

Appendix 3: SOUTHAMPTON MASTER PLAN VISIONING WORKSHOPS MARCH 2010

Consultant Report

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“Would increasing services in itself change the rural character of the town?”

Process

The “Southampton 2030: Planning for the Future” visioning workshops culminated a five month process of collecting community input for the Southampton Master Plan. Previously, community and stakeholder interviews were held to discuss long-range issues and opportunities. Results from the interviews were then used to help craft a community-wide survey. The visioning workshops then provided an opportunity for the community to come together to discuss the future of Southampton.

“Southampton 2030: Planning for the Future” included three days of community planning workshops. The first day covered general concerns and opportunities and constraints, as well as a vision statement exercise. The second day provided an opportunity to discuss particular subject areas in detail, including land use, transportation, housing, open space, agriculture, cultural and historic resources, public services, infrastructure, and economic development. On the last day, several alternative growth scenarios were presented to stimulate discussion, and participants were asked to identify where in town they would like to see new development, what kind of development this should be, and where in town they would like to focus on preservation. Finally, the workshops ended with a design activity in which participants worked in small groups to create a collage of images describing the kind of development they would like to see in the Village Center and along their main road, College Highway.

Likes

Residents like living in Southampton! Participants noted the town’s strong community spirit, and that the town has friendly, open, involved residents who are proud of the town’s resources and history. Southampton is a good place to raise children, has good schools, and has community spirit and a strong sense of place. The town is rural and quiet, and has abundant natural lands, agriculture, historic resources, and recreation opportunities. Residents also like the historic village center, and that the town is close to many transportation routes and amenities.

Concerns & Future Opportunities

Sprawling Land Use Patterns: Residents dislike the town’s “sprawling” land use patterns, car-centric development and unchecked residential growth. They are concerned about the loss of farms, land management practices, and strip commercial growth along College Highway. Housing affordability, which is affected by the town’s development patterns, is also a concern.

In the future, residents think that planned and balanced growth is an opportunity for Southampton. The town can protect existing natural, agricultural and historic resources, and can encourage affordable, diverse housing. The town can develop a vibrant, thriving village center, and can protect its visual appeal through design guidelines.

Need for Services: Residents note that some needs are not being met. There is a need for pedestrian amenities, as well as passive and active recreation opportunities. There is also a need for gathering spaces, and there is a need to address traffic on College Highway.

There is a future opportunity for the town to expand its public safety, sewer and library services, and to develop a rail-trail and riverwalk. There are also opportunities to enhance passive and active recreation.

Community Engagement and Municipal Decision-Making: Residents are concerned that municipal decisions lack transparency and that there is a lack of citizen participation. The Master Plan process is an opportunity for community engagement, and in the future, the town can focus on making government actions more transparent.

Major Topics

Land Use: Residents are concerned about sprawl development patterns and support smart growth that conserves agricultural land, wildlife habitat and scenic views. Residents want the town to involve the public in decision-making and to communicate information to the public in numerous ways. The town should promote concentrated commercial development, especially small local businesses, and residents support design and development standards. Finally, residents feel the town needs more gathering spaces and local destinations. However, developing the village center will be a challenge.

Transportation: Residents expressed support for expanded transportation options, including public transit, zip cars, carpooling, bicycling and walking. Some residents desire greater PVRTA bus service from Westfield to Easthampton (Route 10), Southamptton to Holyoke (County Road), and for low income residents and seniors. Many residents expressed enthusiasm for a bike trail and bike access to public open space. Residents expressed support for building more sidewalks and walking paths, developing commuter parking areas, pursuing traffic calming measures, and creating bicycle lanes that offer safer road conditions for cyclists.

Housing: Southamptton residents expressed concerns about the affordability of housing in town, as well as density, lot size requirements, zoning and the pace of growth. Some residents said that new housing developments should be design to provide a sense of community, and there was support for cluster open space residential developments that allow for alternative lot sizes in order to preserve open space. Residents support a broadening the town's variety of housing types to include tasteful apartments, multiple uses of existing buildings, and mixed-use areas that intermingle business, arts and cultural uses with residences.

