

# **Introduction and Overview**

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This Master Plan replaces the comprehensive 1988 Master Plan and its 1995 and 1997 updates. This new Master Plan brings the plan up to date with respect to the growing and changing needs of the community. In preparing this plan, the Planning Board was assisted by Appledore Engineering, a consulting firm out of Portsmouth, NH. In addition, various subcommittees also provided guidance and input. Numerous citizens of Plaistow participated in a Community Forum and also responded to a Questionnaire Survey (See Appendix 1). Similar to the 1988 Plan, this document includes sections that pertain to all facets of the planning process and contains maps, diagrams, graphs and charts. It incorporates current data, philosophy and citizen opinion.

The Plan serves many purposes. It presents and analyzes the social, economic, environmental and physical characteristics of the community. It takes into account the distribution of population and housing, capacity of public facilities, and the amounts of the various categories of land. The Master Plan also provides a means to coordinate land development with Town facilities, including recreation, police, fire and highways, as well as other services provided by the Town. It expresses the rationale and broad principles that serve as guidelines to the Planning Board, the Board of Selectmen and other town boards, commissions, and committees as they plan for the future.

The Planning Board is authorized under the provisions of RSA 674 et seq. to develop a vision and strategy, in the form of a Master Plan, to guide the future growth of the community. Most important, without it, the Town would not be able to enact the zoning ordinance and land use regulations that are utilized daily and which are the basis of short and long-term development. The Master Plan, zoning ordinance and land use regulations address the need to integrate and balance the rights of the individual landowner with restrictions that are designed to protect the rights of many. Land-use regulations also help promote orderly growth and protect the larger community from the actions of individuals.

In preparing this Master Plan update, the Planning Board conducted an informal survey, the goal of which was to acquire a sense of how Plaistow residents feel about their community, what they feel are the Town's strengths and weaknesses, what is special about Plaistow, and how they would like to see the community develop in the future. The results of this survey provided important input and guided the Planning Board philosophically. At the Community Forum held in May of 2001, residents identified issues and likes related to Transportation, Community Facilities, and Land Use. Though population and housing were not part of the forum, residents did express the need for more elderly housing and the need for orderly, systematic expansion of services over time that is consistent with the growth of the town. The residents also stated they liked the variety in the levels of housing that are available.

One of the primary responsibilities of local governments in New Hampshire is to provide an adequate level of community facilities and services for its residents and businesses. The availability and quality of these services are often major factors in determining the

quality of life and general character of a community. The availability of quality community facilities and services also affects how the land in town will be used in the future. It is important to consider the effect population and economic growth will have on a town's ability to provide essential community facilities for its present and future residents.

The anticipated amount and type of future residential and non-residential development in Plaistow will influence the level of community facilities required by the town. As the town's residential and commercial base increases, the town will need to allocate additional resources to specific community facilities and services.

Plaistow's natural resources are a critical consideration in establishing a proper approach for land planning and management. Understanding natural resource values provides a rational basis for determining which areas of the town are more appropriate for protection and open space and which areas are more suitable for development. Natural resources such as slope, soils, vegetation, wildlife and water resources add to Plaistow's character, provide recreational opportunities and contribute to the quality of life for Plaistow's residents. These natural resources also provide both opportunities and constraints for growth. Steep slopes and wetlands, for example, while better drained, are less suitable for development; flatter areas are more suitable. On the other hand, these well-drained areas may be associated with groundwater areas that require protection. Thus, the natural resource base of Plaistow provides an important factor as the basis for local land use decisions. This Master Plan contains a description and analysis of Plaistow's natural resources.

Population and housing are usually closely related. As population increases, the demand for housing rises. On the other hand, if population levels off or decreases, the demand for housing also decreases, leading to increased vacancy rates. Housing type and location are also related to natural resource constraints and opportunities, community services – including transportation facilities, zoning, cost of land and economic conditions. The magnitude and character of a community's population plays a key role in determining the type and amount of housing, as well as what community facilities and services the community will require. Because Plaistow is a growing community, the town needs to ensure that the opportunity exists for an affordable supply of decent, safe and sanitary housing to accommodate the growth of the community.

It should be noted that the latest US Census was taken in the year 2000, but some data is not yet available for use and won't be until a later time. At the time the population and housing chapter was completed, the most recent data was used.

Open space in Plaistow is a mixture of public, semi-public and private land. However, there is a difference between protected and unprotected open space. Protection can come through a variety of methods such as acquisition, conservation restrictions, easements and regulations designed to preserve important resources. While Plaistow contains several parcels which are owned and protected by the town through the Conservation Commission, a significant portion of remaining land could be sold for development in the future. The town needs to take action to protect key parcels in order to meet the open

space and recreation needs of the community as well as to protect and preserve the town's character.

The Transportation Chapter identifies highway and other transportation issues of concern to Plaistow officials and residents and to recommend proposed actions. Transportation planning is both a local and state responsibility and much of the long range transportation planning occurs at the regional and state levels based on input from local officials.

