

Plan NH
Visits East Kingston

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Executive Summary
Plan NH

Executive Summary

Who are we?

Plan New Hampshire, The foundation for Shaping the Built Environment (Plan NH), is a nonprofit organization formed in 1989. Our continuing mission is to contribute to the quality of life in New Hampshire by promoting excellence in sustainable planning, design and development of the built environment.

We believe that the economic vitality of a community is directly related to the vitality of the community itself, and are champions of smart growth, by which towns, communities, and/or neighborhoods:

- reflect the earliest years of a town's existence with dense, compact design, while preserving the unique historic architectural character, natural resources, and the surrounding rural landscape
- are mixed use (living units, office/commercial, locally-based retail, municipal) and multi-generational
- include living spaces for professionals, service workers and others who work in town or nearby
- can be lived in/worked in/visited with a minimum of use of fossil fueled vehicles (i.e., are pleasant and easy on walking, biking, wheelchairs, etc.)
- offer a variety of spaces for social and civic gatherings (parks, playgrounds, benches on the sidewalks, cafés, a public library, post office, school...)
- use a minimum of synthetic materials and encourage waste as a resource as well as other eco-industrial development
- minimize or eliminate irreversible encroachment upon nature (i.e., land, water, wildlife, forests, soil, eco-systems)
- maximize rich natural resources through community gardens, nature paths for walking or biking, conserving and protecting open land from development.

Members from across the state and beyond include architects, engineers, planners, contractors, real estate, law and other professionals. The common thread linking these people is they are concerned with the quality of the built environment and its impact on communities, including their economic and social identities. The diversity of our members brings a variety of views and perspectives for discussions of issues that address the built environment in New Hampshire.

What is a Design "Charrette"?

A design charrette is simply a period of intensive work involving both professionals and local citizens as they explore potential solutions to a design issue. It has been referred to as the graphic equivalent of a brainstorming session. Lots of ideas are brought forth, explored by the group, and a consensus is built as how to best move forward.

Why does Plan New Hampshire do this?

Plan NH believes that the quality of our built environment and the social capital people are willing to invest in helping to design that built environment contribute in a significant way to the quality of life in New Hampshire. Our goal is to assist communities with worthy projects that would not get started if there were significant expenses associated with deciding what to do, as well as to assist communities that have funding but require a clear and effective plan to begin the process. An important beginning point is to tap into a communities resources -- people willing to become involved in helping to decide how to proceed with improving their community.

East Kingston's Proposal

The Proposal

The project is important to the community in that it may be an avenue that will broaden the tax base, plus lowering or stabilizing the growth in property taxes to farms and residential housing.

In March of 2007, the Town adopted a Town Center Ordinance which includes a commercial overlay zone. The Town does not control the land within the newly created overlay zone, and would like to create a cooperative environment to encourage landowners and other stakeholders to work together in the development of this zone.

The citizens of East Kingston want the Town to remain a small farming, scenic community. However there is concern about the escalating property taxes negatively impacting the quality of life and the ability for citizens to remain in their homes/farms.

An individual stated that they would like to see more of a balance in their property taxes, instead of the current 85% school at 15% town ratio. The hope is to minimize the property tax burden by coming up with ideas for community business growth.

Listening Session

Listening Session

Managing growth opportunities to broaden the tax base and increased social capital

Michael and Ina Castagna from Plan NH gathered on November 7, 2009 along with town citizens to discuss the land use options in the Town. Specifically discussed were the Town Center and the possible expansion of the Commercial District.

Mr. Castagna opened the discussion, explaining how all Boards have to engage to make changes that are needed and consider consensus building involving the community and all stakeholders.

Mr. Castagna asked:

- What do you visualize when you think of New York City?
 - ✓ Traffic, noise, pollution, tall buildings, theater, good food.
Home for those who came from New York.
- What do you visualize when you think of East Kingston?
 - ✓ Rural, peace and quiet, beauty, farms, clean air, residential, high taxes.
(In 2009, the tax rate is \$23.11 per thousand at 95% valuation)

Discussion took place in regard to the 2007 visioning session meeting to create a town center. An overlay map was displayed which showed the Town Center District and the Commercial area. The map showed the Town Center District spanning from Willow Street to Freeman Road, with a mixture of residential, commercial, and farming mixed in. It also showed the Commercial District spans from Route 107 to Route 108, with residential/farming area in the center.

It was decided not to expand the Town Center; the desire was to expand commercial area.

Goals of the town:

- preserve rural residential character of the Town
- more utilization of the farms
- conserve the open space, managing growth and preserving wetlands
- expand community recreation area of the Powwow River
- encourage commercial and light industrial growth for the tax base
- keep what the town has, but interject cohesive commercial/industrial tax rate base growth
- work at promoting more agriculture functions to produce their own rather than to have to import fruits and vegetables

The Town needs to find a way to create programs to encourage more agriculture production. They also need to create good areas for commercial zones. What types of businesses would the Town like to attract? What kinds of limitations could the Town impose on commercial industrial zones?

