

Chapter 2

Land Use



Downtown Farmington

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Changes in demographics, evolving housing demand, and the economic and conservation needs discussed throughout this plan are all factors that have a direct influence on Farmington's land use patterns. Land is a finite resource, and the thoughtful planning for present and future land use is an issue for all communities. Since 19[] Farmington has regulated land uses with a zoning ordinance which is based on the Farmington Master Plan. New Hampshire RSA 674:2 II (B) requires master plans to have a vision and a land use section at a minimum. This master plan also includes several of the suggested chapters that further support the vision and land use chapters. How a community decides to use its land base clearly has a direct impact on natural resources, on community character, on transportation infrastructure, and on housing affordability, the tax base, and the cost of providing services.



Main Street Businesses

Attitudes toward the land have changed considerably over the past decade. Experience has taught us that land is a complicated resource, and that one parcel of land may be better suited to a particular use than another. Natural factors such as slope, soil, groundwater, and surface water may vary across the landscape and growing communities must take these factors into consideration when planning their future, or face a decreasing quality of life.

Farmington, along with other New Hampshire communities, is growing. With this growth come changes in land use. Fields and meadows become residential areas, or commercial sites. Forests are cleared and built upon, and new roads and other services become necessary. Land once considered undesirable for development becomes more attractive as prime sites are consumed. Steep slopes, wetlands, and other sensitive environmental areas become more susceptible to development as land becomes more and more expensive. This growth and development activity reinforces the need for a master plan which can address all of these factors and illustrate how Farmington would like to grow.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify land use trends in Farmington, discuss how regulations impact such trends, and offer recommendations as to what regulatory and non-regulatory steps should be taken in the future to meet the growing housing, economic, environmental, and land

use needs of the community. Existing land use is a key element to consider when attempting to predict and influence the direction of future growth. Farmington still has three distinctly different geographic areas, with each displaying different patterns and types of development. These areas are the downtown area and associated neighborhoods east of NH Route 11, the NH Route 11 Corridor, and the rural portions of Farmington west of NH Route 11.

2.0 HISTORIC LAND USE PATTERNS

Farmington is located in the northern edge of the rapidly growing Seacoast Region of New Hampshire. The community is also just south of the Lakes and White Mountain Regions. This places Farmington in a key commuter and tourist traffic corridor. Because of this unique set of circumstances, Farmington has experienced increasing development pressure, including areas along the main transportation corridor, NH Route 11. Elsewhere in the community, and overall, the largest development pressure has been from residential development.

The acreage calculations for all of the recorded land uses in Farmington can be found in Table 2-1 below for 1962, 1974, 1998, and 2004. From 1960 to 2000 Farmington's population grew by 91%, climbing from 3,287 to 6,303 persons. During the same general time period (1962 to 2004) Farmington's land uses also changed, and the changes have been documented on Maps  and .

