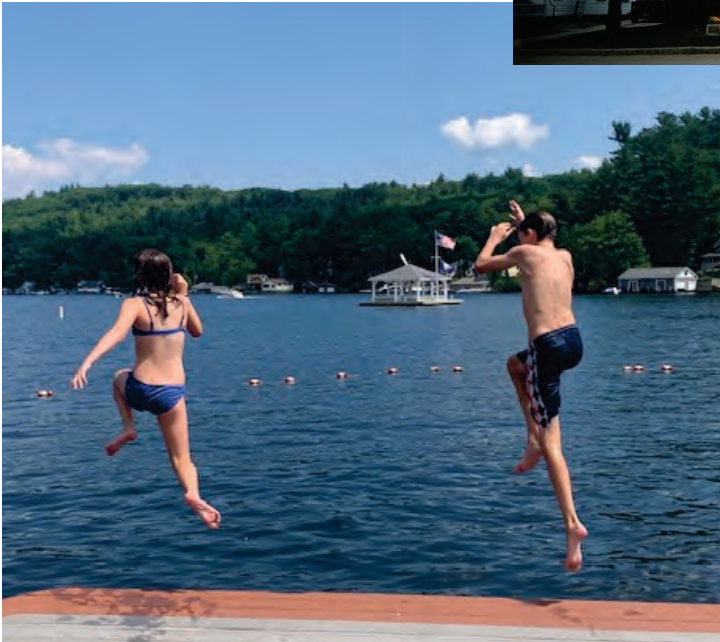




# 2023 Master Plan



# Alton, New Hampshire



# Master Plan Alton, New Hampshire

Adopted January 10, 2023 by the Alton Planning Board

Developed with the Assistance of  
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# Chapter 1. Introduction and Vision

## 1.1. Purpose of the Master Plan

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Under New Hampshire state law (RSA 674:1), planning boards have the responsibility to “prepare and amend from time to time a master plan to guide the development of the municipality.” This includes the “proposed location, extent, and intensity of future land use” (RSA 674:2) which provides the basis for the Town’s Zoning Ordinance (RSA 674:18). The Master Plan provides the framework for the Planning Board to ensure that it carries out its activities in a manner that will achieve the goals of the community. The Master Plan also represents the Planning Board’s recommendations to other town boards and committees and to the voters regarding decisions that will affect the future growth of the community. The Master Plan is required in order to have a capital improvements program (CIP) (RSA 674:5) to ensure that the Town’s infrastructure supports the proposed and anticipated future land use.

*The relevant question is not simply what shall we do tomorrow, but rather what shall we do today to get ready for tomorrow?*

*Peter Drucker*

The Master Plan is a living document that serves to direct and guide the development of the town and to be the foundation for local land use regulations as well as other town programs, major expenditures and public-private partnerships. The plan represents the Planning Board’s recommendations for how the town can best balance and further the goals and meet the needs of the community.

## 1.2 Process Used to Produce This Update

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Alton’s original Master Plan was developed in 1965 by the Planning Board, Selectboard, other Town officials and an outside consulting firm. The report was an accumulation of monthly studies obtained through the cooperation of department heads and residents from each of the five areas of town: Alton Village, Alton Bay, West Alton, East Alton and the islands (and

likely South Alton). To keep the plan up to date, the Town has held a charette, community forums, and distributed surveys in 1985, 1989, 1990, 1997, and again in 2005 in preparation for the 2007 update. In 2007, the Planning Board adopted a comprehensive Master Plan update. A Vision Chapter contained not only a Vision Statement but also a discussion of high priority issues covering a wide range of topics including land use, community facilities, transportation and natural and historic resources.

At Town Meeting in 2020, voters approved funding to hire a consultant to assist the Planning Board with the next Master Plan update. A Master Plan Committee was appointed by the Planning Board to oversee and guide the update. After a competitive bid process, Community Planning Consultant Tara Bamford was hired to assist with the update.

A link to a web-based survey to obtain community input on priorities and needs was mailed to all 5,723 voter and property owner addresses and provided to all Town employees. A total of 818 responses were received. In addition, several former and current local officials and other community leaders were interviewed to obtain their thoughts on what the town's priorities should be over the next ten years. The results of the surveys and interviews guided this update and are integrated throughout the plan.

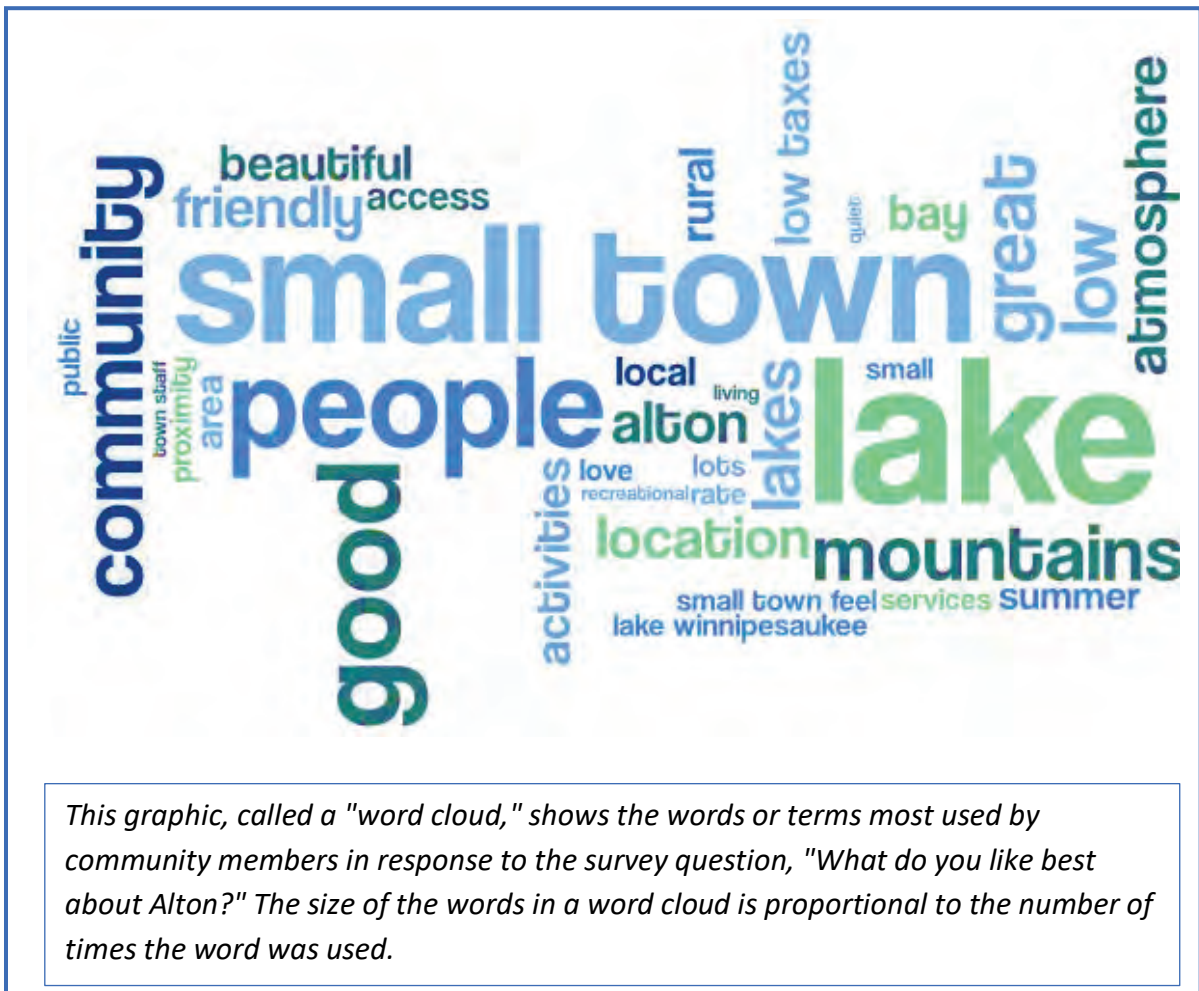
The plan was adopted by the Planning Board on January 10, 2023 following a public hearing and a few minor revisions based on the input received.

## 1.3 Vision

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It is clear that both the small town feel and Lake Winnepesaukee form the foundation for the character of our community. When asked in the Master Plan Update Survey "What do you like best about Alton?", the Lake and the small town atmosphere both stood out with much higher numbers of responses than other values. The small town atmosphere was described by respondents as including friendly people and a sense of community spirit as well as the rural character. Many people specifically mentioned town staff and businesses when calling out the friendly people and events as part of the sense of community. Next in importance were the low tax rate and beautiful outdoor environment with abundant lake and mountain recreation activities.





The vision for the future of Alton is one where these attributes are stewarded and built upon, where:

- The town continues to be a place where both year-round and seasonal residents continue to enjoy a friendly small town atmosphere.
- Everyone feels welcome at community events, town staff are friendly and helpful, and people of all ages can enjoy the beautiful natural landscape.
- Lake-oriented activities, businesses and homes remain an important feature, while diverse four-season recreation opportunities have expanded, improving the sustainability of local businesses.
- Good capital and fiscal planning has enabled high quality community facilities and services to continue while maintaining the relatively low tax rate.

- Good land use planning has enabled some growth to occur while maintaining the distinctive characters of the town's various village and rural areas.
- It is recognized that "business-friendly" and "conservation-minded" are not in conflict with each other, but are one and the same, that the town's clean water, recreation opportunities and scenic resources are the foundation of the town's economic base.

# Chapter 2. Priorities for the Next Ten Years

## 2.1 Goals

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The following goals, developed and updated with input from the community, guided the Planning Board's development of this Master Plan update, determined focus areas of the plan and specific recommendations:

- Continue to celebrate and build upon Alton's location in the Lakes Region.
- Maintain the small town character of Alton.
- Integrate consideration of livability for all ages into decision-making regarding land use, transportation and other capital investments, and programs, policies and partnerships.
- Protect and improve water quality throughout town; incorporate water quality considerations into decision-making, including land use regulations, programs and policies, and capital budgeting.
- Consider protection of the town's water resources, important habitats and natural areas, scenic views, and linkages between natural areas when prioritizing land for conservation.
- Support community and individual efforts to preserve and highlight the town's cultural and historic structures and features as important elements of community character.
- Continue to support the town's recreation economy, while also encouraging other business development that is compatible with the small town character of the community and will increase job opportunities for residents and the resilience of the local economy.

- Ensure that the Zoning Ordinance, other land use regulations, and capital improvements work together to maintain the rural character of the less developed areas of town.
- Maintain a stable tax rate by balancing expenditures with the tax base and planning ahead for large expenditures.
- Maintain an efficient transportation network with provisions for safe bicycle and pedestrian use.
- Ensure that the town's facilities meet the changing needs of residents, businesses and visitors in an efficient and cost-effective manner.
- Ensure that information technology is integrated into community and municipal infrastructure planning and budgeting.
- Continue to build upon the town's strong recreation focus by maintaining, and, where necessary, improving or expanding existing facilities, or, when needed, adding new facilities or encouraging the development of private facilities.
- Continue to develop and maintain the town's multi-purpose trail network using public and private partnerships.
- Increase the resilience of the community by implementing the town's Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Ensure that Alton has a voice in regional plans and benefits from public funds provided for local and regional initiatives by participating on and supporting Lakes Region Planning Commission and other public and nonprofit regional entities as appropriate.
- Maintain the relevance of the Master Plan, e.g., integrate the Action Plan into the development of zoning amendments and annual updates of the Capital Improvements Program, and hold a multi-board meeting annually to review the Action Plan, celebrate progress and identify priorities for the coming year.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION ITEMS THAT APPLY TO ALL PLAN TOPICS

- ✓ Establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee to collaborate with other Town boards and committees regarding the Action Plan, including scheduling an annual meeting of the Selectboard, Planning Board and Conservation Commission to review the Action Plan, celebrate the previous year's accomplishments and identify priorities and next steps for the coming year.
- ✓ Participate on and support Lakes Region Planning Commission and other public and nonprofit regional entities as appropriate to ensure that Alton has a voice in regional plans and benefits from public funds provided for local and regional initiatives.

## 2.2 Priority Issues

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The following are issues of high importance to the community. In the Master Plan Update Survey, each suggestion for "What would make Alton even better?" that was made by 25 or more respondents related to one of these issues. Each of these issues also cuts across traditional topic areas in a town plan and needs to be considered in more than one chapter of the plan. They are each important to the well-being of the community and should be a lens through which the town's decision-makers assess alternative courses of action regarding future land use, facilities and services.

### Commercial Development

When asked, "What would make Alton even better?", the greatest number of survey responses focused on commercial development. Almost 200 suggestions were provided regarding Alton Village and/or Alton Bay. These included redevelopment, filling empty storefronts, beautification, support for small local businesses, more small businesses/shops, improving walkability and parking, and enhancing historic character. In addition, almost 200 comments were provided regarding the need for more businesses in town without reference to either village area. Comments were provided by those who would like to see more restaurants or retail opportunities in town and those who mentioned jobs, the tax base,

specific businesses, and the need for more year-round businesses. Several recommended that any new businesses should be located in or adjacent to the existing commercial areas.

The most recent place-of-work data show that of 906 primary jobs in Alton, only 202 are filled by Alton residents. More than ten times that many employed Alton residents, 2,087, work outside Alton. (US Census Bureau OnTheMap, 2018 data) Economic development that aligns with the skills and education of Alton residents may benefit the community by reducing the time and expense of a commute. The OnTheMap data will count some Alton residents who telecommute as working outside of Alton. This number can be assumed to have increased since 2018 as a result of the pandemic. Some of the increase is expected to continue. It is important that economic development planning includes consideration of those who telecommute as well as those who are self-employed.

Viewed in the context of the community's highly valued small town feel, it is clear that great care will need to be taken to ensure that future commercial development enhances and complements the town's existing village areas. Context and unintended consequences will be important considerations when reviewing the Town's Zoning Ordinance and other land use regulations as well as when considering improvements to community infrastructure or siting new facilities.

## Water Quality

Lake Winnepesaukee is the heart of the community and lake water quality is the lifeblood. The importance of water quality to the community was reported by more than 25 survey respondents. Over 25 respondents also suggested a town sewer system for the village areas. In addition to the Lake being the most common answer to "What do you like best about Alton?", many respondents wrote about the importance of swimming and boating on Lake Winnepesaukee.

The 2017 report from UNH Extension on the results of water quality monitoring from 1984 to 2017 in Alton Bay reported increasing phosphorous levels. The report recommended implementation of best management practices to decrease sources of nonpoint pollution such as stormwater runoff. The map displayed by WinnepesaukeeGateway.org shows Alton Bay as mesotrophic, meaning only "fair" water quality based on the average phosphorous level reported in the last season's monitoring.

Cyanobacteria has been identified at unsafe levels in several locations in the Merrymeeting River Watershed. Cyanobacteria growth is caused by excess nutrients and is associated with

toxic "algal blooms." A watershed management plan with recommendation to address this issue was completed in September 2019.

Dense cottage development on and around the Lake shore over the years has led to a large amount of septic system effluent going into the ground in a small area. Many of the septic systems are undersized by today's standards. Fortunately, septic system failures have been rare and most have been addressed right away by homeowners. NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) and local officials have worked with homeowners to find solutions to upgrade systems as needed due to failures, enlargement or replacement of homes or conversion from season to year-round use. However, septic loading has been increasing as seasonal cottages are replaced by larger homes and seasonal use increases to year-round. So far, the well-drained soils have prevented any significant impacts on Lake water quality.

Maintaining the water quality in both the town's surface and groundwaters in the future will be essential for both the economic well-being of the community and for the continued enjoyment of water-based recreation. Water quality will be an important consideration in the Town's natural resource, land use and infrastructure planning decisions.

## Small Town Feel

Alton's small town feel was second only to the Lake when survey respondents were asked, "What do you like best about Alton?" Many respondents focused on the town's small town atmosphere when asked, "What would make Alton even better?" Over 50 respondents commented on keeping Alton small and rural, a desire to see less development, limiting development, or keeping rural areas rural. Although a large number of respondents expressed a desire for more business development in town, a significant number expressed a desire not to see any more chain stores or chain restaurants. Some specified no more large businesses. Summer traffic volumes were also reported as a concern by many.

Although "small town feel" will mean something slightly different to different people, and be a somewhat relative term, some of the necessary ingredients can be deduced from the survey responses:

- Friendly people, including town employees and businesses
- Small locally owned businesses
- Walkable village areas that have a clear contrast from quiet rural areas with low density development
- Abundant outdoor recreation opportunities

These will be important considerations in the town's natural resource, land use and infrastructure planning decisions.

## Recreation Focus

The importance of Alton's outdoor recreation facilities to the community was evident in the survey results. Many made suggestions for additional facilities or improvements to existing facilities when asked, "What would make Alton even better?" Over 50 respondents commented on the town beach, many expressing a desire for a town beach that is more family-friendly, away from the boat ramp. Several would like to see a town beach that is just for residents or taxpayers. Others commented on the size of the beach, its condition or adequacy of parking. Quite a few respondents expressed a desire for a community/recreation center; some mentioned especially the need for year-round activities, sports facilities, a facility for all ages or a place for teens. Over 50 respondents provided suggestions for more outdoor recreation opportunities. These included a desire for water access, more parks and recreation for all ages, trails in general or specifically developing a rail trail to connect with other towns. Upkeep of existing facilities was also mentioned. In addition, over 25 respondents expressed a need for more public docking space and for more parking for the boat launch. Also mentioned by some was a desire to see more access to the lake for residents/taxpayers and improved circulation for launching and parking. Other ways of enjoying Alton's outdoor environment were also mentioned as potential improvements, such as making the town more walkable and holding more community events.

Planning considerations for outdoor recreation include natural resource impacts, compatibility with nearby land uses, and cost. Partnerships and support for private investment in recreation facilities will continue to be important.

## Tax Rate

In 2019 when NH Department of Revenue Administration last ranked full value tax rates by applying that year's equalization ratio, only 13 towns and 9 Unincorporated Places had lower property tax rates than Alton. (Sixteen Unincorporated Places did not have any property tax in 2019 because revenues exceeded costs.) The tax rate was reported by many survey respondents as one of the things they like best about the town and one that is important to hold onto. Over 50 respondents expressed a desire to keep taxes/expenses low or lower them. Some however mentioned concern about taxes on waterfront properties specifically or the ability of retirees to pay taxes.



At the same time, many of the improvements desired by the community, such as more access to the Lake for residents to swim or boat, a community/recreation center, more trails and sidewalks, would commonly be built and maintained with property taxes. Similarly, the improved traffic control and enforcement of speed limits and increased road maintenance and paving, each suggested by over 50 respondents, would all require more property tax revenues.

This is not unusual of course. Who doesn't want great services and low taxes? In Alton's case shorefront and island properties and others with Lake access are a great asset for the tax base and enable the community to have quality facilities and a high level of services while benefiting from a relatively low tax rate. Going forward, as both growth and expectations increase demand for facilities and services, it will be important to ensure that the value of existing property in town is maintained, and that increases in any services and facilities funded by property taxes are offset by increases in the tax base. This will require, for example:

- Increased partnerships with local organizations to provide recreation facilities, services and events
- Maintaining an up-to-date capital improvement program and using it each year for capital budgeting
- Good land use planning to ensure that adequate developable land area is identified for desired growth in locations that will be compatible with efficient provision of municipal services, and that new development is compatible with maintenance of property values
- incorporating hazard mitigation considerations into land use and infrastructure planning

Having adequate road specifications in the town's land use regulations and ensuring that adequate provisions are in place to ensure long term private upkeep of new subdivision roads is also essential for ensuring that new roads do not add to the town's maintenance costs.

## Changing Demographics

Data indicate that the number of housing units occupied year-round in Alton has been increasing much faster than the town's overall housing stock. From 2010 to 2020, the total number of housing units increased less than 1% (from 4,281 to 4,309), while the number of those occupied year-round increased 16% (from 2,145 to 2,480) (US Census, 2010, 2020). Many towns in New Hampshire and other northern New England states are reporting "COVID in-migration," people of all ages moving into their seasonal homes year-round, or renting or

buying the homes of others, to escape the dense populations and higher case counts of COVID-19 in urban areas and live where there are numerous opportunities for safe mask-free outdoor recreation. However, age-related data indicate that this is not the trend behind Alton's increase in year-round occupancy. Data from the 2020 US Census show that Alton has continued to grow in population, with a reported increase from 5,250 in 2010 to 5,894 in 2020 (US Census, 2010, 2020). Data also indicate that the make-up of that population has been changing. The 2010 Census reported that 17% of Alton's population was age 65 and over at that time. Sample data indicate that this figure has been increasing; the American Community Survey 2015-2019 5-year average estimate for Alton's population 65 and over was 28%. At the same time, school enrollment has been falling. On October 1, 2010, Alton had 549 students enrolled in pre-K through grade 8. By October 1, 2020, enrollment had dropped to 419 students. Rather than increasing with COVID, this was even fewer students than either of the previous two years (427 in 2018 and 435 in 2019). (NH Department of Education)

Viewed altogether, these figures indicate that retirees represent a significant portion of Alton's recent growth. It will be important to monitor this trend going forward. Shifting demographics indicate a need for the community to evaluate services and facilities to ensure that adequate focus is placed on meeting the needs of Alton's seniors, especially as this demographic continues to age. The town's only senior housing facility already reports a waiting list. Public transportation is not available in Alton for those who have become unable to drive or become unable in the future.

In addition to ensuring that appropriate housing choices are available for seniors wishing to downsize without leaving their hometown, some small towns have initiated community-based approaches to assist those aging in place, such as an organized system of checking on residents after storms and during power outages and volunteer driver networks. AARP's Age-Friendly Community program is a great resource for helping towns think about the areas of need that may be associated with an aging population.

## Housing

One element of New Hampshire's housing shortage is an actual shortage in the number of dwelling units for sale and for rent due to the population of the state growing faster than the number of housing units in recent years. As noted above, the number of households in Alton grew by 16% from 2010 to 2020 while the number of housing units grew by less than 1% (US Census 2010, 2020). It is also a mismatch between the population and the housing, i.e., a

shortage of housing units priced appropriately in proportion to household incomes, and a lack of an appropriate range of housing types and sizes.

Despite a strong economy with increasing wages and low unemployment, household incomes have not been able to keep up with rising home costs. A common guideline used by some lenders and financial advisors is that the cost of one's home should not exceed 2.5 times gross annual household income. In Belknap County, the median purchase price of homes was \$268,000 in 2020 according to NH Housing and the median household income was \$67,328 (2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate), a ratio of 4.0. This imbalance has been exacerbated by the pandemic. One year later NH Housing data showed that the median purchase price in Belknap County had increased to \$315,800.

Rents have also been increasing although not to the same degree as purchase prices. NH Housing reports that the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment increased 22% from 2000 to 2019 statewide while purchase prices increased by 56%. However, there has been virtually no increase in the number of multi-family units in Alton in the last ten years (*Current Estimates and Trends in New Hampshire's Housing Supply*, NHOSI, December 2020 Update).

Homes have not just been getting more expensive, they have been getting larger while family sizes have not. These trends all make it difficult to find starter homes or homes for those wishing to downsize. The lack of starter homes, in turn, means rental units are not freed up when young would-be home buyers are ready to purchase. When there is a mismatch between the housing and the jobs in an area, it can also begin to slow economic growth as it becomes difficult to fill certain types of jobs. In fact, the state's shortage of workforce housing has been ranked by NH Business & Industry Association as among the top issues (Rick Fabrizio, *There's trouble ahead if New Hampshire doesn't solve the housing crisis*, NH Business Review, October 27, 2021.)

The housing shortage was caused by factors outside of the community's control, such as federal policies and changes in the global economy, and more recently the pandemic. However, local land use regulations such as the town's Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations and Site Plan Review Regulations can be either a negative or positive influence on the local housing supply, as can decisions about municipal water and sewer. It will be important to consider the need for a diverse housing stock priced appropriately for the town's families and workforce when evaluating changes to the town's land use regulations and when considering infrastructure improvements.



# Chapter 3. Natural Resources

## 3.1 Introduction

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From Lake Winnepesaukee to the surrounding mountains, Alton's natural resources are the foundation of the community's economy and way of life. As a four-season recreation destination, Alton's lakes and ponds and extensive mountainous lands are essential to the health and beauty of the town. The town's geography has heavily influenced human



interaction with the landscape and its natural resources for centuries – from Indigenous peoples' trails and settlements to the railroad of the 19th century to today's highway transportation system and development of the Big Lake.

As discussed in *Chapter 1 Introduction and Vision*, residents and visitors alike identified Lake Winnepesaukee as one of the most important features of the town in the recent Master Plan Update Survey. The Lake is not just the focus of many recreational activities, it is also at the heart of the community's character. Townspeople have also consistently noted the importance of the beauty of the town. The community's vision for the future includes attention to clean water, important wildlife habitats, and scenic views while prudently enhancing the diverse four-season recreation opportunities that are the core to a thriving local business community. It is recognized that "business-friendly" and "conservation-

mind ed" are not in conflict with each other but are compatible. In fact, environmental protection is essential in order to maintain the town's economic base.

This chapter will evaluate the condition of today's natural resources and will explore ways to preserve and protect these resources in support of the community's vision for the future.

## 3.2 Water Resources

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### Surface Water

Approximately 23% of Alton's geographic area is comprised of surface water (US Census Bureau as cited in *ELMI Alton NH Community Profile*). Alton's main surface water resource is Lake Winnepesaukee, whose history and recreational value are legendary. Lake Winnepesaukee is the heart of the community and lake water quality is its lifeblood. Alton has the largest and deepest acreage of the Big Lake of any of the surrounding towns. The town of Alton envelopes the southeastern point of Lake Winnepesaukee and includes the southeastern side of Wolfeboro Harbor and all of the largest islands in the southeast end of the Lake -- Rattlesnake, Sleepers, Treasure, Little Barndoor, Barndoor, Cub, Ship, and Moose.

Alton also has several smaller recreational lakes and ponds. Sunset Lake and Hills Pond, a dammed section of a major tributary to the Suncook River, flow into Gilmanton. Half Moon Lake (Crescent Lake) in South Alton flows into the Suncook River through Barnstead. Smaller ponds include Bear Pond, Gilman Pond and Knights Pond. Secluded and quiet Gilman and Knights Ponds are protected in conservation land. The Big River tributary to the Suncook River rises in South Alton and flows through conserved land into Strafford.

The Merrymeeting River is the major tributary to Lake Winnepesaukee in Alton. It flows from Merrymeeting Lake in New Durham through the Merrymeeting Marsh where it is joined by Coffin Brook, a major tributary. Merrymeeting Marsh and Coffin Brook also constitute the largest wetland system in town. The river is dammed at Wentworth Pond and then flows into Lake Winnepesaukee at Alton Bay. Other significant brooks are Watson Brook, Minge Brook, West Alton Brook, Beaver Brook, Hurd Brook, and Frohock Brook. Alton also has about 43 miles of perennial streams (those that usually flow year-round). (See Stoney Ridge Environmental, *Alton Water Resources NRI Map*, January 12, 2022.)

## Surface Water Quality

Maintaining the town’s water quality in the future will be essential for both the economic well-being of the community and for the continued enjoyment of water-based recreation. Water quality needs to be an important consideration in the Town's natural resource, land use and infrastructure planning decisions.

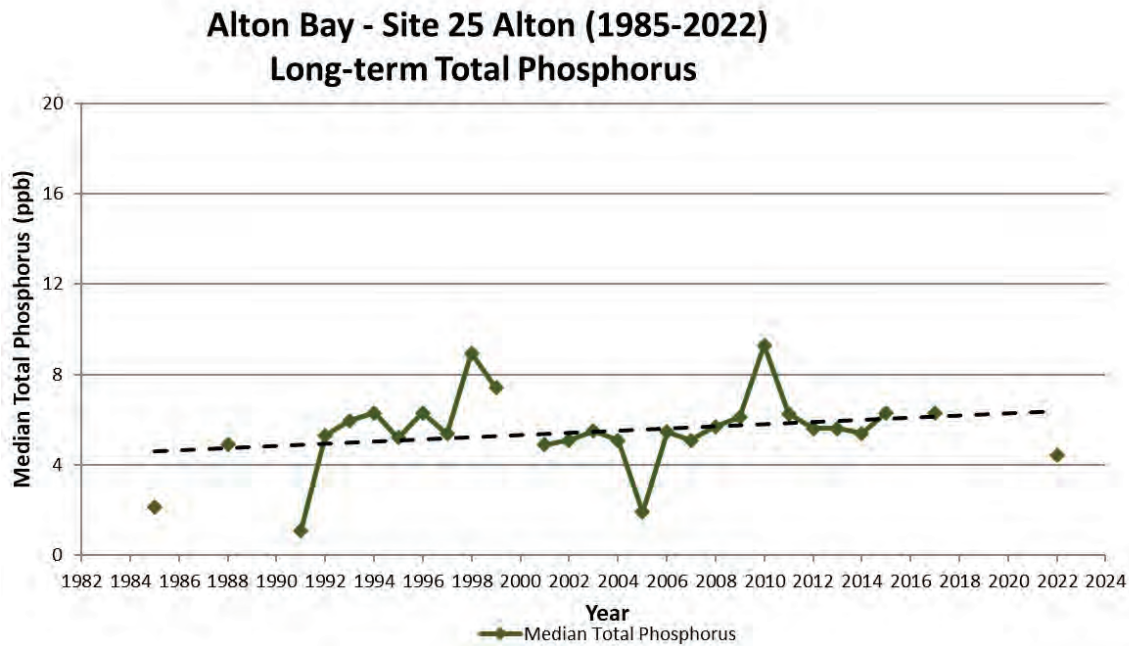
Dense cottage/lakehouse development around the shore of Lake Winnepesaukee over the years has led to a large amount of septic system effluent going into the ground in a small area. Many of the septic systems are undersized by today's standards. Fortunately, septic system failures have been rare and most have been addressed right away by homeowners. NHDES and local officials have worked with



homeowners to find solutions to upgrade systems as needed due to failures, enlargement or replacement of homes, or conversion from seasonal to year-round use. However, septic loading has been increasing as seasonal cottages are replaced by larger homes and seasonal use increases to year-round.

For many years volunteers conducted water quality sampling at several locations in Alton Bay to provide important trend data regarding the Lake. The sampling effort was part of the Lakes Lay Monitoring Program administered jointly through the UNH Cooperative Extension Natural Resources Program Team and the Center for Freshwater Biology at the University of New Hampshire. In 2017 UNH Cooperative Extension reported on the results of water quality monitoring from 1984 to 2017 in Alton Bay (UNH Extension, *Winnepesaukee, 2017 Sampling Highlights, Station 25, Alton, NH*). At that time, the water quality in Alton was considered to be excellent, but the report did show a concerning trend of increasing total phosphorus concentrations. The most recent data available for Alton Bay showed that by 2019 phosphorus levels in Alton Bay were only “marginally” meeting water quality standards. (NH Department of Environmental Services, 2020/2022 Surface Water Quality Assessment). The Alton Conservation Commission resumed the Lakes Lay Monitoring of Alton Bay over the summer of 2022 to ensure that this important effort continues. Water quality was sampled

monthly at five locations. Total phosphorus for Station 25 in Alton Bay is shown in the graph on the following page with 2022 results added to those shown in UNH Extension’s 2017 summary report. Although the result is encouraging, it represents only one season of data after a several year gap. The Alton Conservation Commission is committed to continue participation in the Lakes Lay Monitoring Program which will include monitoring for total phosphorus.



(Source: Robert Craycraft, Lakes Monitoring Program Coordinator, UNH Extension)

Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between human activity within a watershed and the quality of surface water. Common sources of phosphorus around a lake can include older septic systems, detergents and lawn fertilizers. In addition, because phosphorus sorbs to soil particles, disturbance of soil that leads to sedimentation of surface waters also contributes to the phosphorus loading. The 2017 UNH report recommended the implementation of best management practices to decrease sources of nonpoint pollution such as stormwater runoff.

Surface water quality concerns center around algal blooms and invasive species – specifically cyanobacteria and milfoil (FB Environmental Associates, *Merrymeeting River & Lake Watershed Management Plan*, September 2019; and *Mill Pond Supplement*, 2020) Cyanobacteria has also been identified at unsafe levels in several locations in the Merrymeeting River Watershed. Cyanobacteria growth is caused by excess nutrients and is associated with toxic “algal blooms.” The *Merrymeeting River & Lake Watershed*



*Management Plan* was completed in September 2019 and included recommendations to address this issue. The Watershed Management Plan identified the Powder Mill Fish Hatchery on the outlet of Merrymeeting Lake in New Durham as the source of about two-thirds of the total phosphorus load in the Merrymeeting River. A new EPA permit set stricter standards for the discharge and the state has been making both short-term and long-range changes to reduce pollution. This will include a new state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant. However, nutrients remaining in sediments will continue to be a source of phosphorus in the water. Phosphorus loading from developed areas is also expected to continue to increase. Both controlling nutrient-laden runoff and preventing the spread of milfoil continue to be high priorities. NHDES will soon be forming a Cyanobacteria Plan Advisory Committee and developing a plan over the coming year to address this issue statewide.

