

NH Route 28 Corridor – Land Use and Aesthetics Field Observations: From Epsom north to Alton.

EPSOM

Heading north on NH 28, large residential lots contain modest homes that are set back from the road. Single family homes are interspersed with multiple significant agricultural lands, small businesses, a campground, elderly housing facilities, and manufactured housing parks. Small businesses such as a pet care facility are found alongside homes, separated by a natural tree buffer. Small business parks or buildings shared by more than one business are located along both sides of the road at different locations, but most are not landscaped. Businesses situated along NH 28, include a trading post, an auctioneer vendor, and a home sale group. Webster Park offers a recreational experience. The wide shoulders and openness encourage driving faster than the speed limit.

Through field observation, there is little available land for sale along NH 28 for business or new homes. One potentially good location was an underutilized or commercial property with a red house and plenty of parking which was located south of the Epsom traffic circle.

Business signage along the NH 28 corridor in Epsom is inconsistent, and many have an outdated or “institutional” look. Some signage could use improvement because of the visual impressions given, including one recycling sign with aluminum can accents. A manufactured housing park had an attractive wooden sign, which was exterior lit. Most of the signage was exterior lit. Multiple portable reader board signs were observed. A sign directory at a newly built commercial center is an excellent example of a successful sign arrangement.

Minimal road signage is found along NH 28. Signage leading up to the traffic circle at the junction of US 4/202 is not abundant or far enough off to prepare drivers. Several intersection signs were too close to the actual intersections to prepare drivers to slow. A local traffic sign was missing at the entrance of Old NH 28.

Street lighting is uncommon on NH 28. Some businesses have adapted lighting to the buildings or to illuminate signage. Unshielded lighting is found at a car dealership. A good example of lighting is shielded downward-pointing on low poles at a strip mall. Some businesses have floodlights on the building, such as at a restaurant. Other flood lighting is directed at signage.

One tall light pole was erected at the Epsom traffic circle island. While perhaps less efficient, shorter and more frequent poles with shielded lights placed along the perimeter of the circle would be more aesthetically pleasing and may reduce the amount of light escaping into the night sky.

Along the corridor through Epsom, tree buffers are located throughout which naturally screen many residences from businesses and more intensive residential use. Some screening is found at businesses to visually contain certain elements, such as at a propane seller.

Commercial landscaping is consistently non-existent along the corridor in Epsom. These include some of the business parks or buildings which contain multiple businesses, a funeral home, a home

sales group, and multiple others at which landscaping would ordinarily be expected. Examples of lightly and pleasantly landscaped businesses include a real estate office and the post office. Most private homes have pleasing landscaping with mowed lawns, flowers, and shrubs.

On NH 28 on both the southerly side and northerly side of the Epsom traffic circle, the businesses on both sides of the road are mostly devoid of greenery except for mowed sod. Wide curb cuts do not channelize traffic. A pleasing wetland buffer at the circle offers a model or inspiration for others to follow. Visitors traveling through the corridor at this location are provided with convenience businesses such as gas stations and restaurants but are not invited to spend time in the area because of the lack of landscapes and pedestrian-friendly buffers.

CHICHESTER

NH 28 through town follows along the Suncook River. A campground on the east is attractively landscaped. A classic country store on the west adds ambience and historic flair to a busy intersection with Main Street. Modest homes with charming landscaping are situated close to NH 28 along the corridor. Carpenter Memorial Center on the west provides an easily accessible recreational opportunity. A new professional business on the east is architecturally appealing and blends in with the surroundings. Farmland is located in various places along the strip, some of which are vacant and some actively used. Older businesses dot the study area. Throughout the stretch of NH 28, unbroken tree stands that could yield significant development potential are situated in long segments. Near the Pittsfield town line, an older shopping plaza is on the west. Few commercial properties appear to be for sale.

Two residential lots were observed for sale in the vicinity of Bear Hill Road. It appears that Chichester may have other opportunities based on the significant stands of trees alongside the road, but further analysis would need to be undertaken.

Generally, business signs in town are older, have strong coloration, and lack consistency in materials, size, and appearance. Some, including a sign directory at a shopping plaza, have high contrasting signs that compete with one another and as a result, are difficult to read. A large sign at a mattress business could be smaller, closer to the ground, and have less contrasting colors to be visually appealing. Interchangeable signs, some of which appear to be permanent, announce the presence of businesses.

