

A Citizen's Guide to Topsham's Comprehensive Plan Update



Dear Topsham Resident,

The following citizen guide summarizes the Comprehensive Plan, and allows the reader to quickly reference sections of the plan that may be of interest. This guide is **not** a substitute for the comprehensive plan, and it will be most useful when read in conjunction with the plan.

The approach with this Comprehensive Plan update focused heavily on providing an intensive community engagement process that emphasized gathering as neighbors to discuss our shared future. These discussions have produced a plan that has identified where we desire to maintain existing community character, where community character enhancements may be appropriate, and how in accomplishing these we achieve the desire to create a more socially connected community.



INTRODUCTION TO YOUR PLAN

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas section is entirely based on the feedback received during public engagement processes, such as the five-day public design charrette. Residents of all ages were prompted to imagine Topsham in 30 years and identify what aspects they would like to see in that future vision. This feedback informed the nine sections currently forming the Big Ideas section of the Plan.

Plan Your Topsham

A mapping exercise that residents participated in alerted us to the lack of neighborhood centers, specifically neighborhood parks, in Topsham. This section of the plan illustrates theoretical new growth and development strategies for a variety of potential catalyst sites, such as the Crooker District, Topsham Fair Mall, and Main Street Upper and Lower Villages. Creating examples with a range of town fabrics and uses highlights the potential for accessible and connected neighborhood centers throughout Topsham.

Regulatory Framework

This framework considers the future management and application of the new Comprehensive Plan. This section includes a look at future development with the aid of the Conservation, Preservation and Growth map and summarizes Character Districts that encompass expressed goals for preserving community character.

Implementing the Plan



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.

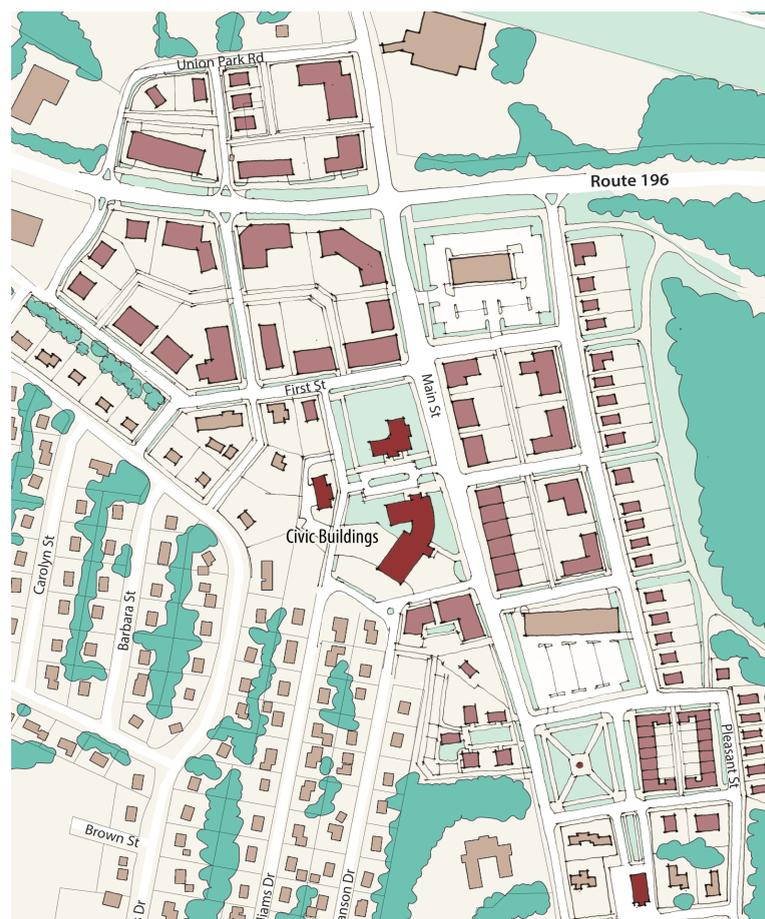
Topsham is in the position to affect positive community change. By taking deliberate steps to adopt new zoning and invest in community infrastructure, Topsham will be demonstrating to potential private investors that it is a community willing to create the Topsham it wants, rather than end up with a 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.



