



# COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN

## Town of Stratham



Adopted  
November 20, 2019

## **Acknowledgements**

The Town of Stratham wishes to thank every member of our community who dedicated time and effort into creating this document.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
What is the Stratham Master Plan?	1
Why Develop a Master Plan?	1
How is the Master Plan Organized?	3
The Process	4
<b>Our Hometown</b>	7
<b>Forces Driving Change</b>	11
<b>Community Vision</b>	19
<b>Choosing a Future for Stratham</b>	21
The Gateway	22
The Viability of Our Farms	25
The Town Center	29
Historic Resource Preservation	31
Biking, Walking, and Automobiles	38
Sustaining Our Natural Resources	44
Public Services and Facilities	50
Open Spaces & Parklands	55
Stratham's Industrial Park	57
Housing for the Future	58
<b>Implementation</b>	65
"Institutionalizing" the Master Plan	67
Cross-Cutting and Complementary Strategies	66
The Future Land Use Map	68
Implementation Matrix	71
<b>Critical Plans and Surveys</b>	79
Land Use and Economic & Community Development	79
Protection of Cultural and Heritage Resources	80
Environmental Quality and Protection	80
Transportation	81
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix A: Baseline Report	
Appendix B: Summary of Public Engagement	
Appendix C: Safe Routes to School Plan	

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# Introduction

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## What is the Stratham Master Plan?

A community Master Plan provides the answers to two important questions: “Where do we want to be 20 years from now?” and “How do we make that happen?”

The Master Plan sets a course for a Town’s future by developing a policy framework that is consistent and complementary across a diverse set of issues: the homes available for existing and future residents; the way people get around town; the businesses and industry that provide jobs; the way we use our land and natural resources. All of these issues and many more come together to create quality of life, community character, and a sustainable future for generations to come.

Once a Master Plan is adopted, it is used in local government by departments, boards and commissions to help set budgets, identify areas for investment, establish program activities, and work on special projects. It guides amendments to zoning ordinances in order to pursue land use objectives identified in the Plan.

## Why Develop a Master Plan?

“Plan your community’s future or  
it will be planned for you.”

Plan your community’s future or it will be planned for you. This maxim, popular with community planners, speaks to the value of looking to the future and taking the time to develop policies and strategies that will move a town towards a particular vision. Without this framework, a town will find itself reacting to market forces, environmental challenges, changes in demands for municipal services, and service-level expectations in inefficient and unorganized ways.

Stratham’s recent history demonstrates the power of a well-designed Master Plan. While the preceding Master Plan was developed in 1998, the list of achievements since that plan’s adoption show the value of a thoughtful policy framework. The following text quotes policy statements from the 1998 Master Plan, then lists achievements that have occurred since the adoption of that plan.

## Economic Development and Growth Management

“It is the policy of the Town of Stratham to maintain a balance of land uses and development opportunities that results in a well planned community with a diverse tax base...As Stratham continues to grow in residential population, it will be necessary to increase opportunity for additional commercial and industrial growth.”

- 1998 Master Plan Section 8.5

Since the adoption of that policy, the Town:

- Rezoned the former New Hampshire Vocational Technical College (Vo-Tech) site for future mixed-use redevelopment.
- Created the Gateway District Master Plan and rezoned the Route 108 commercial corridor for mixed-use redevelopment and improved transportation connectivity.
- Hosted the PlanNH Charette process for the Town Center.
- Supported multiple successful expansions of Lindt & Sprungli in the Industrial Park.

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## Protecting Sensitive Lands

“It is the policy of the Town of Stratham through both regulatory and non-regulatory means, to limit and control development in environmentally sensitive areas...”

- 1998 Master Plan Section 6.1

Since the adoption of that policy, the Town:

- Dedicated Land Use Change Tax (LUCT) funds to support permanent conservation.
- Passed a \$5M conservation bond used to protect valuable lands.
- Purchased the Zarnowski riverfront property (Squamscott River) for environmental protection and possible future public use.
- Expanded the Town Forest with acquisition of the former Noyes land.
- Enhanced environmental protections in various zoning regulation updates.

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## Historic Resource Protection

“It is a fundamental goal of the Town of Stratham to conserve and protect its...historic buildings and sites.”

- 1998 Master Plan Section 6.0

Since the adoption of that policy, the Town:

- Established the Stratham Heritage Commission.
- Constructed the Veterans Memorial Garden.
- Hosted the 300th anniversary celebration for the Town, published an updated history book.
- Adopted NH RSA 79-E and 79-D resulting in the enrollment of the Old Town Hall and 18 barns respectively.
- Prevented the demolition of the Old Town Hall with adaptive reuse as housing.
- Established permanent preservation easements for the Bartlett-Cushman House and Lane Homestead.
- Added Emery Farm/Chase Tavern, Bartlett-Cushman House, and Scamman Farm to the National Register of Historic Places; and Wiggin Memorial Library building to the New Hampshire Register of Historic Places.

## How is the Master Plan Organized?

This plan reflects the process used to identify important issues, policy commitments, and strategies for success. The overall effort to develop this plan created two documents:

### 1. The Stratham Baseline Report.

This document takes a brief look back in history and provides a detailed snapshot of existing conditions in Stratham today. It synthesizes the findings of several previous studies and, where possible, adds more recent data to give the most up to date facts and figures describing conditions and trends in our community. The document was developed in large part by the project consultants with considerable input from the Master Plan Steering Committee and municipal staff. The Stratham Baseline Report is Appendix A of this Master Plan.

### 2. The Master Plan document.

This document (what you are reading now) answers two critical questions: Where do we want to be 20 years from now and how to we get there? The document is organized in chapters that reflect the community discussions used to inform the community engagement process of developing the Master Plan. The chapters include:

#### *Our Hometown*

This chapter summarizes what Stratham residents said makes this town special. The elements of this chapter represent Stratham's greatest strengths and assets upon which the community can build its future.

#### *Forces Driving Change*

This chapter looks at local, regional, and global trends that are impacting Stratham. The Town can build upon some of these trends to reach the community's vision. Others are pushing Stratham away from its vision and will need to be addressed.

#### *Choosing a Future for Stratham*

This chapter examines a wide array of choices that are critical to the future health and prosperity of Stratham. Each section presents a policy commitment along with a set of actions that reflect this commitment.

#### *Implementation*

This section lists all the policy commitments and associated actions provided throughout the document. It also provides a description of how the Town will incorporate the Master Plan into its everyday operation to ensure implementation.

## The Process

The development of the Stratham Master Plan unfolded over the course of almost 18 months. Highlights of the process included the events and efforts listed below. Documentation for several of these public engagement and outreach efforts is provided as Appendix B.

Project Steering Committee – The development of the Master Plan was supervised by a 13-member Steering Committee appointed by the Select Board. This group met approximately monthly during this process to review materials, discuss policy issues, and assist with public outreach.

Public Forums – Two Public Forums were held at strategic points in the process. The first forum (October 16, 2018) was used to initiate public discussion and learn about what people value most in the community and what they believe are the most important challenges for Stratham’s future. The second forum (May 13, 2019) was used to introduce the major issues comprising the policy framework within the plan.

Follow Up Survey – The first public forum was immediately followed by a town-wide survey that presented the same questions as those discussed at the forum. This allowed people who were unable to make the forum an opportunity to add to the round table discussions.

Focused Group Discussions – A series of focus group discussions were held to capture input from smaller audiences that have a unique perspective on the plan. Members of the Conservation Commission, Recreation Commission, Stratham Seniors, Stratham Hill Park Association, Heritage Commission, Pedestrian and Cyclist Advocacy Committee, and Volunteer Fire Department were represented at different topical group gatherings. The Town also convened members of the agricultural community and the regional business community as part of these discussions.

Project Interviews – In addition to focus group meetings, over a dozen one-on-one interviews were conducted with key individuals to gather information and gain insight into the complexities of policy issues at the local level.

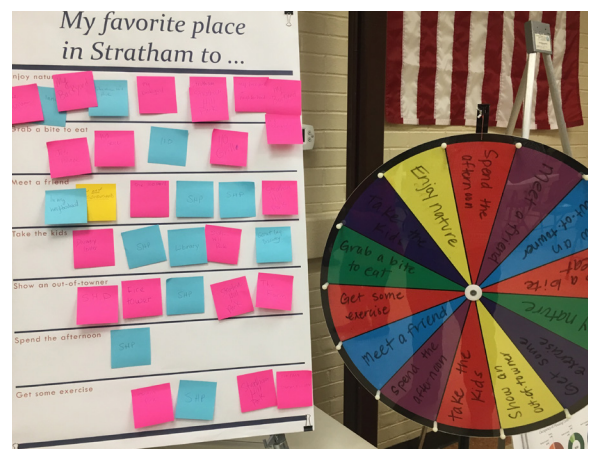
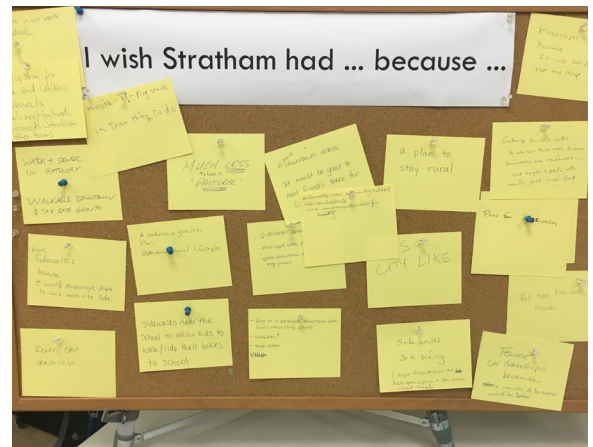
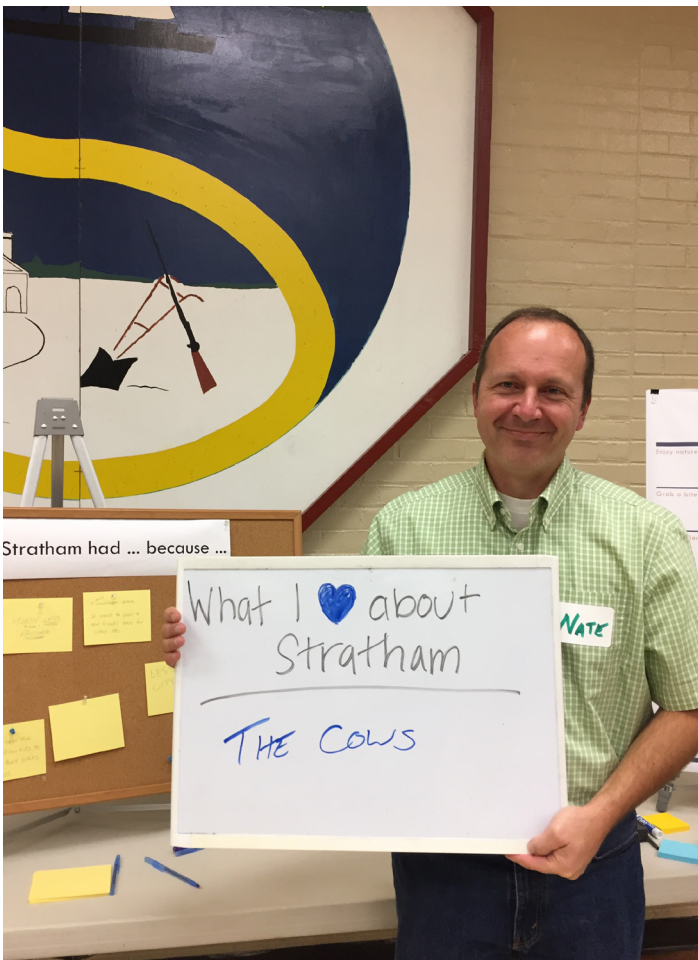
Independent Reviews – Once a complete draft of the plan was developed by the consultant, it was reviewed by the Heritage Commission, the Conservation Commission, and the Recreation Department.

Planning Board Proceedings – The Planning Board was engaged in two workshops with the Master Plan Steering Committee. These sessions were used to review the policy direction and strategies presented in the document, including one session that also included representatives from Boards and Commissions in Town. The Planning Board also held a public hearing during which the final draft was presented for public comment and adoption.





The Master Plan's first forum was used a collection of visual feedback tools as ice breaker exercises before getting into small group discussions.



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*Haying fields is a common summertime activity in Stratham. Wide open expanses of agricultural lands are an important part of the local landscape. Photo credit: Nathan Merrill*

## Our Hometown

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The community engagement process was used, in part, to identify the elements of Stratham that are most important to residents or best reflect their idea of what is most valuable in the community. Stratham's motto, adopted by town vote for its 300th anniversary, is clearly still relevant today and remains widely endorsed by the community. Stratham is "inspired by the past and committed to the future."

### **Agricultural Heritage**

Agriculture is inextricably woven into the identity of Stratham. Sloping hay fields, grazing livestock, stone walls, and historic structures still exist in a network of farms that lie between residential neighborhoods and forested land. These farms provide jobs for local residents and greenhouses, farm stands, and CSAs provide access to fresh, healthy food. The continued strong presence of 4-H programs and agriculture at the annual Stratham Fair is also a reflection of this heritage.



Photo credit: Nathan Merrill

From left to right: Former Wiggin Memorial Library, Kenniston Tavern, and the Old Town Hall.

## Historic Buildings and Sites

The Town of Stratham is over 300 years old and is New Hampshire's sixth-oldest municipality. Stratham sits in the center of New Hampshire's richest collection of historic communities that line its seacoast. While the legacy landscapes of our agricultural past remain one of our greatest cultural resources, the Town is also home to an impressive collection of historic buildings. Because of its agricultural heritage, Stratham was settled in a more dispersed fashion when compared with regional neighbors like Exeter, Durham, and Portsmouth. Where these communities established a densely developed town center early in their history, Stratham's agrarian economy kept development patterns more spread out and historic buildings accent the landscape in a scattered pattern throughout the town.

## Natural Areas, Parks, and Historic Landscapes



Central to so many community discussions around Stratham's strengths are our forests, waterways, and parks. The inventory, extent, and diversity of these areas is impressive, including Stratham Hill Park, Stevens Park, Smyk Park, Great Bay Estuary, the Squamscott River, Gordon Barker Town Forest, and many others. These places provide opportunities for recreation and relaxation, education, programmed activities, scenic viewing, gathering,

and (where specifically allowed) hunting and fishing. The value of these areas is reflected in the consistent financial investments made by the Town for acquisition and maintenance.

“There is a great deal of thinking about the future, conserving open lands, assembling parcels for future bike/pedestrian connections, .... We are fortunate to have forward thinking volunteers, activists, and elected officials on the same page.”

-Master Plan Survey Response





*Stratham Seniors create a sense of community, gathering regularly for social, education, and recreational events. Photo credit: Richard Swett*

## **A Sense of Community**

Despite its rapid growth into a suburban community, Stratham has managed to maintain much of its small-town character. Rural landscapes and winding roads contribute to the Town's identity and make people feel at home. Recreational opportunities help bring people together in parks and on trails, and the Town takes great pride in its public education system. The Town is viewed by its residents as a great place to raise a family. Stratham is also fortunate to be home to many people who care deeply about the town and their neighbors, and who volunteer their time and talents to make the community a better place for everyone. In addition to Stratham's municipal government, many local organizations rely heavily on volunteers, such as the Stratham Volunteer Fire Department, the Stratham Fair, Stratham Seniors, the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Stratham Historical Society and Stratham Hill Park as well as Stratham's municipal government.



*Stratham Boy Scouts Troop 158 continues to instill a sense of civic responsibility in its young scouts and provides numerous volunteer opportunities. Photo credit: Stratham Boy Scouts Troop 185.*

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# Forces Driving Change

This chapter presents a variety of trends driving change in Stratham.

## **An Aging Population**

Stratham's population is aging. As described in the Stratham Baseline Report, the average age of Stratham residents jumped just over six years between 2000 and 2016, from approximately 38 to 44 years. While this trend is not unique to Stratham (Rockingham County and the entire state of New Hampshire have been aging significantly, as have all states in New England overall), Stratham appears to be aging at a rate faster than New Hampshire as a whole. The average Stratham resident is now almost two years older than the average New Hampshire resident. Further, almost every age group under the age of 55 has been shrinking as a percent of the population, even as the Town's population increases.



*Photo credit: Richard Swett*

## **Services and Facilities**

If over the next ten years the majority of current residents aged 55 and older choose to continue living in Stratham (and interviews and focus groups conducted for this plan suggest that many



would like to do so whenever possible), there are potential implications for the services that the Town provides. Mobility for this population will be critical, and the Town may find it necessary to invest in para-transit service. Further, as more people retire, there will be a greater need for senior-oriented (or at least senior-friendly) events, recreation, and activities. The Town may consider investing in a senior center with services and programming, or at least find better ways to connect local seniors with services and activities in neighboring towns, such as those available at the Exeter Senior Center. Another consideration will be the impacts on public safety services – particularly calls for medical emergencies. Statistically, such service calls increase as the population ages. The Town should be prepared to absorb additional costs related to these potential increases in service.



### **Housing**

Many of today's younger senior citizens in Stratham live in single-family homes on individual lots. These homes currently account for over 75% of the Town's housing stock. This type of housing may have suited them well in their earlier years, and indeed may have been what attracted them to Stratham in the first place, but for many seniors, these homes can become a burden as they age. Maintaining more space than they need, paying a larger tax bill than they can comfortably afford, and navigating a home that was not necessarily designed for the elderly—these are the challenges faced by seniors looking to “age in place.” The Town should explore ways to encourage the development of smaller, low-maintenance homes designed in a way that is friendly to individuals with mobility issues.



*Stratham can choose from a variety of traditional New England styles to offer more affordable and accessible housing in the community. Images courtesy of Opticos Design*

### **Fiscal Impacts**

Finally, as people of working age population declines in number, there are fewer and fewer adults to support the Town's growing senior population. This exacerbates the need for services provided by municipal government. The Town should support more young adults and families with children moving to Stratham, particularly as seniors downsize out of their current homes. Incidentally, the same smaller, lower-maintenance homes desired by seniors are often also desired by younger adults, and can serve as stepping stones for people who would like to move up into a larger single-family home as their families grow.



