

# Newton, New Hampshire Charrette September 25 - 26, 2009

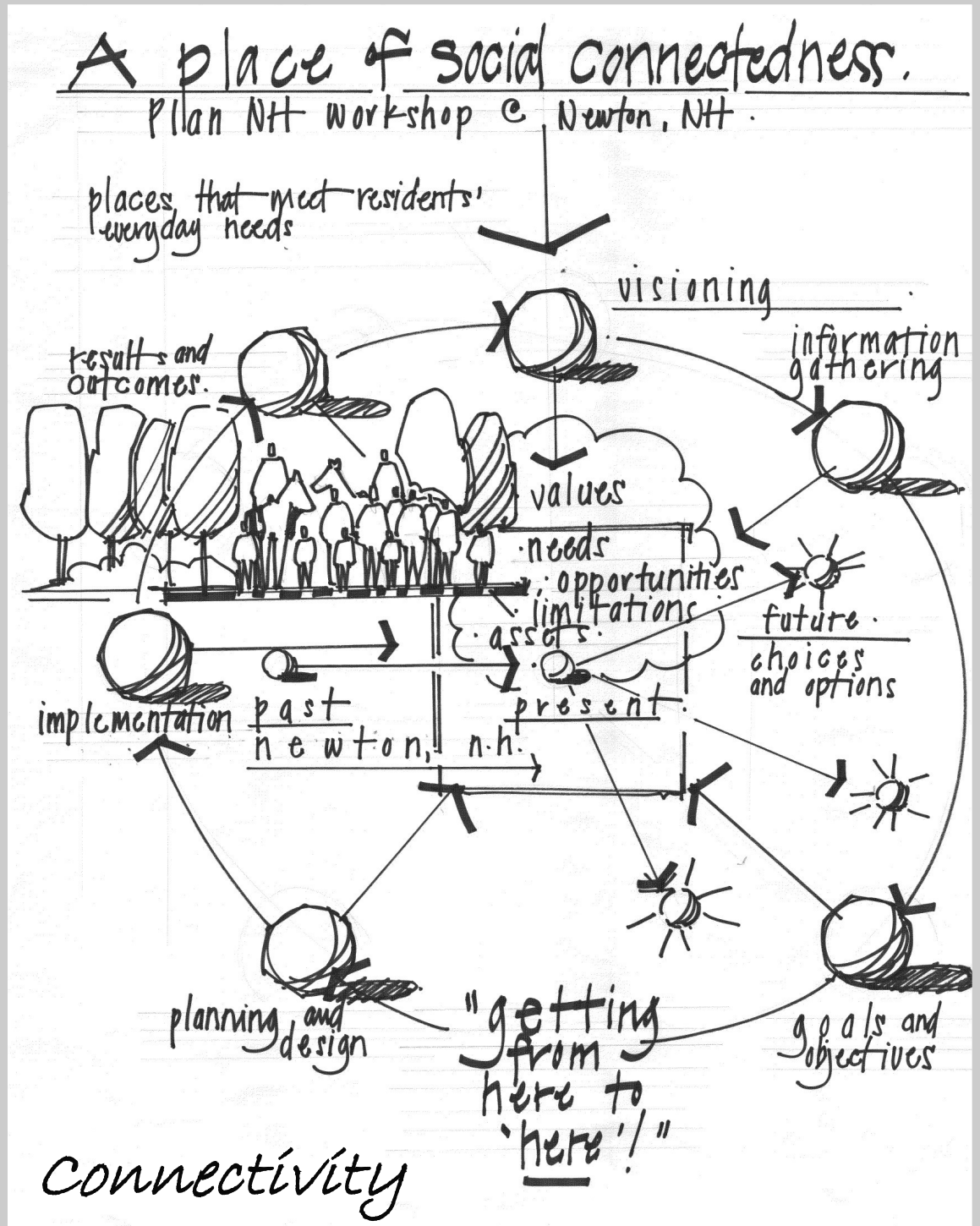
## Seeking A Village Center & Finding a Sense of Community



People



Plans



**PLAN NH**  
 Visioning for Sustainable Communities

The Foundation for Shaping the Built Environment

# Newton Charrette Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks go to those individuals who donated their professional and personal time to make this charrette a success. Also, many thanks to the citizens, businesses and town officials who shared their time, services, thoughts and knowledge with us.



## Charrette Team Leaders

Roger Hawk  
Hawk Planning Resources LLC  
Concord, NH

Robin LeBlanc  
Executive Director, PlanNH  
Portsmouth, NH

## Charrette Team

Kyle Barker, AIA  
Barker Architects PLLC  
Concord, NH

Michael Behrendt, AICP  
Chief of Planning  
City of Rochester, NH

Shane Carter  
Ridgeview Construction  
Deerfield, NH

Scott Collard  
Sr. Landscape Architect, Stantec  
Portland, ME

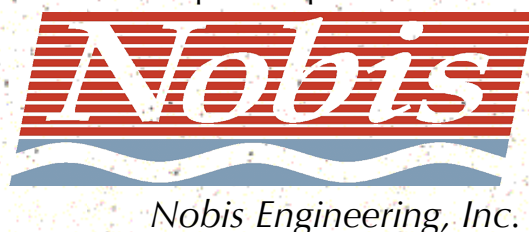
Brian Growth, Regional Planner  
Rockingham Planning Commission  
Exeter, NH

Wes Tator, LEED AP  
2B Green Profitably  
Dover, NH

Donna S. Robbins  
Keene, NH

Timothy Vadney, P.E.  
Engelberth Construction, Inc.  
Keene, NH

Plan NH Corporate Sponsors:



## The Newton Team

Without the support and participation of all of the following individuals, organizations and businesses this charrette would not have been possible.

Acios Pizza

Rep. Mary M. Allen

Arubacat Cat Furniture

Ray Bateman, 108 Store

Dr. Brian J. Blake, Superintendent of Schools

Carriage Barn Equestrian Center

Rep. Kimberley S. Casey

Branden Cote

Selectman Robert S. Donovan, Jr.

Granite State Grange

Sen. Margaret W. Hassan

Cheryl Killam

Selectman Trisha J. McCarthy

Merrimack Savings Bank

Rick Milner

Newton Boy Scouts

Newton Planning Board members

Pete's Sewer Service

Puppy Tails Pet Grooming

Rowe's Corner Market

SJR Construction, Co

SRHS Key Club & Junior Class

Gail Sudduth, SRHS Principal

Selectman Raymond D. Thayer

Jonathan G. VanderEls, Memorial School Principal

Chuck Whitman

Charrette Booklet Printed by:



# Plan NH Visits Newton, NH

September 25-26, 2009

## Who is Plan NH?

**Plan NH** is an association of professionals working in the *built environment*. The organization includes architects, planners, engineers, bankers, builders, construction managers, historic preservationists, and others who concern themselves with sustainable communities and buildings. It was established to create a forum for bringing together these different professional groups and serve as a catalyst for spurring interest in participatory community development. Part of **Plan NH's** mission is to make a positive contribution to New Hampshire communities. One way in which **Plan NH** does this is by providing design assistance to communities with a demonstrated commitment and need.

## So what is a Design Charrette, anyway?

Simply stated, a Design Charrette is a brainstorming session where lots of ideas are brought forth by both professional designers and local citizens, in an attempt to resolve a problem of local interest in a short timeframe. Because of the compressed time frame, the conclusions reached are usually conceptual. They discuss how different plan elements should relate to each other, as opposed to the details of how a particular building would actually be constructed.



At their best, Charrettes blend the broad experience of design professionals with local citizen's knowledge of their community to produce a plan of action that deals with a particular issue of concern to that community. The Charrette provides an overall framework within which final solutions can be developed. It sets a tone and provides a direction against which future decisions may be measured.

## Why did the Plan NH Charrette come to Newton?

In February of 2009, the Town of Newton submitted a proposal to **Plan NH** for design assistance. Of the town proposals submitted, Newton was one of three communities selected for a Charrette in 2009.

**Plan NH** is interested in providing design assistance to communities that seem ready to move forward with a project, where there appears to be a strong community commitment, organizational expertise and where there is the ability to move forward with recommendations that surface in the course of the charrette event. **Plan NH** also seeks to address community problems and issues that may have transferability to other communities.