Table 2-1 Land Use Change 1962 - 2004

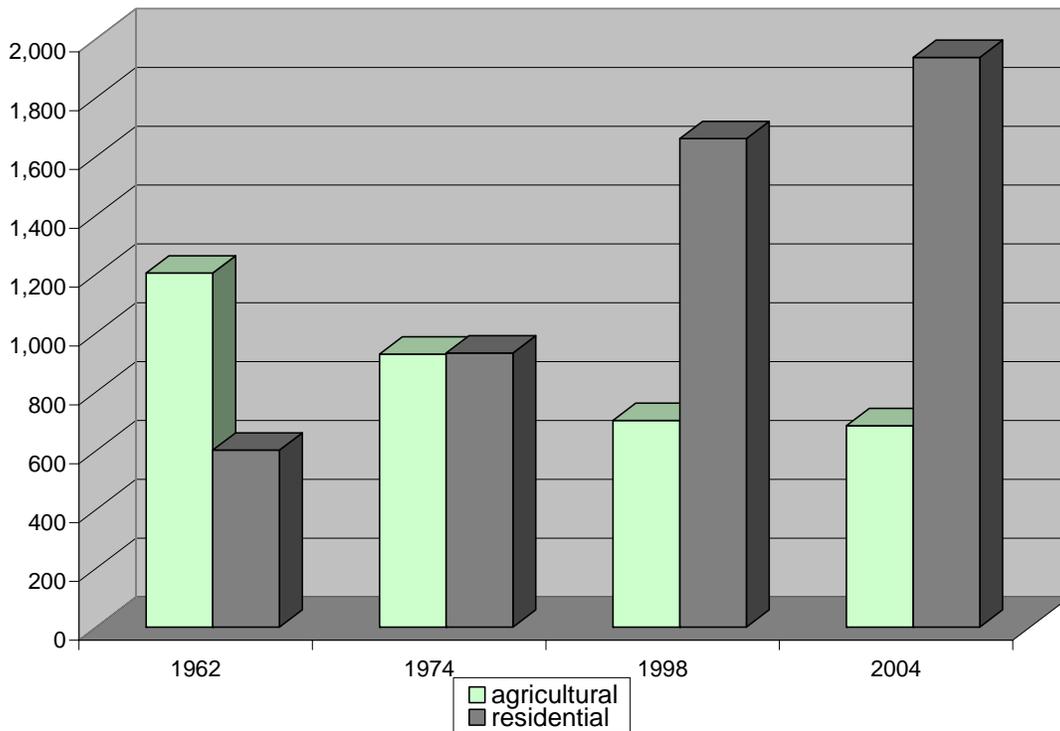
Land Use Description	Acres 1962	Acres 1974	Acre Change 1962-1974	Acres 1998	Acre Change 1974-1998	Acres 2004	Acre Change 1998 - 2004	Acre Change 1962-2004
Residential	601.5	931.8	330.3	1661.1	729.3	1934.6	273.5	1333.1
Industrial / Commercial	33.5	76.6	43.2	148.6	71.9	188.8	40.2	155.4
Mixed Urban	83.4	50.4	-33.0	85.4	35.0	109.9	24.5	26.5
Roads ¹	324.5	345.7	21.1	394.3	48.6	408.2	14.0	83.7
Railroads ¹	17.0	17.0	0.0	16.1	-0.9	16.1	0.0	-0.9
Auxillary Transportation	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2
Playing Fields / Rec	7.1	7.2	0.1	92.6	85.4	126.4	33.8	119.3
Agriculture	1204.4	928.1	-276.4	702.9	-225.2	685.4	-17.5	-519.0
Farmsteads	68.5	52.2	-16.3	65.4	13.2	65.4	0.0	-3.1
Forested	20048.3	19817.4	-230.9	18900.6	-916.8	18582.0	-318.5	-1466.3
Water ¹	283.3	336.6	53.4	384.2	47.5	383.5	-0.7	100.2
Open Wetland ¹	227.9	334.6	106.7	430.4	95.8	430.4	0.0	202.5
Idle/ Other Open	740.5	741.9	1.4	758.2	16.3	709.2	-49.0	-31.3
Total Acres	23639.9	23639.9		23639.9		23640.1		

Note:

1 – Some land uses actually show a slight decrease where one may not exist. This is because the process used to convert the aerial photograph data into GIS maps generates minor change from time period to time period that is capturing map quality and interpretation differences as opposed to landscape change.

Analysis of this Table also reveals that the amount of agricultural land in Farmington was reduced by 43%, and the forestlands were reduced by 7%, during this forty year time period. The largest land use changes are the 222% increase in residential land uses, and the 519% increase in industrial and commercial land uses during this time period. Figure 2-2 illustrates the trends created by changes in the amount of residential and agricultural land uses in Farmington.

Figure 2-2 Residential and Agricultural Land Use Trends



3.0 EXISTING LAND USE PATTERNS

Farmington covers 23,639 acres and now displays a typical land use pattern prevalent throughout the region: concentrated mixed use development in the downtown area; an automobile-oriented highway commercial corridor; scattered rural development; and working landscapes. Overall, the community is still largely rural in nature, with a downtown village at its core. The community has experienced a great deal of land use change during the past forty years. Forestlands now account for less than 80% of the town. Meanwhile, residential uses account for more than 10% of Farmington’s land area, and industrial/commercial uses account for 1%. Residential uses impact an even larger area than Table 2-1 represents because the balance of

their lots, often identified as forest or agriculture on the land use maps, are actually residential in nature.

Although the loss of agricultural lands and properties with key natural resources is of great concern to residents, the larger concern is the spread of development across Farmington's landscape. This relatively low density development is costly to the community because of the need to provide town services to a larger area (police, fire, school busing, road maintenance, etc.), and it blurs the edges between the urban and rural portions of the community. If this trend continues, the community will most likely become more suburban in nature, and will risk losing its distinctly New England character.