Open Space: Southamptton residents LIKE open space and want the town to be more proactive in acquiring private properties to preserve open space, agricultural land and vistas. Southamptton should think beyond active recreation to increase the variety of parks and open space. In addition to property purchases, residents support the use of zoning tools to preserve vistas (e.g. along Route 10) and open space. Residents expressed a desire to protect and enhance Conant Memorial Park (e.g. with a concert pavilion), and to secure access to use the Tighe-Carmody Reservoir area and to launch boats at Hampton Ponds, where the state owns property. Residents support educating the public about conservation issues, establishing connections with existing land trusts, establishing volunteer trail maintenance, and connecting existing open space areas. Finally, some residents suggested that the town consider the fiscal effects of residential growth versus preservation, and the impacts that public utility expansion (e.g. sewers) would have on open space preservation.

Agriculture: Southamptton residents LIKE agriculture and want the town to focus on the preservation of farms and orchards. Ideas that came up include stimulating consciousness about agriculture and the tools available to protect it, creating a farmer's market and promoting farm stands, developing a community garden, and promoting agricultural tourism. One group suggested an outreach program to inform the public about trails on agricultural land. Tools for agricultural preservation include offering economic

relief such as tax incentives for farming activities, encouraging the use of the state's Chapter 61 program, developing a priority list for agricultural land acquisition, and taking prime farm soils into account within the town's zoning regulations. Residents would like the agricultural commission be proactive, and would like Southampton to adopt a Right to Farm bylaw. Other ideas included publicizing www.farmlandinfo.org and encouraging cooperative management of agricultural land.

Cultural and Historic Resources: Many residents would like to see more cultural tourism and a greater awareness of the town's history. One group said there should be flexibility in designating the historical status of a home, and another suggested a "demolition delay" bylaw that requires greater consideration of a building's historic value before it is demolished and replaced with a newer building. The library, one of the town's historic treasures, should be expanded and physically connected to the larger community. Residents would also like to see more venues for cultural and performance space, walkways throughout the historic district, and development of the historic village center area as a destination where artisans could display their works.

Public Services: Participants expressed a desire for some new services, notably an expansion of the library, including more open hours and computers. Residents also hope to physically connect the library with the community. Other desired services include expanding town hall hours; strengthening the town's police, fire and EMT services; and improving the town's land management practices to reduce use of fertilizers. Participants noted the need to plan public services in advance to meet the town's needs as the population grows. One group questioned whether increased services would in themselves change the rural character of the town. Another suggested that the town take a more holistic view of town services to provide broader financial support for cultural, recreational and historic resources. One group suggested that the town needs a recreation center and after school programs, and that the town assess how the School of Choice Program is affecting student/teacher ratios in Southampton schools. Another suggested that the town look into the cost savings of owning a bus company, and consider developing a public safety complex.

