

Town of Madbury, New Hampshire

Master Plan: Toward the Year 2010

2.5 Land Use

Prepared by

Town of Madbury Planning Board
Madbury, New Hampshire

With support from

Strafford Regional Planning Commission
Dover, New Hampshire

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Land Use

1. Introduction

This chapter articulates how Madbury residents want their community to develop over the coming years, describes the forces driving and constraining that development and makes recommendations for shaping that development to be consistent with the characteristics that are important to the people of Madbury.

Public opinion in Madbury, as discerned from community expressions including public hearings, conversations among residents, and a Planning Board survey, clearly favors maintaining the historic, rural character of the town. Madbury serves as a bedroom community and aspires to preserve and enhance the qualities that make it a good bedroom community. Since the town does not offer suitable locations for significant retail or industrial development, no significant commercial center is anticipated. The scenic vistas of farms and open meadows, forests and wetlands, stonewalls and historic architecture, are what give Madbury its unique character. The Town desires to establish land use policies and regulations that preserve and enhance that character.

2. Natural and Water Resources

Existing: The Natural Resources and Water Resources chapters describe the resources of the Town in some detail and provide recommendations for the protection of these resources. Salient features of the Town include large undeveloped areas that provide valuable wildlife habitat and protect the regionally significant water resources in town. Large forest areas and a few remaining large tracts of agricultural land preserve the rural character of the town in fact and in perception.

Influences: Demand pressure for creation of single-family housing will cause existing large tracts to be subdivided into small residential house plots with new roadways. Existing wildlife habitat will become fragmented and thus not viable for many species. The reality and perception of rural character will disappear if large tracts are broken up and dotted with homes. Water supply capacity would be reduced by the destruction of vegetative cover and the increasing area of impermeable surfaces. Water pollution threats could be created by increasing numbers and density of septic systems.

- Policy (1): Protect water resources in Madbury from contamination, depletion and disfigurement using watershed management principles. Act as stewards for municipal and regional water supplies located within the Oyster River, Bellamy River, and Little Bay watersheds.
- Policy (2): Preserve Madbury's rural atmosphere and landscape. Protect and manage open space, wetlands, forests, fields, agricultural resources, scenic vistas, and historic resources for the benefit of present and future generations.
- Objective: Development will be primarily residential with every effort made to preserve open spaces essential to the town's rural character and natural resources. Water resources will be protected by preserving forests and minimizing propagation of impermeable surfaces. Careful attention will be given to septic system design and performance.
- Recommendation: See Open Space/Conservation Subdivisions and Conservation Easements in Strategies section below.

3. Agriculture

Existing: A handful of operating farms and stables in town provide a vital component of the rural character of the town. The University of New Hampshire (UNH)-owned Kingman Farm is both a major component of the town's rural appearance and a significant recreational resource for the area.

Influences: Existing niche agriculture may survive but that is uncertain. Farmland is likely to be converted to residential housing. Recreational "farm" uses, especially stables, may expand due to demand. UNH's interest in maintaining an agricultural research facility cannot be assumed and its use of the land is not constrained by local zoning ordinances.

- Policy (2): Preserve Madbury's rural atmosphere and landscape. Protect and manage... agricultural resources... for the benefit of present and future generations.
- Objective: Existing agricultural lands will be used for viable agricultural activities consistent with a residential community and water resource protection. Agriculturally significant land not actively in use for agriculture will be conserved as open space.

- Recommendation: Learn what agriculture-related activities are economically viable in Madbury and review zoning ordinances to make them compatible with appropriate activities.
- Recommendation: Review zoning ordinances for appropriate constraints on agricultural businesses. Agricultural uses should not conflict with the dominant use: residential, and should not threaten the regional water supplies in town.
- Recommendation: Initiate the following regarding the UNH Kingman Farm:
- Organize a Town committee to work with UNH to discuss current and future uses of the Kingman Farm.
 - Develop strategies for the Town's acquisition of the property should UNH choose to sell or donate all or part of the property.
 - Consider zoning the property for agricultural uses only, to reflect its current and historical use.

4. Residential Development

Existing: The Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) reported nearly 500 residential dwellings in Madbury in its 1999 study¹. The region currently enjoys relative economic prosperity and a reputation for high quality of life including educational, cultural, economic and recreational opportunities. Recent development has been mostly detached single-family residences for middle and upper middle class income households. Homebuyers appear to be attracted by the same rural character of the town that is gradually eroded by the development these buyers encourage.

Influences: The town is likely to continue to experience high demand for residential development. Directed only by current market forces and with current regulations, upper middle-income single-family detached house construction will predominate. Houses will be sprawled across the remaining developable land. This is the dominant development pressure in Madbury.

The SRPC's report quantified the potential number of dwellings that might be built in Madbury under existing regulations at 1816 units, more than three times the Town's current number. With a long-term average housing growth rate of just over 3%, a growth projection of about 15 dwellings per year is very believable. It is also consistent with recent experience.

