

Master Plan for the Town of Jackson

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this Master Plan is to provide direction for the Planning Board in the performance of its duties (RSA 674:2). Master plans involve the research, time, and effort of many citizens, but often they are set aside following their adoption. In Jackson, this Master Plan will be a living document that describes direction for the community.

The following goals, policies, and objectives form a work plan to assist local decision makers in a variety of settings. The Town of Jackson Master Plan will provide:

- the basis for town policies and regulations governing development and use of the land within the Town of Jackson,
- direction to the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Conservation Commission and landowners in local regulatory review and decision-making, and
- guidance to the Board of Selectmen concerning budgetary and capital facility planning.

These goals, policies, and objectives result from a careful review of (1) the Background Studies for the 2016 Master Plan, (2) the 2014 Community Survey (copy and analysis included with the Background Studies), and (3) the 2014 Build-out Analysis by the North Country Council. In this step of the planning process, the aspirations and needs of the town are tempered with the realities of limited resources plus a variety of potentially conflicting sentiments, including:

- the wish to keep regulations simple and not cumbersome,
- a desire to keep the town looking as it traditionally has, while permitting a diversity of housing opportunities
- a need to maintain the vitality and viability of the local economy, which is largely based on tourism,
- and the expectation that Jackson will continue to be a resort community.

VISION STATEMENT AND GOALS

Jackson's mountains, hillsides, woodlands, streams, wetlands, scenic views and special resource areas are very important elements to the quality of life in Jackson for both residents and tourists. Future development in Jackson shall be regulated by the town's policies and ordinances which must promote the protection of natural resources and preservation of the essential town character, while providing for the maintenance of a vital economy. Though tourism is important to the local economy, Jackson must be prepared to take actions that will enhance the broader economic health of the community.

OVERALL LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT GOAL: Maintain and enhance the economic health of the town and provide adequate social and municipal services for the townspeople, in a manner consistent with preserving the rural village character of the town, while managing land use and regulating development to ensure wise stewardship of the town's natural resources.

NATURAL RESOURCES GOAL: Protect and conserve Jackson’s natural resource areas including hills, woodlands, scenic vistas, valuable wildlife habitat, streams, wetlands, floodplains, aquifer recharge areas, sensitive riparian areas, and the night sky.

Policy: Development within the town of Jackson shall not adversely affect the natural resources of the town.

Objective: Establish and enforce land use regulations that limit development to areas where soils, slopes, and hydrological conditions allow such development.

Objective: Establish and enforce land use regulations that require that new development be sited in ways that minimize the impact on open space and viewsheds.

Policy: Unique, sensitive, ecologically valuable or potentially threatened natural areas shall be protected.

Objective: Identify unique, sensitive, and ecologically valuable areas to determine what areas are deserving of protection.

Objective: Develop a plan to facilitate protection of selected lands through acquisition by the town or by an appropriate conservation organization, using available methods such as donation, purchase, or establishment of conservation or scenic easements. Identify potential local, state or federal funding mechanisms.

Objective: Pursue the possibility of participation in the state’s Land and Community Heritage Investment Program.

Objective: Identify and evaluate the feasibility of alternative methods of land protection such as public-private partnerships.

Policy: Conservation of lands important to Jackson’s character shall be encouraged.

Objective: Explore town, state, federal, and grant funding for conservation and preservation.

Policy: The integrity of the soils of Jackson shall be protected and the demands that human activities place on the soils shall not exceed the capabilities of the soils to sustain those activities.

Objective: Continue to enforce the minimum lot size based on soil type provisions of the zoning ordinance.

Objective: Review and amend the zoning ordinance as necessary to accommodate improvements in the understanding of the definition and capabilities of the soil types in Jackson.

Objective: Institute and enforce any land use regulations necessary to protect areas with sensitive soils from the adverse effects of development or other soil-disturbing activities.

Objective: Require developers, loggers and others involved in soil-disturbing activities to adhere to the Best Management Practices (such as those established by state and federal environmental agencies) available to minimize erosion and other irreparable soil damage.

