



13 Land Use

“As with nearly all proposed development standards, the goal is to encourage efficient land use, flexibility, and a wide variety of housing types, while reducing the potential for negative impacts”.

- Bill Vaughn

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to assess Littleton’s existing pattern of land uses, and then to look to the future and identify the actions needed to reach Littleton’s Vision.

Understanding the existing pattern of development and mix of land uses is critical to a master planning effort. Historically, Littleton’s development has been based on its location, geography, transportation system, and available natural resources. Understanding the context of this development and the resulting land use pattern will help the community plan a path toward their chosen vision of the future.

Attitudes toward land have changed considerably over the past decades. Experience has taught us that land is a complicated resource, and that one

parcel of land may be better suited to a particular use than another. Natural factors such as slope, soil, groundwater, and surface water may vary across the landscape and growing communities must take these factors into consideration when planning their future, or face a decreasing quality of life over time.

How a community decides to use its land base clearly has a direct impact on natural resources, on community character, on transportation infrastructure; and on housing opportunities, the tax base, and the cost of providing services. It is important to recognize that land is also a finite resource, and the thoughtful use of land is a critical issue for all communities. To address this the future land use section of this chapter will explore regulatory and non-regulatory techniques for guiding land use decision making toward Littleton’s Master Plan Vision.

EXISTING LAND USE

Littleton’s existing land use pattern is diverse in nature and consists of a wide array of uses. For the purpose of this Master Plan the existing land uses have been grouped into generalized categories in order to facilitate a better understanding of Littleton’s existing pattern of development. This data was made available by the Assessing Department.

For each category of land use the area in acres is noted in a Table in this section. Because the assessing database does not identify the area of the lot being occupied for these uses, the entire parcel was calculated for this Table and labeled on the existing land use map. In many ways, this is best because larger lots have the potential to be further developed over time. The Existing Land Use Map illustrates the distribution of these land uses

Approximately 31% of the land area in Littleton is currently being utilized for residential uses, and 56.5% is composed of undeveloped parcels of land.

across the community. A second map of just the Downtown area has also been included to more clearly show the land uses in this higher density area at the heart of the community.

Littleton ‘s natural features such as topography and geology as well as its politics, transportation system, and economics have all influenced its rate and pattern of development. The development of Littleton into a regional center is a result of its geographic location, and early commercial and

TOWN OF LITTLETON EXISTING LAND USE SUMMARY

Generalized Land Use Code	# of Tracts	Total Acreage	Percent of Total Acreage
Agricultural	27	612	2.0%
Assisted Living	2	4	0.01%
Commercial	225	663	2.1%
Developed Land	49	619	2.0%
Federal Land	2	1	0.004%
Improved Land	16	12	0.04%
Industrial/Manufacturing	39	320	1.0%
Institutional	34	200	0.6%
Multi-Family Residential	215	394	1.3%
Municipal	92	597	1.9%
Single-Family Residential	1974	9251	30.0%
State Land	11	295	1.0%
Transportation	22	56	0.2%
Unclassified	69	332	1.1%
Utility	16	54	0.2%
Vacant	635	17421	56.5%
Total	3428	30830	

Residential development encompasses the largest amount of developed land in Littleton.



manufacturing growth in the community. The Ammonoosuc River provided the early power for manufacturing, and the Town's central location provided easy access for neighboring communities. Littleton's proximity to the White Mountains continues to ensure its place in the tourist-based economy of the region. The recreational opportunities available within Littleton and a short drive away also enhance the success of tourist accommodations and services.

