



Community Technical Assistance Program **Community Assessment Report** **for Hudson, NH**

History and Purpose:

The Community Technical Assistance Program (CTAP) was implemented to help communities grapple with potential growth issues due to the expansion of Interstate 93 in New Hampshire from Salem to Concord. There are 26 CTAP-designated communities with three located in the Nashua Region, including: Hudson, Litchfield and Pelham. The first phase of the five-year CTAP process was to develop and administer Community Assessments to determine whether communities have policies and regulations in place to manage potential growth effectively. Potential growth impacts for these CTAP communities could include, among others, an increase in population, traffic, and a greater demand for housing. Consequently, if growth does occur in some or all of these areas, increased demand in municipal services across the board will be expected. CTAP communities will have to plan accordingly. The result of this project will be a report which will identify a number of issues that communities can implement and be more prepared to deal with growth.

More than 100 questions were developed in an effort to determine if CTAP communities have policies and regulations in place to adequately address potential growth issues. Questions were developed by professional planners and municipal officials involved in the CTAP process.

In addition to benefiting from the survey regarding planning and growth issues, CTAP communities have also profited from the process by identifying and isolating potential projects that could be initiated through the CTAP grant process.

CTAP COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT REPORT
for the Town of Hudson

Many of the Community Assessment questions provided insight as to the status of growth policies and the vision of the Town of Hudson towards its future development. Questions from the assessment dealt with many different planning issues including: land use and mixed-use policies, zoning, minimum-lot requirements, historic preservation, open space, environmental protection, housing, water quality, economic development, and transportation. Another purpose of the Assessment was to gauge the levels at which public participation are present in your community.

The survey, which consisted of more than 100 questions, centered around four major planning themes which include:

Theme A – Community Infrastructure and Regional Cooperation

Theme B – Environmental Protection, Land Use, and Open Space

Theme C – Downtowns, Village Centers, and Community Vitality

Theme D – The Local Economy

The questions developed from these themes address most of the growth concerns of the various municipalities affected by the entire I-93 Reconstruction project. The Assessment was completed through a collaboration of elected officials, town employees, and staff at the Nashua Regional Planning Commission.

The assessment consisted of three steps:

Step 1: Assessment Coordination

Step 2: Verification of Assessment Results

Step 3: Drafting of the Assessment Report

Step 1: The Assessment Coordination consisted of a meeting between NRPC and the Hudson CTAP Subcommittee comprised of municipal officials and volunteers to discuss the preliminary findings and any possible growth issues that have come to light as a result of conducting the survey. This served as a discussion venue where municipal officials and volunteers could voice concerns and ask questions.

Step 2: Since the goal is to create a report that is a useful tool for the community in implementing codes and policies that address development issues, NRPC met with the Hudson CTAP Subcommittee again to verify the answers and ensure that the assessment was complete. This served as an educational opportunity, as well, to better understand Hudson's practices and create an awareness of any inconsistencies between the Master Plan and the regulations.

Step 3: A draft of the Assessment report was the last step in this project and is included below. The Assessment report is two-part: Part I is a "bookmark" that serves as a snapshot of the community's current regulatory and policy measures,

and Part II is a more comprehensive review of the growth issues at hand and how the community might begin to address them. The results should provide community leaders with a basis to make decisions concerning the future implementation of policies to address potential growth issues.

NRPC has considered the community's insights, concerns, and recommendations resulting from the Assessment Coordination and other communications throughout the process and has included these where appropriate. The Final Community Assessment Report should be viewed as a starting point or a guide for future planning activities and goals.

