

Chapter 1

A Vision for Windham

1. Introduction

Preparing a municipal comprehensive plan is a difficult and demanding undertaking. Updating an existing plan, especially in a community dealing with the impacts of growth and development, can, however, be even more difficult.

Since its creation by the Windham Town Council on February 1, 2000, the members of the Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee have been grappling with a wide range of natural resource protection, community character and development related issues. At the same time the members of the Steering Committee have also endeavored to provide a variety of opportunities for the residents of Windham, and other interested individuals, to provide direction and suggestions during the preparation of this comprehensive plan update.

This chapter of the comprehensive plan provides guidance about how land should be preserved and developed in Windham. The contents of this chapter are based, to a significant extent, on the Maine Growth Management Statute that requires that municipal comprehensive plans include "...a policy development section that relates the findings contained in the inventory and analysis section [of the comprehensive plan] to ...state goals." (M.R.S.A. 30A Section 4326:2). In addition, state statutes require that the policies outlined in the comprehensive plan promote identified state goals, address any possible conflicts with state goals, or with regional and local issues. Finally, the policy section, if appropriate, should address coastal policies of the State of Maine.

In this chapter key goals, policies and objectives for guiding development and maintaining the intrinsic character of Windham are identified and discussed. The procedures used to encourage public involvement, which played a significant role in the preparation of these policy statements, are also highlighted.

Although this chapter was completed, in part, to comply with state requirements, these policy statements represent more than just a series of quickly prepared platitudes. These policy statements are designed to reflect the values of Windham residents about how they would like to manage development. The various policy statements recognize that Windham will continue to grow and change in the future, but growth should not determine how town residents live and relate to one another as neighbors.

2. Public Involvement in the Planning Process

A critical component in the preparation of this updated comprehensive plan was the desire of the Steering Committee to involve town residents at important intervals throughout the entire planning process. It was initially decided that rather than just hold a series of meetings at the beginning and end of comprehensive plan preparation activities, various types of issue identification meetings, vision forums and discussion groups would be held during the two-year planning effort. In addition, a variety of different techniques would be used to disseminate information to town residents about growth and development issues in Windham. Outlined below are highlights of the different approaches used to involve the residents of Windham in the process of preparing this comprehensive plan.

■ Common Ground - A Community Concerns Forum

At this initial planning meeting (April 26, 1999) over 190 town residents, members of the business community, town council members, and members of other town boards and organizations met to discuss and identify key concerns that should be addressed in an updated comprehensive plan. Participants were divided into twelve groups and asked to address three distinct areas:

- What comprises an ideal community?
- Describe Windham's character.
- List activities or policy initiatives the town should undertake.

Based on these discussions volunteer facilitators then worked with each group to identify priorities for each of the three subject areas noted above.

■ Issues Identification Sessions

In the spring of 2001, two issues identification meetings were conducted. The first, with town department heads (April 2, 2001), focused on the delivery of existing municipal services and the possible impacts of growth and development on the demand for services in the future. The second was a town-wide meeting (May 21, 2001) that asked participants to review various categories of issues identified during the Common Ground Forum. These categories included:

- Economic development/expand municipal tax base
- Manage/plan for growth and development
- Provision of municipal facilities/information
- Recreation/open space/natural resources
- Community character/cohesion

Over 100 residents attended the town-wide issues identification sessions. During the meeting participants were divided into seven groups in order to discuss and rank factors that defined an ideal community. Participants were also asked to rate how Windham compared to an ideal community and to identify areas where improvements were needed in the town.

■ Vision Forums

Two vision forums were conducted in Windham in order to begin the process of identifying policy and goal alternatives for the town, as well as possible land use options. At the first vision forum (June 4, 2001) a short handout, titled “Shaping a Vision of Windham’s Future - Summary of Key Elements that Define an Ideal Community” was used to promote discussion about community features and characteristics important to residents of Windham (a copy of this handout is located in Appendix C of this comprehensive plan). In effect this discussion, based on the results of the two issues sessions, was structured to identify what mix of characteristics defined an ideal community, how Windham was like an ideal community, and what types of changes were needed for Windham to become more like an ideal community. Participants at the meeting were also divided into groups and asked to identify, on maps of the town, how land in Windham should be used in the future. At the end of the first vision forum about 30 individuals were given disposable cameras and asked to take photographs of places, activities, or features that they liked or disliked about Windham. The individuals that received cameras were also asked to briefly note the reasons that they liked or disliked the images they photographed.

