

Topsham Comprehensive Plan Update 2019





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Welcome to the Plan

Introduction to the Plan

The Topsham Comprehensive Plan began in 2017 with the intent to update the Town's existing plan from 2007. Topsham's Selectboard made decisions early in the planning effort to support a public participatory process that was new to Topsham. A diverse group of volunteers were appointed to a Comprehensive Planning Update Committee to shepherd the effort. Town Staff and the Committee began an almost year-long effort to provide educational opportunities for both volunteers and citizens to build local capacity around current trends in planning and economic development. In October 2017, the Town hosted a five-day public planning event called "Plan Your Topsham" that involved over 300 town residents in shaping the future vision for Topsham. The overwhelming sentiment of this event was positive: people love Topsham, and were grateful for an opportunity to engage in this planning process. After "Plan Your Topsham", the Town provided additional ways to give feedback, including a plan open house, public workshops, and an online comment platform. As a result, the voices of Topsham's residents are embedded within this plan, and provide a framework for future incremental action and change.

This plan sets forth an aspirational set of Big Ideas which capture the spirit of the five-day public planning process, supported by catalyst site drawings that communicate the overarching vision that residents have for Topsham. The plan advocates for a right-sizing of the Town's 2007 Designated Growth Area (shown in Part 2 of this plan), recommending a contraction to accomplish two fundamental goals: **1)** create more value and support more intensive use of land where investments in infrastructure have already been made; and **2)** protect rural character, working farms and forests, and preserve open space for conservation and recreation. Rural lands can be preserved if new growth is directed towards the Town's center: Topsham Fair Mall Road area, Upper Village, Lower Village, the Heights, Navy Annex and around the municipal complex on Main Street.

Topsham's future is wide open, and actions taken today will influence how Topsham evolves beyond the 12-year anticipated horizon of this Comprehensive Plan. What we learned from Plan Your Topsham is that people are interested in change that creates a more cohesive and connected community that nurtures and supports children, families, singles and retirees alike. Implementing the Big Ideas strategies of this plan will require the hard work of many leaders and volunteers acting collaboratively, thoughtfully and

The Comprehensive Plan is the Town's official adopted statement of intent for the future of Topsham. Comprehensive Plans provide a framework for decision-making regarding municipal ordinances and policies, and inform budgetary decisions about investment in special studies and capital improvements. This plan, being Part 1, is complimented by a separate Part 2 document that contains a full inventory of conditions, trends and analyses organized by topic. Parts 1 and 2 collectively represent a complete Comprehensive Plan consistent with the intent of the rules and requirements set forth in the Growth Management Act (30-A M.R.S.A. §§ 4312 - 4350) and Chapter 208: Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule.

Letter from the CPUC

The only way to predict the future is to create the future.

The above quote, often attributed to Abraham Lincoln, has been the guiding principle for the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee. Our mission from the outset has been to create a vision for Topsham's future based upon input and guidance from Topsham residents that would be a guide to the Town's growth and development. During our 2-year planning process, through community gatherings, public meetings, social media posts and online comments, we heard from hundreds of residents who, while not always agreeing with each other, have good intentions and show a true sense of caring about Topsham's future.

And that is Topsham's strength. We consistently heard that people want to live here. They may have to commute to work but they choose to live in Topsham. For some it's about convenience, with easy access to highways north and south that lead to employment centers, shopping and entertainment; some love the quality of life, the feel of comfort in a small New England town that still possesses a rural character, small and accessible government, and green spaces with hiking trails and water access for recreation. Others still are drawn by the quality of the public schools and, for older adults, the proximity of a small-ivy college and the benefits that a college town provides. Yes, Topsham is a wonderful place to live.

But we also heard about the challenges facing Topsham's future. The biggest issue for most residents isn't that there will be growth and development in the Town; in fact, to most this is inevitable. The concern is how much growth should there be, what kind of development do we want, where should it take place, and how will it impact the quality of life in the community. How does Topsham balance the ideals of its rural character and small town feel with the need to expand its property tax base so that people can continue to live here, and yet avoid the suburban sprawl that has affected so many other communities?

We heard from residents that they are concerned about street safety. People want streets that are walkable and user-friendly for bicyclists, as well as being safe for children in the neighborhoods. Residents want lower speeds and more traffic enforcement on many secondary streets, particularly in congested neighborhoods. And people want their streets to connect to other neighborhoods.

We heard from residents that they want more gathering spots in town, to meet and socialize more with others in the broader Topsham community. We're proud of our library because it acts as a community center; we have the Topsham Fairgrounds (though many see it as an under-utilized asset that could host many more events for

the community); and some even love to congregate at the Town's Transfer Station. But we also heard that people would like to see a recreation center, a waterfront park in the Lower Village, and a Main Street with shops and cafes that would help create a stronger sense of town identity.

We heard about the need to be supportive of the knowledge economy, encouraging the creation of small and home-based businesses. There is also a need to ensure that fast broadband internet is available across the Town. This will be critical if we hope to retain and attract younger people to our town.

We heard from many that affordable housing, whether rentals or for purchase, is becoming increasingly rare in Topsham. If we want people to stay here and if we want to attract new residents we must explore the feasibility of diversifying our housing stock. This may mean modifying minimum and/or maximum lot sizes or square footage of houses.

And, finally, we heard from residents that they want our growth to be thoughtful and deliberate. They want growth that prevents sprawl, creates walkable communities, maintains, and even increases, green spaces while at the same time increases our tax base, keeps the Town's finances strong and maintains and supports town services. They want growth that strengthens neighborhood identities in addition to strengthening our village core.

These are not insurmountable challenges, but overcoming them will require us to come together as community to clearly define what we want Topsham to be 5, 10 and even 15 years from now. What is certain is that if we aren't clear on where we want to go, if we don't define the development and growth that we want, someone else will define it for us. We hope that this update of the Comprehensive Plan is a step in helping us to create our own future.

Thank you for helping us to Plan Our Topsham.

The Comprehensive Plan Update Committee

Larry Fitch, Chair
Mary Kate Appicelli
Joe Feely
Jennah Godo
Matt Nixon
Susan Rae-Reeves

Letter from the Planning Department

Dear Topsham Resident,

With your attentive guidance throughout our planning process we developed a plan for Topsham that reflects our shared vision and values. Planning for a prosperous future for our community takes purpose, intent, care and time. Understanding and respect of our history, caring for our neighbors' welfare, and creating a vision of our future that enhances our community are all essential elements to a plan that sets us on a productive course.

In this planning effort, Topsham decided to undertake a new approach to Comprehensive Planning. While meeting the State requirements, we prioritized a focus on community engagement. With the guidance of the consultant team, the effort veered away from engaging with citizens primarily via internet or mailed surveys. Rather, we deliberately sought face to face discussions over a short, intensive time period. The intent and purpose of this approach was to create an atmosphere that enabled citizens to meet with one another in a social gathering setting, where candid conversations about our shared future guided the planning process. We were astounded by the overall turnout and meaningful discussions that occurred. We believe the approach taken produced a sharper vision in regards to Comprehensive Planning.

Perhaps more importantly this approach proves that coming together as a community in this type of setting is a worthy endeavor.

Topsham is proactive and prepared for change, thereby poising itself as a community prepared for success. In light of ongoing changes to our economy, our world, and our community, implementing this vision for a fiscally, environmentally, and socially sustainable future is paramount. The recommendations of this plan will be implemented over many years with cooperation, patience, and diligence. We look forward to working together to bring this vision to life.

Warm regards,
Topsham Planning, Development & Codes



Meet Your Topsham

A History of Topsham



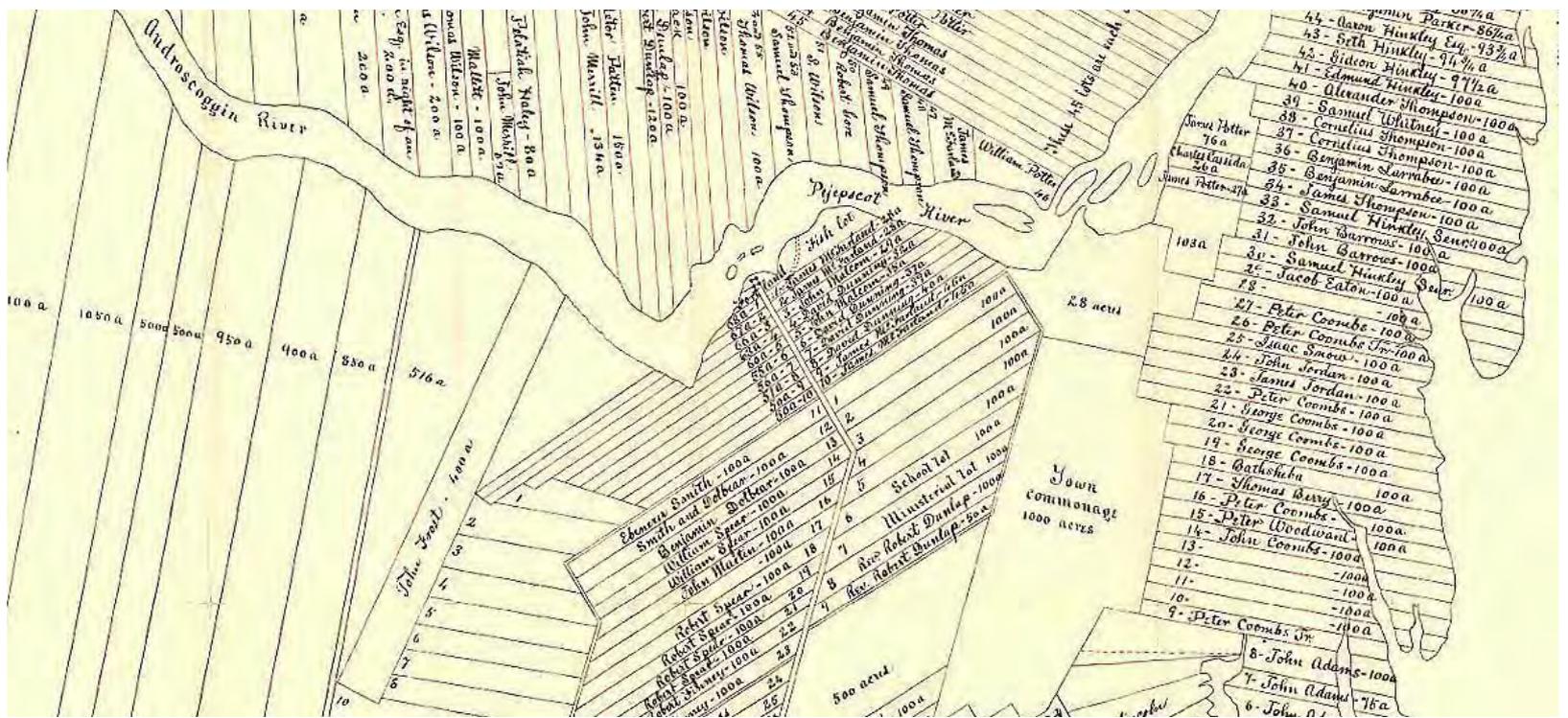
This detail from the 1876 Bird's Eye View of Brunswick and Topsham shows a portion of Topsham Village. Nearly all the buildings shown remain standing and recognizable in 2018, making Topsham an exceptionally intact historic village. Pejepscot Historical Society.

The falls of the Androscoggin River at what would become Topsham and Brunswick were important to Native Americans long before European exploration and settlement began. The river had one of the largest wild Atlantic salmon and sturgeon runs in Maine, and for thousands of years the falls provided an excellent location to catch this important food source. The massive seasonal fish run was also a primary attraction for the first European settler, Richard Purchase, who came from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and purchased title to both sides of the river at the falls from Native chieftain Worumbo in 1628, less than a decade after the Pilgrims arrived New England. In 1631, Purchase caught, processed, and packed 36 barrels of salmon and 90 barrels and ninety kegs of sturgeon for shipment to England for sale.

Five or six families from Massachusetts settled in the wilderness that would become Topsham in the 1630s. Perhaps another ten families settled in other locations around Merrymeeting Bay. Little is known about these first European settlers who farmed, fished, and traded in furs beyond a few names and approximate locations of some of their homesites. All were killed or driven out during King Phillip's War, beginning in 1675. Almost none returned. Following King Philip's War, the authorities in Boston built Fort Andros of wood in 1688 to protect the fishery and encourage resettlement. As tensions with the French and natives eased temporarily, the fort was abandoned in 1694.

A second wave of settlers to the region arrived after 1714, Scots-Irish families immigrating from Ireland. A group of Boston investors, as the Pejepscot Proprietors, purchased up the deeds from descendants of the first wave of settlers and often purchased new titles from the Natives as well, assembling a large tract that included all of Topsham, Brunswick, Harpswell, and portions of other towns. They had the land surveyed and divided it into lots for sale to settlers. They built a stone fort, named Fort Gorges, to protect these settlers and the fishery in 1715. It was manned until 1737. Settlers again periodically departed for the south or were killed during conflicts with the Natives and French, but most returned and the settlement was more or less permanent. The second wave of settlers also farmed, but also focused on cutting and sawing the extensive stands of timber in the region for sale in the rapidly growing city of Boston and in England. Eastern Massachusetts was largely cut bare by this time and wood was needed for cooking and heating as well as building.

While the stands of timber were a major attraction, it was the available water power of the Cathance and Androscoggin rivers that would create the community we know today. With limited technology and man-power, the earliest sawmills were established on the smaller Cathance at the encouragement of the Proprietors. It was not until 1753 that an attempt was made to dam the Androscoggin. A wooden wing dam, extending only part way into the river at an upstream angle was built to funnel water into a mill on the Brunswick bank. In 1756, a group of Topsham residents financed a project to build a dam



from Shad Island to the peninsula in Topsham to reverse the flow of a small seasonal watercourse, the Granny Hole Stream. They blasted a channel at the head of the peninsula, making it an island, and created an industrial canal to power several mills on the island and at the foot of Green Street. Within a few decades three dams extended between Brunswick and Topsham and powered dozens of small mills, including sawmills, and grist mills. These were all wood buildings that were regularly lost to fire or flood. The development of dams and industry put an end to the fishing industry in the area.

Expanded industry helped fuel an increase in population. Until the 1790s, most residents lived on farms along what are now Middlesex, Foreside, and River Roads, with the community's meetinghouse and cemetery near Cathance Road – where the first industry had been developed. In 1768, the population was numerous enough to successfully petition the Governor and Council in Boston to incorporate the Town. The name Topsham was chosen by Council, presumably at the suggestion of the Pejepscot Proprietors who still owned the majority of the land. The Town was named for Topsham, England, an important shipping port at the time. Several of the wealthy Proprietors were involved in shipping and may have chosen the name to honor a profitable port for their shipments from Boston. There is no documentation for early settlers from Topsham, England in the Town.

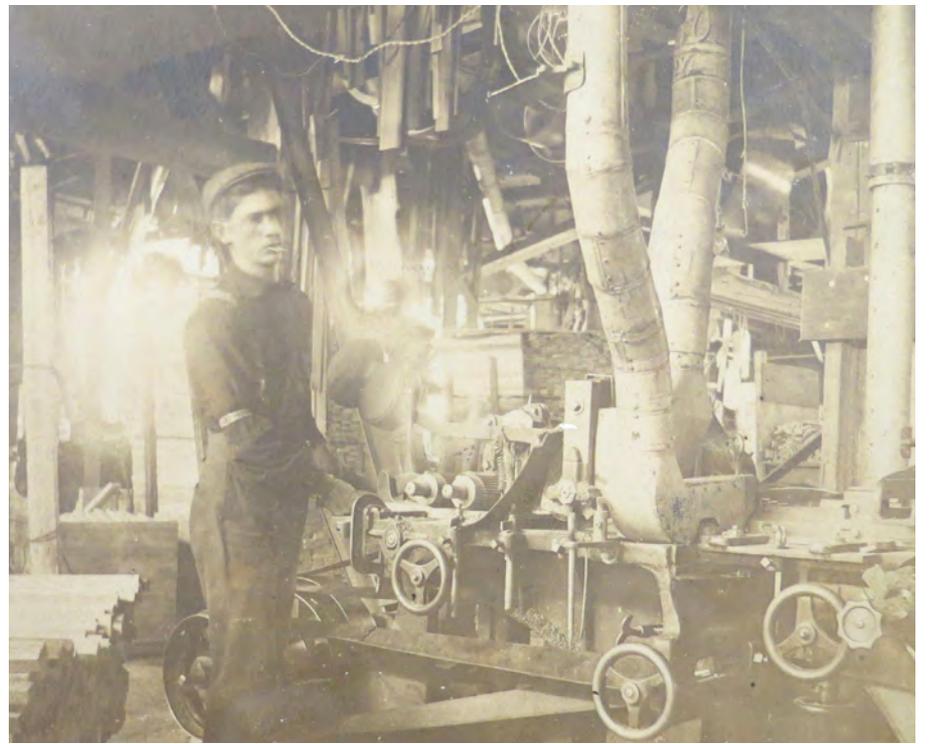
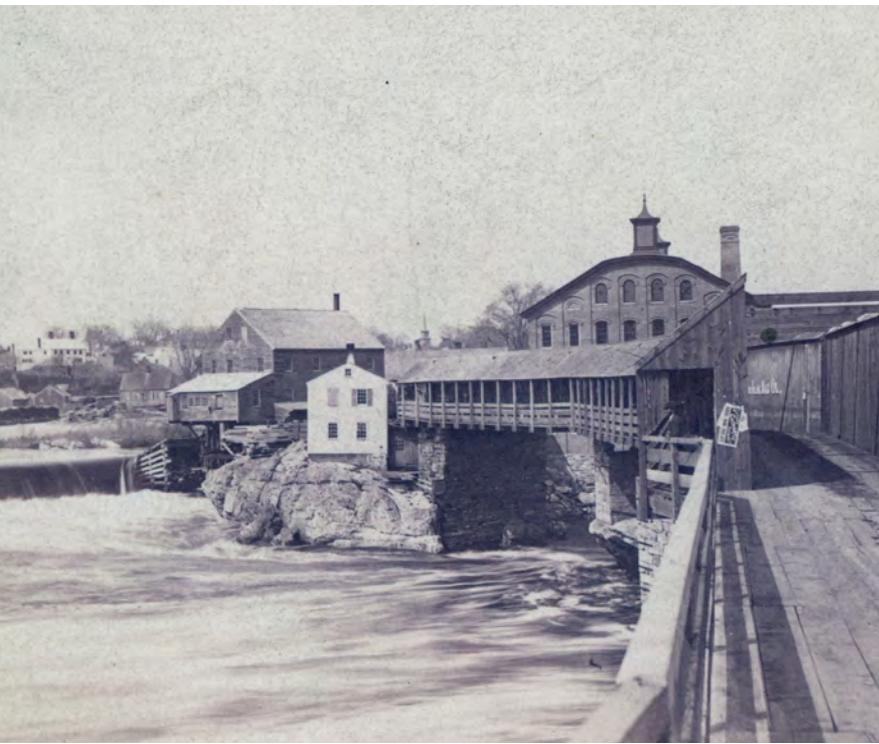
In 1796, a private corporation was chartered to build a toll bridge between Topsham and Brunswick. With this important transportation link, the only bridge across the Androscoggin River at the time, and the increasing industry at the falls, the village of Topsham rapidly developed in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Larger mills were built, and the first small textile mills were started. The flat flood plain along the river below the falls was ideal for shipbuilding and a number of residents became wealthy investing in and building ships to trade around the globe. Many of Topsham's grand Federal and Greek Revival style homes were built by these men. More modest but still stylish homes were built by successful mill owners and farmers. In 1848, the

This detail from an eighteenth century Pejepscot Proprietors map shows the division of land into long narrow lots, most with access to the river. River access was necessary for moving cut timber to mills downstream and for transportation before roads were established. *Maine Historical Society.*

railroad arrived in Topsham, crossing a new bridge below many of the shipyards and cutting off their access to the sea. The introduction of iron plating on wood ships around the same time required a higher level of industrial development and the Bath shipyards took the lead, finishing off shipbuilding in Topsham.

In 1835, the first large granite textile mill was built on the Brunswick side of the river. It would be expanded repeatedly and ultimately rebuilt on a grander scale as the Cabot Mill. Topsham's first large brick mill was built on the mill island for the Bowdoin Paper Company in 1868, later taken over by the Pejepscot Paper Company. Over time these large mills survived while the many small wooden mills disappeared. For many decades the primary industry of Topsham was making paper. In the late 1890s, the Pejepscot Paper Company built a second mill and a village to house its workers several miles upriver, near the Lisbon line. They named the village Pejepscot. Another sizable industry developed after the discovery of large deposits of feldspar near the old Cathance settlement in Topsham. The mineral that is only found in a few locations in America was mixed with clay to create porcelain. Mines were dug, and mills established to turn the feldspar rocks and other products into powder at Cathance and on Elm Street near the railroad. Farming continued to be an important part of the local economy as well, with the New England sheep farming boom and the establishment of the Topsham Fair by the Sagadahoc Agricultural in 1855.

Around the same time, as the Cabot Mill was rebuilt in larger form in Brunswick and needed more workers, a housing crunch developed in both communities. Several Topsham residents formed the Topsham Land Development company and built a village of millworker housing upstream from the mill, called Topsham Heights. They built a pedestrian suspension bridge to allow



workers to cross to their jobs, parochial school, and church in Brunswick. These workers were primarily French-Canadians, recruited by the Cabot company to come work in Brunswick. As Catholics, many preferred to send their children to the parochial school already established at St. John's Catholic Church across the river. The first wave of settlers to the region had been English, the second wave Scots-Irish. As the Town grew in the later eighteenth century, the settlers were primarily second or third generation English-Americans from the increasingly crowded towns of eastern Massachusetts and coastal New Hampshire. When the Pejepscot Paper Company built their new mill and village, they recruited workers from Eastern Europe, particularly the Czech and Slovak regions. The feldspar mining and processing industry attracted Italian immigrants and created another ethnic community within the larger community of Topsham.

After a long period of relative economic stability and a growing middle class, Topsham's industries faltered in the second half of the twentieth century and never recovered. While the loss of industry was painful, the badly polluted Androscoggin River was able to begin to recover – helped by the federal Clean Water Act. New commercial

development came in response to the construction of Interstate 295 through town in the 1970s. In the 1980s, with a dwindling economic base, it was recognized that Topsham's historic village and paper mill were resources that could attract new residents and development if protected. Topsham village is exceptionally intact from the late nineteenth century, something few communities can claim. The establishment of a historic district and eventual rehabilitation of the mill for new uses established Topsham's reputation as an attractive historic community. This reputation led to development of a retirement community incorporating two of the historic mansions in the village, eventually expanded with a second, larger community nearby. Another wave of new residents came to Topsham, this time identified by age rather than ethnicity. The expanding population, attracted by the high quality of life in the historic village along the Androscoggin, led to increased commercial development near the highway. Topsham now has the largest population in Sagadahoc County.

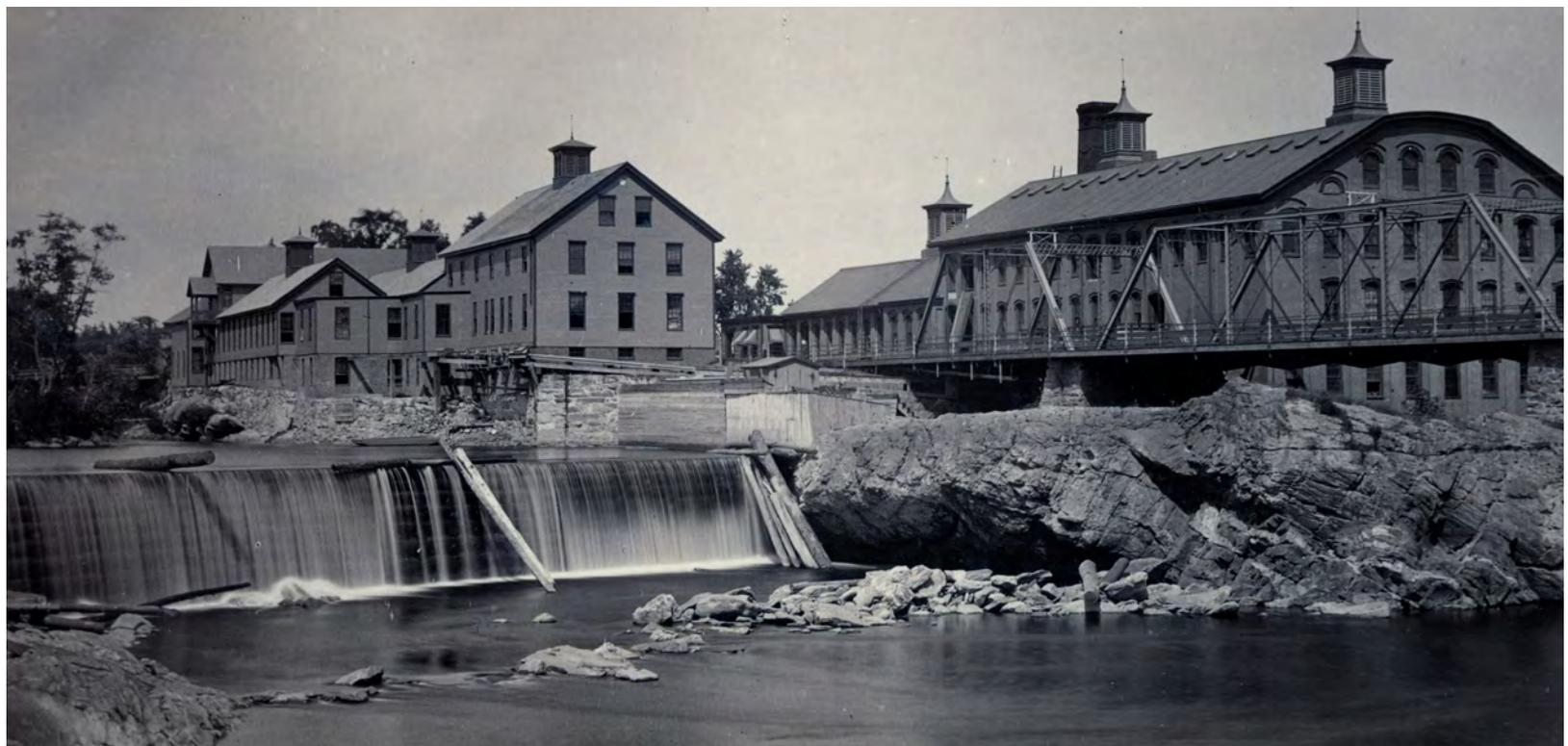
Submitted by Scott Hanson, Topsham resident and historian.

Top Left: Covered wooden bridge from Bowdoin Mill Island to Brunswick.

Top Right: Employee working at Window Sash Mill.

Bottom: Bowdoin Mill Island, looking from Brunswick.

Maine Historic Preservation Commission.





Main Street looking south, Topsham 1885. Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

Insight: According to the Maine Historical Preservation Commission, Topsham has:

- 23 Historic Archaeological sites on the State data list
- 34 Prehistoric Archaeological sites on the State data list; 2 listed on National Register and 19 are probably eligible for listing
- 6 Historic buildings or sites listed on the National Register
- 1 Historic district listed on the National Register



Main Street looking north, Topsham mid-1800s. Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

Topsham Today

The Town of Topsham has approached the update to this Comprehensive Plan with a goal to provide a different kind of planning process than what has been done before in Topsham: to cultivate an open and engaging public process with an intense five-day public design planning process as the cornerstone, where people of all ages and experiences were welcomed and encouraged to contribute their voices to the plan. We have an opportunity, through each updated Comprehensive Plan, to be deliberate about protecting what we value, avoiding unintended consequences, and addressing needs of all town residents, today and over the next decade. As a result, Plan Your Topsham is a visionary document developed by and for the community to guide new policy, the prioritization of capital improvements, the work plans of town committees and staff, and to encourage future investment into real property in the Town.

Early in the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee's work with the Maine Design Workshop (MDW) team, people expressed a desire to begin the planning process by learning about and visiting every neighborhood and corner of Topsham. The planning process first took on the name "Find, Meet, Plan your Topsham" because the feeling amongst the committee was that many residents living in Topsham are not interacting with all parts of town as they go about their busy lives. Many people are commuting to jobs out of town. Residents with school aged children circulate between home and school-based activities, while retirees circulate in a different way, often limiting interactions with other neighborhoods. By beginning in the neighborhoods, people began to build greater understanding for all parts of town.

As the five-day event got underway, very quickly a similar sentiment emerged from participants, that Topsham residents are not converging and gathering in Topsham. People expressed a sense of disconnect from each other and shared a heart-felt desire to physically connect with other residents in town, in particular amongst the two very different faces of Topsham – the young families, and the retirees. They expressed a desire for greater community connections. A number of residents, for example, spoke of connecting retirees who hold a breadth of knowledge and life experience with young students to cultivate and mentor the next generation. Finally, people expressed gratitude for the chance to gather for this planning process. People said they wanted "more of this,"

referring to the public workshop, music, food, community spirit-building, conversation and camaraderie.

Topsham is in a unique regional position to support new residents and new growth, as it is situated within a 45-minute drive of the State's largest employment centers and highest paying wages in Greater Portland, Lewiston/Auburn, Augusta, Bath, Brunswick, and the Mid-coast region. Topsham has quality schools and has made significant investments in school facilities in the past 10 years. Families are attracted to market-rate, affordable housing options with the convenience of regional retail amenities in the Topsham Fair Mall area and a walking downtown in Brunswick to meet daily needs and provide cultural experiences.

DATA TRENDS

Parallel to the participatory planning efforts, this process has included a detailed inventory and analysis of existing conditions consistent with Maine's Growth Management Action (30-A MRSA, Chapter 187). This section of the plan provides a broad summary of the key data trends that may affect future planning and the specific policies and strategies for implementing this Comprehensive Plan. Maine Design Workshop interviewed key staff and agencies to complete the inventory, and draft iterations of the inventory were shared with staff and committee for its review prior to finalizing this plan. More detailed information by topic can be found in the appendix.

The reasons people love living in Topsham are many, but a few key reasons rose to the top of the list, including:

- proximity to other cities and towns
- high quality schools
- outdoor recreational opportunities
- working farms and forests
- open spaces
- Cathance, Androscoggin, and Muddy Rivers



Nancy Greindl.

POPULATION AND HOUSING TRENDS

Thinking about where Maine’s population is going in the future can be a perplexing task. First, our state population continues to track as one of the oldest populations in the nation, coupled with undeveloped open spaces, forests, farms and water. Second, the majority of municipalities are losing population and, as a result, are directly competing with each other for new population and economic investment to stabilize fiscal budgets. Third, the road infrastructure systems we rely upon heavily to stay connected and move goods between spread out population centers is vast and aging. State funding allocations needed to maintain infrastructure systems is falling short of the actual annual costs to simply maintain what we already have. Municipalities with coastline continue to see gains in new residents and added revenues from higher value housing constructed or rehabbed near the coast. At the same time, we are seeing continued migration of people from Maine’s rural areas to the coast and to southern Maine as traditional resource-based jobs continue to decline.

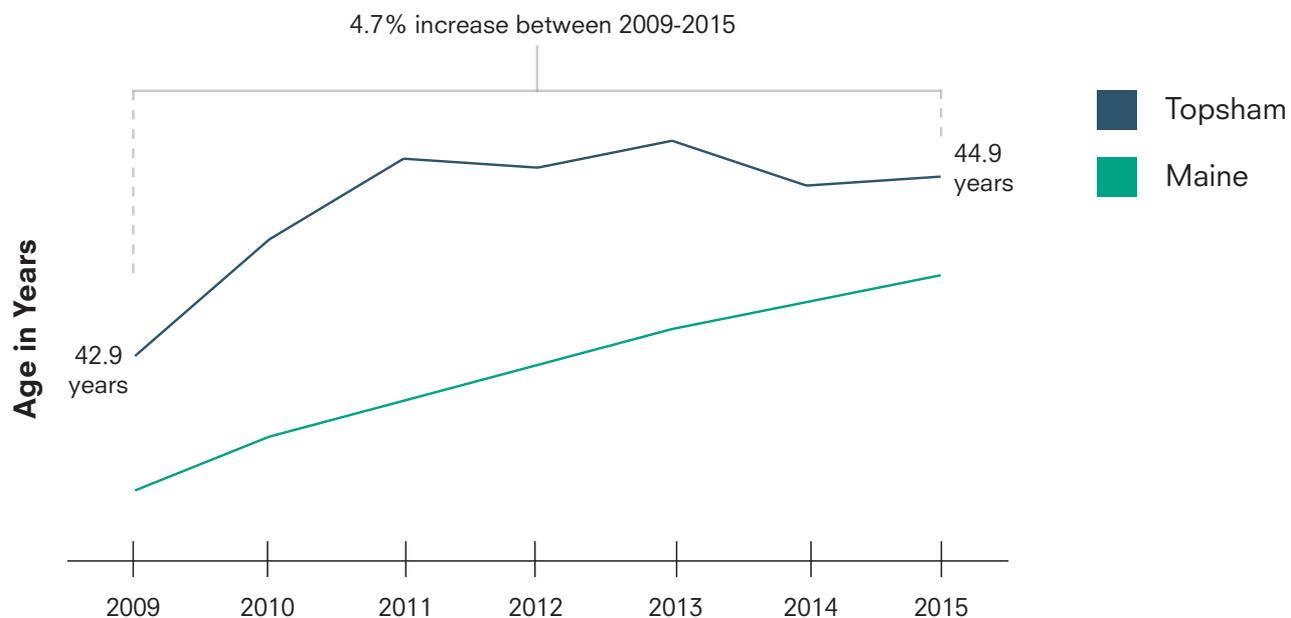
Nationally and regionally we are seeing a trend amongst new empty nesters and boomers selling larger houses in suburban auto-oriented communities to buy scaled down condominiums in cities and walkable village centers. The exception to this trend is the retirees living in smaller post-World War II capes and ranches within or immediately adjacent to walkable village centers in

places like Cumberland Center, Yarmouth, Freeport and Topsham. Long-term boomer residents are holding onto these smaller houses on generously sized suburban lots near good quality schools. These boomers are directly competing with new young families who are looking for this same housing product and neighborhood.

The perplexing aspect of planning comes when thinking about the network of infrastructure on the ground and in the ground today, where the investments have already been made and how and where we should be investing our municipal dollars when the population of Topsham and so many other Maine communities has either decreased or shown little to no gain. Some people think we should have already shifted into a mindset of contraction – of abandoning the formulas that award funding and grants for systems “improvements” or “expansion,” instead adopting more fiscally constrained practices. This might look like shrinking existing infrastructure growth boundaries, right-sizing and not rebuilding oversized streets. This might look like doing more with the land resources we have already affected, adding buildings atop of oversized parking lots on regional corridors to accommodate new housing, new jobs and the social experiences and cultural amenities people are calling for.

Here in Topsham, some people anticipate that investments in the schools, in particular the high school and the possibility of a mandatory public pre-

Change in Median Age, 2009-2015





Larry Fitch.

school program, will trigger an influx of new students into a system that has been losing enrollment since approximately 2000 and is projected to continue losing enrollment over the next 6 to 7 years (Planning Decisions, 2015). At the same time, the data point to a lack of both market rate and affordable housing for families. The lack of affordable housing in the immediate Portland area will push families north to communities like Topsham. Currently, Topsham does not have the housing supply to accommodate families moving north. Where, for the past several decades, the housing industry has neglected to build small and large apartments, duplexes, and townhouses, Topsham is also missing newer single family affordable and market rate housing.

One potential population cohort accelerator could be new development. Historical settlements that occurred around natural and forest resources such as the rivers is also part of what is drawing outdoor enthusiasts to Topsham today. The rich quality and diversity of the landscape - from rural farms and fields to rivers and forests - is attracting new residents, in particular retirees, to Topsham. Residents describe places in Topsham as instilling a feeling of being out in the wilderness, whether paddling up the Cathance River or walking in forested lands preserved as part of new developments.

Looking at building permit data for the past five years, the majority of permits have been issued for new construction in age-restricted complexes and buildings, or in "naturally occurring retirement communities,"

Insight: Topsham's average household size has decreased from 2.53 in 2009 to 2.33 in 2016. The average family size has also decreased from 3.09 in 2009 to 2.74 in 2016.

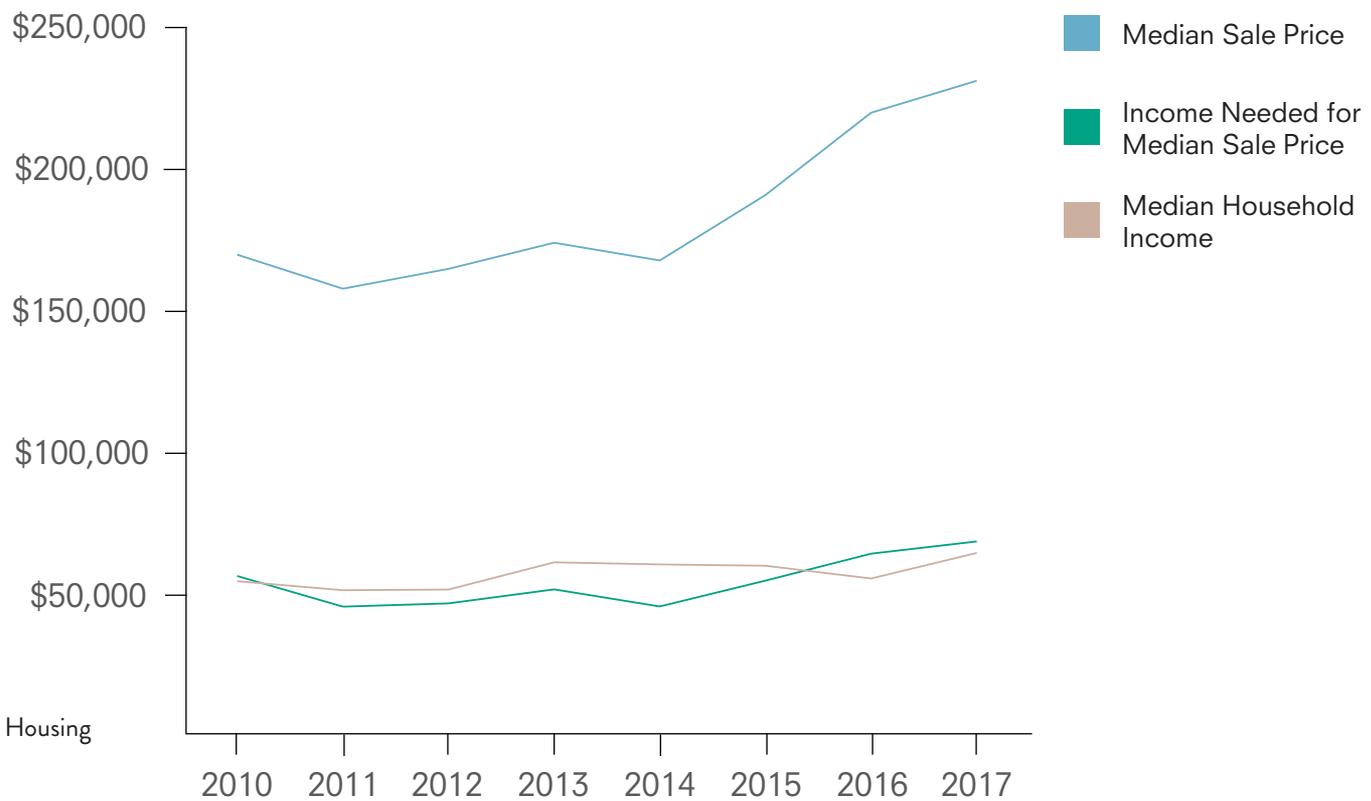
POPULATION ACCELERATORS

There is no way to precisely anticipate population trends. There is no way to know for certain who the future faces of Topsham will be. Past projections prepared by the State have not been realized. From 2000 to 2016, Topsham's actual population decreased from 9,100 residents to 8,731, a loss of 369 residents or approximately 4%. The State's projections for Topsham indicate that its population will increase slightly from an estimated 8,750 residents in 2014 to 8,924 residents in 2024. According to the State, Sagadahoc County is one of only four counties in the State that expects to see population growth between 2014 and 2034. Projected growth will be marginal and could still be influenced by any number of accelerators, causing growth or decline.

described by a local resident and planner as a place where the building product, price-point and condominium condition is attracting retirees. A substantial number of new age-restricted units are expected to be permitted and constructed in the near future in the Highland Green area. Continuing to build units restricted to a specific age cohort could send the population trajectory further towards older and retired. This may or may not be a desirable outcome for Topsham.

