

Bedford Master Plan – Update and Summary

Planning Process and Status

- University of New Hampshire conducted a phone survey in April 2009
- Public Forum in May 2009
- Monthly meetings with Steering Committee
- Project website established (www.vhb.com/bedfordmasterplan)
- Drafts prepared for chapters of the plan
 - Land use and community design
 - Population and housing
 - Economic conditions
 - Transportation
 - Energy and utilities
 - Municipal services and facilities
 - Historic and cultural resources
- Town has recently updated both its open space plan and hazard mitigation plans. These will be incorporated into master plan.
- Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission prepared a build-out study. The build-out study analyzes current land use, future conditions with no changes to zoning, future conditions after applying additional environmental constraints, and a community alternative that tests an alternative growth pattern.

Land Use and Community Design

Key Findings

- Over 89% of the Town is zoned for residential use. Just under 8% is zoned for commercial use (mostly along Route 3 in the Performance Zone). Less than 1% is zoned for office or industrial uses.
- Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC) data shows that over 7,500 residential dwelling units have been built and almost 5.1 million sq. ft. of commercial space.

- 15,700 acres of open space currently exists according to SNHPC, although this number includes undeveloped areas in addition to conserved lands and parks.
- Approximately 6.6% of the Town's land is covered by impervious surfaces, according to SNHPC.
- Current development trends include:
 - An increase in childless and empty nester households seeking walkable living in close proximity to shopping and transportation options; and
 - Communities and developers are looking at compact development and mixed use particularly in response to a rising demand for live/ work/ play proximity, but also as a means to balance demand with open space preservation.
- Much of the rural residential character of the landscape has been maintained and reinforced with stone walls, natural fences and narrow, uncurbed, country roadways. It is differentiated by:
 - Open and closed views
 - Roads in character with the landscape
 - Development that does not overpower the landscape
 - Rural details...stone walls, low fencing, natural materials, steep pitched rooflines
 - Low density or pockets of development
- The Route 101 corridor:
 - Provides a contrast – rural patterns and commercial needs
 - Knits together the past, present and future Bedford
 - Provides east-west linkage
 - Should balance the need for services/ tax revenues with the value of the rural tradition of the town
- The combination of sign control and land development regulations serves to reduce the potential negative visual impacts of the pockets of commercial development along Route 101. Town efforts to shape the design of development have had a positive effect on the overall character of the River Road commercial corridor. This, in combination with an interesting mix of old and new, of building typologies and of uses, has resulted in a character that is not typical of such corridors. This area is characterized by:
 - Minimal single story, flat roofed buildings
 - Varied rooflines-village scale
 - “Buildings in the woods”
 - Softened edges
 - Multi-generational buildings

The Town has an opportunity to build on its strengths in this area.

Recommendations for Consideration

1. Consider encouraging future development along Route 101 into nodes at key intersections, preserving natural areas between these nodes using tools such as transfer of development rights (TDR). Essentially, TDR transfers the growth from areas where protection is desired (open spaces, environmental resources) to areas where development is appropriate because of proximity to infrastructure and services.
2. Review locations along Route 101 where zoning could be revised to allow for increased lot depth. This would provide space for additional development and required parking that could reduce curb cuts and create more of a campus style development.
3. Consider rezoning the areas around the proposed transit station and Manchester Airport Access Road for transit oriented development (TOD). This would encourage higher density, high-quality development within 10-minute walk of the station in a manner that focuses on pedestrian traffic. Development around the station would include a mixture of office, residential, retail, and civic uses.
4. Consider the addition of multi-family housing mixed in with the commercial uses in the northern end of the Performance Zone. Encourage mixed-use development with retail and services on the first floor and residential above.
5. Future growth should consider mixed use and compact development in this zone particularly where there are infill opportunities or redevelopment of existing sites. Adding vertical housing as a component of new buildings will place new residents within walkable distance of these uses, reduce vehicle trips, and provide an opportunity to create a sense of place that has vitality and interest.
6. Develop architectural/ design standards for the Performance Zone. This district currently includes standards for dimensions, landscaping, parking, screening, signage, lighting and environment. In order to enhance the character of the built environment along Route 3, some design guidelines should be established for future development.
7. Consider amending the Cluster Residential Development to reduce or eliminate the minimum size threshold (currently 15 acres). Consider requiring a conservation subdivision plan as an alternative to the standard subdivision where appropriate as a means to increase conserved, contiguous open spaces. Lot sizes would be reduced, but overall project density would remain the same.
8. Consider requiring a conservation subdivision plan as an alternative to the standard subdivision where appropriate as a means to increase conserved, contiguous open space. Lot size would be reduced but overall project density would remain the same.

