

planLITTLETON

# 2020 MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The Town of Littleton is the heart of New Hampshire's North Country. As a community, Littleton is committed to effectively balancing economic growth to ensure a healthy local economy, while maintaining its distinctive landscape and natural resources, its quality of life, its cultural heritage, and its historic downtown.

The community continues to provide high-quality social, healthcare, and educational services to the region, offer unique outdoor recreation opportunities, and promote its burgeoning arts and cultural resources. The Town and its community members are committed to building upon its growing reputation as a vibrant, multi-generational community and to protect its defining qualities including its welcoming attitude, its unique sense of identity, its creative spirit, its resourcefulness, and its vitality into the future.

## WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN?

How a community uses its land impacts the its character and the quality of life for its residents and visitors. A municipality that plans wisely for its land use will be better equipped to anticipate and deal with future demands, population growth, development pressure and opportunities, and other issues. The primary purpose of the Master Plan is to guide the **overall character, growth, and development** of a community. It provides an opportunity to develop and document a vision for the future and structure community goals and objectives around them. It serves as an overall community planning framework. Through this process, actionable implementation activities that includes specific programs, policies, and regulatory changes, are designed to achieve the Town's visions and goals.

## THE MASTER PLANNING PROCESS IN LITTLETON

From 2019-2020, the Littleton Planning Board worked with consultant Resilience Planning & Design to update its Master Plan.

**EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS -** An analysis of existing conditions, major issues, challenges, and trends in Littleton gave insight into how the Town has changed over time. Land use related issues such as transportation, economic development, natural esources, housing, recreation, and others provided valuable background on the character of Littleton and who the community is.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT -** Community members were engaged and informed the Plan's development through a series of focus groups, a

community forum, and an online feedback form.

**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN -** Feedback from the public informed new content and the development of implementation strategies that supported the overall vision for future land use.



## WHERE IS LITTLETON HEADED?

### *A Snapshot of the Issues*



#### POPULATION AND HOUSING

Though Littleton's population growth has seen little change in recent decades, the Town is attracting new economic activity and young families and professionals into the community. Littleton is also further establishing its role as a regional center for shopping, healthcare, and entertainment with the addition of new and expanding businesses and industries. Although Littleton has been far ahead of other nearby communities in supplying **diverse and affordable housing options**, the Town should ensure that their land use regulations support the increasing need for high-quality diverse housing stock that includes single-family housing units, apartments, and condominiums, as well as more **creative**

**housing solutions** such as accessory dwelling units, tiny houses, and co-housing developments. This will ensure that employees, young professionals, families, and seniors all have access to housing options that make sense at different points of their lives. Land use regulations should also be reviewed to ensure they promote **higher density, mixed use development** to create a walkable, livable downtown that includes housing.



#### NATURAL RESOURCES

Littleton's natural resources create a **complex network of rivers, wetlands, forests, and farmland** that serves as wildlife habitat and provides the residents of Littleton with clean air, clean water, recreational and economic value, and contributes to its rural character. The Town should partner with land protection organizations and invest in **land conservation initiatives** targeted at lands that have the highest concentration of unique and important natural resources (such as wetlands, prime farming soils, rare or high priority habitat, and riparian corridors) and focus on developing **performance standards** for developers that ensure protection of the Town's shared natural resources.

#### HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The historic and cultural resources in Littleton help define the fabric and character of the community. They are unique to Littleton and tell a story to both residents and visitors. Often taken for granted by those who have grown accustomed to their presence, these homes, agricultural buildings, commercial structures and landscapes retain a **sense of place and identity** that is Littleton. The Town should consider some of the **historic preservation** tools the state of NH authorizes for use by communities, including the establishment of a Heritage Commission and the utilization of grants such as the Land and Community Heritage Investment (LCHIP) program to preserve properties. Additionally, the Town should prioritize future historic preservation opportunities and promote its existing historic and cultural resources (such as the Littleton Opera House) as an economic development and tourism strategy.



#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A strong local economy is built through **harnessing a community's assets**, diversifying the Town's tax base, offering a high-quality environment for businesses to locate and expand in, and increases jobs opportunities. In Littleton, these assets include a tight-knit sense of community, its historic Downtown, its arts and cultural legacy and contemporary activities, the Ammonoosuc River, the abundant natural resources offering hiking, skiing, mountain biking opportunities, and more. Littleton should invest in economic development initiatives in the Industrial District, River District, and overall Downtown area, address **workforce needs**, and attract entrepreneurs to the area. Littleton should also work to provide programming, coordinated marketing, and online tools to increase **tourism** to the area that attract new residents and employees. Investing in **small business development** and entrepreneurial activity and incentivizing **infill** and redevelopment in the



Downtown should continue to grow the community's local economy. To preserve the values of Littleton, a balanced approach to development is needed to preserve the Town's character, natural resources, and quality of life.



