

Vision Statement

(Updated in 2011)

Vision Statement

Plaistow has always played a vital role in the area's economy. Even as early as the 17th century, Plaistow's taverns and waysides provided services to the commercial traffic traveling the County Road en route from Concord, NH to Newburyport, MA. In the early 19th century, Plaistow was a small community whose residents contributed to the Haverhill, MA factory workforce. The transportation network allowed Plaistow residents to easily commute to Haverhill for work and for shopping. In the latter half of the century, Plaistow's commercial and industrial sector started to expand so that many Plaistow residents could live, work, and shop in Plaistow. As this expansion occurred so did the population. In 1900 there were 1408 people living in Plaistow, in 1950 there were 2082 people living in Plaistow and in 2000 there were 7747 people living in Plaistow. The population peaked in 2007 at approximately 7800 people. The last years of the decade showed minor decreases in population to a low of 7609 as of the 2010 census.

Route 125 is a regional commercial center for communities on both sides of the Massachusetts/New Hampshire border. Unfortunately the transportation infrastructure did not keep pace with the growth and although substantial effort has been spent in the last 10-15 years in getting necessary improvements in place, there is still much work to be done. Development pressures have abated during the current recession, however, it is expected they will return as the recession eases. The Town needs to make sure plans are in place so the infrastructure can support the growth.

In planning for the future the Town must clearly identify how and where its residents want to live, go to school, go to shop, go to work, and go to play at all age levels from pre-school aged children to senior citizens. All require different activities throughout the year and all are important as the Town strives to maintain family-based lifestyles and activities.

Clean Air

Plaistow, like many communities in southern New Hampshire, is in an Air Quality Non-attainment area as designated by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The main source of the pollutants causing poor air quality comes from vehicular emissions. Poor air quality can contribute to poor health as well as restrict time spent outdoors for many people.

Although Plaistow by itself cannot solve the air quality issues, the Town can take steps to minimize emissions that contribute to the poor air quality. The best approach to help improve air quality is to make sure the Town has an efficient transportation system in place.

The Beede Superfund Site has in the past contributed significantly to poor air quality in its surrounding neighborhoods. The cessation of the business at the site along with the removal of above ground petroleum products has helped immensely toward improving the air quality around the site; however much more remains to be done. The Town should work closely with the EPA and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) to make sure the cleanup activity continues in the most efficient and safest manner possible.

During construction projects that disturb large tracts of land dust can be problem. The Town should make sure that proper dust control measures are in place during intervals where soils are susceptible to being blown into the air.

Clean Water

The Town of Plaistow is one of only two municipalities in New Hampshire without a named body of water greater than 1 acre. Although there are several streams in Plaistow none of them have an adequate supply of water to use for either fire protection or for a municipal water supply. Therefore the Town's primary sources of water are subsurface waters or aquifers (stratified drift and bedrock). It is vital that the Town take measures to protect these subsurface waters.

With the exception of the State Line Plaza on Route 125 at the Haverhill, MA state line all residents and businesses are served by wells and septic systems. State Line Plaza is connected to Haverhill water and sewer.

A Source Water Protection Plan (SWPP) was adopted by the Conservation Commission in 2000. All of the initial tasks were completed at the time of adoption, however, the SWPP should be reviewed and its future tasks and on-going tasks should be incorporated into the Master Plan and so that proper and timely updates can be made.

The Town should undertake a water supply study that would update the findings of the Fenton Keyes study completed in the late 1970s. The study should look at bedrock sources of water as well as the stratified drift sources identified by Fenton Keyes. These sources should also be analyzed to see if there is sufficient water to maintain the current fire suppression system as well as any expansions to that system that may be proposed. The study should also include an analysis to see if there is sufficient water for a potential future municipal water system. A municipal water system would likely start on Route 125.

Plaistow's proximity to large urban centers, Haverhill to the immediate south as well as being part of the Boston Urbanized Area, requires that Plaistow obtain a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit. The MS4 permits are multi-year permits and require an annual report be submitted to the EPA. The Town should continue to maintain its MS4 committee made of up Town staff, volunteers, and professional engineers to ensure that the requisite water sampling is completed and that the annual report gets submitted on a timely basis.

