

III. A VISION FOR LAND USE

Introduction

Land use planning is a fundamental component to New London's Master Plan. New Hampshire State Law, RSA 674:2, II, establishes the Master Plan as the basis for the Planning Board to enact land use guidelines, regulations, and ordinances. This chapter, *A Vision for Land Use*, seeks to translate the Vision Statement into physical terms.

Land use considerations are closely related to virtually every other chapter of this Master Plan including population, housing, economic conditions, transportation, community facilities, historic resources, and natural resources. New London's planning for future land uses considers the opportunities and challenges of the above community resources to ensure balanced, appropriate, and sustainable development patterns.

This chapter addresses existing land use patterns and trends, public opinion and recommended future land use growth policy. The existing land use patterns and trends report local and regional population-based statistics, mapping of New London's existing land use patterns and analysis of future development potential, and an assessment of the build-out analysis completed in the mid-1990s. The portion of the chapter devoted to public opinion summarizes important issues gleaned from the 2008 Community Attitude Survey and public forums and develops a list of Land Use Goals based on community input. The last two parts of this chapter focus on land use policy and recommendations for future land use planning.

Historic Population and Land Use Patterns

Regional Growth and Development Comparison

A comparison of the population growth experienced by New London with other communities in the Region between 1980 and 2010, as detailed in Table III-1 (Page 10), reveals that New London had a spike in average annual growth between 1990 and 2000 compared with the other neighboring communities, Merrimack County, and the state. Over the 30-year period from 1980 to 2010, the New London population growth rate was at an average 1.36%, which is moderate compared with neighboring municipalities with substantially higher growth rates (Springfield – 3.05%) and lower growth rates (Lebanon – 0.56%). New London's 30-year average growth rate matches the County and is consistent with statewide population growth.

Table III-2 (Page 10) details total housing units and average annual growth rates for regional communities, Merrimack County, and the state. The growth in housing units in New London between 1980 and 2010 is equivalent to the statewide growth for the same period and has not indicated dramatic fluctuations for the three decades of Census data.

TABLE III-1
Comparison of Population Growth with Neighboring Communities: 1980-2010

Area	Population 1980	Population 1990	Avg. Annual Growth Rate 1980-1990	Population 2000	Avg. Annual Growth Rate 1990-2000	Population 2010	Avg. Annual Growth Rate 2000-2010	30-Yr Avg. Annual Growth Rate
New London	2,935	3,180	0.8%	4,116	2.6%	4,397	0.7%	1.36%
Newbury	961	1,347	3.4%	1,702	2.4%	2,072	2.0%	2.59%
Bradford	1,115	1,405	2.3%	1,454	0.3%	1,650	1.3%	1.31%
Springfield	532	788	4.0%	945	1.8%	1,311	3.3%	3.05%
Sunapee	2,312	2,559	1.0%	3,055	1.8%	3,365	1.0%	1.26%
Sutton	1,091	1,457	2.9%	1,544	0.6%	1,837	1.8%	1.75%
Wilmot	725	935	2.6%	1,144	2.0%	1,358	1.7%	2.11%
Hanover	9,119	9,212	0.1%	10,850	1.7%	11,260	0.4%	0.71%
Lebanon	11,134	12,183	0.9%	12,568	0.3%	13,151	0.5%	0.56%
Merrimack County	98,302	120,240	2.0%	136,225	1.3%	146,445	0.7%	1.34%
New Hampshire	920,610	1,109,252	1.9%	1,235,786	1.1%	1,316,470	0.6%	1.20%

