

Existing Land Use

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the physical features of the land, but also the existing zoning that is resulting in the use of the land. In addition to the textual descriptions, various maps provide a visual overview of the existing land use in Plaistow.

Plaistow is located in southeastern New Hampshire adjacent to the Massachusetts border and is at the crossroads of several major highway corridors including Route 125, Route 121A, Route 121 and Route 108. Travelers can take both Route 125 and Route 108 all the way to the Rochester area while users of Route 121A and Route 121 can travel west all the way to the City of Manchester. Heading south, Routes 121A and 121 merge with Route 125 in Haverhill, Massachusetts which then joins with Interstate 495. Route 108 also joins with Interstate 495 in Haverhill. Plaistow's recent pattern of development reflects the town's proximity to nearby employment centers, the excellent roadway network and the affordability of housing. The system of roadways has also stimulated commercial growth along these highway corridors – most notably Route 125. Consequently, Plaistow has become primarily a residential community with substantial amounts of commercial development located on major highways.

The current pattern of development and the recent trends in land use change must be understood in order to manage future growth through the planning process. The following discussion describes more fully the determinants of Plaistow's land use pattern and the issues that affect the character of the community.

Comparison of Current Land Use to Previous Land Use Data

Based on data from the 1988 Master Plan, in 1977 51% of Plaistow was determined to be undeveloped while in 1987 the figure was 55%. These data are at odds with data prepared by the former NH Agricultural Experiment Station in 1978 that identified over 60% of the town's land as undeveloped in 1975. The most recent data is based on aerial photography from 1992 and interpreted by the Rockingham Planning Commission. Although past data may not be consistent, it is clearly based on the most recent data that there is much undeveloped land in Plaistow.

Plaistow's pattern of land use is the result of several historical and more recent trends that have resulted in the following:

- 1) encroachment of single-family residential homes and subdivisions into areas of open space;
- 2) strip commercial development along major roadways such as Routes 125; and
- 3) areas of undeveloped land scattered throughout the town.

Over the past 50 years the most significant trends in land use change have been the steady loss of agriculture and forest land. In 1978 the Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of New Hampshire published a land use change report for the State of New Hampshire by municipality. Based on this study, between 1952 and 1975 there was a loss of over 740 acres of

agricultural land. In addition, there was a loss of over 860 acre of forest land. These lands were converted to development for residential, commercial and industrial uses. **See Table ELU-1, Land Use Change, 1952-1775.** This trend has continued and, by 1999, there were only approximately 93 acres of agriculture and approximately 3600 acres of undeveloped land that is primarily forested **See Table ELU-1.**

Table ELU-1: Land Use Change, 1952-1775

Land Use Type	1952 Area (acres)	%	1975 Area (acres)	%
Agriculture	1124	17.7	378	6.0
Idle	287	4.5	233	3.7
Forest	4627	73.2	3763	59.5
Developed	287	4.5	1718	27.1
Other	-	-	233	3.7
Total	6325	100	6325	100

Source: Agriculture, Forest and Related Land Use, 1952-1975, Agricultural Experiment Station, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire

The Existing Land Use Inventory includes discussion of the following land uses within Plaistow: residential, commercial, industrial, transportation/utilities, government/institutional/educational, agriculture, outdoor and other urban and built-up land, undeveloped and brush or transitional between open and forested. For each category of use the area in acres is noted. The total area of Plaistow is 6,789.59 acres or 10.61 square miles. Of this, undeveloped land comprises Plaistow’s largest land use with 3,479.80 acres or approximately 51.25 % of the town’s total area. Residential is second with just under 2131.96 acres or 31.40 % of the town’s area (**see Table ELU-2**). It should be noted that land use and land cover classifications are taken from the US Geological Survey and employed in the statewide GRANIT system.

Table ELU-2: Plaistow’s Land Area

Land Use Type	Area (acres)	%
Residential	2131.96	31.40
Commercial	379.19	5.58
Industrial	286.71	4.22
Transportation/Utilities	15.93	0.23
Government/Institutional/Education	82.06	1.21
Agriculture	81.84	1.21
Outdoor & Other Urban and Built-Up Land	154.78	2.28
Transitional	145.87	2.15
Waterbodies *	31.45	0.46
Undeveloped	3479.80	51.25
Total	6789.59	100

Source: Rockingham Planning Commission

*does not include rivers/streams/brooks, only includes ponds

Residential

Residential development encompasses the largest amount and percentage of developed land in Plaistow. In total it comprises 2131.96 acres and 31.40 % of the town's area. Below is a description of the different types of residential development. **See the Land Use Map.**

Single Family

Single-family development is spread throughout town and is consistent with the town's Zoning Ordinance, which requires 110,000 square foot lots in the Low Density Residential Zone, 40,000 square foot lots in the Medium Density Residential Zone, and five-acre lots in the Residential Conservation Zone.