The narrow selection of housing units in Madbury may become a problem for its population. The predominant large 3-4 bedroom single family home on 2 acres of land is well suited for raising children in our society. These homes, however, do not fall within the financial capabilities of many first-home buyers or retirees. As our demographics change in the foreseeable future, more of our residents will need retirement homes. Our

¹ Madbury Build Out Study by Strafford Regional Planning

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younger adults will need starter homes. If the Town wishes to become a lifelong home to its residents, alternate housing forms must be permitted and encouraged

Four major considerations limit the type, rate and extent of residential development in Madbury:

1. Preserving the town's rural character that makes it so desirable for this use.
2. Respecting practical taxation limits in funding the public school system.
3. Protecting the water resources in the town.
4. Limiting septic system capacities to safe, sustainable levels in a town with no public sewer system and no prospects of building one.

Policy (1): Protect water resources in Madbury from contamination, depletion and disfigurement...

Policy (2): Preserve Madbury's rural atmosphere and landscape. Protect and manage open space, wetlands, forests, fields, agricultural resources, scenic vistas, and historic resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Policy (5): Keep the property tax stable.

Policy (10): Allow a diversity of housing so that people of all ages and income may live in Madbury.

Objective: Residential development will continue. The rural character of the town will be preserved and its water resources protected. Infrastructure and services will be expanded as needed to meet demand and at a rate sustainable with stable property tax rates. Appropriate housing will be available to all members of the community.

Recommendation: See Open Space/Conservation Subdivisions and Conservation Easements in Strategies section below.

Recommendation: Investigate incorporating shared wall housing or accessory housing units within appropriate residential developments having access to shared water or sewage facilities.

Recommendation: Investigate allowing limited mixed densities (single and multifamily dwellings) in residential subdivisions that may provide more affordable housing opportunities.

Recommendation: Modify zoning ordinances to reflect existing densities and characteristics of particular regions in town.

5. Civic District

Existing: The Civic District has been the center of Town government since the construction of the Town Hall in 1860 and as early as 1735 with the construction of the first meeting house in the vicinity of the current firehouse on Madbury Road. The Town now owns close to 140 acres in the vicinity, and the school district controls 50 acres. While not all of that land would be available for civic buildings and uses, there is excellent potential to develop a true town center.

The Town is constructing a new facility at this writing, which should meet the Town's needs for safety services space for the next decade and more. The Moharimet School has reached its intended maximum size. The Madbury Congregational Church is thriving. Demerritt Park has been developed into high quality playing fields and another field is being developed nearby for casual recreational use. The Madbury Cemetery was recently established to provide an essential function previously unavailable in town.

Influences: Madbury faces the need to expand town services and facilities due to increased population and expanded service demands.

- Policy (9): Focus Madbury's civic and social activities within the present civic district.
- Policy (4): Insure a safe and secure community.
- Policy (6): Accommodate the service and infrastructure needs of residents without placing an undue burden on taxpayers.
- Objective: The Town's civic district becomes a vital center for community life. Possible future public service facilities include a library, additional elementary school space, expansion of Town Offices, and recreational facilities.
- Recommendation: Work closely with the school district and community service organizations to ensure that Town and school facilities and programs enhance and support one another in order to maximize the public benefit.

6. Recreation

Existing: The Town provides high quality playing fields for organized sports in Demerritt Park. A newly developed field is available for informal group activity. The Town owned lands and UNH-owned Kingman Farm in the center of town have become very popular hiking and biking areas.

Large tracts of undeveloped land and old roads are available to hunters, hikers, and bicycle riders. The Bellamy Reservoir, controlled by Portsmouth, is open to fishermen, snowmobilers and (non-motorized) boaters.

Influences: With population growing regionally and open space disappearing, the remaining relatively large tracts of agricultural land will be of increasing interest for recreational use. Private lands near the co-operative high school are of interest for sports fields.

Recent public health alarms about the pervasive lack of exercise and related overweight condition in our society bring new importance to recreational resources.

- Policy (3): Acquire additional interests in land for conservation, water supply, open space, public recreation, and Town facilities.
- Objective: The Town's open spaces will be preserved and remain available for recreation. Civic facilities for recreation continue to improve and expand.
- Recommendation: See Open Space/Conservation Subdivisions and Conservation Easements in Strategies section below.
- Recommendation: Enhance public recreational facilities in the civic district. Develop hiking paths and nature trails in the civic district that utilize adjacent conservation land.
- Recommendation: Incorporate the open lands in the civic district with the Bellamy Greenway to link these uses.

7. Services and Service Facilities

Existing: As a result of zoning regulations, the majority of residential development has occurred along existing Town roads on the lands that can sustain it. There have been only nine subdivisions where the developer put in a new road, and eight of those are cul-de-sacs. As a result, residential developments to this point have not had a severe impact on town services (other than schools) since most of the development occurred along existing roads.

Influences: Housing and population growth, rising service expectations and decreasing availability of volunteers will necessitate expansion of town funded services including police, fire, recreation, code enforcement, public works, etc.

- Policy (4): Insure a safe and secure community.
- Policy (5): Keep the property tax stable.
- Policy (6): Accommodate the service and infrastructure needs of residents without placing an undue burden on taxpayers.
- Policy (8): Plan and implement a safe, attractive and efficient transportation network.