Source: U.S. Census

TABLE III-2
Comparison of Housing Growth with Neighboring Communities: 1980-2010

Area	Total Housing Units 1980	Total Housing Units 1990	Avg. Annual Growth Rate 1980-1990	Total Housing Units 2000	Avg. Annual Growth Rate 1990-2000	Total Housing Units 2010	Avg. Annual Growth Rate 2000-2010	30-Yr Avg. Annual Growth Rate
New London	1,492	1,806	1.9%	2,085	1.4%	2,303	1.0%	1.46%
Newbury	1,021	1,184	1.5%	1,311	1.0%	1,559	1.7%	1.42%
Bradford	696	757	0.8%	762	0.1%	917	1.9%	0.92%
Springfield	351	481	3.2%	534	1.1%	702	2.8%	2.34%
Sunapee	1,645	1,904	1.5%	2,143	1.2%	2,431	1.3%	1.31%
Sutton	660	776	1.6%	826	0.6%	985	1.8%	1.34%
Wilmot	401	458	1.3%	530	1.5%	659	2.2%	1.67%
Hanover	2,373	2,623	1.0%	2,989	1.3%	3,445	1.4%	1.25%
Lebanon	4,758	5,718	1.9%	5,707	0.0%	6,649	1.5%	1.12%
Merrimack County	39,636	50,870	2.5%	56,224	1.0%	57,069	0.1%	1.22%
New Hampshire	386,381	503,904	2.7%	547,024	0.8%	614,754	1.2%	1.56%

Source: U.S. Census

Density of development is another metric of comparison for rural communities with relatively sparse development patterns. Population density is measured in persons per square mile of area in town and provides a relative comparison to understand overall land use conditions in New London and its neighbors. Table III-3 (Page 11) provides information for comparison of densities among neighboring communities. New London's higher density is more consistent with a community that has a distinctly built-out landscape like the region's cities and larger towns. It is important to note the public sentiment that New London maintains a rural atmosphere; a sense that the Town is a rural town. New London's accomplishment of achieving a higher population density while maintaining a rural/small town atmosphere indicates the Town's success applying its land use ordinances and development controls to encourage density while maintaining a community with appreciable rural and small town characteristics.

TABLE III-3
Comparison of Population Density with Neighboring Communities: 1980-2010

Area	Land Area (Sq. Mi.)	Persons per Sq. Mi. - 1980	Persons per Sq. Mi. - 1990	Persons per Sq. Mi. - 2000	Persons per Sq. Mi. - 2010
New London	25.4	115.6	125.2	162.0	173.1
Newbury	38.1	25.2	35.4	44.7	54.4
Bradford	34.9	31.9	40.3	41.7	47.3
Springfield	43.6	12.2	18.1	21.7	30.1
Sunapee	25.2	91.7	101.5	121.2	133.5
Sutton	42.1	25.9	34.6	36.7	43.6
Wilmot	29.4	24.7	31.8	38.9	46.2
Hanover	48.8	186.9	188.8	222.3	230.7
Lebanon	40.3	276.3	302.3	311.9	326.3
Merrimack County	931.5	105.5	129.1	146.2	157.2
New Hampshire	9,294.0	99.1	119.4	133.0	141.6

Source: U.S. Census, 1980 – 2010, UVLSRPC

Recent Subdivision and Building Permit Activity

A summary of subdivision activity between 2001 through 2010 is presented in Table III-4 (Page 12). The number of approved subdivisions fluctuated between low of 0 in 2001 and 2004 and a high of 7 in 2007. The number of approved subdivision lots ranged from a low of 0 in 2001 and 2004 to a high of 32 in 2003. Over the 10-year period, there was an average of almost 3 subdivisions approved each year resulting in an average of 12 new approved lots per year.

Table III-5 (Page 12) presents a summary of the building permit activity for New London from 2001 through 2010. The number of new residential units being built ranged from a low of 3 single-family units in 2009 to a high of 40 single-family units in 2004. The average number of new residential units being constructed over the 10-year period was approximately 15 per year. New London experienced a surge in residential building permit activity during the three year period from 2002 through 2004.

TABLE III-4
Summary of Subdivision Activity: 2001-2010

Year	Total Approved Subdivision Applications	Total Approved Subdivided Lots
2001	0	0
2002	4	27
2003	6	32
2004	0	0
2005	1	2
2006	5	11
2007	7	20
2008	3	8
2009	2	18
2010	1	2
Total	29	120

Source: Planning Board Records

TABLE III-5
Summary of Building Permit Activity in New London: 2001-2010

Year	Single Family Residential Dwelling	Two-Family Residential Dwelling	Multi-Family Residential Dwelling	Institutional	Commercial / Industrial
2001	15	0	0	1	3
2002	24	0	0	1	0
2003	31	0	0	1	0
2004	40	0	0	0	0
2005	19	0	0	0	0
2006	8	0	0	0	0
2007	7	0	0	0	1
2008	7	0	0	0	0
2009	3	2	0	1	0
2010	8	0	0	0	0
Total	162	2	0	4	4