Population and Housing

Key Findings

- Bedford's population growth has been substantial between 1970 and 2000, increasing from 5,859 to 18,274. The 2007 estimate is 21,550.
- The Town's population is projected to grow in the next ten years but at a much slower rate (8–10%) than the past.
- The Town's age characteristics will show increases in the 20-34, 55-64, 65 and over year old age groups, while the population aged 19 and under in decline.
- Bedford's per capita and household income levels are consistently higher than those for both the county and the state.
- Bedford's housing stock is predominately single family homes, although multi-family housing has been developed over the last decade.
- New housing construction has decreased in the last decade from an average of about 250 per year to 150.
- Bedford's housing prices are 30–40% higher than the region and state (\$395,000 median home sales price and an average rent of \$1,560 for a two-bedroom unit).

Recommendations for Consideration

1. Develop a strategy to retain seniors and younger residents in the community, including a periodic assessment of needs, more neighborhood-based services geared toward seniors, expanded transportation services, increased housing options, and the establishment of other amenities geared towards seniors and younger adults.
2. Revise the existing zoning regulations for accessory apartments and duplexes with the goal of making them more viable housing options for seniors or starter households.
3. Consider allowing mixed-use development (commercial/ residential) in the northern half of the PZ district in order to expand the town's supply of rental housing, and/ or, high density owner occupied housing. Such regulations might include provisions for inclusionary affordable housing and could allow combined elderly and workforce housing developments in districts that have access to municipal sewer as part of mixed-use developments. This would provide housing for seniors in close proximity to shopping and services and encourage multi-generational neighborhoods.
4. Consider limited construction of workforce housing in the southern PZ zone in proximity to the airport access road and/ or rail station, if a site is selected in Bedford for construction of such a facility. Any such regulations should contain inclusionary provisions that mandate a certain portion of housing units be priced for workforce households.

5. Consider allowing some existing age-restricted housing developments to transition to affordable, workforce housing units.
6. Examine the potential for rezoning the General Residential (GR) district in the northeast section of the town for higher density apartment uses and infill development (this pertains to the area bounded by Route 114, Boynton Street, and the Manchester/ Goffstown town lines).

Economic Conditions

Key Findings

- Over the past 20 years Bedford has experienced a significant expansion of its private sector employment base (increase of 4,700 jobs to 13,360).
- Bedford's economy has outperformed that of the county and the state between 2000 and 2007.
- The largest employment sectors in Town are Health Care, Retail Trade, and Professional and Technical Services. Finance and Insurance showed the largest decrease during this time.
- New Hampshire is expected to fare better than other New England states in employment forecasts for 2008–2012.
- The Town's economy has performed well over the past two decades...with steady employment growth and a sustained expansion of the nonresidential tax base.
- The majority of new nonresidential construction over the last ten years was categorized as Commercial which includes retail/ service stores, restaurants, and banks. Bedford had approximately 4.5 million square feet of nonresidential (commercial and industrial) building space in 1998. Since that time, an additional 1.12 million square feet has been constructed bringing the 2008 total to 5.6 million square feet. Most of this has been in the PZ district.
- The total undeveloped land area remaining in the nonresidential zoning districts presently stands at approximately 200 acres. One factor that could increase the amount of nonresidential building space is the potential development, or redevelopment, of properties with existing commercial buildings (such as the Bedford Mall site) or residential structures. However, since many of these properties are smaller lots, redevelopment would necessitate aggregation of numerous parcels making their potential redevelopment more complex and thus, less certain to occur.

