

MASTER PLANS

AT-A-GLANCE

September 2015

NH RSA 674:1 The Master Plan is a duty of the Planning Board

The preparation of a master plan is a major responsibility of the planning board (RSA 674:1), and it should serve as an aid to the planning board in the performance of its other duties. The board may elect to undertake the job itself or may engage professional assistance in completing some or all of the planning elements. The Lakes Region Planning Commission (LRPC) is available to help communities in the Lakes Region develop a master plan that not only meets state requirements, but also serves as the foundation for responsible planning at the local level.

Master Plans Defined in State Law—NH RSA 674:2

The master plan is both a reference and policy document. It contains appropriate maps, charts and supporting text, which present the recommendations of the planning board, and offers guidelines for community decision makers.

The plan should be the most complete source of information about current conditions and trends within the municipality. By developing coordinated policies that address future growth and development, the master plan should help a community meet

change responsibly, guiding growth in an orderly constructive manner. As stated in NH RSA



674:2: “The purpose of the master plan is to set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning board, to aid the board in designing ordinances that result in pre-serving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture of New Hampshire, and to guide the board in the performance of its other duties in a manner that achieves the principles of smart growth, sound planning, and wise resource protection.”



Prepared by:
Lakes Region Planning Commission
103 Main Street, Suite #3
Meredith, NH 03253
Tel.: (603) 279-8171
Fax: (603) 279-0200
www.lakesrpc.org

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NH RSA 674:2

Required Sections:

- Vision
- Land Use

Optional Sections:

- Transportation
- Community Facilities
- Economic Development
- Natural Resources

- Recreation
- Utility and Public Services
- Cultural and Historic Resources
- Regional Concerns
- Neighborhood Plan
- Community Design
- Housing
- Implementation
- Energy

Master Planning is a Five Step Process

The process used to prepare a master plan generally consists of five steps:

1. Visioning

The required visioning section is often the most important step in the master planning process. The vision is based on the values held by the community, and articulates those values as goals, objectives, and specific action steps designed to turn a vision for the future into reality. Ultimately, the vision for a community describes the direction that the community should move in, based on the opinions of the public at-large.

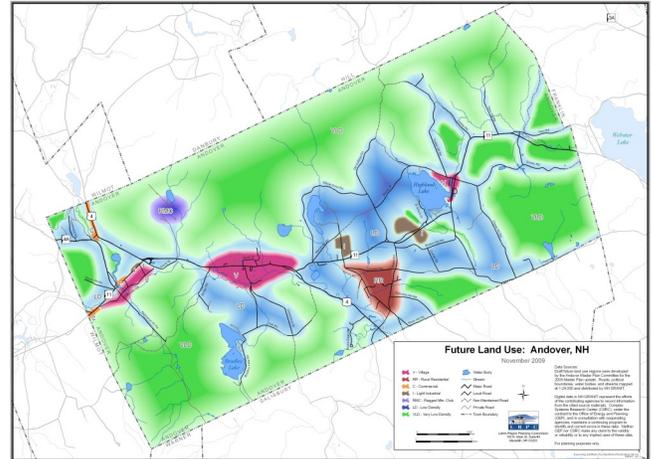
The vision section is not only used to check the pulse of the community, it is also used to identify the scope and breadth of your new master plan. The appropriate sections for your anticipated new plan are best identified early in the process. For example, if you also need to update a *capital improvements program*, the master plan needs community facilities and transportation chapters.

The process to develop a vision of your community can take many different forms. A few examples include a community opinion poll or survey, focus groups, a community profile, or a workshop. A community needs to decide what process will work best for them at any given time. The Lakes Region Planning Commission (LRPC) can help you determine what process might work best, and assist you in carrying out your visioning process.

2. Data Collection

Data collection includes the development of baseline data used to better understand the community. At minimum, this includes the development of base maps (municipal boundaries, roads, etc.) and an existing land use inventory showing the location of different land uses throughout your community.

Depending on the master plan content, the plan may contain other data and develop an environmental inventory, a survey of existing public lands and buildings, a detailed road condition survey, population, economic, and housing trends, and related information.



3. Data Analysis

Based on the data that were collected, the plan should explain and lend understanding to the data. For example, the plan should review historic population growth and present population projections that provide guidance as to how population growth may affect your community in the near future.

4. Writing the Plan

The next step is to compile the information into a working draft. This stage requires considerable writing, often with the use of suitable graphs, charts, and maps. Each chapter of the master plan must be prepared, reviewed, edited, and finalized. For communities that anticipate writing a master plan using local volunteers, this step may be the most challenging to complete in a timely manner.

5. Plan Adoption and Implementation

After the text and format are finalized, the master plan must be adopted by the planning board after a public hearing in accordance with NH RSA 674:4. Once adopted, it is time to implement the plan. An implementation schedule will help keep the plan on track. Review the master plan and the implementation schedule regularly and revise the master plan as needed, to reflect changes in the community, new challenges, and accomplishments.

Essentials for a Good Master Plan

1. IT PRESENTS ESSENTIAL DATA, BUT NOT TOO MUCH. KEEP ALL YOUR BACK-UP DATA IN A SEPARATE APPENDIX TO KEEP THE MASTER PLAN USER FRIENDLY.
2. IT COMMUNICATES A SENSE OF PLACE AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY.
3. IT ORIGINATES FROM A PROCESS THAT SOLICITS PUBLIC INPUT FROM A WIDE RANGE OF CITIZENS AND STAKEHOLDERS, AND DESCRIBES THE PROCESS THAT WAS USED IN PREPARING THE PLAN.
4. IT STRIVES TO BALANCE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AGAINST THE NEED TO CONSERVE AND PROTECT ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES.
5. IT TELLS A STORY AND IS INTERESTING. IT EXPLAINS HOW THE COMMUNITY IS CHANGING AND WHAT IT WILL BE LIKE IN THE FUTURE IF PRESENT TRENDS CONTINUE.