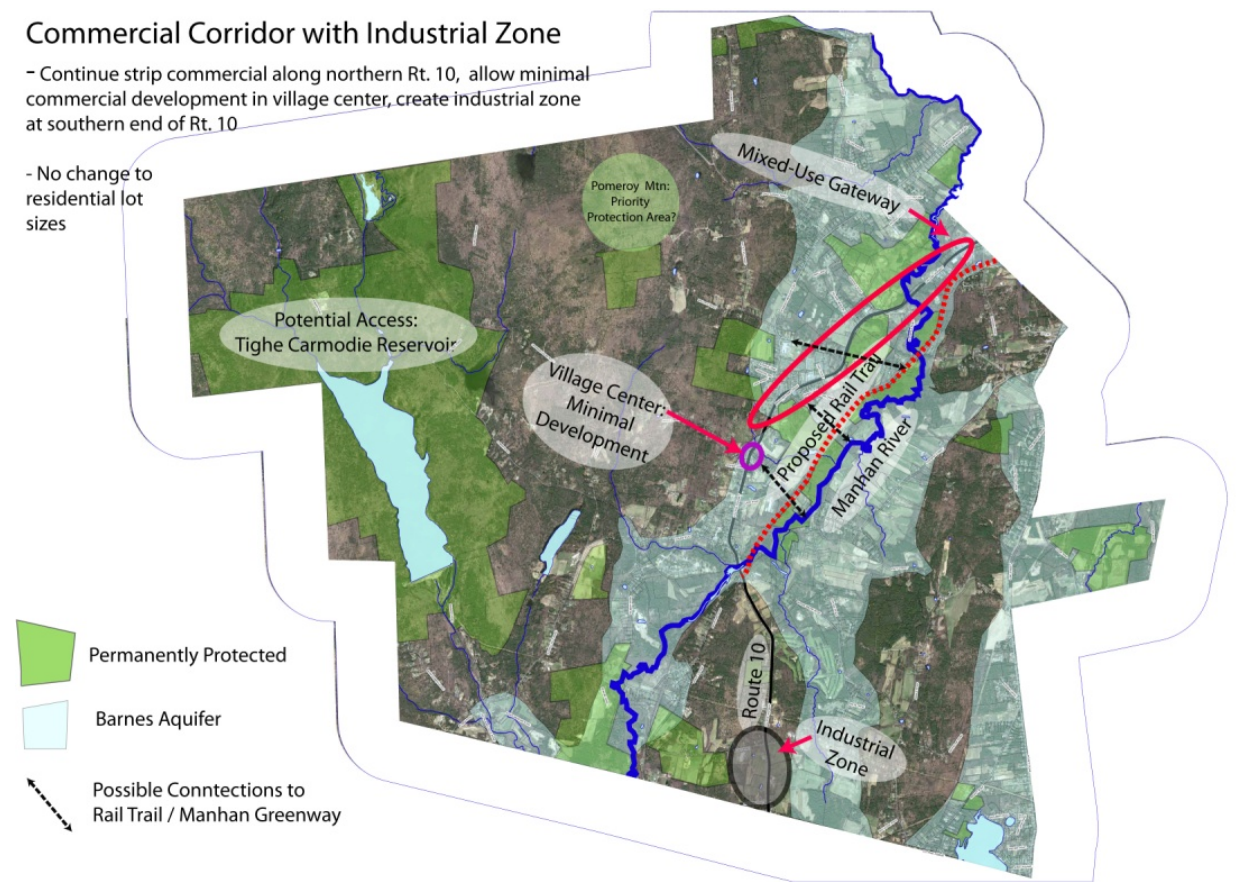
Infrastructure: Participants expressed enthusiasm of FiOs (fiber optics internet services), and also suggested considering the town's options for broadband service. Residents see both pros and cons to developing a sewer system. There were questions about whether sewers were an option in the center of town. Some residents see the merits of developing sewers to accommodate commercial expansion, and one group suggested that a cost-benefit evaluation is merited. At the north and south ends of town, sewers could be extended from Southampton's neighboring communities. During the discussions about infrastructure, residents mentioned a desire for rail service, as well as underground electric wires to avoid power outages. Finally, residents want to see the town improve the safety of roads, and to address visibility and traffic concerns, but to weigh these improvements against scenic impacts.

Economic Development: Residents noted that commercial development could be focused at the south end of town, from Easthampton to the OPA curve, and Cumberland. Other suggestions included considering the west side of southern Route 10 and Russelville for light industrial uses, and some residents support the idea developing an industrial park to improve the town's tax base. However, one group of residents noted that, in reality, there is little suitable land for industrial development. Residents would like to encourage businesses in existing homes, including cottage industries (with restricted noise levels and hours of operation), including web-based businesses, barbers, attorneys, real estate professionals and landscapers. Participants wanted economic development policies to be mindful of existing agriculture. They expressed enthusiasm about promoting agricultural tourism and supported the idea of a village center that is more of a destination, with appropriate commercial development, including an area where artisans could display work, and a breakfast spot.

Alternative Growth Scenarios & Future Land Use Map Activity

For the Future Land Use Map activity, participants were shown three different possible future growth scenarios to stimulate discussion, and were asked to write down their ideas about what they liked and did not like about these scenarios, where they would like different land uses to be in town, and where the town should focus on growth versus conservation.