New Subdivision Activity off Route 75

3.1 Downtown

The original centers in Farmington were the villages in the western part of the community, but the railroad and mills drew a large portion of the population and the related activities to an area that now encompasses the downtown. The majority of Farmington's more intense development is now east of NH Route 11. Located at the intersection of NH Routes 153 and 75, the town center is the focus of residential, commercial, governmental, and community functions. Historically, this was also where the major industrial employment opportunities were located. The industrial sector has gradually moved out to NH Route 11 due to easier access to regional and interstate transportation facilities, and the decline of manufacturing facilities in the downtown area has continued due to economic trends

The downtown area is served by public water and sewer and a well developed street network, all allowing a relatively high density of development. Although commercial development has been increasingly moving out to NH Route 11, the downtown still provides a large number of commercial and service related activities focused mainly on serving local residents. The commercial development of downtown exhibits the characteristics of a traditional compact New England village. Commercial structures are two to three stories tall, constructed of wood and brick, and complement each other well. The downtown is the only area in Farmington that exhibits this concentrated, commercial land use pattern. Farmington's Town Hall, police station, fire station, public library, post office, and all of the public schools are within, or directly adjacent to, the downtown area. Farmington's major private recreational area, the Farmington Country Club, is also directly adjacent to the downtown.

Residential development in the eastern portion of Farmington is primarily in the downtown area, with the exception of Chestnut Hill Road, which is roughly parallel to Route 11 and east of the Cocheco River, and is a heavily developed residential road. Residential development in the downtown consists mostly of older, two-story homes on small lots served by both town water and town sewer. The sidewalk system is extensive throughout the downtown area. While there are some maintenance issues, walking to commercial and governmental uses is easily

accomplished. There is an interest in seeing the system of sidewalks expanded, better linking the downtown, school, and recreational sites. The existing residential development on the outskirts of the downtown in this eastern section of Farmington is becoming increasingly suburban in character. Homes are generally newer than in the town center, and the lots are often larger. The houses generally sit back from the road and are surrounded by large lawns and trees.

3.2 NH Route 11 Corridor

The NH Route 11 Corridor is the major transportation feature in Farmington, and carries a large amount of through traffic heading north and south. According to the NH Department of Transportation, the average annual daily traffic on NH Route 11 continues to increase. See Table 2-3 below for detailed traffic count information from two locations. There is some seasonal variability to the traffic volumes. Because of this traffic volume and the nature of the road as an arterial, the character of this corridor is different from anywhere else in the community.

Table 2-3 Farmington Traffic Counts

Location	1994	1996	1997	2001	2002
NH Route 11 at the New Durham Town Line	7,200		9,800	12,000	
NH Route 11 at the Rochester Town Line	12,000	14,000			15,000

Source: NH Department of Transportation

Businesses now located on NH Route 11 cover a wide range of services including small antique shops, a state liquor store, gas stations, a pharmacy, and auto repair shops. The common characteristics among these businesses are that they are automobile-oriented and depend on passing traffic and non-resident patronage more than the businesses in the downtown. Development is generally spread along the length of the roadway in Farmington with a greater concentration along the southern section of the corridor near the Rochester town line. The intersection of NH Routes 11 and 153 has the largest concentration of development activity within the corridor, and is currently being reconstructed as a major signalized intersection. This is an auto-oriented environment, and is not pedestrian friendly.



Route 11 Commercial Development

The land along this roadway has developed incrementally. Although there are undeveloped or lightly developed sections, much of it now exhibits a strip development pattern. Most of this strip development is concentrated on the road frontage and generally has little or no depth back from the road. Highway access is the primary factor driving this type of development; however,

the local regulations have also been a factor. This has created an environment that lacks local character, and is starting to erode the sense of place that is Farmington.

3.3 Rural Lands

Farmington is sparsely developed west of NH Route 11, and this section of the community is generally rural in character. This portion of the community contains an array of valuable natural resources, and extensive recreational opportunities exist at Blue Job Mountain State Forest, Baxter Lake, the various ponds in the area, and within the large unfragmented blocks of land. Approximately 90% of the land area still supports farm and forestry activities. This area supplies drinking water to the City of Rochester. The mixture of uses here presently includes low density residential, commercial, home businesses, farming, and forestry activities.