Another population cohort accelerator could be development of affordable, family and work-force housing. Currently, 57% of Topsham's households cannot afford to buy a house selling for the median sale price of \$220,000. Yet, Topsham has an above state-average median household income of \$69,132 (American

Housing Affordability, 2010-2017



Source: Maine Housing

Community Survey 5 year estimates, 2016). We know that Topsham has adopted development policies that incentivize construction of affordable, workforce-targeted housing. Whether it is because of a need to tweak the policy or whether it is because construction costs and development costs are too high to yield profit, the Town has seen only limited construction of intentional workforce housing since Topsham Crossing in 2003. The private sector development industry is not building products that today’s households can afford, or that could attract new households priced out of other greater Portland communities.

As an approach to counter population decline of young families with school-aged children, Topsham needs to take deliberate, proactive steps to provide zoning and financial incentives to accommodate new families who want to move to Topsham. Zoning policies and financial programs that offset development costs could encourage the private sector to build a different house product than the \$350,000 plus, 2-bedroom condominium or the \$600,000 plus age-restricted single family dwelling. Regulatory framework overhauls could look like incentive-based zoning that encourages the construction of “missing middle housing.” The missing middle housing type can be described as smaller to medium sized footprint housing, that, when clustered together or located in amongst average sized houses, will increase the overall density of a neighborhood without changing neighborhood character. A handful of smaller buildings may fit in the context of an existing neighborhood in a way that a large apartment building might not.

Some regulatory overhauls may ultimately need to come from the State. For example, amendments may need to be considered to the thresholds that trigger Maine Department of Environmental Protection’s (MDEP) Site Location of Development permit. A 14-lot subdivision on 30 acres does not trigger this review process, yet a 15

lot subdivision does. While the Town has Site Location of Development Authority (SLODA), triggering this level of review increases permitting soft costs. The loss really comes from the added time it takes for permit review. It could be that adjustments in local or state permitting regulations will incentivize the private sector to build more family housing. The Town may need to enter into public-private partnerships with developers or non-profit housing groups to realize new mixed-income, multigenerational neighborhoods.

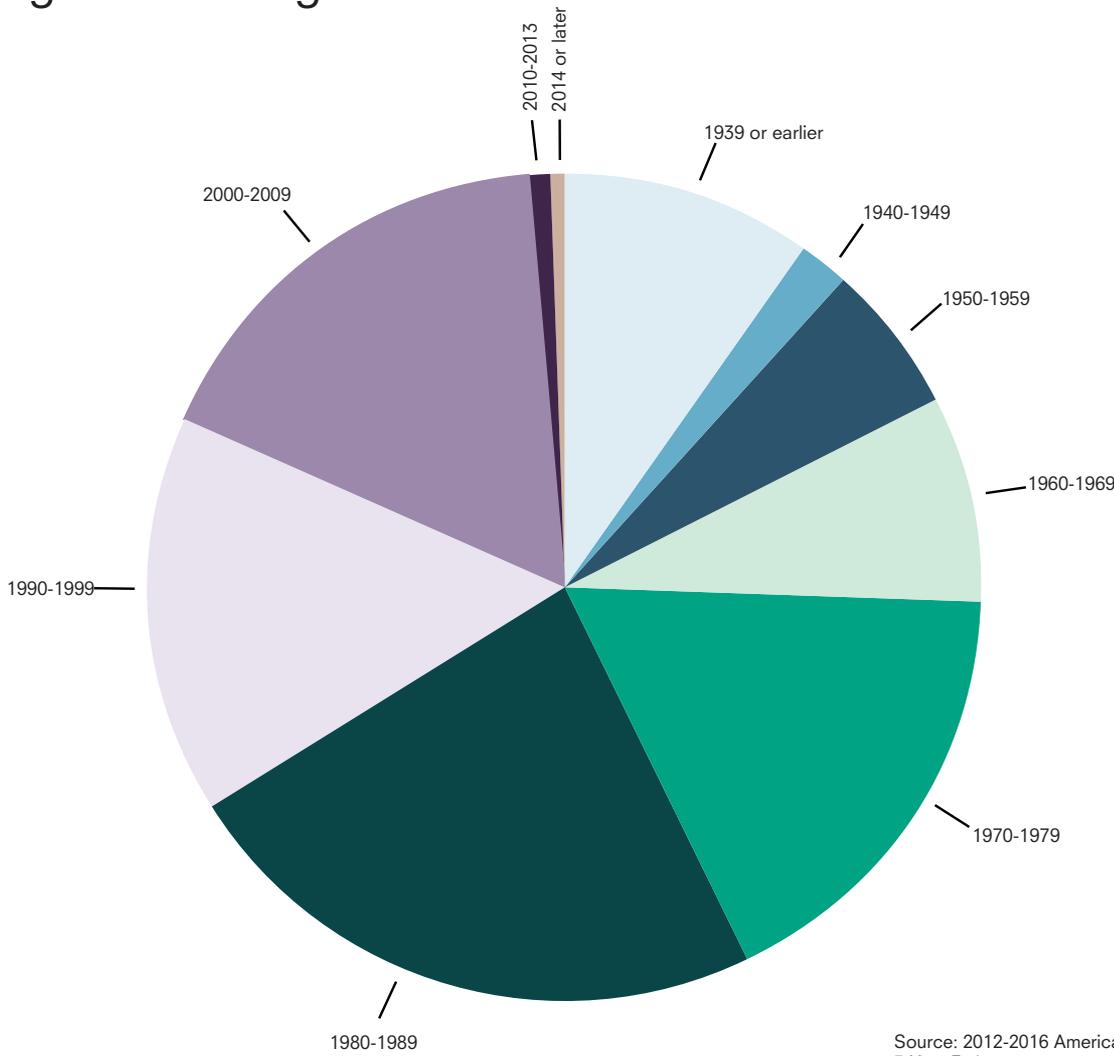
POSITIONING TOPSHAM FOR DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Regardless of the demographic trajectory, the Town can take proactive steps to ensure the quality of life for residents and the quality of place is maintained and enhanced over time. If the demographic trajectory continues towards a predominantly older, retirement-aged population, some of the physical infrastructure needs of that population look very similar to the needs of children and young adults.

For example, both demographics are dependent on safe, walkable streets to enjoy independence, mobility and good social connections. Both demographics need to be able to experience a level of autonomy to engage in social relationships with peers. Children are dependent on walking, bicycling and riding in parent’s cars to access school, sports, social and cultural activities. Similarly, aging residents can experience physical impairments that may limit their ability to drive or their comfort levels driving or bicycling alongside traffic. Slow streets are known to be more comfortable for the elder driving population than fast regional roads and highways, and slow streets keep elders driving longer.

Residents of all ages have also expressed an interest in promoting a more integrated arts and culture scene that helps bring community together, celebrates local talent,

Age of Housing



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

and activates underutilized spaces. Residents want a variety of communication platforms such as newsletters, email blasts, or well-placed bulletin boards to help community members connect and learn about events. Public spaces such as the Library are being actively used as community centers, but these spaces are too few in number to meet the need.

Both young and old demographics will benefit from investment in neighborhood parks, playgrounds and commons within 5 minute walks of where people live, for formal and informal recreation and social gathering. This means recreational opportunities should not be centralized to just one location in town, accessed only by those who can drive cars. School playgrounds serve as recreational spaces, but only for a small age cohort (children) and are located beyond a safe walking distance from many of Topsham's residential neighborhoods and developments. Nationally and locally, villages and walkable neighborhoods are highly desired by families and retirees for their safe walking and bicycle friendly streets, social connectivity, proximity to amenities and the independent lifestyles such communities foster. Building walkable neighborhoods, with a mix of housing types, could be the accelerator that changes Topsham's demographic future.

REGIONAL PROXIMITY AND WORKFORCE

Topsham is geographically situated to access the State's major employers and the highest wages in the State. The rates of both educational attainment, participation in the workforce, and median household income are

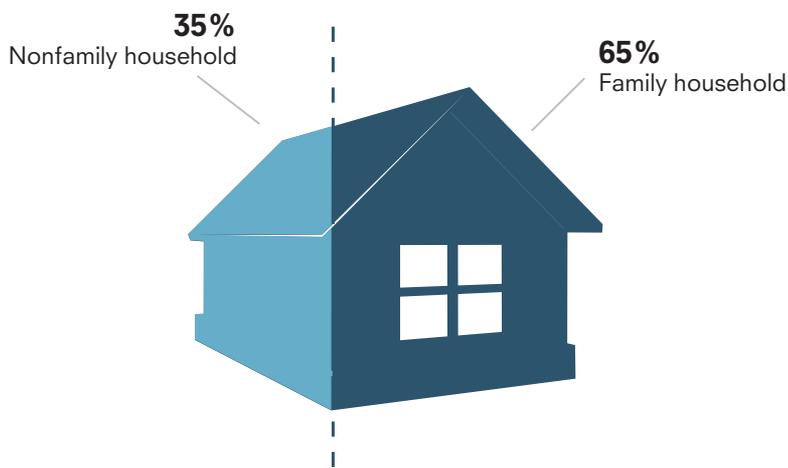
increasing. The percent of Topsham residents with at least a bachelor's degree has grown from 34% in 2010 to 42% in 2016, which is higher than the State's average of 29%, but notably lower than other I-295, Portland north communities of Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, Yarmouth and Freeport. Brunswick and Topsham have on par statistics for educational attainment. In 2015, an estimated 4,733 Topsham residents participated in the labor force. Topsham's unemployment rate has dropped impressively over recent years. In 2010, Topsham's unemployment rate was 6.2% and by 2016, its unemployment rate had dropped to 2.8%. Of the 4,733 employed workers in Topsham in 2015, the largest percentage, about 28%, were employed in jobs in education, health care and social services.

Some of the increase in workforce participation is representative of retirees re-entering the workforce. From 2010 to 2016, the number of people age 75 and older participating in the workforce increased by 242 people. People age 55 and older participating in the workforce accounts for 1,262 people. This number could indicate that the costs of living for those on fixed incomes has increased in combination with residual effects of the recession on retirement savings, pushing people back into employment. Or, it could mean people are working to keep socially and emotionally active. Increases in workforce participation could also be a direct result of job creation in the region, in particular at Brunswick Landing.

INTERPRETING DATA

The housing and local economic data is suggesting some

Household Composition, 2016



Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

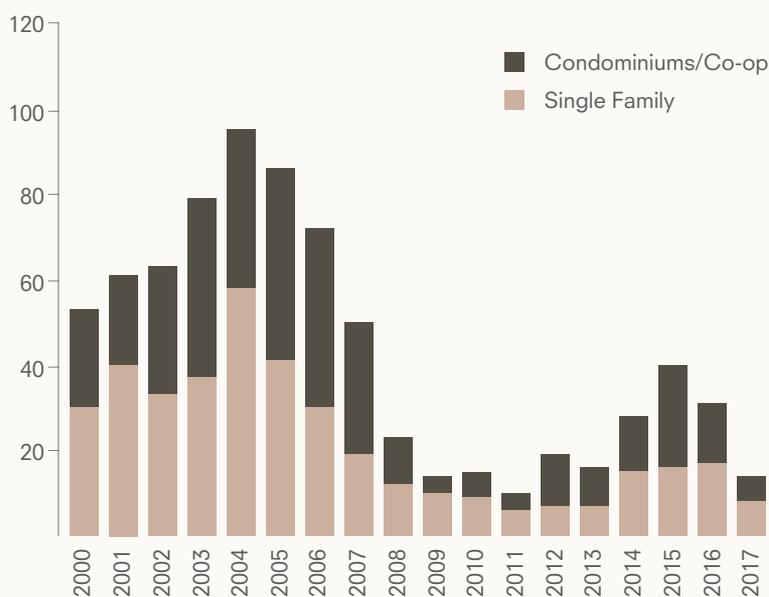


Home rental in Topsham is increasing, from 19% in 2010 to nearly 23% in 2016.



Home ownership in Topsham is decreasing, from nearly 81% in 2010 to 75% in 2016.

Building Permit Distribution, 2000-2017



Source: Town Assessor

Between 2009 - 2017, demolition permits were issued for:

- 7** houses
- 4** mobile homes and trailers

Source: Town Assessor

Insight: Topsham's current housing stock was built largely between the 1970s and the early 2000s. Comparatively, there has been less construction of houses in the most recent decade. Recent building permit data indicates that construction of housing in this decade has been split almost evenly between condominiums/co-ops and single family houses.

interesting stories. First, Topsham's existing housing stock does not include housing that is affordable to 57% of the households who live here today. In 2016, the median sale price of a house in Topsham was \$220,000 and the median income was \$55,908 which translates to a household being able to afford an \$190,232 house (Maine State Housing Authority, 2016). [Note: This median income data differs from the ACS data previously mentioned, however it is the Maine State Housing Authority's data that is used to calculate housing affordability.]

Second, Topsham residents live within proximity to all of the State's major employment centers. Topsham may not be building the kinds of housing products or neighborhoods that will attract higher wage-earning professionals and families to relocate to Topsham, despite the Town's proximity to major employment centers, quality schools, outdoor recreational amenities and proximity to Brunswick's vibrant Maine Street and cultural opportunities. The question then becomes do we proactively change Topsham's population and demographic trajectory through purposeful actions, such as development initiatives to get the kinds of housing products needed to increase targeted demographics? Do we proactively adjust policies to incentivize development? In this economic market, is it practical to think local government can create enough of an incentive to change what the private sector is building?

VALUE OF DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, town leadership has been taking a different look at the math behind development costs to make better decisions about the kinds of development patterns and infrastructure the Town should support and invest in. **Leadership understands that adding additional infill and development to places already served by infrastructure will yield increased taxable value for the Town.** At the same time, concentrating

new growth in Topsham's already developed areas will advance goals of creating more economically-vibrant, walkable Lower and Upper Villages, a Town Center and support the Topsham Fair Mall area as it grows and redevelops over time.

Limiting infrastructure expansion reduces development pressure from the rural transitional edges and areas of town where future protection of farms and working landscapes, and increased conservation and recreational opportunities are desired. In the Topsham Fair Mall Stream watershed, there's approximately 320 acres of which 79% is developed, and of that percentage, 30% of the area is comprised of impervious surfaces. This acreage alone provides ample infill and redevelopment opportunities to support additional growth over the next generation.

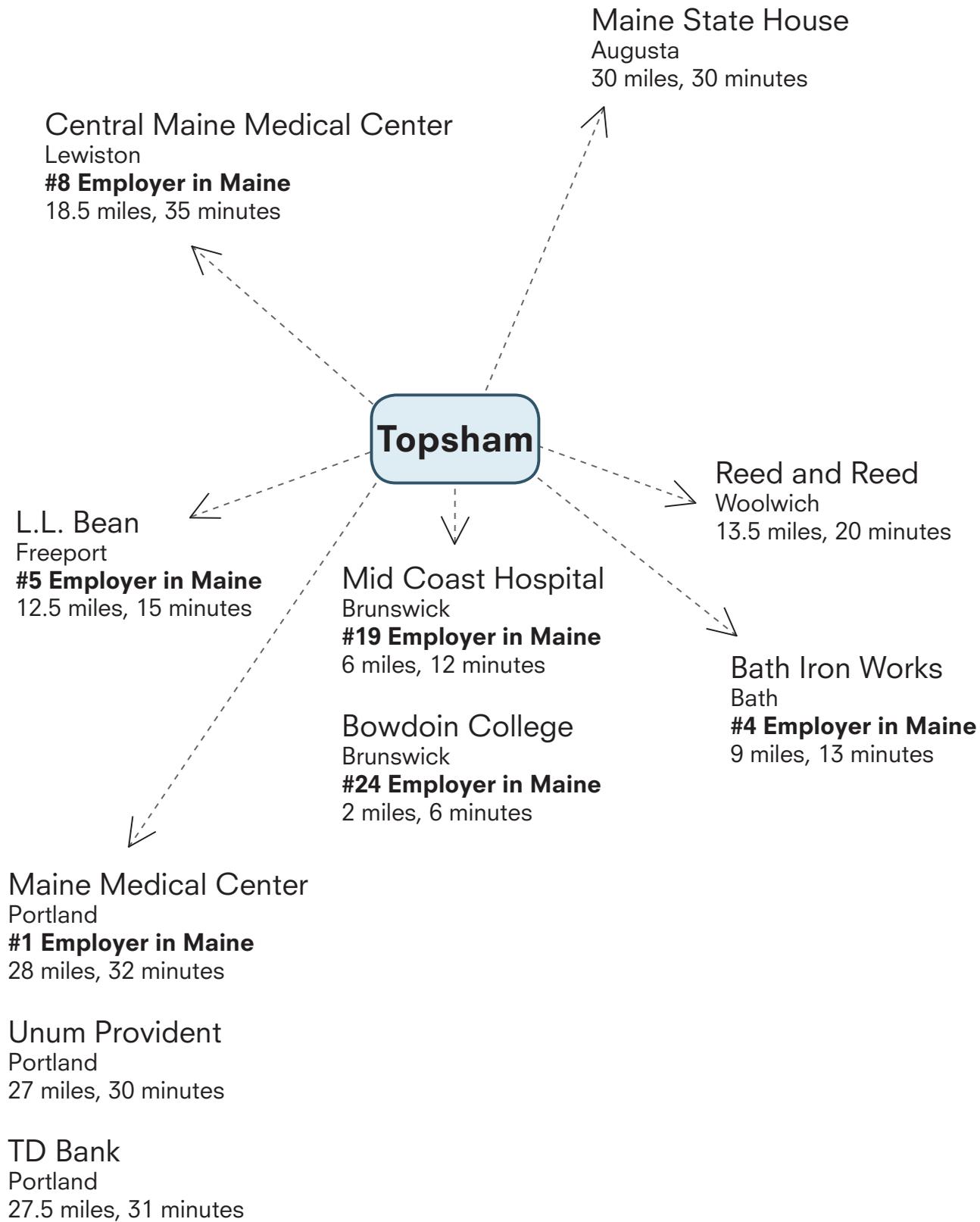
SUPPORTING THE PROTECTION OF RURAL CHARACTER

Open spaces provide services to the community, enhancing quality of life for all residents. When open spaces are conserved, values are typically equalized throughout the community. Through active efforts to protect the rural character of Topsham, the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust has worked collaboratively to protect over 700 acres of land either by fee acquisition or easement since the 2007 Comprehensive Plan. When Topsham residents drive the Town's rural roads, people see working farms and forests. When residents were asked during the public process to identify priority places for protection, people marked up the maps to indicate support for Topsham's farms. According to local Tax Assessor's data for 2016, 2,251 acres of farmland comprised of 60 parcels of land are enrolled in the Farmland Tax Program. An additional 110 parcels totaling 3,339 acres of forestland is enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax Program, with another 366 acres of land (5 parcels) taking advantage of the Open Space Tax Law

Marilyn Hunter.



Regional Employment Opportunities



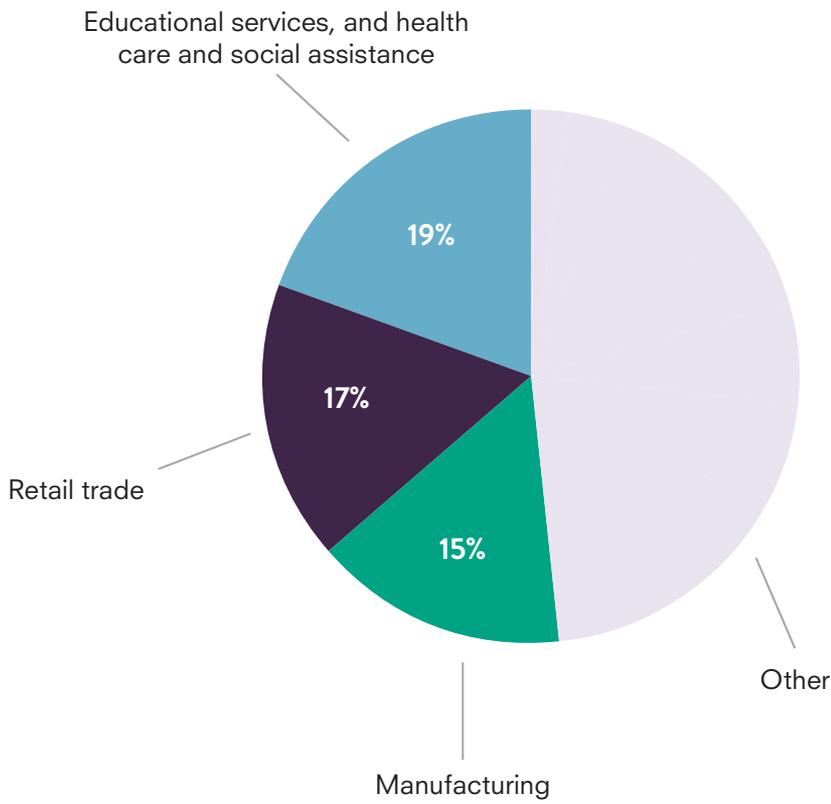
Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI), 2017

Insight: Topsham has access to many of the State’s largest and highest paying employers within a 30-minute driving distance.

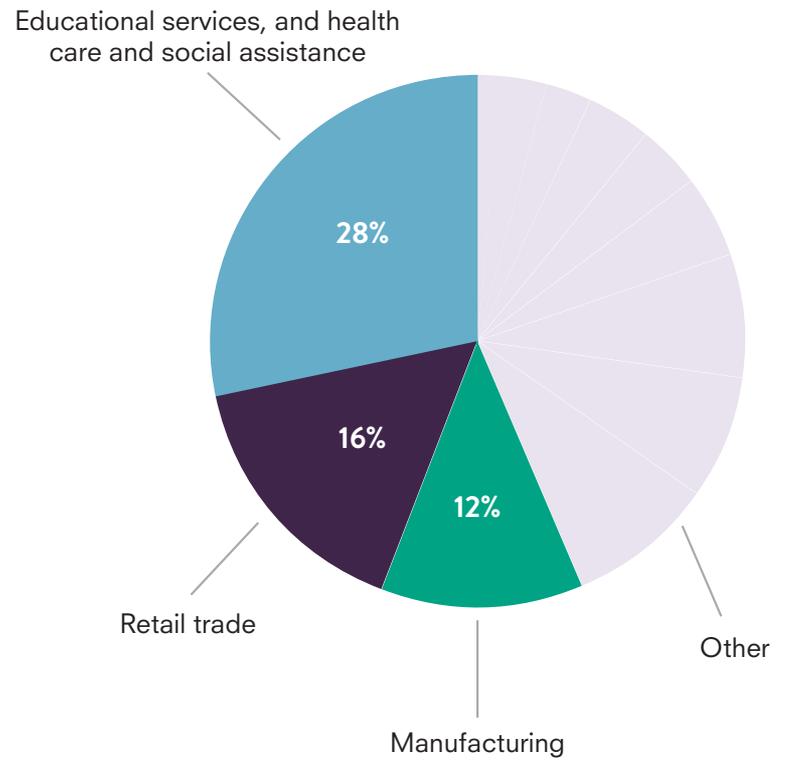
Employment by Industry, 2000 vs. 2016

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

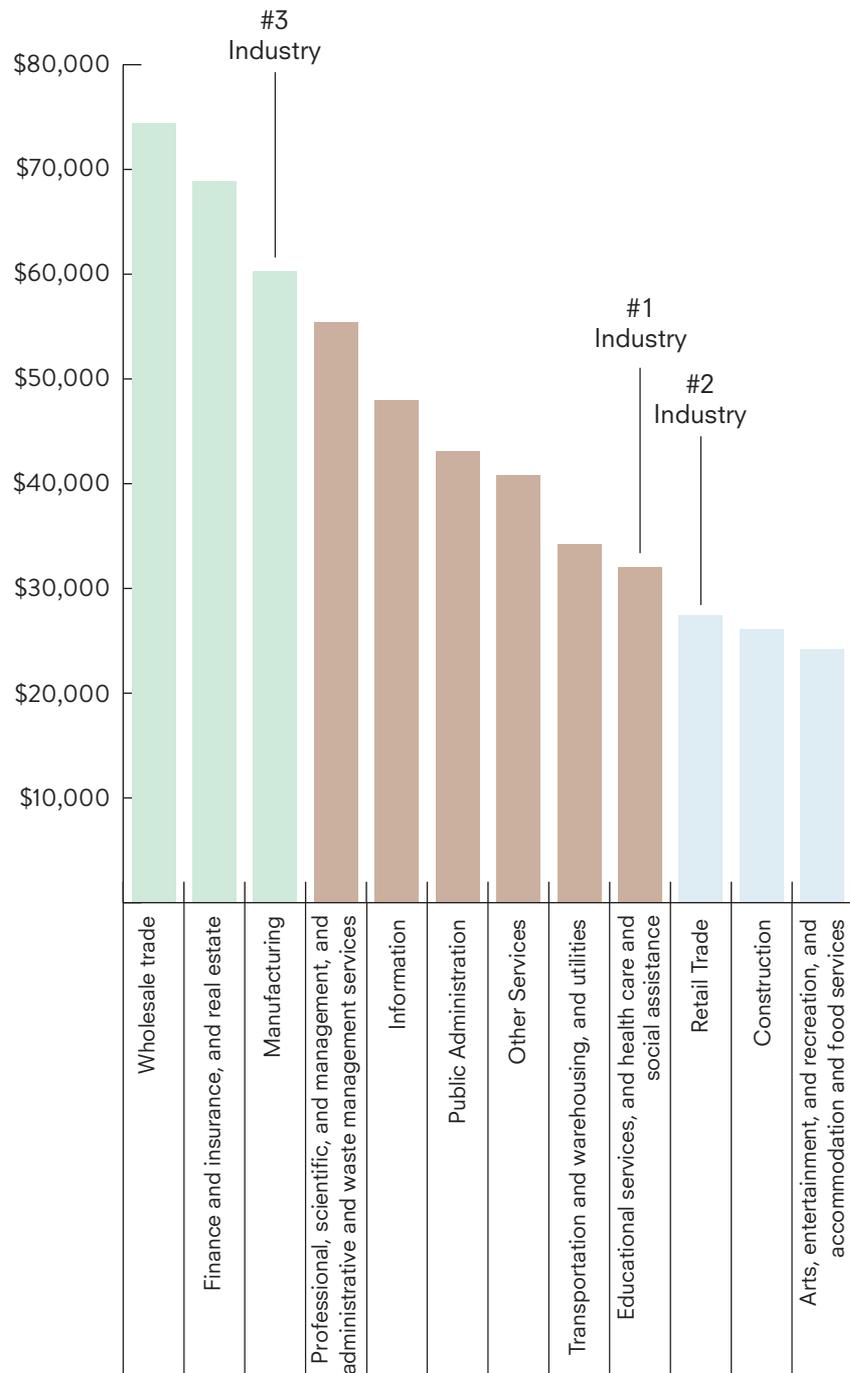
2000



2016



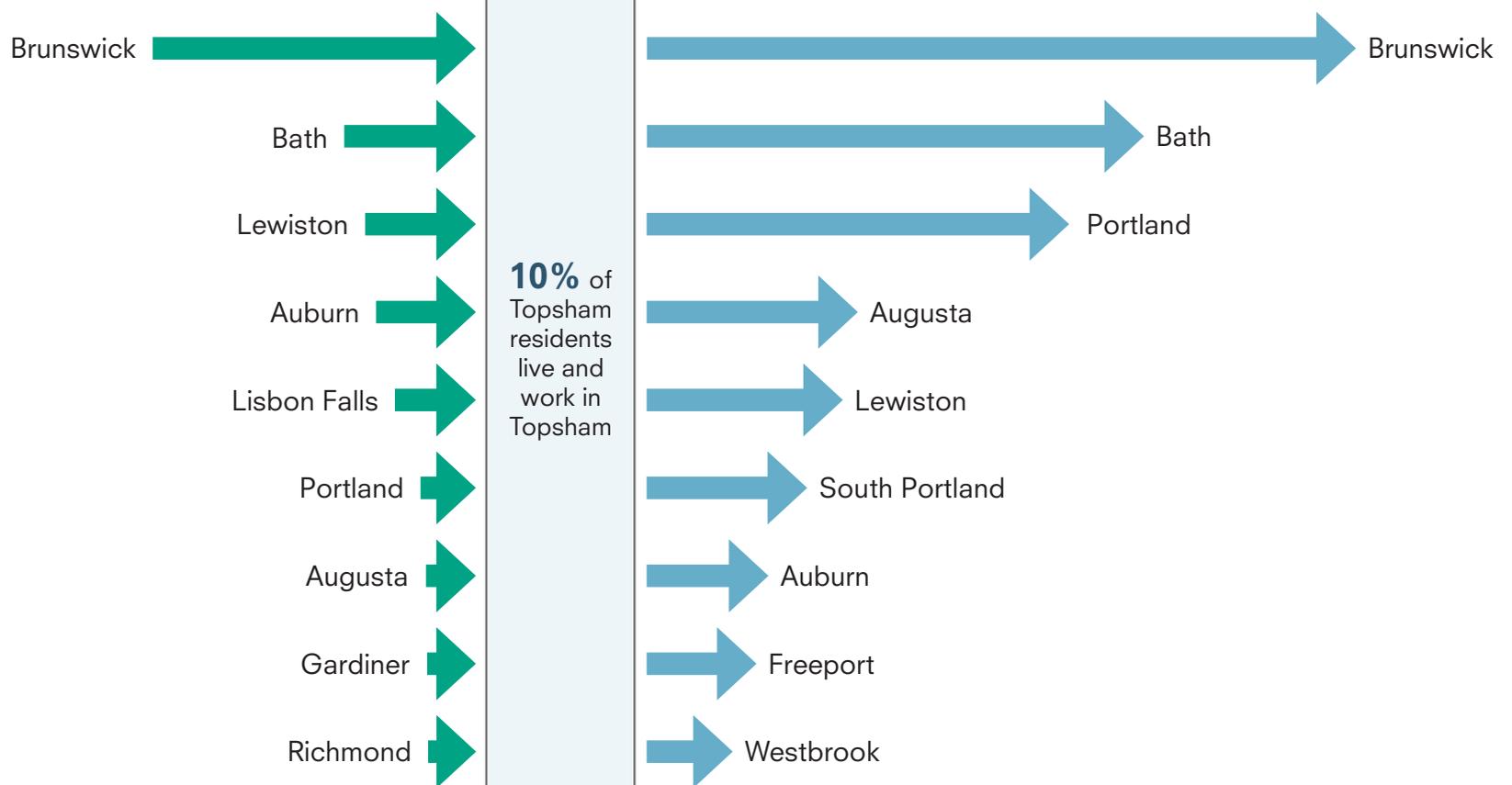
Average Annual Wages by Industry and Top Three Industries (Based on Number of Employees), 2016



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Where Topsham Employees Travel From

Where Topsham Residents Travel to Work



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics Origin-Destination Employment Statistics

in Topsham. The combined total of land benefitting from some kind of tax program today is 5,956 acres, creating a net sum of aesthetic benefit and preservation of rural character for residents to enjoy. But, enrollment in tax programs is optional and an enrollee can withdraw at any time if penalty fees are paid.

The 2012 Census of Agriculture, which was conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture, shows that while the number of working farms declined by 4 percent nationally, the number of Maine farms has increased slightly since the last census was done in 2007. In 2012, there were 8,174 farms operating in Maine, up from 8,136 in 2007 and 7,196 in 2002 (2002 being the data captured during Topsham's last Comprehensive Plan). The number of Maine farmers under age 34 increased from 396 in 2007 to 551 in 2012. There were also more women farmers in Maine in 2012 – 2,381, compared with 2,043 in 2007. This statewide trend of an increasing number of farms and a younger workforce of farmers reflects similar occurrences within the greater Topsham region.

Real long-term protection of rural character and support for farms goes hand in hand with policies that direct growth to areas of town already served by sewer and water. When zoning policies and incentives allow greater densities of development in-town, the private sector market will follow, directing investment in-town by way

of infill and redevelopment. If infrastructure is expanded to the rural areas of town, costs of development to the private sector plummet making lower density, single use projects on open spaces significantly more profitable. Being deliberate about protecting rural character means the efforts of BTLT should continue to be supported to protect environmentally high-value parcels of land. It may mean looking at the protection of rural lands as an economic development strategy, where protecting the land also accompanies proactive zoning strategies and business development programs to allow new, rural entrepreneurship to emerge. Business and rural landscapes do mix. A dense town center supports a strong rural economy, and vice versa.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

A fiscal tool that allows a municipality to support capital improvements, programming, and services to achieve local economic development goals. TIF Funds are generated by setting aside a portion of new tax revenue created by growth, as certified by the Town's Assessor.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Residents young and old, living in neighborhoods or along rural roads share two common threads that speak directly about how government can be prepared for the future: the desire to gather, and the desire for enhanced mobility. From a public facilities and services perspective, the Town's Select Board have been actively engaged in municipal budgeting, including undertaking annual capital improvement planning, limiting spending from reserve funds, establishing TIF districts, and setting aside dollars for future improvements. No town building in Topsham, other than the transfer station, is older than 17 years, and emergency service and public works vehicles are on an efficient replacement cycle. The framework of infrastructure and public facilities is here today, and should continue to be fiscally managed and maintained.

However, the threads expressed during the public process speak to a concern for the future and a desire for new services and social programming to support an active and socially-engaged lifestyle for all stages of life. Private public partnerships should be explored to ensure access to health and human services, social, recreational and cultural amenities for people of all ages and incomes. This could look like using TIF dollars for workforce development, matching young adults with highly-skilled, retirees. Or, it could look like fixed route expansions to the Brunswick transit service into Topsham. Or, it could look like repurposing underutilized or vacant space in the Town Center to create a new social and recreational hub for residents and partnering with the Library Trustees to expand social and recreational programming at the Library.



Susan Rae-Reeves.

WHERE DATA INFORMS VISION

Data can help guide planning decisions, but we need to be cognizant that the societal rate of change we have been experiencing in the past few decades has been increasingly rapid, and the effects of federal policy on the housing and development industry made outside of Maine can be dramatic and far-reaching. Data alone cannot predict change and should not entirely inform planning decisions, which is why identifying priorities via a public process is so beneficial to the framework of this document.

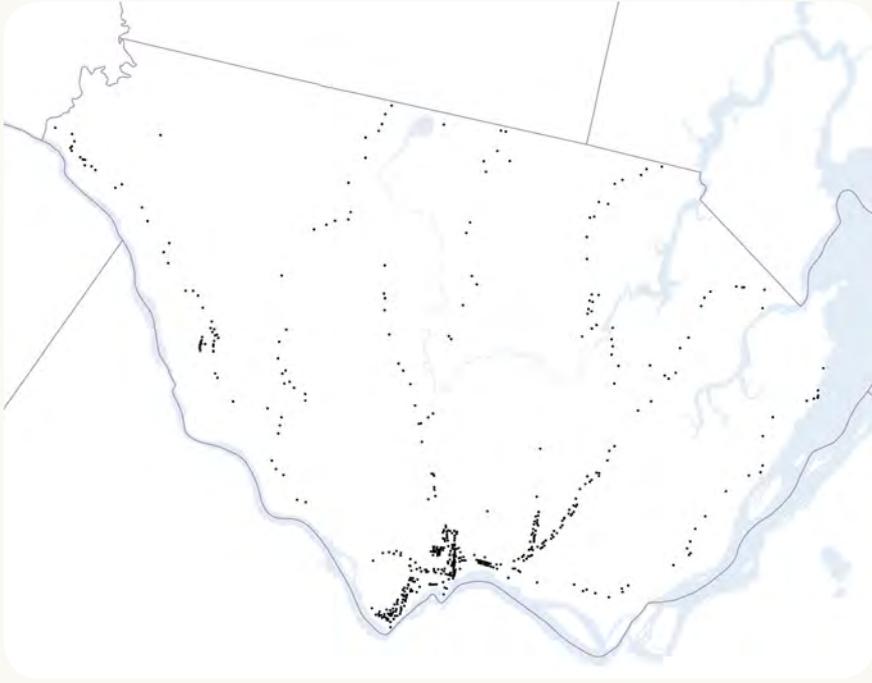
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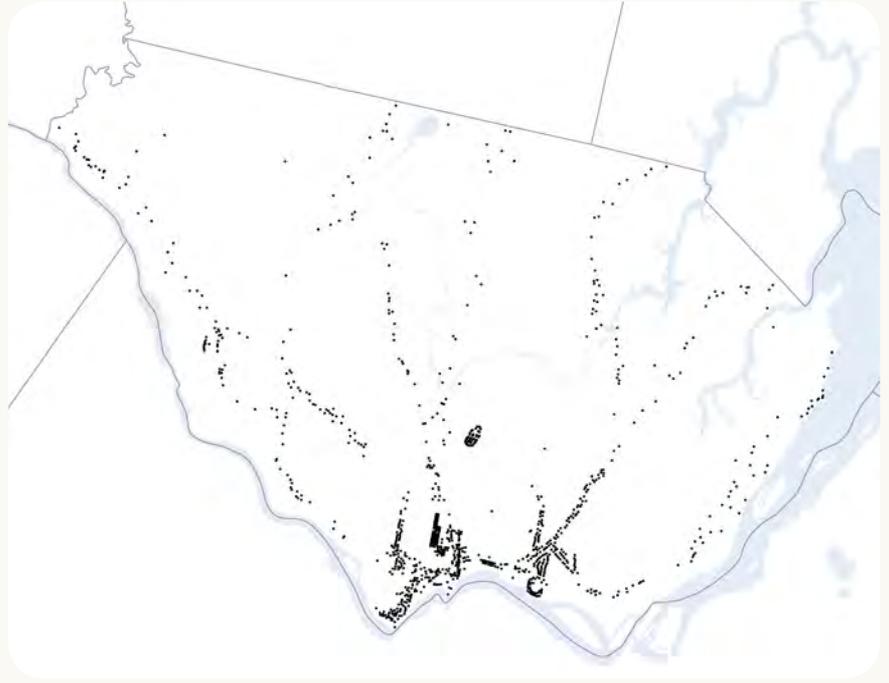
Since 2007's Comprehensive Planning effort, we have experienced two significant developments in technology that have far-reaching implications for planning: 1) the widespread use of smartphones; 2) the invention of sensors and autonomous, or self-driving vehicle technology. Technologies such as the smart phone were still in their infancy stages in 2007. Fast-forward 12 years to today and smartphones have changed how generations socialize and interact with one another, and access goods and information. If, in 2007, we had predicted the wide-spread use of the iPhone, what policies and physical conditions in Topsham might be different today? Along a similar line of thought, what might the implications be for planning and budgeting if self-driving cars become equally as wide-spread in the next 12 years? Can every wide street and highway be shrunk because a super smart computer-guided object is programmed to not crash but to stay between the painted lines and stop short of a collision with a pedestrian, or fixed or moving object? The technology, in its infancy

Housing Development, 1900 - Present

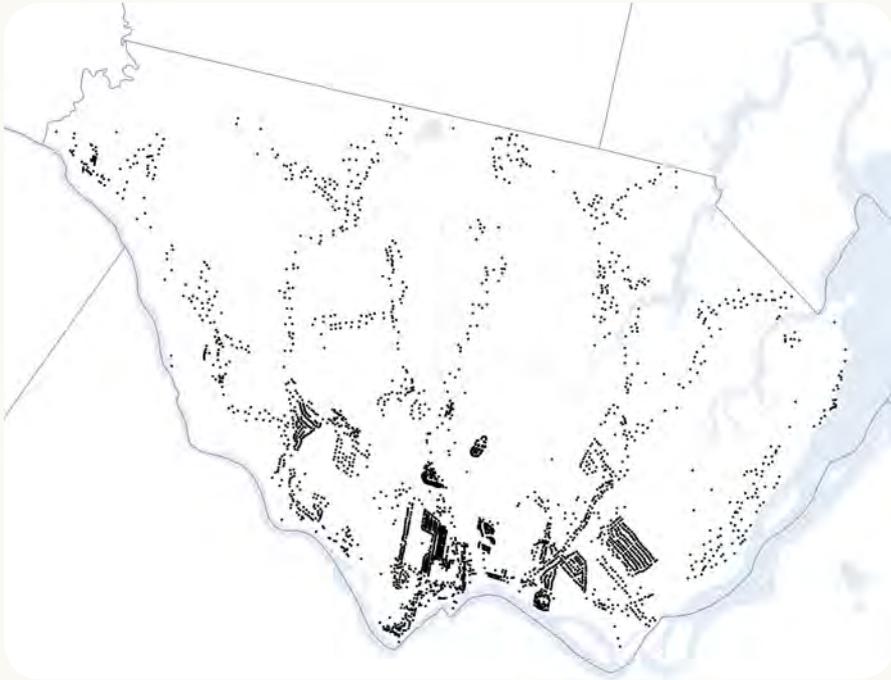
1900 - 1950



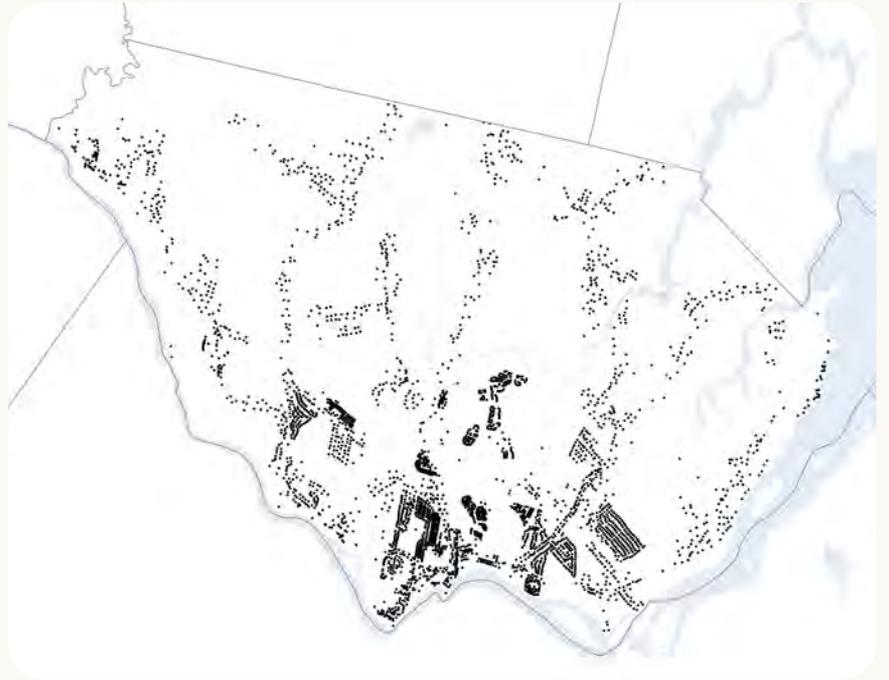
1950 - 1970



1970 - 2000



2000 - Present



This series of four maps shows the rate of housing development in Topsham over the course of the 20th century into today.

stages, exists today in cars for sale right here in Topsham. Merging insights gleaned from the data with the community's visions for the future of Topsham, this plan is structured around Big Ideas and neighborhood-scale plans that either protect and enhance existing character or illustrate how a place can transform over time in a desired direction. Each Big Idea includes a series of recommended strategies that range from short-term and minimal resources to implement to longer-term, higher levels of investment that will need to be thoughtfully budgeted for. The catalyst site drawings presented in the plan incorporate the Big Ideas and preferences expressed by the community during the five-day process. Site drawings are concepts only, not approved development plans ready for construction. Private landowners need

to be willing to undertake projects on private property when financially feasible and supported by the market. In tandem, the Town's regulatory framework needs to legally enable the vision to be built, and in some cases, the Town may want to take the lead to set up the infrastructure framework to attract private investment, such as sidewalks, streets, and public space enhancements. Most importantly, to implement a Comprehensive Plan takes initiative, hard work and perseverance by many people working together towards common goals.