During the second vision forum (October 1, 2001) participants were asked to refine their vision of Windham and relate these concepts to specific land use policies and goals for the town. A short hand out, “A Vision for Windham’s Future - Conceptual Land Use Alternatives” was provided as a basis for this discussion (a copy of this handout is located in Appendix D of this comprehensive plan). The hand-out related land use patterns and photographic images prepared by town residents to a variety of goals and policy issues identified earlier during the planning process. Approximately 70 people attended the two vision forums.

■ Steering Committee Meetings

Beginning in the spring of 2000, the Windham Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee initiated monthly public meetings to discuss procedures and issues associated with updating the comprehensive plan. In 2001, the Steering Committee began meeting twice a month. At some

of the meetings members of the Steering Committee invited other town organizations and agencies such as members of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, heads of town departments, and the Windham Economic Development Corporation. At other meetings specific groups of individuals were invited, such as large land owners or residents of specific areas in Windham, to offer comments and suggestions. Finally the Steering Committee met to review and discuss various draft chapters of the comprehensive plan. In all the Steering Committee held over 40 public meetings and forums during the preparation of this updated comprehensive plan. At all of these meetings, no matter the purpose, people in attendance were encouraged to offer suggestions and comments.

- **Public Review of Draft Chapters**

Two town-wide public forums were held to review various draft chapters of the inventory and analysis portion of the comprehensive plan. The first forum (October 29, 2001) reviewed land use, housing, transportation and economic conditions. The second forum (December 3, 2001) reviewed recreation, natural resources, historic and archeological features, and municipal services/infrastructure. Handouts that summarized the various inventory and analysis chapters were provided to the attendees (copies of these handouts are located in Appendix E and F of this comprehensive plan). Approximately 100 people attended these two public forums.

- **Posting of Comprehensive Planning Material**

All draft material, prepared specifically for public meetings and draft chapters of the comprehensive plan reviewed by the Steering Committee, were posted on the town's website. Phone numbers and e-mail addresses were also distributed in order to elicit follow-up questions and comments.

- **Presentation of Draft Comprehensive Plan**

A presentation of the final draft comprehensive plan was made to the Town Council and at a general public meeting.

3. A Vision for Windham

As described in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this comprehensive plan, the Town of Windham has undergone significant changes during the past 20 to 30 years. The character of Windham, especially how land is used, will most likely continue to change in the future. Although numerous factors will influence these changes, some, such as national and regional economic trends, are beyond the town's control. The future of Windham, however, is too important to rely just on happenstance to determine the community's character and future land development patterns.

During the process of preparing this comprehensive plan the members of the Steering Committee participated, as noted in the previous section, in numerous meetings and discussions about the future of Windham that were held with a wide variety of residents, business people and town officials. While opinions do differ about certain specific issues, there is a certain degree of agreement about basic goals for the future of Windham. These goals and policies, which are discussed on the next several pages, should not be regarded as an inflexible blueprint for the future development of Windham, but as a guide for directing and managing future land use changes within the community.

During the preparation of this policy statement, it was determined that an overall vision for the future of Windham should be identified. In addition, it was felt that because vision statements tend to be rather broad in scope, specific policy guidance should be provided in order to amplify and clarify this vision for Windham. Outlined below is the overall vision statement and policy guidance identified for Windham.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF WINDHAM

Retain and protect our rural character, scenic vistas, natural features and environment by maintaining a critical balance between preservation and development through managing and directing growth in a manner that accommodates all segments of our community and provides affordable, high-quality living conditions.

