



## **Community Technical Assistance Program** **Community Assessment Report** **for Litchfield, 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 Litchfield

Many of the Community Assessment questions provided insight as to the status of growth policies and the vision of the Town of Litchfield 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 Litchfield 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 growth-related issues, NRPC met with the Litchfield 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 Litchfield’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 Litchfield's land use regulations and town policies and procedures, six main categories were identified as key issues. These issues are included below in no particular order:

- 1. Economic Development**
- 2. Town Center Zoning/Neighborhood Planning**
- 3. Transportation Network**
- 4. Energy Conservation/Renewable Energy**
- 5. Water Supply Protection**
- 6. Solid Waste/Recycling**

Due to the fact that community planning is multi-disciplinary, some of the recommendations can be grouped into more than one category. For instance, local tax exemptions for alternative energy installation can be grouped into town center zoning, economic development and solid waste/recycling issues. With this in mind, Litchfield can take a more holistic approach to community planning by implementing several recommendations such as considering the development of a Town Center ordinance while also planning for increased street connectivity and bicycle/pedestrian facilities. Growth 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 Litchfield CTAP 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 Litchfield 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 Litchfield 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.

### **Theme A: Community Infrastructure and Regional Cooperation**

The purpose of this theme was to determine how Litchfield 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 your community has 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 CTAP 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 range of facilities and services in the town.
- Litchfield has taken water quality and quantity very seriously over the past 10 years. However, there is currently no plan in place for the provision of future utilities.

- EPA has mandated that all small incinerators be upgraded to meet new air quality standards or be decommissioned. The incinerator manager is currently developing options to handle the town's solid waste/recycling needs, however, there is no formal plan addressing the future needs of the town.
- The community's land use regulations do not currently encourage energy conservation.
- The Master Plan includes detailed sections about the need for workforce housing and regional housing needs. The regulations, however, are focused on single family and Elderly housing for residential development.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop a Master Plan for current and future utilities. Southern New Hampshire is experiencing increased development with a number of major utility advancements in cable, high speed internet and availability of town water and gas to accommodate this growth. "Catching up" to these technologies and planning for future advancements is necessary to be prepared for additional residents and businesses coming into Litchfield. Energy efficiency and conservation should be included as a goal for any future utility plans.
2. Continue to address Litchfield's long-term water supply, including protection. In addition to assessing the water quantity, it is recommended that the Town also consider water quality, which includes an assessment of the land uses surrounding the water supply and potential impacts to that water quality **as well as** quantity for future residents.
3. Implement a Community Reinvestment and Opportunity Program zone or Tax Increment Financing district. This may be especially useful if the town considers adopting a Town Center ordinance. These methods have been very helpful in providing the resources necessary to support denser, multi-use districts and use land more efficiently.
4. Develop a Solid Waste and Recycling Plan. When discussing future utilities, this plan should also include, or at least mention how to incorporate energy efficiency and alternative energy sources to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
5. Diversify the housing types allowed in the zoning ordinance to accommodate more diverse and accessible housing options. Teachers, town employees, service industry employees and fire/police officers should be able to live in the community where they work. Litchfield has identified the need for affordable housing in the Master Plan - the next step is to update the land use regulations to allow for more diverse housing types including: multi-family housing, manufactured housing, disabled and universal designs, etc. This can be accomplished by adopting an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance.

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

Theme B focused on how Litchfield 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 CTAP 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 ground water, 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:**

