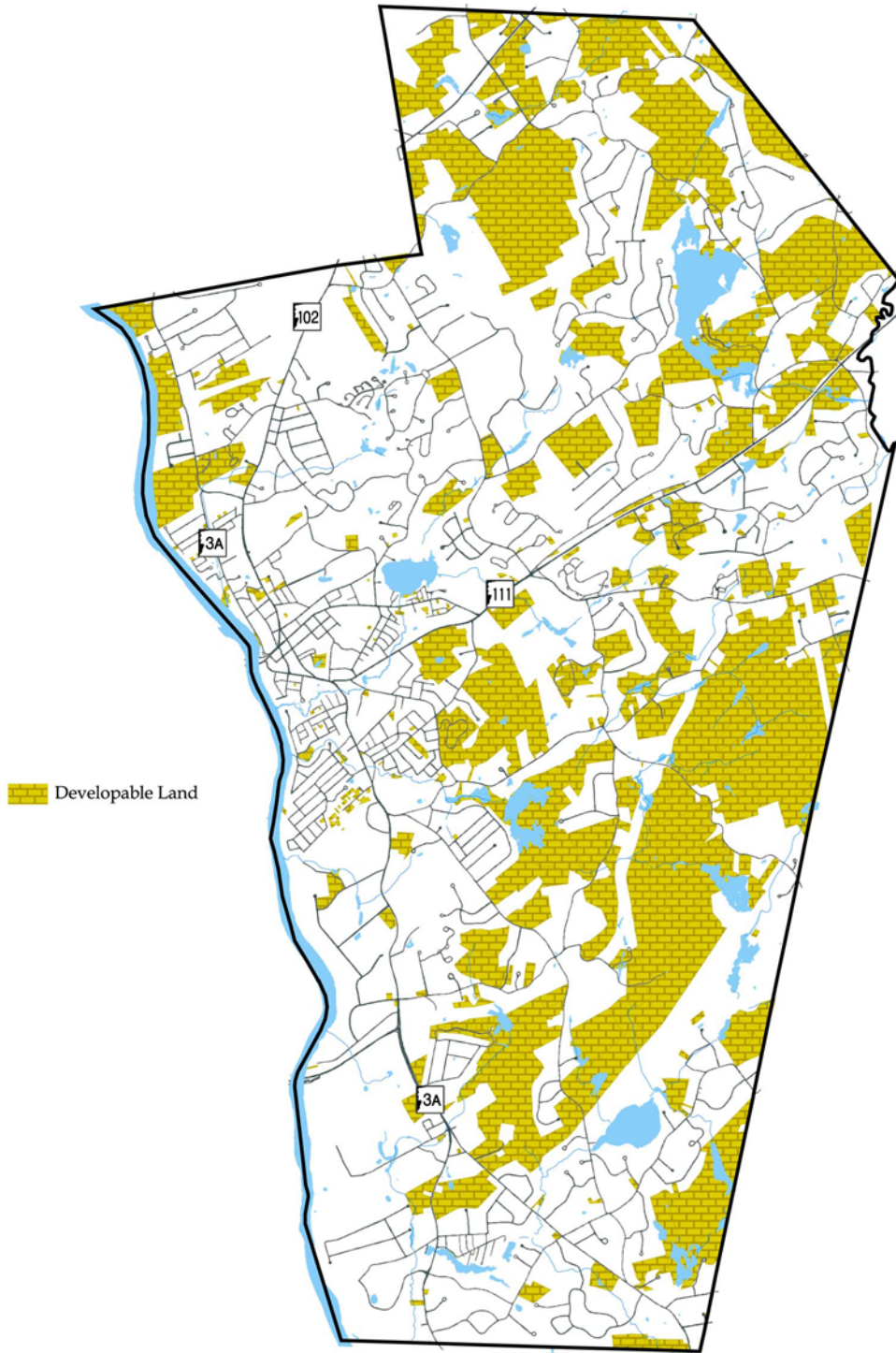
d. Riverfront Development

Up through the mid-20th Century, the typical American city or town with river frontage regarded its waterway as a transportation route and a convenient source of water and energy. The result was often an industrial/warehousing district – economically sound in its day, but hardly picturesque. More recently, as manufacturing has declined and the service-sector economy, especially tourism, has boomed, riverfront communities are discovering that waterways like the Merrimack River are assets. There are many examples in New England of communities that have redeveloped their riverfronts with shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues that complement the river’s natural beauty.



A Merrimack Riverfront District is a concept that Hudson should consider. A specific plan should be created to promote this possibility in the Town, with recommendations that can be implemented through zoning and economic development initiatives, among other tools. Specific elements should include public access, as discussed previously, and a pedestrian-friendly access network.

Map IX-1. Developable Land



Source: NRPC GIS, 2004