Policy: The high quality of local water resources shall be preserved and local land uses that might cause water quality degradation shall be prohibited.

Objective: Review the River Conservation District and floodplain management regulations periodically and amend if necessary to maintain optimum protection of water quality.

Objective: Allow only compatible land uses in riparian and floodplain areas.

Objective: Enforce measures to prevent the degradation of surface water quality from erosion caused by land-disturbing activities.

Objective: Identify valuable wetland and aquifer recharge areas in Jackson and develop wetland and aquifer protection regulations.

Objective: Prevent the degradation of wetlands and aquifers by allowing only compatible land uses within the wetland and aquifer influence areas.

Objective: Continue inspections to protect groundwater from septic effluent, leaky underground storage tanks and other potential pollution sources.

Objective: Encourage proper maintenance of septic systems including regular pumping to prevent groundwater contamination.

Objective: Review each development proposal to determine its impact on aquifers, wetlands, and other natural water features and how best to protect them.

Objective: Encourage cooperation between the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission in the review and processing of dredge and fill permits for the Town of Jackson.

Objective: Support the provisions of the Wildcat River Conservation Plan (on file at the Jackson Town Office).

Objective: Participate in the Volunteer River Assessment Program to monitor water quality in the town's surface waters.

Objective: Encourage use of community sewerage treatment as appropriate to reduce adverse environmental impacts.

Policy: The hillsides and ridgelines in Jackson should be protected from inappropriate development that threatens the integrity of the natural resources.

Objective: Develop a steep slope and hillside development ordinance to ensure maximum possible protection of both natural resources and views.

Policy: Scenic vistas should be preserved and protected for the present and future enjoyment of residents and travelers alike.

Objective: Incorporate into land use regulations provisions that require consideration of strategies such as landscape screening and placement of structures to complement topography, in order to minimize the negative impacts of development on scenic vistas.

Objective: Inventory Jackson's scenic vistas and viewpoints and research methods of protection of views from roadways within Jackson.

Objective: Develop a vista and view-shed protection ordinance.

Policy: Views of the night sky shall not be degraded by light pollution.

Objective: Enforce regulations to minimize light pollution that interferes with the visibility of the natural night sky.

VILLAGE CHARACTER GOAL: Preserve and protect Jackson’s rural atmosphere and character of the central village.

Policy: The central village core of Jackson shall be maintained without the introduction of sprawl and strip development.

Objective: Review the present boundaries of the Village District and develop regulations to limit the scope of development along Route 16.

Objective: Retain the Village appearance by encouraging development and redevelopment within the Village to be kept within the style and scale of the greatest number of nearby buildings.

Objective: Develop a long-range plan for the use of town-owned property to best meet the needs of the town.

Objective: Maintain the mix of residential and commercial structures currently found in the Village.

Objective: Review the existing parking facilities in the village area and examine ways to increase the amount of available parking.

Objective: Where feasible require commercial development to place parking areas beside or behind buildings, not between buildings and the street, to maintain a small-town atmosphere.

Objective: Develop ways to make parking areas more attractive.

Policy: The rural atmosphere and appearance of the town of Jackson shall be maintained.

Objective: Regulate the location, style, size, and lighting of commercial signage throughout the town.

Objective: Encourage the use of underground utilities wherever feasible.

Objective: Revisit the issue of requiring planning board review of multi-unit residential and commercial structures to ensure that the development will comply with all regulations and will not have adverse impacts on the town.

Objective: Support historic designation of selected structures, recognizing that funding for structural repairs is available when the designation is in place.

Objective: Prevent regulations that unreasonably restrict use of historic structures; encourage preservation of historic structures.

ECONOMY GOAL: Support the present tourist-based economy while encouraging diversification to maintain economic health through the development of low-impact, small-scale businesses.

Policy: Diversification of the economy in a manner compatible with Jackson’s identification as both a resort community and a traditional New Hampshire village shall be encouraged.

Objective: Support the marketing efforts of the Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce and existing tourism businesses.

Objective: Encourage the establishment of compatible home-based businesses in appropriate locations throughout the town.