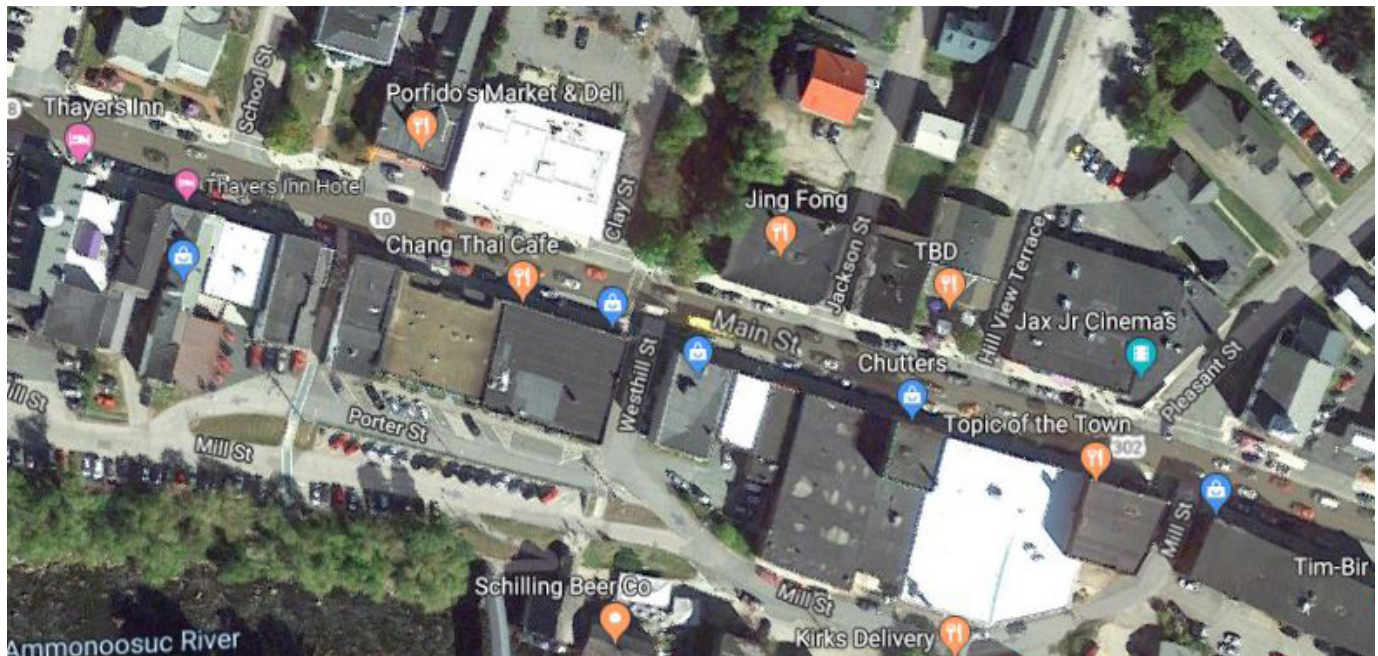
Since the completion of Interstate 93 from Franconia to Interstate 91 in Vermont, accessibility to Littleton has increased dramatically. The present and future land uses in Littleton will likely continue to flourish and change due to this ease of access, and as a result Littleton holds a key position in the development of the North Country. Since 2004, Littleton has seen development activity, but the total land area of developed land has not changed significantly. Some of this activity has been redevelopment and renovation, and some has been infill development, but the overall pattern has been fairly stable.

Residential Development

In total, it represents approximately 31% of the Town's land area. The majority of this is single-family development spread throughout Town, and at its highest density within the neighborhoods around the Downtown area. Multi-family development, only represents 1.3% of this total residential land area based on the 215 properties that are assessed for this use.

A great deal of residential development has been accommodated around the central business district due to the availability of Town services. As more residential development takes place in the rural areas of the community, land becomes further fragmented, natural resources are impacted, the character of the community is altered, and services must be extended to meet the needs of these residents. These effects of poorly planned development should be avoided with the use of complimentary land use regulations. Over the past decade, it has become clear that multi-family conversions and development is increasing in Littleton even if the number of residential structures