Meet the Neighborhoods

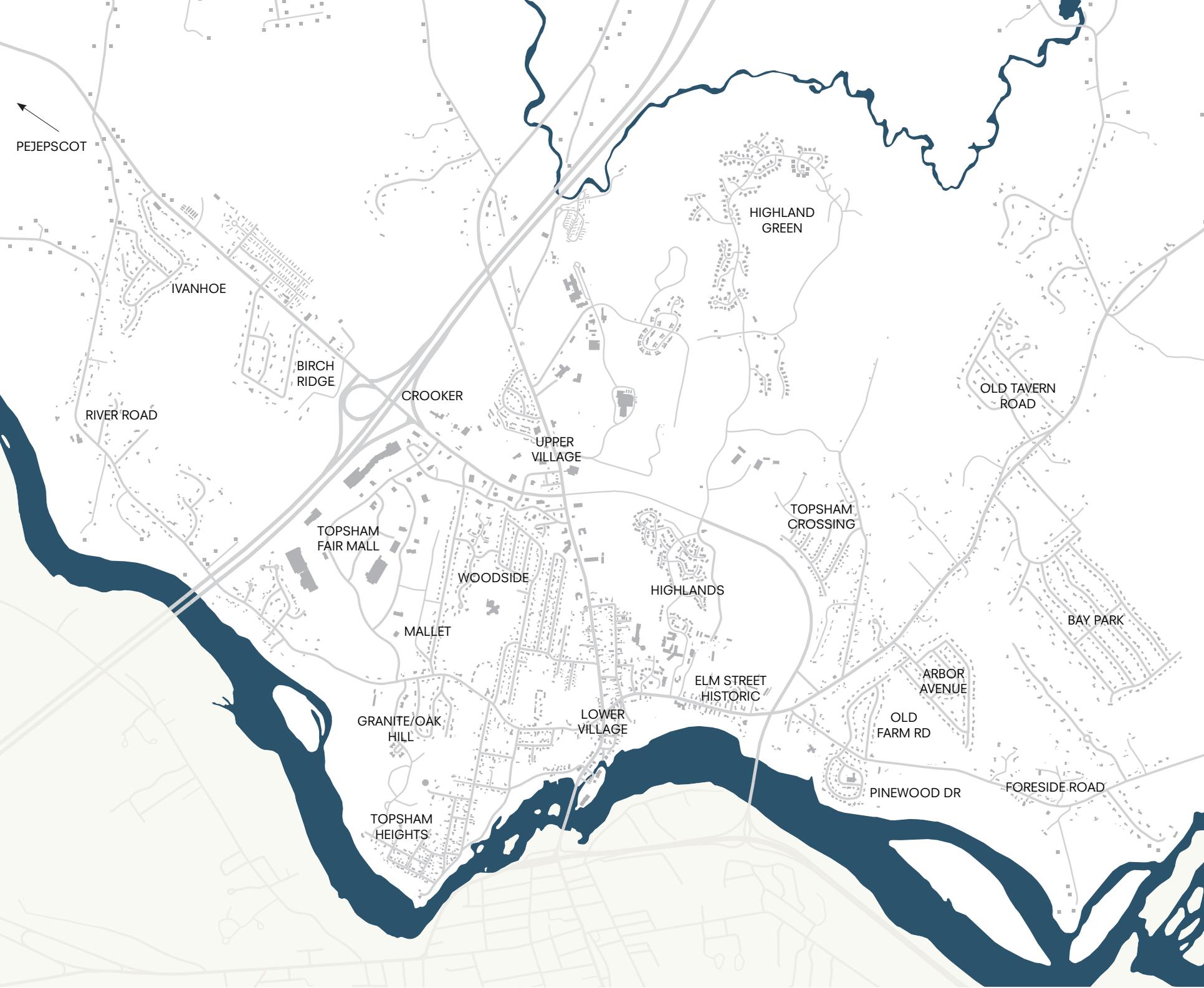
During the public process, participants were asked to identify Topsham’s existing neighborhood centers. Neighborhood centers are places that people can walk to comfortably from where they live to gather, play, socialize, or to access amenities to meet daily needs. A neighborhood center may be a park, civic building, church, local pub or corner store.

From this mapping and survey work, the team learned that most neighborhoods in Topsham lack real neighborhood centers, and that the Town’s only designated public park is a centralized recreation facility located where the majority of the Town needs to drive to access it. We can surmise from historical reporting that the Heights had a more robust neighborhood center when commercial businesses were active here. Perhaps the Heights neighborhood center extended across the river, since residents were known to cross the pedestrian bridge daily to attend church, school and to work in Brunswick. Furthermore, the historic Town Hall site, located in the pre-Civil War Elm Street neighborhood has a large front yard setback and lawn, most likely used in the past for gathering. The Fairgrounds, Grange, and a number of churches within the neighborhood also would have served as gathering places. Even Pejepscot Village appears to have a neighborhood center where there’s still evidence of a shopfront and civic building surrounded by a cluster of housing.

However, all Topsham’s neighborhoods constructed after the turn of the 20th century were not planned around a strong neighborhood center. Instead, the three school playgrounds are serving double-duty for children to play during the day and after school hours. The Bay Park and Old Tavern Road neighborhoods are exclusively comprised of residential housing with no defined neighborhood center: no corner store, park or civic building to serve as a focal point or gathering place. Instead, many people have created informal trails along edges of developments, and a little free library kiosk has popped up in the Old Tavern Road and Oak Hill neighborhoods. Similarly, the Ivanhoe and River Road areas located off Route 196 west represent significant clusters of housing with no defined neighborhood center.

An example of a neighborhood gathering spot on private property.





Existing Neighborhoods and Centers



Elm Street Historic District



Elm Street is home to an established, historic neighborhood featuring tree-lined sidewalks, a bike lane, and large lots running down to the riverfront. The aesthetic of the neighborhood is cohesive, mature, and residential with primarily single-family colonial units from the 18th-19th centuries, most of which have additions or attachments. Houses are typically close to the street, with setbacks ranging around three to five feet. There are also a number of historical buildings with grand setbacks. Some multi-family units are appearing in the neighborhood, along with apartment buildings such as River Landing Apartments for Seniors, which was constructed in 2015. The neighborhood abuts the Topsham Fairgrounds and the Highlands.



YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- WALKABILITY

Sidewalks

Make Green Street a one-way with a raised sidewalk

More street lights

- PUBLIC PARK

- COMMERCIAL AMENITIES

Food trucks

Restaurants and stores

- LOWER TRAFFIC SPEEDS

Speed bumps

Enforced speed limit on problem streets

- PRESERVATION

Woodside



Woodside is a residential, uniform neighborhood, with a mix of one- to two-story single-family houses built around the mid 20th-century. Woodside's proximity to schools, the Town offices, and police and fire stations, coupled with low-traffic and narrow streets, makes it an attractive neighborhood for families with children. Aesthetically, the neighborhood features a range of New England midcentury housing types, gardens, and some personal use outbuildings.



YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- WALKABILITY

Sidewalks

Crosswalks (especially near major intersections)

- TRAFFIC CALMING

Stop signs

Reduce speeds

Speed bumps

Enforced speed limit on problem streets

- AESTHETICS

Standards for maintenance

Public park

- CURB RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

- IMPROVE BROADBAND LEVEL OF SERVICE

Topsham Heights



Topsham Heights, known as “The Heights” is a popular family neighborhood, with a range of one- to two-story, single-family houses. The Heights incorporates a mix of multi-family units as well as small home-occupations. This neighborhood was developed to house mill workers and still reflects this character in its density and aesthetic. There are no sidewalks, but well-maintained yards and landscaping.

YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- PEDESTRIAN SAFETY
 - Sidewalks
 - Child-oriented safety prioritization
- SAFE ACCESS FOR ALL MODES OF TRANSPORTATION





Bay Park, Old Tavern Road, Arbor Avenue

There are several pocket neighborhoods located along Route 24, or Middlesex Road as it splits from Elm Street and becomes a regional connector to Bowdoinham and beyond. Due to the connection of this route, Middlesex Road ends up carrying fast regional traffic. Neighborhoods such as Bay Park and Old Tavern Road are similar conventional suburban neighborhoods with mostly ranches, raised ranches, and colonial structures built in the 1960s and 1980s. Pine trees are dispersed throughout these neighborhoods amongst wide streets, no curbs, and no drainage. Houses are placed fairly close together, and located on lots around one-acre in size. There is a notable range of setbacks, with some more than 40 feet in depth.

YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- TRAFFIC CALMING

Posted speed limits

Speed bumps

- CONNECTIVITY

Safe crosswalks

Sidewalks

Public access to railroad tracks and trails

- NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

Improved street lighting

Underground power lines



Granite/Oak Hill

Granite Hill (Phase I) and Oak Hill (Phase II) are condominium neighborhoods, started in 2000, located adjacent to Topsham Heights. The housing is connected and ranges between one and a half to two story condominiums in colonial, saltbox, and cape styles. Garages are placed forward of the front facades and the houses all feature small covered entranceways. The streets are narrow and feature curbs and sidewalks connected throughout the community and to River Road.

YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENTS

Remediations for cut through traffic on Winter Street
Another connector road

- NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

More street lights
Community and open space

Cathance Road



Cathance Road splits from Route 24 towards the Cathance River and through northern Topsham. Along this road there are large parcels with some historic structures built in the 1700s and 1800s. There are also pockets of newer construction, built starting around the 1990s, with some stock from the 1960s closer to the river. These houses are placed amongst deciduous woods in neighborhoods with no curbs or drainage.

YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- ROAD MAINTENANCE

Preservation of rural sections of road

Comprehensive repaving

- NATURE PRESERVATION

Protect streams from getting filled in

Less development

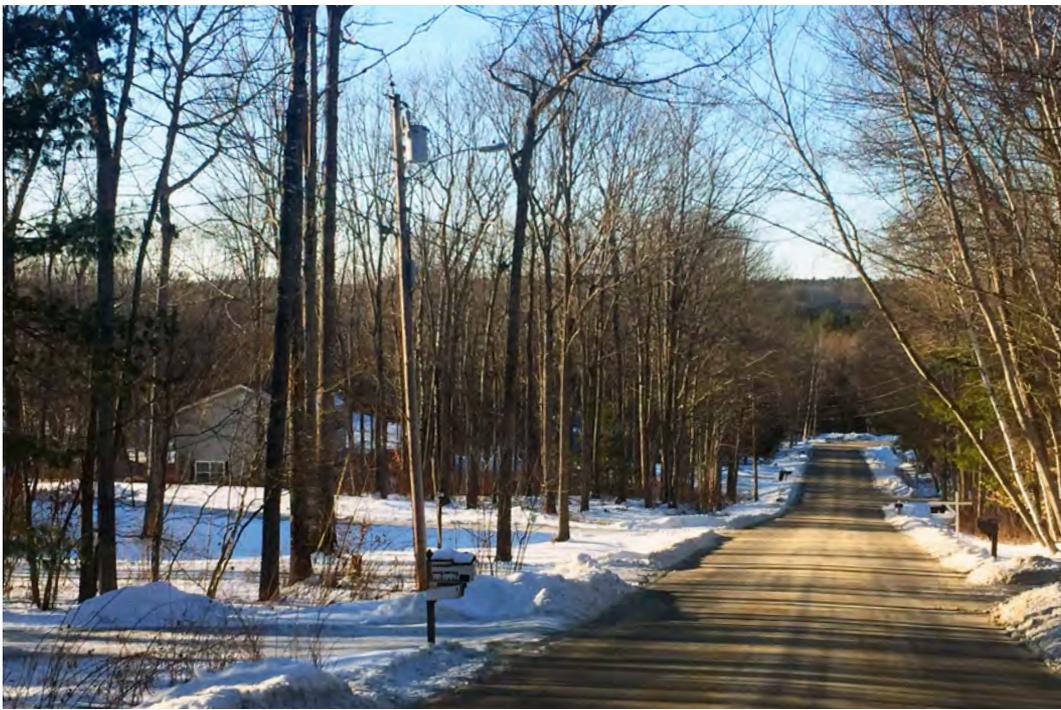
Enforcement of natural waterway and wildlife setbacks

- TRAFFIC CALMING

Reduce automobile speeds

Safety for pedestrians, runners, and bicyclists





River Road, Ivanhoe, Birch Ridge, Pejepscot



River Road is a wooded road that curves and extends west along the Androscoggin River, terminating at Route 196. Birch Ridge and Ivanhoe are traditional, suburban, single-family subdivisions. Pejepscot Village is a historical village site that still has indicators of its original paper mill settlement. River Road is mostly residential, with some commercial businesses, significant historic industrial areas, and a cemetery. As the road passes the Brunswick & Topsham Water District office and continues west, the lot sizes increase from less than an acre to three to five acres, and the houses are set farther back. The housing stock is a mix of ranches, raised ranches, and colonials, mostly built in the late 1900s and early 2000s, with a few historical structures built in the 1700s and 1800s, particularly further west.



YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- ZONING IMPROVEMENTS

Concerns that required commercial buffers and setbacks are inadequate

Concerns with industrial land-use expansion

Protection of residential quality of life and character

- SAFER BIKE ROUTES

- ACCESS TO TOWN SERVICES

Trash and recycling pickup

- AUTOMOBILE SAFETY

Visibility improvements



Craig P. Snapp and Dave Cleaveland/Maine Imaging.

Highlands and Highland Green

Over the past two decades, the Highlands and Highland Green have created more than 500 units of housing targeted to a specific demographic. The Highlands is a retirement community with 350 living units that are owned and rented. The Highlands is located south of Route 196. Highland Green, located north of Route 196, is an active adult lifestyle community for residents ages 55 years and older. Highland Green currently has 190 custom built single family houses, with an additional 369 homes planned and underway.

YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

Ability to cross major roads as a pedestrian or bicyclist

Connectivity across Route 196

Access to trails and river recreation

- SOCIAL CONNECTION

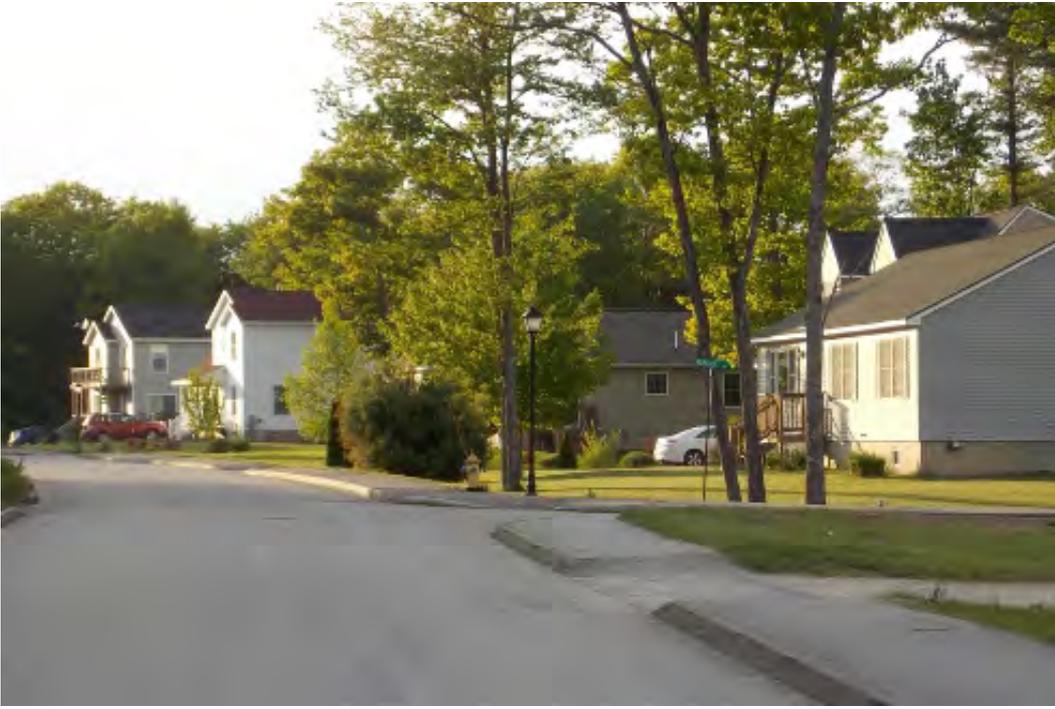
More planned cultural activities

Opportunities for connecting outside the Highland Green community

Craig P. Snapp and Dave Cleaveland/Maine Imaging



Topsham Crossing



Topsham Crossing is a uniform planned suburban neighborhood with its own homeowner's association. The neighborhood features small lots, less than a quarter of an acre in size. The housing styles are one- and two-story single family ranches, capes, and colonials, built starting in the early 2000s. The houses are set close to a narrow street. Many houses do not have garages and some have gravel driveways. Sidewalks are against the street with no street trees or landscape strips. Though constructed recently, this neighborhood has no dedicated playground. The neighborhood master plan for Topsham Crossing has not been fully built out.





Foreside Road is a wooded pleasant street that passes town features such as the Library, the Town recreational complex and the transfer station, and runs along the Androscoggin River to the northeast. There is a mix of housing including mobile homes, ranches, capes, and colonials, mostly built in the 1950s and 1960s with a few historic buildings dating back to the 1800s. While most lot sizes are fairly uniform, around one acre in size, the area includes variable size lots with some much larger. As the road extends north near the Town's solid waste facility, the character becomes more rural with farms, larger parcels, and more historic structures that are more set back than those closer to town.

YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

Paved shoulders

Extension of sidewalks and bicycle lanes

- TRAFFIC CALMING

Automobile speed reduction

Traffic enforcement on problem roads

- MAINTAIN RURAL/RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER

- IMPROVE WALKABILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

Existing Land Use and Community Character

Topsham has a diverse range of building types, land uses and landscapes that define community character, from contemporary big box retailers in regional shopping centers to historic riverfront mill buildings and pre-Civil War era homes on narrow village streets.

Community character can be defined as the collective relationship of:

- building form and scale
- predominant architectural character
- relationship of buildings to each other (building setbacks)
- lot dimensions (size, width)
- street (sidewalks, width, street trees)
- block pattern
- land use

Land use is different from community character as it describes the primary activity that is happening inside a building and/or on a site. Land use alone cannot sufficiently describe the essence of a place. Land use regulations have historically focused on keeping uses apart, where new approaches to zoning recognize that regulations controlling development should start with existing community character - what is here today. Understanding community character, and land use as part of that character, informs the regulatory framework section found later in this plan.

Peter A. McCarthy





LOWER VILLAGE MAIN STREET

Topsham’s Lower Village was the Town’s historic center, including buildings for work, commerce, and social gathering (church). The Lower Village today is still characterized by a mix of uses and building types, though over the past 150 years the fabric of the Lower Village has slowly eroded. Some roads have been smoothed out or closed off, structures removed and replaced with surface parking lots or new suburban-type buildings set back from the street. Rt 201 running through the Lower Village is creating a neighborhood edge as opposed to creating a neighborhood center, and no formal public space or waterfront access/park exists here today. Rt 201 has some limited on street parking and wider travel lanes than the context of a village main street should.



HISTORIC RESIDENTIAL

Topsham has neighborhoods which have intact historic fabric: the Heights, Summer Street, and the Elm Street/Green Street neighborhoods. Subtle differences exist between the three neighborhoods. The Elm Street/Green Street neighborhood is comprised of historic, post-colonial and pre-Civil War houses and little in the way of new infill construction. The Heights, characterized by a majority of post-Civil War housing, has seen new infill over the years. In both neighborhoods, lot sizes and setbacks vary, and building components may include bay windows, dormers, front and side porches, attached barns and carriage houses behind or beside the main house. Streets vary in width, with some sidewalks on wider streets and many streets functioning in a yield condition. The Elm Street/Green Street neighborhood includes architecturally notable civic buildings, but no formal public common or square. The Heights used to have neighborhood stores, and residents who lived here walked across the pedestrian bridge to work, attend church and school in Brunswick, but again no formal public common, square or park.



LIGHT INDUSTRIAL & WAREHOUSE

Light industrial businesses are located in a number of areas throughout town, not centralized to one particular area or park, though the Town has zoned some of the Navy annex property as a business park to reconcile that the activity on some sites is quite different from surrounding school, recreation and residential uses. Some light industry and warehouse uses are located on Park Drive, between the Woodside neighborhood and Topsham Fair Mall.



SUBURBAN OFFICE

Suburban office buildings are characterized by large setbacks to the street with parking lots and/or residential landscaping in front yards and single-use function inside the buildings. Constructed in the period from the 1970s to present, suburban office buildings can be found in clusters in the Upper and Lower Villages, and as stand-alone buildings sometimes surrounded by other commercial uses.



REGIONAL SUBURBAN RETAIL CENTER

Topsham has a large regional retail center located on Topsham Fair Mall Road, including both a mixture of stand alone big box retailers with national tenants, medium sized commercial buildings with a mix of national and regional tenants, and strip center with regional and local tenants. Many buildings are set deeply back from the road with parking lots in front, a mixture of landscaping treatments, and some sidewalks. Parking lots are often accessed by wide, street-sized access lanes.



INDUSTRIAL

Topsham's industrial past is still evident in the historic mill buildings in the Lower Village and some structures near Pejepscot Village that were once associated with the Pejepscot Paper Company. Today the Lower Village mill buildings are occupied by offices and restaurants. Medium to heavy industry businesses are still present in Topsham, including the large Crooker site at Rt 196 and I-295, and the Crooker gravel site, Pejepscot Industrial Park and Grimmel Metal Scrap yard sites off Rt 196 near the Androscoggin River. This area is currently zoned industrial. Another pocket of medium industrial activity can be found at the Sandelin Precast Products, Inc. concrete site on outer Main Street near the school campus. Wicked Joes Coffee Roasters represents an example of light industry, also located near the school campus.



VILLAGE SUBURBAN

Post-WWII style, suburban neighborhoods are located near Main Street in the Lower Village and Village Center, where the form feels tighter than a conventional suburban neighborhood even if the lot sizes are still generously sized. Use is primarily single family residential. Lot widths are smaller and variable, buildings are located closer to the street, and garages are attached but set-back from the front façade of the house as compared to conventional suburban development. Streets are narrow enough to force a yield condition if a resident parks on-street, and most streets do not have sidewalks. Suburban developments in Topsham lack strong neighborhood centers.



CONVENTIONAL SUBURBAN

The larger, lower density suburban residential developments built between 1970 - present are primarily located off the 196 Connector, with some smaller infill subdivisions dispersed throughout town. Conventional suburban residential is characterized by single family building types, residential land use with no commercial activities, deeper setbacks of buildings, and sometimes dead-end cul-de-sac streets. Streets function in a yield condition where sidewalks are not present. Most of the conventional developments in Topsham lack a neighborhood center - no school, church, corner store or gathering space within an easy walking distance of homes. Many conventional subdivisions have robust formal and informal trail systems running through and along the perimeter.



RURAL

Topsham has a significant number of large, rural lots comprised mostly of forests, with farms and conserved lands. Topsham has 3,339 acres of forestland enrolled in the Tree Growth current use tax program, 2,251 acres enrolled in the Farmland current use tax program, 366 acres enrolled in the Open Space current use tax program, and 575 acres subject to conservation easements. Historically, Topsham saw recreation-oriented businesses in the rural areas, such as duck hunting camps along Merrymeeting Bay and skiing at Sky-Hy. Today there's a robust network of maintained snowmobile trails criss-crossing the rural lands, and the rivers draw recreational paddlers. Other examples of rural-based businesses and organizations include Bisson Farms' meat market, Riverview Martial Arts and the Cathance River Education Alliance Ecology Center.



CIVIC & INSTITUTIONAL

With the construction of a new Town Hall and fire station, Topsham established a municipal complex between the Lower and Upper villages in an area envisioned to transform into a Town Center. Buildings are set back from the street and constructed of high quality materials, including red brick, deserved of new civic buildings. Historic civic buildings include the Grange, the Library, the old Town Hall, and the collection of buildings at the Topsham Fairgrounds provide neighborhood gathering places. Topsham has two, smaller neighborhood elementary schools and one large school campus consisting of elementary, middle and high school with supporting athletic fields. The campus is located adjacent to the Upper Village, on the old Navy Annex. (Within this educational campus, some Navy auxiliary buildings still remain, including the commissary building which has been renovated with light industrial use by Wicked Joe's Coffee.) Additional buildings still wait for repurposing or redevelopment. The campus is currently accessed from Rt 196/Main Street with future plans to connect Canam Drive through to Highland Green.



Public Process

From October 19th through the 23rd, 2017 the citizens of Topsham were invited to participate in an intensive, multi-day public planning and design event to develop a vision for the future of Topsham.



Larry Fitch.



Mary Kate Appicelli.

LOCAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Gearing up for the Comprehensive Plan Update process, the Select Board appointed a citizen committee, representing a variety of neighborhoods and backgrounds. The Topsham Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) was the driving force behind public outreach efforts for this plan, working with the consultant team early in the process to develop an outreach plan. Prior to launching into the process, the CPUC met for almost a year to build local technical capacity and knowledge about contemporary issues in planning, design, and regulatory frameworks. The CPUC is assisted by Topsham staff members in the Planning and Economic Development departments.

SOCIAL & ONLINE MEDIA

With assistance from the consultant team, CPUC planned local outreach initiatives to spark community interest prior to the Plan Your Topsham event. The campaign, called "Find-Meet-Plan" your Topsham, asked residents to post photos of themselves in and around Topsham. The team created a Facebook page in August 2017 to communicate important dates for meetings and events, interesting planning-related articles, and local photos. Community members were encouraged to interact with the Facebook page by posting their own photos of places they love in Topsham, using the hashtags developed by the team. The team posted update on their own wanderings within the Town, including photos and brief description of the CPUC's two-hour Windshield Tour. More than creating an added source of online information, the Facebook page provided and continues to provide a platform for

the community to celebrate what they love most about Topsham.

The informational website created by the CPUC provides information about the entire Comprehensive Plan Update process with important topics including links to the existing Comprehensive Plan (developed in 2005 and revised in 2007), the Select Board, the Topsham Planning staff and the consultants from Maine Design Workshop.

PRINT MEDIA

All printed materials were branded consistently with the Find-Meet-Plan Your Topsham logo and aesthetic, to provide a cohesive identity for all things project-related. Postcards were handed out by CPUC members and delivered to all elementary age school kids to bring home, and a banner was hung spanning Main Street. Postcards communicated the full five-day schedule and provided direction for more information.

KICK-OFF & HANDS ON WORKSHOP

The five-day process kicked off at the pop up studio in the fire station in Topsham's Lower Village. The CPUC worked with a local landowner to secure the old fire house on Green Street, previously used as a DPW garage, a site where future redevelopment is supported. The team set up a fully-functioning office and design studio for the duration of the event, welcoming in the community and generating interest amongst a broad spectrum of citizens and local stakeholders.

The first presentation, which coincided with a homemade bean supper provided by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Topsham Fire Department, introduced the Maine Design Workshop team and gave a brief overview of the CPUC's activities to date. The presentation also included how the Town has evolved over time, ways in which Comprehensive Planning and coding can facilitate opportunities, and the project timeline. The presentation provided no pre-conceived ideas, notions or concept sketches and the team explained its role as listeners and interpreters, and set the stage for residents to communicate their visions for the Town.

Immediately following the presentation, the consultant team facilitated a hands-on design workshop where over 60 participants were invited to roll up their sleeves and brainstorm ideas while working over base maps. The activity began with a town-wide map and asked participants to identify key areas of concern and opportunities throughout the Town. The second map was a more focused view of Topsham center-area and which prompted participants to identify areas for development, civic spaces and favorite or problematic streets.

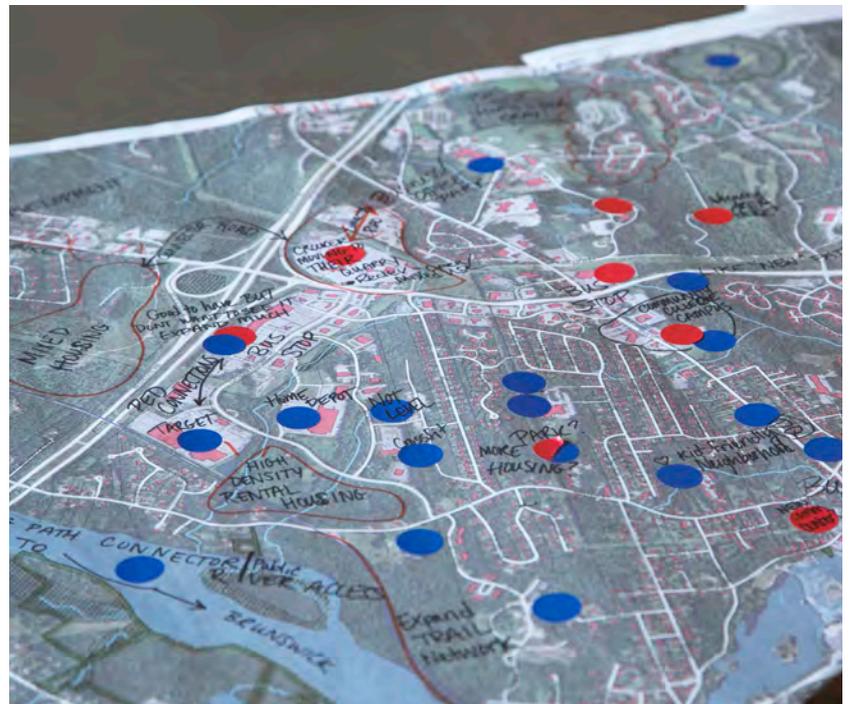
Next, ideas were presented by each group, highlighting for the participants just how many diverse ideas people have for Topsham, but bringing into focus the most critical concerns and aspirations people have for their community. Information gathered from the hands-on workshop directly informed the design team as to community priorities and guiding principles.

On the second day of the event, the team hosted several special topic meetings in the studio, discussing on a deeper level issues, opportunities and constraints related to streets & mobility, arts & culture, and mom & pop economic development. Local businesses and entrepreneurs met with team representatives to share stories and insights about what it is like to be a business-owner/operator in Topsham. The Bicycle Coalition of Maine presented an 'advocate and learn' event on how to implement and advocate for incremental bike-friendly changes in your town. The small group set off on a bike route around Topsham after the lecture. Later that evening as it grew dark, a large group gathered at the fire station for an historic Lower Village lantern walk. After the walk, Topsham Parks and Recreation hosted an outdoor family movie night complete with buttered popcorn. The studio remained open until well after the movie was finished to take questions from residents and to receive input on the Visual Preference Surveys, the Visioning Survey and the Big Ideas Wall.

Left, a focus group meeting in the studio. Right, the results of hands-on workshop mapping.



Larry Fitch.

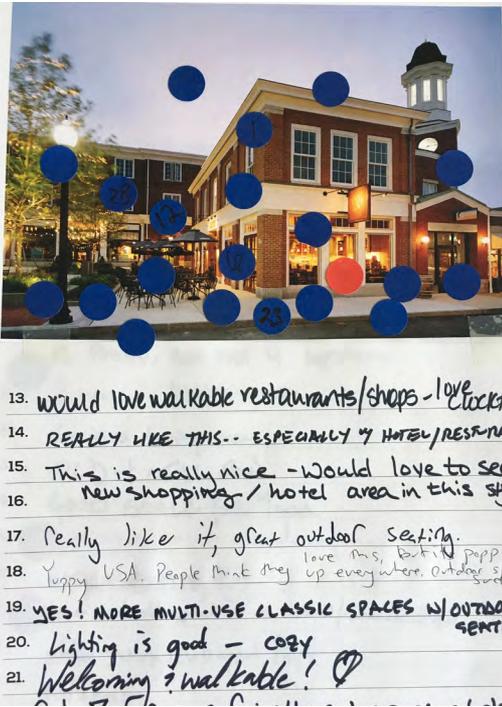


VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEYS

In order to gauge what Topsham residents would like to see in their town, the team set up over 40 photos of design, architecture and landscaping ideas which may inspire the future development of the Town's plan, coding or zoning. Each photo had a list of comment spaces long with red and blue sticky dots. Residents were encouraged to identify things about each photo that they liked (blue dot) and did not like (red dot), along with a comment to explain. The Visual Preference Surveys were immensely successful at gathering feedback, with resident comments overrunning the spaces available for almost every photo.

VISIONING SURVEY

Upon arriving at the studio, residents were greeted and asked to fill out a Visioning Survey which asked questions about all things Topsham: things they love, questions about their neighborhoods, opportunities for cultural engagement, recreation, big concerns, big opportunities, imagining Topsham in 5 to 10 years, and anything else residents wanted to tell the planning committee. Almost 100 residents took time to complete the survey and answers helped to inform the work of the design team during the process. Survey responses highlighted resident's appreciation for the Town's location, Topsham's lack of parks, the love for the Library, and the importance of maintaining and expanding the Town's trails network, including the existing bike path along the Androscoggin. Many of the responses have been incorporated into the Plan Framework section of this plan.



Above, Visual Preference Survey results used to gather feedback. Below, a workshop participant contributing to a Visual Preference Survey. Larry Fitch.



BIG IDEAS WALL

The Big Ideas Wall prompted residents of all ages to imagine Topsham in 30 years and identify things they would like to see in the future. The Big Ideas wall encouraged residents to think beyond 5 to 10 years, to think beyond the status quo and identify big wishes for the future. The activity was incredibly successful as it allowed residents a creative forum for expressing their wants and needs. The Big Ideas Wall directly informed the team's write up of common Big Ideas, which were incorporated into each phase of the planning process. Additionally, the Big Ideas were incorporated into the public process portion of the planning process by soliciting feedback from residents. Comments from the workshop, survey, Big Ideas wall and other public input received during the public planning process guided the team to draw and shape illustrative master plans.

THE STUDIO

Meanwhile, members of the planning team began developing overall planning framework and illustrative plans that responded to community input, pulling ideas from the planning workshop, citizen drop-ins, and the Round Table meetings.

The third day of the event began with a public process workshop on Open Spaces & Trails which coincided with the Topsham Public Library's Pop Up Library and the Wicked Joe's coffee bar. The studio was open for the whole day for residents to provide input through surveys, Big Ideas and Visual Preference Surveys.

While the team worked preparing concepts for the mid-process community check in presentation, the CPUC implemented and checked in on three Tactical Urbanism demonstrations: Lot Activation, Winter Street one-way and a bike lane/sidewalk on Elm Street.

LOT ACTIVATION BLOCK PARTY

For the duration of the event, the CPUC temporarily activated the parking lot in front of the studio with a palette fence built by the CPUC to create community gathering space and model new community gathering space development in the Lower Village. Families were invited to watch a series of live, local bluegrass and oldies bands who played from a stage constructed

from recycled materials on the sunny October day. Crowds started rolling in when Taco the Town food truck arrived for the evening. People ate, danced and visited the studio to look over the team members at the work being developed, and shared their aspirations for Topsham’s future. As the final band wrapped up, the team segued into the community planning check-in session.

WINTER STREET ONE-WAY

Prior to the planning process kick off, the Topsham Department of Public Works and the Economic Development Coordinator activated Winter Street. The street forks into two, with the upper fork (across from Elm Street at the stop light) previously a one-way away from Main Street, and the southern fork a two-way, also leading back to Main Street. The lower Winter Street enabled drivers to take a left-hand turn before the street lights, which backed up traffic on busy Main Street. In advance of the planning process, the Town installed bollards to redirect the flow of traffic, making lower Winter Street a one-way toward Main Street, effectively creating an ‘in’ and an ‘out’. After completion, there was significant positive feedback for this installation from community members who frequent, or live on, Winter Street.

ON-BIKE SAFETY TRAINING

During the event, the Bicycle Coalition of Maine held an on-bike safety training workshop open to residents interested in learning how to ride safer in traffic, and about how to generally make streets safer for bicycling and walking.

COMMUNITY PLANNING CHECK-IN

As the halfway point of the planning process, the team presented the various plans, sketches and maps with information and data collected about Topsham thus far. The team presented preliminary illustrative plans, a draft set of guiding principles, and other work products produced up to this mid-point in the process. After the community check-in presentation, people were invited to view maps and plans pinned up onto makeshift display boards set out in the studio.

The pin-up format was a team presentation with a questions and answers period, followed by an open work session for residents to speak with the team members about their designs and give feedback on the workups and Big Ideas. After the community check-in and into the next afternoon, the public continued to filter into the studio to observe the team hard at work. This session provided valuable input and helped inform the subsequent final drawings which would be presented in the final wrap-up session on Monday night.

Bottom left, team member preparing concept drawings during the public design event. **Larry Fitch.**





Larry Fitch.

TOPSHAM SUNDAY MARKET

The studio was open early on Sunday with team members working furiously to integrate resident input from the pin-up event the previous evening. Additionally, the team received some one-on-one feedback from community members who stopped by the open studio. At any time of day, the team was willing to listen and talk with citizens who wanted to provide feedback. At around 11:00 am, the Topsham Sunday Market set up shop in the Fire barn outdoor area, which included vendors, non-profit organizations, a local museum and community workshops to draw people to the planning process. In the meantime, the team was busy gathering information from Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps of Topsham, using input gleaned from the public process feedback, and identifying the areas of the Town considered as hot spots for development, as well as refining those areas of the Town which residents want to preserve.