Source: Board of Selectmen Records

Existing Land Use Analysis

This section summarizes a mapping analysis to identify the current land uses in New London. This analysis is based on professional interpretation of aerial photography using a digital Geographic Information System (GIS). Consultants for the Town analyzed an aerial photo,

which was taken in 2003 and processed to be an accurate, to-scale map. This aerial photo is the basis of the following tables and summary information regarding existing land uses. As summarized in the prior section of this chapter there has been development and changes in land use since 2003, but these changes do not have a substantial impact on the conclusions of this analysis.

The GIS analysis for existing land use is summarized in Map III-1 (Page 17). The mapping interpretation of land uses included digitizing the shaded areas for the different observed land uses. Table III-6 (Page 13) summarizes the land uses identified in the aerial photo and the associated land area.

TABLE III-6
Summary of Existing Land Uses: 2003

		Acres	% of Total Town Area
Undeveloped			
	Forest	9,396	57.7%
	Agriculture/Open Fields	641	3.9%
	Outdoor Use	275	1.7%
	Lakes & Ponds	2,028	12.5%
Sub-Total Undeveloped		12,340	75.8%
Developed			
	Residential	2,888.0	17.7%
	Commercial/Institutional	195	1.2%
	Transportation (ROW)	860	5.3%
Sub-Total Developed		3,943	24.2%
Total		16,283	100%

Source: GIS Mapping of 2003 Aerial Photography by Stewardship Technology

This analysis indicates undeveloped land and open space land uses predominate in New London. Such uses include land cover associated with forests, open fields, outdoor use, and identifiable water bodies. The Town is predominantly undeveloped or open space land (approximately 63% of the total area), excluding public facilities like roads and other transportation infrastructure.

Developed land, including roads and highways, accounts for approximately 24% of the total area in New London. Residential areas, typically single-family housing units on individual lots, account for nearly 18% of the land area. The Commercial and Institutional areas, which include Colby-Sawyer College, the downtown commercial districts, and municipal facilities, occupy less than 2% of the Town. Combined, the primary developed areas (residential, commercial, and institutional) account for nearly 20% of the Town. These are the predominant settlement areas accessible by most, if not all, Town residents and visitors. The existing mix of land uses help to form the image of New London as a rural community still dominated by forested hillsides and numerous lakes and ponds.

Land Use Patterns

Town Center Development

In terms of overall development pattern, New London exhibits a strong community center pattern with residential uses on comparatively small lots clustered around the core commercial and community service district, or downtown. Continued growth in demand for commercial properties, along with carefully crafted land use regulations, has resulted in a well-defined commercial core in the downtown where the Town has experienced commercial infill development and conversion of residential uses to commercial uses.

Colby-Sawyer College

Colby-Sawyer College is an important institutional use that helps anchor the downtown area and has experienced steady increases in student enrollment numbers since the 1980s. Increases in enrollment are expected for the next decade or more until it reaches 1,300 students, according to College Administration. Colby-Sawyer continues to improve its facilities including recently completed projects: a student athletic center, new student dormitories, a new science center, new athletic fields and expanded parking.

Residential Development

New London has a strong residential component adjacent to the downtown commercial and institutional districts. One striking form of residential development in New London is its shoreline development. Historically, most of the lake shores in New London have developed with a relatively dense pattern of seasonal cottages. Regional Census data and anecdotal evidence indicate a trend in converting these seasonal cottages to year round residences through renovation work or demolition and new construction over the last 20 years.

Residential development patterns elsewhere in New London range from a typical single-family detached unit development pattern to multi-family developments and dormitories. The single-family residential development pattern consumes more land area and developers are having increasing difficulty finding suitable locations for single-family subdivisions. Conversely, the presence of a college and regional hospital secures New London's future as a hub for the younger and older segments of the population. These two segments tend to have very similar housing needs: small, inexpensive rental or condominium units situated within a short travel distance to services and institutions. New London's distinct commercial district with regionally significant institutions, good services, and a good infrastructure will continue to attract younger and older residents in the coming decade.

