

X. FUTURE LAND USE

Chapter X

FUTURE LAND USE

Introduction

Each of the preceding chapters describes the characteristics of Warner as they exist today and proposes recommendations based on community input. The Future Land Use Chapter draws all of the recommendations together and makes a statement about what the residents of Warner want the Town to look like in ten to twenty years. It is a vision of the future and a guide for the Planning Board and the Town in making future land use development decisions.

The first section of this chapter presents an overall picture of the desired future pattern of development based on general land use characteristics. These characteristics are separated into several categories, including residential, commercial, Warner Village, community facilities, rural character and natural resource protection. One of the major desired outcomes expressed during the master planning process, from community input from the survey and committee discussions, is the importance of preserving the rural character and natural resources of the Town. Especially of note in achieving these goals is the protection of the Mink Hills from over-development. The first section includes a discussion on one way to make this goal a future reality.

In the second part of this chapter, the Town is divided into watershed areas. This section provides a summary of resources and key points for the Planning Board to consider when making development decisions. As stated in the Natural Resources Chapter, an in-depth watershed inventory and analysis is key to making informed planning decisions. Within each watershed, the natural features, existing land use, unique characteristics, and future recommendations are summarized. These recommendations are specific to each area but are tied to the overall recommendations located in the first part of the chapter. Although all of the watersheds do not have a completed in-depth analysis, there is a significant amount of information readily available from the UNH GRANIT System, as well as through other sources, such that this type of presentation is appropriate and sets the format for future master plans. The Planning Board should make every effort to collaborate with the Conservation Commission to conduct additional watershed studies and to incorporate the findings into future Master Plans.

Future Land Use Overview

Overall, the future land use map in Warner is similar to the existing pattern of land use. Please refer to the Future Land Use Map at the end of this chapter.

Residential Development

High and medium density residential development are proposed to remain essentially the same as they are currently permitted by the zoning ordinance. Concentrated high density development should remain in the downtown village area, since this is where town water and sewer services are located. Medium density development should be focused in the immediate vicinity of downtown and along Route 103, where medium density development currently exists.

Low density residential development should be located in all other areas of Town, but limited to existing road systems. To protect valuable unfragmented open spaces, conservation land, and wildlife habitat corridors, a 500' maximum set back from the road should be required for all low density residential development. This will prevent the further fragmenting of valuable open spaces and wildlife habitat. Premature or scattered development should be discouraged and in-fill between currently developed land should be encouraged as preferable development. Also, residential development should be discouraged on Class VI roads. The possibility of NH State scenic road designations should be investigated and considered for a few key roads in Town.

Commercial Development

Commercial development should remain concentrated generally in the same areas as it is today: off of I-89 at Exits 7 and 9 and in the downtown village business district. Exit 9 has seen significant development activity with the construction of the McDonald's, Market Basket, and reconstruction of the two gas station/convenience centers. The parcel of land at Exit 7, that once housed an old motel, now has a new self-storage facility. It is likely that these areas will continue to develop over the next few years due to their proximity to I-89, providing for day-to-day shopping needs for Town residents.

Commercial development of the village center should be encouraged to reuse existing structures. The former Cricenti's Market and a number of existing residential units could be reused or converted into other commercial ventures. The Planning Board should investigate the promotion of architectural guidelines in the Village Center as a way of maintaining the areas historic integrity.

Warner Village Area

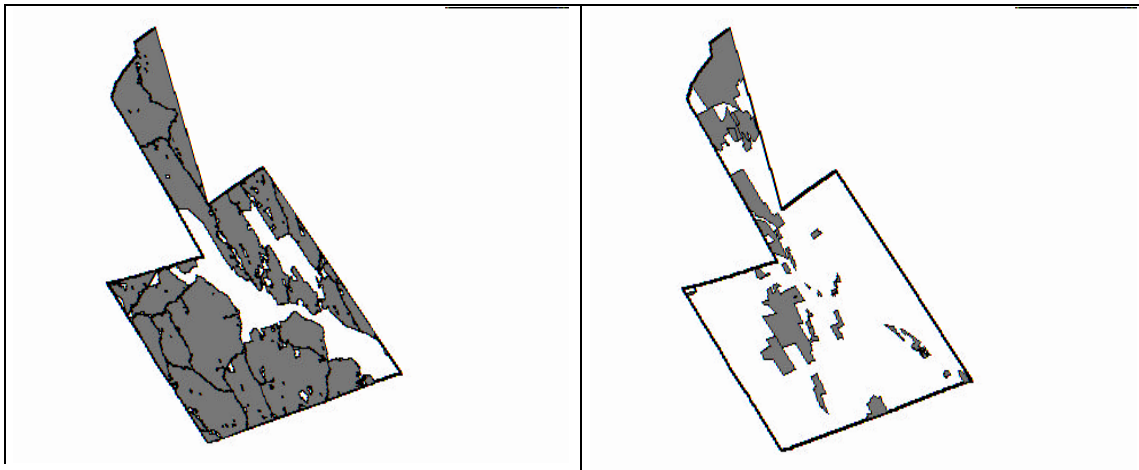
Concentrated, high density residential development should be encouraged in this area where services are readily available. The Planning Board should study the Geneva, Kirtland Street area for extending sewer and water to paper (dedicated but not built) streets, such as Grove Street, within the Village. Infill in this area should be encouraged through further subdivisions. Current dimensional requirements could be reduced to allow for more intense residential development. The Planning Board should review the dimensional requirements for the entire Village District, particularly the Business District and R1, for consistency with existing development and to determine if it hinders additional development in the area.