## **Market Forces/Business Trends**

No municipality can properly plan for its future without understanding the region in which it lies. Stratham, like all its neighbors, is subject to regional, national, and even global market forces that shape the local economy. The location alone, within the economic sphere of Greater Boston and New Hampshire's Seacoast Region, and the proximity of high-wage jobs associated with those areas, puts immense pressure on the existing housing market and the demand for new development. While there are certain market forces that the Town cannot influence on its own, there are many ways Stratham can face these realities and manage them to its advantage. Importantly, all these things involve a thoughtful balance of several inherent trade-offs.

### ***Growth Management and Fiscal Health***

There are fiscal implications for the Town's current growth trajectory, and it can be tempting to think that modest levels of development embodied in the Town's two-acre lot subdivisions will maintain fiscal stability. However, as municipalities like Stratham continue to build out with low density subdivisions, they find it more and more difficult to cover expenses. In brief, even with little to no growth, the costs of providing services and paying municipal employees will increase over time. New equipment will need to be purchased, roads will need plowing and repairs, and municipal buildings will need to be replaced. With little growth to feed the tax base, a higher tax burden will be placed on fewer people over time. Furthermore, the development of single-family homes on mid-sized lots (1-3 acres) is shown to be a "net negative" in fiscal terms, meaning the taxes paid by the property owners, on average, do not cover the cost for services.

### ***Commercial/Industrial Development***

One trade-off common to many small, rural communities like Stratham is the extent to which commercial/industrial development is allowed versus maintaining a predominantly residential and agricultural community. It is worth noting that the less commercial/industrial development in a town, the more local government must rely on residential property taxes for its revenue. For some communities, residents are comfortable paying higher property taxes in order to maintain a strictly residential/rural environment. Over time, these communities become exclusive bedroom communities with most (if not all) of their previously unprotected lands converting to high-end subdivisions. However, other communities find that investing in viable commercial/industrial areas in targeted portions of town can help shift some of the tax burden away from residential property owners, while also providing space for local businesses and services. It has long been Stratham's intention to promote this sort of targeted commercial growth along the Portsmouth Avenue (NH Route 108) "Gateway" corridor and targeted industrial growth in the Industrial Park.

### ***Business Trends***

Beyond providing land and infrastructure for commercial development, there are business trends that will impact the types of development and businesses that Stratham can expect to attract and maintain. In an environment, nationally and regionally, where "bricks and mortar" retail is in decline, Stratham needs to continue to build on what makes it special, providing opportunities for small-scale "mom and pop" commercial spaces that complement, and do not compete with,



*Aerial view of the industrial park that covers land in both Stratham and Exeter.*

larger retailers outside of town. The Town also needs to be prepared for a future where more and more retail sales occur online, and commercial buildings are occupied by services, maker spaces, recreation, unique retailers, and other niche uses. A lot of these contemporary commercial businesses are locating in shared spaces, in order to more efficiently take advantage of shared resources. Other people are taking advantage of the power of the Internet to run businesses from their homes.

### ***Housing Market***

The local housing market in Stratham is expensive by several measures and prices are rising. Stratham's market has completely recovered from the Great Recession, and now exceeds pre-recession prices. The median home sale price in Stratham between 2007 and 2017 was \$400,000 and anecdotal evidence suggests this number is still increasing. Assuming a monthly mortgage that accounts for no more than 30% of a household's income, a household income of over \$100,000 a year would be required to afford a "starter" home in Stratham. This is perhaps the most influential factor affecting who can and cannot afford to live in Stratham and will have future implications relative to the demographic profile.

In addition to cost, Stratham should consider the types of housing the market is not currently providing but that people need. As discussed above, both seniors and young adults have a need for smaller, lower-maintenance (and consequently, generally more affordable) homes, both to own and to rent, ideally within walking distance to amenities and services. While the overall housing development patterns in Stratham are not likely to change much, some targeted mixed-



#### Relative Housing Costs in Stratham:

- The gap between median home costs in Stratham and Rockingham County as a whole was approximately \$50,000 in 2010. In 2017, this gap increased to almost \$100,000.
- Median home costs in Stratham are approximately 67% higher than the median cost statewide.
- Median gross rent in Stratham in 2016 was approximately \$1,500, nearly \$500 higher than that of the state and \$370 higher than Rockingham County.

use development in the Gateway District, Town Center, and the Flexible/Mixed Use District (former Vo-Tech site) could go a long way. Along with adaptive reuse of properties in other zones along transportation corridors, these more concentrated areas can provide options for downsizing seniors and starter homes for younger adults who might otherwise move elsewhere.

### Land Available for Development

As with every municipality, undeveloped land is a finite resource in Stratham. While there are still hundreds of acres of vacant developable land in Town, under the pressures of the current housing market unprotected lands will not stay undeveloped for long.

#### ***Lands with Ecological Value***

There is a great deal of natural habitat in Town that is already permanently protected with conservation easements. Outside these areas, there are also a number of wetlands and other lands with environmental constraints that will preclude or seriously limit future development. However, there is still a notable amount of land that is privately owned, technically “developable,” and ecologically valuable for the estuary, forests, and other important local habitats. The Town will need to continue to evaluate these areas and refine a system for prioritizing future conservation efforts. While the housing market remains strong, there will be more and more pressure to develop these sensitive areas, especially if no other land areas in Stratham are available and able to contain and accommodate this development pressure and market demand.



*Ponds that intermittently dry up are known as vernal pools. They are incredibly important to Stratham's local ecology.*

### ***Farmland***

Currently, approximately 20% of Stratham's land area is farmed. This is a tremendous asset for a community located so close to the coast and metropolitan Boston, and agriculture is embedded in the cultural heritage of Stratham. Fortunately, Stratham has done an excellent job working with local farmers to establish conservation easements on farm properties. Today, about 55% of all active farms in Stratham are conserved. However, that still leaves about 900 acres of farmland susceptible to future development.

### ***The Great Bay Estuary Watershed***

As land continues to be developed in Stratham, it is important to recognize the impact of this development in the larger context of the Great Bay Estuary. Continued study shows the estuary is under stress with many important indicators showing negative trends over time. Increases in impervious cover, on-site wastewater systems, fertilizer application and other activities contribute more pollution to the estuary either through steady groundwater recharge or stormwater runoff. New development and improvements to existing developed areas will occur within this watershed context and should be designed and regulated accordingly.

### **Major Roadways**

The early settlement patterns in the region established a series of trade highways that connected the major commercial/industrial hubs. The Town of Exeter connected to Durham through what is now Route 108 (College Road) and to Portsmouth through what is now Route 33 (Portsmouth Avenue). These arterial roads were, and still are, incredibly influential on the Town of Stratham. Historically, during Stratham's peak agricultural years, these roads served as the first transportation link for produce and dairy products that would move to the urban centers and then see national and international distribution. Today, these roads provide passage for tens of thousands of automobiles moving within or passing through Stratham on a daily basis. Much of this traffic is comprised of commuters coming and going from Stratham or passing through as they head toward more densely populated job centers. Further, particularly for Portsmouth Avenue, these roads can serve as barriers that divide neighborhoods from one another, making it unsafe to cross by any means other than with an automobile.

In addition to these major arterial roadways, local roads like Bunker Hill Avenue and Winnicutt Road served as the primary travel routes for some of Stratham's earliest residents and farmers. As a result, these important local roads and the more regional arterials described above provide access to many of the scattered historic homesteads and landscapes as well as institutional buildings integral to Stratham's identity. Historic homes and the lots where they stand provide a setting that connects passersby with the history of these corridors. As regional and local traffic on these roads increases, the appeal of living along these roads will decrease and the future of these homesteads will become more uncertain.



## Climate Change

The planet's climate is changing, generally becoming warmer. This trend has resulted in changing weather patterns, changing hydrologic patterns, and sea level rise. The implications of these trends for municipal governments, particularly for communities close to the coast, are significant. Typical predictions for communities like Stratham include:

- Rising groundwater levels caused primarily by an inland response to sea level rise.
- Localized disruption of hydrology (e.g., groundwater, streams, and wetlands) due to increased frequency of severe storms.
- Destruction or migration of coastal habitats caused by sea level rise (inundation) and coastal storms.
- Infrastructure failure from high frequency, high intensity storms (e.g. roadway damage, culverts, storm drains, etc.).
- Migration of wildlife species northward, including invasive species.
- Loss of property, including important public utilities and other facilities, to flood waters.

The most recent study of risks to Stratham associated with climate change is the 2017 *Climate Risk in The Seacoast: Vulnerability Assessment Report for Town of Stratham, New Hampshire (C-RiSe)*. This report was developed by the Rockingham Planning Commission to assess impacts to six communities in the region from various storm event and sea level rise scenarios. The impacts predicted in Stratham are not insignificant, with the report stating:

*The inland coastal portion of Stratham that is most susceptible to coastal flooding is located in lowlands adjacent to and within the floodplain of the Squamscott River and its tributaries. Although confined in extent, these low-lying areas, containing a mix of residential and commercial development and the infrastructure that services them, are particularly vulnerable to flooding from seasonal high tides, sea-level rise and coastal storms. Other flood impacts include:*

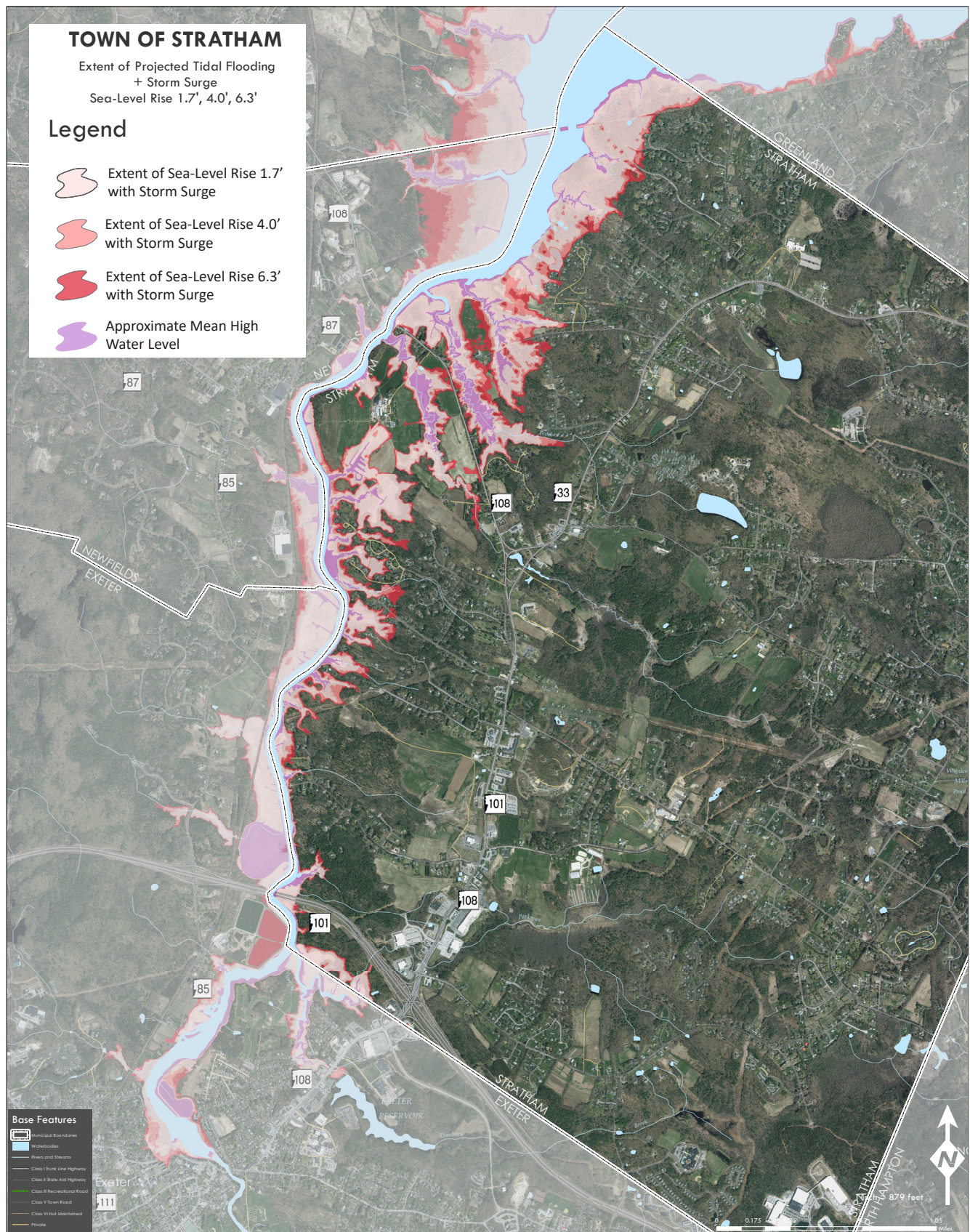
- *Chapmans Landing water recreation access and parking lot.*
- *Stuart Farm and Scamman Farm bordering the Squamscott River.*
- *Reduced hydraulic capacity of four culverts on Squamscott Road.*
- *Well-head protection areas for residential developments west of Route 33.*
- *128 parcels valued at \$40.6 million and 6 residential structures valued at \$2.5 million.*

The report goes on to examine the capacity of culverts at street crossings as these are particularly important for public safety. Where culverts are improperly sized or designed, water can easily overtop roadways cutting off emergency access and evacuation routes. Of the ten culverts examined in the study, seven of them are over capacity during a 100-year storm. Even at a storm frequency as low as the 10-year storm,<sup>1</sup> three of these culverts are over capacity.

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<sup>1</sup> A 10-year storm is an event of such size that over a long period of time, the average time between storms of equal or greater magnitude is 10 years. Likewise, for a 100-year storm, the average time between events of equal or greater magnitude is 100 years. Mathematically, a 10-year event has a probability of 0.1 or 10% of being equaled or exceeded in any one year.





The C-RiSe report shows the impact of different sea level rise scenarios on Stratham waterfront properties and roads.





# Community Vision

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“Inspired by the past and committed to the future.”

The Town of Stratham is a community “inspired by the past and committed to the future.” The Town will maintain and build a well-planned community designed to meet the needs of our current and future residents in a way that is sustainable, attractive, accessible, and affordable. To achieve this vision, we, the community of Stratham, will follow and seek to balance these guiding principles:

## Heritage

- Celebrate Stratham’s agrarian heritage by protecting buildings and landscapes that connect us to our agricultural past.
- Support our farmers by tailoring our policies and regulations to facilitate economic success on farms where appropriate.
- Pursue the preservation and continued use of historic buildings, sites, and landscapes.

## Land Use

- Invest in infrastructure that will foster a high quality of life, increase public safety, anticipate climate change, and keep us fiscally sound.
- Promote a diversity of housing that is thoughtfully located, well-designed, and responsive to local needs.
- Maintain our parks and natural areas in a way that protects our natural resources and balances the needs of people with varied interests and abilities.

- Foster the development and long-term prosperity of commercial, mixed use, and industrial development in areas designated for those uses.
- Reduce sprawl from development pressure in the more rural Residential/Agricultural zone by planning for Stratham's future growth in focused locations, such as the Gateway District and the mixed-use zone at the Vo-Tech site. Planning for future growth and focusing that growth in targeted locations will reduce pressure on Stratham's historical and agricultural resources.
- Connect different areas of our community with a network of roadways, paths, trails, sidewalks, and bikeways designed to foster community and improve the environment.

## **Community**

- Foster a community that invests in children and continues to be highly desirable for raising families.
- Foster a community that provides for its senior residents, looking to keep them active in town.
- Foster an inclusive, diverse, and welcoming community.
- Foster a collaborative decision-making process wherever possible.
- Work proactively to maintain and enhance transparency in our government affairs.
- Communicate openly and honestly about the future of our community, respect differences of opinion, and work toward collaborative solutions.





# Choosing a Future for Stratham

The chapter on *Our Hometown* provides a summary of what people value most in Stratham and the *Community Vision* aspires to a future where these assets remain healthy and integral to the community for decades to come. However, when we examine the more powerful *Forces Driving Change* in Stratham today, it is easy to see many of our most cherished assets are at risk and our vision will not be achieved without strong commitments and bold actions.

*The path on which this community is traveling is one where the housing market gradually consumes our available land, including our farmland, and makes it possible only for the wealthy to live here. If no changes are made to current land use policies and the community does not invest in a different future, the Community Vision articulated in this Master Plan will not be achieved.*

The desire of people to move to Stratham is as high as it has ever been. Further, people fortunate enough to already live here generally want to stay. Scenic landscapes, good schools, and a healthy regional economy have made Stratham a desirable place to live. Combined with trends in transportation, needs for services, and demographic shifts, Stratham is at risk of becoming a victim of its own success. The path on which this community is traveling is one where the housing market gradually consumes our available land, including our farmland, and makes it possible only for the wealthy to live here. If no changes are made to current land use policies and the community does not invest in a different future, the *Community Vision* articulated in this Master Plan will not be achieved.



In order to achieve the future vision set forth in this plan, the Town of Stratham will need to make a series of bold choices going forward. In some cases, these choices are easy to identify, and the path forward is clear. In other instances, the path forward is not yet entirely clear. Some issues require further study before concrete action can be taken. In these instances, this plan will establish a deep commitment and strong policy framework. The sections below present ten key issues for which important policy commitments are needed from the Town.

## STRATHAM'S MASTER PLAN KEY ISSUES

The Gateway	Historic Resource Preservation	Public Services and Facilities
The Viability of Our Farms	Biking, Walking, and Automobiles	Open Spaces and Parklands
The Town Center	Sustaining Our Natural Resources	Stratham's Industrial Park
	Housing for the Future	

### The Gateway

The vision for the Gateway District articulated in this plan was adopted by the Planning Board in 2008. The Gateway District refers to the commercial/mixed use zones along Portsmouth Avenue beginning at the edge of Town near Route 101 and ending approximately at Raeder Drive. This district has a clearly articulated vision in The Gateway Commercial Business District Master Plan (District Master Plan), which states the district will...

