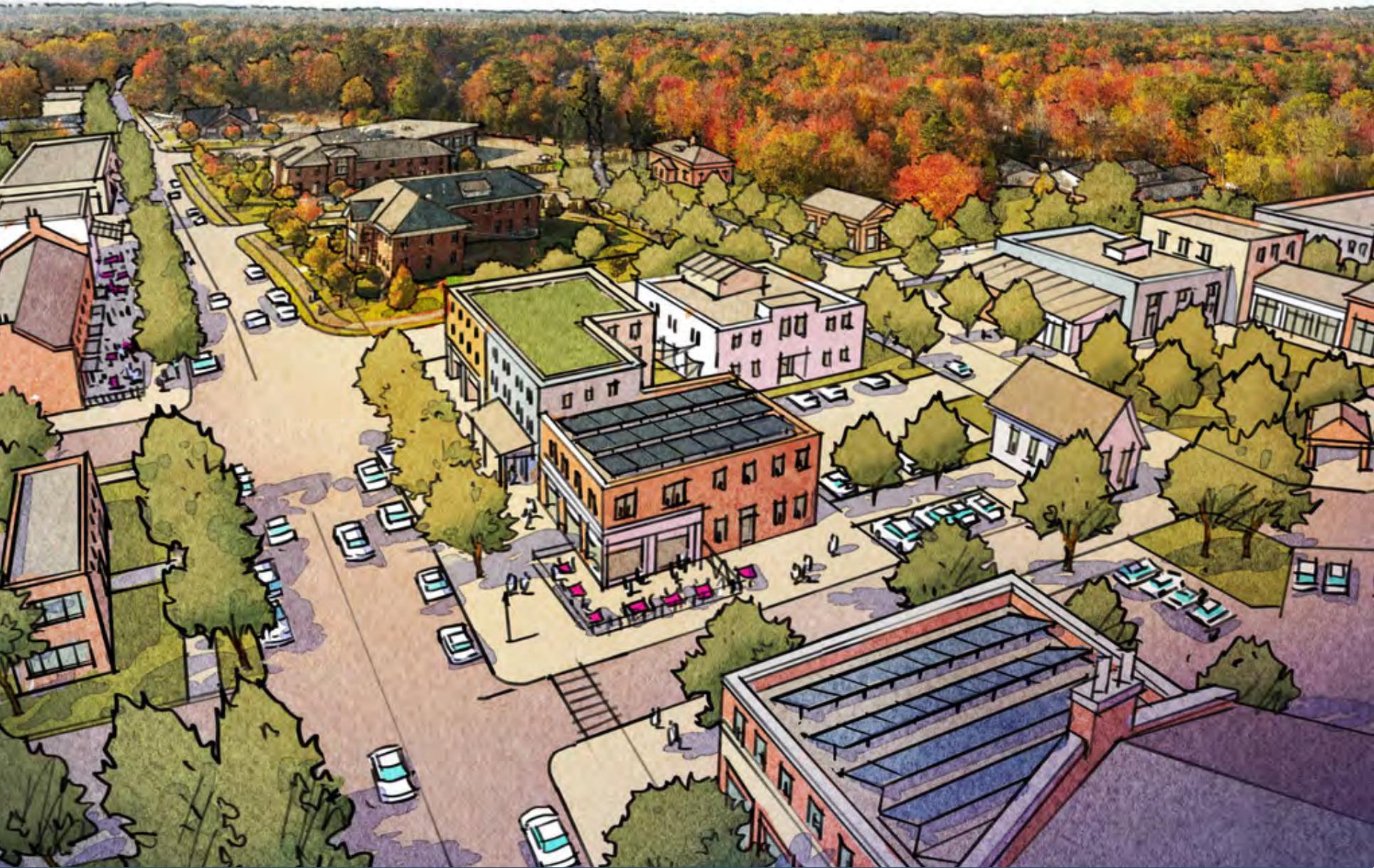


# Topsham Comprehensive Plan Update 2019





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**Welcome to the Plan**



# Introduction to the Plan

The Topsham Comprehensive Plan began in 2017 with the intent to update the Town's existing plan from 2007. Topsham's Selectboard made decisions early in the planning effort to support a public participatory process that was new to Topsham. A diverse group of volunteers were appointed to a Comprehensive Planning Update Committee to shepherd the effort. Town Staff and the Committee began an almost year-long effort to provide educational opportunities for both volunteers and citizens to build local capacity around current trends in planning and economic development. In October 2017, the Town hosted a five-day public planning event called "Plan Your Topsham" that involved over 300 town residents in shaping the future vision for Topsham. The overwhelming sentiment of this event was positive: people love Topsham, and were grateful for an opportunity to engage in this planning process. After "Plan Your Topsham", the Town provided additional ways to give feedback, including a plan open house, public workshops, and an online comment platform. As a result, the voices of Topsham's residents are embedded within this plan, and provide a framework for future incremental action and change.

This plan sets forth an aspirational set of Big Ideas which capture the spirit of the five-day public planning process, supported by catalyst site drawings that communicate the overarching vision that residents have for Topsham. The plan advocates for a right-sizing of the Town's 2007 Designated Growth Area (shown in Part 2 of this plan), recommending a contraction to accomplish two fundamental goals: **1)** create more value and support more intensive use of land where investments in infrastructure have already been made; and **2)** protect rural character, working farms and forests, and preserve open space for conservation and recreation. Rural lands can be preserved if new growth is directed towards the Town's center: Topsham Fair Mall Road area, Upper Village, Lower Village, the Heights, Navy Annex and around the municipal complex on Main Street.

Topsham's future is wide open, and actions taken today will influence how Topsham evolves beyond the 12-year anticipated horizon of this Comprehensive Plan. What we learned from Plan Your Topsham is that people are interested in change that creates a more cohesive and connected community that nurtures and supports children, families, singles and retirees alike. Implementing the Big Ideas strategies of this plan will require the hard work of many leaders and volunteers acting collaboratively, thoughtfully and

**The Comprehensive Plan is the Town's official adopted statement of intent for the future of Topsham. Comprehensive Plans provide a framework for decision-making regarding municipal ordinances and policies, and inform budgetary decisions about investment in special studies and capital improvements. This plan, being Part 1, is complimented by a separate Part 2 document that contains a full inventory of conditions, trends and analyses organized by topic. Parts 1 and 2 collectively represent a complete Comprehensive Plan consistent with the intent of the rules and requirements set forth in the Growth Management Act (30-A M.R.S.A. §§ 4312 - 4350) and Chapter 208: Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule.**

# Letter from the CPUC

## **The only way to predict the future is to create the future.**

The above quote, often attributed to Abraham Lincoln, has been the guiding principle for the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee. Our mission from the outset has been to create a vision for Topsham's future based upon input and guidance from Topsham residents that would be a guide to the Town's growth and development. During our 2-year planning process, through community gatherings, public meetings, social media posts and online comments, we heard from hundreds of residents who, while not always agreeing with each other, have good intentions and show a true sense of caring about Topsham's future.

And that is Topsham's strength. We consistently heard that people want to live here. They may have to commute to work but they choose to live in Topsham. For some it's about convenience, with easy access to highways north and south that lead to employment centers, shopping and entertainment; some love the quality of life, the feel of comfort in a small New England town that still possesses a rural character, small and accessible government, and green spaces with hiking trails and water access for recreation. Others still are drawn by the quality of the public schools and, for older adults, the proximity of a small-ivy college and the benefits that a college town provides. Yes, Topsham is a wonderful place to live.

But we also heard about the challenges facing Topsham's future. The biggest issue for most residents isn't that there will be growth and development in the Town; in fact, to most this is inevitable. The concern is how much growth should there be, what kind of development do we want, where should it take place, and how will it impact the quality of life in the community. How does Topsham balance the ideals of its rural character and small town feel with the need to expand its property tax base so that people can continue to live here, and yet avoid the suburban sprawl that has affected so many other communities?

We heard from residents that they are concerned about street safety. People want streets that are walkable and user-friendly for bicyclists, as well as being safe for children in the neighborhoods. Residents want lower speeds and more traffic enforcement on many secondary streets, particularly in congested neighborhoods. And people want their streets to connect to other neighborhoods.

We heard from residents that they want more gathering spots in town, to meet and socialize more with others in the broader Topsham community. We're proud of our library because it acts as a community center; we have the Topsham Fairgrounds (though many see it as an under-utilized asset that could host many more events for

the community); and some even love to congregate at the Town's Transfer Station. But we also heard that people would like to see a recreation center, a waterfront park in the Lower Village, and a Main Street with shops and cafes that would help create a stronger sense of town identity.

We heard about the need to be supportive of the knowledge economy, encouraging the creation of small and home-based businesses. There is also a need to ensure that fast broadband internet is available across the Town. This will be critical if we hope to retain and attract younger people to our town.

We heard from many that affordable housing, whether rentals or for purchase, is becoming increasingly rare in Topsham. If we want people to stay here and if we want to attract new residents we must explore the feasibility of diversifying our housing stock. This may mean modifying minimum and/or maximum lot sizes or square footage of houses.

And, finally, we heard from residents that they want our growth to be thoughtful and deliberate. They want growth that prevents sprawl, creates walkable communities, maintains, and even increases, green spaces while at the same time increases our tax base, keeps the Town's finances strong and maintains and supports town services. They want growth that strengthens neighborhood identities in addition to strengthening our village core.

These are not insurmountable challenges, but overcoming them will require us to come together as community to clearly define what we want Topsham to be 5, 10 and even 15 years from now. What is certain is that if we aren't clear on where we want to go, if we don't define the development and growth that we want, someone else will define it for us. We hope that this update of the Comprehensive Plan is a step in helping us to create our own future.

Thank you for helping us to Plan Our Topsham.

The Comprehensive Plan Update Committee

Larry Fitch, Chair  
Mary Kate Appicelli  
Joe Feely  
Jennah Godo  
Matt Nixon  
Susan Rae-Reeves

# Letter from the Planning Department

Dear Topsham Resident,

With your attentive guidance throughout our planning process we developed a plan for Topsham that reflects our shared vision and values. Planning for a prosperous future for our community takes purpose, intent, care and time. Understanding and respect of our history, caring for our neighbors' welfare, and creating a vision of our future that enhances our community are all essential elements to a plan that sets us on a productive course.

In this planning effort, Topsham decided to undertake a new approach to Comprehensive Planning. While meeting the State requirements, we prioritized a focus on community engagement. With the guidance of the consultant team, the effort veered away from engaging with citizens primarily via internet or mailed surveys. Rather, we deliberately sought face to face discussions over a short, intensive time period. The intent and purpose of this approach was to create an atmosphere that enabled citizens to meet with one another in a social gathering setting, where candid conversations about our shared future guided the planning process. We were astounded by the overall turnout and meaningful discussions that occurred. We believe the approach taken produced a sharper vision in regards to Comprehensive Planning.

Perhaps more importantly this approach proves that coming together as a community in this type of setting is a worthy endeavor.

Topsham is proactive and prepared for change, thereby poising itself as a community prepared for success. In light of ongoing changes to our economy, our world, and our community, implementing this vision for a fiscally, environmentally, and socially sustainable future is paramount. The recommendations of this plan will be implemented over many years with cooperation, patience, and diligence. We look forward to working together to bring this vision to life.

Warm regards,  
Topsham Planning, Development & Codes





# Meet Your Topsham

# A History of Topsham



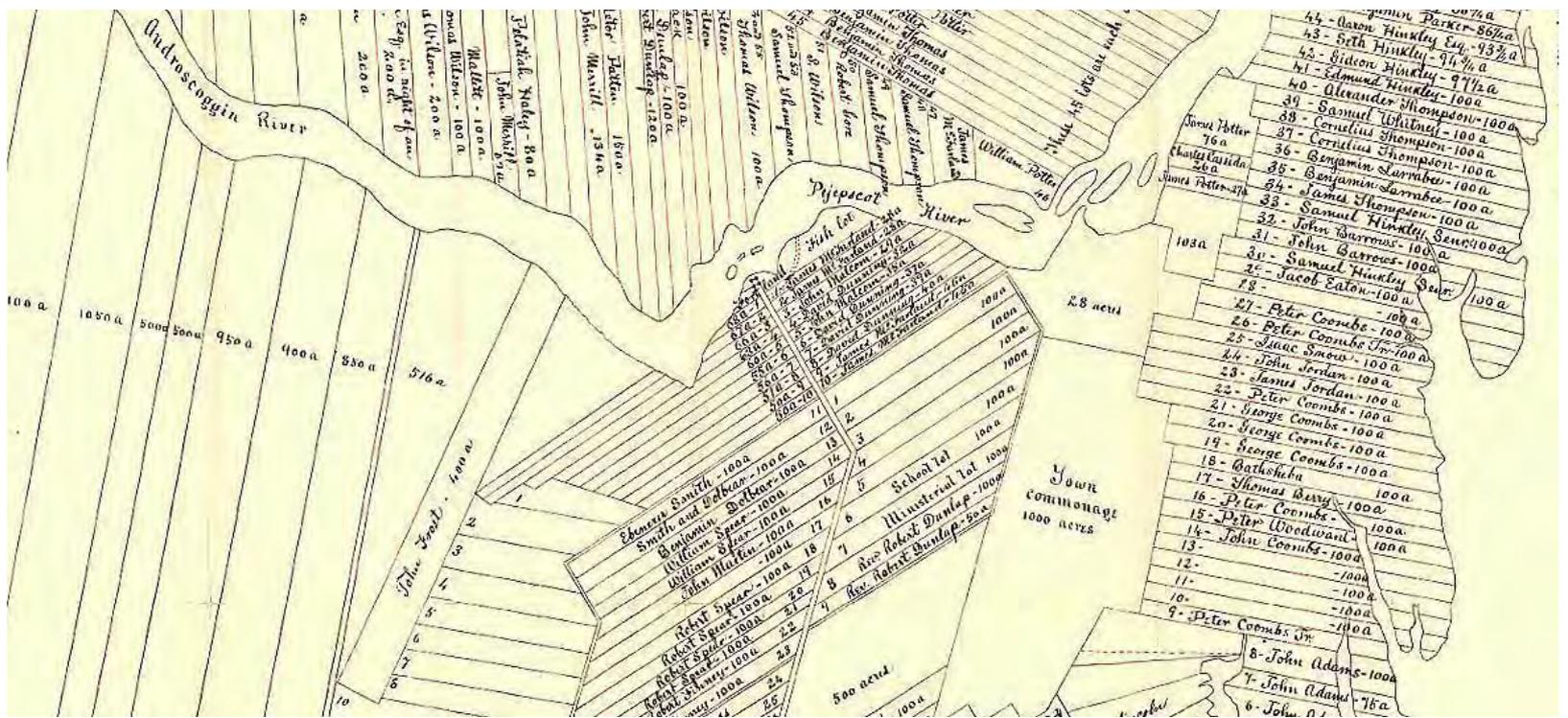
This detail from the 1876 Bird's Eye View of Brunswick and Topsham shows a portion of Topsham Village. Nearly all the buildings shown remain standing and recognizable in 2018, making Topsham an exceptionally intact historic village. Pejepscot Historical Society.

The falls of the Androscoggin River at what would become Topsham and Brunswick were important to Native Americans long before European exploration and settlement began. The river had one of the largest wild Atlantic salmon and sturgeon runs in Maine, and for thousands of years the falls provided an excellent location to catch this important food source. The massive seasonal fish run was also a primary attraction for the first European settler, Richard Purchase, who came from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and purchased title to both sides of the river at the falls from Native chieftain Worumbo in 1628, less than a decade after the Pilgrims arrived New England. In 1631, Purchase caught, processed, and packed 36 barrels of salmon and 90 barrels and ninety kegs of sturgeon for shipment to England for sale.

Five or six families from Massachusetts settled in the wilderness that would become Topsham in the 1630s. Perhaps another ten families settled in other locations around Merrymeeting Bay. Little is known about these first European settlers who farmed, fished, and traded in furs beyond a few names and approximate locations of some of their homesites. All were killed or driven out during King Phillip's War, beginning in 1675. Almost none returned. Following King Philip's War, the authorities in Boston built Fort Andros of wood in 1688 to protect the fishery and encourage resettlement. As tensions with the French and natives eased temporarily, the fort was abandoned in 1694.

A second wave of settlers to the region arrived after 1714, Scots-Irish families immigrating from Ireland. A group of Boston investors, as the Pejepscot Proprietors, purchased up the deeds from descendants of the first wave of settlers and often purchased new titles from the Natives as well, assembling a large tract that included all of Topsham, Brunswick, Harpswell, and portions of other towns. They had the land surveyed and divided it into lots for sale to settlers. They built a stone fort, named Fort Gorges, to protect these settlers and the fishery in 1715. It was manned until 1737. Settlers again periodically departed for the south or were killed during conflicts with the Natives and French, but most returned and the settlement was more or less permanent. The second wave of settlers also farmed, but also focused on cutting and sawing the extensive stands of timber in the region for sale in the rapidly growing city of Boston and in England. Eastern Massachusetts was largely cut bare by this time and wood was needed for cooking and heating as well as building.

While the stands of timber were a major attraction, it was the available water power of the Cathance and Androscoggin rivers that would create the community we know today. With limited technology and man-power, the earliest sawmills were established on the smaller Cathance at the encouragement of the Proprietors. It was not until 1753 that an attempt was made to dam the Androscoggin. A wooden wing dam, extending only part way into the river at an upstream angle was built to funnel water into a mill on the Brunswick bank. In 1756, a group of Topsham residents financed a project to build a dam



from Shad Island to the peninsula in Topsham to reverse the flow of a small seasonal watercourse, the Granny Hole Stream. They blasted a channel at the head of the peninsula, making it an island, and created an industrial canal to power several mills on the island and at the foot of Green Street. Within a few decades three dams extended between Brunswick and Topsham and powered dozens of small mills, including sawmills, and grist mills. These were all wood buildings that were regularly lost to fire or flood. The development of dams and industry put an end to the fishing industry in the area.

Expanded industry helped fuel an increase in population. Until the 1790s, most residents lived on farms along what are now Middlesex, Foreside, and River Roads, with the community's meetinghouse and cemetery near Cathance Road – where the first industry had been developed. In 1768, the population was numerous enough to successfully petition the Governor and Council in Boston to incorporate the Town. The name Topsham was chosen by Council, presumably at the suggestion of the Pejepscot Proprietors who still owned the majority of the land. The Town was named for Topsham, England, an important shipping port at the time. Several of the wealthy Proprietors were involved in shipping and may have chosen the name to honor a profitable port for their shipments from Boston. There is no documentation for early settlers from Topsham, England in the Town.

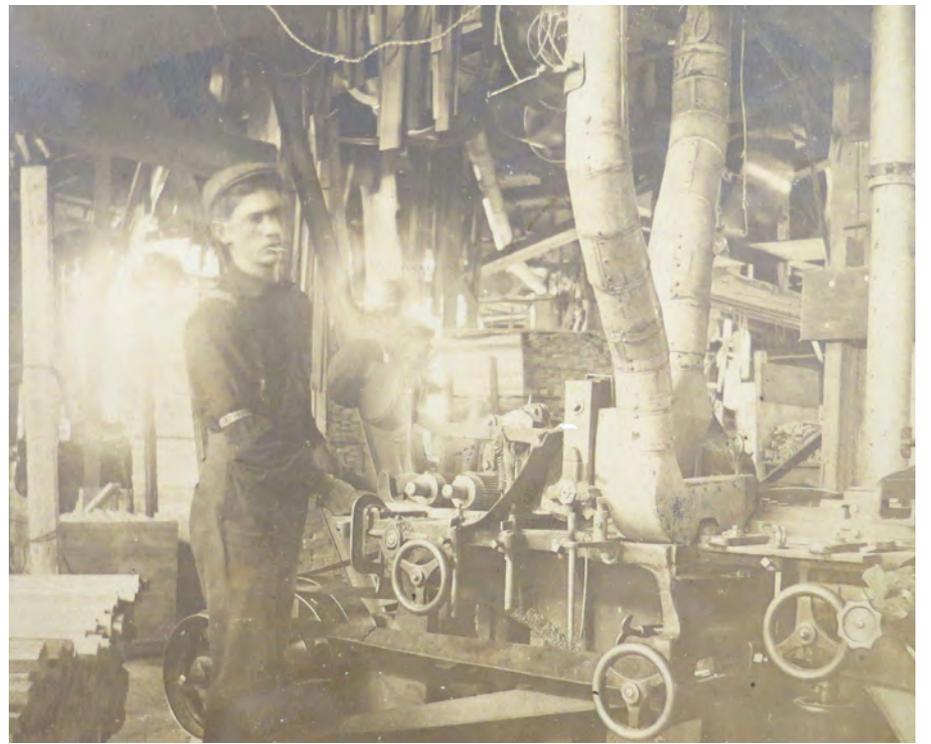
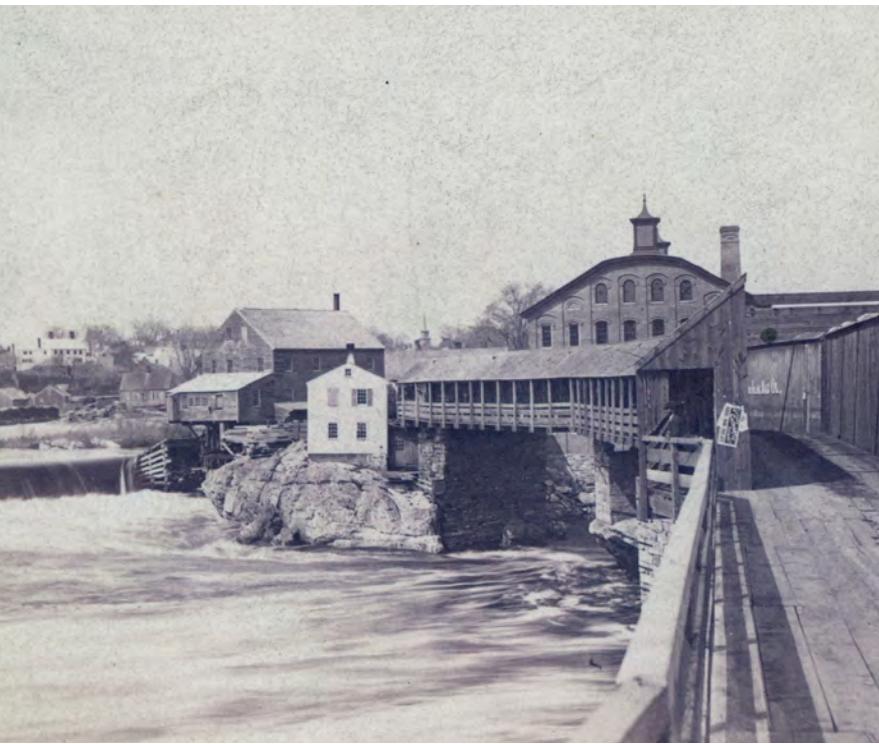
In 1796, a private corporation was chartered to build a toll bridge between Topsham and Brunswick. With this important transportation link, the only bridge across the Androscoggin River at the time, and the increasing industry at the falls, the village of Topsham rapidly developed in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Larger mills were built, and the first small textile mills were started. The flat flood plain along the river below the falls was ideal for shipbuilding and a number of residents became wealthy investing in and building ships to trade around the globe. Many of Topsham's grand Federal and Greek Revival style homes were built by these men. More modest but still stylish homes were built by successful mill owners and farmers. In 1848, the

This detail from an eighteenth century Pejepscot Proprietors map shows the division of land into long narrow lots, most with access to the river. River access was necessary for moving cut timber to mills downstream and for transportation before roads were established. *Maine Historical Society.*

railroad arrived in Topsham, crossing a new bridge below many of the shipyards and cutting off their access to the sea. The introduction of iron plating on wood ships around the same time required a higher level of industrial development and the Bath shipyards took the lead, finishing off shipbuilding in Topsham.

In 1835, the first large granite textile mill was built on the Brunswick side of the river. It would be expanded repeatedly and ultimately rebuilt on a grander scale as the Cabot Mill. Topsham's first large brick mill was built on the mill island for the Bowdoin Paper Company in 1868, later taken over by the Pejepscot Paper Company. Over time these large mills survived while the many small wooden mills disappeared. For many decades the primary industry of Topsham was making paper. In the late 1890s, the Pejepscot Paper Company built a second mill and a village to house its workers several miles upriver, near the Lisbon line. They named the village Pejepscot. Another sizable industry developed after the discovery of large deposits of feldspar near the old Cathance settlement in Topsham. The mineral that is only found in a few locations in America was mixed with clay to create porcelain. Mines were dug, and mills established to turn the feldspar rocks and other products into powder at Cathance and on Elm Street near the railroad. Farming continued to be an important part of the local economy as well, with the New England sheep farming boom and the establishment of the Topsham Fair by the Sagadahoc Agricultural in 1855.

Around the same time, as the Cabot Mill was rebuilt in larger form in Brunswick and needed more workers, a housing crunch developed in both communities. Several Topsham residents formed the Topsham Land Development company and built a village of millworker housing upstream from the mill, called Topsham Heights. They built a pedestrian suspension bridge to allow



workers to cross to their jobs, parochial school, and church in Brunswick. These workers were primarily French-Canadians, recruited by the Cabot company to come work in Brunswick. As Catholics, many preferred to send their children to the parochial school already established at St. John's Catholic Church across the river. The first wave of settlers to the region had been English, the second wave Scots-Irish. As the Town grew in the later eighteenth century, the settlers were primarily second or third generation English-Americans from the increasingly crowded towns of eastern Massachusetts and coastal New Hampshire. When the Pejepscot Paper Company built their new mill and village, they recruited workers from Eastern Europe, particularly the Czech and Slovak regions. The feldspar mining and processing industry attracted Italian immigrants and created another ethnic community within the larger community of Topsham.

After a long period of relative economic stability and a growing middle class, Topsham's industries faltered in the second half of the twentieth century and never recovered. While the loss of industry was painful, the badly polluted Androscoggin River was able to begin to recover – helped by the federal Clean Water Act. New commercial

development came in response to the construction of Interstate 295 through town in the 1970s. In the 1980s, with a dwindling economic base, it was recognized that Topsham's historic village and paper mill were resources that could attract new residents and development if protected. Topsham village is exceptionally intact from the late nineteenth century, something few communities can claim. The establishment of a historic district and eventual rehabilitation of the mill for new uses established Topsham's reputation as an attractive historic community. This reputation led to development of a retirement community incorporating two of the historic mansions in the village, eventually expanded with a second, larger community nearby. Another wave of new residents came to Topsham, this time identified by age rather than ethnicity. The expanding population, attracted by the high quality of life in the historic village along the Androscoggin, led to increased commercial development near the highway. Topsham now has the largest population in Sagadahoc County.

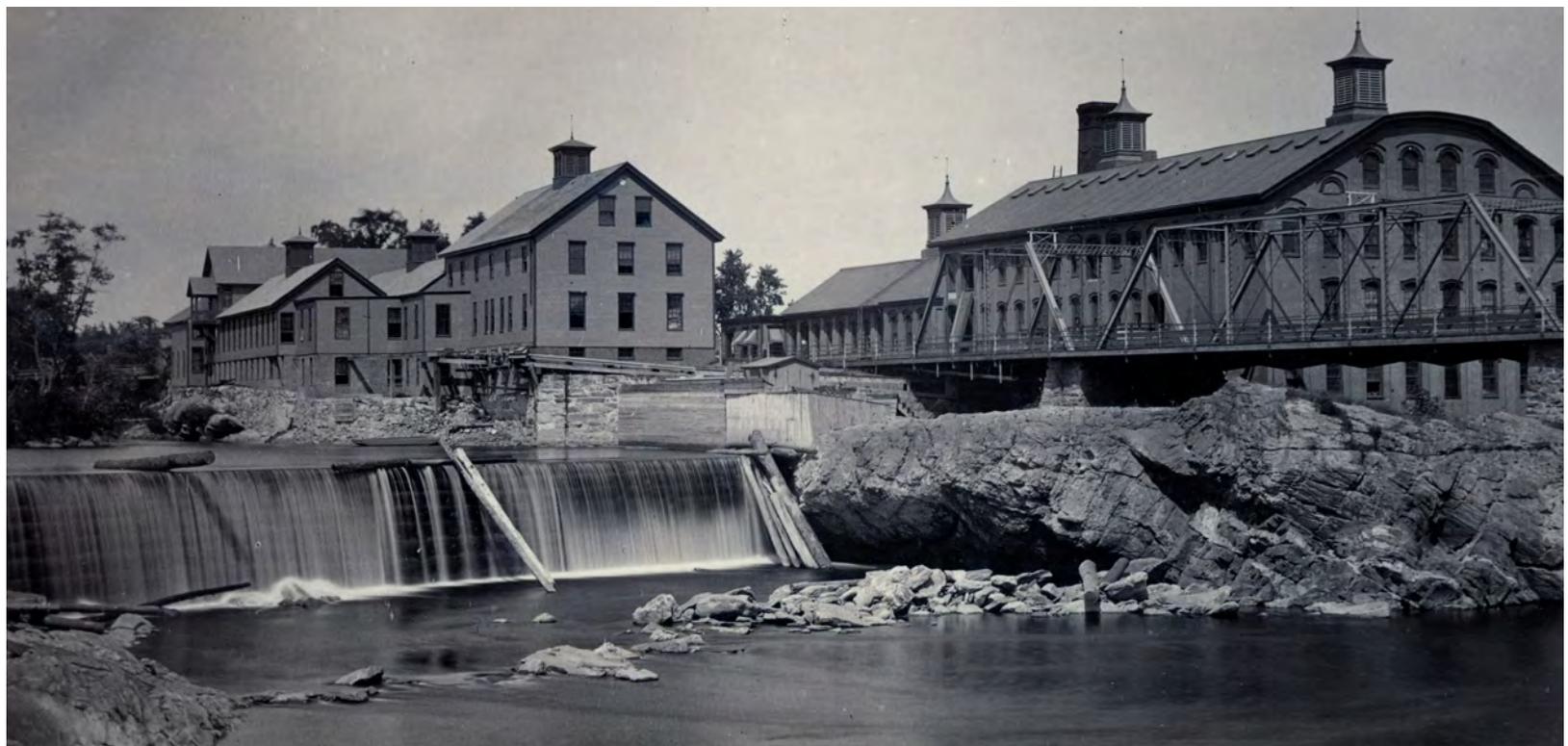
**Submitted by Scott Hanson, Topsham resident and historian.**

**Top Left:** Covered wooden bridge from Bowdoin Mill Island to Brunswick.

**Top Right:** Employee working at Window Sash Mill.

**Bottom:** Bowdoin Mill Island, looking from Brunswick.

Maine Historic Preservation Commission.





Main Street looking south, Topsham 1885. Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

**Insight:** According to the Maine Historical Preservation Commission, Topsham has:

- 23 Historic Archaeological sites on the State data list
- 34 Prehistoric Archaeological sites on the State data list; 2 listed on National Register and 19 are probably eligible for listing
- 6 Historic buildings or sites listed on the National Register
- 1 Historic district listed on the National Register



Main Street looking north, Topsham mid-1800s. Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

# Topsham Today

The Town of Topsham has approached the update to this Comprehensive Plan with a goal to provide a different kind of planning process than what has been done before in Topsham: to cultivate an open and engaging public process with an intense five-day public design planning process as the cornerstone, where people of all ages and experiences were welcomed and encouraged to contribute their voices to the plan. We have an opportunity, through each updated Comprehensive Plan, to be deliberate about protecting what we value, avoiding unintended consequences, and addressing needs of all town residents, today and over the next decade. As a result, Plan Your Topsham is a visionary document developed by and for the community to guide new policy, the prioritization of capital improvements, the work plans of town committees and staff, and to encourage future investment into real property in the Town.

Early in the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee's work with the Maine Design Workshop (MDW) team, people expressed a desire to begin the planning process by learning about and visiting every neighborhood and corner of Topsham. The planning process first took on the name "Find, Meet, Plan your Topsham" because the feeling amongst the committee was that many residents living in Topsham are not interacting with all parts of town as they go about their busy lives. Many people are commuting to jobs out of town. Residents with school aged children circulate between home and school-based activities, while retirees circulate in a different way, often limiting interactions with other neighborhoods. By beginning in the neighborhoods, people began to build greater understanding for all parts of town.

As the five-day event got underway, very quickly a similar sentiment emerged from participants, that Topsham residents are not converging and gathering in Topsham. People expressed a sense of disconnect from each other and shared a heart-felt desire to physically connect with other residents in town, in particular amongst the two very different faces of Topsham – the young families, and the retirees. They expressed a desire for greater community connections. A number of residents, for example, spoke of connecting retirees who hold a breadth of knowledge and life experience with young students to cultivate and mentor the next generation. Finally, people expressed gratitude for the chance to gather for this planning process. People said they wanted "more of this,"

referring to the public workshop, music, food, community spirit-building, conversation and camaraderie.

Topsham is in a unique regional position to support new residents and new growth, as it is situated within a 45-minute drive of the State's largest employment centers and highest paying wages in Greater Portland, Lewiston/Auburn, Augusta, Bath, Brunswick, and the Mid-coast region. Topsham has quality schools and has made significant investments in school facilities in the past 10 years. Families are attracted to market-rate, affordable housing options with the convenience of regional retail amenities in the Topsham Fair Mall area and a walking downtown in Brunswick to meet daily needs and provide cultural experiences.

## DATA TRENDS

Parallel to the participatory planning efforts, this process has included a detailed inventory and analysis of existing conditions consistent with Maine's Growth Management Action (30-A MRSA, Chapter 187). This section of the plan provides a broad summary of the key data trends that may affect future planning and the specific policies and strategies for implementing this Comprehensive Plan. Maine Design Workshop interviewed key staff and agencies to complete the inventory, and draft iterations of the inventory were shared with staff and committee for its review prior to finalizing this plan. More detailed information by topic can be found in the appendix.

## The reasons people love living in Topsham are many, but a few key reasons rose to the top of the list, including:

- proximity to other cities and towns
- high quality schools
- outdoor recreational opportunities
- working farms and forests
- open spaces
- Cathance, Androscoggin, and Muddy Rivers



Nancy Greindl.

### POPULATION AND HOUSING TRENDS

Thinking about where Maine’s population is going in the future can be a perplexing task. First, our state population continues to track as one of the oldest populations in the nation, coupled with undeveloped open spaces, forests, farms and water. Second, the majority of municipalities are losing population and, as a result, are directly competing with each other for new population and economic investment to stabilize fiscal budgets. Third, the road infrastructure systems we rely upon heavily to stay connected and move goods between spread out population centers is vast and aging. State funding allocations needed to maintain infrastructure systems is falling short of the actual annual costs to simply maintain what we already have. Municipalities with coastline continue to see gains in new residents and added revenues from higher value housing constructed or rehabbed near the coast. At the same time, we are seeing continued migration of people from Maine’s rural areas to the coast and to southern Maine as traditional resource-based jobs continue to decline.

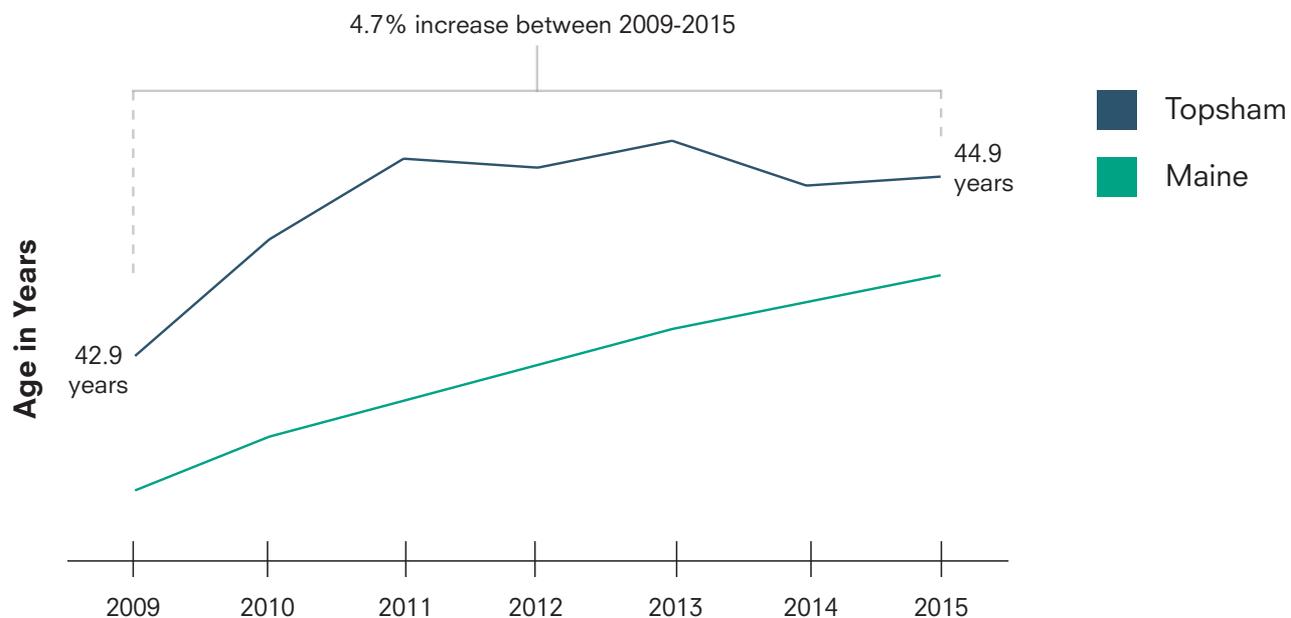
Nationally and regionally we are seeing a trend amongst new empty nesters and boomers selling larger houses in suburban auto-oriented communities to buy scaled down condominiums in cities and walkable village centers. The exception to this trend is the retirees living in smaller post-World War II capes and ranches within or immediately adjacent to walkable village centers in

places like Cumberland Center, Yarmouth, Freeport and Topsham. Long-term boomer residents are holding onto these smaller houses on generously sized suburban lots near good quality schools. These boomers are directly competing with new young families who are looking for this same housing product and neighborhood.

The perplexing aspect of planning comes when thinking about the network of infrastructure on the ground and in the ground today, where the investments have already been made and how and where we should be investing our municipal dollars when the population of Topsham and so many other Maine communities has either decreased or shown little to no gain. Some people think we should have already shifted into a mindset of contraction – of abandoning the formulas that award funding and grants for systems “improvements” or “expansion,” instead adopting more fiscally constrained practices. This might look like shrinking existing infrastructure growth boundaries, right-sizing and not rebuilding oversized streets. This might look like doing more with the land resources we have already affected, adding buildings atop of oversized parking lots on regional corridors to accommodate new housing, new jobs and the social experiences and cultural amenities people are calling for.

Here in Topsham, some people anticipate that investments in the schools, in particular the high school and the possibility of a mandatory public pre-

## Change in Median Age, 2009-2015





Larry Fitch.

school program, will trigger an influx of new students into a system that has been losing enrollment since approximately 2000 and is projected to continue losing enrollment over the next 6 to 7 years (Planning Decisions, 2015). At the same time, the data point to a lack of both market rate and affordable housing for families. The lack of affordable housing in the immediate Portland area will push families north to communities like Topsham. Currently, Topsham does not have the housing supply to accommodate families moving north. Where, for the past several decades, the housing industry has neglected to build small and large apartments, duplexes, and townhouses, Topsham is also missing newer single family affordable and market rate housing.

One potential population cohort accelerator could be new development. Historical settlements that occurred around natural and forest resources such as the rivers is also part of what is drawing outdoor enthusiasts to Topsham today. The rich quality and diversity of the landscape - from rural farms and fields to rivers and forests - is attracting new residents, in particular retirees, to Topsham. Residents describe places in Topsham as instilling a feeling of being out in the wilderness, whether paddling up the Cathance River or walking in forested lands preserved as part of new developments.

Looking at building permit data for the past five years, the majority of permits have been issued for new construction in age-restricted complexes and buildings, or in "naturally occurring retirement communities,"

**Insight:** Topsham's average household size has decreased from 2.53 in 2009 to 2.33 in 2016. The average family size has also decreased from 3.09 in 2009 to 2.74 in 2016.

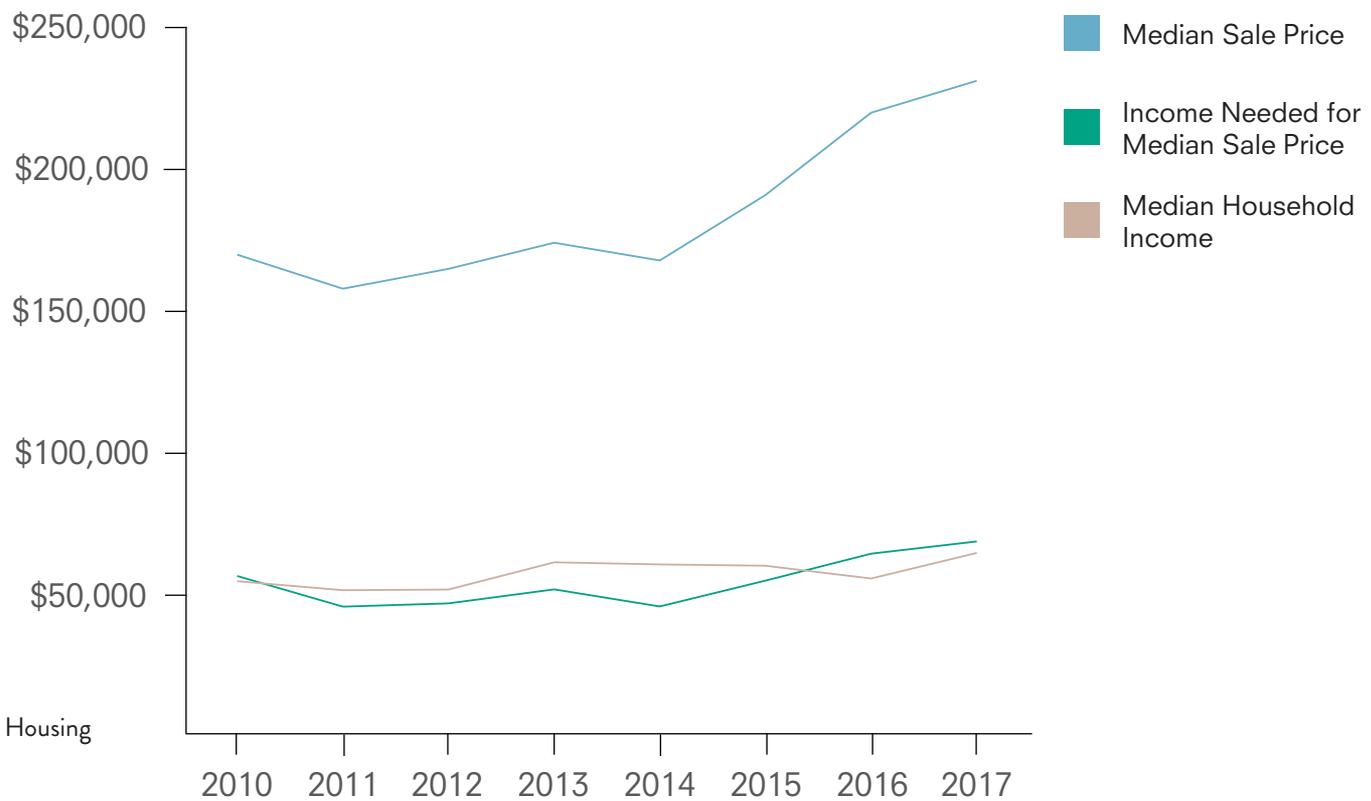
#### POPULATION ACCELERATORS

There is no way to precisely anticipate population trends. There is no way to know for certain who the future faces of Topsham will be. Past projections prepared by the State have not been realized. From 2000 to 2016, Topsham's actual population decreased from 9,100 residents to 8,731, a loss of 369 residents or approximately 4%. The State's projections for Topsham indicate that its population will increase slightly from an estimated 8,750 residents in 2014 to 8,924 residents in 2024. According to the State, Sagadahoc County is one of only four counties in the State that expects to see population growth between 2014 and 2034. Projected growth will be marginal and could still be influenced by any number of accelerators, causing growth or decline.

described by a local resident and planner as a place where the building product, price-point and condominium condition is attracting retirees. A substantial number of new age-restricted units are expected to be permitted and constructed in the near future in the Highland Green area. Continuing to build units restricted to a specific age cohort could send the population trajectory further towards older and retired. This may or may not be a desirable outcome for Topsham.

Another population cohort accelerator could be development of affordable, family and work-force housing. Currently, 57% of Topsham's households cannot afford to buy a house selling for the median sale price of \$220,000. Yet, Topsham has an above state-average median household income of \$69,132 (American

# Housing Affordability, 2010-2017



Source: Maine Housing

Community Survey 5 year estimates, 2016). We know that Topsham has adopted development policies that incentivize construction of affordable, workforce-targeted housing. Whether it is because of a need to tweak the policy or whether it is because construction costs and development costs are too high to yield profit, the Town has seen only limited construction of intentional workforce housing since Topsham Crossing in 2003. The private sector development industry is not building products that today’s households can afford, or that could attract new households priced out of other greater Portland communities.