# The Charrette Process & Executive Summary

Newton Town Officials and residents gathered with the **Plan NH** Charrette team on Friday, September 25, 2009 to discuss the details of the town's proposal to the Plan NH team. Design professionals on the team included an architect, landscape architect, planners, civil engineers, cost estimators, and real estate professionals and a representative of the Rockingham Regional Planning Commission who is working with the town on their new master plan. The critical piece that the Charrette Team lacked, which only the local residents could provide, was the intimate knowledge of the Town of Newton.

**Local residents are the experts on the community — what makes sense, what history has brought forth, what will pass at the local board meetings — the design team relies on resident input and knowledge to develop viable suggestions and proposals.**

With that in mind, the team and residents began formulating a new vision for Newton and its Villages.



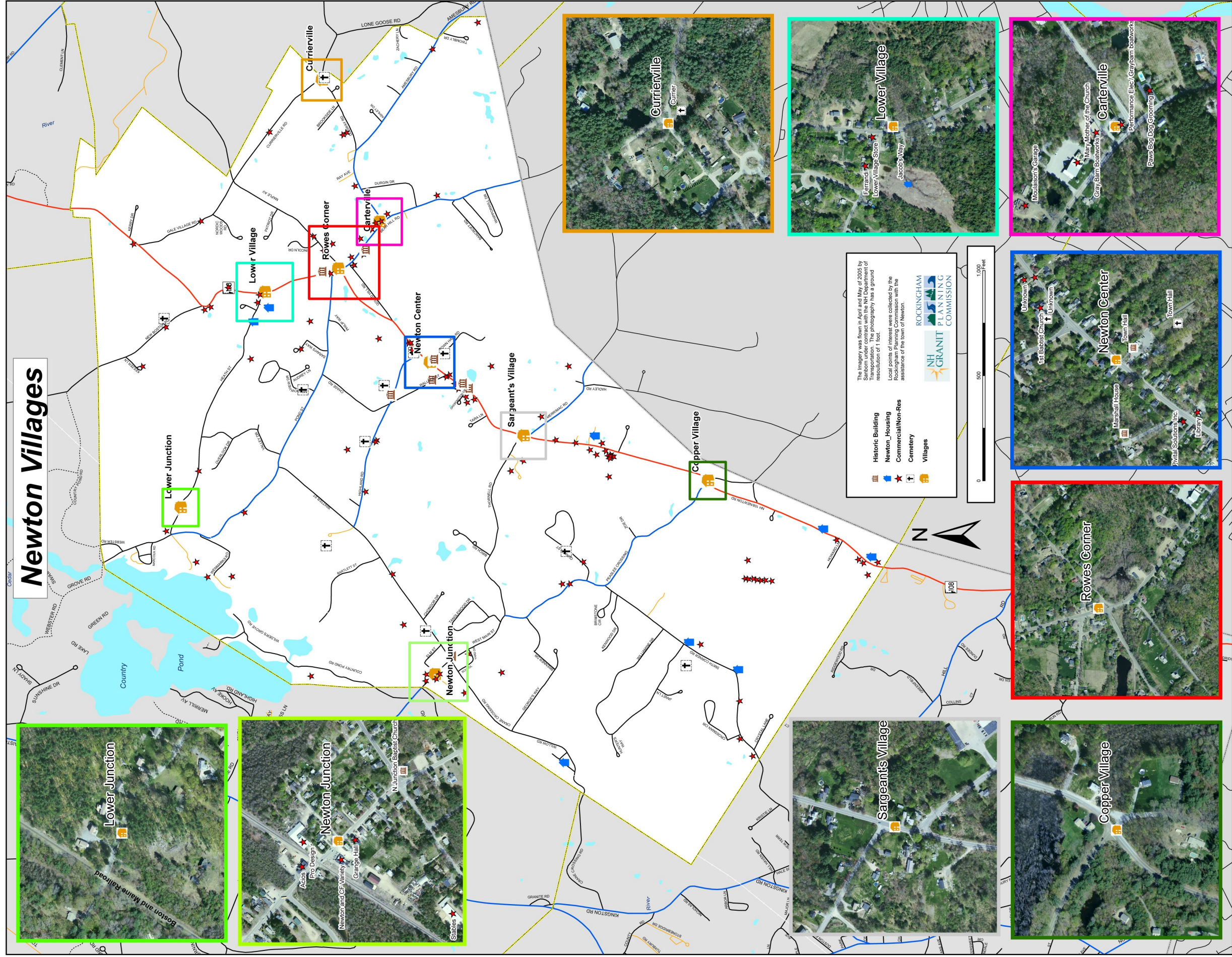
After an introductory meeting with town officials to orient the team to the issues and concerns of the project, the team joined quite a few town representatives on a bus tour of the entire community to become acquainted with each of the villages, the churches, town department buildings and parks. We also observed the physical layout and setting of the town, its traffic, parking, land uses and buildings. We observed that the town of Newton is a predominantly residential community with a mix of commercial and industrial uses that are concentrated primarily in several villages and a new industrial park near the south end of town along Route 108.

Newton Center, Newton Junction and Rowe's Corner are currently the most active villages. In addition to residences and some commerce, they also include a number of civic structures that lend greater significance to them. Other historic villages that are not as prominent as they once were are Copper Village, Sargeant's Corner, Lower Village, Carterville and Currierville. We were also informed about the history of the town which gained prominence in the late 1800's, primarily as a country vacation destination for people from nearby cities in Massachusetts. Newton Junction gained more significance as a result of the railroad coming through town in the 1800's.

The tracks still cross Main Street and connect Haverhill with Exeter, Dover and Portland, providing passenger service via the Downeaster.

The retail activity that exists primarily serves local convenience and service needs. The vast majority of the retail and service needs of the community are met by larger stores along route 125 in Plaistow and in several nearby communities in Massachusetts where the higher traffic volumes exist that are needed to support the shopping needs of the region.





## Newton's Proposal and Challenge to Plan NH

As expressed to the Plan NH team, the residents of Newton were interested in transitioning the town into a more self-sufficient community while preserving its traditionally rural character. In surveys and public meetings conducted to obtain input for the town's new Master Plan, residents clearly indicated the desire for Newton to remain true to its rural nature while embracing the concept of smart growth as it looks to the future.

The Planning Board indicated that they were seeking assistance in identifying proper locations and appropriate uses for mixed use zones. The effect of these mixed-use hubs would be to create a harmonious blend of residential and non-residential uses; preserve natural and historical resources; and enhance the sense of community within the town.

Their long term goals are to draw more businesses into the town that will provide services and employment opportunities while protecting natural and historic resources. One aspect of this goal is to develop an overall zoning plan that brings the town's commercial, residential, conservation and recreation areas together through a sustainable, cohesive design.

*"We can begin by doing things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for our neighbors. That is how change takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously." Grace Lee Boggs*

*Building a sense of community requires fostering a sense of connection among citizens and developing a sense of civic provide. Open communication and networking are key ingredients in fostering a sense of community. It also takes involved citizens. A sense of community involves joining together to work on community issues, celebrate, listen, vision, plan, problem solve, and make decisions. - UNH Cooperative Extension Service*



# What TOWN Residents Told Us

Two public listening sessions were held during the afternoon and evening of September 25. The purpose of the sessions was to let town residents express their opinions about what they most value about living in Newton and what they would like to see changed — more specifically, we asked them where one or more mixed use village centers should be located and what types of land uses would be most appropriate in the identified locations.

