HILLSBOROUGH TOMORROW

Our Vision

Hillsborough is committed to supporting a high quality of life and sense of community for all residents and strives to be welcoming to all. These commitments need to be reflected in our community programs, housing options, services and facilities alike. In addition, Hillsborough seeks to be welcoming to new business and supportive to existing businesses.

Hillsborough residents value the Town's rural and historic character, natural resources and recreation opportunities, and the walkability of the Central Business District. Residents want to ensure these characteristics and assets are preserved for future generations in the years to come. Hillsborough's vision of the future builds on what was heard from residents, the demographic trends and development patterns described in this Master Plan, and the story conveyed by history, community values and the present-day environment.

FROM HILLSBOROUGH TODAY TO HILLSBOROUGH TOMORROW…

Throughout the development of the Master Plan, engaging residents and other community stakeholders was a key goal. The Visioning Session and the Community Survey gave the Planning Board important information on residents' opinions on many topics related to Hillsborough's land use and regulations as well as other thoughts on priorities and concerns. Next describes some broad themes that are based on the public outreach and other stakeholder input.

Residents were supportive of revitalization and growth in the Central Business District (downtown) area. Available parking and an expanded sidewalk network was thought to be beneficial in attracting new businesses and visitors. The renewal of the downtown area was a central theme, with the efforts tied to a number of projects such as the Riverwalk and necessary water and sewer infrastructure improvements.

As previously stated, Hillsborough residents value the Town's rural and historic character, vast array of natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities, and the walkability of the downtown area. Support was shown in both the Community Survey and during the Visioning Session for further commercial development in Hillsborough, with most preferring retail establishments, restaurants, a major grocery store, and services. Though not as highly ranked, but still important are recreational businesses, agriculture-related businesses, and professional offices.

Residents are in favor of a variety of housing options, including senior housing, assisted living, condominiums, accessory dwelling units and workforce housing. Hillsborough's natural resources were highly valued overall. Lakes and ponds, streams and rivers, forests, and aquifers were most highly rated in the Community Survey as resources that should be protected. It was commonly mentioned that there is a lack of awareness for access to the Town's natural resources, with specific mention of trails, the Contoocook River, and Bagley and Contention Ponds.

Finally, desire for a Community Center was expressed at the Visioning Session and in responses of the Community Survey. It was felt that a Community Center would serve all ages, and be used as gathering place and as a facility for indoor recreation activities.

Like many other communities, residents expressed concern that the rural character often viewed as central to Hillsborough's identity may be lost due to additional residential growth over the next few decades. There are many types of "rural character" images that shape Hillsborough - historical buildings, natural forests, water bodies, streams, and rivers, stone arch bridges, and many treasured scenic views. Often, it is the mix of landscapes that contributes to the concept of rural character, including current development patterns and the scenic vistas of hills, rivers, open space and forests.

Many of the responses and comments received through the Community Survey and input from the Visioning Session related to how residents want to see Hillsborough in the future. Community spirit, recreational resources, services, and an attractive place to visit were common themes among the responses. A snapshot of representative responses can be found on the next page.

WHAT IS RURAL CHARACTER

When asked what residents like about their community, "rural character" is no doubt one of the most popular responses. While it is difficult to narrow down a common definition of rural character, it is clear there are some shared images that come to mind: scenic views, forested hills, historic buildings, ponds, unpaved roads, waterways, stone arch bridges, etc. However, rural character also refers to a community's social structures that are created by activities and settlement patterns.

Preserving this character is very often expressed as the highest priority in community surveys and other public outreach events. Each community has something unique about it that contributes to its rural character. "You know it when you see it or feel it" is one way to think about it and, while the definition of rural character is unique to each community, it does highlight one of the most common themes in master plan goals or vision statements. While nearly every New Hampshire community identifies rural character as a value to preserve, it is important to identify what specific elements about a Town need preserving.

HOW DO HILLSBOROUGH RESIDENTS WANT TO SEE HILLSBOROUGH IN THE FUTURE?

"That it is a warm, welcoming, inviting town with lots of businesses and things to do."

"Great place to live, welcoming to small businesses, great place to bring up children. A destination town, for outdoor pursuits and activities like the Balloonfest, Schnitzelfest & Living History weekend."

"A place of natural beauty, handsome historical neighborhoods, good food and fun, and a community that celebrates its economic diversity."

"A good place to live, shop, go to school and volunteer."

"A pleasant historical town with active citizenship participating in arts, outdoor activities and recreation as well as good shopping and diverse housing."

"Family friendly Town."

"Nice place to visit with good choice of restaurants, places to spend the night. Great recreation opportunities: hiking, walking, attending events, etc."

"A growing town with a great education system."

"A thriving destination bedroom community, with good services and social and recreational opportunities and resources for families and people in the area."

DEVELOPING A VISION

Common threads emerged from a close examination of the public outreach efforts throughout the Master Plan's development. As mentioned previously, appreciation of community values and rural character were repeated as valued strengths identified by residents. The themes of connection and sustainability of what the Town already "has" are important to keep in mind as we develop not only a vision for the future but recommendations on how to achieve that vision. The following represent the major themes to be carried forward throughout this Master Plan.