As an approach to counter population decline of young families with school-aged children, Topsham needs to take deliberate, proactive steps to provide zoning and financial incentives to accommodate new families who want to move to Topsham. Zoning policies and financial programs that offset development costs could encourage the private sector to build a different house product than the \$350,000 plus, 2-bedroom condominium or the \$600,000 plus age-restricted single family dwelling. Regulatory framework overhauls could look like incentive-based zoning that encourages the construction of “missing middle housing.” The missing middle housing type can be described as smaller to medium sized footprint housing, that, when clustered together or located in amongst average sized houses, will increase the overall density of a neighborhood without changing neighborhood character. A handful of smaller buildings may fit in the context of an existing neighborhood in a way that a large apartment building might not.

Some regulatory overhauls may ultimately need to come from the State. For example, amendments may need to be considered to the thresholds that trigger Maine Department of Environmental Protection’s (MDEP) Site Location of Development permit. A 14-lot subdivision on 30 acres does not trigger this review process, yet a 15

lot subdivision does. While the Town has Site Location of Development Authority (SLODA), triggering this level of review increases permitting soft costs. The loss really comes from the added time it takes for permit review. It could be that adjustments in local or state permitting regulations will incentivize the private sector to build more family housing. The Town may need to enter into public-private partnerships with developers or non-profit housing groups to realize new mixed-income, multigenerational neighborhoods.

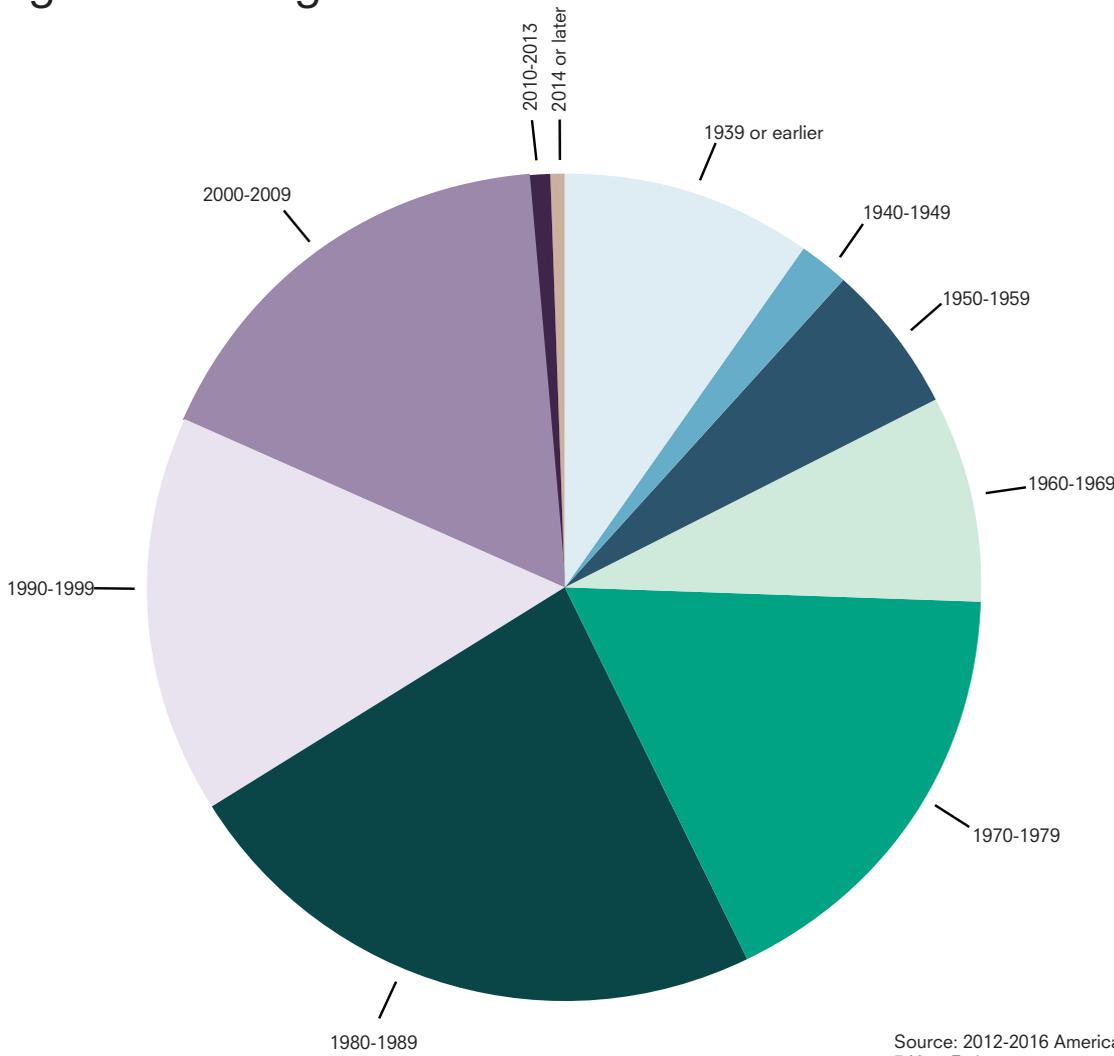
## POSITIONING TOPSHAM FOR DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Regardless of the demographic trajectory, the Town can take proactive steps to ensure the quality of life for residents and the quality of place is maintained and enhanced over time. If the demographic trajectory continues towards a predominantly older, retirement-aged population, some of the physical infrastructure needs of that population look very similar to the needs of children and young adults.

For example, both demographics are dependent on safe, walkable streets to enjoy independence, mobility and good social connections. Both demographics need to be able to experience a level of autonomy to engage in social relationships with peers. Children are dependent on walking, bicycling and riding in parent’s cars to access school, sports, social and cultural activities. Similarly, aging residents can experience physical impairments that may limit their ability to drive or their comfort levels driving or bicycling alongside traffic. Slow streets are known to be more comfortable for the elder driving population than fast regional roads and highways, and slow streets keep elders driving longer.

Residents of all ages have also expressed an interest in promoting a more integrated arts and culture scene that helps bring community together, celebrates local talent,

# Age of Housing



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

and activates underutilized spaces. Residents want a variety of communication platforms such as newsletters, email blasts, or well-placed bulletin boards to help community members connect and learn about events. Public spaces such as the Library are being actively used as community centers, but these spaces are too few in number to meet the need.

Both young and old demographics will benefit from investment in neighborhood parks, playgrounds and commons within 5 minute walks of where people live, for formal and informal recreation and social gathering. This means recreational opportunities should not be centralized to just one location in town, accessed only by those who can drive cars. School playgrounds serve as recreational spaces, but only for a small age cohort (children) and are located beyond a safe walking distance from many of Topsham’s residential neighborhoods and developments. Nationally and locally, villages and walkable neighborhoods are highly desired by families and retirees for their safe walking and bicycle friendly streets, social connectivity, proximity to amenities and the independent lifestyles such communities foster. Building walkable neighborhoods, with a mix of housing types, could be the accelerator that changes Topsham’s demographic future.

## REGIONAL PROXIMITY AND WORKFORCE

Topsham is geographically situated to access the State’s major employers and the highest wages in the State. The rates of both educational attainment, participation in the workforce, and median household income are

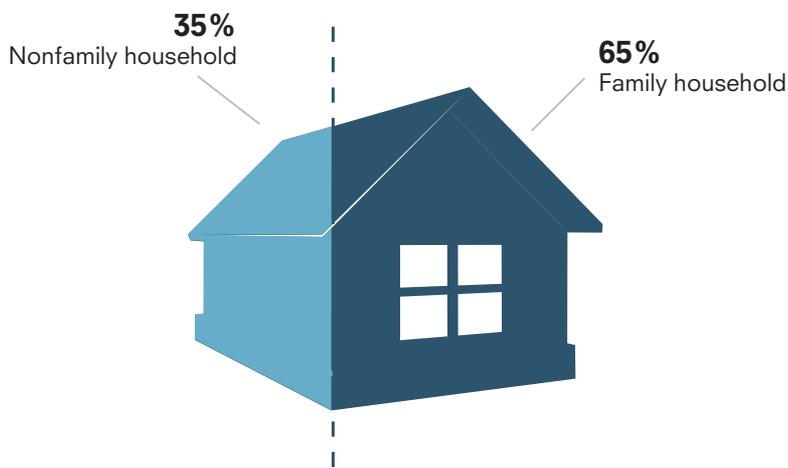
increasing. The percent of Topsham residents with at least a bachelor’s degree has grown from 34% in 2010 to 42% in 2016, which is higher than the State’s average of 29%, but notably lower than other I-295, Portland north communities of Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, Yarmouth and Freeport. Brunswick and Topsham have on par statistics for educational attainment. In 2015, an estimated 4,733 Topsham residents participated in the labor force. Topsham’s unemployment rate has dropped impressively over recent years. In 2010, Topsham’s unemployment rate was 6.2% and by 2016, its unemployment rate had dropped to 2.8%. Of the 4,733 employed workers in Topsham in 2015, the largest percentage, about 28%, were employed in jobs in education, health care and social services.

Some of the increase in workforce participation is representative of retirees re-entering the workforce. From 2010 to 2016, the number of people age 75 and older participating in the workforce increased by 242 people. People age 55 and older participating in the workforce accounts for 1,262 people. This number could indicate that the costs of living for those on fixed incomes has increased in combination with residual effects of the recession on retirement savings, pushing people back into employment. Or, it could mean people are working to keep socially and emotionally active. Increases in workforce participation could also be a direct result of job creation in the region, in particular at Brunswick Landing.

## INTERPRETING DATA

The housing and local economic data is suggesting some

# Household Composition, 2016



Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

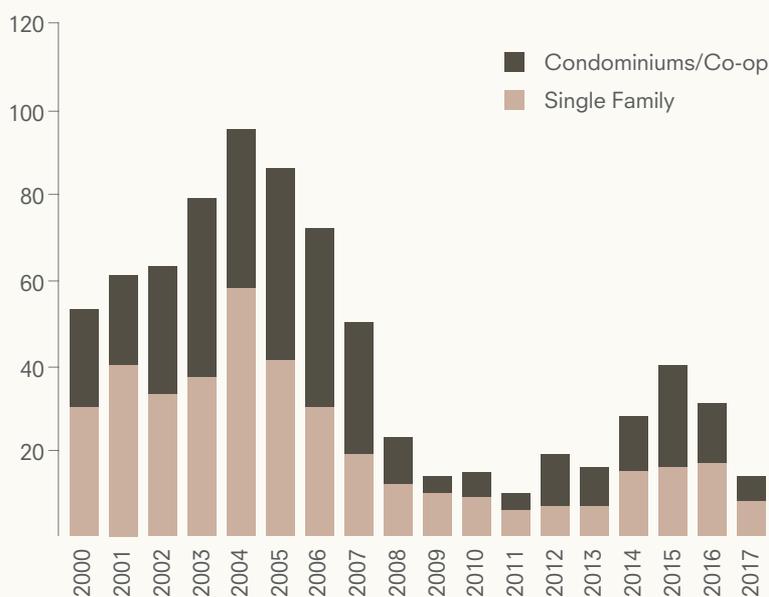


Home rental in Topsham is increasing, from 19% in 2010 to nearly 23% in 2016.



Home ownership in Topsham is decreasing, from nearly 81% in 2010 to 75% in 2016.

## Building Permit Distribution, 2000-2017



Source: Town Assessor

Between 2009 - 2017, demolition permits were issued for:

- 7** houses
- 4** mobile homes and trailers

Source: Town Assessor

**Insight:** Topsham’s current housing stock was built largely between the 1970s and the early 2000s. Comparatively, there has been less construction of houses in the most recent decade. Recent building permit data indicates that construction of housing in this decade has been split almost evenly between condominiums/co-ops and single family houses.

interesting stories. First, Topsham's existing housing stock does not include housing that is affordable to 57% of the households who live here today. In 2016, the median sale price of a house in Topsham was \$220,000 and the median income was \$55,908 which translates to a household being able to afford an \$190,232 house (Maine State Housing Authority, 2016). [Note: This median income data differs from the ACS data previously mentioned, however it is the Maine State Housing Authority's data that is used to calculate housing affordability.]

Second, Topsham residents live within proximity to all of the State's major employment centers. Topsham may not be building the kinds of housing products or neighborhoods that will attract higher wage-earning professionals and families to relocate to Topsham, despite the Town's proximity to major employment centers, quality schools, outdoor recreational amenities and proximity to Brunswick's vibrant Maine Street and cultural opportunities. The question then becomes do we proactively change Topsham's population and demographic trajectory through purposeful actions, such as development initiatives to get the kinds of housing products needed to increase targeted demographics? Do we proactively adjust policies to incentivize development? In this economic market, is it practical to think local government can create enough of an incentive to change what the private sector is building?

#### VALUE OF DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, town leadership has been taking a different look at the math behind development costs to make better decisions about the kinds of development patterns and infrastructure the Town should support and invest in. **Leadership understands that adding additional infill and development to places already served by infrastructure will yield increased taxable value for the Town.** At the same time, concentrating

new growth in Topsham's already developed areas will advance goals of creating more economically-vibrant, walkable Lower and Upper Villages, a Town Center and support the Topsham Fair Mall area as it grows and redevelops over time.

Limiting infrastructure expansion reduces development pressure from the rural transitional edges and areas of town where future protection of farms and working landscapes, and increased conservation and recreational opportunities are desired. In the Topsham Fair Mall Stream watershed, there's approximately 320 acres of which 79% is developed, and of that percentage, 30% of the area is comprised of impervious surfaces. This acreage alone provides ample infill and redevelopment opportunities to support additional growth over the next generation.

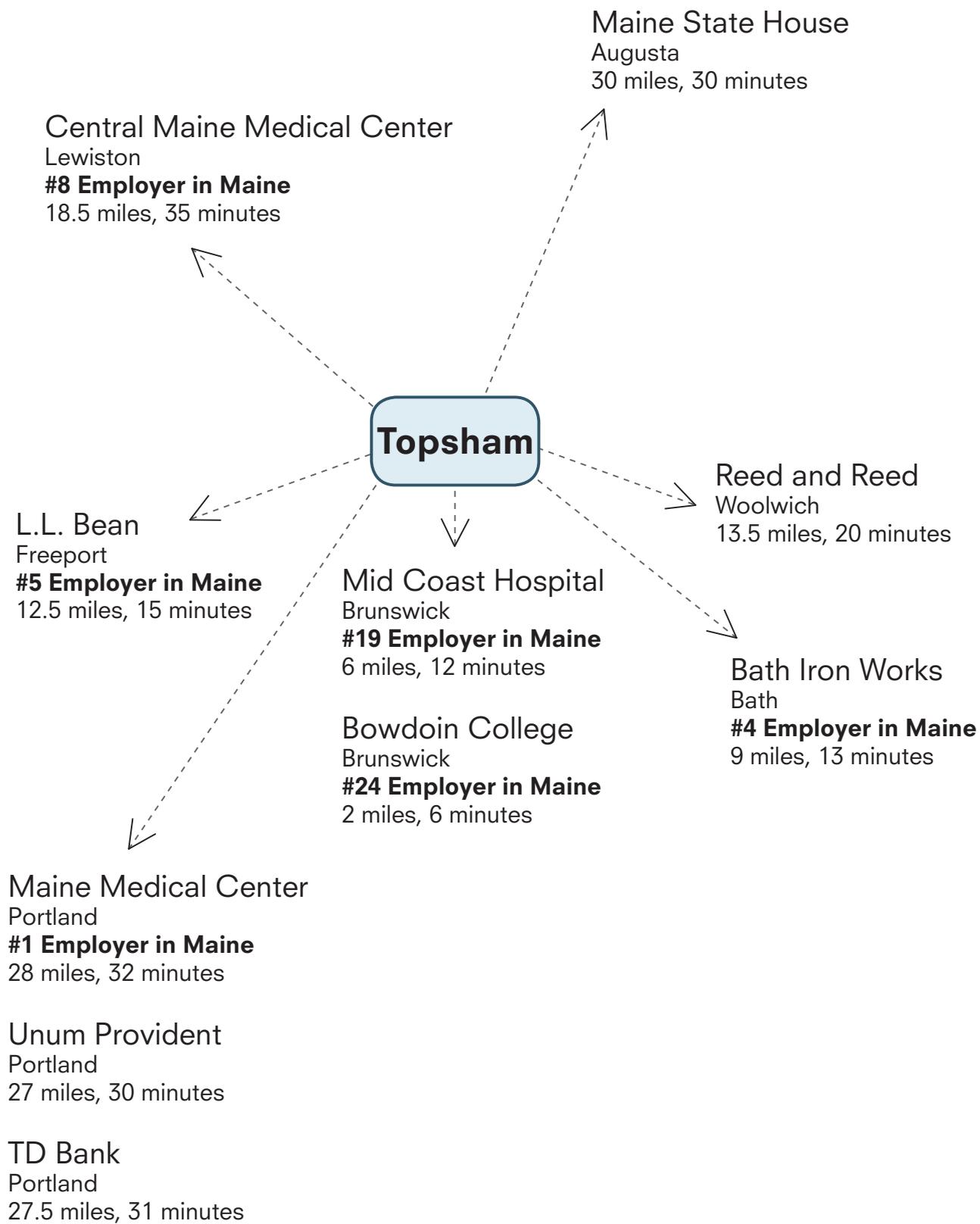
#### SUPPORTING THE PROTECTION OF RURAL CHARACTER

Open spaces provide services to the community, enhancing quality of life for all residents. When open spaces are conserved, values are typically equalized throughout the community. Through active efforts to protect the rural character of Topsham, the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust has worked collaboratively to protect over 700 acres of land either by fee acquisition or easement since the 2007 Comprehensive Plan. When Topsham residents drive the Town's rural roads, people see working farms and forests. When residents were asked during the public process to identify priority places for protection, people marked up the maps to indicate support for Topsham's farms. According to local Tax Assessor's data for 2016, 2,251 acres of farmland comprised of 60 parcels of land are enrolled in the Farmland Tax Program. An additional 110 parcels totaling 3,339 acres of forestland is enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax Program, with another 366 acres of land (5 parcels) taking advantage of the Open Space Tax Law

Marilyn Hunter.



# Regional Employment Opportunities



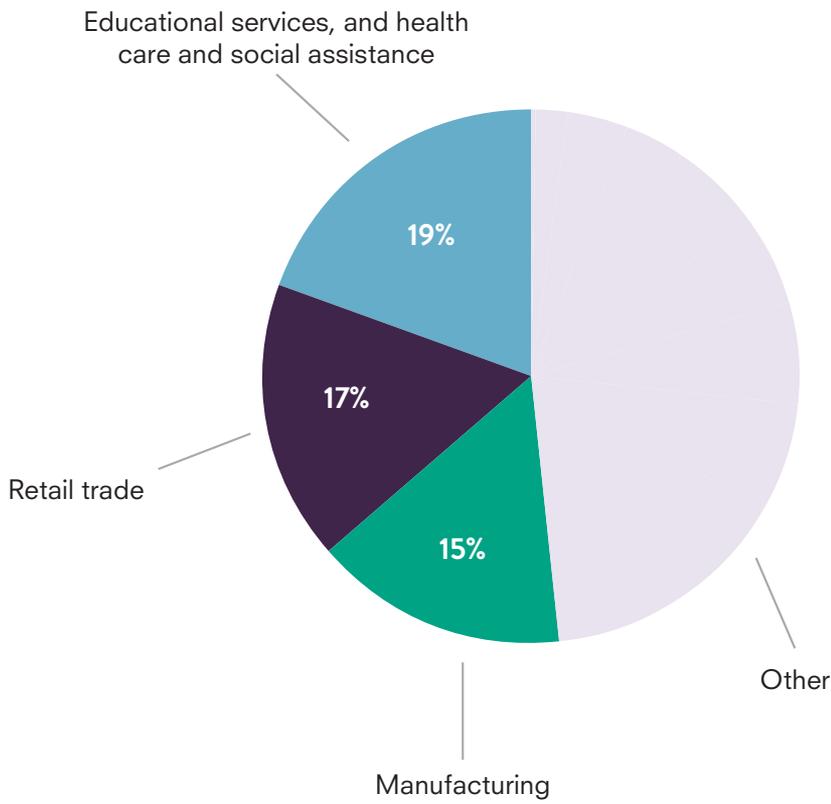
Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI), 2017

**Insight:** Topsham has access to many of the State’s largest and highest paying employers within a 30-minute driving distance.

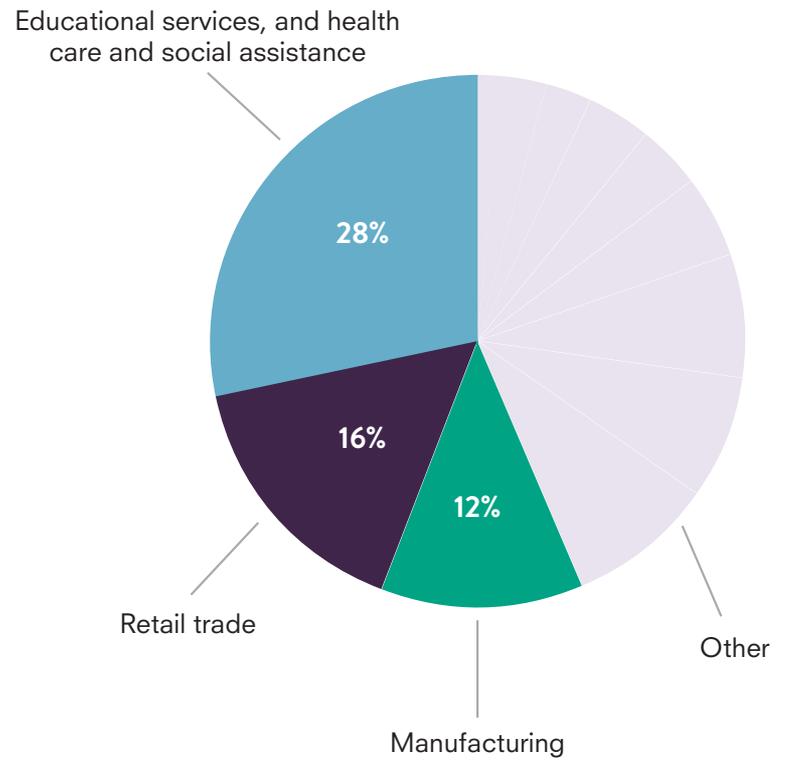
# Employment by Industry, 2000 vs. 2016

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

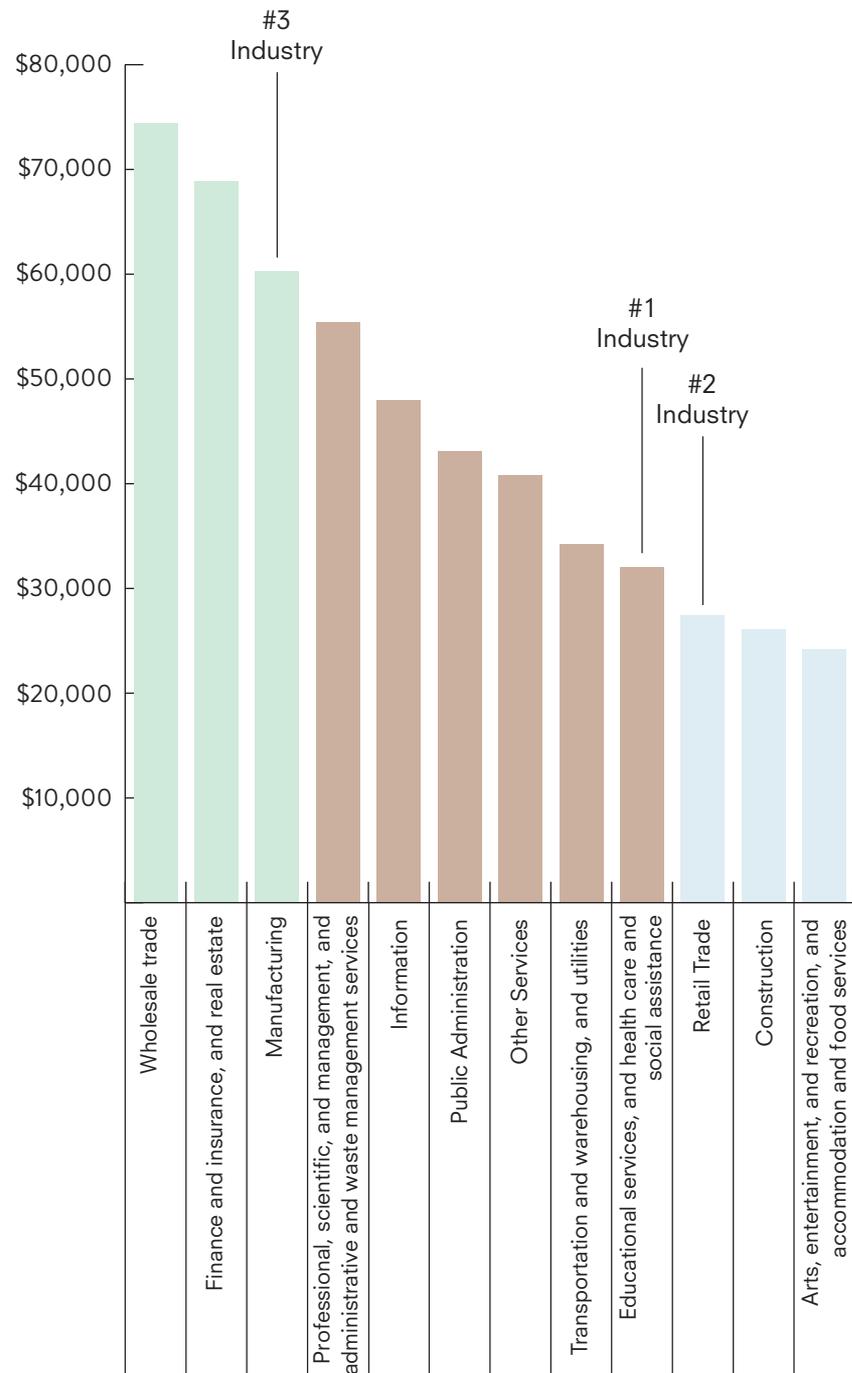
2000



2016



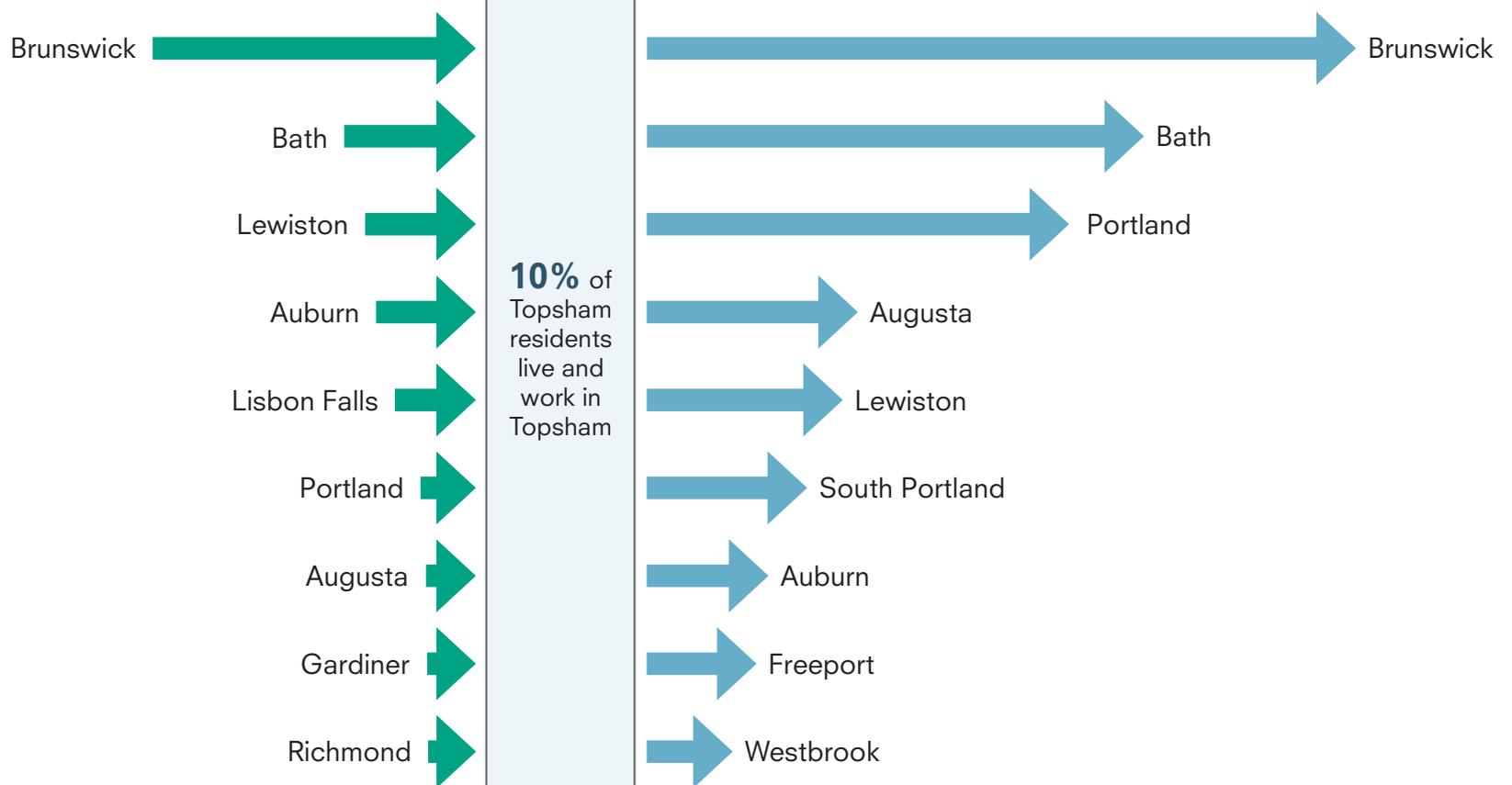
## Average Annual Wages by Industry and Top Three Industries (Based on Number of Employees), 2016



Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Where Topsham Employees Travel From

## Where Topsham Residents Travel to Work



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics Origin-Destination Employment Statistics

in Topsham. The combined total of land benefitting from some kind of tax program today is 5,956 acres, creating a net sum of aesthetic benefit and preservation of rural character for residents to enjoy. But, enrollment in tax programs is optional and an enrollee can withdraw at any time if penalty fees are paid.

The 2012 Census of Agriculture, which was conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture, shows that while the number of working farms declined by 4 percent nationally, the number of Maine farms has increased slightly since the last census was done in 2007. In 2012, there were 8,174 farms operating in Maine, up from 8,136 in 2007 and 7,196 in 2002 (2002 being the data captured during Topsham's last Comprehensive Plan). The number of Maine farmers under age 34 increased from 396 in 2007 to 551 in 2012. There were also more women farmers in Maine in 2012 – 2,381, compared with 2,043 in 2007. This statewide trend of an increasing number of farms and a younger workforce of farmers reflects similar occurrences within the greater Topsham region.

Real long-term protection of rural character and support for farms goes hand in hand with policies that direct growth to areas of town already served by sewer and water. When zoning policies and incentives allow greater densities of development in-town, the private sector market will follow, directing investment in-town by way

of infill and redevelopment. If infrastructure is expanded to the rural areas of town, costs of development to the private sector plummet making lower density, single use projects on open spaces significantly more profitable. Being deliberate about protecting rural character means the efforts of BTLT should continue to be supported to protect environmentally high-value parcels of land. It may mean looking at the protection of rural lands as an economic development strategy, where protecting the land also accompanies proactive zoning strategies and business development programs to allow new, rural entrepreneurship to emerge. Business and rural landscapes do mix. A dense town center supports a strong rural economy, and vice versa.

## Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

**A fiscal tool that allows a municipality to support capital improvements, programming, and services to achieve local economic development goals. TIF Funds are generated by setting aside a portion of new tax revenue created by growth, as certified by the Town's Assessor.**

## SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Residents young and old, living in neighborhoods or along rural roads share two common threads that speak directly about how government can be prepared for the future: the desire to gather, and the desire for enhanced mobility. From a public facilities and services perspective, the Town's Select Board have been actively engaged in municipal budgeting, including undertaking annual capital improvement planning, limiting spending from reserve funds, establishing TIF districts, and setting aside dollars for future improvements. No town building in Topsham, other than the transfer station, is older than 17 years, and emergency service and public works vehicles are on an efficient replacement cycle. The framework of infrastructure and public facilities is here today, and should continue to be fiscally managed and maintained.

However, the threads expressed during the public process speak to a concern for the future and a desire for new services and social programming to support an active and socially-engaged lifestyle for all stages of life. Private public partnerships should be explored to ensure access to health and human services, social, recreational and cultural amenities for people of all ages and incomes. This could look like using TIF dollars for workforce development, matching young adults with highly-skilled, retirees. Or, it could look like fixed route expansions to the Brunswick transit service into Topsham. Or, it could look like repurposing underutilized or vacant space in the Town Center to create a new social and recreational hub for residents and partnering with the Library Trustees to expand social and recreational programming at the Library.



Susan Rae-Reeves.

## WHERE DATA INFORMS VISION

Data can help guide planning decisions, but we need to be cognizant that the societal rate of change we have been experiencing in the past few decades has been increasingly rapid, and the effects of federal policy on the housing and development industry made outside of Maine can be dramatic and far-reaching. Data alone cannot predict change and should not entirely inform planning decisions, which is why identifying priorities via a public process is so beneficial to the framework of this document.

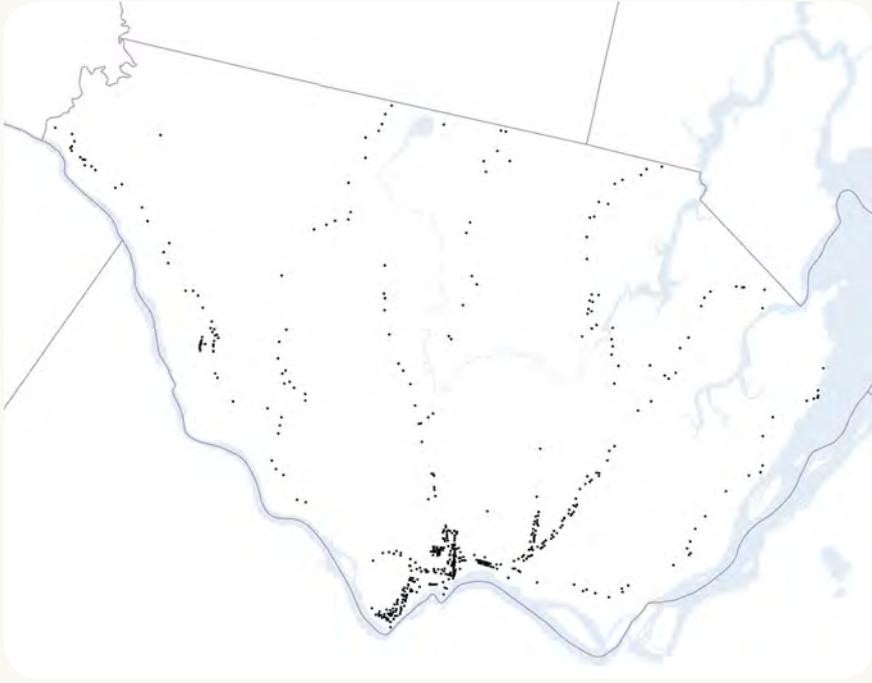
**Residents young and old, living in neighborhoods or along rural roads share two common threads that speak directly about how government can be prepared for the future: the desire to gather, and the desire for enhanced mobility.**



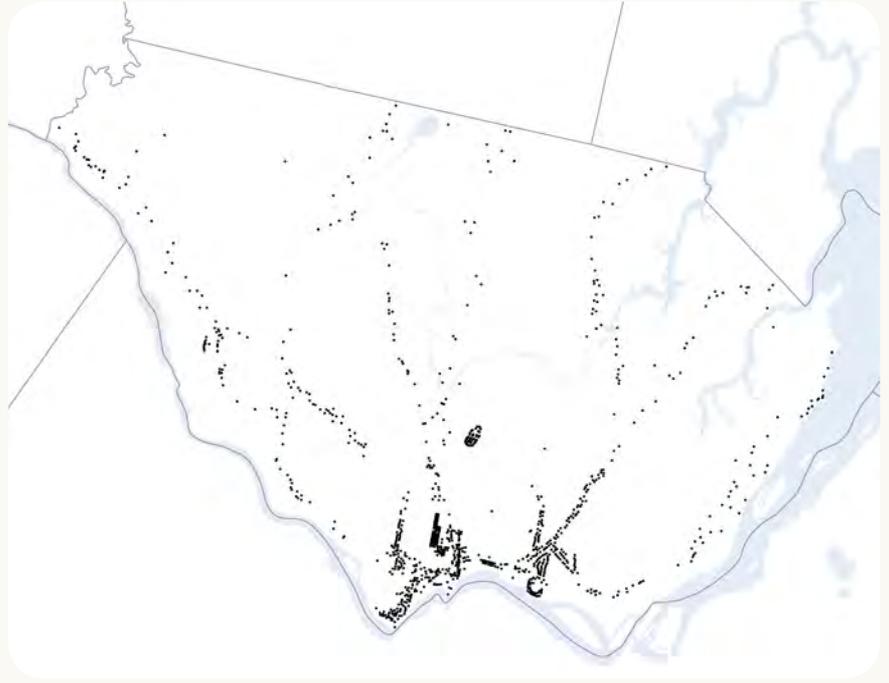
Since 2007's Comprehensive Planning effort, we have experienced two significant developments in technology that have far-reaching implications for planning: 1) the widespread use of smartphones; 2) the invention of sensors and autonomous, or self-driving vehicle technology. Technologies such as the smart phone were still in their infancy stages in 2007. Fast-forward 12 years to today and smartphones have changed how generations socialize and interact with one another, and access goods and information. If, in 2007, we had predicted the wide-spread use of the iPhone, what policies and physical conditions in Topsham might be different today? Along a similar line of thought, what might the implications be for planning and budgeting if self-driving cars become equally as wide-spread in the next 12 years? Can every wide street and highway be shrunk because a super smart computer-guided object is programmed to not crash but to stay between the painted lines and stop short of a collision with a pedestrian, or fixed or moving object? The technology, in its infancy

# Housing Development, 1900 - Present

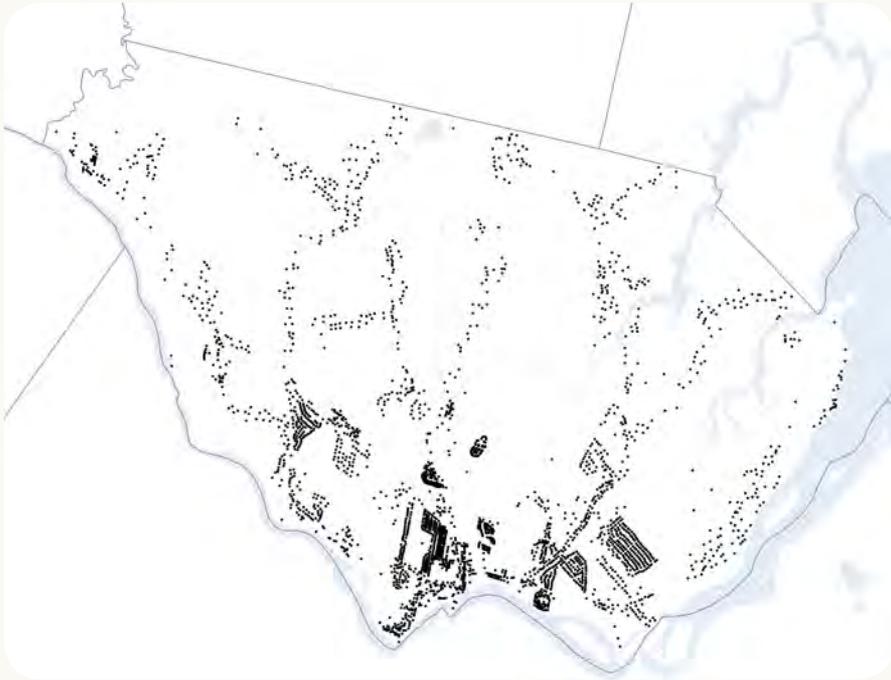
1900 - 1950



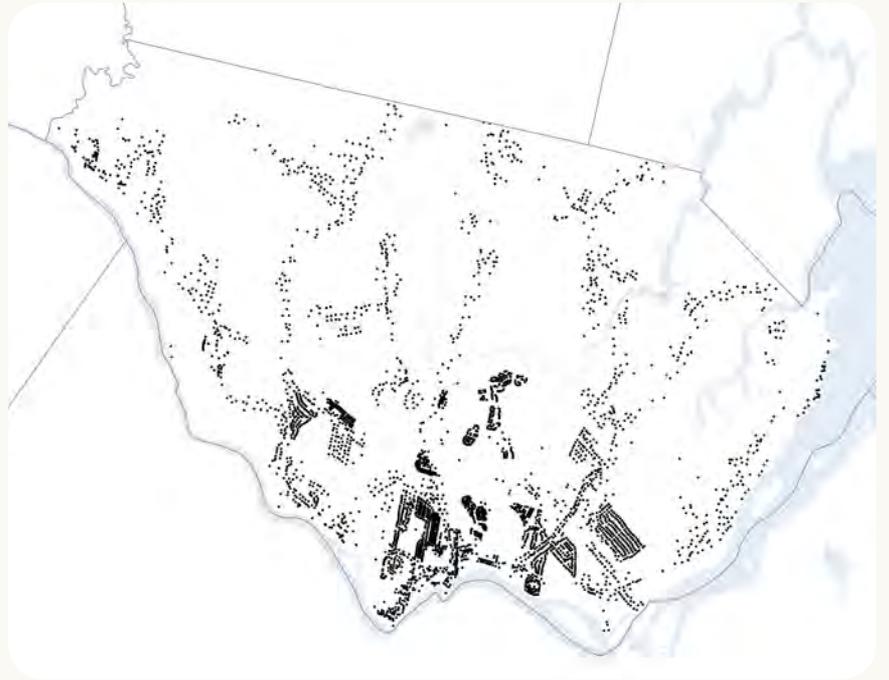
1950 - 1970



1970 - 2000



2000 - Present



This series of four maps shows the rate of housing development in Topsham over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into today.

stages, exists today in cars for sale right here in Topsham. Merging insights gleaned from the data with the community's visions for the future of Topsham, this plan is structured around Big Ideas and neighborhood-scale plans that either protect and enhance existing character or illustrate how a place can transform over time in a desired direction. Each Big Idea includes a series of recommended strategies that range from short-term and minimal resources to implement to longer-term, higher levels of investment that will need to be thoughtfully budgeted for. The catalyst site drawings presented in the plan incorporate the Big Ideas and preferences expressed by the community during the five-day process. Site drawings are concepts only, not approved development plans ready for construction. Private landowners need

to be willing to undertake projects on private property when financially feasible and supported by the market. In tandem, the Town's regulatory framework needs to legally enable the vision to be built, and in some cases, the Town may want to take the lead to set up the infrastructure framework to attract private investment, such as sidewalks, streets, and public space enhancements. Most importantly, to implement a Comprehensive Plan takes initiative, hard work and perseverance by many people working together towards common goals.

