

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Opinion Survey

- Feelings have changed little since the 1982 plan, with rural character remaining important; the respondents defined issues that were essential to the maintenance of New Gloucester's town character as the maintenance of good water quality, the protection of the natural environment, a reasonable tax rate, and quality school systems.
- The majority called for further protection of woodland trail systems and open space preservation.
- Lack of a town police department was still a concern among respondents.
- Use of tax dollars in recreation and school facilities was noted as improving over the past four years.
- There is a significant concern that availability of affordable housing is declining.
- A continuing paradox in opinion is that the environment remains the number one concern, but reducing the burden of property taxes is the number two concern.
- Concern for the environment, from the 1982 survey to the 1989 survey has only grown in magnitude.
- The community is split over the need for new industry, many favoring light industry, some none at all. Its location should be heavily controlled.
- There was strong support for senior citizen housing and less support for condominiums or apartments.
- Manufactured housing should be permitted everywhere, although a majority favored confining the use of mobile homes to specific areas; this included mobile home parks.

Population Characteristics

- New Gloucester has been heavily impacted by growth in the Portland and Lewiston-Auburn urban centers.
- This growth has also had an impact on local income, raising income to new levels with the entry of new "baby boom" and retirement residents into the community.
- Population has grown from 2,811 in 1970 to 3,180 in 1980 (13% increase) and to 4,290 in 1990 (35% increase). Projections call for population to increase another 20% to 5,138 by 2000.
- Most of this growth has been in-migration, suggesting that the building moratorium, from a numbers standpoint, had very little effect.
- Age groups that are increasing include the 30-64 age group, requiring a variety of new services. Additionally, people in the 30-44 age bracket are prime child bearers, suggesting that new "baby boomlet" trends will cause substantial increases in the 0-9 age groups in the next five years.

Housing

- As of 1980, there were 132 seasonal houses; conversions have or may have an impact on growth pressures.
- By 1987, the New Gloucester housing stock had increased by 28%.
- During that same period, the average people per household had decreased from 3.01 to 2.88, reflecting a national trend.

- Average actual housing costs between 1982 and 1988 increased by 172%, as compared to 76% in Windham and 127% in Portland; this is consistent with concerns voiced by public opinion.
- During this same period, actual wages in Cumberland County increased by only 28%.
- Mobile homes make up 37% of the total housing stock.
- An analysis of housing concluded most housing in New Gloucester was considered to be in average condition; a building code would therefore have the primary purpose of maintaining property value and establishing a predictable housing market. In essence, the need for a code is considered important from a long term planning perspective.
- Rather than a housing code, an individual lot, site location requirement might better address the issue of location, solar access and viewscape issues; however, the process would need to be streamlined and remain inexpensive to the average citizen.

Economy

- With the exception of the Pineland Center, employment in New Gloucester (jobs available in the Town) is dominated by the construction industry (37%). Services employment follows at 17%.
- Between 1980 and 1987, total employment increased 83%, from 191 jobs in 1980 to 349 jobs in 1987. The Pineland Center accounts for another 684 employees working in New Gloucester.
- Many residents in New Gloucester commute out of town for work; this pattern is unlikely to change in the near future.

Transportation Facilities

- The town owns 61.18 miles of road, 33.64 miles of which are dirt; 52 miles are plowed in the winter, while all are maintained year round.
- Additionally, Route 122, 231, 26, and 4 account for 19.35 miles.
- Thirty-three percent of the roads in New Gloucester are state-owned. Any further development, (driveway cuts) will cause MDOT to consider turning additional mileage over to the Town for maintenance and plowing.
- The intersections of I-95 and Bridges 0296 and 0298, have high critical rate accident factors. The stretch of roadway on Route 231 near the Universalist Church also had a high accident rate over the past two years.
- MDOT is currently in the design stages of a project on Route 26 to re-route seven dangerous curves. A modification of an earlier design has not yet been submitted to the Town for comment.
- There do exist a number of ordinances now controlling the design of parking areas and roads.
- Expenditures on roads account for 20% of the total town budget, somewhat higher than similar communities, (although the per mile cost was not calculated). Present sprawl patterns will likely add to the cost further.
- A greater focus on roads in the future should include a plan for focusing growth where there is a suitable road network. The future road pattern should take into consideration existing capacity, important historical areas and critical natural resources. The relationship between a road plan, long term road layouts and rural and growth areas should be established.
- Road layout and design is an avenue for protecting rural character (for example, providing road widths of between 18 and 24' instead of 30').

