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Introduction

The Land Use chapter is a critical component of the Wilton Master Plan. Decisions regarding how Wilton uses its land impact everything from its transportation network and community design to its natural resources and economic vitality. Two key issues emerge from Wilton's land use vision and influence the content of this chapter. The first is a need to balance future development opportunities with the preservation of Wilton's natural resources, rural character, and sense of community. The second is the promotion of economic vitality and employment opportunities in Wilton, with a particular focus on redevelopment opportunities in the downtown.

Section 1 ~ Wilton Today

1.1 Current Conditions and Existing Land Uses

Current Conditions

The Town of Wilton is a rural, residential community. Existing residential development is located throughout town, with the highest concentrations in the downtown/Main Street area and the Abbot Hill Acres/Intervale Road area. Non-residential development is primarily concentrated along Main Street and Route 101. The southwestern portion of Wilton is very rural, with abundant natural resources and little existing development.

The Current Conditions map depicts Wilton's rural character and residential focus. Dots on the map represent existing buildings and correspond to the location of the structure on the parcel.

Map—Current Conditions

Existing Land Uses

Land use simply describes the type of activity that occurs on a parcel of land. Existing land use is influenced by natural resource constraints and opportunities, accessibility, and zoning. The land uses described and mapped in this chapter were derived by the Nashua Regional Planning Commission using a combination of assessing data interpretation, field surveys, parcel based data, and input from the Wilton Planning Board. They are meant to be general in nature. Classifications and calculated acreages are based on Town assessing data from March 2011. For the purposes of this Master Plan, land uses in Wilton have been consolidated into the following categories:

- Residential—this category includes single family, two family, and three family dwelling units. In Wilton, residential development primarily consists of single-family homes. Residential land can be found throughout town, with the highest densities in the downtown and Abbot Hill Acres area.
- Commercial—Wilton has very limited commercial land use. The highest concentration of commercial activity is located along Main Street, with additional development along Route 101 and Route 31.

- **Industrial**—in addition to industrial development, this land use category includes utilities and mining and waste disposal. Industrial activity does not comprise a substantial portion of land use in Wilton, although there are several large industrial parcels. Sand and gravel operations make up a majority of industrial land use, occupying over 450 acres in the southwest portion of Wilton along Greenville Road and roughly 180 acres in the northern portion of town along Forest Road.
- **Natural Resources**—this land use category includes agriculture, open space, recreation, and surface water. Natural resources are an essential component of Wilton’s rural character and quality of life. According to the Town of Wilton’s 2009 “Natural Resources Inventory,” over 3,200 acres or roughly 20% of Wilton’s land is permanently protected. The following table, taken from the same report, highlights important natural resources in town, their acreage, and level of protection. Note: some natural resource types overlap, so the percent of land base values do not add to 100%.

Natural Resource	Acres in Wilton	% Land Base	Acres Protected	% Protected
Forest Cover	12,690	78.0%	2,711	21.4%
Productive Forest Soils	11,892	73.0%	1,850	15.5%
Best Agriculture Soils	1,596	9.8%	214	13.4%
Agriculture Land Use	1,335	8.2%	254	19.0%
Wetlands and Hydric Soils	1,489	9.2%	325	21.8%
Riparian & Shoreland Buffers	2,786	17.1%	572	20.5%
Aquifers	3,370	20.7%	675	20.0%
Drinking Water Protection Area	1,740	10.7%	223	12.8%
Wildlife Habitats	2,414	14.8%	707	29.3%

- **Municipal/Government/Institutional**—this category includes municipal government facilities, such as Town Hall, Police Department, and Ambulance Service; the library; public and private schools (not including daycare centers); and churches. This category does not include town-owned recreation lands, which are included under natural resources. Wilton’s municipal facilities are located in the eastern portion of town near the downtown. High Mowing and Pine Hill Schools occupy several large parcels along Abbot Hill Road and Pine Hill Drive. Churches can be found along Route 101 and Isaac Frye Highway.
- **Vacant**—vacant land is located throughout town and is defined as any parcel that does not have a structure or specific use assigned to it.

Map—Current Land Use

1.2 Land Use Relative to Zoning

Zoning ordinances divide the municipality into special districts and establish regulations concerning the use, placement, spacing, and size of land and buildings within the respective district. Zoning is intended to avoid disruptive land use patterns by preventing activities on one property from having detrimental effects on other properties.

Zoning is an essential tool for implementing Master Plan goals, protecting community resources, and guiding new development. In turn, the Master Plan can be used to guide future zoning. There should be a clear link between zoning ordinance requirements and the goals of the master plan.