Part I - Community Assessment Report: The Key Recommendations

After an in depth review of Hudson's land use regulations and town policies and procedures, six main categories were identified as key issues:

- 1. Economic Development Plan**
- 2. Town Center Development/Village Plan Alternative**
- 3. Future Utilities Needs Assessment**
- 4. Workforce Housing**
- 5. Natural and Historic Resources**
- 6. Community Character and Development**

Due to the fact that community planning is multi-disciplinary, some of the recommendations can be grouped into more than one category. For instance, town center development can be grouped into economic development, workforce housing and community character and development. With this in mind, Hudson can take a more holistic approach to community planning by implementing several recommendations such as developing a Village Plan Alternative that concentrates utilities in the Town Center, provides workforce housing, and supports economic development by encouraging new businesses to locate in the center. Development affects many aspects of your community, so a "big-picture" approach allows you to consider the many ways your town could be impacted and plan accordingly.

What follows is a determination of findings based on the Subcommittee's review of the land use regulations and town policies and procedures. They are grouped by CTAP goals, with findings and recommendations that fit into the six main categories identified above. The goal is that implementation of these recommendations will place Hudson in a position to best address future growth.

Part II – Community Assessment Report: The Full Analysis

The following report contains findings within the four CTAP theme goals. This section is intended to give the Town of Hudson details on the specific recommendations that have been derived from the community assessment process and serve as a roadmap for future updates to the appropriate land use regulations and policies in Hudson.

Theme A: Community Infrastructure and Regional Cooperation

The purpose of this theme was to determine how Hudson has planned for the future in terms of the provision and funding for increased municipal services. This may include new facilities and other infrastructure improvements to help meet these needs. In addition, Theme A analyzed how effective communities have been, and will be, regarding regional cooperation with other local municipalities in an effort to better serve constituents. Special attention was given to communication strategies and cooperation initiatives between communities within regions.

Theme A consisted of 42 questions dealing with the funding and delivery of municipal services, regional cooperation among local governments, housing, and transportation.

The Steering Committee identified a number of broad goals that CTAP-designated communities should strive to accomplish which are outlined below:

Goals

- Promote the establishment of consistent funding approaches to help pay for improved and expanding public infrastructure and services. Local governments should make certain that their funding strategies are adequate to meet the new level of service provision to meet projected growth needs.
- Evaluate the need for regional cooperation between local governments. Regional approaches can often embellish the delivery of public services and environmental quality, avoid the possible duplication of services, and better allocate financial resources.
- Plan for an adequate supply of housing. The housing stock should reflect local needs and priorities and include housing for a range of income levels.
- Implement strategies to promote safe and efficient multi-modal transportation systems.

Findings:

- Current Impact Fees cover a wide variety of facilities and services in Town including: water treatment/distribution, sewer, public roads, schools, and library
- Hudson updates their Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) on a yearly basis.

- The Town completed a water distribution system study in 2001, entitled *Town of Hudson Water Distribution System Study*.
- The Master Plan includes detailed sections about the need for workforce housing and references the regional housing needs assessment. The regulations, however, are still focused mainly on single family and elderly housing as options for residential development.
- Hudson recognizes the need for road standards that reflect community character and land use regulations that, where practical, require sidewalks and pedestrian/bicycle facilities in and between developments.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a comprehensive Master Plan for all current and future utilities. Although a water plan has been developed, the sewer plan is still in need of updating. The needs of these three important utilities should be comprehensively assessed at a community-wide scale to understand the holding capacity of the community and develop strategies to address capacity limitations. These strategies could include encouraging the concentration of new development and redevelopment within the sewer system service boundary, which could benefit water delivery and consumption as well.
2. Continue to update the CIP and plan accordingly for important infrastructure needs. These needs should be considered when investigating the potential of broadening the impact fees or other mechanisms to fund these infrastructure improvements, notably, the Police Department, future High School facility needs and the Fire Department.
3. Continue to address Hudson's long-term water supply needs, including protection. The 2005 Master Plan calls for the implementation of the recommendations of the 2001 *Town of Hudson Water Distribution Study*, and research to find potential well sites in Hudson. Specifically, the Master Plan calls for considering the use of impact fees as a source of revenue for new water supply facilities necessary to accommodate future population growth.

