

## **Route 33 Legacy Highway Ad-Hoc Committee Final Report**

<b>Members</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Forrest Barker, chair	Heritage Commission
Alex Dardinski	Community
Thomas House	Planning Board
April Mason	Community
Nathan Merrill	Heritage Commission
Robert Roseen	Planning Board
David Rying	Community

### **Purpose**

The Route 33 Legacy Highway Ad Hoc Committee was formed by the Planning Board at the suggestion of the Heritage Commission for the purpose of addressing the unique resources and challenges along the Portsmouth Avenue corridor from the Greenland town line to the Stratham Town Center district. The Master Plan (adopted 2019) highlighted this corridor on its Future Land Use Map (FLUM) as the “Route 33 Legacy Highway”. The Master Plan recommended that 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.” It goes on to recommend that we should “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).”

### **Statement of Intent**

The intent of establishing the ‘Route 33 Legacy Highway corridor’ is to recognize the uniquely historic character of this roadway. This section of Portsmouth Avenue contains the greatest concentration of historically significant properties in the town of Stratham. The Town’s intent is to maintain the existing and surrounding neighborhood’s residential/agricultural appearance while allowing professional office development, expanded home occupations, and limited retail uses through creative planning, oversight, and performance standards. The Town’s objective is to foster greater private investment in the nearly three dozen properties that have been identified as contributing to the historic character of this heavily traveled area. The proposed Route 33 Legacy Highway corridor zone offers a unique opportunity to promote mixed-use development while maintaining buffering for adjoining residential neighborhoods from disturbance and protecting the historic fabric of the highway.

### **Brief History of the Area**

To assist and guide the Committee, the following narrative was prepared by members of the Heritage Commission to provide a historic context to the Committee’s study area:

*From its origins in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the King’s Great Highway, also referred to as the Country Way, was an important thoroughfare for transportation between the seaport town of Portsmouth and the interior settlements in Exeter and beyond. Today’s Portsmouth Avenue follows much the same route through Stratham as it first did in 1681. In the post-colonial era the highway was referred to as the Main Road. From 1902 to 1913, when there was a trolley line, it was known locally as “the electric road.” The state paved the road with concrete for the first*

*time in the 1920s. In the 1950s the state widened Portsmouth Avenue and constructed the traffic circle in the center of town. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the highway served as NH Route 101, the heavily-traveled main corridor connecting Portsmouth to Manchester.*

*Whereas homes and farms were situated in scattered areas throughout town, Stratham's businesses and public buildings were almost entirely located along Portsmouth Avenue. For travelers and residents there were numerous taverns, three of which still exist as private homes, with Kenniston Tavern at the corner of Portsmouth Avenue and Depot Road being recently rehabilitated. In the mid-20th century, Robie's Cabins served early automobile travelers where Stratham Hill Stone is located today. Further south in the Town Center Rt. 33 Legacy Highway corridor at the intersection of Winnicutt Road, "The Elms" was a Victorian-era resort hotel, prior to its later conversion to apartments. Nearby are the former Town Hall (1877); Wiggin Memorial Library (1911); Stratham Community Church (1718/1768/1837) and Maple Lane cemetery. No longer extant is the Middle Christian Church (1812). Further south, closer to Exeter, were filling stations and other automotive-focused businesses, as well as the former District 1 "Ridge" schoolhouse (now a residence and frame shop).*

*The former District 2 "Stratham Hill" schoolhouse still stands on Route 33 as a private residence that at one time included a bicycle shop. The Greenwood Cemetery is located just outside of the Town Center District, though the adjacent Baptist Church (1840) was moved in the 1980s to the site of the Community Church on Emery's Lane. Stratham Hill Park has been a popular recreation destination and cherished community asset for the past century. Its open spaces and steep wooded hillside and fire lookout tower feature prominently along the roadside.*