Voters at Alton’s 2022 Annual Town Meeting approved funding to participate in NH Lakes’s Lake Host Program. Lake Hosts conduct free inspections of boats for aquatic invasive species and provide education to boaters. NH Lakes also provides a LakeSmart program for homeowners, including a list of trusted service providers and free educational material.

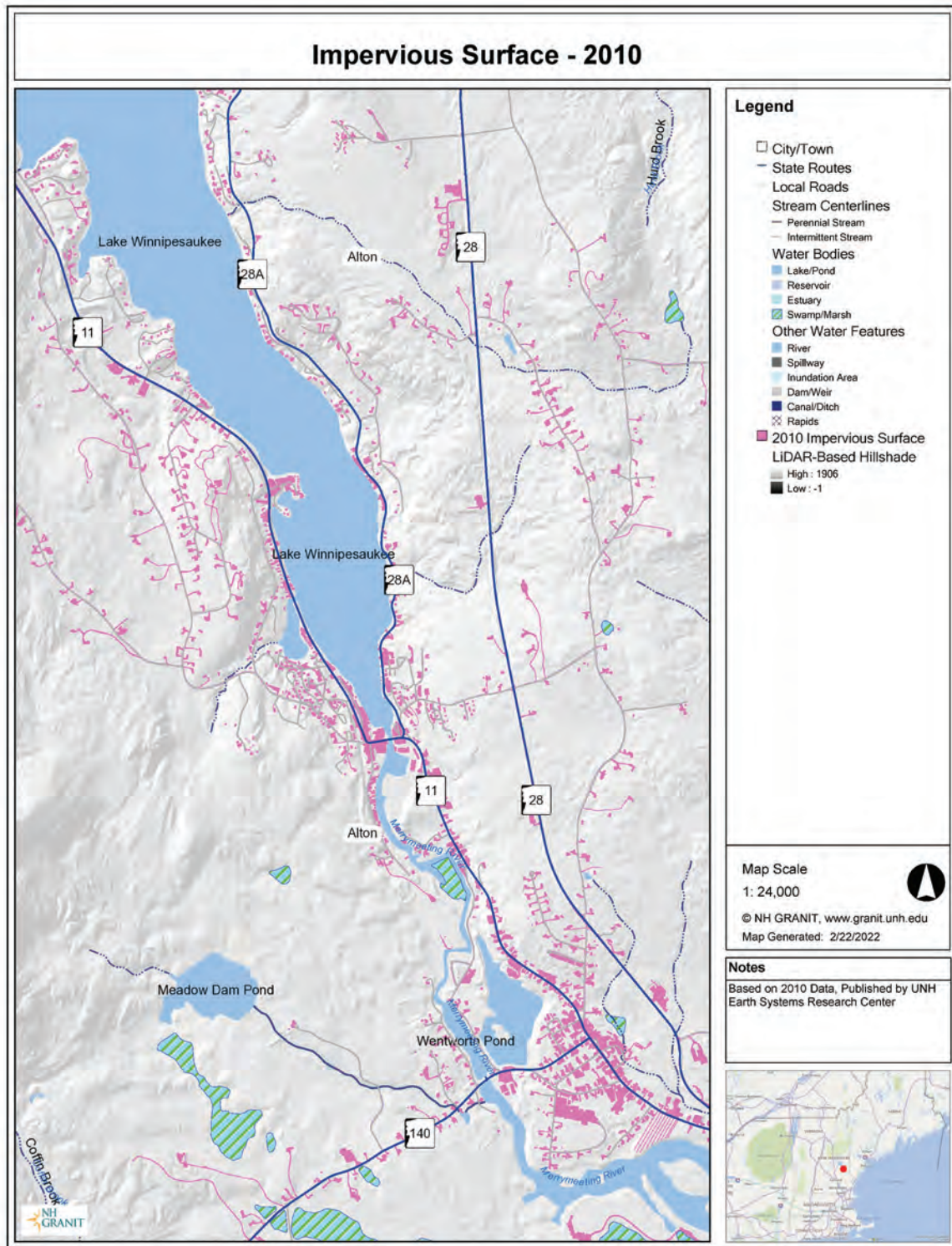
Alton’s Zoning Ordinance provides little protection for surface water quality. A Lakeshore Residential Zone adopted by voters in the 1970s was designed to limit further dense development around Lake Winnepesaukee. The Ordinance also includes a Shoreland Protection Overlay District that is intended to mirror the Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act (SWQPA) (RSA 483-B). However, the SWQPA has been weakened significantly since its inception. In addition, certain NHDES permits rely on follow-up that is difficult to monitor and enforce. For example, pervious pavements are often used in site design to reduce impervious area, but they have to be rigorously maintained in order to retain their design functionality. Follow-up monitoring and enforcement are inadequate to ensure that this maintenance is properly conducted. In addition, the SWQPA only applies to lakes and ponds greater than 10 acres in size and no rivers and brooks in Alton other than the segment of the Merrymeeting River below the juncture with Coffin Brook. Studies conducted by NH Fish & Game from 2008 to 2010 showed that many stretches of Alton’s perennial streams still contained healthy populations of Eastern Brook Trout, an indicator of high water quality and of high value to protect.

To maintain and restore Alton’s surface water quality, it is necessary to protect shorelines from certain human activities and to maintain a vegetated buffer around surface waters wherever practical. This means strengthening the Town’s Shoreland Protection Overlay District. Shoreline vegetation and the layer of organic matter that builds up underneath it slow down the stormwater runoff that occurs naturally along with that which results from

impervious surfaces such as roofs, roads, parking areas and driveways. Buffer strips along lakes, ponds, rivers and streams intercept and store surface runoff, allowing it to infiltrate rather than continue off-site as runoff. This can reduce impacts from a variety of pollutants including phosphorus, sediment, pathogens, nitrates, and pesticides. A buffer's capacity to tie up pollutants depends on its width. The wider a buffer is, the more removal of pollutants occurs. Vegetated shoreline buffers also provide necessary shade for aquatic species, provide important habitat corridors, and slow the advance of some harmful invasive species. Following a thorough review of available research and consultation with natural resource professionals and state and federal regulators, New Hampshire experts recommended a minimum naturally vegetated buffer width of 100 feet for removal of pollutants and some of the needs of wildlife (Vicki Chase, Laura Deming and Francesca Latawiec, *Buffers for Wetlands and Surface Waters – A Guidebook for New Hampshire Municipalities*, 1997). Additional research since that time has continued to support that recommendation.

For rivers, streams, lakes and ponds regulated by the state's Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act (RSA 483-B), Alton's Zoning Ordinance currently requires a 50-foot setback for structures on lots created after 1995 and a 30-foot setback for older lots. Extending this setback to 50 feet for all lots on all year-round streams and requiring a vegetated buffer like the ordinance now requires for wetlands would greatly increase the protection of the town's surface waters. Examples are available for consideration of possible language that are based on models initially developed by a team of experienced planners, land use lawyers and scientists and published by NHDES in October 2008 in *Innovative Land Use Techniques – A Handbook for Sustainable Development*.

Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between impervious surfaces and increased nonpoint pollution. As shown on the map on the following page, this poses a special challenge for communities like Alton where development has historically been concentrated around lakeshores.



Alton’s Zoning Ordinance contains detailed Stormwater Management provisions for developments over 15% slope, with developments requiring site plan review, subdivision approval, or a state shoreland permit deferring to those regulations instead. There are many areas that were developed before the adoption of these regulations, most notably the historic Alton Village and Alton Bay. With increasing awareness of the role that stormwater plays in water quality deterioration, efforts have increased in this area. The Town Highway Department has a program of cleaning stormwater catch basins and has installed porous pavement at the parking lots in Alton Bay. The new Fish & Game boat launch parking area also has a new stormwater management system. However, there is room for improvement of stormwater management. The Town’s land use regulations should all be reviewed to ensure that requirements are consistent and that all major developments and developments on steep slopes demonstrate compliance with the NHDES Stormwater Manual, including the requirement that stormwater leaving the site after development will not be of any higher volume or velocity or lower quality than that leaving the site before the proposed development. The design flow should also be increased to the 50-year storms with emergency flow provisions for the 100-year storm since we are seeing more frequent extreme weather events. Compliance with stormwater operation and maintenance plans should be included in conditions of approval so that they can be enforced by the town.



(Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Climate change modeling specific to northern New Hampshire indicates increased precipitation, particularly in winter and spring, and an increase in extreme weather events (Cameron Wake et al, UNH Sustainability Institute, *Climate Change in Northern New Hampshire - Past Present and Future*, 2014). This will mean attention to stormwater

management will become even more important in order to prevent erosion and protect not only Alton’s water quality but also its transportation infrastructure. Protecting vegetated riparian buffers would also have the added benefit of keeping property away from the eroding banks of rivers and brooks.

## **Floodplains**

Floodplains are areas associated with surface waters that can be expected to flood periodically during periods of high rainfall, snowmelt and/or ice-out. These areas serve to store and slow floodwaters, in some cases enabling sediments and other material carried by the floodwaters to settle out. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) published Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for Alton, dated May 17, 1988. These maps show the areas in town with a one-percent chance of flooding each year, known as the 100-year floodplain or “Special Flood Hazard Areas.” An examination of these maps along with the wetlands mapped by the US Fish & Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) shows that, with a few exceptions, most of these areas are along small streams and along the Merrymeeting River. Exceptions include the wetlands below Knight’s Pond and the town’s larger wetlands such as Trask Swamp and those associated with the Merrymeeting River and Coffin Brook. The vicinity of the West Alton Marina is also in the mapped 100-year floodplain.

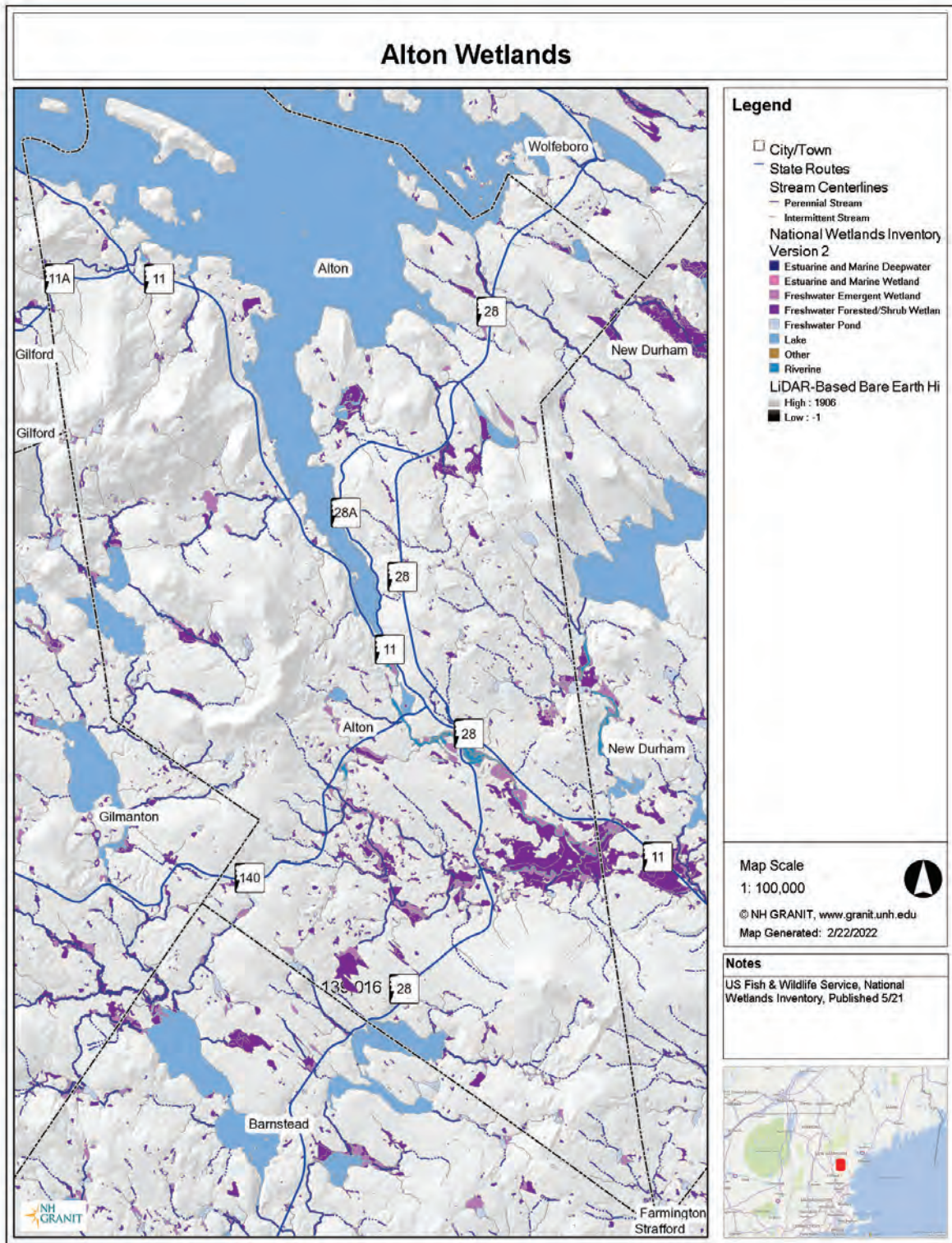
Alton’s Floodplain Development Overlay District applies to all 100-year floodplains and requires a permit for all proposed development in these areas to ensure that National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) requirements for floodproofing are met. NFIP requirements are only designed to protect the value of the structure in the event of a flood. They don’t protect residents of the structures, emergency responders, or those downstream of any debris or objects that are carried away by floodwaters. In addition, New Hampshire has been experiencing more frequent extreme weather events. It is important to maintain floodplain areas for flood storage and keep them free from structures. Fortunately, many of Alton’s larger floodplain areas have already been protected. The Knight’s Pond wetland/floodplain area and a significant amount of the wetlands/floodplain area around Merrymeeting River and Coffin Brook have been conserved by NH Fish & Game. Trask Swamp has been conserved by the Town and Lakes Region Conservation Trust. Protection for the town’s remaining wetlands and strengthening the Town’s shoreline buffer requirements would serve to protect much of the town’s remaining mapped floodplains.

## Wetlands

In New Hampshire, wetlands are defined as areas that are “inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal conditions does support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions (RSA 482-A:2). Of Alton’s land area, 3,768 acres of wetlands (excluding Lake Winnepesaukee) have been mapped by US Fish & Wildlife Service’s National Wetland Inventory (NWI). An additional 5,570 acres have been mapped by the US Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as hydric soils, an indicator of possible wetlands (Stoney Ridge Environmental, *Alton Wetland Resources NRI Map*, January 4, 2022). Wetlands mapped as part of the NWI are shown on the next page. Together these areas represent about 22% of the town. Wetlands provide numerous benefits to the community, including the storage and filtering of floodwaters as discussed in the previous section, as well as groundwater recharge and augmentation of stream flows during low water periods. Wetlands also provide critical habitat for numerous species.

The Conservation Commission reviews and comments on all NHDES wetland and shoreland applications and also provides comments to the Planning Board on subdivision applications.

Alton’s current regulatory protection of wetlands is limited to a 25-foot buffer zone. For lots created after March 14, 2006, buildings, driveways and structures must maintain a 25-foot natural vegetative buffer from all wetlands greater than 10,000 square feet in size. However, relief from the 25-foot natural vegetative buffer may be granted by the Planning Board if the vegetation has already been removed or with a NHDES permit. NHDES regulations do not apply to wetland buffers. The Town should consider strengthening its wetlands protection by closing the loopholes in the current wetland regulations and requiring protection of a vegetated buffer around wetlands of any size when adjacent to rivers, streams, ponds and lakes. Current examples of zoning ordinance language for protecting wetlands are available that are based on models initially developed by a team of experienced planners, land use lawyers and scientists and published by NHDES in October 2008 in *Innovative Land Use Techniques – A Handbook for Sustainable Development*.



## Groundwater

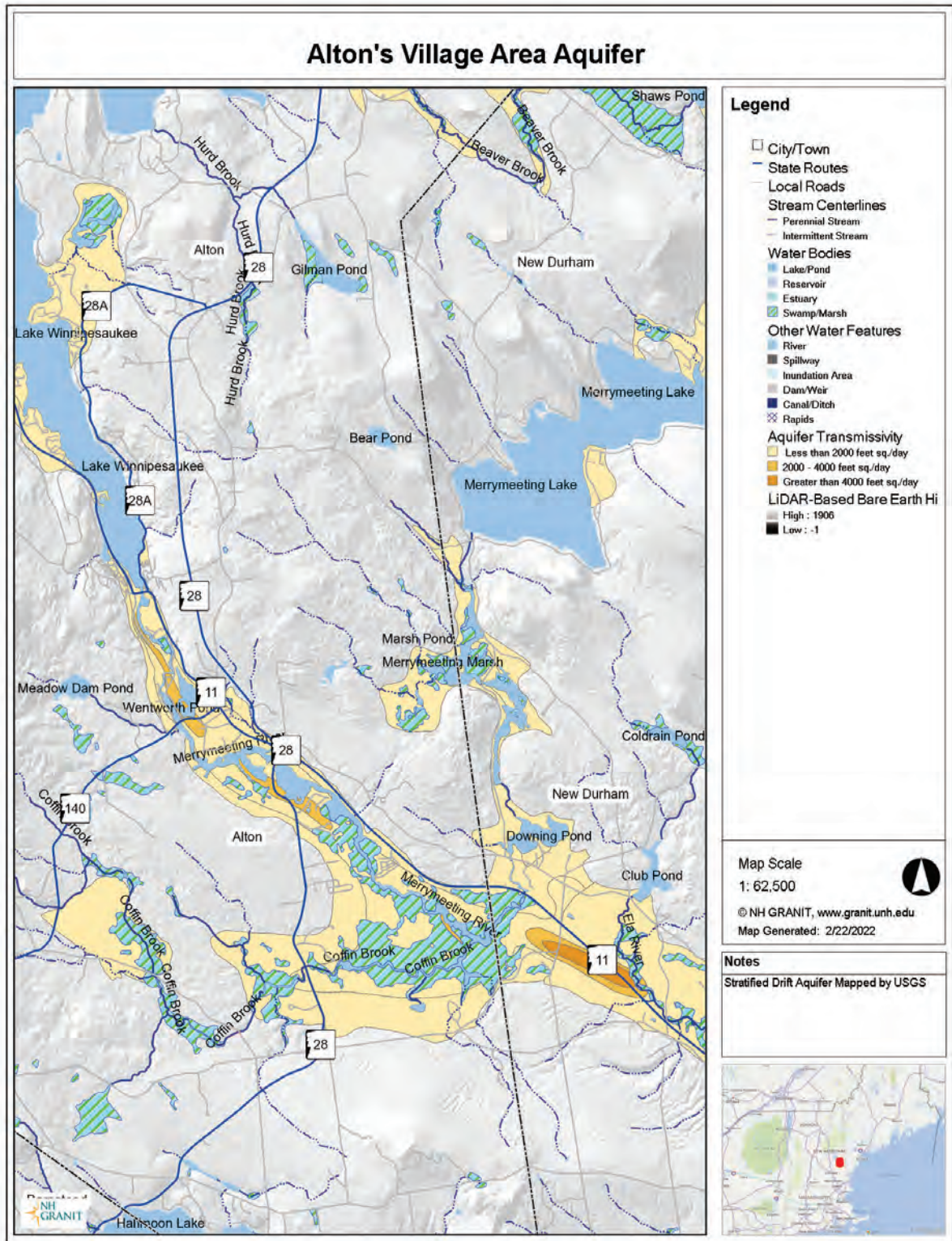
While most private wells in Alton are drilled rock wells, the two wells that provide the municipal supply rely on the greater volumes of water provided by the Merrymeeting River stratified drift aquifer. Stratified drift aquifers consist primarily of sand and gravel deposits that were deposited in layers by the glaciers as they retreated. In New Hampshire these are the deposits most able to produce groundwater in the volumes needed for public supply wells. All wells may be impacted by groundwater contamination whether in stratified drift aquifers or in fractured bedrock.

New Hampshire's important stratified drift aquifers have been mapped by NH Department of Environmental Services and United States Geological Survey. Alton's municipal wells are in the stratified drift aquifer that extends from the western side of Alton Bay, under Alton Village to the Old Riverside Cemetery. As shown on the map on the following page, a large portion of this aquifer is located in New Durham, with an area hooking back into Alton at Merrymeeting River. Other areas of the aquifer more suitable for smaller water systems occur adjacent to the following brooks:

- West Alton Brook
- Watson Brook
- Frohock Brook
- Coffin Brook
- Marsh Pond drainage
- Brook along the eastern end of Powder Mill Road
- Trask Pond to Echo Point drainage
- Beaver Brook
- Knights Pond Brook

(Source: Stoney Ridge Environmental, *Alton Groundwater Resources & Potential Contamination Sources NRI Map*, January 11, 2022)





Land use must be managed carefully over important aquifer areas to ensure that best practices are used for the storage and handling of materials which could pose a threat to water quality if spilled, and to ensure that activities that involve large quantities of potentially harmful substances are located elsewhere in town.

Alton's Zoning Ordinance includes an Aquifer Protection Overlay District that applies to activities within the stratified drift aquifer areas mapped by USGS. The Ordinance provides for groundwater recharge, prohibits the disposal of hazardous waste and solid waste other than brush and stumps, and provides for additional review for any onsite wastewater disposal beyond that typical of a single family home. However, several other land uses typically prohibited in an aquifer protection overlay district would be allowed in Alton if allowed in the underlying zone. These include storage of road salt, snow dumps, junkyards, gasoline stations and other uses involving petroleum products in bulk. Alton's important aquifer areas would benefit from strengthening the Overlay District to prohibit these uses and to require conditional use permits for uses that involve the handling of toxic and hazardous materials in greater than typical household quantities. Requiring a conditional use permit would enable enforcement of performance standards, also known as best management practices, to ensure that the underlying groundwater is protected from contamination.

### RECOMMENDED WATER RESOURCES ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Develop and implement a comprehensive surface and groundwater protection plan for the village areas, densely-developed areas and municipal water supply wellhead protection areas that includes consideration of current and future land use and wastewater disposal needs. Include a septic survey and study of feasibility of a small community wastewater system.
- ✓ Continue to address failed septic systems immediately.
- ✓ Ensure that shoreland landowners are aware that they are required to obtain a wastewater site assessment prior to sale (RSA 485-A:39).
- ✓ Conduct a voluntary septic survey of shoreland properties and encourage landowner cooperation.
- ✓ Ensure that on-site wastewater capacity is evaluated and properly addressed when structures are enlarged or use increases.

## RECOMMENDED WATER RESOURCES ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED

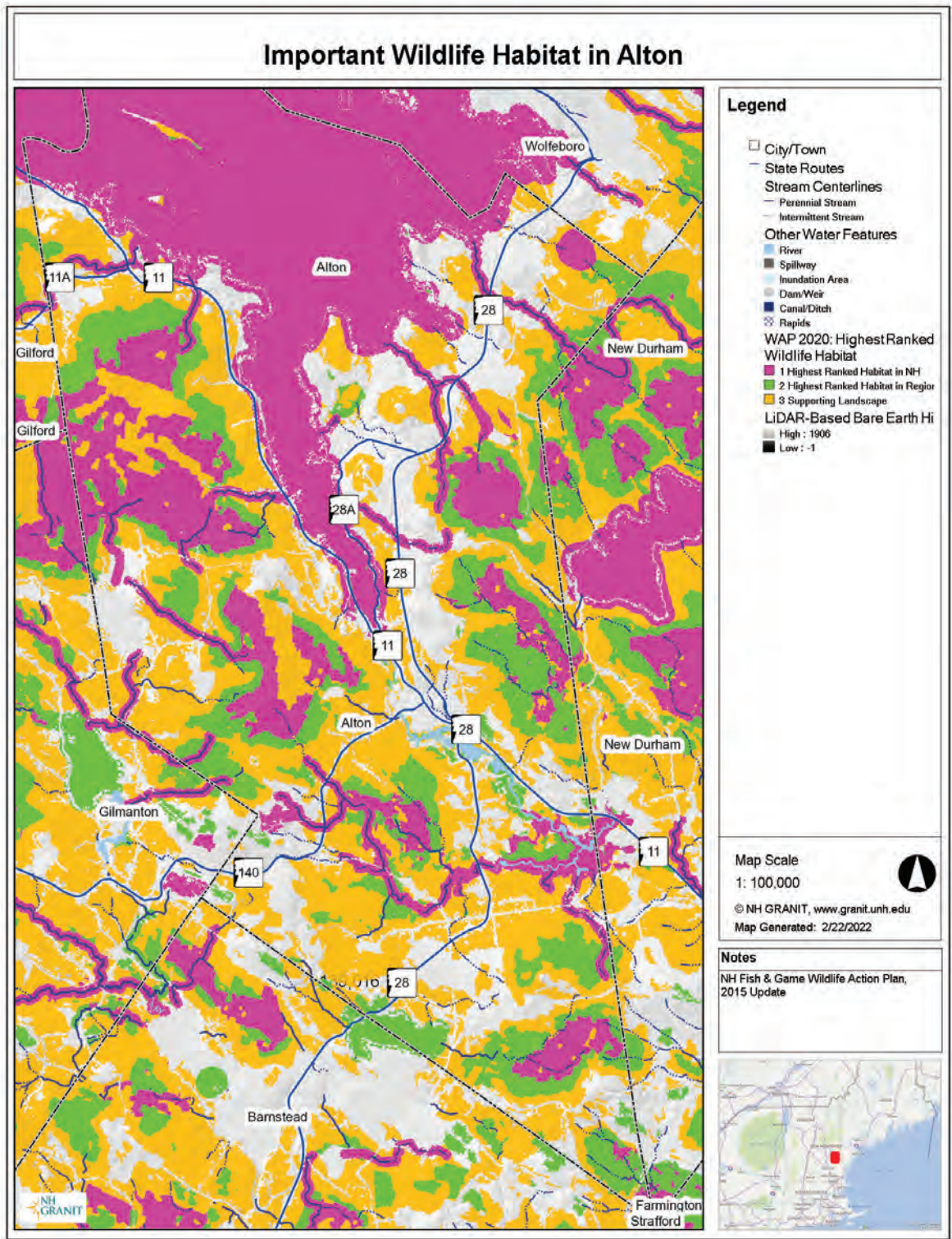
- ✓ Continue to participate in Lakes Lay Monitoring Program to monitor water quality and identify sources of excess nutrients.
- ✓ Participate in NH Lakes' Lake Host Program to educate boaters about keeping boats clean to stop the spread of invasive plants.
- ✓ Promote NH Lakes' LakeSmart program and its resources for homeowners.
- ✓ Amend the Zoning Ordinance to extend the current 50-foot shoreline setback to all lots on all lakes, ponds, rivers and perennial streams and include protection for shoreland vegetation in this buffer.
- ✓ Review, update and strengthen the Town's stormwater management provisions in the Zoning Ordinance, Site Plan Review Regulations and Subdivision Regulations to ensure they are consistent and cover all development disturbing and making impervious an area greater than 20,000 sq.ft., and contain measures to address a 50-year storm.
- ✓ Include stormwater maintenance and operation plan compliance in conditions of approval for subdivisions, site plans, special exceptions and conditional use permits as applicable.
- ✓ Develop a comprehensive stormwater management plan that includes strengthening the Town's land use regulations and improving the Town's stormwater infrastructure.
- ✓ Consider floodplain protection as a factor when prioritizing land for conservation.
- ✓ Strengthen the 25-foot vegetative buffer requirement currently contained in the Zoning Ordinance to protect wetlands by (1) eliminating the exception for projects with a NHDES wetlands application and (2) expanding the requirement to include wetlands of any size if contiguous with perennial streams.
- ✓ Strengthen the Aquifer Protection Overlay District by prohibiting additional uses that pose a high potential for contamination and requiring best management practices for businesses that use toxic or hazardous materials.

### 3.3 Fish and Wildlife

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As part of the *Wildlife Action Plan* (WAP), updated in 2015, N.H. Fish & Game mapped attributes of the landscape that affect its value as wildlife habitat, such as biodiversity, arrangement of habitats on the landscape, and lack of human impacts. These habitat areas are then ranked with categories for “Highest Ranked Habitat in New Hampshire,” “Highest Ranked Habitat in the Biological Region,” and “Supporting Landscapes.” The resulting map, updated with some additional data in 2020, is shown on the following page. (For more detail, see Stoney Ridge Environmental, *NHF&G Ranked Wildlife Habitat – Alton NRI Map*, January 5, 2022). As shown, the town’s highly ranked habitat areas include a combination of riparian corridors, wetland complexes, and certain other areas valued for their cover type and lack of development. The value of land as wildlife habitat should continue to be a factor in prioritizing land for future conservation efforts.

Over the last several years, there has been increasing awareness of the importance of wildlife corridors to species survival, biodiversity and ecosystem health. In 2016, the NH legislature recognized the importance of wildlife habitat corridors and directed the NH Fish and Game Department to work with the NH Department of Environmental Services and NH Department of Transportation to study important wildlife corridors in the state and research voluntary mechanisms for their protection. Aquatic organism passage has received the most attention. State agencies, regional planning commissions, watershed groups and others have been working together to inventory and assess culverts regarding the ability of aquatic organisms to get from one side to the other, as well as other attributes important for prioritizing culvert replacements. During the summer of 2021, NH Geological Survey interns assessed the majority of culverts in Alton. Some have also been assessed by NH Department of Transportation. The data can be found on NH Department of Environmental Services Aquatic Restoration Mapper at <https://www.des.nh.gov/resource-center/data-and-mapping>. This program provides very important data regarding habitat restoration needs as well as culverts that should be priorities for replacement to ensure emergency providers can continue to reach various areas of town during extreme weather events.



Vernal pools are small depressions dotting the landscape that most years hold water for a couple months in the spring. Awareness has been growing regarding the importance of vernal pools to the lifecycle of a wide range of species, including turtles, frogs, salamanders, insects and others. Vernal pools can be a few square feet or several acres in size. These areas are especially vulnerable to disturbance by human activities, in part because they are difficult to recognize during the remainder of the year when they are dry. Some are captured by the state’s wetland regulations, but many are not. *Identifying and Documenting Vernal Pools in New Hampshire*, published by NH Fish and Game Department, provides detailed information regarding vernal pools and the species that depend on them.

For land that is to be developed, strategies are also available for incorporating consideration of wildlife into the siting and design of the development. These include:

- Direct development away from rare and critical habitats
- Maintain buffers between human activities and important habitats
- Preserve important wildlife corridors
- Maintain the structure and function of aquatic systems
- Protect stands of mature trees
- Provide native plantings

(Source: NHDES, *Innovative Land Use Techniques – A Handbook for Sustainable Development*, October 2008)

Information is also available for homeowners wishing to be good neighbors to wildlife. This includes such things as reducing the amount of lighting, using lower color temperatures (“warmer”), and aiming lighting away from the surrounding forest; landscaping with native plants; and keeping trash and animal feed secured.

### RECOMMENDED FISH AND WILDLIFE ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Provide information on wildlife-friendly site design to applicants.
- ✓ Provide education to homeowners on ways to be good neighbors to wildlife.
- ✓ Work with NH Fish & Game and other partners to utilize the results of the stream crossing inventory to reconnect and improve aquatic habitat while increasing public safety.
- ✓ Strive to incorporate accommodations for important wildlife corridor crossings in development and highway design.
- ✓ Increase protection of vernal pools by providing education and outreach to landowners, inventory and mapping for willing landowners, and ensuring that vernal pools are shown on subdivisions and site plans.

## 3.4 Scenic Resources

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(Photo credit: Adapted from Tinted-glass Flickr photostream, Creative Commons License 2.0)

Alton’s scenic beauty flows from the town’s wealth of unique natural, cultural and historic features. These include lakes, ponds, wetlands, streams, mountain peaks, valleys, agricultural land, byways, historic buildings and stonework such as walls and foundations. The view of the Lake and surrounding mountains is considered one of the most beautiful views in the Lakes Region.

Some examples of important local views include:

- Scenic views from wayside areas on Routes 11 and 28
- The famous view from Roberts Cove Road northwest over the entire lake
- Halls Hill Road
- Views from our mountain/hill tops such as Mount Major, Straightback and Morse Preserve
- Views of our surrounding mountains from the valley and the Lake





Unfortunately, across the state, the scenic value of some wayside areas has been lost to tree growth. In Alton, some of this has been on private lands where view easements were not secured by the NH Department of Transportation in conjunction with construction.

Preserving the natural scenic beauty of Alton viewsheds should be an important consideration in future conservation efforts as well as in highway and trail planning. The townspeople recognized the value of these resources and in 2008 a Scenic Resource Committee worked with Thomas Kokx Associates and Lakes Region Planning Commission to conduct an extensive and detailed town-wide Scenic Resource Inventory. The Inventory focused on viewsheds and viewpoints (a viewshed is the natural environment visible from one or more viewpoints) as a tool for prioritizing protection. Criteria used to prioritize views were viewpoints on or viewed from public land, areas of high visibility, representative key attributes of town character and locations identified as special places in town. The maps and data produced provide a valuable guide for incorporating scenic resource protection into land conservation priorities and for use in identifying high priority viewsheds for possible regulatory protection.