Smith Farm

Development in this area is generally along existing roads, and the existing road network consists of a mix of paved and dirt roads in varying conditions. New development in this area tends to be on relatively large lots. New road construction has been minimal, but a number of the town roads have been upgraded and this appears to have encouraged some additional residential development in parts of the community that had previously been inconvenient to access. Public water and public sewer are not available in this area.

4.0 FUTURE LAND USE

Farmington's desired future land use pattern should be driven by all of the previous elements. It should reflect the vision statement, which speaks of a stronger economy, of a more vibrant downtown, and of clustered and nodal development, rather than a uniform spreading of residential, commercial, and industrial activity across the community. The future land use pattern should be driven by the natural resource chapter, and by the need to protect open space and important groundwater resources. It needs to reflect the likely development pressure that Farmington will experience, and respond to it realistically, providing opportunities on a level that are consistent with those market forces.

To put numbers on that anticipated growth, assuming no significant change in regulations that affect rate of growth, present trends indicate that over the next ten years Farmington:

Will continue to grow at about seventy housing units per year;

Will likely experience a demand for fifty new acres of industrial land, with perhaps as much as 600,000 square feet of new building space; and

Will experience a demand for some thirty new acres of commercial land, again with as much as 600,000 square feet of new building space.

It should be noted that that projected growth will bring the total number of households very close to 3200. With the 2.55 persons per household that has been the norm in Farmington of late, it will likely become the home of over 8,000 people by the end of that ten year period. The nature of that anticipated growth and development, and its placement on the landscape, will be driven by market forces, by individual landowner's preferences, and by Farmington's land use policies and ordinances: its zoning ordinance, its site plan and subdivision regulations, its capital improvement plan, and others. Map  outlines how the Farmington Planning Board would like to see all of these forces brought together. What follows is a written summary of those desired future outcomes.

As envisioned by the Farmington Planning Board, after a review of the extensive community surveying and interviewing undertaken by the Zoning and Master Plan Committee, and so as to achieve the Vision outlined in the beginning of this master plan, this **new growth could best be accommodated while retaining the essential community character, while meeting market forces, and while protecting the community's natural resources, as follows:**

By concentrating residential development in the following areas:

In a node of single family and multi-family projects in the eastern corner of Farmington, along both sides of Governor's Road and parts of Chestnut Hill Road. Cluster development patterns should be encouraged here.

In another node of housing off of Chestnut Hill Road, between that road and the Farmington Country Club, on the east side of the Cocheco River. Again, an emphasis on cluster development is suggested here.

In the downtown, with efforts made to redevelop the upper floors of some of the downtown commercial blocks into residential units where possible as well as upgrading some of the existing apartment buildings.

Open Space Cluster Development should be encouraged in the area around Baxter Lake.

By concentrating commercial and industrial development:

On both in-fill and on redevelopment sites in the village core. The commercial development here needs to be of a nature and scale that is consistent with the village environment.

In a nodal development pattern along Route 11 rather than in linear strips of development. The identified nodes should fit the following criteria:

- Consider the natural characteristics of the land;
- Areas with existing development should be a higher priority than previously undeveloped areas;
- Nodes of development should run back from the highway corridor, where conditions permit this, rather than along the highway frontage like a strip development;
- Nodes of development should be separated by very low density areas;
- Access management techniques should be maximized when designing access to the developable areas from Route 11, and in the design of the internal circulation system between uses.

The first two locations on Route 11 that should be considered for development nodes include:

- The area bounded by Route 11, Tappan Street, and Central Street. The uses within this node should generate a moderate number of vehicle trips. This node is seen as a logical connector between Route 11 and a strengthened downtown and could include a mix of both new and infill development of a residential and commercial nature.
- The area around the intersection of Main Street and Route 11. This node could include the expansion and redefinition of the Sarah Greenfield industrial park, and could include a mix of commercial and industrial uses.

In all of these areas, development would be drawn to these nodes by limiting the type and density of uses along other parts of Route 11, and by adjusting the zoning in these nodal areas to offer bonuses, incentives, and increased densities to attract development to these areas. After a node has been developed the town should consider allowing higher density residential development adjacent to the back side of the node to make the most of the access point to Route 11, and the adjacent commercial activity.

