

## **Newton Vision Chapter**

Growth is inevitable. Although many citizens might prefer that the town remain exactly as it is in size and character, recognizing the inevitability of population growth and the potential for land use change is the first step towards responsible planning. Such planning articulates the desires of citizens and charts a course towards thoughtful management of land use and development. New Hampshire land use law mandates that a town's master plan must now include a Vision Chapter. According to RSA 674:2 II(a), the master plan shall include a vision section that "serves to direct the other sections of the plan. This section shall contain a set of statements that articulate the desires of the citizens affected by the master plan, not only for their locality but also for the region and the whole state. It shall contain a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision."

Based on citizen input and the results of the Newton Master Plan survey, The Vision Statement for the Town of Newton that shall guide this Master Plan is as follows:

***The Town of Newton is primarily a residential community that would like to encourage land uses such as agriculture, single-family homes, local businesses, and the conservation and protection of natural resources. The Town of Newton seeks to preserve our rural character, our natural, historical and cultural resources, while providing municipal and commercial services, recreational facilities and housing options that support the needs of the community in a fiscally, socially and environmentally sustainable manner.***

As the vision and goals will guide the various sections of the Master Plan and ultimately serve as a blueprint for residential, commercial, and industrial development within the Town, it is vital that they reflect the priorities of the community as a whole. The community goals presented below were developed based on results of town-wide surveys conducted by the Master Plan Committee and two community visioning sessions.

In the spring and fall of 2006, the Master Plan Committee distributed a written survey to residents. The survey was distributed by hand at various community events and was also available at Town Offices and at the Town's website. In addition to the survey, two public input sessions were held, one in the spring, and one in late fall, to solicit input on long-term planning topics in Newton. The following sections describe the data received from the survey and public input sessions, and suggest a set of guiding principles for the remainder of the master plan.

### **Responses to the Master Plan Survey**

Residents were asked to respond to survey items in the following categories: Zoning and Housing Topics, Natural Resources, Conservation, and Recreational Facilities, Transportation, Cultural and Historic Resources, Existing Services and Facilities, and New Services and Facilities. Sixty-six individuals responded to the survey.

### Zoning and Housing Topics

The first survey question was “What is your position regarding the following issues?” The survey listed several twenty-two types of development and the possible responses were “Greatly encourage, somewhat encourage, no opinion, do not encourage, and discourage.”

Respondents generally had a positive reaction towards the following types of development or development policies, as shown by the fact that more than 55 percent indicated that these types of development should be either greatly encouraged, or somewhat encouraged: agricultural farms, antique shops, elder care, home businesses, increasing minimum residential lot size, owner occupied homes, professional offices, non-chain restaurants, senior housing, and small manufacturing, as shown in the following table.

**Table 1. Land Use Types Survey Respondents Greatly Encourage or Somewhat Encourage**

	<b>Greatly encourage/ somewhat encourage</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Do not encourage/ discourage</b>
Agricultural Farms	<b>88 percent</b>	9 percent	3 percent
Antique Shops	<b>64 percent</b>	25 percent	10 percent
Elder Care	<b>67 percent</b>	23 percent	9 percent
Home Businesses	<b>67 percent</b>	21 percent	11 percent
Increase Min. Residential Lot Size	<b>67 percent</b>	17 percent	17 percent
Owner-occupied homes	<b>77 percent</b>	11 percent	9 percent
Professional offices	<b>73 percent</b>	12 percent	14 percent
Restrict annual residential building permits	<b>74 percent</b>	9 percent	15 percent
Restaurants (non- chain)	<b>82 percent</b>	5 percent	11 percent
Senior Housing	<b>55 percent</b>	21 percent	18 percent
Small Manufacturing	<b>68 percent</b>	12 percent	18 percent

*\* In some cases percentages do not total 100%; individual fractional percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.*

Residents generally had a negative reaction to the following land use types or policies, as shown by the fact that 55 percent or greater chose the responses “do not encourage or discourage.” These uses included auto dealers, adult entertainment, junkyards, fast food restaurants, retail-large national chains, and tattoo parlors, as shown in the table below.