# Meet the Neighborhoods

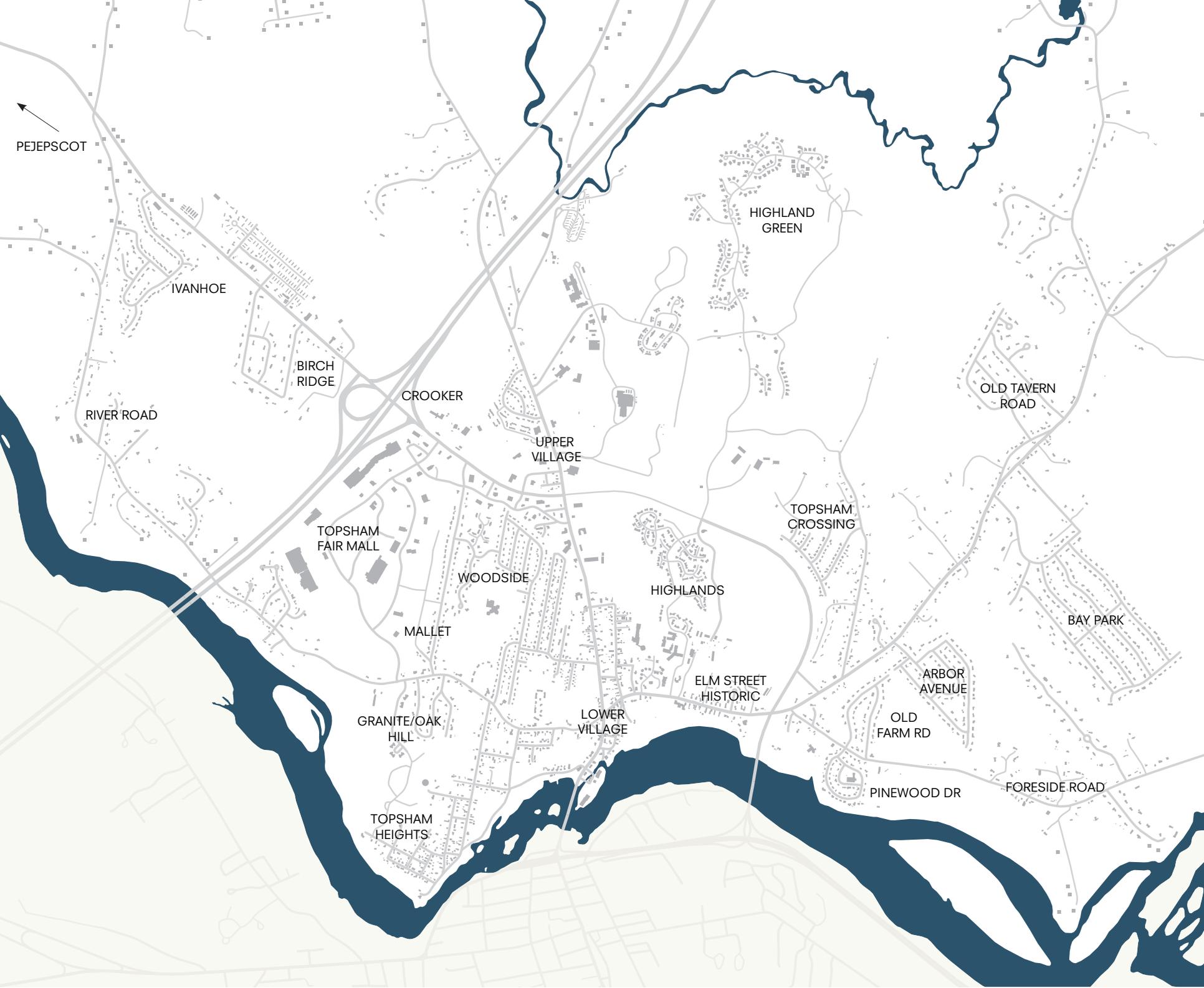
During the public process, participants were asked to identify Topsham’s existing neighborhood centers. Neighborhood centers are places that people can walk to comfortably from where they live to gather, play, socialize, or to access amenities to meet daily needs. A neighborhood center may be a park, civic building, church, local pub or corner store.

From this mapping and survey work, the team learned that most neighborhoods in Topsham lack real neighborhood centers, and that the Town’s only designated public park is a centralized recreation facility located where the majority of the Town needs to drive to access it. We can surmise from historical reporting that the Heights had a more robust neighborhood center when commercial businesses were active here. Perhaps the Heights neighborhood center extended across the river, since residents were known to cross the pedestrian bridge daily to attend church, school and to work in Brunswick. Furthermore, the historic Town Hall site, located in the pre-Civil War Elm Street neighborhood has a large front yard setback and lawn, most likely used in the past for gathering. The Fairgrounds, Grange, and a number of churches within the neighborhood also would have served as gathering places. Even Pejepscot Village appears to have a neighborhood center where there’s still evidence of a shopfront and civic building surrounded by a cluster of housing.

However, all Topsham’s neighborhoods constructed after the turn of the 20th century were not planned around a strong neighborhood center. Instead, the three school playgrounds are serving double-duty for children to play during the day and after school hours. The Bay Park and Old Tavern Road neighborhoods are exclusively comprised of residential housing with no defined neighborhood center: no corner store, park or civic building to serve as a focal point or gathering place. Instead, many people have created informal trails along edges of developments, and a little free library kiosk has popped up in the Old Tavern Road and Oak Hill neighborhoods. Similarly, the Ivanhoe and River Road areas located off Route 196 west represent significant clusters of housing with no defined neighborhood center.

An example of a neighborhood gathering spot on private property.





## Existing Neighborhoods and Centers



# Elm Street Historic District



Elm Street is home to an established, historic neighborhood featuring tree-lined sidewalks, a bike lane, and large lots running down to the riverfront. The aesthetic of the neighborhood is cohesive, mature, and residential with primarily single-family colonial units from the 18th-19th centuries, most of which have additions or attachments. Houses are typically close to the street, with setbacks ranging around three to five feet. There are also a number of historical buildings with grand setbacks. Some multi-family units are appearing in the neighborhood, along with apartment buildings such as River Landing Apartments for Seniors, which was constructed in 2015. The neighborhood abuts the Topsham Fairgrounds and the Highlands.



## YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- WALKABILITY

Sidewalks

Make Green Street a one-way with a raised sidewalk

More street lights

- PUBLIC PARK

- COMMERCIAL AMENITIES

Food trucks

Restaurants and stores

- LOWER TRAFFIC SPEEDS

Speed bumps

Enforced speed limit on problem streets

- PRESERVATION

# Woodside



Woodside is a residential, uniform neighborhood, with a mix of one- to two-story single-family houses built around the mid 20th-century. Woodside's proximity to schools, the Town offices, and police and fire stations, coupled with low-traffic and narrow streets, makes it an attractive neighborhood for families with children. Aesthetically, the neighborhood features a range of New England midcentury housing types, gardens, and some personal use outbuildings.

## YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- WALKABILITY

Sidewalks

Crosswalks (especially near major intersections)

- TRAFFIC CALMING

Stop signs

Reduce speeds

Speed bumps

Enforced speed limit on problem streets

- AESTHETICS

Standards for maintenance

Public park

- CURB RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

- IMPROVE BROADBAND LEVEL OF SERVICE



# Topsham Heights



Topsham Heights, known as “The Heights” is a popular family neighborhood, with a range of one- to two-story, single-family houses. The Heights incorporates a mix of multi-family units as well as small home-occupations. This neighborhood was developed to house mill workers and still reflects this character in its density and aesthetic. There are no sidewalks, but well-maintained yards and landscaping.

### YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- PEDESTRIAN SAFETY
  - Sidewalks
  - Child-oriented safety prioritization
- SAFE ACCESS FOR ALL MODES OF TRANSPORTATION





## Bay Park, Old Tavern Road, Arbor Avenue

There are several pocket neighborhoods located along Route 24, or Middlesex Road as it splits from Elm Street and becomes a regional connector to Bowdoinham and beyond. Due to the connection of this route, Middlesex Road ends up carrying fast regional traffic. Neighborhoods such as Bay Park and Old Tavern Road are similar conventional suburban neighborhoods with mostly ranches, raised ranches, and colonial structures built in the 1960s and 1980s. Pine trees are dispersed throughout these neighborhoods amongst wide streets, no curbs, and no drainage. Houses are placed fairly close together, and located on lots around one-acre in size. There is a notable range of setbacks, with some more than 40 feet in depth.

### YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- TRAFFIC CALMING

Posted speed limits

Speed bumps

- CONNECTIVITY

Safe crosswalks

Sidewalks

Public access to railroad tracks and trails

- NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

Improved street lighting

Underground power lines



# Granite/Oak Hill

Granite Hill (Phase I) and Oak Hill (Phase II) are condominium neighborhoods, started in 2000, located adjacent to Topsham Heights. The housing is connected and ranges between one and a half to two story condominiums in colonial, saltbox, and cape styles. Garages are placed forward of the front facades and the houses all feature small covered entranceways. The streets are narrow and feature curbs and sidewalks connected throughout the community and to River Road.

## YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENTS

Remediations for cut through traffic on Winter Street  
Another connector road

- NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

More street lights  
Community and open space

# Cathance Road



Cathance Road splits from Route 24 towards the Cathance River and through northern Topsham. Along this road there are large parcels with some historic structures built in the 1700s and 1800s. There are also pockets of newer construction, built starting around the 1990s, with some stock from the 1960s closer to the river. These houses are placed amongst deciduous woods in neighborhoods with no curbs or drainage.

## YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- ROAD MAINTENANCE

Preservation of rural sections of road

Comprehensive repaving

- NATURE PRESERVATION

Protect streams from getting filled in

Less development

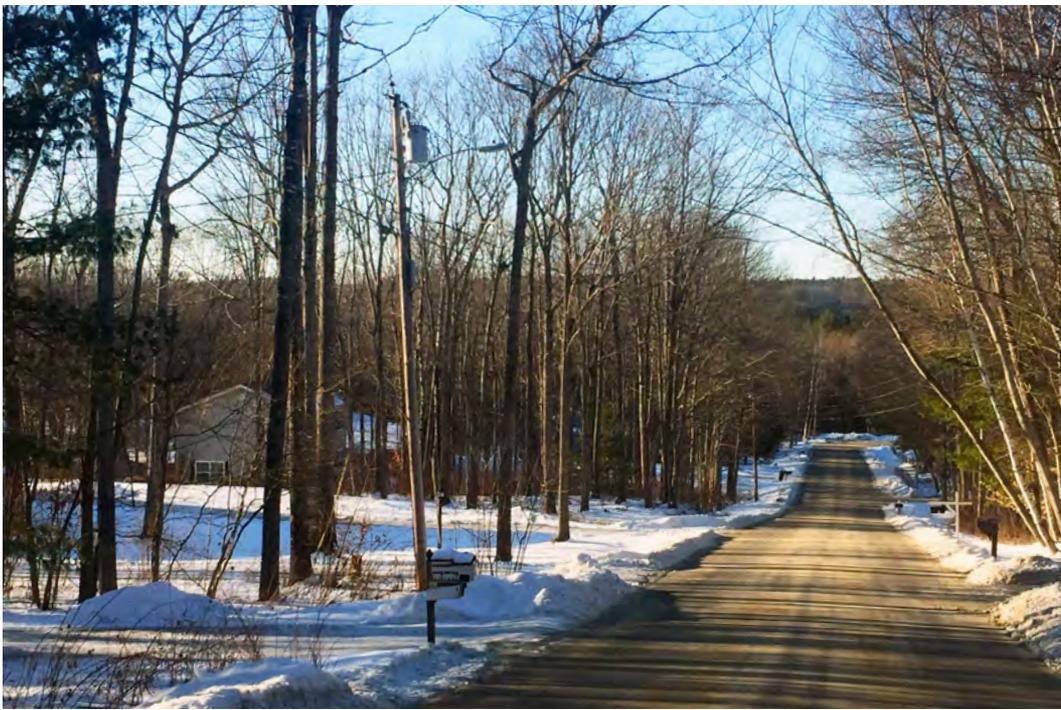
Enforcement of natural waterway and wildlife setbacks

- TRAFFIC CALMING

Reduce automobile speeds

Safety for pedestrians, runners, and bicyclists





# River Road, Ivanhoe, Birch Ridge, Pejepscot



River Road is a wooded road that curves and extends west along the Androscoggin River, terminating at Route 196. Birch Ridge and Ivanhoe are traditional, suburban, single-family subdivisions. Pejepscot Village is a historical village site that still has indicators of its original paper mill settlement. River Road is mostly residential, with some commercial businesses, significant historic industrial areas, and a cemetery. As the road passes the Brunswick & Topsham Water District office and continues west, the lot sizes increase from less than an acre to three to five acres, and the houses are set farther back. The housing stock is a mix of ranches, raised ranches, and colonials, mostly built in the late 1900s and early 2000s, with a few historical structures built in the 1700s and 1800s, particularly further west.



## YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- ZONING IMPROVEMENTS

Concerns that required commercial buffers and setbacks are inadequate

Concerns with industrial land-use expansion

Protection of residential quality of life and character

- SAFER BIKE ROUTES

- ACCESS TO TOWN SERVICES

Trash and recycling pickup

- AUTOMOBILE SAFETY

Visibility improvements



Craig P. Snapp and Dave Cleaveland/Maine Imaging.

# Highlands and Highland Green

Over the past two decades, the Highlands and Highland Green have created more than 500 units of housing targeted to a specific demographic. The Highlands is a retirement community with 350 living units that are owned and rented. The Highlands is located south of Route 196. Highland Green, located north of Route 196, is an active adult lifestyle community for residents ages 55 years and older. Highland Green currently has 190 custom built single family houses, with an additional 369 homes planned and underway.

## YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

Ability to cross major roads as a pedestrian or bicyclist

Connectivity across Route 196

Access to trails and river recreation

- SOCIAL CONNECTION

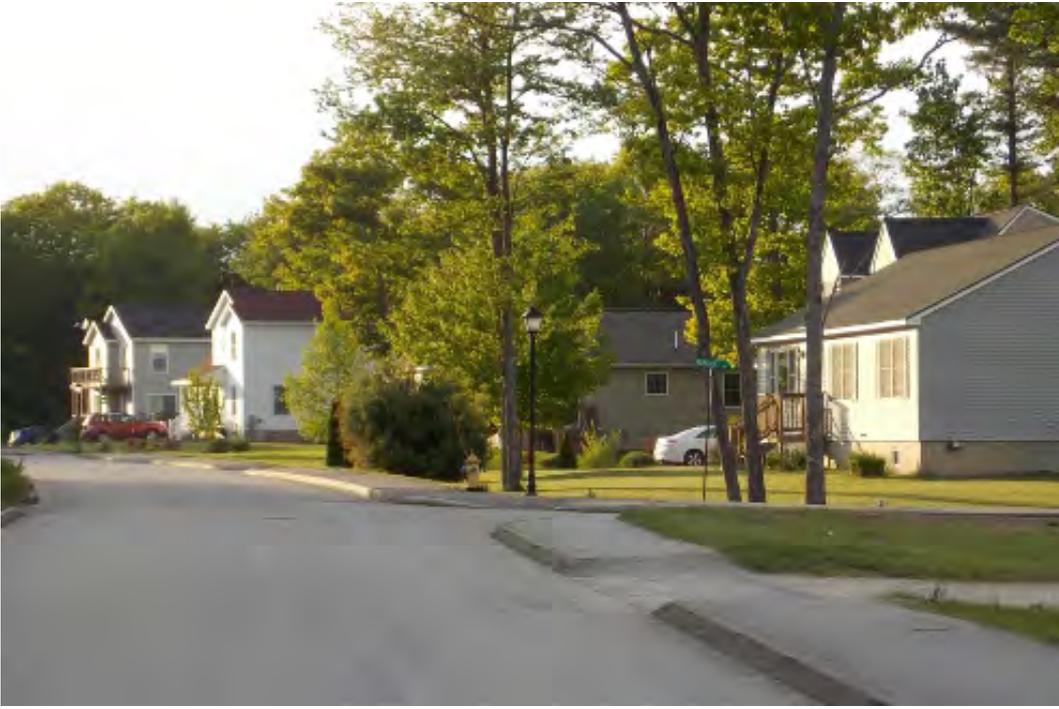
More planned cultural activities

Opportunities for connecting outside the Highland Green community

Craig P. Snapp and Dave Cleaveland/Maine Imaging



# Topsham Crossing



Topsham Crossing is a uniform planned suburban neighborhood with its own homeowner's association. The neighborhood features small lots, less than a quarter of an acre in size. The housing styles are one- and two-story single family ranches, capes, and colonials, built starting in the early 2000s. The houses are set close to a narrow street. Many houses do not have garages and some have gravel driveways. Sidewalks are against the street with no street trees or landscape strips. Though constructed recently, this neighborhood has no dedicated playground. The neighborhood master plan for Topsham Crossing has not been fully built out.





Foreside Road is a wooded pleasant street that passes town features such as the Library, the Town recreational complex and the transfer station, and runs along the Androscoggin River to the northeast. There is a mix of housing including mobile homes, ranches, capes, and colonials, mostly built in the 1950s and 1960s with a few historic buildings dating back to the 1800s. While most lot sizes are fairly uniform, around one acre in size, the area includes variable size lots with some much larger. As the road extends north near the Town's solid waste facility, the character becomes more rural with farms, larger parcels, and more historic structures that are more set back than those closer to town.

## YOU SAID YOU WANT...

- ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

Paved shoulders

Extension of sidewalks and bicycle lanes

- TRAFFIC CALMING

Automobile speed reduction

Traffic enforcement on problem roads

- MAINTAIN RURAL/RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER

- IMPROVE WALKABILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

# Existing Land Use and Community Character

Topsham has a diverse range of building types, land uses and landscapes that define community character, from contemporary big box retailers in regional shopping centers to historic riverfront mill buildings and pre-Civil War era homes on narrow village streets.

Community character can be defined as the collective relationship of:

- building form and scale
- predominant architectural character
- relationship of buildings to each other (building setbacks)
- lot dimensions (size, width)
- street (sidewalks, width, street trees)
- block pattern
- land use

Land use is different from community character as it describes the primary activity that is happening inside a building and/or on a site. Land use alone cannot sufficiently describe the essence of a place. Land use regulations have historically focused on keeping uses apart, where new approaches to zoning recognize that regulations controlling development should start with existing community character - what is here today. Understanding community character, and land use as part of that character, informs the regulatory framework section found later in this plan.

Peter A. McCarthy





**LOWER VILLAGE MAIN STREET**

Topsham’s Lower Village was the Town’s historic center, including buildings for work, commerce, and social gathering (church). The Lower Village today is still characterized by a mix of uses and building types, though over the past 150 years the fabric of the Lower Village has slowly eroded. Some roads have been smoothed out or closed off, structures removed and replaced with surface parking lots or new suburban-type buildings set back from the street. Rt 201 running through the Lower Village is creating a neighborhood edge as opposed to creating a neighborhood center, and no formal public space or waterfront access/park exists here today. Rt 201 has some limited on street parking and wider travel lanes than the context of a village main street should.



**HISTORIC RESIDENTIAL**

Topsham has neighborhoods which have intact historic fabric: the Heights, Summer Street, and the Elm Street/Green Street neighborhoods. Subtle differences exist between the three neighborhoods. The Elm Street/Green Street neighborhood is comprised of historic, post-colonial and pre-Civil War houses and little in the way of new infill construction. The Heights, characterized by a majority of post-Civil War housing, has seen new infill over the years. In both neighborhoods, lot sizes and setbacks vary, and building components may include bay windows, dormers, front and side porches, attached barns and carriage houses behind or beside the main house. Streets vary in width, with some sidewalks on wider streets and many streets functioning in a yield condition. The Elm Street/Green Street neighborhood includes architecturally notable civic buildings, but no formal public common or square. The Heights used to have neighborhood stores, and residents who lived here walked across the pedestrian bridge to work, attend church and school in Brunswick, but again no formal public common, square or park.



**LIGHT INDUSTRIAL & WAREHOUSE**

Light industrial businesses are located in a number of areas throughout town, not centralized to one particular area or park, though the Town has zoned some of the Navy annex property as a business park to reconcile that the activity on some sites is quite different from surrounding school, recreation and residential uses. Some light industry and warehouse uses are located on Park Drive, between the Woodside neighborhood and Topsham Fair Mall.



**SUBURBAN OFFICE**

Suburban office buildings are characterized by large setbacks to the street with parking lots and/or residential landscaping in front yards and single-use function inside the buildings. Constructed in the period from the 1970s to present, suburban office buildings can be found in clusters in the Upper and Lower Villages, and as stand-alone buildings sometimes surrounded by other commercial uses.



## REGIONAL SUBURBAN RETAIL CENTER

Topsham has a large regional retail center located on Topsham Fair Mall Road, including both a mixture of stand alone big box retailers with national tenants, medium sized commercial buildings with a mix of national and regional tenants, and strip center with regional and local tenants. Many buildings are set deeply back from the road with parking lots in front, a mixture of landscaping treatments, and some sidewalks. Parking lots are often accessed by wide, street-sized access lanes.



## INDUSTRIAL

Topsham's industrial past is still evident in the historic mill buildings in the Lower Village and some structures near Pejepscot Village that were once associated with the Pejepscot Paper Company. Today the Lower Village mill buildings are occupied by offices and restaurants. Medium to heavy industry businesses are still present in Topsham, including the large Crooker site at Rt 196 and I-295, and the Crooker gravel site, Pejepscot Industrial Park and Grimmel Metal Scrap yard sites off Rt 196 near the Androscoggin River. This area is currently zoned industrial. Another pocket of medium industrial activity can be found at the Sandelin Precast Products, Inc. concrete site on outer Main Street near the school campus. Wicked Joes Coffee Roasters represents an example of light industry, also located near the school campus.



## VILLAGE SUBURBAN

Post-WWII style, suburban neighborhoods are located near Main Street in the Lower Village and Village Center, where the form feels tighter than a conventional suburban neighborhood even if the lot sizes are still generously sized. Use is primarily single family residential. Lot widths are smaller and variable, buildings are located closer to the street, and garages are attached but set-back from the front façade of the house as compared to conventional suburban development. Streets are narrow enough to force a yield condition if a resident parks on-street, and most streets do not have sidewalks. Suburban developments in Topsham lack strong neighborhood centers.



## CONVENTIONAL SUBURBAN

The larger, lower density suburban residential developments built between 1970 - present are primarily located off the 196 Connector, with some smaller infill subdivisions dispersed throughout town. Conventional suburban residential is characterized by single family building types, residential land use with no commercial activities, deeper setbacks of buildings, and sometimes dead-end cul-de-sac streets. Streets function in a yield condition where sidewalks are not present. Most of the conventional developments in Topsham lack a neighborhood center - no school, church, corner store or gathering space within an easy walking distance of homes. Many conventional subdivisions have robust formal and informal trail systems running through and along the perimeter.



## RURAL

Topsham has a significant number of large, rural lots comprised mostly of forests, with farms and conserved lands. Topsham has 3,339 acres of forestland enrolled in the Tree Growth current use tax program, 2,251 acres enrolled in the Farmland current use tax program, 366 acres enrolled in the Open Space current use tax program, and 575 acres subject to conservation easements. Historically, Topsham saw recreation-oriented businesses in the rural areas, such as duck hunting camps along Merrymeeting Bay and skiing at Sky-Hy. Today there's a robust network of maintained snowmobile trails criss-crossing the rural lands, and the rivers draw recreational paddlers. Other examples of rural-based businesses and organizations include Bisson Farms' meat market, Riverview Martial Arts and the Cathance River Education Alliance Ecology Center.



## CIVIC & INSTITUTIONAL

With the construction of a new Town Hall and fire station, Topsham established a municipal complex between the Lower and Upper villages in an area envisioned to transform into a Town Center. Buildings are set back from the street and constructed of high quality materials, including red brick, deserved of new civic buildings. Historic civic buildings include the Grange, the Library, the old Town Hall, and the collection of buildings at the Topsham Fairgrounds provide neighborhood gathering places. Topsham has two, smaller neighborhood elementary schools and one large school campus consisting of elementary, middle and high school with supporting athletic fields. The campus is located adjacent to the Upper Village, on the old Navy Annex. (Within this educational campus, some Navy auxiliary buildings still remain, including the commissary building which has been renovated with light industrial use by Wicked Joe's Coffee.) Additional buildings still wait for repurposing or redevelopment. The campus is currently accessed from Rt 196/Main Street with future plans to connect Canam Drive through to Highland Green.



# Public Process

From October 19<sup>th</sup> through the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 the citizens of Topsham were invited to participate in an intensive, multi-day public planning and design event to develop a vision for the future of Topsham.



Larry Fitch.



Mary Kate Appicelli.

#### LOCAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Gearing up for the Comprehensive Plan Update process, the Select Board appointed a citizen committee, representing a variety of neighborhoods and backgrounds. The Topsham Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) was the driving force behind public outreach efforts for this plan, working with the consultant team early in the process to develop an outreach plan. Prior to launching into the process, the CPUC met for almost a year to build local technical capacity and knowledge about contemporary issues in planning, design, and regulatory frameworks. The CPUC is assisted by Topsham staff members in the Planning and Economic Development departments.

#### SOCIAL & ONLINE MEDIA

With assistance from the consultant team, CPUC planned local outreach initiatives to spark community interest prior to the Plan Your Topsham event. The campaign, called “Find-Meet- Plan” your Topsham, asked residents to post photos of themselves in and around Topsham. The team created a Facebook page in August 2017 to communicate important dates for meetings and events, interesting planning-related articles, and local photos. Community members were encouraged to interact with the Facebook page by posting their own photos of places they love in Topsham, using the hashtags developed by the team. The team posted update on their own wanderings within the Town, including photos and brief description of the CPUC’s two-hour Windshield Tour. More than creating an added source of online information, the Facebook page provided and continues to provide a platform for

the community to celebrate what they love most about Topsham.

The informational website created by the CPUC provides information about the entire Comprehensive Plan Update process with important topics including links to the existing Comprehensive Plan (developed in 2005 and revised in 2007), the Select Board, the Topsham Planning staff and the consultants from Maine Design Workshop.

#### PRINT MEDIA

All printed materials were branded consistently with the Find-Meet-Plan Your Topsham logo and aesthetic, to provide a cohesive identity for all things project-related. Postcards were handed out by CPUC members and delivered to all elementary age school kids to bring home, and a banner was hung spanning Main Street. Postcards communicated the full five-day schedule and provided direction for more information.

#### KICK-OFF & HANDS ON WORKSHOP

The five-day process kicked off at the pop up studio in the fire station in Topsham’s Lower Village. The CPUC worked with a local landowner to secure the old fire house on Green Street, previously used as a DPW garage, a site where future redevelopment is supported. The team set up a fully-functioning office and design studio for the duration of the event, welcoming in the community and generating interest amongst a broad spectrum of citizens and local stakeholders.

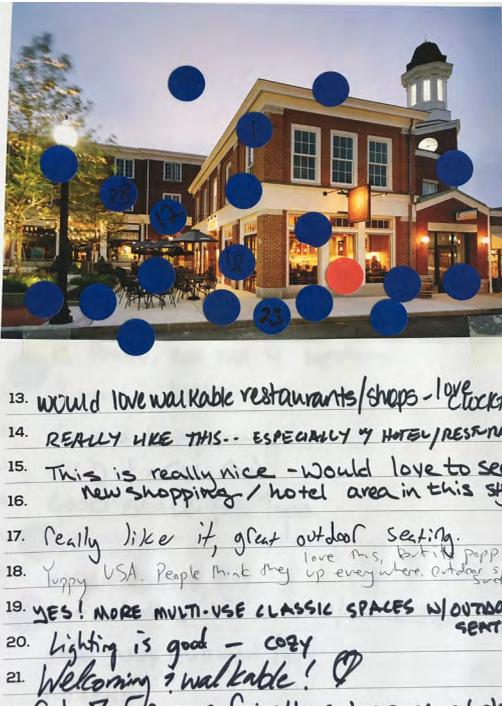


## VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEYS

In order to gauge what Topsham residents would like to see in their town, the team set up over 40 photos of design, architecture and landscaping ideas which may inspire the future development of the Town's plan, coding or zoning. Each photo had a list of comment spaces long with red and blue sticky dots. Residents were encouraged to identify things about each photo that they liked (blue dot) and did not like (red dot), along with a comment to explain. The Visual Preference Surveys were immensely successful at gathering feedback, with resident comments overrunning the spaces available for almost every photo.

## VISIONING SURVEY

Upon arriving at the studio, residents were greeted and asked to fill out a Visioning Survey which asked questions about all things Topsham: things they love, questions about their neighborhoods, opportunities for cultural engagement, recreation, big concerns, big opportunities, imagining Topsham in 5 to 10 years, and anything else residents wanted to tell the planning committee. Almost 100 residents took time to complete the survey and answers helped to inform the work of the design team during the process. Survey responses highlighted resident's appreciation for the Town's location, Topsham's lack of parks, the love for the Library, and the importance of maintaining and expanding the Town's trails network, including the existing bike path along the Androscoggin. Many of the responses have been incorporated into the Plan Framework section of this plan.



Above, Visual Preference Survey results used to gather feedback. Below, a workshop participant contributing to a Visual Preference Survey. Larry Fitch.



## BIG IDEAS WALL

The Big Ideas Wall prompted residents of all ages to imagine Topsham in 30 years and identify things they would like to see in the future. The Big Ideas wall encouraged residents to think beyond 5 to 10 years, to think beyond the status quo and identify big wishes for the future. The activity was incredibly successful as it allowed residents a creative forum for expressing their wants and needs. The Big Ideas Wall directly informed the team's write up of common Big Ideas, which were incorporated into each phase of the planning process. Additionally, the Big Ideas were incorporated into the public process portion of the planning process by soliciting feedback from residents. Comments from the workshop, survey, Big Ideas wall and other public input received during the public planning process guided the team to draw and shape illustrative master plans.

## THE STUDIO

Meanwhile, members of the planning team began developing overall planning framework and illustrative plans that responded to community input, pulling ideas from the planning workshop, citizen drop-ins, and the Round Table meetings.

The third day of the event began with a public process workshop on Open Spaces & Trails which coincided with the Topsham Public Library's Pop Up Library and the Wicked Joe's coffee bar. The studio was open for the whole day for residents to provide input through surveys, Big Ideas and Visual Preference Surveys.

While the team worked preparing concepts for the mid-process community check in presentation, the CPUC implemented and checked in on three Tactical Urbanism demonstrations: Lot Activation, Winter Street one-way and a bike lane/sidewalk on Elm Street.

## LOT ACTIVATION BLOCK PARTY

For the duration of the event, the CPUC temporarily activated the parking lot in front of the studio with a palette fence built by the CPUC to create community gathering space and model new community gathering space development in the Lower Village. Families were invited to watch a series of live, local bluegrass and oldies bands who played from a stage constructed

from recycled materials on the sunny October day. Crowds started rolling in when Taco the Town food truck arrived for the evening. People ate, danced and visited the studio to look over the team members at the work being developed, and shared their aspirations for Topsham's future. As the final band wrapped up, the team segued into the community planning check-in session.

#### WINTER STREET ONE-WAY

Prior to the planning process kick off, the Topsham Department of Public Works and the Economic Development Coordinator activated Winter Street. The street forks into two, with the upper fork (across from Elm Street at the stop light) previously a one-way away from Main Street, and the southern fork a two-way, also leading back to Main Street. The lower Winter Street enabled drivers to take a left-hand turn before the street lights, which backed up traffic on busy Main Street. In advance of the planning process, the Town installed bollards to redirect the flow of traffic, making lower Winter Street a one-way toward Main Street, effectively creating an 'in' and an 'out'. After completion, there was significant positive feedback for this installation from community members who frequent, or live on, Winter Street.

#### ON-BIKE SAFETY TRAINING

During the event, the Bicycle Coalition of Maine held an on-bike safety training workshop open to residents interested in learning how to ride safer in traffic, and about how to generally make streets safer for bicycling and walking.

#### COMMUNITY PLANNING CHECK-IN

As the halfway point of the planning process, the team presented the various plans, sketches and maps with information and data collected about Topsham thus far. The team presented preliminary illustrative plans, a draft set of guiding principles, and other work products produced up to this mid-point in the process. After the community check-in presentation, people were invited to view maps and plans pinned up onto makeshift display boards set out in the studio.

The pin-up format was a team presentation with a questions and answers period, followed by an open work session for residents to speak with the team members about their designs and give feedback on the workups and Big Ideas. After the community check-in and into the next afternoon, the public continued to filter into the studio to observe the team hard at work. This session provided valuable input and helped inform the subsequent final drawings which would be presented in the final wrap-up session on Monday night.

Bottom left, team member preparing concept drawings during the public design event. **Larry Fitch.**





Larry Fitch.

#### TOPSHAM SUNDAY MARKET

The studio was open early on Sunday with team members working furiously to integrate resident input from the pin-up event the previous evening. Additionally, the team received some one-on-one feedback from community members who stopped by the open studio. At any time of day, the team was willing to listen and talk with citizens who wanted to provide feedback. At around 11:00 am, the Topsham Sunday Market set up shop in the Fire barn outdoor area, which included vendors, non-profit organizations, a local museum and community workshops to draw people to the planning process. In the meantime, the team was busy gathering information from Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps of Topsham, using input gleaned from the public process feedback, and identifying the areas of the Town considered as hot spots for development, as well as refining those areas of the Town which residents want to preserve.

#### CLOSING PRESENTATION

Monday was the final day of the Topsham planning process and was spent preparing for the culminating event in the evening, the big reveal: the closing presentation. At 2:30 pm on Monday, the studio doors closed to the public and the team entered into full production mode, synthesizing ideas, collaborating over design challenges, preparing renderings, compiling precedent images, refining the illustrative plans, action-oriented maps and Big Ideas. After the closing presentation, temporary displays were set up on round tables in the studio for participants to view and continue to provide feedback by way of dots and comments on sticky notes. The evening and process concluded with a community discussion over a catered spread of locally-made food and drink.

#### ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION

Over the winter, as the committee worked through topical Inventory and Analysis chapters, the community and interested stakeholders could attend these open

workshops and participate in the conversation. Often, staff and committees attended to provide guidance and insight. The committee held regular check-ins with the Select Board to discuss plan progress.

In June, residents gathered at the Library for a presentation sharing the plan in progress. At this event, further comments and feedback were collected to continue to inform the Big Ideas, strategy items, catalyst site drawings, and maps. The event was accompanied by live music and an ice cream social.

After the June open house event, materials made their way to the lobby at Town Hall, where people could view the materials and continue to provide feedback on the plan. Ongoing participation was also possible via an online comment platform, which allowed people to comment directly on the plan and to see and interact with each other's comments. This platform was Topsham's first use of active digital planning participation.

The committee processed all public comments collected throughout the year. Many of these comments are graciously incorporated into this plan.

Outdoor activities at June's open house event. Rod Melanson.





# BIG IDEAS



## 3. Access to Nature & Open Spaces

- More trails.
- Provide more access to the 3 rivers.
- Formalize access to more spaces.
- Get meaningful public spaces when development happens.
- Capitalize on paddling opportunities.



• RIVER ACCESS ON  
TOPSHAM SIDE



This is VERY important  
to me - make Topsham  
a beautiful town, showing  
the nature + heritage  
of Maine.

Keep working w BTLT on open space preservation

AGREE... AREAS OUTSIDE OF TOWN NOT WELL  
KNOWN AND NOT SURE WHICH  
LAND IS OPEN TO PUBLIC AND IF  
SO WHAT ARE ACCEPTABLE USES?

# Big Ideas

The Big Ideas identified in this section are entirely based on the feedback received during public engagement processes including the five-day public design planning process and plan open house events. Residents of all ages were prompted to share their ideas big and small to achieve the vision they have for Topsham's future. The nine Big Ideas are presented based on magnitude of expressed importance, each having a number of "Strategies" that can move the idea forward.

# Streets for People





Topsham residents are asking for slower, safer streets. This includes safer streets for driving, biking, and walking. During the planning process, safe streets were raised as the single most expressed issue affecting quality of life in Topsham. In order to address this issue, the Town should take a system-wide approach to shift town culture. This can be done by designing (and retrofitting) streets in a way that gives everyone a chance to feel safe and comfortable on the road. Conventional traffic calming strategies such as enforcement and speed bumps will not, on their own, solve the problem. A meaningful approach that effectively slows traffic while maintaining mobility will require good (thoughtful) design that understands human behavior, business needs, and how to truly enhance safety.

#### EMBRACE SLOW FLOW TRAFFIC AS THE TOPSHAM WAY

During the planning process, Topsham residents indicated a strong preference for minimizing the negative impact of traffic utilizing local streets for regional mobility. Many streets in Topsham can serve both as critical regional mobility corridors that handle considerable through traffic, while also providing safe streets for people walking or biking. This balance can be achieved through a slow flow approach to street design. Slow flow streets are designed in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable to drive at speeds in excess of 25 MPH, while also taking steps to increase efficient traffic flow by removing merges, stop lights, and other design interventions that create unnecessary delays and safety issues. This includes creating friction in order to slow vehicle speeds, narrowing travel lanes, allowing on-street parking and adding objects like street trees which, when seen in our peripheral vision, make drivers feel like they are moving faster than they really are. Through a balanced approach, Topsham's streets can become safer for everyone, reversing decades of automobile planning and design at the expense of all other transportation modes. The Town is looking at complete street policies to add to our road construction standards. Slowing traffic will also help improve crossing safety for snowmobiles and ATVs.

**STRATEGY:** Adopt a resolution that reduces the default speed within Topsham’s more densely populated neighborhoods.

**STRATEGY:** Advocate at the State level for greater town control over posted speed limits and changes to the way speed limits are set, so limits can be based on safety goals.

**STRATEGY:** Be the first town in Maine to adopt Vision Zero, an international initiative to eliminate roadway fatalities.

**STRATEGY:** Adopt a complete street policy that assures the safety and accessibility of all roads for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, motorists, commercial vehicles, emergency vehicles, and for people of all ages and abilities.

**STRATEGY:** Prioritize pedestrian-first approach for all transportation projects and programs, from scoping to maintenance.

**STRATEGY:** Develop a Streets Master Plan that identifies priorities, funding sources, and funding amounts, and that includes street design standards which support the community’s goals for safe, multimodal, slow flow streets.

**STRATEGY:** As part of the annual budgeting process, identify priority road resurfacing projects two years in advance in order to provide time for development and vetting of restriping plans, as appropriate.

**STRATEGY:** Develop a five-year infrastructure maintenance and capital improvement plan that details the design metrics that must be accommodated to incorporate the new design standards. Minimize emphasis on vehicular Level of Service (LoS, a vehicular-focused transportation metric) and mobility and prioritize safety and slow vehicular movement.



“A focus on safety means reconsidering traditional highway planning. We need to get from Point A to Point B, but maybe not as fast.”

— Joyce Taylor, MDOT

**STRATEGY:** Allow on-street parking townwide. Amend Chapter 210 accordingly.

**STRATEGY:** As part of a Streets Master Plan, identify locations where on-street parking can be added to help narrow vehicular travel lanes, improve pedestrian safety, and provide additional parking opportunities.

**STRATEGY:** Revise road design and construction standards so that curb radii are reduced to help slow vehicular turning movements and increase pedestrian safety.

**STRATEGY:** Establish a bicycle and pedestrian committee.

#### RE-STRIPE LANES THROUGHOUT TOWN TO 9 AND 10 FEET IN WIDTH

Roads throughout Topsham were identified as too fast and too dangerous, from Main Street in the Lower Village to Route 201 on the outskirts of town. The easiest, fastest, and least expensive way to slow vehicular speeds is to restripe lanes from 12 feet down to 9 or 10 feet. The interstate highway system is striped with 12-foot lanes. When this lane width is applied to neighborhood streets, drivers feel comfortable driving at speeds upwards of 30 miles per hour. By narrowing lanes, drivers become more careful. Restriping already built wide streets with narrower vehicular lanes is a quick and inexpensive way

to provide more space on shoulders for walking and biking. If Topsham would like to address a root cause of speeding, restriping to 9- or 10-foot lanes can be done now. Through a smart restriping policy, Topsham can achieve safe streets at essentially no increased cost to taxpayers.

**STRATEGY:** Review and update the code to key a range of street types to land use character, and that provide for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use. Require new developments to choose from these street types.

**STRATEGY:** Update existing street construction standards to allow 9- and 10-foot lanes on regional roads and enforce the existing maximum 9-foot lane standard for new neighborhood streets.

**STRATEGY:** Conduct staff training so all levels of staff understand the benefits of narrower lanes.

**STRATEGY:** Amend Chapter 185 Appendix A and begin the process of restriping lanes to 9 or 10 feet through annual restriping efforts.

**STRATEGY:** Prioritize pedestrian-first approach for all transportation projects and programs, from scoping to maintenance.

## Vision Zero

A strategy to bring the number of traffic fatalities in a city or town to zero. Vision Zero is being progressively adopted by American cities and is helping to also achieve a balance among transportation modes.





A reduction in speed from 30 to 20 MPH can represent the critical difference between life and death, with a demonstrated 42% reduction in pedestrian casualties.

**STRATEGY:** Add stencils, bikeway signage, and physical barriers, such as on street parking, or seasonal vertical elements, such as bollards or planters, to restriped streets that have four feet or more of space on the shoulder.

#### ADD PROTECTED SIDEWALKS & BIKE FACILITIES

People in Topsham have concerns about the safety of streets throughout town. People overwhelmingly want streets that feel safe and comfortable for walking and biking, both in the center of town as well as in more rural and suburban residential areas. The primary reason that many people do not consider biking a feasible means of transportation is because they are afraid to be on the same roadway as automobiles. Research has found that separating cyclists from vehicles through some physical means, such as protected bikeways, can reduce the risk of injury by up to 90% when compared to standard unprotected bike lanes. Similarly, sidewalks will feel more safe and comfortable when they are separated from vehicle movement by physical elements, such as a planted green buffer or on-street parking.

In downtown areas, priority sidewalks and separated bike paths should be built systematically along existing roadways, using capital funds over time. When DOT funds become available to repave state roads, projects should include complete street best practices. Transportation planning is an evolving field, so each project should look broadly at the latest examples of how to best design a street that works well for all people.

The Town has already begun to address walkability through main street improvements, Lower Village planning, Topsham Fair Mall Road Plan, and Planning Board review of new developments. The Town conducted a Rural Active Living Assessment (RALA) in 2015, and inventoried all of the existing town bicycle and pedestrian facilities. This inventory will be a helpful resource in planning for improved areas in the future.

**STRATEGY:** As part of a Streets Master Plan include bicycle and pedestrian priority streets and

connections, amenities (lighting, ADA compliance), a hierarchy of pedestrian standards, and that identifies priorities, funding sources, and funding amount.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to use a Payment In Lieu program to fund the construction of sidewalks.

**STRATEGY:** Build funding into the capital improvement plan for the construction of sidewalks and multi-use paths.

**STRATEGY:** Work through the list of priority projects in-house using inexpensive, semi-permanent materials.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to include a range of street types keyed to land use character and that provide for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use. Require new developments to choose from these street types.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to require that new developments provide an internal street network to the extent possible and connect to existing street and trail networks.

#### IMPROVE INTERSECTION SAFETY

Topsham has a high number of crashes at intersections throughout town, as shown in the crash density map below. In the past, a typical response to dangerous intersections has been to add signals, flashing beacons, turn lanes, and to re-engineer and redesign bigger roads. What we've seen is that this approach, while expensive, doesn't usually result in a place that is safer or more attractive to walking and biking. A different approach is needed, one that uses design techniques and cues to slow traffic as it approaches identified intersection conflict points.

It is common that a yellow light, in practice, results in people stepping on the gas to beat the red light. Because of the high speeds at these critical crossing points, traffic lights have been demonstrated to create unsafe

conditions for not only pedestrians but also for drivers. Traffic lights can also decrease mobility during off-peak hours. On streets that have pedestrian and bicycle activity, traffic lights should be removed when feasible and replaced with 4-way stops to prioritize slow, safe, and steady traffic movement.

Multiple lanes and turn lanes provide relief to traffic congestion. However, they also result in high-speed intersections that are disorienting and confusing, leading to more severe crashes between drivers or between drivers and pedestrians, cyclists, or ATVs. Turn lanes also allow vehicles continuing straight to speed past turning vehicles, creating a dangerous blind condition, especially for people walking and biking. Turn lanes can also create longer pedestrian crossing distances, which is uncomfortable and discourages these alternative modes of travel.

**STRATEGY:** Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages the use of turn lanes and traffic lights in order to favor safety over mobility.

**STRATEGY:** Conduct staff training so that all levels of staff understand the benefits of 4-way stops over traffic lights on pedestrian-prioritized streets.

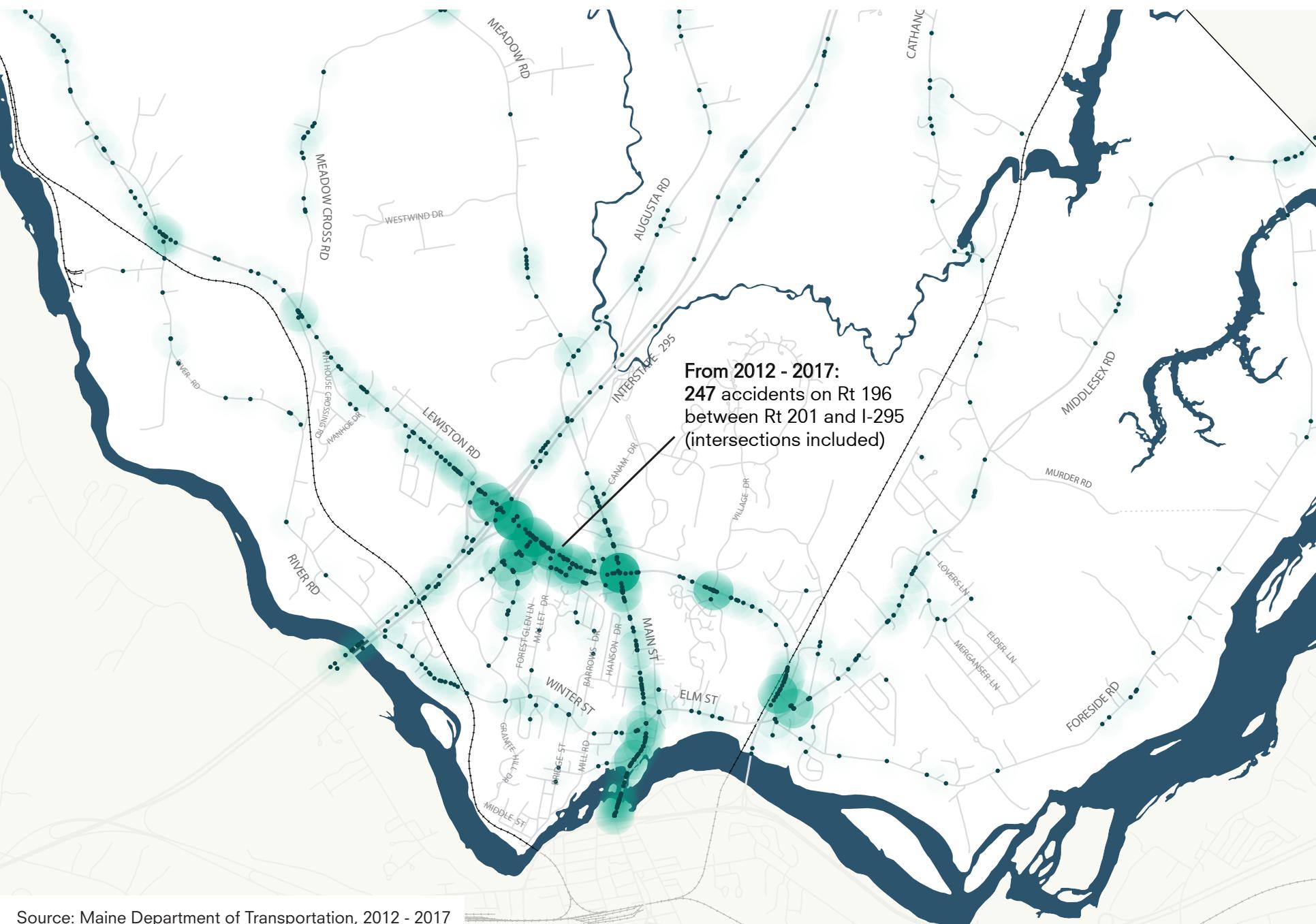
**STRATEGY:** Evaluate the feasibility of converting traffic lights to 3-way or 4-way stop intersections on Main Street and other streets used by bicycles and pedestrians.