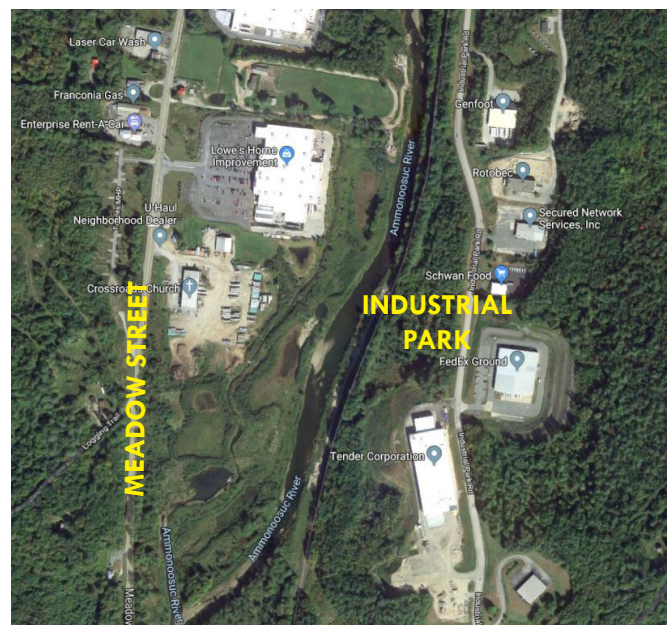
3% of Littleton’s land area is commercial, industrial, and manufacturing uses. Below is a snapshot of Littleton’s Downtown.



has not increased substantially. While this is a more efficient use of land resources, and provides greater housing options for current and future residents, it is important that Littleton commit to a broader range of housing alternatives. The continuance of Littleton as a viable area to live, work and eventually to retire will depend on diverse housing options that are balanced with other land uses and intact natural resource areas.

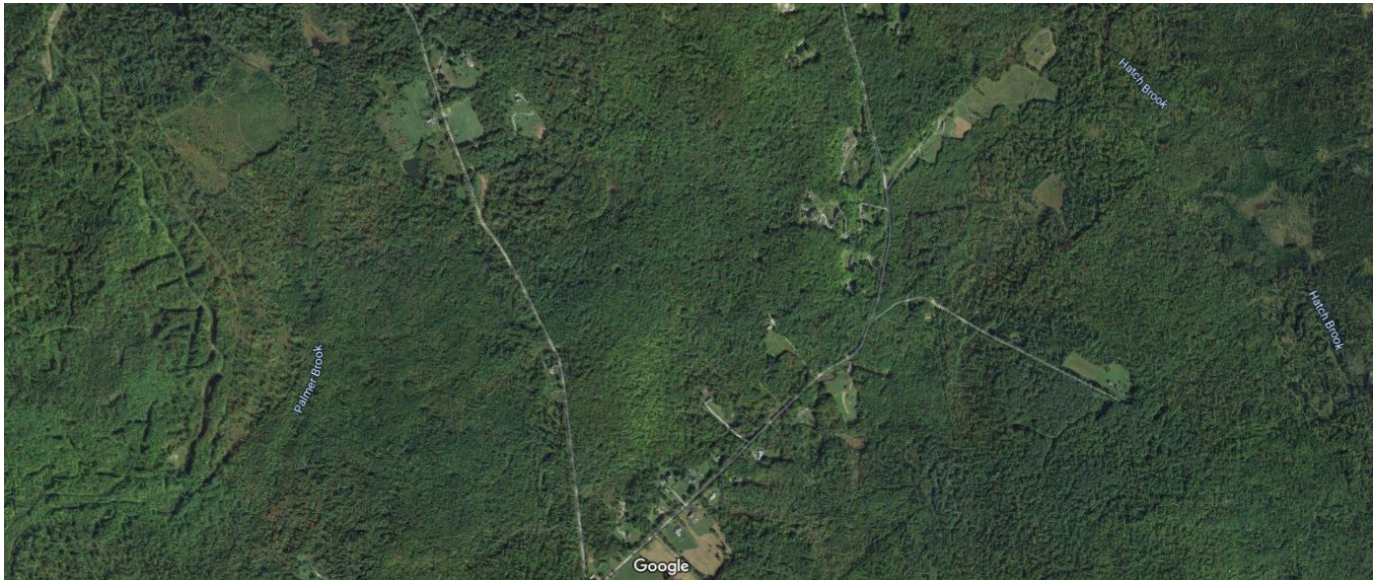
Commercial, Industrial, and Manufacturing