Commercial Corridor with Industrial Zone: This scenario shows a similar pattern to current development trends, with continued strip commercial development along Route 10, minimal commercial development in the village center, and continued low density residential growth in outlying areas. However, to improve the town's tax base under the current growth pattern, this scenario includes an area for industrial uses at the southern end of Route 10.






Mixed-Use Centers and Agricultural Tourism: The second scenario presents one possible smart growth alternative to the current development pattern by concentrating growth in a number of small mixed-use centers with commercial and residential development. This scenario also includes a mixed-use center in Russellville with an eco-industrial park that has different industries sharing resources and using each other's waste products. The scenario proposes a multi-modal center, perhaps including a Park & Ride lot, where Route 10, the proposed bike path, the proposed Manhan River Greenway, and the train tracks converge. Finally, the second scenario proposes economic development through an Agricultural Tourism Corridor.

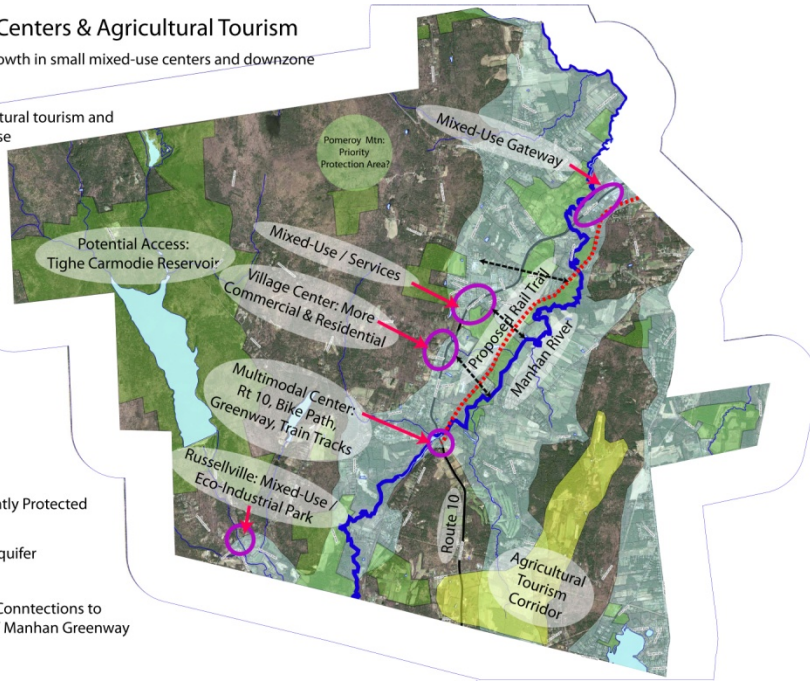
Mixed-Use Centers & Agricultural Tourism

- Concentrate growth in small mixed-use centers and downzone outlying areas

- Promote agricultural tourism and develop mixed-use eco-industrial area

- Allow transfer of development rights from Agricultural Tourism Corridor to mixed-use centers

-  Permanently Protected
-  Barnes Aquifer
-  Possible Connections to Rail Trail / Manhan Greenway






Three Centers, With Gateways: This scenario provides another smart growth alternative that concentrates growth in three adjacent centers. The village center would be expanded to accommodate more commercial and residential development than the other scenarios, a mixed-use services center would be developed to the north along Route 10, and a third smaller center with a neighborhood store and offices would be located near Norris Elementary School. This scenario also indicates visual gateways at the Route 10 entrances to town.