Emerging Land Use Patterns

Rural areas have gained access broadband communications, like high-speed internet, telephone, and cable television, in recent years. Such access to high-speed communications has enabled individuals to pursue home occupations and home businesses or to simply work from home. This allows for a higher potential for commercial development in rural areas that had not been economically viable before the advent of rural broadband communications. This potential will likely yield long-term benefits when the smaller home-based ventures grow to occupy commercial property.

Another emerging trend is residential development on hillsides and ridgelines. With relatively few remaining opportunities for development along the lake shores, developers are searching out sites with good views rather than waterfronts for new house lots.

Future Development Considerations

Future development patterns in New London will depend as much upon the landscape and natural features as the local, state, and federal land use and environmental regulations. The future development considerations address the likely constraints to development as well as the factors influencing future build-out scenarios.

Development Constraints

As with most New England towns, New London's landscape has a range of development constraints, or circumstances that prevent reasonable use for commercial or residential purposes. The following text summarizes a development constraint analysis illustrated in Map III-2 (Page 18), which is based on the presence of the following land characteristics:

Surface waters and wetlands: Surface waters and wetlands are regulated and cover a significant portion of the Town's total area (surface waters cover approximately 12.5%). Wetlands identified in this analysis are based on existing maps: the National Wetland Inventory Maps from the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Natural Resource Conservation Service mapping of very poorly drained soils.

Steep Slopes: Steep slopes are considered development constraints in this analysis if the topography indicates areas with slopes in excess of 25%, or 1 foot of vertical rise for every 4 feet of horizontal run. Problems encountered by development on steep slopes include erosion and sedimentation issues during site construction, unsuitable conditions for on-site wastewater systems, and aesthetic disruption.

Protected Lands: Property protected for conservation either by easement or through fee simple ownership, based on 2003 data.

Existing Development: Existing developed areas based on the current land use map (Map III-1, Page 17) with the assumption that existing developed areas would remain unchanged.

The non-shaded or hatched areas on Map III-2 (Page 18) are potentially developable.

Build-Out Analysis

In 1994 the New London Planning Board conducted a build-out analysis – a planning tool intended to assess the full development potential of a community using the present land use regulations and infrastructure capacity. A build-out analysis provides generic information for decision makers to understand the scale and impact of a land use scenario. Since the initial study the New London Planning Board adopted changes to the Zoning Ordinance, which affected the analysis findings. These changes included allowable zoning density for residential lots.

Consultants for New London revised the full build-out estimates based on these changes to the Zoning Ordinance and determined the following results:

- The Town land area and regulations may accommodate up to 4,374 residential units. This is approximately 2,071 dwelling units more than the 2010 Census count of 2,303 dwelling units.
- The total population under full build-out conditions could reach 9,000, which is more than double the 2010 Census count of 4,397 persons.

Public Input for Present and Future Land Use

Community Survey conducted as part of this Master Plan update effort solicited reactions to the results of the revised build-out estimates outlined above. Just over half of the respondents (approximately 56%) indicated they were okay with the projected growth potential. Over 30% reacted unfavorably and wanted to discourage growth. The remaining respondents (approximately 14%) reacted favorably to encourage growth.

Further public input collected from public forums and survey responses addressed the following topics. The listed responses are in no particular order

Valued Attributes in New London's Landscape

There was strong public support to maintain the rural character of the community including the following attributes:

- Landmarks and historic buildings
- Agricultural lands & uses
- Stone walls & tree lines
- Lakes and ponds
- Scenic views & vistas
- Sense of community pride
- Colby-Sawyer College campus
- Recreational opportunities
- Good schools

Future Land Uses

Public response regarding future land uses tended toward protecting what individuals value in the landscape. To the extent possible, the public supported the following efforts with regard to future land use and development:

- Preserve & protect ridgelines, scenic areas, and scenic views from public spaces (e.g. – roadways, parks, lakes and ponds, and areas of public assembly – both public and private)
- Conserve and maintain land that contributes to the Town's rural character
- Encourage land uses that enable individual choices to travel using different transportation modes (e.g. – private car, bus, bicycle, walk, etc.)