*“Enhance the economic vitality, business diversity, accessibility, and visual appeal of Stratham’s Gateway Commercial Business District, in a manner that is consistent with the landscape and architecture of the Town’s agricultural tradition.”*

The current zoning of the Gateway District was adopted to implement the Vision in the District Master Plan. The opportunities and benefits to Stratham residents:

- Upgraded amenities (i.e. modernized shopping facilities for groceries, markets).
- New services and uses and gathering spaces (i.e. theaters and civic spaces).
- Diversified housing options for seniors and people at all stages of life.
- Modern site development that better cares for the environment (i.e. stormwater quality and waterways).
- Connections through side and interior roads, which relieve congestion by providing motorists with multiple ways to reach their destination. These also increase access for pedestrians and bicyclists.

AND

- More viable economic structure for the Town through added property valuation.

## Quality of Development

In addition to more vibrant uses - including a mix of stores, eating places, residential units, and offices - the quality of site development will provide many physical improvements. Site design techniques will incorporate best practices related to circulation, aesthetics, environmental sustainability, retail planning, and safety. Development proposals will be scrutinized for their ability to create cohesion between abutting land uses, the surrounding landscape, and meet the intent of the District Master Plan.

The Gateway District regulations require:

- Public spaces that are attractive and inviting.
- Compact redevelopment patterns scaled to the pedestrian experience.
- Well-connected pedestrian and bicycle networks.
- Sustainable landscaping that uses resilient native plants and stonework reflective of the region.

Every aspect of site design, building orientation, circulation, and architecture will be chosen to establish the Gateway District as a unique destination where people live, work, dine, and come for entertainment.

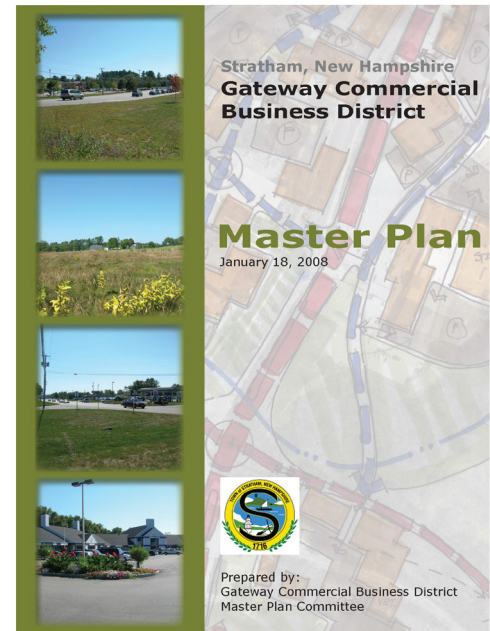
### Town Meeting Actions for Adoption (2009 & 2014)

The Gateway District vision has been adopted and many steps taken toward implementation with some key steps remaining.

This vision for the Gateway District emerged from a local planning process that dates back to the early 2000's. A summary of the adoption steps and implementation is provided below:

- The District Master Plan was adopted unanimously by the Planning Board in 2008.
- The Gateway District zoning ordinance was approved by Stratham voters as an optional overlay in the General Commercial zone in 2009.
- The Gateway District zoning ordinance was made mandatory by Stratham voters in 2014 (rescinding the previous General Commercial district in that area).

The corridor has seen some limited development that incorporates Gateway District streetscape and architecture requirements since the Gateway District zoning provisions were adopted. However, none of these newly developed or redeveloped sites are the higher value, denser developments that provide the sought-after public services, spaces, and amenities in the District Master Plan vision. Recent developments have included single-story/single-use auto-dependent retail structures that are more typical of strip malls that have limited infrastructure.



*The Gateway Commercial Business District Master Plan marked an important milestone in the evolution of this area of Stratham.*

In order for the development and redevelopment potential of this key asset to materialize, additional implementation steps are required. Denser developments with more use by the public require access to public utilities such as water and sewer for basic services, as well as fire protection and more sophisticated stormwater management systems.

### **Implementation Efforts**

Following the 2016 Town Meeting, where a bond measure to finance the connection of water infrastructure to the Exeter system did not pass, the Select Board appointed a new Committee to study the future of the corridor in order to address concerns raised at the Town meeting and, in particular, to review the financial viability of the Gateway District zoning as it relates to water and sewer infrastructure.

With guidance and technical assistance from a professional consultant, the Committee studied the technical options for connecting to existing water and sewer systems in the region as well as creating a Stratham system. In addition, it studied the financial feasibility of these services into the district. The Committee concluded that the most logical connection is to the existing

Exeter systems and, further, that a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) – a municipal finance tool used successfully in many New Hampshire communities and elsewhere to target tax revenues from a certain district to public improvements (such as water and sewer) in that same district – offers a viable financial model for financing the infrastructure. The financial projections were very conservative and did not include funding sources from any state or federal programs, which could further improve the financial projections.

*In 2018, extensive public engagement, including a community-wide survey, demonstrated both a commitment to the vision of the Gateway and a commitment to investing in infrastructure.*

The community survey showed very strong support for further implementing the Gateway District vision. A total of 611 Stratham residents, 20 years and older (or 11.3% of the town's population), responded. Highlights from the survey are below:

- The survey showed overwhelming support for a more walkable commercial area; more variety in restaurants and gatherings spaces; and more variety of retail and business options.
- “So long as developers pay their share, some investment from the town makes sense” (80% agree and strongly agree).
- “Taxpayers will benefit in the long term from town infrastructure investment” (76% agree and strongly agree).

Input received during the development of this plan includes interests from walking and biking advocates, farmers, business owners, seniors, local officials, parents, and others. Almost universally, these groups and individuals saw the tremendous potential of the Gateway District to contribute positively to the future of Stratham. These discussions, and those that came before the Master Plan, place the Gateway District high on the list of local priorities.



### **Our Commitment to the Gateway District:**

Stratham is committed to actively working toward the success of the Gateway District as envisioned in the Gateway Master Plan.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Continue to pursue the vision of the Gateway Corridor Master Plan and the full range of development and redevelopment envisioned.
2. Continue to engage property owners and developers along the corridor who have not yet been able to take advantage of the Gateway vision due to infrastructure limitations.
3. Develop and approve a financing plan and tools that provide the necessary funding for the design and installation of water and sewer infrastructure in accordance with recommended project phasing.
4. Further develop the existing inter-municipal agreement for water and pursue sewer connection discussions.
5. Install water and sewer infrastructure in accordance with the terms and conditions of the financial and legal documents (such as a TIF District and Financing Plan).
6. Keep the public informed as progress toward the Gateway vision unfolds, including design of public improvements, new development projects, and other progress related to the Gateway.
7. Re-visit, as appropriate, the existing zoning for the Gateway District and make amendments that will facilitate achieving the vision.

### **The Viability of Our Farms**

A core element of this Master Plan vision includes the continued presence of viable farms in Stratham. The agricultural legacy in our community shapes our landscapes and connects us to a history rich in cultivation and industry. Beyond our connection to Stratham's agrarian heritage, active farms provide many benefits to the community. Residents agree these lands provide a public benefit due to their scenic quality. But it is important to note that the scenic quality of these views often requires maintenance in the form of building repairs, mowing, path/road repair, and other items that may be outside the normal daily operations of a working farm. Maintenance of these scenic views therefore often falls to the farmer, who provides the service at no direct cost to the Town. Finally, from an economic perspective, agricultural commerce is a significant regional draw in Stratham, bringing tens of thousands of visitors into Stratham every year.

Farmers face many challenges relative to financial sustainability, and as one farmer stated in the outreach process, "If farms don't make a profit, then they'll just close." Costs that impact farmers disproportionately to their income level can include property tax assessments, permit fees and building code requirements, intensive stewardship of the property (e.g., maintenance and mowing), and start-up costs for young farmers. The strength of the regional housing market and gradual loss of developable land in Stratham will continue to make it more financially attractive for landowners

to develop their farms as single-family home subdivisions. To curb the development of farmland for residential subdivisions or other development, an array of land use and tax-based tools are needed to help farms remain financially viable. Land conservation easements, current use taxation, historic preservation and barn easements, and zoning tailored to farm viability all help to ensure the long-term sustainability of agriculture in Stratham.

### **Diversified Income**

Small farm operation in the 21st century is often a story of adaptation and diversification. While many traditional farm activities like cultivation, animal husbandry, and harvest still lie at the core of everyday farm life, new and sometimes unexpected streams of revenue are emerging. For example, a re-kindled interest in agriculture and nostalgia has created a surge in agritourism as well as some opportunities to establish other revenue-generating uses on site. Some of these uses are closely related to agriculture and might include activities like machinery/electrical repair, farm-related crafts, or cheese making. Other activities are more non-traditional and, in other communities, have included public meeting space (leasable), heritage-based education, special events (e.g., weddings, concerts, fund raisers), or culinary workshops.

The choices Stratham needs to make related to agricultural viability deal in large part with this issue of accessory uses. The benefits of additional revenue are easy to see. More revenue, especially from diverse sources, will make a farm more financially resilient. This, in turn, can make farmers more inclined to keep the property in agricultural use, which is consistent with the vision of this plan. With every choice, however, there may be trade-offs for the community. Expanded allowances



*21st century farms are adding retail, community events, and many other enterprises in order to increase revenue.  
Photo credit: Nathan Merrill*

for accessory uses can lead to changes in farm operations that may seem disruptive or undesirable to the surrounding neighborhood or residents in general. Additional commercial activity on site can lead to increased localized traffic, outside storage, or the construction of new “out buildings” that impact the scenic quality of the farm.

The Town currently addresses these issues in the Zoning Ordinance through a broadly defined set of allowances under “Agritourism.” Based on the way this term is defined, it can be unclear whether a specific use proposed by a farmer is included. Ultimately, the Town should develop a clear list of accessory uses that are potentially allowable and a set of standards to reasonably regulate those uses. This is a challenging but potentially rewarding process for a community like Stratham. A great deal of public education and engagement is required for this type of exercise so that farmers have an opportunity to talk about what they want, and residents can talk about where they have concerns.

### **Other Development Regulations**

While the issue of accessory uses is a high priority for the Town, it is not the only issue that Stratham should consider related to agricultural viability. Regulating construction activities on farms, for example, was discussed at length during the engagement process. Anecdotal accounts suggest that some of the permit review processes imposed on farmers were more arduous and costly than they may need to be. Further, some of the standards or permit processes used for more conventional construction (e.g., residential homes or commercial use) may not be a practical for some of the improvements more typical to farm operations. While the Town certainly should have assurances that construction activities are done properly, there may be opportunities unique to farmland for reducing costs and other investments related to local permitting.

### **Easements for Agricultural Properties**

Stratham relies primarily on two different easement programs to assist with issues of farm viability. First, more broadly, conservation easements have been applied to over a thousand acres of farmland in the town, more than half of the current active acreage. These easements provide farmers with the opportunity for significant tax benefits and improved estate planning, while allowing the farmer to live and work on the land. The ultimate holder of the easement can vary, with Stratham sometimes using the town, the state, or a variety of land trust organizations. The second easement tool used in Stratham is the so called “barn easement.” Effective in 2002, NH RSA 79-D5 allows municipalities to grant property tax relief to barn owners who (a) can demonstrate the public benefit of preserving their barns or other historic farm buildings, and (b) agree to maintain their structures throughout a minimum 10-year preservation easement. The Stratham Select Board has approved preservation easements for 18 barns that meet the statutory qualifications.

#### **POLICY CONNECTION**

*The use of easements is an integral part of the broader town-wide approach to preserving historic resources.*





*Preserving barns like the Robinson Barn pictured above and below is essential to maintaining Stratham's connection to its past. Photo credit: Sophie Robinson*

Easements have proven to be an effective tool for farm viability in Stratham and agricultural stakeholders vocally supported their continued use. The Town will need to consider whether to establish a fund in order to have access to funding in the future when unexpected opportunities to purchase easements arise. Finally, it was acknowledged that some of the restrictions attached to easements applied in the past were narrowly written. Moving forward, the parties involved in purchasing/selling new easements should be mindful that the easement language is not unnecessarily restrictive and therefore counterproductive.



*Photo credit: Sophie Robinson*

### **Our Commitment to the Viability of Our Farms:**

Stratham is committed to the continued viability of our farms. We recognize the unique challenges to this industry and the unique benefits of agricultural operations to our community. Stratham will look for ways in which the Town can facilitate the long-term economic health of farmers without unreasonably impacting scenic viewsheds and neighboring properties.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Organize a public discussion around accessory uses for active farms to determine what uses are acceptable and what performance standards should apply.
2. In the discussion of accessory uses, include a component that looks specifically at barn structures rehabilitated under the barn easement program.
3. Review existing local regulations through the lens of farm operations. Identify areas where permit review processes or specific standards are not practical for farm operations and amend the regulations as appropriate.
4. Continue the use of conservation and barn easements in the community. Because conservation easements are permanent deed restrictions, it is important to develop easement terms that allow for diverse agricultural uses, ensuring competing interests do not impinge on the long-term goal of agricultural viability.
5. Consider re-establishing funding for purchasing conservation easements when opportunities arise.

## **The Town Center**

As discussed in previous sections of the plan, Stratham did not develop a compact “Town Center” in the way that more urbanized nearby mill communities did (e.g., Exeter, Newmarket). Nonetheless, Stratham’s Town Center served for centuries as a municipal, secular, and business hub for the community. Our Town Center has at various times been home to three churches, taverns, town hall/municipal government, town library, public safety, highway department, the post office, the electric streetcar trolley barn, and village stores. However, some of those institutions have relocated and this area of Town does not have the same cohesive identity as other traditional New England town centers. Further, the design of the roadway system through



*Renovated Old Town Hall. Photo credit: Nathan Merrill*





Photo credit: Wallace Stuart



Photo credit: Ironwood Design

this area (from its earlier days as the Route 101 corridor) burdens residents and visitors with severe challenges related to walkability and bicyclist safety.

Despite its challenges, the Town Center does have a collection of businesses, historic buildings, and municipal uses. In recognition of these assets, Stratham has invested resources in Town Center planning, zoning, and infrastructure. The foundation for this work was the 2011 PlanNH charrette, which drew heavily on the previous community Master Plan (1998). The plan that resulted from the 2011 charrette provides a bold, but not impractical vision for the Town Center. The document was reviewed favorably by New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) and recommends a “phased approach” to both public and private investment that would, over time, transform this area into something much more walkable and welcoming. In 2014, voters adopted NH RSA 79-E, known as the Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive. Properties in the Town Center (and the Professional/Residential District immediately south) are now eligible for this tax incentive, which was instrumental in preserving the Old Town Hall.

### **POLICY CONNECTION**

*The use of easements is an integral part of the broader town-wide approach to preserving historic resources.*

Since the development of the charrette plan, street lamps and sidewalk sections have been installed, which will be part of a larger suite of improvements and sidewalk extensions over time. The bolder design recommendations related to roadway realignment and the installation of round-about traffic circles will require more significant investments from NHDOT, and the Town will continue to coordinate and advocate for the best possible design solutions (see also *Walking and Biking*).



### **Our Commitment to the Town Center:**

Stratham is committed to the vision for our Town Center put forward in the local plans generated for this area. We acknowledge the enormous challenges created by the existing street network and commit to a long-term vision for changing that network to facilitate a more walkable, cohesive center.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Continue to keep the district eligible for tax relief related to qualifying structures.
2. Coordinate with NHDOT on all proposed work within the center.
3. Amend the Town Center zoning as necessary to meet the goals of the district.
4. Coordinate later phases of sewer service installation (related to the Gateway District) with roadway and streetscape improvements in the Town Center.

## **Historic Resource Preservation**

In addition to its agrarian roots, historic resources define the character of Stratham and contribute to its sense of place and quality of life. As discussed in *Our Hometown* (above), Stratham's rural development patterns created a scattered, spread out collection of homes, farms, and institutions. Preservation of these resources, therefore, generally occurs site by site rather than across a more concentrated district. Preservation efforts recognize the value of the resources that remain intact and provide context for new development. Historic resources include farms, houses, cemeteries, churches, parks, schools, and other town buildings as well as landscapes and sites of archaeological or historic interest. A partial but extensive inventory of structures developed through volunteer efforts is included in the Master Plan Baseline Report and the map on the following page is taken from that document.