The majority of this activity is concentrated within the Downtown Area, along Meadow Street, at the Hospital, and in the Industrial Park. The availability of infrastructure (water and sewer, roads, telecommunications, etc.) makes this activity possible while allowing for a higher density of development which utilizes land more efficiently. While only 3% of Littleton’s land area is composed of these uses, these properties have a dramatic effect on surrounding land uses, and contribute to the Town’s tax base. These uses in Littleton support



the needs of local residents as well as residents of other communities in the region, and also provide employment within the region. The success of these land uses in the future is somewhat dependent on available housing, quality schools, and available infrastructure in Littleton.

Littleton's network of open and undeveloped land is central to its vision as a community to "live, work, and play" in.



Open Space and Conservation Land

While approximately 56% of Littleton is undeveloped land, only 8.6% is protected from future development activity. The majority of this conservation land is along the shore of the Moore Reservoir on the Connecticut River. Elsewhere in the community there are large contiguous open spaces containing important natural resources, supporting forestry and agricultural uses, and providing recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.

Working forestlands are by far the most dominant land use within these open space areas of Littleton. The largest extent of woodlands in Littleton is in the north/northeast sections of Town. The land is predominately steeply sloped and is generally unsuited for other uses, but has become a destination for recreation activities. There are also lands throughout the community that were once pastureland, but are now abandoned and in the process of returning to forest cover. Generally, land that is presently unsuitable for development

due to steepness or inaccessibility will remain as woodlands until the pressure to develop, or the demand for the wood products exceeds the natural barriers of the land.

The decline in agriculture in Littleton is largely attributed to the construction of Moore Dam (which virtually wiped out farming along the Connecticut River), the construction of Interstate 93 (which eliminated a number of farms and farmland), and the potential for higher wages in non-farm professions.

However, there are still some agricultural land uses, and this is a highly desirable use that contributes to the character and resilience of the community. It is important to recognize that unprotected agricultural land will continue to be under pressure from development. This existing open space network provides numerous ecosystem services to the community including improved air and water quality, flood mitigation, habitat, and it reinforces Littleton's community character.

Government and institutional land uses include such things as post offices, court houses, administrative offices, emergency services, public works, social organizations and schools.



Government and Institutional Uses

In Littleton these uses are generally found in the Downtown area adding to the mixed-use nature and vibrancy of this area of the community. These uses compliment the businesses and residential uses in this densely developed portion of the community, and their location makes them accessible to many residents without requiring the use of an automobile.

Existing Land Use Trends

1. 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.
2. The loss of open space has long term impacts through the loss of important natural services

such as habitat, stormwater management, flood protection, recreation, and land uses such as forestry and agriculture.

3. 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.
4. Thoughtfully coordinating new development and redevelopment activity in Littleton will reinforce the community’s aesthetic qualities, environmental quality, and the overall quality of life.

As Littleton takes these steps to implement actions that will fulfill the community’s vision it must also consider how transportation facilities, water and sewer lines, and other traditional grey infrastructure will serve the existing land uses without contributing to a sprawl land use pattern. Future investments in these infrastructure elements along with appropriate land use controls can

guide future development and redevelopment efforts in a way that preserves Littleton's character. The addition of green infrastructure will further compliment these efforts while addressing stormwater, air quality, aesthetics, traffic calming and other critical resource management needs that the community would like to proactively address.

FUTURE LAND USE

A Future Land Use Plan provides guidance to the community on how to direct land use changes over time. It recommends land use policy which can then be implemented by regulatory and non-regulatory means.