**Table 2. Land Use Types Survey Respondents Do Not Encourage or Discourage**

	<b>Greatly Encourage/ somewhat encourage</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>	<b>Do Not Encourage/ Discourage</b>
Auto dealers	18 percent	12 percent	<b>70 percent</b>
Adult entertainment (XXX)	10 percent	6 percent	<b>79 percent</b>
Junkyards	6 percent	6 percent	<b>85 percent</b>
Restaurants (fast food)	30 percent	11 percent	<b>55 percent</b>
Retail/ large commercial chains	30 percent	3 percent	<b>64 percent</b>
Tattoo parlors	9 percent	9 percent	<b>80 percent</b>

*\* In some cases percentages do not total 100%; individual fractional percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.*

On many other land uses, opinion was either split, or a sizeable percentage of respondents chose “No opinion as their response.” The following land uses fall into this category: auto repair garage, gasoline stations, hotels/motels, rental housing, and senior housing.

**Table 3. Land Uses with Split Opinion or High No Opinion Responses**

	<b>Greatly Encourage/ somewhat encourage</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>	<b>Do Not encourage/ discourage</b>
Auto repair/garage	31 percent	31 percent	38 percent
Gasoline stations	33 percent	26 percent	41 percent
Hotels/motels	29 percent	18 percent	52 percent
Rental housing	29 percent	18 percent	51 percent
Senior housing	55 percent	21 percent	18 percent

*\* In some cases percentages do not total 100%; individual fractional percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.*

#### Natural Resources, Conservation and Recreation Facilities

Respondents to the survey generally favored encouraging the protection of natural resources. Following the format of preceding questions, this section asked whether respondents greatly encouraged, somewhat encouraged, had no opinion, do not encourage, or discourage the several tools for environmental protection. The following tables illustrate the survey results.

**Table 4. Natural Resources, Conservation and Recreation Facilities**

	<b>Greatly/ somewhat encourage</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Do not encourage or discourage</b>
Water Management Plan	<b>85 percent</b>	9 percent	6 percent
Communal Septic Systems	<b>60 percent</b>	27 percent	9 percent
Plan to Maintain Undeveloped Lands	<b>88 percent</b>	8 percent	5 percent
Purchase Additional Conservation Land	<b>78 percent</b>	11 percent	11 percent
Purchase Conservation Easements/ Development Rights (to preserve forest and agricultural land)	<b>81 percent</b>	11 percent	8 percent
Purchase Additional Land for Recreation	<b>72 percent</b>	14 percent	14 percent
Increase Participation in Recycling Programs	<b>86 percent</b>	11 percent	3 percent
Educate Adults and Children about Newton's Natural Resources	<b>84 percent</b>	12 percent	3 percent

Transportation

Respondents generally favored using the tools below to deal with transportation issues such as truck traffic, pedestrian safety, and alternative transportation such as bicycling and walking.

**Table 5 Transportation**

	<b>Greatly/ somewhat encourage</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Do not encourage/ discourage</b>
Designated Truck Traffic Route	<b>70 percent</b>	23 percent	6 percent
Bicycle Travel Lanes	<b>73 percent</b>	14 percent	13 percent
Sidewalks	<b>64 percent</b>	12 percent	24 percent

Cultural and Historic Resources

Respondents placed great importance on protecting cultural and historic resources as shown by their responses below. Based on these responses, the town may wish to consider the formation of a historic district as well as a historic district commission.

**Table 6 Cultural and Historic Resources**

	<b>Greatly/ somewhat encourage</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Do not encourage/ discourage</b>
Establish historic district	<b>60 percent</b>	20 percent	20 percent
Purchase undevel. and for historic preservation	<b>63 percent</b>	20 percent	17 percent
Preservation of Historic Stone Walls	<b>75 percent</b>	14 percent	11 percent

**Quality of Existing Services and Facilities**

Responses to the survey questions concerning the quality of existing services and facilities revealed that while most respondents thought essential police and fire services were excellent or good, many residents had no opinion on some of the resource based services in the town, such as the trail system and town forest. Other questions that were expected to generate either a split of opinion or at least strong opinions did not. For example, responses to a question regarding the quality of existing housing options showed that 38 percent of respondents had no opinion on the matter.

It should be noted that this series of questions was noted by several respondents as potentially confusing—as there was not a distinction made between town services and town facilities, which could be problematic for a respondent wishing to express a different view on the quality of services versus the quality of facilities.