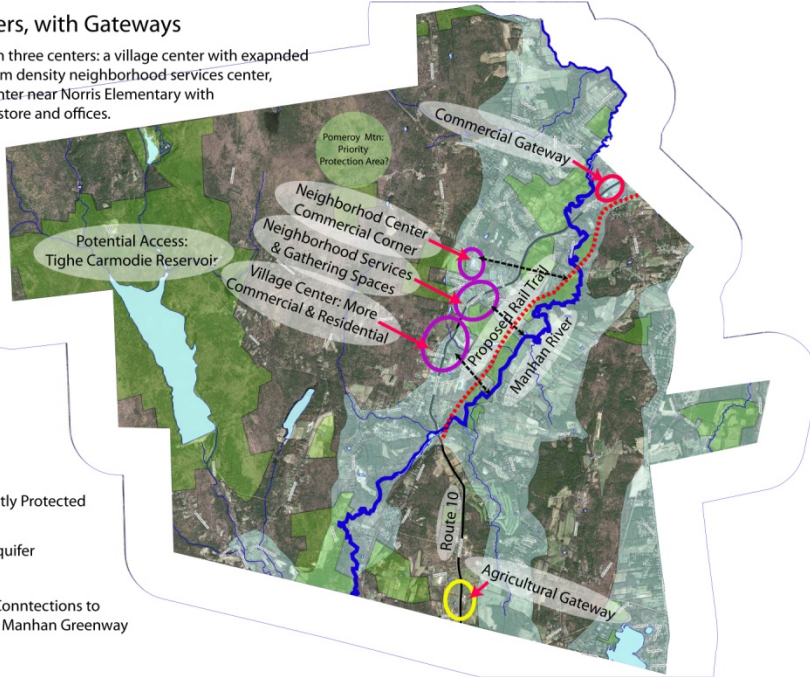
Three Centers, with Gateways

- Focus growth in three centers: a village center with expanded services, a medium density neighborhood services center, and a satellite center near Norris Elementary with a neighborhood store and offices.

- Downzone or allow transfer of development rights from outlying areas

- Develop visual gateways at Rt.10 entries

-  Permanently Protected
-  Barnes Aquifer
-  Possible Connections to Rail Trail / Manhan Greenway



Future Land Use Map Activity:

In the discussions about the alternative development scenarios, small mixed-use centers, an agricultural tourism corridor, and agricultural gateways, especially at the south end of the town, received favorable responses. Residents also support a bike path and making multiple connections to it, including

connections from Big Y and the village center. One group thought the bike path should allow for multiple activities, including horseback riding, and one group supported the idea of a multi-modal center on Route 10 at the southern end of the proposed rail trail. Residents want to keep the town rural, and one group noted that an Arcadia-like sanctuary would be an asset.

Responses to the idea of a Russelville industrial park were mixed; some thought it was a good idea, while others did not. In general, the north end of town along Route 10 was identified as a place for commercial and light industrial development, though one group noted that there should not be big box stores. There was some positive response to the idea of allowing industrial uses at the south end of town along Route 10; however, many groups thought this would be inappropriate and that rural and agricultural uses should be preserved there. Conversations about future growth patterns led to discussions about whether future growth could be limited or restricted. Ideas for accomplishing this included using larger minimum frontages and restricting the expansion of public roads. Some miscellaneous ideas also came out of the Future Land Use Map discussions, including planning for sidewalks within ½ mile of any commercial area, the need for community design standards, and the need to keep trucks off route 10.

Once group desired a true village center with mixed-uses, shops, sewer services, and sidewalks. Another group said that the town should keep the village center quaint, including no billboards, preservation of historic structures, and town beautification efforts. The village center could be connected to the bike path, and residents want to protect Conant Park. One group said there should be no change to the village center. Two groups said they would like to see a farmer's market, and one supported winter recreation activities. Yet another suggested a coffee shop next to heritage books, with a walking path between the two buildings that leads to the library and then connects to the bike trail.

In addition to the comments summarized here, the map below synthesizes some ideas that residents shared about where commercial, industrial, residential, agricultural, preservation, and mixed-uses could be promoted in town. However, some residents noted that there is limited development potential due to topography, wetlands and water bodies.

Collage Activity Results: Village Center

Residents were enthusiastic about the collage activity and appeared to be engaged and having fun. To analyze the results, pictures were categorized and counted. If a picture fell into more than one category, and if the two categories were distinctly different, the image was counted in both categories.