Recommendations for Consideration

1. Stabilize and support the existing business and employment base through outreach, creation of an economic development staff position,

- updated databases, regular communications, and establishment of a Bedford Economic Development Commission.
2. Expand the Town's economic marketing activities and ensure that policies and regulations emanate a pro-business attitude.
 3. Examine regulatory requirements for nonresidential zoning districts to ensure compatibility with town goals and adaptability to changing market conditions including zoning revisions to increase density where appropriate, encourage redevelopment, and consider Transit Oriented Development near the proposed rail station.
 4. Ensure that an adequate bus, shuttle, or comparable transit, is available throughout Town to adequately move commuters who may access the proposed rail station and/ or airport access road.
 5. Consider expanding the existing commercial zones along Route 101 to facilitate further economic development to the benefit of the Town.
 6. Examine potential for hotel/ conference center in the Route 3 Corridor.
 7. Consider preparing a "master design plan" for key parcels along the northern portions of the Route 3 corridor.
 8. Ensure that an adequate sewer and roadway capacity is available along the Route 3 corridor to accommodate potential future development in the area.

Transportation

Key findings

- Many of the recommended actions from the 2000 Plan have been initiated or completed.
- The 91% of the Town's residents utilize the automobile to travel to work (86% in single occupancy vehicles) and 6% work from home.
- The lack of safe, accessible, and attractive pedestrian and bicycle facilities prevents people from using other modes of transportation. Route 101 creates a physical barrier within the community.
- The three areas of particular concern for traffic congestion are NH Route 101 within and west of Bedford, US Route 3 south of Back River Road, and NH Route 114.
- No official bike routes in Town.
- The Town has little to no pedestrian infrastructure.

Recommendations for Consideration

1. Continue to support the Town's roads program which has proven to be an effective means of transitioning the Town's roads from rehabilitation

to maintenance, ultimately resulting in a less costly maintenance program in the future.

2. Continue to promote the US Route 3 improvement plan and the exaction procedure and integrate plans for the southern performance zone with planned transportation improvements such as the Manchester Airport Access Road.
3. Since new signals were installed as a result of the high school/ middle school complex, the Town should revisit the NH Route 101 Corridor Plan to re-evaluate the connector road and pedestrian bridge. Continue to seek state support for needed improvements.
4. Develop a Town-wide pedestrian and bicycle plan.
5. Support the NH Rail Transit Authority effort to develop commuter rail in New Hampshire and look for transit oriented development opportunities around the proposed commuter rail station.
6. Continue to require formal traffic impact assessments for development projects.
7. The Town should continue to pursue access management strategies in the high-traffic corridors of US Route 3 and NH Route 101, requiring interconnection of commercial developments.
8. Develop a long-range plan to widen NH Route 114.
9. Continue to advocate for businesses along Route 3 if a new toll structure could adversely affect the Town.

Energy and Utilities

Key Findings

- Energy use by the Town's municipal buildings has remained relatively steady from 2006–2008.
- Townwide electric use from 2007–2009 has increased by approximately 6 percent while the customer base has remained steady.
- PSNH and National Grid both offer a number of programs to promote energy efficiency for homes and businesses.

Recommendations for Consideration

1. Conduct detailed energy audits for Town owned and school district buildings, as well as the vehicle fleets.
2. Once the audits are complete, prepare a detailed energy reduction plan with a clear energy reduction goal. Projects should be prioritized to determine which ones will generate the greatest savings.

3. Utilize programs such as Energy Star Portfolio Manager or the Clean Air and Climate Protection Software to monitor and manage municipal energy consumption.
4. Adopt a policy to purchase only fuel-efficient vehicles for municipal use.
5. The Energy Commission should continue to seek grants to continue energy audits, retrofitting of buildings, installing new equipment, and initiating a comprehensive outreach program to area residents and businesses.
6. Publicize the Town's existing renewable energy property tax exemption programs.
7. Revise the zoning ordinance to incorporate mixed-use, TOD, and compact development patterns to reduce automobile trips/ dependency (especially in the Performance Zoning District).
8. Adopt regulations that incentivize the use of LEED or similar standards for new construction, including municipal buildings.
9. Adopt building code regulations that enhance energy efficiency in all new renovated and residential buildings.