## **What do Residents Most Value about Newton?**

- Rural, small town character
- Not heavily developed
- No street lights or sidewalks
- Local agriculture and horse farms
- Privacy—space to do what you want
- Easy going, small town atmosphere
- Not on a major highway
- Don't have to lock your doors
- Safe environment for children
- Easy commute to shopping, jobs and amenities
- Classic New England style architecture
- People feel welcome

## **What Characteristics do Residents want to see in Newton's Future?**

### **Rural Character**

- Maintain small town, rural character
- Evolve a bit but don't change a lot
- Protect conservation values

### **Safety**

- Traffic needs to slow down
- Ability to walk in the woods safely during hunting season
- Safe places to bicycle: bike paths or set back from roads

### **Convenience**

- More access to services
- A medical complex
- Bus service around town and region for shopping and services—especially for elderly
- Businesses that serve the needs of residents
- Small restaurants

### **Aesthetics**

- Preserve and enhance town's classic New England architectural character
- Repair poorly maintained properties

- Preserve rural landscape
- Preserve openness between buildings - don't fence in houses
- No strip malls

### **Recreation**

- Better information needed on the location of town recreation and open space properties and trail system
- Clean up and maintain trails; don't let development cut off access
- Better use of existing buildings/resources and provide more recreation opportunities for kids - including a pool, bowling, roller skating, ice skating, etc.
- Make beach more accessible
- Expanded bike paths and trails

### **Economics**

- Businesses that primarily serve needs of residents
- It's not feasible to build enough commercial to significantly lower taxes without changing the character of the town
- Encourage small businesses that are supported by existing traffic in town (residents and non-residents)
- Encourage businesses that support the rural character of town (e.g., horse riding, pick-your-own, feed & grain)
- Buy local - support local contractors and construction workers
- Small restaurants
- Encourage but manage home based businesses
- Non-residential uses need to maintain classic New England architectural character

### **Municipal Services & Taxes**

- Limit the number of town services to keep taxes down
- New safety complex for police and fire
- Present zoning plan is outdated and difficult
- Remove private property eyesores: unmaintained houses, junk vehicles, heavy equipment, etc.

## **Villages**

- General store and fire station downtown
- Limit development to villages to keep remainder of town rural
- We wish there was a real town center with some mixed use that had a welcoming, real village feel.
- Need a community center

### **Development Issues**

- Present zoning plan is outdated and difficult
- Control residential development
- New residential developments look different from the rest of the community—roads are too large, retention ponds, too much tree clearing and re-grading of sites.
- New developments need to be set back and screened from existing streets
- Work with more flexible development criteria and respect historical and natural features
- Encourage conservation subdivisions with significant protected open space
- Allow for affordable, higher density housing
- Don't allow commercial strip development
- Enhance village center by encouraging mixed uses
- All buildings need to retain rural New England architectural style

### **Social Connectivity**

- Town needs more volunteers on boards and commissions including trail maintenance, snowmobile access, etc.
- Inclusiveness for all kinds of people
- Need places for people to gather and socialize—all ages
- People need to feel welcome
- Initiate a town newsletter
- Get to know your neighbor, schools, culture

# Charrette Team Observations and Recommendations

**We have heard the opinions and concerns of the residents. We have walked, studied, and observed the physical character and working dynamics of the village centers and have observed the conditions that we need to address with a comprehensive proposal. Following are our findings and recommendations to address the**

The charrette team listened very carefully to the comments received from town residents. Although we were charged with the task of defining the best locations for one or more village centers that could accommodate a mixture of land uses, we heard many more issues that were also of concern to residents.

## What We Heard-

**Newton very clearly values its rural small town character. Residents view the town as a sanctuary in the middle of a fast growing urbanizing area. Preserving the rural, small town feel includes a number of important characteristics:**

- ❑ Peruse the enhancement of several village centers so that they contain a mix of moderate density residential, civic institutions and small retail uses that cater to the needs of town residents; seek to consolidate town and community services in the village centers; promote village center residential development rather than development in the more rural parts of town; use village centers to promote social connectivity by having social events, establishing restaurants and other locations
- ❑ The town should consist primarily of residential land uses with some small scale businesses and retail that cater to the needs of town residents. They do not want to compete with commercial strips and shopping centers in adjacent communities

## Our Recommendations-

1. **Villages:** Newton currently has three village centers that have some critical mass of people, buildings and activity but they need to be enhanced to become more active and vibrant. Newton Junction, Newton Center and Rowe's Corner should be re-designated for a new "Village Center" zoning district that allows for increased residential density and a mix of civic, institutional, small retail, and office uses all of which foster greater social interaction. This needs to be done in a manner that discourages strip commercial development.
2. **Allow retail & service businesses only in village centers:** Focus on small, scale retail and services, located in the village centers, that meet the needs of residents and visitors but do not create strip commercial areas or attempt to compete with regional retail activity in surrounding communities. All structures should be compatible with the traditional New England architecture of the town.



# Charrette Team Observations and Recommendations (continued)

## What We Heard

## Our Recommendations

❑ Maintaining the dominant historic New England architectural style that is important both for preserving existing village streetscapes as well as any new structures that are added.

❑ Home based businesses scattered throughout the community are okay as long as they maintain the rural feel of the community. Businesses that support the agricultural activities in town are also acceptable (horse riding, pick-your-own fruits, feed and grain, etc.).

❑ New residential development needs to better fit in with the rural character and New England architecture of the town. This means that developments should have narrower streets, no clear-cutting of trees, limited site grading and should be set back from existing town roads to help retain the rural character of town roads.

3. **Establish building design standards that reinforce New England architectural character in the village centers:** Build on the town's extensive historic architectural character and develop design standards (or a "form-based zoning" code) to allow renovation of existing buildings and new development in villages that reinforces the scale and character of existing 19th and early 20th century architecture.

4. **Ensure that zoning allows reasonable home based businesses:** Review the current zoning and development regulations and determine whether they provide reasonable opportunities for home based businesses as well as businesses that are directly supportive of agricultural activities.

5. **Revise zoning & subdivision regulations to require better residential development design throughout Town:** Adopt zoning and subdivision amendments that require narrower roads that are similar to existing town roads; reduce the amount of land clearing and site regarding; and are designed to be set back from existing town roads to preserve the rural road feel in Newton.

6. **Consider creating a state-of-the-art Conservation Subdivision Ordinance:** Consider adopting a new conservation subdivision regulation (i.e. cluster) that incorporates all of these features and preserves larger tracts of contiguous open space.

7. **Encourage new residential development in village centers:** Incentivize new "infill" residential in villages that are compatible with current village building densities.



# Charrette Team Observations and Recommendations (continued)

## What We Heard

❑ The town has many recreation and open space resources but many residents do not know where they are or how to access them. Existing open spaces are not well connected and by maintaining narrow, rural roads it is difficult to travel on foot or bicycle between villages, recreation and other local destinations. Better publicity on existing recreation and open space resources is needed as well as a comprehensive long term strategy to care for them and link them to neighborhoods with a trail network for pedestrians and bicycles.

❑ Promoting larger non-residential land uses will not achieve any significant tax benefits without adversely affecting the town's rural character.

❑ The community is hungry for ways and places for all age groups to connect socially.

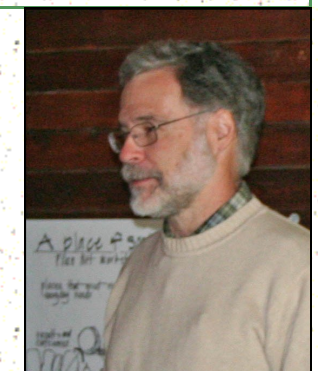


## Our Recommendations

8. **Develop a town wide pedestrian-bicycle plan:** Develop a comprehensive pedestrian and bicycle trail plan and network that links residential areas, with village centers, recreation, schools and other destinations in town.
9. **Open Space and conservation land protection:** Enlist volunteers to undertake a comprehensive natural resource inventory for the entire town—starting with town owned conservation land. The inventory should then be used to prioritize maintenance, further protection efforts and help inform the pedestrian-bicycle plan.
10. **Enlist volunteers to implement the pedestrian-bicycle plan:** Enlist volunteers to better advertise the existing trail and recreation opportunities, to help maintain them, help implement the pedestrian/bicycle trail plan—and to promote greater social interaction and connectivity.
11. **Maintain existing rural roads:** Do not promote the widening or expansion of existing roads in town, including state maintained roads, to discourage additional through traffic and slow traffic down (traffic calming).

12. **Thoroughly study the benefits and impacts of a non-residential tax based expansion policy:** Carefully study the balance between how much additional non-residential development would be needed to significantly benefit the tax rate vs. that development's impacts on the small town rural character of the community that is so highly valued.

13. **Actively pursue ways to promote social connectivity:** Create places and activities that foster social interaction (a.k.a. social capital) among town residents.
  - A. Actively pursue the enhancement of the three identified village centers as places to connect and socialize—restaurants, clubs, and a community center.
  - B. Find ways to get people involved in projects and through social networking.
  - C. Create committees to work on a ped/bike plan for the entire town.
    - (1). Energize a committee to do trail maintenance and trail acquisition.
    - (2). Create a committee to develop a really good map and guide to all recreation, trails and public open spaces—make sure it gets distributed widely and maintained.