All land in Wilton is located in one of the following primary zoning districts: residential, general residence and agricultural, commercial, industrial, and office park. In addition, Wilton utilizes the following overlay zones: research and office park, gravel excavation, floodplain conservation, wetlands conservation, aquifer protection, elderly housing, watershed, and personal wireless service facilities.

Residential District

- **Acreage**—464 acres (2.82%)
- **Location**—primarily located in the eastern portion of town along Intervale Road, Burns Hill Road, between Gibbons Highway and Abbot Hill Road, and north of Main Street.
- **Permitted Uses**— single family and duplex family dwellings and accessory uses, multi-family dwellings containing three dwelling units with site plan approval by the Planning Board.
- **Current Land Use Relative to Zone**— the Current Land Use map shows that the actual land use in the Residential District is consistent with zoning.
- **Implications for Future Land Use**—this district requires a minimum lot size of one-half acre per dwelling unit when served by both public water and sewer and one acre per dwelling unit for lots not served by both public water and sewer. Therefore, future expansion of public water and sewer would impact the density of housing in this district.

Residence-Agriculture District

- **Acreage**—14,984 acres (90.97%)
- **Location**—throughout Wilton
- **Permitted Uses**—single family and duplex family dwellings and accessory uses, multi-family dwellings containing three dwelling units with site plan approval by the Planning Board, all general farming and forestry activities
- **Current Land Use Relative to Zone**—the Current Land Use map shows that the actual land use in the Residence-Agricultural District is consistent with zoning. It should be noted that several large parcels in the Residence-Agriculture District along Route 31 fall under the Gravel

Excavation overlay district. Given the limited amount of residential land use in this area, disruption to private residents is likely to be minimal.

- **Implications for Future Land Use**—the minimum lot size in the Residence-Agriculture District is two contiguous acres of land per dwelling unit. This requirement will help to preserve Wilton’s rural character. With the exception of approved home occupations, no commercial, industrial, or office activity is permitted in the Residence-Agricultural District. This limits the amount of non-residential development that can occur in Wilton given that this district encompasses 90% of the Town.

Commercial District

- **Acreage**—62 acres (0.38%)
- **Location**— Commercially zoned parcels can be found along Main Street, Frye Mill Road, at the intersection of Isaac Frye Highway and Greenville Road, and the south side of Route 101 near Temple Road.
- **Permitted Uses**—any use permitted in the General Residence-Agricultural District; duplex and multi-family dwellings, inns, tourist courts, cabins, and bed & breakfasts; restaurants and other retail establishments; garages, parking lots, and filling stations; business and professional offices; theaters, halls, clubs, and amusement centers; greenhouses and florist shops; funeral homes; wholesale establishments in connection with permitted retail establishments, warehousing, or merchandise for retail sale within the District; houses of worship; hospitals, emergency medical centers, and clinics; schools, kindergartens, preschools, and daycare centers, including in-home childcare.
- **Current Land Use Relative to Zone**— Current land use in the Commercial District is consistent with the zoning. A variety of uses can be found in this zone, including residential, office, retail, houses of worship, professional services, salons, theaters, and restaurants.
- **Implications for Future Land Use**—although this zone is small, non-residential commercial uses are also permitted in the industrial zone. Even so, these zones represent a small portion of Wilton, which limits the amount of commercial development that can occur in town.

Industrial District

- **Acreage**—886 acres (5.38%)
- **Location**—Industrial zoning can be found along Route 31/Forest Road, south of Main Street along the Souhegan River, and along Route 101/Gibbons Highway and Greenville Road.
- **Permitted Uses**—manufacturing, compounding, processing, packing, treatment or warehousing of goods and products; research and/or testing laboratory; offices; non-residential commercial uses
- **Current Land Use Relative to Zone**—permitted uses in the Industrial zone are wide ranging and as such, so are the current land uses found in the zone. They include land uses traditionally thought of as industrial such as sand and gravel, auto salvage, and aluminum casting operations.

However, they also include large parcels of natural resources as well as smaller pockets of commercial and grandfathered residential development.

- **Implications for Future Land Use**—given that commercial activities are allowed in the industrial zone and that there are more industrial zoned acres than commercial acres, it is possible that future commercial land use could be accommodated in the industrial zone. There is a cluster of industrial zoned parcels on the east side Route 31 in southern Wilton between King Brook Road and the Everett Well that have no natural resource constraints and could be developed. Additional industrial zoned parcels can be found along Route 101 in the Intervale Road area, however, their development potential is somewhat limited by environmental constraints.