For important viewsheds that involve ridgelines and hilltops that are not yet protected from development, developers and builders should be encouraged to consider guidelines for reducing scenic impacts. These guidelines include, for example:

- Limiting the size of the building envelope
- Carefully planning where to clear for views from the home and cutting a filtered view
- Using natural/neutral colors
- Minimizing reflective material

- Minimizing lighting
- Ensuring that no portion of the structure extends above the elevation of the ridgeline
- Retaining vegetation for screening for both the home and driveway
- Minimizing cut and fill
- Considering important tree stands in siting decisions

(Source: NHDES, *Innovative Land Use Techniques – A Handbook for Sustainable Development*, October 2008)

NH Route 11 west of the intersection with NH 28 and NH 28 north of that intersection are legs of the Lakes Region Tour. This state scenic byway circles the Lake and has connectors to Laconia, Plymouth and West Ossipee. In addition to being a tool for tourism outreach, there is sometimes federal money available for enhancements to scenic byways to improve the experience for visitors, such as viewshed protection and pull-offs. This may be a possible source of funding to purchase view easements that would enable tree thinning in order to produce a filtered view in key locations along these routes. In addition, NHDOT rules prohibit the state from issuing sign permits for off-site signs in the state right-of-way, keeping it free of billboards.

For local roads with that special feel that goes with old stone walls and mature shade trees, towns can vote to designate these as local scenic roads pursuant to RSA 231:157. This designation doesn't restrict any private property rights of landowners, but requires the town or utility to notify the Planning Board before commencing any work that would involve destroying stone walls or cutting mature trees. The town also needs to hold a public hearing prior to commencing the work except in emergencies. Alton has not yet designated any local scenic roads.

### RECOMMENDED SCENIC RESOURCES ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Consider the 2008 Scenic Resources Inventory in prioritizing lands for conservation.
- ✓ Work with willing landowners to open up views from scenic waysides.
- ✓ Consider adopting a local scenic roads ordinance.
- ✓ Provide information to developers and builders on design guidelines for reducing the scenic impacts of development on hillsides and ridgelines.

## 3.5 Forest and Agricultural Lands

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The majority of Alton's land area, 86%, is covered by soils that are considered by NRCS to be "important forest soils" and supports a healthy cover of hardwoods and softwoods (Stoney Ridge Environmental, *Alton Important Forest Soils NRI Map*, January 5, 2022). Logging is a prevalent commercial activity in the town. Alton's forests provide a significant water quality benefit to the surface water resources of the town by attenuating overland flow from storms and filtering recharge of groundwater. Forest land also provides important habitat and backdrops to important scenic views. Much of this land is also made available by landowners for recreation.

Much of Alton's undeveloped land is enrolled in the state's Current Use Program (RSA 79-A). The Current Use Program is a property tax strategy that helps landowners keep their land undeveloped by taxing the land based on its value as open space rather than its value for house lots. This makes it much easier for landowners who wish to keep forest, agricultural and other undeveloped land as open space. Tracts of forest, agricultural, wetlands and other undeveloped land of at least 10 acres or more may qualify. Alton currently has 24,728 acres enrolled in this program, representing just over 60% of the town's land area (NH DRA, 2020 Current Use Report). The majority, 21,924 acres, is forestland.

The health of our forests is important to both the timber industry, landowners relying on their forestlands for income, and the wildlife that depends on it for habitat. While Variable Milfoil remains the only documented invasive plant in Lake Winnepesaukee, invasive plants on land are even more pervasive. According to John Gunn, Research Assistant Professor of Forest Management at UNH, non-native species such as burning bush, glossy buckthorn, multiflora rose, and Japanese barberry already make up at least 30 percent by species of all plants in New England (NH Agricultural Experiment Station, *UNH Scientist Takes Aim at Invasive, Non-Native Plants Threatening NH's Forests*, March 20, 2017). Gunn and other researchers are trying to learn more about what steps landowners and forest managers can take to make our forests more resistant to invasive species to protect forest health. Non-native insects such as the Emerald Ash Borer are also expected to be a growing concern as our climate continues to warm.

For the most part only small, isolated areas of prime agricultural soils are found in Alton. Much of this land has already been subdivided for residential uses as these areas also tend to be among the easiest lands to develop. Very little active farmland or open fields remain in Alton as forest has quickly taken over lands that were once farms. The remaining farmland is primarily



hayfields and blueberries. The NH DRA 2020 Current Use Report includes 1,417 acres of farmland enrolled in the Current Use Program in Alton. These remaining open lands are important, not only for future generations but also for their scenic value.

### RECOMMENDED FOREST AND AGRICULTURAL LANDS ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Provide education on identification and management of invasive species.
- ✓ Encourage owners of agricultural and forestland to enroll in conservation programs such as Current Use and those offered by USDA that support continued productive use of the land.
- ✓ Continue to ensure that Land Use Change Tax continues to be collected at the appropriate times.

## 3.6 Conservation Lands

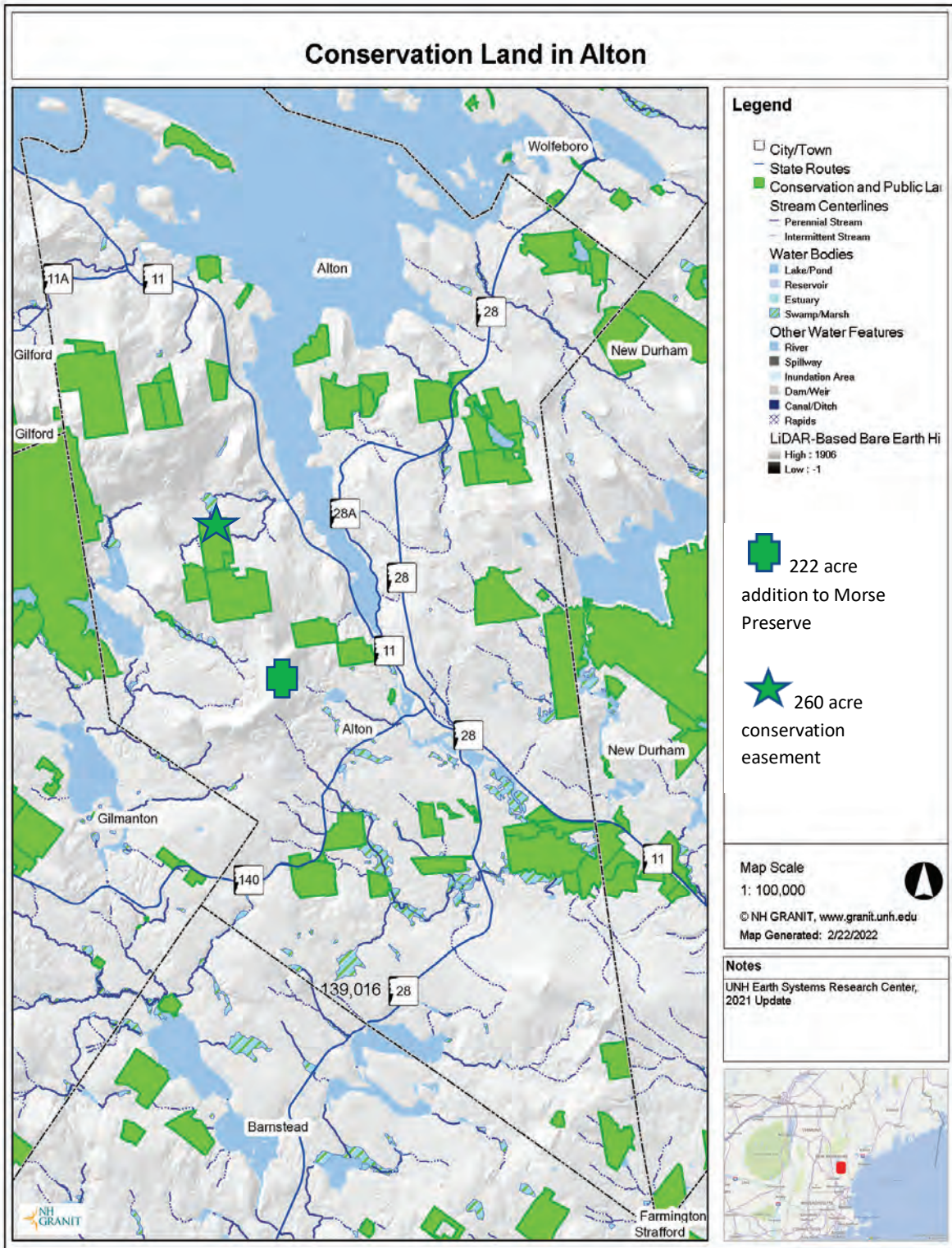
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As shown on the map on the next page, the efforts of the Alton Conservation Commission, NH Fish & Game, Lakes Region Conservation Trust, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests and other partners have resulted in a large number of conservation areas distributed across the town. These lands include high value wetlands, ponds, large contiguous forested areas, and agricultural lands. (For greater detail, see *Alton Conservation Lands NRI Map* developed by Stoney Ridge Environmental, January 7, 2022).

According to Stoney Ridge Environmental, 3,788 acres have been conserved by fee ownership and another 1,702 have conservation easements on them (Stoney Ridge Environmental, LLC., *2022 Natural Resource Inventory*, page 64, Table 5-1, July 2022). Many of these lands have hiking trails maintained by the Conservation Commission, Lakes Region Conservation Trust and the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests.

In addition to high priority natural resources already discussed in this chapter as important factors in prioritizing land for conservation – water resources, important habitats, scenic resources and farmland – the recreation needs of residents and visitors is another factor to consider. In addition, the proximity to other conserved lands adds value for wildlife as habitat as well as for recreation and viewshed protection. Each land conservation project almost always achieves multiple conservation goals. For example, Alton’s rugged topography provides for many scenic views both from the valleys as well as the numerous hilltops. Land with high value for wildlife habitat often coincides with these steep slope areas. In turn, protection of steep slopes from development activities helps with water quality protection as downstream areas are protected from erosion and sedimentation. Similarly, conservation of wetlands and surface water bodies protects not only water quality, but important habitat areas, and often scenic resources and recreation opportunities.





Alton has significant unfragmented lands in large blocks that help define the geographic character of the town. As part of its Natural Resource Inventory for the Town, Stoney Ridge Environmental conducted an analysis of unfragmented lands (*Alton Unfragmented Lands/Open Space Areas NRI Map*, January 5, 2022). The Belknap Mountains, including Mount Major, and Rocky/Alton Mountain make up the two largest areas of unfragmented land in town, together comprising about 10,000 acres. These mountaintops provide the beautiful backdrop to Alton Bay and are among the highest priorities for conservation. The Town of Alton has been working with the Forest Society to protect lands on and around Mount Major. Currently, only Mt. Major’s summit is permanently protected by the State. It is important that the Town and its conservation partners continue to work toward purchases and easements to secure the long-term protection for this area, as it is a matching gem to Lake Winnepesaukee. This area has been a high conservation priority for the Town for multiple reasons in addition to standing out in the Town’s Scenic Resources Inventory. The area includes some of the highest ranked wildlife habitat in the state and the highest concentration of slopes over 25% in the town. In addition, Mount Major is one of the most climbed mountains in the state of New Hampshire. More work needs to be done to protect nearly 2000 privately-owned acres. To the south of Mount Major, the Conservation Commission is currently assisting the Forest Society with the protection of nearly 500 acres adjacent to the Society’s Morse Preserve. The Alton Mountain-Avery Hill area is steep and difficult to develop. This area also scores highly for wildlife habitat.

Conservation efforts are well underway in three areas along the eastern boundary with New Durham that have been focus areas for the Town: Marsh Pond/Upper Merrymeeting, Gilman/Bear Pond and Knights Pond. The Coffin Brook and Merrymeeting River/Lower Coffin Brook areas are another valuable area that is largely protected due to the fact that these areas have extensive wetlands and much of the Merrymeeting Marsh is already managed by NH Fish & Game as a wildlife management area.



The views from and to the Belknap Range, Pine Mountain, Rocky Mount and the hills in East Alton frame Alton’s portion of Lake Winnepesaukee, Sunset Lake and Hills Pond and Knights and Gilman Ponds. Protection of the high priority lands identified in the *Lakes Region Conservation Plan* would protect these scenic views while achieving other conservation goals (Lakes Region Conservation Trust, *Lakes Region Conservation Plan - 2017 Update, Mapping, Analysis & Technical Report* Prepared by Dan Sundquist).



Alton currently has 5,578 acres in conservation, some held by the Town and others held by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Lakes Region Conservation Trust, New Hampshire Fish & Game and others (Stoney Ridge Environmental, LLC., *2022 Natural Resource Inventory*, page 64, Table 5-1, July 2022). The New Hampshire Everlasting Initiative offers a benchmark for the community to strive for, conserving “at least 25% of its lands for a network of trails, parks, farms and forests where people can connect with the natural world” (Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, *New Hampshire Everlasting - An Initiative to Conserve Our Quality-of-Life; Working Proposal*, September 22, 2001). To accomplish this goal, Alton would need to conserve approximately an additional 4,800 acres in addition to the currently conserved acreage for a total of 10,400 acres. One step toward this goal would be to increase the Conservation Commission’s Conservation Fund by allocating 100% of the Land Use Change Tax to the fund. Currently the first \$20,000 and then 50% of the remainder goes to the Conservation Fund with the rest going to the General Fund.



### RECOMMENDED CONSERVATION LANDS ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Continue to work toward conservation of the town's high priority natural resource lands through a combination of fee purchase and conservation easements in partnership with land trusts, state agencies and others. Consider the Scenic Resources Inventory, the Lakes Region Conservation Plan, current Wildlife Action Plan data and local input when prioritizing land for conservation.
- ✓ Continue to consider multiple resources and benefits when prioritizing land for conservation.
- ✓ Continue efforts to preserve lands on and around Mount Major.
- ✓ Allocate 100% of the Land Use Change Tax to the Conservation Fund.

## 3.7 Dark Skies

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In much of Alton the dark night sky allows for wildlife and natural ecosystems to remain undisturbed by artificial light and for residents and visitors to enjoy the night sky. Proper design of outdoor lighting is important for maintaining the dark night sky. Considerations include the intensity of lighting, how lighting fixtures are aimed, and the color of the lighting. Blue light brightens the night sky more than “warmer” lighting, and has been shown to harm human health and endanger wildlife (International Dark-Sky Association, Outdoor Lighting Basics, [darksky.org](http://darksky.org)). For these reasons, the International Dark-Sky Association recommends using lighting that has a color temperature of no more than 3000 Kelvins.

Alton’s Zoning Ordinance contains only minimal language regarding lighting, applicable only to uses in the Lakeshore Residential Zone requiring a Special Exception. The Site Plan Review Regulations do contain lighting regulations for nonresidential or multifamily developments, but do not yet require dark sky compliant lighting fixtures or manage the color temperature. These regulations should be strengthened and kept up to date as lighting technology continues to change and the knowledge informing best practices continues to increase.

### RECOMMENDED DARK SKIES ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Strengthen the lighting requirements in the Site Plan Review Regulations to ensure they are adequate for protecting the town's dark skies.
- ✓ Educate existing commercial property owners on Dark Sky lighting and on the lighting requirements in the Town's Site Plan Review Regulations.
- ✓ Provide information to builders and homeowners on lighting best practices, e.g., shielded fixtures to protect dark skies, using "warmer" color lighting, aiming flood lights and spotlights downward to be good neighbors, and ensuring lighting doesn't impact wildlife in adjacent forestlands.

# Chapter 4. Historic Resources

## 4.1 Introduction

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Alton is richly endowed with historic resources which are essential to its character and small-town feel. Learning and understanding the early and later history of Alton is beneficial to everyone who has either made or is contemplating making this gem of small-town America their home or their home away from home. It helps to shape an understanding of the people, the culture, and significant events that have attracted people to the area and made Alton what it is today. How we manage and protect these valuable historic resources brings value and important insight to guide future planning decisions.

## 4.2 Early History

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During the pre-contact period (before colonization by England) Indigenous peoples occupied the area known today as Alton for thousands of years. The Winnepesaukee Tribe of the Abenaki is thought to have had encampments at Camp Kabeyun and Quannippi. As shown on the map on the next page, several major trails converged at Alton Bay. These included the Quannippi, Winnibisauqua (Winnepesaukee), Cochikek (Cocheco), and Sankek (Suncook). The Quannippi (long water) Trail began at the outflow of Rust Pond in South Wolfboro following the eastern shore of Winnepesaukee to Alton Bay. The Cocheco (at the place of the great pine trees) Trail began at Dover Point and followed the Cocheco, Ela, and Merrymeeting Rivers to Alton Bay.

According to Price, there is ever-increasing evidence that there was once a Native American village near Alton Bay, located on the eastern shore of the Merrymeeting River (Chester B. Price, *Historic Indian Trails of New Hampshire*, New Hampshire Archeological Society, 1967). This village, probably of the Winnepesaukee tribe, was believed to have been located on land used for a garden by Perley Barr of Alton. The strip of level meadowland in the rear of the village site was undoubtedly an Indian cornfield, as stone artifacts used as garden tools were found here. Beyond Alton Bay and extending to the Native American fish weirs at the outlet

of Lake Winnepesaukee, the trail became the Winninanebiskek ("at the narrow place where the water flows out of the lake") Trail.



(Source: Chester B. Price, *Historic Indian Trails of New Hampshire*, New Hampshire Archeological Society, 1967)

## 4.3 Late 18th Century

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In 1778, after the French and Indian Wars (1702-1763) and during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), Alton was settled as New Durham Gore. The town received its charter as a separate town in 1796 as Alton, named for an English town of the same name. The town covered 100 square miles and by 1803 was divided into 26 school districts. By 1820 Alton had a population of 2058. This figure was not matched again until the 1970s.

The earliest settlements cleared land for subsistence agriculture. The most favorable agricultural land was found in the eastern and southern parts of New Durham Gore. Alton's agricultural land was greatly expanded for grazing of sheep during the "Great Sheep Boom" from 1810-40. According to ecologist Tom Wessels' *"Reading the Forested Landscape: A Natural History of New England,"* the sheep boom of the 19th century had its start in Europe and spread to New England. This led to the deforestation of central New England and the building of stone walls to keep the sheep corralled; many of those walls can be found in Alton's woods today. By 1840, there were an average of 65 sheep per square mile – more than two sheep for every person. Competition and oversupply of wool among other factors quickly turned the boom to a bust and farms were rapidly abandoned. East Alton may have been the original town center although the town's population center also could have been first in South Alton and then in what we now know as the Village. This is reflected in the architectural style of many of the houses in the village which were built when the Cocheco Railroad came through from Dover. The Cocheco Railroad was granted a charter in 1847 to extend the line to Alton Bay where the railroad station was built in 1850. Steamboats provided transportation across the Lake until the Lakeshore Railroad (Boston & Maine) line was built in 1890. The Lakeshore Railroad connected Alton Bay to Lakeport and subsequently the Weirs on the line from Laconia to Center Harbor, where the stage picked up passengers from both the boats and the railroad.

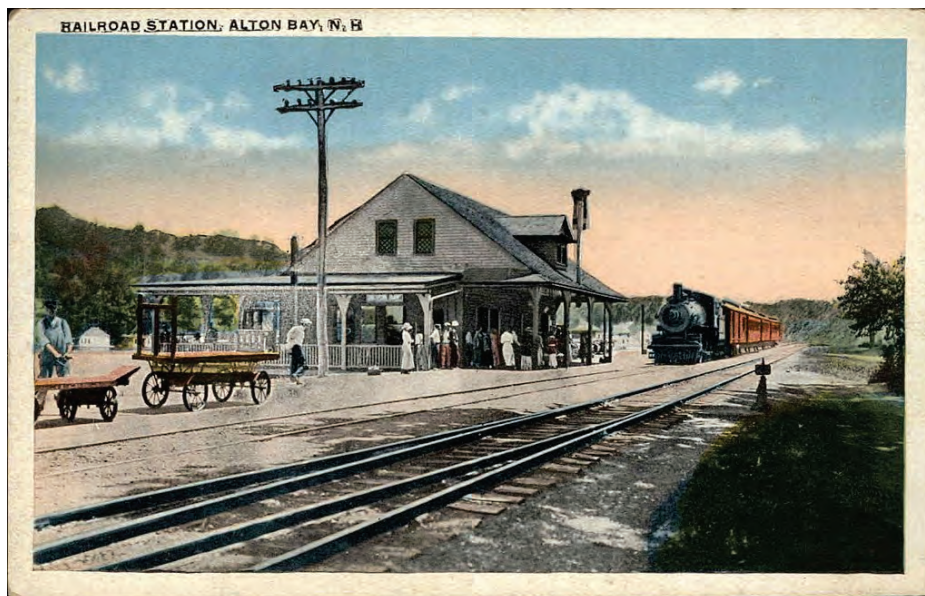
The railroad promoted the growth of manufacturing in Alton including shoes, pianos, roll-top desks and corkscrews. The most famous industry was the invention and manufacturing of a particular type of corkscrew by the Rockwell Clough Company established in 1875. By 1903 the company was producing over thirty million of these items worldwide. Wooden toys were manufactured up until the 1930s. Sawmills and a granite quarry operated over a period of a century, and ice was shipped out by railroad from Alton Bay using the Lakeshore Railroad. The Lakeshore Railroad ceased operation in 1935. (Dana Philbrook, *Lake Shore Railroad: The First Forty Years*, B&M Bulletin 27, VOL.XVI No. 4)

## 4.4 Historic District, Buildings and Sites

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### Alton Bay Railroad Station

The Alton Bay Railroad Station is a well-preserved early 20th-century Shingle Style railroad station. It was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. The Cocheco Railroad was chartered in 1847 to connect Dover to the Boston, Concord & Montreal Railroad at Lakeport, but could only raise the funds to construct the line as far as the southern tip of Alton Bay. The railroad was able to extend its service by building a steamboat that operated on the lake during the warmer months to connect visitors to lakeshore hotels and cottages. The steamboat made its first run in the same month that regular train service to Alton Bay began--August 1851. The railroad station on the shore of Alton Bay thus became an important transfer point for tourists who took the railroad to the lake and then boarded the steamboat for the trip to their lakeside hotel or cottage.



(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Alton Bay itself became a major destination after a lakeside resort village grew up near the railroad station. After the completion of the Lake Shore Railroad along the south shore of Lake Winnepesaukee from Alton Bay to Lakeport in 1890, the Alton Bay Railroad Station ceased to be the terminal depot of the line, but it remained the major transfer point from the railroad to the Boston & Maine's steamboat, the famous "Mount Washington."



(Source: Ken Gallagher, NRHP, February 15, 2010)

The present structure is the third railroad station built at Alton Bay. The first burned a few years after the Cochecho Railroad opened. The second station also burned along with the adjoining steamboat wharf on the night of November 3-4, 1906. Work on the replacement of the railroad station and the wharf began first on the wharf, which was completed in June 1907, in time for the beginning of the summer steamboat service. The station was completed and opened to the public in November and used as a passenger station from November 1907 until July 1935 when train service to Alton Bay ended. Apparently, the only major change made to the station during these years was the addition of the shed-roofed lakeside porch, which does not appear in the very earliest photographs of the building.

In 1937, the Boston & Maine Railroad sold its Alton Bay property to the Town of Alton. For some years, the town leased the station, but, in 1957, it was voted to use the building for a community center. The station was subsequently remodeled to better serve its new role. The exterior fortunately has seen only a few changes and much of the interior detail survives unchanged. The Alton Bay Railroad Station is still a good example of the railroad station of its period. It appears today much as it did when built--a fine reminder of an era when the railroad and the steamboat were still the primary means of transportation in the Lakes Region. (Lakes Region Planning Commission; Alton Historical Society)

## Burial Grounds

In addition to the cemeteries maintained by the Town, there are hundreds of private cemeteries found all over Alton. These cemeteries have been cataloged by the Historical Society and continue to be added as they are found. There is a need to identify the locations

and access points of all these historic burial grounds to aid in protecting them from destruction during the development of land.

## East Alton Meeting House



The East Alton Meeting House (First Freewill Baptist Church) was the first local structure placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The National Register is the official Federal listing of significant heritage resources (buildings, structures, sites, districts and objects) worthy of preservation. Built around 1810, it represents a strong social significance of that period. It was one of three early meeting houses, the other two having been located in South Alton and in the Village. It was built as a meeting house rather than as a church. In the 1840s the inside of the meeting house was refinished in Greek Revival style, reflecting the trend of the times. It serves today as a non-denominational church and is maintained by East Alton residents. It is used as well for weddings, baptisms and special community meetings. (Lakes Region Planning Commission; Alton Historical Society)

## Monument Square Historic District

The Monument Square Historic District is notable for the quality of its 19th-century buildings and for the unusual layout of those buildings around a triangular square. The District was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.



The Square was created by the intersection of two major 18th-century highways. In 1722, the Provincial legislature established a committee to survey a road from Dover to Alton Bay. When built, this road, part of which is now Alton's Main Street, became one of the most important highways in the area, a major route from the Lakes Region to the seacoast. The Wolfeboro Road, from Wolfeboro to Alton, is mentioned in late 18th century deeds, and was of equal importance for the residents of the eastern shores of Lake Winnepesaukee traveling south. The intersection of these two roads at an acute angle created the triangular open space that became Monument Square.

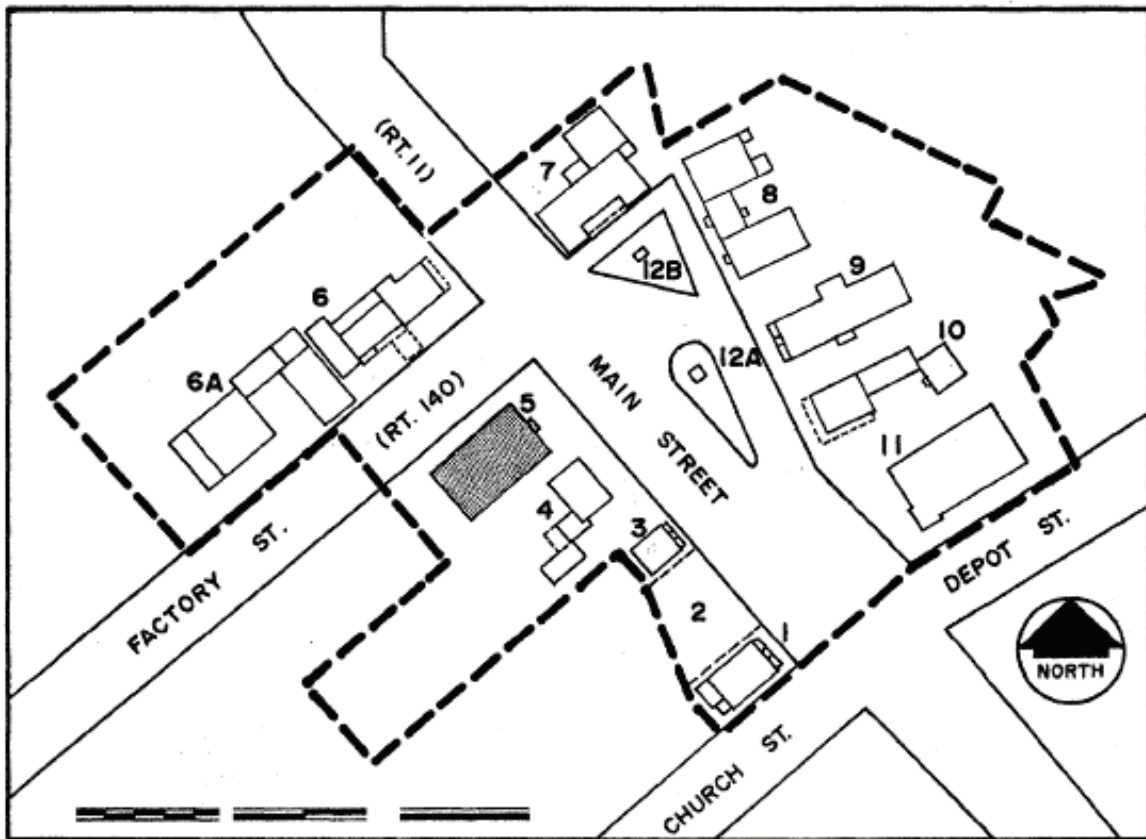
The Square was certainly not the center of Alton village in the village's earliest years. The first house lots sold in the village, at a large auction in June of 1804, were located south of the Square, along Main and School Streets. The center of the paper village laid out for the land sale was the meetinghouse, which stood a little south of the intersection of Main Street and School Street, then the major road west to Gilmanton from Alton. The Main Street--Wolfeboro Road intersection was then on the northern fringes of the village.

[NOTE: The numbers in the following paragraphs are keyed to the Monument Square Historic District map on the next page.]

The village developed in the 19th century; the Square grew in importance. The construction of the Cocheco House ( #7) at the northwest end of the Square in about 1830, was the first major event in the Square's history. The Cocheco House was an important inn in its time and is today one of the best surviving early hotels in the area. Its distinguished Monument Square facade, a symmetrical facade with two wings flanking a two-story columned veranda, set a high standard for the Square's later buildings.

In the later 1830s and the 1840s, the Square saw the construction of three residences that still survive. Two, the Wheeler House (#4) and the Tobias Berry House (#10), are good examples of the cape, then the standard New Hampshire house. The Wheeler House of 1838-9 has notable Greek Revival fretwork ornament around its doors. The Tobias Berry House, built in the later 1840s, was later elevated above a new first story, but its attractive entry and moulded window trim can still be seen. The James N. Jones House (#8), probably built in 1841 or 1842, is a larger two-and-a-half-story house, distinguished by paneled window and entry trim, and two quarter-circle louvers in the pedimented gable facing the square. The building was also the site of one of the village's earliest stores, operated by the Jones family. This store was prophetic of the Square's next period of growth.

In the summer of 1851, the Cocheco Railroad from Dover to Alton Bay was completed which helped to establish the Square as the center of the village. The depot serving Alton village was built just east of the Square. The new importance of the Square can be seen in the layout of the three streets entering it, and in the construction of the three surviving store buildings. In June 1851, Church Street was laid out by the Selectmen and was soon followed by the layout of Depot Street from the Square to the new depot in January of 1852. Factory Street was laid out in May of 1855 and soon superseded School Street as the main road from Alton Village west to Gilmanton.



Consequently, the Square gained as a transportation center which led to its growth as a thriving commercial center. On the west side of the Square, we find Dudley Barker appearing as the first known owner of two stores (#1 and #3) on lots carved out of his property. Barker may well have had both buildings erected. Certainly, the similarities of their design would suggest a common origin. Their paneled corner pilasters and wide cornices with deep friezes show a developed interest in the Greek Revival style, which is also apparent in Dudley Barker's fine house still standing on Church Street. The same features are also found in the equally attractive J. Jones & Son Store (#9), built on the east side of the Square in 1855 to house the

expanding business of the Jones family. The 1859 county map shows another store standing on the site of #5, but this building was replaced by the Alton Shoe Factory, built in 1883. (The Shoe Factory did have a store and later the Post Office, in the first story of its Monument Square front.)

The elevated status of the Square was reflected and reinforced by the erection of one of the village's grandest homes, the White Lodge (#6), probably in the third quarter of the 19th century. This fine house with its Greek Revival temple form, enriched by some Victorian details, is among the most interesting 19th-century houses in Belknap County.

At an 1893 meeting, the voters of Alton decided to permit the Boston and Maine Railroad, which had taken over the Cocheco Railroad, to replace the Main Street and Wolfeboro Road bridges over the railroad north of the Square with a single bridge on a slightly rerouted Main Street. Wolfeboro Road was also rerouted to intersect Main Street north of the new bridge and the Square. That portion of the former Wolfeboro Road between the Square and the rerouted section was abandoned. This change somewhat diminished the Square's role as a major intersection, but its symbolic importance as the center of the community was soon confirmed by the erection of the Town Hall (#11) and the Soldiers Monument (#12A). The Alton Town Hall of 1893-4, designed in the Romanesque Revival style by architect A.T. Ramsdell of Dover, is the most impressive town hall in Belknap County. It is certainly one of the best Victorian public buildings in the Lakes Region. In 1897, the Soldiers Monument, a zinc statue of a Union soldier on a granite pedestal, was placed in the center of the Square. Still Alton's only public statue, the Monument became one of the town's landmarks and the Square's namesake.

One direct result of the Town Hall project was the remodeling of the Tobias Berry House (#10). In 1893, the town purchased Tobias Berry's property, reserved the corner lot for the Town Hall, and sold the remainder of the property, including the house. By 1906, if not sooner, the cape had been raised and a new Victorian first story built beneath it. None of the District's other buildings have seen such drastic remodeling. All three store buildings (#1, #3 and #9) were given one-story storefronts in the 20th century. The J. Jones & Son Store (#9) also received an extension to the rear, as did the Cocheco House (#7). With the exception of a few alterations and additions, the district's buildings have survived almost intact.

In summary, the District's contributing buildings include a fine early 19th-century hotel (#7), an attractive cape with Greek Revival ornamentation (#4), another attractive cape that has been raised above a Victorian first story (#10), an interesting mid-19th century two and a half story house (#8), three mid-19th century stores with some Greek Revival ornamentation (#1,

#3 and #9), a distinguished Greek Revival temple-form house with interesting Victorian decoration (#6), and a fine Romanesque Revival town hall (#11). This group of buildings deserves recognition for the high quality of its architecture.