Managing and Directing Development Policy Guidance

- *Recognize that times have changed and that densely developed portions of Windham, including some existing village areas, may require municipal water and sewer.*
- *Not every land parcel in Windham is suitable for every type of possible development. In addition, some land parcels should not be developed at all, but instead preserved as open space.*
- *Retain and enhance the different village land use patterns that now exist in Windham.*
- *Diversity in land development patterns should be encouraged in the future growth of Windham.*
- *The property tax implications of development activities should be considered in managing the growth of Windham.*

Retain Rural Character Policy Guidance

- *Maintain a low density of development in major portions of Windham (see Map I-1).*
- *Woodlands, open space and farmlands should be regarded as key elements of the town's rural landscape.*
- *Parts of Windham should retain the characteristics commonly associated with a New England village, including the preservation of historic and older structures.*
- *Land areas adjacent to Route 202 (except for existing areas in South Windham Village, Windham Center and Foster's Corner) should not be developed for commercial purposes.*
- *Wildlife habitats are an important element of the town's rural character.*

Sense of Community Policy Guidance

- *Every town resident should have an opportunity to participate in local government decision making.*
- *Encourage the participation of citizen/volunteers in a wide range of municipal and community activities.*
- *Provide various places in Windham for all residents to meet, interact and recreate.*
- *Provide opportunities for a wide range of individuals and families, of all ages and income levels, to live in Windham.*

In order to achieve this vision for Windham, general goals and objectives for various substantive issue areas (e.g., transportation, economic development, environmental protection, etc.) have also been prepared. These goals and objectives, as is the vision statement, are based on comments and suggestions received during the various public meetings discussed earlier, and were then refined by the members of the Steering Committee to reflect their understanding of specific planning related issues.

A. Economic Development Goal

Economic development initiatives that improve the town's tax base and promote new quality employment opportunities, should be directed to specific growth areas of the community.

Primary Objectives

1. The Route 302 corridor, and adjacent land areas, should, over time, be the primary location for economic development in Windham. This may require, after additional evaluation (as noted on page 2-3), the installation of a municipal sewer system.
2. A corridor land management plan, that also identifies future development opportunities, should be prepared for the Route 302 corridor. In essence, future economic development patterns must be related to the town's ability to provide safe and reasonable roadway access along this roadway corridor.
3. Infrastructure improvements, including roadway improvement, a municipal sewer system (if approved), improved electrical service and expanded high-speed Internet access should be coordinated with private sector development initiatives. Economic development expansion should also be supportable by available municipal infrastructure and/or planned improvements. In essence, the ability to provide adequate municipal services should be a key requirement in evaluating and approving significant development proposals.
4. Some form of development and design standards for commercial development should be adopted for North Windham and then extended, as appropriate, along the entire Route 302 corridor.

B. Infrastructure Goal

Increasing demands for infrastructure improvements in Windham will require careful consideration of the timing of expenditures and future debt service payment schedules.

Primary Objectives

1. The town should prepare a long range plan, such as a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) budget, for major physical improvements that includes all anticipated municipal and school capital costs over a specific time period (i.e., six years). This will require the cooperation of both school and municipal officials.
2. Capital funding should, to the maximum extent feasible, be based on recommendations contained in the updated comprehensive plan in terms of location (growth areas). Major public investments in non-growth areas should be avoided in order to minimize the potential for more intense development activities in these areas of town.
3. Capital improvement spending should be structured to avoid significant and sudden property tax increases.

C. Roadways and Transportation Goal

There should be a continuing effort to maintain and improve the safety and operation of the network of highways and arterials in Windham including Routes 35, 115, 202 and 302, as well as alternative methods of transportation. Significant attention should be focused on Route 302, which is known as the lifeline of Windham and the Lakes Region and carries some of the highest traffic volumes and has one of the highest accident rates of any highway in the state.