Community Facilities

When considering the future expansion of all community facilities, the Town should focus on keeping the integrity of the village center intact by locating facilities within walking distance of the village center. An excellent example of this is the Post Office location in the Village center. When a proposal emerged to relocate it at Exit 9, community opposition to such a move forced reconsideration, and the eventual location at its present site on East Main Street.

Rural Character and Natural Resource Protection

Warner, unlike many of its neighbors to the south, has large tracts of remaining undisturbed forest in town. These large tracts provide excellent opportunities for recreation, commercial and private forestry, and wildlife habitat protection. It is these forests which give Warner its rural feel. The map on the left below shows all unfragmented tracts of forest larger than 500 acres as the darkened areas.



Warner is blessed with a significant amount of conservation land, approximately 6,536 acres, which are depicted on the map on the right. This conservation land is located primarily through the center of the town, from Mt. Kearsarge extending south in scattered plots, to Bear Pond on the Henniker border.

Analysis of these two maps, along with survey results and input from the Master Plan Committee, suggests a few major recommendations to protect the community character and natural resources of the town. The first recommendation is to tie together the existing conservation lands held by the Town, State and private entities by linking and expanding these protected areas. (See Future Land Use Map) This will have the effect of creating a wide swath of protected lands traversing the town from North to South. The development of hiking trails or

multiple use trails throughout this area could create a spur for the Sunapee, Kearsarge, Ragged Mountain Greenway.

The second recommendation is to create additional land protection to the Mink Hills. The Mink Hills are primarily forest land, with large tracts that are used for various forestry purposes. Within the Mink Hills, zoning should be made more restrictive, premature development should be restricted and only very low density residential development, such as 25-50 acre minimum size lots, permitted. Such density and lot restrictions would promote the economic feasibility of the forest industry. A large lot of fifty acres has been found to be a minimum for sustaining a viable forestry/timber harvest industry. Such special protections should be created to maintain the working landscape of Warner's agricultural lands. Extra consideration for agriculture and forestry activities should be granted if best management practices are used. The Planning Board should also look at alternative development options for this area of Town.

Another recommendation is to protect the scenic ridgelines and slopes in Town. An important element in the Town's rural character is the rugged terrain and the prominent Mink Hills to the South, with their ridgelines providing scenic views from many parts of Town, especially from the Village. In order to protect these scenic views, the Town should consider extending its ridgeline zoning, now limited to communication towers, to residences and other structures. Provisions should be proposed which preclude the intrusion of such structures above the ridgeline and which minimize their visibility on hillsides through such measures as limiting the cutting of vegetation and certain aesthetic features, such as house paint color.

One other important aspect of the rural character in Warner is the agricultural use of land in Town. Many of the agricultural uses are in locations such as Schoodac Brook and Waldron Hill, and many more fields in town are devoted to forage crops for horses, sheep and other livestock. Horse farms, organic produce farms, and livestock farms are only a few examples of the proliferations of agricultural uses of land in Warner. The Town should support agricultural enterprises and also encourage the use of best management practices to protect water quality.