Public opinion was against strip center type commercial development. Mr. Castagna explained that the Town needed to examine existing infrastructure and keep any retail stores that promote locally grown produce near the highway for trucking ease, since they would also need to bring in outside products to be successful. A food co-op would also be good, as it can become a promoter of social capital. If it contained a café, that would be a good additional attraction.

Mr. Castagna reminded the participants that their Post Office was where most things come together, along with the Town Hall and Library. It was noted that the old town center/post office was originally located on the other side of the railroad tracks. It is desired to create more localized business area opportunities for local business owners to use.

A participant wondered if Town-owned conservation land could be utilized for co-op use.

Mr. Castagna noted that all Town Boards, including the Fire Department, Police Department, Recreation Department, and Highway Department, as well as state Highway Department plus the Historical Society and the Library Director need to be part of a consensus-building effort. Everyone needs to find common ground and be on the same page to properly grow the Town and broaden the tax base.

Mr. Castagna explained to the participants how the town of Durham handled the redesign of the Durham Mill Plaza.

It is important to remember to talk to NH DRED to help create and attract the right kind of commercial/industrial users that may have an interest in the area. Also, East Kingston Boards have to have dialogue to discuss Town incentives and streamline approval processes to attract good businesses of the Town's liking that would blend into the rural nature, as well as broaden the tax base, which is needed.

Down the road, consider hiring a good Economic Development Director or outsource to the Regional Economic Development Commission to work with the state of New Hampshire, while managing the process of bringing into town what you need for good business growth. Your town will need someone to help manage the creation of a TIF district and job creation through big picture with proper planning.

East Kingston has many transplant citizens from other areas due to what the town has to offer, as well as being close to commuting roads to Massachusetts. The Town offers a great rural life, and SAU # 16 offers a great school system. Create a Town of East Kingston Committee that can begin to work on easy things to do and promote social capital through town events and festivals on a frequent basis. Keep news of ongoing efforts in the local news.

Ideas to think about -

- Where can you have an art gallery or place in the summer for art festivals and shows?
- How about a café near the town center?
- What about a bike rental business nearby biking paths, starting at the town center, if possible?
- What about a community garden; something everyone can participate in and create produce to sell?

Encourage local farmers to use their property to have an event that promotes the sale of the produce. Maybe something different at each farm to re-introduce the public to all the farm owners on the same day.

East Kingston's 275th year celebration is coming, so plan that all farmers can be involved in some way, as well as any stores or businesses that you have in town.

Discuss with neighboring towns any opportunity for regional services to help the tax base. Send out a town questionnaire with no more than five questions to obtain citizen opinions; a good job for the East Kingston committee.

Remember to review your town's website and rewrite it if necessary. It's always good to have a section where the public can write in to and offer their suggestions or ask questions.

Form Based Zoning

Form Based Zoning

Form Based Zoning could be considered and is often done in Districts.

Definition - A method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form.

Form-based codes create a predictable public realm primarily by controlling physical form through city or county regulations, with a lesser focus on land-use.

Form-based codes address the relationship between building façades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes, presented in both diagrams and words, are keyed to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore character) of development rather than only distinctions in land-use types.

This is in contrast to conventional zoning's focus on the micro-management and segregation of land uses, and the control of development intensity to abstract and uncoordinated parameters (e.g., FAR, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic LOS) to the neglect of an integrated built form. Not to be confused with design guidelines or general statements of policy, form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory.

Form-based codes are drafted to achieve a community vision based on time-tested forms of urbanism. Ultimately, a form-based code is a tool; the quality of development outcomes is dependent on the quality and objectives of the community plan that the code implements.

Form-based codes commonly include the following elements:

- **Regulating plan.** A plan or map of the regulated area designating the locations where different building forms standards apply. Based on clear community intentions regarding the physical character of the area being code.
- **Public space standards.** Specifications for the elements within the public realm (e.g., sidewalks, travel lanes, on-street parking, street trees, street furniture, etc.).
- **Building forms standards.** Regulations controlling the configuration, features and functions of buildings that define and shape the public realm.
- **Administration.** A clearly defined application and project review process.
- **Definitions.** A glossary to ensure the precise use of type of technical terms.

Eight advantages to form-based codes.