Although Plaistow is not one of the largest communities in the region in terms of population, its proximity to the Massachusetts border and the presence of NH Route 125 have combined to give the town an urban aspect often found in communities with 3 to 5 times the population. In addition, many local residents commute to northern Massachusetts for employment. This situation presents the town with both opportunities and challenges with respect to transportation issues. This higher level of urbanization is accompanied by concerns such as traffic congestion and loss of rural character. However, there is also increased opportunity for public transportation and infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks and bike paths. Finding an appropriate balance between these opportunities and challenges is one of the goals of this Master Plan and a long-term goal for Plaistow.

## **Historical Perspective**

Plaistow's land use reflects natural, historical, and cultural factors. The pattern of existing land use in Plaistow is reflective of the town's small town character and its role as an historical crossroads between the southeastern New Hampshire and northern Massachusetts. The development of the town has been shaped by a variety of natural, historical and cultural factors and more recently by the control of development through zoning and other land use regulations. The traditional settlement pattern that has defined Plaistow's character consists of rural residential development, multiple commercial centers located along major transportation corridors, scattered industrial sites and large tracts of undeveloped land located throughout the entire town.

This pattern of land use is a direct result of Plaistow's early development. The following is a condensed version of the early history of Plaistow as taken from the 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report of the Town of Plaistow.

Early settlers arrived in New England in 1638 and just over a hundred years later, in 1749, King George II signed the charter for the Town of Plaistow. Early meetings were held in the Congregationalist's Meeting House at the junction of South Main Street and Danville Road or Route 125. In 1831, a brick town hall was built on common land in an area nearer to the geographic center of Plaistow where Main Street intersected with a road leading toward Kingston or over Sweet Hill toward the lower river towns. It wasn't until 1895 that Plaistow's present town hall was built. One of the earliest roads that passed through Plaistow was called Stage or County Road. It followed a route from Central Street in East Hampstead southeasterly over Garwood Hill, through Kelley Town, past Walton's farm, over what are now Hale Spring Road, Sweet Hill Road and Corliss Hill Road and onto ports along the Merrimack River. Main Street extended northward

only to the mills at Pollard Brook and 1833; the road was extended from the Kelly Corner area up over Eaton's Hill, to the County Road near Cornell's. Sweet Hill Avenue was graded just prior to the Civil War and it joined Elm Street with "Highland Square". In the mid 1800's, a highway connection from Westville Road to Greenough Road was created. Now known as Route 125, this was for many years the only long stretch of straight road in town.

As Plaistow's population increased so did its transportation infrastructure. Electric trolley service was available from 1902 through 1930 giving residents the opportunity to work and shop in Haverhill as well as go to the beaches at Salsbury, Hampton, and Canobie Lake. Residents had train service via the Boston and Maine Railroad with 4 to 5 daily trains to Boston and Portland, Maine. Freight service was equally active with 4 to 5 freight trains stopping daily to deliver coal and grain. Passenger service was available from 1858 to 1968.

Early settlers cultivated the land for farming. Most of Plaistow, during one period was completely cleared of woodlands and attempts were made to farm some of the poorest and rockiest lands. Miles of stonewalls were built around the cultivated and pastured land. Many of these stonewalls still stand today. For a more thorough description of the early history of the town, see the 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report of the Town of Plaistow.

With the rapid growth of the southern part of the state since the 1960's, there has been significant growth of residential developments that have access to major roadways. Plaistow's population increased dramatically from 4712 persons in 1970 to 7747 persons in 2000 – a 64.41 % increase. Many of these new residents are commuters that live in Plaistow and work outside of town. In addition, the commercial areas have intensified and spread along major thoroughfares such as Route 125. The declining importance of agriculture has resulted in an increase in brush or transitional land.

Between 2000 and 2020, the population is expected to grow by 39 percent. When compared to surrounding towns, Plaistow's population increase was not as high between 1970 and 2000. For example, while Plaistow grew by 64 percent, Hampstead grew by 246 percent, Danville by 335 percent, and Sandown by 594 percent. Between 2000 and 2020, population in Plaistow and that of surrounding towns is expected to grow by at least 35 percent with Sandown and Hampstead projected to grow by the most (63.65 % and 61.9% respectively). Rockingham County as a whole is expected to grow at almost the same rate as Plaistow (40.57% versus 39.09%).

The total number of housing units in Plaistow increased 8.77 percent between 1990 and 2000. Of those housing units, 96.66 percent were occupied in 1990 and 98.09 percent were occupied in 2000. Higher occupancy rates leads to a larger demand for housing units and higher rental and ownership costs. In 1990 and 2000, Plaistow had the highest percentage of multi-family homes, the lowest percentage of single-family homes, and the second lowest percentage of manufactured homes as compared to the surrounding towns. During this same time, the percentage of single-family homes has increased while the percentage of multi-family homes and manufactured housing has declined.