- Objective: Public services will expand to keep pace with demand. Town property taxes will remain stable by careful financial planning and growth management.
- Recommendation: Use and maintain the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).
- Recommendation: Investigate the feasibility and fairness of imposing impact fees on new development.
- Recommendation: Investigate the long-term cost benefits of bonding funds for the acquisition of conservation lands and open space.
- Recommendation: Investigate the cost benefits of sharing services with adjacent communities.

8. Commercial Development

Existing: Commercial activity is quite limited, occurring mainly on the state roads through town. Despite the relatively high speeds used on these roads, they retain their rural appearance with minimal development in Madbury.

Several homes located along these routes have witnessed the encroachment of traffic as these roadways have been widened over the years. As these areas become less desirable for residential use, their conversion to business or professional offices becomes more attractive.

Industrial facilities are limited. One plot near the Bellamy River, accessed from a Dover industrial park, is unused. A metal recycling business occupies an old gravel pit threatening an important aquifer. A gravel mine near Barbadoes Pond has expanded its long history of operation with the introduction of hydro-mining.

Influences: Limited demand for commercial space could lead to development along the state routes in town. The high traffic volumes on these roads might support retail or commercial service activities. Commercial development along these corridors could adversely impact the town's rural character severely. New development (either residential or commercial) without good access management strategies would have a detrimental effect on the efficiency of these roadways. As neighboring towns grow to larger populations the commuter traffic grows between those towns and areas of industrial and commercial development, the traffic on the state roadways will continue to increase and with it will come demands to change these roads.

The availability of high-speed communications throughout town makes more home occupations feasible, creating new demand for home based business space.

In the absence of public water and sewer service, demand for industrial space development is unlikely.

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- Policy (2): Preserve Madbury's rural atmosphere and landscape. Protect and manage open space, wetlands, forests, fields, agricultural resources, scenic vistas, and historic resources for the benefit of present and future generations.
- Policy (7): Insure future economic development that does not harm the environment or abutting properties.
- Policy (8): Plan and implement a safe, attractive and efficient transportation network.

Objective: Access to state highways will be managed to provide safe travel with increasing traffic volumes.

Recommendation: Adopt access management standards to ensure the preservation of road efficiency.

Office and professional service activities might be compatible and sustainable uses of these highway corridors. These corridors will maintain their rural landscape and architectural values, possibly by conversion of existing structures. Curb cuts will be minimized. Appropriate office use would have relatively low impact on the community and adjacent properties.

Recommendation: Identify appropriate areas for non-industrial commercial development.

Recommendation: Do not re-zone long strips of land along these roadways where eventual development would result in inefficient sprawl.

Recommendation: Develop site plan design standards that will enhance and support the adaptive re-use of existing structures and developed areas while maintaining the rural landscape and architectural scale of development.

Home-based occupations may become more common without compromising the quality of life in residential areas.

Recommendation: Develop performance standards for home-based businesses that prevent negative impacts on surrounding properties and the community.

Recommendation: Continue to support home occupation in all districts.

Recommendation: Review regulations to ensure support for the marketing of farm products, local arts and crafts and traditional enterprises.

Industrial development will not threaten water resources in any way. Existing gravel mining operations will be monitored for potential adverse impacts to water resources and

quality of life for neighbors. The metal recycling activity that threatens an important aquifer should be discontinued if that opportunity should arise.

Recommendation: Limit or prohibit industrial development that could adversely affect the Town's water resources.

9. Economic Viability

Given the present state tax structure, the Town must concern itself with the balance of taxable resources and non-discretionary spending. With the schools representing the dominant property tax burden, the Town is forced to consider the tax consequences of attracting a high proportion of school-aged children into the Town.

10. Strategies for Promoting Recommended Land Uses.

10.1 Provide knowledgeable review of subdivision proposals.

Our volunteer Planning Board lacks the expertise necessary to recognize all the planning issues presented by subdivision proposals.

Recommendation: Consider budgeting additional professional support services for the Planning Board.

10.2 Create incentives for developers to work to preserve existing resources within developments.

Recommendation: Revise the current cluster subdivision ordinance into an open space/conservation subdivision.

Recommendation: Structure development constraints and incentives to encourage the preservation of natural habitat, recreational space, scenic features, and water resources.

Recommendation: Adopt a natural resource review of each subdivision application that comes before the Planning Board.

10.3 Secure conservation easements and related land rights interests.

- Recommendation: Identify and inventory parcels that are critical to the protection of our natural resources and watersheds.
- Recommendation: Target key parcels for long-term protection.
- Recommendation: Expand conservation land fund with annual funding allocations from Town government.
- Recommendation: Identify protection methods and tools that would be most appropriate for the resources.
- Recommendation: Consider creating Bellamy and Oyster River Greenbelts through the acquisition of conservation easements on lands not currently protected.

10.4 Review enforcement policies and practices.

- Recommendation: Investigate bonding of subdivision performance by developers
- Recommendation: Review budgets for subdivision review staff and building and construction review services.