Images of pastoral and rural scenes were most frequently used (11 images), followed by images of farm vegetables (10 images). Related to this, images of a corner or grocery store, of community gardens, and of farmer's markets all appeared twice. Images of people walking and pathways, including one image of a crosswalk, were widely used (10 images), and participants selected three images of trees, three of gardens, and several images of public open spaces, including a park, a playground and a pavilion. There were also five images of benches and outdoor furniture and three images of trash or recycling bins. Another very popular image category was iconic and historic architecture (7 images), and there were three images of American flags. A note tagged to one of these flag images indicated that this represented the desire to preserve Southampton's small town feel. Many of the collages showed families and children (6 images), and there were two images of pets.

Many participants selected images that represented cultural and destination activities (22 images), including six images of culture and art activities, three images of music activities, two images representing books and the library, three images of coffee shops and outdoor seating, two images of corner grocery stores, two images of community gardens, two images of farmer's markets, and two

images of farm animals. Along a similar vein, participants selected images of a number of outdoor activities (8 images), including three images of water-based activities (one of a water park, one of a pool, and one showing boating), two images of sports and exercise activities, and three images of bike lanes and people biking. Two images of bicycle parking were also shown. Finally, the collages included two images of fire and police departments, and one image of green pavers, an environmentally preferable type of paving system.

On the whole, the village center collages reveal that while residents want to retain historic architecture and a rural, small-town feel, they also want the village center to be a vibrant civic and cultural center for Southampton, with public parks, pathways, and multiple activities that accommodate families and children. Activities might include a coffee shop, a corner store, art exhibitions, music and cultural events, community gardens, a farmer's market, a petting farm, and outdoor activities, from nearby water-based activities to field sports, biking and walking. The types of public spaces that would be central to this vision include a civic campus, parks and gardens, indoor and outdoor event spaces, a farmer's market, and a few small stores with outdoor seating. The village center would be walkable and should have benches, trash bins, grass, gardens, trees, open areas and, above all, variety. Some of these ideas are captured in the winning entries from the town's recent village center design competition, shown below.



**“Southampton Village Center”, First Place Award, 2009 Smart Growth Design & Reuse Competition
Kraus-Fitch Architects & Walter Cudnohufsky Associates**



“Bet on the Farm”, Second Place & People’s Choice Awards, Glickman Schlesinger Design Office



View of Village Center from Main Street

“Smart Growth Concepts”, Third Place Award, Philip D. Burdick

Collage Activity Results: College Highway (Route 10)

By far the most frequently selected images for the College Highway corridor were of farmland and pastures (18 images), followed by other rural scenes (16 images), including rural roads and open vistas. Related to this, participants selected two images of farm vegetables, as well. Images of gardens and estates were also quite popular (9 images), as were images of historic architecture (4 images). Natural areas and wildlife were another popular topic area (14 images), including 7 images of wildlife, 6 images of woodlands, and one image of a lake.

Outdoor activities were frequently shown in the collages, including 6 images relating to cycling (bicyclists, bike parking and bike paths), two images of sidewalks, three images of hiking (including one of a trail kiosk), and one image of a water park. There were also five images of public open space (including parks, public gardens, and a pavilion), two images of benches, and two image of community gardens. Two images showed a diversity of users, including families and disabled people engaging in outdoor activities. One of the College Highway collages showed a mixed-use village center with street trees, and several collages included images of public transit (including an image of a trolley and trains). Restaurants and prepared food images were selected several times as well.

Some collages included images of commercial and industrial uses (4 images), and one of these included an image of a commercial building set at the street (not set back with parking in front). Two collages included examples of commercial development that participants did not like, including an image of commercial strip development with a large parking lot (and with a large “X” over the image), and commercial development with a sign that is “not historical.” One collage included images of vehicles with a note indicating that the participants do not want trucks and traffic along College Highway, one collage included a Park & Ride commuter lot, one collage showed an image of a wind farm, and one collage even showed an image of a stormwater treatment plant, to represent “clean water.”

One group made a collage of “residential development” that they indicated does not apply exclusively to College Highway. This collage included an image of a rural estate, two images of community-oriented cohousing type residential developments, three images of traditional architecture (including images of homes with front porches), and three images of neighborhood open spaces and playgrounds.