**Table 7. Quality of Existing Services and Facilities**

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Police	38 percent	<b>42 percent</b>	3 percent	14 percent	3 percent
Fire	32 percent	<b>48 percent</b>	5 percent	6 percent	9 percent
Library	17 percent	<b>35 percent</b>	15 percent	17 percent	14 percent
Cemetery Care	11 percent	<b>40 percent</b>	37 percent	9 percent	3 percent
Webpage	14 percent	<b>38 percent</b>	26 percent	20 percent	2 percent
Cable Television	5 percent	26 percent	25 percent	<b>32 percent</b>	12 percent
Town Transfer Station	6 percent	<b>60 percent</b>	6 percent	20 percent	8 percent
Trail System	3 percent	20 percent	<b>48 percent</b>	17 percent	9 percent
Ponds	5 percent	28 percent	<b>32 percent</b>	29 percent	6 percent
Town Beach	6 percent	31 percent	<b>32 percent</b>	23 percent	8 percent
Greenie Park	9 percent	32 percent	<b>37 percent</b>	18 percent	3 percent
Town Forest	5 percent	33 percent	<b>52 percent</b>	3 percent	6 percent
Boat Ramp @ Country Pond	2 percent	5 percent	<b>71 percent</b>	18 percent	5 percent

<b>(table 7 continued)</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Road Conditions	3 percent	<b>49 percent</b>	3 percent	31 percent	13 percent
Snow Removal	9 percent	<b>48 percent</b>	3 percent	32 percent	8 percent
Street Lights	6 percent	20 percent	22 percent	22 percent	<b>30 percent</b>
Elderly Van Service	2 percent	3 percent	<b>85 percent</b>	3 percent	8 percent
School Bus Service	7 percent	41 percent	<b>51 percent</b>	2 percent	
Housing/ commercial industrial balance	3 percent	14 percent	13 percent	<b>42 percent</b>	28 percent
Housing Options Offered	3 percent	25 percent	<b>38 percent</b>	22 percent	13 percent

### Need for New Facilities

The last set of questions in the survey focused on the need for new facilities. Although the results for this portion of the survey do not suggest universal support for any single item, survey responses indicate strong support for the need for several new facilities. Based on the large number of no opinion responses for this item, it is suggested that many of the items considered below should be considered in more detail in the context of master planning, specifically in the community services and facilities chapter of the master plan. Survey results are shown below.

**Table 8. Need for New Facilities**

	<b>Very Needed</b>	<b>Somewhat Needed</b>	<b>No Opinion</b>	<b>Not Very Needed</b>	<b>Not Needed</b>
Police Station	<b>37 percent</b>	<b>32 percent</b>	6 percent	17 percent	8 percent
Fire Station	<b>45 percent</b>	<b>22 percent</b>	9 percent	18 percent	6 percent
Expand Cemeteries	3 percent	15 percent	<b>52 percent</b>	20 percent	8 percent
Town-owned water system	8 percent	23 percent	18 percent	<b>28 percent</b>	23 percent
Town-owned sewer	3 percent	23 percent	21 percent	<b>28 percent</b>	25 percent
Local Bus Service	6 percent	20 percent	<b>35 percent</b>	<b>25 percent</b>	<b>14 percent</b>
Bike paths	<b>22 percent</b>	<b>38 percent</b>	20 percent	15 percent	6 percent
ATV use	6 percent	8 percent	18 percent	21 percent	<b>46 percent</b>
Skate Park	6 percent	21 percent	20 percent	<b>27 percent</b>	25 percent
Large Community Playground	<b>22 percent</b>	<b>32 percent</b>	15 percent	16 percent	12 percent
Town Parks	<b>29 percent</b>	<b>38 percent</b>	14 percent	14 percent	5 percent
More Senior Activities	6 percent	31 percent	<b>49 percent</b>	8 percent	5 percent
(continued)					