The composition of Littleton land uses includes open space, natural resources and constraints (soils, wetlands, floodplains, and steep slopes), a pattern of existing development, and a focused area of infrastructure and services. This pattern of land uses was reviewed through the context of the type of land use activities that Littleton anticipates and desires. Through this process, an updated future land use plan was created. The Future Land Use Plan is presented as three major components – a future land use map, area descriptions, and future land use recommendations.

Key Areas and Opportunities

There is a need and an opportunity to incorporate future development in the community in a way that maintains Littleton's form and function. In Littleton, the majority of the community is forested open space and low-density single-family residential uses. This large area of the community has many constraints to development including steep slopes, presence of ledge, highly erodible soils, and wetlands. These constraints have resulted in the land use pattern that exists there today.

It's also 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 more efficient for providing municipal services and ensures that the majority of the Town provides space for working landscapes, recreation, and limited development. This contributes to Littleton's character and quality of life. The Future Land Use Plan that follows reinforces this approach.

The existing developed areas of Littleton will be further developed and redeveloped as opportunities arise. To guide this activity in a way that is reflective of the community, it is important that the appropriate land use regulations are in place. This will ensure that the land use pattern that emerges over time is similar to the Future Land Use Plan and Vision articulated in this Master Plan.

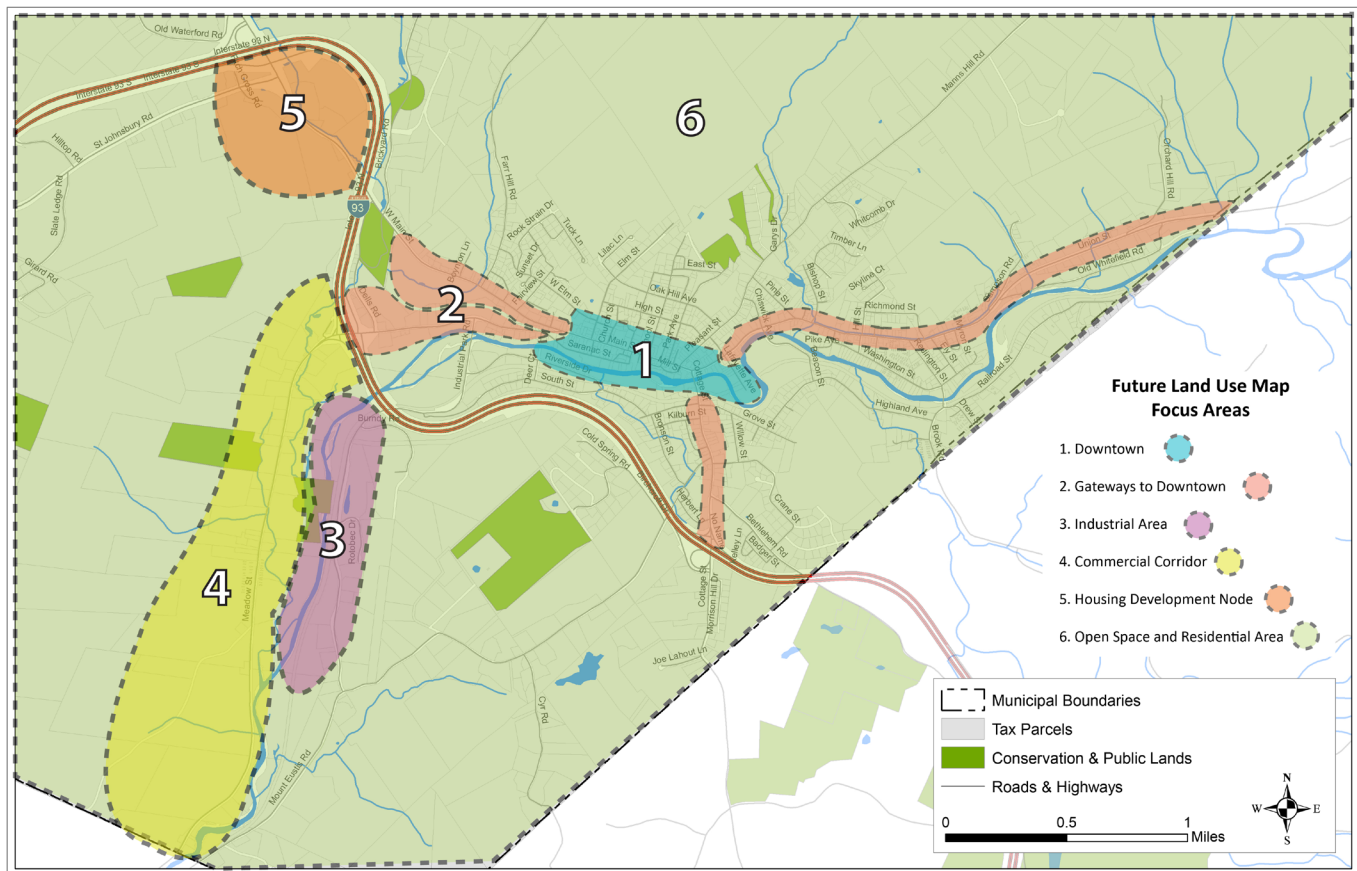
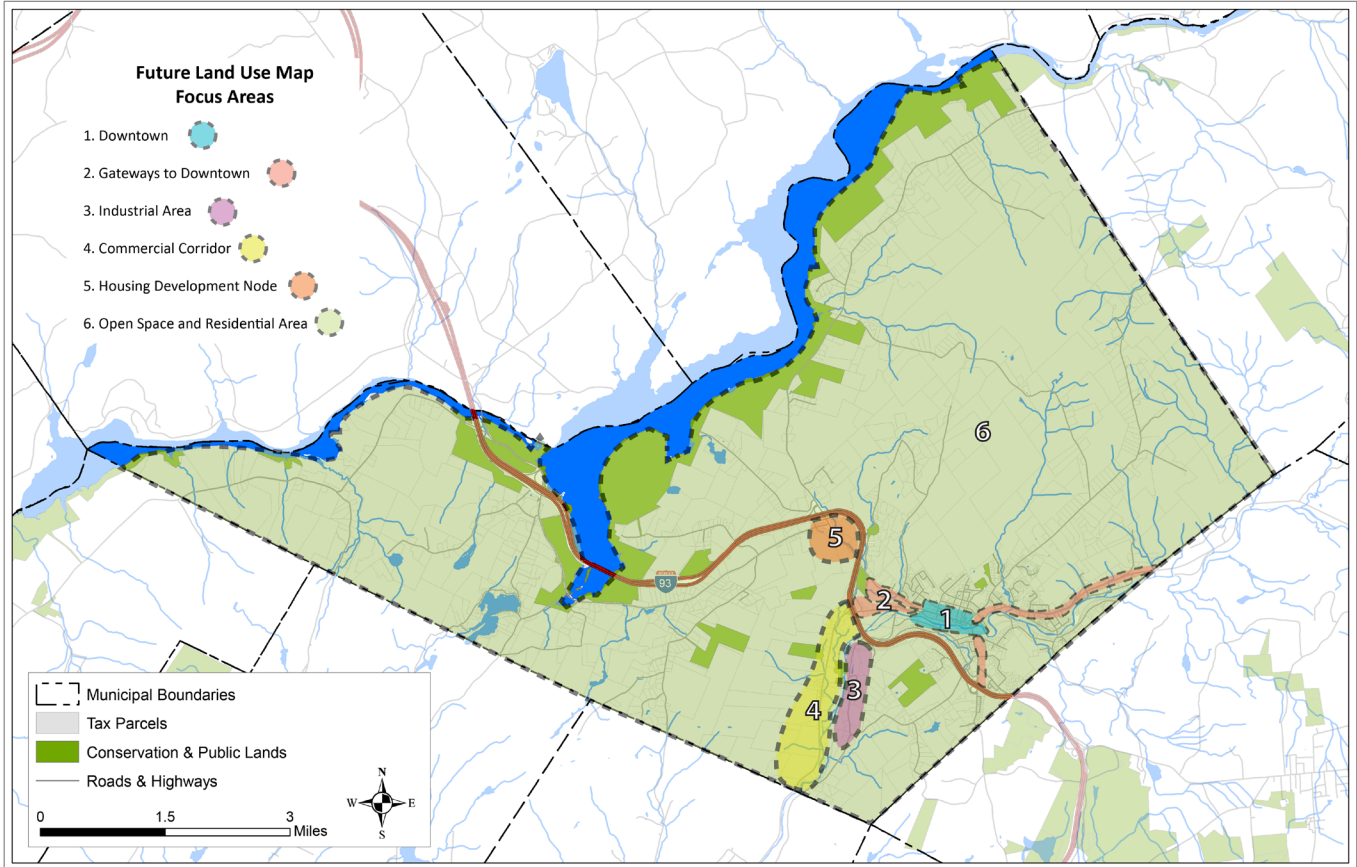
To accomplish this, the Future Land Use Plan has identified distinct areas of the community that have an identifiable character and function. They are as follows:

- Downtown
- Gateways to Downtown
- Industrial Area
- Commercial Corridor
- Housing Development Node
- Open Space and Residential Area

The ability of future development to protect and enhance Littleton's community character is an issue of both location and design.

DOWNTOWN

This is the most densely developed area of Littleton and also the most pedestrian friendly and walkable. There are a diverse mix of uses in this area and even within individual



structures. Shopping, services, entertainment, and professional offices are all found in the Downtown. 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.

GATEWAYS

Four distinct corridors radiate out from the Downtown. Each of these corridors provides access, 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.

West Main Street Gateway: This area has a lower density development, mix of businesses, and is the location of several municipal departments (Police/Fire/Public Works). It is also the location of Glenwood Cemetery and several residential uses. The State of NH has identified West Main Street as a regional “recommended bike route” and the Town’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan has targeted this area for bike and pedestrian infrastructure upgrades.

Meadow Street Gateway: This area is dominated by older commercial structures that are being redeveloped and replaced with newer commercial uses. This corridor has the potential to accommodate a higher density of mixed-use development while still providing parking facilities. This would require new land use regulations that encourage multi-level structures that are situated closer to the roadway, shared parking facilities to the side and rear, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and access management standards to consolidate curb cuts. A form-based code

FORM BASED CODE

A form-based code is a land development regulation that **fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm** by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. A form-based code is a regulation, not a mere guideline, adopted into city or town law. A form-based code offers a powerful, visual, and user friendly alternative to conventional zoning regulation. Lancaster, NH has implemented form-based code regulations in their downtown and is starting to see some redevelopment. Their form-based code is focused on the three distinct areas of the downtown and is in place to protect the rural, small scale downtown architecture and sense of place.

should be considered in this area to guide future development.

Cottage Street Gateway: Known for its historic homes, professional offices, and numerous medical offices, this area connects the Downtown to Littleton’s southernmost exit on the Interstate. Over time there is potential for additional housing to be created in this area and to improve the transportation infrastructure to better accommodate walking and biking to the Food Coop and other destinations. Land use regulations that reinforce the character of this district and inform development projects should be adopted.

Union Street Gateway: Also characterized by many historic homes, this area of Littleton accommodates a variety of housing types along with some non-residential uses. The emphasis of this area should remain mixed use with a high percentage of residential units. As some of the larger non-residential structures are redeveloped over time, there will be potential to incorporate a

new mix of uses. Prioritizing the creation of some additional residential units will be necessary to address the growing demand for housing units in Littleton.

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 AREA

This area is parallel to the Ammonoosuc River and contains many commercial businesses. Most of these businesses 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.

NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AREA

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 node 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 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 and to continue to support the community and its residents through its working landscapes, such as farms and forestry operations, and rural housing options.