CLOSING PRESENTATION

Monday was the final day of the Topsham planning process and was spent preparing for the culminating event in the evening, the big reveal: the closing presentation. At 2:30 pm on Monday, the studio doors closed to the public and the team entered into full production mode, synthesizing ideas, collaborating over design challenges, preparing renderings, compiling precedent images, refining the illustrative plans, action-oriented maps and Big Ideas. After the closing presentation, temporary displays were set up on round tables in the studio for participants to view and continue to provide feedback by way of dots and comments on sticky notes. The evening and process concluded with a community discussion over a catered spread of locally-made food and drink.

ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION

Over the winter, as the committee worked through topical Inventory and Analysis chapters, the community and interested stakeholders could attend these open

workshops and participate in the conversation. Often, staff and committees attended to provide guidance and insight. The committee held regular check-ins with the Select Board to discuss plan progress.

In June, residents gathered at the Library for a presentation sharing the plan in progress. At this event, further comments and feedback were collected to continue to inform the Big Ideas, strategy items, catalyst site drawings, and maps. The event was accompanied by live music and an ice cream social.

After the June open house event, materials made their way to the lobby at Town Hall, where people could view the materials and continue to provide feedback on the plan. Ongoing participation was also possible via an online comment platform, which allowed people to comment directly on the plan and to see and interact with each other's comments. This platform was Topsham's first use of active digital planning participation.

The committee processed all public comments collected throughout the year. Many of these comments are graciously incorporated into this plan.

Outdoor activities at June's open house event. Rod Melanson.



BIG IDEAS



3. Access to Nature & Open Spaces

- More trails.
- Provide more access to the 3 rivers.
- Formalize access to more spaces.
- Get meaningful public spaces when development happens.
- Capitalize on paddling opportunities.



• RIVER ACCESS ON
TOPSHAM SIDE



This is VERY important
to me - make Topsham
a beautiful town, showing
the nature + heritage
of Maine.

Keep working w BTLT on open space preservation

AGREE... AREAS OUTSIDE OF TOWN NOT WELL
KNOWN AND NOT SURE WHICH
LAND IS OPEN TO PUBLIC AND IF
SO WHAT ARE ACCEPTABLE USES?

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas identified in this section are entirely based on the feedback received during public engagement processes including the five-day public design planning process and plan open house events. Residents of all ages were prompted to share their ideas big and small to achieve the vision they have for Topsham's future. The nine Big Ideas are presented based on magnitude of expressed importance, each having a number of "Strategies" that can move the idea forward.

Streets for People





Topsham residents are asking for slower, safer streets. This includes safer streets for driving, biking, and walking. During the planning process, safe streets were raised as the single most expressed issue affecting quality of life in Topsham. In order to address this issue, the Town should take a system-wide approach to shift town culture. This can be done by designing (and retrofitting) streets in a way that gives everyone a chance to feel safe and comfortable on the road. Conventional traffic calming strategies such as enforcement and speed bumps will not, on their own, solve the problem. A meaningful approach that effectively slows traffic while maintaining mobility will require good (thoughtful) design that understands human behavior, business needs, and how to truly enhance safety.

EMBRACE SLOW FLOW TRAFFIC AS THE TOPSHAM WAY

During the planning process, Topsham residents indicated a strong preference for minimizing the negative impact of traffic utilizing local streets for regional mobility. Many streets in Topsham can serve both as critical regional mobility corridors that handle considerable through traffic, while also providing safe streets for people walking or biking. This balance can be achieved through a slow flow approach to street design. Slow flow streets are designed in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable to drive at speeds in excess of 25 MPH, while also taking steps to increase efficient traffic flow by removing merges, stop lights, and other design interventions that create unnecessary delays and safety issues. This includes creating friction in order to slow vehicle speeds, narrowing travel lanes, allowing on-street parking and adding objects like street trees which, when seen in our peripheral vision, make drivers feel like they are moving faster than they really are. Through a balanced approach, Topsham's streets can become safer for everyone, reversing decades of automobile planning and design at the expense of all other transportation modes. The Town is looking at complete street policies to add to our road construction standards. Slowing traffic will also help improve crossing safety for snowmobiles and ATVs.

STRATEGY: Adopt a resolution that reduces the default speed within Topsham’s more densely populated neighborhoods.

STRATEGY: Advocate at the State level for greater town control over posted speed limits and changes to the way speed limits are set, so limits can be based on safety goals.

STRATEGY: Be the first town in Maine to adopt Vision Zero, an international initiative to eliminate roadway fatalities.

STRATEGY: Adopt a complete street policy that assures the safety and accessibility of all roads for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, motorists, commercial vehicles, emergency vehicles, and for people of all ages and abilities.

STRATEGY: Prioritize pedestrian-first approach for all transportation projects and programs, from scoping to maintenance.

STRATEGY: Develop a Streets Master Plan that identifies priorities, funding sources, and funding amounts, and that includes street design standards which support the community’s goals for safe, multimodal, slow flow streets.

STRATEGY: As part of the annual budgeting process, identify priority road resurfacing projects two years in advance in order to provide time for development and vetting of restriping plans, as appropriate.

STRATEGY: Develop a five-year infrastructure maintenance and capital improvement plan that details the design metrics that must be accommodated to incorporate the new design standards. Minimize emphasis on vehicular Level of Service (LoS, a vehicular-focused transportation metric) and mobility and prioritize safety and slow vehicular movement.



“A focus on safety means reconsidering traditional highway planning. We need to get from Point A to Point B, but maybe not as fast.”

— Joyce Taylor, MDOT

STRATEGY: Allow on-street parking townwide. Amend Chapter 210 accordingly.

STRATEGY: As part of a Streets Master Plan, identify locations where on-street parking can be added to help narrow vehicular travel lanes, improve pedestrian safety, and provide additional parking opportunities.

STRATEGY: Revise road design and construction standards so that curb radii are reduced to help slow vehicular turning movements and increase pedestrian safety.

STRATEGY: Establish a bicycle and pedestrian committee.

RE-STRIPE LANES THROUGHOUT TOWN TO 9 AND 10 FEET IN WIDTH

Roads throughout Topsham were identified as too fast and too dangerous, from Main Street in the Lower Village to Route 201 on the outskirts of town. The easiest, fastest, and least expensive way to slow vehicular speeds is to restripe lanes from 12 feet down to 9 or 10 feet. The interstate highway system is striped with 12-foot lanes. When this lane width is applied to neighborhood streets, drivers feel comfortable driving at speeds upwards of 30 miles per hour. By narrowing lanes, drivers become more careful. Restriping already built wide streets with narrower vehicular lanes is a quick and inexpensive way

to provide more space on shoulders for walking and biking. If Topsham would like to address a root cause of speeding, restriping to 9- or 10-foot lanes can be done now. Through a smart restriping policy, Topsham can achieve safe streets at essentially no increased cost to taxpayers.

STRATEGY: Review and update the code to key a range of street types to land use character, and that provide for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use. Require new developments to choose from these street types.

STRATEGY: Update existing street construction standards to allow 9- and 10-foot lanes on regional roads and enforce the existing maximum 9-foot lane standard for new neighborhood streets.

STRATEGY: Conduct staff training so all levels of staff understand the benefits of narrower lanes.

STRATEGY: Amend Chapter 185 Appendix A and begin the process of restriping lanes to 9 or 10 feet through annual restriping efforts.

STRATEGY: Prioritize pedestrian-first approach for all transportation projects and programs, from scoping to maintenance.

Vision Zero

A strategy to bring the number of traffic fatalities in a city or town to zero. Vision Zero is being progressively adopted by American cities and is helping to also achieve a balance among transportation modes.





A reduction in speed from 30 to 20 MPH can represent the critical difference between life and death, with a demonstrated 42% reduction in pedestrian casualties.

STRATEGY: Add stencils, bikeway signage, and physical barriers, such as on street parking, or seasonal vertical elements, such as bollards or planters, to restriped streets that have four feet or more of space on the shoulder.

ADD PROTECTED SIDEWALKS & BIKE FACILITIES

People in Topsham have concerns about the safety of streets throughout town. People overwhelmingly want streets that feel safe and comfortable for walking and biking, both in the center of town as well as in more rural and suburban residential areas. The primary reason that many people do not consider biking a feasible means of transportation is because they are afraid to be on the same roadway as automobiles. Research has found that separating cyclists from vehicles through some physical means, such as protected bikeways, can reduce the risk of injury by up to 90% when compared to standard unprotected bike lanes. Similarly, sidewalks will feel more safe and comfortable when they are separated from vehicle movement by physical elements, such as a planted green buffer or on-street parking.

In downtown areas, priority sidewalks and separated bike paths should be built systematically along existing roadways, using capital funds over time. When DOT funds become available to repave state roads, projects should include complete street best practices. Transportation planning is an evolving field, so each project should look broadly at the latest examples of how to best design a street that works well for all people.

The Town has already begun to address walkability through main street improvements, Lower Village planning, Topsham Fair Mall Road Plan, and Planning Board review of new developments. The Town conducted a Rural Active Living Assessment (RALA) in 2015, and inventoried all of the existing town bicycle and pedestrian facilities. This inventory will be a helpful resource in planning for improved areas in the future.

STRATEGY: As part of a Streets Master Plan include bicycle and pedestrian priority streets and

connections, amenities (lighting, ADA compliance), a hierarchy of pedestrian standards, and that identifies priorities, funding sources, and funding amount.

STRATEGY: Continue to use a Payment In Lieu program to fund the construction of sidewalks.

STRATEGY: Build funding into the capital improvement plan for the construction of sidewalks and multi-use paths.

STRATEGY: Work through the list of priority projects in-house using inexpensive, semi-permanent materials.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to include a range of street types keyed to land use character and that provide for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use. Require new developments to choose from these street types.

STRATEGY: Continue to require that new developments provide an internal street network to the extent possible and connect to existing street and trail networks.

IMPROVE INTERSECTION SAFETY

Topsham has a high number of crashes at intersections throughout town, as shown in the crash density map below. In the past, a typical response to dangerous intersections has been to add signals, flashing beacons, turn lanes, and to re-engineer and redesign bigger roads. What we've seen is that this approach, while expensive, doesn't usually result in a place that is safer or more attractive to walking and biking. A different approach is needed, one that uses design techniques and cues to slow traffic as it approaches identified intersection conflict points.

It is common that a yellow light, in practice, results in people stepping on the gas to beat the red light. Because of the high speeds at these critical crossing points, traffic lights have been demonstrated to create unsafe

conditions for not only pedestrians but also for drivers. Traffic lights can also decrease mobility during off-peak hours. On streets that have pedestrian and bicycle activity, traffic lights should be removed when feasible and replaced with 4-way stops to prioritize slow, safe, and steady traffic movement.

Multiple lanes and turn lanes provide relief to traffic congestion. However, they also result in high-speed intersections that are disorienting and confusing, leading to more severe crashes between drivers or between drivers and pedestrians, cyclists, or ATVs. Turn lanes also allow vehicles continuing straight to speed past turning vehicles, creating a dangerous blind condition, especially for people walking and biking. Turn lanes can also create longer pedestrian crossing distances, which is uncomfortable and discourages these alternative modes of travel.

STRATEGY: Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages the use of turn lanes and traffic lights in order to favor safety over mobility.

STRATEGY: Conduct staff training so that all levels of staff understand the benefits of 4-way stops over traffic lights on pedestrian-prioritized streets.

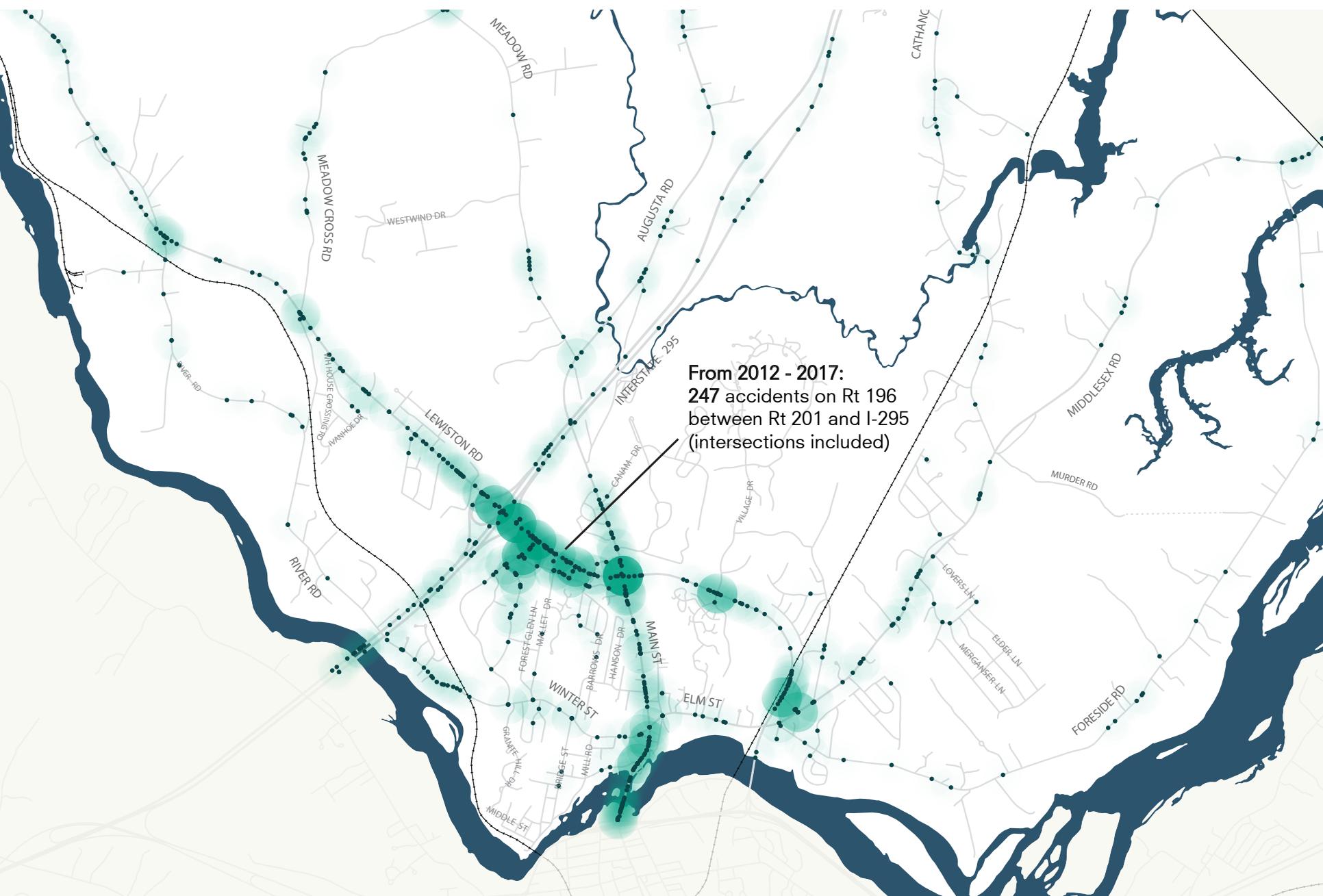
STRATEGY: Evaluate the feasibility of converting traffic lights to 3-way or 4-way stop intersections on Main Street and other streets used by bicycles and pedestrians.

Target intersections along Main Street including both entrances to Bowdoin Mill Island, Elm Street, Green Street, Winter Street, Town Hall entrance, Monument Place, Eagles Way, and Canam Drive.

STRATEGY: Conduct a staff training on how to efficiently complete studies and paperwork for traffic signal removal in compliance with Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards and protocols.

AVOID MULTIPLE LANES, TURN LANES, AND MERGES WHERE POSSIBLE

A street that fluctuates between single and multiple lanes can also create a condition that is confusing and dangerous amongst its users. Multiple lanes of traffic moving in the same direction take a driver's attention from directly in front of them and require more attention to cars beside and behind them. This creates a more distracted driver who may not notice a pedestrian in a crosswalk, a bicyclist on the side of the road, or an ATV trying to cross. In places where multiple lanes merge back to one lane, competing visual cues again create a very dangerous situation, where high speeds are coupled with the need to be aware of variables in multiple directions. On pedestrian- and bicycle-prioritized streets, the use of turn lanes and multiple lanes should be minimized. This may result in slightly longer travel times, but with a critical trade-off of safer walking and bicycling conditions.



STRATEGY: Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages the use of multiple lanes in the same direction in order to better balance safety and mobility.

STRATEGY: Educate Planning Board and Town Hall staff on how to implement a complete streets policy.

IMPROVE STREET CONNECTIONS

One method for reducing traffic and congestion within a transportation system is to improve connectivity, which involves increasing the number and density of routes. Connecting neighborhood streets to other neighborhoods and to existing streets has long been a contentious issue. However, these connections are critical to maintaining a system of streets that provide route options and, as a result, relief from congested collector roads. Where streets cannot connect, bicycle and pedestrian connections should be provided. Another critical strategy for maintaining connectivity is to avoid one-way streets, which cut off connections and create confusion and increased traffic from having to take a more circuitous route to reach a destination. Topsham is fortunate to have only a limited number of one-way streets. As the community begins to explore improvements to streets - including balancing competing interests between vehicle movement, on-street parking, bike facilities, and other priorities for space in the right-of-way - one-way streets should be avoided to the extent possible. One-way streets often increase vehicular speeds, reduce friction provided by the presence of oncoming vehicles, increase vehicle miles traveled, reduce business visibility, and increase driver confusion, especially for people from out-of-town. Additional pedestrian and bicycle connections should also be provided whenever possible.

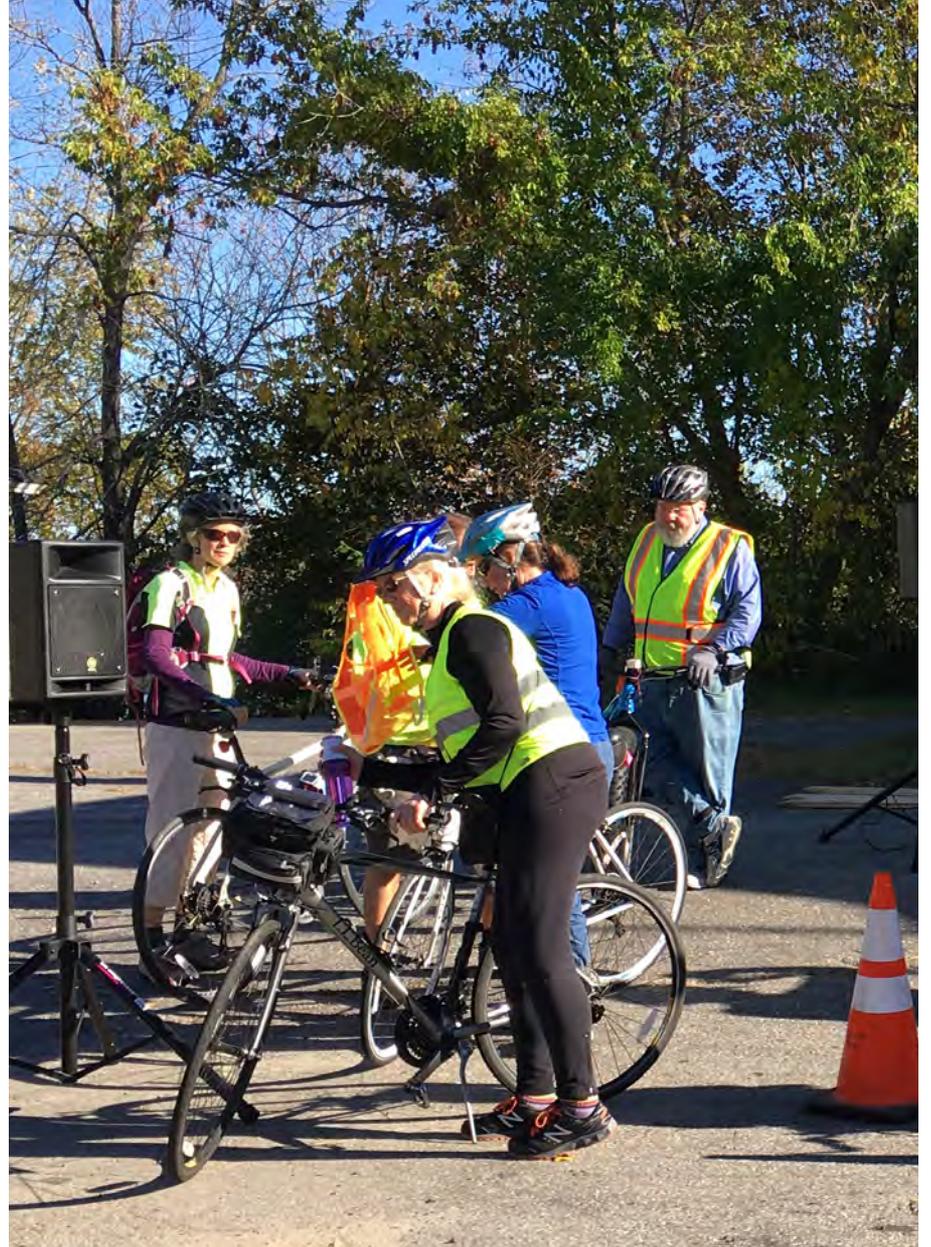
STRATEGY: Continue to require that new neighborhoods connect to existing streets and adjacent neighborhoods to produce a network of streets and paths.

STRATEGY: Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages one-way streets.

STRATEGY: Train Planning Board, public works staff, and the Code Enforcement Officer on the complete streets policy.

MAKE SPECIAL PLANS FOR KID-PRIORITIZED STREETS

For neighborhood streets or streets identified as part of the "Safe Routes to School" (SRTS) program, a number of options should be explored, piloted, and promoted. One of the safest options is a shared travel lane that is a total of 14-16 feet wide. This type of street is called a "yield street" because vehicles passing each other are forced to slow down and in some cases even pull over slightly to make enough room for the other vehicle to pass. Yield streets significantly reduce travel speeds and promote safety for all modes because of the visual friction they provide. Green Street is a great local example of a yield street that uses inexpensive techniques to reallocate space within a constrained right-of-way. Streets that incorporate advisory bike lanes can also be introduced in Topsham, following on the success of these facilities in towns like Scarborough. Advisory bike lanes are



Participants of a bicycle safety workshop held at the public planning and design event preparing for a group bicycle ride. Larry Fitch.

demarkated by dashed lines, indicating that motor vehicles are legally allowed. Advisory bike lanes can be tested both in town and on more rural roads to introduce more friction while providing safe space for cyclists.

STRATEGY: As part of a Streets Master Plan effort, identify an existing and future Safe Routes to School network.

STRATEGY: Prioritize funding to repair neighborhood streets and Safe Routes to School to achieve maximum speeds of 20 MPH, including during off-peak times.

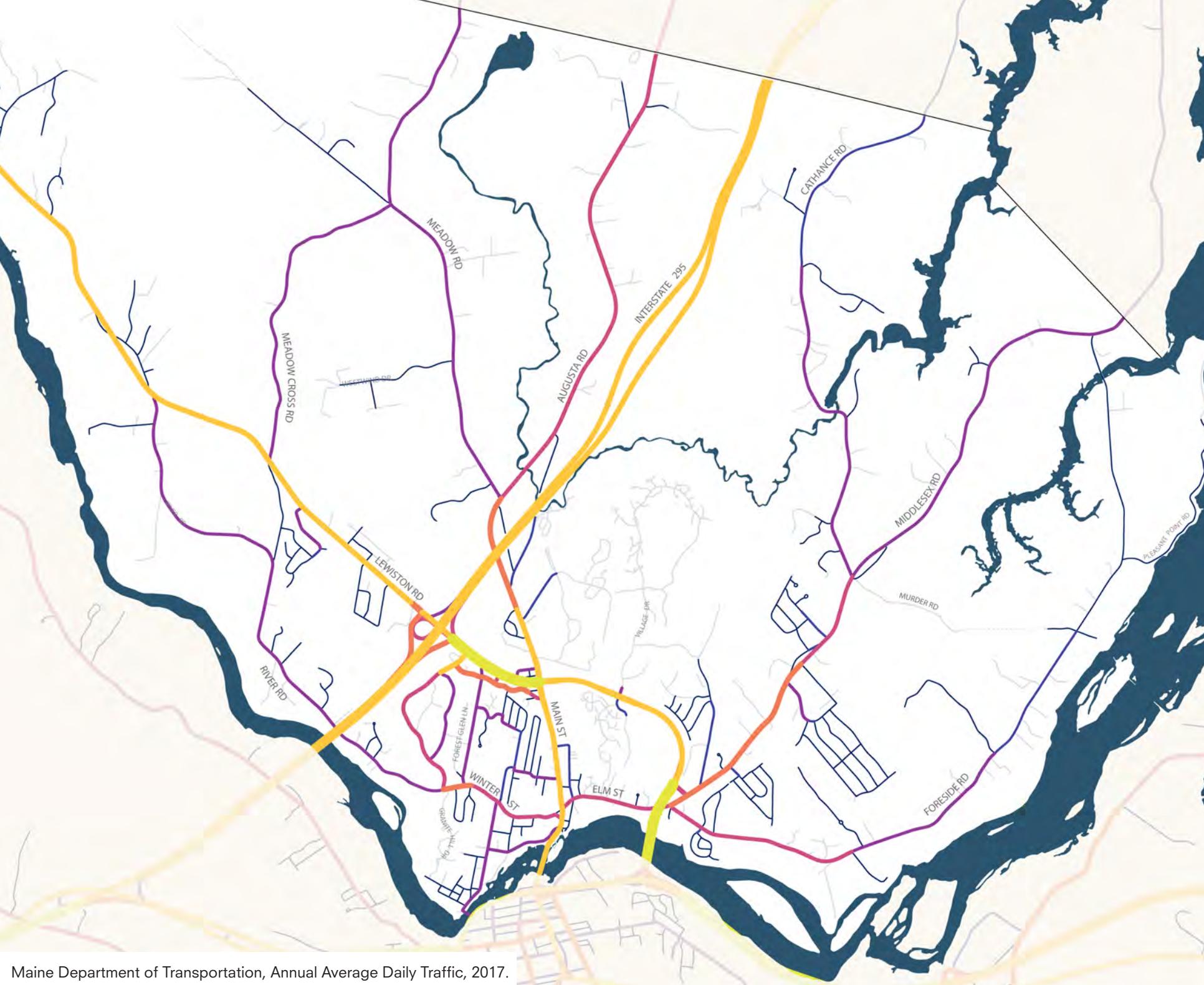
STRATEGY: Adopt a resolution that creates a home to school zone with reduced speed limits within 2 miles of every school. Sign and enforce accordingly.

STRATEGY: Direct funding to pilot advisory bike lanes, yield streets, and other techniques to slow traffic on local neighborhood street.

STRATEGY: Start a program that empowers neighborhoods to slow their local residential streets through a number of pre-approved strategies.

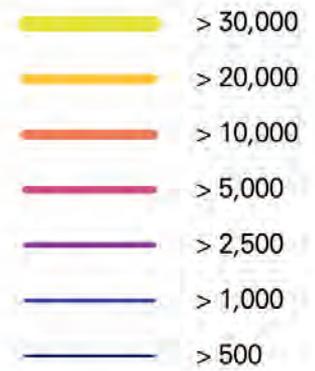
KEEP THE STREETS GREEN AND LUSH

Topsham residents have a strong and overwhelming preference for streets that heavily feature trees and other greenery. When new development commercial, mixed-use,



Existing Streets and Traffic

Annual Average Daily Traffic





or large residential projects occur, street trees should be required as well as vegetation that softens the edges of new buildings. In addition to providing greenery, street trees have been shown to slow vehicular speeds by providing regularly spaced objects that increase a driver's perceived speed. The canopy and light dappled on a road has a positive impact on driver experience, and also serves to decrease speeds. The Town should engage in a street tree planting program that provides one-shot funding for targeted streets to gain access to free street trees, as a way to both slow traffic and increase property values. By focusing the program on targeted streets to enable the creation of a tree canopy, the impact on behavior and values can be significant and have a strong impact.

STRATEGY: As part of a Streets Master Plan effort, identify priority streets for tree planting program, market the program, secure funding, and plant trees.

KEEP 196 AS A TRAFFIC-PRIORITIZED STREET THAT IS TAME ENOUGH TO CROSS

Most people agree that Route 196 needs to remain a street that prioritizes mobility. However, people have also strongly indicated that they need to be able to cross the street on foot at three specific places, including Topsham Fair Mall Road, Main Street, Village Drive/Community Way. This includes high school kids trying to get home from school or to their jobs and people from Highland Green and neighborhoods north of the Connector getting to the village. Steps should be taken to redesign these intersections as more narrow and tame places for street crossings, including the removal of excess turn lanes that increase pedestrian crossing distances, lengthen signal phases, and induce more traffic.

STRATEGY: Hire an engineer adept at working within an urban, pedestrian-prioritized context to redesign smaller, tamer intersections that better balance mobility and safety.

STRATEGY: Continue to manage and limit new curb cuts onto Route 196.

ADOPT A LOW-COST APPROACH TO STREET DESIGN

Traffic related complaints were one of the highest rated comments expressed during the Public Planning Process. The Police Department has a Traffic Safety Officer and utilizes grant funding to increase the number of officers available to address concerns related to speeds and other road safety issues. While Topsham has recently been increasing its funding for road reconstruction to improve more road miles each year, transportation funding generally continues to tighten. The State has largely been limited to restriping and re-paving, with little state funding available for road reconstruction. Less costly approaches to improving streets are needed. Tactical Urbanism is a strategy that allows communities to use temporary or semi-permanent materials to test changes to street design. This approach relies on real-world evaluation of a project, versus costly engineering that can still result in a built outcome that needs adjustment. By testing ideas on the ground, using paint, bollards, or other inexpensive approaches, the community can provide feedback, and



iterative changes can be made quickly that respond to the community's concerns or to the relative success of the installation. Topsham has already engaged in this kind of approach, on Green Street, Main Street, and Elm Street, making adjustments as needed. In all cases, the cost of these projects was minimal and allowed the Town to more quickly address local issues related to street safety.

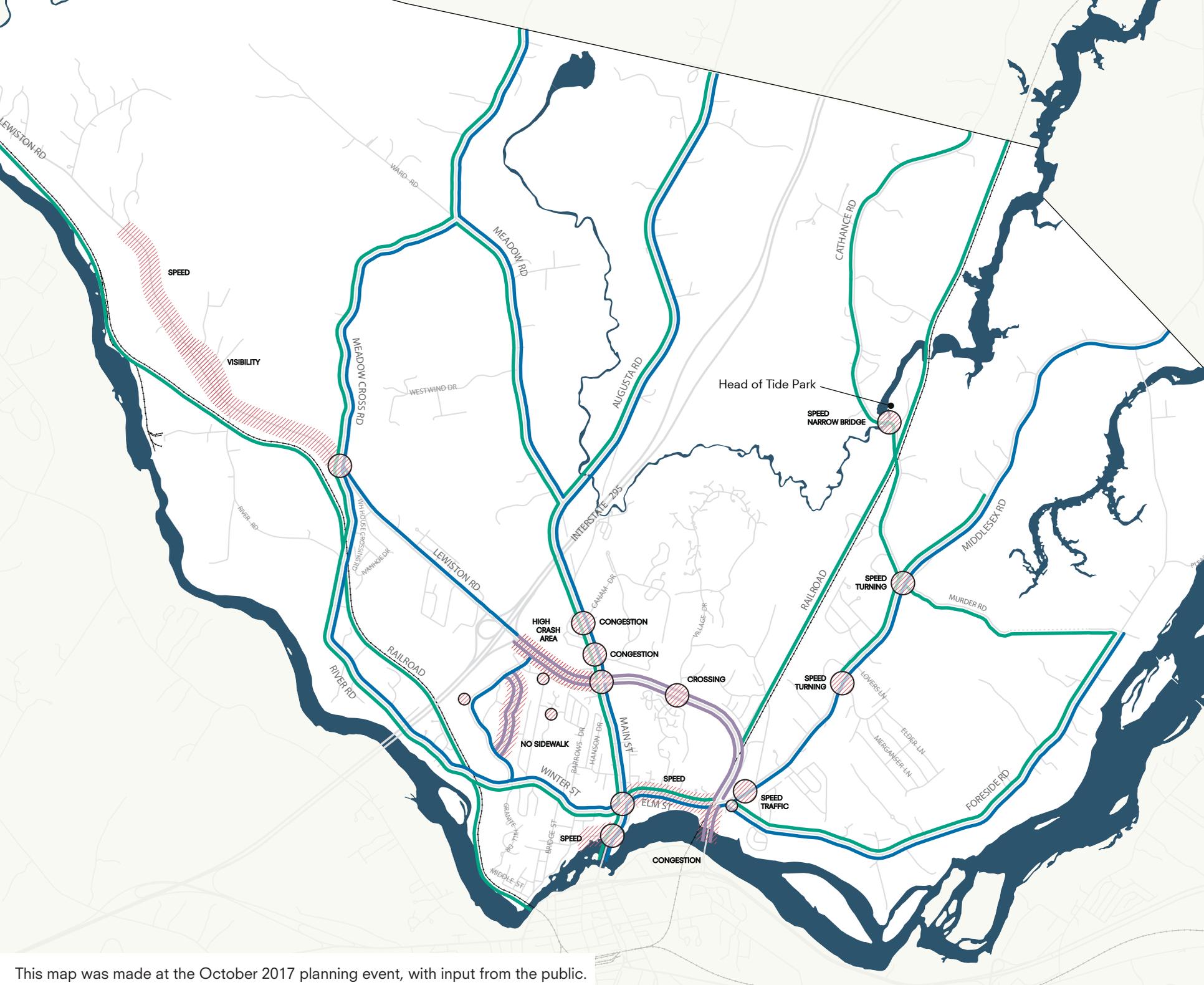
STRATEGY: Include the practice of Tactical Urbanism in the Town's complete streets policy and continue staff training.

Tactical Urbanism

A town, organizational, and/or citizen-led approach to neighborhood building using short-term, low-cost, temporary installations that demonstrate the effectiveness of potential changes to the built environment.

Insight: Topsham has...

- 84.62 miles of publicly maintained roadways
- 7.6 miles of arterial roadways, carrying high speed, long distance traffic including Interstate 95, Route 196, Route 24 and Route 202
- 6.6 miles of collector roadways, collecting and distributing traffic to and from arterials, including the Cathance Road, Foreside Road, and River Road
- 61 miles of local roads, serving primarily adjacent land areas



This map was made at the October 2017 planning event, with input from the public.

Safe Streets and Tactical Repair

- Priority Vehicle
- Improve for Biking
- Improve for Pedestrians
- Dangerous Intersection
- Dangerous Roadway

Local and Regional Mobility





Transit is broadly considered a basic public service that can help a community retain existing residents, attract new ones, and support business activity. For 15 years, Topsham has opted out of regional public transportation. As Topsham grows, more people may begin to support funding for transit. Transit supports a diverse population more equitably, and can also attract employees needed to support businesses within town.

MAKE BUS TRANSIT CONNECTIONS TO OTHER COMMUNITIES

A 2017 Transit Feasibility Study done by Western Maine Transit Services determined that regional transit is feasible. The study looked at a number of routes within the region and identified the route between Lewiston/Auburn and Topsham and Brunswick along Route 196 as the highest priority transit connection in the Western Maine region, based on travel patterns and anticipated ridership numbers. Western Maine Transit Services is already managing regional transit in Bath, providing potential for additional connections to the north. The Topsham and Brunswick route identified along Route 196 already has sufficient numbers of potential frequent and occasional users, a larger number of people traveling for work, and a high percentage of elderly populations.

STRATEGY: Continue discussions with transit providers to connect Topsham to regional destinations.

SUPPORT INTRA-TOWN BUS TRANSIT SERVICE

The Town of Topsham has explored local bus service to extend the Brunswick Explorer to connect population centers and business centers in town. A preliminary study found that a local bus route would cost less than 1/2 percent of the Town's overall budget. The Town's elected officials are still considering this option. Should a local bus service move forward, the route should be designed for efficiency so that it appeals to all potential users. Bus transit begins and ends with pedestrians and should therefore not strive to provide door-to-door service. Bus routes should avoid weaving through parking lots and along tertiary roads to optimize efficiency and to attract a broader group of transit riders. In order to provide the best system for the greatest number of people, bus stops should be located along primary streets. People with significant mobility challenges have other types of services available to serve their needs in a more direct manner.

Conversations should also be convened with private transit operators, including the Highlands to coordinate and potentially provide transit service throughout Topsham, via a public-private partnership.

STRATEGY: Plan an intra-town transit service for people of all ages and abilities.

STRATEGY: Work with local businesses to coordinate and provide a range of transportation services to accommodate the needs of an aging population.

SUPPORT MORE RIDE-SHARING OPTIONS

Companies and organizations that provide ride-sharing, vanpooling, carpooling, taxis, and transportation network companies (such as Uber) should be encouraged to operate in Topsham. These services offer efficient door-to-door service for people who are unable to afford cars or who choose to live without a car. Ridesharing can also help reduce parking demand, so parking lots can be reallocated to tax-generating, community-oriented development. Employee incentives could look like flexible work hours and schedules to alleviate peak-period travel or accommodate ride-share, and preferential parking for vanpools and carpools.

STRATEGY: Work with local businesses to set up and maintain ridesharing locations in oversized parking lots.

STRATEGY: Work with the business community to create employee incentives for ride-sharing.

MAKE ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION VIABLE BY LIMITING PARKING

Topsham today is overparked everywhere. Historically, new construction has come with requests for oversized parking lots, turning vacant land into asphalt gaps. Gappy, suburban patterns cannot support public transit and asphalt yields much less taxable value for the Town compared to the value generated from a new building with site improvements. To make transit service viable, don't gap. Fill in vacant parking lots between buildings with new buildings and public spaces to centralize parking, strengthen the Town's tax base and provide common areas for social gathering.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to require parking maximums within the growth areas, but allow flexibility in permitting so the free market can determine what the actual parking need is.

UNDERSTAND AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY

We are in a period of rapid technological change with sensor technology and mobile connectivity, advances in vehicle safety and lighter weight, utilitarian versions of the vehicles we know today. Car companies are beginning to roll out subscription-based models as a means of recapturing an evident shrinking market share. Autonomous car technology has far reaching implications as to how we provide public transportation services and what the transit users' experience will be at either ends of the journey. Autonomous vehicle technology has the ability to turn transportation engineering upside down, reshaping how we allocate pavement when cars don't need as wide margins of space to account for operator error. This technology trend is emerging rapidly and we would be advised to look back into history to a time when we allowed private cars to take over our streets and displace people, streetcars and bicycles. Sensory technology already means with a mere swipe of a wallet or phone, a shared bicycle can be unlocked. Mobile connectivity means transit riders can confidently predict when buses will appear at stops. Shared, subscription-based vehicles mean less money spent on parking and more real estate available for housing, businesses, civic and public space amenities. Finally, technology allows cities and town to adjust the costs of curb-side parking based on demand to ensure there's always a supply of on-street parking available to support local business. Perhaps the time to think about a moratorium on the expansion of single mode, car-supportive infrastructure is now.

STRATEGY: As smart vehicle technology advances, implement a system of real-time value pricing for parking.

STRATEGY: As smart vehicle technology advances, evaluate and adjust public infrastructure funding priorities.

STRATEGY: As vehicle sensor technology improves, reallocate excess pavement for pedestrian and bicycle amenities, stormwater retention, and street trees.



Access to Nature and Open Spaces



Nancy Greindl.



Topsham residents love their natural spaces and having access to a vast supply of open lands, hiking trails and places to explore and visit. However abundant, these assets are a relatively well kept secret. It may be in the best interest of the Town to more broadly promote Topsham as a community that boasts incredible access to nature as a means of attracting more people to the area, both to live and visit. Additionally, locals expressed confusion as to which lands are public, semi-public, or private. An opportunity exists to better manage and protect the resources that are part of the community's life and identity.