It cannot be said that Monument Square was designed as a public square. The creation of this open space in the center of Alton village was almost fortuitous. Two major roads intersected at an angle so acute that a large triangle at the intersection was kept open for traffic and public use. The creation of the Square was not guided by any official plan. However, from the beginning, the space was treated by both private and public developers in a formal way as a public square. The earliest building, the Cocheco House (#7) was built to close the northwest end of the Square with a distinguished symmetrical facade that emphasized the axis of the Square. The two long sides were developed in the 19th century with closely spaced buildings, all set near the front lot line. The buildings surrounding the open space vary somewhat in style, size and material, but they do give that essential sense of enclosure and coherence that makes the space a public square and not simply a street intersection. Finally, the placement in 1897 of the Soldiers Monument, a public statue, in the center of the space, gave it a focal point and an identity as a public square. In essence, then, the Alton villagers took the accident of a street intersection and turned it into a public square that could function both visually and symbolically as the center of the community. (Lakes Region Planning Commission; Alton Historical Society)

## First Congregational Church

The First Congregational Church is located on Church Street, 500 feet west of Main Street. It is one of the finest Greek Revival churches in Belknap County. The church's congregation, which was established in 1827, was finally able to worship in its new building when it was completed in 1853-1854. The building has been continuously used by the First Congregational Church and its successor, the Community Church of Alton. The exterior of the building is however strikingly well preserved. The public facades have changed little since its construction, save in minor details,



such as the addition of two inconspicuous windows. (National Register of Historic Places – NRHP Reference Number: 90000386)

## Second Free Baptist Church – The Community Church of Alton

The Second Free Baptist Church of Alton is an Italianate-style wooden church that stands in its original location on its own lot on the southwest side of Main Street (N.H. Route 11 - 250 feet south of Church Street). It is located just south of the Monument Square Historic District. The original church, the main block and the tower, was built in 1853-1854. The building frame was raised on September 26, 1853, and the completed church was dedicated on March 23, 1854. The building has been in continuous use as a church since its construction and has been periodically modernized and enlarged. Nevertheless, the church is quite well preserved, particularly on the exterior. The Second Free Baptist Church is unique in the county, as the only pre-Civil War Italianate-style church



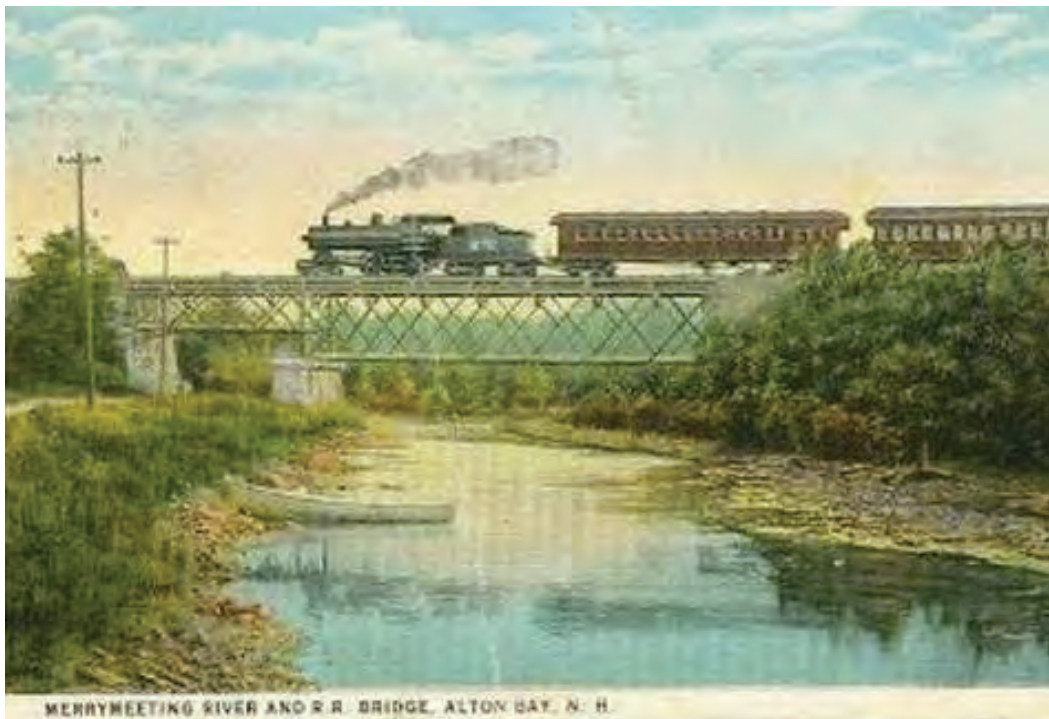
(Source: Lakes Region Planning Commission, June 23, 1989)

(National Register of Historic Places - NRHP Reference Number: 90000387). On February 17, 2022, it was announced that the church has been listed for sale for \$375,000. The Community Church of Alton had last used the church for religious services in 2019. Recently, the church was used as a preschool kindergarten. Interested buyers have indicated potential uses for the building as a personal residence, a microbrewery, distillery, artist's studio, or dance studio (New Hampshire Union Leader, Thursday, February 17, 2022, Page A3-A4).

## Letter S Road Trestle Bridge Supports

The old railroad trestle supports that stand on either side of the Merrymeeting River on the Letter S Road was recognized on October 31, 2016, by the NH Division of Historical Resources and listed in the Register of Historic Properties of Significance.

The trestle, built by the Cochecho Railroad in 1850, consists of three vertical structures built of cut granite blocks topped with poured-in-place concrete used to support a 2-span 132' - long lattice truss bridge across the Merrymeeting River. The trestle was essential for the railroad to cross the Merrymeeting River to continue the rail line to its terminus at the railroad's steamboat landing in Alton Bay at the southernmost tip of Lake Winnepesaukee where freight and passengers came to make the connection to the railroad.



(Source: [https://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/programs/state\\_reg\\_list\\_details.htm](https://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/programs/state_reg_list_details.htm))

Steamboat service was very lucrative for the railroad during this period before the automobile and trucking became the more popular modes of transportation. Lumber, ice and passenger service was critical to the development and economy of Alton and surrounding towns on the lake, as well as the railroad. One major business was the Cape Pond Ice Co. out of Gloucester, Massachusetts that had a large icehouse in West Alton, near Mt Major on the lake. The Cape Pond Ice Co. provided ice for the Gloucester fishing fleet. The first year of operations on the Lake Shore Line saw half a million tons of ice pass over the rails from this

ice company and others heading to Gloucester, Boston, and points south. The Cocheco Railroad not only owned the steamboat wharf, but they owned their own steamboat, the "Dover," later renamed the "Chocorua" after being reconstructed to increase its freight capabilities. When the B&M Railroad took over the Cocheco Railroad it purchased the steamer "James Bell" that was able to handle the increase of summer visitors after the end of the Civil War. In 1872 the B&M Railroad built the steamer "Mount Washington" right in Alton Bay and continued steamboat business until the beginning of the 1900s.

Alton Bay was a hub of activity not just for freight service, but for the number of people coming to Alton Bay. The population increased dramatically due to the rising interest in summer vacationing, the growth of Grand Hotels and the Alton Bay Camp Meetings that started in 1863, often referred to as "The Campground," now known as the "Alton Bay Christian Conference Center." An excerpt from a written history of the Campground by the Alton Bay Christian Center states: "From 1866 to 1874, the audiences on the closing Sunday never fell below 20,000. A record was made in 1872 with an estimated attendance of 35,000 to 50,000 people". Alton Bay today is still a destination for tourists and summer people, although not anywhere near the numbers in those bygone years.



(circa 1920)

Letter S Road Trestle  
Ada B. Downing (Second Prize)

The B&M Railroad ceased service to Alton Bay in 1935. The Letter S Road Trestle supports and the railroad stations remain as reminders of the important role the railroad played in Alton’s history. (Alton Historical Society)

## Preservation

As discussed throughout this chapter, Alton has many historic resources that are worthy of preserving. Loss of these resources over time will erode the Town’s small-town character. To protect these resources, the Town should consider formalizing coordination with the Alton Historical Society when permitting development that would impact these resources. One way would be to take advantage of enabling legislation that provides for the creation of a Heritage Commission. A Heritage Commission has no regulatory authority; they advise and assist other local boards and commissions; conduct surveys of historic resources, educate the public on matters relating to historic preservation and historical resources, and serve as a resource for revitalization efforts. A heritage commission can also accept and expend funds for a non-lapsing heritage fund, acquire and manage property, and hold preservation easements. A Heritage Commission could be formed from the Alton Historical Society and provided support with paid staff assistance from the Planning Board or the Building Department.

### RECOMMENDED HISTORIC RESOURCES ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Continue to keep the Alton Bay Railroad Station, Town Hall and other Town-owned buildings up to date to meet the current needs of the population while retaining historic character and features.
- ✓ Consider establishing a Heritage Commission (RSA 673:4-a) to help town government manage, recognize, and protect historical and cultural resources.
- ✓ Consider establishing a procedure to consult with the Alton Historical Society (AHS) (or Heritage Commission if established) to review applications for demolition permits and other development projects so that the AHS can provide advice and documentation in a timely manner.



# Chapter 5. Land Use

## 5.1 Introduction

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As shown in the table below, for the past half century, Alton’s year-round population has consistently grown at a rate greater than the county or state.

ALTON POPULATION GROWTH COMPARED WITH COUNTY AND STATE				
Year	Alton Population	Growth Rate Over Previous Ten Years		
		Alton	Belknap County	NH
1970	1647			
1980	2440	48.1%	32.5%	26.7%
1990	3289	34.8%	14.9%	19.0%
2000	4528	37.7%	14.8%	9.4%
2010	5250	15.9%	6.2%	8.9%
2020	5894	12.3%	6.0%	4.0%

(Source: US Census)

As shown in the next table, although increasing at a slower rate than population, the number of housing units in Alton more than doubled during the same fifty-year period. The land use impact associated with this growth included both homesites and numerous subdivision roads.

TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS IN ALTON 1970 – 2020 GROWTH RATE COMPARED WITH POPULATION				
Year	Housing Units	Population	Growth Rate Over Previous Ten Years	
			Housing Units	Population
1970	1879	1647		
1980	2570	2440	36.8%	48.1%
1990	3267	3289	27.1%	34.8%
2000	3522	4528	7.8%	37.7%
2010	4281	5250	21.6%	15.9%
2020	4309	5894	0.7%	12.3%

(Note: Housing units include houses, apartments and mobile homes.)  
(Source: US Census)

Growth and development of the town can be expected to continue at an accelerated rate. Existing land use, demographic changes, conservation projects, private landowner decisions, infrastructure investments, regional and global economic trends, availability of labor and materials for construction, and the suitability of the land for development all have an effect on future land use. New on-site wastewater treatment technologies are opening up some additional lands for development.

In 2010, 45% (1,928) of the dwelling units in Alton were used as seasonal or vacation homes (2010 US Census). Housing occupancy figures for 2020 are not yet available, but given that the number of households grew 16% from 2010 to 2020 while the number of housing units grew by less than 1%, it can be deduced that the percentage of seasonal homes has been decreasing (US Census, 2010, 2020).

The same features of Alton that attract visitors also give it the quality of life that attracts year-round residents. These include the small town feel, Lake Winnepesaukee, a scenic landscape, abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, nearby communities with services and easy access to cities to the south via the state highway system and nearby Interstate Highways. The increase in remote work options enabled by broadband have given some people an increased ability to consider quality of life in choosing a home.

Through conservation efforts, infrastructure investments and land use planning implemented through the Zoning Ordinance and other local land use regulations, future growth can be steered and shaped in a direction consistent with the vision and goals of the community. This chapter will look at today's land use, features of the landscape that limit development in certain areas of town, tools that the Town has in place now to shape and manage development, and some strategies that could help to further the community's vision and goals as growth continues.

## 5.2 Land Use History

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Like other northern New England towns, early settlement in Alton was dispersed and subsistence farming based. In 1803 the town was divided into 26 school districts. By 1820 the population had grown to over 2,000, a figure not exceeded again until the 1970s. While many New Hampshire communities' main villages were formed around the location of waterpower for mills, with the more heavily traveled paths used by settlers to bring their grain to the grist mill becoming the main roads, Alton's land use pattern has been more heavily influenced by Lake Winnepesaukee and transportation infrastructure. Development became concentrated

around Alton Bay where the railroad brought visitors and goods and around the Village where highways connecting Alton with other areas of the state intersected. Alton Bay was the transportation hub for Lake commerce. At the same time, industrialization and improved transportation to areas much easier to farm led to population loss. Much of the open farmland grew up to forest.

The growth boom of the last half of the twentieth century once again spread residents across the landscape. This time, rather than land to farm and harvest wood from, the attraction was land for a large yard and privacy, and the feel of living in a more rural area. At the same time, this development pattern led to a decrease in the attributes that many had come to associate with rural areas, such as agriculture and long wooded stretches of road without driveways.

Throughout its history Alton has played a significant role in Lakes Region tourism. Over time, several other communities such as Laconia, Wolfeboro and Meredith have become the primary commercial centers on the Lake, while Alton has retained more of its small-town feel despite having a comparable year-round population. A handful of small to medium-sized hospitality businesses continue to support tourism in Alton.

### **5.3 Development Trends**

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As shown in the table on the following page, development activity has increased over the last few years. More building permits were issued for new homes in each of the last two years than in the previous eight. Some of this is likely pandemic-related, but, due to a combination of factors, the housing market in New Hampshire has gotten very difficult for those wishing to purchase a home. Few homes are available for sale and fewer still are affordable by the average household. This has likely led to a renewed interest in the purchase of building lots. Towns like Alton with large remaining undeveloped tracts and a high quality of life can be expected to see increased subdivision activity unless other factors dampen interest.

At the turn of the century from the 1800s to the 1900s, Alton was busy with commerce, manufacturing, sawmills, a granite quarry and an ice cutting operation, all made possible by the railroad. During the 1900s, the influence of the railroad was replaced by automobiles and highways such as NH Route 11 and NH Route 28 that intersect in Alton. By the turn of the century from the 1900s to the 2000s, Alton's economy was predominantly built on the recreation opportunities, scenic beauty and quality of life made possible by the town's extensive Lake Winnepesaukee shore frontage, other smaller lakes and surrounding mountains. This is reflected today in the composition of the town's property tax base. Today,

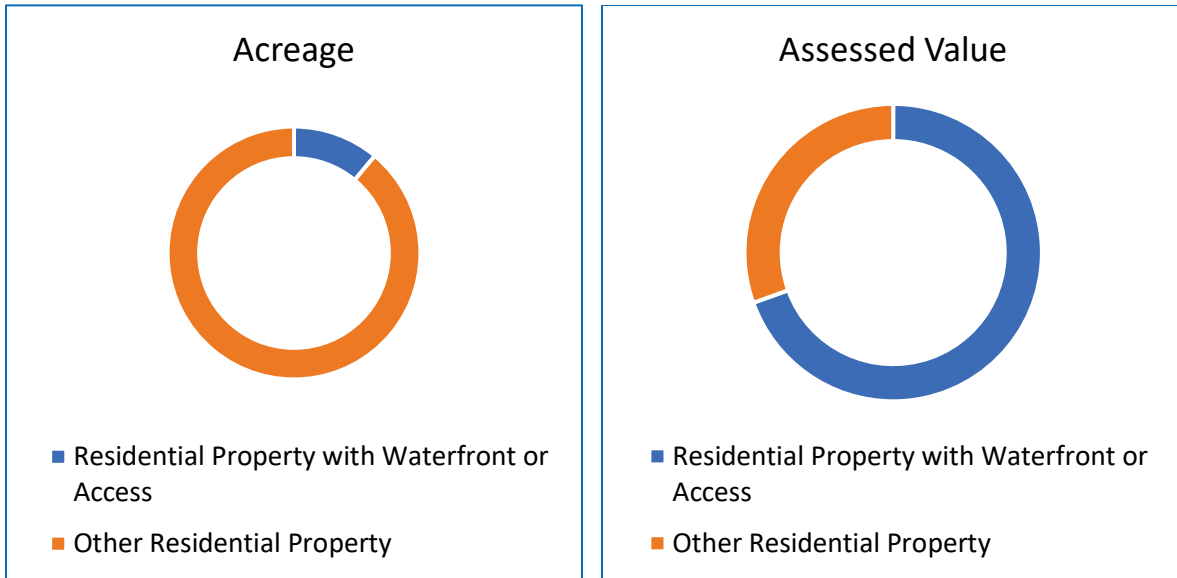
commercial, industrial and utility land and buildings make up about 6% of the town’s tax base while residential property makes up about 94% (Alton Assessor’s Data, January 2022).

SUBDIVISION AND BUILDING PERMIT ACTIVITY, 2012 - 2021				
Year	Increase in Number of Lots	Number of Building Permits Issued for New Homes	Number of Building Permits Issued for New Commercial Buildings	Number of Building Permits Issued for Additions, Remodels, Repairs, Renovations
2012	6	22		65
2013	4	23		42
2014	3	24		38
2015	9	22		56
2016	0	42	5	69
2017	2	25		44
2018	10	32		52
2019	17	38		44
2020	14	53		74
2021	12	53	1	69

(Source: Alton Town Reports, 2012-2021)

Few commercial properties have been developed in the last few years; those that have been have had a significant impact on the community. Chain retail and fast-food restaurants at the eastern gateway to the town provide a very different first impression on visitors than did the traditional New England village. Hannaford grocery store, although a big box chain, is sited back from the main roads and provides an asset to both residents and visitors without major visual impact.

Not all residential development has had the same impact on the town’s tax base. As shown in the graphs on the next page, although real estate with water frontage or water access comprises only 11% of the town’s acreage that has been developed for residential use, it forms 65% of the town’s residential tax base (Alton Assessor’s Data, January 2022).



(Source: Alton Assessor’s Data, January 2022)

Both this higher relative value and the high percentage of these homes that are seasonal or vacation homes have resulted in waterfront homes having a positive impact on the town’s tax rate; seasonal homes generally bring in more property tax revenue than they cost a town in services due to the lack of school children. Today, while the town’s lakeshores are pretty much completely developed, reconstruction and additions continue to increase this important element of the town’s tax base. Encouraging carefully sited high quality business development can also have a positive impact on the town’s tax base, while additional residential development in areas of town where provision of services is a burden to the town due to its remoteness or the condition of roads can have a negative impact.

## 5.4 Land Use Today

### Alton Village

The primary center of the community, Alton Village houses the Town Hall, Gilman Library, Gilman Museum, Alton Central School, as well as the Police Station and Central Fire Station. This area is served by a small municipal water system but is dependent on on-site septic systems. The Village contains a variety of land uses, including retail shops, restaurants, single and multifamily dwellings, as well as a church and several professional offices.

Most of the businesses in the village are located on Main Street, and operate out of converted old colonial and cape houses. Residences located on Main Street and the side streets are

primarily populated with year-round residents. It is this mix of municipal functions, businesses and old homes that give this part of town its beloved village center character.

The Merrymeeting River Marsh is both a highlight and a natural constraint for the growth of Alton Village. This wetland is a scenic treasure and offers excellent wildlife habitat. Residents and visitors enjoy the recreational and bird watching opportunities.

## Alton Bay

Alton Bay has a number of distinguishing features, such as its own Post Office, public lake access, and seasonal/vacation homes. Alton Bay has always been the focus of tourism in Alton. The Bay has a deep and rich history. It was the location where Royal Governor Wentworth constructed the schooner Rockingham, and also where the original M.S. Mount Washington was constructed.



The development pattern of the Bay is very dense considering that no municipal sewer is available. This pattern emerged from the combined influence of the waterfront, limited areas where slopes are acceptable for structures, and the dominance of the railroad in the Bay in the late nineteenth century.

Many of the existing homes and structures located in the Bay are seasonal in nature and are constructed on substandard lots. The Alton Bay Christian Conference and Retreat Center, which offers seasonal and year-round programs, occupies a significant area of the Bay and is the location of some of the densest development. The Bay also serves several water-dependent establishments, including two marinas, the town boardwalk and public boat docks, the town beach and swim areas. Several lodging and eating and drinking establishments cater to the many visitors to the area.

Alton Bay development constraints include Lake Winnepesaukee, the Merrymeeting River, steep slopes, and the lack of municipal sewer. Dense private ownership along the waterfront limits opportunities for public lake access.

### **Lake Winnepesaukee Shorelands**

Northwest and northeast of the Alton Bay village area, the vast majority of the town's extensive lakeshore has been developed with small house lots. Development along the western shore generally occurred during the earlier part of the 20th century due to the Lakeshore Railroad. This area has a very traditional lakeside tourist area feel with a campground, some remaining small cottages, and roadside businesses, scenic views and stonewalls. Two of the town's five commercial marinas are also located in West Alton. Most existing lots located along the Lake in West Alton were created prior to zoning, and, thus, are often undersized and irregularly shaped.

Many of the homes in town on and nearby the Lake that started out as summer cottages have been enlarged and winterized and are now being used year-round, either as residences or as rental property. In some cases, retirees have converted what was previously their summer home for year-round use. Over time, some of these year-round homes have been replaced with larger structures. This pattern is reflected in the large number of building permits issued over the last ten years for work on existing structures (see table on page 5-4). The conversions continue at a rapid pace, increasing the value of the lakeshore tax base. On the eastern shore, although three remain, several large landholdings previous operated as summer camps for youths were subdivided for residential use. This conversion and increased development have

changed the character of these areas from family summer getaways to exclusive neighborhoods, and increased human impacts on the Lake.

## Winnepesaukee Islands

Alton contains eleven named islands in Lake Winnepesaukee and numerous named and unnamed small rock islands. The named islands include Rattlesnake, Sleepers, Treasure (Redhead), Cub, Barndoor, Little Barndoor, Ship, Moose, Little Mark, Woodman Cove Islands and Plum. The majority of buildable land available on these islands has been subdivided, with building lots along the shore and common land in the middle. The largest, Rattlesnake Island, has 191 homes on it. Due to the ever-increasing demand for Lake access and shorefront property, many of the islands have reached near build-out capacity, with only a few marginal lots remaining. Like the lakeshore on the mainland, these homes have also been reconstructed and enlarged over the years. However, island use is still generally seasonal. The need to access these lots by boat has ensured that these shoreland homes have not seen the same kind of intensification of land use as mainland shoreland homes. Adequate docking facilities for these seasonal homeowners is an essential service to accommodate in the town's mainland shorelands. Docking is currently provided by two marinas in West Alton and a third nearby in Gilford. Docking for the Barndoor Islands is provided at the Roberts Cove Marina and marinas in Wolfeboro.

## Other Lakeshores

Alton Shores is a 600-lot small-lot subdivision situated on Hills Pond and Sunset Lake near the Alton-Gilmanton border. Narrow, substandard dirt roadways serve the vast majority of seasonal and year-round homes in the Alton Shores area. Many of these roads have less than fifty-foot rights-of-way, making improvements to meet Town road standards difficult.

Further south on the Barnstead town line is another area of dense lakeshore development on Halfmoon Lake. Here are seasonal cottages, single-family year-round homes, and a large summer camp.

The construction of larger, more valuable homes is occurring on the shores of these smaller lakes and ponds as well. The many smaller structures without shorefront have access to the ponds and are being purchased and remodeled as year-round primary residences, helping to provide more affordable housing that is in such short supply.



## State Highway Corridors/Gateways

Alton Village grew up around the intersection of several main roads leading to other parts of the state. Like many New England villages, Alton experiences the challenges of Main Street being a busy state road. Heading out of town, several segments of NH Routes 11 and 28 have become limited access roads with more of a highway feel.

Alton's gateways, the first glimpses of town that most visitors experience, have for the most part remained scenic and retained their character. Entering town from the east from New Durham on NH Route 11, visitors experience a scenic wooded corridor with glimpses of the Merrymeeting River on the left. The traffic circle provides a clear transition to the commercial and village areas of town. Coming from Wolfeboro to the north on NH Route 28 the corridor is also primarily wooded. From the south on NH Route 28 the driver experiences a mix of rural and lakefront cottage land uses continued from adjacent Barnstead. From the west on NH Route 11 the gateway is a continuation of the busy lakeside and rural mix seen in the adjoining portion of neighboring Gilford. Maintaining the look and feel of each of these gateways will remain an important land use consideration relative to the town's tourist economy.

## Rural Areas

The remaining areas of town are comprised of a mix of land uses and development densities. Large lots, many in current use, are interspersed with smaller lot subdivisions. Single family residences are the dominant development type and forest is the dominant land cover.



On the eastern side of town is found the historic settlement of Gilman's Corner/East Alton located near the Alton-New Durham town line. This area contains an old church and several homes dating to the 1700s. In this area, the historic homes built close to the road contribute

to the historic rural character. This settlement is of great value to Alton due to the historic character it has retained.

The southern part of Alton lacks any identifiable historic village center although Stockbridge Corners was identified as a place name on older maps. Dominated by the profile of Prospect Mountain overlooking the Merrymeeting Marsh, this part of Alton includes one of the largest operating blueberry farms (Kardinal Farm) in the state of New Hampshire.

On the western side of town there is a significant amount of undeveloped land due to steep slopes. Much of this is considered to be high value wildlife habitat and is part of the 33,000 acres of unfragmented land in the Belknap Mountains. This area forms the mountainous and scenic backdrop for the Big Lake in Alton. Mount Major is a very popular hiking area with a mix of public and private ownership.

The vast majority of the land in the rural areas of town is forested. Some of this forest is part of large residential lots and some is owned for other purposes such as conservation, wood products or investment. The town also has 1,417 acres of remaining farmland enrolled in the state's Current Use Program (NH DRA 2020 Current Use Report).

## 5.5 Development Limitations

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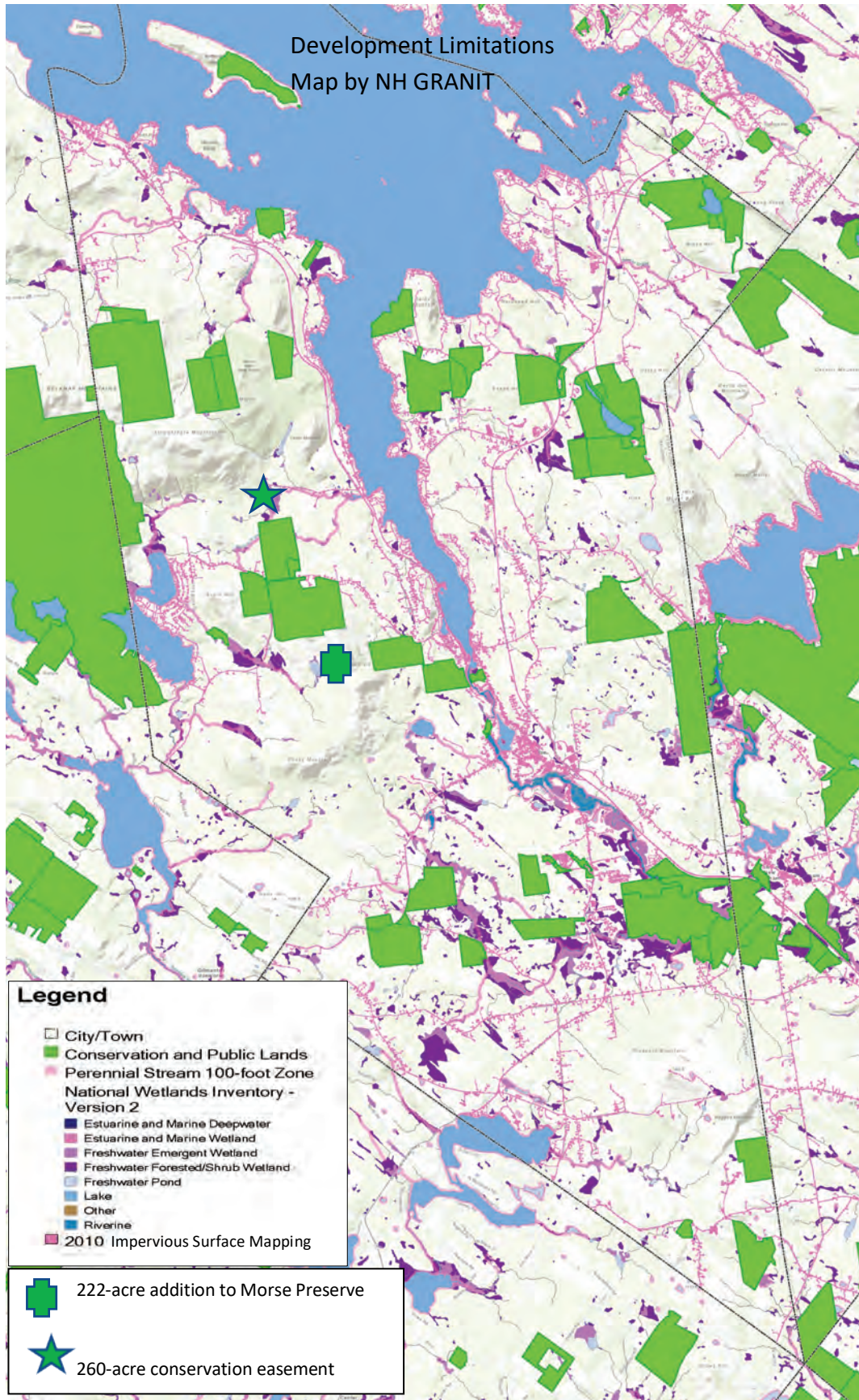
### Natural Features

The map on page 5-12 shows a general town-wide view of development suitability, including terrain, conserved land, 100-foot buffers from shorelines, wetlands, and already developed areas. It is meant to provide just a general indication of the remaining areas which are likely to be developed eventually unless conserved. Detailed maps contained in the Natural Resource Inventory developed by Stoney Ridge Environmental provide more detail on these features.

#### *Lake Winnepesaukee*

Lake Winnepesaukee is the dominant feature of the town's geography and basically bisects the upper two-thirds of the town. It is also the engine of Alton's economy and quality of life. This poses a challenge when the resource that attracts development can easily be harmed by it. The relationship between water quality and development is well documented. One obvious factor is wastewater. With no municipal wastewater collection and treatment system, all wastewater goes into the ground. When properly sited, constructed and maintained, on-site

septic systems remove bacteria and viruses. However, a significant amount of nutrients continues on to the groundwater and any surface water bodies connected to that groundwater, including Lake Winnepesaukee. Phosphorous is the limiting factor for freshwater bodies; recent research has shown that septic systems contribute not only nitrogen to water bodies, but phosphorous as well, especially when in sandy soils with high water tables. A greater concentration of development near the Lake and the Merrymeeting River which flows into the Lake, larger numbers of occupants as cottages are enlarged, and increases in the usage of homes will all increase the nutrient loading to the Lake. In addition, certain businesses, such as restaurants and lodging, produce a large volume of wastewater. Increased development also means increased stormwater runoff which also carries nutrients directly to the Lake as well as via tributaries. In fact, stormwater runoff is the principal source of excess phosphorus contributions to surface water bodies. A combination of careful stormwater management and wastewater planning will be needed to ensure that growth does not negatively impact the Lake water quality. See *Chapter 3 Natural Resources* for more information on water quality.



### *Steep Slopes*

The layout of the town on either side of Alton Bay and the Merrymeeting River provides almost a valley feel to the town's geography with some hills and steep terrain on either side. Development on steep slopes is both costly and carries a high risk of erosion and



sedimentation of downhill surface waters. Large areas of slopes over 25% are found on the western side of town and some in the southern part. These steep slopes are considered by planners to be generally unsuitable for development. Only isolated areas of steep slope are found in the eastern side of town. Areas of moderate slopes, from 15% - 25%, are scattered throughout town. Moderate slopes are considered to be those where special precautions are required to prevent development activities from causing erosion and sedimentation. This includes design considerations to minimize impacts and a professionally-prepared stormwater management plan incorporating best practices for stormwater management and erosion control both during and after construction.

### *Wetlands*

Large wetland complexes can be found all over town with an especially high concentration south of the Village area.

### *Floodplains*

For the most part, floodplains mapped by FEMA for the National Flood Insurance Program are limited to relatively narrow strips along the shorelines of ponds, rivers and streams and to wetland areas.

## Reliance on On-site Septic Systems

The lack of centralized wastewater treatment has hindered certain types of development in both Alton Bay and Alton Village. Certain land uses that would be a good fit for one or both areas such as lodging, dense residential development, and restaurants, use high volumes of water and consequently need to dispose of large quantities of wastewater. The feasibility of a small community wastewater system was studied in the past. It would be worth exploring again; there have been advances in treatment technology as more attention is being paid to the social, economic and environmental benefits of encouraging denser development in and around northern New England's villages.

### Limited Access Highways

As state highways in town have been reconstructed and converted to limited access highways with wide shoulders and higher speeds, they have become



barriers to connectivity between the land uses on either side. No longer is there a neighborhood with a street down the middle that happens to be state maintained; instead, the highways themselves dominate the landscape. In addition, the state has its own regulations regarding access. Lands along these limited access highway segments are best suited for nonresidential land uses with adequate buffers from the highway to retain their scenic value.

## 5.6 Existing Land Use Regulations

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### Zoning Ordinance

As shown on the map on page 5-16, the current Zoning Ordinance divides the town into six zoning districts. The densely developed Alton Village and Alton Bay areas are within the Residential and Residential Commercial districts. The Residential Commercial district also includes additional areas east of these village areas. The Ordinance does not currently

differentiate between the two historic business areas and those to the east. To the east and west of the village areas and north along NH Route 28 is a Rural Residential District. Along Lake Winnepesaukee outside of the Alton Bay village area is a Lake Shore Residential District. Within this district are four small areas zoned Recreational Services primarily to accommodate several of the town's marinas. The remainder of the town is in the Rural Zone.