Objective: Strengthen resource-based enterprises (e.g., farming, forestry, and skiing) through both protecting the resource base, and fostering the ability to properly market products and services.

Objective: Encourage small professional offices and independent retail establishments in the Village District.

Policy: Growth and development that meets the needs of the community shall be allowed as long as it does not exceed the capacity of the town to provide supporting facilities and services.

Objective: Maintain an updated capital improvements program.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES GOAL: The town of Jackson shall provide the necessary municipal services to ensure the health and safety of Jackson residents and visitors.

Policy: Adequate support shall be given to all town departments to enable them to provide for the safety of all in the town of Jackson.

Objective: Continue to provide adequate space for the town departments to conduct business and perform their responsibilities.

Objective: Develop a sound fiscal policy to sustain the necessary manpower, replace outdated equipment, and maintain the equipment necessary for the town's needs.

Objective: Encourage training and professional improvement for all town employees.

Policy: Town lands shall be utilized in such a way as to accommodate the known and anticipated needs of the community.

Objective: Inventory the town-owned lands and determine the potential and optimal uses and limitations for each parcel as the need arises.

Objective: Develop a master plan for the utilization of town-owned property.

Policy: All town buildings should be handicapped accessible and have suitable restroom facilities.

Objective: Develop and implement a plan to upgrade and bring into compliance any municipal facilities which do not already comply.

Policy: In all appropriate instances, the town of Jackson shall work in a cooperative fashion with surrounding towns and the White Mountain National Forest to ensure maximum benefit for all the towns and the region.

Policy: The town will support the Highway Department's provision of acceptable, safe travel ways throughout the town, while retaining its rural character.

Objective: Evaluate existing town roadways and develop a long-range program to maintain or improve the present roads so that they adequately meet the demands of current usage.

Objective: Continue to require that town roadways being constructed by private developers be built to the approved town standards.

Objective: Take necessary action to ensure the state assumes its responsibility for maintenance and reconstruction of Class I, II and III roads.

Objective: Develop guidelines governing development of lands adjacent to Class VI roads.

Policy: The town will provide information, inspection and suppression from inherent dangers of fire at a level of service required by the community.

Objective: Ensure that every new and renovated building in the town be built to all applicable codes.

Objective: Develop a plan to maintain existing fire ponds and dry hydrants, establish new fire ponds and dry hydrants out of the hydrant district where necessary, and generally ensure that fire suppression needs of the town are met.

Policy: The town will provide an adequate level of enforcement services required by the town both now and in the future.

Objective: Continue funding to ensure quality law enforcement and police services for all town residents.

Policy: Emergency medical services should be maintained at the highest quality appropriate to meet the needs of the community.

Objective: Continue funding to ensure quality emergency medical service for all town residents.

Objective: Continue to work in a cooperative fashion with surrounding towns.

Objective: Ensure that all new development has suitable access by emergency vehicles.

Policy: The water precinct shall provide an adequate supply of water to meet the safe drinking water needs and fire suppression needs of the precinct members.

Objective: Maintain water precinct equipment and facilities so as to provide adequate treatment, storage and distribution of water supplies.

Objective: Update and/or expand facilities to meet the needs of the precinct members.

Objective: Regulate land uses in the watershed above the water precinct intake facilities to preserve water quality.

Objective: Investigate potential subsurface sources of water that could be used should the present source become inadequate or unusable.

Policy: Maintain a cost effective and environmentally sound solid waste disposal system at the Jackson-Bartlett Transfer Station and Recycling Center.

Objective: Encourage and support the recycling of waste products.

Objective: Continue to support regional solid waste solutions and work with nearby towns to develop a long-range disposal plan.

Policy: Examine water quality within the central Village area and consider the possibility and benefits of a centralized sewage treatment system.

Policy: Examine opportunities to bury electric lines whenever road and other systems are being improved.

HUMAN SERVICES GOAL: Ensure that human and social services, such as housing, education, medical services and recreational opportunities, are available to meet the needs of the townspeople.