PROTECT, ADD, AND FORMALIZE TRAILS

Topsham has a rich network of both publicly-accessible trails and informal trails crossing private property. Trail networks support hiking, walking, snowmobiling and ATV's. As development continues to occur, the community could lose its informal trails unless steps are taken to purchase trail easements or to require developers to provide direct and convenient trail connections as a part of their development projects. Between the Planning Office (Conservation Commission, Tree Committee, Bowdoin Internships), Public Works, and Parks and Recreation, the Town attempts to maintain trails and provide mapping. Additional work is also done by the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust, the Greater Topsham Trail Alliance, Cathance River Education Alliance, and the Topsham Trail Riders to manage existing trails and build new ones. This work should continue to be supported and funded.

STRATEGY: Update zoning to clearly articulate when trail corridors should be preserved or added as private development occurs.

STRATEGY: Create and use a more in-depth open space and trails connectivity map to identify where important trail corridors and connections can be established as part of new private development.

STRATEGY: Seek both private and public funding to expand the number of trails, pedestrian/bicycle paths, access points to natural resources, and water access.



PROVIDE LOCAL ACCESS TO MARKED AND UNMARKED TRAILS

Many people don't have a clear understanding of which lands are open to the public and acceptable for use. While there may always be mixed feelings about how much to advertise local trails for fear of overuse, steps should be taken to help clarify for residents the public and private status of trails and water access points. Local institutions such as the Topsham Public Library, Topsham Parks & Recreation Department, and the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust could informally distribute information about available trails as a way to provide a semi-controlled distribution of information.

STRATEGY: Install low-cost, low-impact and friendly signage at private trail locations and water access points inviting discrete and respectful use of property.

STRATEGY: Work with the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust to solidify use agreements with private landowners.

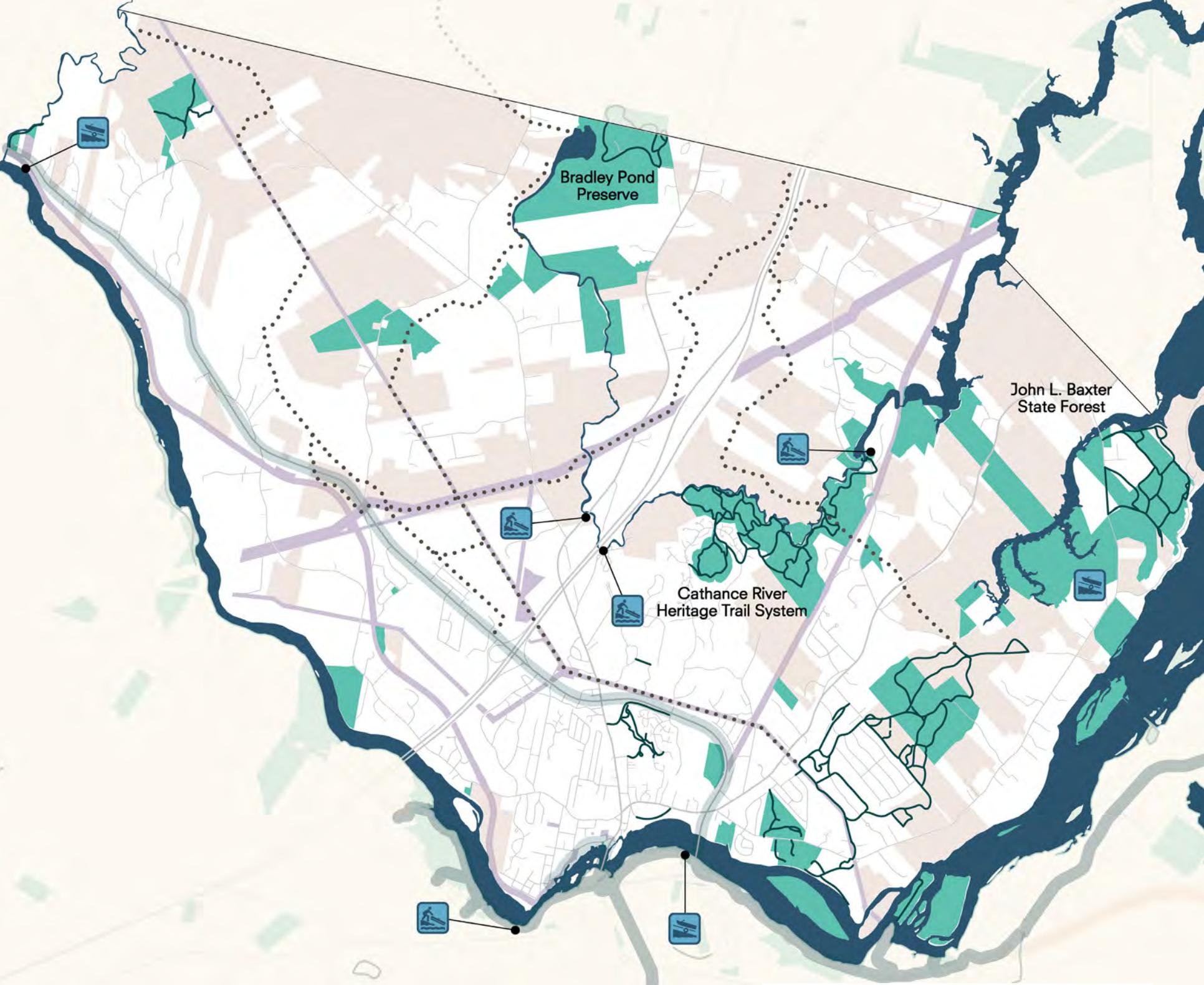
STRATEGY: For frequently used trails on private property, provide ongoing stewardship assistance to landowners.

STRATEGY: Seek private funding support to establish an Open Space and Trails Ombudsman to work in partnership with the Topsham Recreation Department, CREA and the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust.

INCREASE INVENTORY OF OPEN SPACES, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND WILDLIFE HABITATS

The Topsham Conservation Commission continually watches over the lands the Town acquires, and with the Select Board's support, is always looking to improve the Town's Open Space inventory. The recently improved Head of Tide Park, Cathance Nature Preserve, and the Androscoggin Brunswick-Topsham Riverwalk have added to the quality of life in town. A high priority is





Existing Open Space and Trails

-  Conserved Lands
-  Utility Corridors
-  Tree Growth & Agriculture
-  Snowmobile Trails (As of 2017)
-  Recreational Trails
-  Hand Carry Water Access
-  Trailerable Water Access

the establishment of a new Downtown Waterfront Park that can serve as a civic center and also provide access to the Androscoggin River.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to require developers building projects of a certain scale within the rural districts to protect high quality open space. Use the Natural Areas Plan to inform protection.

STRATEGY: Set up an acquisition fund to purchase open space identified in the four focus areas identified in the Natural Areas Plan.

STRATEGY: Continue to use the Open Space Tax Program as a strategy to protect important scenic resources and open spaces in Topsham.

STRATEGY: Form public/private partnerships to execute a Downtown Waterfront Park.

STRATEGY: Update the 2010 Natural Areas Plan.

PROVIDE MORE ACCESS TO THE THREE RIVERS

Topsham is blessed with multiple rivers including the Androscoggin, Cathance, and Muddy Rivers leading to Merrymeeting Bay. The community has expressed a strong desire to capitalize on views and access to the water. People would like to see boat access on the Topsham side of the Androscoggin River for kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards, both above and below the dam. Having a stronger connection to the rivers is both a quality-of-life and economic opportunity for the Town and should be the focus of conversations to make this goal a reality. Issues surrounding ownership, incline, and safety always surface when discussing boat ramp access. Locals report using access at the Sewer District area on Pinewood. Not only creating the Boat Ramp, but safety and oversight to a ramp in addition to adequate parking facilities will also need to be supported and funded.

STRATEGY: Set up a "Topsham Conservation, Inc." as a quasi-municipal entity, similar to Topsham Development, Inc, to allow Topsham to set aside and spend funding for land conservation.

STRATEGY: Seek funding to expand the number of trails and pedestrian/bicycle paths to the rivers.

STRATEGY: Enter into agreements with private landowners to formalize water access points.

PROMOTE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IN TOPSHAM

People in the community have expressed an interest in seeing the Town more actively promote hunting and fishing on Merrymeeting Bay through economic development promotional information. Merrymeeting Adult Ed (SAD #75) already offers classes locally on basic firearms and archery skills. Efforts should be made to further support Topsham as a community that supports nature-based activities and promotes this through marketing efforts. Private sector investments can be made to help bring more tourism into town, including woodland yurt hotels or other creative lodging opportunities.

STRATEGY: Work with organizations such as Merrymeeting Adult Ed, Topsham Trail Riders, Brunswick Topsham Land Trust and CREA to offer four-season, nature-based activities and programming for people of all ages and abilities.

STRATEGY: Work with TDI to support development of natural resource-based tourism.

STRATEGY: Work regionally to develop branded marketing materials to showcase outdoor amenities, farms and local food and beverage unique to Topsham and its neighboring communities.

EXPAND THE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE NETWORK

The Town has pursued several projects to increase and/or improve walkability across Topsham. When the Town moves forward to create a waterfront park, this new facility should include related improvements to traffic flow and access/safety for pedestrians and bicyclists on Main Street to connect the park to the Androscoggin Brunswick-Topsham Riverwalk Town Landing Trails. Extension of our trail networks here would dramatically increase the attraction for walking in the Lower Village, as was noted during the Dan Burden walkability audit and presentation in September 2014.

STRATEGY: Prioritize funding for sidewalk and bicycle network expansions.

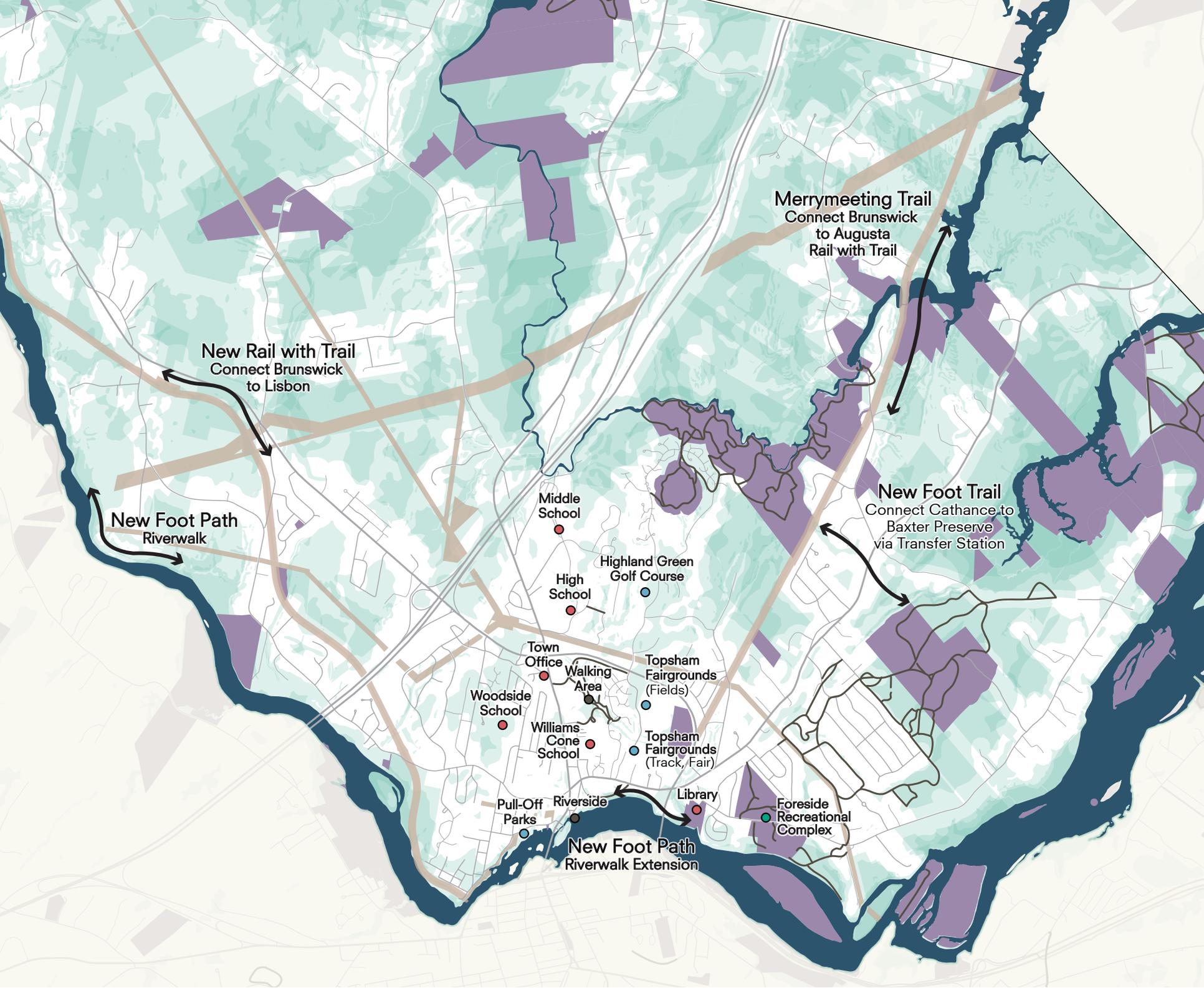
REGIONAL TRAIL CONNECTIONS

Participants of the Plan Your Topsham process identified two abandoned rail corridors as optimal long-term regional trail opportunities (see Open Space and Trails Connectivity Map). The first, the Androscoggin Railroad line, could connect Topsham via the Lewiston Branch of the Maine Central Railroad (formerly the Androscoggin Railroad), to Brunswick, Lisbon Falls, Lisbon and Lewiston. The second, the Merrymeeting Trail, could connect Topsham to Augusta and ultimately Bangor. A feasibility study has been completed to investigate a paved, multi-use Merrymeeting Trail. Participants who serve on the Town's conservation commission noted that a more lower-impact trail could be implemented in segments, over time, on the Androscoggin Railroad line.

STRATEGY: Work regionally to seek funding opportunities for the Merrymeeting Trail to Kennebec River Rail Trail.

STRATEGY: Work regionally to explore opportunities to build segments of footpaths in the Androscoggin Railroad corridor.

STRATEGY: Continue to work regionally with other municipalities and organizations to extend regional trails.



Open Space and Trails Connectivity

-  Conserved Lands
-  Utility Corridors
-  Trails
-  Civic Space
-  Informal Recreation Area
-  Private Recreation Space
-  Park
-  Lands Potentially Suitable for Conservation

Merrymeeting Bay

This place Topsham we all call home was once known as Sawacook by native Pejepscot Abenaki and highly valued for its rich land and water resources. Those same features similarly attracted early European settlers who quickly capitalized on these locally abundant, natural treasures. Despite 400 years of persistent change since, many of those same resources remain evident to this day and continue to enrich the modern lives of Topsham's current residents.

Maine's third largest river, the mighty Androscoggin, serves as our western and southern borders. The tidal freshwaters of Merrymeeting Bay – second in size only to Chesapeake Bay - borders to our east. With large blocks of contiguous undeveloped forest and farm fields in the north and west, the 36 square miles of land and waters that comprise the town of Topsham are endowed with a myriad of high value natural resources that would be the envy of any global community, large or small.

These natural features, set in a coastal geography in conjunction with upland floodplains and wetlands of the Cathance, Muddy, and Little Rivers, include scattered pockets of unique and rare natural communities such as the Cathance River Nature Preserve heath bog, open water bodies like Bradley Pond, and tiny mapped - and unmapped - vernal pools. All conjoin to provide exceptional scenic resources and abundant, high value natural habitats to our local wildlife – and to the residents of Topsham.

Merrymeeting Bay, where six rivers including the Kennebec and Androscoggin come together, is the heart of the Kennebec Estuary and pride of our town - a water body of statewide ecological significance due in part to its importance for wildlife habitat including rare animals, plants and natural communities. Merrymeeting Bay is critical habitat for waterfowl who visit the

thriving beds of wild rice, a native grass that grows tall with feathery flowers that mature into a seed head full of nutritious grains. The Bay provides spawning and nursery habitat for important recreational and commercial fisheries as well. Frank Burroughs, in his book *Confluence: Merrymeeting Bay*, illustrates how unique the Bay is, as only one of four places in the world where large rivers come together to share a delta, thus creating a most productive ecosystem. Unlike the others, our Bay is relatively preserved in its natural condition. The Bay's importance as a significant natural community cannot be understated.

Topsham today is healthier than many lands, but is not untouched by current and historic forces. Topsham's landscape saw impact and degradation from the earliest European settlers' intensive farming practices and land-clearing for the raising of sheep. Mining, industrial and military efforts, both in our Town borders and up river put intense pressure on our ecosystems. Commercial, residential, and transportation pressures continue to contribute modern day impacts. Our natural resources are finite, limited in place, and challenged by a changing environment, our appetite for growth, and the mounting influences of global climate change. Whether it's the incremental loss of forest and farmland from sea level rise along the Muddy River; the continued onslaught of invasive species throughout our Town due in part to warming temperatures and landscaping choices; or the direct loss and fragmentation of habitats through planned and unplanned development; these continued and cumulative pressures pose real and direct threats to our local natural resources. We encourage the Town to continue to consider in Plan implementation the significance of our natural resources, and to use available and innovative tools to protect the economic and ecological benefits they provide. We are ready to help.



Peter A. McCarthy.

The return of millions of river herring to Merrymeeting Bay and improvement of water quality on the Androscoggin River are fantastic successes; we shouldn't stop there. In the Recovery of Maine's Coastal Fisheries John Lichter notes "Maine's people and communities would benefit from additional ecological recovery. Our economy depends largely on a clean, natural environment that allows both tourism and the extraction of natural resources such as commercial fisheries."

The importance of open space in Topsham goes beyond aesthetics. Town citizens recreate in these lands, creating deeply meaningful memories of exploring our lands and waters in all seasons. Generations have enjoyed our natural areas from our favorite backyard rock to our preferred scenic view of the River. Many still make their livelihoods harvesting or studying the same natural riches once utilized by our ancestors.

There has long been consistent and strong recognition by Topsham residents of the importance, and need for the conservation of our natural resources. Yet, beyond obvious hard-earned contributions of organizations like the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust, it's important we remember

that many of the natural resources enjoyed by our populace are derived from the good stewardship efforts of numerous private landowners who own and manage those undeveloped lands. How we, as a community, can continue to effectively work with and support these landowners to help retain that rural quality of life we look for in a community like Topsham – while maintaining or even enhancing those same natural features most dear to us – remains our challenge.

Conservation planning is an integral component of growth area planning to maintain the rural character we love about Topsham. Look to Merrymeeting Bay and the restoration of the Androscoggin River to see what careful management can do. This Comprehensive Plan is meant to drive how our forward movement over the next 10 years; it's important we remember our resources require purposeful planning with consideration of our future Topsham generations. Thank you in advance for that consideration.

Sincerely,

Members of the Topsham Conservation Commission

Victor Langelo, Chair
Shana Stewart Deeds
Steve Pelletier
Raija Suomela, Secretary

Peter A. McCarthy.



Foster Social Connection





Larry Fitch.

During the Plan Your Topsham process, residents expressed a deep desire and need for a greater sense of community. They identified that they are missing opportunities to gather and have the kinds of informal interactions that allow people to engage with each other. Some seniors noted that the community building and meeting spaces and activities offered by the Highlands and Highland Green for their residents, serve as a desirable model for similar town-sponsored amenities.

There was a broad interest among many different kinds of people for more events, social gatherings, neighborhood activities, places to gather and greater communication around local happenings. Whether at a park, a coffee shop, or an ice skating rink, people want to have the opportunity for chance interactions with others. And building on those places, there is a hope for additional programming, and easy to access information about goings-on for people of all ages.

STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Existing and new neighborhoods within Topsham should have identifiable neighborhood centers that provide both indoor and outdoor gathering spaces and opportunities for informal interactions. Examples of neighborhood centers include parks and pocket parks, neighborhood-scale retail (corner store or restaurant), churches, and other destinations within walking distance. Neighborhood centers are critical for allowing spontaneous interactions between neighbors and a reason for people to walk to and from their home. Chance encounters, including bumping into a neighbor on the sidewalk or at the park, have been found to be critical for healthy, happy people. Ideally, every home within Topsham's intended growth area would be within a 5-minute walk of a neighborhood center. Topsham can enhance quality of life by finding

ways to build civic spaces, while also enabling the private sector to build neighborhood-scale retail in appropriate locations.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to include neighborhood centers that are enabled through 5-minute walk pedestrian shed standards.

STRATEGY: Form public/private partnerships to fund the retrofit of existing neighborhoods to add desired amenities such as parks and civic gathering spaces.

REQUIRE MEANINGFUL PUBLIC SPACES WHEN DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS

Currently, zoning requires a percentage of land to be preserved as open space, which results in remnant land set aside in fragments that don't tend to yield usable parks. Topsham should revise zoning standards to require civic spaces, such as parks, playgrounds, greens, and other open spaces designed for active community use. Civic space requirements should be responsive to the kinds of civic opportunities that already exist and work to fill in gaps so there is a range of community spaces provided within neighborhoods. As with any public infrastructure project, staff should be mindful to appropriately budget for ongoing maintenance and long-term costs.

STRATEGY: Update the Town's zoning code to include provisions for meaningful open space types tied to developments of various scales. Open space types should include the full range of civic spaces including commons, parks, squares, and plazas, as well as amenities such as recreation fields, playgrounds, swimming pools, gardens, skating rinks, dog parks, and amphitheaters.

INCREASE PROGRAMMING WITHIN TOWN

There is a strong local desire for community events that bring people together. During the planning process, the community brainstormed a long list of social activities that people would like to see in Topsham. These events could happen in a variety of locations, both existing and new, including the fairgrounds, civic buildings, or in public spaces, including the Library, streets, and parks, that could be re-imagined for more active use.

More social capacity is needed within town to organize events and bring people together. The people of Topsham have an opportunity to establish a group of local people to take on the role of programming more activities within town. This effort should supplement and align with the work already happening through the Library and other existing networks. The effort could be formalized through the formation of a quasi-public commission. Or, the Town could engage with the Maine Development Foundation's Main Street program, which provides guidance to help communities strengthen their main street through a focus on programming, capacity building, growing local business, and quality placemaking.

STRATEGY: Form an Arts & Culture Commission, a local Annual Event Citizen's Group, or organize and apply for the Main Street Program, including the options

of becoming a network affiliate community.

WORK WITH THE FAIRGROUNDS TO MAKE IT A CENTERPIECE OF THE TOWN

There is broad support in town for seeing more programming at the Fairgrounds. Topsham Development, Inc. (TDI) has included the goal of supporting more events at the Topsham Fairgrounds in its strategic plan for economic development. The Topsham Fairgrounds provides an ideal – and very attractive – location for large scale events, with plenty of space, lots of parking and great road access. The Town is also working with the Topsham Fair board of directors to ensure that buildings at the Fairgrounds are properly equipped and permitted in order to be used for public gatherings. Regulations regarding the use of the Fairground have been simplified over the recent past to make non-fair uses easier to run.

STRATEGY: Support the work of TDI to financially support regional and national caliber events at the Topsham Fairgrounds.

SUPPORT THE LIBRARY

Topsham's Public Library is serving as a modern day community center, welcoming to young and old alike. The Library has huge support from the community in terms of attendance, circulation, donations and interest. However, the Library also has some gaps in funding vs. services. There is concern about the ability to replace any individual at current salary levels and to retain the quality of the staff. Skill sets needed for a 21st century library are much more demanding.

STRATEGY: Support increased funding for the Library from both municipal and non-municipal revenue sources.

STRATEGY: Support the Library Trustees in efforts to review space needs for the Library, ensure facilities are being used effectively and meeting 21st century needs. Plan accordingly for any future additions or renovations.



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SEEK MORE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Topsham residents generated an exhaustive list of indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities that are desired but currently unavailable. The list includes hockey/skating rink, swimming pool, community center, dog park, teen center, BMX bike track, amphitheater, outdoor splash pad, bowling and performance space. Many of these opportunities could be provided through public-private partnerships or by business enterprise. The Town should consider strategies such as TIF agreements and form-based zoning to encourage and incentivize private sector investment in these important community-identified activities.

STRATEGY: Use credit enhancement agreements to incentivize private development of new indoor and outdoor recreation facilities.

STRATEGY: As part of new development, explore opportunities to partner with private developers to create new recreational facilities which the Town could benefit from through lease agreements.

MAKE PARK MANAGEMENT (AND CONSTRUCTION) A GROUP EFFORT

In communities across the country, both formal and informal neighborhood parks, trails, and other spaces have fallen under the care of local neighborhood groups. With tightening municipal budgets, these community spaces might have the grass cut by the local public works crew, but additional care is challenging. "Friends of" groups have stepped in to keep parks clean, plant flowers, plant trees, fundraise for seating, manage trails, and otherwise make these community places a true community labor of love and an opportunity for community building. In Topsham, where many neighborhoods lack public parks and civic spaces, this shared approach to construction and management would help Topsham's neighborhoods meet social and recreational needs of residents of all ages. Town leaders should encourage civic groups to make neighborhood and park improvements.

STRATEGY: Allow and encourage "Friends of" groups to help construct and manage Topsham's civic spaces.

STRATEGY: Ensure adequate department budgets and staffing to manage lawn care and tree pruning at town properties and in the street right of way.

"Imagining Topsham 5 – 10 years into the future, I would like to see and experience..."

- More local businesses and retailers (coffee shop, place for high schoolers to get wifi, store near school)
- Centralized downtown
- Improving mall space and making the area pedestrian-friendly
- Community centers, indoor and outdoor
- Senior center and adult-focused activities
- Family-focused community activities
- Community feel/engagement (or government)
- Indoor pool/outdoor splash area
- Music events
- Pedestrian-accessible areas (make walk more friendly to Brunswick to create more cohesion)
- Mixed-use residential development
- Stay, work, play (professional services)
- Local pub/winery
- Dog park
- Roller derby
- Performance spaces (amphitheater)
- Hiking/biking events
- Groomed cross country ski trails
- Mountain biking trails
- Boat launch
- Water sport rentals
- Bring back Sky High ski area
- Bowling alley
- Basketball courts
- Playground
- Outdoor movie night
- Safer community
- Game night
- Adventure obstacle course on the trails
- BMX/skate park
- Ice rink
- Food trucks
- Farmers market
- Fire station development
-and more!

Social Connectivity

English Poet John Donne famously said “No [hu]man is an island” describing how humans need each other to survive. That was back in 1624 and he was clearly onto something as it’s still true now, likely more than ever.



In America today, the number of people living alone, and having fairly solitary lives is the highest in human history. People may live alone, and/or far from loved ones, are communicating through devices rather than in person, trying to keep up with a fast pace of life through conveniences like online shopping, working long hours, and struggling with having less time for family, friends, and community—all making for a challenging environment to feel connected. Feeling connected to others is important because loneliness and social isolation have negative health effects on everyone, whether young or old. Recent social research points overwhelmingly to social connectivity — sometimes using the term sociality or social connectedness— as a linchpin element in determining whether a

community is healthy and well-functioning. So important, in fact, that the lack of it competes well with obesity and smoking in contributing to poor health outcomes and premature death. Loneliness and social isolation are considered an unrecognized public health problem — including the quality of relationships people have on an individual level as well as the sense of connection to the larger community.

So what does this have to do with urban or town planning, and how should we be looking at this as we come together for this Comprehensive Plan Update? Well, some of these needs can be addressed through neighborhood design and the built environment.

Planning as it has traditionally been done has not considered sociality or social connectivity. It has focused mostly on mobility, on regulation of land-use of private property. And as such much of planning has actually contributed to keeping us separated, in individual houses, which we drive to in our vehicles.

Looking at some of the best research done on this topic, ingredients for healthy, well functioning communities include:

- face-to-face meeting,
- interaction,
- communication among members, and
- high quality physical space.

In addition, studies of “Blue Zones” around the world (place where people live the longest, healthiest lives) shows ingredients for longevity include making low-intensity physical activity part of one’s daily routine, building good relationships with friends and family, eating a diet lighter on meat and excess calories and heavier on plants, and finding a purpose for and sense of meaning in your life.



Larry Fitch.

If you are one of the 300+ people who attended the 5-day public planning process in October 2017 at the Old Fire Barn that kicked off the community engagement process for this Comp Plan Update, you know that something special happened there. The process of people coming together to talk about what people want for our town was invigorating. We looked at lots of options for how we want our town to look in the future. We told the MDW consultants what we love and what we don't about Topsham. And what came out of the five days was a set of desires that have shaped this Plan.

People said "we want more of this," — gathering in a meaningful way. They stated a desire for opportunities for physical spaces where we can come together, interact, and enjoy face-to-face contact; a desire to get to know each other better, meet people who live in other neighborhoods. A shift in priorities from what past planning has offered. All of these ideas relate to using human sociality as a measure for setting priorities and scope as we move forward with implementation.

Topsham has developed in much the same way as many towns in America. As a town in Maine where the average age is 44, we have a larger percentage of older folks. The other thing that many residents have

pointed out in response to the evolving plan and its illustrations is that we have a dearth of gathering places. And no "town center," no main street with shops and cafes and restaurants that draw people together. And our public recreation facilities are all outdoor. No surprise for a community with serious winters, people in Topsham want indoor rec facilities and meeting places.

Maine has a long history of creating opportunities for gathering—bean suppers, family reunions, summer fairs, craft fairs, farmers market, school events, worship services, sporting events, etc. While those events are fun traditions and highlights for many, they are actually vital for maintaining the health of the community and there is desire for even more opportunities to connect.

With this update of the Comprehensive Plan, we have an opportunity to do something different, something that will improve the health of our community. We have the power to prioritize making it easier to meet face-to-face, easier to interact, and communicate with each other in public spaces that foster these things. While it is only part of the solution, it is a great first step. We have the desire, now let's do this!

Submitted by CPUC members Mary Kate Appicelli and Susan Rae-Reeves.

Support Knowledge Economy





An example of a coworking space. WeWork.

As a bedroom community where only 10% of the workforce stays in Topsham each day for work, Topsham is well positioned to support the knowledge economy and home-based businesses by improving access to high-speed internet and making strategic quality of life enhancements that attract more people to town. This largely under-the-radar workforce can be supported as a way to bolster the local economy from the ground up. Increased workplace flexibility, remote offices, and an increase in laptop business, as well as Topsham's proximity to nearby job centers, opens Topsham up to a unique opportunity to attract new residents. The critical components include a diverse supply of affordable housing and good schools, with walkable neighborhoods and safe streets for walking and biking.

INCREASE WIFI SPEEDS

An increasing number of people are engaged in the knowledge economy and working from home. Topsham should take steps to attract more knowledge workers by laying the infrastructure to support this growing sector of the jobs economy. Topsham has a contract with Comcast (XFINITY) to provide cable/internet services. The requirement is to provide these services to all residences where there is a specific density of units per road mile. A range of basic to high speed internet (up to 2 GIG) is available to many addresses in Topsham, however the costs for 2 GIG monthly service is substantial and could pose a financial barrier for knowledge workers and small businesses.

Further, in a communications network, the middle mile is the link that connects regions together. It is the segment of a telecommunications network that connects the core network with the central office, commonly found in the center of towns. The "last mile" is the part of a communications system that connects individual dwellings or offices. A growing number of Maine communities are investing in the last mile of fiber, including Islesboro, Sanford, Scarborough, South Portland, and Rockport, all of whom have invested in bringing broadband to portions of, and sometimes all, of their town. This infrastructure may be more critical for small-medium sized companies where a significant amount of data is being transferred.

Having broader housing choices means allowing small apartments, town houses, cottages, and accessory dwelling units. These housing types are referred to as “missing middle housing”

STRATEGY: Explore costs and funding mechanism for bringing fiber to all homes within the intentional growth area.

ENCOURAGE SHARED WORKSPACES

Maine has seen an increasing interest in shared office spaces, including co-working spaces, as more people are able to work remotely. Even people with home offices enjoy a shared office environment, for access to shared office equipment as well as the social and collaborative benefits.

Co-working spaces are relatively simple start-up ventures that provide an opportunity for knowledge workers, creatives, writers, graphic designers, software engineers, freelancers, and others who work remotely, to afford offices outside of their homes. Co-working spaces typically include shared desks, private offices, conference room, lounge, office equipment, high-speed Internet, and sometimes lockers and showers. Regular events are often organized to help members meet, collaborate, and grow professionally. The next generation of co-working spaces looks like well-stocked workshops, garages, and commercial kitchens, accommodating prototyping, carpentry, industrial arts, and food and beverage production. Co-working spaces typically charge a monthly, yearly, or per hour fee to use the facility and its resources.

Maine has seen a notable increase in co-working offices in the last five years. From just a handful of spaces, they now exist in Biddeford, Lewiston, Westbrook, Yarmouth, Damariscotta, Thomaston, Rockland, Bar Harbor, Ellsworth, Bangor, as well as five shared-working offices in Portland, including a women-only space. Topsham is fortunate that it has had a bonafide co-working space in the Lower Village (at the Priority Group property) since 2006. The Topsham Public Library has established two quiet spaces that are available for co-working and a 15-seat conference room that can be rented for a nominal fee.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to allow shared workspaces throughout all zoning districts in Topsham.

SUPPORT SCHOOLS, FAMILIES WILL FOLLOW

In the new economy, more people are choosing community and quality of life first and bringing their job with them. One of the largest market demands on the national horizon consists of young couples with kids seeking affordable living options within walkable neighborhoods. However, a big challenge for many parents seeking such a lifestyle relates to the quality of nearby schools. Despite a growing demand for walkable mixed-use neighborhoods, finding such a neighborhood with a high performing neighborhood public school is difficult. Finding a neighborhood that is also affordable for middle-class families is even harder. Topsham is fortunate to have both of its elementary schools embedded within its downtown residential neighborhoods. The middle and high schools, while not located in walkable neighborhoods, are within walking distance of the Upper Village, the Crooker property on 196, and the Navy Annex Housing.

We have an opportunity to attract the best and brightest young talent, as well as the developers looking to capitalize on the next great market demand. Topsham will need to make purposeful investments so it may be seen as a community that boasts a mix of housing types and affordability levels in mixed-use neighborhoods with great public schools. By building on these assets and improving the walkability of the Lower, Center and Upper Village areas, Topsham can enhance its status as a family destination.

STRATEGY: Prioritize streets that are safe, interesting, and comfortable for walking.

STRATEGY: Update zoning to allow for higher density development as a means for creating more walkable destinations and broader housing choices

ALLOW HOME-BASED BUSINESS

The traditional office environment is changing as cloud-based technology continues to improve, allowing people to connect and communicate virtually. An increasing number of people, even those employed by large companies, are choosing to work from home, in small or medium-sized shared office spaces, or in coffee shops and restaurants. In 2015, the American Community Survey (ACS) reported that 279 Topsham residents worked at home. This rapidly emerging workforce can be supported

by proactive zoning that allows alternative offices to emerge across town, as well as through networking and community building events.

STRATEGY: As part of future zoning efforts, ensure performance standards continue to allow as-of-right home occupations for businesses with on-site employees.

STRATEGY: Support the organization of professional groups to hold networking and community building events.

STRATEGY: Encourage private sector partnership with the Library to host professional enrichment and skills building workshops.

STRATEGY: Create a town-wide directory of home-based businesses.

SUPPORT EXISTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Topsham has a strong local contingency of existing businesses that are well positioned to take advantage of additional growth as result of demographic shifts and new development. An organized business community can provide peer to peer support as change happens incrementally over time. The Town and Topsham Development Inc. (TDI) can play a role in coordinating local business activities, ensuring early involvement of stakeholders in planning, and enhancing business-related community development communications.

STRATEGY: Work with Topsham Development Inc. (TDI) to create a local business association.

Be Deliberate About Growth





Nancy Griendl.

People love Topsham because of its central location and the ease it provides to get to other places. But people also have a deep desire for a stronger sense of place. There is a feeling locally that Topsham could generate a town-wide, strong sense of place - more than just the series of semi-independent neighborhoods that seem to currently define the Town. Topsham has seen growth over the past 15 years, but this growth was predicted as far back as in 1992, during previous Comprehensive Planning efforts. The Town planned and encouraged much of the growth since 1992, and the 2007 plan included a Designated Growth Area that encompassed the entire Route 196 Corridor west of I-295 to Lisbon.

As the Town continues to grow, the impacts of this growth should be managed, measured and revisited often through community-driven processes to ensure residents are getting the kinds of outcomes they want. An intentional approach to local growth can also position the Town for long-term viability, by attracting people to choose Topsham as their community. Smart, place-based growth can not only lead to improved quality of life for local people, but can also protect the Town's financial stability and reduce the local tax burden. A "Strong Towns" approach that emphasizes incremental, bottom-up growth and long-term thinking can protect the tax base and ensure that Topsham remains financially strong well into the future.

CONTINUE TO INVEST WISELY

Topsham has benefited financially from limiting public utilities to a fairly centralized area, where the amount of development is great enough to support the cost and replacement costs of the utility systems. By avoiding expansion into rural and suburban areas of town, Topsham has avoided unfunded liabilities that can create extreme financial pressure in the long-term. Instead, Topsham has made efficient investments that have yielded the kinds of returns needed to pay for the cost of its infrastructure, including construction, maintenance, repair, and replacement. This kind of smart investment strategy will ensure that Topsham remains financially strong well into the future. To continue along this trajectory, Topsham should continue to encourage and incentivize new development where there is existing infrastructure, which will help preserve and even improve the tax base.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to further encourage a higher density, mixed use pattern of development that delivers a higher municipal return on investment.

STRATEGY: Work with TDI to fund a full value per acre analysis.

STRATEGY: Work with the Sewer and Water District to proactively plan for future service improvements and extensions.

AVOID EXTENDING PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE SHORT TERM

Ongoing public utility policy has been to generally limit infrastructure expansion, including to the west side of I-295. The high cost of extending infrastructure to the west side, and the availability of commercial property in Topsham already served by infrastructure are the most significant impediments to west side development in the near future. Recent estimates of the cost of extending the level of sewer and water infrastructure necessary for most high-quality commercial development exceed six million dollars. This level of cost is not economically feasible for most commercial projects. Even if a project could support the cost of the initial construction, the Town and local utility districts need to be considerate about taking on new infrastructure. Long-term costs should be understood prior to accepting infrastructure.

STRATEGY: Prior to using public money on any expansion of utilities west of I-295, require an analysis of the economic benefit of utility expansion.

MEASURE & USE VALUE PER ACRE AS A TOOL FOR EVALUATING GROWTH

The questions a town asks and the way it measures success have a direct impact on the quality of outcomes. When it comes to economic development and growth, history has taught us that the old questions and metrics don't necessarily protect the long-term financial health of a community. Instead of simply measuring square feet or taxable value of new development, we have learned to look closely at where growth occurs and the relationship between costs and revenues.

Many communities are now measuring value per acre as a means to understand how new businesses and development are impacting local finances. By evaluating business value by acre of land, it becomes evident that the taxes spun off by small projects can contribute more relative value than the taxes spun off by larger projects that have more direct and indirect costs. For example, a large box development might not only require additional infrastructure at a great immediate and long-term expense, but there may be on-going public service costs associated with the development. Large developments are often suited to a single business and aren't easily reused when that business moves. Large developments can lay unused for a decade or more with little tax revenue. When all of these costs are compared to a small new building constructed along an existing street, it becomes clear that the smaller projects do more for Topsham's long-term financial stability.

The Town is working to increase commercial properties' proportionate share of Topsham's real estate taxes to

Nancy Griendl.



help reduce the burden on residential taxpayers. There is a focused effort to make sure commercial development is appropriate and beneficial for the Town, both by seeking businesses that are compatible with our community and by ensuring that new commercial development does not create new costs for the Town that could offset any increased tax revenues they provide.

STRATEGY: Evaluate, measure and if necessary adjust the Town’s Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Policy.

STRATEGY: Key TIF policy to value-per-acre to prioritize development that further funds existing investments.

STRATEGY: Consider applicability of keying TIF policy to goals of job creation, creation of community access or public benefit (rail, recreation, bus transit, water access, workforce housing, job training).

FOLLOW GOOD TOWN PLANNING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Topsham has an opportunity to capitalize on several current trends that are playing into decisions about where people choose to live and work. There is a growing interest in walkable places, where a variety of activities can be accessed by foot. Topsham continues to work on establishing a more walkable Main Street and village core, and a strong groundwork is in place. A collection of existing buildings in the Lower Village, and their proximity to both the Upper Village and Brunswick, provide connectivity and access to additional services from the Town’s core.