According to the Office of State Planning, sixty percent (60%) of the housing units in Plaistow in 1999 were single family units – up from 56.8 % in 1990 (1990 US Census). In surrounding communities, the percentage of single family homes is much greater. This phenomenon may be attributed to Plaistow's lower household income relative to surrounding communities. Consequently, Plaistow serves a housing market that results in a greater mix of housing types.

Multi-Family

These residential areas, which include apartments, condominiums and town houses comprise approximately 125.59 acres or 1.85 % of Plaistow. Multi-family residential areas tend to be located along Newton Road/Route 108, Cifre Lane, West Pine Street, Chandler Avenue, Westville Road, Forrest Street, Greenough Road and Danville Road area, and Old County Road.

Commercial (C-I)

Plaistow has assumed an increasing role as a regional shopping center, particularly along Route 125. This phenomenon is one that provides shopping opportunities to an area greater than the Town of Plaistow, as it serves surrounding towns in New Hampshire and nearby Massachusetts and is partially the result of earlier zoning measures.

For a town the size of Plaistow, this development along a partially substandard Route 125 reaches proportions of over development, particularly since there are no municipal services for potable water and sewer. Only a limited fire support system exists. Nonetheless, the need for such a regional shopping facility exists and the Town of Plaistow, as in the past, can accommodate this need provided the commercial areas do not allow for conflicting residential development. It is important, however, that over-zoning for such commercial development be avoided in order to discourage marginal commercial strip developments.

The State Line Plaza, located at the westerly Route 125 right-of-way and at the Massachusetts border, does have municipal water and sewer by virtue of being connected to the Haverhill, Massachusetts facilities. This agreement was reached between the developer and the City of Haverhill since some of the buildings in the shopping center are in fact located in Haverhill. This is the only location in Plaistow with such facilities.

The State of New Hampshire has made significant improvements along Route 125 from the Massachusetts line to East Road, 1.2 miles to the north. As the reconstruction of Route 125 took place, the fire suppression water lines were extended in the southerly direction to Shaw's Plaza and in the northerly direction over the Westville railroad bridge. It has been the policy of the Town to extend the water suppression line as Route 125 is reconstructed in order to allow the expansion to occur when costs are at a minimum.

NHDOT traffic counts have recorded daily volumes of traffic along selected roads in Plaistow (see **Plaistow Transportation Chapter of the Master Plan**). Route 125 at Little River went from 15,000 vehicles a day in 1994 to 23,000 vehicles a day in 1998 – a 53.3 % increase. Route 125 south of NH 121A, went from 13,000 vehicles a day in 1994 to 14,000 vehicles a day in 1998. In 1996, 22,000 vehicles a day were counted on Route 125 at the Massachusetts state line. These figures not only show the levels of traffic on Route 125 during this period, but some also show that the higher counts tend to be in the southern portion of town near the Massachusetts border - an indication that Plaistow will continue to be subjected to additional growth pressures for both commercial and residential growth.

Traffic continues to be a problem on Route 125 and long lines backed up at traffic lights seem to be the focus of attention when looking at the problem. Plaistow alone can not solve all the problems, since traffic is already slowed to a crawl coming through the lights in Haverhill on Route 125 in the northerly direction and in the southerly direction will back up into Plaistow from traffic lights in Haverhill. It is very important to reduce the traffic congestion on Route 125 for many reasons; congestion will prevent commercial growth along Route 125 and the same congestion will force drivers to seek alternate ways around the congestion – such as Main Street. The alternative pathways through the Town are extremely undesirable. Studies should be undertaken to provide solutions to the Route 125 congestion and then the solution must be implemented. In 1995 the Planning Board commissioned a study of Route 125 from the Massachusetts border to the intersection of Route 125 and the Pentucket Mall, This effort coincided with the State of New Hampshire's effort to open a Park and Ride facility on Westville Road with a traffic light at Route 125 just before the Westville railroad bridge. The study really consisted of 3 pieces: 1) a study of traffic volumes on Route 125 at all intersections in the study area; 2) a set of preliminary drawings of proposed changes to be made to Route 125, and 3) a set of cost estimates for any work that needed to be done and to find a way to finance the improvements.