### **Tools for Preservation**

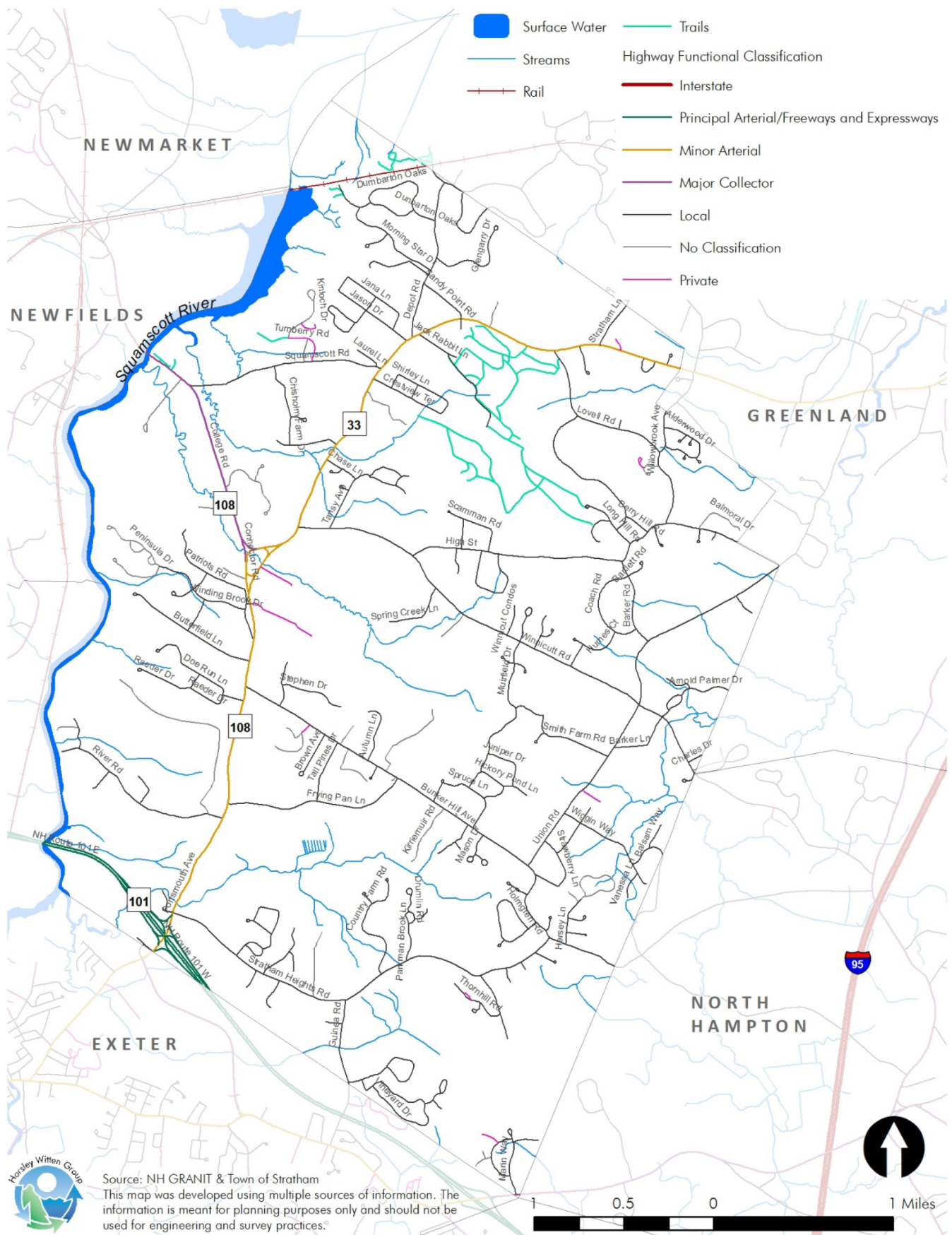
Stratham has used a number of tools over decades past to preserve historic structures and sites. A brief summary of these tools is provided below.

#### ***Local Zoning***

There are provisions in Stratham's town regulations protecting stone walls and establishing a process of demolition review. The Residential/Agricultural Zone is also intended to maintain Stratham's historic character.

#### ***NH RSA 79***

NH RSA 79 is a provision to lower tax assessments of open space and historic structures. The Town uses NH RSAs 79-A, 79-D, and 79-E. Section A of RSA 79 permits current use taxation on open lands keeping undeveloped land open. With regard to farm sites, 79-D allows the Town to grant property tax relief to barn owners who (a) can demonstrate the public benefit of preserving



their barns or other historic farm buildings, and (b) agree to maintain their structures throughout a minimum 10-year preservation easement. The Stratham Select Board has approved preservation easements for more than 18 barns that meet the statutory qualifications.

The provisions of 79-E encourage the rehabilitation and active use of underutilized commercial, office, mixed use, and residential buildings in the Town Center and Professional/Residential districts. Improvements must meet 79-E guidelines as well as the public benefit test. In return, the Select Board may provide tax relief at a pre-rehabilitation value for a limited period. The historic Town Hall is an example of how 79-E can be used for preserving important structures in Stratham.

### ***Historic Resources Surveys***

A town-wide historic resources survey can be used to help raise public awareness of the community's historic and cultural resources and assist in the prioritization of properties for preservation. A 2007 partial inventory was completed under the auspices of the Heritage Commission.

### ***Portsmouth Avenue Area Survey***

This comprehensive survey of historical resources in the Portsmouth Avenue and Emery Lane corridor was completed in 2017 and can be used to increase public awareness of local historic and cultural resources. It also provides valuable information to help develop local planning policies and zoning regulations to meet preservation priorities.

### ***Archaeological Surveys***

Archaeological surveys have been conducted formally and informally in Stratham since the first half of the 20th century. The results of formal surveys are held at the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources. Presently there are professional archaeological projects in many of the towns surrounding the Great Bay. The relatively intact sites in Stratham have the potential to provide important artifacts and information to this regional effort.

### ***Preservation Easements***

Like conservation easements discussed in Open Space and Conservations Lands and agricultural easements in Agriculture, preservation easements are also voluntary, legal agreements between the landowner and a monitoring agency. Preservation easements are customized to each property. They typically do not limit uses of the property, but they can limit what changes may or may not be allowed to the exterior and/or interior of the structure(s). As with other easements, private owners retain many of their rights, including the right to own and use the property, sell it, and pass it on to their heirs. Preservation, agricultural, and conservation easements go hand-in-hand in Stratham, as many historically significant properties are linked to farmland and natural areas. This preservation tool was successfully deployed with the Old Town Hall, Lane Homestead, and the Bartlett-Cushman home.

### ***Historic Demolition Review Ordinance***

The Town's Historic Demolition Review Ordinance gives the Town an opportunity to review demolition applications for properties that are over 50 years of age. Within five days of receiving



a demolition application, the Demolition Review Committee must issue their opinion whether the building is potentially “historically significant” and a more thorough investigation is warranted to prepare a recommendation. The Committee has 60 days to conduct its investigation, hold public hearings, and write its recommendation. Ultimately, this ordinance does not give the Town the authority to refuse demolition. The 60-day review provides an opportunity for all parties to explore options for preservation, documentation, and possible salvage operations.

### **Stratham’s Legacy Roadways**

As previously discussed in this plan (*Forces Driving Change*), the arterial roadways leading north and east out of town have shaped Stratham in many ways. During the Master Plan process, it was noted that some of our most beautiful historic homes, scenic homestead settings, and other historic sites (e.g., schools, churches, etc.) are concentrated on these roadways. Further, because of their location along busier streets, these buildings and sites are the most visible resources in the Town and play an integral role in establishing historic character. To facilitate the preservation of these

*The former Stratham Hill School was one of four district schoolhouses that were replaced c. 1955 with the opening of Stratham Memorial School on Bunker Hill Avenue (the current Municipal Center). Photo credit: Rebecca Mitchell*







*The former Wiggin dairy farm is located across the street from Stratham Hill Park. Most of the farm's land was used to build the former New Hampshire Vocational-Technical College c. 1980. Photo credit: Rebecca Mitchell*

properties and the historic structures thereon, Stratham will need to think creatively about providing incentives to property owners.

One of the tools already being used in Stratham is the barn easement (RSA 79-D5), where property owners receive tax relief when they invest in the restoration of a historical barn structure. This tool could be used for certain properties along these major roads in an effort to increase investment in a specific structure. However, similar to the accessory use issue with agriculture, the Town should think carefully about what types of restrictions it will place on future uses of the barn structure. Another tool used elsewhere in Town is the Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive (see Town Center section), which has potentially broader application than the barn easement program. The Town could explore expanding the geographic reach of this program to include areas along major roadways that are particularly rich with historic buildings.

Another tool to consider strengthening these areas would be expanding uses along the major roadways for home-based business (referred to in zoning as “home occupation”) or professional, office, or residential uses. Stratham already allows home occupation business along the roadways targeted in this section of the plan. However, home occupation businesses are only allowed through a Special Exception and there are several performance standards that could be adjusted if appropriate. The Town should reevaluate the current zoning language especially with regard to

Route 33 as it heads north out of the Town Center then turns east to the Greenland border. This corridor was discussed at length during the Master Plan process, picking up on debates that have occurred over a long period within the community. A proposal to change zoning along this stretch of the corridor to General Business was defeated in 2016 and public sentiment showed little appetite for major changes to its current character.

However, in order to maintain that character, incentives for things like home-based business or other professional/office/residential uses—perhaps at a larger scale than what is considered today—may be needed. In addition, flexible zoning standards (such as a form-based code) may promote desirable redevelopment and infill development. Standards can be used to ensure construction complements the existing historic fabric, providing a context-sensitive approach to enabling economically viable reuse. Preventing demolition of historic structures should be at the center of regulatory adjustments in this corridor.

Finally, while many of these roadways have a higher concentration of adjacent historic properties, it is important to note the scenic and historic character of some of the actual roadways. As Stratham continues to make roadway improvements based on infrastructure needs and the desire to increase biking and walking, it will be important to coordinate these improvements with the desire to maintain a rural, historic setting. This includes minimizing impacts to assets such as stonewalls and large street trees or enhancing them through landscape treatments or other strategies.

#### **Our Commitment to Historic Resource Preservation:**

Stratham is committed to providing incentives and accessing funds to preserve, maintain and, where appropriate, adaptively re-use our valuable inventory of historic resources.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Ensure the extensive and geographically disbursed historic structures, barns, homesteads, and other features contributing to Stratham's connection the past remain intact for the future.
  - a. Evaluate existing land use ordinances (such as the Use Table and associated performance standards) to ensure they encourage effective and vibrant reuse of historic properties, decreasing the risk of losing them to deterioration (e.g. new or expanded uses along Route 33).
  - b. Explore regulatory tools available in New Hampshire, but not adopted in Stratham, to designate historic districts in the zoning ordinance for the purpose of preserving and protecting existing current historic resources.
  - c. Evaluate existing ordinances (such as demolition ordinance) to ensure they effectively fulfill the purposes of the ordinance and other goals in this Master Plan.



2. Make investments that actively preserve historic buildings and important spaces to the Town.
  - a. Investigate the possibility of establishing a revolving loan fund or small grants program for critical repairs to privately-owned historic structures.
  - b. Continue municipal funding for preservation easement purchases on particularly important historical resources.
  - c. Identify tools to incentivize the rehabilitation and preservation of historic structures along the Portsmouth Avenue corridor from Town Center to the Greenland town line. Viable tools may include, but are not limited to, the expansion of RSA 79-E.
3. Expand the Town's base of knowledge and appreciation for Stratham's architectural and agricultural heritage.
  - a. Complete a town-wide survey of historic resources and create an interactive online map of historical resources in our town.
  - b. Pursue efforts to share information about the history and historic development of the town through initiatives such as historic markers, interpretive signboards, and related educational materials to be installed at key locations.
4. Continue to ask the Heritage Commission to serve as resource for the Select Board, boards and commissions, and Town staff in carrying out public works improvements for the Town.
  - a. Designate a list and map of "heritage streets" and add specific zoning language that applies to them – particularly regarding streetscape changes such as any proposed sidewalks, roadway widening, bike lanes, etc. and also special protections for stone walls, open spaces, and other features.
  - b. Provide input on Town operations and capital projects affecting Town-owned historic properties and landscapes.

## Biking, Walking, and Automobiles

The idea of investing significant resources in creating safe conditions for walking and biking alongside automobile traffic has been embraced at varying levels in different municipalities across the country. Collectively, this movement is often referred to as the “Complete Streets” approach (see inset). In Stratham, trails enthusiasts have advocated for investments in off-road transportation options for years and a cohesive network throughout town is beginning to emerge. More recently, the Pedestrian and Cyclist Advocacy Committee (PCAC) took on the role of establishing both a broad policy framework and making project-specific recommendations. These groups have started to raise awareness of the many benefits related to pro-bike and pro-walking investments.

### Benefits of Complete Streets

#### *Building Community*

One of the key themes in the chapter entitled *Our Hometown* is “a sense of community.” Stratham maintains a strong sense of community through a

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Complete Streets are streets designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users. Those include people of all ages and abilities, regardless of whether they are traveling as drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, or public transportation riders. The concept of Complete Streets encompasses many approaches to planning, designing...with all users in mind to make the transportation network safer and more efficient...Complete Streets approaches vary based on community contexts.

- U.S. Department of Transportation

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Photo credit: [www.ruraldesignguide.com](http://www.ruraldesignguide.com)





*In rural areas, a complete streets approach sometimes requires creating separate “streets” for bikers and pedestrians.*

variety of networks and groups, whether connections are made through government groups, social groups, the schools, or other organizations. A sense of community is not just fostered through these social connections, but also through physical connections between different places in town. Community planners have long observed that towns foster a stronger sense of community where people have lots of opportunities to walk and bike. These connections provide opportunities for chance meetings between friends and also connect gathering places and neighborhoods in a way that fosters more interaction.

### ***Public Health***

People who regularly walk and bike tend to be healthier than people who need to drive everywhere they go. Studies have shown that those regularly engaged in biking or walking have lower risk of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. There is also documentation showing that these more active individuals have better mental health than more sedentary individuals. The other obvious public health benefit comes from greater safety on the roadways where “Complete Streets” design principles are applied.

### ***Economic***

Connectivity is fast becoming a higher priority for both incoming residents and business owners looking to relocate or (in the case of a business owner) expand. The presence of well-designed streets, sidewalk networks in more densely developed areas, and a comprehensive network of



trails in more rural area—these amenities signal a commitment to vitality, connection, health, and safety. Infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians fosters an “economics of place” where multiple businesses have access to a mobile group of consumers.

Complete Streets, as a concept, is widely recognized across the country and NHDOT embraces these principles where possible. The state agency also offers technical assistance to communities looking to develop a strong local policy preference for these street design techniques. For this reason, to be consistent with the State initiatives, Stratham should set its policy foundation on the complete streets approach. However, it is important to recognize that planners, advocates, urban designers, and engineers have built upon complete streets to incorporate other benefits through innovative design. Perhaps the most notable example is the Green Streets approach, which looks to integrate innovative stormwater treatment practices into the streetscape in a manner that enhances the pedestrian experience. Tree box filters, sidewalk swales, and pocket bioretention facilities are examples of stormwater management practices that can be woven into more urban settings in a way that creates both environmental and aesthetic benefits. Stratham will have ample opportunity to consider these types of practices moving forward, especially in areas like the Gateway District, the Vo-Tech site, and the Industrial Park as they continue to grow.

### **POLICY CONNECTION**

*The development of a network of off-road bicycle and walking trails that connects neighborhoods and parks is an integral component of strengthening Stratham’s recreational facilities.*



*These landscaped areas treat stormwater and can be integrated into designs for safer walking, biking and parking.*

### **The Challenge of Rural Roadways**

Rural application of complete streets principles often looks very different from urban application but can be just as transformative to the host community. While dedicated bike lanes, bold crosswalks, and sidewalks may be appropriate to areas like the future Gateway District, other areas of Stratham will focus more on off road solutions. Paved or hard-packed pathways that run alongside historic winding roads, for example, are a much more common rural complete streets application. Further, viewing trails as important connections throughout the community can add a different perspective to the discussion of establishing new connections. While some communities view trails as more of a recreational amenity, the idea that they are part of the local transportation system can affect the way they are located and designed. As connectivity continues to improve, linking neighborhoods, parks, farms, and commercial areas through a more comprehensive system of trails will be just as important as “in road” improvements.

A final important consideration for rural roadway design is the local regulatory framework in which streets are designed. In general, Stratham governs the design of streets through its Subdivision Rules and Regulations. The standards contained in these regulations provide a straightforward way to design conventional street configurations in a safe manner. Stratham should build upon the regulatory framework it has today and provide a broader menu of street profiles that shows developers how to integrate complete street elements on different roadways depending on the opportunities presented on a specific site.



*Applying complete streets to rural areas requires a Town like Stratham to consider softer approaches in residential areas and treatments on long, busy corridors. Photo credit: [www.ruraldesignguide.com](http://www.ruraldesignguide.com)*

### **New Hampshire's Context Sensitive Solutions Program**

NHDOT is tasked with the enormous responsibility of managing, building, and maintaining all state-owned roads. This process takes place through an elaborate planning process, which is used to prioritize funding on an annual basis for roadway construction/maintenance jobs. Many important roadways have different stewards for different stretches of roadway. Certain stretches of roadway can be owned and maintained by the Town, others are owned and maintained by the State, while others may be owned by one entity and maintained by the other through an agreement.

Like many other state departments, NHDOT recognizes the benefits of incorporating bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure into its projects. It recognizes that the state owns a diversity of roadway types—from major highways to rural throughways—and decisions about how bicycle and pedestrian elements are woven into their roadways need to be adaptable. The organization also understands that local knowledge and plans for placemaking should be part of the discussion related to roadway improvements in key locations. NHDOT has therefore created the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process, which is a collaborative planning process that combines local planning goals and state-level expertise toward better roadway improvements. From the NHDOT website:

*“CSS involves a commitment to a process that encourages transportation officials to collaborate with stakeholders from the community and environmental resource groups so the design of the project reflects the goals of the people who live, work and travel in the area. Such collaboration results in creative and safe transportation solutions.”*

The Town of Stratham could meet with NHDOT and present the results of different studies in Town, particularly the Gateway District Master Plan and the Town Center Charrette Plan. Outside of those special areas, the Town could also identify which streets are a priority for multiple modes of

transportation. The Town and DOT can then decide if the CSS program is a good fit for any planned improvements to the state-owned roads in Stratham.

### ***Safe Routes to School***

The Town of Stratham started participating in Safe Routes to School (SRTS) activities in 2014 with National Bike to School Day. Since then, interest and resources put toward participation in Safe Routes to School has steadily increased. In 2018, the Town (with significant assistance from PCAC) won a grant that would help to fund the study and identification of potential design solutions. What followed was the Stratham Safe Routes to School Action Plan, which includes:

- A portfolio of infrastructure design strategies.
- Infrastructure project recommendations for the Stratham Memorial School and the Cooperative Middle School.
- Non-infrastructure recommendations for public education, encouraging walking and biking, and enforcing laws that will help the program become a success.