If Topsham can continue to build and improve its availability of strong, walkable neighborhoods and grow and connect its mixed-use centers, the Town can attract and retain more people. Updating zoning to allow for the development of a network of streets and blocks, streets as public spaces, buildings in the right place, and mix of uses and housing options will be critical to the future strength of the Town within the regional market. The character of development matters, and the groundwork is in place for Topsham to offer a stronger sense of community and town identity.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to emphasize good town building principles, including neighborhood character, blocks, streets, civic spaces, and buildings that, in total, add up to a feeling of authenticity.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to permit greater density within the intentional growth area as identified on the Conservation & Growth Map.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to permit rural development that responds to rural character, including rural building group types.

POSITION TOPSHAM TO ATTRACT BUSINESS

The Comprehensive Planning process focused considerable energy and time determining where the community is comfortable with intensive new development and growth. An intended growth area described in the Regulatory Framework section of this plan includes several locations with the potential for significant new development. Encouraging medium- to high-density development to encourage high density development in the Town’s core is a key tool to discouraging sprawl in rural areas.



Home Depot
 Acreage: 16.88
 Property Tax per Acre: \$9,654.05



Michaud’s Market
 Acreage: 0.18
 Property Tax per Acre: \$16,438.87



Frosty’s Donuts
 Acreage: 0.05
 Property Tax per Acre: \$142,183.80

A comparison of commercial properties in Topsham Fair Mall, Topsham’s Lower Village, and Maine Street in Brunswick. The comparison is made between the property tax generated per acre, known as Value Per Acre (VPA).

At the same time, the face of retail continues to shift and contract. Topsham has an opportunity to effectively compete with Brunswick Landing and Cooks Corner by taking a proactive approach to the retail industry, by inviting, permitting, and encouraging higher density mixed-use development within its commercial and other growth zones. High quality development should be required while giving developers and landowners clear and straight-forward rules that allow projects to gain quick and administrative approval to the extent possible.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to make it easier to attract new, denser development to zoning districts within the Neighborhood Transformation - Intentional Growth Sector.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to allow smaller parcels and higher density mixed-use development within the Neighborhood Transformation - Intentional Growth Sector, including infill on parcels that already have development.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to remove off-street parking requirements to enable the market to determine parking need.

STRATEGY: Review all municipal codes, licensing, and other procedures to remove barriers to small-scale development and the establishment of new businesses.

STRATEGY: Allow a broad range of land uses within the intentional growth areas as well as within the rural zones as part of building groups.

SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE COMMERCIAL SPACE

Topsham has an abundance of parking lots that create a negative visual introduction to the community and a less than desirable experience for people walking, biking, and driving through town. However, these parking lots can also provide an opportunity for small-scale development of small, incubator spaces and liner buildings that can provide affordable space for business. Liner buildings, for example, are a unique type of building that is often shallow in depth but wide so as to line the edge of a parking lot and create a new street wall. A variety of building types can be marketed to current landowners and new investors who want to build affordable spaces in town. There are many national examples of affordable commercial spaces that are attracting business and providing a stepping stone for businesses to locate and grow.

STRATEGY: Engage in public/private partnerships to pilot low-cost incubator shared workspaces for start-ups along the edges of private parking lots.

STRATEGY: Work with local staff to ensure that information on incremental and affordable development projects are provided to landowners.

PROTECT HISTORIC ASSETS

Historic buildings provide an attractive asset that should be preserved and supported. Not only do historic

buildings provide a connection with the history of the Town, but they also offer an affordable option for small-scale developers and business owners. Rehabilitation of historic buildings is considerably less expensive than new construction. Today, buildings located within the Topsham Historic District or listed on the National Register of Historic Places as individual buildings or sites have access to federal and state funds that can reduce the construction cost of a commercial project by 45% for all qualifying work. And, Topsham's Certified Local Government Status means that Topsham has access to Federal Historic Preservation funds that are annually allocated to the State and Maine Historic Preservation Commission technical assistance for activities such as building assessments, surveys, nominations, and preservation assistance. At least 10% of Federal funds must be spent on places that are certified as Local Government Status. Finally, the International Existing Building Code should be used as a means to provide greater flexibility over the International Building Code when reviewing historic building projects. While this code has been adopted by the State of Maine and Topsham, many local landowners and contractors are not familiar with its provisions.

STRATEGY: Continue to support the work of the Historic District Commission to review projects within the Historic Overlay District, including expansion of the District.

STRATEGY: Provide educational opportunities to advance local use of the more flexible International Existing Building Code.

STRATEGY: Continue to provide staff support to property owners of historic buildings inside and outside of the Topsham Historic District, with information on how to get a building listed on the register and gain access to federal and state funds.

STRATEGY: Update zoning to enable flexible use of historic buildings, including a range of uses, unit numbers, and a removal of off-street parking requirements.

STRATEGY: Actively promote and pursue Federal Historic Preservation funds to advance historic preservation efforts.

STRATEGY: Leverage State Historic Preservation Office technical assistance to advance historic preservation efforts.

ALLOW DEVELOPMENT THAT SUPPORTS RURAL CHARACTER

Topsham, like many Maine communities, has a rich history of rural-based business. With the advent of suburban, use-based zoning in the 1960s and 70s, business activities were largely relegated to business and industrial zones, and rural areas were left with only a handful of ways to make productive use of the land, the primary option being residential subdivisions.

“Topsham has done bold things in the past – mill redevelopment, mall development, Highlands – we should continue to do more bold things and keep trying to shape town.”

— Survey Respondent

The community has expressed an interest in maintaining rural character at the edges of town. Existing open views, farms, forested lands, and marshes are a central part of why people love Topsham. Currently, these lands are zoned to allow a minimum lot size of 1-acre (R2 Zone) and 1.5 acre (R3 Zone). While limited development has occurred to date in these areas, there is a potential for development that conflicts with local desires and that has significant visual, environmental, and recreational impacts on the community.

Topsham should explore strategies for protecting property rights while providing additional economic options beyond what is available now. New approaches to zoning are available that can allow people to work the land and conduct a variety of business activities within a pattern that is fundamentally rural in character. Traditional rural development, such as hamlets and farm compounds, can be reintroduced, providing a greater menu of options beyond putting land into the farmland and tree growth tax programs, or building housing subdivisions. Rural business development that is in harmony with traditional rural landscapes ensures that land can be passed down to future generations with expanded business and residential opportunity.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to allow rural building groups, including hamlets and farm compounds, as a way to support rural character and support rural-based businesses.

STRATEGY: Continue to encourage working farms and forests to participate in the Farmland and Tree Growth Tax Program.

AGGRESSIVELY PROTECT AND ATTRACT FARMS

There continue to be working farms in Topsham and there is growing interest in local sourcing of food. This trend is reflected statewide as well. In the face of decreasing farmland nationwide, Maine has actually grown in number of farms. According to the 2012 census, there were 8,174 farms operating in Maine, compared to 8,136 farms in 2007. New farms starting up tend to be smaller in scale and sell more high-value products to the local market. The work of economic development staff should include attracting more farmers and agricultural-based businesses to the Town to capitalize on Maine’s growing position at the center of the local food industry.

STRATEGY: Work with the Maine Farmland Trust, Department of Agriculture, Merrymeeting Food Council and others involved in food-related industries to attract farmers and other agricultural-based businesses to Topsham.

STRATEGY: Pursue a public/private partnership to start up a food hub and certified commercial kitchen.

Housing Diversity





Topsham residents expressed concerns about housing and the need to provide more affordable housing options into the future. Many people also understand the critical connection between affordable housing options and jobs, and the competitive advantage available for communities to attract businesses to town by providing ample housing options for potential workers. Through the public process, a variety of housing needs have been identified, including additional senior housing, units with two or more bedrooms, and housing for single occupants. National trends also increasingly show that people desire smaller housing types within the context of a walkable neighborhood.

PROMOTE NATURALLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Many communities across the country have mandated affordable units as part of private sector housing development, known as inclusionary zoning, with a varying degree of success. At the same time, many communities continue to take a more market-based approach to housing, letting private sector forces determine what gets built. Topsham currently has an overly complex system of density bonuses and thresholds by which a developer can take advantage of bonuses. Topsham could benefit from a more market-based approach with some tweaks and adjustments to current zoning policies. Naturally affordable housing centers around the idea of making it legal to build a diversity of housing types, price points and adequate housing supply to help mitigate high housing prices. Not all residents can, should or will be able to take on the costs associated with private housing construction. Removing barriers to affordable housing creation will let small-scale developers who may not be actual developers by trade, but local people trying to invest in their own community, take on the task of building affordable housing.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to include clearly defined building types with a range of unit sizes that are reflective of local character and are allowed to be built in town by right.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to allow building groups such as pocket neighborhoods, connected farms, small and large compounds, and hamlets.

STRATEGY: Review all municipal codes and procedures to remove barriers to small-scale development and the construction of affordable building types.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to remove parking minimums within the growth areas, allowing the free market to determine parking need. Add controls that require new parking to be located behind buildings.

STRATEGY: Conduct a detailed housing study based on target market preferences and an understanding of the full range of housing types, including those not currently available within the market.

MAKE IT EASY TO BUILD SMALL AND ACCESSORY UNITS

The State of Maine has recently updated the Unified Building Code to allow for exemptions to several mandatory construction requirements for 400 square foot or less dwelling units. Tiny units can come in a variety of forms, including small micro-units, small cottages, accessory units located behind a single-family house, or tiny homes on wheels. Within the intentional growth area, Topsham should allow tiny homes and other kinds of accessory units to occupy the same lot as a single-family home. The accessory units, also known as granny flats, in-law apartments, or carriage houses, can attract more people to town looking for a less expensive home within a neighborhood environment, and can also provide home-owners a secondary source of income.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to ensure that local land use rules are aligned with the updated building codes to support the construction of tiny homes and accessory units.

STRATEGY: Evaluate and adjust zoning policies in regards to accessory units.



“We must encourage 20-30 year olds to stay or move here with strong school systems and new, affordable residential building.”

— Survey Respondent

UPDATE ZONING TO ATTRACT HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

While demand for smaller and more diverse types of housing with walkable neighborhoods is on the rise, many larger-scale local developers continue to produce the product types that they are accustomed to: single family houses with two car garages. Understanding the nuances of what makes a place feel attractive, exciting, fun, and authentic to Topsham, and then coding for those local nuances, should be a priority. Development at all scales should support the Town’s existing character and goals for future long-term change.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to provide a more stringent set of development standards to control building form, scale, components, placement, materials and associated site improvements.

STRATEGY: Update the zoning code to regulate building types by zoning district to ensure new buildings and projects complement the scale and character of the existing neighborhood.

MORE HOUSING TO ACCOMMODATE RANGE OF FAMILY SIZES AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

There are more alternative lifestyles than ever before, with unique family and living arrangements that require a new approach to housing development. Despite the changing face of families, many communities tend to see the same housing product replicated throughout town. Topsham should work with developers to encourage new product types, in particular “missing middle” housing types that may be absent from the existing housing supply, such as duplexes, 4-plexes, townhouses, lofts, dorms, shared living spaces, and other unique types that provide a lower price point or different lifestyle option. A housing specific leakage study that takes a more fine grained look at demographics and preferences, and that understands the full range of housing types available to match unmet demand, can identify what housing products are needed to support additional growth in population and jobs.

STRATEGY: Conduct a detailed housing study.

STRATEGY: Partner with TDI and local developers to create a housing plan that sets the pace for construction of targeted new housing units.

SUPPORT PUBLICLY FUNDED AFFORDABLE HOUSING

While the market can and should be able to provide a range of housing types that hit various price points, there is still a need for capital-A Affordable Housing that meets the needs of the most financially stressed households. This includes housing for individuals and families that make less than 80% of the median household income or those eligible for Section 8 housing vouchers. The Topsham Housing Authority is charged with managing rental units and buildings that serve this important function.

STRATEGY: Evaluate the effectiveness of zoning policies that grant density bonuses to incentivize affordable and senior housing. Amend, as needed.

STRATEGY: Target and incentivize construction of affordable housing units in growth areas envisioned as dense, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.

STRATEGY: Allow density bonuses for developments within the growth area if that development contributes fees to an affordable housing fund.

STRATEGY: Use Affordable Housing TIFs to support the creation of new affordable housing.

TINY HOUSE

A residential structure under 500 square feet.

POCKET NEIGHBORHOOD (AKA MULTI-UNIT COURT)

The arrangement of a single building type around a central common courtyard space to promote greater density than otherwise allowed with the base district and allow for an alternative lifestyle option.

Open Governance





Ribbon cutting ceremony at Head of Tide Park.
Larry Fitch.

Topsham has been a leader in open governance, trying new ways to engage the community, improve direct communication, and respond to local concerns through targeted action. However, there is always room for improvement and more work to do. Some people feel there is a disconnect and natural tension between elected officials who are trying to keep the government afloat and community members who want to think about new ideas. Steps could be taken to further align leadership with the sentiments of larger community, through still more improvements in communication. While the Town has taken heroic steps to get Topsham on solid financial footing, town staff are expressing their departments are understaffed and lack funding to deliver desired services.

FIND MORE WAYS TO LISTEN TO PEOPLE

Communication is time consuming and expensive, but critical. Topsham has recently engaged in a number of creative efforts to communicate directly with the people of Topsham, including Neighborhood Meetings and the planning process associated with the Comprehensive Plan. These efforts have gone a long way toward building additional trust between town leadership and the people. While these kinds of efforts are incredibly resource intensive, they successfully work toward more closely aligning the objectives of the community and those of its professional and elected leaders.

STRATEGY: Include funding in the budget for meetings between Town Hall and the community.

STRATEGY: Include funding in the budget for a part-time staff person to focus on supporting the Town Manager, Planning, and Economic Development staff and to focus on communications between constituents and leadership.

IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT BASICS OF GOVERNMENT HAPPENINGS

As a result of community input, staff has created a Facebook page, as well as a Twitter account. There are also multiple email groups for various committees

and boards and an expanded list through the Library that town staff uses for larger events. The Town also continues to use newspapers and mail for those not able to connect digitally. The Town website includes a link on the home page for e-alerts, which allows anyone to request notices by topic for various boards and committees. Topsham lacks an Information Technology (IT) position. Each department is responsible for its own page. Keeping a site active is constrained by staff time and availability. The Town continually evaluates whether maintenance should be directed to a third party.

STRATEGY: Include funding in the budget for a part-time staff person to support communications from the Town Manager, Planning, and Economic Development staff, and to focus on communications between constituents and leadership.

DIVERSIFY REPRESENTATIVE LEADERS

Finding people to serve on volunteer boards is a challenge. Populating boards with people who represent a range of diverse viewpoints is an additional challenge. However, the makeup of boards is critical to the success of various efforts within the community and to ensuring that decisions more closely reflect the interests of the community at large. The Town should consider creative approaches to improving the experience of serving on a board, including more comfortable and fun meeting venues, food, childcare, and training opportunities.

STRATEGY: Add leadership development incentives to better attract a diverse selection of volunteers for town boards and committees.

STRATEGY: Test alternative committee meeting times/days to make it easier to volunteer.

STRATEGY: Annually, hold a community celebration to acknowledge the work of volunteers.

FLEXIBLE TOWN HALL

The nature of the how we work is changing rapidly, from schedules to the communication tools we use. The Town has recently made efforts to extend and shift Town Hall hours to accommodate people who have daytime jobs and who work out of town. Creative and flexible staffing options should also be explored to provide additional opportunities for the Town Hall to better serve the community. There may be an opportunity to allow certain positions to have more flexible hours including deviating from the more traditional 9 to 5 protocols or job sharing. Or, there may be opportunities to bring certain services more directly to the people, considering Topsham has an aging population. In addition, Town Hall should be internally secured so it can be used more actively as a community center.

STRATEGY: Consider job sharing as a means to attract highly skilled, mature private sector talent to the public sector.

STRATEGY: Explore ways to bring Town Hall services direct to the neighborhoods.

STRATEGY: Evaluate how work is being performed and consider if new job structures or changes to workplace culture should occur to attract the next generation of talent to government service.

CONTINUE TO NURTURE A CULTURE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE

In today's political climate, local government plays a critical role in addressing the needs of local people. There is also an important opportunity for town leaders to help incubate a culture of open, direct, and respectful communication that can help bring people together and develop a shared understanding of alternative points of view. This kind of hard work to communicate and problem solve in a productive and tolerant manner is a centerpiece of civics. In-person meetings and social media should all intentionally speak to the rules for civic engagement to build a culture of community within the Town.

STRATEGY: Continue to work with community partners to build shared communication goals focused on civil discourse.

STRATEGY: Demonstrate appropriate and productive civil discourse on social media through active pages that have strong moderators that present content, debate, and activities based in the community.

MAKE GOVERNMENT FUN & INVITING

For decades, government processes nationwide have trended toward greater formality and a top-down power dynamic that can make it hard for people to easily and comfortably engage. The standard allotment of two minutes of public comments have, in many communities, been the only way for people to share their ideas. There are many people who are not able or willing to stand up and speak into a microphone at a public hearing. Topsham has worked hard to increase public engagement in town decisions, trying a number of creative approaches over the past few years. Topsham has an opportunity to be a leader in creating a more relaxed and fun approach to governance, testing new ways of holding meetings and interfacing in productive conversations with the public. Alternative venues, alternative room setups, alternative times of day and other varied approaches can help the Town continue to increase engagement, build a more robust group of active citizens, problem solve around complex issues, and generate better ideas.

STRATEGY: Adopt a policy to hold facilitated public workshops when complex problems arise that need broad community engagement and professional expertise from multiple disciplines.

STRATEGY: Develop a strategy or partnership to make child-care available for all public meetings.

USE OPEN BUDGETING

The most effective time for the public to be involved with the budget is during its development stages. The Town has been using an open budgetary process. This process has historically begun with the manager presenting a draft budget to the Select Board and Finance Committee

on the first Thursday in February. Following that meeting, there are a series of workshops held by the Select Board and Finance Committee where they seek input from individual departments to understand budget requests. This process, which currently takes three months to complete, would be benefitted by engaging staff/departments and the public much earlier to create the actual budget, rather than place staff and the public in the position of defending the budget. Adopting a similar process such as the open and participatory budgeting process required by ordinance for the expenditure of money from the Community Fund would mean the community is bringing forward the recommendations.

Ultimately, the Finance Committee should continue to work with the Select Board to hold open meetings and make a final recommendation to the Select Board for action.

STRATEGY: Continue to use the open and participatory budgeting process for expenditures from the Community Fund.

STRATEGY: Fund staff professional development to improve how open and participatory budgeting is used in budgeting and planning for long term capital improvements.

A More Sustainable Future



Peter A. McCarthy.



There is a desire in Topsham to continue to grow in a manner that leaves an environmentally healthy community for future generations to enjoy. Since the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, the Town has taken the initiative to complete a Climate Action Plan to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 20% below the Town's 2008 baseline and mitigate the impacts of climate change at the local level. The Climate Action Plan develops specific strategies in the sectors of energy use, transportation, land use, green purchasing, waste and water use that will be necessary to minimize Topsham's impacts on climate change and meet the established 20% greenhouse gas emission reduction target set by the plan. Work should continue to lessen the Town's impacts on the environment by improving energy efficiency, promoting recycling, and conserving resources when cost effective. These concerns should be considered for both capital investments and on-going operations.

WATER QUALITY

The health of the rivers and Merrymeeting Bay and the protection of drinking water resources are top priorities for residents. Pollution prevention strategies and ongoing water quality monitoring should be prioritized, with a focus on preservation of higher quality systems and aquifers. Currently the Town is engaged with MDEP in monitoring and improving the water quality of the Topsham Fair Mall Stream.

STRATEGY: The Town should explore ways to expand monitoring of Topsham's surface water quality to maintain a high level of water quality.

STRATEGY: Coordinate with neighboring communities and organizations to monitor water quality in the region's rivers and ponds as well as the Merrymeeting Bay watershed.

STRATEGY: Educate residents and business owners on non-point and point source pollution and the importance of groundwater protection in Topsham.

STRATEGY: Educate residents and business owners about the improvements to water quality in the past several decades.

STRATEGY: With professional assistance, review current Aquifer Protection Zone regulations to ensure goals and objectives are being met.

RECYCLING + COMPOSTING

The Town has taken proactive steps to increase rates of recycling by introducing single-stream recycling programs. In 2016, the residents of Topsham recycled over 1,146 tons of recyclable material, an estimated rate of 36%, reducing disposal costs to the Town. The Town currently does not collect materials curbside.

STRATEGY: Facilitate educational workshops to teach residents how to compost and provide ongoing public education about the proper methods of recycling.

STRATEGY: Explore a private/public partnership with an entity such as Garbage to Garden to provide a municipal composting kiosk in town.

ADAPT GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Residents and community members of Topsham expressed a desire to enhance the Town's walkability and connectivity and to transition away from an automobile-oriented and suburban character, particularly between neighborhoods and mixed-use centers. As automobile-dominated spaces are reclaimed to accommodate these goals, simple opportunities for implementing green infrastructure will be created. The paving materials that make up auto-serving spaces are often impervious and shed large volumes of runoff. Converting these spaces with pervious materials or bioswales, precipitation can be captured, filtered, and absorbed instantaneously, reducing flooding and demands on the Town's stormwater system. Bioswales and rain gardens

Garden beds at Wicked Joes, which donates the produce it grows to the Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program, located in Brunswick.





Peter A. McCarthy.

serve the double purpose of supporting plant growth while enhancing the Town’s landscape.

STRATEGY: Identify spaces for a bioswale pilot program.

STRATEGY: Create signage to educate public on existing bioswale at Town Hall.

CONNECT TO GREEN

There is also a public engagement and education aspect to introducing green infrastructure to the Town’s public spaces. Systems like bioswales are simple and easy to understand and can educate and raise awareness to the natural systems that are always present in built environments but easy to ignore. Factors are brought to attention like the flow of water corresponding to topography, the kinds of native plants that best absorb rainwater, where precipitation collects, what contaminants are collected and added to precipitation as it flows to its collection site and what the implications are of this, the different kinds of soil systems and their capacities, and much more. It is important to put people in touch with natural systems in order to encourage an awareness that cities and towns are human built and have a consistent relationship to the original environments on which they sit.

STRATEGY: Work with CREA and the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust to build local awareness for the social, environmental and economic benefits of green infrastructure.

STRATEGY: Organize annual neighborhood clean up days.

STRATEGY: Consider the Municipal Complex as a demonstration area for low-cost, high-impact techniques that residents could implement at home.

CUT GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

In 2009, a study and analysis conducted by Bowdoin College students found that Topsham emitted 125,970 tons of CO₂ in 2008. The study’s breakdown of Topsham’s community emissions by source showed that 69.5% was produced from the transportation sector. Commercial

and residential emissions were second and third in volume, with 15.0% and 14.3% respectively. The following measures were recommended in order to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 20% of the Town’s 2008 baseline emissions level:

Mitigation Measure	Tons CO ₂ e	Reduction %
Reduced vehicle usage	4,445	3.82%
National Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards	13,425	11.54%
Green building and weatherization	3,272	2.81%
Installation of renewable energy systems	273	0.21%
Appliance and lighting upgrades	1,377	1.18%
Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative	1,577	1.36%
Planting 600 new trees	72	0.06%
Total	24,369	21.00%

STRATEGY: Continue to build energy consumption awareness.

STRATEGY: Evaluate progress in order to update and continue to implement the Climate Action Plan.

STRATEGY: In partnership with the Library, work with public non-profit and private sector energy and weatherization specialists to offer local workshops about advances in energy technology and retrofits.

STRATEGY: Promote awareness and use of Efficiency Maine.

STRATEGY: Encourage electric vehicle usage, and provide a charging kiosk at Town Hall.



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Plan Your Topsham

Catalyst Sites and Future Neighborhood Centers

Based upon preferences expressed during the public engagement process for where to direct new growth, the team identified a number of potential catalyst sites that represent opportunities for future development. Each catalyst site has been drawn with the intent to create vibrant, walkable mixed-use neighborhood centers where currently a neighborhood center is missing, or where an existing or emerging center could be made stronger.

The catalyst site drawings in this plan explore how, over time, sites could be transformed through new buildings, sidewalks and paths, streets, and public spaces. The drawings think about how to advance community goals, such as creating additional housing choices, deliberately protecting rural areas, adding new neighborhood parks and recreational amenities, enhancing pedestrian mobility, and supporting places to gather and more local businesses. The catalyst site drawings are aspirational and representative of concepts only – showing a potential pattern of development, rather than an engineered set of plans. Each catalyst site would require private initiative to advance a project, including engineering, design and local permitting by the Planning Board before a project could be built.

Catalyst sites were drawn considering the following key goals:

- create additional value for the Town where infrastructure investments have already occurred;
- avoid sensitive habitats and areas prioritized for protection, conservation, agriculture, forestry and recreation; and,
- potential to support, strengthen or create a neighborhood center.

The mapping of future neighborhood centers begins to lay the foundational work for future zoning efforts by recognizing that within neighborhoods a diverse range of land use activities should be permitted to support daily life: the coffee shop, restaurant, neighborhood market. These desired amenities can only be realized if zoning regulations permit new commercial uses and residential uses to coexist.

Through this planning effort, neighborhood centers have been mapped to:

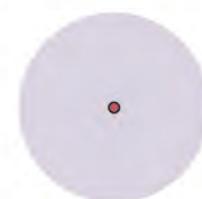
- identify where strong neighborhood centers currently exist;
- formalize existing neighborhood centers and support their enhancement;
- identify where, through retrofitting or tactical interventions, new neighborhood centers could be created in places without centers;
- identify places where redevelopment or new neighborhood development could orient around a distinct, new neighborhood center; and,
- support future zoning that enables mixed use neighborhoods to emerge.

Within the various mapped pedestrian sheds, future land use policy should enable compact, walkable, mixed-used centers with churches, corner stores, civic buildings and public spaces and local businesses to emerge. The goals for some neighborhood centers may be to maintain a predominantly residential character, with only a handful of commercially zoned properties to support a corner store, coffee shop, civic building or school at its center. Other neighborhood centers, such as those envisioned in the catalyst site drawings for the Crooker site and Topsham Fair Mall area may have a more balanced mix of residential, commercial and civic uses. Having strong neighborhood centers means allowing some mix of uses appropriate to the type of neighborhood center desired.



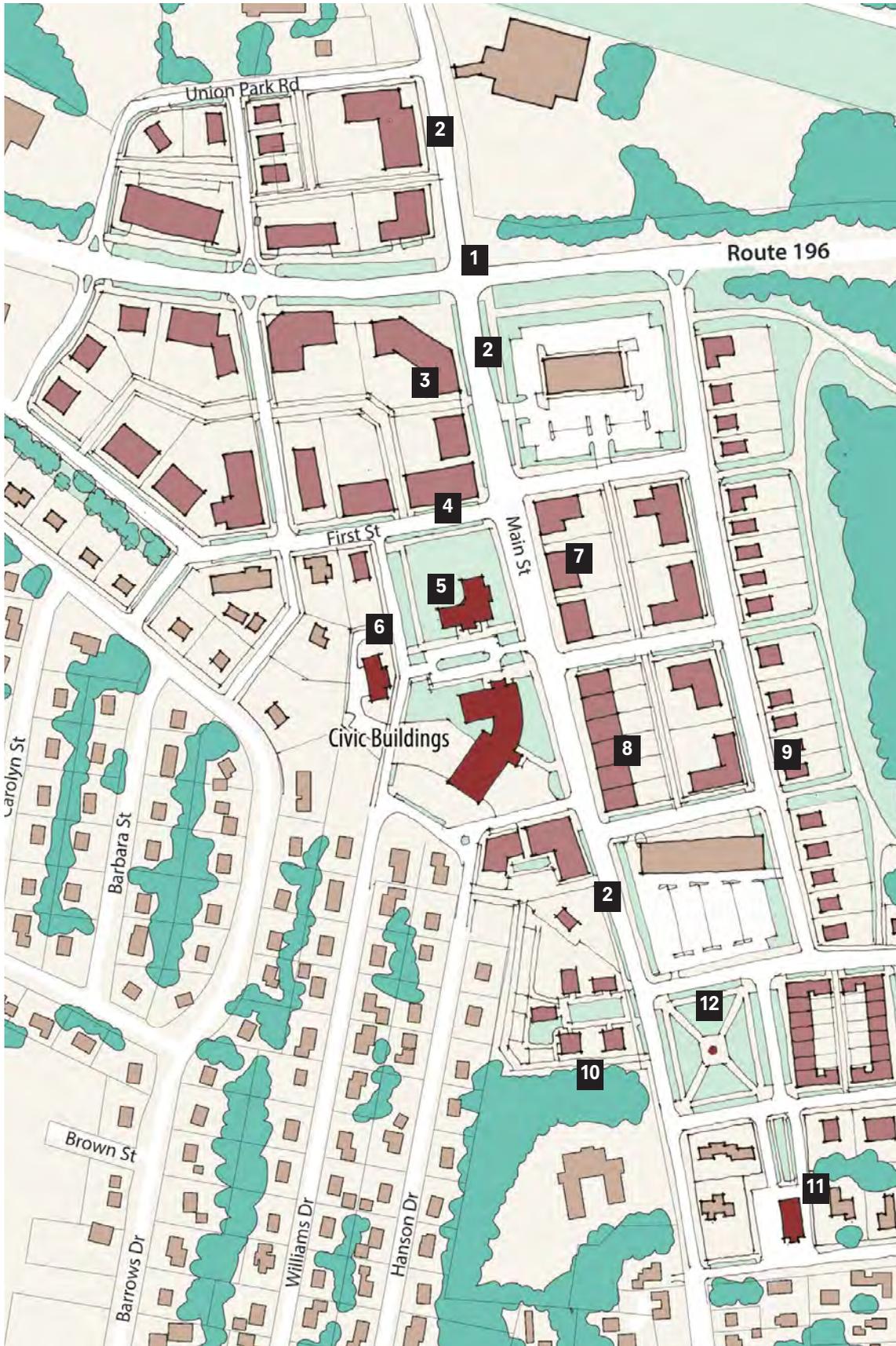
Future Neighborhood Centers

The structure of a neighborhood center reinforces compact, walkable environments, as the time it takes a pedestrian to walk from the edge to the center is approximately 5 minutes. This 5-minute walk area is known interchangeably as a pedestrian shed or a walkshed.



Pedestrian Shed
5 Minute Walk

Upper Village



The area surrounding Topsham’s municipal complex has an opportunity to transform, over time, into a true village center with walkable streets that support shopping, outdoor dining, cultural programming and social connectivity. Currently there is an opportunity for a large commercial property on Main Street to redevelop and continue to set the pace for redevelopment that the new Town Hall has accomplished.

This plan is aspirational and requires multiple property owners to work collaboratively with the Town to achieve.

1 FIX INTERSECTION

A redesign of this intersection should anticipate the need for pedestrians and bicyclists to safely cross the street. The design should prioritize creating the shortest possible crossing distances to benefit children and elders who are trying to access schools, local businesses, jobs, and neighborhood amenities.

2 SLOW MAIN STREET

Main Street should be restriped with narrow 10 ft travel lanes and on-street parking to help slow vehicular travel speeds, provide critical “teaser” on-street parking, and improve the economic viability of businesses along the corridor. Slowing Main Street will support safer conditions at the school entrance and improve walking conditions for children.

3 INFILL DEVELOPMENT

New mixed-use buildings with primarily office space and some support services might be most feasible along 196 and Main Street Main. New buildings should be located close together with minimal side setbacks and parking located behind buildings.

4 REALIGN MONUMENT PLACE

Monument Place is designed as a curvilinear road that promotes high travel speeds and reduces the number of developable lots. By rebuilding the segment of this road closest to the core of the Upper Village, significant redevelopment can occur in a manner that supports a more vibrant and complete neighborhood center.

5 TOWN HALL IN A GREEN

The Upper Village currently serves as the civic center of Topsham, with the Town Hall, Police and Fire Stations, and Post Office all located within this central area. The Town Hall could be strengthened as the center of both civic and community life by consolidating parking at the rear of the site and allowing the area around Town Hall itself to function as a civic space that supports the community functions within the building.

6 NEW POST OFFICE

The reorganized civic green around Town Hall is further defined by a new civic building, potentially a relocated post office, that anchors the western side of the green.

7 NEW MIXED-USE OPPORTUNITIES

New mixed-used buildings along Main Street.

8 RESIDENTIAL INFILL

Rowhouses fronting onto new green.

9 NEW ROAD AND HOUSING

A new road is added parallel to Main Street, opening up an opportunity for additional housing within walking distance of Upper Village amenities.

10 COTTAGE COURTS

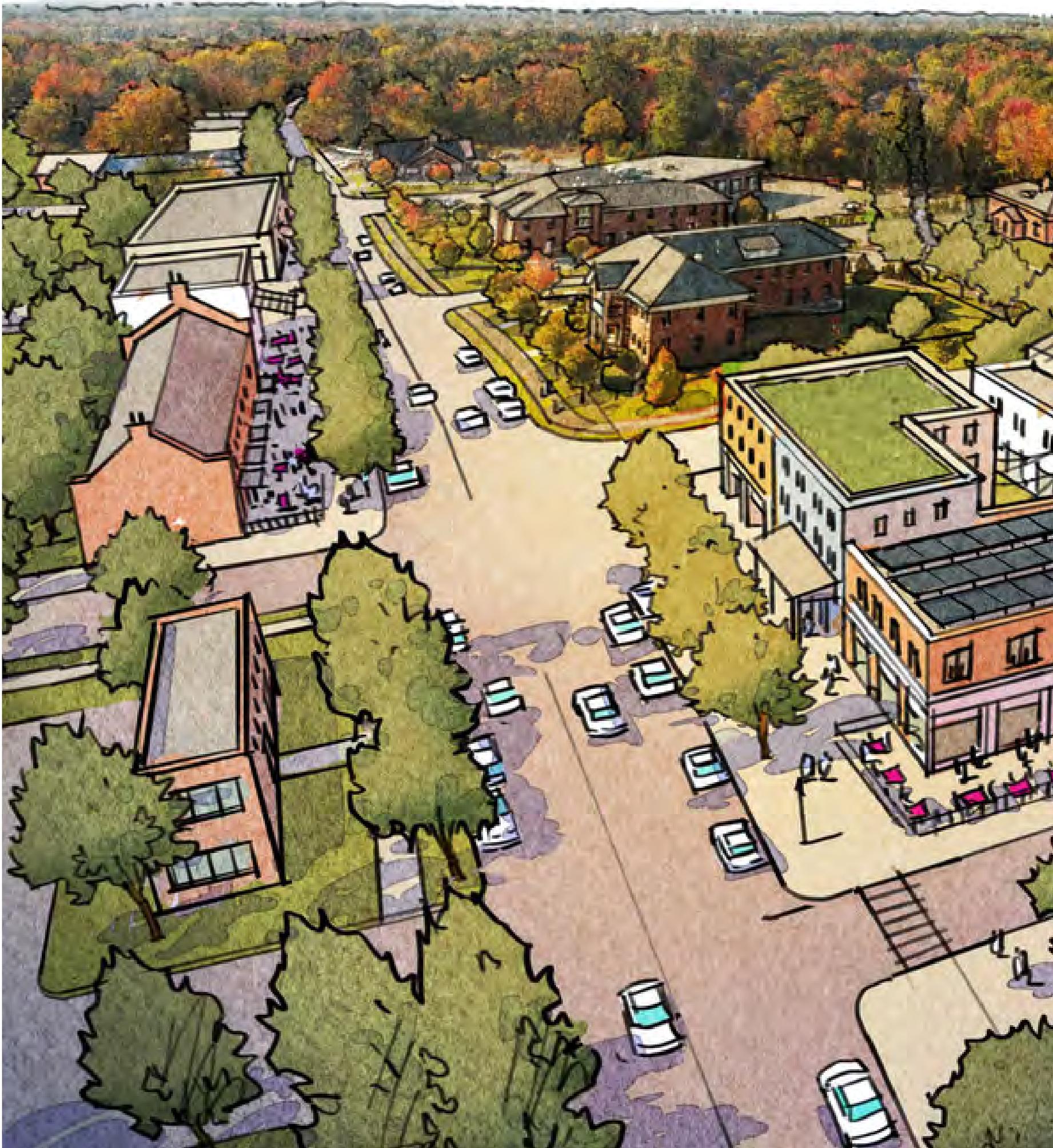
A new cottage court is shown, demonstrating how this development typology can be integrated into the village and support more housing within a walkable area.

11 GRANGE AND NEW COMMON

The existing Grange hall is integrated with new civic yard that connects with a new Upper Village common.

NEW TOWN PARK

12 Formalize a public space to support and serve residential neighborhoods.





View of Main Street looking south, toward the Municipal Complex (right).

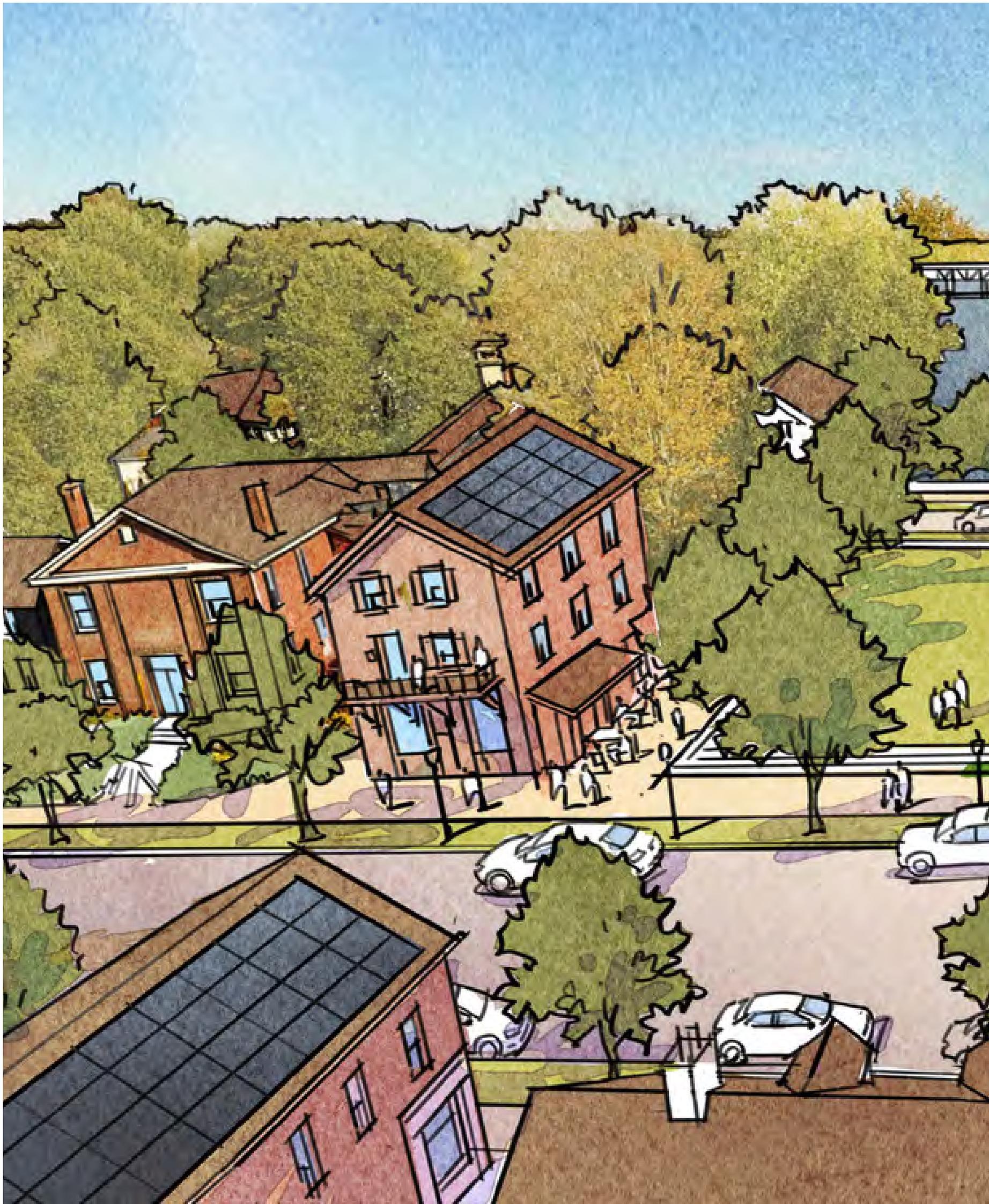


Lower Village



This conceptual plan identifies opportunities to strengthen the Lower Village by identifying strategic locations for new buildings to be added. Buildings can come forward to the street on sites currently occupied by surface parking to create an attractive mixed use neighborhood shopping district. A much desired village park with waterfront views to the Androscoggin River can be created through partnerships with area landowners to realign a portion of Green Street. This conceptual plan is aspirational and requires collaboration by many people to move ideas to implementation.