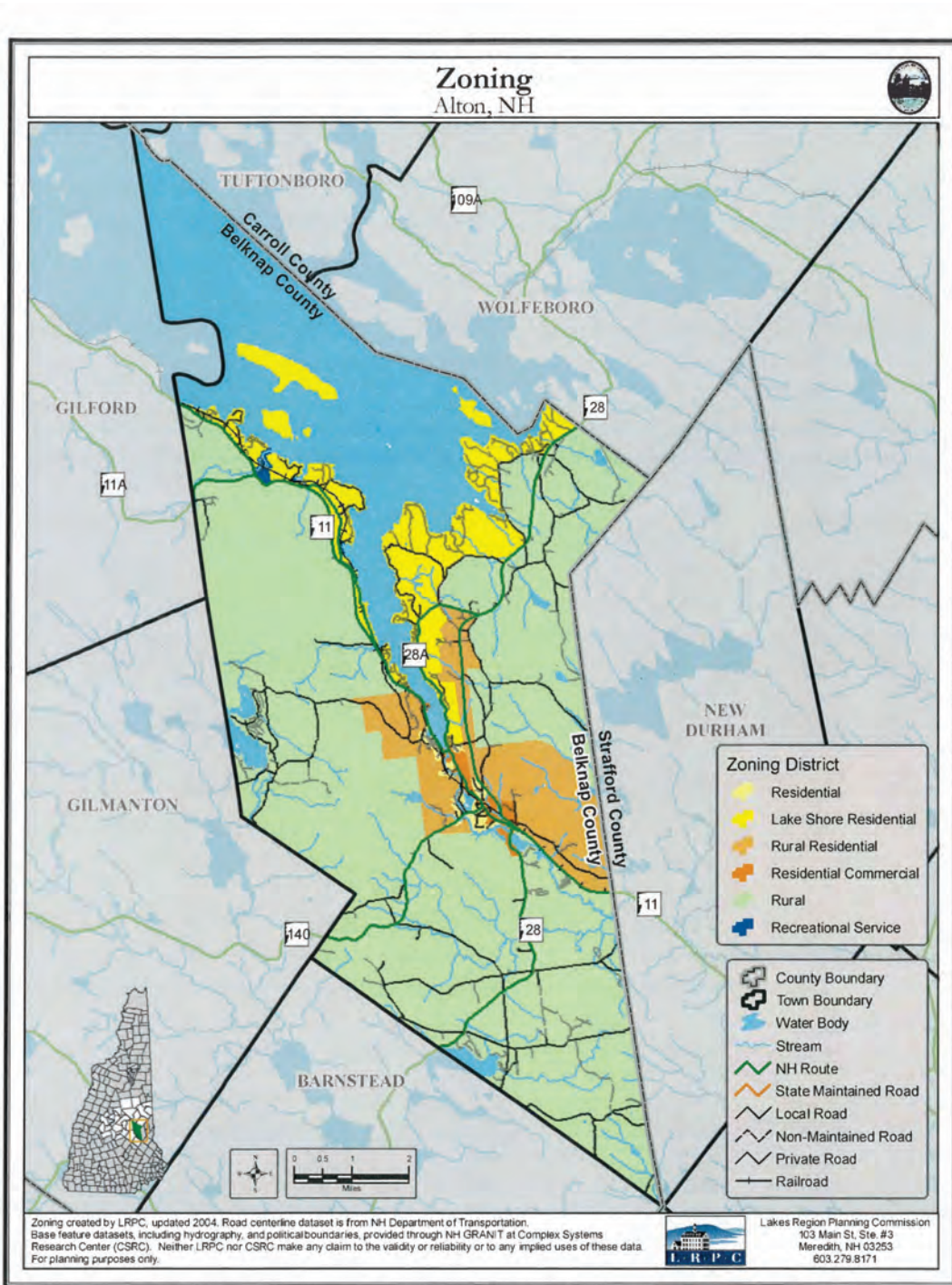
The current Zoning Ordinance is in some ways very strict and in other ways very lenient. Much attention is paid to the design of specific types of land uses, but little is paid to shaping the future growth and development of the town overall. The differences between the minimum lot size/maximum density does not vary much among zoning districts. Also, the land uses allowed by right and by Special Exception do not create as clear a distinction between different areas of town, such as village vs. rural, as would be desirable in order to retain the unique character of each.

## Subdivision Regulations

The town's current Subdivision Regulations were adopted in 2015 and amended in 2017 and are very thorough and detailed. The regulations provide for a step-by-step process for reviewing proposed subdivisions and for follow-up to ensure developments are built in accord with approvals. Direction is provided for construction of roads, utilities, fire protection, monuments and erosion and stormwater management. These regulations should serve the town well for years to come with just minor updates as needed when there are changes to state laws or new guidance on best practices.

One exception where the town would benefit from further consideration of the subdivision regulations is the topic of the right-of-way for private roads. The regulations require all rights-of-way to be fifty feet, but in effect do not require any right-of-way at all for private roads. Subdivision plans showing "permanently private roads" are not required to show a discrete right-of-way nor to deduct the area of the road from the land being subdivided. There are numerous drawbacks to treating roads proposed as private differently than those proposed for dedication to the Town. Primarily, there is no such thing as a "permanently private road." Any landowner can petition the Town later on to take over maintenance. Second, neither the rationale for a certain minimum lot size nor a certain minimum road right-of-way width are affected by whether the road is maintained privately or publicly. The same needs for proper construction and maintenance, pedestrian safety, drainage and utilities exist. The subdivision regulations and subsequent approvals and enforcement should ensure that all new roads are an asset to the community. Consideration might be given to providing the Planning Board with the option of reducing the right-of-way to forty feet where the road functions more like

an internal road with no possibility of additional traffic or through-traffic in the future. This should of course be conditioned on the applicant demonstrating adequate width for drainage and utilities, and for vehicular and pedestrian safety in the winter.





## Site Plan Review Regulations

The town's current Site Plan Review Regulations were adopted in 2012 and are also very thorough and detailed. The regulations provide for a step-by-step process for reviewing proposed multifamily and nonresidential developments and for follow-up to ensure these are built in accord with approvals. Direction is provided for parking, landscaping, lighting and other elements of site design as well as potential environmental impacts such as erosion, stormwater and noise. Design guidelines are also included to promote an attractive, consistent architecture. Also, unlike most communities, Alton's Site Plan Review Regulations clearly articulate what types of projects require approval and provide a streamlined process for minor changes. Like the Subdivision Regulations, these regulations should serve the town well for years to come with just minor updates as needed when there are changes to state laws or new guidance on best practices.

## Excavation Regulations

Although often overlooked when speaking of land use tools, excavation regulations are important due to the nature of excavations themselves. During active use, excavations have a large and unsightly impact on the community that is pretty much unavoidable. However, careful attention to restoration can ensure that the land is once again usable someday when the excavation activity ceases rather than remaining an eyesore and safety hazard. The Town has comprehensive excavation regulations and has kept these up to date.

## 5.7 Future Land Use

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### Maintain General Pattern

In general, the current pattern of land use should be continued and enhanced.

This means:

- Conservation of important recreation and resource lands.
- Dense development with a mix of land uses in Alton Village including residential; small, primarily retail and service, businesses serving both residents and visitors; and municipal services.
- Densely developed residential areas adjacent to the Village with a neighborhood feel.
- Commercial and institutional uses involving larger amounts of traffic and requiring larger lots north of the Village and traffic circle area.
- Lake-oriented businesses and activities concentrated in Alton Bay.

- Cottage and other resort and water-based activity in lakeshore areas.
- Low density residential and natural resource-based development in the remainder of town.

The 2021 Master Plan Update Survey results indicated that community members desire to strengthen each village area, bring more business to town, protect the Lake, and keep the rural areas rural, essentially to keep things as they are now, only make them even better. This includes maintaining a clear distinction between the two village areas and between village and rural areas of town. However, a build-out analysis would show a much different future than most residents desire, with the distinctions between village and rural areas blurring over time. In other words, the town is zoned for a great deal of unwanted change.

The current Zoning Ordinance and zoning districts have evolved over time to address issues and proposals incrementally, and no longer necessarily represent a comprehensive coordinated approach to achieving the community's vision and goals. Some changes to zoning will be needed to ensure that continued growth furthers the community's vision and goals by maintaining the present land use pattern and the unique character of each area of town. This point was highlighted in the previous Master Plan as well. If made more strategic and targeted as described below, the Zoning Ordinance could be a much more effective tool for shaping future land use. A thorough review of the Ordinance to compare the key elements with the Master Plan, such as the zoning districts and their boundaries, as well as density, land uses and special exception criteria, will be needed as one of the first steps toward implementation of the Plan.

### **Build Upon the Village**

The survey results provided clear direction to support, improve and grow the business districts in Alton Bay and Alton Village while retaining the historic small-town character of the Village and the vacation atmosphere of Alton Bay. Respondents emphasized support for existing businesses and revitalization of both areas. This would include pedestrian improvements and traffic calming to address residents' concerns about high traffic volumes in summer. Many also noted a desire for more businesses overall in town. Reasons included jobs, the tax base, and a desire for more local commerce.

Despite very different characters, the same zoning ordinance provisions currently apply to Alton Bay, Alton Village and the areas around the traffic circle and Hannaford. In order to retain the unique characters of Alton Bay and Alton Village while providing land for uses that require a greater footprint, it would be helpful to reconfigure portions of the Residential

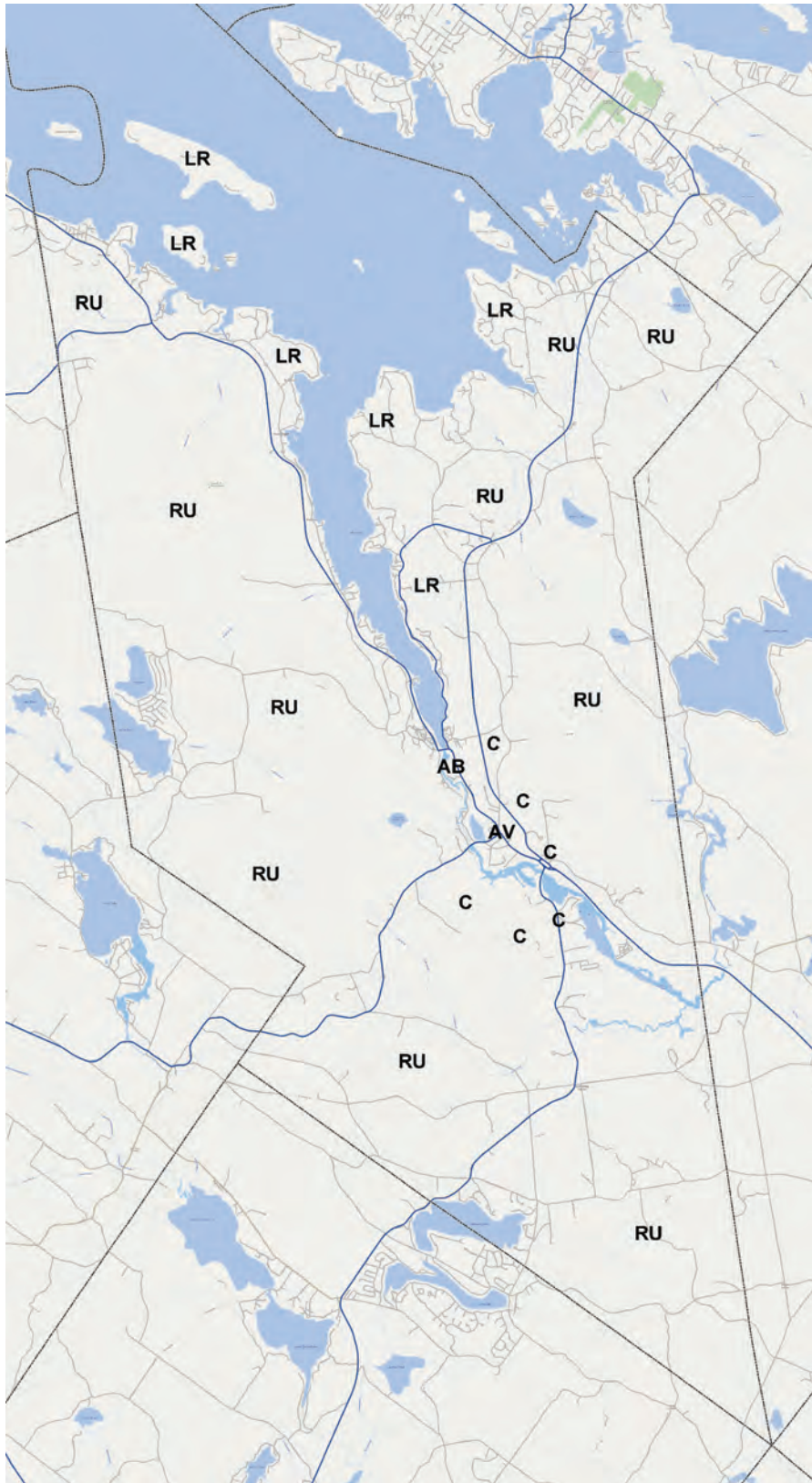
Commercial and Rural Residential zoning districts into three different zoning districts. One would be for Alton Bay and would focus on businesses that support tourism and water-based recreation. Alton Village should focus on the mixed-use nature of a traditional village center. Both should be written in a manner that can enable businesses and living arrangements to change and grow with the times. Adequate public parking and flexible parking arrangements are both important ingredients when increasing the vitality of an existing village area.

Certain other areas adjacent to Alton Village could form a third type of district for land uses that require a larger lot size and are not as good a fit within the Village itself, such as large retail, office parks, medical facilities, multifamily housing complexes, and other larger commercial and institutional uses. This new commercial zoning district would include the area currently developed with this type of use north of the traffic circle, east of NH Route 28, and would include certain other adjacent developable lands as well. Another potential location for this new type of district might be south of the Village on the other side of Merrymeeting River, between the High School and NH Route 140. Town water is available for some of this area; the feasibility of service for the remainder would need to be evaluated.

The proposed reconfiguration of the current Residential Commercial zoning district into three separate zoning districts is shown in concept form on the Future Land Use Map on the following page. Both Alton Village and the new Commercial district should emphasize businesses that would provide services needed by Alton residents and those that would provide livable wage jobs. These could both be mixed-use areas, but with residential uses limited to higher density types.

As part of this reconfiguration of zoning districts, the role of the Rural Residential zoning district should be re-evaluated. Areas currently zoned Rural Residential might be best incorporated into the most similar adjacent zoning district instead of continuing to comprise a separate type of district.

**PROPOSED FUTURE LAND USE MAP**

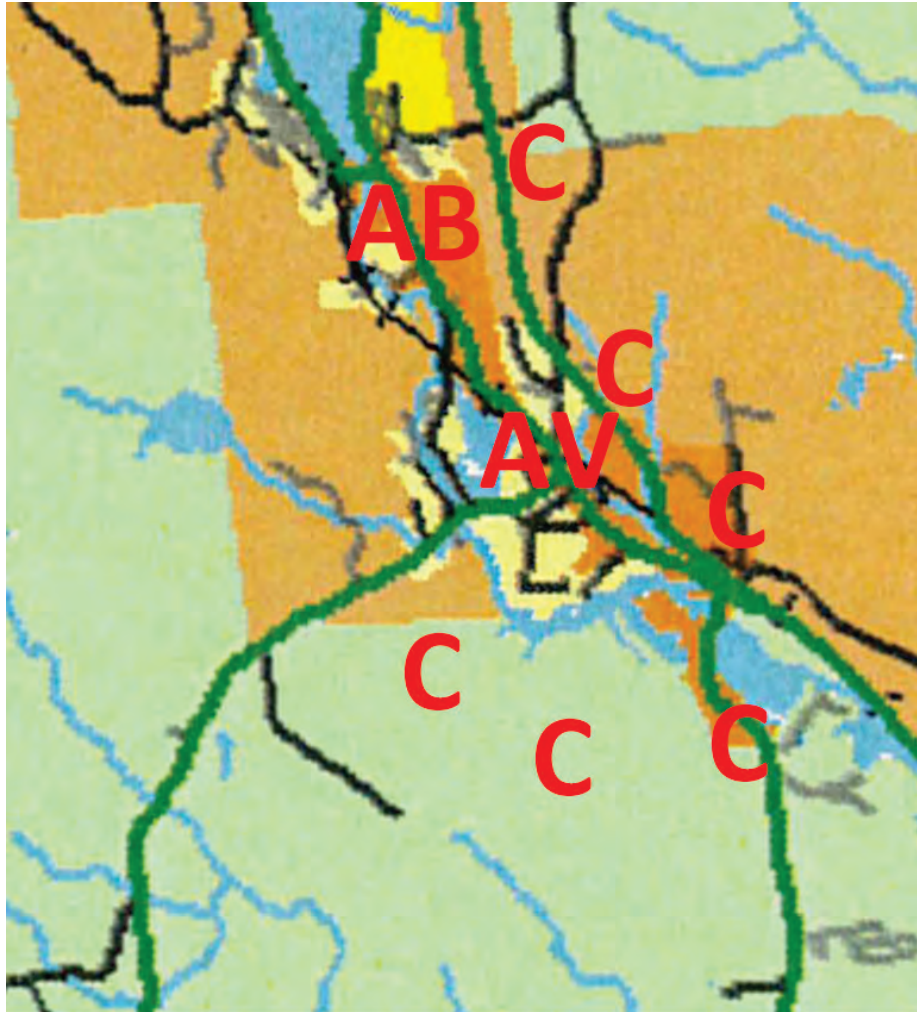


LEGEND

- AB = Alton Bay
- AV = Alton Village
- C = Commercial
- LR = Lakeshore Residential
- RU = Rural

*(Base Map: NH GRANIT)*

**PROPOSED FUTURE LAND USE FOR VILLAGE AREA  
SHOWN WITH CURRENT ZONING**



Zoning District	
	Residential
	Lake Shore Residential
	Rural Residential
	Residential Commercial
	Rural
	Recreational Service

## Celebrate Alton’s Lakeshore Heritage

Lake Winnepesaukee has been a dominant factor in the town’s land use development patterns since the arrival of the railroad. The railroad stopped in Alton Bay to unload visitors and with them came lakeshore cottages and businesses to serve the tourists. In response to concerns about dense development ruining the feel and health of the Lake, the town adopted a Lakeshore Residential Zone that allowed for just a moderate density of residential development and little else. Many commercial uses that one would typically expect to find in a Lakeshore Zone such as hotels, motels, campgrounds and marinas are now prohibited in this zoning district. The majority of small cottages have by now been replaced with large homes in these areas and there is little public or commercial access to the Lake. The result has been that the majority of the Lake’s shoreline in town has an exclusive feel. Lakeshore business activity and the town beach and public boat launch are all concentrated into the Alton Bay area which is also a traffic bottleneck.



At the same time, as discussed in *Chapter 3 Natural Resources*, additional steps are needed to protect the water quality of the Lake and its shoreline. Targeted change to the town’s land use regulations could both better protect this important resource and open the lands along the Lake up to some additional recreation and tourist-related businesses that could increase the public’s enjoyment of the Lake. If done carefully, this could be accomplished without detracting from the traditional Lakeside cottage feel or negatively impacting water quality.

In the Lakeshore Residential Zone, few nonresidential uses are allowed by the Zoning Ordinance. Outdoor Recreation and Restaurants are prohibited. A Lodging House or Bed and Breakfast requires a Special Exception from the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Special Exception criteria include a minimum lot size of 10 acres, 50-foot setbacks, and one acre for each bedroom. A more performance zoning-type approach might be helpful here. Certain types of businesses could be allowed by Special Exception, e.g., low-impact recreation, studios and small-scale hospitality businesses such as a bed and breakfast, and the criteria would focus on the potential impacts such as water quality, noise, lighting, traffic, and visibility from the Lake. This might open up some additional recreation business opportunities, including home businesses, without negatively impacting existing homes, property values, water quality, or the residential character of the area. Focusing on the potential impacts associated with each proposal instead of trying to apply predetermined mitigation measures across the board, such as large lot sizes and setbacks, would enable the town to leave the door open for emerging and uses, new approaches to land use and development, and the creativity of entrepreneurs.

### **Keep the Rural Feel in the Rural Zone**

As shown in the Development Limitations map on page 5-12, large unconserved developable tracts of land remain all over town. This means that how these areas are developed and with what types of land uses will play a key role in determining the ultimate character of the areas of town that currently still feel rural.

Concern has been expressed both by survey respondents and in the previous master plan about the Zoning Ordinance allowing too many types of businesses in the rural areas of town. This could be addressed by reorganizing the business types allowed in the Rural Zone into three distinct and clear categories. The first would be home businesses. The second would be those businesses that are natural resource-based. Natural resource-based includes not only agriculture, wood products and excavations, but also those that share the rural amenities with visitors,



such as country inns, camps and campgrounds, as well as those that are traditionally located in less populated areas due to their need for large amounts of land but not drive-by traffic volumes, such as shooting sports and outdoor skills courses. Resort facilities in the rural areas could augment and make use of the town's four-season recreational activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling on the town's existing trail network. Land use regulations in the rural areas of town should always give deference to ancillary activities that are needed to sustain the viability of traditional land uses, such as portable sawmills, seasonal farmstands and farm stores. Special exceptions for businesses that require a large land area but do not involve customer traffic, such as a contractor yard or parking for trucks or buses, might be considered as well. Restrictions on both home businesses and natural resource-based businesses should be minimal to allow for business growth, innovation and emerging markets.

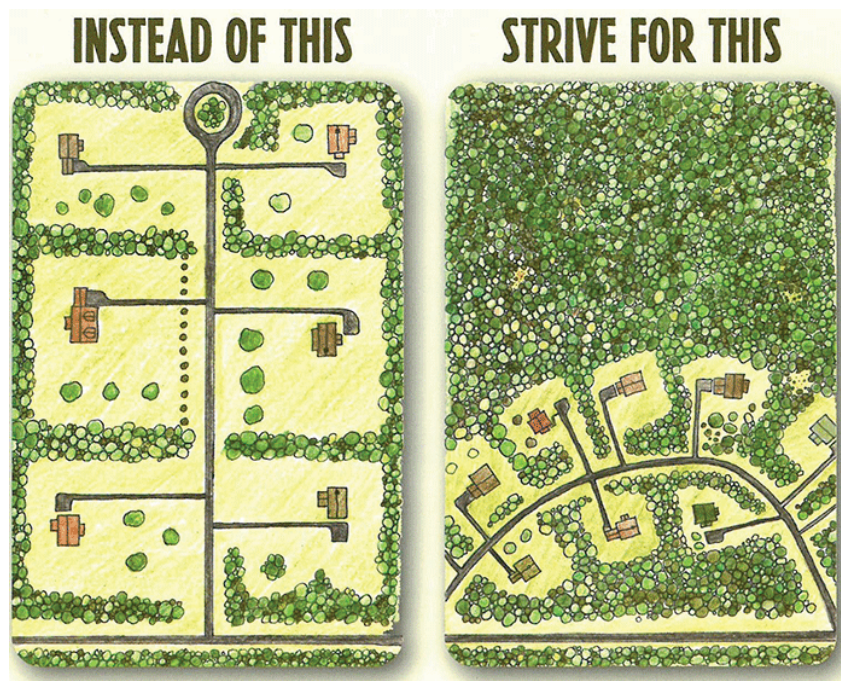
A third category which could be allowed by Special Exception would be neighborhood businesses. The additional Special Exception criteria currently in the Zoning Ordinance both in general and in those criteria specific to the Rural Zone are focused on siting and design to minimize negative impacts of the business on surrounding land uses. Imagine if this was turned around to make the focus on the positive impacts on the neighborhood instead. The filter for business types could be those that *would have a positive impact* on the specific area of town rather than on those that *would not have a negative impact*. This might include, for example, sale of products to local residents and visitors, such as a neighborhood market, or community-building such as an art studio with classes or a gathering place such as a cafe. In this context, proximity to a relatively large number of homes would be seen as a positive rather than a negative. Certain dimensional requirements such as front setbacks might even be reduced for these businesses to more closely recreate the historic village feel.

The abundance of forest land, scenic mountain views, town roads with large trees and stone walls that lack that suburbia feel of numerous driveways and manicured lawns, and scattered open meadows and farms all contribute to the rural feel of the areas in the western, southern and eastern areas of town. Maintaining the rural character does not mean protecting all of





the remaining undeveloped tracts nor does it necessarily even mean limiting the amount of development. It is more important *how* that development gets arranged on the landscape. This might mean, for example, limiting the number of driveways along town roads by encouraging shared driveways. Providing incentives for construction of subdivision roads to provide frontage and access is another tool for decreasing the number of driveways and front yards on through-roads. Incentives might include reduced lot sizes, lot frontage and setbacks on these subdivision roads compared to existing state and town through-roads. Concentrating the development on smaller lots toward the existing road while preserving backland, with a wooded buffer between homes and the through-road, would reduce road construction and maintenance costs and provide a buffer for wildlife. A similar approach can be used to concentrate development on one side or toward to the rear of an open field to retain the scenic, agricultural and habitat values of the open space. This type of subdivision can also be used to concentrate development away from wetlands, shorelines and floodplains, steep areas and important wildlife corridors. When protecting a high priority resource, a density bonus might be offered as shown in the example below.



Courtesy Wildlife Conservation Society, Adirondack Program

The visual impact and perception of the density of development is also affected by the layout of driveways and subdivision roads along the town's roads through rural areas. Although both should ideally intersect the main road at close to a 90-degree angle for safety, a curve soon after the intersection can greatly reduce the perception of the size of the development. The photo to the right shows three driveways, one that heads straight in, putting the parking area

and house in full view of passing traffic, and two that used the curved approach to afford themselves privacy and in doing so have reduced their visual impact on drivers. This could be encouraged for both subdivision roads and for driveways in subdivision lots that will access the main road directly. A wooded buffer between homes and existing roads also helps maintain the rural feel.

Highly visible residential development on hills and ridges that form the backdrop for scenic views also detracts from the rural feel of a community. As discussed in *Chapter 3 Natural Resources* this is another situation where the impacts can be greatly reduced by proper planning and site design, e.g., limiting glare and clearing only for a filtered view.



(Source: Google Earth)

## Housing Matters

Local families are increasingly being priced out of the housing market in New Hampshire towns. This is due to many factors including the high cost of new construction, the increased demand for real estate brought on by those moving to New Hampshire during the pandemic, and investment in homes for short term rental on-line. Most factors affecting the local housing market are outside of the municipality's control, and most agree that the problem is not the municipality's responsibility to solve. The one tool the municipality does have for moderating the effects of the state and regional housing market on Alton families is the Zoning Ordinance. Zoning can't do much to stimulate the construction of more or varied housing, but it can inadvertently stand in the way by containing restrictions whose benefits don't outweigh their dampening effect on development. Small things like allowing duplexes on any lot where a single family home would be allowed, minimizing accessory dwelling unit restrictions, and encouraging multifamily housing in any mixed use or village district while allowing it as a special exception in the Residential zone can all add up to make a real difference.

Incentives can also be provided in the Zoning Ordinance for constructing more affordable styles of home. For example, in mixed use areas of town, consideration might be given to encouraging denser development by allowing greater density (number of dwelling units per

acre) for smaller dwellings. Many young people, families just starting out, and seniors not only have a difficult time affording the typical large home on a large lot, but prefer a more village-like atmosphere within walking distance of amenities such as services, parks and trails, and events and activities.

## Short Term Rentals

The broad accessibility of the internet has led to the rise of companies like Airbnb and Vrbo that make it very easy to advertise or book a home to rent for a short stay. This has expanded the number of private homes available for vacation rentals. It has also expanded the usage of some vacation homes as it is now very easy for owners to connect with those interested in renting their homes during previously unused periods. Since many people enjoy gathering with family or friends on vacation to socialize and pool their resources, there is more potential for issues such as exceeding septic or parking capacity than would normally be associated with residential property. Issues such as these, noise and safety have led to the need for some basic regulations to ensure that transient use of dwellings does not negatively impact neighborhoods or the environment.

## Guiding Principles

### *Engage the Community*

Survey responses reflected a desire for a high level of engagement, transparency and communication regarding decision-making at the municipal level. Any major changes proposed to the Zoning Ordinance must be the outcome of meaningful dialogue with the voters, business owners and other landowners to ensure that their questions are answered and concerns heard. Major changes requiring this type of process would include but not be limited to changes to zoning district boundaries, changes to broad categories of uses allowed in a district, or structural changes such as a shift away from minimum lot sizes toward more focus on density, or away from predetermined specifications to a more performance-based approach. The point of a thoughtful community consensus-building process would be to find the right balance between individual property owner concerns and the benefits to the community, the right balance being the one that could be supported by a majority of voters.

### *Do No Harm*

Zoning changes are sometimes considered not because they implement the Master Plan or further the community vision and goals, but because a landowner has a specific request or an emerging land use has become a concern. While the Planning Board does need to be reactive rather than proactive at times, decisions should nonetheless always be guided by the

Master Plan to ensure that the proposed zoning change to address one issue will not lead to a worsening of another. For example, a proposed zoning change should not be supported if it is likely to have the unintended consequence of further restricting housing opportunities for residents. Changes to zoning and infrastructure improvements should both be examined for their potential impacts on the housing market. Similarly, any proposed zoning change should be evaluated carefully to ensure the result won't have the potential to degrade water quality. Another example would be the types of businesses allowed in various parts of town. Any proposal for allowing additional business types in a zoning district or expanding a commercial district should be evaluated to ensure that any such change won't detract from the desired character of that part of town, or harm the competitiveness of existing local businesses in the village areas. In addition, businesses made nonconforming by zoning changes should be allowed to expand with appropriate mitigation for impacts on the neighborhood.

### *Be Resilient*

Resilience means many things. For a town, resilience includes ensuring that the land use regulations don't stand in the way of emerging types of businesses and living arrangements, and that businesses can grow and change with changing markets and economic conditions. This requires periodic review of the Zoning Ordinance and Site Plan Review Regulations to ensure they allow for flexibility and creativity. The global pandemic of the last two years has been a reminder that businesses need the ability to adapt to unexpected circumstances.

Resilience also means ensuring that lives, property and infrastructure are safe from hazards such as extreme weather events, and that the community can bounce back quickly from a disaster with minimal disruption and cost. The Town's 2017 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update contains numerous recommendations for increasing the town's resilience and is considered to be an Appendix to this plan.

### RECOMMENDED LAND USE ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Thoroughly review the Zoning Ordinance regarding its effectiveness as a tool for shaping future growth and development in a manner consistent with the vision and goals of the community, including zoning districts and their boundaries, density, land uses permitted and allowed by special exception, and special exception criteria, and develop amendments as needed. Include consideration of the following:
  - Eliminate the Residential Commercial District and incorporate in three new mixed use zoning districts with land uses more focused on the character of each area: Alton Bay, Alton Village and Commercial.
  - Focus Alton Bay zoning on tourism and water-based recreation in Alton Bay
  - In Alton Village, encourage a wide range dwelling types and businesses consistent with the village feel.
  - Create a new Commercial district for uses that require a larger lot size and are not as good a fit within the village areas. Encourage high-quality business development to serve the needs of residents for year-round livable wage jobs such as office parks, medical facilities and institutional uses. Include areas currently zoned Residential Commercial north of the traffic circle on the east side of NH Route 28, and south of the traffic circle along NH Route 28. Evaluate other lands that may be suitable for this new type of zoning, including lands currently zoned Residential Rural and Rural in close proximity to NH Route 28 south to Ehlen Way/Lamper Road, lands north of the traffic circle on the east side of NH Route 28 to the vicinity of Bay Hill Rd., and the area south of the Merrymeeting River from the High School to NH Route 140. Limit residential development in this zoning district to high density types.
  - Review the role of the Rural Residential zoning district and consider incorporating portions into the most appropriate adjacent district.