Office Park District

- **Acreage**—75 acres (0.45%)
- **Location**—two parcels west of West End Road between Gibbons Highway and Keyes Hill Road.
- **Permitted Uses**— corporate offices, research facilities, farming uses.
- **Current Land Use Relative to Zone**—the larger parcel (C-127, 68.28 acres) is currently categorized as having a natural resources land use, which falls under the permitted farming use. The smaller parcel (C-127-1, 6.4 acres) is currently categorized as commercial and is an office park.
- **Implications for Future Land Use**—although the Office Park District only includes 2 parcels, there is opportunity for additional office land use on parcels included in the Research and Office Park overlay district. In addition, parcel C-127 in the Office Park District has limited natural resource constraints and could be developed into corporate offices or research facilities.

Map—Current Zoning

Section 2 ~ Future Land Use

2.1 Where Can Future Development be Located?

Future development in Wilton will be driven by the availability of developable land and opportunities for redevelopment.

Developable Land

Developable land can be thought of as vacant or partially developed parcels with no significant natural, legal, or practical constraints on their development. For the purposes of this Master Plan, constraints on future development in Wilton include:

1. Water Bodies and Wetlands—water bodies and wetlands can be found throughout Wilton. According the 2009 Natural Resources Inventory, 1.1% (182 acres) of Wilton’s total land area is surface water (lakes, ponds, rivers), 0.1% (24 acres) is forested wetlands, and 1.3% (208 acres) is non-forested wetlands. National Wetlands Inventory data was used to map these features.
2. Conserved Land—as of the 2009 Natural Resources Inventory, more than 3,200 acres or roughly 20% of Wilton’s land area was permanently protected. These lands can be found throughout town, with the largest concentrations in the southwestern quadrant. NH Granit Conserved Lands Type 1 data was used to map these features.
3. Steep Slopes—this includes parcels with slopes greater than 25%. Steep slopes limit development potential due to site grading and erosion considerations. Wilton has a hilly topography, with steep slopes found throughout large portions of town. The NH Granit SSURGO database was used to map these features.
4. Current Land Use—in some cases, current land use is unlikely to change and therefore precludes future development. In this plan, current land use constraints include roads and road right of ways, municipal/government facilities, and schools. There are a limited number of parcels that fall under this category in Wilton. The Nashua Regional Planning Commission GIS database was used to map these features.
5. Poorly and Very Poorly Drained Soils—these soils result from repeated, prolonged periods of saturation or inundation. They pose significant challenges to development and their active use for development purposes is prohibited under the Wetlands Conservation District. The NH Granit SSURGO database was used to map these features.

Wilton’s constraints map illustrates that a significant portion of town has limitations on its development potential. Steep slopes can be found throughout town and large parcels of conserved land are prevalent in the southwest quadrant.

Map—Constraints

Redevelopment Opportunities

Redevelopment opportunities should also be encouraged to accommodate future growth in Wilton. Sites that have already been developed often provide additional economic benefits since they are able to utilize existing infrastructure. In addition, empty storefronts have a significant impact on the local economy. These include lost sales, lost loan demand to local banks for the building and business, lost business profits and owner compensation, lost employee payroll, lost rents to the property owner, and lost property management fees. Redeveloped properties, on the other hand, not only bring in additional revenue for the community, but also enhance the value of surrounding properties. Furthermore, successful developments encourage additional investments, creating a revitalized and economically vibrant community.

The most likely area for redevelopment in Wilton is the downtown. This includes changes in use to existing businesses as well as filling currently vacant buildings. Sand and gravel pits in Wilton may also

offer additional redevelopment opportunities. NH RSA 155-E sets out reclamation standards for areas affected by excavation activities. The ultimate goal of the reclamation is to restore the former mining site so that it can be redeveloped without any environmental restrictions. However, it should be noted that many of the existing sand and gravel operations are located in the Residence-Agricultural district, which prohibits their redevelopment for commercial or industrial uses.

2.2 Where Should Future Development be Located?

Land Use Vision

1. To encourage the balance of residential, commercial, and clean industrial development while protecting the town's natural resources, rural character, small town feel, and the integrity of existing residential neighborhoods.
2. To promote economic vitality, employment, and the tax base of Wilton by redeveloping existing downtown areas and building new commercial and industrial development along major transportation corridors where appropriate in accordance with existing regulations and goals.
3. To guide development and redevelopment that encourages commercial investment in the downtown, improves its function and image, and creates a destination to work, visit, and play.
4. To enhance the community character and rural visual, natural, and historic look of the Town.
5. To protect valuable agricultural land and productive soils.