- 1** A CIVIC GATEWAY TO THE LOWER VILLAGE
There is a unique opportunity to carve out a new civic common in Topsham through a creative land deal. This undeveloped site is currently located on private property. By making a land trade and shifting the location of the street to meet Main Street at a right angle, a civic green can be created in front of the church, providing for another new traditional gathering space within the community.
- 2** SLOW MAIN STREET
Main Street is currently uncomfortable for walking and biking, and also is impacted by traffic congestion during peak travel periods. Main Street can be improved for all users by considering a slow flow strategy that improves the efficiency of vehicular flow while also improving the safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. Improvements could include narrowing travel lanes to slow traffic, which does not impact capacity. The extra space that is created could be used for on-street parallel parking to further slow vehicular speed and provide more efficient parking opportunities. Traffic lights should also be replaced with 2- or 4-way stops to improve pedestrian safety and reduce vehicular speeds through intersections.
- 3** MORE VILLAGE IN THE VILLAGE
The Lower Village is a loved place within Topsham. During the public process, people indicated that they would like to see additional housing and business within the village. New development should be done in a similar scale and character as the existing fabric.
- 4** REALIGN GREEN STREET
Elevated crosswalks should be considered for the crosswalks that access new consolidated parking and to allow for an easy pedestrian shopping experience critical to Main Street retail vitality.
- 5** DELIVERING THE TOPSHAM GREEN
The Town of Topsham has been discussing for years how to create a town common in the Lower Village. From the feedback at multiple public workshops and presentations over the past few years, interest in, and support for, both a Lower Village waterfront park and a riverside trail is very strong. This is not surprising since a waterfront park in this area has been identified as a goal in the Town's planning efforts going back to the mid 1990s. The creation of a waterfront park, together with related improvements in traffic flow and access/safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and the extension of trail networks, would be the same kind of bold project with very important economic and community development benefits for Topsham. The park, new waterfront overlook, and the enlarged trail networks are community development amenities that can attract both new residents, new businesses, and more visitors to the Lower Village.
- 6** NEW COMMERCIAL BUILDING
The reorganized civic green can be anchored by a new restaurant or other active commercial use that takes advantage of the river views and pulls people into and through the new green.
- 7** EXPAND VIEWS TO THE RIVER
Currently, Main Street narrows as it passes over Granny Hole. This infrastructure should be reconstructed to include wider sidewalks to enhance and support the street's value as a retail, business, and civic center within the community. This also allows an opportunity to open up views of the Androscoggin River.
- 8** CONSOLIDATE AND SHARE PARKING
Topsham has an opportunity to rebalance its supply of parking, with a more strategic park-once approach that can open up more land for value-generating buildings. By further expanding this parking lot and supporting a high-quality pedestrian environment, more people will be willing to park in this convenient lot and walk to one or more nearby destinations. This expanded parking lot makes it feasible to redevelop surface lots with more village-supportive buildings that add to the energy and commercial success of the Lower Village. Work with landowners to open lots up for parking during non-peak business hours.
- 9** HIGHER INTENSITY MIXED-USE INFILL
Topsham has an opportunity to redevelop some of its existing surface lots along Main Street into larger scale mixed-use buildings that can support the growing energy within the mill complex.
- 10** PRIORITIZE PEDESTRIANS
Main Street is narrowed immediately upon entering the Lower Village to help improve pedestrian comfort.
- 11** ACCESS TO THE WATER
New civic space is added along the River to further connect people with the water.





Topsham Fair Mall

The visioning for the east side of I-295 includes the Topsham Fair Mall area and the Crooker Construction property. These areas are included as catalyst sites to demonstrate how Town visioning and planning may assist any future development or redevelopment of these areas. As part of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, a master plan for the east side of I-295 was called for, but has yet to be achieved. This planning effort provides a community vision for these districts which anticipates future growth of this area. These visions do not advocate any particular business interest, they were developed based upon community input, and are intended to inform future town planning efforts.



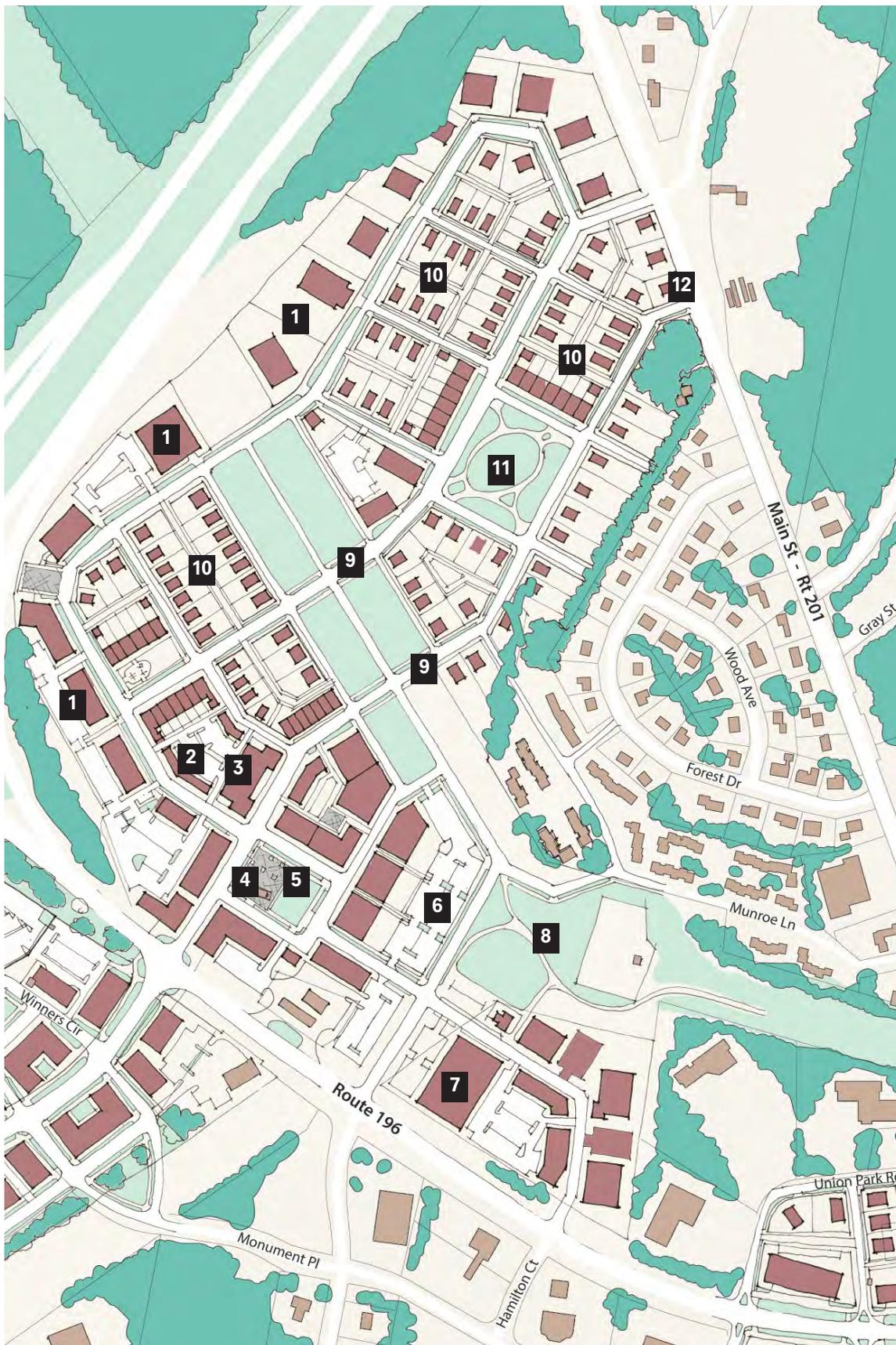
The Topsham Fair Mall area is comprised of multiple parcels and property owners. There may be a time when the changing retail market presents an opportunity for property owners to pursue redevelopment that responds to emerging retail and lifestyle trends. This illustrative plan shows how the mall site can begin to incrementally create a more mixed-use and active environment within Topsham. New streets and blocks allow the mall to accommodate a park-once strategy, where people can safely and comfortably walk and bike to multiple destinations.

- 1** A NEW MAIN STREET
Over time, the mall property could be incrementally converted to main street buildings, with other national tenants moving into floors of new mixed-use buildings. This area of town could continue to allow drive-throughs, designed in a way to allow for safe streets for walking and biking, by locating drive-through windows to the back of buildings.
- 2** BUILD A PARKING GARAGE
A parking garage can be constructed to create shared central parking that will allow for the infill and redevelopment of surface lots and the redevelopment of a larger grocery store (see facing page). The garage could also house a large national big box tenant on the ground floor. The construction of the facility could involve a public / private partnership.
- 3** EXPAND GROCERY STORE
Once a large central parking garage is constructed, the existing grocery store could construct a new expanded building on this site while remaining open.
- 4** REPLACE EXISTING GROCERY STORE
Once a large central parking garage is constructed, a new grocery store could be constructed as part of a multi-floor building, with office or residential above.
- 5** NEW SQUARE
Create a new square with terminating views to a monument located at the center the plaza. Include groupings of canopy trees to provide shade.
- 6** MARKET PAVILION
Market pavilion provides covered seating for shows.
- 7** OUTDOOR MUSIC
Program new public space with outdoor arts and cultural events.
- 8** PEDESTRIAN STREET
Idea of pedestrian-only street with two sided restaurant building facing onto a court, narrow street or mews.
- 9** FLEXIBLE PUBLIC SPACE
Outside ice skating rink and hot chocolate hut in winter and skate park and ice cream stand in summer.
- 10** EXPAND MEDICAL USES
Additional medical offices can be targeted for the back of the site, to build on the current momentum and potential for additional medical users.
- 11** MALL ACCESS ROAD
The existing mall access street becomes a secondary street, with opportunity to infill over time.
- 12** NEW ROAD
A new street designed as parkway that faces the utility corridor, which is landscaped as a park. Buildings could front onto this improved space, and water could drain toward utility corridor.

GROCERY STORE EXPANSION AND NEW PARKING GARAGE

The plan shows how the existing grocery store can expand its 50,000 sf operation by building a new 70,000 sf store on its existing property, while remaining open. Step 1 is to build an inexpensive, parking structure to the east of the existing store, fronting on Route 196 (see **2** on the keyed map). The southern facade of the garage should be lined with retail, facing onto the new parking plaza, which will provide handicap and teaser parking adjacent to the new store's main entrance. Step 2 is to build the new store in the existing surface parking lot (see **3** on the keyed map). The new building could have office or residential above, with glass facades facing both the existing Topsham Fair Mall Road and the new street. Step 3 involves replacing the old grocery store with a new movie theater or other mixed-use building (see **4** on the keyed map) that could open up onto a new main square located to the west. All the parking for the theater and incremental conversion of the mall can be handled in the parking garage.

Crooker District



The Crooker District illustrative plan reimagines how the site could be transformed in the future over many years to accommodate new light industrial, commercial, and residential development. This plan describes how new streets arranged to create neighborhood blocks can provide a framework for a walkable, mixed use district for living, working and playing. The plan is designed to foster a strong neighborhood identity, with generously wide sidewalks inviting people to stroll, linger, and enjoy outdoor dining. A new town square at the center of the neighborhood provides desired outdoor park space that could be used for summer concerts and movies, live performances and social gathering.

This is a concept drawing only. As with the other examples of catalyst sites, before new development can happen, private landowners would first bring forward detailed site drawings for a review and public hearing process at the Planning Board.

- 1** ARTISAN + INDUSTRIAL SPACE
The plan includes 10,000 square foot spaces for artisan industrial activities, including breweries, coffee roasters, distilleries, and other value-added small-scale production to address regional shortage of these spaces within a walkable urban fabric, where other adjacent uses can benefit from the proximity to these destination businesses. Clean industry or commercial businesses with outdoor storage yards and compatible with highway frontage can be accommodated as well.
- 2** LINER ARTIST STUDIOS
The plan shows how small, inexpensive artist or retail liner buildings can be used to screen a parking lot.
- 3** MID-MARKET FLAG HOTEL
The Crooker District is positioned to attract a hotel that can serve as an anchor for a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood within Topsham.
- 4** PUBLIC ART
Communities across the country have celebrated their local industrial heritage by preserving towers, grain silos, and other features that provide an interesting landmark or art piece. For example, Grandville Island in British Columbia celebrates its industrial past through the creation of public art on its silos.
- 5** PUBLIC PLAZA
The plan includes an activated plaza and green embedded within the heart of the Crooker District to support commercial and social activities.
- 6** SHARED PARKING
To gain the most value from the District, parking needs to be carefully managed. Shared parking that is well screened from the street can ensure convenient parking in the right location, without detracting from the appeal of walking through the District. Parking courts, surfaced with pavers that can serve as function space or as surface parking, should be incorporated.
- 7** ACTIVE INDOOR USES
During the public process, the community overwhelmingly supported additional indoor recreational opportunities. The plan includes several sites large enough to accommodate a bowling alley, climbing gym, skating rink, and other large-footprint uses that can benefit from being embedded within a neighborhood environment.
- 8** LINEAR GREENWAY
A linear greenway connection is pulled into the site under the existing power lines, and is imagined as a landscaped meadow. A pavilion head house for the trail system is included.
- 9** NEW STREET NETWORK
The plan shows two new street connections between 196 and 201 to provide relief from the existing large intersection of 196 and Main Street. These new connector streets should be relatively narrow and designed for speeds of 25 MPH. Secondary streets should be narrow and designed for speeds less than 20 MPH. All streets follow a cardinal direction and use segmented bends to maximize buildable lots. Curvilinear highway geometries that promote speeding should be avoided.
- 10** A RANGE OF HOUSING OPTIONS
The Crooker District can provide both market rate and affordable housing options, including mid-rise housing, live-works, cottages, and single-family homes. These new product types would be unique in the market, providing a range of new-construction housing within a walkable neighborhood.
- 11** NEIGHBORHOOD PARK
The plan shows a neighborhood park that includes a playground and gathering space for adjacent neighborhoods. This and other civic space types will help maintain a balance between economic activity and civic life that is critical to authentic-feeling neighborhoods.
- 12** COMPATIBILITY WITH NEIGHBORHOODS
The Crooker site should be developed in a manner that respects the context of existing neighborhoods, in terms of scale and intensity of development.





Regulatory Framework

Dynamic Approach to Planning

The development of the future Conservation, Preservation and Growth map is a multi-faceted exercise in thinking about historical and future development patterns in the context of emerging data trends, regulatory frameworks, environmental resources and community preferences. Comprehensive Planning can be described as the intersection of art and science, absent a fixed formula to suggest how many parts art or how many parts science a Comprehensive Plan should be. At times planning is scientific, illustrated by point data or measurements of built physical form. At other times planning can be about a sense or feeling one gets when standing in a place or walking down a neighborhood street.

During the planning process, the team has delved into a number data sources, information and trends including but not limited to:

- local zoning
- state-enacted regulations
- infrastructure capacity and factors affecting expansion
- conservation land acquisition trends
- housing availability and permitting data.

The team has visited neighborhoods and walked, bicycled and driven down Topsham's streets, and completed an extensive state-required inventory (Part 2 of this plan). This work helps to tell us what factors may be influencing conservation and development. Looking at local data and trends tells us, for example, if land is being conserved purposefully or by happenstance and to what extent the Town can direct the trajectory of growth. Most importantly, this work informs a framework for how development happens, where it happens and who benefits. The culmination of this work – the mapping, analysis, and community conversations – is the Conservation, Preservation and Growth map.

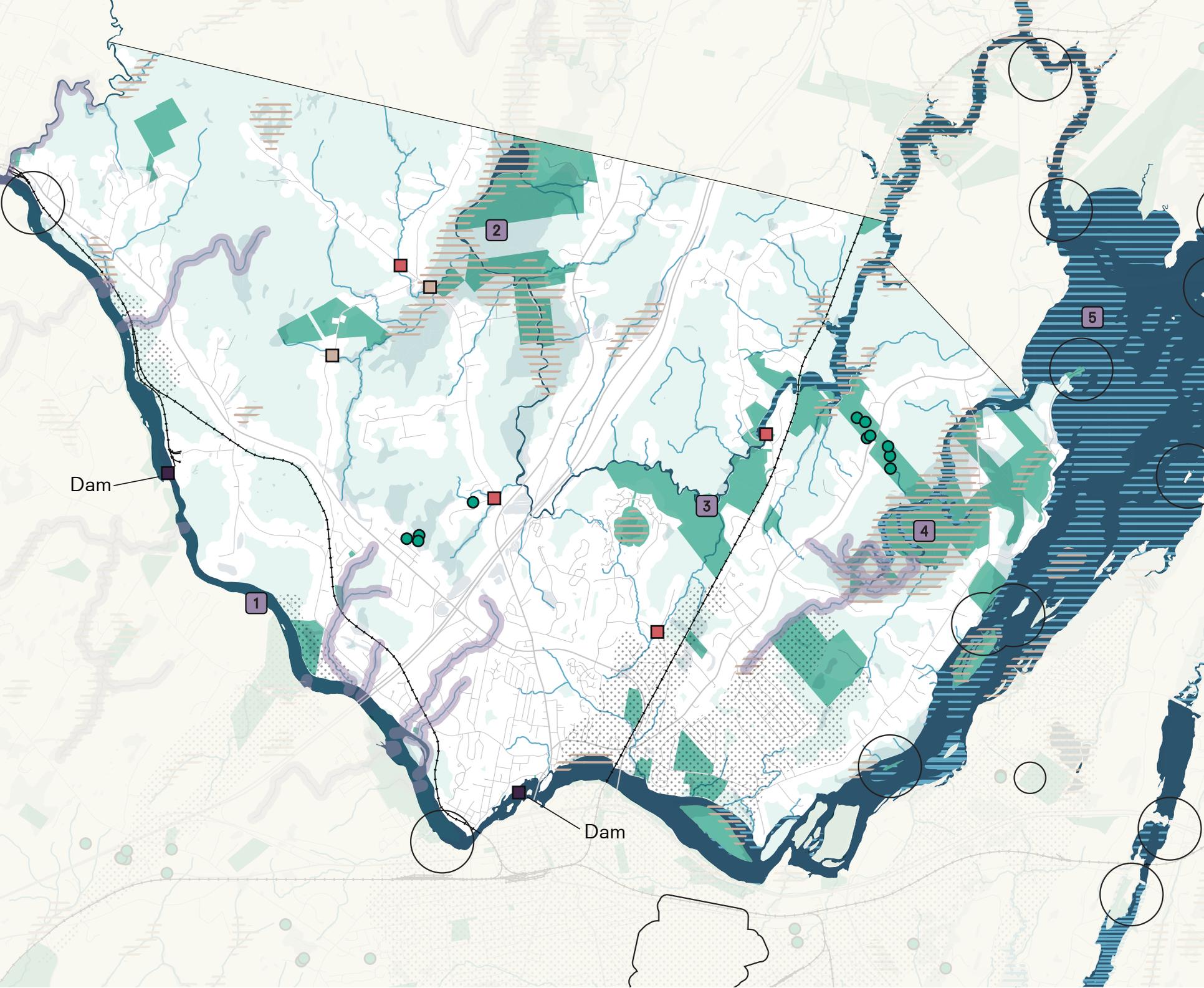
ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

The Environmental Systems map in this chapter visually communicates Topsham's natural, marine, agricultural and forestry assets inventoried in detail in Part 2 of this plan. This map demonstrates that even though the southern section of town is highly developed, several unique ecosystems exist within the Town boundaries.

These include pervasive mixed northern woodlands, freshwater wetlands, and a marine estuary. The mouths of the Androscoggin, Cathance, and Muddy Rivers and Merrymeeting Bay are key ecological resources of this area. Local sections of land at these rivers may be well situated to be conserved for the benefit of the environment and for public enjoyment.

Topsham has several large undeveloped blocks of land which are spread out across the northern half of the community into neighboring Bowdoin and Bowdoinham. The Natural Areas Plan of 2010 identified four local focus areas where high value conservation areas are to be prioritized. The four focus areas were determined by combining an evaluation of the areas achieving natural resource and open space functions with the community's relative valuation of those functions. However, the plan also found that a majority of the development which was occurring at the time was in or very close to the four focus areas.

Furthermore, the plan also pointed out that land which was likely to become available for development was also located in these conservation focus areas. Recent mapping efforts conducted by the Town in 2017 and discussions through this planning effort have confirmed that development continues to occur within these focus areas. Although rural development is not outpacing in-town development, the rate of development in rural areas impacts the focus areas identified in the Natural Areas Plan.



Environmental Systems

- 1** Lower Androscoggin River
- 2** Bradley Pond
- 3** Cathance River
- 4** Muddy River
- 5** Merrymeeting Bay Estuary

-  Conserved Lands
-  Aquifer Protection
-  Inland Water/Waterfowl Habitat
-  Tidal Water/Waterfowl Habitat
-  Uninterrupted (Core) Habitat
-  Wetland
-  Open Water
-  Trout Habitat
-  Dam
-  Fish Barrier
-  Potential Fish Barrier
-  Vernal Pool
-  Threatened or Endangered Species, Known Habitat



Nancy Greindl.

CONFIRMING CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

During the public design planning process, residents were guided through a hands-on workshop to identify on maps all the places people felt should be prioritized for protection and places where people felt comfortable seeing additional growth and development. Participants worked with a base map including wetlands, water bodies, current parcels of land classified as conservation and enrolled in agricultural or tree growth tax programs, and areas zoned for Resource Protection and Shoreland Zoning. The priority habitat matrix developed as part of the Natural Areas Plan of 2010 was also available for use. This mapping exercise confirms that the 2010 Natural Resources Plan goals for protection and expansion of farming, forestry, conservation and recreation in the four focus areas are still a priority today.

LOCAL AND STATE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS

The development of land is subject to a number of local and state regulations that encourage protection of natural resources and incentivize growth in areas currently served with sewer and water infrastructure. In addition to mandatory state Shoreland Zoning, Topsham adopted a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) in 2016 in conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Topsham created a "designated development area" where federal and state vernal pool regulations undergo a separate permitting requirement with option to choose payment of a mitigation impact fee to avoid vernal pool permitting within this designated area. The Vernal Pools Overlay District, adopted in 2016, allows for development in areas that are state or federally regulated due to their inclusion of vernal pool locations. The ordinance benefits the environment and Topsham's growth, as it clarifies development potential of a property where vernal pools are located. This recently adopted "designated development area" represents a more compact, limited area than the Designated Growth Area established in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan.

INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT GROWTH

Today, sewer and water infrastructure currently serves the areas where Topsham residents have said they are comfortable with new growth happening. Systems do not serve the rural fringe areas where the preservation of rural lands for conservation, recreation and active farming and forestry is preferred. In the suburban fringe and rural areas of town, development is constrained to places with suitable soils for individual septic disposal systems and potable water from private wells. The presence of sewer and water infrastructure enables development to occur.

For the 2007 Comprehensive Plan a much larger Designated Growth Area encompassing the entire western portion of Route 196 south of Topsham Fair Mall was envisioned. In recent years the Town's Select Board, with assistance by Topsham Development Inc (TDI), has considered the costs associated with expansion of infrastructure balanced against the value of different land use development patterns. Value per acre analysis supports leadership decisions to limit town-funded infrastructure expansion outward in favor of directing investment to improve quality of place for existing neighborhoods and commercial centers.

However, this planning process identified a continued desire to see additional growth in select and discrete areas not served today by sewer and water, including business growth at existing industrial sites off Route 196 west in the Pejepscot Village area. Part of this area near Pejepscot Village between River Road, Route 196 and the Androscoggin River is zoned commercial and industrial, but water lines exist only along River Road, and the sewer line stops short at Topsham Fair Mall.

Any kind of redevelopment of the Crooker Site adjacent to I-295/Route 196 and areas in the Upper Village and School Campus areas would benefit from public sewer expansion. These areas are within the sewer expansion boundary (maximum 2 mile radius of Route 201 and Route 24) and the sewer and water systems have the capacity to accept additional users.

Water infrastructure currently extends north of the Connector, serving the school campus, the annex, and a portion of Highland Green, and extends through the Crooker site at Topsham Fair Mall Road. Sewer serves housing on the west side of Route 201, annex housing (private sewer connected to public), Toyota, NAPA, Precast Concrete Products of Maine, and schools. Private sewer serves Highland Green and connects to the public sewer system. With sewer and water, land use patterns can be tighter and denser, translating to a walkable urban or village character or hamlet. Without sewer, lot sizes cannot be reduced beyond 20,000 square feet or roughly half an acre. Half acre lots result in low density suburban sprawl, and do not allow walkable, mixed use neighborhoods to emerge.

ABOUT THE DATA

The Environmental Systems map is comprised of data from a number of sources including the State's Beginning with Habitat data and new data from Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW), though the original source files are the products of various municipal and state agencies, as well as other NGOs.

The Conserved Lands file is a comprehensive demarcation of all land (public and private) under some form of conservation, whether it be an easement, park, or privately owned preserve. Wetlands are derived from the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) and include emergent, forested, estuarine and marine wetland categories together. Aquifer information comes from the Maine Geological Survey, and "open water" is from the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD).

The habitat information - in Topsham's case this means wild brook trout, tidal and inland wading birds and waterfowl, significant vernal pools, and endangered or threatened species - was created by Maine Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife (MDIFW). Uninterrupted Habitat (MDIFW) represents "core habitat areas" which are buffered from impervious surfaces and development, meaning human disruption is scarce to non-existent.

The fish barrier information comes from the Maine Stream Connectivity Work Group's "Stream Habitat Viewer" which catalogs various stream crossings throughout the State. These provide a good idea of what types of barriers might inhibit diadromous, anadromous, and catadromous fish migrations.

A Framework for Conservation, Preservation and Growth

The Conservation, Preservation and Growth Map provides the framework for making future zoning, policy, and investment decisions for the Town of Topsham. Organizing the future map based on sectors and special districts provides a framework for a fine grain regulatory system of character districts, building groups, building types and standards to accomplish conservation, preservation and development goals.

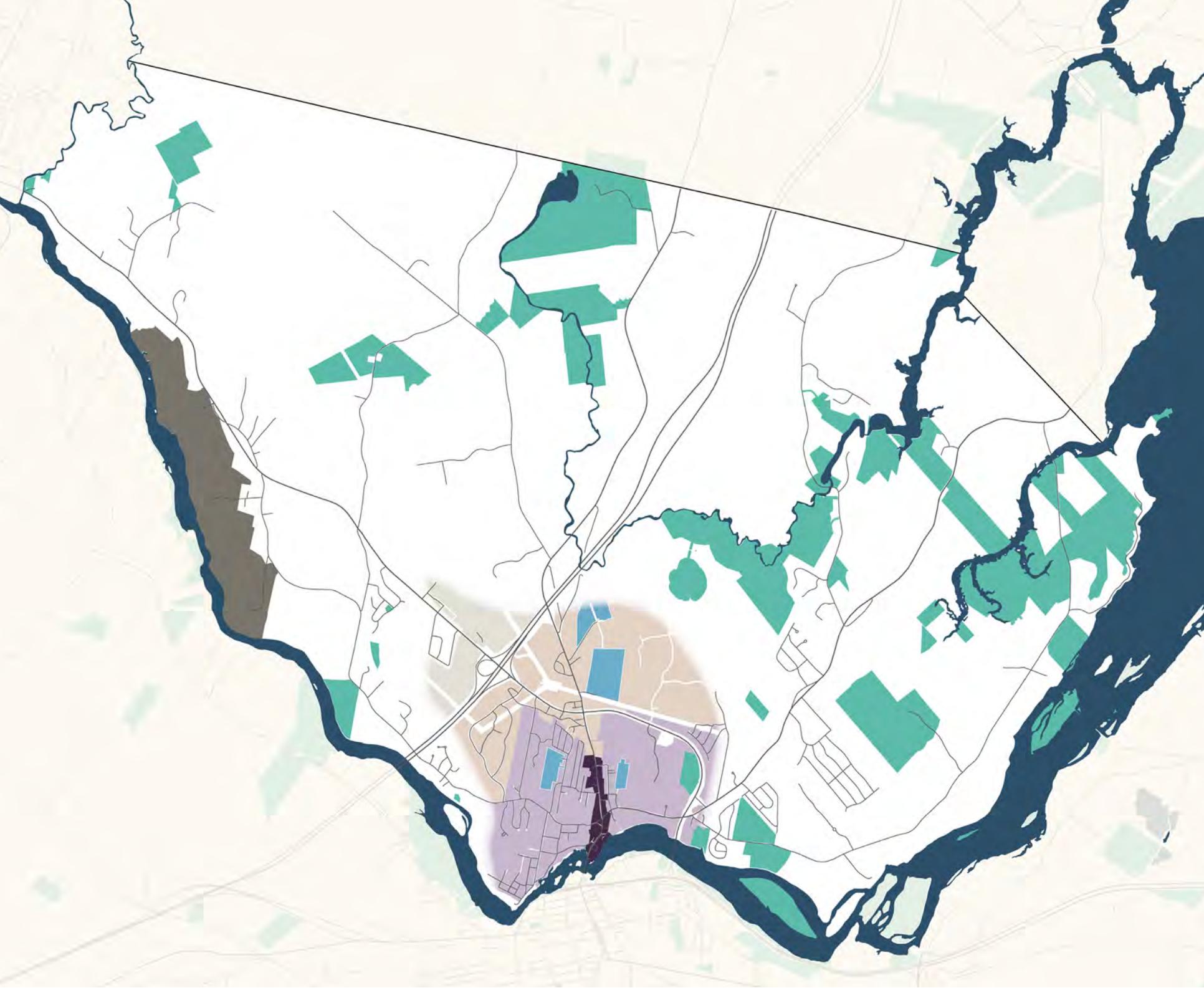
The framework for future conservation, preservation and growth is organized into a series of sectors and special districts. A sector describes the overarching goal for how physical land will be treated into the future. A special district recognizes a discrete area that is highly unique or different from other areas of town. Sectors allow for future zoning efforts to assign new character districts (also called zoning districts) and special districts to regulate growth.

This system of regulation is similar to nesting dolls: the sector sets the overarching goal. Inside the sector could be any number of character districts, establishing specific zoning regulations. Next, inside a character district could be any number of building groups. Building groups, explained in the following pages, become an available zoning tool to accomplish a desired pattern of development based again on the desired goals of each sector.

The sectors on this map are not fixed to parcel lines. They provide a guiding framework for evaluating whether the Town's current zoning districts align with the future goals and aspirations for land in the sectors. The exception is the No Growth sector, which has fixed boundaries on the map. Legal instruments have locked parcels into permanent conservation or preservation based on deeds. In future, a more surgical, lot by lot character district analysis would need to be completed as part of an effort to establish new zoning to implement this Comprehensive Plan.

This plan discontinues the use of the term, "Designated Growth Area". Instead, the plan identifies future land use in a more nuanced system recognizing that all land, excluding that which is permanently conserved, has potential for growth enabled under current zoning district designation and regulations.

The catalyst site drawings prepared during the planning process demonstrate that land within the Intentional Growth sector has the capacity to support a significant amount of new growth and development. The Intentional Growth sector should be the focus of new infrastructure investments to incentivize infill, redevelopment and new growth where some or all services currently exist. Focusing development and investments in the Intentional Growth sector strengthens the ability to have a deliberately rural Topsham. Mapping land as Limited Growth does not alone result in preservation of rural character where the zoning may have already granted significant development rights in the form of 1 and 2 acre lot minimums.



Conservation, Preservation, and Growth

-  Conservation and Preservation
-  Rural - Suburban Lands
-  Neighborhood Preservation
-  Neighborhood Enhancement
-  Neighborhood Transformation
-  Industrial Special District
-  School Special District
-  Route 196 Special District



CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION - **NO GROWTH SECTOR**

This sector comprises all parcels of land that have been permanently protected for conservation, recreation and open space, agricultural or forestry purposes. While the sector is identified as “No Growth”, this plan recognizes that legal instruments such as deeds, easements, covenants and/or agreements may contain parcel-specific permissions or restrictions governing the use or development of the subject property. As development rights are purchased, land is acquired or farm preservation easements are secured, those lands would ultimately become part of the No Growth sector.



RURAL - SUBURBAN LANDS - **LIMITED GROWTH SECTOR**

In order to realize the goals of the 2010 Natural Areas Plan and this Comprehensive Plan, land in the “Limited Growth” sector should be prioritized for lower density, rural compatible development in order to strengthen working farms, forests and rural-based business economies, and to preserve rural character.

Limited growth recognizes that the Town’s current zoning ordinance permits landowners rights to build residential housing on 1 and 2-acre lots. This plan suggests adopting zoning regulations to incentivize new housing to organize in an intentionally rural-compatible pattern as opposed to developing in a conventional suburban sprawl pattern. Examples of rural-compatible patterns include hamlets or crossroads building groups, described in further detail later on in this chapter. Further, this plan recognizes that rural and land-based businesses may continue to grow, and performance standards may need to be evaluated as part of future zoning amendments to ensure protection of natural resources, and compatibility with working farms and existing residential neighborhoods.



NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION - **INTENTIONAL GROWTH SECTOR**

Existing places identified for continued protection of historic structures include the historic neighborhoods surrounding the Lower Village Main Street. Ideas expressed about the future use and potential for development at the Topsham Fairgrounds were mixed and broad, ranging from creating a regionally-significant agricultural food hub to basic ongoing maintenance and some expanded community programming, but making no substantial change, keeping the fairgrounds as-is.



NEIGHBORHOOD ENHANCEMENT - **INTENTIONAL GROWTH SECTOR**

This sector is assigned to the Lower Village Main Street, recognizing that the existing character of Lower Village is historical in its layout of streets and blocks, mix of historical buildings and contemporary buildings. This sector has the highest proportion of mixed uses in Topsham and represents the most identifiable downtown “Main Street” condition. New growth should enhance the Lower Village through sensitive rehabilitation of buildings, carefully designed and placed new buildings, and public space improvements (streets, sidewalks, parks). Development should support town goals of creating a walkable, mixed use Main Street district.



NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSFORMATION - INTENTIONAL GROWTH SECTOR

Built places identified for transformation through infill, expansion and redevelopment include the area around the Municipal Complex and Upper Village, where a walkable, mixed use Main Street-type character is desired to take shape over time. Sites around Topsham Fair Mall Road and the Crooker Site were identified as opportunities for long-term transformation, including the establishment of new, walkable streets and blocks with a mix of land uses and businesses. This area of Topsham will require the most focused zoning work to accomplish transformation.



INDUSTRIAL SPECIAL DISTRICT

This district outlines the existing industrial zone, encompassing clusters of industry and businesses along the Androscoggin River off Route 196. This area should be zoned and regulated as special districts to reflect the uniqueness of the land use activity, and the intent for the future growth or transformation that may be desired for that specific area. Future zoning efforts should assess and, if necessary, amend performance standards to address potential impacts of industry on adjacent land or neighborhoods.



SCHOOL SPECIAL DISTRICT

The school special district identifies land use, building and site conditions that are unique only to the function of a school. Zoning regulations may permit a condition that would otherwise not be permitted in the surrounding neighborhood. An example may be a three story school building that is larger in height and scale than would be found in the surrounding neighborhood.



ROUTE 196 SPECIAL DISTRICT

This district represents land along the 196 corridor that is commercially zoned to permit development but has a number of original residential houses, a mix of businesses and established residential neighborhoods. Highway conditions are negatively impacting quality of residential living for people with houses on 196. At the same time, highway conditions are attractive to businesses looking to serve regional customers. Future zoning efforts should require any new commercial development to use land efficiently, provide safe access to 196, respect existing adjacent residential neighborhoods, and not disrupt but enhance the aesthetic integrity of the corridor.

An Introduction to Future Character Districts

Character districts are similar to zoning districts such that each district has a purpose, intent, and set of standards that apply to real property and land within the district. A district may be assigned to preserve or enhance what is already in existence on the ground, or to encourage the transformation of a place through new development activities. Character districts include standards such as use, permitted building types, setbacks, roof pitches and building components, building stories, and massing and scale of buildings. The following are examples of potential character districts that may apply to Topsham. Through future analysis, additional districts may apply to accomplish future land use goals.



CD1 CONSERVATION

Topsham is host and neighbor to a diverse natural landscape with large contiguous blocks of undeveloped land, farms and properties enrolled in the Open Space, Farmland, and Tree Growth current use tax programs. Some properties and water bodies have permanent conservation easements. Land enrolled in the tax programs is not permanently protected from development.

The CD1 Conservation Character district would consist of lands that are under conservation through purchase or by easement only.



CD2 RURAL

Topsham residents expressed a desire to retain the character of its rural areas. There are also some residents who want rights to make a living and work the land in both traditional and nontraditional ways, allowing business that is in character with rural landscapes to develop there.

The CD2 Rural Character districts could consist of rolling pastoral fields and forested lands. Typical buildings include houses, farmhouses, agricultural buildings, and cabins.



CD3-N NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL

Topsham’s Lower Village and Heights neighborhoods are within walking distance to Main Street and the downtown core of Brunswick. There is strong support for protecting the historic architecture and residential character of these neighborhoods. Some of Topsham’s newer neighborhoods may have similar lot dimensions, setbacks, and predominantly residential character.

The CD3-N Neighborhood Residential district would be characterized by low-to medium-density residential areas, possibly adjacent to a higher density residential neighborhood. This district has narrow, interconnected streets and long, irregular blocks, with a mix of small and large homes on large lots. Many of the lots have generous side yards and/or rear yards, and accessory barns and carriage houses connected to the principal house and sometimes detached. In this district, accessory dwelling units should be allowed. Plantings include street trees or naturalistic vegetation.



CD4 VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD

The CD4 Village Neighborhood district could apply to areas of Topsham identified for intentional growth and development to enable new business, strengthen local economy, provide a variety of housing types, and support Main Street and adjacent residential neighborhoods. A character-based approach will be integral to helping this district revitalize and thrive, and do so in a manner that is compatible with Topsham’s historic character.

The CD4 Village Neighborhood district consists of a wide variety of building types within which a variety of uses and activities can occur. Building types include a range of housing types, addressing the need for missing-middle housing, including apartment buildings, stacked flats, single family homes, duplexes, live/works, and row houses. Setbacks and landscaping are variable. Streets may or may not have curbs and sidewalks, with medium-sized blocks.



CD3-V VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL

The Village Residential district is similar to the Neighborhood Residential district in that it has intact historic fabric, exemplary architecture, and is primarily single family residential in use and character.

The CD3-V Village Residential district has narrow, interconnected streets with a mix of small and large residential houses with barns and carriage houses connected to the principal house and sometimes detached. Lots in this district are generally smaller, with shallower lot depths, narrower lot widths, and shallower setbacks, giving this district a more dense character than the adjacent neighborhood district.



CD5 VILLAGE CENTER DISTRICT

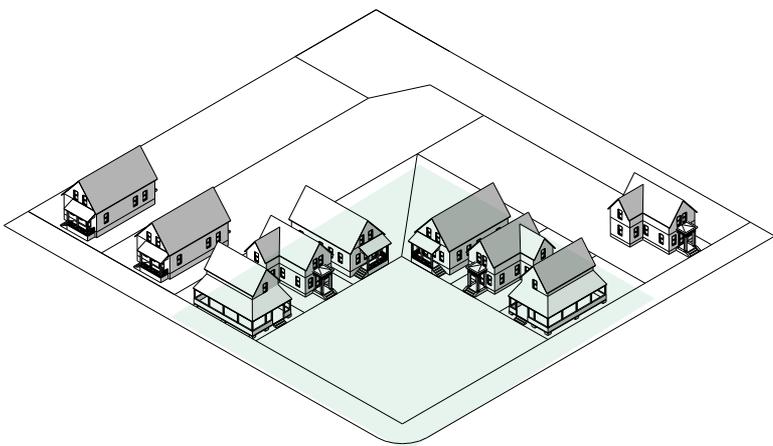
Topsham’s Lower Village contains a handful of remaining historic commercial and civic buildings. This area is viewed by many as the heart of the community and the place where residents feel new growth should occur. Residents support transforming the street and adjacent properties into a highly walkable, downtown environment.