#### RECOMMENDED LAND USE ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED

- Align frontage requirements on limited access highways with NHDOT Driveway Policy to minimize the number of curb cuts.
- Revise the uses allowed by special exception for the Lakeshore Residential District to allow home businesses, low-impact recreation and small-scale hospitality businesses compatible with existing homes, water quality protection and historic land uses. Replace current special exception criteria on potential impacts such as water quality, noise, lighting, traffic, and lakeshore aesthetics.
- Revise the lists of uses permitted in the Rural zone and those allowed by Special Exception to create 3 categories: (1) home businesses (permitted), (2) natural-resource based land uses (agriculture and forest industry permitted and others requiring large areas of rural lands such as outdoor recreation, country inns, camps and campgrounds, and excavations by special exception), and (3) neighborhood businesses (special exception). Focus special exception criteria on ensuring the proposed business would have a positive impact on residents of the rural areas of town, e.g., by providing a neighborhood store in walking distance of a number of homes, serving as a gathering place or performing a community-building role. Consider a mechanism for reducing setbacks for neighborhood businesses, e.g., as part of the site plan review process.
- Enable the Planning Board to provide more flexibility in subdivision design when the result will be conservation of contiguous high priority natural resource areas, or agricultural, forest or recreation land. Incentives available to the Planning Board might include reduced lot sizes, frontage and setbacks. Consider offering a bonus for subdivision designs that will result in smaller building footprints.
- Consider removing the restriction of one single family home per lot to allow more flexibility in design, such as zero-lot line

#### RECOMMENDED LAND USE ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED

- Increase front setbacks in Rural zones on town roads and state highways.
- Reduce frontage requirements for residential lots with shared driveways on town roads.
- Identify and eliminate unnecessary barriers to residential development, for example, make duplexes a permitted use in the Rural zones, and allow multifamily dwellings as a special exception in the Residential zone.
- Consider density bonuses for housing developments with smaller homes more affordable to young families, singles and retirees seeking to downsize.
- ✓ Amend the Zoning Ordinance to define short term rentals and adopt business regulations to manage safety and environmental impacts.
- ✓ Ensure that any major zoning changes are developed with meaningful two-way communication and engagement with voters, business owners and other landowners.
- ✓ Carefully review any proposed zoning changes to ensure that adoption would be consistent with the Master Plan vision and goals.
- ✓ Continue to improve the aesthetics, pedestrian infrastructure and traffic calming in Alton Bay and Alton Village.
- ✓ Incorporate requirements for enhanced vegetated front buffers in subdivision and site plan regulations to maintain the scenic rural character of town and state highways.
- ✓ Periodically review the zoning ordinance and site plan review regulations to ensure that they allow for the flexibility and creativity small business owners need to grow and change in response to changing markets and circumstances.

**RECOMMENDED LAND USE ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED**

- ✓ Review the Hazard Mitigation Plan periodically to identify any changes to land use regulations required to increase the town's resilience.



# Chapter 6 Infrastructure

## 6.1 Transportation

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### Highways

#### *Alton's Highway Network*

##### PUBLIC HIGHWAYS

The state classifies public highways into what are called “legislative classes” based on responsibility for maintenance. Legislative Class I are considered the primary state highway system and the state assumes full control and pays the costs of construction, reconstruction and maintenance. Alton has 26.02 miles of Class I highway. These are NH Routes 11 and 28. These highways are also considered Tier 2 in importance for state funding, second only to the interstate highways. The state’s tier system considers both the function of the highway and the traffic volumes to prioritize the use of federal transportation funds.

Legislative Class II are considered the secondary state highway system, also called “state aid highways.” Alton has 9.28 miles of Class II highway. These are NH Routes 11A, 140 and 28A. As regional connectors, NH Routes 11A and 140 are Tier 3 priorities for funding and NH Route 28A is Tier4 because it is a local connector.

Class V highways are those that the Town has a responsibility to maintain. In Alton there are 85.48 miles of Class V highway. Class VI highways are other public ways that the town does not maintain or repair. In Alton there are 9.37 miles of Class VI highway. The public retains the right to travel over Class VI highways subject to gates and bars, but the Town is not liable for any damages that result from lack of maintenance.

Three Class V highways are designated as “Winter Roads” for specific locations and lengths as specified in Town records — Dan Kelley Drive, Haslet Drive, and Spring Street Extension. This means that the layout of these Town rights-of-way pursuant to RSA 231:24 was primarily for snowplowing. (Sources: NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) 2021 Legislative Class Miles map; NHDOT Tiers online map, accessed 8/9/22; NHDOT 2019 Roads & Highways Town Centerline Miles by Legislative Class; Town of Alton Highway Policies and Regulations)

#### PRIVATE ROADS

All other roads in town are private roads. According to Town records, there are at least 35.27 miles of private road in Alton. The Town has no responsibility for private roads, and no control over them unless conditions for proper construction and maintenance were included in a subdivision or other development approval process.

#### *Accesses on Public Highways*

##### STATE ACCESS PERMITS

Driveways accessing State-maintained highways require a permit from the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT). The number of driveways allowed on a lot is governed by the length of the lot frontage and the safe sight distance. For limited access highways such as portions of NH Routes 11 and 28, limits on the number of accesses are also contained in the acquisition documents.

The process for obtaining a driveway permit for a major development can require a traffic study to ensure that the design will be safe and will not interfere with traffic flow. Some communities have developed Memoranda of Understanding with NHDOT to ensure that the review process and requirements conducted by NHDOT and the Town are well coordinated and that the Town's development goals are taken into consideration.

##### TOWN DRIVEWAY PERMITS

Driveways accessing Town Class V and VI highways require a permit from the Town's Department of Public Works. Permits are required prior to any construction or alteration to an existing driveway located within the limits of any Town right-of-way, or to the approach to any driveway within the limits of any Town right-of-way. The Town's Highway Policies and Regulations require that every dwelling and lot is "provided with a separate means of access which is located solely on that property" Section 4.26). These current restrictions could make more efficient use of the town's remaining developable land difficult. Shared driveways reduce both the visual and traffic safety impacts of residential development.

State law does not give the Town the authority to issue driveway permits on private roads. However, conditions of approval for new subdivisions can require that driveways be designed and constructed in accord with the same standards as provided in the Town regulations. This can help ensure that the driveways are constructed in a safe location and do not damage the road.

## Road Condition

### STATE HIGHWAYS

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) collects information about the condition of road surfaces with a special survey vehicle that measures roughness. The International Roughness Index (IRI) measures the vertical movement, or “bumpiness,” that occurs along a route. This is considered to be an important metric because it measures what the driver feels.

As shown in the map below, state highway segments that have been reconstructed with a better base and improved drainage are generally rated “Good.” Other segments are generally a mix of “Fair” and “Poor.” It should be noted that because state highways are surveyed over a two-year period and the database is updated annually, the data may not reflect more recent improvements.

2021 PAVEMENT CONDITION

### Legend

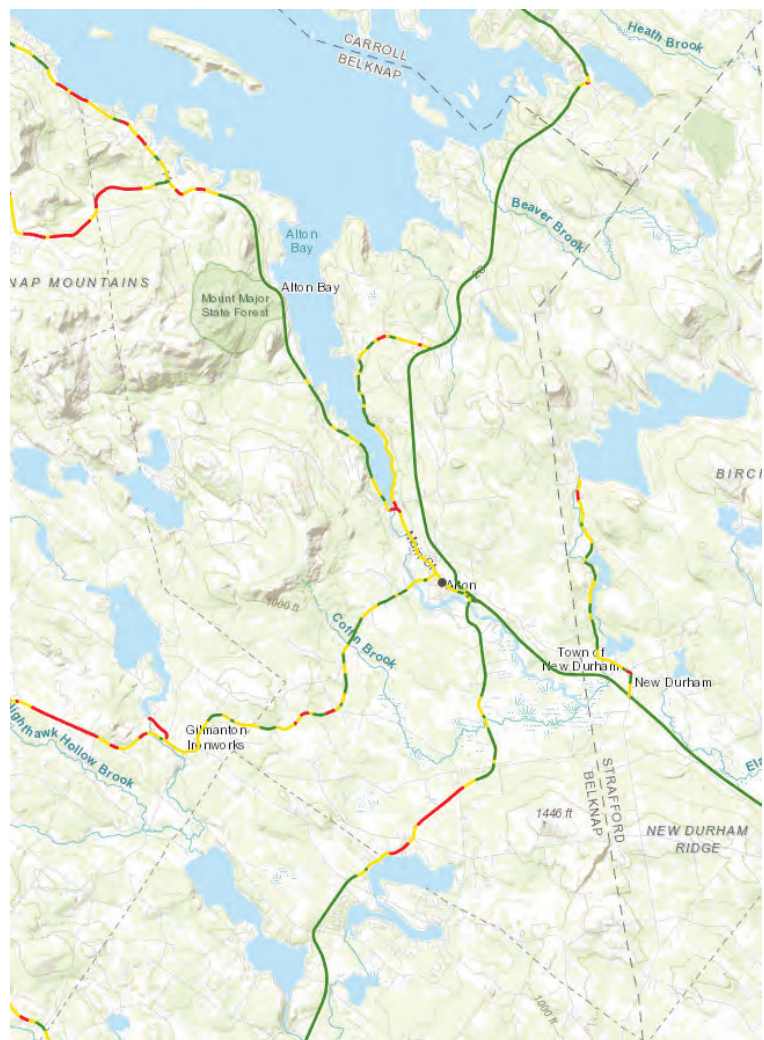
Green = Good (IRI < 95)

Yellow = Fair (95 < IRI < 170)

Red = Poor (170 < IRI < 350)

(An IRI of greater than 350 would be considered “Very Poor,” however none of Alton’s state highways were in this category.)

(Source: NHDOT Pavement Condition Online Viewer)



## TOWN ROADS

In May of 2022, the Town contracted with Public Works 1 of Utah to conduct an assessment of the condition of the Town's paved roads. This data was entered into the Town's road work management software, called iWorQ. This Road Surface Management System (RSMS) will help with planning for maintenance of roads, pavement preservation and allocation of funds. An RSMS enables towns to prioritize use of highway improvement funds where they will be most effective in the long run. This is not always the roads that are in the worst condition or the ones more residents are concerned about. Pavement preservation can greatly extend the life of the road. This includes repaving a road while it is still in pretty good shape to make sure past investments don't go to waste.

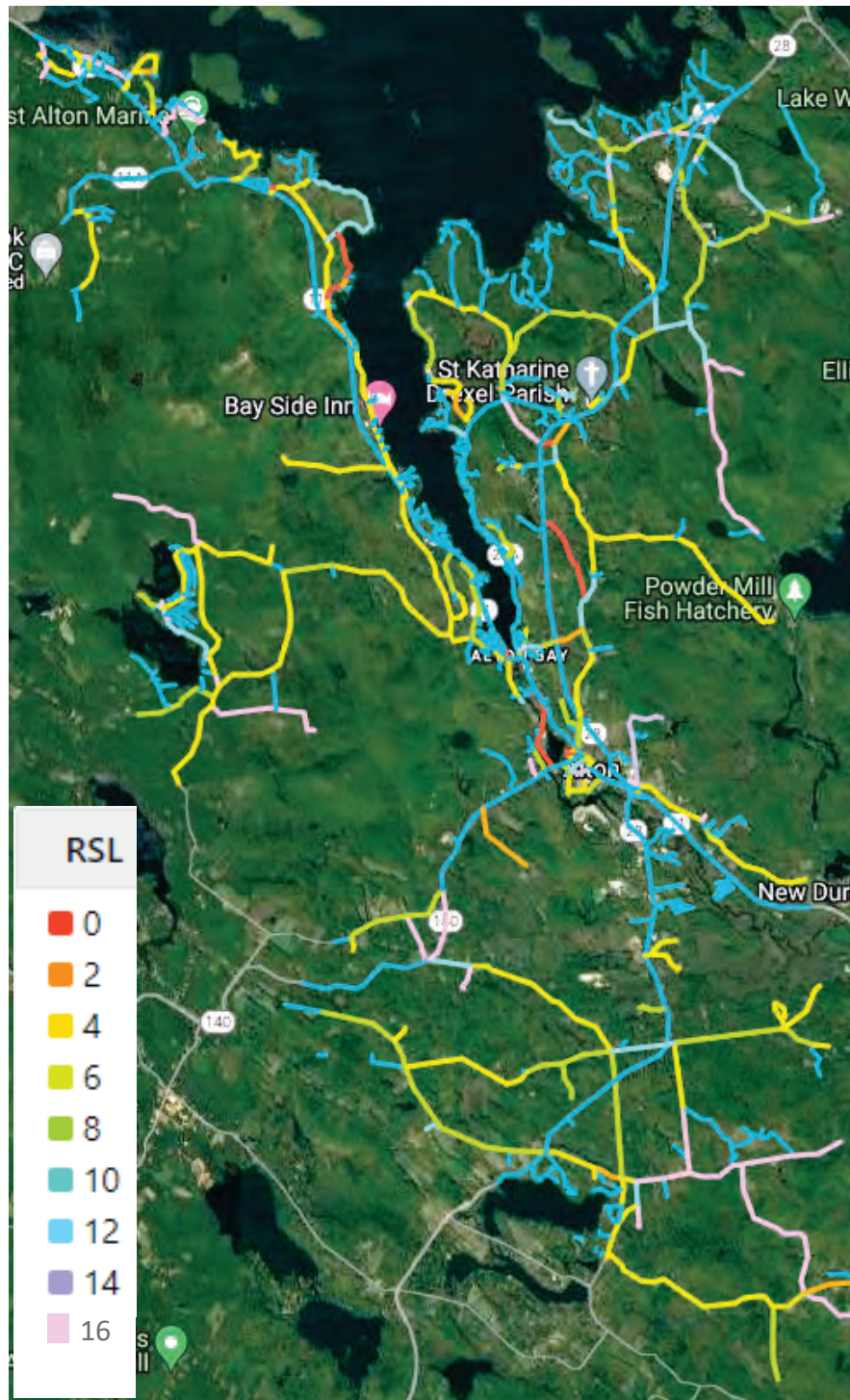
The assessment provided the Town with both a pavement condition index (PCI) and a remaining service life (RSL) score. Data collected included length, width and surface distresses, e.g., alligator cracking, horizontal and longitude cracks, heaves and depressions. These documented distresses were also imaged 360 degrees for future comparisons. Overall, the report rated the Town's paved roadway network as a PCI of 69, or a C rating, and an RSL of 9.1. The RSMS can be used to work toward the goal of an improved overall pavement condition index and lengthened remaining service life. Scores for individual road segments are shown on the map on the following page.

The Town was also recently awarded a NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) Stormwater Asset Management Grant. This will be used to create a GIS map and condition assessment of open and closed stormwater drainage.

### *Private Roads*

Some of Alton's private roads pose difficult access issues for Alton's first responders, particularly in inclement weather. The majority were established prior to the adoption of planning and zoning requirements in 1970. In some cases, the streets were not fully constructed; in others, maintenance efforts were abandoned, rendering sections of streets impassable. Upgrades to current standards should be required prior to permitting additional subdivisions accessed by these substandard roads. In addition, RSA 674:41 lays out the steps required prior to issuing building permits on roads that haven't received Planning Board approval.

REMAINING SERVICE LIFE (RSL)



(Source: Town of Alton Road Surface Management System, *iWorQ*, Public Works 1)

*Traffic Volumes*

Traffic counts are conducted by NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) and Lakes Region Planning Commission (LRPC) through the placement of traffic counters at certain specific locations on about a three-year cycle. Other counters are in place year-round each year. Data from both types of counters are adjusted to produce average annual daily traffic (AADT). Traffic volume data is shown in the four tables below and on the following page, grouped like this:

PRIMARY STATE HIGHWAYS - GATEWAYS AND OTHER LOCATIONS OUTSIDE OF VILLAGE AREA

PRIMARY STATE HIGHWAYS - IN AND AROUND VILLAGE AREA

SECONDARY STATE HIGHWAYS

LOCAL ROADS

As shown, traffic volumes fluctuate year-to-year with changes in tourism, individual businesses, and roadwork. The two locations in Alton with continuous counters show an upward trend, interrupted by the COVID19 pandemic in 2020. Other locations vary. Of particular note is NH Route 11 over the Merrymeeting River in Alton Bay, shown in the second table. AADT at that location increased from 7,817 in 2018 to 10,052 in 2021. Some of this is local traffic going from one location in Alton Bay to another.

PRIMARY STATE HIGHWAYS - GATEWAYS AND OTHER LOCATIONS OUTSIDE OF VILLAGE AREA

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
NH 11, South of Loon Cove	5183	5160	5338	5472	5592	5802	5782	5775	5942	5650	6225
NH 28 at Hurd Brook			7600			7754			7642		
NH 11, North of NH 11A			5100			4811			4438		
NH 28, at Barnstead Townline	6300			6100			7228				6113
NH 28, South of Drew Hill Rd	6837	6811	6794	6956	7024	7212	7244	7334	7490	6668	7706
NH 11, at New Durham Townline	7400			7400			9026			8340	

PRIMARY STATE HIGHWAYS - IN AND AROUND VILLAGE AREA

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
NH 28, West of NH 28A			7700			7529			7192		
NH 11, North of NH 140	8800			7200			9089			8464	
NH 140, West of Mooney St	2200			2000			2327			2161	
NH 28, North of NH 11		6500			6800			6876			7629
NH 28, South of NH 11		6100			6600			7174			7274
NH 11, Over Merrymeeting River (at Alton Bay)		8300			7800			7817			10052

SECONDARY STATE HIGHWAYS

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
NH 140, at Gilmanton Townline			2000			2474			2585		
NH 140, West of Mooney St.	2200			2000			2327			2161	
NH 11A, West of NH 11	1200			1500			1514				1538
NH 28A, South of Falls Brook		1500			1700			1462			1696
NH 11D, South of Woodlands Rd	350			170			190			226	

LOCAL ROADS

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Roberts Cove Rd, South of Ledge Hill Rd	270			300			343			315	
New Durham Rd, North of NH 11/28		960			940			970			972
New Durham Rd, at New Durham Townline	680			630			678			697	
Alton Mountain Rd, at Watson Brook	400			520			520			550	

(Source: NHDOT Transportation Data Management System, Accessed 8/26/22)

### *Traffic Safety*

Several locations were identified by local officials as relatively high accident locations which would benefit from a closer look. These included:

- Old Wolfeboro Road – NH Route 28 intersection, north of traffic circle
- Stockbridge Corner Road – NH Route 28 intersection, south of traffic circle
- NH Route 11 towards West Alton, 100 feet past Jesus Valley Road - Surface is raised a bit, causing the road to freeze in winter, becomes very slick.

### *Bridges*

Most bridges are inspected every two years. If a bridge is found to have one or more major elements in poor condition, it is placed on what is called the “red list.” State-owned red list bridges are then inspected twice per year and municipally-owned red list bridges are inspected once per year. There is only one red list bridge in Alton. This is in Alton Bay where NH Route 11 crosses the Merrymeeting River. This state-owned bridge was built in 1934 and is considered structurally deficient. This bridge is scheduled to be rehabilitated/reconstructed in 2026 (NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) *Roads and Projects Viewer*).

### *NH Route 11 Planning Study*

A 4.2-mile segment of NH Route 11 from Ellacoya State Park in Gilford, east to Minge Cove Road in Alton has been the subject of a study to plan improvements. Earlier, segments of NH Route 11 on either side of this segment were widened to 12-foot lanes with 10-foot shoulders. A bypass had previously been considered for this remaining segment; at this time the plan is to conduct some widening of the roadway and improve specific intersections to increase safety. NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) hired GM2 and Weston & Sampson to conduct extensive data collection and analysis, evaluate various alternatives, and facilitate a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC included representation from Alton’s Selectboard, Planning Board and Conservation Commission.

There was agreement among the CAC members that the design speed for this segment should remain at 40 MPH rather than the 60 MPH design speed of the adjacent segments of highway. (Note that “design speed” refers to the geometry of the roadway, not the posted speed limit.) The CAC identified the priorities to be improved safety for bicyclists, improvements to intersection safety and sight distance, and improved drainage. The draft report was released on August 4, 2022.



Short term improvements recommended in the draft report included:

- Provide pavement markings and additional signage on side road approaches where necessary to improve safety.
- Trim existing vegetation and cut trees as needed along NH Route 11 at intersections to improve sight distances.
- Remove existing structures (fences, walls, etc.) and side slopes along NH Route 11 at intersections to improve sight distance.
- Provide lighting at key intersections within the project area.
- Add signs to warn drivers of pedestrians in the area.
- Add signs to warn drivers and bicyclists to “Share the Road.”

Long term improvements recommended in the draft report included:

- Reconfigure the Scenic Drive - NH Route 11 intersection or replace with a roundabout. The study showed that a roundabout would have the added benefit of providing a traffic calming measure in addition to improving operations. The CAC supported the roundabout option; however, the cost would be a great deal more.
- Construction of either a dedicated westbound left-turn lane onto NH Route 11A from Route 11 or a roundabout. The study found that either approach would improve operations and safety, but a roundabout here would also provide traffic calming. The CAC supported the roundabout option; however, again the cost would be a great deal higher.
- Widen the highway to 11-foot lanes and 5-foot shoulders where feasible when accounting for right-of-way and wetland impacts.
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle accommodations as needed within the corridor.

*(GM2 and Weston & Sampson, DRAFT Alton-Gilford 40634 NH Route 11 Planning Study, August 4, 2022)*

It will be important for Alton officials to remain engaged as the project progresses to the design phase to ensure that the town’s priorities such as paved shoulders for bicycles and improved stormwater management to protect water quality are part of the final design.

## **Parking**

Additional parking is needed in the Village/Town Hall area. Parking in the Village area is currently limited to on-street parking, with seven parking spaces available directly in front of the Town Hall. There are approximately eight additional parking spaces located on Depot Street, across from the Police Station. The available public parking is not adequate to meet current needs. Fortunately, during community events such as the town block party or Halloween, some local businesses allow use of their parking areas for overflow parking. The

Town is currently looking into a parcel of land on Depot Street with the potential to accommodate 30 to 50 vehicles.

### **Facilities for Bicyclists and Pedestrians**

NH Route 11 has sidewalks for approximately two and one quarter miles, from the Back Bay causeway through Alton Bay, connecting Alton Bay to Alton Village and then through the Village to the traffic circle. Short segments of sidewalk continue along NH Route 28 south to the Winnepesaukee Lodge and north to the Hannaford entrance. Crosswalks are provided at appropriate locations in conjunction with the sidewalk as well as at other key locations such as across NH Route 28A to connect the town beach and parking lot. The John Racine Trail connects the crosswalk on NH Route 28 in front of Hannaford to the B & M Railroad Park behind the Town Hall.

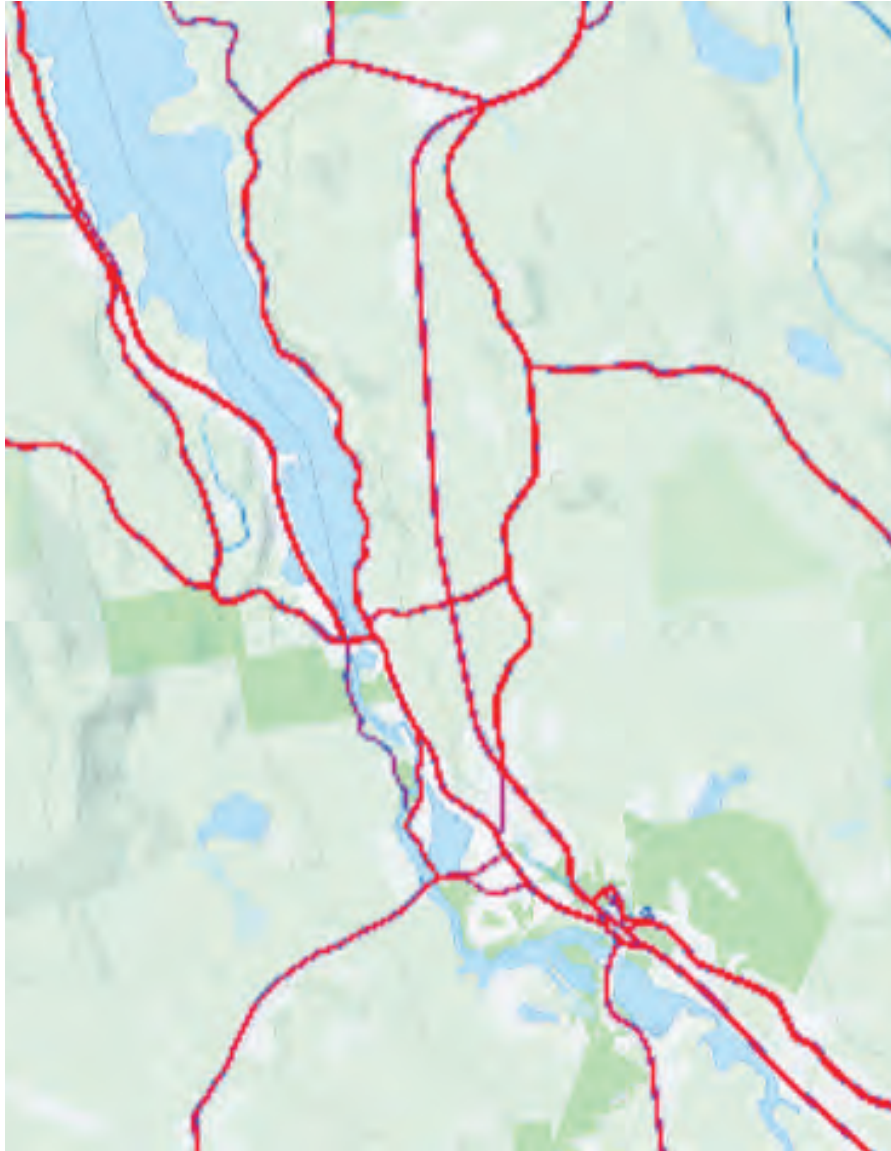
NHDOT prepares bicycle route maps with suggested routes for those wishing to travel around the state by bike. The recommended routes through Alton are shown on the map on the following page. Heading east from the traffic circle to New Durham, New Durham Road is recommended as an alternative to NH Route 11. Heading north from the Bay, NH 28A is recommended as a connector to NH 28 North. For those heading north, this has the benefit of avoiding the segment of NH Route 11 where the state highway passes through Alton Village in order to get to NH 28 North. In the Village bicycles must share the travelled lane to pass behind parked vehicles; in a couple spots these vehicles are backing out into traffic and the driver would not be able to see an approaching bicycle.

In some cases, such as segments where shoulders are narrow or absent, grades are steep, pavement is rough, and/or high speeds are present, routes are labeled for experienced riders only. As shown, this is the recommendation for NH Route 11 from Alton Bay west, and for the NH 28A connector to NH 28 North.



(Source: NHDOT Statewide Interaction Bicycle Route Map, accessed 9/16/22)

Strava heat maps are generated by users of the popular app for logging bike rides, runs and cross-country ski outings. The heat map generated by bike rides Strava users logged over the past year are shown on the map below. A fat bright red line indicates many rides logged; a thin blue line indicates few rides logged. As shown, multiple routes to and from and through Alton Bay and Alton Village are popular with bicyclists.



Strava Heatmap, showing bike rides logged in Alton area in the past 12 months.

(Accessed at [www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped/maps/](http://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped/maps/) 8/26/22)

Both walking and bicycling are important to Alton residents and visitors. While it is relatively easy to address safe infrastructure for users of all ages and abilities when designing new roads by following guidance available for “complete streets,” the problems are more difficult to address with existing roads. Where there is adequate right-of-way, paved shoulders four to five feet wide should be added when roads are reconstructed. Gravel shoulders are extremely dangerous for bicyclists when they hit the edge of the pavement at high speeds, e.g., to get out of the way of a large truck or passing vehicle. Signage and speed limits are other tools to consider. Through busy stretches such as Alton Bay and Alton Village, and the relatively narrow stretch of NH Route 11 in between, “sharrows” might also be considered as a way to alert drivers to the presence of bicycles. The following photo shows the standard sharrow contained in the Federal Highway Administration’s *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD).



Standard sharrow contained in Federal Highway Administration’s Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) (Photo credit: National Association of Transportation Officials (nacto.org))

## Transportation for Nondrivers

Options are limited for those in Alton who are unable to drive or afford a vehicle. The Town collaborates with the Belknap-Merrimack County Community Action Program’s Volunteer Driver Program which organizes transportation for residents who are 60 years or older or if they are a person with disabilities. Qualified riders can get assistance with rides to their medical appointments, grocery shopping, or other errands such as a ride to the bank. For more information, contact [vdpcordinator@bm-cap.org](mailto:vdpcordinator@bm-cap.org).

## Lake Winnepesaukee Seaplane Base & Ice Runway

Alton Bay has a unique transportation feature, an ice runway that is the only FAA-certified ice runway within the lower 48 states. Although planes have been using the ice runway since 1945, an official petition was not submitted to the State until the 1960s for official use. The runway is a state-owned, public-use general aviation airport in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire. It is located at 46 Mount Major Highway in Alton Bay and managed by the NH Department of Transportation Bureau of Aeronautics.

The runway operates during the winter months, usually from January to March unless the ice is not thick enough; the ice needs to be at least 12 inches thick for safe use. The runway is 100 feet wide and the length varies from 2,300 to 2,900 feet depending on the condition of the ice. It is open daily during daylight hours when safe, and is staffed by 6 to 10 volunteers. An orange windsock indicates wind direction for aircraft. The taxiway is 50 feet wide and there is room for about 30 planes if they park with wings overlapping; if they park wingtip to wingtip, the runway would only have room for 20 planes.

The ice runway has other attributes that benefit the town of Alton; ice fishermen, cross-country skiers and snowmobilers are allowed to also enjoy the ice during the winter months. This, combined with the Winter Carnival, brings in steady revenue for the community.

In the spring and summer months, seaplanes are welcome to enjoy the Bay. The Town is working on arranging a docking station to give the pilots access to the businesses within and around town.

## The Transportation-Land Use Relationship

### *Role of the Planning Board*

The Planning Board has several tools for assisting the town with the development and maintenance of a safe and effective transportation system. The different roles the Planning Board can play are:

- Laying out the Town's policies in the Master Plan.
- Financial planning for transportation improvements through the CIP Committee.
- Recommending zoning amendments to Town Meeting that will direct intense uses to sites where the roads can handle them.
- Ensuring that the subdivision and site plan regulations provide for safe and efficient transportation connections for users of all ages and abilities.
- Preventing congestion and safety hazards through careful review of the location and design of proposed accesses.

*Planning Strategies*

There is a significant relationship between land use and transportation. When road corridors are built or upgraded, additional development is encouraged. Similarly, road capacity must sometimes be increased to accommodate growth where it occurs. It is important for safety, cost and mobility that the interrelationship between land use and transportation is considered in land use planning and in planning road improvements. Some planning strategies to ensure that land use and transportation planning are well coordinated include:

FOCUS DEVELOPMENT IN AND AROUND THE VILLAGE

Providing for mixed use and higher densities in and around Alton Village and the existing commercial area east of the village area rather than in the outlying parts of town allows for the efficient use of existing infrastructure.

IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE LAND USES

The Zoning Ordinance should be reviewed periodically to ensure that development will be compatible with the road system. Applications for development must always be reviewed with the scale of the proposal relative to the road network and abutting land uses in mind.

PLAN FOR PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE CONNECTIONS

The Town can advocate for pedestrian and bicycle connections when NH Department of Transportation (NH DOT) is preparing plans involving the state highways such as the planned upgrade of a segment of NH Route 11 toward Gilford, and make every effort to see that consideration is given to the accommodation of non-motorized traffic, in a manner that is compatible with community character.

EXPAND THE TOWN'S CLASS VI ROAD POLICY

The Planning Board and Board of Selectmen should develop a road policy that would guide development in town based on the status of existing roads and any future plans for roads. This can go far to ameliorate potential questions and problems when applications are submitted for the upgrading of a road, or for a building permit on a Class VI road. While the Town of Alton Highway Policies and Regulations contains a process for applying for and considering the issuance of a building permit on a Class VI road, no guidance is provided regarding the decision-making, i.e., the criteria for approval and factors to be considered. These might include, for example, distance to a Class V road, condition of the road, width and grade of the road, drainage infrastructure, extent of demands on public services, location of the proposed structure on the lot/length of driveway, or likelihood of becoming town-maintained in the future. Some communities have Class VI road policies that limit the distance the driveway can be to the nearest Class V segment and/or require that the applicant bring the road up to town standards and maintain it.

#### RSMS AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

The Road Surface Management System being developed by the Public Works Department should inform the Town's Capital Improvements Program (CIP) by setting forth the needs for highway improvements over a rolling six-year period.

#### LRPC TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)

Lakes Region Planning Commission (LRPC) receives federal transportation planning funds to assist the State in establishing the region's priorities for spending federal funds for construction projects. Rejoining LRPC will ensure that Alton is allowed to fully participate on the TAC as the group develops its input into the state's 10-year Transportation Improvement Plan. It is also the best way to stay abreast of any other funding opportunities.

### *Regulatory Strategies*

#### ROAD STANDARDS

Included in the Subdivision Regulations administered by the Planning Board are standards for road construction. In addition to the street design standards contained in the Subdivision Regulations, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Roadway Design Criteria and the Town's Highway Policy and Regulations are incorporated by reference. Ensuring that roads proposed to provide access to new lots are constructed and maintained to these standards, regardless of the subdivider's stated intent to seek Town acceptance of the road or to maintain it as a private road, can protect future residents and protect the Town from expensive upgrades and repairs later on if the Town takes over the road. Currently the Subdivision Regulations exempt subdividers from providing a road right-of-way separate from the individual lots if they state that their intention is to maintain the road privately. However, this does not prevent Town Meeting from voting to accept the road as a Town road in the future. The Planning Board has no authority over Town acceptance of a road, other than the ability to vote to recommend it or not.

Steps the Planning Board can take to safeguard future residents and the Town by ensuring that all new and upgraded roads are built and maintained to Town road standards include:

- Amend the Subdivision Regulations to extend the Town road requirements to all roads, with Planning Board discretion over the width of the right-of-way for certain internal roads such as those serving a condominium development with the access and land held in common.
- Require the cost of inspections by the Town Engineer during and after the construction of the road to be paid by the developer and placed in escrow before plans are signed and recorded.