A Closer Look at a Catalyst Site - 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, community events and social gathering. 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 re-imagining of the Upper Village is an example of the form that development could take. The Comprehensive Plan includes a number of catalyst sites. These illustrative concepts inform the Regulatory Framework discussion, and are only actionable at such time that a landowner brings forward a plan to the Town, and the planning board approves it in a public hearing process.



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?



13. would love walkable restaurants/shops - love Clocktower
14. REALLY LIKE THIS - ESPECIALLY w/ HOTEL/RESTAURANT
15. This is really nice - would love to see new shopping / hotel area in this style
- 16.
17. Really like it, great outdoor seating.
18. Yuppy USA. People think they love this, but they popping up everywhere. outdoor spaces
19. YES! MORE MULTI-USE CLASSIC SPACES w/ OUTDOOR SEATING



BIG IDEAS

Streets for People

Safe streets were raised as the single most expressed issue by the community during the charrette affecting quality of life in Topsham.

Local and Regional Mobility

Transit not only supports a diverse population more equitably, but it can also attract employees needed to support businesses within town.

Access to Nature and Open Spaces

An opportunity exists to better manage and protect the resources that are a regular part of the community's life and identity.

Foster Social Connection

During the Plan Your Topsham process, the people of Topsham expressed a deep desire and need for a greater sense of community.

Support Knowledge Economy

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.

Be Deliberate About Growth

As the town continues to grow, the impacts of this growth should be managed, measured and often revisited through community-driven processes to ensure residents are getting the kinds of outcomes they want.

Housing Diversity

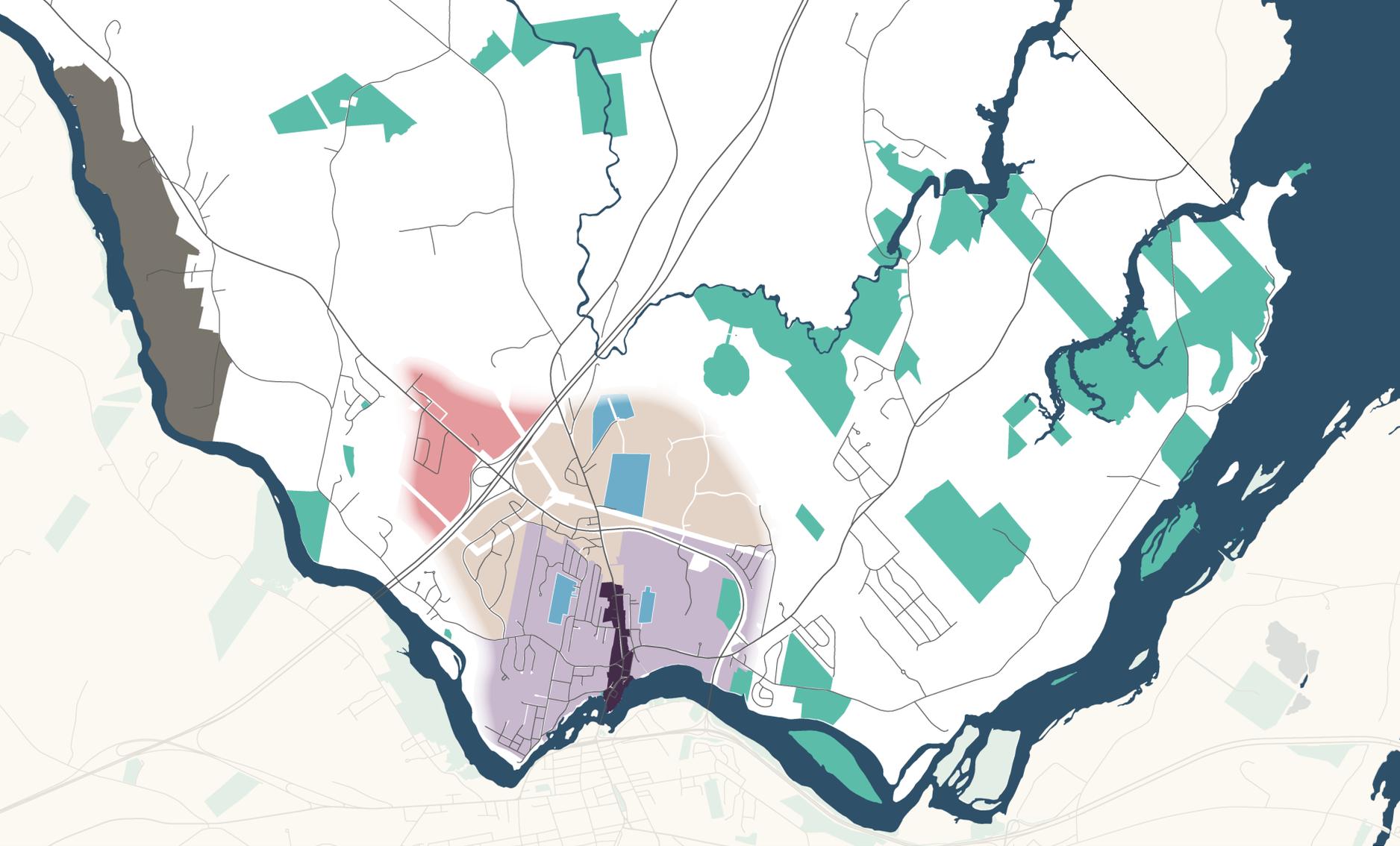
Through the public process, a variety of housing needs have been identified, including additional senior housing, units with two or more bedrooms, and housing for single occupants.