Target intersections along Main Street including both entrances to Bowdoin Mill Island, Elm Street, Green Street, Winter Street, Town Hall entrance, Monument Place, Eagles Way, and Canam Drive.

**STRATEGY:** Conduct a staff training on how to efficiently complete studies and paperwork for traffic signal removal in compliance with Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards and protocols.

#### AVOID MULTIPLE LANES, TURN LANES, AND MERGES WHERE POSSIBLE

A street that fluctuates between single and multiple lanes can also create a condition that is confusing and dangerous amongst its users. Multiple lanes of traffic moving in the same direction take a driver's attention from directly in front of them and require more attention to cars beside and behind them. This creates a more distracted driver who may not notice a pedestrian in a crosswalk, a bicyclist on the side of the road, or an ATV trying to cross. In places where multiple lanes merge back to one lane, competing visual cues again create a very dangerous situation, where high speeds are coupled with the need to be aware of variables in multiple directions. On pedestrian- and bicycle-prioritized streets, the use of turn lanes and multiple lanes should be minimized. This may result in slightly longer travel times, but with a critical trade-off of safer walking and bicycling conditions.



**STRATEGY:** Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages the use of multiple lanes in the same direction in order to better balance safety and mobility.

**STRATEGY:** Educate Planning Board and Town Hall staff on how to implement a complete streets policy.

#### IMPROVE STREET CONNECTIONS

One method for reducing traffic and congestion within a transportation system is to improve connectivity, which involves increasing the number and density of routes. Connecting neighborhood streets to other neighborhoods and to existing streets has long been a contentious issue. However, these connections are critical to maintaining a system of streets that provide route options and, as a result, relief from congested collector roads. Where streets cannot connect, bicycle and pedestrian connections should be provided. Another critical strategy for maintaining connectivity is to avoid one-way streets, which cut off connections and create confusion and increased traffic from having to take a more circuitous route to reach a destination. Topsham is fortunate to have only a limited number of one-way streets. As the community begins to explore improvements to streets - including balancing competing interests between vehicle movement, on-street parking, bike facilities, and other priorities for space in the right-of-way - one-way streets should be avoided to the extent possible. One-way streets often increase vehicular speeds, reduce friction provided by the presence of oncoming vehicles, increase vehicle miles traveled, reduce business visibility, and increase driver confusion, especially for people from out-of-town. Additional pedestrian and bicycle connections should also be provided whenever possible.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to require that new neighborhoods connect to existing streets and adjacent neighborhoods to produce a network of streets and paths.

**STRATEGY:** Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages one-way streets.

**STRATEGY:** Train Planning Board, public works staff, and the Code Enforcement Officer on the complete streets policy.

#### MAKE SPECIAL PLANS FOR KID-PRIORITIZED STREETS

For neighborhood streets or streets identified as part of the "Safe Routes to School" (SRTS) program, a number of options should be explored, piloted, and promoted. One of the safest options is a shared travel lane that is a total of 14-16 feet wide. This type of street is called a "yield street" because vehicles passing each other are forced to slow down and in some cases even pull over slightly to make enough room for the other vehicle to pass. Yield streets significantly reduce travel speeds and promote safety for all modes because of the visual friction they provide. Green Street is a great local example of a yield street that uses inexpensive techniques to reallocate space within a constrained right-of-way. Streets that incorporate advisory bike lanes can also be introduced in Topsham, following on the success of these facilities in towns like Scarborough. Advisory bike lanes are



Participants of a bicycle safety workshop held at the public planning and design event preparing for a group bicycle ride. Larry Fitch.

demarkated by dashed lines, indicating that motor vehicles are legally allowed. Advisory bike lanes can be tested both in town and on more rural roads to introduce more friction while providing safe space for cyclists.

**STRATEGY:** As part of a Streets Master Plan effort, identify an existing and future Safe Routes to School network.

**STRATEGY:** Prioritize funding to repair neighborhood streets and Safe Routes to School to achieve maximum speeds of 20 MPH, including during off-peak times.

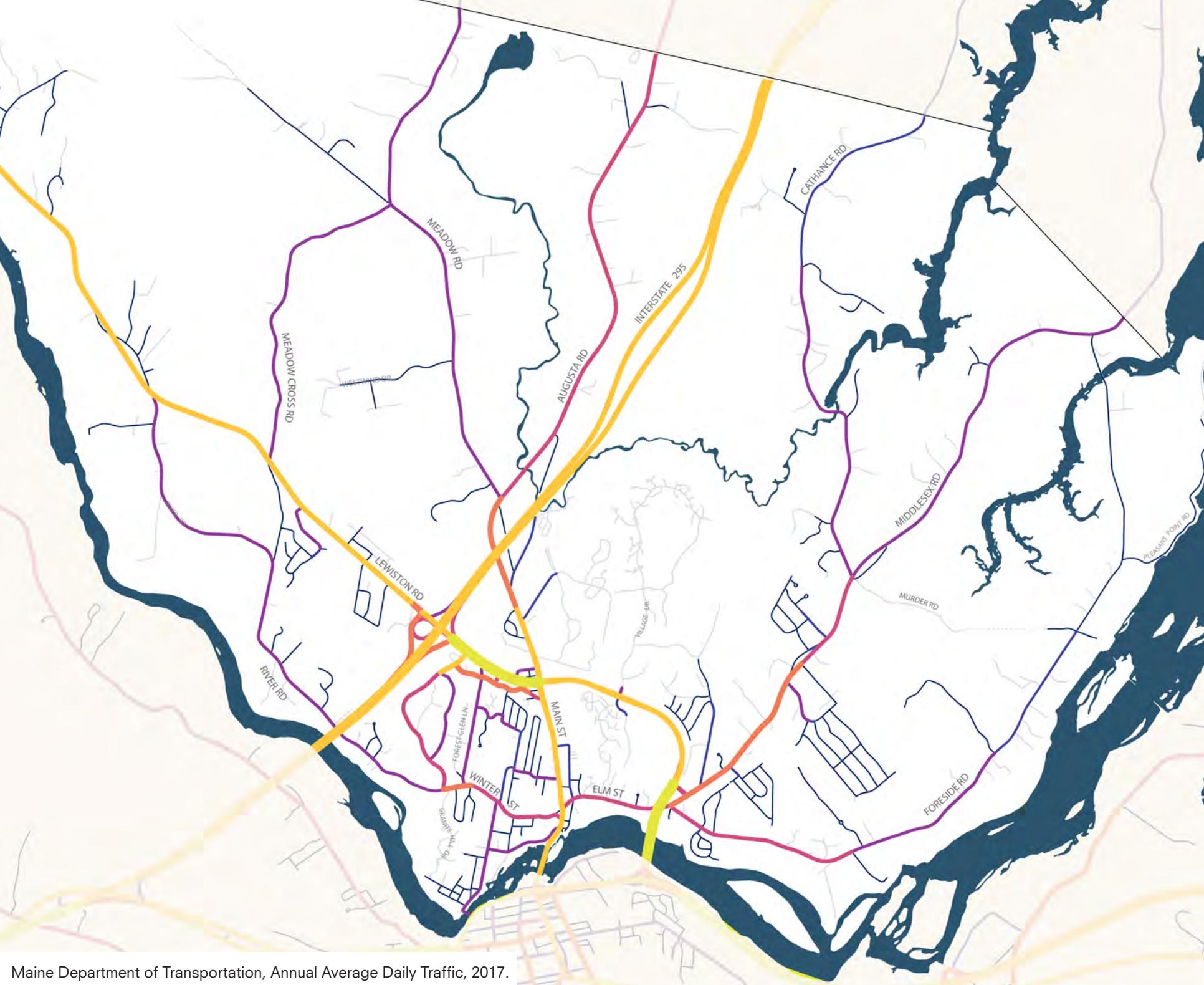
**STRATEGY:** Adopt a resolution that creates a home to school zone with reduced speed limits within 2 miles of every school. Sign and enforce accordingly.

**STRATEGY:** Direct funding to pilot advisory bike lanes, yield streets, and other techniques to slow traffic on local neighborhood street.

**STRATEGY:** Start a program that empowers neighborhoods to slow their local residential streets through a number of pre-approved strategies.

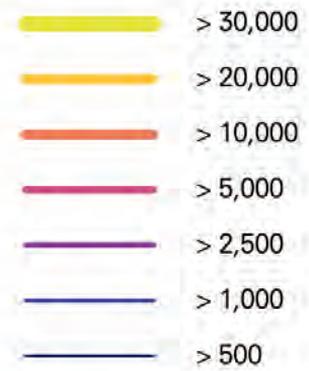
#### KEEP THE STREETS GREEN AND LUSH

Topsham residents have a strong and overwhelming preference for streets that heavily feature trees and other greenery. When new development commercial, mixed-use,



## Existing Streets and Traffic

Annual Average Daily Traffic





or large residential projects occur, street trees should be required as well as vegetation that softens the edges of new buildings. In addition to providing greenery, street trees have been shown to slow vehicular speeds by providing regularly spaced objects that increase a driver's perceived speed. The canopy and light dappled on a road has a positive impact on driver experience, and also serves to decrease speeds. The Town should engage in a street tree planting program that provides one-shot funding for targeted streets to gain access to free street trees, as a way to both slow traffic and increase property values. By focusing the program on targeted streets to enable the creation of a tree canopy, the impact on behavior and values can be significant and have a strong impact.

**STRATEGY:** As part of a Streets Master Plan effort, identify priority streets for tree planting program, market the program, secure funding, and plant trees.

#### KEEP 196 AS A TRAFFIC-PRIORITIZED STREET THAT IS TAME ENOUGH TO CROSS

Most people agree that Route 196 needs to remain a street that prioritizes mobility. However, people have also strongly indicated that they need to be able to cross the street on foot at three specific places, including Topsham Fair Mall Road, Main Street, Village Drive/Community Way. This includes high school kids trying to get home from school or to their jobs and people from Highland Green and neighborhoods north of the Connector getting to the village. Steps should be taken to redesign these intersections as more narrow and tame places for street crossings, including the removal of excess turn lanes that increase pedestrian crossing distances, lengthen signal phases, and induce more traffic.

**STRATEGY:** Hire an engineer adept at working within an urban, pedestrian-prioritized context to redesign smaller, tamer intersections that better balance mobility and safety.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to manage and limit new curb cuts onto Route 196.

#### ADOPT A LOW-COST APPROACH TO STREET DESIGN

Traffic related complaints were one of the highest rated comments expressed during the Public Planning Process. The Police Department has a Traffic Safety Officer and utilizes grant funding to increase the number of officers available to address concerns related to speeds and other road safety issues. While Topsham has recently been increasing its funding for road reconstruction to improve more road miles each year, transportation funding generally continues to tighten. The State has largely been limited to restriping and re-paving, with little state funding available for road reconstruction. Less costly approaches to improving streets are needed. Tactical Urbanism is a strategy that allows communities to use temporary or semi-permanent materials to test changes to street design. This approach relies on real-world evaluation of a project, versus costly engineering that can still result in a built outcome that needs adjustment. By testing ideas on the ground, using paint, bollards, or other inexpensive approaches, the community can provide feedback, and



iterative changes can be made quickly that respond to the community's concerns or to the relative success of the installation. Topsham has already engaged in this kind of approach, on Green Street, Main Street, and Elm Street, making adjustments as needed. In all cases, the cost of these projects was minimal and allowed the Town to more quickly address local issues related to street safety.

**STRATEGY:** Include the practice of Tactical Urbanism in the Town's complete streets policy and continue staff training.

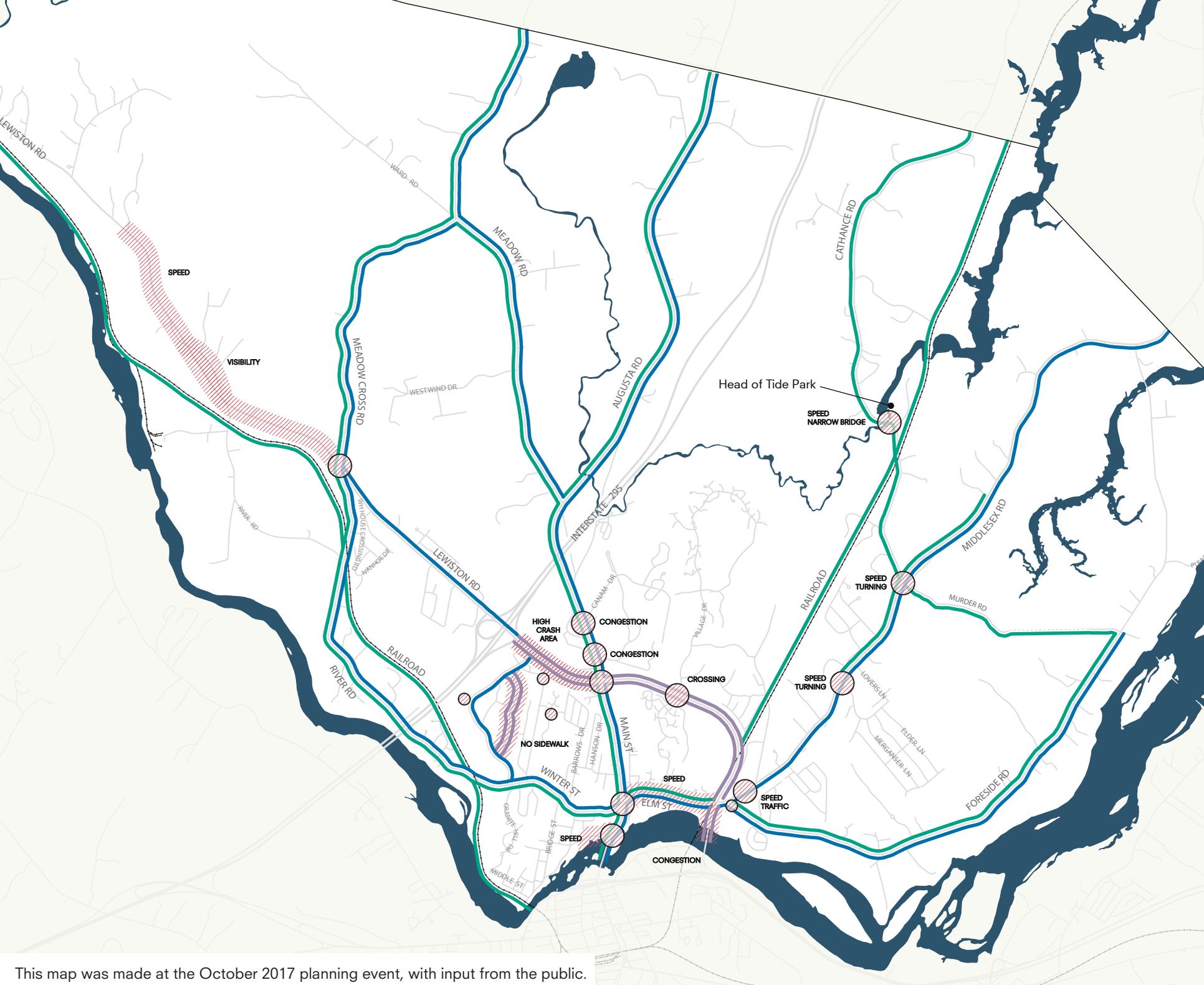
## Tactical Urbanism

**A town, organizational, and/or citizen-led approach to neighborhood building using short-term, low-cost, temporary installations that demonstrate the effectiveness of potential changes to the built environment.**

### **Insight:** Topsham has...

- 84.62 miles of publicly maintained roadways
- 7.6 miles of arterial roadways, carrying high speed, long distance traffic including Interstate 95, Route 196, Route 24 and Route 202
- 6.6 miles of collector roadways, collecting and distributing traffic to and from arterials, including the Cathance Road, Foreside Road, and River Road
- 61 miles of local roads, serving primarily adjacent land areas





This map was made at the October 2017 planning event, with input from the public.

# Safe Streets and Tactical Repair

- Priority Vehicle
- Improve for Biking
- Improve for Pedestrians
- Dangerous Intersection
- Dangerous Roadway

# Local and Regional Mobility





Transit is broadly considered a basic public service that can help a community retain existing residents, attract new ones, and support business activity. For 15 years, Topsham has opted out of regional public transportation. As Topsham grows, more people may begin to support funding for transit. Transit supports a diverse population more equitably, and can also attract employees needed to support businesses within town.

#### MAKE BUS TRANSIT CONNECTIONS TO OTHER COMMUNITIES

A 2017 Transit Feasibility Study done by Western Maine Transit Services determined that regional transit is feasible. The study looked at a number of routes within the region and identified the route between Lewiston/Auburn and Topsham and Brunswick along Route 196 as the highest priority transit connection in the Western Maine region, based on travel patterns and anticipated ridership numbers. Western Maine Transit Services is already managing regional transit in Bath, providing potential for additional connections to the north. The Topsham and Brunswick route identified along Route 196 already has sufficient numbers of potential frequent and occasional users, a larger number of people traveling for work, and a high percentage of elderly populations.

**STRATEGY:** Continue discussions with transit providers to connect Topsham to regional destinations.

#### SUPPORT INTRA-TOWN BUS TRANSIT SERVICE

The Town of Topsham has explored local bus service to extend the Brunswick Explorer to connect population centers and business centers in town. A preliminary study found that a local bus route would cost less than 1/2 percent of the Town's overall budget. The Town's elected officials are still considering this option. Should a local bus service move forward, the route should be designed for efficiency so that it appeals to all potential users. Bus transit begins and ends with pedestrians and should therefore not strive to provide door-to-door service. Bus routes should avoid weaving through parking lots and along tertiary roads to optimize efficiency and to attract a broader group of transit riders. In order to provide the best system for the greatest number of people, bus stops should be located along primary streets. People with significant mobility challenges have other types of services available to serve their needs in a more direct manner.

Conversations should also be convened with private transit operators, including the Highlands to coordinate and potentially provide transit service throughout Topsham, via a public-private partnership.

**STRATEGY:** Plan an intra-town transit service for people of all ages and abilities.

**STRATEGY:** Work with local businesses to coordinate and provide a range of transportation services to accommodate the needs of an aging population.

#### SUPPORT MORE RIDE-SHARING OPTIONS

Companies and organizations that provide ride-sharing, vanpooling, carpooling, taxis, and transportation network companies (such as Uber) should be encouraged to operate in Topsham. These services offer efficient door-to-door service for people who are unable to afford cars or who choose to live without a car. Ridesharing can also help reduce parking demand, so parking lots can be reallocated to tax-generating, community-oriented development. Employee incentives could look like flexible work hours and schedules to alleviate peak-period travel or accommodate ride-share, and preferential parking for vanpools and carpools.

**STRATEGY:** Work with local businesses to set up and maintain ridesharing locations in oversized parking lots.

**STRATEGY:** Work with the business community to create employee incentives for ride-sharing.

#### MAKE ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION VIABLE BY LIMITING PARKING

Topsham today is overparked everywhere. Historically, new construction has come with requests for oversized parking lots, turning vacant land into asphalt gaps. Gappy, suburban patterns cannot support public transit and asphalt yields much less taxable value for the Town compared to the value generated from a new building with site improvements. To make transit service viable, don't gap. Fill in vacant parking lots between buildings with new buildings and public spaces to centralize parking, strengthen the Town's tax base and provide common areas for social gathering.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to require parking maximums within the growth areas, but allow flexibility in permitting so the free market can determine what the actual parking need is.

#### UNDERSTAND AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY

We are in a period of rapid technological change with sensor technology and mobile connectivity, advances in vehicle safety and lighter weight, utilitarian versions of the vehicles we know today. Car companies are beginning to roll out subscription-based models as a means of recapturing an evident shrinking market share. Autonomous car technology has far reaching implications as to how we provide public transportation services and what the transit users' experience will be at either ends of the journey. Autonomous vehicle technology has the ability to turn transportation engineering upside down, reshaping how we allocate pavement when cars don't need as wide margins of space to account for operator error. This technology trend is emerging rapidly and we would be advised to look back into history to a time when we allowed private cars to take over our streets and displace people, streetcars and bicycles. Sensory technology already means with a mere swipe of a wallet or phone, a shared bicycle can be unlocked. Mobile connectivity means transit riders can confidently predict when buses will appear at stops. Shared, subscription-based vehicles mean less money spent on parking and more real estate available for housing, businesses, civic and public space amenities. Finally, technology allows cities and town to adjust the costs of curb-side parking based on demand to ensure there's always a supply of on-street parking available to support local business. Perhaps the time to think about a moratorium on the expansion of single mode, car-supportive infrastructure is now.

**STRATEGY:** As smart vehicle technology advances, implement a system of real-time value pricing for parking.

**STRATEGY:** As smart vehicle technology advances, evaluate and adjust public infrastructure funding priorities.

**STRATEGY:** As vehicle sensor technology improves, reallocate excess pavement for pedestrian and bicycle amenities, stormwater retention, and street trees.





# Access to Nature and Open Spaces



Nancy Greindl.



Topsham residents love their natural spaces and having access to a vast supply of open lands, hiking trails and places to explore and visit. However abundant, these assets are a relatively well kept secret. It may be in the best interest of the Town to more broadly promote Topsham as a community that boasts incredible access to nature as a means of attracting more people to the area, both to live and visit. Additionally, locals expressed confusion as to which lands are public, semi-public, or private. An opportunity exists to better manage and protect the resources that are part of the community's life and identity.

#### PROTECT, ADD, AND FORMALIZE TRAILS

Topsham has a rich network of both publicly-accessible trails and informal trails crossing private property. Trail networks support hiking, walking, snowmobiling and ATV's. As development continues to occur, the community could lose its informal trails unless steps are taken to purchase trail easements or to require developers to provide direct and convenient trail connections as a part of their development projects. Between the Planning Office (Conservation Commission, Tree Committee, Bowdoin Internships), Public Works, and Parks and Recreation, the Town attempts to maintain trails and provide mapping. Additional work is also done by the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust, the Greater Topsham Trail Alliance, Cathance River Education Alliance, and the Topsham Trail Riders to manage existing trails and build new ones. This work should continue to be supported and funded.

**STRATEGY:** Update zoning to clearly articulate when trail corridors should be preserved or added as private development occurs.

**STRATEGY:** Create and use a more in-depth open space and trails connectivity map to identify where important trail corridors and connections can be established as part of new private development.

**STRATEGY:** Seek both private and public funding to expand the number of trails, pedestrian/bicycle paths, access points to natural resources, and water access.



PROVIDE LOCAL ACCESS TO MARKED AND UNMARKED TRAILS

Many people don't have a clear understanding of which lands are open to the public and acceptable for use. While there may always be mixed feelings about how much to advertise local trails for fear of overuse, steps should be taken to help clarify for residents the public and private status of trails and water access points. Local institutions such as the Topsham Public Library, Topsham Parks & Recreation Department, and the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust could informally distribute information about available trails as a way to provide a semi-controlled distribution of information.

**STRATEGY:** Install low-cost, low-impact and friendly signage at private trail locations and water access points inviting discrete and respectful use of property.

**STRATEGY:** Work with the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust to solidify use agreements with private landowners.

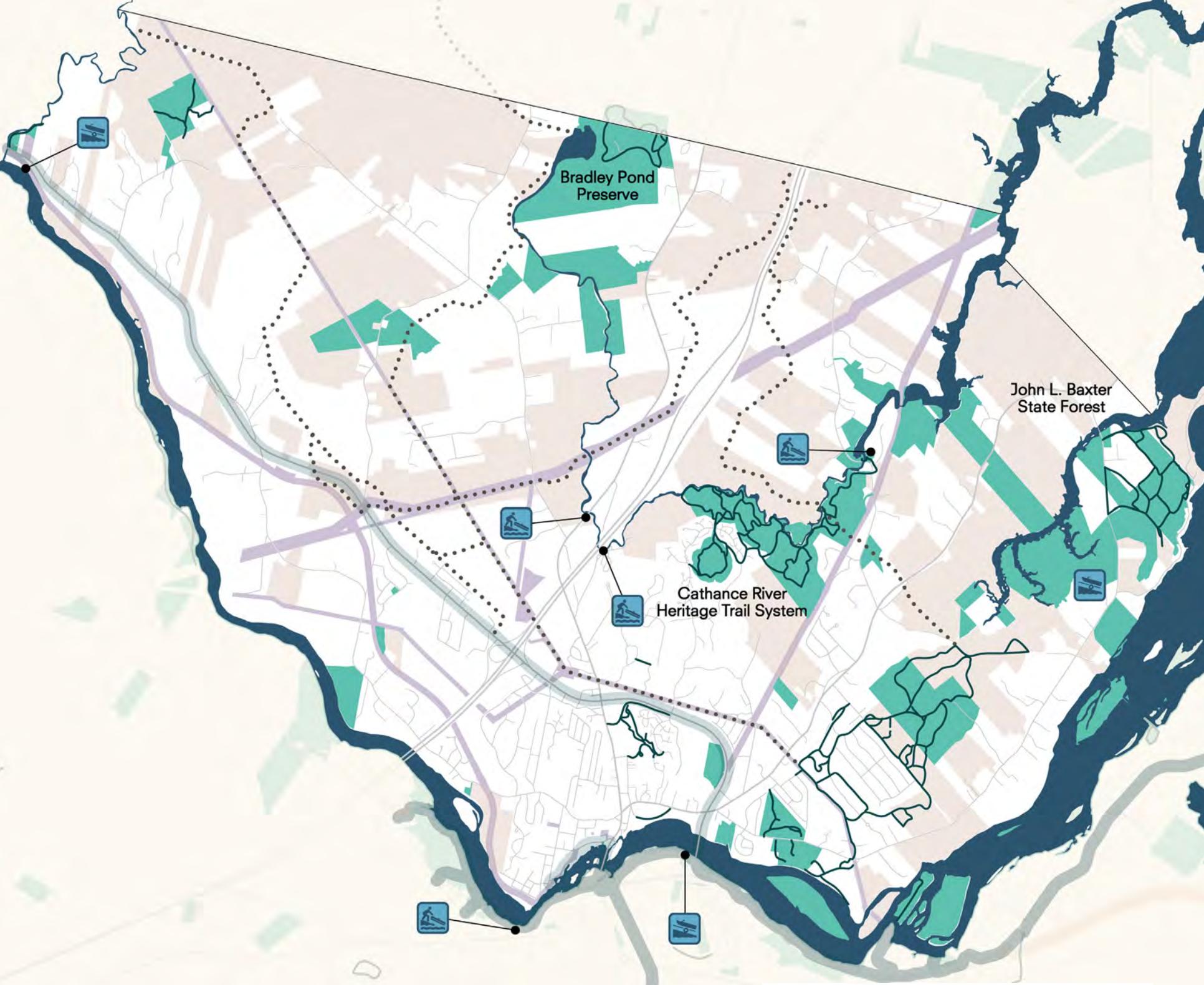
**STRATEGY:** For frequently used trails on private property, provide ongoing stewardship assistance to landowners.

**STRATEGY:** Seek private funding support to establish an Open Space and Trails Ombudsman to work in partnership with the Topsham Recreation Department, CREA and the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust.

INCREASE INVENTORY OF OPEN SPACES, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND WILDLIFE HABITATS

The Topsham Conservation Commission continually watches over the lands the Town acquires, and with the Select Board's support, is always looking to improve the Town's Open Space inventory. The recently improved Head of Tide Park, Cathance Nature Preserve, and the Androscoggin Brunswick-Topsham Riverwalk have added to the quality of life in town. A high priority is





## Existing Open Space and Trails



the establishment of a new Downtown Waterfront Park that can serve as a civic center and also provide access to the Androscoggin River.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to require developers building projects of a certain scale within the rural districts to protect high quality open space. Use the Natural Areas Plan to inform protection.

**STRATEGY:** Set up an acquisition fund to purchase open space identified in the four focus areas identified in the Natural Areas Plan.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to use the Open Space Tax Program as a strategy to protect important scenic resources and open spaces in Topsham.

**STRATEGY:** Form public/private partnerships to execute a Downtown Waterfront Park.

**STRATEGY:** Update the 2010 Natural Areas Plan.

#### PROVIDE MORE ACCESS TO THE THREE RIVERS

Topsham is blessed with multiple rivers including the Androscoggin, Cathance, and Muddy Rivers leading to Merrymeeting Bay. The community has expressed a strong desire to capitalize on views and access to the water. People would like to see boat access on the Topsham side of the Androscoggin River for kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards, both above and below the dam. Having a stronger connection to the rivers is both a quality-of-life and economic opportunity for the Town and should be the focus of conversations to make this goal a reality. Issues surrounding ownership, incline, and safety always surface when discussing boat ramp access. Locals report using access at the Sewer District area on Pinewood. Not only creating the Boat Ramp, but safety and oversight to a ramp in addition to adequate parking facilities will also need to be supported and funded.

**STRATEGY:** Set up a "Topsham Conservation, Inc." as a quasi-municipal entity, similar to Topsham Development, Inc, to allow Topsham to set aside and spend funding for land conservation.

**STRATEGY:** Seek funding to expand the number of trails and pedestrian/bicycle paths to the rivers.

**STRATEGY:** Enter into agreements with private landowners to formalize water access points.

#### PROMOTE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IN TOPSHAM

People in the community have expressed an interest in seeing the Town more actively promote hunting and fishing on Merrymeeting Bay through economic development promotional information. Merrymeeting Adult Ed (SAD #75) already offers classes locally on basic firearms and archery skills. Efforts should be made to further support Topsham as a community that supports nature-based activities and promotes this through marketing efforts. Private sector investments can be made to help bring more tourism into town, including woodland yurt hotels or other creative lodging opportunities.

**STRATEGY:** Work with organizations such as Merrymeeting Adult Ed, Topsham Trail Riders, Brunswick Topsham Land Trust and CREA to offer four-season, nature-based activities and programming for people of all ages and abilities.

**STRATEGY:** Work with TDI to support development of natural resource-based tourism.

**STRATEGY:** Work regionally to develop branded marketing materials to showcase outdoor amenities, farms and local food and beverage unique to Topsham and its neighboring communities.

#### EXPAND THE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE NETWORK

The Town has pursued several projects to increase and/or improve walkability across Topsham. When the Town moves forward to create a waterfront park, this new facility should include related improvements to traffic flow and access/safety for pedestrians and bicyclists on Main Street to connect the park to the Androscoggin Brunswick-Topsham Riverwalk Town Landing Trails. Extension of our trail networks here would dramatically increase the attraction for walking in the Lower Village, as was noted during the Dan Burden walkability audit and presentation in September 2014.

**STRATEGY:** Prioritize funding for sidewalk and bicycle network expansions.

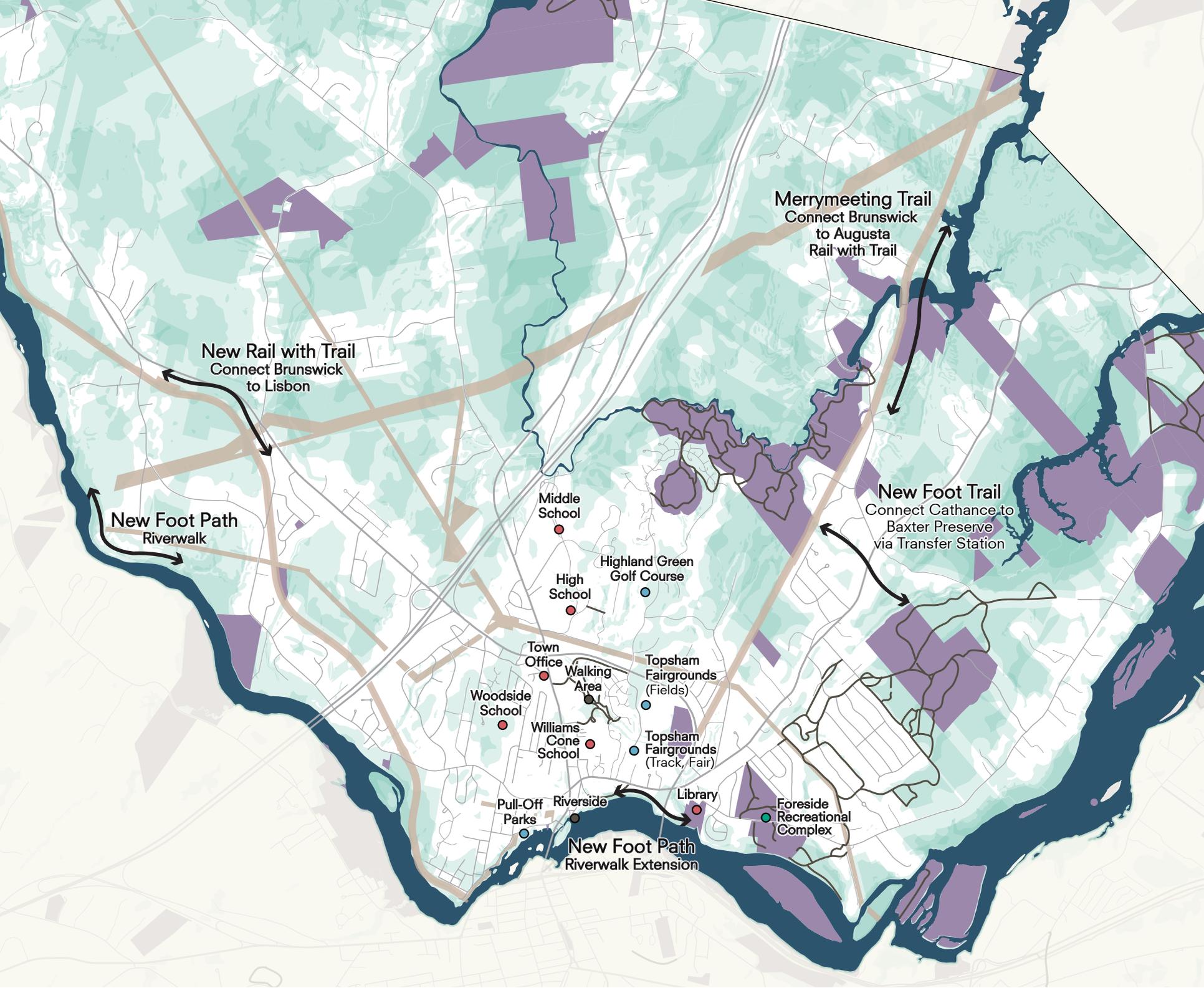
#### REGIONAL TRAIL CONNECTIONS

Participants of the Plan Your Topsham process identified two abandoned rail corridors as optimal long-term regional trail opportunities (see Open Space and Trails Connectivity Map). The first, the Androscoggin Railroad line, could connect Topsham via the Lewiston Branch of the Maine Central Railroad (formerly the Androscoggin Railroad), to Brunswick, Lisbon Falls, Lisbon and Lewiston. The second, the Merrymeeting Trail, could connect Topsham to Augusta and ultimately Bangor. A feasibility study has been completed to investigate a paved, multi-use Merrymeeting Trail. Participants who serve on the Town's conservation commission noted that a more lower-impact trail could be implemented in segments, over time, on the Androscoggin Railroad line.

**STRATEGY:** Work regionally to seek funding opportunities for the Merrymeeting Trail to Kennebec River Rail Trail.

**STRATEGY:** Work regionally to explore opportunities to build segments of footpaths in the Androscoggin Railroad corridor.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to work regionally with other municipalities and organizations to extend regional trails.



## Open Space and Trails Connectivity

-  Conserved Lands
-  Utility Corridors
-  Trails
-  Civic Space
-  Informal Recreation Area
-  Private Recreation Space
-  Park
-  Lands Potentially Suitable for Conservation

# Merrymeeting Bay

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This place Topsham we all call home was once known as Sawacook by native Pejepscot Abenaki and highly valued for its rich land and water resources. Those same features similarly attracted early European settlers who quickly capitalized on these locally abundant, natural treasures. Despite 400 years of persistent change since, many of those same resources remain evident to this day and continue to enrich the modern lives of Topsham's current residents.

Maine's third largest river, the mighty Androscoggin, serves as our western and southern borders. The tidal freshwaters of Merrymeeting Bay – second in size only to Chesapeake Bay - borders to our east. With large blocks of contiguous undeveloped forest and farm fields in the north and west, the 36 square miles of land and waters that comprise the town of Topsham are endowed with a myriad of high value natural resources that would be the envy of any global community, large or small.

These natural features, set in a coastal geography in conjunction with upland floodplains and wetlands of the Cathance, Muddy, and Little Rivers, include scattered pockets of unique and rare natural communities such as the Cathance River Nature Preserve heath bog, open water bodies like Bradley Pond, and tiny mapped - and unmapped - vernal pools. All conjoin to provide exceptional scenic resources and abundant, high value natural habitats to our local wildlife – and to the residents of Topsham.

Merrymeeting Bay, where six rivers including the Kennebec and Androscoggin come together, is the heart of the Kennebec Estuary and pride of our town - a water body of statewide ecological significance due in part to its importance for wildlife habitat including rare animals, plants and natural communities. Merrymeeting Bay is critical habitat for waterfowl who visit the

thriving beds of wild rice, a native grass that grows tall with feathery flowers that mature into a seed head full of nutritious grains. The Bay provides spawning and nursery habitat for important recreational and commercial fisheries as well. Frank Burroughs, in his book *Confluence: Merrymeeting Bay*, illustrates how unique the Bay is, as only one of four places in the world where large rivers come together to share a delta, thus creating a most productive ecosystem. Unlike the others, our Bay is relatively preserved in its natural condition. The Bay's importance as a significant natural community cannot be understated.

Topsham today is healthier than many lands, but is not untouched by current and historic forces. Topsham's landscape saw impact and degradation from the earliest European settlers' intensive farming practices and land-clearing for the raising of sheep. Mining, industrial and military efforts, both in our Town borders and up river put intense pressure on our ecosystems. Commercial, residential, and transportation pressures continue to contribute modern day impacts. Our natural resources are finite, limited in place, and challenged by a changing environment, our appetite for growth, and the mounting influences of global climate change. Whether it's the incremental loss of forest and farmland from sea level rise along the Muddy River; the continued onslaught of invasive species throughout our Town due in part to warming temperatures and landscaping choices; or the direct loss and fragmentation of habitats through planned and unplanned development; these continued and cumulative pressures pose real and direct threats to our local natural resources. We encourage the Town to continue to consider in Plan implementation the significance of our natural resources, and to use available and innovative tools to protect the economic and ecological benefits they provide. We are ready to help.



Peter A. McCarthy.

The return of millions of river herring to Merrymeeting Bay and improvement of water quality on the Androscoggin River are fantastic successes; we shouldn't stop there. In the Recovery of Maine's Coastal Fisheries John Lichter notes "Maine's people and communities would benefit from additional ecological recovery. Our economy depends largely on a clean, natural environment that allows both tourism and the extraction of natural resources such as commercial fisheries."

The importance of open space in Topsham goes beyond aesthetics. Town citizens recreate in these lands, creating deeply meaningful memories of exploring our lands and waters in all seasons. Generations have enjoyed our natural areas from our favorite backyard rock to our preferred scenic view of the River. Many still make their livelihoods harvesting or studying the same natural riches once utilized by our ancestors.

There has long been consistent and strong recognition by Topsham residents of the importance, and need for the conservation of our natural resources. Yet, beyond obvious hard-earned contributions of organizations like the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust, it's important we remember

that many of the natural resources enjoyed by our populace are derived from the good stewardship efforts of numerous private landowners who own and manage those undeveloped lands. How we, as a community, can continue to effectively work with and support these landowners to help retain that rural quality of life we look for in a community like Topsham – while maintaining or even enhancing those same natural features most dear to us – remains our challenge.

Conservation planning is an integral component of growth area planning to maintain the rural character we love about Topsham. Look to Merrymeeting Bay and the restoration of the Androscoggin River to see what careful management can do. This Comprehensive Plan is meant to drive how our forward movement over the next 10 years; it's important we remember our resources require purposeful planning with consideration of our future Topsham generations. Thank you in advance for that consideration.

Sincerely,

Members of the Topsham Conservation Commission

Victor Langelo, Chair  
Shana Stewart Deeds  
Steve Pelletier  
Raija Suomela, Secretary

Peter A. McCarthy.



# Foster Social Connection





Larry Fitch.

During the Plan Your Topsham process, residents expressed a deep desire and need for a greater sense of community. They identified that they are missing opportunities to gather and have the kinds of informal interactions that allow people to engage with each other. Some seniors noted that the community building and meeting spaces and activities offered by the Highlands and Highland Green for their residents, serve as a desirable model for similar town-sponsored amenities.

There was a broad interest among many different kinds of people for more events, social gatherings, neighborhood activities, places to gather and greater communication around local happenings. Whether at a park, a coffee shop, or an ice skating rink, people want to have the opportunity for chance interactions with others. And building on those places, there is a hope for additional programming, and easy to access information about goings-on for people of all ages.

#### STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Existing and new neighborhoods within Topsham should have identifiable neighborhood centers that provide both indoor and outdoor gathering spaces and opportunities for informal interactions. Examples of neighborhood centers include parks and pocket parks, neighborhood-scale retail (corner store or restaurant), churches, and other destinations within walking distance. Neighborhood centers are critical for allowing spontaneous interactions between neighbors and a reason for people to walk to and from their home. Chance encounters, including bumping into a neighbor on the sidewalk or at the park, have been found to be critical for healthy, happy people. Ideally, every home within Topsham's intended growth area would be within a 5-minute walk of a neighborhood center. Topsham can enhance quality of life by finding

ways to build civic spaces, while also enabling the private sector to build neighborhood-scale retail in appropriate locations.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to include neighborhood centers that are enabled through 5-minute walk pedestrian shed standards.

**STRATEGY:** Form public/private partnerships to fund the retrofit of existing neighborhoods to add desired amenities such as parks and civic gathering spaces.

#### REQUIRE MEANINGFUL PUBLIC SPACES WHEN DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS

Currently, zoning requires a percentage of land to be preserved as open space, which results in remnant land set aside in fragments that don't tend to yield usable parks. Topsham should revise zoning standards to require civic spaces, such as parks, playgrounds, greens, and other open spaces designed for active community use. Civic space requirements should be responsive to the kinds of civic opportunities that already exist and work to fill in gaps so there is a range of community spaces provided within neighborhoods. As with any public infrastructure project, staff should be mindful to appropriately budget for ongoing maintenance and long-term costs.

**STRATEGY:** Update the Town's zoning code to include provisions for meaningful open space types tied to developments of various scales. Open space types should include the full range of civic spaces including commons, parks, squares, and plazas, as well as amenities such as recreation fields, playgrounds, swimming pools, gardens, skating rinks, dog parks, and amphitheaters.

#### INCREASE PROGRAMMING WITHIN TOWN

There is a strong local desire for community events that bring people together. During the planning process, the community brainstormed a long list of social activities that people would like to see in Topsham. These events could happen in a variety of locations, both existing and new, including the fairgrounds, civic buildings, or in public spaces, including the Library, streets, and parks, that could be re-imagined for more active use.

More social capacity is needed within town to organize events and bring people together. The people of Topsham have an opportunity to establish a group of local people to take on the role of programming more activities within town. This effort should supplement and align with the work already happening through the Library and other existing networks. The effort could be formalized through the formation of a quasi-public commission. Or, the Town could engage with the Maine Development Foundation's Main Street program, which provides guidance to help communities strengthen their main street through a focus on programming, capacity building, growing local business, and quality placemaking.

**STRATEGY:** Form an Arts & Culture Commission, a local Annual Event Citizen's Group, or organize and apply for the Main Street Program, including the options

of becoming a network affiliate community.