1. Because they are prescriptive (they state what you want) rather than proscriptive (what you don't want), form-based codes (FBCs) can achieve a more predictable physical result. The elements controlled by FBCs are those that are most important in the shaping of a high quality built environment.
2. FBCs encourage public participation because they allow citizens to see what will happen and where, for instance, leading to a higher comfort level about greater density.
3. Because they can regulate development at the scale of an individual building or lot, FBCs encourage independent development by multiple property owners. This obviates the need for large land assemblies in the megaprojects that are frequently proposed for such parcels.
4. The built results of FBCs often reflect a diversity of architecture, materials, uses, and ownership that can only come from the actions of many independent players operating within a communally agreed-upon vision and legal framework.
5. FBCs work well in established communities because they effectively define and codify a neighborhood's existing DNA. Vernacular building types can be easily replicated, promoting infill that is compatible with surrounding structures.
6. Nonprofessionals find FBCs easier to use than conventional zoning documents because they are much shorter, more concise, and organized for visual access and readability. This feature makes it easier for non-planners to determine whether compliance has been achieved.
7. FBCs obviate the need for design guidelines, which are difficult to apply consistently, over to much room for subjective interpretation, and can be difficult to enforce. They also require less oversight by discretionary review bodies, fostering a less politicized planning process that could deliver huge savings in time and money and reduce the risk of takings challenges.
8. FBCs may prove to be more enforceable than design guidelines. The stated purpose of FBCs is the shaping of a high-quality public realm, a presumed public good that promotes healthy civic interaction. For that reason, compliance with the codes can be enforced, not on the basis of aesthetics, but because a failure to comply would diminish the good that is sought. While enforceability of development regulations has not been a problem in new growth areas controlled at private covenants, such matters can be problematic in already urbanized areas due to legal conflicts with First Amendment rights.

Form-based codes also sometimes include;

- **Architectural Standards.** Regulations controlling external architectural journals and quality.
- **Landscaping Standards.** Regulations controlling landscape design and plant materials on private property as the impact public spaces (e.g., regulations about parking lot screening and shading, maintaining sightlines, ensuring unobstructed pedestrian movements, each etc.).
- **Signage Standards.** Regulations controlling allowable signage sizes, materials, illumination and placement.
- **Environmental Resource Standards.** Regulations controlling issues such as storm water drainage and infiltration, development on slopes, tree protection, sewer access, etc.
- **Annotation.** Text and illustrations explaining the intentions of specific code provisions.

Grant Opportunities

Foundations and Private Funding Sources:

Wal-Mart Good Works - www.walmartfoundation.org

The Home Depot - Community Impact Grants

<http://corporate.homedepot.com/wps/portal/lut/p/.cmd cs/.ce/7 0 A/.s/7 0 121/ s.7 0 A/7 0 121>

The Timberland Company - Community Involvement Program

<http://www.timberland.com/corp/index.jsp?page=communityinvolvement>

The Ford Foundation - <http://www.fordfound.org/>

PSNH - Community Giving Program - http://www.psnh.com/Community/Support/corp_giving.asp

The Allstate Foundation - <http://www.allstate.com/Community/PageRender.asp?Page=foundation.html>

The Verizon Foundation - <http://foundation.verizon.com/>

Merck Family Fund - <http://www.merckff.org/index.html>

The Madeline G. von Weber Trust - Funds projects in community development, neighborhood development, human services, and the performing arts. Contact: Madeline G. von Weber Trust, c/o James D. Dow, 95 Market Street, Manchester NH 03101.

New England Grassroots Environment Fund - <http://www.grassrootsfund.org/>

Transportation Enhancement Act Program - Project categories include: facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians; safety and educational activities for bicyclists and pedestrians; acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites; scenic or historic highway programs; landscaping and other scenic beautification; historic preservation; rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures or facilities; preservation of abandoned railway corridors; control and removal of outdoor advertising; archaeological planning and research; environmental mitigation to address water pollution due to highways or vehicles; and establishing transportation museums.

<http://www.nh.gov/dot/municipalhighways/tecmag/index.htm>

Waste Management Charitable Giving Program - Support for environment, education, and community impact programs. <http://www.wm.com/WM/community/Giving.asp>

Enterprise Community Partners - <http://www.enterprisecommunity.org/>

BUZGate™ is a public/private collaborative project between America's public entrepreneurial assistance network and the Knowledge Institute. As a free public service, the Knowledge Institute works with thousands of public technical assistance agencies across the country to aggregate and further promote access to federal, state, regional and local economic development programs that specifically serve individuals seeking to start, grow, and succeed in entrepreneurial ventures. www.buzgate.org

ORTON FAMILY FOUNDATION - Heart & Soul Community Planning. Open to communities in select New England and Rocky Mountain states. Partnership opportunity for four communities to receive funding and technical assistance on major community visioning and planning projects. Submission deadline: March. www.orton.org

"Growth is inevitable and desirable, but destruction of community character is not. The question is not whether your part of the world is going to change. The question is how."...

Edward T. McMahon, The Conservation Fund