# As a "sanctuary" the town needs greater Social Connectivity

Many of the comments received during the public listening sessions highlighted the fact that many residents moved to Newton because it is viewed as a small town sanctuary in the middle of a very active and highly developed region. It has convenient access to major highways, jobs, shopping, etc. What appeared to be missing was a strong sense of *social connectedness*, or as it is being increasingly

referred to - *social capital*. Residents value the rural character and open space in town but they also find that it can be somewhat socially isolating.

The charrette team observed that there are not enough places for people of all ages to gather and interact with each other.

The town transfer station is an important example of creating a setting where chance encounters and social relationships can occur. Newton essentially needs more transfer stations! So, how does a community develop more opportunities for social interaction?

The charrette team offers two important avenues that the town can take to promote greater opportunities for developing social capital:

**First**—there are many areas where residents can volunteer their skills to help out with community projects. During the charrette we identified at least three major opportunities, and there are certainly many more that can be developed:

(a). Designing, building and maintaining a comprehensive town-wide pedestrian and bike trail system that seeks to provide off-road connections between neighborhoods, village centers, schools, churches, recreation areas, existing recreational trails, etc.

(b). Document and develop a web site and other materials to publicize the existing and potential recreational resources that the town has, and

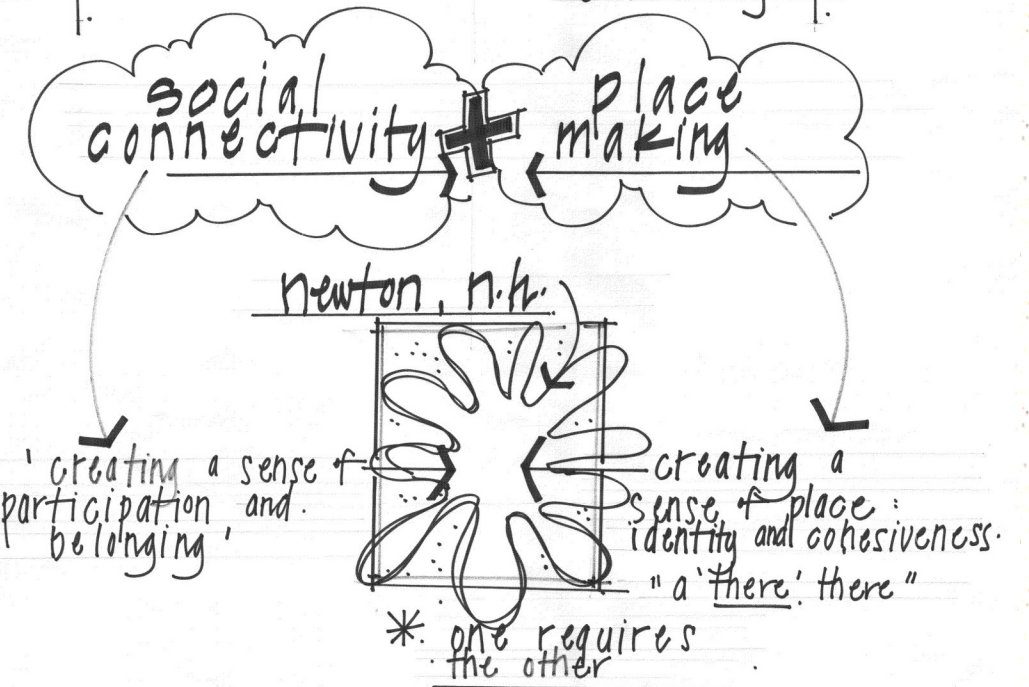
(c). Document open space and conservation resources in town and develop a long term strategy for protection and potential future expansion.

**Second**—The town needs to incentivize the revitalization and enhancement of several of its existing villages. Currently Newton has very few places where people can meet formally or informally in social settings. A number of residents commented on the lack of a good local coffee shop, restaurant, sports bar, community center or other

## Healing the 'disconnect'

Plan NH workshop @ Newton, NH.

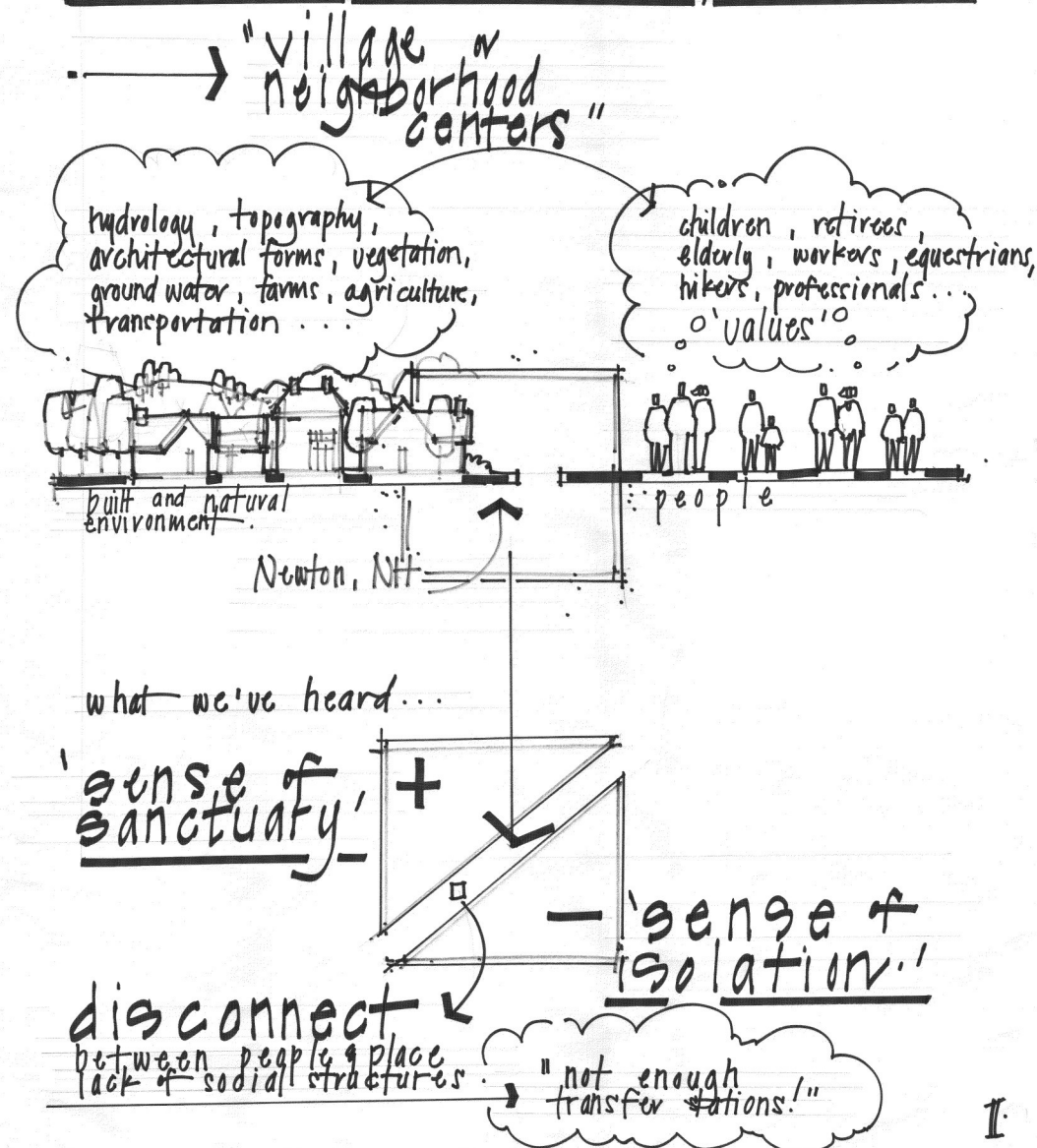
role of Plan NH changes:  
 facilitators & designers/planners + mentors to community



location for meeting people. This is often referred to as place making.

In the next section, we will detail how Newton can build on three existing villages by incentivizing a mix of residential and appropriate retail and office uses through zoning and physical improvements that foster a setting and regulatory structure that can result in vibrant villages that will attract more people and business activity.

## Plan NH workshop @ Newton, NH.



# Social Connectivity (continued)

The charrette team explored the steps needed to create social capital that fit within the framework of placemaking. The graphic at right highlights the process that the town should follow to create villages that are inviting, interesting, facilitate people gathering and interacting—all within the small town, classic New England architectural parameters that residents said they highly value.