#### WORK WITH THE FAIRGROUNDS TO MAKE IT A CENTERPIECE OF THE TOWN

There is broad support in town for seeing more programming at the Fairgrounds. Topsham Development, Inc. (TDI) has included the goal of supporting more events at the Topsham Fairgrounds in its strategic plan for economic development. The Topsham Fairgrounds provides an ideal – and very attractive – location for large scale events, with plenty of space, lots of parking and great road access. The Town is also working with the Topsham Fair board of directors to ensure that buildings at the Fairgrounds are properly equipped and permitted in order to be used for public gatherings. Regulations regarding the use of the Fairground have been simplified over the recent past to make non-fair uses easier to run.

**STRATEGY:** Support the work of TDI to financially support regional and national caliber events at the Topsham Fairgrounds.

#### SUPPORT THE LIBRARY

Topsham's Public Library is serving as a modern day community center, welcoming to young and old alike. The Library has huge support from the community in terms of attendance, circulation, donations and interest. However, the Library also has some gaps in funding vs. services. There is concern about the ability to replace any individual at current salary levels and to retain the quality of the staff. Skill sets needed for a 21<sup>st</sup> century library are much more demanding.

**STRATEGY:** Support increased funding for the Library from both municipal and non-municipal revenue sources.

**STRATEGY:** Support the Library Trustees in efforts to review space needs for the Library, ensure facilities are being used effectively and meeting 21<sup>st</sup> century needs. Plan accordingly for any future additions or renovations.



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## SEEK MORE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Topsham residents generated an exhaustive list of indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities that are desired but currently unavailable. The list includes hockey/skating rink, swimming pool, community center, dog park, teen center, BMX bike track, amphitheater, outdoor splash pad, bowling and performance space. Many of these opportunities could be provided through public-private partnerships or by business enterprise. The Town should consider strategies such as TIF agreements and form-based zoning to encourage and incentivize private sector investment in these important community-identified activities.

**STRATEGY:** Use credit enhancement agreements to incentivize private development of new indoor and outdoor recreation facilities.

**STRATEGY:** As part of new development, explore opportunities to partner with private developers to create new recreational facilities which the Town could benefit from through lease agreements.

## MAKE PARK MANAGEMENT (AND CONSTRUCTION) A GROUP EFFORT

In communities across the country, both formal and informal neighborhood parks, trails, and other spaces have fallen under the care of local neighborhood groups. With tightening municipal budgets, these community spaces might have the grass cut by the local public works crew, but additional care is challenging. "Friends of" groups have stepped in to keep parks clean, plant flowers, plant trees, fundraise for seating, manage trails, and otherwise make these community places a true community labor of love and an opportunity for community building. In Topsham, where many neighborhoods lack public parks and civic spaces, this shared approach to construction and management would help Topsham's neighborhoods meet social and recreational needs of residents of all ages. Town leaders should encourage civic groups to make neighborhood and park improvements.

**STRATEGY:** Allow and encourage "Friends of" groups to help construct and manage Topsham's civic spaces.

**STRATEGY:** Ensure adequate department budgets and staffing to manage lawn care and tree pruning at town properties and in the street right of way.

## "Imagining Topsham 5 – 10 years into the future, I would like to see and experience..."

- More local businesses and retailers (coffee shop, place for high schoolers to get wifi, store near school)
  - Centralized downtown
  - Improving mall space and making the area pedestrian-friendly
  - Community centers, indoor and outdoor
  - Senior center and adult-focused activities
  - Family-focused community activities
  - Community feel/engagement (or government)
  - Indoor pool/outdoor splash area
  - Music events
  - Pedestrian-accessible areas (make walk more friendly to Brunswick to create more cohesion)
  - Mixed-use residential development
  - Stay, work, play (professional services)
  - Local pub/winery
  - Dog park
  - Roller derby
  - Performance spaces (amphitheater)
  - Hiking/biking events
  - Groomed cross country ski trails
  - Mountain biking trails
  - Boat launch
  - Water sport rentals
  - Bring back Sky High ski area
  - Bowling alley
  - Basketball courts
  - Playground
  - Outdoor movie night
  - Safer community
  - Game night
  - Adventure obstacle course on the trails
  - BMX/skate park
  - Ice rink
  - Food trucks
  - Farmers market
  - Fire station development
- ....and more!

# Social Connectivity

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English Poet John Donne famously said “No [hu]man is an island” describing how humans need each other to survive. That was back in 1624 and he was clearly onto something as it’s still true now, likely more than ever.



In America today, the number of people living alone, and having fairly solitary lives is the highest in human history. People may live alone, and/or far from loved ones, are communicating through devices rather than in person, trying to keep up with a fast pace of life through conveniences like online shopping, working long hours, and struggling with having less time for family, friends, and community—all making for a challenging environment to feel connected. Feeling connected to others is important because loneliness and social isolation have negative health effects on everyone, whether young or old. Recent social research points overwhelmingly to social connectivity — sometimes using the term sociality or social connectedness— as a linchpin element in determining whether a

community is healthy and well-functioning. So important, in fact, that the lack of it competes well with obesity and smoking in contributing to poor health outcomes and premature death. Loneliness and social isolation are considered an unrecognized public health problem — including the quality of relationships people have on an individual level as well as the sense of connection to the larger community.

So what does this have to do with urban or town planning, and how should we be looking at this as we come together for this Comprehensive Plan Update? Well, some of these needs can be addressed through neighborhood design and the built environment.

Planning as it has traditionally been done has not considered sociality or social connectivity. It has focused mostly on mobility, on regulation of land-use of private property. And as such much of planning has actually contributed to keeping us separated, in individual houses, which we drive to in our vehicles.

Looking at some of the best research done on this topic, ingredients for healthy, well functioning communities include:

- face-to-face meeting,
- interaction,
- communication among members, and
- high quality physical space.

In addition, studies of “Blue Zones” around the world (place where people live the longest, healthiest lives) shows ingredients for longevity include making low-intensity physical activity part of one’s daily routine, building good relationships with friends and family, eating a diet lighter on meat and excess calories and heavier on plants, and finding a purpose for and sense of meaning in your life.



Larry Fitch.

If you are one of the 300+ people who attended the 5-day public planning process in October 2017 at the Old Fire Barn that kicked off the community engagement process for this Comp Plan Update, you know that something special happened there. The process of people coming together to talk about what people want for our town was invigorating. We looked at lots of options for how we want our town to look in the future. We told the MDW consultants what we love and what we don't about Topsham. And what came out of the five days was a set of desires that have shaped this Plan.

People said "we want more of this," — gathering in a meaningful way. They stated a desire for opportunities for physical spaces where we can come together, interact, and enjoy face-to-face contact; a desire to get to know each other better, meet people who live in other neighborhoods. A shift in priorities from what past planning has offered. All of these ideas relate to using human sociality as a measure for setting priorities and scope as we move forward with implementation.

Topsham has developed in much the same way as many towns in America. As a town in Maine where the average age is 44, we have a larger percentage of older folks. The other thing that many residents have

pointed out in response to the evolving plan and its illustrations is that we have a dearth of gathering places. And no "town center," no main street with shops and cafes and restaurants that draw people together. And our public recreation facilities are all outdoor. No surprise for a community with serious winters, people in Topsham want indoor rec facilities and meeting places.

Maine has a long history of creating opportunities for gathering—bean suppers, family reunions, summer fairs, craft fairs, farmers market, school events, worship services, sporting events, etc. While those events are fun traditions and highlights for many, they are actually vital for maintaining the health of the community and there is desire for even more opportunities to connect.

With this update of the Comprehensive Plan, we have an opportunity to do something different, something that will improve the health of our community. We have the power to prioritize making it easier to meet face-to-face, easier to interact, and communicate with each other in public spaces that foster these things. While it is only part of the solution, it is a great first step. We have the desire, now let's do this!

**Submitted by CPUC members Mary Kate Appicelli and Susan Rae-Reeves.**

# Support Knowledge Economy





An example of a coworking space. WeWork.

As a bedroom community where only 10% of the workforce stays in Topsham each day for work, Topsham is well positioned to support the knowledge economy and home-based businesses by improving access to high-speed internet and making strategic quality of life enhancements that attract more people to town. This largely under-the-radar workforce can be supported as a way to bolster the local economy from the ground up. Increased workplace flexibility, remote offices, and an increase in laptop business, as well as Topsham's proximity to nearby job centers, opens Topsham up to a unique opportunity to attract new residents. The critical components include a diverse supply of affordable housing and good schools, with walkable neighborhoods and safe streets for walking and biking.

#### INCREASE WIFI SPEEDS

An increasing number of people are engaged in the knowledge economy and working from home. Topsham should take steps to attract more knowledge workers by laying the infrastructure to support this growing sector of the jobs economy. Topsham has a contract with Comcast (XFINITY) to provide cable/internet services. The requirement is to provide these services to all residences where there is a specific density of units per road mile. A range of basic to high speed internet (up to 2 GIG) is available to many addresses in Topsham, however the costs for 2 GIG monthly service is substantial and could pose a financial barrier for knowledge workers and small businesses.

Further, in a communications network, the middle mile is the link that connects regions together. It is the segment of a telecommunications network that connects the core network with the central office, commonly found in the center of towns. The "last mile" is the part of a communications system that connects individual dwellings or offices. A growing number of Maine communities are investing in the last mile of fiber, including Islesboro, Sanford, Scarborough, South Portland, and Rockport, all of whom have invested in bringing broadband to portions of, and sometimes all, of their town. This infrastructure may be more critical for small-medium sized companies where a significant amount of data is being transferred.

## Having broader housing choices means allowing small apartments, town houses, cottages, and accessory dwelling units. These housing types are referred to as “missing middle housing”

**STRATEGY:** Explore costs and funding mechanism for bringing fiber to all homes within the intentional growth area.

### ENCOURAGE SHARED WORKSPACES

Maine has seen an increasing interest in shared office spaces, including co-working spaces, as more people are able to work remotely. Even people with home offices enjoy a shared office environment, for access to shared office equipment as well as the social and collaborative benefits.

Co-working spaces are relatively simple start-up ventures that provide an opportunity for knowledge workers, creatives, writers, graphic designers, software engineers, freelancers, and others who work remotely, to afford offices outside of their homes. Co-working spaces typically include shared desks, private offices, conference room, lounge, office equipment, high-speed Internet, and sometimes lockers and showers. Regular events are often organized to help members meet, collaborate, and grow professionally. The next generation of co-working spaces looks like well-stocked workshops, garages, and commercial kitchens, accommodating prototyping, carpentry, industrial arts, and food and beverage production. Co-working spaces typically charge a monthly, yearly, or per hour fee to use the facility and its resources.

Maine has seen a notable increase in co-working offices in the last five years. From just a handful of spaces, they now exist in Biddeford, Lewiston, Westbrook, Yarmouth, Damariscotta, Thomaston, Rockland, Bar Harbor, Ellsworth, Bangor, as well as five shared-working offices in Portland, including a women-only space. Topsham is fortunate that it has had a bonafide co-working space in the Lower Village (at the Priority Group property) since 2006. The Topsham Public Library has established two quiet spaces that are available for co-working and a 15-seat conference room that can be rented for a nominal fee.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to allow shared workspaces throughout all zoning districts in Topsham.

### SUPPORT SCHOOLS, FAMILIES WILL FOLLOW

In the new economy, more people are choosing community and quality of life first and bringing their job with them. One of the largest market demands on the national horizon consists of young couples with kids seeking affordable living options within walkable neighborhoods. However, a big challenge for many parents seeking such a lifestyle relates to the quality of nearby schools. Despite a growing demand for walkable mixed-use neighborhoods, finding such a neighborhood with a high performing neighborhood public school is difficult. Finding a neighborhood that is also affordable for middle-class families is even harder. Topsham is fortunate to have both of its elementary schools embedded within its downtown residential neighborhoods. The middle and high schools, while not located in walkable neighborhoods, are within walking distance of the Upper Village, the Crooker property on 196, and the Navy Annex Housing.

We have an opportunity to attract the best and brightest young talent, as well as the developers looking to capitalize on the next great market demand. Topsham will need to make purposeful investments so it may be seen as a community that boasts a mix of housing types and affordability levels in mixed-use neighborhoods with great public schools. By building on these assets and improving the walkability of the Lower, Center and Upper Village areas, Topsham can enhance its status as a family destination.

**STRATEGY:** Prioritize streets that are safe, interesting, and comfortable for walking.

**STRATEGY:** Update zoning to allow for higher density development as a means for creating more walkable destinations and broader housing choices

### ALLOW HOME-BASED BUSINESS

The traditional office environment is changing as cloud-based technology continues to improve, allowing people to connect and communicate virtually. An increasing number of people, even those employed by large companies, are choosing to work from home, in small or medium-sized shared office spaces, or in coffee shops and restaurants. In 2015, the American Community Survey (ACS) reported that 279 Topsham residents worked at home. This rapidly emerging workforce can be supported

by proactive zoning that allows alternative offices to emerge across town, as well as through networking and community building events.

**STRATEGY:** As part of future zoning efforts, ensure performance standards continue to allow as-of-right home occupations for businesses with on-site employees.

**STRATEGY:** Support the organization of professional groups to hold networking and community building events.

**STRATEGY:** Encourage private sector partnership with the Library to host professional enrichment and skills building workshops.

**STRATEGY:** Create a town-wide directory of home-based businesses.

#### SUPPORT EXISTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Topsham has a strong local contingency of existing businesses that are well positioned to take advantage of additional growth as result of demographic shifts and new development. An organized business community can provide peer to peer support as change happens incrementally over time. The Town and Topsham Development Inc. (TDI) can play a role in coordinating local business activities, ensuring early involvement of stakeholders in planning, and enhancing business-related community development communications.

**STRATEGY:** Work with Topsham Development Inc. (TDI) to create a local business association.

# Be Deliberate About Growth





Nancy Griendl.

People love Topsham because of its central location and the ease it provides to get to other places. But people also have a deep desire for a stronger sense of place. There is a feeling locally that Topsham could generate a town-wide, strong sense of place - more than just the series of semi-independent neighborhoods that seem to currently define the Town. Topsham has seen growth over the past 15 years, but this growth was predicted as far back as in 1992, during previous Comprehensive Planning efforts. The Town planned and encouraged much of the growth since 1992, and the 2007 plan included a Designated Growth Area that encompassed the entire Route 196 Corridor west of I-295 to Lisbon.

As the Town continues to grow, the impacts of this growth should be managed, measured and revisited often through community-driven processes to ensure residents are getting the kinds of outcomes they want. An intentional approach to local growth can also position the Town for long-term viability, by attracting people to choose Topsham as their community. Smart, place-based growth can not only lead to improved quality of life for local people, but can also protect the Town's financial stability and reduce the local tax burden. A "Strong Towns" approach that emphasizes incremental, bottom-up growth and long-term thinking can protect the tax base and ensure that Topsham remains financially strong well into the future.

#### CONTINUE TO INVEST WISELY

Topsham has benefited financially from limiting public utilities to a fairly centralized area, where the amount of development is great enough to support the cost and replacement costs of the utility systems. By avoiding expansion into rural and suburban areas of town, Topsham has avoided unfunded liabilities that can create extreme financial pressure in the long-term. Instead, Topsham has made efficient investments that have yielded the kinds of returns needed to pay for the cost of its infrastructure, including construction, maintenance, repair, and replacement. This kind of smart investment strategy will ensure that Topsham remains financially strong well into the future. To continue along this trajectory, Topsham should continue to encourage and incentivize new development where there is existing infrastructure, which will help preserve and even improve the tax base.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to further encourage a higher density, mixed use pattern of development that delivers a higher municipal return on investment.

**STRATEGY:** Work with TDI to fund a full value per acre analysis.

**STRATEGY:** Work with the Sewer and Water District to proactively plan for future service improvements and extensions.

#### AVOID EXTENDING PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE SHORT TERM

Ongoing public utility policy has been to generally limit infrastructure expansion, including to the west side of I-295. The high cost of extending infrastructure to the west side, and the availability of commercial property in Topsham already served by infrastructure are the most significant impediments to west side development in the near future. Recent estimates of the cost of extending the level of sewer and water infrastructure necessary for most high-quality commercial development exceed six million dollars. This level of cost is not economically feasible for most commercial projects. Even if a project could support the cost of the initial construction, the Town and local utility districts need to be considerate about taking on new infrastructure. Long-term costs should be understood prior to accepting infrastructure.

**STRATEGY:** Prior to using public money on any expansion of utilities west of I-295, require an analysis of the economic benefit of utility expansion.

#### MEASURE & USE VALUE PER ACRE AS A TOOL FOR EVALUATING GROWTH

The questions a town asks and the way it measures success have a direct impact on the quality of outcomes. When it comes to economic development and growth, history has taught us that the old questions and metrics don't necessarily protect the long-term financial health of a community. Instead of simply measuring square feet or taxable value of new development, we have learned to look closely at where growth occurs and the relationship between costs and revenues.

Many communities are now measuring value per acre as a means to understand how new businesses and development are impacting local finances. By evaluating business value by acre of land, it becomes evident that the taxes spun off by small projects can contribute more relative value than the taxes spun off by larger projects that have more direct and indirect costs. For example, a large box development might not only require additional infrastructure at a great immediate and long-term expense, but there may be on-going public service costs associated with the development. Large developments are often suited to a single business and aren't easily reused when that business moves. Large developments can lay unused for a decade or more with little tax revenue. When all of these costs are compared to a small new building constructed along an existing street, it becomes clear that the smaller projects do more for Topsham's long-term financial stability.

The Town is working to increase commercial properties' proportionate share of Topsham's real estate taxes to

Nancy Griendl.



help reduce the burden on residential taxpayers. There is a focused effort to make sure commercial development is appropriate and beneficial for the Town, both by seeking businesses that are compatible with our community and by ensuring that new commercial development does not create new costs for the Town that could offset any increased tax revenues they provide.

**STRATEGY:** Evaluate, measure and if necessary adjust the Town’s Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Policy.

**STRATEGY:** Key TIF policy to value-per-acre to prioritize development that further funds existing investments.

**STRATEGY:** Consider applicability of keying TIF policy to goals of job creation, creation of community access or public benefit (rail, recreation, bus transit, water access, workforce housing, job training).

**FOLLOW GOOD TOWN PLANNING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES**

Topsham has an opportunity to capitalize on several current trends that are playing into decisions about where people choose to live and work. There is a growing interest in walkable places, where a variety of activities can be accessed by foot. Topsham continues to work on establishing a more walkable Main Street and village core, and a strong groundwork is in place. A collection of existing buildings in the Lower Village, and their proximity to both the Upper Village and Brunswick, provide connectivity and access to additional services from the Town’s core.

If Topsham can continue to build and improve its availability of strong, walkable neighborhoods and grow and connect its mixed-use centers, the Town can attract and retain more people. Updating zoning to allow for the development of a network of streets and blocks, streets as public spaces, buildings in the right place, and mix of uses and housing options will be critical to the future strength of the Town within the regional market. The character of development matters, and the groundwork is in place for Topsham to offer a stronger sense of community and town identity.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to emphasize good town building principles, including neighborhood character, blocks, streets, civic spaces, and buildings that, in total, add up to a feeling of authenticity.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to permit greater density within the intentional growth area as identified on the Conservation & Growth Map.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to permit rural development that responds to rural character, including rural building group types.

**POSITION TOPSHAM TO ATTRACT BUSINESS**

The Comprehensive Planning process focused considerable energy and time determining where the community is comfortable with intensive new development and growth. An intended growth area described in the Regulatory Framework section of this plan includes several locations with the potential for significant new development. Encouraging medium- to high-density development to encourage high density development in the Town’s core is a key tool to discouraging sprawl in rural areas.



**Home Depot**  
 Acreage: 16.88  
 Property Tax per Acre: \$9,654.05



**Michaud’s Market**  
 Acreage: 0.18  
 Property Tax per Acre: \$16,438.87



**Frosty’s Donuts**  
 Acreage: 0.05  
 Property Tax per Acre: \$142,183.80

A comparison of commercial properties in Topsham Fair Mall, Topsham’s Lower Village, and Maine Street in Brunswick. The comparison is made between the property tax generated per acre, known as Value Per Acre (VPA).

At the same time, the face of retail continues to shift and contract. Topsham has an opportunity to effectively compete with Brunswick Landing and Cooks Corner by taking a proactive approach to the retail industry, by inviting, permitting, and encouraging higher density mixed-use development within its commercial and other growth zones. High quality development should be required while giving developers and landowners clear and straight-forward rules that allow projects to gain quick and administrative approval to the extent possible.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to make it easier to attract new, denser development to zoning districts within the Neighborhood Transformation - Intentional Growth Sector.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to allow smaller parcels and higher density mixed-use development within the Neighborhood Transformation - Intentional Growth Sector, including infill on parcels that already have development.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to remove off-street parking requirements to enable the market to determine parking need.

**STRATEGY:** Review all municipal codes, licensing, and other procedures to remove barriers to small-scale development and the establishment of new businesses.

**STRATEGY:** Allow a broad range of land uses within the intentional growth areas as well as within the rural zones as part of building groups.

#### SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE COMMERCIAL SPACE

Topsham has an abundance of parking lots that create a negative visual introduction to the community and a less than desirable experience for people walking, biking, and driving through town. However, these parking lots can also provide an opportunity for small-scale development of small, incubator spaces and liner buildings that can provide affordable space for business. Liner buildings, for example, are a unique type of building that is often shallow in depth but wide so as to line the edge of a parking lot and create a new street wall. A variety of building types can be marketed to current landowners and new investors who want to build affordable spaces in town. There are many national examples of affordable commercial spaces that are attracting business and providing a stepping stone for businesses to locate and grow.

**STRATEGY:** Engage in public/private partnerships to pilot low-cost incubator shared workspaces for start-ups along the edges of private parking lots.

**STRATEGY:** Work with local staff to ensure that information on incremental and affordable development projects are provided to landowners.

#### PROTECT HISTORIC ASSETS

Historic buildings provide an attractive asset that should be preserved and supported. Not only do historic

buildings provide a connection with the history of the Town, but they also offer an affordable option for small-scale developers and business owners. Rehabilitation of historic buildings is considerably less expensive than new construction. Today, buildings located within the Topsham Historic District or listed on the National Register of Historic Places as individual buildings or sites have access to federal and state funds that can reduce the construction cost of a commercial project by 45% for all qualifying work. And, Topsham's Certified Local Government Status means that Topsham has access to Federal Historic Preservation funds that are annually allocated to the State and Maine Historic Preservation Commission technical assistance for activities such as building assessments, surveys, nominations, and preservation assistance. At least 10% of Federal funds must be spent on places that are certified as Local Government Status. Finally, the International Existing Building Code should be used as a means to provide greater flexibility over the International Building Code when reviewing historic building projects. While this code has been adopted by the State of Maine and Topsham, many local landowners and contractors are not familiar with its provisions.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to support the work of the Historic District Commission to review projects within the Historic Overlay District, including expansion of the District.

**STRATEGY:** Provide educational opportunities to advance local use of the more flexible International Existing Building Code.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to provide staff support to property owners of historic buildings inside and outside of the Topsham Historic District, with information on how to get a building listed on the register and gain access to federal and state funds.

**STRATEGY:** Update zoning to enable flexible use of historic buildings, including a range of uses, unit numbers, and a removal of off-street parking requirements.

**STRATEGY:** Actively promote and pursue Federal Historic Preservation funds to advance historic preservation efforts.

**STRATEGY:** Leverage State Historic Preservation Office technical assistance to advance historic preservation efforts.

#### ALLOW DEVELOPMENT THAT SUPPORTS RURAL CHARACTER

Topsham, like many Maine communities, has a rich history of rural-based business. With the advent of suburban, use-based zoning in the 1960s and 70s, business activities were largely relegated to business and industrial zones, and rural areas were left with only a handful of ways to make productive use of the land, the primary option being residential subdivisions.

“Topsham has done bold things in the past – mill redevelopment, mall development, Highlands – we should continue to do more bold things and keep trying to shape town.”

## — Survey Respondent

The community has expressed an interest in maintaining rural character at the edges of town. Existing open views, farms, forested lands, and marshes are a central part of why people love Topsham. Currently, these lands are zoned to allow a minimum lot size of 1-acre (R2 Zone) and 1.5 acre (R3 Zone). While limited development has occurred to date in these areas, there is a potential for development that conflicts with local desires and that has significant visual, environmental, and recreational impacts on the community.

Topsham should explore strategies for protecting property rights while providing additional economic options beyond what is available now. New approaches to zoning are available that can allow people to work the land and conduct a variety of business activities within a pattern that is fundamentally rural in character. Traditional rural development, such as hamlets and farm compounds, can be reintroduced, providing a greater menu of options beyond putting land into the farmland and tree growth tax programs, or building housing subdivisions. Rural business development that is in harmony with traditional rural landscapes ensures that land can be passed down to future generations with expanded business and residential opportunity.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to allow rural building groups, including hamlets and farm compounds, as a way to support rural character and support rural-based businesses.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to encourage working farms and forests to participate in the Farmland and Tree Growth Tax Program.

### AGGRESSIVELY PROTECT AND ATTRACT FARMS

There continue to be working farms in Topsham and there is growing interest in local sourcing of food. This trend is reflected statewide as well. In the face of decreasing farmland nationwide, Maine has actually grown in number of farms. According to the 2012 census, there were 8,174 farms operating in Maine, compared to 8,136 farms in 2007. New farms starting up tend to be smaller in scale and sell more high-value products to the local market. The work of economic development staff should include attracting more farmers and agricultural-based businesses to the Town to capitalize on Maine’s growing position at the center of the local food industry.

**STRATEGY:** Work with the Maine Farmland Trust, Department of Agriculture, Merrymeeting Food Council and others involved in food-related industries to attract farmers and other agricultural-based businesses to Topsham.

**STRATEGY:** Pursue a public/private partnership to start up a food hub and certified commercial kitchen.

# Housing Diversity





Topsham residents expressed concerns about housing and the need to provide more affordable housing options into the future. Many people also understand the critical connection between affordable housing options and jobs, and the competitive advantage available for communities to attract businesses to town by providing ample housing options for potential workers. Through the public process, a variety of housing needs have been identified, including additional senior housing, units with two or more bedrooms, and housing for single occupants. National trends also increasingly show that people desire smaller housing types within the context of a walkable neighborhood.

#### PROMOTE NATURALLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Many communities across the country have mandated affordable units as part of private sector housing development, known as inclusionary zoning, with a varying degree of success. At the same time, many communities continue to take a more market-based approach to housing, letting private sector forces determine what gets built. Topsham currently has an overly complex system of density bonuses and thresholds by which a developer can take advantage of bonuses. Topsham could benefit from a more market-based approach with some tweaks and adjustments to current zoning policies. Naturally affordable housing centers around the idea of making it legal to build a diversity of housing types, price points and adequate housing supply to help mitigate high housing prices. Not all residents can, should or will be able to take on the costs associated with private housing construction. Removing barriers to affordable housing creation will let small-scale developers who may not be actual developers by trade, but local people trying to invest in their own community, take on the task of building affordable housing.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to include clearly defined building types with a range of unit sizes that are reflective of local character and are allowed to be built in town by right.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to allow building groups such as pocket neighborhoods, connected farms, small and large compounds, and hamlets.

**STRATEGY:** Review all municipal codes and procedures to remove barriers to small-scale development and the construction of affordable building types.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to remove parking minimums within the growth areas, allowing the free market to determine parking need. Add controls that require new parking to be located behind buildings.

**STRATEGY:** Conduct a detailed housing study based on target market preferences and an understanding of the full range of housing types, including those not currently available within the market.

#### MAKE IT EASY TO BUILD SMALL AND ACCESSORY UNITS

The State of Maine has recently updated the Unified Building Code to allow for exemptions to several mandatory construction requirements for 400 square foot or less dwelling units. Tiny units can come in a variety of forms, including small micro-units, small cottages, accessory units located behind a single-family house, or tiny homes on wheels. Within the intentional growth area, Topsham should allow tiny homes and other kinds of accessory units to occupy the same lot as a single-family home. The accessory units, also known as granny flats, in-law apartments, or carriage houses, can attract more people to town looking for a less expensive home within a neighborhood environment, and can also provide home-owners a secondary source of income.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to ensure that local land use rules are aligned with the updated building codes to support the construction of tiny homes and accessory units.

**STRATEGY:** Evaluate and adjust zoning policies in regards to accessory units.



“We must encourage 20-30 year olds to stay or move here with strong school systems and new, affordable residential building.”

## — Survey Respondent

### UPDATE ZONING TO ATTRACT HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

While demand for smaller and more diverse types of housing with walkable neighborhoods is on the rise, many larger-scale local developers continue to produce the product types that they are accustomed to: single family houses with two car garages. Understanding the nuances of what makes a place feel attractive, exciting, fun, and authentic to Topsham, and then coding for those local nuances, should be a priority. Development at all scales should support the Town’s existing character and goals for future long-term change.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to provide a more stringent set of development standards to control building form, scale, components, placement, materials and associated site improvements.

**STRATEGY:** Update the zoning code to regulate building types by zoning district to ensure new buildings and projects complement the scale and character of the existing neighborhood.

### MORE HOUSING TO ACCOMMODATE RANGE OF FAMILY SIZES AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

There are more alternative lifestyles than ever before, with unique family and living arrangements that require a new approach to housing development. Despite the changing face of families, many communities tend to see the same housing product replicated throughout town. Topsham should work with developers to encourage new product types, in particular “missing middle” housing types that may be absent from the existing housing supply, such as duplexes, 4-plexes, townhouses, lofts, dorms, shared living spaces, and other unique types that provide a lower price point or different lifestyle option. A housing specific leakage study that takes a more fine grained look at demographics and preferences, and that understands the full range of housing types available to match unmet demand, can identify what housing products are needed to support additional growth in population and jobs.

**STRATEGY:** Conduct a detailed housing study.

**STRATEGY:** Partner with TDI and local developers to create a housing plan that sets the pace for construction of targeted new housing units.

### SUPPORT PUBLICLY FUNDED AFFORDABLE HOUSING

While the market can and should be able to provide a range of housing types that hit various price points, there is still a need for capital-A Affordable Housing that meets the needs of the most financially stressed households. This includes housing for individuals and families that make less than 80% of the median household income or those eligible for Section 8 housing vouchers. The Topsham Housing Authority is charged with managing rental units and buildings that serve this important function.

**STRATEGY:** Evaluate the effectiveness of zoning policies that grant density bonuses to incentivize affordable and senior housing. Amend, as needed.

**STRATEGY:** Target and incentivize construction of affordable housing units in growth areas envisioned as dense, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.

**STRATEGY:** Allow density bonuses for developments within the growth area if that development contributes fees to an affordable housing fund.

**STRATEGY:** Use Affordable Housing TIFs to support the creation of new affordable housing.

## TINY HOUSE

A residential structure under 500 square feet.

## POCKET NEIGHBORHOOD (AKA MULTI-UNIT COURT)

The arrangement of a single building type around a central common courtyard space to promote greater density than otherwise allowed with the base district and allow for an alternative lifestyle option.

# Open Governance





Ribbon cutting ceremony at Head of Tide Park.  
Larry Fitch.

Topsham has been a leader in open governance, trying new ways to engage the community, improve direct communication, and respond to local concerns through targeted action. However, there is always room for improvement and more work to do. Some people feel there is a disconnect and natural tension between elected officials who are trying to keep the government afloat and community members who want to think about new ideas. Steps could be taken to further align leadership with the sentiments of larger community, through still more improvements in communication. While the Town has taken heroic steps to get Topsham on solid financial footing, town staff are expressing their departments are understaffed and lack funding to deliver desired services.

#### FIND MORE WAYS TO LISTEN TO PEOPLE

Communication is time consuming and expensive, but critical. Topsham has recently engaged in a number of creative efforts to communicate directly with the people of Topsham, including Neighborhood Meetings and the planning process associated with the Comprehensive Plan. These efforts have gone a long way toward building additional trust between town leadership and the people. While these kinds of efforts are incredibly resource intensive, they successfully work toward more closely aligning the objectives of the community and those of its professional and elected leaders.

**STRATEGY:** Include funding in the budget for meetings between Town Hall and the community.

**STRATEGY:** Include funding in the budget for a part-time staff person to focus on supporting the Town Manager, Planning, and Economic Development staff and to focus on communications between constituents and leadership.

#### IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT BASICS OF GOVERNMENT HAPPENINGS

As a result of community input, staff has created a Facebook page, as well as a Twitter account. There are also multiple email groups for various committees

and boards and an expanded list through the Library that town staff uses for larger events. The Town also continues to use newspapers and mail for those not able to connect digitally. The Town website includes a link on the home page for e-alerts, which allows anyone to request notices by topic for various boards and committees. Topsham lacks an Information Technology (IT) position. Each department is responsible for its own page. Keeping a site active is constrained by staff time and availability. The Town continually evaluates whether maintenance should be directed to a third party.

**STRATEGY:** Include funding in the budget for a part-time staff person to support communications from the Town Manager, Planning, and Economic Development staff, and to focus on communications between constituents and leadership.

#### DIVERSIFY REPRESENTATIVE LEADERS

Finding people to serve on volunteer boards is a challenge. Populating boards with people who represent a range of diverse viewpoints is an additional challenge. However, the makeup of boards is critical to the success of various efforts within the community and to ensuring that decisions more closely reflect the interests of the community at large. The Town should consider creative approaches to improving the experience of serving on a board, including more comfortable and fun meeting venues, food, childcare, and training opportunities.

**STRATEGY:** Add leadership development incentives to better attract a diverse selection of volunteers for town boards and committees.

**STRATEGY:** Test alternative committee meeting times/days to make it easier to volunteer.

**STRATEGY:** Annually, hold a community celebration to acknowledge the work of volunteers.

#### FLEXIBLE TOWN HALL

The nature of the how we work is changing rapidly, from schedules to the communication tools we use. The Town has recently made efforts to extend and shift Town Hall hours to accommodate people who have daytime jobs and who work out of town. Creative and flexible staffing options should also be explored to provide additional opportunities for the Town Hall to better serve the community. There may be an opportunity to allow certain positions to have more flexible hours including deviating from the more traditional 9 to 5 protocols or job sharing. Or, there may be opportunities to bring certain services more directly to the people, considering Topsham has an aging population. In addition, Town Hall should be internally secured so it can be used more actively as a community center.

**STRATEGY:** Consider job sharing as a means to attract highly skilled, mature private sector talent to the public sector.

**STRATEGY:** Explore ways to bring Town Hall services direct to the neighborhoods.

**STRATEGY:** Evaluate how work is being performed and consider if new job structures or changes to workplace culture should occur to attract the next generation of talent to government service.

#### CONTINUE TO NURTURE A CULTURE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE

In today's political climate, local government plays a critical role in addressing the needs of local people. There is also an important opportunity for town leaders to help incubate a culture of open, direct, and respectful communication that can help bring people together and develop a shared understanding of alternative points of view. This kind of hard work to communicate and problem solve in a productive and tolerant manner is a centerpiece of civics. In-person meetings and social media should all intentionally speak to the rules for civic engagement to build a culture of community within the Town.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to work with community partners to build shared communication goals focused on civil discourse.

**STRATEGY:** Demonstrate appropriate and productive civil discourse on social media through active pages that have strong moderators that present content, debate, and activities based in the community.

#### MAKE GOVERNMENT FUN & INVITING

For decades, government processes nationwide have trended toward greater formality and a top-down power dynamic that can make it hard for people to easily and comfortably engage. The standard allotment of two minutes of public comments have, in many communities, been the only way for people to share their ideas. There are many people who are not able or willing to stand up and speak into a microphone at a public hearing. Topsham has worked hard to increase public engagement in town decisions, trying a number of creative approaches over the past few years. Topsham has an opportunity to be a leader in creating a more relaxed and fun approach to governance, testing new ways of holding meetings and interfacing in productive conversations with the public. Alternative venues, alternative room setups, alternative times of day and other varied approaches can help the Town continue to increase engagement, build a more robust group of active citizens, problem solve around complex issues, and generate better ideas.

**STRATEGY:** Adopt a policy to hold facilitated public workshops when complex problems arise that need broad community engagement and professional expertise from multiple disciplines.

**STRATEGY:** Develop a strategy or partnership to make child-care available for all public meetings.

#### USE OPEN BUDGETING

The most effective time for the public to be involved with the budget is during its development stages. The Town has been using an open budgetary process. This process has historically begun with the manager presenting a draft budget to the Select Board and Finance Committee

on the first Thursday in February. Following that meeting, there are a series of workshops held by the Select Board and Finance Committee where they seek input from individual departments to understand budget requests. This process, which currently takes three months to complete, would be benefitted by engaging staff/departments and the public much earlier to create the actual budget, rather than place staff and the public in the position of defending the budget. Adopting a similar process such as the open and participatory budgeting process required by ordinance for the expenditure of money from the Community Fund would mean the community is bringing forward the recommendations.

Ultimately, the Finance Committee should continue to work with the Select Board to hold open meetings and make a final recommendation to the Select Board for action.

**STRATEGY:** Continue to use the open and participatory budgeting process for expenditures from the Community Fund.

**STRATEGY:** Fund staff professional development to improve how open and participatory budgeting is used in budgeting and planning for long term capital improvements.

# A More Sustainable Future



Peter A. McCarthy.



There is a desire in Topsham to continue to grow in a manner that leaves an environmentally healthy community for future generations to enjoy. Since the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, the Town has taken the initiative to complete a Climate Action Plan to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 20% below the Town's 2008 baseline and mitigate the impacts of climate change at the local level. The Climate Action Plan develops specific strategies in the sectors of energy use, transportation, land use, green purchasing, waste and water use that will be necessary to minimize Topsham's impacts on climate change and meet the established 20% greenhouse gas emission reduction target set by the plan. Work should continue to lessen the Town's impacts on the environment by improving energy efficiency, promoting recycling, and conserving resources when cost effective. These concerns should be considered for both capital investments and on-going operations.

#### WATER QUALITY

The health of the rivers and Merrymeeting Bay and the protection of drinking water resources are top priorities for residents. Pollution prevention strategies and ongoing water quality monitoring should be prioritized, with a focus on preservation of higher quality systems and aquifers. Currently the Town is engaged with MDEP in monitoring and improving the water quality of the Topsham Fair Mall Stream.

**STRATEGY:** The Town should explore ways to expand monitoring of Topsham's surface water quality to maintain a high level of water quality.

**STRATEGY:** Coordinate with neighboring communities and organizations to monitor water quality in the region's rivers and ponds as well as the Merrymeeting Bay watershed.

**STRATEGY:** Educate residents and business owners on non-point and point source pollution and the importance of groundwater protection in Topsham.

**STRATEGY:** Educate residents and business owners about the improvements to water quality in the past several decades.

**STRATEGY:** With professional assistance, review current Aquifer Protection Zone regulations to ensure goals and objectives are being met.

#### RECYCLING + COMPOSTING

The Town has taken proactive steps to increase rates of recycling by introducing single-stream recycling programs. In 2016, the residents of Topsham recycled over 1,146 tons of recyclable material, an estimated rate of 36%, reducing disposal costs to the Town. The Town currently does not collect materials curbside.

**STRATEGY:** Facilitate educational workshops to teach residents how to compost and provide ongoing public education about the proper methods of recycling.

**STRATEGY:** Explore a private/public partnership with an entity such as Garbage to Garden to provide a municipal composting kiosk in town.

#### ADAPT GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Residents and community members of Topsham expressed a desire to enhance the Town's walkability and connectivity and to transition away from an automobile-oriented and suburban character, particularly between neighborhoods and mixed-use centers. As automobile-dominated spaces are reclaimed to accommodate these goals, simple opportunities for implementing green infrastructure will be created. The paving materials that make up auto-serving spaces are often impervious and shed large volumes of runoff. Converting these spaces with pervious materials or bioswales, precipitation can be captured, filtered, and absorbed instantaneously, reducing flooding and demands on the Town's stormwater system. Bioswales and rain gardens

Garden beds at Wicked Joes, which donates the produce it grows to the Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program, located in Brunswick.





Peter A. McCarthy.

serve the double purpose of supporting plant growth while enhancing the Town’s landscape.

**STRATEGY:** Identify spaces for a bioswale pilot program.

**STRATEGY:** Create signage to educate public on existing bioswale at Town Hall.

**CONNECT TO GREEN**

There is also a public engagement and education aspect to introducing green infrastructure to the Town’s public spaces. Systems like bioswales are simple and easy to understand and can educate and raise awareness to the natural systems that are always present in built environments but easy to ignore. Factors are brought to attention like the flow of water corresponding to topography, the kinds of native plants that best absorb rainwater, where precipitation collects, what contaminants are collected and added to precipitation as it flows to its collection site and what the implications are of this, the different kinds of soil systems and their capacities, and much more. It is important to put people in touch with natural systems in order to encourage an awareness that cities and towns are human built and have a consistent relationship to the original environments on which they sit.

**STRATEGY:** Work with CREA and the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust to build local awareness for the social, environmental and economic benefits of green infrastructure.

**STRATEGY:** Organize annual neighborhood clean up days.

**STRATEGY:** Consider the Municipal Complex as a demonstration area for low-cost, high-impact techniques that residents could implement at home.

**CUT GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS**

In 2009, a study and analysis conducted by Bowdoin College students found that Topsham emitted 125,970 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2008. The study’s breakdown of Topsham’s community emissions by source showed that 69.5% was produced from the transportation sector. Commercial

and residential emissions were second and third in volume, with 15.0% and 14.3% respectively. The following measures were recommended in order to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 20% of the Town’s 2008 baseline emissions level:

Mitigation Measure	Tons CO <sub>2</sub> e	Reduction %
Reduced vehicle usage	4,445	3.82%
National Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards	13,425	11.54%
Green building and weatherization	3,272	2.81%
Installation of renewable energy systems	273	0.21%
Appliance and lighting upgrades	1,377	1.18%
Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative	1,577	1.36%
Planting 600 new trees	72	0.06%
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,369</b>	<b>21.00%</b>

**STRATEGY:** Continue to build energy consumption awareness.

**STRATEGY:** Evaluate progress in order to update and continue to implement the Climate Action Plan.

**STRATEGY:** In partnership with the Library, work with public non-profit and private sector energy and weatherization specialists to offer local workshops about advances in energy technology and retrofits.

**STRATEGY:** Promote awareness and use of Efficiency Maine.

**STRATEGY:** Encourage electric vehicle usage, and provide a charging kiosk at Town Hall.



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# Plan Your Topsham

# Catalyst Sites and Future Neighborhood Centers

Based upon preferences expressed during the public engagement process for where to direct new growth, the team identified a number of potential catalyst sites that represent opportunities for future development. Each catalyst site has been drawn with the intent to create vibrant, walkable mixed-use neighborhood centers where currently a neighborhood center is missing, or where an existing or emerging center could be made stronger.

The catalyst site drawings in this plan explore how, over time, sites could be transformed through new buildings, sidewalks and paths, streets, and public spaces. The drawings think about how to advance community goals, such as creating additional housing choices, deliberately protecting rural areas, adding new neighborhood parks and recreational amenities, enhancing pedestrian mobility, and supporting places to gather and more local businesses. The catalyst site drawings are aspirational and representative of concepts only – showing a potential pattern of development, rather than an engineered set of plans. Each catalyst site would require private initiative to advance a project, including engineering, design and local permitting by the Planning Board before a project could be built.

Catalyst sites were drawn considering the following key goals:

- create additional value for the Town where infrastructure investments have already occurred;
- avoid sensitive habitats and areas prioritized for protection, conservation, agriculture, forestry and recreation; and,
- potential to support, strengthen or create a neighborhood center.

The mapping of future neighborhood centers begins to lay the foundational work for future zoning efforts by recognizing that within neighborhoods a diverse range of land use activities should be permitted to support daily life: the coffee shop, restaurant, neighborhood market. These desired amenities can only be realized if zoning regulations permit new commercial uses and residential uses to coexist.

Through this planning effort, neighborhood centers have been mapped to:

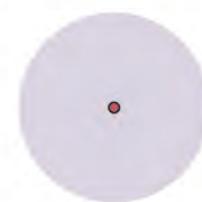
- identify where strong neighborhood centers currently exist;
- formalize existing neighborhood centers and support their enhancement;
- identify where, through retrofitting or tactical interventions, new neighborhood centers could be created in places without centers;
- identify places where redevelopment or new neighborhood development could orient around a distinct, new neighborhood center; and,
- support future zoning that enables mixed use neighborhoods to emerge.

Within the various mapped pedestrian sheds, future land use policy should enable compact, walkable, mixed-used centers with churches, corner stores, civic buildings and public spaces and local businesses to emerge. The goals for some neighborhood centers may be to maintain a predominantly residential character, with only a handful of commercially zoned properties to support a corner store, coffee shop, civic building or school at its center. Other neighborhood centers, such as those envisioned in the catalyst site drawings for the Crooker site and Topsham Fair Mall area may have a more balanced mix of residential, commercial and civic uses. Having strong neighborhood centers means allowing some mix of uses appropriate to the type of neighborhood center desired.