Economic Development

The Town should promote commercial and industrial growth that will provide jobs and expand the tax base. Continued participation in the Economic Development Committee (EDC) is an excellent way to promote such growth. The EDC members include representatives from the Town staff, the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce and its Southern New Hampshire Division, the Plaistow business community, the Rockingham Planning Commission, the Rockingham Economic Development Corp and its association with the NH Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) and the Plaistow Area Commerce Exchange (P.A.C.E.).

The one project that all members feel will do most for the development of Route 125 is the implementation of water and sewer along Route 125. This will allow for a better mix of commercial and industrial growth that will provide high paying jobs and a larger tax base. Undertaking a study to look at what it would take to get water and sewer along Route 125 should be given high priority by the Town.

The latest plans for the Route 125 expansion project call for widening to 4 lanes of traffic with dedicated left turn lanes at busy intersections from the Massachusetts state line to the intersection of Hunt Road/Newton Junction Road in Kingston. Work on that intersection, given the highest priority by a joint Plaistow/Kingston Advisory Committee, began in the 1999/2000 time frame. The final section of work is not expected to be completed until after 2017 depending on the availability of highway funds beyond 2013. Lengthy, major construction activity not only hurts the businesses on Route 125, but encourages drivers to bypass Route 125 and use other local roads that are not designed to handle the high volume of traffic. The Town should continue to work with NH DOT to make sure the Route 125 construction gets completed as efficiently and quickly as possible.

Making better use of the Park and Ride lot at the intersection of Route 125 and Westville Road can also be used to promote growth and business opportunities along Route 125. The vision for transportation has more information about the Park and Ride possibilities.

Although Route 125 is an obvious target for promoting economic development in Plaistow, the Town should also look to enhance business opportunities in the Commercial II district, Village Center District, and the Integrated Commercial Residential zone along Route 108. These opportunities should be for small businesses as well as home businesses and home occupations.

Village Center District

The Village Center District is an area along Main Street that begins in the north at the recreation facilities at Ingalls Terrace and terminates in the south at the Library and intersection with Bittersweet Road. The east-west boundaries are based on the former Commercial II boundaries in the same area. All of the Commercial II uses are permitted in the Village Center District as well as the ability to have mixed use where a single building may have residential and commercial uses coexisting. The Village Center District also includes Elm Street.

The Town should promote planning and development activities that add to the casual, pedestrian-friendly atmosphere of the village center with the Town Hall as its anchor.

Build Out and Infrastructure

Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) completed a build out analysis for the Town several years ago using an RPC block grant that required a 50% local match from the Town. The result of the analysis showed where the undeveloped residential land and undeveloped commercial/industrial lands are in Plaistow. Note the analysis discounted Town-owned properties, wetlands, and other natural barriers to development. This analysis should be updated to include the latest developments and extended to show how many more residents would be

added with the current zoning in place if all the remaining undeveloped lands were to be developed. This should be taken one step further to estimate the impact on all Town services. Similarly, the analysis done for the commercial and industrial lands should be expanded to estimate the impact on Town services should they become fully developed with the current zoning in place.

The Town should continually monitor the state of repair of its infrastructure including buildings, recreation facilities, vehicles, roads, sidewalks, bike paths, drainage infrastructure, fire suppression water system, and communications facilities. Timely repairs and replacement of such infrastructure should be included in the Town's Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

The Town recently completed an update of its Hazard Mitigation Plan which among many other things identifies road and drainage infrastructure that could be improved to help mitigate damage to the Town's infrastructure during catastrophic natural events. FEMA requires an update to this plan every 5 years. The infrastructure improvements in this plan should also be placed in the CIP so they can be done in a timely, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

Town Forest and Conservation Lands

In 1998 the Town contracted with a professional forester to prepare a Forest Management Plan for the parcels specifically designated as part of the Town Forest as well as some of the Town-owned properties that need to be protected and preserved but might be set aside for less restrictive, or more restrictive, uses than can be managed as part of the Town Forest. The Conservation Commission approved the Forest Management Plan in 2000 and although the Forest Management Plan is a separate document, like the SWPP it should be considered an adjunct to the Master Plan. It should be reviewed and its future tasks and on-going tasks should be incorporated into the Master Plan and so that proper and timely updates can be made.