Street lights are scarce along the Chichester section of NH 28. The occasional street lamppost provides light, but not always at helpful places such as intersections with other roads. Some businesses that stay open at night have lights on the buildings, but few business signs are lighted. Most signs are exterior lit with a floodlight directed onto the sign.

Because of the large tree expanses on NH 28 between residential and non-residential uses, buffers may not be necessary in many cases.

A stone and loam business on the left has trucks and equipment parked at the rear of the property alongside NH 28. There is an opportunity for screening from the road.

A campground is simply landscaped with an expanse of mowed lawn with trees. A landscaping company on the right heading north looks visually appealing with immature landscaping and an attractive wood sign. An agricultural store has no landscaping between the parking lot and NH 28. A carpet business on the right could be made more attractive with more landscaping and less

pavement. A country store could have more greenery, shrubs, and flowers to complete the old-time feel of the site. Traffic islands such as at the intersection of Main Street and NH 28 are plain and could use perennial and annual plantings.

PITTSFIELD

Just after the Chichester town line, a vacant industrial / manufacturing / commercial building appears available for reuse in Pittsfield. Wide travel lanes with wide shoulders are found along much of NH 28 in Pittsfield and most residential homes and commercial facilities are set far back from the road. This setup encourages fast travel and makes it more difficult for drivers to see upcoming businesses; as a result, the signs are larger. There are a few new buildings that were built with architectural character, including a professional building and a gas station. Other businesses populate the corridor, including a construction industry business, storage units, a jewelry business, restaurants, and others. Businesses are generally screened from residences by natural tree buffers.

There were no properties for sale in Pittsfield observed along NH 28. An opportunity for a business relocation is found on the west side of NH 28 where a large vacant commercial/industrial building is for lease.

Business signs are larger and taller in order to be seen from NH 28, as most are set back from the wide road. A billboard for a jewelry business on the side of the road draws the driver's eye but is too large for the feel that Pittsfield is trying to foster. An automatic teller machine sign is exceptionally tall. Two electric moving signs were observed. An attractive sign directory has different fonts and colors, which renders the individual signs difficult to read. Signs are often unclear when several are within sighting distance because of the size and contrast variation. An opportunity for sign regulation exists within Pittsfield for a consistent feel that both limits the distraction of drivers and invites them to stop at businesses.

Exterior lit signs are common, and buildings often have floodlights. Lighting at a gas station was observed as appropriate for the site as well as architecturally interesting with low, black historic poles. Traffic signalization on the Pittsfield section of the NH 28 is abundant. Areas of blinking lights or traffic lights include at intersections with NH 107, River Road, Leavitt Road, and Loudon Road.

As is found along most of the NH 28 corridor, Pittsfield has much of its non-residential uses screened by natural tree buffers. One example of such an arrangement is a commercial/construction/industry business on the east side of NH 28, which is screened by a natural buffer from residences. Some of these businesses appear to be home businesses.

Some new commercial buildings with architectural character are missing the landscaping component. A gas station on the east side of NH 28 is an attractive example of new architecture although little landscaping is present. An asphalt traffic island just south of Barnstead is a lost opportunity for a landscaped gateway into the community. Plain mowed grass landscaping is present in places. A beautiful example of landscaping is found at a business on the east side of NH 28 with retaining walls and a pond with a fountain.

BARNSTEAD

The section of NH 28 through Barnstead heading north begins with wide lanes and shoulders, which encourage faster traffic flows. As with other sections of the corridor, homes are taken care of with pride. A scenic tree farm and horse boarding center is located on a hill on the west side. Tree stands seem to stretch along for miles. Barnstead has a friendly feel through its land use. A few larger businesses such as self-storage units, a Mobil station, and a motor sports store are interspersed with quaint small businesses, a restaurant, a campground and a country store that begin to take on a more tourist-type character. Farm stands and crafters set up a temporary business site along the roadside. Numerous gravel roads are located off of NH 28. A gravel operation is located on the west side. A commercial node is situated at South Barnstead Road. A large wetland is located on the west side near the Alton town line. Open space and views of nearby hills offer a pleasing gateway into the Lakes Region.