The CD5 Village Center district consists of higher density mixed use buildings that accommodates retail, offices, row houses, and apartments. It has a tight network of streets designed to accommodate all modes of travel, with wide sidewalks to encourage active ground-floor uses such as restaurants and cafes, steady street tree planting, on-street parking and buildings set close to the sidewalks. This district would be the most dense of all character districts, with high permitted lot coverages, greatest number of stories and highest percentage of build out of lots. Buildings may or may not have off-street parking located behind buildings.

An Introduction to Building Groups

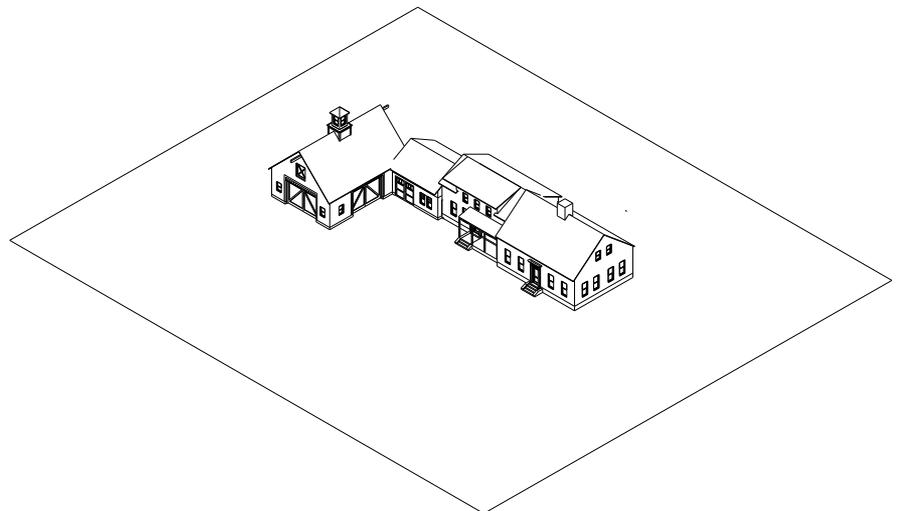
A building group describes an arrangement of building types in relationship to each other, and to existing streets and landscapes. For the purpose of informing future character-based zoning efforts, the team has provided examples of building groups that could be permitted in certain sectors to accomplish the goals of conservation, preservation and growth set forth in this plan.

Building groups can provide a zoning mechanism to accomplish preservation or enhancement of existing community character across all sectors. At the smallest scale, a farmstead building group, for example, may include a series of connected buildings with one or more residential dwelling units inside and perhaps a business activity, mimicking the traditional rural small town Maine “big house, little house, back house barn” form. At the larger scale, the mixed use hamlet has many new dwellings oriented in a traditional, connected street pattern on two sides of an existing street. Narrow but deep lots, and houses sitting up close to the street creates a spatial relationship of buildings that reads as a traditional New England neighborhood, yet the diversity of lot sizes allows rural activities to be supported. The following diagrams are examples of building groups.



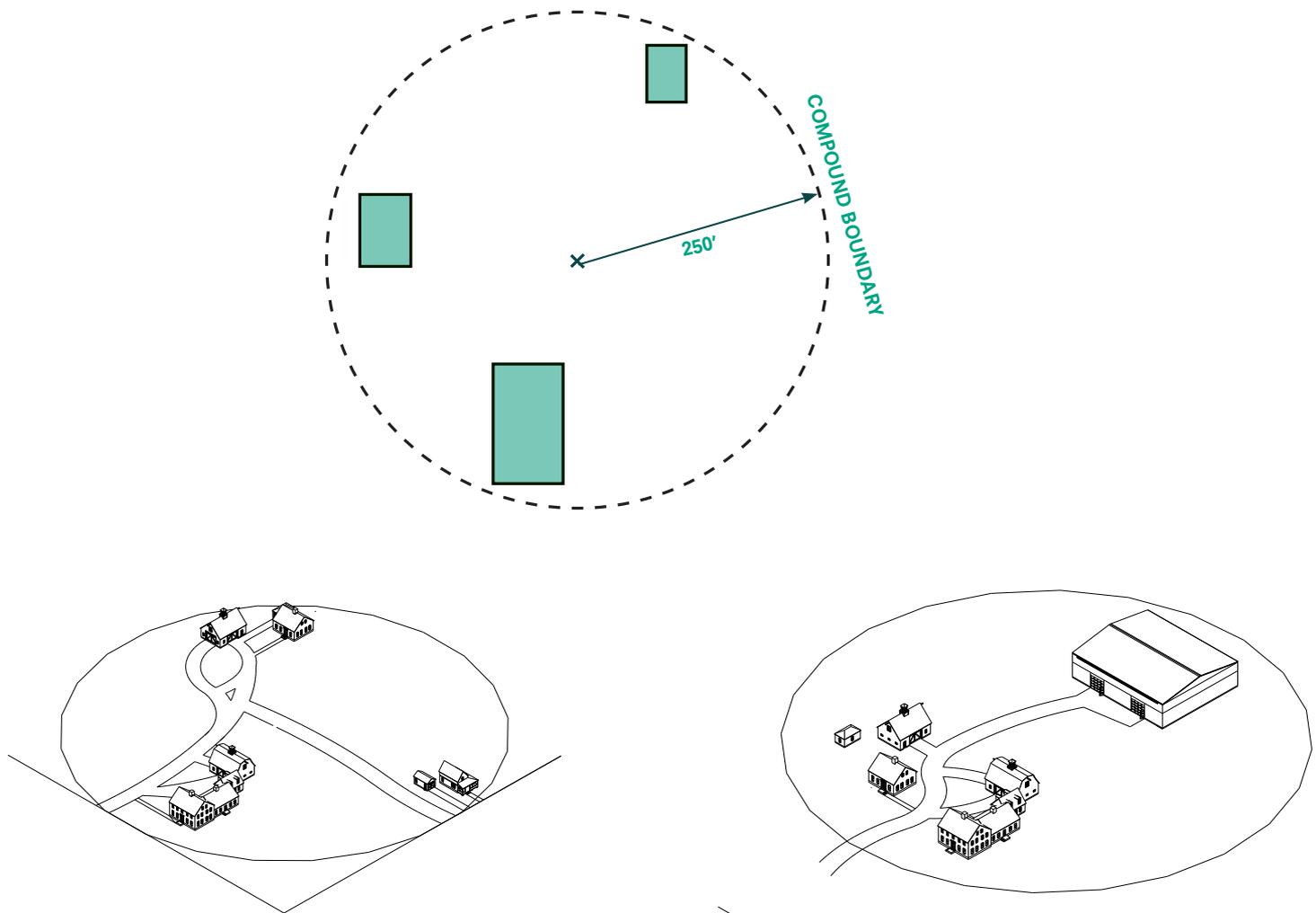
MULTI-UNIT COURT

The arrangement of a single building type, such as a cottage or bungalow, around a central common courtyard space to promote greater density what might otherwise be permitted in the character district it is located in. Multi-unit courts are often referred to as pocket neighborhoods.



CONNECTED FARM

A connected farm describes a building type comprised of multiple elements, based on the common building tradition of big house, little house, back house, and barn.

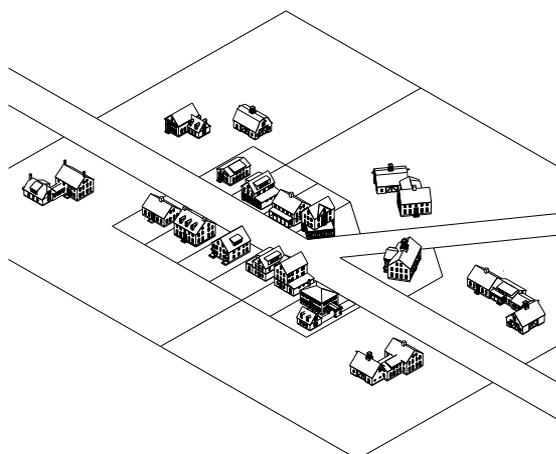


SMALL RURAL COMPOUND

A small rural compound may be located on a medium sized lot, allowing for more dense arrangement of buildings in the character of traditional rural farms. Buildings are grouped together, separated no further than 250' from the center of the compound, to meet residential and working needs. A town may allow a broader range of permitted land use activity than otherwise permitted in the character district it is located if it is part of a small rural compound.

LARGE RURAL COMPOUND

Large rural compounds are located on large lots that allow for the more dense arrangement of buildings in the character of traditional rural farms, with buildings grouped together to efficiently meet residential and working needs. Similar to small rural compounds, all buildings are located within 250' of the center of the compound. A town may allow an even broader range of permitted land use activities than otherwise permitted in the character district it is located if it is part of a large rural compound.



HAMLET

A hamlet building group emulates historic rural settlement patterns found in rural Maine. Hamlets allow new streets and lots to be laid out at greater density and often with narrower lots and smaller lot sizes than are typically permitted in rural suburban character districts.



Implementation

Strategy for Implementation

The implementation of a Comprehensive Plan takes an all-hands-on-deck coordinated effort of staff, committees, elected officials and community service groups working together to move the visions and goals of the plan into action.

The implementation of a Comprehensive Plan takes the work of many people, sometimes working collaboratively, sometimes independently. The heavy lifting of implementation is a shared opportunity amongst the entire Topsham community including elected leaders, staff, local businesses, volunteer committees for profit and non-profit organizations and citizens. The very first official action of the Select Board will be to bring the plan forward for adoption at Town Meeting.

APPOINT IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

The Select Board's second official action to successful implementation is the appointment of an "Implementation Committee" to act as core leaders and champions to oversee implementation activities and provide coordination assistance. The key role of the Implementation Committee is first to be advocates of the plan and second, to ensure all parties are advancing the strategies identified in the plan in the spirit of the visions the Comprehensive Plan sets forth. The composition of the committee should include both people who were intimately involved in the Comprehensive Planning process and representatives from the various town committees and boards who play a direct role in plan implementation.

SET A TIMELINE: USE THE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

The implementation matrix provides an organizational framework for the implementation of each project, policy or initiative identified in the Comprehensive Plan. The matrix can be used by Implementation Committee, staff and all stakeholders who have a hand in moving the plan forward. Each strategy (project, policy, or initiative) identified in the document is listed in the matrix, including where to find the strategy in the plan, who the responsible lead party for implementation should be, who should support the strategy, and the estimated timeframe for when the strategy should be completed. Any project may be advanced ahead of the anticipated timeline if resources or circumstances allow for earlier implementation.

Priority First Step: Adopt the plan. Assign a standing Implementation Committee to:

- continue the momentum of community engagement
- champion the plan
- frame the roles and responsibilities for moving strategies forward.

IMPLEMENT PLAN & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

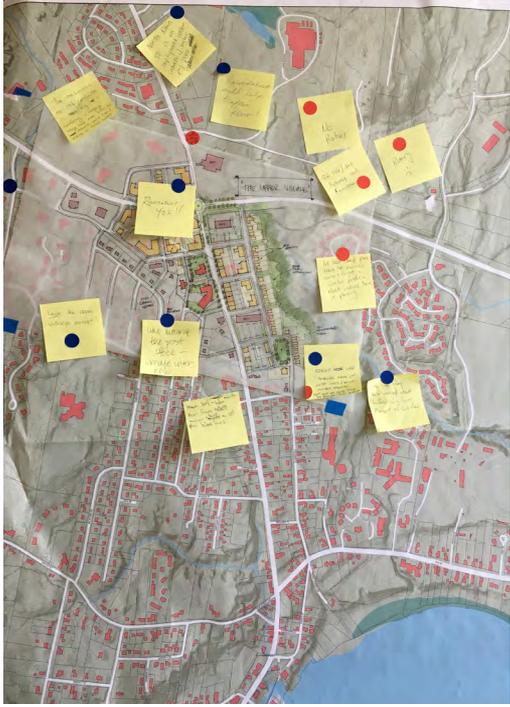
During the life of the plan, the Board and the voters at Town Meeting will play a significant role in implementation by:

- creating and adopting new zoning and land use policies;
- reconsidering previously adopted policies and studies that may conflict with the recommendations of this plan;
- funding any further planning studies or zoning amendments; and,
- allocating resources through the annual budget and the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process.

Outcomes of subsequent plans and studies may, too, need Town Meeting action or endorsement or adoption by the Select Board. The pace of implementation will be set by the willingness of the Select Board and residents to financially support the recommendations of this plan.

ANNUALLY, USE THE CIP PROCESS

The Select Board's next important role in Comprehensive Plan implementation is to continue undertaking good budgetary housekeeping on an annual basis, making sure each year the Town keeps a balanced budget and does not borrow significant sums of money to cover general operating expenses. The Town should continue to use the CIP process to strategize funding for projects, additional



Larry Fitch.

plans and studies or other initiatives that are identified as high value and high priority in the plan. The Town's CIP guides future funding, schedule, and construction of capital improvements so that necessary infrastructure is in place consistent with demand. It distributes expensive projects over time.

EVALUATE PROGRESS OFTEN AND ADJUST TO RESPOND TO CHANGING NEEDS

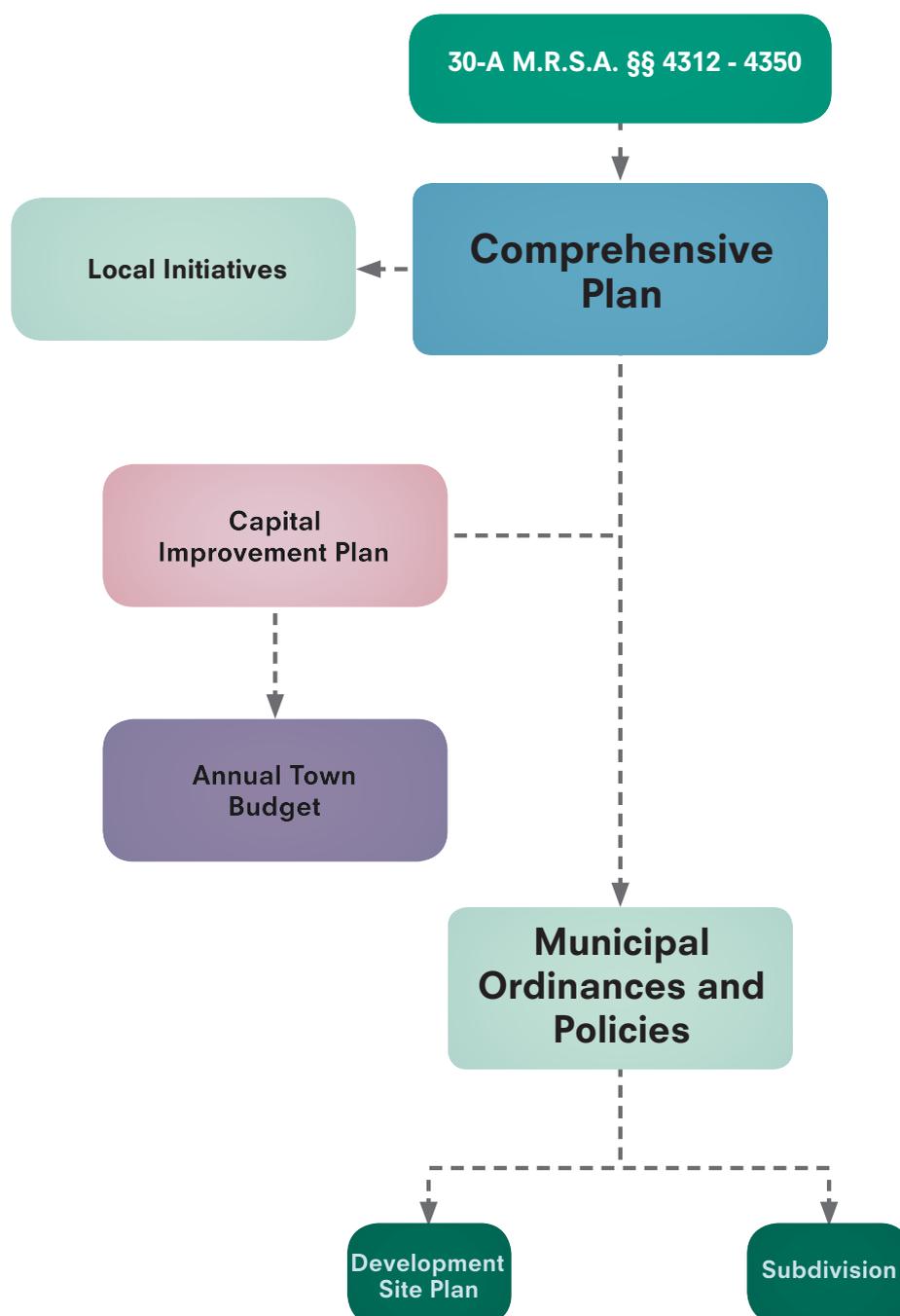
On an annual basis, the Implementation Committee should meet with the Select Board to check in and evaluate implementation progress. The parties should openly discuss any issues or impediments to plan implementation, monitor performance, measure achievement and reflect on changes that have occurred as result of the plan or impacts of external market conditions or new trends affecting the community. This should serve as a time to identify any resources, whether human capital or financial capital, needed to implement the plan and, if determined as result of evaluation, shift upcoming priorities or adjust timelines to respond to changing conditions.

SETTING THE PACE

Topsham is in the position to affect positive community change. By taking deliberate steps to adopt new zoning and invest in community infrastructure, Topsham will be demonstrating to potential private investors that it is a community willing to create the Topsham it wants, rather than end up with a future haphazardly shaped by outside forces. Staff and the Implementation Committee can play an important role as spokespersons for this plan in the business community and at community events. Finally, the Implementation Committee should honor the participatory process that led to this plan by boosting communications, inviting participation in discrete implementation tasks, hosting plan check-ins and celebrating success.

Regulatory Flow Chart

Topsham has a history of collaboration and support within the Town and in the region. The implementation of the Comprehensive Plan requires the involvement of leaders and volunteers across many boards and committees. This regulatory flowchart illustrates the relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and planning activities and procedures in Maine, as defined by Maine Statute. The Comprehensive Plan is the keystone document that informs and sets goals for local initiatives, Capital Improvement Plan, annual town budgets and regulatory tools.



Strategy Matrix

STREETS FOR PEOPLE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Adopt a resolution that reduces the default speed within Topsham's more densely populated neighborhoods.	No	Short	TM	P
Advocate at the State level for greater town control over posted speed limits and changes to the way speed limits are set, so limits can be based on safety goals.	No	Mid	TM	P
Be the first town in Maine to adopt Vision Zero, an international initiative to eliminate roadway fatalities.	No	Mid	TM	P
Adopt a complete street policy that assures the safety and accessibility of all roads for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, motorists, commercial vehicles, emergency vehicles, and for people of all ages and abilities.	No	Short	TM/P	P
Prioritize pedestrian-first approach for all transportation projects and programs, from scoping to maintenance.	No	Short	P	DPW
Develop a Streets Master Plan that identifies priorities, funding sources, and funding amounts, and that includes street design standards which support the community's goals for safe, multimodal, slow flow streets.	No	Mid	P	DPW
As part of the annual budgeting process, identify priority road resurfacing projects two years in advance in order to provide time for development and vetting of restriping plans, as appropriate.	No	Short	DPW	P/TM
Develop a five-year infrastructure maintenance and capital improvement plan that details the design metrics that must be accommodated to incorporate the new design standards. Balance emphasis on vehicular Level of Service and mobility with safety and slow flow movement.	No	Mid	DPW	P/TM
Allow on-street parking townwide. Amend Chapter 210 accordingly.	Yes	Short	P	DPW/EMS
As part of a Streets Master Plan, identify locations where on-street parking can be added to help narrow vehicular travel lanes, improve pedestrian safety, and provide additional parking opportunities.	No	Mid	P	DPW/ECD/EMS
Revise road design and construction standards so that curb radii are reduced to help slow vehicular turning movements and increase pedestrian safety.	Yes	Mid	P	DPW/PB/EMS
Establish a bicycle and pedestrian committee.	No	Short	P	DPW/P/Rec
Review and update the code to key a range of street types to land use character, and that provide for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use. Require new developments to choose from these street types.	Yes	Mid	P	DPW/ECD/PB
Update existing street construction standards to allow 9- and 10-foot lanes on regional roads and enforce the existing maximum 9-foot lane standard for new neighborhood streets.	Yes	Mid	P	DPW/EMS

Acronyms

TM	Town Manager
P	Planning Department
DPW	Department of Public Works
EMS	Emergency Services
ECD	Economic and Community Development
PB	Planning Board
Rec	Parks and Recreation Department
TA	Town Assessor
TPL	Topsham Public Library
SB	Select Board

TDI	Topsham Development Inc.
SD	School District
TCC	Topsham Conservation Commission
HDC	Historic District Commission
CEO	Code Enforcement Officer

Timeframes

Short	- 2 years or less
Mid	- 2-5 years
Long	- 5+ years
Ongoing	

STREETS FOR PEOPLE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Conduct staff training so all levels of staff understand the benefits of narrower lanes.	No	Short	P	DPW/ECD/EMS
Amend Chapter 185 Appendix A and begin the process of restriping lanes to 9 or 10 feet through annual restriping efforts.	Yes	Mid	P	DPW/ECD/PB
Add stencils, bikeway signage, and physical barriers, such as on street parking, or seasonal vertical elements, such as bollards or planters, to restriped streets that have four feet or more of space on the shoulder.	No	Mid	DPW	P/ECD
As part of a Streets Master Plan include bicycle and pedestrian priority streets and connections, amenities (lighting, ADA compliance), a hierarchy of pedestrian standards, and that identifies priorities, funding sources, and funding amount.	No	Mid	P	DPW/EMS
Continue to use a Payment In Lieu program to fund the construction of sidewalks.	No	Ongoing	P	DPW
Build funding into the capital improvement plan for the construction of sidewalks and multi-use paths.	No	Short/Ongoing	DPW	P/ECD/TM
Work through the list of priority projects in-house using inexpensive, semi-permanent materials.	No	Short	DPW	P
Update the zoning code to include a range of street types keyed to land use character and that provide for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use. Require new developments to choose from these street types.	Yes	Mid	P	PB/DPW/ECD
Continue to require that new developments provide an internal street network to the extent possible and connect to existing street and trail networks.	Yes	Mid/Ongoing	P	DPW/PB
Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages the use of turn lanes and traffic lights in order to favor safety over mobility.	No	Short	P	DPW/ECD
Conduct staff training so that all levels of staff understand the benefits of 4-way stops over traffic lights on pedestrian-prioritized streets.	No	Short	P	DPW/ECD
Evaluate the feasibility of converting traffic lights to 3-way or 4-way stop intersections on Main Street and other streets used by bicycles and pedestrians. Target intersections along Main Street including both entrances to Bowdoin Mill Island, Elm Street, Green Street, Winter Street, Town Hall entrance, Monument Place, Eagles Way, and Canam Drive.	No	Mid	DPW	P/ECD
Conduct a staff training on how to efficiently complete studies and paperwork for traffic signal removal in compliance with Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards and protocols.	No	Long	DPW	P/ECD
Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages the use of multiple lanes in the same direction in order to better balance safety and mobility.	No	Short	P	DPW/EMS

Acronyms

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Timeframes

Short - 2 years or less
Mid - 2-5 years
Long - 5+ years
Ongoing

STREETS FOR PEOPLE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Educate Planning Board and Town Hall staff on how to implement a complete streets policy.	No	Short	P	SB
Continue to require that new neighborhoods connect to existing streets and adjacent neighborhoods to produce a network of streets and paths.	Yes	Ongoing	P	PB
Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages one-way streets.	No	Short	P	DPW/SB
Train Planning Board, public works staff, and the Code Enforcement Officer on the complete streets policy.	No	Short/ Mid	P	TM
As part of a Streets Master Plan effort, identify existing and future Safe Routes to School network.	No	Mid	P	DPW/EMS/ SD
Prioritize funding to repair neighborhood streets and Safe Routes to School to achieve maximum speeds of 20 MPH, including during off-peak times.	No	Ongoing	DPW	SB
Adopt a resolution that creates a home to school zone with reduced speed limits within 2 miles of every school. Sign and enforce accordingly.	No	Mid	P/ DPW/ EMS	SB
Direct funding to pilot advisory bike lanes, yield streets, and other techniques to slow traffic on local neighborhood street.	No	Mid	P	DPW
Start a program that empowers neighborhoods to slow their local residential streets through a number of pre-approved strategies.	No	Mid	P	DPW
As part of a Streets Master Plan effort, identify priority streets for tree planting program, market the program, secure funding, and plant trees.	No	Short	P	DPW
Hire an engineer adept at working within an urban, pedestrian-prioritized context to redesign smaller, tamer intersections that better balance mobility and safety.	No	Ongoing	DPW	P
Continue to manage and limit new curb cuts onto Route 196.	No	Ongoing	DPW	P
Include the practice of Tactical Urbanism in the Town's complete streets policy and continue staff training.	No	Ongoing	P	DPW

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SB Select Board

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SD School District
TCC Topsham Conservation Commission
HDC Historic District Commission
CEO Code Enforcement Officer

Timeframes

Short - 2 years or less
Mid - 2-5 years
Long - 5+ years
Ongoing

LOCAL AND REGIONAL MOBILITY				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Continue discussions with transit providers to connect Topsham to regional destinations.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P/TM
Plan an intra-town transit service for people of all ages and abilities.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P/TM
Work with local businesses to coordinate and provide a range of transportation services to accommodate the needs of an aging population.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P/TM
Work with local businesses to set up and maintain ridesharing locations in oversized parking lots.	No	Ongoing	P	ECD
Work with the business community to create employee incentives for ride-sharing.	No	Short	ECD	P
Update the zoning code to require parking maximums within the growth areas, but allow flexibility in permitting so the free market can determine what the actual parking need is.	Yes	Short	P	ECD/PB
As smart vehicle technology advances, implement a system of real-time value pricing for parking.	No	Long	P	ECD/SB
As smart vehicle technology advances, evaluate and adjust public infrastructure funding priorities.	No	Long	P	ECD/SB
As vehicle sensor technology improves, reallocate excess pavement for pedestrian and bicycle amenities, stormwater retention, and street trees.	No	Long	P	DPW

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ACCESS TO NATURE AND OPEN SPACE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Update zoning to clearly articulate when trail corridors should be preserved or added as private development occurs.	Yes	Mid	PB/TCC	P/Rec
Create and use a more in-depth open space and trails connectivity map to identify where important trail corridors and connections can be established as part of new private development.	No	Mid	TCC	P/Rec
Seek both private and public funding to expand the number of trails, pedestrian/bicycle paths, access points to natural resources, and water access.	No	Mid	P/Rec	TCC
Install low-cost, low-impact and friendly signage at private trail locations and water access points inviting discrete and respectful use of property.	No	Mid	Rec	DPW
Work with the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust to solidify use agreements with private landowners.	No	Ongoing	TCC	P
For frequently used trails on private property, provide ongoing stewardship assistance to landowners.	No	Ongoing	TCC	Rec
Seek private funding support to establish an Open Space and Trails Ombudsman to work in partnership with the Topsham Recreation Department, CREA and the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust.	No	Mid/Long	TCC	Rec
Update the zoning code to require developers building projects of a certain scale within the rural districts to protect high quality open space. Use the Natural Areas Plan to inform protection.	Yes	Mid	TCC/PB	P
Set up an acquisition fund to purchase open space identified in the four focus areas identified in the Natural Areas Plan.	Yes	Mid	P	TCC
Continue to use the Open Space Tax Program as a strategy to protect important scenic resources and open spaces in Topsham.	No	Ongoing	TA	TM
Form public/private partnerships to execute a Downtown Waterfront Park.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P/TM
Update the 2010 Natural Areas Plan.	No	Mid	TCC	P
Set up a "Topsham Conservation, Inc." as a quasi-municipal entity, similar to Topsham Development, Inc, to allow Topsham to set aside and spend funding for land conservation.	No	Mid	P/TCC	TM/Rec
Seek funding to expand the number of trails and pedestrian/bicycle paths to the rivers.	No	Mid	TCC	P/Rec
Enter into agreements with private landowners to formalize water access points.	No	Mid	Rec	P/TCC
Work with organizations such as Merrymeeting Adult Ed, Topsham Trail Riders, Brunswick Topsham Land Trust and CREA to offer 4-season, nature-based activities and programming for people of all ages and abilities.	No	Ongoing	Rec	TCC

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ACCESS TO NATURE AND OPEN SPACE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Work with TDI to support development of natural resource-based tourism.	No	Mid	ECD	TCC
Work regionally to develop branded marketing materials to showcase outdoor amenities, farms and local food and beverage unique to Topsham and its neighboring communities.	No	Short	ECD	TCC/Rec/P
Prioritize funding for sidewalk and bicycle network expansions.	No	Ongoing	DPW	SB
Work regionally to seek funding opportunities for the Merrymeeting Trail to Kennebec River Rail Trail.	No	Mid/Long	TCC	Rec
Work regionally to explore opportunities to build segments of footpaths in the Androscoggin Railroad corridor.	No	Mid/Long	TCC	Rec
Continue to work regionally with other municipalities and organizations to extend regional trails.	No	Mid/Long	TCC	Rec

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FOSTER SOCIAL CONNECTION				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Update the zoning code to include neighborhood centers that are enabled through 5-minute walk pedestrian shed standards.	Yes	Mid	P	PB
Form public/private partnerships to fund the retrofit of existing neighborhoods to add desired amenities such as parks and civic gathering spaces.	No	Long	Rec	P
Update the Town's zoning code to include provisions for meaningful open space types tied to developments of various scales. Open space types should include the full range of civic spaces including commons, parks, squares, and plazas, as well as amenities such as recreation fields, playgrounds, swimming pools, gardens, skating rinks, dog parks, and amphitheaters.	Yes	Long	P/Rec	PB
Form an Arts & Culture Commission, a local Annual Event Citizen's Group, or organize and apply for the Main Street Program, including the options of becoming a network affiliate community.	No	Mid	ECD	P/Rec
Support the work of TDI to financially support regional and national caliber events at the Topsham Fairgrounds.	No	Short	TDI	ECD/TPL
Support increased funding for the Library from both municipal and non-municipal revenue sources.	No	Short	TM	TPL
Support the Library Trustees in efforts to review space needs for the Library, ensure facilities are being used effectively and meeting 21st century needs. Plan accordingly for any future additions or renovations.	No	Short	TPL	TM
Use credit enhancement agreements to incentivize private development of new indoor and outdoor recreation facilities.	No	Short	ECD	TDI
As part of new development, explore opportunities to partner with private developers to create new recreational facilities which the Town could benefit from through lease agreements.	No	Short	P/ECD	TDI/Rec
Allow and encourage "Friends of" groups to help construct and manage Topsham's civic spaces.	No	Mid	Rec	DPW
Ensure adequate department budgets and staffing to manage lawn care and tree pruning at town properties and in the street right of way.	No	Ongoing	DPW	TM

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SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Explore costs and funding mechanism for bringing fiber to all homes within the intentional growth area.	No	Long	ECD	TM
Update the zoning code to allow shared workspaces throughout all zoning districts in Topsham.	Yes	Mid	P	PB
Prioritize streets that are safe, interesting, and comfortable for walking.				
Update zoning to allow for higher density development as a means for creating more walkable destinations and naturally affordable housing.	Yes	Short	P	PB
As part of future zoning efforts, ensure performance standards continue to allow as-of-right home occupations for businesses with on-site employees.	Yes	Short	P	PB/CEO
Support the organization of professionals groups to hold networking and community building events.	No	Short	ECD	TDI
Encourage private sector partnership with the Library to host professional enrichment and skills building workshops.	No	Short	TPL	TDI/ECD
Create a town-wide directory of home-based businesses.	No	Short	ECD	TPL
Work with Topsham Development Inc. (TDI) to create a local business association.	No	Short	TDI	P

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- Ongoing**

BE DELIBERATE ABOUT GROWTH

STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Update the zoning code to further encourage a higher density, mixed use pattern of development that delivers a higher municipal return on investment.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Work with TDI to fund a full value per acre analysis.	No	Mid	ECD	TDI
Work with the Sewer and Water District to proactively plan for future service improvements and extensions.	No	Ongoing		
Prior to using public money on any expansion of utilities west of I-295, require an analysis of the economic benefit of utility expansion.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P
Evaluate, measure and if necessary adjust the Town's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Policy.	No	Mid	ECD	TM/TDI
Key TIF policy to value-per-acre to prioritize development that further funds existing investments.	No	Mid	ECD	TM/TDI
Consider applicability of keying TIF policy to goals of job creation, creation of community access or public benefit (rail, recreation, bus transit, water access, workforce housing, job training).	No	Mid	ECD	TM/TDI
Update the zoning code to emphasize town building principles, including neighborhood character, blocks, streets, civic spaces, and buildings that, in total, add up to a feeling of authenticity.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to permit greater density within the intentional growth area as identified on the Conservation & Growth Map.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to permit rural development that responds to rural character, including rural building group types.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to make it easier to attract new, denser development to zoning districts within the Neighborhood Transformation - Intentional Growth Sector.	Yes	Short	P	PB/ECD
Update the zoning code to allow smaller parcels and higher density mixed-use development within the Neighborhood Transformation - Intentional Growth Sector, including infill on parcels that already have development.	Yes	Short	P	PB/ECD
Update the zoning code to remove off-street parking requirements to enable the market to determine parking need.	Yes	Short	P	PB/ECD
Review all municipal codes, licensing, and other procedures to remove barriers to small-scale development and the establishment of new businesses.	Yes	Mid	P	CEO/TC
Allow a broad range of land uses within the intentional growth areas as well as within the rural zones as part of building groups.	Yes	Short	P	PB

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Timeframes

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- Ongoing**

BE DELIBERATE ABOUT GROWTH

STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Engage in public/private partnerships to pilot low-cost incubator shared workspaces for start-ups along the edges of private parking lots.	Yes	Mid	ECD	P
Work with local staff to ensure that information on incremental and affordable development projects are provided to landowners.	No	Mid	ECD	P
Continue to support the work of the Historic District Commission to review projects within the Historic Overlay District, including expansion of the District.	Yes	Mid	P	HDC
Provide educational opportunities to advance local use of the more flexible International Existing Building Code.	No	Mid	CEO	P
Continue to provide staff support to property owners of historic buildings inside and outside of the Topsham Historic District, with information on how to get a building listed on the register and gain access to federal and state funds.	No	Ongoing	P	HDC
Update zoning to enable flexible use of historic buildings, including a range of uses, unit numbers, and a removal of off-street parking requirements.	Yes	Short	P	HDC
Actively promote and pursue Federal Historic Preservation funds to advance historic preservation efforts.	No	Mid	P	HDC
Leverage State Historic Preservation Office technical assistance to advance historic preservation efforts.	No	Mid	P	HDC
Update the zoning code to allow rural building groups, including hamlets and farm compounds, as a way to support rural character and support rural-based businesses.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Continue to encourage working farms and forests to participate in the Farmland and Tree Growth Tax Program.	No	Ongoing	Tax	TM
Work with the Maine Farmland Trust, Department of Agriculture, Merrymeeting Food Council and others involved in food-related industries to attract farmers and other agricultural-based businesses to Topsham.	No	Short	ECD	TDI
Pursue a public/private partnership to start up a food hub and certified commercial kitchen.	No	Mid	ECD	TDI

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HOUSING DIVERSITY				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Update the zoning code to include clearly defined building types with a range of unit sizes that are reflective of local character and are allowed to be built in town by right.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to allow building groups such as pocket neighborhoods, connected farms, small and large compounds, and hamlets.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Review all municipal codes and procedures to remove barriers to small-scale development and the construction of affordable building types.	Yes	Short	P	CEO/PB
Update the zoning code to remove parking minimums within the growth areas, allowing the free market to determine parking need. Add controls that require new parking to be located behind buildings.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Conduct a detailed housing study based on target market preferences and an understanding of the full range of housing types, including those not currently available within the market.	No	Long	ECD	P
Update the zoning code to ensure that local land use rules are aligned with the updated building codes to support the construction of tiny homes and accessory units.	Yes	Short	P	CEO/PB
Evaluate and adjust zoning policies in regards to accessory units.	Yes	Short	P	CEO/PB
Update the zoning code to provide a more stringent set of development standards to control building form, scale, components, placement, materials and associated site improvements.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to regulate building types by zoning district to ensure new buildings and projects complement the scale and character of the existing neighborhood.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Partner with TDI and local developers to create a housing plan that sets the pace for construction of targeted new housing units.	No	Long	ECD	P/TDI
Evaluate the effectiveness of zoning policies that grant density bonuses to incentivize affordable and senior housing. Amend, as needed.	Yes	Long	P	ECD/PB
Target and incentivize construction of affordable housing units in growth areas envisioned as dense, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.	Yes	Long	P	ECD/PB
Allow density bonuses for developments within the growth area if that development contributes fees to an affordable housing fund.	Yes	Long	P	ECD/PB
Use Affordable Housing TIFs to support the creation of new affordable housing.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P

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Ongoing

OPEN GOVERNANCE

STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Include funding in the budget for meetings between Town Hall and the community.	No	Ongoing	TM	Finance
Add leadership development incentives to better attract a diverse selection of volunteers for town boards and committees.	No	Short	TM	SB
Test alternative committee meeting times/days to make it easier to volunteer.	No	Short	TM	All support staff
Annually, hold a community celebration to acknowledge the work of volunteers.	No	Short	TM	All support staff
Consider job sharing as a means to attract highly skilled, mature private sector talent to the public sector.	No	Mid	TM	SB
Explore ways to bring Town Hall services direct to the neighborhoods.	No	Long	TM	SB
Evaluate how work is being performed and consider if new job structures or changes to workplace culture should occur to attract the next generation of talent to government service.	No	Mid	TM	
Continue to work with community partners to build shared communication goals focused on civil discourse.	No	Mid	TM	All staff
Demonstrate appropriate and productive civil discourse on social media through active pages that have strong moderators that present content, debate, and activities based in the community.	No	Short	TM	All committees/boards
Adopt a policy to hold facilitated public workshops when complex problems arise that need broad community engagement and professional expertise from multiple disciplines.	No	Short	TM	SB
Develop a strategy or partnership to make child-care available for all public meetings.	No	Mid	TM	All support staff
Continue to use the open and participatory budgeting process for expenditures from the Community Fund.	No	Ongoing	TCF	P
Fund staff professional development to improve how open and participatory budgeting is used in budgeting and planning for long term capital improvements.	No	Short	TM	SB

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A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
The Town should explore ways to expand monitoring of Topsham's surface water quality to maintain a high level of water quality.	No	Long		
Coordinate with neighboring communities and organizations to monitor water quality in the region's rivers and ponds as well as the Merrymeeting Bay watershed.	No	Long	TCC	P
Educate residents and business owners on non-point and point source pollution and the importance of groundwater protection in Topsham.	No	Ongoing	P	TCC
Educate residents and business owners about the improvements to water quality in the past several decades.	No	Long	TCC	P
With professional assistance, review current Aquifer Protection Zone regulations to ensure goals and objectives are being met.	Yes	Short	P	CEO/PB
Facilitate educational workshops to teach residents how to compost and provide ongoing public education about the proper methods of recycling.	No	Short	SW	
Explore a private/public partnership with an entity such as Garbage to Garden to provide a municipal composting kiosk in town.	No	Short	SW	
Identify spaces for a bioswale pilot program.	No	Mid	DPW	P
Create signage to educate public on existing bioswale at Town Hall.	No	Mid	TCC	P
Work with CREA and the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust to build local awareness for the social, environmental and economic benefits of green infrastructure.	No	Mid	TCC	P
Organize annual neighborhood clean up days.	No	Mid	TCC	SW/DPW
Consider the Municipal Complex as a demonstration area for low-cost, high-impact techniques that residents could implement at home.	No	Ongoing	TCC	TM
Continue to build energy consumption awareness.	No	Mid	TCC	P
Evaluate progress in order to update and continue to implement the Climate Action Plan.	No	Short	TCC	P
In partnership with the Library, work with public non-profit and private sector energy and weatherization specialists to offer local workshops about advances in energy technology and retrofits.	No	Short	TPL	TCC
Promote awareness and use of Efficiency Maine.	No	Ongoing	TCC	P
Encourage electric vehicle usage, and provide a charging kiosk at Town Hall.	No	Short	P	TM

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Acknowledgements

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE COMMITTEE

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Larry Fitch
Matt Nixon
Bill Ewing (former member)
Doug Bennett (former member)
James Dealaman (former member)
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Susan Preece

CONSULTING TEAM

Maine Design Workshop
Principle
Rhumb Line Maps
Kate Howe Makes Things

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