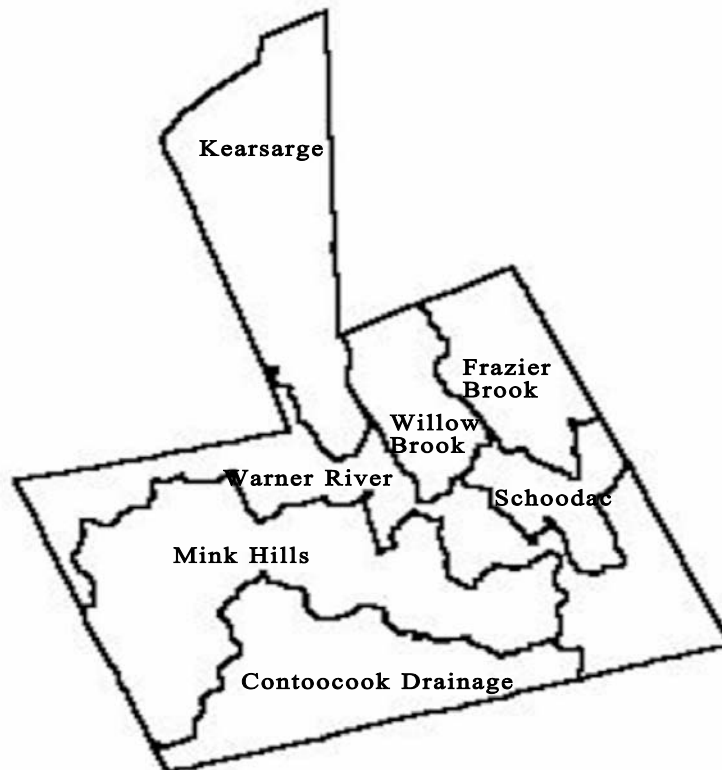
Summary by Watershed Areas

In this section, Warner's sub-watersheds have been consolidated into seven planning areas. These areas include:

- Frazier Brook watershed;
- Kearsarge watersheds;
- Schoodac watersheds;
- Warner River drainage;
- Willow Brook watershed;
- Mink Hills watersheds; and
- Contoocook drainage.

Because the Willow Brook Watershed has undergone a complete in-depth analysis, it serves as the template for other watersheds. This level of analysis will help the Planning Board evaluate any development proposals within watershed areas and will help the Town in deciding where public resources and dollars should be allocated for conservation purposes. As more watershed studies are conducted, they should be added to future revisions of the Master Plan. A summary of the Willow Brook Watershed Project is contained in Appendix B.

Warner Watersheds



Willow Brook Watershed

Natural Features:

The Willow Brook Watershed contains approximately 2,343 acres, or 6.6% of the land area in Warner. Tory Hill Meadow, a 50 acre wetland area, dominates the central portion of the watershed between Pumpkin Hill and Tory Hill. Willow Brook joins the Warner River in Warner Village area and is a Class B waterbody, which signifies a healthy stream system. An 84 acre high-yield aquifer underlies the watershed, providing a potential source for the municipal water supply system. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has mapped 85 acres of floodplain within the watershed. The watershed also contains abundant wildlife with many active beaver colonies and a large variety of birds.

Existing Land Use:

The central and northern areas of the watershed are sparsely developed while the highly developed downtown village lies within the southern end of the watershed. Overall, 82% is forest, 8.5% is agriculture, and 3.0% is residential. The watershed is characterized with a low population density and low intensity land use.

Unique Characteristics:

Uncommon forest types- mature mixed hardwood forests and hemlock-dominated forests, Tory Meadow, and there are large wetland complexes in the southeast and southwest of the watershed.

Future Recommendations:

- Residential development should be encouraged in the downtown village, and limited to the existing roadway boundaries of Pumpkin Hill Road and Kearsarge Mountain Road.
- Priority Conservation areas include: Tory Hill Meadow, Willow Brook, southeast wetland complex, and southwest wetland complex (see Appendix B). These areas should be protected through purchase or conservation easement.
- Continued forest management for timber production should be encouraged in the watershed.

Kearsarge Mountain Watersheds

Natural Features:

The area consists of 6,744 acres, which is 19% of the land area in Warner. The most prominent feature in these watersheds is Mount Kearsarge, located in Rollins State Park. This area contains the most concentrated area of steep slopes in Town, and extensive unfragmented lands. A high yield aquifer runs through the center of the Stevens Brook watershed, under the I-89 corridor.

Existing Land Use:

There is some low density residential development along Kearsarge Mountain Road. More than half of this area, 3,630 acres, is conservation land under State, Town and private ownership. Most of the Stevens Brook Watershed, which is at the bottom of this area, is zoned for commercial development.

Unique Characteristics:

Mount Kearsarge, conservation areas such as Carriage Trail Acres and Rollins State Park, and the large amount of unfragmented lands.

Future Recommendations:

- Connect the conservation areas located within this watershed with the large amount of unfragmented lands in the southern half of Warner. This could be done through easements or recreational trails, which would connect to the Kearsarge, Sunapee, Ragged Mountain Greenway.
- Protect ridgelines through ridgeline protection ordinances.
- Protect the aquifer from over-development through an aquifer protection ordinance that minimizes impervious surfaces and limits the types of activities within the aquifer protection area to those which do not use hazardous materials.

Frazier Brook Watersheds

Natural Features:

These watersheds make up 2,938 acres, which is 8.3% of the land area in Warner. The major features in this area are the abundant wetland areas, 271 acres, and 540 acres of floodplains.