Open Governance

Steps can be taken to further align leadership with sentiments of the larger community, through ongoing improvements in communication.

A More Sustainable Future

Work should continue to lessen the Town's impacts on the environment by improving energy efficiency, promoting recycling, and conserving resources when cost effective.



The Conservation, Preservation and Growth map begins to structure a framework for future zoning policy amendments to activate the community's visions. The map is organized by sectors, grouped to indicate three intended land use outcomes:

1) Conservation and preservation (**No Growth sector**);

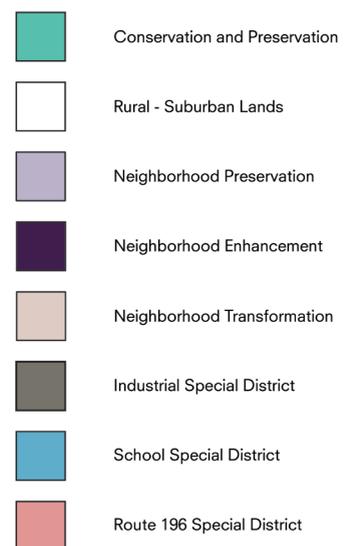
This sector comprises all parcels of land that are public land or have been permanently protected for conservation, recreation and open space, agricultural or forestry purposes. This sector is represented on the map as Conservation and Preservation.

2) Enhancement of existing developed areas and intentional patterns of new development (**Limited Growth sector**);

This sector includes land that is prioritized in order to strengthen working farms, forests and rural-based business economies, and to preserve rural character. This sector still allows for growth and change based on current zoning regulations, but performance standards should be evaluated as part of future zoning amendments to ensure protection of natural resources, and compatibility with working farms and existing residential neighborhoods. This sector is represented on the map as Rural - Suburban Lands

3) Intentional neighborhood preservation, enhancement or altogether transformation of the existing land use pattern of an area (**Intentional Growth sector**).

The catalyst site drawings prepared during the charrette demonstrate that land within the Intentional Growth sector has the capacity to support a significant volume of new growth and development. Focusing development and investments in the Intentional Growth sector strengthens the ability to have a deliberately rural Topsham. This sector is represented on the map as Neighborhood Preservation, Enhancement, and Transformation.



WHAT'S NEXT?...

- Approval at public hearing
- Vote at town meeting
- Be involved with 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 actions forward.

Get Involved! Volunteer on a town board or committee