Enhancing the Central Business District: A central theme of the Master Plan has been the need to revitalize the Central Business District through a variety of measures such as infrastructure improvements (sidewalks/water and sewer), through the use of available tax incentives, or through ordinance or regulation changes. There are also opportunities for public/private partnerships to take a leading role in the process.

Improving connectivity: Residents identified the need for improved connections and access for recreational activities like walking, hiking, biking, canoe/kayaking, and cross-country skiing as well as for economic development and transportation.

Continuing preservation, protection and enhancement of open spaces, recreational trails, and water resources: Striving to improve management of water resources and improve access to recreational resources are all important priorities as Hillsborough continues to look for opportunities to support these activities through partnerships and grant opportunities.

HILLSBOROUGH'S SCHOOLS

The Hillsboro-Deering Cooperative School District was formed in 1954 and serves students from the towns of Hillsboro, Deering, Washington and Windsor. The School District has made great progress in recent years, and plays a strong role in what makes Hillsborough a great place to live.

Sixty-one percent (61%) of the teachers in Hillsboro-Deering schools hold Master's Degrees and fifty-nine percent (59%) of teachers in Washington Elementary School have a Master's Degree. Total enrollment in October 2017 was 1,184 students with 269 students identified with special educational needs and 40% eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student to teacher ratio is 10.4:1 with an average class size of 20 students. Approximately 60% of the district's students pursue post high school education upon graduation.

The High School dropout rate has averaged 0.55% over the past six years. In 2012, the High School earned the New Hampshire Department of Education Commissioner's Circle of Excellence award in recognition of the significant improvements being made. In 2016, US News and World Report recognized HD High School as the 11th best High School in NH out of 87 participants. Five years prior to that the High School was ranked 81st out of 86 in the now discontinued New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) scores!

Responding to population changes and demographic shifts by addressing any emerging issues in housing, broadband availability, economic development and transportation: Hillsborough should continue to invest in transportation improvements, broadband availability and economic development as a way to attract new opportunities and be a participant in a more visible and vibrant economy in the region. Recognizing the need to accommodate an aging population throughout Hillsborough and all of New Hampshire is an important factor for the future planning of housing, infrastructure, and transportation needs.

Keeping Hillsborough's rural and historic character while addressing the challenge of meeting the needs of residents: This value continues to have strong appeal to residents. One of the most common desires voiced by residents was a strong interest in preserving Hillsborough's rural character and its associated historical sites, downtown "village" feel, open spaces and other natural resources.

Keeping fiscal responsibility a priority. There is concern about increasing expenditures and resulting impacts on property taxes. While residents generally supported a wide variety of objectives and recommendations as described in the other Master Plan chapters, there are also challenges regarding taxes and any potential new burdens. As municipal government makes public investments in infrastructure, land protection, new programs and initiatives, consider the "bottom line."

A SUMMARY OF THE MASTER PLAN

Each topic area of this Master Plan, with its data analysis, community survey consideration, objective and recommendations for Town-wide implementation, supports the future vision of Hillsborough.

ECONOMIC BASE

Hillsborough supports responsible economic development with an emphasis on the Central Business District and other commercial zones that result in increased employment opportunities, an increase to the variety of available commercial enterprises, and leads to an enhanced local image.

OBJECTIVE 1: Promote "quality of life" economic development that capitalizes on Hillsborough's location, Central Business District, and available infrastructure.

OBJECTIVE 2: Educate and make use of available economic development incentives that serve to focus commercial development in suitable areas of Hillsborough.

OBJECTIVE 3: Provide the impetus and support for local funding for varied infrastructure projects such as improved sidewalks, water/sewer expansion/improvements and the redevelopment of local brownfields parcels.

OBJECTIVE 4: Emphasize how non-traditional economic development activities such as the formation of a Trails Committee, the development of the Kemp Memorial Park, and the development of a Regional Community Center can serve to promote the Town's overall image, thus enhancing its economic development opportunities.

HOUSING

Provide opportunities throughout the Town of Hillsborough that meet the varied housing needs of Hillsborough's current and future residents.

OBJECTIVE 1: Maintain the existing housing stock, protect existing residential areas, but continue to look for opportunities to develop new residential neighborhoods.

OBJECTIVE 2: Preserve and enhance the current Village development pattern.

OBJECTIVE 3: Ensure a mix of housing that address changing demographics and meet the demands of the housing market.

OBJECTIVE 4: Look for opportunities to strengthen the connection between housing opportunities and economic development, and natural resource protection and transportation.

COMMUNITY AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES WITH UTILITIES

Hillsborough supports the delivery of quality Town services to residents and businesses, and supports improvements or expansion of services as necessary to continue to enhance Hillsborough's quality of life.

OBJECTIVE 1: Inventory and evaluate the Town of Hillsborough's existing community and recreational facilities and services.

OBJECTIVE 2: Anticipate the Town's future community and recreational facilities and service needs.

OBJECTIVE 3: Offer creative means of meeting the future facility and service needs.

OBJECTIVE 4: Recommend innovative Town community and recreational facilities that will foster a greater sense of community in Hillsborough.