The recommendations from the study included adding a traffic light at the intersection of Route 125 and a realigned Haseltine Street and to make Route 125 a 5 lane road for the length of the study area. The 5 lanes would include 2 northbound lanes, 2 southbound lanes, and a center turn lane. Also all traffic lights would have left turn lanes, left turn arrows and would all be synchronized (from Massachusetts to East Road) so that a car traveling at the speed limit, once at a green light should be able to travel the length of the study area without stopping again. The study recommended that these improvements be partially financed by a set of impact fees imposed on new and expanded growth along Route 125.

In 1997 Rockingham Planning Commission and the Towns of Plaistow and Kingston undertook a higher level study of Route 125 from the Massachusetts line to the Kingston/Brentwood line. This study used the data collected from the study Plaistow undertook in 1995 and focused on details of the Plaistow intersections along Route 125 starting at East

Road and proceeding north to the Kingston line. This study does not include any engineering drawings of proposed changes nor does it include any updates to the impact fee schedule which would be needed to help finance the improvements.

In 1996 the Planning Board's request to finish the study /engineering drawings /impact fee analysis to complete the work started in the 1995 study was turned down at Town meeting. The Planning Board made a similar request in 1997.

While any changes made to Route 125 in Plaistow are helpful, the larger part of the Route 125 problem occurs in Haverhill, MA between Route I-495 and the New Hampshire border. Any solution to alleviate traffic through Haverhill will probably require changes that will impact Haverhill, MA and Plaistow, Atkinson, and Newton, NH. In order to facilitate some of these changes the Plaistow Board of Selectmen have set a series of meetings with the Haverhill Mayor and City Council and with representatives from the Atkinson and Newton Boards of Selectmen starting in October 1997. Once the local officials have agreed upon some proposals, they will work with the respective State Departments of Transportation to do the engineering and implementation of the proposals.

Route 125 Commercial I Characteristics

Route 125, through Plaistow, is 3.4 miles in length and currently has 3 distinct and nearly equidistant sections (Haverhill, MA to East Road, East Road to Main Street, and Main Street to Kingston, NH).

Route 125 (Haverhill, MA to East Road)

The first section from Haverhill to East Road is approximately 1.2 miles in length and is very heavily developed to the point where there are no more undeveloped lots with frontage on Route 125. It contains all of the large shopping center, State Line Plaza, Shaw's Plaza, Bradlee's/Market Basket, and the Pentucket Shopping Center. In addition includes several individual stores, smaller strip malls, banks, car dealerships and repair facilities.

All of the shopping centers, large and small, contain a good balance of retail businesses – grocers, cleaners, restaurants, department stores, hardware stores, etc. This balance helps to create and maintain prosperity by not focusing on one particular business type, for example Pizza takeout. When businesses of one type are congregated in one area and that particular market segment declines, vacancies can result and when there are a lot of vacancies concentrated in one area it can reflect on the entire business community and health of the commercial zone. This type of variability in businesses should be encouraged along the entire length of Route 125.

Route 125 (East Road to Main Street)

The second section along Route 125 starts at East Road and ends at Main Street, 1.1 miles to the north of East Road. This section has a different look and feel to it. There are no large shopping centers and it contains one of the last large undeveloped areas with frontage along Route 125. This undeveloped area was formerly Goudreaults Trailer Sales and the old Plaistow Drive-in Theatre. It is also characterized by numerous new and used car

dealers. If these dealerships were distributed along Route 125 with equal distances between them, they would be spaced approximately 1000 feet apart. It would be desirable then to change the zoning to support this distance between vehicle dealerships. In 1997, Town meeting passed an ordinance setting the distance between dealership lots to 1000'. A similar strategy may need to be developed when any singular type of business starts to become dominant anywhere along Route 125. In 1997, town meeting passed a similar 1000 feet restriction for gas stations.

Route 125 (Main Street to Kingston, NH)

The third section along Route 125 starts at Main Street and ends at the Kingston, NH line, 1.1 miles to the north of Main Street. This section also has a look and feel that is different from either of the 2 southern sections. There are a couple of large wetland areas to the east of Route 125 as well as a large tract of land which is zoned industrial to the west of Route 125, north of Old County Road. This is the only section of any industrial zone with direct access to Route 125 and as such should be treated as a valuable resource.

Town Center/Commercial II Zone

This zone has become commonly known as Commercial II or C-II and includes that part of Main Street extending from the railroad tracks to the junction of the Commercial I zone near the Haverhill, Massachusetts border.

Presently some portions of Main Street in Plaistow are designated for limited commercial activities. The continued plan is to reduce intensity in order to preserve its historic qualities and its general town center atmosphere. It is proposed that this designation be of a density similar to the Medium Density Residential area, with limited offices and government service establishments also permitted within the Town Center use designation.