*The Route 33 corridor once featured numerous working farms. The two that remain are both now protected from development with permanent conservation easements: Saltbox Farm, which grows pick-your-own blueberries; and Barker's Farm, which grows myriad vegetables sold at their farm store and also at local farmers' markets. Farms lost to development include the Wiggin dairy farm (now the former NH Vocational/Technical College); Chase/Sweetser dairy farm (now the Chase Lane/Crockett Hill subdivisions); Whittaker's poultry farm (now Crestview Terrace subdivision); and Piper's poultry farm (in the area of Stratham Lane and Lovell Road). Crestview Terrace is noteworthy as Stratham's first residential subdivision, with the earliest homes dating from c. 1960.*

*Today Portsmouth Avenue is busier than ever as a local and regional transportation route. With the completion of the 4-lane Route 101 highway circa 2000, Stratham's southern portion of Portsmouth Avenue retained its status as part of NH Route 108, while the segment northeast from the traffic circle to Portsmouth was renumbered as NH Route 33. This section of Portsmouth Avenue contains the greatest concentration of historically significant properties in the Town of Stratham.*

### **Goals of the Committee:**

The Committee identified the following goals to guide their discussion and process in applying their purpose and intent statement:

- Amplify historic character; preserve historic properties; support architectural and site design guidelines for new structures or improvements;
- Prevent commercial sprawl and commercial appearances from spreading through the Route 33 Legacy Highway corridor; both new and existing structures should retain residential appearance;
- Promote viewshed preservation;
- Complement historic development with a form-based ethos for new development;
- Enhance continuity of the historic development pattern of the corridor;
- Support NH RSA 79-E efforts for economic revitalization and adaptive reuse of historic properties;
- Prohibit new development in front of or blocking historic structures; new construction cannot compromise the integrity of the existing historic structures;
- Allowing professional office development, expanded home occupations, and limited retail uses;
- Promote adaptive reuse of historical structures—don't demolish to build new;
- Provide options to incentivize or allow re-use and investment in significant existing structures.

### **Challenges:**

The Committee also identified the following challenges to implementing their identified Goals in drafting proposed land-use changes within the FLUM Rt. 33 Legacy Highway Corridor:

- Traffic volume and noise levels on NH 33;
- A dispersed arrangement of historically significant structures which seems to minimize applicability of creating of a Historic *District*;
- Declining residential use along the Rt. 33 Legacy Highway corridor;
- An increase in the rate and totality of dilapidation of older structures, apparent neglect of structures;
- Abutters concerns related to “commercial” development, or to adaptive reuse;
- Physical and visual impacts of increased parking;
- Lack of transportation options along corridor (auto only), lack of sewer and water infrastructure necessitates inclusion of water and sewer needs on the generally small lots within the corridor;
- Challenges related to satisfying parking requirements while minimizing impacts of parking.