OBJECTIVE 5: Recognize and seek to overcome the geographic challenges to providing services to all Town residents.

TRANSPORTATION

Promote the improvement of public roads in Hillsborough; encourage a system of transportation that will meet the mobility needs of all local residents by providing for the efficient movement of people, goods, and services within Hillsborough and throughout the region; maintain a commitment to the rural and historic character of the community; and provide a well-maintained and safe transportation system that meets the functional and aesthetic needs of the community, in a cost effective manner.

OBJECTIVE 1: Develop a program to maintain and enhance local roads.

OBJECTIVE 2: Work with the New Hampshire Department of Transportation to ensure that state maintained roadways and bridges within the Town of Hillsborough are adequately maintained, are safe and reliable, and will achieve a reasonable service life.

OBJECTIVE 3: Establish a set of guidelines and policies to be used by the Planning Board when considering new development that may impact state and local roads.

OBJECTIVE 4: Create a transportation system that safely supports all users including a pedestrian and bicycle system that allows for safe, efficient and reliable foot and bike traffic.

OBJECTIVE 5: Enhance the economic vitality of downtown through transportation and street scape improvements. Monitor and expand parking as appropriate in the Central Business District to assist current businesses and spur economic development.

OBJECTIVE 6: Leverage the town's scenic roads and trail networks to encourage all season tourism, preserve history, and maintain its rural character.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hillsborough supports environmental stewardship of our natural resources providing residents with a healthy natural environment that enhances a high quality of life.

OBJECTIVE 1: Present information gathered from the survey and visioning session regarding the community's interest in conservation including the local environment, land preservation and water protection.

OBJECTIVE 2: Provide a review of the Town's initiatives and process on land and water conservation activities.

OBJECTIVE 3: Develop a guide for the Town's conservation actions over the next ten years.

A) Educating citizens about the Town's natural resources and the importance they play to the Town's quality of life.

B) Identify opportunities to enhance access to the Town's lands and water bodies.

C) Use the identification of Ecologically Significant Areas to assist in the identification of priority areas for future acquisition and/or protection through regulatory and non-regulatory techniques.

D) Identify opportunities to coordinate efforts with adjoining communities as well as within our own to protect watersheds and connect wildlife corridors.

EXISTING AND FUTURE LAND USE

Hillsborough supports an emphasis on future development and redevelopment in the Central Business District and other commercial zones, along with the continued conservation of existing natural resources and lower densities in the Town's rural areas.

OBJECTIVE 1: Identify key short and long-term changes to the Zoning Ordinance and Land Use regulations to support the vision developed on the master plan update process, with an emphasis on the enhancement of the Central Business District, continued development of the Commercial Zone (including Gateway zones), the redevelopment of Brownfields parcels and the future redevelopment of existing gravel excavation areas.

OBJECTIVE 2: Promote a coordinated effort through a public/private partnership to enhance the Central Business District through the combined efforts of Town Boards and Committees, the Hillsborough Chamber of Commerce, Hillsborough Reborn, and other entities.

OBJECTIVE 3: Promote appropriate levels of development and density in the Rural District, specifically through a review of commercial uses that are permitted or allowed by special exception.

OBJECTIVE 4: Following the recommendations and priorities found in the Natural Resources Chapter, continue work to enhance the protection of Ecologically Sensitive Areas.

OBJECTIVE 5: Promote the development of a trails system (Riverwalk) in the vicinity of the Contoocook River as an enhancement to the Central Business District/commercial area.

OUR VISION…

Hillsborough is a vibrant community favored by residents and visitors for its diverse and walkable downtown, vast natural resources and recreation opportunities, rural and historic heritage, and high quality of life.

What do we know from Today? What makes Hillsborough a great place to live?

- "Healthy and diverse environments, protected lands, quaint downtown, rural and historic character and a sense of community." These are the values to be kept in mind as we plan for and accommodate the necessary growth important for maintaining the quality of life and services that residents need and expect.

What do we value as important amenities?

- Our quality of life (leisure, recreation, employment, and preserving rural character) must be supported.
- We need to continue to be good stewards of our cultural heritage and natural environments. We will continue to work towards the preservation of open space and watersheds in connected networks. Our historic homes, the Village area, and scenic views should be preserved as part of the Town's heritage.
- Infrastructure (roads, bridges, community facilities and services, and broadband) is vital to our community.

How do we respond to the challenge of making needed changes?

- An aging population brings into focus new challenges as many retirees are remaining in rural areas to remain close to family or to enjoy the scenic and recreation amenities available in a community like Hillsborough. How we address the potential demands for smaller houses for downsizing families is important as we adapt to an aging population.
- We welcome businesses that align with our development patterns and rural character while supporting economic growth.
- We support housing choices for residents throughout their life cycle, from young adults, to families with children, to retirees.
- We look for opportunities to work with other communities on issues of regional concern and will continue to be proactive with planning and zoning ideas.

How do we allocate limited resources to maintain and enhance the rural character and quality of life that resident's value?

- We must maintain fiscal responsibility, ensuring today's decisions do not create hardship for future generations.
- We invest in our community through an open, transparent process prior to any decision-making.