Municipal Services & Facilities

Key Findings

- Town buildings appear to all need major repairs. To that end, the Town Council established a Building Committee, which is expected to release a report later in 2010. The Committee will conduct an inventory of all Town buildings and will review the space needs for all Town departments. The potential cost of building replacement, renovation, or repairs will be ascertained.
- Similarly, the Town has established an Infrastructure Committee that will look at road, water, sewer, recreation, and related issues to create a plan that determine project cost estimates and how the Town should prioritize capital improvements needed to maintain and expand the Town's infrastructure.
- Major capital needs are summarized in the Town Manager's FY 2010 budget message. Among the long-term capital needs are the following:
 - The local roads program is two years behind in implementation, including improvements to Routes 3 and 101.
 - The Nashua Road Parks and Recreation building needs to be replaced
 - Recreation fields, many of which are in fair to poor condition, require upgrades
 - Recommendations made by a consultant to the Town regarding public safety staffing levels, as well as facility and equipment needs, have not been fully implemented
 - Decisions still need to be made regarding new fire substations

- Public Works Department equipment needs to be upgraded
- The Town Offices need substantial renovation and/ or expansion
- The library needs expanded parking
- School facilities are generally in good shape.
- Generally demand outstrips supply of ball fields for use by Bedford residents and organized leagues.
- The police department is not staffed as recommended in the MRI study.
- Fire protection and ambulatory services are adequate at the moment but will need to grow in the future. Some staffing increases have been recommended.

Recommendations for Consideration

1. Structure municipal budgets around community goals rather than financial milestones.
2. Address long-term concerns immediately (i.e. deferred maintenance). It will be important to implement recommendations made by the Building and Infrastructure Committees.
3. Continue working towards becoming a sustainable community by establishing a sustainable task force. Implement recommendations to be made by the Energy Commission upon completion of the detailed energy audits.
4. Lead by example—seamlessly integrate a green mindset into all government functions.
5. The Town should identify and implement water conservation measures for municipal buildings and facilities.
6. Continue to participate in regional stormwater management and education programs to meet federal requirements.
7. Detailed discussions with property owners in the Route 101 corridor should be held (if they're not already) to determine the level of interest in, and potential co-financing for, providing sewer and water services to the corridor
8. As the budget allows, continue to implement the increased staffing levels for both the Police and Fire Departments as recommended in the respective MRI studies.
9. The Town Building Committee should consider the building of a new fire substation in the South River Road area as a high priority and move forward with design plans to construct it as soon as possible. Consideration should also be given to the substation in the northwest section of town.
10. Upon completion and approval of the Building Committee's report, the Town Council should identify specific projects to fund in order to improve the condition and functionality of town-owned buildings.
11. Similarly, once the Infrastructure Committee completes its report, the Town Council should adopt a preliminary project schedule for prioritized improvements based upon a list of projects developed by Town staff and refined by the Town Manager, Planning Director, and the Planning Board.

12. There is a need for more community meeting space, either separate or as part of existing structures, which should be integrated into planning future municipal building projects.
13. Work with the William B. Cashin Senior Activity Center in Manchester and other communities to formalize specific programs to serve the Bedford senior citizen clientele including transportation to and from the facility. Efforts should be undertaken to explore public/ private partnerships to provide additional services and programs for Bedford's older residents.
14. Using the NRPA guidelines as a baseline, the Parks and Recreation Department should establish service and locational standards for the Town's park and recreational facilities. Not all of the NRPA guidelines apply to Bedford, but given the high demand for certain playing fields, the Town should adopt appropriate standards that can serve as a guide for future decision-making regarding new fields and maintenance of existing ones.
15. Additional staff is needed to keep up with the maintenance demands for park and recreational facilities, especially ball fields which are considered to be in short supply regardless of their condition.

Historic & Cultural Resources

Key Findings

- Bedford has a rich history represented by its historic and archaeological resources, which include buildings, structures, objects, burial grounds, landscapes, and archaeological sites. These resources define the Town's character and identity.
- The Bedford Historic District Commission, which oversees the Bedford Historic District, and the Bedford Historical Society are the two primary historic preservation organizations in the town.
- Two properties are on the National Register of Historic Places – Bedford Town Hall and the Bedford Presbyterian Church.
- Currently, the Town of Bedford has one local historic district, the Bedford Historic District, which was established in 1970. The district is roughly bounded by Wallace Road, Church Road, Ministerial Road, and Liberty Hill Road.