Land Use and Land Use Changes

- Between the 1986 and 1990 Comprehensive Plans, irrespective of the limitation on building permits, most development occurred in the rural areas (207 acres of a total of 376 acres).
- 22 acres of land were developed in the business zone, 20 acres of which were developed in residential use.
- Village zones remained mostly unchanged in terms of new development.
- Land use patterns continue to be influenced by a changing regional economy.
- Future strategies will require that greater emphasis be placed on directing growth to certain areas and avoiding growth in other areas; in essence, there is a need to create incentives for more growth in the village and developed areas which providing for disincentives in the rural or critical natural resource areas.
- Tax assessing methodologies remains a critical problem in that they place an increasing value on rural land and are legally mandated to reflect “highest and best use”, rather than “current use”, by the state constitution; this has forced the sale of rural land which might have otherwise been left undeveloped.
- Because of old assessing patterns (which are now being updated), the Farm and Open Space current use assessment played a very small role in land preservation.
- The establishment of the New Gloucester Land Trust is seen as a major success; working with them and expanding their role is critical to open space preservation.
- As part of a continued planning process, a consultant was hired to assess commercial land use patterns in New Gloucester, to examine appropriate infrastructure needs and potential for development, and to examine ordinance provisions to assess viability and consistency with comprehensive planning goals.
- Consistent interpretation by the Zoning Board of Appeals is critical to maintaining the integrity of the land use plan.
- Assessment of all existing policies for their success or failure is needed as part of the comprehensive planning process.

Public Facilities

- All public service areas have faced an increase in demand, although the largest increases in expenses have been made in the educational system.
- Revenues have increased since 1980 by almost 200%, while federal revenue sharing has shrunk as a proportion of that revenue from 21% to 0% in 1988; the state has done little to make up that difference.
- Not adjusting for inflation, the revenue raised per capita has increased from \$252 in 1980 to \$496 in 1988.
- These changes suggest an increasing reliance on the property tax.
- Overall town debt is well within state guidelines and represents only 3% of total valuation.
- School costs make up 61% of the total expenditures.
- The town has eliminated in-house police personnel.
- Changes in expenditures are likely to result from changes in demographics in the next five years; a plan to deal with operational cost increases should be developed.
- Changes in the citizenry may result in an increase in a variety of services demanded, as families familiar with more suburban settings request such services.
- Residential development and additional sprawl will only add to the costs of providing services.

- Population growth and complexity of the workload will change the nature and availability of volunteer work by residents, thus adding pressure to add more professional staff. While legitimate staffing concerns should be evaluated, additional ways of encouraging volunteers to participate should be examined.
- A permanent CIP committee is recommended, transitioning out of the Comprehensive Planning Process and rolled into one program aligned closely with the work of the Selectmen. The CIP committee would be concerned with a five year implementation program.
- Additional work needs to be done on the CIP, including the inventory of buildings and equipment, input from department heads and replacement cost investigation.
- Also included in any decision related to a CIP project is the need to relate that project to the impact it will have on land use development; this impact should be consistent with growth and rural development strategies.
- An action matrix of committees and responsibilities is needed.
- The town has recently approved a program to maintain cash flow and build up a permanent fund balance equal to one quarter of town expenditure liabilities.
- In terms of town service, costs, and demographic changes, it was concluded that New Gloucester is now at an important crossroads where the pressure to maintain reasonable tax rates must be balanced with an appropriate growth management/land use plan.

