

Visioning Exeter in the 21st Century

Dear Reader,

The Exeter Master Plan is for citizens, volunteer boards, town staff, students and anyone interested in Exeter's evolution. The Master Plan is a guidance document designed to help understand the town's growth. It provides the foundation for capital improvement projects and can be used to aid in drafting ordinances and regulation changes that will help preserve and enhance Exeter's unique quality of life. In using this document as a resource guide, you have fulfilled the purpose of the many dedicated volunteers joined in its creation.

Early in 2001, the Exeter Planning Board began the process of updating and revising the 1994 Exeter Master Plan. With assistance from Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) and the Town Planner, an approach for its review and revision was developed. Adopted by the Planning Board, this approach was designed to phase the review process over a multi-year period, tackling three to four chapters per year. A Steering committee made up of community representatives would oversee this effort, and subcommittees would be charged with focusing on revisions for each chapter. See **Master Plan Revision Summary Table** on the following page to see an overview of when each chapter was revised and adopted by the Planning Board.

In August, 2001 the steering committee was formed and began its first year focusing on Land Use, Community Facilities and Parks and Recreation Chapters. Their first task was to organize "Visioning Sessions" or citizen forums, in which opinions, ideas, and suggestions regarding Exeter's present and future on selected chapters could be shared. A total of 150 people attended the first Visioning Sessions in which focused discussions were guided by veteran facilitators from RPC. Once the ideas and concerns from the Visioning Sessions were summarized, the information was used as one of the many tools to assist subcommittees in revising the selected chapter. Later, in 2003, the State Office of Planning awarded Exeter with the "Planning Project of the Year" for this process of involving the public. At the end of each chapter is a summary of the visioning sessions held for each chapter.

The master plan is required by law in the state of New Hampshire and is recognized as a representation of the goals and aspirations of the people. Although it has no enforceable authority, nor a way to generate the resources that may be required for its implementation, it can be a powerful tool to shape the future. In order to successfully manage the town's resources, the master plan should be a "living document" that reflects the challenges growth brings.

1,600 years ago, St. Augustine wrote:

"Time is a three-fold present: the present as we experience it, the past as present memory, and the future as a present expectation. By this criterion, the world of the year 2000 has already arrived, for it is within the decisions we make now and the way we design our environment... that the future is committed."

Let this document be proof that Exeter residents, businesses and schools are committed to bringing Exeter into the 21st century with sensitivity and thoughtfulness.

About This Document:

There are nine chapters covering land use, housing, transportation, public utilities, community facilities, parks and recreation, conservation and preservation, water resources, and historic and cultural resources. Each chapter includes a title page, table of contents, the body of the chapter, recommendations, and appendices including visioning session results and maps for the chapter. As each chapter had a different set of volunteers assisting with the development of the chapter, each chapter has its own character.

Master Plan Revision Summary Table

Chapter Or section	Year Approved by Planning Bd	Contributing Factors	Additional Guidance
Intro:			Steering Com, Town Planner
Ch. 1: Existing /Future Land Use	2002	RPC's new digital ortho photos Residential Build Out Analysis	RPC, Plan Dept., Chapter SubCom.
Ch. 2: Housing	2010	2000 Census Data (available in 2002)	RPC, Chapter Sub Com., Welfare
Ch. 3: Transportation	2010	Neighborhood traffic management efforts, downtown parking study	RPC, Chapter Sub Com, DPW, NHDOT
Ch. 4: Utilities and Public Services	2003	Sewer and Water Improvements, regional planning efforts	Chapter Sub Com, DPW, Utilities
Ch. 5: Community Facilities	2002	Studies used to develop CIP and Impact fees	Ch. Sub Com, Town Depts, Schools, Hospital, Senior Cen.
Ch. 6: Parks and Recreation	2002	Parks and Rec volunteer boards	Ch. Sub Com, Rec Dept, Schools,
Ch. 7 Conservation and Preservation	2004	Watershed Study, grants and land acquisitions, regional planning efforts	Sub Com., Conservation Com, RLT
Ch. 8 Water Resource Management and Protection Plan	2004	Water Study, Watershed Study, Exeter River Study Updates, regional planning efforts	Sub Com, DPW, Con. Com.
Ch. 9 Historic and Cultural Res.	2010	Brief Town history	Sub Com, RPC

Master Plan Maps:

The Rockingham Planning Commission was instrumental in the development of Exeter's Master Plan including the maps for each chapter. In hard-copy, the maps are located at the end of the chapters. As each map has a considerable amount of detail, it may be difficult to view the maps in this format. On the other hand, if you, the reader are viewing the maps on-line in pdf format, you may be able to appreciate the maps in color and in better detail.