More Adult Activities	12 percent	31 percent	<b>37 percent</b>	9 percent	11 percent
More Adolescent Activities	<b>22 percent</b>	<b>46 percent</b>	22 percent	5 percent	6 percent
More Children's Activities	<b>20 percent</b>	<b>42 percent</b>	23 percent	8 percent	6 percent
New Community Center	<b>22 percent</b>	<b>28 percent</b>	25 percent	11 percent	14 percent
Adult Education	20 percent	<b>30 percent</b>	25 percent	15 percent	11 percent
Senior Housing	14 percent	31 percent	<b>32 percent</b>	11 percent	8 percent
Owner-occupied. Single-fam. Hous.	30 percent	<b>34 percent</b>	19 percent	8 percent	8 percent
Owner-occupied. condos	10 percent	<b>31 percent</b>	26 percent	16 percent	18 percent
Rental housing	11 percent	14 percent	25 percent	22 percent	<b>27 percent</b>

### **The Community Input Sessions**

The first community input session was held at the Newton Town Hall on May 7<sup>th</sup>, from 2 to 4 p.m. The Newton Grange hosted the event. A very small group of fewer than 20 of Newton's citizens gathered and discussed long-term planning issues, following the format of the survey, and reviewed natural resource maps of the community. The second community input session was held during the November Planning Board meeting, at the Town Hall. This event was also televised on public access television. Newton's citizens again gathered to express their views on the planning issues, again using the format of the survey.

The following is a summary description of the input gathered at these sessions. The comments listed below do not necessarily reflect a consensus of all participants; in many cases, participants were at odds over particular issues and concerns. The purpose of this section is rather to include all concerns raised.

#### **What do you like about Newton?**

Residents were asked what they liked about living in Newton. Responses included the small town feel, the rural character, quiet, forest, and trails.

#### **What don't you like?**

The responses to this question included the loss of open space, cookie cutter development, lack of affordable housing, lack of retail and industrial development, the cost of maintenance of wooded areas, the lack of a community center, the lack of community spirit, and the need to educate people about what is available in town.

#### **What types of development do you want more of/less of?**

Responses to these questions were mixed and at times conflicting. When asked what types of development they would like to see more of, residents listed senior housing, rental housing, professional buildings, restaurants, small business retail, golf

course, and a business zone. When asked what residents want less of, residents included junkyards, adult book/video stores, auto dealers, fast food, rental housing, and large retail chains. The split of opinion found in these forums was similar to the split expressed in the survey responses.

### **What mix of land use is desirable?**

Residents did not reach consensus on this question, though all participating at the session agreed that the largest percentage of land should continue to be used for residential use (in the range of 50 to 60 percent) with other land uses of commercial/industrial, recreation, and conservation open space.

### **Concerns Related to Commercial and Industrial Development**

Residents stated the following concerns about commercial and industrial development: traffic patterns must be identified, tax incentives should be considered, tax increment financing should be considered, the web should be used to advertise the availability of land, landowners should be informed of what zone they are in, more community events should occur, town infrastructure should be upgraded, worker housing should be increased, and restrictions of businesses should be lessened.

### **Other Vision Chapter Input**

In addition to the citizen input gathered from the survey results and the community forums, many survey respondents expressed their views in additional narrative comments written on submitted surveys. While these comments are too numerous to include here, and it is not possible in this chapter to accurately reflect the full content of these statements, such narrative comments are very valuable in pointing out possible changes to future surveys and highlighting common themes that respondents care about, which did emerge from the comments. These themes included the following:

- 1) Protection of natural resources
- 2) Preservation of Newton's rural aspects
- 3) The relationship between development and taxes
- 4) Traffic
- 5) Development of a small downtown area and food store
- 6) Different funding mechanisms for community services and facilities
- 7) Communication between the town and citizens
- 8) Town recreation areas
- 9) The pace of growth
- 10) Informed voting
- 11) New Library
- 12) Need for greater Citizen participation
- 13) Condition and location of Town buildings



## Goals Based on the Public Input Sessions and the Master Plan Survey

Based on the responses to the survey, and the public input sessions, the following goals and strategies may serve as guiding principles to the implementation to the Vision Statement of Newton and guide the Master Plan as a whole:

### **Goal 1: Maintain the rural residential character of Newton.**

Although opinion is split on some housing and other land use topics, residents generally favor farms, single-family residential uses, professional offices, local businesses and restaurants, and small manufacturing as land uses.

***Strategy to implement this goal:*** The master plan should discuss ways to maintain and encourage these land uses, and discourage those land uses not favored by residents.

### **Goal 2: Discuss land use issues on which opinion was split.**

Opinion was split on several issues. More discussion is needed on many of these issues in order to develop an effective strategy to deal with these issues.