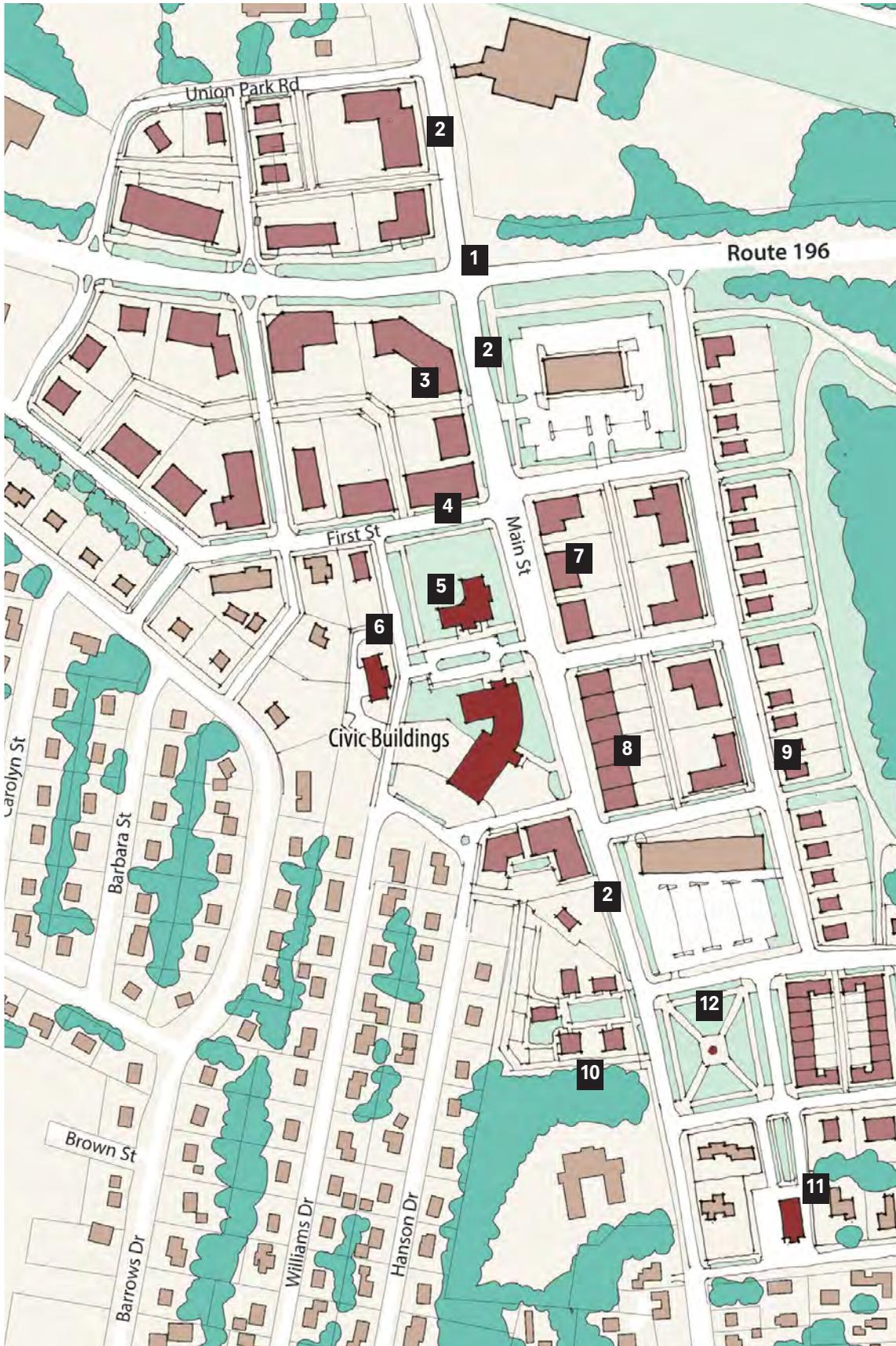
## Future Neighborhood Centers

The structure of a neighborhood center reinforces compact, walkable environments, as the time it takes a pedestrian to walk from the edge to the center is approximately 5 minutes. This 5-minute walk area is known interchangeably as a pedestrian shed or a walkshed.



Pedestrian Shed  
5 Minute Walk

# Upper Village



The area surrounding Topsham’s municipal complex has an opportunity to transform, over time, into a true village center with walkable streets that support shopping, outdoor dining, cultural programming and social connectivity. Currently there is an opportunity for a large commercial property on Main Street to redevelop and continue to set the pace for redevelopment that the new Town Hall has accomplished.

This plan is aspirational and requires multiple property owners to work collaboratively with the Town to achieve.

**1** FIX INTERSECTION

A redesign of this intersection should anticipate the need for pedestrians and bicyclists to safely cross the street. The design should prioritize creating the shortest possible crossing distances to benefit children and elders who are trying to access schools, local businesses, jobs, and neighborhood amenities.

**2** SLOW MAIN STREET

Main Street should be restriped with narrow 10 ft travel lanes and on-street parking to help slow vehicular travel speeds, provide critical “teaser” on-street parking, and improve the economic viability of businesses along the corridor. Slowing Main Street will support safer conditions at the school entrance and improve walking conditions for children.

**3** INFILL DEVELOPMENT

New mixed-use buildings with primarily office space and some support services might be most feasible along 196 and Main Street Main. New buildings should be located close together with minimal side setbacks and parking located behind buildings.

**4** REALIGN MONUMENT PLACE

Monument Place is designed as a curvilinear road that promotes high travel speeds and reduces the number of developable lots. By rebuilding the segment of this road closest to the core of the Upper Village, significant redevelopment can occur in a manner that supports a more vibrant and complete neighborhood center.

**5** TOWN HALL IN A GREEN

The Upper Village currently serves as the civic center of Topsham, with the Town Hall, Police and Fire Stations, and Post Office all located within this central area. The Town Hall could be strengthened as the center of both civic and community life by consolidating parking at the rear of the site and allowing the area around Town Hall itself to function as a civic space that supports the community functions within the building.

**6** NEW POST OFFICE

The reorganized civic green around Town Hall is further defined by a new civic building, potentially a relocated post office, that anchors the western side of the green.

**7** NEW MIXED-USE OPPORTUNITIES

New mixed-used buildings along Main Street.

**8** RESIDENTIAL INFILL

Rowhouses fronting onto new green.

**9** NEW ROAD AND HOUSING

A new road is added parallel to Main Street, opening up an opportunity for additional housing within walking distance of Upper Village amenities.

**10** COTTAGE COURTS

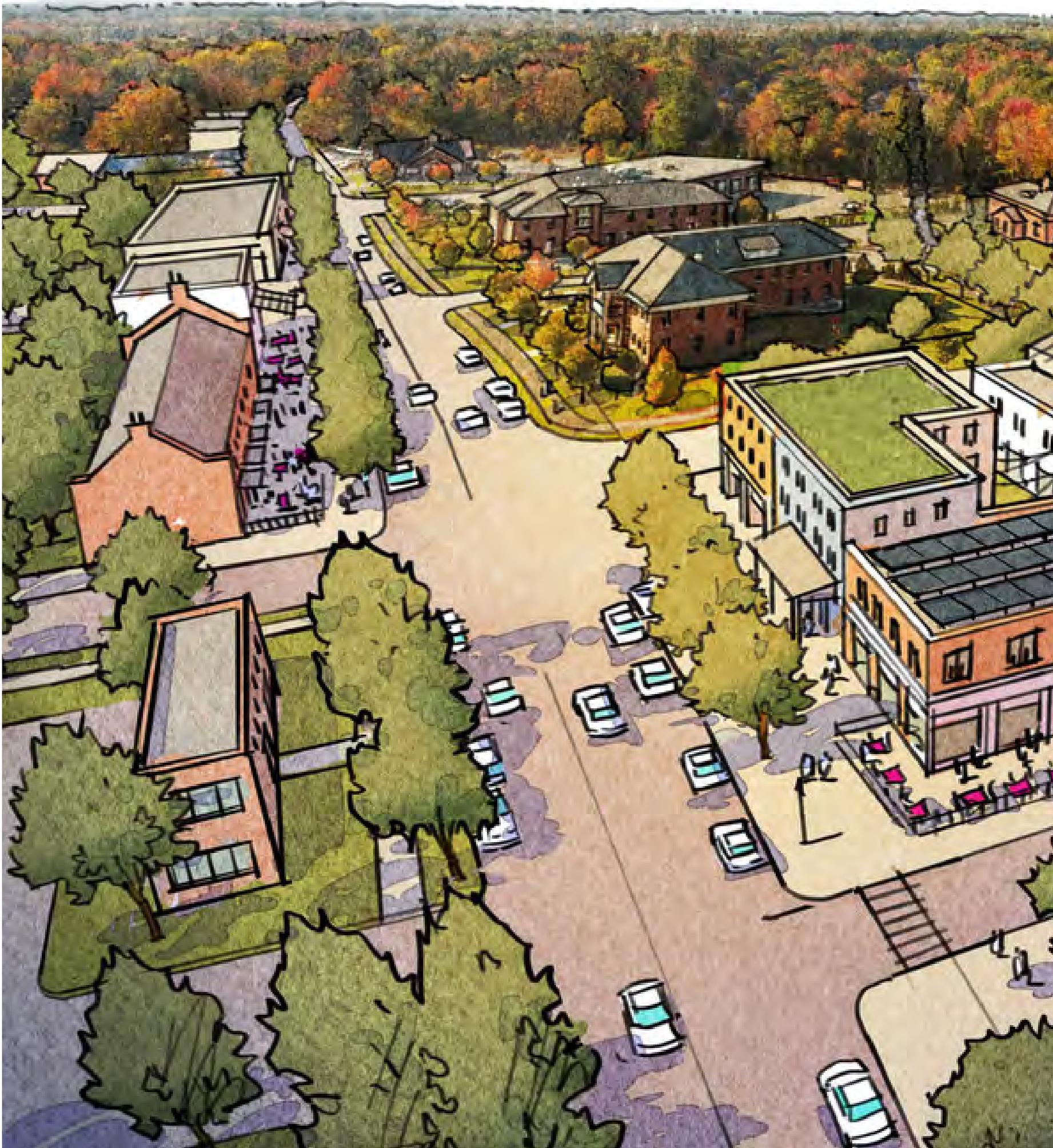
A new cottage court is shown, demonstrating how this development typology can be integrated into the village and support more housing within a walkable area.

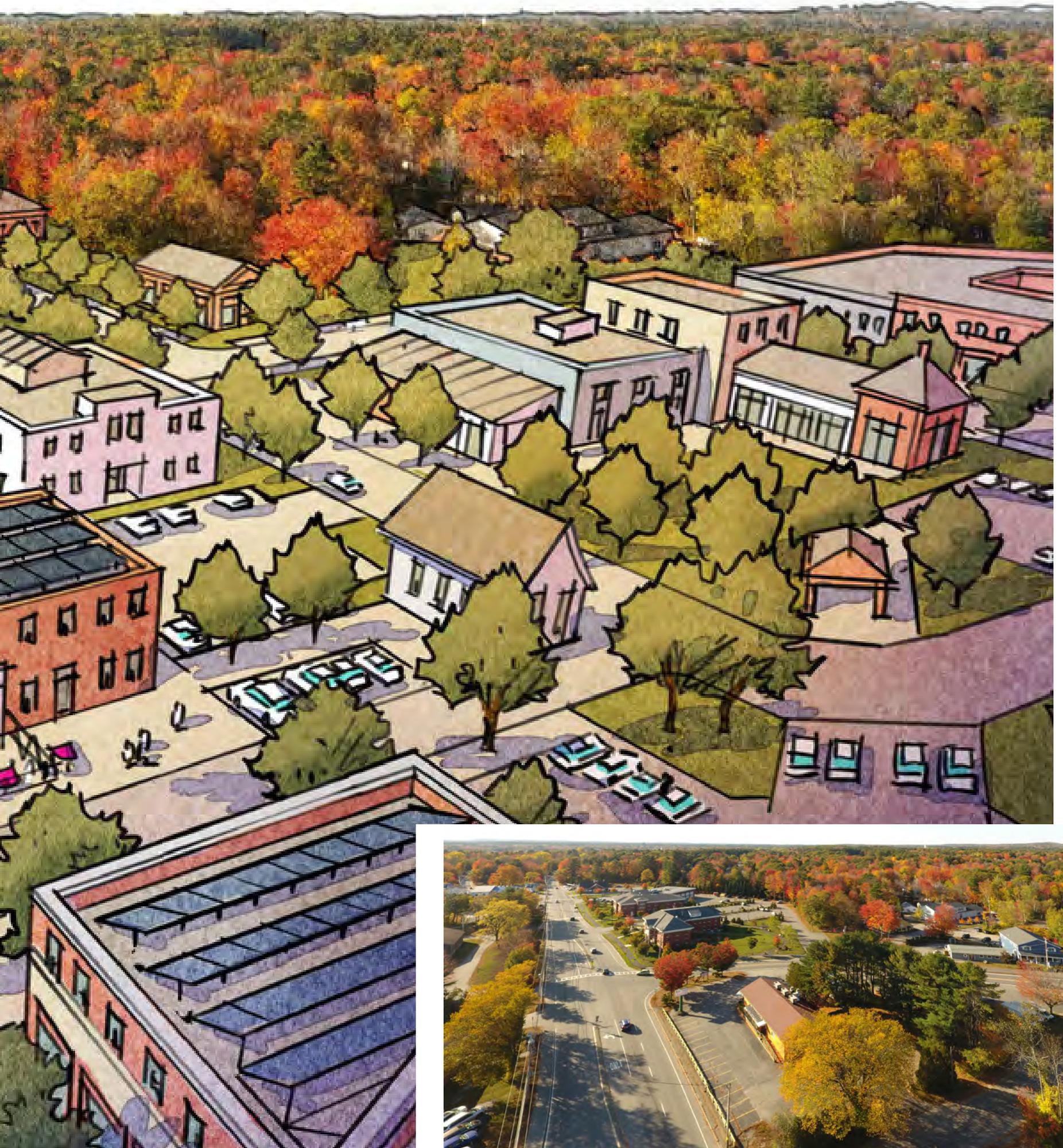
**11** GRANGE AND NEW COMMON

The existing Grange hall is integrated with new civic yard that connects with a new Upper Village common.

NEW TOWN PARK

**12** Formalize a public space to support and serve residential neighborhoods.





View of Main Street looking south, toward the Municipal Complex (right).

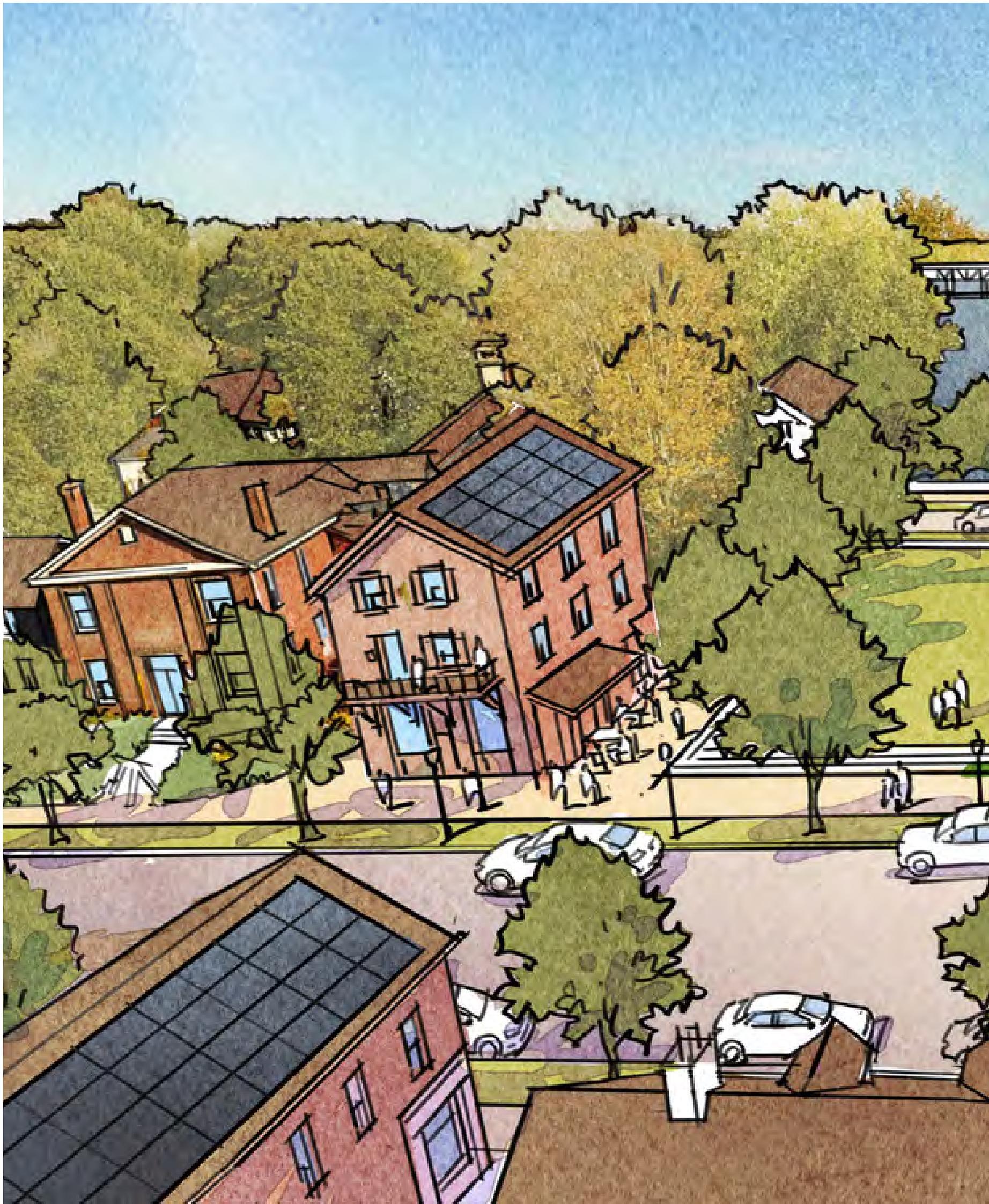


# Lower Village



This conceptual plan identifies opportunities to strengthen the Lower Village by identifying strategic locations for new buildings to be added. Buildings can come forward to the street on sites currently occupied by surface parking to create an attractive mixed use neighborhood shopping district. A much desired village park with waterfront views to the Androscoggin River can be created through partnerships with area landowners to realign a portion of Green Street. This conceptual plan is aspirational and requires collaboration by many people to move ideas to implementation.

- 1** A CIVIC GATEWAY TO THE LOWER VILLAGE  
There is a unique opportunity to carve out a new civic common in Topsham through a creative land deal. This undeveloped site is currently located on private property. By making a land trade and shifting the location of the street to meet Main Street at a right angle, a civic green can be created in front of the church, providing for another new traditional gathering space within the community.
- 2** SLOW MAIN STREET  
Main Street is currently uncomfortable for walking and biking, and also is impacted by traffic congestion during peak travel periods. Main Street can be improved for all users by considering a slow flow strategy that improves the efficiency of vehicular flow while also improving the safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. Improvements could include narrowing travel lanes to slow traffic, which does not impact capacity. The extra space that is created could be used for on-street parallel parking to further slow vehicular speed and provide more efficient parking opportunities. Traffic lights should also be replaced with 2- or 4-way stops to improve pedestrian safety and reduce vehicular speeds through intersections.
- 3** MORE VILLAGE IN THE VILLAGE  
The Lower Village is a loved place within Topsham. During the public process, people indicated that they would like to see additional housing and business within the village. New development should be done in a similar scale and character as the existing fabric.
- 4** REALIGN GREEN STREET  
Elevated crosswalks should be considered for the crosswalks that access new consolidated parking and to allow for an easy pedestrian shopping experience critical to Main Street retail vitality.
- 5** DELIVERING THE TOPSHAM GREEN  
The Town of Topsham has been discussing for years how to create a town common in the Lower Village. From the feedback at multiple public workshops and presentations over the past few years, interest in, and support for, both a Lower Village waterfront park and a riverside trail is very strong. This is not surprising since a waterfront park in this area has been identified as a goal in the Town's planning efforts going back to the mid 1990s. The creation of a waterfront park, together with related improvements in traffic flow and access/safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and the extension of trail networks, would be the same kind of bold project with very important economic and community development benefits for Topsham. The park, new waterfront overlook, and the enlarged trail networks are community development amenities that can attract both new residents, new businesses, and more visitors to the Lower Village.
- 6** NEW COMMERCIAL BUILDING  
The reorganized civic green can be anchored by a new restaurant or other active commercial use that takes advantage of the river views and pulls people into and through the new green.
- 7** EXPAND VIEWS TO THE RIVER  
Currently, Main Street narrows as it passes over Granny Hole. This infrastructure should be reconstructed to include wider sidewalks to enhance and support the street's value as a retail, business, and civic center within the community. This also allows an opportunity to open up views of the Androscoggin River.
- 8** CONSOLIDATE AND SHARE PARKING  
Topsham has an opportunity to rebalance its supply of parking, with a more strategic park-once approach that can open up more land for value-generating buildings. By further expanding this parking lot and supporting a high-quality pedestrian environment, more people will be willing to park in this convenient lot and walk to one or more nearby destinations. This expanded parking lot makes it feasible to redevelop surface lots with more village-supportive buildings that add to the energy and commercial success of the Lower Village. Work with landowners to open lots up for parking during non-peak business hours.
- 9** HIGHER INTENSITY MIXED-USE INFILL  
Topsham has an opportunity to redevelop some of its existing surface lots along Main Street into larger scale mixed-use buildings that can support the growing energy within the mill complex.
- 10** PRIORITIZE PEDESTRIANS  
Main Street is narrowed immediately upon entering the Lower Village to help improve pedestrian comfort.
- 11** ACCESS TO THE WATER  
New civic space is added along the River to further connect people with the water.





# Topsham Fair Mall

The visioning for the east side of I-295 includes the Topsham Fair Mall area and the Crooker Construction property. These areas are included as catalyst sites to demonstrate how Town visioning and planning may assist any future development or redevelopment of these areas. As part of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, a master plan for the east side of I-295 was called for, but has yet to be achieved. This planning effort provides a community vision for these districts which anticipates future growth of this area. These visions do not advocate any particular business interest, they were developed based upon community input, and are intended to inform future town planning efforts.



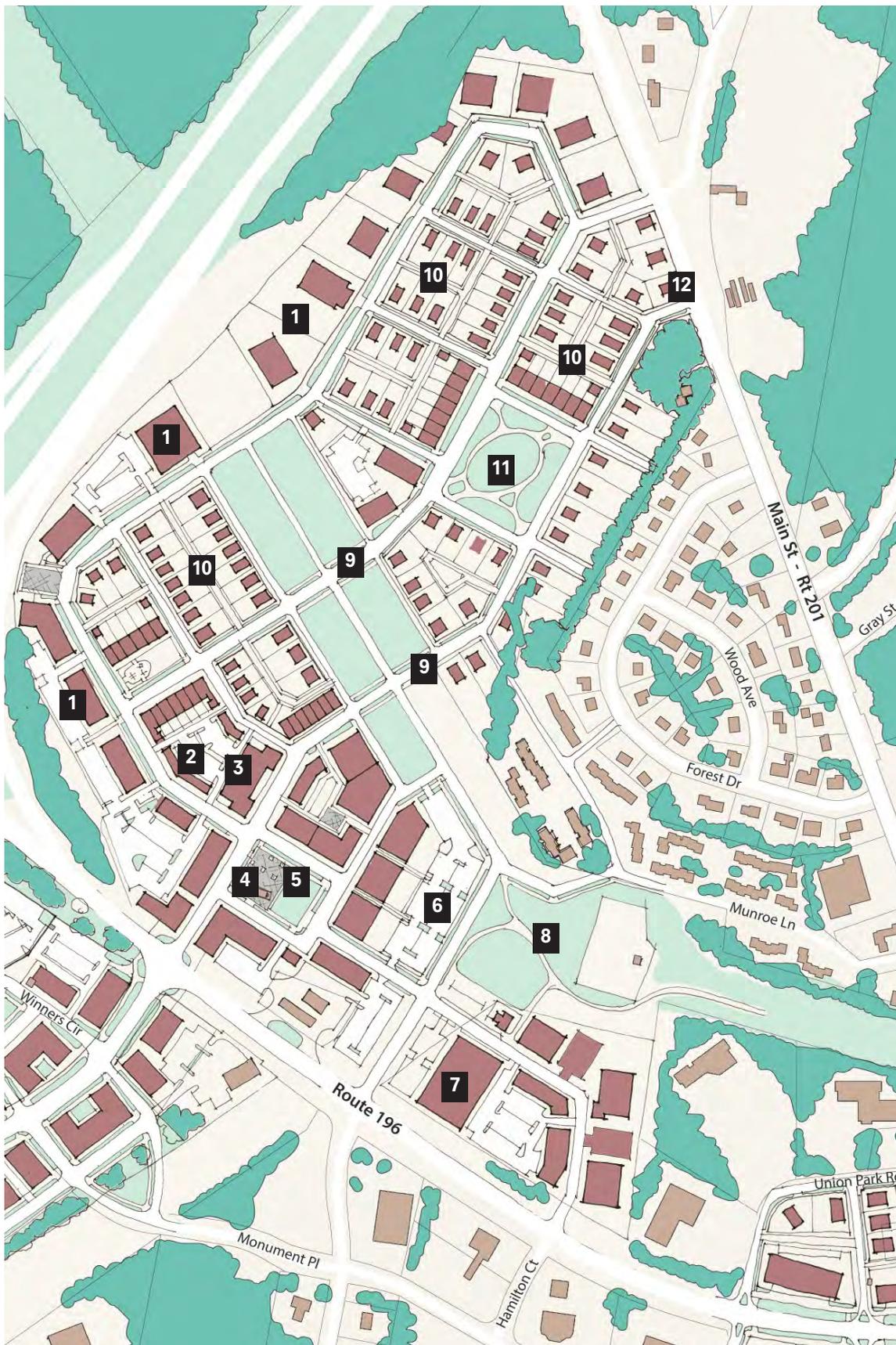
The Topsham Fair Mall area is comprised of multiple parcels and property owners. There may be a time when the changing retail market presents an opportunity for property owners to pursue redevelopment that responds to emerging retail and lifestyle trends. This illustrative plan shows how the mall site can begin to incrementally create a more mixed-use and active environment within Topsham. New streets and blocks allow the mall to accommodate a park-once strategy, where people can safely and comfortably walk and bike to multiple destinations.

- 1** A NEW MAIN STREET  
Over time, the mall property could be incrementally converted to main street buildings, with other national tenants moving into floors of new mixed-use buildings. This area of town could continue to allow drive-throughs, designed in a way to allow for safe streets for walking and biking, by locating drive-through windows to the back of buildings.
- 2** BUILD A PARKING GARAGE  
A parking garage can be constructed to create shared central parking that will allow for the infill and redevelopment of surface lots and the redevelopment of a larger grocery store (see facing page). The garage could also house a large national big box tenant on the ground floor. The construction of the facility could involve a public / private partnership.
- 3** EXPAND GROCERY STORE  
Once a large central parking garage is constructed, the existing grocery store could construct a new expanded building on this site while remaining open.
- 4** REPLACE EXISTING GROCERY STORE  
Once a large central parking garage is constructed, a new grocery store could be constructed as part of a multi-floor building, with office or residential above.
- 5** NEW SQUARE  
Create a new square with terminating views to a monument located at the center the plaza. Include groupings of canopy trees to provide shade.
- 6** MARKET PAVILION  
Market pavilion provides covered seating for shows.
- 7** OUTDOOR MUSIC  
Program new public space with outdoor arts and cultural events.
- 8** PEDESTRIAN STREET  
Idea of pedestrian-only street with two sided restaurant building facing onto a court, narrow street or mews.
- 9** FLEXIBLE PUBLIC SPACE  
Outside ice skating rink and hot chocolate hut in winter and skate park and ice cream stand in summer.
- 10** EXPAND MEDICAL USES  
Additional medical offices can be targeted for the back of the site, to build on the current momentum and potential for additional medical users.
- 11** MALL ACCESS ROAD  
The existing mall access street becomes a secondary street, with opportunity to infill over time.
- 12** NEW ROAD  
A new street designed as parkway that faces the utility corridor, which is landscaped as a park. Buildings could front onto this improved space, and water could drain toward utility corridor.

#### GROCERY STORE EXPANSION AND NEW PARKING GARAGE

The plan shows how the existing grocery store can expand its 50,000 sf operation by building a new 70,000 sf store on its existing property, while remaining open. Step 1 is to build an inexpensive, parking structure to the east of the existing store, fronting on Route 196 (see **2** on the keyed map). The southern facade of the garage should be lined with retail, facing onto the new parking plaza, which will provide handicap and teaser parking adjacent to the new store's main entrance. Step 2 is to build the new store in the existing surface parking lot (see **3** on the keyed map). The new building could have office or residential above, with glass facades facing both the existing Topsham Fair Mall Road and the new street. Step 3 involves replacing the old grocery store with a new movie theater or other mixed-use building (see **4** on the keyed map) that could open up onto a new main square located to the west. All the parking for the theater and incremental conversion of the mall can be handled in the parking garage.

# Crooker District

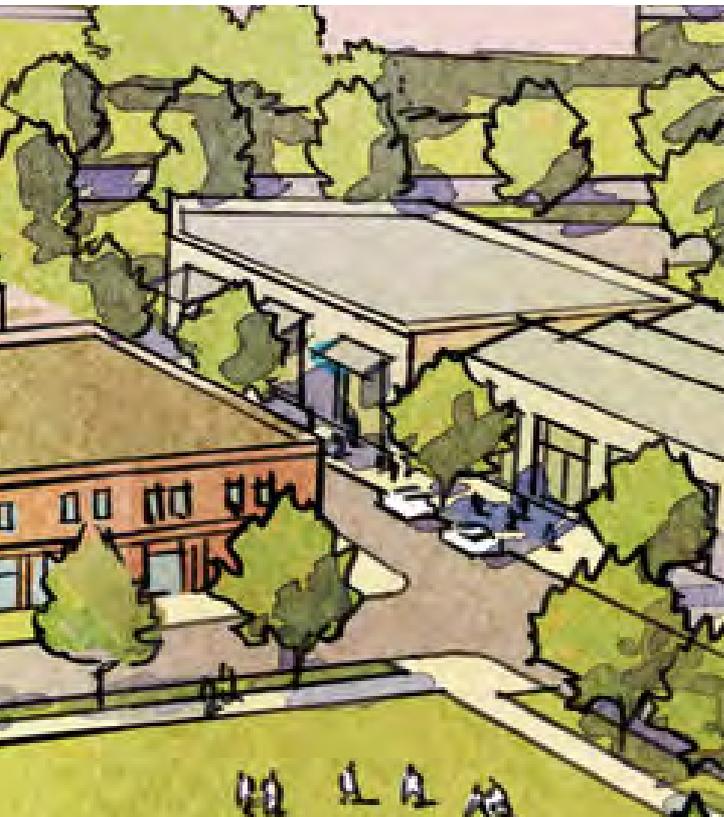


The Crooker District illustrative plan reimagines how the site could be transformed in the future over many years to accommodate new light industrial, commercial, and residential development. This plan describes how new streets arranged to create neighborhood blocks can provide a framework for a walkable, mixed use district for living, working and playing. The plan is designed to foster a strong neighborhood identity, with generously wide sidewalks inviting people to stroll, linger, and enjoy outdoor dining. A new town square at the center of the neighborhood provides desired outdoor park space that could be used for summer concerts and movies, live performances and social gathering.

This is a concept drawing only. As with the other examples of catalyst sites, before new development can happen, private landowners would first bring forward detailed site drawings for a review and public hearing process at the Planning Board.

- 1** ARTISAN + INDUSTRIAL SPACE  
The plan includes 10,000 square foot spaces for artisan industrial activities, including breweries, coffee roasters, distilleries, and other value-added small-scale production to address regional shortage of these spaces within a walkable urban fabric, where other adjacent uses can benefit from the proximity to these destination businesses. Clean industry or commercial businesses with outdoor storage yards and compatible with highway frontage can be accommodated as well.
- 2** LINER ARTIST STUDIOS  
The plan shows how small, inexpensive artist or retail liner buildings can be used to screen a parking lot.
- 3** MID-MARKET FLAG HOTEL  
The Crooker District is positioned to attract a hotel that can serve as an anchor for a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood within Topsham.
- 4** PUBLIC ART  
Communities across the country have celebrated their local industrial heritage by preserving towers, grain silos, and other features that provide an interesting landmark or art piece. For example, Grandville Island in British Columbia celebrates its industrial past through the creation of public art on its silos.
- 5** PUBLIC PLAZA  
The plan includes an activated plaza and green embedded within the heart of the Crooker District to support commercial and social activities.
- 6** SHARED PARKING  
To gain the most value from the District, parking needs to be carefully managed. Shared parking that is well screened from the street can ensure convenient parking in the right location, without detracting from the appeal of walking through the District. Parking courts, surfaced with pavers that can serve as function space or as surface parking, should be incorporated.
- 7** ACTIVE INDOOR USES  
During the public process, the community overwhelmingly supported additional indoor recreational opportunities. The plan includes several sites large enough to accommodate a bowling alley, climbing gym, skating rink, and other large-footprint uses that can benefit from being embedded within a neighborhood environment.
- 8** LINEAR GREENWAY  
A linear greenway connection is pulled into the site under the existing power lines, and is imagined as a landscaped meadow. A pavilion head house for the trail system is included.
- 9** NEW STREET NETWORK  
The plan shows two new street connections between 196 and 201 to provide relief from the existing large intersection of 196 and Main Street. These new connector streets should be relatively narrow and designed for speeds of 25 MPH. Secondary streets should be narrow and designed for speeds less than 20 MPH. All streets follow a cardinal direction and use segmented bends to maximize buildable lots. Curvilinear highway geometries that promote speeding should be avoided.
- 10** A RANGE OF HOUSING OPTIONS  
The Crooker District can provide both market rate and affordable housing options, including mid-rise housing, live-works, cottages, and single-family homes. These new product types would be unique in the market, providing a range of new-construction housing within a walkable neighborhood.
- 11** NEIGHBORHOOD PARK  
The plan shows a neighborhood park that includes a playground and gathering space for adjacent neighborhoods. This and other civic space types will help maintain a balance between economic activity and civic life that is critical to authentic-feeling neighborhoods.
- 12** COMPATIBILITY WITH NEIGHBORHOODS  
The Crooker site should be developed in a manner that respects the context of existing neighborhoods, in terms of scale and intensity of development.







# Regulatory Framework

# Dynamic Approach to Planning

The development of the future Conservation, Preservation and Growth map is a multi-faceted exercise in thinking about historical and future development patterns in the context of emerging data trends, regulatory frameworks, environmental resources and community preferences. Comprehensive Planning can be described as the intersection of art and science, absent a fixed formula to suggest how many parts art or how many parts science a Comprehensive Plan should be. At times planning is scientific, illustrated by point data or measurements of built physical form. At other times planning can be about a sense or feeling one gets when standing in a place or walking down a neighborhood street.

During the planning process, the team has delved into a number data sources, information and trends including but not limited to:

- local zoning
- state-enacted regulations
- infrastructure capacity and factors affecting expansion
- conservation land acquisition trends
- housing availability and permitting data.

The team has visited neighborhoods and walked, bicycled and driven down Topsham's streets, and completed an extensive state-required inventory (Part 2 of this plan). This work helps to tell us what factors may be influencing conservation and development. Looking at local data and trends tells us, for example, if land is being conserved purposefully or by happenstance and to what extent the Town can direct the trajectory of growth. Most importantly, this work informs a framework for how development happens, where it happens and who benefits. The culmination of this work – the mapping, analysis, and community conversations – is the Conservation, Preservation and Growth map.

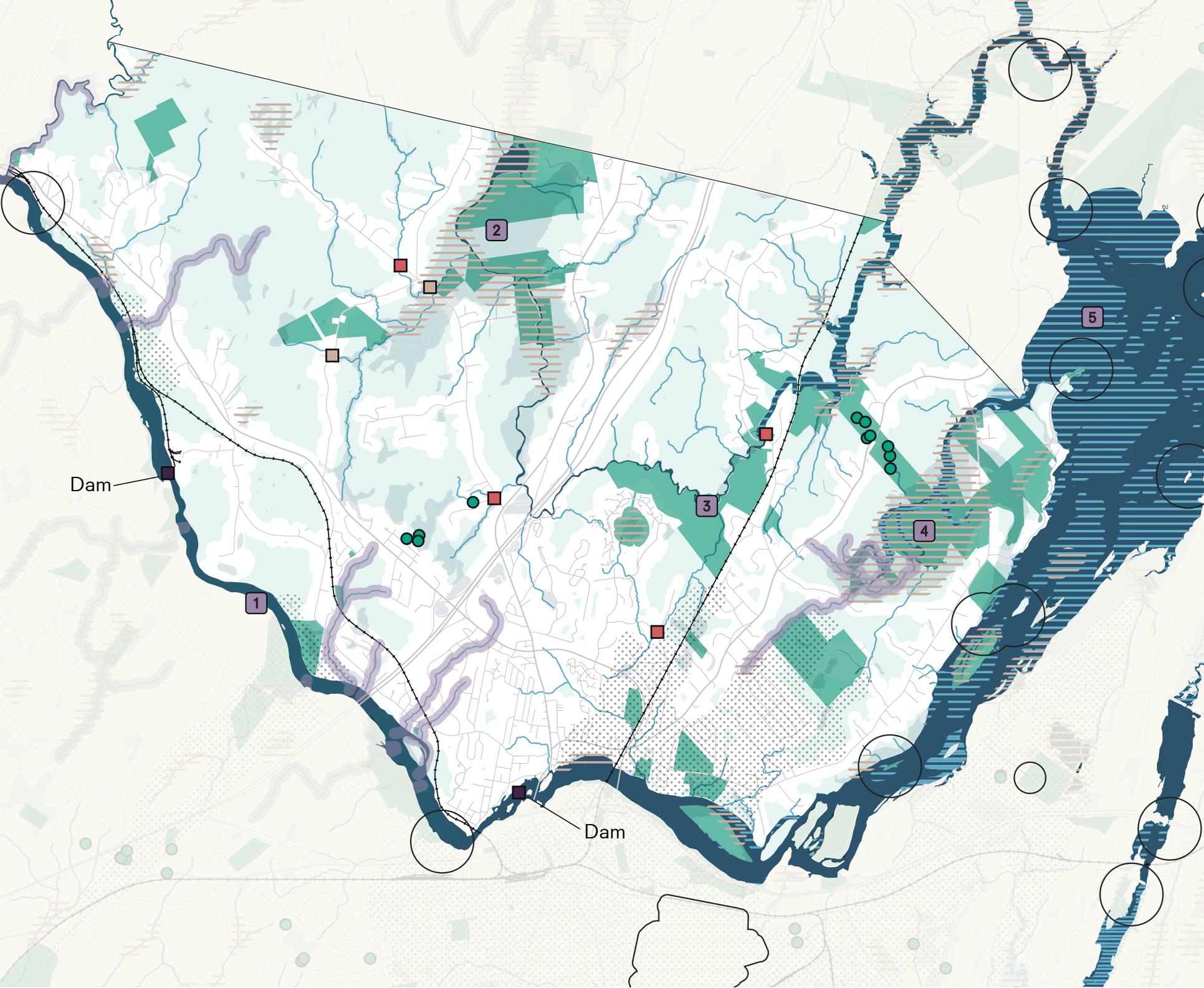
## ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

The Environmental Systems map in this chapter visually communicates Topsham's natural, marine, agricultural and forestry assets inventoried in detail in Part 2 of this plan. This map demonstrates that even though the southern section of town is highly developed, several unique ecosystems exist within the Town boundaries.

These include pervasive mixed northern woodlands, freshwater wetlands, and a marine estuary. The mouths of the Androscoggin, Cathance, and Muddy Rivers and Merrymeeting Bay are key ecological resources of this area. Local sections of land at these rivers may be well situated to be conserved for the benefit of the environment and for public enjoyment.

Topsham has several large undeveloped blocks of land which are spread out across the northern half of the community into neighboring Bowdoin and Bowdoinham. The Natural Areas Plan of 2010 identified four local focus areas where high value conservation areas are to be prioritized. The four focus areas were determined by combining an evaluation of the areas achieving natural resource and open space functions with the community's relative valuation of those functions. However, the plan also found that a majority of the development which was occurring at the time was in or very close to the four focus areas.

Furthermore, the plan also pointed out that land which was likely to become available for development was also located in these conservation focus areas. Recent mapping efforts conducted by the Town in 2017 and discussions through this planning effort have confirmed that development continues to occur within these focus areas. Although rural development is not outpacing in-town development, the rate of development in rural areas impacts the focus areas identified in the Natural Areas Plan.



# Environmental Systems

- 1** Lower Androscoggin River
- 2** Bradley Pond
- 3** Cathance River
- 4** Muddy River
- 5** Merrymeeting Bay Estuary

-  Conserved Lands
-  Aquifer Protection
-  Inland Wader/Waterfowl Habitat
-  Tidal Wader/Waterfowl Habitat
-  Uninterrupted (Core) Habitat
-  Wetland
-  Open Water
-  Trout Habitat
-  Dam
-  Fish Barrier
-  Potential Fish Barrier
-  Vernal Pool
-  Threatened or Endangered Species, Known Habitat



Nancy Greindl.

#### CONFIRMING CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

During the public design planning process, residents were guided through a hands-on workshop to identify on maps all the places people felt should be prioritized for protection and places where people felt comfortable seeing additional growth and development. Participants worked with a base map including wetlands, water bodies, current parcels of land classified as conservation and enrolled in agricultural or tree growth tax programs, and areas zoned for Resource Protection and Shoreland Zoning. The priority habitat matrix developed as part of the Natural Areas Plan of 2010 was also available for use. This mapping exercise confirms that the 2010 Natural Resources Plan goals for protection and expansion of farming, forestry, conservation and recreation in the four focus areas are still a priority today.

#### LOCAL AND STATE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS

The development of land is subject to a number of local and state regulations that encourage protection of natural resources and incentivize growth in areas currently served with sewer and water infrastructure. In addition to mandatory state Shoreland Zoning, Topsham adopted a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) in 2016 in conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Topsham created a "designated development area" where federal and state vernal pool regulations undergo a separate permitting requirement with option to choose payment of a mitigation impact fee to avoid vernal pool permitting within this designated area. The Vernal Pools Overlay District, adopted in 2016, allows for development in areas that are state or federally regulated due to their inclusion of vernal pool locations. The ordinance benefits the environment and Topsham's growth, as it clarifies development potential of a property where vernal pools are located. This recently adopted "designated development area" represents a more compact, limited area than the Designated Growth Area established in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT GROWTH

Today, sewer and water infrastructure currently serves the areas where Topsham residents have said they are comfortable with new growth happening. Systems do not serve the rural fringe areas where the preservation of rural lands for conservation, recreation and active farming and forestry is preferred. In the suburban fringe and rural areas of town, development is constrained to places with suitable soils for individual septic disposal systems and potable water from private wells. The presence of sewer and water infrastructure enables development to occur.

For the 2007 Comprehensive Plan a much larger Designated Growth Area encompassing the entire western portion of Route 196 south of Topsham Fair Mall was envisioned. In recent years the Town's Select Board, with assistance by Topsham Development Inc (TDI), has considered the costs associated with expansion of infrastructure balanced against the value of different land use development patterns. Value per acre analysis supports leadership decisions to limit town-funded infrastructure expansion outward in favor of directing investment to improve quality of place for existing neighborhoods and commercial centers.

However, this planning process identified a continued desire to see additional growth in select and discrete areas not served today by sewer and water, including business growth at existing industrial sites off Route 196 west in the Pejepscot Village area. Part of this area near Pejepscot Village between River Road, Route 196 and the Androscoggin River is zoned commercial and industrial, but water lines exist only along River Road, and the sewer line stops short at Topsham Fair Mall.

Any kind of redevelopment of the Crooker Site adjacent to I-295/Route 196 and areas in the Upper Village and School Campus areas would benefit from public sewer expansion. These areas are within the sewer expansion boundary (maximum 2 mile radius of Route 201 and Route 24) and the sewer and water systems have the capacity to accept additional users.

Water infrastructure currently extends north of the Connector, serving the school campus, the annex, and a portion of Highland Green, and extends through the Crooker site at Topsham Fair Mall Road. Sewer serves housing on the west side of Route 201, annex housing (private sewer connected to public), Toyota, NAPA, Precast Concrete Products of Maine, and schools. Private sewer serves Highland Green and connects to the public sewer system. With sewer and water, land use patterns can be tighter and denser, translating to a walkable urban or village character or hamlet. Without sewer, lot sizes cannot be reduced beyond 20,000 square feet or roughly half an acre. Half acre lots result in low density suburban sprawl, and do not allow walkable, mixed use neighborhoods to emerge.

## ABOUT THE DATA

The Environmental Systems map is comprised of data from a number of sources including the State's Beginning with Habitat data and new data from Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW), though the original source files are the products of various municipal and state agencies, as well as other NGOs.