Integrated Residential-Commercial (ICR)

Prior to the Master Plan update and corresponding zoning changes made in 1988, a Commercial I zone was defined that included the general areas of Route 125, some areas of Main Street north of its northern intersection with Route 125, and Route 108. Some of the changes of use recommended for Commercial I zones were not appropriate for Route 108 and a new zone, the ICR zone, was created for Route 108. A major change made to the Commercial I uses was the elimination of residential use in any C-I zone; this was not appropriate for Route 108.

The ICR zone is characterized by small businesses, single family homes, multi-family homes, and Plaistow's last remaining working farm. It is desirable to keep this mixed use in tact. The ICR zone continues to grow at a manageable and orderly rate.

Industrial

Approximately 287 acres in Plaistow are committed to industrial activity, which is 4.23 % of the town's total area. The majority of industrial use land in Plaistow is located in the vicinity of the

town's major routes such as Route 125, Old County Road and Kingston Road in the northern portion of Plaistow, and along the railroad tracks.

Transportation/Utilities

There are approximately 9.59 acres (0.14%) in town classified as road transportation and 6.34 (0.09%) acres in town classified as electric, gas and other utilities. Road transportation includes such things as right-of-ways, park and ride lots, bus and truck terminals and railroad stations and terminals. Electric, gas and other utilities includes such things as electric transmission lines, electric power generation facilities, gas or oil pipelines and gas or oil storage facilities.

Government, Institutional, and Educational

Government, institutional and educational land use includes such things as post offices, court houses, administrative offices, emergency services, public works, hospitals/clinics, religious facilities, social organizations and schools.

Governmental facilities account for 9.53 acres in town, institutional facilities account for 10.91 acres and educational facilities account for 61.62 acres in Plaistow for a total of 82.06 acres or 1.21 % of the total land area in town.

The majority of land classified as educational is located near the Atkinson town border along Greenough Road (51 acres) and is associated with Timberlane Regional High School and Timberlane Middle School. The only other parcel of educational land is located on Main Street in the village area--the Pollard School. Land classified as institutional is found scattered throughout the town. The seven parcels range in size from 0.3 acres to 3.7 acres.

Agriculture

There are approximately 81.84 acres of agricultural land in Plaistow or 1.21 % of the town's total land area. Agricultural land includes cropland and pasture. The majority of agricultural land is located along Newton Road/Route 108 in the southeastern part of the town. Small parcels of agricultural land can also be found off of Crane Crossing Road, Sweet Hill Road, Jesse George Road, Route 125 and along the Atkinson town border.

Outdoor and other Urban and Built-up Land

This category includes such uses as outdoor recreation, outdoor public assembly places (stadiums, fairgrounds, racetracks, etc.) and cemeteries. There are 131.01 acres that are classified as outdoor recreation and 23.77 acres classified as cemeteries in Plaistow. Cemetery land in town can be found on Wentworth Avenue, East Road and Elm Street.

Undeveloped Land

There are approximately 3479.80 acres (51.25 % of total land) in Plaistow that is undeveloped. This type of land can be found scattered throughout the town with large amounts located near the northern section of town along the Hampstead, Atkinson and Kingston town borders. Much of

this area is wooded and also includes two town forest tracts--the 320-acre Kelly Brook Conservation Area and the 105-acre Old County Road Conservation Area that are both located in the northern portion of town west of North Main Street (NH Route 121).

Brush or Transitional Land Between Open and Forested

Brush or transitional land includes non-woody vegetation, shrubs, and brush that is currently undeveloped. There are 145.87 acres of brush or transitional land in Plaistow which is 2.15% of the town's total land area. In Plaistow, this type of land is usually surrounded by undeveloped land. Brush or transitional land in town can be found in the northwest part of Town, along Kingston Road, and at other scattered locations throughout Town.

Surface Water

The town of Plaistow has a total of 31.45 acres of waterbodies with approximately 2.5 acres being the largest size pond, all of which are manmade. The waterbodies in Plaistow are scattered throughout the town. There is a total of 18.54 miles of streams, rivers and brooks in town. There are numerous wetland areas throughout Plaistow – a total of 441.89 acres. Most of these overlay undeveloped land as shown in the Land Use Map while a few overlay residential, commercial and industrial land use types.

Residential/Commercial Growth

The scattering of residential areas into the more rural areas of Plaistow is a major land use trend in the community. The growth in residential land use has implications for community services such as fire, police, roadway maintenance and schools.

Along with the increase in residential growth, there has been commercial/retail growth along the major roadways – more specifically Route 125. Demand for additional highway commercial activities will likely continue because of Plaistow's location and the need to support a growing population. This trend will have an impact on the capacity of the roadway system to accommodate additional traffic. In addition, the aesthetic quality of the community is negatively affected.