The clear consensus represented by the participants’ collages is that College Highway should remain rural, agricultural and scenic; that new development should be compatible with historic architectural styles and should be oriented to the street; and that there should be natural areas, public open spaces, and outdoor recreational activities along the corridor. Residents also want alternative transportation options, including sidewalks and bike paths. Some collages included images of general commercial and light industrial type development, though it was also suggested that development should not be of the auto-oriented strip commercial variety, and that trucks and auto traffic should be minimized.

Themes & Consultant Comments

Southampton residents like living in Southampton. However, they are concerned about sprawl development patterns and want to preserve agricultural and open space lands in the town. In addition, residents are concerned about the lack of affordable and diverse housing options, and there are a number of new and expanded town services that residents would like to see. During the Future Land Use Map activity, most groups favored small mixed-use centers, an agricultural tourism corridor, and agricultural gateways, especially at the south end of town. Residents also widely supported alternative transportation options, including sidewalks and the proposed bike path. Further, residents want a vibrant village center with a rural, small-town feel. This center would be walkable and would have activities and public spaces with benches, trash bins, grass, gardens, trees, open areas and, above all, variety. The village center could have a coffee shop, a corner store, art exhibitions, music and cultural events, community gardens, a farmer’s market, a petting farm, and outdoor activities, including field sports, biking and walking. Meanwhile, while residents are open to the idea that commercial or light industrial development could help enhance the town’s tax base, residents would like College Highway to remain as rural, agricultural and scenic as possible.

Based on a Build-Out Analysis of Southampton’s zoning regulations in 2000, Southampton’s regulations would eventually result in the town having 20,240 residents. This is a far greater number than most Southampton residents would prefer. Residents have expressed a desire to minimize sprawl development while providing a greater variety of housing types and transportation options. A future growth pattern that concentrates new growth around mixed-use centers and limits growth in outlying areas is compatible with residents’ desires as well as smart growth principles. However, in practice, it can be difficult to make the regulatory changes that are necessary because of public aversion to higher density development, as well as opposition from private landowners in outlying areas who perceive that their property will lose value as a result of the proposed changes.

In addition to the pattern of development, the mix of development in Southampton is an important issue. Many residents support more balanced growth that includes a mix of residential and commercial development, and many recognize that commercial development could improve the town’s tax base and

help keep residents' taxes lower. However, more commercial development would require sewer infrastructure, and some residents support development of sewer infrastructure, while others do not. If it were pursued, it would be easiest to extend sewer infrastructure from neighboring communities to the north (Easthampton) or south (Westfield). However, any new development in the village center would require sewer infrastructure, which would be difficult to extend from neighboring cities.

One final critical issue is that of services. One group suggested that increased services might not in themselves later the town's rural character. However, services do cost money to provide, and some services, such as sewer, are capable of allowing for new development that affects the town's character. Residents would like to see more pedestrian amenities, passive and active recreation opportunities (including a bike path), gathering spaces, traffic calming, and public safety, sewer and library services. In addition, the town might benefit from the services of a Town Planner, who could help develop regulatory changes to pursue balanced growth and smart growth development patterns, and who could help prioritize and establish some of the expanded services that make sense for Southamptton.

Moving Towards a Vision Statement

Based on the vision statements developed by residents during the first night's visioning exercise, the following are offered for consideration:

In 2030, Southamptton....

- ...is a community with balanced growth that promotes economic development yet maintains its rural character.
- ...has retained the feel of a small New England village by implementing smart growth zoning and preserving open space and scenic views.
- ...is a community where residents have many transportation options, including walking, biking and public transit.
- ...is a town with passive recreation, gathering spaces, and programs for all ages.
- ...is a community that is environmentally friendly.
- ...is a town that embraces change and is receptive to new technologies.
- ...is a welcoming, caring, thriving community for all ages with a well-planned village center that provides community, cultural, and commercial amenities.
- ...is a town that has preserved its historic buildings, open spaces and agricultural lands.
- ...is a close-knit and vibrant community with residents who are committed to sustainability, volunteerism, and each other.
- ...is a community with many small, local businesses, a well-developed agricultural tourism economy, and a vibrant village center that welcomes people of all ages.