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### **The Stratham SRTS Program is based on the “five E’s”**

Evaluation: All-around data collection with parent survey, in class tallies about student travel patterns, student concentration maps, walk/bike ability checklist to identify future travel roads, review of pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure around schools, traffic count and traffic speed assessment, specific concerns of community

Education: Bike safety course for Grades 4 and 5 held by the Bike and Walk Alliance of NH, Bike Safety Rodeo in August, pop-up infrastructure, outreach material

Encouragement: Bike to School Day, Wellness Walk, Walk to School Day, Walking School Bus, Bike Safety Rodeo

Enforcement: Safety patrol by Stratham police, speed monitors, traffic complaint hotline

Engineering: Engineering consulting firm will analyze data and suggest preferred Safe Routes to School from different neighborhoods. The firm will develop conceptual designs and estimates for priority infrastructure projects in school zones.

*Source: Stratham Safe Routes to School Action Plan*

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### ***Traffic Congestion***

Existing conditions in Stratham for transportation are almost completely auto-dependent, and much of the traffic in the community comes at peak commuting times where residents going through town and commuters going through town combine to create heavy congestion. While broader complete streets improvements should always be part of discussions with NHDOT, there may be specific design or management improvements in the short-term that could help to alleviate traffic congestion. The Town can consider financing the conceptual design of improvements to help push NHDOT in a particular direction and should regularly advocate for improvements to signalization changes and prioritization on the State improvements program.



## ***Public Transportation***

As presented in the Baseline Report, Stratham is located along Route 7 of the COAST bus system, which travels along NH 108. Route 7 provides as-needed bus service to riders. Reservations are accepted up to two weeks before the ride; however, same day reservations are not allowed. Riders can be picked up in the Market Basket parking lot for a fee of \$1.50, or anywhere not specified as a stop along the designated route for \$3.00. The bus takes riders south to Exeter or north to Newmarket, where riders can transfer to the Wildcat Transit services run by the University of New Hampshire. Stops in Exeter include those at the train station, YMCA, Exeter Hospital, and the downtown area. COAST also offers paratransit services for people with disabilities.

Transportation Assistance for Seacoast Citizens (TASC) provides transportation for individuals 55 years old and older or adults with a disability that prevents them from driving. Services are offered to residents in the communities of Exeter, Brentwood, Greenland, Hampton, Falls, Kensington, North Hampton, Rye, Seabrook, and Stratham. Drivers are volunteers. While it is difficult to invest in more public transportation in areas where ridership is naturally low, in the immediate future Stratham should continue to advocate for service from COAST and TASC and continue to educate residents (particularly seniors) about these opportunities. Looking farther into the future, the growth of the Gateway District, the Flexible Mixed Use Zone (Vo-Tech site), the Town Center, and the Industrial Park may create a critical mass of activity that could support some form of local transit option (e.g., shuttle, etc.). Stratham should be ready to investigate different opportunities as these areas begin to grow.

### **Our Commitment to Walking, Biking and Automobiles:**

Stratham is committed to fostering the development of a town-wide walking and biking transportation system. We understand that these improvements may occur over the course of many years, but there are several near-term opportunities to set policy, change regulations, and make physical improvements.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Draft and adopt a “Complete Streets” policy committing the Town to seriously considering all possibilities for incorporating walking and biking infrastructure into local roadway improvements.
2. Apply techniques related to “Green Streets” particularly in more densely developed areas like the Gateway, Town Center, and future redevelopment of the Vo-Tech site.
3. Building on what we have today, develop a comprehensive Trails Master Plan that maps out the potential town-wide network of trails with a focus on making connections between neighborhoods, parks, and mixed-use centers.
4. Seek input from bicycle, pedestrian, and trail advocates in the local planning including, but not limited to, capital improvement planning, the development of any Park/Forest Management Plan, and discussions with NHDOT.

5. Coordinate closely with NHDOT to ensure specific future roadway improvements (on state roads) are designed consistent with the goals of this section, such as through the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process.
6. Advocate for short-term improvements from NHDOT, including periodic adjustments to signalization at commuting times.
7. Develop an expanded menu of roadway design standards to be used at the local level, which includes different configurations for pedestrian and bicycle elements.
8. Require development proposals to identify where new roads, trails, or paths may be able to connect with the same features on adjacent sites.
9. Prioritize Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Infrastructure Projects as provided in the SRTS Plan (see Appendix C).
10. Seek opportunities for establishing or expanding public transportation options in Town, such as COAST and TASC. Continue to plan for future options that expand services and serve the community, particularly vulnerable populations (i.e. seniors and people with disabilities).
11. Continue to work toward a more comprehensive local transit service as the Gateway, Industrial Park, Town Center, and Vo-Tech areas continue to mature and develop.

## **Sustaining Our Natural Resources**

In addition to its farms and historic settings throughout town, Stratham's character is defined in large part by the natural resources that support wildlife and water resources within the larger context of our watersheds. The Town's Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) was updated as part of the Master Plan development process, largely focusing on updates of data and mapping associated with the document. Similar to other plans referenced in the Master Plan (e.g., Safe Routes to School, Gateway Commercial Business Master Plan, etc.) the NRI provides more detailed information related to its focus and serves as an important supplement to the Master Plan. As discussed previously in the Master Plan, work performed by PREP related to the Great Bay Estuary is also critical and helps to frame natural systems policy in Stratham. PREP's most recent publication *The State of Our Estuaries 2018* serves as another important supplement to this Master Plan. Some of the driving policy issues from each of these documents are highlighted below.

### **A Snapshot of Our Natural Resource Issues**

#### ***Coastal System Protection***

Stratham shares one of New England's richest ecological resources with a number of other communities, all bordering the Great Bay Estuary, which is part of the National Estuaries Program. Home to a remarkable diversity of marine, plant, and animal wildlife, this coastal ecosystem is perhaps the region's most notable natural resource and is the focal point of numerous governmental, non-profit, and academic research/advocacy groups.

The Great Bay Estuary faces continuous threats to its delicate ecosystem, primarily from land-based pollution that eventually makes it way to the estuary via rivers and streams or through groundwater

recharge. The majority of this pollution begins with activities on land, generally associated with developed areas. Nutrients from septic systems, stormwater runoff, fertilizers, and other sources make their way to the estuary and upset the natural balance by encouraging plant and algae growth. This growth, in turn, can reduce light penetration, oxygen levels, and the general health of marine plants, fish, and other important organisms.

### **Surface Water Protection**

Stratham contains a rich network of streams and ponds, as well as the larger tidal Squamscott River, which serves as part of the Town's border. These surface waters provide important habitat for a unique set of animal and plant species and serve as important feature in the scenic landscapes around town. From an ecological perspective, the lands adjacent to surface water resources help to provide wildlife corridors, breeding areas, and hunting grounds for many predators. More practically for our residents, these areas serve as flooding resources during heavy rains and the maintenance of adjacent floodplains provides a critical "eco-service" to the community.

Water quality in Stratham's surface waters, like the Great Bay Estuary, is threatened primarily by land-based activity. The same sources of pollution can load pathogens, nutrients, metals, and sediment into these water bodies causing significant damage to the aquatic ecosystem. Poorly designed drainage systems can pour stormwater into streams at high velocities, causing the banks to scour and erode. In many cases, these water quality and flooding impacts can be mitigated through the maintenance of healthy buffers to rivers, streams, and ponds.



*Snowy Egrets are just one example of the amazing wildlife species that can be found in the Great Bay Estuary.*

### **Groundwater Protection**

Groundwater is the primary source of drinking water for Stratham's residents, and as discussed above, recharges our surface waters and the Great Bay Estuary. Groundwater quality can be compromised in many different ways, and is dependent upon the quality and quantity of water that is allowed to recharge into the soils down to the water table. Accidental leaks or spills of toxic materials can negatively impact groundwater quality where these leaks or spills go undetected and make their way to the water table. Nutrients, particularly nitrogen, can migrate through soils and become mobile in groundwater flow, eventually making their way to surface water habitats.

Another important consideration for groundwater protection is the installation and maintenance of on-site septic systems. Because there is no sewer service in Stratham, every property has its own individual septic system. These smaller systems do not treat wastewater as effectively as larger wastewater treatment facilities, which are able to employ more sophisticated technologies because of larger effluent flow and facility size. Throughout New England, different states allow innovative individual septic system technologies on a more limited basis. The New Hampshire Department of



Environmental Services has approved over a dozen different “innovative and alternative” systems that can be installed at different scales.

### ***Wetlands and Vernal Pools***

Wetlands occur where the surficial soils remain saturated (or near saturation) for at least most of the year. These areas create an environment for plant and animal life specifically suited to wet conditions. Fluctuations in water levels across the seasons, periodic flooding, and micro-climates make these areas particularly rich in biodiversity and many regional rare plants and animals are dependent on wetlands for survival. Similar to the protection of rivers and streams, maintaining healthy buffers adjacent to wetlands is an important preservation strategy.

Vernal pools generally appear in the spring when snow melt, heavier rain, and rising groundwater levels create pools of standing water that last for several weeks. During that time, these pools provide specialized habitat for micro-organisms, amphibians, and plants that may not be able to exist without this special resource. The standing water, shoreline, and adjacent lands serve as breeding grounds for some of our ecosystem’s most sensitive and unique species including fairy shrimp, spotted salamanders, wood frogs, the spotted turtle and Blanding’s turtle. Because vernal pools dry out for much of the year, it is easy for people to overlook these resources. Impacts to these areas often include clearing of vegetation around the pool, stockpiling slash, encroaching on buffers, or even filling.



*The Jefferson Salamander, Wood Frog, and Spotted Salamander are examples of wildlife that depend upon the sustained presence and health of vernal pools in Stratham.*

### ***Forests***

Forests are an important part of Stratham’s landscape and can provide an easily accessible place for residents and visitors to connect with nature. Beyond recreational benefits, forests provide eco-services in the form of carbon sinks, stormwater retention, good air quality, temperature reduction, wind protection, and effective buffers to surface water resources. In addition to eco-services, forest lands can provide food for hunters, wood products, and specialty items like maple syrup.

Gordon Barker Town Forest is Stratham’s most notable forest area with just over 84 acres of land and the need to protect and manage this resource is widely recognized in the community (see Open Spaces & Parklands). But as land continues to develop in Stratham, smaller stands of forest will become more important to providing corridors for wildlife, preserving localized hydrology, and buffering important surface water resources.

### ***Invasive Species***

As the world becomes more physically connected through transportation networks and shipping, plant and animal species from different regions and different countries will continue to find their way to places like Stratham. In some cases, the introduction of these species goes without notice. In other cases, the arrival is incredibly disruptive to the local ecosystem and, in the case of plant species, the visual landscape. Eliminating invasive species is sometimes impossible and, in those instances, regular management strategies are developed that mitigate damage to the greatest extent possible.

In the ongoing battle against invasive species, public awareness is an incredibly important tool. Providing education to residents about how to identify and remove invasive species can help stop the spread of these plants or prevent new populations from taking hold. The University of New Hampshire Extension publishes excellent materials that help residents identify and take action against invasive species.

### ***Renewable Energy***

Generating renewable energy at smaller (non-utility) scales in Stratham is possible with some technologies. Wind power generation in New Hampshire statewide is fairly limited, as is small-scale hydro power. Geo-thermal wells used for heating and cooling are not uncommon in the region, but the most promising technology is solar energy.

### **Protecting Natural Resources – Regulation and Public Education**

Strategies to protect natural resources often start with regulatory measures to address issues related to development and ongoing operations that could be environmentally damaging. At the local level, Stratham has incorporated numerous protective measures that enable a close look at environmental issues during permit review. Notable examples include:

#### ***Residential Open Space Cluster Development***

These provisions potentially allow a developer to cluster new homes on smaller lots so that a minimum percentage of land will be set aside as protected open space.

#### ***Wetlands Conservation District***

This overlay district is designed to place added protections where development activity occurs in close proximity to wetlands or poorly drained soils.

#### ***Shoreland Protection District***

These provisions establish a set of protective overlay zones related to the Squamscott River, Great Bay Estuary, and other inland shoreline areas.

#### ***Aquifer Protection District***

This section of the Zoning Ordinance limits the types of uses that can occur over sensitive aquifer areas and prescribes performance standards for those uses that are allowed (e.g., limited impervious cover).

### ***Floodplain Management District***

These provisions ensure compliance with State requirements for disturbance within regulated floodplain areas and local requirements designed to protect individual properties during a flood, as well as downstream properties.

In addition to these special provisions, Stratham's local regulations address stormwater management, septic system installation, and erosion and sediment control during construction practices. For all of these provisions, it is critical that Stratham continues to revise and refine their local requirements to address the realities of development and the ever-evolving best practices that emerge from ongoing research and industry innovation.

The other important overarching strategy for protecting natural resources is public education. While some potential negative impacts can be averted through regulating development proposals, the everyday activities of residents and business owners generally occur outside the world of regulation but can be equally harmful to natural resources. Examples of issues that could be included in a public education campaign include:

### ***Role of Water Resources Buffers***

Residents and business owners may be compelled to maintain buffers to surface waters, wetlands, and vernal pools if they understand the importance of these areas to the health of the resource.

### ***Sustainable Landscape and Land Management Practices***

Education on selecting and installing native plants for landscaping can encourage property owners to replace turf, hardscape, or "thirsty" plant species with low-maintenance varieties that serve pollinators and other wildlife.

### ***Using Pesticides, Fertilizer, Cleaners, and Hazardous Materials***

Homeowners should understand the potential impacts of using toxic chemicals on their lawns and in their driveways. Proper disposal is also critical to the health of water resources.

### ***Maintenance of Septic Systems***

Well maintained septic systems are an integral component of protecting both groundwater and surface water resources throughout town.

### ***The Value and Fragility of the Great Bay Estuary***

A well-designed public education campaign around Great Bay Estuary would communicate the ecological and economic value of the resources. It would also help residents make the direct connection between their property management habits at home and the health of the estuary.

### ***Invasive Plant and Insect Species***

Homeowners can be educated about their own plant selection and avoiding species that can cause problems. They can also be educated on how to respond to identifying invasive plant or insect species.



### **Opportunities for Renewable Energy**

Businesses, homeowners, and government agencies have opportunities to incorporate renewable energy technology into their buildings and operations at varying scales. Education about the state-level programs and local regulations that govern solar facility installation can help business owners and residents retrofit their existing buildings. Developers can also be educated about making smart choices that allow for easier installation of solar panels in the future (e.g., roof type, building orientation, etc.).



*Emanuel Companies, Inc. installed a double solar array in November of 2018 on the roofs of buildings A & B. This array can produce 74.4 kW and is to date the largest array in Stratham. Most people know these buildings as Millbrook Office Park and are located at 118 Portsmouth Avenue just south of the traffic circle. Their green infrastructure is also infused with porous pavement. This pavement allows storm water to be infiltrated to the aquifer, after being treated.*

### **Our Commitment to Sustaining Our Natural Resources:**

Stratham is committed to sustaining the natural resources that are integral to the community's identity and overall health.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Work to protect land that will, in turn, protect our sensitive natural resources. This could include:
  - a. Engage with the Conservation Commission during the review of development proposals or the planning of public improvements where natural resources may be impacted.
  - b. Use conservation easements, outright purchase of land, the purchase of development rights, or other mechanisms to extinguish development rights on land that serves as buffers to surface waters, wetlands, or vernal pools, or as recharge areas to important aquifers.
  - c. Encourage the use of cluster subdivisions, especially where the established open space will protect existing resources.
  - d. Identifying and mapping vernal pools to the extent possible.
2. Actively participate on the regional advisory groups such as the Squamscott/Exeter River Local Advisory Committee and support the efforts of non-profit and/or community organizations who monitor water quality in and around Stratham.

3. Continue to regulate and encourage activities and development that is protective of natural resources.
  - a. Ensure existing conditions plans in development applications identify the location and extent of sensitive water resources and wildlife habitat.
  - b. Consider making cluster subdivisions more accessible by reducing the minimum amount of land for eligibility.
  - c. Consider making the design of cluster subdivisions more flexible with greater requirements for open space, more flexible property buffer requirements, and smaller lots.
  - d. Update the Groundwater Protection District provisions to ensure the land use limitations are up to date and site development performance standards are current with best practices.
  - e. Require or provide incentives for low impact design in sensitive areas like the Wetlands Conservation District and the Shoreline Protection District.
  - f. Update requirements for erosion and sediment control (during construction) and stormwater management (post-construction) to incorporate the most current best practices.
  - g. Encourage the use of alternative energy applications in both new development and redevelopment projects.
  - h. Review local requirements for on-site septic systems and ensure there are no unnecessary barriers to the installation of innovative systems approved by NHDES.
4. Develop and implement a detailed five-year public education work plan related to the natural resource issues identified in this Master Plan.
5. Expand knowledge of staff and residents about management of invasive species through ongoing training and education.
6. Develop permitting guides that explain the basic provisions of federal, State, and local laws that apply to typical proposals in Stratham.

## **Public Services and Facilities**

Regardless of the growth management strategies Stratham will choose to pursue in the coming decades, the community will continue to grow. As the community does continue to grow, a subsequent increase in the demand for services will follow. Discussions throughout the Master Plan development process suggest there are pressures to expand several areas of service based on current trends. Some of the issues discussed during the engagement process include:

### **Senior Services**

The increase in aging population in Stratham shows where there may be gaps in services for those seniors who want to continue living in town. Getting around is always one of the greatest challenges to aging seniors as personal mobility may become compromised and comfort levels with driving may decrease. Discussions with seniors in Stratham showed that meeting places for seniors in the

community are scarce and, where there is space, availability is limited. Seniors generally need to travel to neighboring communities to take part in daily programs and receive technical assistance on issues like health care and financial planning. Additionally, services available to shuttle seniors from their homes to other communities or important appointments are very limited.

### **Public Safety**

Public safety services in Stratham benefit from facilities that are in good condition (e.g., the Police Station and Fire Station). However, discussions about the volunteer Fire Department suggest there is some strain on its ability to provide all the services demanded at this time. Further, with the anticipated increase in overall population along with the increase in the elderly population (see Baseline Report), demand for emergency services will likely increase and Stratham will need to plan accordingly.