Development along the west side of Route 11 is envisioned as being somewhat limited to the immediate highway corridor itself, and not spreading further west. Development along the eastside of Route 11 needs to transition from the highway to the smaller scale of the village core, and, as noted below, needs to be sensitive to natural resource issues and recreational opportunities along the Cocheco River corridor.

Extending sewer lines to these nodal areas would require significant improvements to the sewage treatment facility, and survey respondents indicated that they would only support such an extension of infrastructure if there was a detailed plan. If it is determined that new lines are needed they can be constructed by the community, or by private developers. One regulatory tool for the community to consider when the sewage treatment facility has been upgraded, and new sewer lines are needed, is a Tax Increment Financing District. This would provide a mechanism for funding these infrastructure improvements.

There is a concern within the community that greater use of the sewage treatment facility by new commercial and industrial uses could compromise the quality and safety of the community's

sludge. This issue needs to be examined further, and standards should be developed to identify which substances and levels are acceptable. If standards are in place the community can assess the potential impact of a new user on the quality of the sludge. If the impact will be too great alternative treatment options may be a possibility.

By protecting the community's natural resource base and rural character

The community should continue to work to protect the most sensitive of natural resources in the Cocheco River valley, in the area bounded by Spring Street and Old Bay Road, in cooperation with neighboring towns, and by seeking to foster cluster development patterns in the hilly, rural landscape west of Route 11. The majority of residents (82%) responding to the survey indicated that the town should do more to preserve open space in Farmington. The majority of respondents (62%) also favor using local funds to acquire land and keep it as permanent open space. There are several large unfragmented blocks of land that Farmington shares with neighboring communities. The town should communicate with these communities to ensure that opportunities to preserve these resources are coordinated, and neither town carelessly or unknowingly impacts one of these large blocks.

In the future, the community may wish to consider whether to require cluster development patterns on properties with prime agricultural soils, over aquifers, or that contain other sensitive resources. It also may wish, over time, to discuss whether to require cluster development plans in projects over a certain number of units. This is of concern throughout all of the community, and particularly so in the largely rural and undeveloped land that is west of Route 11, and in the upper reaches of the Cocheco Watershed east of Route 11.

The survey showed support for the expansion of water and sewer lines if there was a specific plan, and many respondents (46%) also indicated that they would support such expansion where it would protect natural resources. Based on this support consideration should be given to extending water and sewer lines to the Spring Street area because studies have indicated that residences in the area are a pollution source for the Cocheco River.

By requiring a higher quality of non-residential development

There is a concern that some non-residential development, particularly along Route 11 where the traveling public gets its primary view of Farmington, has not always been of the highest caliber. Not only does this create a poor image of Farmington, but it uses up valuable land resources in a manner that does not contribute as much as it might to the local tax base.

Reasonable improvements to the community's site plan review regulations could establish improved standards for the quality of design, construction, landscaping, and parking lot configuration for non-residential properties. The creation of a design manual and design guidelines for non-residential uses outside of the downtown, similar to the one being completed for the downtown area, would help foster higher quality design.

By monitoring and evaluating the mix of housing types

As a matter of public policy, until the concentration of mobile homes in Farmington is consistent with that in other surrounding communities, Farmington wishes to permit mobile homes on individual, private lots just as they would any other form of construction, but to remove mobile home parks as a development option.

By monitoring and evaluating all growth and development

Farmington undertook this master planning effort concurrent with adopting an Interim Growth Management Ordinance in the fall of 2003. In a careful and thoughtful process it has measured its current growth against that being experienced by its neighbors. Consistent with state law, it has also evaluated its municipal facilities and evaluated its ability to provide adequate sewer and water and educational facilities.

The results of this evaluation indicate that those facilities are able to accommodate reasonable levels (approximately 70 building permits per year) of new population growth. Farmington is concerned, however, that a few large projects could start to tax some or all of those facilities.

It is the recommendation of this plan that Farmington both undertake some modest, immediate changes to its zoning ordinance, and that it prepare, on a longer term basis, a growth management ordinance with an annual building permit cap that would only be activated when certain regularly monitored criteria (such as building permits issued, school capacity, and water and sewer capacity) exceed certain pre-specified levels.

The Farmington Planning Board recognizes that some of these goals will require changes in its regulatory framework, but it feels that the benefits will be worth that extra effort, and it commits to working on those pieces that are necessary in order to achieve a better Farmington for all of its citizens into the future.