The Boy Scouts of Troop 18 have done a great job in laying out trails in the Town Forest and that provides an excellent resource for recreation. The Town should work with all concerned residents and organizations to lay out a trail expansion network in the Town Forest so that the "Plaistow" trails meet trail networks from Atkinson and Hampstead. Outside of the Town Forest, there is interest in developing a Little River trail. Work on a layout for this trail should begin so that appropriate easements and land purchases can be obtained.

The Town should identify parcels of land that should be preserved and protected for any number of reasons including, but not limited to: wildlife habitats, wetlands preservation, recreational uses, scenic views, and bird watching.

Recreation

The Town should work closely with the Recreation Commission and the Recreation Department to ensure the recreational needs of the children, teens, adults, and elderly residents of Plaistow are being met. Where deficiencies exist, they should be identified, prioritized and where capital improvements are required they should be placed in the CIP.

In an effort to enhance the ability of residents to walk and enjoy the outdoors, a network of neighborhood “mini-parks” should be established. The Town can contribute to their maintenance, but hopefully residents of neighborhoods where such parks exist would do most of the maintenance. The members of the neighborhoods would be largely responsible for designing the park, that is, what amenities might be available ranging from just a simple park bench, to larger park with benches, picnic tables, trails, etc.

Transportation

Transportation is generally considered to a regional or state-wide responsibility. In Plaistow, the obvious examples are Routes 108, 121, 121A, and 125. The cost to maintain those roads is way beyond what the Town could afford. They are also part of a larger road network that connects Plaistow to its neighbors as well as other New Hampshire and Massachusetts destinations.

By working with the Rockingham Planning Commission and its associated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) the Town can be a strong advocate for improvements to state roads and infrastructure. The current Route 125 project is one example of such advocacy. Many approaches to reducing the congestion on Route 125 need to be taken; there is no “silver bullet” solution. The Town has also been an advocate for extending the Haverhill commuter rail line of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to Plaistow at the site of the existing Park and Ride lot on Westville Road. In 2008, the MBTA reported they were looking to move the current layover facility in Bradford, MA further north. Should this move result in a proximate location to the Park and Ride lot, the combined project (layover facility and rail station) becomes economically feasible. A team made up of Town officials, RPC officials, NHDOT officials, MBTA officials, and a consultant applied for and received an \$8.4 million Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) grant to accomplish this task. The expectation is alternatives and environmental studies will begin in the late fall of 2011. The result of these studies will determine whether or not it is feasible to locate the layover facility and rail station at their current proposed locations. Legislative approvals for any expenditure of funds for land purchase or construction must be approved by the NH legislature. It is expected the MBTA will pay for the construction of the layover facility and they too must get approval from the MA legislature for such construction activity as well as permission to operate a commuter rail service outside of Massachusetts.

The Town should support this effort by visiting sites of current layover facilities with comparable technologies (Scituate, MA and Wachusett, MA) to be used at the proposed site and holding frequent public update sessions including both Plaistow and Atkinson since the proposed layover facility abuts Atkinson.

The Town should work with local, regional, and state transportation officials to develop the Park and Ride into a regional transportation center where people could not only use commuter rail services but also get transportation to the Manchester Airport. The Town should try to re-establish connecting commuter bus service from Epping, Brentwood, Kingston, and Hampstead to the Park and Ride lot. A feasibility study should be conducted to see if the Plaistow shopping centers, restaurants, rec facilities, etc. can be linked by a shuttle bus or trolley service.

These alternative transportation modes should be integrated so that residents who, for whatever reason, do not have access to a personal automobile can find a useable public transportation network to commute to work, school, medical appointments, recreation facilities, athletic facilities, and shopping facilities.

The Town should establish a network of sidewalks and bike paths so that residents can safely walk or ride bikes on a majority of Town roads, but at a minimum connect the Village Center to P.A.R.C. and to the Route 125 existing sidewalks. The Town should also promote the Safe Routes To School (SRTS) program to encourage students to walk or bike to school as often as possible.

Vision Summary Statement

The Town should provide through infrastructure and programs the means to provide its residents with a high quality of life including functional neighborhoods, flexibility in living and working arrangements, access to alternate modes of transportation so that residents of all ages have access to jobs, shopping, recreational facilities, and medical facilities.