Policy: The availability of safe, livable, high-quality, compatible, and affordable housing shall be maintained to accommodate the needs of a diverse population, while protecting and enhancing the present and future values of the community's existing housing.

Objective: Enforce the life safety code in accordance with all applicable regulations.

Objective: Continue to require that access to residential structures be suitable for use by emergency vehicles.

Objective: Inventory existing accessory apartments, rental housing and apartment buildings.

Objective: Broaden the availability of affordable housing for elderly and low- to moderate-income people through creative alternatives.

Policy: The town shall provide an educational system of the highest quality possible.

Objective: Funding should be adequate for a properly functioning school system.

Objective: Encourage citizen participation in the educational process to facilitate a better understanding by the community of the needs and requirements of the educational system, as well as adding enrichment to the educational program.

Policy: Adequate medical and social services shall be available to the residents of Jackson.

Objective: Promote citizens' awareness of available human services through the use of news, the town website, the media, mailings and posted notices.

Objective: Ensure adequate funding of pertinent human services for the community through warrant articles.

Objective: Obtain and provide social and economic data for effective long-range planning of community services.

Policy: A legitimate library/media facility (or access to one) should be properly funded to provide adequate service and facilities to meet community needs.

Objective: In the library, provide books and materials, including technology, that promote and stimulate knowledge, wisdom, culture and enjoyment for all citizens.

Objective: Encourage regular cooperation between the schools and the library.

Objective: Support the library's development of programs to stimulate the use of library materials and to enlighten people of all ages.

Objective: Seek library funding from private and public sectors.

Policy: The recreational opportunities in the town shall be maintained and enhanced.

Objective: Support public and private recreational programs within the town.

Objective: Utilize the town's present land holdings to further recreational opportunities for the community.

Objective: Encourage preservation of public access to recreational opportunities.

Objective: Support initiatives to develop parkland and other public space in ways that retain the natural flavor of an area while allowing for parking and other conveniences within a reasonable proximity.

Objective: Any accessory facilities required by recreational activities should be located unobtrusively away from roadways, viewpoints and private residences.

Objective: Encourage gifts of land or recreational easements to the town or conservation organizations in order to further recreational opportunities for the community.

REGULATORY GOAL: Develop appropriate land use regulations and enforce them reasonably and uniformly.

Policy: The permitting process necessary for development will require careful review and strict adherence to existing regulations.

Objective: Continue to require building permits.

Objective: Continue to require subdivision review by the Planning Board prior to approvals for any subdivisions.

Policy: Review town ordinances for consistency with stated community goals.

Objective: Consider altering the number and boundaries of the present zoning districts to foster economic development that is consistent with maintaining the town's rural village character and protecting its natural resources.

Objective: Consider ways to address issues arising from non-conforming structures and uses.

Objective: Review the definition and requirements for home-based businesses, so as to encourage them where appropriate.

Policy: Consider development of an energy policy with the intent of finding a suitable balance between promotion and use of renewable energy and protection of area resources.

Objective: Examine the importance of renewable resources for sustainability vs. land use impacts of large scale wind and solar facilities.

Objective: Make available upon request, and on the Town website, information about area wind patterns for wind turbine usage, and percentages of sun necessary for suitable benefit from solar panels.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE LAND USE

Jackson's character – a small New Hampshire village center surrounded by sparsely settled rural areas and rugged, hilly terrain – remains important to its well-being as a tourist-oriented town.

Current Zoning Regulations

Since Jackson voters adopted zoning regulations in 1971, development has occurred largely as prescribed, with the exception of modifications made to non-conforming uses and structures. The village core has limited space available for future development because of its extensive floodplain and flood hazard areas. In the outlying rural parts of Jackson, development has occurred primarily on those privately owned parcels which have relatively easy access from the existing road network and which are not characterized by unusually difficult or sensitive terrain.

Analyses of current land use patterns and capabilities along with a review of citizen choices for development and preservation provide information upon which informed planning decisions can be based.