New Commercial and Industrial Development Opportunities

There are limited opportunities for future commercial and industrial development in Wilton. Future development will likely occur along a main transportation corridor, such as Route 101 or Route 31. Route 31 South has several limitations on its development potential. A number of large parcels along the corridor are conserved while others fall within the flood zone, aquifer protection overlay, and wellhead protection overlay. Route 31 North has natural resource constraints related to Stoney Brook and traffic to access these developments would flow through downtown, which would be undesirable. Route 101 has fewer environmental and logistical limitations on its development potential.

Support for development along Route 101 was somewhat mixed among 2012 Wilton Master Plan survey respondents. 34.1% of the 128 respondents to this question stated it was very important to attract development to Route 101 and 27.0% said it was somewhat important. At the same time, 18.3% thought it was not important and 16.7% thought it was undesirable.

There is a cluster of industrial zoning along Route 101 in the Intervale Road vicinity that could support new industrial or commercial development. However, development opportunities on many of these parcels may be limited by steep slopes. In general, development along Route 101 would likely have less

impact on Wilton's rural character if it were scattered along the corridor and properly buffered and set back rather than consolidated in large strips.

Opportunities

The 2012 Wilton Master Plan Survey asked respondents to rate how important they felt it was to attract particular types of businesses to Wilton. According to this survey, local restaurants, small retail, and small office are the most important types of business to bring into Town. 56.8% of the 128 respondents to this question stated it was very important to attract local restaurants and 38.4% said it was somewhat important. 54.3% of respondents stated it was very important to attract small retail, such as a pharmacy, florist, or butcher, to Wilton and 32.3% said it was somewhat important. 43.5% of respondents stated it was very important to attract small office-based businesses, such as a dentist, CPA, lawyer, and insurance to Wilton and 42.7% said it was somewhat important.

Concerns

Large retail, such as strip malls, Target, Wal-Mart, and Home Depot were viewed as undesirable businesses to attract, according to 59.1% of the 128 respondents. Furthermore, 42.5% stated that it was undesirable to attract franchised restaurants to Wilton.

Wilton residents are also concerned about the appearance of commercial and industrial development. 76.3% of the 135 respondents to this question stated that the town should require the maintenance of adequate buffers and setbacks at lot boundaries for new development and 73.1% said the town should require design standards to maintain rural/New England character.

Downtown Redevelopment Opportunities

Encouraging downtown development was viewed favorably by respondents to the 2012 Wilton Master Plan survey; 57.9% of the 128 respondents to this question stated that it was very important to attract downtown development and 31.7% said it was somewhat important.

Opportunities

Small retail, small office, and local restaurants are all desirable types of development to Wilton residents and all are suitable for downtown locations. It only takes one successful business to spark interest in Wilton's downtown and once a few businesses are successful others will follow. Wilton already has a number of unique downtown offerings to build upon, such as the Town Hall Theatre and Riverview Mill.

Concerns

Despite these unique businesses, many people outside of Wilton still are not aware that the downtown is a commercial destination. Main Street does not receive significant traffic and convenient parking is somewhat limited. More needs to be done to promote downtown businesses.

*Map—Downtown Land Use***Section 3 ~ Strategies and Recommendations*****Goal 1—Preserve and enhance Wilton’s rural character, historic look, and small town feel.***

Respondents to the 2012 Wilton Community Survey were asked to identify the five features most important to making Wilton a desirable place to live. 83.5% of the 139 respondents to this question answered “small town atmosphere” and 71.9% identified “rural character.” In addition, 88.9% of the 127 respondents rated rural character as an economic strength for Wilton. Given the prominent role these qualities play in making Wilton the town it is, their preservation is essential.

- **Recommendation 1.1**—promote the use of buffer zones to minimize the potentially negative visual, auditory, and ecological impacts of new development on important natural features and key community resources.
- **Recommendation 1.2**—define design requirements for new commercial and industrial development to protect and enhance the rural character of the town (*1999 Wilton Master Plan*). Update the Site Plan Review process as necessary to administer design guidelines.
- **Recommendation 1.3**—guide new housing growth to minimize its impact on Wilton’s open space and small-town rural character.
- **Recommendation 1.4**—identify historic structures and sites worthy of preservation and consider benefits and drawbacks of establishing a Historic District.
- **Recommendation 1.5**—obtain public input and develop a town-wide plan mapping future sidewalks, pedestrian trails, and bike paths. Investigate a variety of funding options to help implement the plan.