Visioning Session Priorities:

From 2002 to 2004, the master plan committees engaged the public in annual workshops called Visioning Sessions. As mentioned earlier, these sessions provided an opportunity for the public to voice concerns and recommendations on each of the chapters of the master plan. At the end of each session, participants voted on the issues they felt were the most important. A tally of the number of votes for each topic provided a quantitative measure. An overview of the highest priority issues for each chapter was organized in a table at the end of this section entitled, **Master Plan, Visioning Session Summary of Top Five Topics Voiced by Attendees**. In reviewing the table, there are several comments that came up in more than one chapter and in more than one year. These issues/suggestions included:

- Provide more sidewalks and bike paths connecting public spaces, neighborhoods, creating specific routes and making Exeter pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
- Obtain more conservation land/open space including easements. Link conservation lands for recreation and wildlife corridors.
- Create a community center including an indoor pool, various recreational uses, and meeting rooms.
- Improve high school including a new building and grounds.
- Ensure an adequate water supply. Acquire development rights from private landowners to protect Dearborn Brook and other watersheds.
- Make downtown a destination and maintain its unique character.
- Investigate incentives for affordable housing, including conversions for multi-family.
- Improve town hall facility, providing for more use.
- Create a shuttle service or trolley for an in-town loop.

Within the visioning session table is a column that briefly summarizes the progress that has been made over the past several years. Some of the top priority items have been completed, while others have had minimal improvements. Still, some departments may have had to reconsider priorities due to economics, environment, safety and health, public support, and various other reasons. This would have led staff to redirect resources and create a new set of priorities. It should be noted that there will be future opportunities to review the visioning session concerns and to create new and revised recommendations to help direct future projects, regulations, and resource allocations.

Future of This Document:

First, a public work session, similar to the visioning sessions will be organized to review the recommendations and priorities developed for each chapter. Attendees will be encouraged to verify the direction described or to suggest new directions that the town might consider.

Second, this document was meant to be done in phases. It should be noted that there are five chapters that already need to be revisited and updated. In order to address this need, the Planning Department will request assistance from other departments, land use board volunteers, citizens, and stakeholders to organize the next effort in updating these chapters. Citizen input will remain a critical component during the next update.

Finally, since this process was started in 2001, a new subject has been added to many municipal master plans, specifically energy. An energy section should include an analysis of energy and fuel resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems that may affect Exeter's energy usage. Exeter should set energy goals and develop an action plan, consider adoption of energy regulations, encourage energy efficient development, and encourage renewable energy uses. Due to the unique requirements of such an effort, it is anticipated that the Planning Department would research grant opportunities in order to gain assistance in the preparation and analysis needed in developing an energy chapter.

Master Plan, Visioning Session Summary of Top Five Topics Voiced by Attendeesⁱ		
Chapter/Topic	Votes	Status/Progress
Chapter 1: Land Use (2002)		
Conservation land/open space: need more land, more town funds to acquire land, link existing lands to create green belt, maintain existing open space, allow some recreational uses ie, hiking, create more mechanisms for putting land into conservation, continue getting easements, publicize public open space and make more accessible (maps, trails, information distribution).	30	Ongoing effort: 2003 bond supported purchase of land or easements on 10 different parcels totaling approximately 221 acres. Trail plan completed in 2010. Trail brochures for 3 major trail areas (Henderson Swasey, Oaklands, and Little River) have been developed. Trails in these areas have been blazed, kiosk maps installed and trail maintenance and improvement continue. Brochures are available for printing on the town website or purchase from the Planning Dept. Monitoring and marking of conservation parcels has been initiated (several parcels completed) and has been incorporated into the Conservation Commissions annual priority. The Commission has hired a contractor for development of a Natural Resource Inventory to be completed by 2011.
Supermarket/grocery store in town (See CF)	27	Completed (Stop' N Shop)
Affordable housing: Promote affordable housing development (middle and low income) with 2, 3, and 4 family units (See CF)	25	Consideration for affordable housing regulations has been an ongoing effort for the past 10 years. Multiple revisions to Exeter's regulations have been developed since 2001.
Commercial/retail should not look like "Anywhere USA" (no strip malls/big box stores), develop architectural design standards for commercial buildings.	23	Yes – Architectural Standard in Site and Subdivision Regulations.
Bicycles: More bike paths and sidewalks connecting public spaces, build more on-road bike shoulders, separated bike paths, and signage marking routes, encourage use of bicycles. (See CF and P&R)	20	Completed High Street/Hampton Road Bike Lanes. Reconstructed sidewalk on Main Street/Epping Rd . However, sidewalk budgets have been cut regularly, therefore, maintenance of existing sidewalks, repairs of sidewalks, and extending sidewalks have not been kept up. DPW investigating using GIS to conduct a sidewalk management program.