Primary Objectives

1. Future highway plans for Windham should include alignment and design changes in order to improve traveling safety on key roadways in Windham such as River, Windham Center and Falmouth Roads (see Chapter 7).
2. New roadway standards, based on a detailed evaluation of existing conditions, should be prepared for Windham. These roadway standards should include an examination of the feasibility of reducing roadway widths in portions of the community including those designated as rural or village areas.
3. The Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) is planning to reconstruct Route 302 (from the Fosters Corner intersection with Route 202 to the Westbrook line) in 2003 and Route 115 (from Route 302 one half mile easterly to the bridge) in 2002. Windham should cooperate with the "Route 302 and You Committee" (a branch of the Lake Region Development Council) to widen and improve Route 302 from the Whites Bridge Road intersection northwesterly through Raymond and realigning the intersection of Anglers Road and Route 302. This is considered to be one of the worst bottlenecks and accident prone areas along the entire Route 302 corridor.
4. Consider the proposal of the "302 and You Committee" to study the feasibility of constructing a connector highway between Route 302 and the Maine Turnpike to reduce traffic volumes on Route 302 and improve overall highway safety in Windham.

5. Support the North Windham District Development Advisory Committee in developing secondary roads easterly and westerly of Route 302, from Routes 35 and 115, to the Whites Bridge Road area to help alleviate traffic on Route 302 and provide better access for residents and retail shoppers.
6. Alternative methods of transportation, including bus and rail service, should be investigated by town, regional and state officials.

D. Sense of Community Goal

Even though the population of Windham has increased substantially during the last several decades, the town is still a community of individuals and families that care about their neighbors and fellow citizens. The town has a rich history of volunteerism and community involvement that should be supported and enhanced.

Primary Objectives

1. As the town has grown it has become more difficult to attract local residents to volunteer for community and civic activities. Town government should work to encourage the expansion of volunteer opportunities including new methods for citizen involvement in local governmental activities and decision making.
 2. Recognize that Windham should be a community that provides a range of opportunities for families and individuals of different income levels to live, as required under state statutes (MRSA 30A - Section 4358), and work.
 3. Encourage and establish options for elderly residential developments that are safe and suitable and provide lower cost alternatives for retired and older individuals.
4. Identify sites for residents of Windham to congregate, such as parks, and establish a community center for special events, meetings and recreational opportunities.
 5. Support the efforts of the Windham Historic Commission and Historical Society in preserving historic structures in Windham, especially in the existing village areas of the community.
 6. Local officials should provide a variety of methods for citizens to comment about issues that impact the Town of Windham.
 7. Design and construct identifiable gateways that signify the entrance to Windham on major roadways. Also consider providing incentives to private landowners for the redevelopment of property adjacent to gateways.

E. Recreation Goal

Promote a variety of recreational opportunities, including outdoor activities, for Windham residents of all ages and income levels.

Primary Objectives

1. Examine other methods for financing, including a more diverse funding base, for recreational activities in order to ensure that opportunities are available to residents of all income levels and ages.

2. Provide a community center in order to offer recreation and meeting space opportunities for all Windham residents. Special attention should also be focused on the needs of senior citizens in designing and planning activities for the facility.
3. Work with land owners and other organizations to ensure that open space, woodlands and access to water bodies remain available for outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, and hiking.

F. Environmental Goal

In both municipal government activities and the consideration and review of development proposals, the Town of Windham should promote a sense of environmental stewardship and prevent the degradation of any existing natural resources within the town.

Primary Objectives

1. Citizens, local organizations and governmental bodies in Windham should endeavor to protect and enhance key natural resources of the community that define the town's rural character such as scenic vistas, river corridors, lakes and ponds, woodlands, fields and farmlands.
2. In order to protect the wide variety of environmental and natural resources important to the residents of Windham, the standards and procedures contained in the town's existing zoning ordinance, and other land use regulations, should be examined and, where appropriate, improved. Specific changes should focus on methods for protecting steep slopes and land adjacent to water bodies and near wetlands from inappropriate and harmful development.
3. Groundwater quality and availability in Windham is an important issue today and will become even more important in the future. Due to the fact that a significant number of town residents rely on groundwater as their basic supply source, better information about the quantity and use of groundwater resources in Windham will be required. This data should be collected from federal, state and local agencies and organizations and used for planning purposes and the evaluation of future development proposals.
4. The Town of Windham should evaluate alternatives for determining and mapping the existing condition of key environmental attributes within Windham (especially lakes, ponds and rivers) and then periodically monitor these sites over time to determine any changes in quality or possible sources of degradation.
5. Create a municipal organization, such as a Natural Resource Commission, to monitor, evaluate and report to local residents about the condition of natural resources and changes in environmental quality within the town. This organization could also assist the Planning Board in evaluating development proposals and operate as an educational resource for the community about environmental protection issues. The possibility of providing future staff support for this type of organization should also be considered.
6. Due to increased development activities in Windham, noise and light pollution regulations, as well as standards for blasting, should be adopted in order to minimize adverse impacts on town residents, wildlife, natural resources and neighboring land owners.