Theme B: Environmental Protection, Land Use, and Open Space

Theme B focused on how Hudson has planned for the protection of land in a way that is consistent and compatible with future growth trends. To achieve these goals communities must focus on future land use strategies and determine how these would help to promote the preservation of natural resources, open space, and agricultural resources.

Theme B consisted of 38 questions dealing with natural resources, green infrastructure, parks and recreational opportunities, rural character, and the preservation of agricultural lands and forests.

The Steering Committee identified a number of broad goals that CTAP-designated communities should strive to accomplish which are:

Goals:

- Promote the preservation and protection of natural resources when addressing the economic needs of the community and region.
- Protect natural resources and the environment including groundwater, aquifers, wildlife, and wildlife corridors.
- Establish and conserve an interconnected green infrastructure and ensure public access to open space, parks, and other recreational opportunities.
- Maintain rural character whenever possible, especially forests and farms.

Findings:

- There are a number of innovative zoning techniques that have been adopted by the Town including: Growth Management, Accessory Dwelling Units, Wetlands Conservation District, and Conservation Subdivisions/OSD.
- Although the Master Plan includes a summarized list of historic resources, Hudson does not have a formal historic resources inventory.
- The Town is currently in the process of updating their 1980 Natural Resources Inventory.
- The Town has several active boards and commissions that are working on environmental protection, including: a Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, Ottarnic Pond Committee and Robinson Pond Committee.
- Hudson is currently updating their Open Space Plan.
- Hudson has taken water quality and watershed protection seriously through adoption of a Wetlands Conservation District, enforcing the Comprehensive Shoreland Protection Act on the local level through development review, and the most recent adoption of Stormwater Management regulations (January 2007).

Recommendations:

1. Continue to expand the use of Innovative Zoning Techniques. Although some zones *allow* mixed use, traditional neighborhood development, and establish minimum densities, promoting and encouraging the *use* of them with developers could result in developments that are consistent with Hudson's community character.
2. Develop a Historic Resources Inventory and consider other policy and regulatory measures to protect Historic Resources. The Master Plan outlines several recommendations that underscore Hudson's commitment to historic resources including: 1) creating the institutional structure necessary to protect historic resources; 2) creating/updating a formal historic resources inventory; and 3) adopting contemporary tools like a historic district, identifying/designating scenic roads, and creating Historic Preservation Standards for construction projects in the Historic District.
3. Continue with the Prime Wetlands Inventory. Once the prime wetlands are inventoried, a map would serve as a great tool to begin coordinating future development to provide additional protection under the existing Wetlands Conservation District. In addition, the NRI should be coordinated with the most recent Natural Services Network and Wildlife Action Plan data developed at the State level through the CTAP program and NH Fish and Game.
4. Consider strengthening regulations for water quality and quantity protection. Hudson does not currently have an Aquifer Protection Overlay District or a local Shoreland Protection District. The Town has emphasized the importance of the Merrimack River and other surface water and groundwater sources in the Master Plan. Specific protection measures such as these will underscore that importance and provide long-term enjoyment and fresh water supplies for future generations.
5. Continue developing an Open Space Plan and coordinate with abutting towns. The final step in the development of this plan would be to adopt the Open Space Plan and Natural Resources Inventory as a chapter in the Master Plan. In addition, establishing regional coordination opportunities with abutting towns in protection and use of open space. For instance, Hudson shares an important watershed (Musquash Brook) with Pelham who has been actively protecting land in this area. Coordination with Pelham could result in large tracts that are permanently protected in this resource that has regional importance.
6. Coordinate the implementation of the Open Space Plan with all land use boards. After an Open Space Plan is completed for the Town, the Land Use boards and Conservation Commission should work together to activate this plan and develop specific tools that can be used to protect open space. This could be done through the conservation development ordinance currently being developed requiring developers to plan according to your Open Space Plan, etc. The key here is to work with the Land Use boards and Conservation Commission to develop this strategy - open space protection requires more than one tool and needs participation from many boards to make it happen.