Existing Land Use:

Due to the predominantly wet soils, there is very little development in these watersheds.

Unique Characteristics:

Conservation areas in Webster abut this area because of the Blackwater Dam and its associated flood protection zones.

Future Recommendations:

- Limit future residential development by purchasing conservation lands or easements, and permitting very low density zoning.
- Encourage future development to be limited to existing roads.
- Classify the wetlands which show up on the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) maps as important and place protective buffer overlays on them.

Schoodac Watersheds

Natural Features:

These watersheds consist of 1,840 acres, which is 5.2% of the land area of Warner. There are few steep slopes in this relatively flat area. A high-yield aquifer lies along the brook, however, the center of this area has no significant wetland areas.

Existing Land Use:

Medium density development in the lower part of the watershed in the Denny Hill area and along Schoodac Road. Low density development along Schoodac Road near the Webster Town line.

Unique Characteristics:

Agricultural lands along Schoodac Brook as well as a high yield aquifer.

Future Recommendations:

- Future medium density residential development should be encouraged near existing residential development.
- Protection of Schoodac Brook by increasing the 75' setback.
- The aquifer and wetlands should be protected through zoning ordinances and mandatory Best Management Practices (BMPs).

Warner River Corridor

Natural Features:

This 7,532 acre watershed bisects the town, and accounts for 21.2% of the land area in Warner. There are steep slopes along the northern part of the river where it comes into town from Bradford. There are abundant wetlands and floodplain areas (1,331 acres of floodplain) along the length of the corridor and especially concentrated in the lower southeast corner. The entire corridor is underlain by high-yield aquifer, which is especially large in the southeast corner of Warner. Warner's water supply is located in this watershed.

Existing Land Use:

Most of the corridor is relatively undeveloped as it runs through Warner. The corridor contains the most significant development as the river flows through the downtown Village Center.

Unique Characteristics:

Except for a few small dams, the Warner River is a free-flowing class B river, suitable for both recreation and wildlife purposes. The extensive amount of pristine floodplain and floodplain forest is especially important not only for flood control but for wildlife habitat. The river has many historical resources such as old mill sites, railroad abutments and covered bridges.

Future Recommendations:

- Allow higher density development in downtown village areas but mitigate the impacts through engineered solutions and groundwater protection.
- Protect the floodplain area from any further development through stricter floodplain development regulations, or through Town purchase or conservation easements.
- Strictly enforce setbacks from the river and consider additional shoreline protection.

Mink Hills Watersheds

Natural Features:

These watersheds contain 8,730 acres, which is 24.6% of the land area in Warner. There are concentrated areas of steep slopes within the Mink Hills, which are the dominant feature in these watersheds. Although there are very few wetlands or other water resources, the ones that do exist are important to the wildlife diversity of the area.

Existing Land Use:

The Chandler Reservation and Harriman Chandler State Forest cover 2,017 acres of this area. This area is mostly undeveloped with scattered residential development.

Unique Characteristics:

The extensive conservation lands and the Mink Hills make up a large portion of the unfragmented land in Warner. The Mink Hills are also rich in historical resources, such as cellar holes and old homestead sites.

Future Recommendations:

- Link the conservation areas to the upper conservation areas, as mentioned in the Kearsarge Mountain Watershed section, to create a large corridor of unfragmented land within Warner.
- Enact very low density zoning requirements of 25-50 acre minimum lot sizes, in order to maintain unfragmented forest.
- Investigate alternative development options for residential subdivisions.
- Inventory and map cellar holes. Consider protection for these historic resources especially where they overlap with other important natural resources.
- Enact a ridgeline/slope protection ordinance for the Mink Hills.
- Minimize visual impacts of development in the Mink Hills through the use of ordinances regulating site design.

Contoocook River Watersheds

Natural Features:

This area consists of 5,399 acres, which is 15.2% of the land area in Warner. There are a number of wetlands in the lower southwest corner of these watersheds. This area drains into the Contoocook River, whereas the other watersheds in Town drain to the Warner River, with the exception of the top portion of Kearsarge Mountain which drains into the Blackwater River. There are also some floodplains near ponds and streams. The most dominant natural features are the steep slopes in Mink Hills.

Existing Land Use:

There are 2,224 acres of conservation area within these watersheds, including parts of the Chandler Reservation and Harriman Chandler State Forest.

Unique Characteristics:

The extensive conservation lands and the Mink Hills make up a large portion of the unfragmented land in Warner.

Future Recommendations:

- Link the conservation areas to the upper conservation areas, as mentioned in the Blackwater River Watershed section, to create a large corridor of unfragmented land within Warner.
- Buffer unfragmented lands with very low density zoning requirements.