Goal 2—Identify and protect Wilton’s critical natural resources.

Natural resources contribute to Wilton’s rural character, quality of life, and recreation opportunities. They also provide valuable services to the Town free of charge, including drinking water, flood storage, clean air, water purification, productive soils, wildlife habitat, waste recycling, and temperature moderation. Loss of these services would impact human health, safety, the economy, and quality of life.

- **Recommendation 2.1**—update the 2009 Natural Resources Inventory and use it to develop a policy-related, strategic conservation plan for Wilton (*2009 Natural Resources Inventory*).
- **Recommendation 2.2**—review current land use laws and regulations to ensure adequate measures are in place to minimize the impacts of future development on private wells and drinking water supply.

- **Recommendation 2.3**—monitor the wetlands conservation, aquifer protection, and watershed overlay zoning districts to ensure they are accomplishing the community’s environmental protection priorities.
- **Recommendation 2.4**—ensure that subdivision and site plan review regulations require the placement of septic systems in accordance with the highest standards for public health.

Goal 3—Maintain valuable agricultural land and productive soils in Wilton.

As of the 2009 Natural Resources Inventory, there were 1,335 acres of actively farmed lands in Wilton, representing roughly 8% of the town’s total land area. Only 19% of these acres were protected at that point. In addition to providing local sources of food, farmlands contribute to Wilton’s rural character and sense of community.

- **Recommendation 3.1**—identify and implement incentives to encourage the use of farming practices that conserve and protect water quality, retain wildlife habitats, and maintain high soil quality.
- **Recommendation 3.2**—consider establishing a farmland conservation overlay district to regulate new residential development in critical farmland areas in order to preserve agricultural land uses and protect prime soils.
- **Recommendation 3.3**—review Wilton’s Land Use Laws and Regulations to ensure policies do not impede farming business options.

Goal 4—Encourage and support appropriate economic development initiatives, local employment opportunities, and an expanded tax base in Wilton.

Respondents to the 2012 Wilton Community Survey identified the following as their top three concerns both now and in 10 years—high town taxes, high school taxes, and lack of local jobs. The Town’s zoning policy must be consistent with its economic development interests. Wilton has zoned a relatively small amount of land for commercial, industrial, and office use, limiting its ability to expand the tax base and create local job opportunities. At the same time, economic development efforts must not conflict with the town’s rural character and residential feel.

- **Recommendation 4.1**—establish a Town Economic Development Committee to plan for and promote economic growth in Wilton. Expand the local business association to incorporate businesses throughout the entire town, not just the downtown, and include home businesses. Consider inviting businesses from surrounding towns to participate.
- **Recommendation 4.2**—conduct a comprehensive review of Wilton’s Land Use Laws and Regulations to ensure there is an appropriate quantity of commercial and industrial zoned sites in areas with adequate road access and infrastructure in order to achieve economic development goals.

- **Recommendation 4.3**—review provisions of the Home Occupation ordinances to ensure they provide sufficient opportunities for this type of economic activity in Wilton.
- **Recommendation 4.4**—develop an inventory of parcels most suitable for targeted economic development in Wilton, with a focus on redevelopment opportunities.
- **Recommendation 4.5**—streamline administrative procedures as necessary to ensure that the development application and review process is thorough yet efficient.
- **Recommendation 4.6**—determine if current infrastructure (water, sewer, road network, utilities) is adequate to accommodate desired future economic development and begin planning for expansion if necessary.

Goal 5—guide development and redevelopment that encourages commercial investment in the downtown, improves its function and image, and creates a destination to work, visit, and play.

The downtown area is a visible indicator of Wilton’s economic health, character, and heritage. A vibrant downtown provides a prime location for independent businesses and helps to reduce sprawl. It also improves surrounding property values and offers an area for community members to interact.

- **Recommendation 5.1**—simplify/expedite the process to redevelop buildings in the downtown.
- **Recommendation 5.2**—support existing arts, entertainment, and dining venues in downtown and encourage additional establishments that increase the vibrancy of the downtown by creating activities and attracting visitors.
- **Recommendation 5.3**—work with the local business, civic, and community organization to help implement the recommendations established in this Master Plan.
- **Recommendation 5.4**—require or encourage landscaping and other public improvements to walkways and open spaces within the downtown area (*1999 Wilton Master Plan*).