G. Education Goal

In Windham the School Board is responsible for oversight in managing the educational system and maintaining school facilities. The Board has established various goals and policies to accomplish these tasks. For example, the Windham School Board has stated that its mission "...is to create an educational environment that promotes positive and successful learning experiences which enable all members of the school community to develop their unique potential." A key vision statement of the School Board also notes that "Our schools are active and support centers of learning that encourage personal challenge, honor diversity, and nurture growth in individuals of every age." In support of these School Board's policies, it should be recognized that school facilities are an important part of the community that have an impact on Windham much greater than just providing education to the children of Windham. In this context continued cooperation between the School Board and other town departments and organizations will be necessary to meet the needs of all Windham residents in the future.

Primary Objectives

1. School financial needs, especially the timing of bond financing, should be coordinated with other municipal capital expenditures in order to minimize sudden and steep increases in bond repayments by local property tax payers.
2. School facilities play a significant role in providing space for recreation and other community needs. The School Board should be encouraged to continue working with town officials and organizations to maximize the use of school facilities for non-school events.
3. School facilities should be available for a variety of continuing educational programs and activities.
4. A well trained work force is key to the economic vitality of Windham and the region. The School Board and Department are encouraged to work with town officials and private sector firms in meeting, to the extent feasible, education and training needs of local and regional business.

H. Land Use Goal

Standards used to evaluate and manage land development in Windham should be changed. These changes should focus on identifying portions of Windham suitable for commercial and industrial growth, as well as more densely populated types of residential development. The balance of Windham should be designated for rural related types of land uses and limited residential development.

Primary Objectives

1. Changing how land is developed in the future, as recommended in the Land Use Goal, will not be a simple task. Existing land use patterns in Windham have been created by a multitude of decisions made during the last two centuries. In addition, municipal zoning and other regulations adopted during the past several decades have significantly influenced both individual and business decision-making about land acquisition and development initiatives. Changes concerning how land can be developed in the future should, to the extent possible, seek to balance community needs with the rights of private property owners while protecting the environment and natural resources.