Chapter 2: Housing and Residential Life (2004)		
Make downtown a destination and maintain its character. Encourage more practical mix of stores. Support downtown businesses and encourage occupancy of buildings.	39	The Downtown Restoration Project continued for ten years. In 2007, the project was reduced to focus on the area along Front St from the Bandstand to Court St. Engineering drawings were completed and a warrant for \$1.1 mil was approved by the Budget Committee. However, the BOS voted to not support the project going forward and the project has been shelved since then.
Connect neighborhoods by installing more sidewalks. Require developers to build walk/bike paths with signage. Expand them out from Downtown into outlying areas.	28	New subdivisions are required to have sidewalks, however additional maintenance costs have not been funded which will exacerbate sidewalk program deficiencies. Brentwood Road sidewalk was connected to Washington Street. Plans for further connections have been stalled. Sidewalk budgets have been cut regularly, therefore, maintenance of existing sidewalks, repairs of sidewalks, and extending sidewalks have not been kept up. DPW investigating using GIS to conduct a sidewalk management program.
Amend zoning ordinance to allow conversions for multi-family (affordable) units, also consider incentives for elderly to convert and still reside there.	23	A Zoning Ordinance Review committee started working on overhauling various sections of the zoning ordinance in 2006. Since then much work has been complete on the zoning ordinance including amending the allowance for conversion, which was amended in 2008.
Investigate incentives for affordable/work force housing.	18	Consideration for affordable housing regulations has been an ongoing effort for the past 10 years. Multiple revisions to Exeter's regulations have been developed since 2001.
Convert old high school into a mix of affordable residential units & support services (doctors, daycare, etc.)	17	
Chapter 3: Transportation (2004)		
Parking garage: at municipal lot behind Town offices or behind Citizen Bank and Town Hall, possibly underground	26	A parking garage was completed behind Town Hall through private development.
Conservation land used for bike trails to link streets, create bicycle paths off road, and create a circumferential bicycle network	24	It should be noted that a road impact fee was analyzed in 2010. If such a fee was implemented, some money could be used for expanding roadway/sidewalk connections.

Service expansion for additional runs (a.m. and p.m.), more commuter and local trains, incl. Portland and Boston.	23	Some progress – in 2007 one additional trip was added
Designated bike routes through downtown; promote Exeter as a bike friendly community, create a bike corridor and ensure Exeter is part of the statewide bike route system	17	Completed High Street/Hampton Road Bike Lane. Presently \$150,000 of funds have been collected for shoulder widening, however, efforts to obtain grants for same have not been successful
Develop local loop transit (link businesses, recreation areas, residential neighborhoods; could be seasonal or year round)	16	Being considered for summer of 2011
Chapter 4: Public Utilities* (2003)		
Pursue regional water management/wastewater study and protect water quantity and quality by working with other communities	30	Exeter Water Safe Yield Study completed for Aquarion (Hampton) in 2003. Discussions with Stratham are ongoing, including Public Meeting held in 2010, with assistance from RPC; study being considered for 2011.
Create "Swap Shop" for reusing of household items	28	
Bury underground utilities in downtown area	25	
Ensure water and sewer extensions consistent w/master plan	22	ongoing
Ensure adequate water supply for perpetuity	20	Completed design of new Surface Water Treatment Plant in 2004; warrant articles for construction did not pass (\$15.5M in 2004 and \$17.1M in 2005). Redirected efforts toward groundwater solutions, including redevelopment of Gilman and Stadium Wells. Received NHDES approval for redevelopment in Nov. 2010. \$6.3M warrant article for design and construction of Groundwater Treatment Facility proposed for 2011. Additional potential groundwater resources have been identified for future development
Support water treatment plant	20	See above. The existing Surface Water Treatment Plant (SWTP) continues to produce most of the water for the Town. Maintenance and upgrades to the facility have included flood protection efforts, replacement of filter media, reconstruction of clarifiers, addition of new monitoring and control equipment, new chemical feed pumps, and replacement of dam sluice gates. SWTP