### **Recreational Services**

As Stratham continues to transition from a sparsely developed rural town to more of a 'bedroom community,' demand for recreational services will increase along with user conflicts. The current workload for the Town's Parks and Recreation Department is considerable, due primarily to the number of facilities, trails, programs, and special events they supervise or participate in. It should be noted that the Parks and Recreation Department also plays a role in providing Senior Services in the form of programs and special field trips organized on a regular basis. Of course, the Parks and Recreation Department works 'hand-in-hand' with the Conservation Commission, Planning Department, and many community groups to help provide these essential services. However, the scope of the Parks and Recreation Department's responsibilities suggests that increases in facility demand will need to be monitored closely and regularly juxtaposed with staff capacity.

#### **POLICY CONNECTION**

*Recreation services are an integral part of the management of Stratham's open spaces. Planning, programming and maintenance of open space areas is an important component of the larger suite of recreation services provided by the Town.*

During the Master Plan process, the Parks and Recreation Department performed a brief survey to gauge what residents felt were the strengths, weaknesses and needs in the community relative to recreation. The survey generally showed a high level of satisfaction with the management of the department as well as with the condition of facilities. In terms of the relative importance of different facilities, picnic areas, ballfields, playgrounds and trails were most popular. Also, the survey showed that residents were largely comfortable with the concept of fee increases related to programs, and a majority were in favor of tax increases for the purposes of bolstering recreation offerings. The survey provides a general snapshot of residents thoughts about several important issues and can serve as a platform for a more detailed survey related to a formal Recreation Needs Assessment.

In addition to more detailed assessment, the Town should consider a more sophisticated system for gathering, organizing, and displaying data. For example, some basic GIS information does exist



for the existing recreation properties and trails. This information can be bolstered through the use of data gathering software in the field along with recording of usage for different parks and trails. In terms of displaying the data, the full network of properties and trails could be available to residents and visitors through an online platform. This would help to display existing connections between facilities and help identify gaps that need to be filled.

### ***Wiggin Memorial Library***

The Wiggin Memorial Library is one of the community's most beloved and utilized facilities. Like many other libraries across the country, Wiggin continually strives to increase its reach in the community and serve needs that go well beyond the responsibilities associated with libraries just one or two generations past. Community programming for education, senior activities, youth programming, and political discussion are a big part of what Wiggin Memorial Library offers to the community. Their 2014-2020 Strategic Plan makes a commitment to continuing their wide range of programming and reminds the reader that basic supports are needed to keep these programs going. For example, having access to high quality tech devices and infrastructure is becoming more and more important as electronic devices become more integral to the learning and information sharing experience.



*The Municipal Building, Wiggin Memorial Library, and Steven's Park are a few examples of the many public facilities maintained by the Town.*

### ***Community Resilience***

In recent years, with increased awareness of climate change, municipalities are closely examining their capacity to maintain services and operate facilities during and shortly after natural hazards. Flooding, power outages, ice storms, high winds, and heat waves are examples of events that are expected to increase both in frequency and intensity as climate change continues to unfold. The goal of community resilience is to be able to respond to, and recover from, these events in the safest and most efficient manner possible. Most emergency response professionals are now receiving advanced training that will help communities effectively handle these situations. Planners are also getting involved with these issues by assessing the vulnerability of different facilities (i.e., Are important buildings or evacuation routes susceptible to flooding?) and helping to prioritize capital improvements that will help mitigate the effects of natural hazards. As discussed earlier, the C-RiSe report developed by the Rockingham Planning Commission provides a good foundation for this work in Stratham. Local departments should review this document when considering future investment in the Capital Improvements Program process.

## Stormwater Management

The issue of stormwater management is always a high priority at the municipal level, primarily because of the extent of infrastructure that needs to be maintained. Proper management of stormwater and maintenance of the associated infrastructure reduces flooding and helps to protect the health of our water resources. More recently, the prominence of stormwater management has increased because of new requirements associated with the State-level Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) program. This program requires Stratham (and over 50 other New Hampshire municipalities) to develop a Stormwater Management Plan that addresses six minimum control measures (see inset).

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### MS4 Program – Six Minimum Performance Measures:

1. Public Education and Outreach - Municipalities are required to provide educational material about stormwater to four audiences (residents, industry, commercial, and construction).
  2. Public participation - Municipalities are required to at least annually provide an opportunity for the public to participate in the development/implementation of their Stormwater Management Program (SWMP).
  3. Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination - Municipalities are required to find and eliminate sources of non-stormwater from their storm sewer system.
  4. Management of Construction Site Runoff - Municipalities are required to have an ordinance for management of stormwater discharges from construction sites that disturb one or more acres of land.
  5. Management of Post Construction Site Runoff - Municipalities are required to address stormwater runoff from new development and redevelopment that disturb one or more acres of land.
  6. Good Housekeeping in Municipal Operations - Municipalities are required to implement good housekeeping practices in municipal operations such as vehicle maintenance, open space, buildings, and infrastructure.
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*Left: This low impact development bioswale was installed in 2015 as part of the Exeter Subaru expansion that included construction of one part of the small connector roadway between River Road and Market Basket envisioned in the Gateway District. Right: This bioretention system, located at the Stratham Municipal Center, was installed in 2013 as part of a parking lot expansion. This system provides treatment for stormwater runoff carrying pollutants from the parking lots and turf fields and provides clean surface water and groundwater recharge.*

### ***Considering the Cost of Services***

The specific services and facilities issues described above are those that received the most attention during the Master Plan process. These issues, however, represent pieces of a larger scope of services provided by the Town over the course of a given year. Each year, all departments provide information regarding anticipated needs for the coming fiscal budget. Some needs for the community are also tallied in the annual Capital Improvements Plan, which summarizes anticipated capital costs related to roads, facilities, and similar “bricks and mortar” projects.

While many residents who participated in the Master Plan process felt strongly about the need to expand services and facilities, many also expressed concern about expenses and the potential for tax rates to climb in direct response to those added expenses. Most commonly, participants in the process understood that some form of growth will occur regardless of the policy choices made by

#### **Our Commitment to Public Services and Facilities:**

Stratham is committed to providing services important to its residents and maintaining the quality of its facilities mindful of budgetary limitations.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Develop a 10-year staffing plan for the Volunteer Fire Department that phases in paid employees to match anticipated demands.
2. Ensure active participation from municipal departments—including the Town Administrator, Town Planner, and Parks and Recreation—in the next update of the Wiggin Memorial Library Strategic Plan.
3. Provide funding and staff resources necessary to address the revised requirement of the MS4 stormwater management program.
4. Actively pursue the success of the Gateway District and the Town Center as significant mid to long-term positive contributors to the municipal tax base in order to fund future expansions of public services.
5. Develop a Recreation Needs Assessment to assess future programming, facilities, and staffing needs and to prioritize investments identified for programming, services, and facilities (upgrades and new) (ie. senior center and community center).
6. Using 2019 survey results as a platform, continue to engage the community to understand needs related to youth, adult, and senior programming.
7. Continue to improve upon the ways the Town shares information with seniors about programming and special events.
8. Evaluate and invest in digital mapping tools and data collection for recreation facilities including the trail systems to facilitate analysis, management (communicating use limitations and scheduling) and policy making as well as capital planning.
9. Continue parks and recreation programming, sponsorship of community events, and inter-departmental coordination that promote community building.



the community, and with that growth will come increased services. The policy choices that are most important in this discussion, therefore, examine whether the coming growth will represent a drain on the municipal budget, or will have a “net positive” effect on the budget over time.

## Open Spaces & Parklands

The role played by open spaces and parklands in defining Stratham’s community character cannot be understated (see *Our Hometown*). Many of the open spaces in the community not only receive high levels of use from Stratham residents, but also draw large numbers from neighboring communities. People visiting parks have diverse interests, abilities, and needs and there will be ever mounting pressure to manage this diversity of needs through programming, facility development, and general management. Trends in regional recreational facilities (and this is reportedly true in Stratham) show the diversity of desired uses can lead to conflicts between users or damage to facilities that are not being used as intended.



*Steven's Park is one of Stratham's most important active recreation facilities with tennis courts, athletic fields, and a playground for public use.*

Communities that face these management challenges are often well served by individual management plans for large and/or highly trafficked open space and recreational facilities. In Stratham, for example, there is a Forest Management Plan for Stratham Hill Park and the Town Forest that provides a framework for defining acceptable recreational uses, preserving scenic vistas, managing invasive species, and protecting forest, pond, and field resources. The diversity

of properties like Stevens Park, Smyk Park, and the Zarnowski property on Boat Club Road demonstrates the variety of uses and priorities that will be applied based on the attributes of a specific park. While the scope of these individual management plans can differ, some of the more important features typically include:

- Defining the activities that will or will not be allowed. This can be for the park as a whole or can be more specific to sub-areas.
- Identifying strategies for conveying important information both on and off-site. Large parks, for example, often benefit from a system of signage that informs users of what is and what is not allowed.
- Identifying threats or problems associated with natural communities or built infrastructure. For example, invasive species management can be critical to saving the natural resources or a constructed stream crossing may be showing signs of deterioration and resources will be required to fix it.
- Estimating costs associated with addressing the problems identified. This can be particularly useful during the Town's Capital Improvement Plan development.

Importantly, individual management plans for recreational parks or forest lands do not need to be lengthy documents that are difficult to write and amend. A concise presentation of issues that need to be addressed, recommended solutions, and estimated costs is often enough to provide a powerful reference for local boards. The plan should also be accessible enough so that average residents can navigate the document and understand what is being proposed. What may be slightly more complex is the process for identifying the challenges that need to be addressed and associated solutions. The Town will need to ensure that there is opportunity for groups like the Stratham Hill Park Association to provide input into the plan development.

#### **Our Commitment to Open Spaces & Parklands:**

Stratham is committed to maintaining and expanding our irreplaceable network of open spaces and continually improving the experience of residents and visitors who come to enjoy them. We recognize that management of these open spaces can be complex and will often require intensive planning and community engagement.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Consider the development of a Stratham Hill Park Master Plan in order to plan future investments in this invaluable public asset and gift to the people of Stratham. A site-specific plan benefiting from the input from the public, user and advocacy groups, and various boards and commissions of the Town will serve to guide near and short-term investments in the various park facilities and amenities.
2. Explore the need for a comprehensive management plan required for individual open space/forest areas and develop those plans through a public engagement process. Set aside resources to develop and maintain those plans.

3. Continue to update and publicize guidelines and prioritize criteria for acquiring new open spaces, easements or other interests in land to be used in evaluating opportunities as they come before the Town.
4. Develop a network of trails and connections between open space lands to facilitate access by walking or biking.
5. Ensure Recreation, Public Works, Fire, Police, and other Town departments participate in providing input on subdivision and site plans during conceptual and later phases in order to promote features and improvements reflective of the Master Plan goals and connections with open space assets.
6. Inventory, map, and publicize open space lands, recreation facilities, and parklands and methods of connecting between (including those not publicly owned where access rights exist).
7. Coordinate any campaigns or mechanisms for public awareness about activities and restrictions across other municipal departments.

### **Stratham's Industrial Park**

Stratham's industrial park lies in the southern corner of town and contains over 10 major corporate operations. This park is a major piece of Stratham's economic and fiscal base providing over 1,000 jobs for the region and generating significant property tax revenue for the Town. Stratham has always valued the industrial park as a major economic asset, and has supported growth within the district in whatever way the Town thought was appropriate. This policy remains strong in the community and the goal for the industrial park includes long-term full occupancy.

The most important tool for the Town related to the long-term health of the industrial park is building relationships with the resident companies. Municipal staff, particularly the Town Administrator and Town Planner, should cultivate these relationships by establishing some form of regular communication with company leadership. The form of that connection will vary from one company to another. What is important is that each company has a regular reminder that the Town is thinking of them and is invested in their success. Some recent trends in office/industrial park revitalization suggest ancillary uses are becoming more common in these areas and at increasingly larger scales. Outdoor recreational amenities, indoor workout facilities, limited food service, coffee shops, and similar uses that would be convenient for employees are becoming more popular. These trends are examples of issues Stratham should discuss with company ownership to see if there is any demand for items not currently allowed in local regulations.

As a final consideration for the Industrial Park, the current location is somewhat isolated and access/egress is generally limited to one point of entry by automobile on Route 111. Looking to the future, the Town should encourage tenants and work with the Town of Exeter to improve accessibility to the site by more than one means. As the Gateway District implementation continues, the Town can also be mindful of opportunities to leverage higher levels of activity with transit opportunities related to both the Gateway District and the Industrial Park.



### **Our Commitment to the Industrial Park:**

Stratham is committed to the sustained success of our Industrial Park and we recognize the park as one of our strongest economic assets.

To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Continue to maintain regular lines of communication with current tenants' company leadership.
2. Revise zoning language as appropriate to accommodate trends in industrial park development and to ensure the full range of desirable uses is allowed.
3. Revise zoning language as appropriate to allow for accessory uses that may make the park more self-sufficient and reduce vehicle trips (e.g., indoor fitness, outdoor recreation, café, flex space, etc.)
4. Encourage tenants and ownership to consider accessibility and circulation improvements for the site. Advocate for transit opportunities in the Industrial Park, particularly as the Gateway begins to develop.

## **Housing for the Future**

Perhaps more than any other issue addressed in this Master Plan, the impact of housing policy directly cuts across almost every other issue of concern. The ubiquitous nature of housing issues highlights the urgency behind Stratham's need to develop a comprehensive housing strategy focused on meeting the diverse needs and preferences of residents today and into the future.

### **Housing Policy Shapes Success in Other Issues**

#### ***The Gateway District***

If the Gateway District receives the investment it requires for infrastructure, development proposals will need to include housing to ensure profitability. Housing development in the Gateway District could provide opportunities for smaller units (ownership and rentals) that allow young professionals, seniors looking to downsize, and first-time buyers the opportunity to live in Stratham.

*Housing will be essential to the financial success of the Gateway District and long-term housing choice in the community.*

#### ***An Aging Population***

Housing for seniors is an enormously important and multi-layered issue. Many seniors would like to move to smaller homes in a more densely populated area like the Gateway District is envisioned to become. Others would prefer downsizing to a quieter model like cottage community style, multi-plex, or bungalow housing. Further, in new construction, there is rising demand for homes built with "universal design" standards that make it far easier for people with mobility challenges or other disabilities to live independently.

*Housing development is the foundation for meeting the needs of an aging population.*

### ***Agricultural Viability***

One of the more challenging aspects of agricultural sustainability is recruiting and retaining skilled employees. Sometimes, these employees even become future business partners and owners. The high cost of housing in the region makes it cost prohibitive for aspiring farmers to settle here and work at our local farms. Being able to provide accessory housing for farm employees and other family members on-site is essential for developing the next generation of farmers and preserving long-term agricultural land viability in Stratham.

*Flexible housing strategies can help protect farms long-term.*

### ***Town Center***

Similar to the Gateway District, but on a smaller scale, the Town Center is envisioned to become a walkable center that provides a complementary mix of uses. Increased residential use in a wider variety of housing styles will be an integral component to the future success of the Town Center.

*Housing development in the Town Center will be necessary to achieve the vision for this area.*

### ***Bicycle and Walking Infrastructure***

One of the greatest needs in the community moving forward will be providing alternative means of mobility for people in all stages of life. The development of new housing, whether high or low density, will need to incorporate amenities and connections to a larger mobility network.

*Housing location and design can help sustain bicycle and pedestrian networks.*

### ***Historic Resource Preservation***

Living along some of the busier roadways in Town has become less desirable due to the traffic volumes and, perhaps, the difficulties associated with maintaining an old historic home. Keeping the homes viable along these major roads is critical to maintaining our stock of historic buildings and setting a “design context” for new development. Ensuring the success of areas such as the Gateway District as an opportunity for housing development will help to mitigate pressure on historic properties and landscapes in Town.

*Maintaining historic homes is critical to the identity of our community.*

### ***Open Spaces***

While the plan focuses primarily on Stratham’s larger open space areas, residential subdivisions can augment a community’s open space resources through innovative site design techniques like cluster subdivisions and cottage community zoning.

*Housing location and design can create small but valuable pockets of open space.*

### ***The Industrial Park***

From discussions with business owners in the industrial park and in other commercial/industrial areas in Stratham, it was clear that the biggest barrier to sustaining their businesses was finding

qualified workers. These business owners further explained that the inability to find qualified workers is directly tied to the cost of housing in Stratham and across the region. The lack of diverse housing options exacerbates the affordability issue, whereas housing in mixed-use settings, apartments and condos with smaller square footage, and units located along corridors generally tend to be more affordable.

*Housing affordability is a major economic development issue.*

### **Stratham's Housing Approach**

Stratham's current regulatory framework does potentially allow for some housing diversity. Provisions for duplex, in-law apartments, workforce housing, multi-family housing (own or rent), senior housing, and open space cluster subdivisions are all part of the toolbox Stratham currently uses. However, even with these provisions, the dominant product in Stratham remains the market-rate single-family home. Between 2010 and 2016, the State reported that Stratham had permitted the construction of 91 single-family homes compared with only 10 multi-family units (see Baseline Report).

To create a more balanced housing stock, Stratham will need to revisit and potentially revise some of the existing provisions in the Zoning Ordinance. The goal of this exercise should be to increase opportunities for a variety of housing types in a way that will not compromise the rural character so important to residents today. Fortunately, housing design in the past couple of decades has focused intently on this issue of "choice" and architects have done amazing work resurrecting traditional forms of housing that provide options consistent with Stratham's vision.

### **A Summary of Housing Tools**

#### ***Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)***

The State of New Hampshire requires municipalities to allow ADUs that are either contained within or attached to the primary residence. The State enables municipalities to allow for detached ADUs (e.g., above a garage or as an "out building"), but does not require the allowance. Stratham currently allows ADUs inside of a primary residence or above a garage with restrictions. The Town should consider whether a Conditional Use Permits may be appropriate for certain situations (such as historic homesteads or farms), or where any of the prescriptive performance standards could be relaxed under specific conditions (e.g., large lot size, active farms etc.)