- Substantial portions of the Town of Jackson have development constraints, including national forest lands, floodplains, steep slopes, and shallow soil-to-bedrock conditions.
- Development pressures continue, even reaching to those areas without existing suitable road access.
- In a community survey completed in 2014, almost all of the respondents stated that the rural atmosphere, natural landscape, the availability of outdoor recreation and views are important to them; about a third of the respondents felt that funding for the preservation of land for agriculture and conservation was presently adequate while more than 40% felt funding should be increased; and a majority of the respondents were in favor of zoning changes to encourage recreational uses.

Future Land Use

Jackson residents live here because of the way it is now, and they do not see a need for significant change. The natural beauty, rural atmosphere and recreational opportunities of the town are important to them, and the emphasis is on conserving these natural resources. Tourism, agriculture and forestry are compatible with and dependent on the conservation and protection of the town's natural resources.

Because most of the areas with road access and limited development constraints have already been developed, it is reasonable to anticipate an increase in applicants seeking to develop land with more sensitive topographic features. Suitable regulations must be developed to minimize impact on sensitive lands. The Build-out analysis performed for Jackson by the North Country Council in 2014 suggested that a reexamination of both the boundaries and number of zoning districts in Jackson be conducted to consider ways to maintain rural character while fostering the economic health of our community.

The following land uses should be allowed in the future:

Agricultural and Forest Land

Agricultural and forest land are important natural resources. Both preserve and protect the rural landscape, the scenic vistas, and the historic character of Jackson through providing open space and ecological benefit. They also offer recreational and economic opportunities.

Residential

Residential development in Jackson is limited by the soils and slopes in some areas. Low-density housing and designs that both emphasize the preservation of open space and minimize land disturbance, such as clustering, should continue to be encouraged in order to maintain the character of Jackson. The intensity of development should continue to be based on the land's capability to sustain it, and not be detrimental to the preservation of Jackson's natural resources.

Because Jackson has many tourist-oriented businesses, it is likely that some workers at those establishments, as well as town employees, will seek low-cost housing in town. With existing soil constraints, lack of public sewers, and high land values, housing tends to be expensive. To meet some of the housing needs for the workforce, senior citizens, and young families, opportunities in addition to the accessory apartment and workforce housing provisions already in the Jackson Zoning Ordinance should be explored.

Commercial

While recognizing the benefits to the town's economy of developing a diverse commercial base, Jackson needs to have appropriate regulations in place to ensure that any future commercial development is appropriate and suitably located. Future development needs to be consistent with preserving the town's rural village character and protecting its natural resources.

Recreation

Jackson attracts tourists because of its natural beauty and recreation opportunities. Retaining scenic features of the town, maintaining access to recreation opportunities and preserving viewsheds throughout the town will be necessary to sustaining the tourist economy.

River Conservation

An overlay district has been established "to promote and protect the health, safety and general welfare of the people of the Town," restricting uses to ones which "will not alter the natural surface configuration of the land." In general, open space uses are permitted in the district while most new structural uses are not.

Preservation of Natural Resources

One of Jackson's greatest assets is its scenic beauty. The mountainous terrain, woodlands, open fields and orchards, and clean water and air have created an atmosphere that attracts visitors. With tourism as a major economic contributor in Jackson, retention of the natural setting of Jackson is critical.

Protecting Jackson's many natural resources can be accomplished by such protective measures as individual conservation easements, public land acquisition, and land regulations designed both to protect critical and sensitive natural resources and to encourage private developers to design projects that have minimal impact on the environmental qualities and scenic beauty of the town.

Implementation

Following adoption of this Master Plan, the Planning Board will form a committee to initiate a review of zoning and subdivision regulations to ensure against redundancy and to include desirable land use changes. Involving citizens from all sectors of town will provide an opportunity to reach consensus on regulations that will be approved by the voters. This committee should include some Planning Board and Conservation Commission members; it must report its progress to the Planning Board on a regular basis.

The committee will be charged with reviewing this Master Plan and working to incorporate wording from both the goals and future land use sections into the form of regulations, bearing in mind the need for regulations that are neither cumbersome nor onerous.