The Conserved Lands file is a comprehensive demarcation of all land (public and private) under some form of conservation, whether it be an easement, park, or privately owned preserve. Wetlands are derived from the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) and include emergent, forested, estuarine and marine wetland categories together. Aquifer information comes from the Maine Geological Survey, and "open water" is from the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD).

The habitat information - in Topsham's case this means wild brook trout, tidal and inland wading birds and waterfowl, significant vernal pools, and endangered or threatened species - was created by Maine Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife (MDIFW). Uninterrupted Habitat (MDIFW) represents "core habitat areas" which are buffered from impervious surfaces and development, meaning human disruption is scarce to non-existent.

The fish barrier information comes from the Maine Stream Connectivity Work Group's "Stream Habitat Viewer" which catalogs various stream crossings throughout the State. These provide a good idea of what types of barriers might inhibit diadromous, anadromous, and catadromous fish migrations.

# A Framework for Conservation, Preservation and Growth

The Conservation, Preservation and Growth Map provides the framework for making future zoning, policy, and investment decisions for the Town of Topsham. Organizing the future map based on sectors and special districts provides a framework for a fine grain regulatory system of character districts, building groups, building types and standards to accomplish conservation, preservation and development goals.

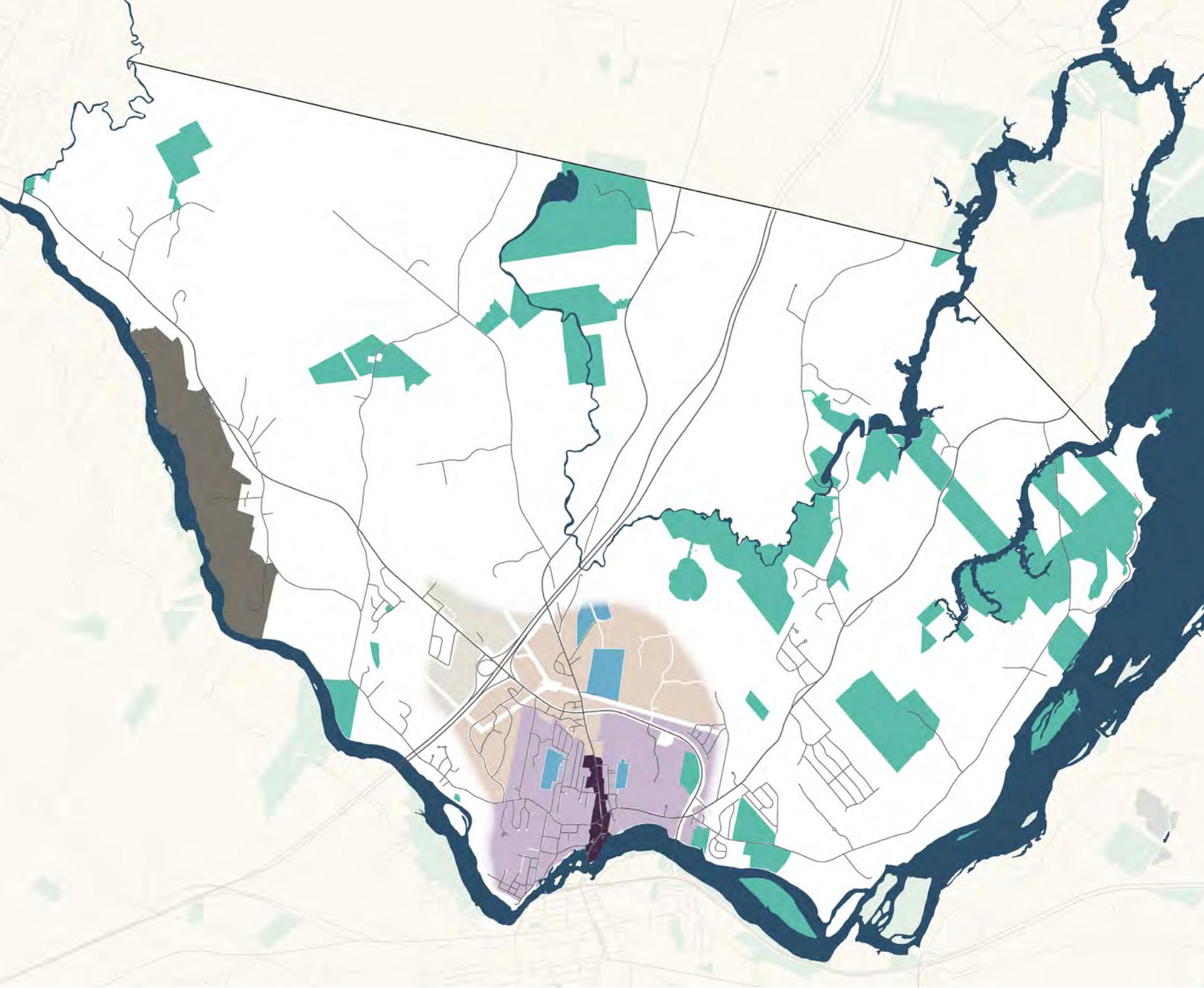
The framework for future conservation, preservation and growth is organized into a series of sectors and special districts. A sector describes the overarching goal for how physical land will be treated into the future. A special district recognizes a discrete area that is highly unique or different from other areas of town. Sectors allow for future zoning efforts to assign new character districts (also called zoning districts) and special districts to regulate growth.

This system of regulation is similar to nesting dolls: the sector sets the overarching goal. Inside the sector could be any number of character districts, establishing specific zoning regulations. Next, inside a character district could be any number of building groups. Building groups, explained in the following pages, become an available zoning tool to accomplish a desired pattern of development based again on the desired goals of each sector.

The sectors on this map are not fixed to parcel lines. They provide a guiding framework for evaluating whether the Town's current zoning districts align with the future goals and aspirations for land in the sectors. The exception is the No Growth sector, which has fixed boundaries on the map. Legal instruments have locked parcels into permanent conservation or preservation based on deeds. In future, a more surgical, lot by lot character district analysis would need to be completed as part of an effort to establish new zoning to implement this Comprehensive Plan.

**This plan discontinues the use of the term, "Designated Growth Area". Instead, the plan identifies future land use in a more nuanced system recognizing that all land, excluding that which is permanently conserved, has potential for growth enabled under current zoning district designation and regulations.**

**The catalyst site drawings prepared during the planning process demonstrate that land within the Intentional Growth sector has the capacity to support a significant amount of new growth and development. The Intentional Growth sector should be the focus of new infrastructure investments to incentivize infill, redevelopment and new growth where some or all services currently exist. Focusing development and investments in the Intentional Growth sector strengthens the ability to have a deliberately rural Topsham. Mapping land as Limited Growth does not alone result in preservation of rural character where the zoning may have already granted significant development rights in the form of 1 and 2 acre lot minimums.**



# Conservation, Preservation, and Growth

-  Conservation and Preservation
-  Rural - Suburban Lands
-  Neighborhood Preservation
-  Neighborhood Enhancement
-  Neighborhood Transformation
-  Industrial Special District
-  School Special District
-  Route 196 Special District



## CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION - **NO GROWTH SECTOR**

This sector comprises all parcels of land that have been permanently protected for conservation, recreation and open space, agricultural or forestry purposes. While the sector is identified as “No Growth”, this plan recognizes that legal instruments such as deeds, easements, covenants and/or agreements may contain parcel-specific permissions or restrictions governing the use or development of the subject property. As development rights are purchased, land is acquired or farm preservation easements are secured, those lands would ultimately become part of the No Growth sector.



## RURAL - SUBURBAN LANDS - **LIMITED GROWTH SECTOR**

In order to realize the goals of the 2010 Natural Areas Plan and this Comprehensive Plan, land in the “Limited Growth” sector should be prioritized for lower density, rural compatible development in order to strengthen working farms, forests and rural-based business economies, and to preserve rural character.

Limited growth recognizes that the Town’s current zoning ordinance permits landowners rights to build residential housing on 1 and 2-acre lots. This plan suggests adopting zoning regulations to incentivize new housing to organize in an intentionally rural-compatible pattern as opposed to developing in a conventional suburban sprawl pattern. Examples of rural-compatible patterns include hamlets or crossroads building groups, described in further detail later on in this chapter. Further, this plan recognizes that rural and land-based businesses may continue to grow, and performance standards may need to be evaluated as part of future zoning amendments to ensure protection of natural resources, and compatibility with working farms and existing residential neighborhoods.



## NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION - **INTENTIONAL GROWTH SECTOR**

Existing places identified for continued protection of historic structures include the historic neighborhoods surrounding the Lower Village Main Street. Ideas expressed about the future use and potential for development at the Topsham Fairgrounds were mixed and broad, ranging from creating a regionally-significant agricultural food hub to basic ongoing maintenance and some expanded community programming, but making no substantial change, keeping the fairgrounds as-is.



## NEIGHBORHOOD ENHANCEMENT - **INTENTIONAL GROWTH SECTOR**

This sector is assigned to the Lower Village Main Street, recognizing that the existing character of Lower Village is historical in its layout of streets and blocks, mix of historical buildings and contemporary buildings. This sector has the highest proportion of mixed uses in Topsham and represents the most identifiable downtown “Main Street” condition. New growth should enhance the Lower Village through sensitive rehabilitation of buildings, carefully designed and placed new buildings, and public space improvements (streets, sidewalks, parks). Development should support town goals of creating a walkable, mixed use Main Street district.



## NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSFORMATION - INTENTIONAL GROWTH SECTOR

Built places identified for transformation through infill, expansion and redevelopment include the area around the Municipal Complex and Upper Village, where a walkable, mixed use Main Street-type character is desired to take shape over time. Sites around Topsham Fair Mall Road and the Crooker Site were identified as opportunities for long-term transformation, including the establishment of new, walkable streets and blocks with a mix of land uses and businesses. This area of Topsham will require the most focused zoning work to accomplish transformation.



## INDUSTRIAL SPECIAL DISTRICT

This district outlines the existing industrial zone, encompassing clusters of industry and businesses along the Androscoggin River off Route 196. This area should be zoned and regulated as special districts to reflect the uniqueness of the land use activity, and the intent for the future growth or transformation that may be desired for that specific area. Future zoning efforts should assess and, if necessary, amend performance standards to address potential impacts of industry on adjacent land or neighborhoods.



## SCHOOL SPECIAL DISTRICT

The school special district identifies land use, building and site conditions that are unique only to the function of a school. Zoning regulations may permit a condition that would otherwise not be permitted in the surrounding neighborhood. An example may be a three story school building that is larger in height and scale than would be found in the surrounding neighborhood.



## ROUTE 196 SPECIAL DISTRICT

This district represents land along the 196 corridor that is commercially zoned to permit development but has a number of original residential houses, a mix of businesses and established residential neighborhoods. Highway conditions are negatively impacting quality of residential living for people with houses on 196. At the same time, highway conditions are attractive to businesses looking to serve regional customers. Future zoning efforts should require any new commercial development to use land efficiently, provide safe access to 196, respect existing adjacent residential neighborhoods, and not disrupt but enhance the aesthetic integrity of the corridor.

# An Introduction to Future Character Districts

Character districts are similar to zoning districts such that each district has a purpose, intent, and set of standards that apply to real property and land within the district. A district may be assigned to preserve or enhance what is already in existence on the ground, or to encourage the transformation of a place through new development activities. Character districts include standards such as use, permitted building types, setbacks, roof pitches and building components, building stories, and massing and scale of buildings. The following are examples of potential character districts that may apply to Topsham. Through future analysis, additional districts may apply to accomplish future land use goals.



## CD1 CONSERVATION

Topsham is host and neighbor to a diverse natural landscape with large contiguous blocks of undeveloped land, farms and properties enrolled in the Open Space, Farmland, and Tree Growth current use tax programs. Some properties and water bodies have permanent conservation easements. Land enrolled in the tax programs is not permanently protected from development.

The CD1 Conservation Character district would consist of lands that are under conservation through purchase or by easement only.



## CD2 RURAL

Topsham residents expressed a desire to retain the character of its rural areas. There are also some residents who want rights to make a living and work the land in both traditional and nontraditional ways, allowing business that is in character with rural landscapes to develop there.

The CD2 Rural Character districts could consist of rolling pastoral fields and forested lands. Typical buildings include houses, farmhouses, agricultural buildings, and cabins.



**CD3-N NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL**

Topsham’s Lower Village and Heights neighborhoods are within walking distance to Main Street and the downtown core of Brunswick. There is strong support for protecting the historic architecture and residential character of these neighborhoods. Some of Topsham’s newer neighborhoods may have similar lot dimensions, setbacks, and predominantly residential character.

The CD3-N Neighborhood Residential district would be characterized by low-to medium-density residential areas, possibly adjacent to a higher density residential neighborhood. This district has narrow, interconnected streets and long, irregular blocks, with a mix of small and large homes on large lots. Many of the lots have generous side yards and/or rear yards, and accessory barns and carriage houses connected to the principal house and sometimes detached. In this district, accessory dwelling units should be allowed. Plantings include street trees or naturalistic vegetation.



**CD3-V VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL**

The Village Residential district is similar to the Neighborhood Residential district in that it has intact historic fabric, exemplary architecture, and is primarily single family residential in use and character.

The CD3-V Village Residential district has narrow, interconnected streets with a mix of small and large residential houses with barns and carriage houses connected to the principal house and sometimes detached. Lots in this district are generally smaller, with shallower lot depths, narrower lot widths, and shallower setbacks, giving this district a more dense character than the adjacent neighborhood district.



**CD4 VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD**

The CD4 Village Neighborhood district could apply to areas of Topsham identified for intentional growth and development to enable new business, strengthen local economy, provide a variety of housing types, and support Main Street and adjacent residential neighborhoods. A character-based approach will be integral to helping this district revitalize and thrive, and do so in a manner that is compatible with Topsham’s historic character.

The CD4 Village Neighborhood district consists of a wide variety of building types within which a variety of uses and activities can occur. Building types include a range of housing types, addressing the need for missing-middle housing, including apartment buildings, stacked flats, single family homes, duplexes, live/works, and row houses. Setbacks and landscaping are variable. Streets may or may not have curbs and sidewalks, with medium-sized blocks.



**CD5 VILLAGE CENTER DISTRICT**

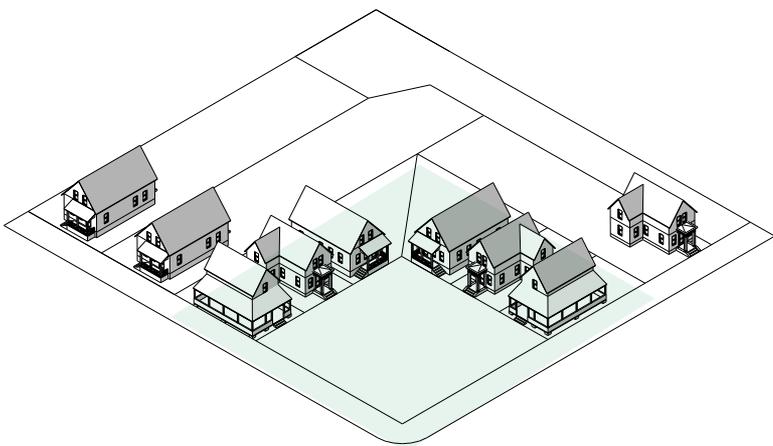
Topsham’s Lower Village contains a handful of remaining historic commercial and civic buildings. This area is viewed by many as the heart of the community and the place where residents feel new growth should occur. Residents support transforming the street and adjacent properties into a highly walkable, downtown environment.

The CD5 Village Center district consists of higher density mixed use buildings that accommodates retail, offices, row houses, and apartments. It has a tight network of streets designed to accommodate all modes of travel, with wide sidewalks to encourage active ground-floor uses such as restaurants and cafes, steady street tree planting, on-street parking and buildings set close to the sidewalks. This district would be the most dense of all character districts, with high permitted lot coverages, greatest number of stories and highest percentage of build out of lots. Buildings may or may not have off-street parking located behind buildings.

# An Introduction to Building Groups

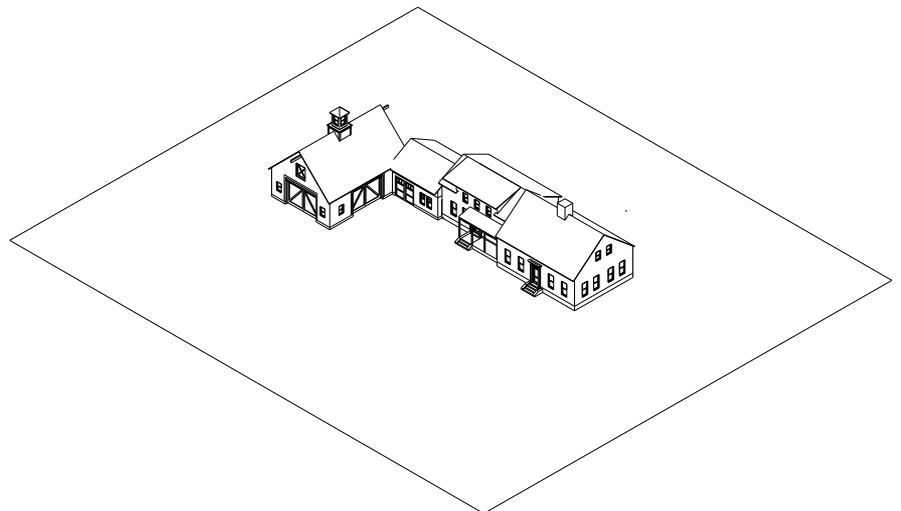
A building group describes an arrangement of building types in relationship to each other, and to existing streets and landscapes. For the purpose of informing future character-based zoning efforts, the team has provided examples of building groups that could be permitted in certain sectors to accomplish the goals of conservation, preservation and growth set forth in this plan.

Building groups can provide a zoning mechanism to accomplish preservation or enhancement of existing community character across all sectors. At the smallest scale, a farmstead building group, for example, may include a series of connected buildings with one or more residential dwelling units inside and perhaps a business activity, mimicking the traditional rural small town Maine “big house, little house, back house barn” form. At the larger scale, the mixed use hamlet has many new dwellings oriented in a traditional, connected street pattern on two sides of an existing street. Narrow but deep lots, and houses sitting up close to the street creates a spatial relationship of buildings that reads as a traditional New England neighborhood, yet the diversity of lot sizes allows rural activities to be supported. The following diagrams are examples of building groups.



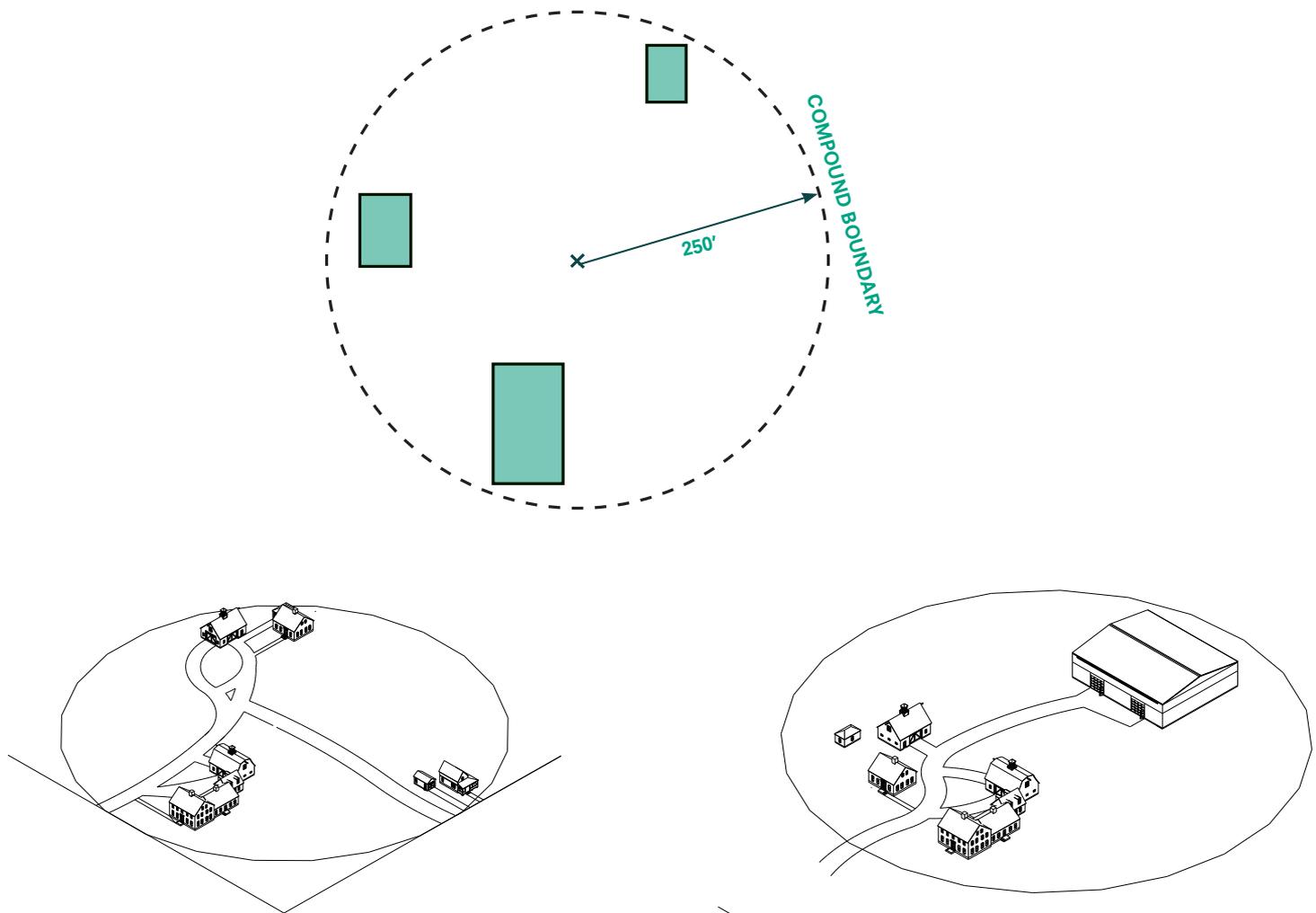
## **MULTI-UNIT COURT**

The arrangement of a single building type, such as a cottage or bungalow, around a central common courtyard space to promote greater density what might otherwise be permitted in the character district it is located in. Multi-unit courts are often referred to as pocket neighborhoods.



## **CONNECTED FARM**

A connected farm describes a building type comprised of multiple elements, based on the common building tradition of big house, little house, back house, and barn.

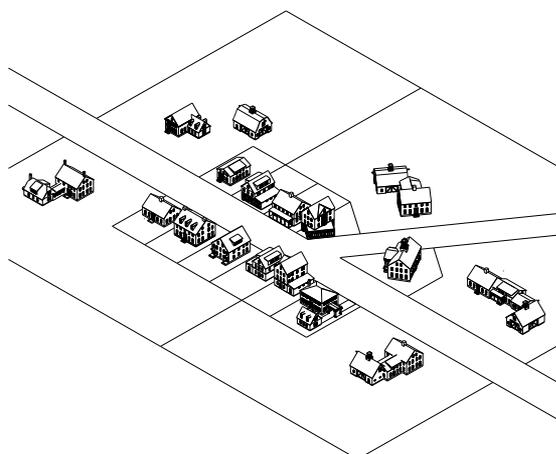


**SMALL RURAL COMPOUND**

A small rural compound may be located on a medium sized lot, allowing for more dense arrangement of buildings in the character of traditional rural farms. Buildings are grouped together, separated no further than 250' from the center of the compound, to meet residential and working needs. A town may allow a broader range of permitted land use activity than otherwise permitted in the character district it is located if it is part of a small rural compound.

**LARGE RURAL COMPOUND**

Large rural compounds are located on large lots that allow for the more dense arrangement of buildings in the character of traditional rural farms, with buildings grouped together to efficiently meet residential and working needs. Similar to small rural compounds, all buildings are located within 250' of the center of the compound. A town may allow an even broader range of permitted land use activities than otherwise permitted in the character district it is located if it is part of a large rural compound.



**HAMLET**

A hamlet building group emulates historic rural settlement patterns found in rural Maine. Hamlets allow new streets and lots to be laid out at greater density and often with narrower lots and smaller lot sizes than are typically permitted in rural suburban character districts.



# Implementation

# Strategy for Implementation

The implementation of a Comprehensive Plan takes an all-hands-on-deck coordinated effort of staff, committees, elected officials and community service groups working together to move the visions and goals of the plan into action.

The implementation of a Comprehensive Plan takes the work of many people, sometimes working collaboratively, sometimes independently. The heavy lifting of implementation is a shared opportunity amongst the entire Topsham community including elected leaders, staff, local businesses, volunteer committees for profit and non-profit organizations and citizens. The very first official action of the Select Board will be to bring the plan forward for adoption at Town Meeting.

## APPOINT IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

The Select Board's second official action to successful implementation is the appointment of an "Implementation Committee" to act as core leaders and champions to oversee implementation activities and provide coordination assistance. The key role of the Implementation Committee is first to be advocates of the plan and second, to ensure all parties are advancing the strategies identified in the plan in the spirit of the visions the Comprehensive Plan sets forth. The composition of the committee should include both people who were intimately involved in the Comprehensive Planning process and representatives from the various town committees and boards who play a direct role in plan implementation.

## SET A TIMELINE: USE THE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

The implementation matrix provides an organizational framework for the implementation of each project, policy or initiative identified in the Comprehensive Plan. The matrix can be used by Implementation Committee, staff and all stakeholders who have a hand in moving the plan forward. Each strategy (project, policy, or initiative) identified in the document is listed in the matrix, including where to find the strategy in the plan, who the responsible lead party for implementation should be, who should support the strategy, and the estimated timeframe for when the strategy should be completed. Any project may be advanced ahead of the anticipated timeline if resources or circumstances allow for earlier implementation.

**Priority First Step:** Adopt the plan. Assign a standing Implementation Committee to:

- continue the momentum of community engagement
- champion the plan
- frame the roles and responsibilities for moving strategies forward.

## IMPLEMENT PLAN & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

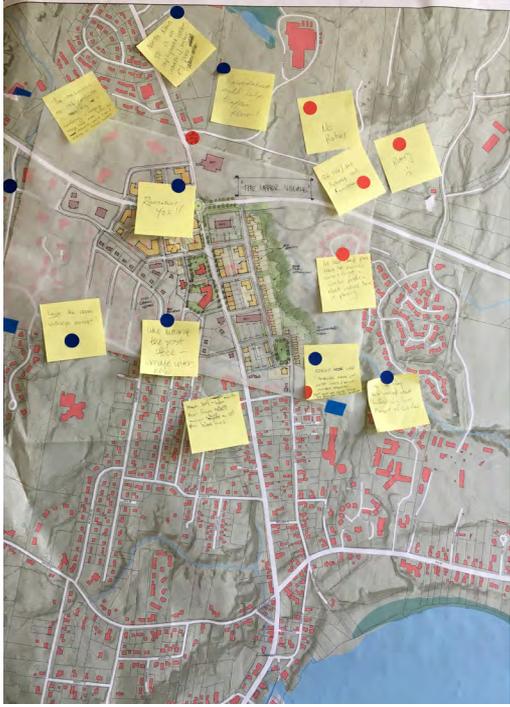
During the life of the plan, the Board and the voters at Town Meeting will play a significant role in implementation by:

- creating and adopting new zoning and land use policies;
- reconsidering previously adopted policies and studies that may conflict with the recommendations of this plan;
- funding any further planning studies or zoning amendments; and,
- allocating resources through the annual budget and the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process.

Outcomes of subsequent plans and studies may, too, need Town Meeting action or endorsement or adoption by the Select Board. The pace of implementation will be set by the willingness of the Select Board and residents to financially support the recommendations of this plan.

## ANNUALLY, USE THE CIP PROCESS

The Select Board's next important role in Comprehensive Plan implementation is to continue undertaking good budgetary housekeeping on an annual basis, making sure each year the Town keeps a balanced budget and does not borrow significant sums of money to cover general operating expenses. The Town should continue to use the CIP process to strategize funding for projects, additional



Larry Fitch.

plans and studies or other initiatives that are identified as high value and high priority in the plan. The Town's CIP guides future funding, schedule, and construction of capital improvements so that necessary infrastructure is in place consistent with demand. It distributes expensive projects over time.

#### EVALUATE PROGRESS OFTEN AND ADJUST TO RESPOND TO CHANGING NEEDS

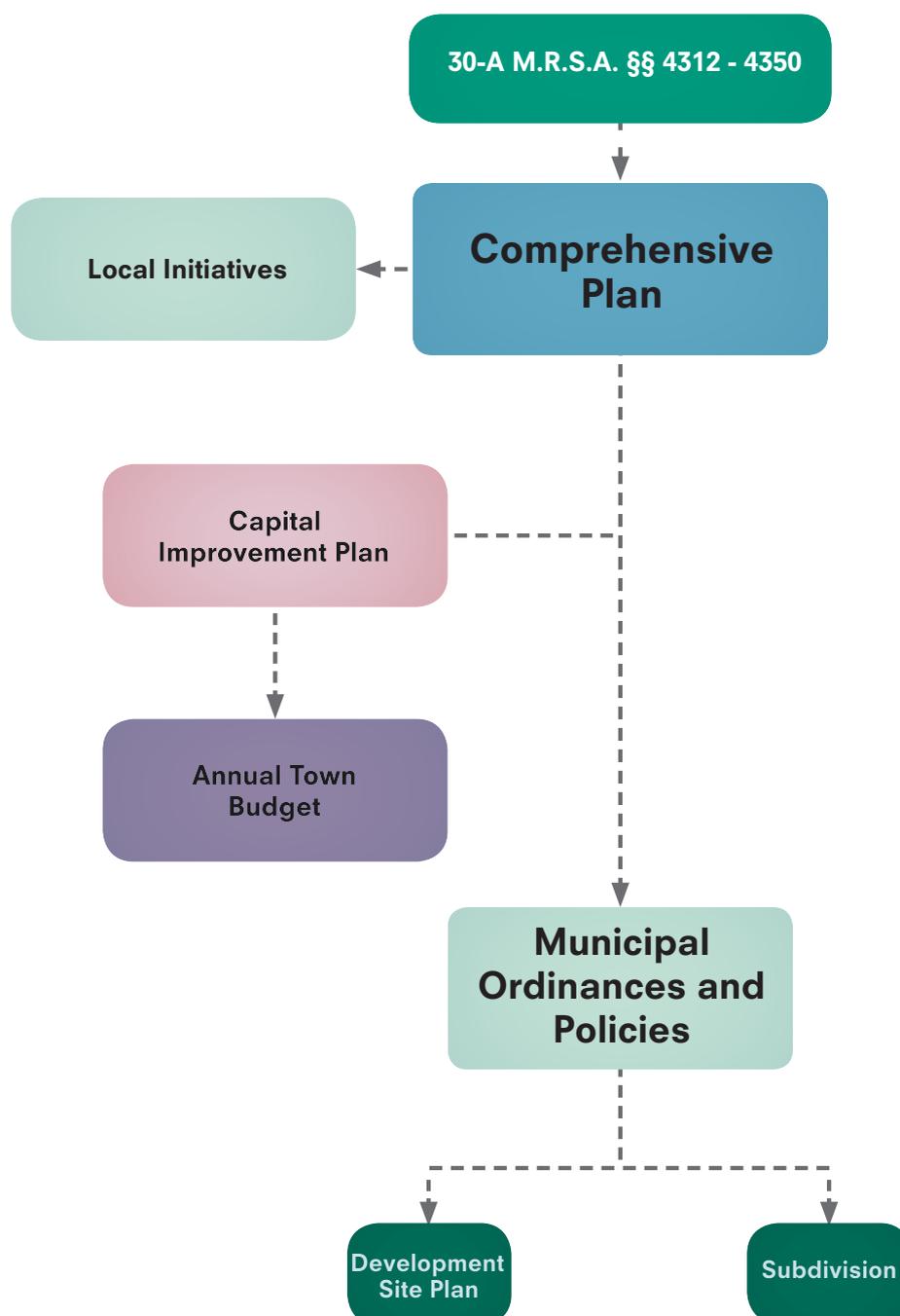
On an annual basis, the Implementation Committee should meet with the Select Board to check in and evaluate implementation progress. The parties should openly discuss any issues or impediments to plan implementation, monitor performance, measure achievement and reflect on changes that have occurred as result of the plan or impacts of external market conditions or new trends affecting the community. This should serve as a time to identify any resources, whether human capital or financial capital, needed to implement the plan and, if determined as result of evaluation, shift upcoming priorities or adjust timelines to respond to changing conditions.

#### SETTING THE PACE

Topsham is in the position to affect positive community change. By taking deliberate steps to adopt new zoning and invest in community infrastructure, Topsham will be demonstrating to potential private investors that it is a community willing to create the Topsham it wants, rather than end up with a future haphazardly shaped by outside forces. Staff and the Implementation Committee can play an important role as spokespersons for this plan in the business community and at community events. Finally, the Implementation Committee should honor the participatory process that led to this plan by boosting communications, inviting participation in discrete implementation tasks, hosting plan check-ins and celebrating success.

# Regulatory Flow Chart

Topsham has a history of collaboration and support within the Town and in the region. The implementation of the Comprehensive Plan requires the involvement of leaders and volunteers across many boards and committees. This regulatory flowchart illustrates the relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and planning activities and procedures in Maine, as defined by Maine Statute. The Comprehensive Plan is the keystone document that informs and sets goals for local initiatives, Capital Improvement Plan, annual town budgets and regulatory tools.





# Strategy Matrix

STREETS FOR PEOPLE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Adopt a resolution that reduces the default speed within Topsham's more densely populated neighborhoods.	No	Short	TM	P
Advocate at the State level for greater town control over posted speed limits and changes to the way speed limits are set, so limits can be based on safety goals.	No	Mid	TM	P
Be the first town in Maine to adopt Vision Zero, an international initiative to eliminate roadway fatalities.	No	Mid	TM	P
Adopt a complete street policy that assures the safety and accessibility of all roads for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, motorists, commercial vehicles, emergency vehicles, and for people of all ages and abilities.	No	Short	TM/P	P
Prioritize pedestrian-first approach for all transportation projects and programs, from scoping to maintenance.	No	Short	P	DPW
Develop a Streets Master Plan that identifies priorities, funding sources, and funding amounts, and that includes street design standards which support the community's goals for safe, multimodal, slow flow streets.	No	Mid	P	DPW
As part of the annual budgeting process, identify priority road resurfacing projects two years in advance in order to provide time for development and vetting of restriping plans, as appropriate.	No	Short	DPW	P/TM
Develop a five-year infrastructure maintenance and capital improvement plan that details the design metrics that must be accommodated to incorporate the new design standards. Balance emphasis on vehicular Level of Service and mobility with safety and slow flow movement.	No	Mid	DPW	P/TM
Allow on-street parking townwide. Amend Chapter 210 accordingly.	Yes	Short	P	DPW/EMS
As part of a Streets Master Plan, identify locations where on-street parking can be added to help narrow vehicular travel lanes, improve pedestrian safety, and provide additional parking opportunities.	No	Mid	P	DPW/ECD/EMS
Revise road design and construction standards so that curb radii are reduced to help slow vehicular turning movements and increase pedestrian safety.	Yes	Mid	P	DPW/PB/EMS
Establish a bicycle and pedestrian committee.	No	Short	P	DPW/P/Rec
Review and update the code to key a range of street types to land use character, and that provide for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use. Require new developments to choose from these street types.	Yes	Mid	P	DPW/ECD/PB
Update existing street construction standards to allow 9- and 10-foot lanes on regional roads and enforce the existing maximum 9-foot lane standard for new neighborhood streets.	Yes	Mid	P	DPW/EMS

## Acronyms

<b>TM</b>	Town Manager
<b>P</b>	Planning Department
<b>DPW</b>	Department of Public Works
<b>EMS</b>	Emergency Services
<b>ECD</b>	Economic and Community Development
<b>PB</b>	Planning Board
<b>Rec</b>	Parks and Recreation Department
<b>TA</b>	Town Assessor
<b>TPL</b>	Topsham Public Library
<b>SB</b>	Select Board

<b>TDI</b>	Topsham Development Inc.
<b>SD</b>	School District
<b>TCC</b>	Topsham Conservation Commission
<b>HDC</b>	Historic District Commission
<b>CEO</b>	Code Enforcement Officer

## Timeframes

<b>Short</b>	- 2 years or less
<b>Mid</b>	- 2-5 years
<b>Long</b>	- 5+ years
<b>Ongoing</b>	

STREETS FOR PEOPLE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Conduct staff training so all levels of staff understand the benefits of narrower lanes.	No	Short	P	DPW/ECD/EMS
Amend Chapter 185 Appendix A and begin the process of restriping lanes to 9 or 10 feet through annual restriping efforts.	Yes	Mid	P	DPW/ECD/PB
Add stencils, bikeway signage, and physical barriers, such as on street parking, or seasonal vertical elements, such as bollards or planters, to restriped streets that have four feet or more of space on the shoulder.	No	Mid	DPW	P/ECD
As part of a Streets Master Plan include bicycle and pedestrian priority streets and connections, amenities (lighting, ADA compliance), a hierarchy of pedestrian standards, and that identifies priorities, funding sources, and funding amount.	No	Mid	P	DPW/EMS
Continue to use a Payment In Lieu program to fund the construction of sidewalks.	No	Ongoing	P	DPW
Build funding into the capital improvement plan for the construction of sidewalks and multi-use paths.	No	Short/Ongoing	DPW	P/ECD/TM
Work through the list of priority projects in-house using inexpensive, semi-permanent materials.	No	Short	DPW	P
Update the zoning code to include a range of street types keyed to land use character and that provide for safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle use. Require new developments to choose from these street types.	Yes	Mid	P	PB/DPW/ECD
Continue to require that new developments provide an internal street network to the extent possible and connect to existing street and trail networks.	Yes	Mid/Ongoing	P	DPW/PB
Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages the use of turn lanes and traffic lights in order to favor safety over mobility.	No	Short	P	DPW/ECD
Conduct staff training so that all levels of staff understand the benefits of 4-way stops over traffic lights on pedestrian-prioritized streets.	No	Short	P	DPW/ECD
Evaluate the feasibility of converting traffic lights to 3-way or 4-way stop intersections on Main Street and other streets used by bicycles and pedestrians. Target intersections along Main Street including both entrances to Bowdoin Mill Island, Elm Street, Green Street, Winter Street, Town Hall entrance, Monument Place, Eagles Way, and Canam Drive.	No	Mid	DPW	P/ECD
Conduct a staff training on how to efficiently complete studies and paperwork for traffic signal removal in compliance with Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards and protocols.	No	Long	DPW	P/ECD
Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages the use of multiple lanes in the same direction in order to better balance safety and mobility.	No	Short	P	DPW/EMS

Acronyms

**TM** Town Manager  
**P** Planning Department  
**DPW** Department of Public Works  
**EMS** Emergency Services  
**ECD** Economic and Community Development  
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Timeframes

**Short** - 2 years or less  
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**Long** - 5+ years  
**Ongoing**

STREETS FOR PEOPLE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Educate Planning Board and Town Hall staff on how to implement a complete streets policy.	No	Short	P	SB
Continue to require that new neighborhoods connect to existing streets and adjacent neighborhoods to produce a network of streets and paths.	Yes	Ongoing	P	PB
Adopt a complete streets policy that discourages one-way streets.	No	Short	P	DPW/SB
Train Planning Board, public works staff, and the Code Enforcement Officer on the complete streets policy.	No	Short/ Mid	P	TM
As part of a Streets Master Plan effort, identify existing and future Safe Routes to School network.	No	Mid	P	DPW/EMS/ SD
Prioritize funding to repair neighborhood streets and Safe Routes to School to achieve maximum speeds of 20 MPH, including during off-peak times.	No	Ongoing	DPW	SB
Adopt a resolution that creates a home to school zone with reduced speed limits within 2 miles of every school. Sign and enforce accordingly.	No	Mid	P/ DPW/ EMS	SB
Direct funding to pilot advisory bike lanes, yield streets, and other techniques to slow traffic on local neighborhood street.	No	Mid	P	DPW
Start a program that empowers neighborhoods to slow their local residential streets through a number of pre-approved strategies.	No	Mid	P	DPW
As part of a Streets Master Plan effort, identify priority streets for tree planting program, market the program, secure funding, and plant trees.	No	Short	P	DPW
Hire an engineer adept at working within an urban, pedestrian-prioritized context to redesign smaller, tamer intersections that better balance mobility and safety.	No	Ongoing	DPW	P
Continue to manage and limit new curb cuts onto Route 196.	No	Ongoing	DPW	P
Include the practice of Tactical Urbanism in the Town's complete streets policy and continue staff training.	No	Ongoing	P	DPW

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**Mid** - 2-5 years  
**Long** - 5+ years  
**Ongoing**

LOCAL AND REGIONAL MOBILITY				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Continue discussions with transit providers to connect Topsham to regional destinations.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P/TM
Plan an intra-town transit service for people of all ages and abilities.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P/TM
Work with local businesses to coordinate and provide a range of transportation services to accommodate the needs of an aging population.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P/TM
Work with local businesses to set up and maintain ridesharing locations in oversized parking lots.	No	Ongoing	P	ECD
Work with the business community to create employee incentives for ride-sharing.	No	Short	ECD	P
Update the zoning code to require parking maximums within the growth areas, but allow flexibility in permitting so the free market can determine what the actual parking need is.	Yes	Short	P	ECD/PB
As smart vehicle technology advances, implement a system of real-time value pricing for parking.	No	Long	P	ECD/SB
As smart vehicle technology advances, evaluate and adjust public infrastructure funding priorities.	No	Long	P	ECD/SB
As vehicle sensor technology improves, reallocate excess pavement for pedestrian and bicycle amenities, stormwater retention, and street trees.	No	Long	P	DPW

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ACCESS TO NATURE AND OPEN SPACE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Update zoning to clearly articulate when trail corridors should be preserved or added as private development occurs.	Yes	Mid	PB/TCC	P/Rec
Create and use a more in-depth open space and trails connectivity map to identify where important trail corridors and connections can be established as part of new private development.	No	Mid	TCC	P/Rec
Seek both private and public funding to expand the number of trails, pedestrian/bicycle paths, access points to natural resources, and water access.	No	Mid	P/Rec	TCC
Install low-cost, low-impact and friendly signage at private trail locations and water access points inviting discrete and respectful use of property.	No	Mid	Rec	DPW
Work with the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust to solidify use agreements with private landowners.	No	Ongoing	TCC	P
For frequently used trails on private property, provide ongoing stewardship assistance to landowners.	No	Ongoing	TCC	Rec
Seek private funding support to establish an Open Space and Trails Ombudsman to work in partnership with the Topsham Recreation Department, CREA and the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust.	No	Mid/Long	TCC	Rec
Update the zoning code to require developers building projects of a certain scale within the rural districts to protect high quality open space. Use the Natural Areas Plan to inform protection.	Yes	Mid	TCC/PB	P
Set up an acquisition fund to purchase open space identified in the four focus areas identified in the Natural Areas Plan.	Yes	Mid	P	TCC
Continue to use the Open Space Tax Program as a strategy to protect important scenic resources and open spaces in Topsham.	No	Ongoing	TA	TM
Form public/private partnerships to execute a Downtown Waterfront Park.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P/TM
Update the 2010 Natural Areas Plan.	No	Mid	TCC	P
Set up a "Topsham Conservation, Inc." as a quasi-municipal entity, similar to Topsham Development, Inc, to allow Topsham to set aside and spend funding for land conservation.	No	Mid	P/TCC	TM/Rec
Seek funding to expand the number of trails and pedestrian/bicycle paths to the rivers.	No	Mid	TCC	P/Rec
Enter into agreements with private landowners to formalize water access points.	No	Mid	Rec	P/TCC
Work with organizations such as Merrymeeting Adult Ed, Topsham Trail Riders, Brunswick Topsham Land Trust and CREA to offer 4-season, nature-based activities and programming for people of all ages and abilities.	No	Ongoing	Rec	TCC

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ACCESS TO NATURE AND OPEN SPACE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Work with TDI to support development of natural resource-based tourism.	No	Mid	ECD	TCC
Work regionally to develop branded marketing materials to showcase outdoor amenities, farms and local food and beverage unique to Topsham and its neighboring communities.	No	Short	ECD	TCC/Rec/P
Prioritize funding for sidewalk and bicycle network expansions.	No	Ongoing	DPW	SB
Work regionally to seek funding opportunities for the Merrymeeting Trail to Kennebec River Rail Trail.	No	Mid/Long	TCC	Rec
Work regionally to explore opportunities to build segments of footpaths in the Androscoggin Railroad corridor.	No	Mid/Long	TCC	Rec
Continue to work regionally with other municipalities and organizations to extend regional trails.	No	Mid/Long	TCC	Rec