#### ***Inclusionary Zoning***

This term is used to describe a very specific regulatory tool that requires a fraction of proposed housing units must be deed restricted as "affordable" to a particular income level. For example, a community could require subdivisions for single family homes over 10 lots to provide 10% of the homes as deed restricted "workforce housing." Similarly, a community could require a percentage of multi-family units to be deed restricted in the same way. The goal is to develop subsidized housing at a controlled pace and in a manner that integrates subsidized units with market rate units.



Stratham provides opportunities for developers to receive density bonuses where a fixed percentage of housing is affordable in accordance with state law. A review of best practices related to inclusionary zoning suggests it is most effective where:

- The inclusion of subsidized housing is required for developments of a certain size. Optional programs rarely work.
- The income limits targeted for the subsidized units have some flexibility. Subsidy programs can change over time and zoning language should account for that variability.
- Developers receive a density bonus (additional market-rate units) to compensate for the lost profit on the subsidized units.

### ***Missing Middle Housing***

The term “missing middle housing” was coined as planners realized that many communities were missing significant opportunities to enable a more diverse housing stock. Countless communities allow for single-family (and maybe two-family) homes along with larger multi-family structures (e.g., apartment buildings). The detached homes represent one extreme on the scale of housing types, and the apartment buildings represent the other extreme. What is missing too often is what is “in the middle” of these extremes. This realization has prompted designers and regulators to work together in a way that creates a more sophisticated menu of options in communities like Stratham.



*The photos here show a range of housing options that are architecturally consistent with traditional New England homes. From cottages to small-scale multi-family models, Stratham can explore a range of options for the Gateway District, former New Hampshire Vo-Tech site, and other areas of town. Images courtesy of Opticos Design.*





- Senior multi-family housing.
- Congregate care facilities.
- Retirement home or other supported or independent living arrangement for active adults.

Standard multi-family housing (not age restricted) is allowed with the following stipulations:

- Approval of a Conditional Use Permit.
- Housing units are limited to two-bedrooms.
- Multi-family will be “subordinate or complimentary” to uses allowed by right.

Given the clearly articulated goals related to housing in this Master Plan, the Town should review the zoning on this site from this perspective. It is possible that amendments could be identified that make multi-family homes more easily permitted, level the playing field between age-restricted and non-restricted housing, and diversify the units to include some that are more conducive to housing young families.

#### **Our Commitment to Housing for the Future:**

Stratham is committed to fostering a diversity of housing choices that will meet the needs of residents with a wide range of preferences, abilities, and financial means. To achieve success, Stratham will:

1. Develop updated educational materials for local boards and residents about the different tools and housing types discussed in the Master Plan.
2. Identify areas in the community where expanding the types of housing potentially allowed is appropriate.
3. Revise zoning language as appropriate to promote new housing types and tools. Revisions to consider will include:
  - a. More flexible standards for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) on actively farmed property.
  - b. Adding incentives for single family-subdivisions to include deed-restricted affordable/workforce housing (i.e., inclusionary zoning).
  - c. Adding a new section for cottage community zoning.
  - d. Expanding the list of potential housing types allowed in residential districts to include more “missing middle” housing options.
  - e. More flexible and innovative site design techniques for Residential Open Space Cluster Development.
  - f. Broader by-right housing allowances for the Flexible/Mixed Use Development District (Vo-Tech site).
  - g. Clarifying the distinction between how market rate multi-family and deed restricted affordable multi-family are developed.



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Stuart Farm. Photo credit: Nathan Merrill

# Implementation

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## **“Institutionalizing” the Master Plan**

The most common criticism of Master Plans is that they require considerable resources to develop, then they end up “sitting on a shelf.” Moving forward, Stratham will consider the following measures to ensure the continued utility of the plan:

1. The Planning Board and Town Planner will provide regular (e.g., quarterly) updates on Master Plan Implementation in a regularly scheduled Planning Board meeting.
2. The plan will be posted on the Town’s website and copies will be available in the library.
3. A separate implementation matrix will be printed for each department identified as a lead or supporting party for any of the strategies.
4. A concise implementation update report will be developed by the Town Planner twice each year. This will be posted to the Town’s website and distributed to every department, board, and commission.
5. Any recommendations for the Capital Improvement Plan by individual departments will be accompanied by a statement of consistency with the Master Plan.
6. Decisions regarding Conditional Use Permits, Use Exceptions, and Variances will include a statement regarding the consistency of the proposal with the Master Plan.

## **Cross-Cutting and Complementary Strategies**

Strategies that cut across numerous issues, if implemented, can achieve multiple objectives at once. For example, implementation of the Gateway helps to address issues related to the local economy, housing needs, fiscal health, etc.

Similarly, individual strategies related to separate issues may be related, and it may be more efficient to package these strategies for implementation. Examples in this Master Plan include:

### **Local Regulatory Reform**

The strategies provided under several key issues include recommendations for regulatory reform. Recommended items include (but are not limited to):

- Revisiting allowances for different housing types to encourage construction of “missing middle” housing where appropriate.
- Potential revisions to performance standards and accessory use allowances on active farms.
- Revisions to the subdivision regulations to expand guidance on complete street design options.
- Potential revisions to the Open Space Cluster Development ordinance to provide more flexibility and stronger incentives for affordable housing.

The scope of the reforms listed above varies in complexity and in the degree to which they may “ripple” through other regulatory documents. Further, drafting some of these changes may require considerable public engagement, while other amendments will be of little consequence to the general public. It will be critical for the Town to consider how to best package these efforts to manage public discourse and anticipate the complexity of weaving some of these changes into the existing regulations.

### **Roadway Infrastructure Improvements**

Numerous potential roadway infrastructure improvements are called for in the Master Plan. These include:

- Retrofits to incorporate complete streets design elements.
- The replacement of under-sized culverts to account for more severe storms.
- The phased installation of sewer lines through the Gateway District and farther north through Town Center.
- Streetscape improvements in the Town Center and Gateway Districts.
- Targeted improvements along state roads as identified in their annual improvements planning.

The Town will need to coordinate these improvements to the degree possible and look for opportunities to combine construction activities to achieve multiple objectives.

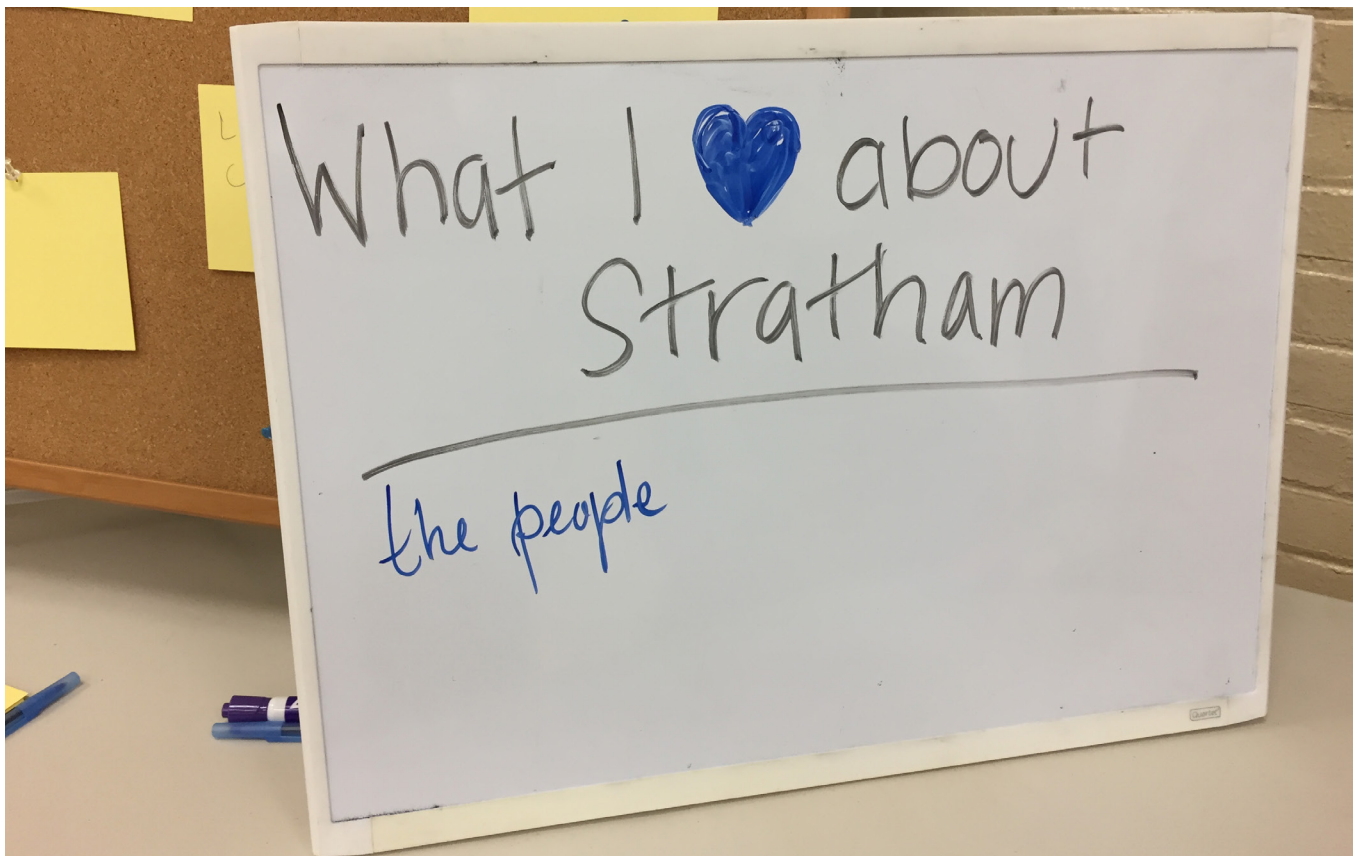


## Transparency and Communication

Throughout the public engagement process, a recurring theme that underpinned several different issues was effective communication between local government and residents/business owners. Stratham effectively uses a number of different media to let residents know when important events or meetings are scheduled and when important actions will be deliberated and decided. As the community grows, the amount of information local government will need to distribute will grow, and the diversity of the residential population will require an equally diverse set of communication tools. This plan calls for the Town to continually improve communications for:

- Environmental issues (education).
- The progress of implementation in the Gateway.
- Future needs of the Industrial Park.
- Needs related to recreational programming and facilities.
- The location and descriptions of different trails.
- Permitting requirements.
- Planning and programming of Town-owned open spaces and parks.
- Inter-departmental coordination.

Moving forward, the Town will need to think strategically about the different platforms used to communicate to ensure it captures as many opportunities and reaches as many different audiences as possible.





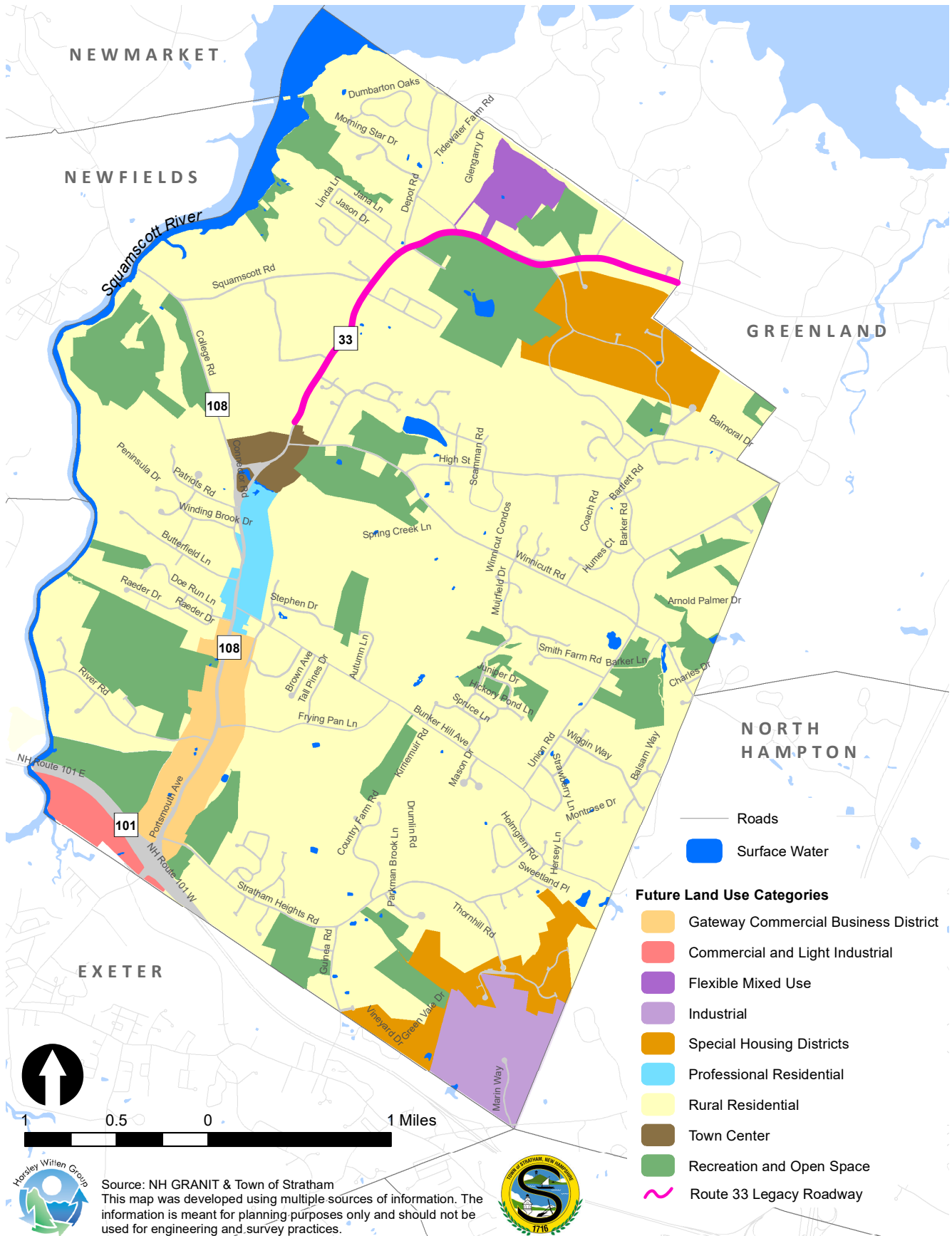


## The Future Land Use Map

Pursuant to state law, a community Master Plan requires a Future Land Use Map (FLUM) that visualizes the preferred uses of land across the entire Town. One of the primary functions of this map, from an implementation perspective, is to show where new policy development may require changes in the Zoning Ordinance or other regulations. Importantly, Stratham made major zoning changes in advance of this Master Plan that are still generally consistent with this more recent FLUM. Accordingly, no alterations to land use categories are necessary in order to reflect the goals of the community. That notwithstanding, several of the areas identified on the FLUM are referenced in the Master Plan and review/changes to zoning in these areas are called for. These proposed reforms are not reflective of major policy changes either in the location of the zones or the uses they are meant to foster. Rather, the Master Plan generally calls for zoning reforms that strengthen the work already in place and brings the Town closer to successful implementation.

# Future Land Use Map

Refer to Future Land Use Category descriptions.



Source: NH GRANIT & Town of Stratham  
This map was developed using multiple sources of information. The information is meant for planning purposes only and should not be used for engineering and survey practices.



## **Future Land Use Categories**

### **Gateway Commercial Business District**

Uses in areas categorized as the Gateway Commercial Business District follow the vision of the Gateway Community Business District Master Plan and create a vibrant, walkable neighborhood that is a mix of public spaces, homes, shopping, services, and offices.

### **Commercial and Light Industrial**

Uses in Commercial and Light Industrial areas are businesses that do not create a level of noise, dust, odor, or other nuisance or hazard that would impact the natural environment or adjacent homes. These businesses could include allowable manufacturing or assembly of products, offices, retail, or restaurants.

### **Flexible Mixed Use**

Flexible Mixed Use is the former New Hampshire Community College. The Town envisions the redevelopment of this area as a mix of residential, commercial, and public spaces that is walkable.

### **Industrial**

Areas categorized as Industrial are for uses focused on the manufacture, production, and assembly of goods. Performance standards are in place that minimize the impacts to the natural environment and surrounding community.

### **Special Housing Districts**

Special Housing Districts encompass areas for more specialized housing types that include manufactured homes and age-restricted developments.

### **Professional Residential**

Professional Residential areas are office uses compatible with nearby homes.

### **Rural Residential**

Lands categorized as Rural Residential are areas that the Town sees as maintaining the rural qualities of Stratham. Uses are a mix of single-family homes, agricultural activities, and conservation land.

### **Town Center**

Areas categorized as Town Center support the vision expressed in the PlanNH design charrette as a walkable, cohesive center with a mix of homes, shopping, public spaces, and services.

### **Recreation and Open Space**

Areas categorized as Recreation and Open Space are lands the town has identified for recreation facilities or dedicated open space for protecting resources for public access, farmland, water quality, or wildlife habitat, among other criteria.

### **Route 33 Legacy Highway**

Uses along what is categorized as the Route 33 Legacy Highway maintain the rural, historic character of the corridor while optimizing the reuse of properties.