- RSA 72:61-74 allows a tax exemption for alternative energy installations if adopted at Town Meeting. This has not made it to Town Meeting in Litchfield yet.
- Litchfield has had a Stormwater Management Ordinance since 2001.
- Litchfield has many water protection regulations: Aquifer Protection Overlay District, prohibits building in the floodplain, and a Wetlands Conservation District.
- Numerous Prime Wetlands have been categorized according to the NH Highway Method by the Town over the past 20 years, however they have not been officially designated.
- The Town recognizes that Open Space is a priority and has proved this through adoption of a conservation subdivision ordinance for elderly housing, working with developers to connect open space, and permanently protecting hundreds of acres of the past 10 years.
- The Conservation Commission has both an active land purchase sub-committee and a land oversight/maintenance committee.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Research the tax exemption for alternative energy installation and place it on the Town Ballot for consideration.
2. Incorporate Low Impact Development techniques in the Stormwater Management Regulation. This will underscore the town's priorities regarding aquifer protection and long-term preservation of the water supply.
3. Add Wellhead Protection measures to the Site Plan regulations and Zoning Ordinance. This was listed as a high priority in both the 2002 and 1991 Master Plans. There was also a study started for Darrah Pond in 2002 to develop a protection model. Continuing this work is recommended.
4. Designate and map the current Prime Wetlands. The prime wetlands are currently categorized but not designated or mapped in Litchfield. Designating prime wetlands can afford them larger protected buffers, while mapping would serve as a wonderful tool to begin coordinating the designation of future prime wetlands as well as coordinating future development to provide additional protection of currently designated wetlands.
5. Compile a Natural Resources Inventory and develop an Open Space Plan. Although recommendations for open space protection can be found in the Master Plan, the next step is to compile an inventory of the natural resources and develop a plan (through CTAP) that identifies and outlines how these resources are related to priority parcels to be protected. The Wildlife Action Plan and Natural Services Network information compiled by the NH Fish and Game Department and the Audubon Society will compliment the inventory and Open Space Plan nicely.
6. Research zoning districts and other open space protection strategies that fit best for the Town of Litchfield. After an Open Space Plan is developed for the Town, the land use boards should work together to activate this plan and develop specific tools that can be used to protect open space. This could be done through a zoning district, updates to the conservation subdivision regulations, requiring developers to plan according to your Open Space Plan, etc. The key here is to work with the land use boards 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, Litchfield was assessed by how it has planned for the development and preservation of vibrant community centers which would include an extensive array 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 add rural character and 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 small town New England community tradition. Special emphasis was given to the development of main streets, historic preservation, and landscaping.

The CTAP 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 small community, New England town atmosphere.

### **Findings:**

- Although Litchfield has identified Town Center Zoning as a priority, the town does not currently have a traditional Town Center or Village area.
- Many of the town's facilities and services are currently located close together (i.e., town hall and emergency services/police, fire station and library and school, etc.)
- Litchfield has taken many innovative steps to support a vibrant community. Through the use of design guidelines, designating the maximum size and scale of new developments to fit the community, and requiring installation of street trees and landscaping along new and existing roads, the town is working to create developments that fit the community character.
- Although street trees are required in new developments, tree-preservation or minimal site clearing is not required.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Consider developing and adopting a Town Center Ordinance or Village Plan Alternative. This would support the current policy to place new public buildings near the town center, add infill development requirements, could provide regulatory relief for businesses that locate in the town center, and allow for mixed-use

development. This could also allow for increased street connectivity and greater walkability in Town.

2. Adopt a Tree Preservation/Minimal Clearing Ordinance. The Master Plan talks at length about preserving existing trees and minimizing the amount of clearance and disturbance on development sites. These could be combined into an ordinance that requires minimal disturbance on a site during development. Also known as Low or Minimum Impact Development.

## **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:**

- The Master Plan specifies that new nonresidential growth should be focused in the Southern Commercial/Industrial Service District.
- Most of the nonresidential growth is focused along NH Route 3A and NH Route 102.
- The Town has documented nonresidential growth in two separate documents – SEED Project Report from 2001 and the Agricultural Preservation Project.
- Litchfield does not currently provide regulatory relief for businesses which locate in the town center.
- Litchfield is rich in prime agricultural land and has many working farms still intact. The town has recognized the importance of this land through protection strategies such as 30-acre zoning and coordination with adjacent towns, etc.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Revisit and consider the recommendations from the SEED Project Report . This report goes into great length about how to ensure compatibility of the regulations developed in town to guide development that retained community character. Implementation of this document could include 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.
2. Revisit and consider the recommendations from the Agricultural Preservation Project. This could include additional research of alternative protection measures for existing farms like adopting districts restricted to agricultural uses only, purchasing development rights, outright acquisition, or zoning land with a substantial

minimum lot size to discourage single-family tract housing, allowing for large sites to retain agricultural uses. Transfer of development rights is also a common tool for agricultural preservation, but research needs to be conducted to designate appropriate receiving areas in Litchfield. Conservation developments for all residential development could also be considered.

3. Require mapping of Prime agricultural soils as part of development proposals. This is a tool that can be used to both assist the Planning Board with the site specific location of these important soils while also raising awareness amongst the developers in the hopes of avoiding these lands or setting them aside when proposing future developments (potentially even in different towns).

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