Recreation Facilities

- New Gloucester has limited programs, although the quality of what they have has been rated very high by public opinion; the upkeep and maintenance of such facilities is going to increase in cost, particularly as volunteer efforts decline.
- In terms of a supply and demand, there may be a need for ball fields, tennis courts and basketball courts; there exists a need for improved playgrounds and associated space and facilities. However, growing use from an increase in population may place excessive strain on existing facilities, hastening their decline.
- In terms of condition, the Memorial School ball field is considered in need of significant renovation; other facilities, in terms of condition, are judged adequate over the 5 year capital improvement planning period.
- There is a continued desire for improved nature trails, walking trails, and bike paths connected to a town wide greenbelt system.
- Both access and quality of fishing is in decline and needs to be dealt with. General public access, as well as a year round swimming facility are needs identified by the Recreation Committee and opinion survey.
- A greenbelt trail system is recommended, implementation to begin immediately. Connections and planning with adjacent towns is recommended.
- Strategies for implementing the Greenbelt include Planning Board negotiation, land trust acquisition, gaining easement use of private property as part of the system, utilizing tax acquired property, and the establishment for an associated education program.
- The trail system should also take into consideration important wildlife areas, visually important areas to the town, and a Royal River Corridor program.

Agricultural Uses

- There was a consensus that agricultural activity is defined in the broad sense and can include land presently not being farmed but well suited for such, backyard subsistence farms, and the so called “gentlemen” farms; long term protection for future generations is believed to be the main issue.
- Although there is a need for large, contiguous land area for large scale farming, part time farmers on small parcels are successful. New techniques and diversity can make smaller farms more efficient and less costly.
- Stability of agricultural land and activity is critical to rural character.
- Farming has been crucial to keeping open space available in the town.
- Only one quarter of the acreage in active agricultural use is in current use taxation; some noted that prior assessing policies provided no incentive.
- Farm, forest and open space conjures the type of rural zone the community values.
- Agricultural activity, if poorly managed, can have a detrimental impact on water quality in New Gloucester.

Water Resources

- Groundwater is the major source of water supply in New Gloucester.
- An extensive sand and gravel aquifer is located in the Town.
- There are existing water quality problems in town, most notably in the Upper Village, where the Town is supplying bottled water to two businesses and one home.
- The town’s strategy has been to avoid the need for public water and sewer facilities by allowing low densities of development.
- Radon may be a very serious problem because of geologic history in New Gloucester. A program for mapping, notification and testing should be part of the review process (in some form).
- Surface water quality is generally good, although Pineland’s discharges to the Royal River and non-point pollution of several streams are exceptions.
- Three Great Ponds and portions of 7 watersheds are located in the town.
- There are 56 mapped wetlands in the town’s jurisdiction.
- Most floodplains are currently protected under resource protection zoning.
- Water quality testing has been an ongoing priority in past years.

Historic and Cultural Resources

- There exist 199 older structures in the community, with approximately half over 100 years old.
- Two Districts and the Universalist Church are on the National Register.
- A complete survey of all older structures will be completed by the Fall of 1990.
- An active Historical Society has been the impetus for historic preservation efforts in New Gloucester beginning with a successful effort to nominate structures to the Historic Register, and a program to place identifying plaques on historic structures.
- The recommended strategy of the subcommittee included identifying those additional properties appropriate for nomination to the National Register, local legislation that protects historic structures throughout the Town, classes and educational programs on how to do renovation/preservation and why it is important, and a pamphlet identifying the general activities in New Gloucester.

Planning Background

- The most recent comprehensive plan was adopted in 1986.
- The Town has had zoning since 1976.
- A limitation on building permits and subdivision lots was in effect for two years from 1987 – 1989.
- A land use plan and land use map were adopted by Town Meeting in 1988.
- A new zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations have been in effect since 1989.

Goals and Policies

- Town goals and policies were developed in Chapter 3 for the following issues: land use, housing, environmental protection, public involvement, public facilities, economic development, open space and greenbelt, historical and archaeological preservation, transportation, and recreation. The goals and policies, in a broad sense, describe the general direction of the Town's future – a Town vision.

Implementation Strategies

- Action steps were designed for each topic listed under goals in the previous section. The action steps are meant to be specific, quantifiable activities that are to be carried out by various groups and individuals over the next five – ten years. A timeline for activities is also included in Chapter 7.

Appendices

- The appendices to this plan contain more detailed information than was appropriate for the Plan text.