The PlanNH charrette process is, at its core, a visioning process for the community. With everything that the townspeople have told us, we have shaped a vision statement that residents need to review and validate and then move toward implementation steps.

### **Draft Village Vision Statement:**

Newton highly values its existing villages and seeks to make designated villages vibrant, mixed use centers in the community that:

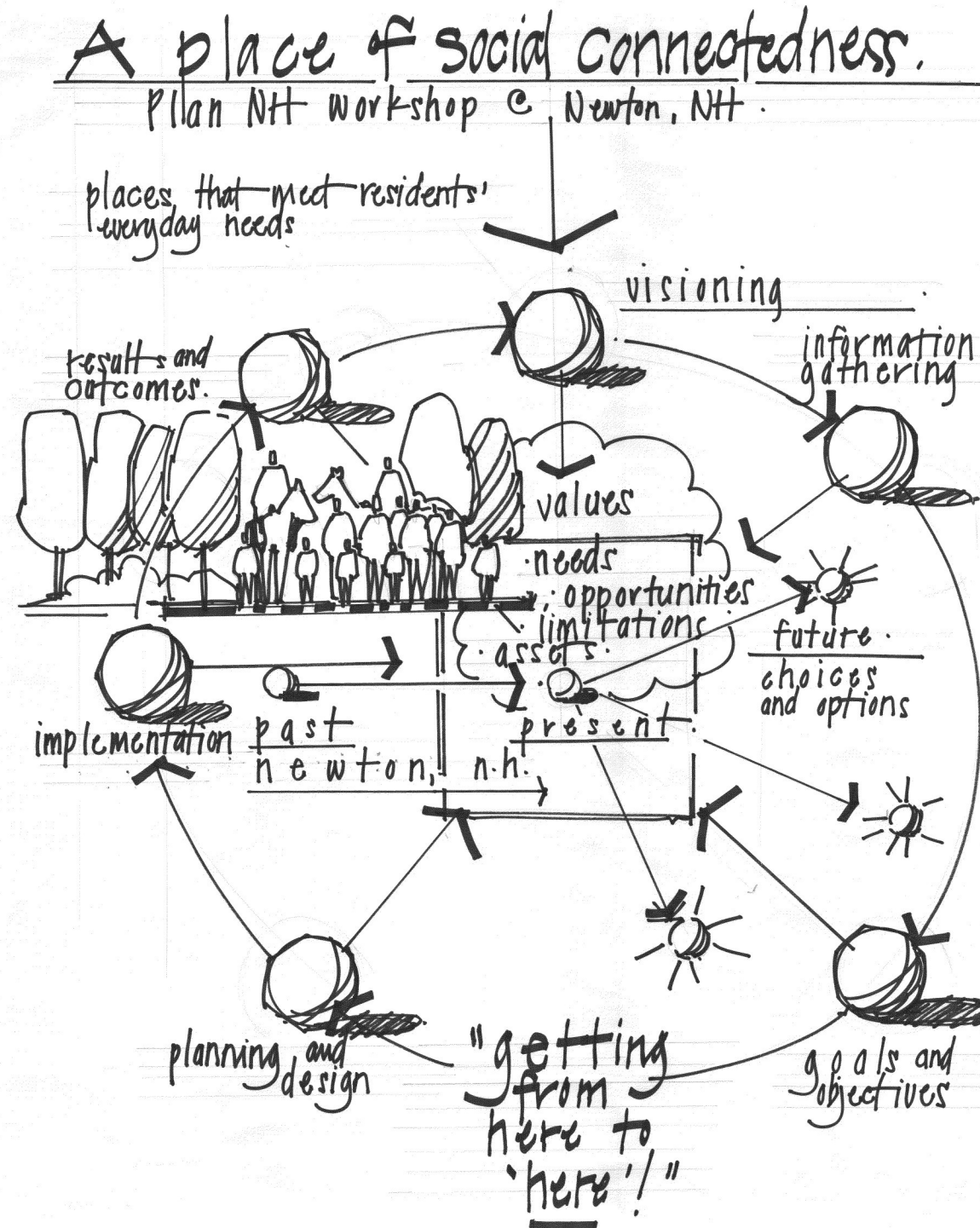
- Preserve and enhance the town's existing traditional New England architectural character,
- Provide opportunities for more residential development that is in character with existing design and densities,
- Encourage small scale retail and office uses that cater to the needs of Newton residents and fit within the architectural character and scale of existing buildings,
- Strive to retain or locate public buildings and services in designated village centers, and
- Provide the public improvements needs to facilitate the accomplishment of this vision.

What the charrette team requests of the residents of Newton is that they work together to explore opportunities for changes in zoning and physical improvements that work toward this village vision.

In the following sections, the charrette team provides an outline of what some of the vision objectives might achieve, but the real work is in the hands of the residents of Newton. It will be their job to forge more detailed

goals and objectives, plan out what you want to happen in detail and then implement it.

**Newton has already begun the process. The outpouring of energy and ideas during the charrette showed us that Newton has the social and political will to take on this challenge.**



# Officially Designate Three Village Centers

Newton has two villages that already share many of the necessary attributes to become centers of community activity. Both **Newton Junction** and **Newton Center** have:

- ❑ More compact development patterns (buildings built close together)
- ❑ Commercial development
- ❑ Religious and government land uses that begin to place them as centers of community activity

**Rowe's Corner** has a more compact development form and some commercial development but lacks other land uses that would bring it up to the level of existing activity that the other two villages currently have.

We are recommending that all three villages be considered for a new **"Village Center" zoning district** that would permit additional development that is consistent with the typical lot sizes,



pedestrian scale street lights should be integrated into the village setting to create a stronger statement that says **"this is the village center."** In order to retain the current feel of the villages, any off street parking required for new uses should be carefully designed with shared parking **to the rear of buildings** and **shared driveways** onto the street so that the streetscape views that currently exist are enhanced rather than diminished.

The size of the Rowe's Corner village district should be kept smaller than the other two villages, in keeping with its more limited mix of land uses. Most importantly, the village center zoning for both Rowe's Corner and Newton Center should be kept well separated to prohibit them from becoming a continuous strip of commercial activity along Route 108.

Land uses that cannot fit within the scale and architectural character of the existing villages should not be allowed.



building setbacks, and building sizes and shapes that are already present. The goal of this zoning designation would be to enable undeveloped or under-developed properties in the villages to be developed in such a way that new buildings would fit right in with existing structures. The goal would be to require buildings with similar size, scale and visual character without requiring them to directly copy existing architectural styles. The other goal of the village center zoning district would be to allow a mixture of residential types along with small scale retail, office and institutional uses that add to the vitality of the village and encourage residents to come to the village to shop, do business, attend civic meetings and socialize at restaurants, coffee houses and other logical public gathering places that do not exist today.

Parking should be allowed on both sides of the main roads in village centers and street amenities such as sidewalks and pe-

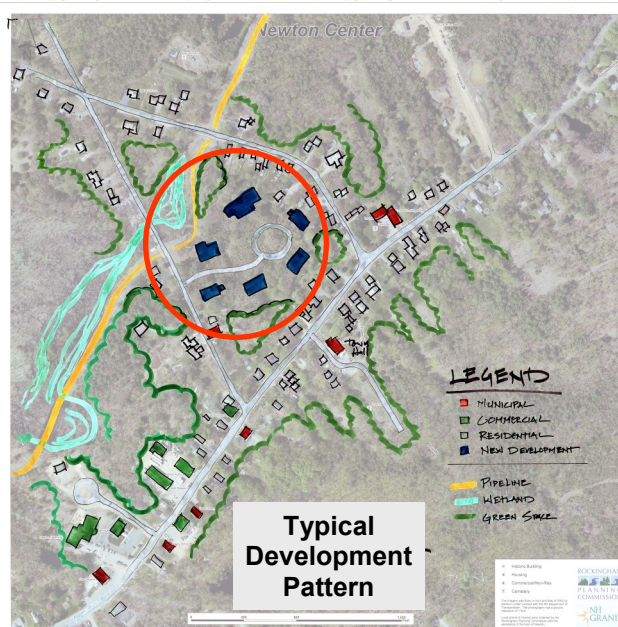


# Newton Center Design Concept

A design concept for Newton Center was developed during the course of the charrette. Due to time limitations we were not able to develop comparable concepts for the other two villages, but the ideas and characteristics that were integrated into the design for Newton Center can readily be applied to the other two recommended village centers.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- ❑ Newton Center is centrally located and has some density already.
- ❑ There are signs of services being dispersed—a pattern that needs to be reversed – Police station, fire station, post office moved away from the village center.
- ❑ A concentration of business and institutional uses already exist but they are too spread out.
- ❑ The residential density needs to be strengthened to create enough “critical mass” to support a mix of land uses and create a stronger sense of “village.” Several developments exist near the village but are isolated due to lack of interconnected streets and lower development densities.
- ❑ Several areas of developable land exist close to town hall.
- ❑ In addition to encouraging residential, small scale re-



tail, office and institutional uses along Route 108, a new “infill” development concept was developed between Highland and Wallace Streets.

## TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERN – Similar to other new developments in town

- ❑ Proposed new development based on similar recent developments elsewhere in town
- ❑ Large lot – 2 acres min. (net 6 homes).
- ❑ Large houses - \$300,000 to \$500,000 value.
- ❑ Cul-de-sac style street—not interconnected with other streets.

### Results:

- ❑ Development too small to enhance the vitality of the village center.
- ❑ Site would likely need to be clear-cut which would be unsightly as with similar developments identified during the charrette.
- ❑ Lack of walkability due to dead end street and concentration of traffic typically associated with cul-de-sacs.

## A MORE APPROPRIATE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

- ❑ Proposed new development based on smart growth principals.
- ❑ Variety of house sizes including multi-family and elderly.
- ❑ Through-street design connecting Highland and Wallace.
- ❑ Inclusion of village infrastructure: community center, park and sidewalks.
- ❑ Creation of village improvement district to fund infrastructure improvements.

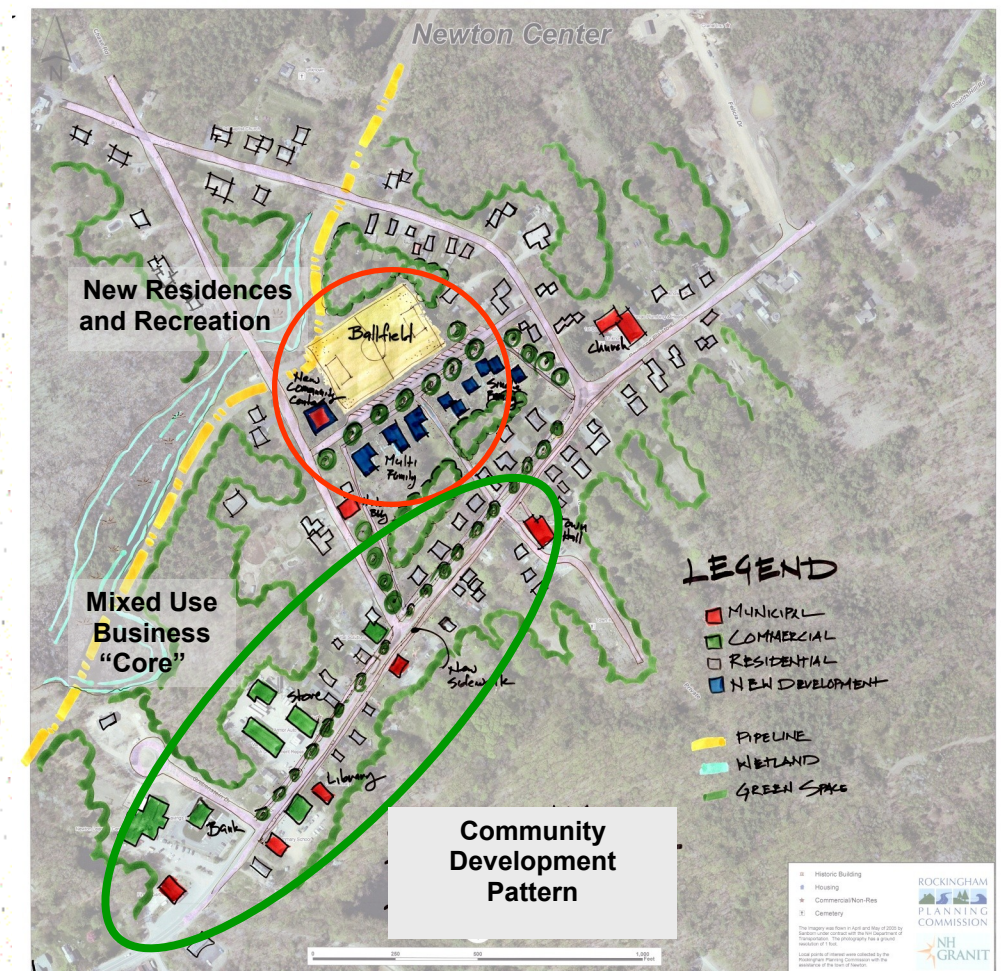
### Results:

- ❑ The increase of housing will bring more activity to the village.
- ❑ The variety of housing will bring diversity to the village including a mix of ages and economic backgrounds. Diversity is key to the vitality of the village.
- ❑ The through-street and sidewalks will allow for community connections to the different parts of the village fostering an increase in social connectivity.
- ❑ The increased walkability of the village will allow access to services (town hall, post office, park) by those with limited access to transportation (lower income, elderly, children).
- ❑ New community structures will provide more opportunities for social interaction.
- ❑ The increase in activity will help existing businesses in the district as well as create the potential for more along route 108.
- ❑ Funding for the improvements does not need to be the burden of the existing property tax payers but can be done through the revenues created with the new development.

## CONCLUSIONS

Traditionally villages fostered a sense of community and brought neighbors together through services and activities that helped define the village. Current development regulations practiced in many New England towns are not in keeping with the traditional village center and perpetuate suburban sprawl, blurring the division between the village edge and the rural landscape. New developments spread out the activity and limit access. Today neighborhood events are becoming rare and volunteer groups are losing membership, due in part to the physical distance between homes. Closer neighbors promote closer social interaction!

The creation of a village district is a benefit to the entire town. New housing stock designed sensitively to the village setting will relieve pressure for housing in the rural district thus conserving open space. The new activity in the village center will create easily accessible services. The vitality that the village district will create enhances the qualities of the original village and will help preserve its character for future generations.



# Pedestrian-Bicycle Plan & Trail

Many comments were received about the desire for a better publicized and more extensive trail network throughout the town. Residents commented on their desire to be able to walk or ride bicycles between neighborhoods, to village centers, to schools and churches, to local retail and to town recreation and conservation properties.



members explored existing and possible trail corridors throughout the community.

The result provides the skeleton upon which the town can build to provide linkages between all important destinations in the community. The Framework for a plan (at right) is intended to be a beginning for the town to generate community interest and citizen participation in creating a plan that meets the needs of the entire community.

By advertising the development of a trail network and getting school children, their parents and others involved, residents can get to know each other and work toward a common goal, creating a plan and implementation strategy to develop a physical and social connectivity network at the same time.