### TRANSPORTATION

An **integrated transportation system** that provides safe opportunities to commute by car, bike, foot, and bus is a critical component of any successful community (especially a regional hub, such as Littleton). The Town's recently completed Downtown Parking Plan has set measures to improve parking facilities, wayfinding, and parking access in the Downtown. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Plan identifies primary corridors that should be targeted for safety and infrastructure improvements such as construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities and traffic calming measures. Expansion and

construction of the Town's multi-use paths, such as the Riverwalk and the Ammonoosuc Rail Trail, will also contribute to the Town's pedestrian and bicycle network. Littleton should also invest in newer transportation technology, such as electric vehicle charging stations to accommodate a changing climate of vehicle technology.

### RECREATION

Littleton's rich natural and cultural landscape and its four-season climate allows for a diversity of recreational activities. The mountains, trails, forests, rivers, town facilities, and sporting fields are all robust resources that promote physical activity, tourism, and a high quality of life. Additionally, access to recreation facilities attracts families, employers, and an active workforce. The Town should **identify recreation as a priority for achieving quality of life and economic development goals** and work to assist leaders, organizations, and others in the outdoor recreation industry to help further Littleton's goals of being a hub for recreation activity. The Town should also conduct a



recreational needs assessment and develop a plan for long-term stewardship of recreation facilities, trails, and parcels. Some priority future projects identified through community engagement include creating a recreation directory for all facilities, events, programs, and trails in Town; hosting more recreation related events such as a fishing derby or mountain biking competition, and constructing additional indoor recreation facilities such as an indoor track and pickleball court.

### COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Planning for the replacement, upgrade, and expansion of existing community facilities and the addition of new facilities is an integral part of the Master Plan. Littleton strives to provide **high-quality community facilities** to its residents and the surrounding region. Future growth in population, and residential and commercial development often result in an increase in the demand placed on municipal services and infrastructure. Careful planning for this growth is important to ensure that an adequate level of service is provided to residents, businesses, and visitors at a manageable cost level. Community facilities include public safety, highway department, the public library, town offices, opera house, public schools, and others. In the full Master Plan, these facilities are carefully analyzed and future improvement projects were noted.



### ARTS AND THE CREATIVE SECTOR

The arts and creative sector includes employees, organizations, businesses, and industries who engage and support creative work including visual, performing, and literary artists, music, museums, and collections. This often includes craftspeople, makers, small-scale artisan manufacturers, arts educators, and professionals in applied fields like architecture and graphic design. The activities and events of cultural groups, arts



organizations and independent artists stimulate **community revitalization** through the building of social networks between people, diversify the local economy, and stimulate cultural tourism. Littleton has a strong arts and creative economy already with creative businesses, artists, galleries, event venues, and public art. The Town can build upon this activity by supporting artists and creative entrepreneurs through land use policy, promoting the integration of public art into Littleton's built and natural environment, and evaluating existing arts and cultural spaces and their infrastructure and program needs. There are also significant opportunities for cross-collaboration between artists, local officials, business owners, recreation groups, schools, and others to ensure arts and culture is reflected in community initiatives.



#### UTILITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

High quality, well-functioning, and reliable public utilities and services (including water, sewer, electric, waste management, and telecommunications) are important for maintaining quality of life and economic growth and have a direct impact on natural, cultural, and financial resources. It is important that the Town maintain a **collaborative relationship** with Littleton Water and Light to address public utility related issues including water and sewer

infrastructure upgrades and expansion, and energy efficiency issues. Zoning and other local regulations should allow for the careful siting and installation of telecommunications capabilities such as fiber optic cabling, and the wireless, cellular and satellite communication infrastructure needed to support and retain commercial and residential interests. The Town should continue to monitor other public infrastructure systems (such as the wastewater treatment plant and transfer station) through Public Works, to ensure timely upgrades and measures that modernize and improve the efficiency of those systems.

#### ENERGY

Being both environmentally aware and fiscally conservative, the Town of Littleton is committed to maximizing **energy conservation and efficiency**, acknowledging its myriad of benefits (including significant savings on energy costs, reducing the town's overall carbon footprint, etc.), and promoting stewardship of the Town's shared natural resources. While

Littleton has undertaken steps to achieve this goal, much more remains to be done that will challenge residents, nonprofits, businesses, and municipal organizations to work together in unprecedented ways. The Town should continue to find ways to work with Littleton Water and Light to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy sources while maintaining its low municipal utility rates. In planning for a resilient energy future, thoughtful, incremental measures are needed through a combination of incentives, voluntary actions, and, where necessary, regulations.



#### NATURAL HAZARDS

Natural hazards refer to weather-related events that may impact lives, property, infrastructure, natural resources, and municipal assets. Emergency management and natural hazard mitigation strategies work to create safer, sustainable communities in the face of natural disasters. Effective risk reduction requires careful community planning, strategizing, and education. Responsible management of the environment and development plays a key role in preventing or mitigating negative impacts of natural disasters. The Town should plan for all known natural hazard risks, even those that seem less likely, knowing that extreme weather events are increasing in frequency. The 2017 Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee did an excellent job in developing a thorough analysis of natural hazard threats and emergency response mechanisms that should continue to be updated and improved upon over time.