- Require a performance bond or letter of credit, reviewed by Town Counsel, to be provided to the Town for the full cost of road construction (or the first phase if the project is to be phased) prior to plans being signed and recorded.
- Require covenants, reviewed by Town Counsel at the developer's expense prior to approval, to be incorporated into each deed ensuring that there will be a mechanism in place with the capacity to carry out and pay for summer and winter maintenance of the proposed road in perpetuity.
- Ensure that all such conditions continue to be clearly stated in Notices of Decision.

#### DRIVEWAY REGULATIONS

NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) regulates curb cuts on state roads; the Town is given the same authority for Town roads. Driveway regulations ensure that the access will not threaten the safety of those using the Town highway due to poor visibility or drainage of water and ice onto the road. The driveway requirements are contained in the Town of Alton Highway Policies and Regulations. As written, the prohibition on shared driveways could stand in the way of more efficient and flexible land use (Section 4.26).

#### ACCESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

For the NH Route 11 and 28 corridors, which both still have quite a bit of development potential, careful land use planning can ensure that increased development doesn't lead to highway congestion or decrease safety. Access management requirements implemented by the Town and NHDOT on higher speed segments can help ensure that future development doesn't have a negative impact on through-traffic. A continued focus on traffic calming through the more developed areas such as Alton Bay, Alton Village and the area in between can reduce conflicts between through-traffic and local activity. Some access management techniques are applied through the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations, Site Plan Regulations, and Highway Policies and Regulations and others are applied at the time of review of a specific development proposal. Some specific access management techniques to keep in mind include:

- Reduce the number of curb cuts by increasing frontage requirements and encouraging the use of shared driveways.
- Encourage the development of service roads parallel to the state highways to allow for access to adjacent commercial developments.
- Encourage connections to adjacent developments and other roads when possible, not just the arterial roadway, to allow employees and customers to move from site-to-site without repeatedly entering and exiting the highway.

- Place parking behind or beside buildings and screen parking when possible to make the building the focal point of the destination. Use green spaces to articulate the differences between driveways, parking, and pedestrian areas.
- Provide for pedestrian access between developments.
- Non-residential driveway entrances should be designed to prevent traffic from backing up into the travelled way while waiting to access the site. By providing adequate depth or driveway throat length at the curb cut access, vehicles are allowed sufficient maneuvering space on-site to move away from the entrance and allow other vehicles to efficiently and safely enter or exit the site.
- Vehicular and pedestrian traffic should be separated as much as possible.

#### SUBDIVISION AND SITE PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

During the subdivision or site plan review process the Planning Board has an opportunity to review each proposal to ensure that it will augment rather than negatively impact the Town's provision of a safe and efficient transportation system. Some of the pertinent issues include:

*Viewing the Whole Parcel.* It is always important to step back from an individual plan and look at it in relation to the neighboring properties and land uses. For example, if the lot fronts on more than one road, decisions can be made about which roads would better serve as access.

*Lot Layout.* When the opportunity presents itself through a multi-lot subdivision, the subdivision design should consider shared driveways or an interior street, with lots fronting off of the interior rather than the main roads.

*Designing Roads That Fit the Town's Character.* Alton's rural roads are characterized by being narrow, winding, and tree canopied. They are often lined by stonewalls, and have large, open spaces between developed areas. In the town's village areas, roads sometimes have granite curbing, narrow sidewalks, smaller building setbacks, and small green spaces such as Monument Square.

Some design considerations for maintaining this northern New England small town character valued by residents and visitors include:

- Consider the desired speed for residential neighborhoods and parking lot access roads and design the road to that speed rather than just the anticipated number of vehicles per day. Alton seeks to maintain lower speeds in these areas. It is recognized that roadway width influences speed more than any other factor. Therefore, where the design speed is intended to be below 25 mph, roadway width

should be limited to 18 feet. Where the design speed is 35 mph, a 20-foot roadway width would be appropriate. For speeds intended to be greater than 35 MPH, 22-foot roadway widths or greater would be required.

- Ensure that setback requirements for new buildings in Alton Village and other densely developed areas is similar to existing village area development; smaller setbacks contribute to lower traveling speeds.
- Outside the village and commercial areas, require new developments to have larger setbacks from Town roads and State highways to maintain the rural character.
- Additional areas to be considered for reduced building setbacks would be on internal roads in subdivisions where smaller lots are allowed in exchange for conservation of an open space area. Increased setbacks from Town or State roads and a curve in subdivision roads adjacent to their intersection with public roads would provide a visual buffer and create the appearance of large undeveloped areas.

*Parking Lot Location and Design.* Parking lots can be located and designed to be in harmony with the town's land use and transportation system with considerations such as:

- Locating the building (s) close to the road and putting the parking on the side or in the rear of the parcel.
- Requiring shared parking when feasible.
- Prohibiting parking and loading that requires backing out onto the street.
- Retaining or planting vegetative buffers between parking lots and roads.

*Driveway Location and Design.* Some of the general guidelines for planning accesses to commercial properties in a manner that will enhance the community include:

- Limit accesses to those that are necessary for the efficient and safe movement of vehicles.
- Make sure the driveway is long enough to allow vehicles to pull off the road and stack inside the lot.
- Require two-way driveways to intersect the road at an angle of 70-90 degrees.
- Address sight distance from the access point. Adequate sight distance will depend on the road classification and traffic volumes and should conform with American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) *A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets*.
- Avoid curb cuts on sharp hills.
- Limit the grade of driveways as they approach the public highway.

### RECOMMENDED TRANSPORTATION ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Establish a target pavement condition index (PCI) and remaining service life (RSL) for Town-maintained paved roads.
- ✓ Establish a 3-5-year pavement preservation plan and budget for working towards the target PCI and RSL.
- ✓ Once the target PCI and RSL are met, budget annually to maintain the improved road surface quality and extended road life.
- ✓ Perform a road surface evaluation every 3 years to update data, account for variations in weather, and evaluate the success of past surface treatments.
- ✓ Coordinate stormwater infrastructure and water line upgrades when needed with road reconstruction projects.
- ✓ When adequate right-of-way width is available, evaluate need and feasibility of improving bicycle and pedestrian safety as part of Town road improvement projects.
- ✓ Advocate for NHDOT to follow FHWA recommendations for paved shoulders for bicycles along all state highways - 4-foot minimum with 5-foot minimum when barriers such as guardrails are present.
- ✓ Work with NHDOT to provide increased signage on all state highways to increase bicyclist safety, and "sharrows" through the Village area.
- ✓ Ensure that pedestrian infrastructure connecting Alton Bay facilities and parking areas is safe and inviting in order to prevent unnecessary short vehicular trips.
- ✓ Request NHDOT and LRPC assistance with an informal road safety audit to review the town's higher accident locations.
- ✓ Continue to participate in the development of plans and design to upgrade NH Route 11 to ensure that the local priorities are part of the final design.

#### RECOMMENDED TRANSPORTATION ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED

- ✓ Participate on the Lakes Region Planning Commission Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to advocate for transportation improvements important to the community and learn about available funding and technical assistance.
- ✓ Safeguard future residents and the Town by ensuring that all new and upgraded roads are built and maintained to Town road standards. This includes the following:
  - Amend the Subdivision Regulations to extend the Town road requirements to all roads, with Planning Board discretion over the width of the right-of-way for certain internal roads such as those serving a condominium development with the access and land held in common.
  - Require the cost of inspections by the Town Engineer during and after the construction of the road to be paid by the developer and placed in escrow before plans are signed and recorded.
  - Require a performance bond or letter of credit, reviewed by Town Counsel, to be provided to the Town for the full cost of road construction (or the first phase if the project is to be phased) prior to plans being signed and recorded.
  - Require covenants, reviewed by Town Counsel at the developer's expense prior to approval, to be incorporated into each deed ensuring that there will be a mechanism in place with the capacity to carry out and pay for summer and winter maintenance of the proposed road in perpetuity.
  - Ensure that all such conditions continue to be clearly stated in Notices of Decision.

#### RECOMMENDED TRANSPORTATION ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED

- ✓ Expand the Class VI Road Policy to include decision-making criteria and factors to consider when approving building permits.
- ✓ Require any existing substandard private roads to be brought up to town standards before serving additional lots.
- ✓ Explore the development of a Memoranda of Understanding with NHDOT to coordinate access permits on the limited access highways in town.
- ✓ Consider including the requirement that driveways be constructed in accord with the Town's driveway regulations in subdivision approval conditions to ensure that driveways on private roads are also constructed in a safe location and will not damage the road.
- ✓ Acquire land for and develop additional parking in the Village/Town Hall area.
- ✓ Promote the Volunteer Driver Program to help recruit volunteers and to ensure that eligible residents are aware of the service.
- ✓ Consider the interrelationship between land use and transportation when recommending zoning amendments.
- ✓ Consider access management and traffic calming techniques as appropriate when reviewing development proposals to prevent traffic congestion and maintain safety, including shared drives, service roads, interconnected developments, green spaces and screened parking, properly designed access and pedestrian infrastructure.
- ✓ Encourage shared driveways and interior streets when reviewing subdivisions.
- ✓ When planning or improving roads, reviewing development, or reviewing land use regulations, consider the design elements of the roads and of the way the development relates to those roads that contribute to the northern New England small town character, including design speed, setbacks and layout.

### RECOMMENDED TRANSPORTATION ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED

- ✓ Ensure that new parking lots are located and designed to be in harmony with the town's land use and transportation system, e.g., locate buildings close to the road with parking on the side or rear, encourage shared parking, prohibit parking and loading that requires backing out into the street, and provide vegetative buffers.
- ✓ Ensure that accesses to commercial properties are located and designed in a manner that will not reduce safety or cause congestion.

## 6.2 Community Facilities

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### Schools

#### *Central School*



Alton Central School serves prekindergarten through 8th grade. Upgrades to the building in recent years have included replacement of tile/carpet; asbestos abatement for the 6th, 7th, & 8th grades; interior and exterior door replacement; replacement of lighting in the gym; Phase I of a three-phase plan for the cafeteria extension and upgrade; automated HVAC controls in a portion of the building, and replacement of Boiler Room One along with re-piping and replacement of controls. Paving off of Pine Street was also completed.

Phase II of the cafeteria extension and upgrade was approved for prior to the fiscal year 2023/2024, and Phase III is to be proposed in March 2023. HVAC replacement at the gym

stage is scheduled for replacement in fiscal year 2023-2024. HVAC replacement in the front hallway is still to be determined. Boiler Room Two and Three replacement along with re-piping and controls is scheduled for 2027/2028.

A Needs and Feasibility study is being performed for the ductless split system for the middle school and for a camera surveillance system.

*Prospect Mountain High School*



Grades 9 – 12 attend Prospect Mountain High School (PMHS) here in Alton along with students from Barnstead. PMHS has been in operation since 2004. PMHS is jointly owned by Alton School District and Barnstead School Districts through the only joint maintenance agreement in New Hampshire. Operating costs are based on the number of students enrolled per town and any surplus is returned the same way. Capital costs are split 50/50. In addition to the efficiency of a shared building, the schools also now share certain functions, e.g., there is now one superintendent and one business administrator serving Alton Central School, Barnstead Elementary, and PMHS.

While consolidating these services did save some money, it also served to align curriculum between the two elementary and middle schools so students arriving at PMHS can be similarly prepared for what the high school is looking for. To further improve upon services, the district was able to hire an ‘Administrator for Curriculum Instruction and Assessment’ and still stay within the established budget.

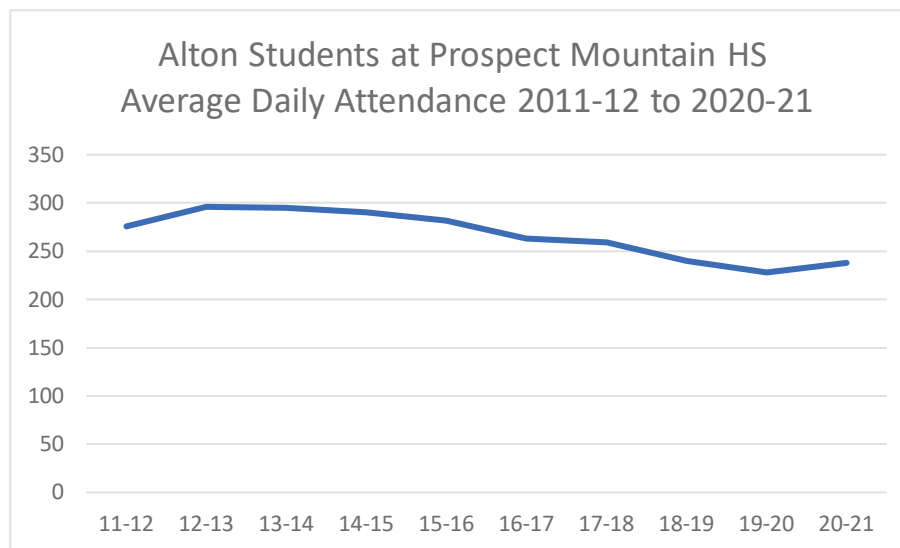
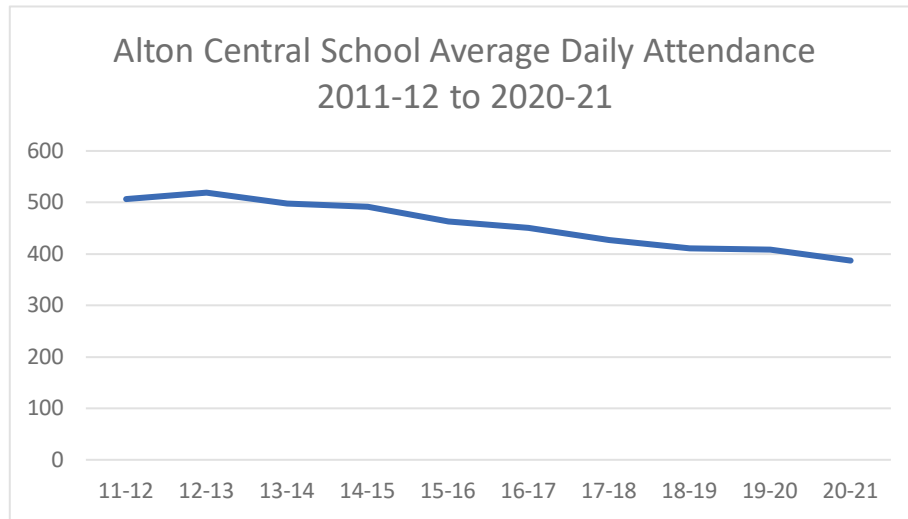
Recent renovations have included paving the access road/driveway into the school. This is the first phase of what is planned to be a three-phase project with the second phase being



the main parking lot and the third being the back parking area. Grant funds are being sought to replace the flat, rubber roof that is over the cafeteria, gym, and auditorium in the next couple of years.

### Enrollment

As shown in the graphs below, Alton's student population has been declining for the past ten years.



(Source: NH Department of Education Enrollment Reports)

Current enrollment at PMHS is 420 counting students from both Alton and Barnstead. This is about a 25% decline over the last 10 years or so. Small schools have a difficult time sustaining a full curriculum that includes, e.g., art, music, and shop. The School Board is going to propose

a warrant article in Alton for March 2023 Town Meeting to make PMHS an open enrollment school under state law, which would allow the school to accept students from outside the district. There will then be an application with enrollment criteria for students wishing to attend from outside the district; parents of students from outside the two towns would be responsible for transportation.

## Town Hall

The Town Hall was built in 1894 and is located in the center of Alton Village on Monument Square. The brick edifice with its tower brings the building height to eighty-five feet. At the top is the Thomas E. Howard clock which has hands more than three feet long on all four sides. The clock strikes every hour on the hour. Today the Town Hall houses the Administrative/Finance Offices, Planning Department, Building Department, Town Clerk/Tax Collector, Treasurer, Assessing, and Information Technology. The basement contains a room for the Town's computer servers and other related equipment. The space is adequate for current staff and meetings, but lacks adequate storage.



The storage issue has become a significant concern. The 31 four/five-drawer filing cabinets that contain the Building/Planning/Zoning/Conservation files are full. There is no room for additional cabinets and staff have become concerned about the weight relative to the old building. The Planning Department and Building Department both need easy access to these files as they are used on a daily basis.

A reorganizing/remodeling project is underway to increase the efficiency of office space and improve the file storage situation. The third floor that was used for old file storage is being remodeled to make room for the administrator's office and a more organized file storage system. New lighting, electrical fixtures and smoke detectors will also be installed. The old administrator's office will now become the office for the Finance Department. This will allow more room for the Selectmen's office and secretaries. In the large meeting room, behind the old stage, more file storage will be constructed.

Other projects include replacing the old boiler and boiler system; removing old heat registers; mini-splits; and upgrading to a more efficient air conditioning and heating system. There are also future plans to install an elevator within the back stairs area to eliminate the chair lift for ADA compliance.

Town board and committee meetings will continue to be held in the second-floor meeting room which can hold approximately ninety-six people. (Town Meeting deliberative sessions will still be held at Prospect Mountain High School.)

## Library

The Gilman Library was opened on Main Street in the heart of Alton Village in 1951. In 1997, two wings were added on either side of the original building. The enlarged basement included a meeting room, kitchenette, restrooms and a wheelchair accessible elevator. This lower level is accessible from the back parking lot via a wheelchair walkway that leads to the door nearest the elevator. The Alton Historical Society Museum room is located here as well.

Recent improvements include replacement of the roof in 2014/2016. Building projects currently underway include gutter replacement, exterior masonry repair, and furnace upgrades.

Current and future needs can be addressed by reconfiguring spaces and upgrading technology. For example, a current storage area may be converted in order to expand the quiet study/meeting room space.



(Photo credit: John Gauvin of Studio One, used with permission of Milestone Engineering & Construction)

## Police Station



The Albert R. Wilder Municipal Building on Depot Street was built for the Police Department in 1987 and expanded in 2011. This project expanded the footprint of the building by approximately 30' to provide some needed relief to space issues. The booking and 4-bay garage areas of the original building were converted into offices, a shared patrol area, an evidence room, an interview room, a new booking area, utility closet, server room, and equipment room. The addition consisted of a single vehicle sally port with some storage space, an exercise room, and a bathroom on the first level. A second level locker room was added above the exercise room.

The renovation project in 2011 also replaced the HVAC system and water heater. High-efficiency lighting has since been installed throughout the building, and the metal roof was installed in 2017. Overall, the building is in very good condition and should remain so with basic maintenance. The septic system and generator are aged, but are functioning well. Lack of space is the greatest concern for the department over the next 10 years. The 2011 expansion was scaled back substantially from a 2008 plan that had been developed to serve the staffing levels that have now been reached. Some of the pressing needs today include:

- The addition of female officers required the locker room space to be converted to two smaller locker rooms with no remaining capacity.
- Full-time patrol officers are limited to a single drawer and a small cabinet for all their case files, work materials and reference items, while part-time officers have only a single file for their work materials. There are no more drawers or cabinet spaces for any additional full-time officers, and there is no space to add some.

- The multi-purpose room, which serves as the training/meeting room, is filled to capacity at current staffing levels. There will not be adequate space for the whole department when additional positions are added.
- The server room is very small, and as needs for additional servers and hardware (e.g., if body-worn cameras are procured), additional space will be required. Currently, there are issues with high heat in the confined area, as well as exposed water lines affixed to the wall immediately adjacent to the servers.
- The records area is filled near capacity. Although the department is working to digitize as many records as possible, it cannot eliminate all hardcopies.

The Police Department is currently staffed with 12 full-time and 8 part-time officers, 2 full-time administrative staff, and a contracted prosecuting attorney. As the town continues to grow and more seasonal residents become full-time residents, a significantly increased need for law enforcement services on a year-round basis can be expected. This increased need for services will require commensurate increases in resources, including personnel. Three to six full-time positions may be required to meet the increased needs associated with growth, school safety needs and increased training requirements that may necessitate changing some part-time positions to full-time.

## Fire & Rescue

### *Central Station*



The original Central Fire Station was built in 1965 and has had several additions over the years. The central location on NH Route 140, a short distance from NH Route 11, is good for equal response times; however, there is concern about the location of the building proximate to the floodplain.

There is also inadequate space within the bays to house the current centrally-located fleet. Currently four response units remain outside. This causes delays in response, unneeded wear,

and lack of security. The second ambulance should also be housed at the Central Station. There is also a lack of space within each apparatus bay. The trucks do not have adequate space around them to work. There is little to no clearance around the trucks as they enter the bay doors.

The office space is inadequate as well. Several officers and staff share desk space. At times reports are being completed in the seat of the ambulance, as there is no available desk to work at. There is no private area to have Human Resource conversations or officers' meetings. One large room is used for multiple purposes. This room is the conference room, training room, dining room, and storage room.

Storage space is lacking as well. The medical supplies are stored under the staircase. Fire gear is stored in the apparatus bays, along with file cabinets and spare uniforms. Items are stored in places with limited access or high up. Some equipment is stored outdoors in storage containers.

The living area is also inadequate. There are members sharing bunkrooms. There is only one shower and bathrooms are not separate for men and women. There is not enough room for each employee to have their own locker for duty uniforms.

There is also limited parking for employees. When there is a recreation program running, the remaining spaces are filled. This leaves no space for Fire Department customers or responders to come for additional apparatus.

Currently when there is rain, the inside of the building becomes wet. Water enters at the overhead doors and through the cracks in the floor. The building is also out of date with many building codes and National Fire Protection Association standards. If the station is replaced, the new building should be adequate to serve the town for fifty years. The building must be centrally located within the town and out of the flood zone. The site and building design should both accommodate additions as needed to fill future needs.

### *East Station*

The location of the East Alton Fire Station on Quarry Road right by NH Route 28 is appropriate to serve the east district of town, however the building has several inadequacies. Maintenance and upgrades are needed. There are electrical issues with building, such as lack of a back-up generator; overhead doors are wired through a light switch and can be powered off accidentally; there is no switch for the overhead lighting and it must be powered on at the circuit breaker box.



Space is also inadequate for this station. The building is comprised of an apparatus bay and a bathroom. There is no shower or storage for equipment or files. There is a desk to work at, but it is not separated from the vehicle exhaust. There is limited space around the apparatus to work. Doors and windows need to be replaced for energy efficiency. The entry doors are rusted on the bottoms and there are gaps around the overhead doors; these issues allow rodents to enter. The electrical also needs to be brought up to current code, and a generator and LED lighting added. A future addition should be planned with a proper bathroom to include a shower, office and storage space. A septic system upgrade will also be needed.

### *West Station*

The West Alton Fire Station is located on the far outskirts of the west district at a sharp curve on busy NH Route 11. There is poor line-of-sight for oncoming traffic, causing several close calls with apparatus pulling out. The space is inadequate. There is limited room to walk around apparatus. The bays are narrow and short. This prevents conventional apparatus from fitting in the building. Some



apparatus must fold in a mirror to fit in the door. Equipment and fire gear are stored between apparatus.

The second floor is in violation of current fire codes and not able to be used as a function hall. This space is virtually unusable. There is one usable bathroom and no working showers. There is no office area to write reports or use a computer.

If the building is replaced, the replacement building could be smaller in overall size while having adequate space to house modern fire apparatus. This building should have bunkrooms or the ability to add them in the future. The building should be built more centrally within the west district, closer to NH Route 11D.

### *Alton Bay Station*

The Alton Bay Fire Station is located within the central district; the building houses the second ambulance and so must be heated. The building lacks insulation and is costly to heat. During strong storms, water and snow enter the building through cracks in the block walls and under the overhead door. In the spring, as the snow melts, there is standing water on the bay floor.



Space is also an issue for this building. There is limited room to store equipment. When inside, the ambulance doors cannot be opened all the way. There is not enough space to walk around the ambulance. There is inadequate clearance around the furnace. The ambulance blocks the oil tank. This building has no bathroom, no shower, and no sink. There is no way for an employee to clean up after a call. There is also not enough room to wash the apparatus. Due to a lack of parking, responding crews must find public parking across the street or block a business.

If the Central Fire Station is replaced, the second ambulance should be housed there. This would eliminate the need for renovation of the Alton Bay Station. This historic building could then be repurposed or sold.



## Public Works Department - Highway Garage

In 2021, the Board of Selectmen created a Public Works Department with a Public Works Director to create, organize and lead the agency. In April 2021, a part-time Public Works Director was hired to manage the day-to-day and Human Resource operations, and a municipal government manager was contracted to manage the transition to the new organizational structure and other public works projects, such as Road Surface Management System, improvements to infrastructure and equipment, and other related projects.



The Public Works Department now operates under its new organizational structure and consists of the Highway Department, Grounds & Maintenance Department, Cemetery Department, and Solid Waste Department. All except the Solid Waste Department are housed at the highway garage.

The highway garage is located at 80 Letter "S" Road and houses the Highway Department, Grounds & Maintenance Department, and Cemetery Department. The Highway Department has eleven full-time employees who handle day-to-day road maintenance tasks for 92 miles of Town roads with maintenance tasks consisting of tree trimming, sign maintenance, gravel road grading and dust control, roadside ditching, drainage improvements, and road rehabilitation projects on failed road segments. In addition, the department manages outside contracted services such as roadside mowing, catch basin cleaning, large hazard tree removals, and pavement preservation work including crack sealing, chip sealing and road paving.

The Grounds & Maintenance Department is comprised of three full-time employees and one part-time seasonal laborer. The department handles day-to-day maintenance of town

buildings and grounds, including mowing, trimming, trash removal, janitorial services, snow removal, general upkeep of buildings, flag maintenance, and support to events and activities of the Parks and Recreation Department such as Old Home Day, foot race, and band concerts. In the past, staffing limitations sometimes negatively impacted the degree of upkeep being performed on town buildings and properties. Incorporating Grounds & Maintenance into the new Public Works Department is expected to lead to more efficiency and increase what can be accomplished.

The Cemeteries Department has two full-time employees that are transferred from Cemetery to Grounds and Maintenance in the winter months. The department handles day-to-day maintenance of the Town's cemeteries, burials, monument installation and burial lot sales.



The highway garage was constructed over fifty years ago, and has had at least two additions — to increase the garage bay capacity, and to add a maintenance bay and mechanics workshop. Both of these additions were over twenty years ago. Although the facility itself is not within the mapped 100-year floodplain, the site is located on a narrow, almost island-like, bit of land between the Merrymeeting River and Mill Pond. The facility houses hazardous materials used for fleet maintenance, used oil for heating and several tons of road salt and deicing liquids. The current facility has no space for staff breakroom, lockers, training, file and record storage and administrative offices for management. The single restroom is substandard. Eighteen employees report to the facility daily, and all of the equipment for maintenance of roads, sidewalks, cemeteries, parks and the grounds of town buildings is stored in the garage or outside.

Replacing the highway garage with a new, safer, cleaner facility would provide the opportunity to relocate the function to a site more appropriate for the safe operation and storage of the fleet, heavy equipment, and materials.

A new facility should include:

- All administrative offices, break and training area, locker rooms, kitchen, rest rooms and reception area.
- Two drive-thru mechanical maintenance bays with appropriate lifts for servicing all Town vehicles.
- Drive-thru vehicle garage to house all Public Works Department vehicles.
- Water mechanical workshop.
- Grounds & Maintenance workshop.
- Storage for portable equipment and supplies.
- Storage facility for salt, sand and liquid deicer /dust control.
- Road maintenance product storage, i.e., gravel, stone, pipe, catch basins, guard rail, etc.

### Public Works Department - Solid Waste

The Alton Solid Waste and Recycling Center is located on Hurd Road in East Alton. Four employees report to this location. The department handles mixed solid waste, construction and demolition debris, metal, electronics, bulky waste, white goods, yard waste and recyclables, and coordinates the disposal and sale of material.

The facility consists of four buildings. A single employee bathroom is contained in the storage building / garage. The recycling building houses two balers and areas for aluminum cans, used oil, plastics, corrugated cardboard, glass, and metal cans. The mixed solid waste building houses the director's office and two drive-thru bays with two horizontal trash compactors into 40-yard containers. The scale house has the Fairbanks vehicle scale equipment and an office for the attendant to process payments for disposal of fee-based disposal items. The fourth building is an 8' x 16" used office trailer.

Also at this site is a capped seven-acre municipal solid waste/construction & demolition landfill and an approximately one-acre stump dump. The current recycling and transfer station is adjacent to the capped landfill; a portion of the activities are over the stump dump.



The Town performs inspection, monitoring and maintenance activities as required by NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES).

## Parks and Recreation Department



The Parks and Recreation Department headquarters is at 328 Main Street. The building was the former Alton Volunteer Ambulance Service (AVAS) Building and was built around 1974. The facility has a two-car garage, small addition on the back for storage/workshop and a small office on the side with a lobby. Building space is shared with the Grounds and Maintenance Department at 328 Main Street. There is also a storage container with electricity on site for the Grounds & Maintenance Department storage.

The Parks and Recreation Department office space and lobby is approximately 24'x12' for two staff members. The garage storage space designated for Parks and Recreation items is 26'x9'. Storage is inadequate and full. Items/supplies are stored in closed bins on shelves to protect them from dirt/rodents in the shared garage. The driveway is dirt and creates a large amount of dust when vehicles are driving in and out. During rain or in the spring the ground is muddy and ruts are created with pedestrian traffic and vehicles. A paved driveway is needed. The building has ample parking for visitors and staff. The building is heated by propane. There is no air conditioning or space to install portable air conditioners. The building is uncomfortably hot to work in during the summer months with only portable fans.

## Water Department

The Water Department handles the day-to-day maintenance of a 700+ user water system for the Alton Village and Alton Bay vicinity. The Department maintains 17 miles of water main and several miles of seasonal water lines. The staff responds to water leaks, monitors well run times and handles meter reading and billing.



The Water Department headquarters is located at 67 Frank C. Gilman Highway (NH Route 140) next to the Central Fire Station, in front of Liberty Park. The facility consists of a small office area for the superintendent and administrative assistant, a single restroom, and a garage/workshop for cold storage of small hand tools and parts. The facility also has an old brick, heated pump house which is used for storage. The Water Department vehicles and equipment are stored outside behind the building. The foreman and technician also report to work at this location. Inclusion in a new Department of Public Works facility would improve both working conditions for Water Department staff and efficiency for the Public Works Department. The Water Works Superintendent is the Assistant Public Works Director and equipment and staff are shared among Public Works functions.

### RECOMMENDED COMMUNITY FACILITIES ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ To the extent feasible, consider facility needs for the town in a comprehensive way. This includes evaluating the potential of existing Town-owned lands to fill needs and the potential of Town-owned buildings to more effectively serve a different need.
- ✓ Continue to support the maintenance of and upgrades as needed to the Central School and Prospect Mountain High School.
- ✓ Continue to explore options to increase efficiency and respond to declining enrollment while maintaining a high quality of education to meet the needs of all students.
- ✓ Continue to maintain and utilize the historic Town Hall and upgrade and modernize systems as needed.
- ✓ Continue to address file storage needs, including rearranging existing functions and converting paper records to digital where practical and compliant with state's record retention and public access requirements.
- ✓ Continue to maintain the Gilman Library and upgrade and modernize as needed.
- ✓ Examine the space needs of the Police Department and evaluate the need for another addition.
- ✓ Consider hiring a consultant team to assist with the evaluation of the Fire & Rescue facility needs including: assessment of existing building conditions and capacities; future needs; flooding potential of existing Central site; technology needs; location of Central, East and West stations relative to response times, development potential, highway safety, flooding potential of roadways between existing stations and developed areas; and comparison of rehabilitation v. replacement cost (with possible relocation of Central and West stations). Incorporate plan into CIP.
- ✓ Repurpose or sell Alton Bay Station and house 2nd ambulance in rehabilitated or replaced Central Fire Station.

#### RECOMMENDED COMMUNITY FACILITIES ACTION ITEMS CONTINUED

- ✓ Replace and relocate the Highway Garage, including consideration of future needs; location of critical infrastructure; and flooding potential of roadways between potential site and key roads, critical infrastructure and developed areas. Incorporate plan into CIP.
- ✓ Continue to maintain transfer station and recycling center, with flexibility to adapt to changes in disposal and recycling markets.
- ✓ Continue to perform required inspection, monitoring and maintenance of the capped landfill.
- ✓ Provide additional office space and year-round storage for Parks & Recreation Department. Continue to monitor needs as programs expand.
- ✓ Pave Parks & Recreation Department driveway.
- ✓ Incorporate Water Department offices into future Department of Public Works Facility to improve efficiency.

### 6.3 Water Supply System

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The Alton Water Works was purchased by the Town in 1921 for \$17,500. At that time water was being pumped from Lake Winnepesaukee. The first well was installed in 1938 on Route 140 next to the Alton Central Fire Station and has the capacity to pump water at a rate of 160 gallons per minute. At that time the 250,000-gallon reservoir at the top of Bay Hill Road on Route 28 was built. This well is not in use at this time. The second well was installed in 1968 behind Levey Park and pumps at a rate of 300 gallons per minute. It was rebuilt/rehabilitated in 2022. In April of 2004, a third well was put online at Jones Field. This well can produce up to 500 gallons per minute. It was rebuilt/rehabilitated in 2019.

Today the Alton Water Works supplies approximately 700 residential and commercial water services in the Alton Village and Alton Bay area and also supplies water to and maintains 55 fire hydrants. In 2021, Alton Water Works produced 53,270,630 gallons of water. The maximum day of water production was 159,790 gallons. The system is operated via an enterprise fund paid from the user fees.