2. Portions of the North Windham Growth Area (See Map 1-1) should be designated for industrial and commercial land uses. This area also includes the Enterprise Development District as a location for future industrial and commercial land uses. Only minimal impact industrial activities, commonly referred to as light industrial uses, should be permitted in this area of Windham. Performance standards for industrial uses should also be prepared that define the limits of possible development related impacts such as noise, glare, air pollution, wastewater discharge, development size and traffic impacts. Various residential uses, with different density requirements, should also be permitted in North Windham.
3. Retail land uses should primarily be located along the northern portion of Route 302. However, the southern portion of Route 302 (see Map 1-1) should be designated as a Commercial Transitional Area that permits the development of a limited amount of retail and commercial activities.
4. Windham Center should be designated as a growth area that would include a mix of residential and limited commercial/retail land uses, possibly through the use of a village overlay zone. Institutional uses, especially governmental and school facilities, already located in the area, are also considered key land use components for this portion of town. In essence Windham Center should continue to be the primary location for all new institutionalized land uses, such as schools and local governmental offices. The Black Brook Preserve, an undeveloped open space site (about 104 acres) that was recently acquired by the Windham Land Trust, is also located within the Windham Center Growth Area.
5. A portion of South Windham, directly across the Presumpscot River from Gorham, should be designated as a growth area. It is anticipated that residential and limited commercial/retail land uses, possibly through the use of a village overlay zone, would be complementary to similar types of adjacent development in Gorham. This growth area also includes the existing state prison site.
6. A Residential Growth Area is recommended for northern Windham, adjacent to the North Windham Growth Area. This portion of town would be designed for high and medium density residential land uses (see Map 1-1).
7. A Residential Transitional Area is also recommended for the northern portion of Windham. It is anticipated that the transitional area would be a location for residential development, but at density levels lower than the designated growth areas (see Map 1-1).
8. The Growth and Transitional Areas identified for Windham are serviced by the municipal water system (see Map 1-1) and involve a significant portion of the land area of Windham (27%) as illustrated in Table 1-1.
9. River resource protection areas are designated for both the Presumpscot and Pleasant Rivers. Development activities should be limited in these resource protection districts. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Implementation Strategy) this will involve limiting development through revised land use regulations, property acquisition, and promoting cluster housing outside the resource protection districts.
10. The remainder of Windham should be designated for rural and residential land uses. The density of residential development should vary throughout the town, with higher densities in existing developed areas and in designated growth areas. Development should be restricted in rural areas in order to protect farmlands, woodlands, open space, wildlife habitat and scenic areas. Special and unique approaches, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Implementation Strategy), for protecting specific critical rural areas should also be identified and enacted during the implementation of this comprehensive plan.
11. A revised zoning ordinance and land use regulations should be prepared in order to achieve the land use objectives outlined under the Land Use Goal. The ordinance should incorporate performance standards and natural resource protection initiatives, such as environmental overlays and river protection zones. As noted earlier, changes in existing land use ordinances will not be a simple or easy task. If necessary a moratorium, as permitted under

M.R.S.A. 30A Section 4356, may be required during the preparation and review of significant changes in zoning or other land use regulations.

- 12. Land use requirements in rural areas should include standards for protecting key environmental features such as wetlands, and natural constraints, such as steep slopes, from the impacts of development.
- 13. New site plan and subdivision regulations should be prepared in conjunction with the new zoning ordinance. A key element of these regulations should be requirements relating to the construction and maintenance of private roads, especially in terms of providing access and sufficient right-of-way for fire and emergency vehicles.
- 14. Periodically monitor and analyze land development trends in Windham.

**Table 1-1
Land in Designated Growth and Transitional Areas
Windham, Maine Comprehensive Plan (2002)**

Growth Areas	Acres	Percent of Total Land Area
North Windham	2,905	10.1%
South Windham	683	2.4%
Windham Center	1,879	6.5%
Residential	698	2.4%
Total	6,165	21.4%
Transitional Areas		
Residential	1,448	5.0%
Commercial	178	0.6%
Total	1,626	5.6%
Grand Total	7,791	27.0%
Note: For purposes of this analysis it is estimated that Windham has 28,812 acres. This does not include roadways or water bodies. The 1993 Comprehensive Plan estimated that the town contained about 35,200 acres, including water bodies and roadways. Source: RKG Associates, Inc.		

I. Regional Cooperation Goal

As Windham has grown, the number of problems confronting the town has increased significantly. A number of these problems will require cooperating with a variety of adjacent communities, as well as participating in joint regional endeavors.

Primary Objectives

1. Improvements to Route 302 will require the involvement of not only the Maine Department of Transportation, but also other communities adjacent to this highway corridor. Consequently, Windham should identify and discuss roadway improvement options with neighboring communities.
2. The Town of Windham should, based on recently enacted state legislation, investigate the possibility of developing the proposed business park on Enterprise Drive in cooperation with neighboring communities.
3. The Town of Windham should consider formalizing relationships with neighboring communities in dealing with surface water monitoring (lakes and rivers) and in the protection of watersheds.
4. Joint efforts with regional organizations should be undertaken to identify possible alternatives for providing affordable housing on a regional basis.
5. The plan for the revitalization of South Windham/Little Falls should be implemented in a cooperative manner with Gorham.
6. The Town of Windham should work with other communities in establishing designated gateways to the community. These gateways (see Map 1-1) should also designate, as appropriate, gateways to the Lakes Region of Maine.

INSERT MAP 1-1

BACK OF MAP 1-1