## EXISTING LAND USE

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Historically, Littleton's development has been based on its location, geography, transportation system, and available natural resources. The Ammonoosuc River provided the early power for manufacturing. Littleton's proximity to the White Mountains continues to ensure its place in the tourist-based economy of the region. Since the completion of Interstate 93 from Franconia to Interstate 91 in Vermont, accessibility to Littleton has increased dramatically, which sparked growth in the community.



### EXISTING LAND USE PATTERN

- **Approximately 31% of the land area in Littleton is currently being utilized for residential uses.** The continued expansion of residential land uses into the more rural areas of Littleton is a major land use trend the community must consider for the future. This growth is primarily related to single-family units and has implications for housing affordability as well as community services such as fire, police, roadway maintenance and schools.
- **56.5% of Littleton is composed of undeveloped parcels of land** (8.6% of which is permanently protected from future development activity through land conservation). The loss of open space has long term impacts on habitat, stormwater management, flood protection, recreation, and land uses such as forestry and agriculture.
- **3% of Littleton's land area is commercial, industrial, and manufacturing uses.** Littleton has experienced commercial growth along the major roadways over the past two decades – more specifically Routes 302 and 116. Demand for additional commercial activity will likely continue because of Littleton's location and the need to support a

growing population. Thoughtfully coordinating new development and redevelopment activity in Littleton will reinforce the community's aesthetic qualities, environmental quality, and the overall quality of life.

## ENVISIONING FUTURE LAND USE

A **Future Land Use Plan** provides guidance to the community on how to direct land use changes over time. This Plan is an opportunity to incorporate future development into the community in a way that maintains Littleton's form and function.

The majority of land in Littleton is forested open space and low-density single-family residential uses and has many constraints to development including steep slopes, presence of ledge, highly erodible soils, and wetlands. These constraints helped focus the majority of the Town's development activity into a small portion of the community where infrastructure is available. This higher density land use pattern is also more efficient for providing municipal services and ensures that the majority of the Town provides space for working landscapes, recreation, and limited development.

To accomplish this, Littleton's vision for Future Land Use identified five distinct focus areas have been defined that have a distinct character and function. They are as follows:

### DOWNTOWN

This is the most densely developed area of Littleton with a diverse mix of uses, businesses, offices, and services and is the most pedestrian friendly and walkable. Residential uses are also interspersed and in adjacent neighborhoods. With the addition of the River District, there are some obvious opportunities for infill development, and there will likely be some redevelopment activity over time. This is all possible because of available infrastructure (water/ sewer/ roads/sidewalks), and the presence of natural amenities like the river corridor. The construction of pedestrian and bicycle



infrastructure and addition of streetcape amenities (such as benches and pedestrian-scale lighting) should be prioritized in this area.

### **GATEWAYS TO DOWNTOWN**

Four distinct corridors radiate out from the Downtown. They include the West Main Street Gateway, Meadow Street Gateway, Cottage Street Gateway, and Union Street Gateway. Each of these corridors provides access into the Downtown, but also has its own distinct character and mix of land uses. The intent is to retain the distinct feel of each corridor and to recognize their roles as gateways to the Downtown as improvements are made.

### **INDUSTRIAL AREA**

This area of Littleton is reaching its capacity to accommodate new commercial uses. However, as national trends continue to impact the many industries located here currently, there may be opportunities to redevelop some of these sites to accommodate new companies.

### **COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR**

This area is parallel to the Ammonoosuc River and contains many commercial businesses, most of which are national chains. The corridor is automobile-oriented with easy access from the Interstate, and contains large areas of each site for parking. As retail continues to change nationwide, this area of Littleton may experience some changes in coming years and may see an increase in service sector uses.

### **HOUSING DEVELOPMENT NODE**

Because Littleton is in need of a greater number and diversity of



housing units, this area was identified as a possible location. The community should investigate land use regulations and incentives that would encourage the creation of a concentrated node near the interchange of Route 18 and 135 of high-density housing as a pedestrian friendly development. The area has access to water and sewer infrastructure, and is equidistant to the Downtown and the Hospital. This mix of potential units could include rental units and condominiums, and some limited retail or service-related uses.

### **OPEN SPACE AND RESIDENTIAL AREA**

The majority of Littleton's remaining land area is composed of low-density residential development, agriculture and forestry, and areas for habitat and recreation. This portion of the community also has the highest concentration of natural resources which are often viewed as constraints to development. This area also has little infrastructure beyond local roads and has potential to expand outdoor recreation amenities. Additionally, this area also supports the community and its residents through its working landscapes, such as farms and forestry operations, and rural housing options.



For more details, please find the the full Master Plan which can be found at the Town Office and on the Town's website.

***“Nowhere else will you find the world’s longest candy counter, an opera house where Bette Davis once celebrated her birthday, a gallery given to “bad art,” an annual “Be Glad” festival and a thriving arts, business and recreation scene all in the same place.”***  
**-Business NH Magazine**