Alton's two production wells are in the Merrymeeting River stratified-drift aquifer. According to the USGS, the available water for the Merrymeeting River aquifer is estimated to be 0.63 to 1.1 million gallons per day (*Map Showing Aquifer Boundaries, Data Collection Locations, Materials and Altitude of Water Table for Stratified-Drift Aquifers in the Winnepesaukee River Basin, Central New Hampshire*, Joseph D. Ayotte, dated 1996). Elevated concentrations of iron and manganese were the most common water-quality problems identified in the 1995 report. In 1995, the town adopted an Aquifer Protection Overlay District to help ensure a safe drinking water supply. Within the Overlay District, disposal of solid or hazardous waste is prohibited, large or commercial wastewater systems require additional review, groundwater recharge is provided for, and best management practices are required for storage of petroleum products.

The water distribution system, shown on the next page, is a gravity system with water flowing into the system from the reservoir. The water mains are ductile iron pipe (D.I.P.) for the older portions and plastic pipe for the newer portions. Water services are copper.

Water main breaks are common, often occurring during the winter months. Some are caused by frozen water pipes caused by insufficient cover or insulation; however, the most common cause is a fracture in the D.I.P. resulting from deterioration and stress in the pipe. As the D.I.P. water mains continue to deteriorate, water main breaks will become more frequent. A lot of the original piping has been replaced; however, some is still in use in the Alton Bay area. A portion of the water main on Main Street was recently replaced.

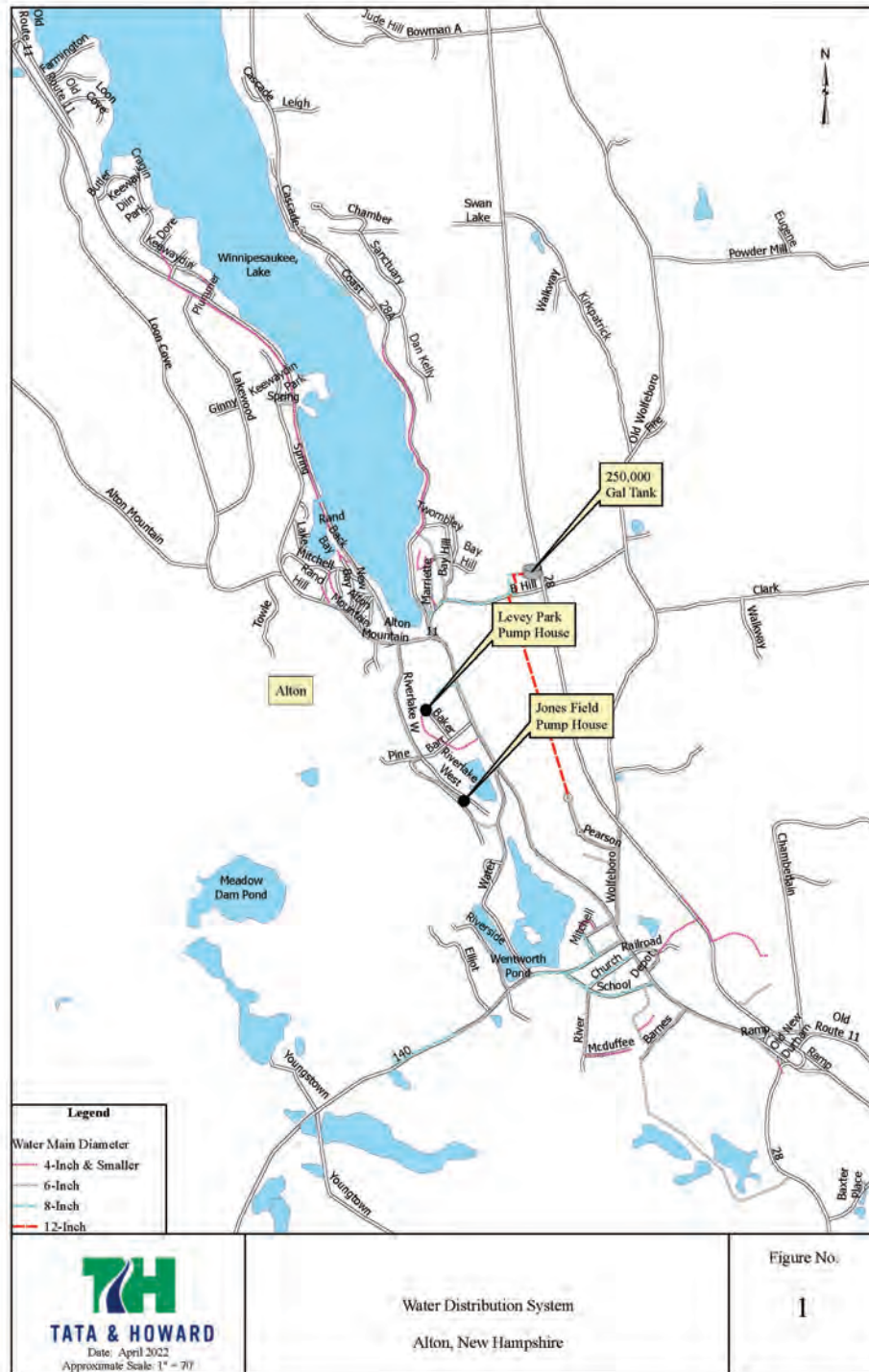
A study should be performed to determine what could be done to stem the deterioration and to extend the usable life of the existing pipes. A program of replacement should be developed and funded by means of the Capital Improvements Plan in preparation for the time when pipe maintenance becomes more expensive than its replacement. Pipe replacement should continue to be performed in conjunction with road reconstruction.

The Water Department contracted with Tata & Howard to perform a Hydraulic Model Study and Capital Efficiency Plan (CEP) which should be completed in fall of 2022. There could be the potential for growth of the water system if the Hydraulic Model Study indicates it can accept it. The current 250,000-gallon storage tank is in poor condition and needs to be replaced or repaired. However, the ability of the water supply system to accommodate a larger tank has not yet been determined. Older water mains are not always able to handle the higher pressure associated with a larger tank. The Capital Efficiency Plan will assist with planning, development and costing for replacement of the tank and distribution infrastructure.



Water meters need to be upgraded in order to conduct a water loss study. Most meters have not yet been replaced with electronic meters and some connections have no meters at all. A rate study will also be needed in order to develop the funding side of the capital plan.

WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM



#### RECOMMENDED WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Apply results of Tata & Howard Hydraulic Model Study and Capital efficiency Plan as foundation for program of conducting needed water system upgrades and replacements, including replacement or repair of water tank and water main replacements where needed.
- ✓ Replace water lines as needed in coordination with road construction projects as appropriate.
- ✓ Perform a study to determine what could be done to stem the deterioration and extend the useful life of existing pipes.
- ✓ Upgrade all meters to electronic meters.
- ✓ Conduct water loss study.

## 6.4 Recreation

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### Outdoor Recreation Facilities

#### *Railroad Square, Community Center, and Public Docks*

Alton Bay is the focus of Lake Winnepesaukee-based recreation activities in Alton. At the southern tip of the Bay, on the western shore, Town facilities include Railroad Square and Community Center and the Alton Bay Swim Dock. The Community Center is in the Alton Bay Railroad Station building, constructed in 1907 and remodeled to serve its current function in the late 1950s. Railroad Square and the Community Center are the center of activity with a bandstand for summer concerts; benches, walkways and picnic tables; the town boat dock and ramp; public parking; and restrooms that are open year-round. The swim dock has a lifeguard on duty in the summer. The water bandstand is a unique feature of Alton Bay. A proposal has been submitted to the NH Division of Historical Resources to place a New Hampshire Historical Highway Marker about the bandstand.

The park has an information kiosk and a staffed information center in the summer. Popular seasonal events include fireworks, Old Home Days, a farmers' market, craft fairs, "Harmony on the Lake" and Winter Carnival. Winter access to the Lake is available for ice fishing and

snowmobiles. Alton Bay also serves as one of five ports for the popular MS Mount Washington in the spring, summer and fall.

The Community Center is available for rental use for small functions. It has a handicap accessible restroom and a kitchen, although the kitchen is in need of updates.

The park itself is in need of upkeep such as repair of brick walkways, replacement and painting of boards on the decks, and other general maintenance. Work is currently underway to reconstruct the stone retaining walls at the Town docks.

Many master plan survey respondents expressed a need for more public docking space and more parking for the boat launch. Improvements are also needed to make docks accessible to those with disabilities. Boat trailer parking is currently available off-site on Letter S Road about a half mile away.

#### *Alton Bay Beach and Harmony Park*

Alton Bay Beach and Harmony Park are located on the eastern shore of the southern tip of Lake Winnepesaukee. The beach has benches and picnic shelters and a lifeguard on duty in the summer. The park has a picnic shelter and fishing access. Restrooms are open in the summer. Parking for these facilities is limited.

Numerous master plan survey respondents expressed a desire for a beach that is more family-friendly and away from the boat ramp. The size of the beach relative to use by both residents and visitors was also a concern, as well as the adequacy of parking.

#### *Ginny Douglas Park*

This small park is in Alton Village at the junction of Old Wolfeboro Road and NH Routes 11/28A. It includes benches, a walking path and flower gardens. A gazebo was donated to the Town, but is now in need of maintenance. The Alton Garden Club maintains the gardens and flower boxes.

#### *Levey Park*

This small park is located on Main Street (NH Routes 11/28A) north of the Bay. The park provides hiking/snowshoeing, a picnic area, scenic views, and drinking water access. This park is maintained by the Levey Park Trustees and has a conservation easement held by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests.

*York Park*

This small park is at the junction of Hopewell Road and Roberts Cove Road. It provides scenic views and a floral and forested pathway; however, parking is limited. It is maintained by volunteers.

*B & M Railroad Park*



This park is located on Depot Street on the site of the former Alton Railroad Station and is one of the newer parks in town. It was built by volunteers. The site includes a caboose, picnicking, playground area and nature boardwalk, walking path, restored freight buildings used by the Historical Society, and a parking area. The trails and buildings are in need of maintenance.

*Liberty Tree Park*

This park is located on NH Route 140 next to the Alton Fire Station. It is a multi-purpose park with facilities for tennis, volleyball, and basketball, as well as a skatepark and playground. There is also a canoe/kayak launch and portage on the Merrymeeting River. The tennis courts are heavily used for tennis and pickleball and often have a waiting list. The playground equipment and skatepark are at least 25 years old and need to be upgraded and made accessible to children with disabilities. Parking is an ongoing issue, especially when parking usage for other town facilities is high.

*Jones Field*

Jones Field provides the only athletic fields in town other than those at the Central School and High School. The field is located on Letter S Road off of NH Route 140. There is also a playground in addition to the two ballfields and bleachers. The volunteer-run Alton Youth League runs baseball and softball here. Field space is inadequate for existing programs. More

field space is needed for both outdoor free play and organized team sports. Both additional baseball and soccer fields are needed. This site is also a fishing access bordering the Merrymeeting River and Dam, with a steel pedestrian bridge. The boat trailer parking for the town launch on the Bay is also located here.

## Indoor Facilities

### *Pearson Road Community Center*



The Pearson Road Community Center provides social and recreational activities for seniors. The Center is operated by Community Action Program Belknap-Merrimack Counties. Senior lunches are also served here, and Meals on Wheels are distributed from the Center. The Center is available for rental use or for meetings of town organizations. The Center is in need of a new roof, other upkeep and a shaded outdoor use area.

### *West Alton/Mount Major Community Center*

This building was deeded over to the Town around 2018. It has not been used in many years and is need of many repairs and upgrades. The septic system is unknown and there is no parking. Further investigation is needed to see if the property could be sold or if the Town could have a deeded access from the nearby West Alton Fire Station.



### *Community Center Needs*

The need for a facility to serve the role as a community center for all ages was a high priority for many master plan survey respondents. A family-oriented community recreation facility was a similarly high priority for the community during the All in for Alton project in 2018. Indoor space is needed with one or two large rooms that could accommodate 25-30 people for after school programs for youth and evening adult programs. Gym space is also needed for youth and adult sports and exercise programs. There are underutilized facilities in town with the potential to serve these needs. Partnerships should be explored with the schools, churches and other community service organizations.

### **Conservation Areas**

Numerous conservation areas provide residents and visitors with a wide range of opportunities for walking, hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, wildlife watching, hunting, fishing and other passive recreation activities. Those listed below are large complexes made up of multiple properties conserved through a combination of public-private partnerships through both fee simple ownership and conservation easements where the private landowner still holds title to the land but the public has acquired certain rights.

- Rattlesnake Island – Lakes Region Conservation Trust – fee ownership
- Knight’s Pond – NH Fish & Game and Lakes Region Conservation Trust - fee ownership and conservation easement
- Cotton-Hurd Conservation Area –Lakes Region Conservation Trust – fee ownership

- Forte Point Woods -Trask Swamp Preserve - Lakes Region Conservation Trust – fee ownership
- Clough Town Forest – Town– fee ownership
- Gilman Pond Conservation Area– Town - fee ownership and conservation easement
- Alton Town Forest - Mike Burke Trails –Town fee ownership
- Marks Memorial Forest/Marks Wildlife Management Area – Society for the Protection of NH Forests, The Nature Conservancy, and NH Fish & Game – fee ownership
- Evelyn H. & Albert D. Morse, Sr. Preserve - Society for the Protection of NH Forests – fee ownership and conservation easement
- Merrymeeting Marsh Wildlife Management Area/Cates – NH Fish & Game and New England Forestry Foundation – conservation easement
- Joy State Forest – NH Division of Forests and Lands - fee ownership
- Alton Bay State Forest - NH Division of Forests and Lands - fee ownership

Although not all conservation easements on private land provide for public access, when adjoining other conservation lands that are owned by public entities or nonprofit conservation groups, these protected lands enhance the enjoyment of adjacent public lands by providing a buffer and additional wildlife habitat.

## Public Access

The NH Fish and Game Department operates Downing’s Landing on the southern tip of Lake Winnepesaukee. This public boat launch has a recently upgraded double ramp and boat trailer parking.

Despite the abundance of surface waters and many miles of shoreline in Alton, public access to the water for boating, fishing, swimming and wading is very limited except for Downing’s Landing and the nearby Town-owned facilities. There are three other very small Town-owned accesses to Lake Winnepesaukee. One is Echo Point, a car-top access with no parking. Another is at Robert’s Cove with very limited parking, and the other is West Side/ Riley Road Beach on the Gilford townline, with a deck and very limited parking. These accesses both serve more as neighborhood amenities than Town facilities.

On other lakes and ponds in Alton, access is very limited. There is a small Town-owned launch on Halfmoon Lake for small boats. Parking is very limited and there is no access for trailers. Knight’s Pond Conservation Area allows limited cartop access. Gilman Pond Conservation Area also allows cartop boats but is carry-in only. There is one public access to Sunset Lake at

the end of Blueberry Lane, but the access is severely eroded. As of 2022, the Town is working to rebuild this access.

Two Town-owned parks - Liberty-Tree Park and Jones Field Park - offer access to the Merrymeeting River for fishing and cartop boats. These are both important amenities to the community due to their location near the village areas and other Town facilities.

## Trails

Alton is fortunate to have an abundance of hiking trails for all abilities. The major trails and trail networks are:

- Belknap Mountains – There are 65 miles of hiking trails available in the Belknap Mountains. These can be accessed from three trailheads in Alton – Alton Mountain Road Trailhead, Mount Major Trailhead on NH Route 11 and the Steinwachs Trailhead on Reed Road.
- The Alton Town Forest on Avery Hill Road has trailhead parking for the Mike Burke Trail and the Forest Society’s Morse Preserve.
- The Quannippi Trail runs from Liberty Tree Park near the fire station on NH Route 140, along Letter S Road to Jones Field, then follows River Lake Street to the Bay ending at the Railroad Station.
- The John Racine Trail follows the rail bed from the B&M Railroad Park to the traffic light at Hannaford on NH Route 28.
- The Lakeshore Rail Trail runs from Mount Major Park to West Alton Marina, crossing Woodlands Road twice and Minge Cove Road. It is maintained for snowmobiling by the Mount Major Snowmobile Club.

[Mount Major Snowmobile Club](#) (MMSC) is the 5th oldest snowmobile club in the state (Baysider Newspaper, January 27, 2022). The club was formed in 1970 and currently has 325 members. The existence of the big lake and many miles of hiking trails make Alton an ideal location for snowmobiling. Over many years the MMSC been able to gain permission from 110+ generous landowners to connect these trails into a trail system. The State’s Corridor Trail 22 connects to the 7000+ miles of trails in the State of New Hampshire. MMSC has 55+ miles of trails of which about 40 miles are groomed.

## Outreach and Education

Despite the wide range of recreation facilities and areas provided by numerous public and nonprofit entities, quite a few master plan survey respondents identified a need for more outdoor recreation opportunities. Although some of this was related to specific needs or



desires such as more Lake access or a rail trail to connect with other towns, some may also be an indication that not all residents are aware of all of the opportunities there are in town. A widely available simple map with all of the Town and State facilities and lands, along with any that private nonprofits desire to include, could help address this need. An app connected to online data about each facility and conservation area would also increase awareness. The Parks & Recreation Department has a great start toward this with the inclusion of the park list in the activities brochure and the website content with details and maps for each park.

## Ongoing Maintenance

Maintenance of outdoor recreation areas is a challenge for small towns like Alton with large seasonal populations and a high degree of tourism. A certain percentage of the rooms and meals tax revenues is distributed to municipalities based on population, some goes into school loans and tourism promotion, and most goes to the state's general fund. None of it is used in a way that helps towns offset the cost of providing recreation (or safety) facilities and services to visitors. This leaves towns like Alton having to choose between funding recreation facilities and other safety, transportation and public works needs. Much is accomplished with the help of community groups such as the Alton Business Association and the Alton Garden Club and with volunteers.

## Other Nearby Recreation Resources

### *Gunstock Recreation Area*

The Gunstock Recreation Area in neighboring Gilford is owned by Belknap County and overseen by the five-member Gunstock Area Commission. Gunstock began with ski trails developed by a local group of skiers. In the 1930s the WPA expanded the ski trails and other facilities. Both downhill and cross-country skiing is available as well as both summer and winter camping. More recent improvements have included development of three-season activities as well as night skiing and tubing.

### *Belknap Mountain State Forest*

Another recreation resource available to Alton residents and visitors is the Belknap Mountain State Forest in Gilford. This large complex of recreation land is comprised of several large conservation easements in addition to the state forest itself. It includes the top of Belknap Mountain and an extensive hiking trail network.

### *Brewster Beach*

Brewster Beach is located in Wolfeboro a short distance from Alton. The beach is operated by the Wolfeboro Department of Parks and Recreation on the grounds of Wolfeboro Academy. Lifeguards are on duty during the summer and swim lessons are available.

#### RECOMMENDED RECREATION ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Conduct deferred maintenance and equipment upgrades at parks, trails and facilities through a combination of organized volunteer work days, equipment sponsorships and the Town's capital and maintenance budgets.
- ✓ Explore partnerships with the schools or other community groups to provide additional ballfields.
- ✓ If property becomes available for an additional town beach, look for a nonprofit organization to partner with who can purchase the property for a temporary period in order to enable time for a capital campaign and grant writing.
- ✓ Assess the demand and unmet need for boat docking and trailer parking and evaluate public, private, and public/private options.
- ✓ Explore partnerships with the schools, churches and other community groups to address need for space for indoor community activities.
- ✓ Develop and make widely available a map of the town's recreation areas and trailheads.
- ✓ Develop an app to connect users with data about recreation areas and trails.

## 6.5 Dams

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The NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) Dam Inventory includes over thirty active dams in Alton. These include structures associated with wastewater lagoons, recreation, conservation, agriculture, stormwater detention, and fire protection. The vast majority of these are considered to be “Non-Menaces” or exempt from periodic inspections due to the nature and location of the structure and/or height of the structure and size of the impoundment. Several are considered to be “Low Hazard” meaning failure would not result in any loss of life and only low loss of property. Both “Non-Menace” and “Low Hazard” dams are inspected by the NHDES Dam Bureau every six years.

Two dams in Alton are considered to have “High Hazard” potential, meaning that due to the location and size, failure or misoperation would result in probable loss of human life. These are the Alton Power Dam and the Sunset Lake Dam. The Alton Power Dam is 190 ft. long and 16 ft. high and impounds 719 acres of the Merrymeeting River including Wentworth Pond. This dam is owned by NH Fish & Game. Failure of this dam would impact structures and roads between the dam and Lake Winnepesaukee at Alton Bay. Sunset Lake Dam is 130 ft. long and 17 ft. high and impounds a tributary of the Suncook River to form the 205-acre Sunset Lake. This dam is privately-owned but controlled and operated by NH Department of Environmental Services.

The 1996 breach of the Bergeron Dam on Meadow Pond was a reminder of the importance of proper maintenance of active dams. When the dam failed, it sent a wall of water rushing downhill to NH Route 140, threatening lives and nearly washing away a small neighborhood. One woman died; homeowners sustained more than \$5 million in damages. This man-made disaster changed the way the state inspects dams (<https://www.wmur.com/article/memories-still-fresh-of-alton-dam-disaster-20-years-ago-1/5209313#>).

### RECOMMENDED DAMS ACTION ITEM

- ✓ Ensure that dam owners conduct upkeep and required repairs. Assist with identification of potential funding sources when appropriate.

## 6.6 Cemeteries

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The town's two main cemeteries are the Old Riverside Cemetery on Main Street (across from Dunkin Donuts) and the New Riverside Cemetery at 124 Suncook Valley Road (NH Route 28). These are both active burial grounds and lots are still available for purchase at the New Riverside Cemetery. Expansion plans are being developed to add an additional 750+ burial plots to the New Riverside Cemetery.

The Town is also responsible for seven older, smaller cemeteries, including:

- Alton Bay Cemetery - Main St. (near the Parks & Recreation Office)
- West Alton Cemetery – NH Route 11A
- Ellis Cemetery - Alton Mountain Road
- Dr. John Morrison Cemetery - 239 Henry Wilson Highway (south of Alton circle towards New Durham)
- Pinkham / Bradley Cemetery - 55 Valley Road
- Crockett Cemetery - 76 Valley Road (off Dobbins Way)
- Kimball / Morrison Cemetery -corner of Prospect Mtn Road & Stonewall Road

The Town cemeteries are governed by Cemetery Trustees, which is the Alton Board of Selectmen. The Cemeteries' care and maintenance is managed by the Cemetery Department within the new Public Works Department. The Cemetery Department "Sexton" manages, oversee, and authorizes burials in the cemeteries. The Cemetery Department has a staff who maintain the grounds and handle burials. The staffing varies seasonally as the cemeteries close during the winter months, at which time the staff transfers to assist the Grounds & Maintenance and Highway Departments within the Public Work Department.

### RECOMMENDED CEMETERIES ACTION ITEM

- ✓ Implement expansion plans for New Riverside Cemetery.

## 6.7 Information Technology

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### Introduction

Sixty years ago, telecommunications were entirely analog and focused on voice, with data transmissions occurring over voice lines. Today, telecommunications are almost entirely digital and there is little differentiation between voice, data, graphics and video. Sixty years ago, information technology typically referred to computing and data services, usually associated with business activities. Today, computing and data services have become ubiquitous and are used in everyday life as well as business. The term “information technology” or “IT” now encompasses both.

The *Community Services* section below focuses on the evolution of telecommunications as it relates to Alton businesses and residents. The *Municipal Services* sections that follow examine the evolution of cross-functional and business-specific IT services used by the various departments of town government.

### Community Services

Today, the telecommunications services available to consumers in Alton are defined by the physical mediums used: land lines (telephone), cable, satellite, fiber optics, cellular and Wi-Fi. So long as the physical media defined the functions serviced, individual service providers competed within their specific domains.

Factors that define physical media are capacity (bandwidth), round trip time (latency), and deployment / use expense (cost). Each media type can satisfy two of the three factors.

Wider deployment of fiber optics along with recent advances in cellular communications allow all three factors to be satisfied at the same time. Fiber optic technology satisfies the bandwidth and latency requirements; however, it is very expensive to connect the network to each individual home and business, the segment of the internet infrastructure known as “the last mile.” 5G cellular technology satisfies all three factors with significant range restrictions. Over the next 10 years, the combination of fiber optics and 5G is expected to rearrange the telecommunications landscape in terms of which companies supply what services. At the same time, federal funding is being made available with the goal of providing cost effective high-capacity broadband service to rural areas. One approach currently being explored by one of Alton’s three electric power providers is to supply Wi-Fi service directly to customers in Alton using fiber with high bandwidth short range (one quarter mile) 5G equipment mounted on the utility poles.

Alton is currently serviced by three companies supplying terrestrial services: TDS, Breezeline, and Consolidated Communications. Satellite services are provided by Direct TV (subsidiary of AT&T) and DISH. Cellular companies include Verizon, AT&T, US Cellular and T Mobile. Other companies such as Comcast are likely to become active here in the future.

Some Alton customers will continue to use their current service providers, usually more than one. Others will migrate to a single provider where voice, data, and mobile are contained in a single bill. TV is migrating from a single provider situation to a la carte streaming services.

Due to the varied topography of Alton, mobile phone coverage has always been problematic. Cell towers located on Prospect Mountain, near Alton Bay, and near the NH Route 28/28A junction provide most of the cell phone service for Alton. Other towers in Gilford and Wolfeboro provide coverage for parts of Lake Winnepesaukee and East Alton. Significant dead spots remain. Additional towers will also be needed to support higher bandwidth 5G service because although the higher frequency radio waves carry more data, they also have a shorter range.

Currently the Zoning Ordinance only allows cell towers in the Rural Zone. Both the Zoning Ordinance and Site Plan Review Regulations need to be reviewed periodically to ensure that they provide for advances in technology in a manner consistent with protection of the town's character and scenic beauty. Current and proposed service coverage maps overlaid with maps of desired residential and business growth areas and zoning districts would provide valuable information.

## **Municipal Services**

### *Cross-Functional Considerations*

#### SECURITY

The Town has maintained an above-average security posture since 2013. Several improvements have been made to strengthen the data, computer and network security of town departments. However, the Town should consider implementing new technologies, controls, and processes to thwart more advanced and changing cyber-attacks coming in the future. Sole reliance on gateway security technology should be avoided; rather a defense in depth methodology paired with a recognized roadmap for security control (such as CIS Controls / NIST Standards) should be implemented to mitigate as much risk as possible. Adjustments to the budget and pursuit of available grants may be necessary to improve

security. All plans to change infrastructure/operations should consider security and implications/improvements.

The Town has done well with security over the years, but we could be working more proactively to implement some stronger control. It is imperative that the Town follows a recognized roadmap for ongoing security improvements in the future. The town should consider security and potential impacts in all of its dealings.

#### COMMUNICATIONS

The Town has greatly improved its communication infrastructure over the years through proactive measures made by the IT Department. New technologies such as VoIP (voice over internet protocol) have cut costs drastically (in excess of \$10k per year) on operation costs.

We should continue to be open to the implementation of new communication technologies. Email communication has been traditionally maintained in-house since 2003. The town should consider moving its email services to a cloud-based provider – perhaps first implementing a hybrid (cloud and local) setup as a low-cost approach to implementation. Many of Microsoft’s existing software technologies encourage this setup.

Individual department adoption of social media should be considered and implemented if deemed a necessary method of communication. Several departments have taken their own steps in this direction already. The Town should maintain supervisory access to these accounts to prevent any sort of purposeful or mistaken miscommunication.

The availability and reliability of new methods (5G, fiber, and satellite) of connecting to the internet should be considered. New technologies are relatively young; however, these very same technologies could become the standard method of tomorrow’s internet access.

The Town has done well in the past by remaining flexible in its approach to new technologies. We should continue to approach new communication technology in this way. Some legacy systems (such as the on-site email server) should be retired and moved to a more flexible cloud platform to reduce overhead and improve security, resilience, and accessibility. Replacing legacy communication channels and staying current is a top priority. Departments should consider if social media is an effective communication channel, and if so, proceed with utilizing it. Adjustments to the budget and pursuit of available grants may be necessary to improve communications infrastructure.

#### HARDWARE/SOFTWARE

The Town has slowly fallen behind over the years on replacing outdated hardware technology. In addition, software has traditionally been outdated and it has been a very slow process to move departments to completely new software systems. There is an associated expense for database migrations in addition to the purchase of new software.

The Town now has a regular computer and server replacement program in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) to effectively budget for and replace systems on a more regular basis. The CIP will be utilized over the years to appropriately budget for the replacement of outdated technology. The need for in-house servers may be reduced as more database and software services move to the cloud.

The need for mobile technology has greatly increased over the years. This will continue to be a need moving into the future. For example, conversion desktop/laptop tablet systems have become more practical for work-from-home scenarios and an increasingly mobile workforce.

Increased capital may be needed to cover the replacement of more technological resources as demand for new technologies increases. For example, replacement planning for physical security equipment has become necessary as most Town buildings have installed or are planning to install camera and access control equipment.

The age and operational health of IT hardware and software should be considered a top priority for the Town. This priority should take into consideration changes in requirements and needs. A regular plan to replace hardware should be used continuously in order to stay current with ever-changing technological needs.

#### FILE / RECORDS MANAGEMENT

There is a major need to convert paper records to digital. The Town is currently investigating solutions. Some departments are further along in this process. There are costs associated with setting up a system for digital record-keeping, converting paper files to digital and maintaining the system. In addition, all record keeping must comply with the requirements of *Chapter 91-A Access to Governmental Records and Meetings*.

#### FINANCIAL SERVICES

Only a few departments can accept credit cards and online payments for Town services. Building and Solid Waste are two examples where acceptance of credit card payments would be beneficial. In addition to the added convenience to the public, credit card payments allow



for easier tracking of transactions. Any additional credit card payment terminals would require their own Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) compliance validation annually.

Inter-departmental account management is also a need. Allowing department heads read-only access to their accounts in real time would not only save time but would also raise awareness, and would encourage better account management practices amongst department heads.

#### PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic brought changes in the way the public consumes information and interacts with public bodies. Hybrid meetings, with options for either in-person or online participation, have been found by many communities to increase public engagement. Hybrid meetings also enable members of a Town committee to continue to participate if they are unable to attend in person, such as following an injury or tending to an ill family member. Alton should maintain and build upon the progress made in this area during the pandemic, including improvements to the Town Hall meeting room.

#### *Department-Specific Considerations*

Some future planning considerations related to each department's specific information technology needs are listed below.

#### FIRE/RESCUE DEPARTMENT

- Use of drone technology in emergency response.
- 5G / Satellite internet access, possible use in field and emergency operations. (4G services currently in use.)
- Utilization of centralized Town Geographic Information System (GIS) in department activities, adding department-specific layers
- Automating Burn Permitting and other department-specific processes with use of expanding website technologies.
- Continued utilization of Town's WAN Fiber network, established in 2007, as a means of access to centrally and securely access internet and network resources.
- Updates to Access Control Systems / Physical Security.
- Document Management Solutions – Digitization.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

- Use of drone technology in emergency response.
- Potential for body-worn camera mandates.
- Utilization of centralized Town GIS in department activities, adding department-specific layers.
- 5G / Satellite internet access, possible use in field and emergency operations. (4G services currently in use.)
- Migration to cloud-based SAAS platform.
- Potential county level adoption of IMC Switch (Hub and Spoke network). Most other counties have done this already. Belknap is slow to adopt but the potential exists for this adoption.
- Continued utilization of Town's WAN Fiber network, established in 2007, as a means of access to centrally and securely access internet and network resources.
- Maintaining security pace with State requirements (VPN, security requirements).
- Updates to Access Control Systems / Physical Security.
- Document Management Solutions – Digitization.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

- Utilization of centralized Town GIS in department activities, adding department-specific layers.
- 5G / Satellite internet access.
- Mobile workforce solutions.
- Secure SCADA systems for water utilities.
- SAAS platform for Parks and Recreation Management that can handle online signup, take payments, and enable registration tracking for events.
- Continued utilization of Town's WAN Fiber network, established in 2007, as a means of access to centrally and securely access internet and network resources.
- Enabling Credit Card payments at the Solid Waste Center.
- Updates to Access Control Systems / Physical Security.
- Document Management Solutions – Digitization.

LAND USE DEPARTMENTS (BUILDING, PLANNING)

- Utilization of centralized Town GIS in department activities, adding department-specific layers.
- Mobile workforce solutions.

- Enabling Credit Card payments at the Building Department.
- Document Management Solutions – Digitization.

TOWN CLERK / TAX COLLECTOR

- Continuing use of Credit Card payments, security upkeep.
- Maintaining pace with State requirements (VPN, security requirements).
- Document Management Solutions – Digitization.
- Migration from old tax software to new tax platform – perhaps one that integrates seamlessly with Assessing software/database.

ASSESSING DEPARTMENT

- Utilization of centralized Town GIS in department activities, adding department-specific layers.
- Mobile workforce solutions.
- 5G / Satellite internet access. (4G services currently in use.)

RECOMMENDED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACTION ITEMS

- ✓ Support efforts to provide fiber throughout town.
- ✓ Review Zoning Ordinance and Site Plan Review Regulations for telecommunications tower requirements to ensure they accommodate advances in technology.
- ✓ Include IT in the CIP and ensure that funds are budgeted regularly to keep up with technology and security needs.
- ✓ Continue to improve upon the ability to offer hybrid meetings to the public to increase participation and transparency.