In response to that desire, the charrette team began the development of a trail plan that would accomplish all of the stated objectives. Working with a number of residents, team

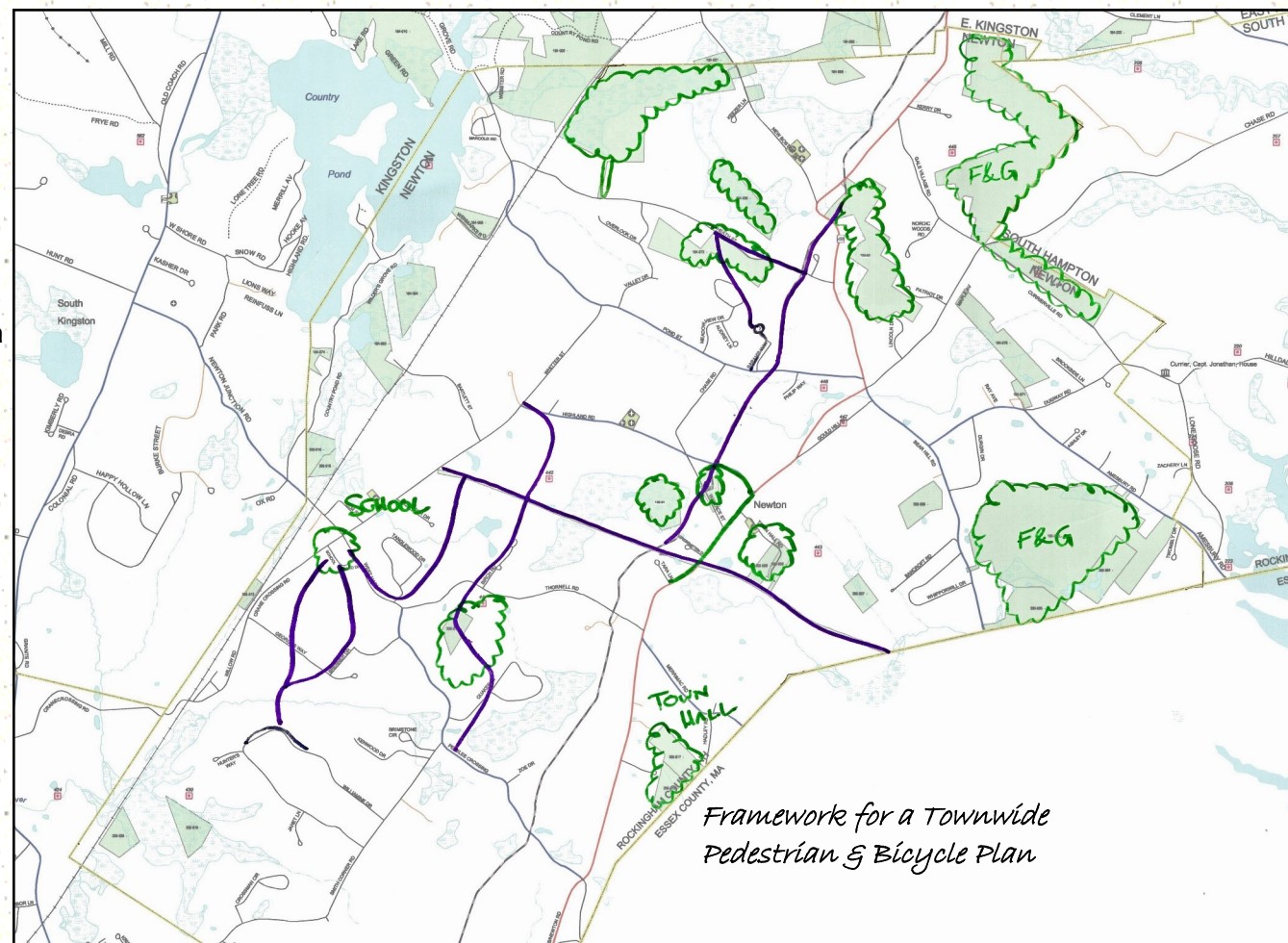
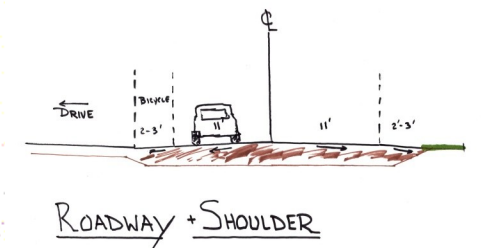
**Step 1 Fully Develop the plan:** Starting with the framework plan, town volunteers should expand it and map out the following:

- Conservation access easements or public access rights,
- Existing trails
- Potential trails including use of old rail beds, utility lines, etc.,
- Fish and Game properties,
- other protected properties,
- Town recreation properties
- Schools,
- Village centers and neighborhoods.

**Step 2 Develop and Implementation Strategy:** Begin by working with trails that already exist. Using the town-wide plan as the “big picture” guide, start exploring linkages to nearby destinations that have been identified. After an expansion strategy is formulated, begin discussing the plan with property owners who will be needed to

provide access permission. Depending on the level of community involvement, more than one trail expansion effort could be going on simultaneously.

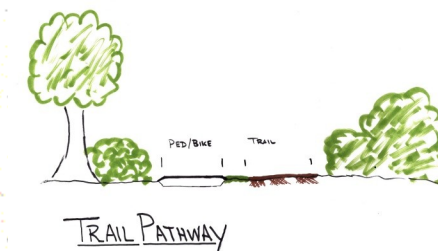
**Step 3 Create some early successes:** At this point, it would be great to get a few concrete success stories that would get people energized. This might include trail work to clean up and maintain one or more existing trails, developing a map that could be printed and/or put on the town’s web site, develop and implement a consistent trailhead signage program that could be built and installed by volunteers, boy scouts, etc. Celebrate success by having a ribbon cutting, newspaper article or other event.



## Step 4 Build on success!

Keep working on expansions to the framework and existing core trail network. Be creative about how best to close gaps in the network.

- Use existing low-volume residential streets to link a trail to a major town road, road crossing or other destination.
- Where existing town roads are the logical route option, reconfigure the road to provide 11 foot vehicular travel lanes with 2-3-foot paved shoulders with a few more feet of unpaved shoulder. The shoulder needs to be striped with a white edge of pavement



line. This arrangement has the advantage of keeping town roads fairly narrow and rural in character while providing a year-round place to walk/bike (since the shoulder will get plowed).

○ A trail pathway can also be located parallel to existing town roads where adequate land exists. This configuration has the advantage of getting pedestrians and bicyclists off roads for improved safety but it requires higher up-front costs as well as higher long term maintenance effort. This configuration might therefore be reserved for higher volume roads.

# Preserving Small Town Rural Character

An overriding theme of the public listening sessions was the desire to maintain Newton's small town, rural feel. Other sections of this plan have discussed enhancement of the village centers, building social capital, and creating a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails. In this section we will present several approaches to protecting the rural, small town character of the community.

Key ingredients to maintaining the small town and rural feel of a community include: preservation of large tracts of open space, agricultural and forested lands; maintaining a quite natural setting; not having development cast a glow of light on the night skies (also called dark skies); preserving wildlife and wildlife corridors and keeping town roads fairly narrow and tree lined.

**Zoning and Land Use Regulation:** Using zoning as a major development management tool should be the first priority in maintaining rural character. Included in our recommendations are several land use regulatory tools that should be considered to preserve the rural feel of Newton.

1. Conservation Subdivisions (See recommendation #6)
2. Creation of a village center zoning district to promote somewhat higher residential density in village centers—rather than in the countryside. (See recommendations on Pages 13 & 14).
3. Encourage most non-residential activity in the village centers. (See recommendations on pages 13 & 14).
4. Allow limited home occupation businesses in rural parts of town. (See recommendation #4)
5. Adopt local regulations that govern excessively noisy uses and require modern lighting that restricts the amount of night lighting that is emitted from individual lots. This issue can best be handled by clearly defining allowed land uses in the zoning ordinance to be sure that there are no objectionable activities in residential areas. Night sky protections can be addressed through a combination of stronger non-residential site plan regulations and zoning amendments. The State of New Hampshire enacted a new dark skies statute (RSA 9-D) in July, 2009 and model dark skies ordinances are available at [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org).

**Protection of the Towns Natural Resources:** The second tool that needs to be used to preserve rural character is to develop a long term strategy to identify, prioritize and protect the natural resource features that are important to Newton.

1. **A Natural Resource Inventory for the entire town and for town owned conserved lands.** This process is necessary for the community to identify areas of high conservation priority and to determine which town owned lands may better serve the community in other ways - e.g. as recreation fields, affordable housing (maybe through a Community Land Trust), or land to sell and use the proceeds to protect land with greater conservation and rural preservation value.
2. **Public Education** – To make land use decisions that preserve features and places important to the town's "rural character" and that protect natural resources of ecological significance (surface and drinking water, wooded steep slopes, wildlife habitat, etc.), voters in the community need more conservation education. This may include:
  - a. A Cost of Community Services analysis.
  - b. Forums and Surveys to identify natural areas and resources that community members treasure and would hate to lose.
  - c. Greater awareness of natural areas and trails in Newton that are open to the public and broader understanding of the need to protect and maintain them.
  - d. Dialogue to address conflicts regarding trail use and maintenance - seek ways to accommodate different user-groups while preventing destructive use of these resources.
  - e. Awareness of land protection and stewardship options and potential partners
3. **Conservation Leadership and Volunteers** - The town needs

more people to help the conservation commission with open space planning, land protection and stewardship, trail mapping and maintenance, and community education.