Commercial properties are for sale on the east side of NH 28, including 114 acres north of the junction with NH 107. Three residential lots are for sale north of NH 126. Other commercial acreage includes lots near the SAU offices, near Watson Road, and near NH 126.

Signage is often consistent with the rural character of the area: artsy in nature, of wooden materials and generally appropriate. However, multiple temporary and permanent reader board signs were observed which detract from the feel that is conveyed by the wooden signage. An electronic blinking interchangeable sign at a restaurant could be modified into a permanent sign to be consistent with the character of Barnstead.

A pedestrian sign to cross from one side of NH 28 to the other at a country store suggests the opportunity of a node as it has the potential for a commercial center.

When found on signage, lighting was mostly exterior. One gas station had an interior lit sign. Pole lighting was sometimes found to be unshielded, casting more light than was needed for the site. Street lighting was found over NH 28's intersection with Colony Drive.

Buffers between uses were natural tree stands, which are typically seen in the other four communities in the corridor. Side buffer distances seemed appropriate in most instances and the businesses were often partially screened from the road by trees.

The SAU 86, located in a beautiful building appropriate to the rural surroundings on the eastern side of NH 28, is nicely landscaped. A traffic island at South Barnstead road was landscaped with annual plantings and added a vibrant feel to the area.

ALTON

NH 28 narrows through Alton, and has no shoulders. Larger, older, traditional homes are on left. The lots seem small, and the driveways are wide with poor visibility to NH 28. The road needs some reconstruction although the speed limit is fast. There is more of a rural feel with trees within 10 feet of the travel way. A large wetland is located on the west. An eclectic mix of high-density residential uses, agricultural and vacant land, and non-residential uses are scattered along the corridor. Locke Lake is located on the east side of NH 28 with side roads to cabins. Quintessential lakeside cottages dot NH 28. Agriculture is present in areas such as at Crescent Lake Farm. Few businesses, including a garden center, thrift shop, and a motor-sports center are found until just south of the traffic circle. Prospect Mountain High School, accessible by a side road, is located on the west side of NH 28. An elderly housing development on the east, a cemetery, and a Masonic temple round out the varied

development found along this stretch through Alton. Like Barnstead, gravel roads turn onto NH 28. A large naturally landscaped traffic circle is situated at the northern end of the study corridor.

More properties for sale were observed in Alton than for all of the other four communities in the corridor combined. On the west, a multifamily residential lot and a residential lot on the east side just opposite are for sale. Multiple other residential properties were for sale. A gravel operation on the west side of NH was advertised. At the traffic circle, a large commercial site is available.

A significant potential for subdivision exists on the west side of NH 28 between Stockbridge Road and Main Street.

Most signage along the corridor is appropriate for the location and land use type. A few are too large and billboard-like, such as some at Halfmoon Lake. Generally, signage appears older and established. A lovely permanent theater sign is appropriate for the site, but a portable reader board sign could be modified to have a similar feel. Most signs are freestanding and few are mounted on the buildings. Reader board signs are common. A few handcrafted signs add to the ambiance of the setting. A garden center has an appropriate sign directory with consistent lettering and colors. A senior housing community has an inviting sign and entryway.

Lighting at the crafting barn on the east side of NH 28 is rustic-looking and appropriate for the setting. Sign lighting is generally exterior, which is appropriate. One example is the school sign lighting.

The intersection lighting with Stockbridge Corner is very clear, with yellow flashing lights at and leading up to the intersection. A few street lights along NH 28 are placed a couple of miles apart.

Like other communities in the corridor, natural tree buffers separate most uses. With the exception of the lake area and the area south of the traffic circle, residences and businesses are spaced far enough apart to take advantage of the tree stands. At the lake and traffic circle, tall landscaping may be more suitable for buffering businesses and residences.

Opportunities for landscaping non-residential uses are found along the corridor. One such location is a thrift shop on the east side of NH 28. A lovely triangle island was landscaped as a rock park and offers a rural flavor to the area. Since NH 28 is narrow through Alton, riprap in the ditches is evident and requires some cleaning. At an established thrift shop, the access to NH 28 is as wide as the building and is all asphalt, with drivers backing into the road to leave the business. Here, a landscaped buffer could serve to alleviate a safety hazard if an alternate parking area was available. The traffic circle is naturally landscaped with a tall, pleasing vegetative buffer in the middle.