Residential Land Uses

The existing land use analysis indicates that residential development in New London occupies the most land area. Public input seems to value diversity in housing types for a diverse range of incomes for various reasons:

- Workforce housing important (costs are no more than 30% of a household's gross income)
- The appearance of new housing development should not degrade community appearances
- Residential development should be concentrated in the existing village centers to utilize water and sewer networks
- Land use regulations should allow residential-scale renewable energy options

Non-Residential Land Uses

Public responses about non-residential development were directed toward encouraging commercial/industrial/institutional development that would meet community needs without a push to expand the commercial base in Town:

- New commercial development should focus on services and businesses with the least impact on the community character and landscape
- Maintain the existing commercial development centers – do not expand the commercial development to new areas in Town
- Avoid low-density commercial development near existing Interstate exits
- Develop regulations to allow alternative energy sources for businesses

Land Use Goals

The Planning Board developed the following land use goals based on input received from several public meetings and results of the Community Survey:

1. To remain, over the next fifteen years, primarily a rural residential community with uncrowded and quiet living conditions, and a scenic and unpolluted natural environment;
2. To preserve, protect, improve and enhance the natural, agricultural, scenic, recreational, cultural, and historic resources and the desirable characteristics of the traditional northern New England land use settlement pattern (compact patterns of development are preferable to non-contiguous development and the spread of strip land use development along the public road system);
3. To maintain and improve the accessibility to and the economic viability of existing villages and to emphasize the importance of a “livable, walkable community” based on the development of a network of non-motorized pathways, trails, bike lanes and sidewalks enabling resident and visitors to enjoy pedestrian and bicycle access to the Town’s business centers and recreational assets;
4. To continue to serve as a sub-regional retail and service center, but not to expand in this capacity to serve a larger geographic area;
5. To ensure that the density, intensity, and siting of future development is consistent with the capacities of access, utilities and natural resource constraints to support such land use development;
6. To enhance New London’s ability to protect its fragile natural environment by:
 - a. preserving remaining farms, fields, and forests and encouraging best practices in their management;
 - b. protecting the scenic resources, natural beauty, and open space lands of New London, and;
 - c. encouraging attractive, consistent aesthetic qualities in the built environment.
7. To strengthen New London’s ability to protect its fragile natural environment by:
 - a. protecting hilltops, steep slopes, wetlands, shorelines and special natural or geologic features, including habitat for rare plant species;
 - b. continuing to provide and protect natural habitat for wildlife, including increased focus on threatened or endangered species; and

- c. preserving and protecting New London's water and air resources.
8. To improve New London's ability to integrate continuing pressures for growth with its commitment to preserving rural character and the environment by:
 - a. continuing its commitment to environmentally sound planning and zoning principles and practices;
 - b. maintaining and improving the Town's enforcement of zoning regulations;
 - c. encouraging greater citizen awareness of and participation in best practices of land conservation, including participation in Town initiatives and volunteer-based organizations promoting land and wildlife habitat conservation; and
 - d. developing the Town's trail system and other recreational resources in a manner that increases the public awareness of and access to our rural landscape and natural environment without compromising its sustainability.
9. To encourage the provision of a safe, adequate and affordable supply of all housing types for residents of all income levels and provide housing opportunities to attract a more balanced mix of resident age groups; and
10. To provide for the aesthetically pleasing development of the community and its environs.

Recommendations

1. Examine rezoning those areas deemed viable for expanding the number of village size residential lots, particularly within Town sewer and Precinct water.
2. Consider accommodating housing needs in the village:
 - a. Rental units;
 - b. Housing over businesses in the Commercial District, and;
 - c. Conversion of large single family homes into multiple units.
3. Consider changes to the existing Commercial District boundaries and permitted commercial uses to meet New London's future needs.
4. Consider opportunities to provide for clean, non-polluting light industry or high-tech industry by Special Exception in areas served by Town sewer and Precinct water.
5. Consider site and building design guidelines for aesthetics.
6. Consider a gateway protection ordinance aimed at preserving the Town's scenic quality and rural character along roads leading into New London and around Interstate interchanges.
7. Consider developing an Aquifer Protection Overlay District to minimize potential pollution of aquifers.
8. Explore innovative land use practices to preserve New London's rural character, natural and historic resources.
9. Conduct a feasibility study to identify future Water and Sewer Service Areas and defining sewer line extension policies.