4. **Policy and Partnerships** -
  - a. The process of creating a Natural Resource Inventory and identifying areas of special community value (e.g. for outdoor recreation, wildlife viewing, "sanctuary" value, scenic value, iconic landscapes, local food production, social clubs and gathering places related to outdoor activities, drinking water) will help provide the information and community education needed to develop an open space plan. Such a plan should be adopted as part of a master plan update.
  - b. An open space plan would include recommendations for the future use and potential protection of all current town owned conservation lands.
  - c. The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department has three wildlife management areas in Newton. Effective management of these areas for wildlife will depend, in part, on these parcels containing enough wildlife resources and connectivity to other natural areas to sustain the wildlife that live in and pass through them. This agency is an important partner for the town in planning priority areas for conservation. If the Conservation Commission hasn't already done so they should approach NH Fish and Game for potential help with their open space planning and with funding for land protection.
  - d. The Southeast Region Land Trust would be another potential partner for Newton's conservation efforts. This regional land trust or another land trust (e.g., The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests) may have natural resource maps for this region that could help town leaders prioritize areas to protect. Land Trusts can also help town leaders learn about land conservation tools, strategies, and sources of conservation funds.

# Implementation

Newton has a wealth of resources that it can build on to implement the recommendations of this plan. It already possesses viable village centers, the beginnings of a trail network, protected public open space, and most importantly a strong group of residents who seem willing to begin to make it happen.

## Working Groups

To get the ball rolling, we recommend that at least three **working groups** (sounds less formal than a “committee”) be formed to explore the following high priority topics:

- **A comprehensive pedestrian/bicycle trail system**
- **A town-wide open space and conservation strategy**
- **Zoning and Land use regulation amendments to create a dynamic, mixed use village center zoning district for Newton Center, Newton Junction and Rowe’s Corner.**

The goals of these working groups should be to not only formalize the details of their respective plans or strategies, but find ways to include more people in the discussion.

The real value of creating working groups is to stimulate social interaction. Get neighbors and friends involved. Hold neighborhood workshops. Get school kids involved and they can bring their parents into the discussion. Find ways to make the subjects that each working group is developing interesting and relevant to the rest of the com-

munity.

*Shamelessly promote and publicize what each working group is doing.*

## Coordination with the new Town Master Plan

Most of the suggestions made during the charrette listening sessions and our recommendations have a direct connection to the town’s new master plan. The working groups we are recommending to get the implementation process started, and to build social capital in the community, should be supported and nurtured by the town and the master planning process.

Bringing the working group’s ideas and work efforts into the master plan is an excellent way to make the master plan a truly “living” document. If the working groups can maintain momentum, develop sound plans and implementation strategies and begin to pursue actual project implementation, they will become empowered and invested in the process and the rewards of their accomplishments. Achieving that level of participation and “buy in” by the community will make their work and the master plan a truly living document since it won’t just be what is put on paper in the master plan report but what everyone who participates in the process learns, gets engaged in and believes in.

The more public participation that can be achieved in the working groups and the master plan, the greater the chances for success. This effort can create strong social connectivity that will further strengthen the entire community.

## Tools for Implementation

There are a wealth of sources of funding and expertise to explore. When applying for grants and foundation monies, many of the funders require plans or a detailed program to be in place as an assurance that projects will be completed in order to qualify for funds.

### Expertise:

NH Office of Energy and Planning (OEP)  
NH Office of Travel & Tourism  
Division of Economic Development (within DRED)  
NH Department of Environmental Services (DES)  
NH Division of Historical Resources  
NH Council on the Arts  
U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)  
NH Preservation Alliance  
NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT)  
Rockingham Planning Commission  
USDA Rural Development

### Funding

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)  
Economic Development Administration  
NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT)  
Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive (RSA 79-E)  
Conservation License Plate Funds  
Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP)  
Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA)  
Tax Increment Financing (TIF)  
Special Assessment Districts  
Town Trust Funds

## Other Foundations and Private Funding Sources:

**Wal-Mart Good Works** – [www.walmartfoundation.org](http://www.walmartfoundation.org)

**The Home Depot** – Community Impact Grants,  
[corporate.homedepot.com/wps/portal/!ut/p/.cmd/cs/.ce/70A/s/70121/s.70A/70121](http://corporate.homedepot.com/wps/portal/!ut/p/.cmd/cs/.ce/70A/s/70121/s.70A/70121)

**The Timberland Company** – Community Involvement Program, [www.timberland.com/corp/index.jsp?page=communityInvolvement](http://www.timberland.com/corp/index.jsp?page=communityInvolvement)

**The Ford Foundation**, [www.fordfound.org/](http://www.fordfound.org/)

**PSNH** – Community Giving program, [www.psnh.com/Community/Support/corp\\_giving.asp](http://www.psnh.com/Community/Support/corp_giving.asp)

**The Allstate Foundation** - [www.allstate.com/Community/PageRender.asp?Page=foundation.html](http://www.allstate.com/Community/PageRender.asp?Page=foundation.html)

**Merck Family Fund** - [www.merckff.org/index.html](http://www.merckff.org/index.html)

**The Madeline G. von Weber Trust** - Funds projects in community development, neighborhood development, human services and the performing arts. Contact: Madeline G. von Weber Trust, c/o James D. Dow, 95 Market St., Manchester, NH 03101.

**New England Grassroots Environment Fund** - [www.grassrootsfund.org/](http://www.grassrootsfund.org/)

**Waste Management Charitable Giving Program** - Support for Environment, Education, and Community Impact Programs - [www.wm.com/WM/community/Giving.asp](http://www.wm.com/WM/community/Giving.asp)

**Enterprise Community Partners** - [www.enterprisecommunity.org/](http://www.enterprisecommunity.org/)

**Orton Family Foundation**, [www.orton.org](http://www.orton.org) **Heart & Soul Community Planning**

**The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance**, [www.nhpreservation.org](http://www.nhpreservation.org)

## Other Public Resources

### **NH Department of Transportation NH Department of Transportation**

New Hampshire Department of Transportation is a source of public funding for state road improvements, as well as safety and sidewalk improvements.  
Mr. George Campbell, Commissioner; Ms. Nancy Mayville, Planning and Community Assistance Bureau, NHDOT, Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301

**Transportation Enhancement Act Program** - Project categories include: facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians; safety and educational activities for bicyclists and pedestrians; acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites; scenic or historic highway programs; landscaping and other scenic beautification; historic preservation; rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings; structures or facilities; preservation of abandoned railway corridors; control and removal of outdoor advertising; archaeological planning and research; environmental mitigation to address water pollution due to highways or vehicles; and establishing transportation museums.—  
<http://www.nh.gov/dot/municipalhighways/tecmaq/index.htm>

**Rural Development Administration** provides low interest loans and grants for municipal projects as well as financing for some private development.  
Mr. Rob McCarthy, U.S. Rural Development Administration, Ferry Street, Concord, NH 03301

**NH Division of Historic Resources** may be used as a source for historic property advice and expertise, any use of historic tax credits must be approved by this agency.  
Mr. Jim Garvin, State Architectural Historian, NH Division of Historic Resources, 19 Pillsbury Street, Concord, NH 03001

**NH Business Finance Authority** is a source for tax-exempt bonding and other subsidies for private and non-profit investment.  
Mr., Jack Donovan, NH Business Finance Authority, 14 Dixon Avenue, Concord, NH 03301

**NH Community Development Finance Authority** is a source for tax credits for publicly supported projects and Community Development Block Grant funds.  
Ms. Kathy Bogle-Shields, NH Community Development Finance Authority, 14 Dixon Avenue, Concord, NH 03301

**NH Municipal Bond Bank** provides low interest funds for publicly bonded projects.  
Ms. Sheila St Germain, NH Municipal Bond Bank, 25 Triangle Park Drive, Suite 102, Concord, NH 03301

We also suggest the town consider enacting RSA 79-E, Community Revitalization Tax Incentives as part of the village center initiatives. Signed into law in 2006, this statute makes it possible for property owners wanting to substantially rehabilitate buildings in a downtown or village center to apply to the local governing body for a period of temporary tax relief.

**Newton has what it takes to realize its objectives to improve its village centers. Your talent, energy, commitment, and spirit are an excellent springboard to continue to move forward.**