Recommendations for Consideration

1. Integrate historic and archaeological resource identification, documentation, and evaluation into local planning.
2. Develop and strengthen local planning and protection measures for historic resources.

3. Incorporate specific historic preservation objectives in community revitalization and economic development efforts.
4. Heighten awareness, understanding, and appreciation of Bedford's historic and archaeological resources and their preservation.
5. Create and enhance cultural opportunities in Bedford.
6. Utilize the grant and tax credit programs available at the federal and state level to identify and preserve historic, archaeological, and cultural resources.
7. Consider additional protection of historic resources through a demolition delay ordinance and additional local historic districts.

Open Space

Key Findings

NOTE: This is a summary of the Open Space Plan already adopted by the Town in November 2009.

- The Open Space Plan defined a “green infrastructure” along open space corridors that have the following benefits:
 - Maintains ground and surface water quality
 - Improves air quality
 - Provides animal and plant habitat
 - Provides connected open spaces
 - Creates a pleasant and scenic environment
 - Establishes wildlife corridors
- As defined, this green infrastructure includes approximately 7,754 acres (36.7%) of the Town.
- The Open Space Task Force identified 45 undeveloped priority parcels to determine a protection strategy for each one. The strategies included high cost options, such as outright purchase or the purchase of an easement. Low or no cost options included regulatory protection, management agreements, and landowner education.
- Financing through Land Use Change Tax revenue can be a valuable tool to protect high priority parcels.

Adopted Recommendations in the Open Space Plan

1. The green infrastructure identified in this plan should be adopted as the town's goal for open space preservation.
2. The parcels identified should be pursued for protection using the regulatory, non-regulatory, and purchasing strategies indicated.

- a) Regulatory options include conservation subdivisions as described under the Land Use section.
 - b) Non-regulatory options include educating landowners about the benefits of open space (such as tax advantages); transfer of development rights (also described in the Land Use section); and voluntary conservation such as land donation or the sale of development rights.
 - c) Purchasing options include outright purchase at market value, a discounted sale to the Town, or a Town purchase of an easement.
3. The Town should work expeditiously and cooperatively with owners of developed parcels within the recommended green infrastructure to ensure their appropriate management.
 4. The Town should re-examine the recommendations of the plan at no more than three year intervals and review the open space financing plan annually, as part of the Capital Improvement Plan process.

Natural Hazard Mitigation

Key Findings

NOTE: This is a summary of the Hazard Mitigation Plan already adopted by the Town Council in May 2009.

- Key natural hazards in Bedford include flooding wind, wildfire, ice and snow events, and earthquakes.
- Critical facilities at risk include Town Offices, Safety Complex, Emergency Operations Center, Emergency Fuel Facilities, emergency shelters, evacuation routes, bridges, hospitals, and communication facilities.
- Areas at risk include public water/ sewer systems, dams, electrical power substations, highways/ roadways, problem culverts, schools and day care centers, health care facilities, commercial areas, recreational and historic resources, and hazardous materials facilities.
- Hazard mitigation is defined by the federal government as “any action taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk to human life and property from hazards”.
- Hazard mitigation works to save lives and property, reduce vulnerability to future hazards, facilitate post-disaster funding, and speed recovery.

Adopted Recommendations in the Hazard Mitigation Plan

1. Implement culvert and bridge inventory and analysis, reporting on the conditions of each.
2. Develop a culvert and bridge maintenance program to ensure the longevity of the infrastructure and minimize potential damage in the event of a disaster.
3. Develop a website for floodplain information, both general and town based information.
4. Coordinate between the School District and Emergency Services to determine further generation needs at emergency shelters.
5. Develop a maintenance program for detention/ retention ponds and identify locations of existing and potential new facilities as required to lessen clogging and flooding.
6. Develop a transportation hazard identification system for major routes (Routes 101/ 114/ I-293) for future hazardous spill events and anticipate hazard contamination characteristics.
7. Develop a tree maintenance program, minimize risk of unhealthy trees being blown over in wind events or swept by floods or landslides.
8. Educate residents on flood mitigation by distributing information through mailings, local newspaper articles or local access television programming.
9. Develop a river stewardship program in coordination with other local communities in the Merrimack River Watershed area.
10. Purchase flood-prone properties and/ or development rights, particularly in the Special Flood Hazard Areas where possible.