## Implementation Matrix

The following table provides the implementation matrix for this Master Plan. The table is organized by the nine major commitments the Town is making by adopting the plan. Beside each major commitment is a concise list of strategies. Each strategy also has the most prominent responsible parties and a potential timeline for implementation. Abbreviations in the table include:

Admin:	Town Administrator	P&R:	Parks and Recreation
Cons:	Conservation Commission	P&Z:	Planning & Zoning Department
DPW:	Department of Public Works	Rec:	Recreation Commission
Heritage:	Heritage Commission	108:	108 Study Commission
Library:	Wiggin Memorial Library	SB	Select Board
PB:	Planning Board	Seniors:	Stratham Seniors (“76ers”)
PCAC:	Pedestrian & Cyclist Advocacy Committee	SHPA:	Stratham Hill Park Association
Police:	Police Department	TBD:	To be determined
		VFD:	Volunteer Fire Department

### The Gateway District

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	Continue to pursue the vision of the Gateway Corridor Master Plan and the full range of development and redevelopment envisioned.	P&Z, 108, Admin, SB, PB	Ongoing
2	Continue to engage property owners and developers along the corridor who have not yet been able to take advantage of the Gateway vision due to infrastructure limitations.	P&Z, PB	Ongoing
3	Develop and approve a financing plan and tools that provide the necessary funding for the design and installation of water and sewer infrastructure in accordance with recommended project phasing.	P&Z, 108, Admin, SB	1-2 years
4	Further develop the existing inter-municipal agreement for water and additionally pursue sewer connection discussions.	P&Z, 108, Admin SB	1-2 years
5	Install water and sewer infrastructure in accordance with the terms and conditions of the financial and legal documents (such as a TIF District and Financing Plan).	TBD	2-10 years
6	Keep public informed as progress toward the Gateway vision unfolds, including design of public improvements, new development projects, and other progress related to the Gateway.	P&Z	Ongoing
7	Revisit the existing zoning for the Gateway District and make amendments that will facilitate achieving the vision.	P&Z, PB	Ongoing

## Viability of Our Farms

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	Organize a public discussion around accessory uses for active farms to determine what uses are acceptable and what performance standards should apply.	P&Z, Heritage, Historic, Cons	1-2 years
2	In the discussion of accessory uses, include a component that looks specifically at barn structures rehabilitated under the barn easement program.	P&Z, Heritage, Historic, Cons	1-2 years
3	Review existing local regulations through the lens of farm operations. Identify areas where permit review processes or specific standards are not practical for farm operations and amend the regulations as appropriate.	P&Z, PB	2-3 years
4	Continue the use of conservation and barn easements in the community. Because conservation easements are permanent deed restrictions, it is important to develop easement terms that allow for diverse agricultural uses, ensuring competing interests do not impinge on the long-term goal of agricultural viability.	P&Z, Heritage, Cons	Ongoing
5	Consider re-establishing funding for purchasing conservation easements when opportunities arise.	Administrator, SB, Cons	1-2 years

## The Town Center

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	Continue to keep the district eligible for tax relief related to qualifying structures.	P&Z, SB	Ongoing
2	Coordinate with NHDOT on all proposed work within the center.	P&Z, DPW, Police, PCAC, Heritage	Ongoing
3	Amend the Town Center zoning as necessary to meet the goals of the district.	P&Z, PB, Heritage	Ongoing
4	Coordinate later phases of sewer service installation (related to the Gateway District) with roadway and streetscape improvements in the Town Center.	TBD	TBD



## Historic Resource Preservation

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	<p>Ensure the extensive and geographically disbursed historic structures, barns, homesteads, and other features contributing to Stratham's connection to the past remain intact for the future.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate existing land use ordinances (such as the Use Table and associated performance standards) to ensure they encourage effective and vibrant reuses of historic properties, decreasing the risk of losing them to deterioration or demolition (e.g. new or expanded uses along Route 33).</li> <li>Explore regulatory tools available in New Hampshire to designate historic districts in the zoning ordinance for the purpose of preserving and protecting existing current historic resources.</li> <li>Evaluate existing ordinances (such as the demolition delay ordinance) to ensure they effectively fulfillment of the purpose of the ordinance and other goals in this Master Plan.</li> </ol>	P&Z, PB, Heritage	1-2 years, then ongoing
2	<p>Make investments that actively preserve historic buildings and important spaces to the Town.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the possibility of establishing a revolving loan fund or small grants program for critical repairs to privately-owned historic structures.</li> <li>Continue municipal funding for preservation easement purchases on particularly important historical resources.</li> <li>Identify tools to incentivize the rehabilitation and preservation of historic structures along the Portsmouth Avenue corridor from Town Center to the Greenland town line. Viable tool may include, but are not limited, to the expansion of RSA 79-E.</li> </ol>	P&Z, PB, Heritage	1-2 years, then ongoing
3	<p>Expand the Town's base of knowledge and appreciation for Stratham's architectural and agricultural heritage.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete a town-wide survey of historic resources and create an interactive online map of historical resources in town.</li> <li>Pursue efforts to share information about the history and historic development of the Town through initiatives such as historic markers, interpretive signboards, and related educational materials to be installed at key locations.</li> </ol>	P&Z, Heritage	2-3 years, then ongoing
4	<p>Continue to ask the Heritage Commission to serve as resource for the Select Board, boards and commissions, Town staff in carrying out public works improvements for the Town.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designate a list and map of "heritage streets" and add specific zoning language that applies to them, particularly regarding streetscape changes like proposed sidewalks, roadway widening, bike lanes, etc. and also special protections for stone walls, open spaces, and other features.</li> <li>Provide input on Town operations and capital projects affecting Town-owned historic properties and landscapes.</li> </ol>	P&Z, Heritage	1-2 years, then ongoing

## Walking, Biking and Automobiles

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	Draft and adopt a “Complete Streets” policy committing the Town to seriously considering all possibilities for incorporating walking and biking infrastructure into local roadway improvements.	PCAC, P&Z	1-2 years
2	Apply techniques related to “Green Streets,” particularly in more densely developed areas like the Gateway District, Town Center, and future development of the Vo-Tech site.	P&R, Rec, Cons, PCAC	2-3 years
3	Building on what we have today, develop a comprehensive Trails Master Plan that maps out the potential town-wide network of trails with a focus on making connections between neighborhoods, parks, and mixed-use centers.	PB, PCAC	Ongoing
4	Seek input from bicycle, pedestrian, and trail advocates in local planning, including, but not limited to, capital improvements planning, the development of any Park/Forest Management Plan, and discussions with NHDOT.	P&Z, PCAC	1-2 years
5	Coordinate closely with NHDOT to ensure specific future roadway improvements (on state roads) are designed consistent with the goals of this section, such as through the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process.	P&Z, DPW, PCAC	1-2 years
6	Advocate for short-term improvements from NHDOT, including periodic adjustments to signalization at commuting times.	P&Z, DPW, PCAC	1-2 years
7	Develop an expanded menu of roadway design standards to be used at the local level, which include different configurations for pedestrian and bicycle elements.	PB (CIP), PCAC, SB	2-5 years
8	Require development proposals to identify where new roads, trails, or paths may be able to connect with the same features on adjacent sites.	P&Z, PCAC	Ongoing
9	Prioritize Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Infrastructure Projects as provided in the SRTS Plan (see Appendix C).	PB (CIP), PCAC, SB	2-5 years
10	Seek opportunities for establishing or expanding public transportation options in Town, such as COAST and TASC. Continue to plan for future options that expand services and serve the community, particularly vulnerable populations (e.g. seniors and people with disabilities).	P&Z, Seniors	Ongoing
11	Continue to work toward a more comprehensive local transit service as the Gateway, Industrial Park, Town Center, and Vo-Tech areas continue to mature and develop.	P&Z, Admin	Ongoing

## Sustaining Our Natural Resources

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	<p>Work to protect land that will, in turn, protect our sensitive natural resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Engage with the Conservation Commission during the review of development proposals or the planning of public improvements where natural resources may be impacted.</li> <li>b. Use conservation easements, outright purchase of land, the purchase of development rights, or other mechanisms to extinguish development rights on land that serves as buffers to surface waters, wetlands, or vernal pools, or as recharge areas to important aquifers.</li> <li>c. Encourage the use of cluster subdivisions, especially where the establishment of open space will protect existing resources.</li> <li>d. Identify and map vernal pools to the extent possible.</li> </ul>	P&Z, PB, Cons, SB, Admin	Ongoing
2	Participate on the Squamscott/Exeter River Local Advisory Committee with a representative from the Conservation Commission.	Cons	1-2, ongoing
3	<p>Continue to regulate and encourage activities and development that is protective of natural resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ensure existing conditions plans identify the location and extent of sensitive water resources and wildlife habitat.</li> <li>b. Consider making cluster subdivisions more accessible by reducing the minimum amount of land for eligibility.</li> <li>c. Consider making the design of cluster subdivisions more flexible with greater requirements for open space, more flexible property buffer requirements, and smaller lots.</li> <li>d. Update the Groundwater Protection District provisions to ensure the land use limitations are up to date and site development performance standards are current with best practices.</li> <li>e. Require or provide incentives for low impact design in sensitive areas like the Wetland Conservation District and the Shoreline Protection District.</li> <li>f. Update requirements for erosion and sediment control (during construction) and stormwater management (post-construction) to incorporate current best practices.</li> <li>g. Encourage the use of alternative energy applications in both new development and redevelopment projects.</li> <li>h. Review local requirements for on-site septic system to ensure there are no unnecessary barriers for installation of innovative systems approved by NHDES.</li> </ul>	P&Z, PB	2-5 years



## Sustaining Our Natural Resources, cont.

4	Develop and implement a detailed five-year public education work plan related to the natural resource issues identified in this Master Plan.	Cons	1-2 years
5	Expand knowledge of staff and residents about management of invasive species through ongoing training and education.	Cons	Ongoing
6	Develop permitting guides that explain the basic provisions of federal, State, and local laws that apply to typical proposals in Stratham.	P&Z, PB	1-2 years

## Public Services and Facilities

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	Develop a 10-year staffing plan for the Volunteer Fire Department that phases in paid employees to match anticipated demands.	VFD, SB, Admin	1-2 years
2	Ensure active participation from municipal departments—including the Town Administrator, Town Planner, and Parks and Recreation—in the next update of the Wiggin Memorial Library Strategic Plan.	Library, Admin, P&Z, P&R, Rec	TBD
3	Provide funding and staff resources necessary to address the revised requirement of the MS4 stormwater management program.	Admin, DPW	1-2 years, then ongoing
4	Actively pursue the success of the Gateway District and the Town Center as significant mid to long-term positive contributors to the municipal tax base in order to fund future expansions of public services.	P&Z, PB, Admin, SB	Ongoing
5	Develop a Recreation Needs Assessment to assess future programming, facilities, and staffing needs and to prioritize investments identified for programming, services, and facilities (upgrades and new) (ie. senior center and community center).	Admin, P&R, Rec	2-3 years
6	Using 2019 survey results as a platform, continue to engage the community to understand needs related to youth, adult, and senior programming.	Admin, P&R, Rec	2-3 years, ongoing
7	Continue to improve upon the ways the Town shares information with seniors about programming and special events.	Admin, P&R, Rec, Cons, Library, Seniors	Ongoing
8	Evaluate and invest in digital mapping tools and data collection for recreation facilities including the trail systems to facilitate analysis, management (communicating use limitations and scheduling) and policy making as well as capital planning.	P&Z, P&R, Rec	2-3 years
9	Continue to build community in Stratham through parks and recreation programming as well as sponsoring community events that promote community building.	Admin, P&R, Rec, Cons, P&Z, Seniors	Ongoing

## Open Spaces & Parklands

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	Consider the development of a Stratham Hill Park Master Plan in order to plan future investments in this invaluable public asset and gift to the people of Stratham. A site-specific plan benefiting from the input from the public, user and advocacy groups, and various boards and commissions of the Town will serve to guide near and short-term investments in the various park facilities and amenities.	P&Z, SHPA, P&R, Rec, Heritage, Cons, SB, Admin	1-5 years
2	Explore the need for a comprehensive management plan required for individual open space/forest areas and develop those plans through a public engagement process. Set aside resources to develop and maintain those plans.	P&R, Rec, Heritage, Cons, SB, Admin	Ongoing
3	Continue to update and publicize guidelines and prioritize criteria for acquiring new open spaces, easements, or other interests in land to be used in evaluating opportunities as they come before the Town.	P&Z, P&R, Rec, Heritage, Cons, SB, Admin	1-2 years
4	Develop a network of trails and connections between open space lands to facilitate access by walking or biking.	P&Z, P&R, Rec, Heritage, Cons	Ongoing
5	Ensure Recreation, Public Works, Fire, Police, and other Town departments participate in providing input on subdivision and site plans during conceptual and later phases in order to promote features and improvements reflective of the Master Plan goals and connections with open space assets.	P&R, Rec, PW, VFD, Police, PB, P&Z	Ongoing
6	Inventory, map, and publicize open space lands, recreation facilities, and parklands and methods of connecting between (including those not publicly owned where access rights exist).	P&Z, PCAC, P&R, Cons	2-3 years, then ongoing
7	Coordinate any campaigns or mechanisms for public awareness about activities and restrictions across other municipal departments.	P&Z, P&R, PB, Heritage, Cons, SB, Admin	Ongoing

## The Industrial Park

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	Continue to maintain regular lines of communication with current tenants' company leadership.	P&Z, Admin	Ongoing
2	Revise zoning language as appropriate to accommodate trends in industrial park development to ensure the full range of desirable uses is allowed.	P&Z, PB	Ongoing
3	Revise zoning language as appropriate to allow for accessory uses that may make the park more self-sufficient and reduce vehicle trips (e.g., indoor fitness, outdoor recreation, café, flex space, etc.).	P&Z, PB	1-2 years
4	Encourage tenants and ownership to consider accessibility and circulation improvements for the site. Advocate for transit opportunities in the Industrial park, particularly as the Gateway District begins to develop.	P&Z, PB	Ongoing

## Housing for the Future

STRATEGY		RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	TIMEFRAME
1	Develop updated educational materials for local boards and residents about the different tools and housing types discussed in the Master Plan.	P&Z, PB	1-2 years
2	Identify areas in the community where expanding the types of housing potentially allowed is appropriate.	P&Z	2-3 years
3	Revise zoning language as appropriate to accommodate new housing types and tools. Revisions to consider will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. More flexible standards for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) on actively farmed property.</li> <li>b. Adding incentives for single family-subdivisions to include deed-restricted affordable/workforce housing (i.e., inclusionary zoning).</li> <li>c. Adding a new section for cottage community zoning.</li> <li>d. Expanding the list of potential housing types allowed in residential districts to include more "missing middle" housing options.</li> <li>e. More flexible and innovative site design techniques for Residential Open Space Cluster Development.</li> <li>f. Broader by-right housing allowances for the Flexible/Mixed Use Development District (Vo-Tech site).</li> <li>g. Clarifying the distinction between how market rate multi-family and deed restricted affordable multi-family are developed.</li> </ul>	P&Z, PB, 108	3-10 years





*Sunset on Mill Brook. Photo credit Nathan Merrill*

# Critical Plans and Surveys

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The development of this Master Plan benefited immensely from previous planning efforts in the community. These efforts culminated in the development of a series of focused planning documents that examine specific issue areas in a more detailed manner than a community Master Plan. This Master Plan can incorporate these other efforts by reference and draws significant policy content and direction from these documents.

## **Land Use and Economic & Community Development**

### **Gateway Commercial Business Master Plan (2008)**

This document (“the Gateway Plan”) lays the foundation for the issues that were most frequently discussed in the Master Plan process. The vision for the area is clearly presented and served as the foundation for a major rezoning of this corridor. A complete, illustrated set of design guidelines also emerged from this process.

### **The Town Center Charrette Report (2011)**

Developed under the leadership of PlanNH, this plan documents a local design charrette intended to reimagine the Town Center district. The vision for this area is articulated both in text and with extensive visualizations. Streetscape improvements and zoning amendments were informed by this report, which still has much to offer.

### **108 Corridor Study Committee Community Survey (2018)**

The 108 Corridor Study Committee released a survey in 2018 to gauge public opinion around potential infrastructure investment in the Gateway District. Over 600 residents took the survey with results indicating strong support for infrastructure investment and continued study on the details of future plans and financing.

### **108 Corridor Study Committee Final Report (2019)**

The 108 Corridor Study Committee released its final report concurrently with the drafting of the Master Plan. The report provides an overview of the importance of commercial development to the fiscal sustainability of Stratham, a comprehensive account of the public discussion leading to the report, and recommendations for next steps.

### **Recreation Department Survey (2019)**

The Recreation Department issued a town-wide survey to help understand public opinion around the issues of recreation desires and needs related to different groups in Stratham (e.g., young children, adults, seniors, etc.)

## **Protection of Cultural and Heritage Resources**

### **Historical Resources Master Plan (2008)**

This document provides an excellent summary of important historic events in Stratham as well as well as preservation activity in the community over the past several decades. Goals and recommendations provided in the document were used as a reference for this Master Plan.

### **Historic Sites Inventory (2008 – Ongoing)**

This document is appended to the Baseline Report for this Master Plan and serves as a reference for the document as well as the foundation for future inventory efforts.

## **Environmental Quality and Protection**

### **Vulnerability Assessment of Projected Impacts from Sea-Level Rise and Coastal Storm Surge Flooding (2017)**

As part of the Climate Risk in the Seacoast (C-RiSe) program, the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) developed vulnerability assessments for the seacoast communities closest to the ocean. Stratham's assessment provides excellent discussion of which areas of public infrastructure are vulnerable to events like major flooding. The recommendations in that report are also considered a valuable reference and supplement to this document.

### **State of our Estuaries 2018**

The Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership (PREP) publishes this report every five years, with the most recent being released in 2018. This report provides an in-depth summary of the health of the Great Bay and the Hampton-Seabrook Estuaries based on the measurement of 16 indicators within the watersheds to these resources.

## **Transportation**

### **Stratham Safe Routes to School Action Plan (2019)**

This most recent document provides an excellent assessment of safety conditions related to walking or biking to school. The document provides a long, detailed list of actions that are specific to the SRTS implementation in Stratham, serving as an important reference and supplement to the Master Plan.

### **Transportation Chapter, 2015 Regional Master Plan**

The Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) developed its Regional Master Plan in 2015. The Transportation Chapter provided a regional framework for the Stratham Master Plan.