		will continue as part of the integrated water resource plan.
Chapter 5: Community Facilities (2002)		
Improve High School: New building, grounds and parking	65	Completed – new high school off Epping Rd.
Community center: Indoor pool, multi-use recreation	20	Ongoing effort with and without YMCA partnership. Considerable fund raising has occurred, progress regarding site design has been made but financing and a shift in economy has made project organizers reconsider project scope.
Sidewalks (West side and everywhere)	18	Some progress along Epping Road. However, sidewalk budgets have been cut regularly, therefore, maintenance of existing sidewalks, repairs of sidewalks, and extending sidewalks have not been kept up. DPW investigating using GIS to conduct a sidewalk management program.
Town Hall (elevator, bathroom , theater, gallery on 3rd floor, public address system)	17	Elevator to second floor and bathroom on second floor completed, also refinished wood floors, new stage curtains.
Shuttle Service/Trolleys (Downtown and Portsmouth Avenue)	15	Town-loop being considered for summer of 2011. A weekend only summer beach bus was attempted summer of 2009 but did not maintain adequate ridership.
Chapter 6: Parks and Recreation (2002)		
Need public fitness/multi-use facility (ie. YMCA) with pool, basketball courts, meeting rooms, etc. (See CF)	46	Town Parks and Rec Dept. continue to work with Squamscott Community Commons organizers. Focus has been on development of outdoor rec. opportunities. Cost to build and maintain is key.
Bike paths: bike paths to connect parks (ie. Brickyard), improve bike path safety, bike path connection to other towns.	24	Most of the recreation has been centralized at the Rec Park due to the facilities and people's desire to use that facility. Their reason is the variety of amenities and parking. Brickyard is more for lacrosse and flag football and not a destination park (like it was for baseball years ago).
Need lighted fields, tennis courts, basketball courts	19	Tennis court and b-ball lights are needed and would be a huge addition to the park but considered cost prohibitive at \$100k.
Kiosks/maps at selected parks and areas of interest (advertisement \$ from local businesses) to promote parks	17	Much of the emphasis for park improvements has been centralized at the Rec Park. The other parks are more complimentary or just playgrounds, so this idea may not have much traction.

Need dog park w/waste containers, bags	16	Re. Dog park: Little interest from the public at large and lack of land with water and parking that the town owns. DPW has installed dog waste containers in multiple areas in the downtown area.
Chapter 7: Conservation and Preservation* (2003)		
Encourage purchase/donation of conservation land - support bond	58	2003 bond supported purchase of land or easements on 10 different parcels totaling approximately 221 acres.
Create linkages: Link conservation lands for recreation and wildlife corridors. Link open space land with community ie. Emerald Necklace, Link uplands	36	Locations will be identified in 2011 as part of the Natural Resource Inventory
Conduct land assessment/inventories to target/purchase/donation as part of town land conservation plan. Develop a decision matrix with priority criteria for land acquisition and protection criteria for conservation use - water, trails, wildlife, etc	22	Will be completed in 2011 as part of the Natural Resource Inventory
Plan conservation land use, maximizing use of conservation land, maintain large areas of unfragmented lands	21	Revisions to site/subdivision regulations instituted regarding this issue. Plans will be completed in 2011 as part of the Natural Resource Inventory
Require conservation cluster development in target areas	19	Revisions to site/sub regulations completed
Chapter 8: Water Resources* (2003)		
Acquire development rights from private landowners to protect Dearborn Brook and other watersheds – protect forest canopy	38	
Encourage volunteer partnership with neighboring towns to protect rivers/watersheds, collaboration for protective measures – increase setbacks, land protection continue work with ERLAC and Dearborn Brook	31	Lower Exeter River & Squamscott River nominated to NH Protected Rivers program

Legal update regarding Exeter River water rights	27	Pierce Atwood report completed; compilation of flowage rights ongoing
Purchase conservation rights on properties outside Exeter's borders to protect our watersheds.	26	
Impact of future growth on water supply – ensure supply is adequate	20	Many studies have been conducted regarding dam removal, water supplies, water wells, etc. DPW has continued doing minor upgrades and repairs to the water treatment plant. Recent efforts have been focused on improving various well facilities. Discuss full partnership of sharing Stratham-Exeter Sources
Chapter 9: Historic and Cultural Resources (2004)		
Use town resources such as Channel 22 and town web site to promote historic and cultural activities, historic education programming, and to provide information. Involve students	29	
Expand town hall (add kitchen facilities) and upgrade to enhance use. Encourage its use by streamlining permitting process	16	An elevator was installed utilizing funds raised by the Arts Committee as well as town warrant. Improvements were made to the permit process resulting in more usage of facility.
Expand the historic district in various areas including High St, Cass St and Main St.. Involve volunteer resident taxpayer committees. Develop volunteer committees for preservation projects.	15	In 2006, the historic district was expanded up High Street up to Ridgewood Terrace.
Step up efforts to revitalize waterfront area, provide education on waterfront area	13	Norris Brook bugger planting completed in 2006. Riverwalk project has been in the town CIP since 2008. Unutil pursuing management/removal of manufactured gas plant (mgs) residuals.
Replace stage at Swasey Parkway with gazebo	12	Completed by volunteer fund raising as well as town warrant.

ⁱ The complete visioning session results are at the end of each chapter.