### **Zoning Analysis of the Area**

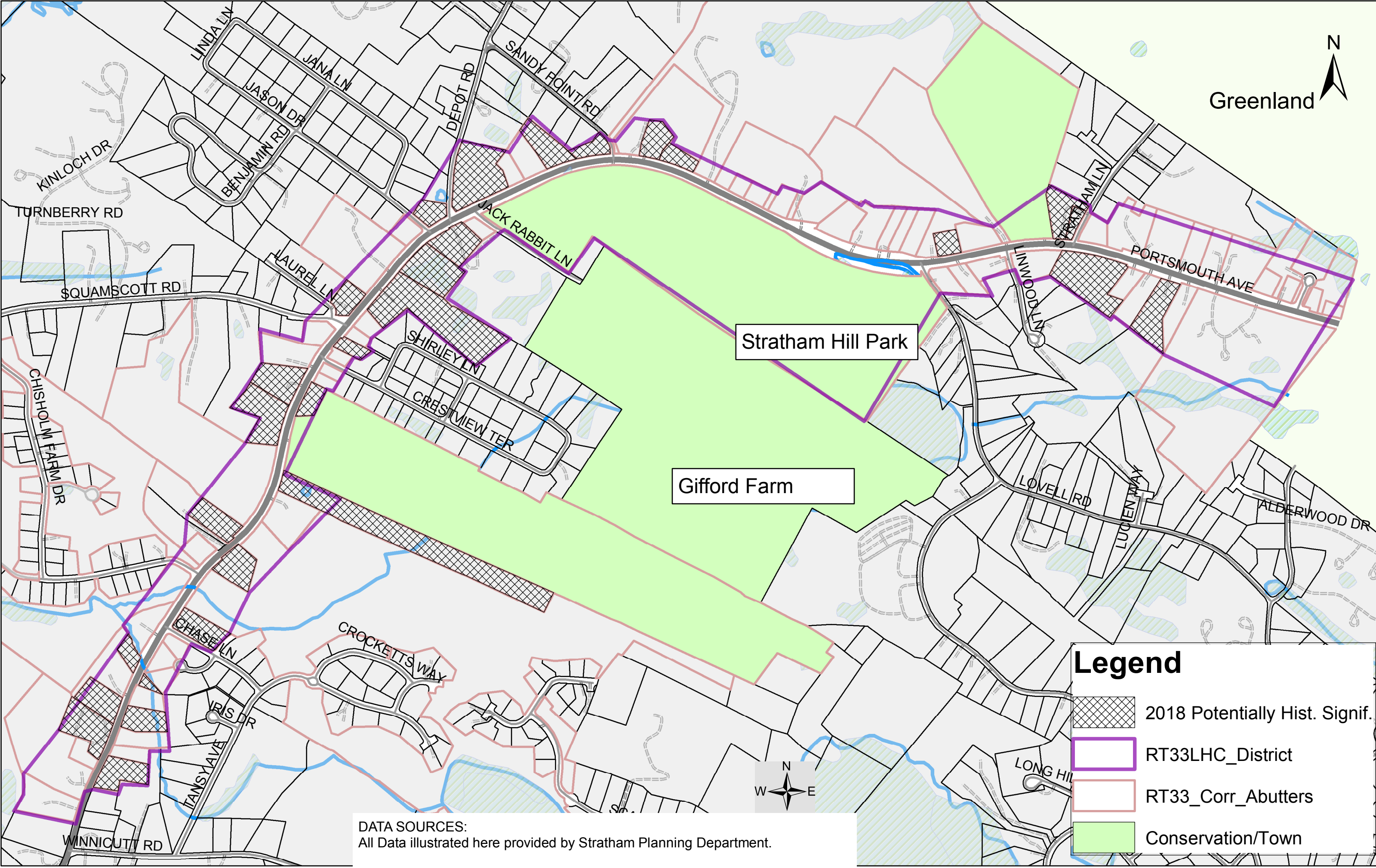
- See attached draft Route 33 Legacy Highway corridor Map;
- See attached draft Route 33 Legacy Highway Zoning Amendments;
- See attached list and map of properties determined to be historically significant and important cultural sites within the Route 33 Legacy Highway corridor.

### **Photos of Parcels/Significant Structures**

The Ad Hoc Committee is coordinating with Heritage Commission for photos from a recent survey of corridor.

### **Conclusion**

The Committee believes they have addressed the charge of the Planning Board by preparing this narrative summarizing its process and by including the attached documents, including a section of draft zoning language that should be considered by the Planning Board for presenting at a future Town Meeting. The Committee includes broad representation from the community and particularly the Route 33 corridor, but it did not conduct a public outreach effort in developing the draft zoning language, partially due to the limitations posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Committee strongly encourages the Planning Board to conduct at least one broadly advertised public forum at a future date for presentation and discussion of the proposed language with the public, prior to bringing a final proposal through the formal public hearing process in preparation for Town Meeting. The Committee remains willing to assist the Planning Board and Heritage Commission with public outreach and further work on this effort as may be requested.



DATA SOURCES:  
All Data illustrated here provided by Stratham Planning Department.

Legend

2018 Potentially Hist. Signif.

RT33LHC\_District

RT33\_Corr\_Abutters

Conservation/Town