Theme C: Downtown/Village Centers and Community Vitality

In Theme C, Hudson was assessed by how it has planned for the development and preservation of vibrant community centers which may include a variety of cultural and recreational resources. The overall intent is to enhance public participation by establishing areas for community activities around the downtown or common community center which would promote a sense of vitality to the village center.

Theme C consisted of 16 questions dealing with the development of village center districts and the promotion of walkable downtown areas in an effort to maintain the New England community tradition. Special emphasis was given to the development of main streets, historic preservation, and landscaping.

The Steering Committee identified a number of broad goals that CTAP-designated communities should strive to accomplish which are outlined below:

Goals:

- Develop or enhance downtowns and village centers through the reuse of existing infrastructure and the rehabilitation of buildings with historic value.
- Promote the development of walkable downtown areas which are consistent with historic patterns.
- Enhance Main streets and promote a New England town atmosphere.

Findings:

- Although there were a couple of town center areas at one time in Hudson, the town does not currently have a traditional town center, and nothing is currently in place to develop the services and amenities of a traditional town center.
- Many town facilities and services are currently located in one central area.
- Residential and mixed uses are not encouraged or allowed near a central area of town (only by Special Exception).
- The town has adopted design regulations, landscape regulations and preservation/enhancement mechanisms to protect community character and enhance quality of life in Hudson.

Recommendations:

1. Consider developing and adopting a Village Master Plan or a Village Plan Alternative Ordinance for the Town Center. This would include concentrating construction of new public buildings near the town center, infill development requirements, regulatory relief for businesses that locate in the town center, and allowance for mixed-use development.
2. Continue implementing community character guidelines/regulations. In addition to the installation of street trees, requirement of landscaping, and preservation of stone walls and other natural features in the Open Space Development zone, consider

expanding these practices to a town-wide scale and encourage the *preservation* of street trees and existing trees along existing and proposed roadways to retain community character.

Theme D: Local Economy

Theme D looked at what policies were in place that promote economic viability, foster a prosperous business environment, and support agricultural development. The development of a strong local economy should result in increased local employment opportunities and livable wages.

Theme D consisted of 15 questions dealing with the development of economic development strategies, commercial and agricultural development, and tax incentives to attract new business development

The Steering Committee identified a number of broad goals that CTAP-designated communities should strive to accomplish which are outlined below:

Goals:

- Support sustainable and balanced economic growth that reflects the current tax base.
- Strengthen local agriculture and forestry through the support of related infrastructure and economic systems.
- Support the development of new jobs and livable wages.

Findings:

- Hudson does not currently have an Economic Development Plan.
- Much of the commercial and industrial development in Hudson is concentrated along the State Highways – Routes 111, 102 and 3A.
- The Town does not currently provide regulatory relief or incentives for businesses which are located in the center of town.
- The Master Plan recognizes that agricultural land is an important part of Hudson's history and that the town should take steps to protect active and idle agricultural lands from development for other uses.

Recommendations:

1. Draft and Adopt an Economic Development Plan. This could begin with an Economic Development Assessment to gauge where you are, and build upon the existing Chapter in the Master Plan. Included in that plan could be consideration for regulatory relief or tax incentives for businesses that locate in the town center, identification of anchors that could spur economic activity in the town center, and accommodations for infill along the current business corridors. This could be adopted as an update to the current Economic Development chapter in the Master Plan.

2. Identify areas in town where development could be focused. This will be the precursor to updating the zoning ordinance to allow for these mixed uses, or where economic incentives could be used to attract businesses. This recommendation will be based on the findings of an Economic Development Assessment and Plan.
3. Conduct an Energy Inventory to measure current energy consumption including associated costs. It is not common practice for Towns, residents or businesses to measure their energy consumption and gauge inefficiencies. As a way to reduce cost expenditures related to energy, communities around New England and the country are conducting energy inventories to determine the costs associated with energy and where they can make improvements to be more energy efficient and save money.

AV/kmb
#440-25