***Strategy to implement this goal:*** Discuss land uses on which respondents were split, or on which a large number of respondents expressed no opinion, such as senior housing, rental housing, gasoline stations, and auto repair shops, in open forums to determine residents' desire to encourage or discourage such land uses, and discuss potential costs/benefits of different development types.

### **Goal 3: Discourage land uses not favored.**

Many land uses were not favored by a sizeable percentage of respondents.

***Strategy to implement this goal:*** Discourage land uses such as fast-food restaurants, retail large national chains, tattoo parlors, and adult entertainment (XXX) that residents generally did not want to encourage through the master plan, zoning, and other land use planning tools.

### **Goal 4: Protect and manage environmental resources to protect the water supply and protect other natural resources.**

Respondents supported the need for sound management of environmental resources and education of the public on natural resources issues.

***Strategies to implement this goal:*** Educate citizens about recycling programs, hazardous waste collection, and other natural resource topics by engaging local and regional groups such as land trusts, the Rockingham Planning Commission, and UNH Cooperative Extension to provide educational materials, sponsor forums, or provide hands-on assistance to town boards and community organizations in managing natural resources. Consider additional measures to protect natural resources such as aquifers, wildlife habitat, and forests through regulatory and voluntary measures and land easements or fee simple ownership acquisitions. Consider ways to encourage citizens to conserve energy such as through the use of the Energy Star program for appliances. Incorporate energy-efficiency into building and site design at the Planning Board level by encouraging developers to use energy-efficient materials and design.

### **Goal 5: Provide opportunities for housing and business development while limiting the impact of new development on natural resources.**

Respondents support single-family housing development and some business development, but these desires must be balanced against expressed desires to protect environmental resources during the course of development and thereafter.

***Strategies to implement this goal:*** Consider long-term conservation planning based on local and regional conservation planning. Discuss funding mechanisms for the purchase of conservation easements or conservation land, as well as management strategies and options, such as management by a land trust or other conservation organization.

Consider village zoning that would allow small-scale mixed-use development that would include compatible residential and small-scale commercial uses while conserving areas of natural resources such as wetlands, forest blocks, and wildlife corridor areas for conservation and/or recreation.

**Goal 6: Promote pedestrian safety and opportunities for safe alternative transportation generally, and address traffic issues associated with development.**

Respondents supported a set of tools listed to respond to issues of transportation such as truck traffic and impacts on pedestrians.

***Strategies to implement this goal:*** Begin the development of trails and travel lanes for alternative modes of transportation by requiring new developments to consider pedestrian and bicycle travel in subdivision design. Consider pedestrian and bicycle travel in the transportation chapter of the master plan as well as longer distance travel needs of residents. Address traffic issues such as safety and congestion through long-term planning for Newton's road network, and short-term planning to connect adjacent developments and roads. Consider access management standards for areas of commercial development.

**Goal 7: Promote agriculture and the right to farm.**

Residents showed strong support for a community of residences and agriculture, but development pressures often present existing farms with a hard choice between development of large parcels or continuing the operation of a family farm that may have existed for several generations. Encouraging farming and other agricultural activities such as forestry, and removing barriers to such operations may help to promote the continuation of agricultural uses.

***Strategies to implement this goal:*** Consider tools to protect existing agriculture and promote new agricultural ventures in the community, such as conducting an agricultural inventory, and considering the establishment of an agricultural commission that would serve in an advisory and educational capacity to the Planning Board and Conservation Commission.

**Goal 8: Consider survey input on facilities and services.**

More discussion is needed on many of the issues dealing with facilities and services, but respondents did support the need for new facilities for police and fire, and town parks by sizeable percentages.

***Strategies to implement this goal:*** Incorporate the responses dealing with facilities and services from the survey into the long-range planning of the town, including

the master plan facilities chapter and the Capital Improvements Program. Discuss alternative funding mechanisms and prioritization of municipal service needs.

**Goal 9: Continue to involve the citizens of Newton in long-range planning.**

The Master Plan Vision chapter is just the first step in the master plan process. Ongoing discussion is needed to ensure thoughtful consideration of the issues raised in this survey and the public input sessions.

***Strategies to implement this goal:*** Consider hosting periodic education sessions, forums, speakers, or social events at which citizens can gather information and provide public input on land use topics of interest to the Town.