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Introduction

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

- Benjamin Franklin

Purpose

In 2019/2020, Littleton embarked on the process of updating its 2004 Master Plan for the community. Throughout this process, the town developed a future vision for land use, growth, and development that reflects the community’s values, opportunities, and challenges during this time.

In New Hampshire, the Master Plan serves as a blueprint that directs future growth patterns

in a community. The Plan examines interrelated land use issues, such as population, housing, community facilities, and natural resources, and provides a summary of the existing social, economic, and environmental conditions of the town.

In an effort to preserve the character of the community, broad land use planning principles are defined to guide future land use. Additionally, implementation strategies are created so that the town can plan for wise, coordinated, and appropriate development throughout the community.

VISION

The following vision statement provides a view into the future. This statement highlights what is important to grow, support, and preserve in Littleton as it relates to the character of its built and natural environment. The vision was created with input from the Planning Board, stakeholders, and the wider community. The implementation plan at the end of this document strives to achieve the vision laid out below.

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.



Above: An aerial view of Littleton.
Source: Go Littleton



Above: Harmony Park near the Riverwalk in Littleton
Source: Chutters



Above: Littleton, the “Be Glad” Town
Source: Garnet Hill

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Littleton Planning Board worked with consultant Resilience Planning & Design to update its Master Plan over a 1.5 year-long timeframe. Recent data was collected and analyzed to paint a picture of what Littleton is like today. This data was woven throughout the Master Plan chapters. Recent plans and reports that were completed for the Town's parking, alternative transportation infrastructure, and the downtown (to name a few) were reviewed and informed the creation of this Plan. Community members were engaged through a series of focus groups, a community forum, and an online feedback form. Feedback from the public and the existing conditions data informed new chapter content and the development of implementation strategies that supported the overall vision for future land use in Littleton.



Master Plan Topics

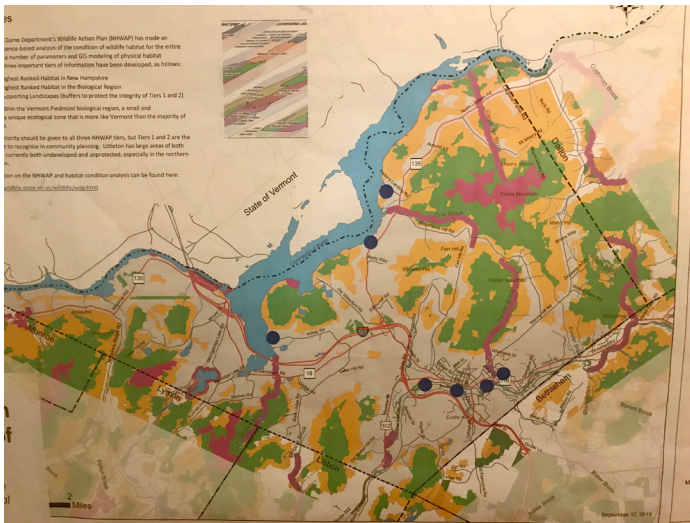
Though the primary purpose of this Plan is to direct future land use in the community, the Town acknowledges that there are many overlapping issues that impact and affect this, including housing, recreation, natural hazards, economic development, and others. Throughout this document, each chapter topic will explicitly be tied back to land use to show how it relates to the Town's vision and goals. Each chapter also includes information about its existing conditions, major issues, challenges, and trends, and a list of implementation strategies that consist both regulatory and non-regulatory planning initiatives to achieve the Town's vision. Many of these initiatives involve collaboration and coordination with other community groups and organizations in town. A full implementation chapter at the end of the document identifies priority of action items and who is responsible for completing the action item. Below are just some of the topics explored in this Plan.



PUBLIC OUTREACH

Community Forum

The Littleton Planning Board and the consultant coordinated a community forum in September 2019 to collect feedback on Master Planning issues from the wider community. An online feedback form was also created to ensure that those who couldn't make it to the forum had a way to participate in the process. Information collected during the forum is integrated into each of the Master Plan chapters. A full summary of comments is located in the Appendix.



Above: During the community forum, participants answered questions about land use issues. Maps and comment cards were used to gather feedback.

Focus Groups

A series of focus groups were conducted to collect information on economic development, recreation, arts and culture, and natural resources. Focus group participants were selected based on their relationship to the topic and their roles in the community. The consultant collected feedback on potential opportunities, perceived challenges, recent projects, and desired improvements or recommendations. The rest of this chapter includes a summary of key findings from the focus groups. The full summary of comments is included in the Appendix.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT KEY FINDINGS

Economic development efforts should be multi-pronged, diverse, and comprehensive, addressing key challenges and maximizing the town's assets.

Littleton's biggest opportunities for economic development in the future include: expanding higher education programming to meet local workforce needs; supporting small, local businesses; capitalizing on the industrial park; investing in the town's school system and its vibrant downtown; and increasing multi-day events to boost tourism.

Littleton should find innovative ways to both maintain and increase tourism to the area.

Its proximity to some of the northeast's major cities, its Downtown, and its mountainous landscape all equate to a world-class place for a vacation in all seasons of the year.

Topography is a primary development constraint.

There is minimal land left that is flat and suitable for development, however, this steep land does provide habitat, recreation value, and other benefits.

Historically, Littleton has always had a diversified economy representing industries like healthcare, retail, and timber harvesting.

Other industries in Littleton that economic development initiatives should actively pursue to grow include the hospitality and tourism industry, entertainment and recreation, and some industrial businesses.

RECREATION KEY FINDINGS

Littleton offers many ways for residents and visitors to get outside, be active, and enjoy the outdoors and is known as a multi-season outdoor recreation destination.

These have direct implications for the Town's economy and quality of life. Some favorite recreation facilities in town include Remich Park, Mt. Eustis Ski Mountain, Parker Mountain, and the Riverwalk.

Planning for future recreation improvements and new facilities should consider contemporary needs of the community, utilize diverse funding streams, and include comprehensive maintenance plans.

Future priorities identified include investigating opportunities to expand indoor recreation facilities and programming (such as pickleball courts, an indoor track, and an indoor pool), expanding the Town's bike and pedestrian infrastructure with its trails to create a local biking and walking network, improving parking, access, and maintenance of the town owned open spaces (such as the Dells and Kilburn Crags), improving access to the river, and expanding community outdoor gathering places.

ARTS & CULTURE KEY FINDINGS

Littleton's arts and cultural resources should be harnessed and leveraged so that they improve quality of life for residents, boost tourism, and contribute to the local economy.

These resources include the Opera House, Pollyanna, Harmony Park, the Community Center, its art galleries, other performance spaces, and others.

Develop regulatory and non-regulatory initiatives that support arts and culture businesses, organizations, and programs in town.

Key priorities identified to support arts and culture in the community include encouraging mixed-use development in Town, improving Town-wide marketing of events, branding Littleton as an "arts hub", assessing the feasibility of creating an entrepreneurial hub or business incubator, and integrating the arts into Town projects.

NATURAL RESOURCES KEY FINDINGS

Littleton's natural resources, including its rivers, forests, farmland, and other open space, should be preserved to the greatest extent feasible into the future as growth and development occurs.

Littleton should balance its goals related to development and growth with protecting its natural resources, which contribute to the Town's overall character, provide valuable ecosystem services, and attract both residents and visitors to the area.

To best prepare for the Town's future, the community should examine ways to preserve water quality, utilize sustainable design methods, promote biodiversity, and promote energy conservation through regulatory or non-regulatory mechanisms.

These may include promoting best management practices for stormwater, identifying open space land for Town forest, and promoting solar opportunities to homeowners.