

Chapter 1

Vision



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1.0 THE RECENT PAST

Farmington is a community in transition. In fact, it has been in transition for some time. Although geographically on the fringe of the New Hampshire Seacoast Region, Farmington has been dramatically impacted by the surge in population in that area. As real estate prices have risen in the Seacoast and other parts of Rockingham County, many people have moved further inland seeking more moderately priced housing. This has brought many new individuals to Farmington.

In 1970 the US Census recorded a population of 3,588 people in Farmington. Today that figure is estimated by Applied Economic Research (AER) to be on the order of 6800, an 89% increase in slightly over thirty years. Growth in Farmington exceeded that in Strafford County in general, albeit only slightly, in each of the decades between 1970 and 2000.

Farmington's growth has not been even, in terms of the economic characteristics of the new citizens. In 1990, Farmington's median household income (\$31,112) was 95% of the same figure for Strafford County. In 2000, the current figure (\$40,971) was only 91% of the county median household income. It would appear that many of the new residents have been at the low and moderate end of the income scale.

Between 1990 and 2000, Farmington issued building permits for 213 new housing units. Of those permits, 46% of them were for mobile homes. This is the largest concentration of new mobile homes of any community in the area, except for the City of Rochester, which had 48% of its growth in mobile homes. On average, mobile homes represented only 18% of the new housing units in Barrington, Middleton, Milton, New Durham, and Strafford.

At the same time that Farmington has been receiving new residents who are living in lower value residential units, it has been losing employment, both in raw numbers of jobs and as a percentage of jobs in the region. Between 1993 and 2002 Farmington had a net loss of nearly 17 jobs for a current total of some 1600 and a loss of some 255 from its peak employment of 1855 positions in 1996. Its share of the regional job base declined as well, from 4.2% in 1993 to 3.7% in 2002. Rochester, by contrast, saw its percentage of regional jobs hold fairly steady, dropping only from 78% in 1991 to 77% at present.

These are important issues for Farmington. A larger population base in the community requires additional services. And yet, Farmington's new taxable property is largely in lower value residential units, not in the higher value commercial and industrial facilities that are used to house an expanding employment base. These circumstances set the stage for a series of questionnaires and visioning sessions undertaken by the Farmington Zoning and Master Plan Committee beginning in the autumn of 2003.

2.0 THE PRESENT

Despite its recent growth, Farmington retains its “small town” feel, and much of its rural character. People like that. They like knowing their neighbors. They like the way people volunteer and help each other out, both as individuals and through a variety of social and civic groups. They like the multi-generational nature of many of the activities here, and the variety of people, families, and income levels present in the community.

People like Farmington’s downtown, with its village character and layout. They like the village’s architecture. There is a concern about the low level of business activity here, however. There is a concern that this lack of economic vitality is leading to a lack of reinvestment and maintenance in both public and private properties. They cite both buildings and sidewalks that need repairs. There is a concern about enforcement of building and life safety codes in this area.

People are concerned about the lack of employment opportunities in Farmington in general. They are concerned about this both from the economic impact on individuals and families, and from the impact on the tax base. People are concerned about the degree that increased demands on services will generate increased tax bills for residential property owners. They do not wish to see Farmington become just a bedroom community.

People are concerned about the amount and the rate of population growth in Farmington. They are concerned about it changing the social dynamic of a small town. They are concerned about its impact on the natural environment and the rural landscape. They are concerned about the economic impact of the new population growth on existing residents, absent an expanding commercial and industrial tax base.

People are concerned about a variety of social issues. Some speak of a lack of activities for youth. Older residents speak of a hesitancy to walk downtown, not only because of a lack of sidewalks and the poor condition of some existing sidewalks, but also because of loitering there by younger people. Some express concern about substance abuse in the community.

Residents are concerned about education in a number of ways. People worry about the cost – as well as the quality - of public education. Many residents don’t understand how the school district is spending their money. Others are concerned that there are not enough opportunities for adult education despite Farmington’s low educational attainment (20% lower than the state average) and relatively high drop-out rate.

3.0 THE FUTURE - A VISION FOR 2020

And yet, despite all of their concerns, there are indications that people in Farmington are becoming more hopeful about the future. They have lots of ideas and suggestions, things that they have seen work in other communities, things they would like to see either developed or brought back to Farmington. The recent introduction of broadcasting of public meetings on public access cable seems to be facilitating a new sense of openness that is drawing even more people to become involved. People seem genuinely ready to work to bring some changes to bear,

so as to preserve that small town atmosphere that either brought them here, or made them decide to stay here. In particular, by the year 2020, people hope to see that...

As Farmington has continued to grow, it has captured the energy of both current and new residents. It has developed teams and strategies to undertake a variety of activities that have helped it to retain its small town character and rural atmosphere, to expand its economic base, and to engage its citizens in a variety of social venues. People are especially hopeful that by 2020, Farmington will have benefited from the following actions:

Farmington has created a more vibrant downtown, by:

Examining alternative traffic patterns, parking configurations, building design standards and other strategies that would improve the function and appeal of downtown.

Creating a more people-friendly downtown with a community police presence.

Securing funds from outside sources with which to assist and stimulate further private investment in the area.

Farmington has created a stronger local economy, by:

Utilizing Route 11 as a center for industrial and commercial development while retaining it as an effective travel corridor.

Controlling municipal costs to help residents have more disposable income to spend locally.

Working cooperatively with state and regional economic development entities.

Creating an incubator program through which to train and assist local entrepreneurs in creating and growing existing Farmington businesses.

Pursuing creative, competitive strategies that offer new and expanding businesses features that other communities don't offer, including grants and integrated transportation, recreation, and trail planning.

Farmington has actively worked to preserve the quality of life of residents, by:

Strengthening development regulations to both protect important natural features and to promote a higher quality of development.

Pursuing a stronger program of building code enforcement.

Ensuring that new development contributes fairly towards the cost of the services it requires.

Remaining on a par with surrounding communities with respect to the pace of development.

Implementing a comprehensive transportation plan that includes sidewalks, access management, and policies governing road maintenance and upgrades.

Residents interact with a town government that they feel is responsive and effective, because:

Municipal leaders encourage participation in meetings with town boards and committees by finding new ways to inform and engage residents.

The town has created and maintained policies that encourage openness and the contributions of residents.

The town has pursued strategies to control tax rates by increasing the assessed value of new construction and by other means.

Farmington has created more social and recreational opportunities for its citizens, by:

Tailoring the recreational program to serve junior high and high-school youth as well as the very young and seniors.

Establishing a community events area in which to host outdoor civic events, flea markets, auto shows, and fairs.

Establishing a program of quarterly public events, such as

Old Home Day	Community Picnics	Skating and Sledding Parties
Band Concerts	Bon Fires	Parades

Creating and expanding a network of multi-use recreational trails, and parks linking the downtown center to a variety of in-town and out-of-town locations

4.0 AFTERTHOUGHT

A grand vision? Perhaps. Too grand for a community the size of Farmington? Absolutely not! It may be ambitious, but so be it. The point of a Vision *is* to be grand, to stretch ourselves, to see how all of the pieces fit together. So let's get started!! If we only achieve 80% of the vision, we will still be better off than we were when we started!!