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FOSTER SOCIAL CONNECTION				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Update the zoning code to include neighborhood centers that are enabled through 5-minute walk pedestrian shed standards.	Yes	Mid	P	PB
Form public/private partnerships to fund the retrofit of existing neighborhoods to add desired amenities such as parks and civic gathering spaces.	No	Long	Rec	P
Update the Town's zoning code to include provisions for meaningful open space types tied to developments of various scales. Open space types should include the full range of civic spaces including commons, parks, squares, and plazas, as well as amenities such as recreation fields, playgrounds, swimming pools, gardens, skating rinks, dog parks, and amphitheaters.	Yes	Long	P/Rec	PB
Form an Arts & Culture Commission, a local Annual Event Citizen's Group, or organize and apply for the Main Street Program, including the options of becoming a network affiliate community.	No	Mid	ECD	P/Rec
Support the work of TDI to financially support regional and national caliber events at the Topsham Fairgrounds.	No	Short	TDI	ECD/TPL
Support increased funding for the Library from both municipal and non-municipal revenue sources.	No	Short	TM	TPL
Support the Library Trustees in efforts to review space needs for the Library, ensure facilities are being used effectively and meeting 21st century needs. Plan accordingly for any future additions or renovations.	No	Short	TPL	TM
Use credit enhancement agreements to incentivize private development of new indoor and outdoor recreation facilities.	No	Short	ECD	TDI
As part of new development, explore opportunities to partner with private developers to create new recreational facilities which the Town could benefit from through lease agreements.	No	Short	P/ECD	TDI/Rec
Allow and encourage "Friends of" groups to help construct and manage Topsham's civic spaces.	No	Mid	Rec	DPW
Ensure adequate department budgets and staffing to manage lawn care and tree pruning at town properties and in the street right of way.	No	Ongoing	DPW	TM

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**SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY**

STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Explore costs and funding mechanism for bringing fiber to all homes within the intentional growth area.	No	Long	ECD	TM
Update the zoning code to allow shared workspaces throughout all zoning districts in Topsham.	Yes	Mid	P	PB
Prioritize streets that are safe, interesting, and comfortable for walking.				
Update zoning to allow for higher density development as a means for creating more walkable destinations and naturally affordable housing.	Yes	Short	P	PB
As part of future zoning efforts, ensure performance standards continue to allow as-of-right home occupations for businesses with on-site employees.	Yes	Short	P	PB/CEO
Support the organization of professionals groups to hold networking and community building events.	No	Short	ECD	TDI
Encourage private sector partnership with the Library to host professional enrichment and skills building workshops.	No	Short	TPL	TDI/ECD
Create a town-wide directory of home-based businesses.	No	Short	ECD	TPL
Work with Topsham Development Inc. (TDI) to create a local business association.	No	Short	TDI	P

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**BE DELIBERATE ABOUT GROWTH**

STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Update the zoning code to further encourage a higher density, mixed use pattern of development that delivers a higher municipal return on investment.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Work with TDI to fund a full value per acre analysis.	No	Mid	ECD	TDI
Work with the Sewer and Water District to proactively plan for future service improvements and extensions.	No	Ongoing		
Prior to using public money on any expansion of utilities west of I-295, require an analysis of the economic benefit of utility expansion.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P
Evaluate, measure and if necessary adjust the Town's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Policy.	No	Mid	ECD	TM/TDI
Key TIF policy to value-per-acre to prioritize development that further funds existing investments.	No	Mid	ECD	TM/TDI
Consider applicability of keying TIF policy to goals of job creation, creation of community access or public benefit (rail, recreation, bus transit, water access, workforce housing, job training).	No	Mid	ECD	TM/TDI
Update the zoning code to emphasize town building principles, including neighborhood character, blocks, streets, civic spaces, and buildings that, in total, add up to a feeling of authenticity.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to permit greater density within the intentional growth area as identified on the Conservation & Growth Map.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to permit rural development that responds to rural character, including rural building group types.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to make it easier to attract new, denser development to zoning districts within the Neighborhood Transformation - Intentional Growth Sector.	Yes	Short	P	PB/ECD
Update the zoning code to allow smaller parcels and higher density mixed-use development within the Neighborhood Transformation - Intentional Growth Sector, including infill on parcels that already have development.	Yes	Short	P	PB/ECD
Update the zoning code to remove off-street parking requirements to enable the market to determine parking need.	Yes	Short	P	PB/ECD
Review all municipal codes, licensing, and other procedures to remove barriers to small-scale development and the establishment of new businesses.	Yes	Mid	P	CEO/TC
Allow a broad range of land uses within the intentional growth areas as well as within the rural zones as part of building groups.	Yes	Short	P	PB

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- TC** Town Clerk

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**BE DELIBERATE ABOUT GROWTH**

STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Engage in public/private partnerships to pilot low-cost incubator shared workspaces for start-ups along the edges of private parking lots.	Yes	Mid	ECD	P
Work with local staff to ensure that information on incremental and affordable development projects are provided to landowners.	No	Mid	ECD	P
Continue to support the work of the Historic District Commission to review projects within the Historic Overlay District, including expansion of the District.	Yes	Mid	P	HDC
Provide educational opportunities to advance local use of the more flexible International Existing Building Code.	No	Mid	CEO	P
Continue to provide staff support to property owners of historic buildings inside and outside of the Topsham Historic District, with information on how to get a building listed on the register and gain access to federal and state funds.	No	Ongoing	P	HDC
Update zoning to enable flexible use of historic buildings, including a range of uses, unit numbers, and a removal of off-street parking requirements.	Yes	Short	P	HDC
Actively promote and pursue Federal Historic Preservation funds to advance historic preservation efforts.	No	Mid	P	HDC
Leverage State Historic Preservation Office technical assistance to advance historic preservation efforts.	No	Mid	P	HDC
Update the zoning code to allow rural building groups, including hamlets and farm compounds, as a way to support rural character and support rural-based businesses.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Continue to encourage working farms and forests to participate in the Farmland and Tree Growth Tax Program.	No	Ongoing	Tax	TM
Work with the Maine Farmland Trust, Department of Agriculture, Merrymeeting Food Council and others involved in food-related industries to attract farmers and other agricultural-based businesses to Topsham.	No	Short	ECD	TDI
Pursue a public/private partnership to start up a food hub and certified commercial kitchen.	No	Mid	ECD	TDI

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HOUSING DIVERSITY				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Update the zoning code to include clearly defined building types with a range of unit sizes that are reflective of local character and are allowed to be built in town by right.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to allow building groups such as pocket neighborhoods, connected farms, small and large compounds, and hamlets.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Review all municipal codes and procedures to remove barriers to small-scale development and the construction of affordable building types.	Yes	Short	P	CEO/PB
Update the zoning code to remove parking minimums within the growth areas, allowing the free market to determine parking need. Add controls that require new parking to be located behind buildings.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Conduct a detailed housing study based on target market preferences and an understanding of the full range of housing types, including those not currently available within the market.	No	Long	ECD	P
Update the zoning code to ensure that local land use rules are aligned with the updated building codes to support the construction of tiny homes and accessory units.	Yes	Short	P	CEO/PB
Evaluate and adjust zoning policies in regards to accessory units.	Yes	Short	P	CEO/PB
Update the zoning code to provide a more stringent set of development standards to control building form, scale, components, placement, materials and associated site improvements.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Update the zoning code to regulate building types by zoning district to ensure new buildings and projects complement the scale and character of the existing neighborhood.	Yes	Short	P	PB
Partner with TDI and local developers to create a housing plan that sets the pace for construction of targeted new housing units.	No	Long	ECD	P/TDI
Evaluate the effectiveness of zoning policies that grant density bonuses to incentivize affordable and senior housing. Amend, as needed.	Yes	Long	P	ECD/PB
Target and incentivize construction of affordable housing units in growth areas envisioned as dense, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.	Yes	Long	P	ECD/PB
Allow density bonuses for developments within the growth area if that development contributes fees to an affordable housing fund.	Yes	Long	P	ECD/PB
Use Affordable Housing TIFs to support the creation of new affordable housing.	No	Ongoing	ECD	P

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**OPEN GOVERNANCE**

STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
Include funding in the budget for meetings between Town Hall and the community.	No	Ongoing	TM	Finance
Add leadership development incentives to better attract a diverse selection of volunteers for town boards and committees.	No	Short	TM	SB
Test alternative committee meeting times/days to make it easier to volunteer.	No	Short	TM	All support staff
Annually, hold a community celebration to acknowledge the work of volunteers.	No	Short	TM	All support staff
Consider job sharing as a means to attract highly skilled, mature private sector talent to the public sector.	No	Mid	TM	SB
Explore ways to bring Town Hall services direct to the neighborhoods.	No	Long	TM	SB
Evaluate how work is being performed and consider if new job structures or changes to workplace culture should occur to attract the next generation of talent to government service.	No	Mid	TM	
Continue to work with community partners to build shared communication goals focused on civil discourse.	No	Mid	TM	All staff
Demonstrate appropriate and productive civil discourse on social media through active pages that have strong moderators that present content, debate, and activities based in the community.	No	Short	TM	All committees/boards
Adopt a policy to hold facilitated public workshops when complex problems arise that need broad community engagement and professional expertise from multiple disciplines.	No	Short	TM	SB
Develop a strategy or partnership to make child-care available for all public meetings.	No	Mid	TM	All support staff
Continue to use the open and participatory budgeting process for expenditures from the Community Fund.	No	Ongoing	TCF	P
Fund staff professional development to improve how open and participatory budgeting is used in budgeting and planning for long term capital improvements.	No	Short	TM	SB

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A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE				
STRATEGY	ORDINANCE RELATED	TIMEFRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
The Town should explore ways to expand monitoring of Topsham's surface water quality to maintain a high level of water quality.	No	Long		
Coordinate with neighboring communities and organizations to monitor water quality in the region's rivers and ponds as well as the Merrymeeting Bay watershed.	No	Long	TCC	P
Educate residents and business owners on non-point and point source pollution and the importance of groundwater protection in Topsham.	No	Ongoing	P	TCC
Educate residents and business owners about the improvements to water quality in the past several decades.	No	Long	TCC	P
With professional assistance, review current Aquifer Protection Zone regulations to ensure goals and objectives are being met.	Yes	Short	P	CEO/PB
Facilitate educational workshops to teach residents how to compost and provide ongoing public education about the proper methods of recycling.	No	Short	SW	
Explore a private/public partnership with an entity such as Garbage to Garden to provide a municipal composting kiosk in town.	No	Short	SW	
Identify spaces for a bioswale pilot program.	No	Mid	DPW	P
Create signage to educate public on existing bioswale at Town Hall.	No	Mid	TCC	P
Work with CREA and the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust to build local awareness for the social, environmental and economic benefits of green infrastructure.	No	Mid	TCC	P
Organize annual neighborhood clean up days.	No	Mid	TCC	SW/DPW
Consider the Municipal Complex as a demonstration area for low-cost, high-impact techniques that residents could implement at home.	No	Ongoing	TCC	TM
Continue to build energy consumption awareness.	No	Mid	TCC	P
Evaluate progress in order to update and continue to implement the Climate Action Plan.	No	Short	TCC	P
In partnership with the Library, work with public non-profit and private sector energy and weatherization specialists to offer local workshops about advances in energy technology and retrofits.	No	Short	TPL	TCC
Promote awareness and use of Efficiency Maine.	No	Ongoing	TCC	P
Encourage electric vehicle usage, and provide a charging kiosk at Town Hall.	No	Short	P	TM

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# Acknowledgements

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE COMMITTEE

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Susan Preece

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Principle  
Rhumb Line Maps  
Kate Howe Makes Things

THE COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO THANK OUR PLAN YOUR TOPSHAM SPONSORS AND CONTRIBUTORS:

Maine Fiber Arts  
Topsham Public Library  
Home Depot  
The Daniel  
Carol and Mark Eyerman  
TDI  
Highlands  
Wicked Joe  
Linkel Construction  
Cosmic Stone  
Mums Plus  
Hunter Farm  
111 Maine St. Catering  
Topsham Fire Rescue Ladies Auxiliary  
Fairwinds Farm

# Topsham Inventory and Analysis 2019

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# Agriculture and Forest Resources

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of the agricultural and forestry capacity within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into five sections:

1. Agricultural Resources
2. Agricultural Product to Market
3. Local Agricultural Protection
4. Forestry Resources
5. Implications

According to the 2007 Natural Resources Plan, 82% of land cover in Topsham is characterized by forests, farms and wetlands (approximately 26 square miles). The 2012 Census of Agriculture, which was conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture, shows that while the number of working farms declined by 4% nationally, the number of Maine farms has increased slightly since the last census was done in 2007. In 2012, there were 8,174 farms operating in Maine, up from 8,136 in 2007 and 7,196 in 2002 (2002 being the data captured during our last comp plan). The number of Maine farmers under age 34 increased from 396 in 2007 to 551 in 2012. There were also more women farmers in Maine in 2012 – 2,381, compared with 2,043 in 2007.

This statewide trend reflects similar occurrences within the greater Topsham region.

## AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

The focal issue for farming operations in Topsham is their economic viability and the associated implications for land use and preservation of open space. New farms that are starting up tend to be smaller in scale and sell high-value products to the local market. The large land-intensive farms with woodlots and rolling pastures are becoming increasingly difficult to keep viable.

As of 2016, Topsham has nine working farms. In addition, Topsham has several landowners who devote acreage exclusively to producing hay, which is sold to horse owners and cattle operations. Topsham also has farm hobbyists and residents who live on farms but do not

work the land. Topsham does not have any designated Forever Farms under the Maine Farmland Trust program.

Economically, agriculture is a minor component of the town's overall employment and output profile. Most of Topsham's farms are owner-operated and family run. According to census estimates, in 2010 there were almost 40 residents employed in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining. Though still a small number in 2010, it is clear that agricultural employment has dropped. Data collected from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages reports that in 2015, Sagadahoc County employed an average of 40 workers in "Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting", earning a total of \$771,088 and an average of \$19,398 in annual wages.

The farms that persevere in Topsham are active and well known. Some farming operations have local retail components that are popular in the community. For example, Bisson Farms maintains a popular retail meat store, Fairwinds and Whatley Farms offer locals year-round CSA memberships and Sunset Farm sells products at stands in the Topsham Fair Mall. In 2006, Topsham added a seasonal retail provision to its code to offer the opportunity for local agricultural producers to seasonally sell their products in expanded areas which were previously restricted by zoning measures.

Through the Local Farms – Local Food initiative of the partnering regional land trusts, a list of working farms within the region was developed. It identified the following lands that are considered working farms:

1. The Imperial Hosta
2. Urban Garden Center
3. TOP-ME Gardens
4. Wakely's Greenhouse
5. Mums Plus
6. Favreau's Greenhouse
7. Sunset Farm Greenhouse
8. Weymouth Brook Farm
9. Jonaitis property
10. L & P Bisson and Sons Inc.
11. Utecht Farm
12. Whatley Farm
13. Bradley Pond Farm
14. Sandelin Farm
15. McManus Farm
16. Fairwinds Farm
17. Windward Farm

The list includes farms from Freeport to Dresden (including all towns within Sagadahoc County). There are nearly 200 working farms within this region.

## AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT TO MARKET

The town supports natural resource based industries via the land use code through the following code chapters, both of which were added to the town's code in 2008:

- Rural entrepreneurial activities
- Reuse of agricultural building for nonresidential use

The town has developed and incorporated standards for "food processing" which address a proposed food hub that has not yet been established. The food hub was proposed to occupy the former naval commissary. The former commissary building has since been bought by local coffee roaster, Wicked Joes. Financing a food hub remains a challenge, but the town is well prepared to allow for this type of use.

The Sagadahoc Agricultural and Horticultural Society is a local non-profit that runs the Topsham Fairgrounds and holds a winter farmers market from 11am-4pm every Friday with music and food as well. The Fairgrounds are supported by the community in all of their event coordination.

## LOCAL AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION

Today, Topsham relies upon both a suite of incentive-based zoning tools, acquisition of land and conservation easements to protect local agriculture. Though the town does not currently have an agricultural zoning district, there have been standards adopted within the zoning ordinance to encourage clustering and the protection of working farms and open fields when subdivision of land occurs. Land in the R3 Zone can be divided using one of three zoning tools, or a combination thereof: 1) as a conventional subdivision; 2) as a large-lot subdivision; or 3) as an open space subdivision. Furthermore, the Agricultural Land Conservation and Development standards work to protect open land of 10 acres or more by providing further incentives to the base Open Space

Subdivision ordinance. Farms in Topsham are generally less than 100 acres and scattered throughout town, making it difficult to create specialized zoning districts. At this time, the majority of the rural lands are zoned R3 with a minimum lot size of 1.5 acres.

In 2010, a Development Transfer Overlay (DTO) District was added to Topsham's zoning code. The DTO District aims to encourage growth within the designated residential growth area and to minimize development in rural areas that are resistant to intense residential growth. In order to achieve this, the DTO District allows developments to build at higher densities with development transfer credits purchasable by paying a fee to the town. The money collected from these fees is invested by the town to acquire conservation land and/or easements and open space, which may often be critical forested and non-forested upland habitats or farmland.

Farmers and landowners in Maine are hesitant to enroll their properties into the Agricultural Tax Exemption program for a number of reasons including preservation of development rights, financial repercussions of un-enrolling property, land acreage (properties under 5 acres that do not qualify), or to avoid being on government lists. At the same time, new farms that are starting up tend to be much smaller in scale and sell high-value products to the local market. The Farmland Tax Law offers a tax exemption to tracts of land greater than five contiguous acres which generate an income of at least \$2,000 from farming activities each year. In 2016, 60 parcels totaling 2,251 acres of land are enrolled in the Farmland Tax Program. Still, it is difficult to capture an accurate assessment of the contribution that agriculture has to the local and state economy when many farms are not being registered or do not meet the size threshold to qualify.

From an acquisition perspective, farmland preservation programs focus on medium to larger-sized agricultural properties, the ability to create networks of contiguous lands, and locations where revenues from local municipal and/or land trusts and other non-profits can leverage funds to make acquisition happen.

## Pressure to Develop

The Natural Areas Plan, prepared as a result of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, identified four focus areas: 1) the Ward Road area, 2) the Bradley Pond/ Western Cathance River Corridor, 3) the Eastern Cathance River Corridor, and 4) the Muddy River area. These areas contain significant natural areas such that the land within that area might be appropriate for special consideration, further study, or greater attention when considering town policy toward land conservation, land use, and information and outreach efforts. The plan also identified an ongoing, steady pattern of dispersed, one-off new residential houses being built in these focus areas. Looking at 2017 Building Permit (BP) data, this trend of dispersed residential growth has continued.

## FORESTRY RESOURCES

Much of the land in rural areas of Topsham is covered by

forest. Commercial logging in Topsham is insignificant, except for a few properties that produce firewood for sale to the public. The biggest threat to forestland in Topsham is residential development.

The town owns several tracts of forest land, including a 160-acre tract of forest at the solid waste facility. The town's forest has a management plan, and was recently harvested. The Foreside recreation area owned by the town also has a forest management plan, and the town intends to do a light harvest there with a public educational aspect. There is a dedicated reserve account for the ongoing management of Topsham's forests, and the town intends to conduct forest management planning on parcels proximal to West Merrill Road.

The Cathance River Education Alliance (CREA) established a preserve totaling 235 acres. CREA's Preserve consists of forests, wetland areas, vernal pools, trails, and a bird sanctuary.

### **Local Initiatives**

The town of Topsham continually applies for and is successful with receiving project canopy grants. Topsham has a street tree management plan that guides maintenance and long-term tree management planning efforts.

In Topsham, there is a Tree Committee dedicated to creating awareness about the value of forests, trees, and forest management in plans for parks, public lands and commercial property developments in order to improve the quality of life for the town's citizens. The Tree Committee acts as a resource for local government, citizens and businesses to facilitate the merging of man-made and natural environments so that both are accommodated and valued in the process. Currently, the Tree Committee and Public Works Department are working with State Officials as part of the monitoring of the invasive Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Rural landowners in Topsham have relied on the Tree Growth Tax Law to reduce their tax bills and help keep large areas of Topsham rural. Forestland that is enrolled in the program is assessed for its current use, as opposed to its potential fair market value for more intensive uses. The State reimburses the Town for the tax revenue that was lost because of the lower valuation. The per-acre reimbursement is 90% of the per acre tax revenue lost due to tree growth enrollment. In 2016, Topsham reported a total value of \$1,344,481 on its Municipal Valuation Return. The local tax assessment for land in Tree Growth is mandated by the State of Maine on a per county basis. The revised value is distributed to municipalities by Maine Revenue Service annually. The method used by the State Tax Assessor to determine the per acre valuation is defined by statute and on the basis of the surveys of average annual growth rates applicable in the State made from time to time by the United States Forest Service or by the Maine Forestry Bureau. The growth rate surveys must be reduced by the percentage discount factor prescribed by section 576-B of Title 36 (Taxation)

of the Maine Revised Statutes to reflect the growth that can be extracted on a sustained basis. The categories of enrolled parcels, hardwood, softwood, mixed wood are determined by the licensed forester hired by the property owner.

The Tree Growth Tax Law offers a tax exemption to tracts of land greater than 10 acres which are being used for commercial harvesting in accordance with a Forest Management and Harvest Plan. In 2016, 110 parcels totaling 3,339 acres of forestland are enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax Program, making it the most utilized current use tax program in Topsham. Most of the land enrolled in this program is in the more rural northern and western sections of town.

The town assessor perceives a trend of stability for the future of Topsham's current use tax programs. A new parcel or two enroll in the program in any given year. Parcels are seldom withdrawn completely from classification, and it is more typical that a small portion of a parcel is withdraw for development as a single-family home. The future legislative trend is harder to read, but actual changes to the adopted statute have been minor throughout the last decade.



# Economy

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of economic development within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into three sections:

1. Economic Overview
2. Labor Market
3. Priorities

## ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

### Economic Shifts

Looking statistically at the period of time between 2010 and 2016, Topsham's economy as measured by income and employment levels, has experienced overall moderate growth with expected declines occurring during the recession. In the region during this time period, several notable changes and investments have occurred. The most notable change has been the decommissioning of the 3,200-acre Naval Air Station Brunswick (NASB) in 2011 and the recruitment of new businesses to Brunswick Landing. In 2005, when the decision was made by the federal Base Closure and Realignment Commission to close the station, the NASB employed 5,000 sailors and civilians (Bangor Daily News, June 23, 2016). Now called Brunswick Landing, economic development efforts have resulted in significant new developments, the largest including Pathways of Maine, Wayfair, SaviLinx, Mölnlycke Health Care and Southern Maine Community College Midcoast Campus.

According to Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA) Marketing and Communications Manager, more than 1,600 jobs have been created by redevelopment efforts at the former Navy properties in both Brunswick and Topsham. MRRA's strategic business attraction plan focuses on several target industries, based partly on the assets the Navy left and on the available talent and workforce, including: aerospace/aviation, biotech/biomed, composites/advanced materials manufacturing, Information Technology (IT), clean technology/renewables, and education. MRRA reports success in

drawing businesses engaged in activities in each of its target industries.

With MRRA's portfolio of businesses, economic clusters have emerged, mostly within its targets. There are currently five composites businesses in Brunswick Landing's technology accelerator, TechPlace, and a shared composites layup facility is slated to open soon in order to attract more composites businesses. TechPlace also houses a shared bioproduction lab. The Brunswick Landing site has seven aerospace companies, including two specializing in Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) and one aircraft manufacturer. Biotech wasn't initially a target sector, but once Mölnlycke opened, other companies followed, and now MRRA is actively recruiting other biotech businesses.

A surprise cluster emerging has been food and beverage production. MRRA has attracted a brewery, a liquor distillery, a coffee roaster (in Topsham), a restaurant, and a spice wholesaler.

Other regional companies experiencing economic changes include:

- Bath Iron Works

With approximately 6,000 employees total, BIW jobs represent about 82 percent of all private-sector shipbuilding jobs in the state in 2014, according to federal data (Bangor Daily News, September 16, 2016). According to Bangor Daily News, Maine's shipbuilding jobs represent an annual average wage of \$64,340 (before taxes or deductions). That's

compared with an average wage of \$41,548 for all payroll workers in Maine.

- **Midcoast-Parkview Health**

In 2015, Midcoast Hospital purchased the bankrupt Parkview Medical Center, merging to form Midcoast-Parkview Health. Midcoast subsequently invested \$6.2 million to renovate the Parkview facilities resulting in expansion of primary care, cancer care, outpatient clinical services and community health and wellness programs. The added wellness center includes expanded medical oncology practice, fully integrated and aligned with MaineHealth/Maine Medical Center and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute of Boston (MaineBiz, September 14, 2016).

In Topsham proper,

- Expanded Lee Toyota and Nissan automobile dealerships were developed. Lee Auto Group is a Maine-based company.
- Environmental and engineering services companies, Stantec and Wright Pierce. Wright Pierce was founded in Topsham and now has offices in New England and Florida, while Stantec is an international company. Stantec has two offices in Topsham, which support an average of around 60 staff members, five administrators, college students as summer interns, and five or more seasonal technicians. Stantec's presence in Topsham has retained this approximate number of employees, fluctuating according to workload, approaching 75+ employees at times.
- Crooker Construction, LLC has experienced overall company growth, according to CEO Tom Sturgeon, and is currently looking to move its operations from its current location at the interchange of I-295 and Route 196.
- Bowdoin Mill Island

In this same time period, the regional retail center in Topsham has both expanded and contracted. National big box retailers Bed, Bath and Beyond and Best Buy have closed. The shopping centers, which are predominantly leased by New England-based companies, have experienced steady, high levels of occupancy even during the recession. Commercial property owners and managers are keenly aware of the resiliency of local businesses during down economic cycles. Furthermore, owners recognize the need to be flexible to attract new tenants and uses to retail spaces. For example, a medical tenant has replaced Best Buy.

## LABOR MARKET

### Employment Numbers and Earnings

In 2016, an estimated 4,867 Topsham residents were employed, according to the Maine Department of Labor. This figure has risen by 3.7% since 2010, when Topsham's labor force totaled 4,692 workers. Comparatively, in 2010 the median household income was \$65,071, and the median income for a family was \$72,655 (ACS, 2016). The median income for a household in Topsham in 2016 is \$69,132, and the median income for a family is \$78,429. Both numbers dipped during the recession. In 2010,

the per capita income was \$31,965, growing slightly to \$33,339 in 2016 (ACS, 2016).

Of the 4,867 employed workers in Topsham in 2016, the largest percentage, about 29%, were employed in educational services, and health care and social assistance. The next largest percentages of Topsham workers, about 14%, were employed in retail trade, and 14% in manufacturing. The distribution of the top employers in Topsham has remained relatively the same since 2010, with 25% of the workforce employed in educational services, and health care and social assistance, 17% employed in retail, and 16% employed in manufacturing (Maine Department of Labor, 2016).

According to the American Community Survey (ACS), the employment sector with the smallest percentage of workers in 2016 in Topsham was in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining. ACS data shows 0 employees in 2016, while in 2015, 8 people (.17%) were employed in this sector. This data is an estimate which does not reflect the actual number of people employed in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting in Topsham. As listed in the Agriculture and Forest Resources chapter of this Inventory, there are currently 17 working farms in Topsham that have been identified through the Local Farms – Local Food initiative of the partnering regional land trusts. Town assessor data also supports the fact that there are people employed in this sector in Topsham. In 2016, 60 parcels of land totaling 2251 acres benefitted from the Farmland Tax Law, according to the Topsham's assessor's database. To benefit from this tax exemption, a property must be greater than 5 acres and generating an income of at least \$2000 each year from farming activity.

### Unemployment and Poverty

About 4.4% of families and 7.2% of the total population were below the poverty line (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). According to the US Department of Labor, Topsham's unemployment rate has dropped over recent years. In 2010, Topsham's unemployment rate was 6.2% and by 2016, its unemployment rate had dropped to 2.8%. The drop in unemployment in Topsham is reflective of a larger downward trend in unemployment in the county and state as well. In Sagadahoc County, the unemployment rate from 2010 to 2016 decreased from 6.5% to 3.0%. In Maine, the unemployment rate from 2010 to 2016 decreased as well, from 8.1% to 3.9% (US Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program).

## PRIORITIES

### Priorities for Economic Development, Locally and Regionally

Topsham is prioritizing local and regional economic development in a number of ways. First, the town has the benefit of having an economic development corporation called Topsham Development Inc. (TDI). The corporation has an appointed board and is supported by the Town's Economic Development Director. Each year TDI generates a strategic plan that summarizes its economic development priorities. The Town Selectmen provide oversight in TDI's appointment processes and have the

ability to discharge the board, but the Selectmen do not shape the strategic plan or vote on Board matters.

Second, Topsham participates in the Midcoast Economic Development Council (MCEDD), a municipally-led economic and community development organization. MCEDD covers the midcoast region including all of Sagadahoc and Knox Counties, and the towns of Brunswick, Harpswell, Lincolnville, Searsport, Belmont, Northport, and Wiscasset. MCEDD provides guidance and assistance to businesses and communities in efforts to stimulate the regional economy and spur job creation including:

- Developing and delivering a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which incorporates the economic, community and workforce development, education, transportation and environmental efforts and initiatives of the Midcoast region;
- Identifying, seeking and implementing opportunities that build the capacity of the region to successfully expand economic opportunity, competitiveness and strategic advantages;
- And partnering with communities, businesses, non-profits and other regional development organizations to support the delivery of those economic and community development programs and services that will further identified goals and objectives.

Third, though independent of the town, the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRRA) is a public municipal corporation by State law established in 2009 by the Maine State Legislature to implement the Reuse Master Plans for both NASB and Topsham's Annex as they have been set forth by both the Brunswick Local Redevelopment Authority (BLRA) and the Topsham Local Redevelopment Authority (TLRA). MRRRA strives to manage the transition and redevelopment of these base properties from military to civilian uses in the form of high-quality jobs. MRRRA has succeeded in achieving its short term goal of recovering civilian job losses in the primary impact community resulting from the base closure (700 jobs). MRRRA is now progressing on its intermediate goal of recovering economic losses and total job losses in the primary impact community resulting from the base closure (\$140 million in payroll) and its long-term goal of facilitating the maximum redevelopment of base properties (12,000+ jobs). MRRRA is overseen by an 11-member board of trustees appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the legislature.

While the Town and other entities are prioritizing economic development, state funding support affects the ability for municipalities to work together and share resources. A new focus on what is already at play on the ground has been incorporated into a shift in the strategy of Comprehensive Economic Developments (CEDs) over the last seven to eight years.

### **A Developing Downtown**

While Topsham has benefitted from its connection to downtown Brunswick, there is the potential and

interest for the Lower Village to support more mixed-use development as a means to attract activity and community engagement. Properties located in the Lower Village have the possibility of generating high tax revenue per acre for the town, similar to properties located on Maine Street in Brunswick.

### **Regional Service Center**

In the fourth quarter of 2016, Topsham hosted five of the top 25 private employers in Sagadahoc County. When the 2010 census was conducted, Topsham had a total employment of 3,673 jobs, of which 3,007 were held by non-residents. In addition to the draw Topsham attracts as a service center, the town's employment prospects are also supported by its close proximity to top paying regional employers.

Employment in Topsham relies greatly on service sector jobs, which represented 26.7% of total employment in 2010. As 80% of employees in the county are traveling to work by personal automobiles in 2015, this influx of daytime workers likely has the most impact on Topsham's street network.

Currently, Topsham sees increased seasonal activity due to its status as a regional service center. With more lodging properties such as hotels and inns, Topsham may benefit even more from the influx of seasonal population and visitations.

### **The Role of Home Occupation in the Community**

Home occupations are welcome in Topsham and are acknowledged for their role as economic activity drivers. Nationwide, trends of employment are growing to include an increase of home occupations. In 2015, Topsham's workforce included approximately 6% home-based workers, slightly higher than the 5% estimate for home-based workers in Sagadahoc County and the State of Maine.

### **Performance Standards for Commercial/Industrial Compatible Development**

Topsham is divided by a multitude of zoning districts that permit business and or industrial types of uses. Each district has specific objectives and permitted uses. The zones related to commercial and industrial development include:

- **Commercial Corridor Zones**  
Creates a tree-lined corridor with developments portraying smaller-scale commercial development than is found in the Mixed-Use Commercial (MUC) Zone.
- **Rural Commercial Use Zones**  
Protects the rural character of these areas while allowing a range of development to create a mixed-use, farmland and forested gateway to Topsham.
- **Mixed-Use Limited Zones**  
Protects the rural character of the Coastal Connector corridor while allowing a range of mixed residential and commercial development to create an attractive gateway to Topsham.
- **Mixed-Use Commercial Zones**

Provides for a mixed-use district that can absorb new growth in the town.

- Industrial Zones

Provides areas for light and heavy manufacturing.

- Mixed-Use Commercial One Zone

Provides an area where high quality, mixed-use development can occur in a manner that is compatible with the existing natural environment while protecting adjacent residential areas.

- Business Park Zone

Provides an area for the development of a business park to accommodate the growth of office, research, service, light manufacturing, and similar uses in a well-planned environment with access to public water and sewer service and the arterial road system.

- Commercial Corridor Route 196 Zone

Provides an area to accommodate the growth of office, research, service, light manufacturing, and similar uses as an extension of the Business Park Zone while allowing small retail uses and motor vehicle sales and service in a way that maintains the livability of the area for existing residential uses.

- Limited Industrial Zone

Creates more flexibility for existing businesses, while minimizing the impact on the adjacent educational and residential uses with appropriate performance and dimensional standards.

- Business Park 2 Zone

Allows for a level of business, commercial and office development that will be compatible with the adjacent higher density residential zone and the adjacent civic uses.

- Residential 2 Zone

Allows limited commercial opportunities for the existing uses with frontage on Route 196, which addresses the commercial marketability of the parcels, and ensures that residential abutters are protected through appropriate development standards.

Currently, Topsham has specific performance standards for commercial and industrial developments. The performance standards for planned commercial developments establish goals of encouraging development patterns that make appropriate use of the area in an integrated design manner. Design standards emphasize a unified character that includes a pedestrian-friendly scale, with pedestrian and bicycle linkages where appropriate. The commercial development should invoke a sense of community through the use of common elements, such as signs, lighting, and furniture. The site plan should minimize direct access of driveways onto existing public roads and the principal roads within the development. The performance standards for industrial developments focus on minimizing and controlling the byproducts of such activity being released into the surrounding area. Engineering designs are required detailing the treatment of industrial waste, and the handling of industrial byproducts such as traffic congestion, noise, odor, heat, glare, air pollution, fire hazards, and safety hazards. Architectural designs are

required to create unity within an area.

### **Public Facilities Needed to Support Economic Activity**

A lack of broadband coverage in Topsham has come up as an ongoing issue, especially as certain areas in town are still out of reach of the broadband system. There has been sporadic interest in increasing broadband access or providing townwide wireless internet access, especially in the Lower Village. Research has been conducted to support these initiatives, but an affordable and effective solution has not yet been reached. As of now, there is free public internet access available at the town library and the town office.

### **How Topsham Uses its Unique Assets for Economic Growth**

According to the Economic and Community Development Director, Topsham's ability to maximize its unique assets is a work in progress. Topsham is a commercial center, with focus on its regional retail center, and so must balance this asset with other economic interests in the more historic areas. Nationally, retailers are reducing both the number and size of their brick and mortar stores as online shopping for basic commodities increases. In addition, although visitors are coming to the town to access its retail center, they are not staying due to a lack of hotels and other accommodations. Provision of such amenities would help maximize economic generation from Topsham's role as a commercial center.

Over the years, trails and accessible recreational open spaces have increased. The Cathance River has sections of the river that reach whitewater class 3 - 4 during spring flow, drawing paddling enthusiasts. Historically, duck hunting camps were located along the Androscoggin River. Today, the town is not actively marketing its outdoor recreational amenities to promote economic growth.





# Fiscal Capacity and Capital Investment Plan

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of the fiscal capacity within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into three sections:

1. Taxation and Revenue
2. Funding for Future Capital Investments
3. Regional Efforts in Shared Investments

## TAXATION AND REVENUE

Topsham's most recent financial audit, performed on June 30, 2017, shows gains in the town's total net position, or the residual difference between assets and liabilities. In FY 17, Topsham reported total assets of \$26,486,075 and total liabilities of \$11,868,661. Topsham's total net position increased by \$1,596,540, indicating a strong overall financial position for the year. The town department budgets were underspent by \$1,027,553 and revenues were above budgeted estimates by \$328,744, largely due to increases in excise taxes collected (Topsham Financial Audit Report, June 30 2017).

The assessed valuation of Topsham is the basis on which its mill rate is multiplied and property taxes are established. With a higher assessed valuation, property taxes can be lowered to raise the same amount of money for the town, provided there is a relatively stable tax rate. With a larger tax base, the town collects more money for its given tax rate, which helps fund capital investment. In 2017, Topsham's assessed valuation has reached \$885,550,000, an increase of 10% since 2010. (Topsham Annual Report, 2017).

Between 2013 and 2017, Topsham's mill rate has slightly increased, from \$16.21 in 2013 to \$17.99 in 2017. This increase could be due to the corresponding decreases in municipal revenue sharing. Maine's state municipal revenue sharing program distributes revenue monthly to each municipality based on a formula whose variables include municipal populations, state valuations and tax assessments. According to Topsham's FY 17 financial

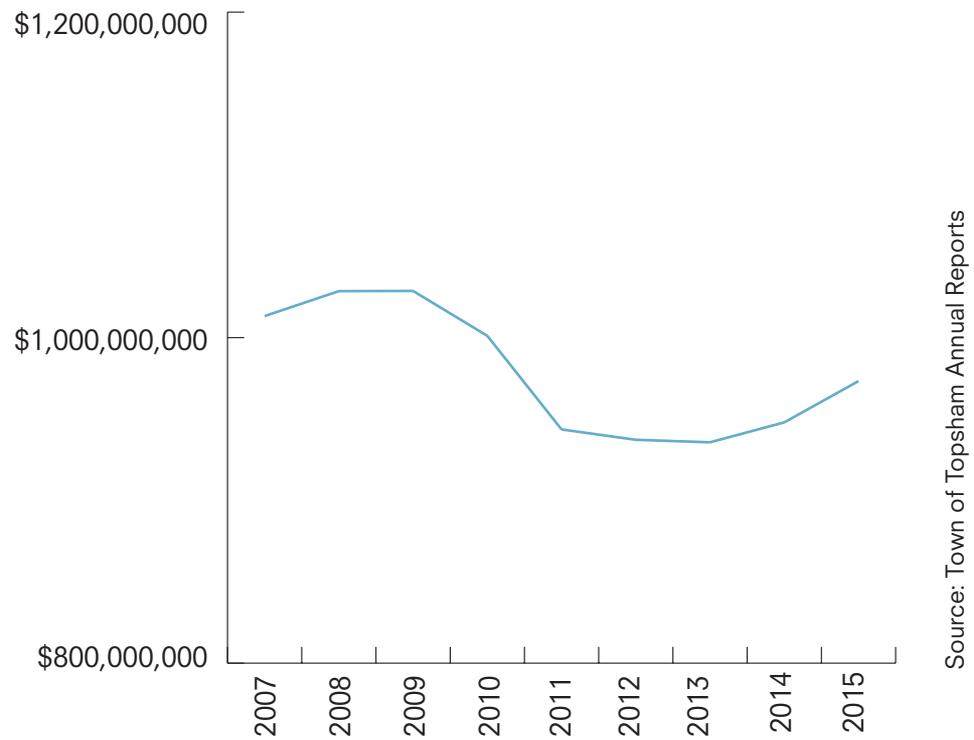
audit, the town manager reports that historically, the State has paid 5% of income and sales tax revenues to communities. However, over the past six years, that percentage has been reduced to 2%. This can be seen by comparing revenue sharing from FY 08, totaling about \$950,000 to FY 17, which totaled \$451,839, a reduction of approximately 50% over those ten years. Had the State adhered to its historical level of funding, the revenue sharing total in FY 17 would have been approximately \$1,126,000, or \$677,000 more than was actually received. Over the past six years, Topsham taxpayers have had to make up this difference (Topsham Financial Audit Report, June 30, 2017).

## FUNDING FOR FUTURE CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

Topsham's general fund has seen healthy growth, totaling \$5,579,139 in FY 17, an increase of \$608,717 from the previous year. The general fund's increase for this past year is primarily due to the operating transfer of the unexpended balance of this year's equipment bond fund to a separate capital projects fund, plus the unexpended portion of the current year's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) appropriation.

The town has an Economic Development (ED) fund which is growing with remaining revenues from the TIF districts. The ED fund has been growing steadily, and in 2017 contains nearly one million dollars. Some of this money will be going towards the relocation of public facilities and services and necessary repairs to the drainage system crossing under Main Street. In addition to its ED

## Total Valuation Base, 2007-2015



fund, Topsham also has a reserve fund, which allows the town to set money aside for major projects over multiple years, instead of borrowing funds through bonds, which comes with added interest costs.

### Tax Increment Financing Districts

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a flexible finance tool used by Topsham to leverage new property taxes generated by a specific project or projects within a defined geographic district. Any portion of the new taxes may be used to finance public or private projects for a defined period of time up to 30 years. Topsham has eight TIF districts, which provide ample proceeds that the town is then able to use to fund future capital investments. The eight TIF districts include two strictly municipal districts, one downtown district, and one affordable housing district. Topsham's TIF districts provide dedicated funds to the town, which are currently being used for the replacement to the Main Street drainage system, the demolition of the old fire station on Green Street, the Economic Development Department and associated costs, and portions of other departments and capital expenses.

### Capital Investment Plan

The town has a 25-year Capital Investment Plan (CIP), which is a long-range budget for capital expenses, including vehicles, major equipment, roads, debt service and facilities maintenance. The parameter for this plan is set around the Fire Department's ladder truck, as it is currently the most substantial piece of town equipment. The oldest facility in town is the waste transfer station, which was constructed in the late 1980 s. All other town facilities have been built in the last 17 years, and so are in good shape. Two bonds have been invoked for this CIP, and no future bonds are being planned. As the bonds dwindle over next nine years, Topsham will be able to maintain its budget. Currently, Topsham has an AA bond rating.

For capital investments, Topsham also actively applies for grant funding. In the past ten years, Topsham has collected several million dollars in grant money, which has gone to improvements ranging from the implementation of new bike paths to updates to the police department.

### Impact Fees

In 2004, Topsham adopted a Traffic Impact Fee ordinance, which imposes an impact fee on land development requiring review under the Town's subdivision, site plan or conditional use regulations. These fees are used to provide new roads and related facilities necessitated by new development that impacts traffic in the Topsham Fair Mall Area. The imposition of impact fees is a preferred method of insuring that new development bears a proportionate share of the cost of capital investments necessary to accommodate such development.

### Tier One Pine Tree Zone

Topsham is designated for Tier One Pine Tree Zone tax relief. The Pine Tree Development Zone Program (PTZ) offers eligible businesses the chance to greatly reduce, or virtually eliminate, state taxes for up to ten years when they create new, quality jobs in certain business sectors, or move existing jobs in those sectors to Maine. Currently, the eligible sectors are:

- Biotechnology
- Aquaculture and Marine Technology
- Composite Materials Technology
- Environmental Technology
- Advanced Technologies for Forestry and Agriculture
- Manufacturing and Precision Manufacturing
- Information Technology
- Financial Services

In the past ten years in Topsham, the Tier One Pine Tree Zone tax relief program has been utilized by Northern Pride Communications, a communications services business.

## **REGIONAL EFFORTS IN SHARED CAPITAL INVESTMENTS**

The Town of Topsham has spoken in the past with neighboring communities about whether to consolidate or share public departments such as Police and Fire. There is particular interest in the feasibility of sharing fire services with the Town of Brunswick. However, due to differences in the structures of these departments, consolidation has not proven feasible. In Lisbon, public meetings are currently being held to vote on whether to bailout Lisbon Emergency Inc., the town's non-profit ambulance service. It is feasible that Topsham could provide such services to Lisbon, and the parameters to do so through a mutual aid framework have been laid out by Topsham's Town Manager. A similar mutual aid approach has been discussed between Topsham and Bowdoinham, but discrepancies over pricing have stalled the conversation.



# Historic and Archaeological Resources

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of the historic and archaeological resources within Topsham.

This Chapter is organized into three sections:

1. Prehistoric and Historic Archaeological Resources
2. Historic Resources
3. Protective Measures

Topsham has achieved notable preservation of its classic New England village character and history. Beginning with its inhabitation by Native Peoples, Topsham gained significant archaeological sites along the banks of its rivers. Topsham's layout as a village began with the earliest permanent European settlement in and a continuous pattern of related development was sustained into the twentieth century.

Today, Topsham's character reflects the architectural styles of several periods that arose during the history of its development. Along the upper portion of Main Street there is a significant concentration of early 20th century residential development, with a smaller number of older buildings remaining. Upper Pleasant Street has the only concentration of post-WWII houses in the area, primarily on the west side of the street. Commercial buildings are concentrated on Main Street below the intersection of Elm and Winter streets. Lower Pleasant, Perkins, Elm, Green, Winter, and Summer streets have heavy concentrations of historic residential structures. Overall, the buildings in the village area retain a high degree of architectural integrity, with a few buildings on the edge of "non-contributing".

The majority of buildings determined to be non-contributing have been given that designation due to being built after the end of a determined period of significance (1784-1932). This period of significance was established by the Historic Resources Survey conducted in Topsham in 2010. 1784 is the built date of the oldest building in the village and 1932 is the year that the Frank J.

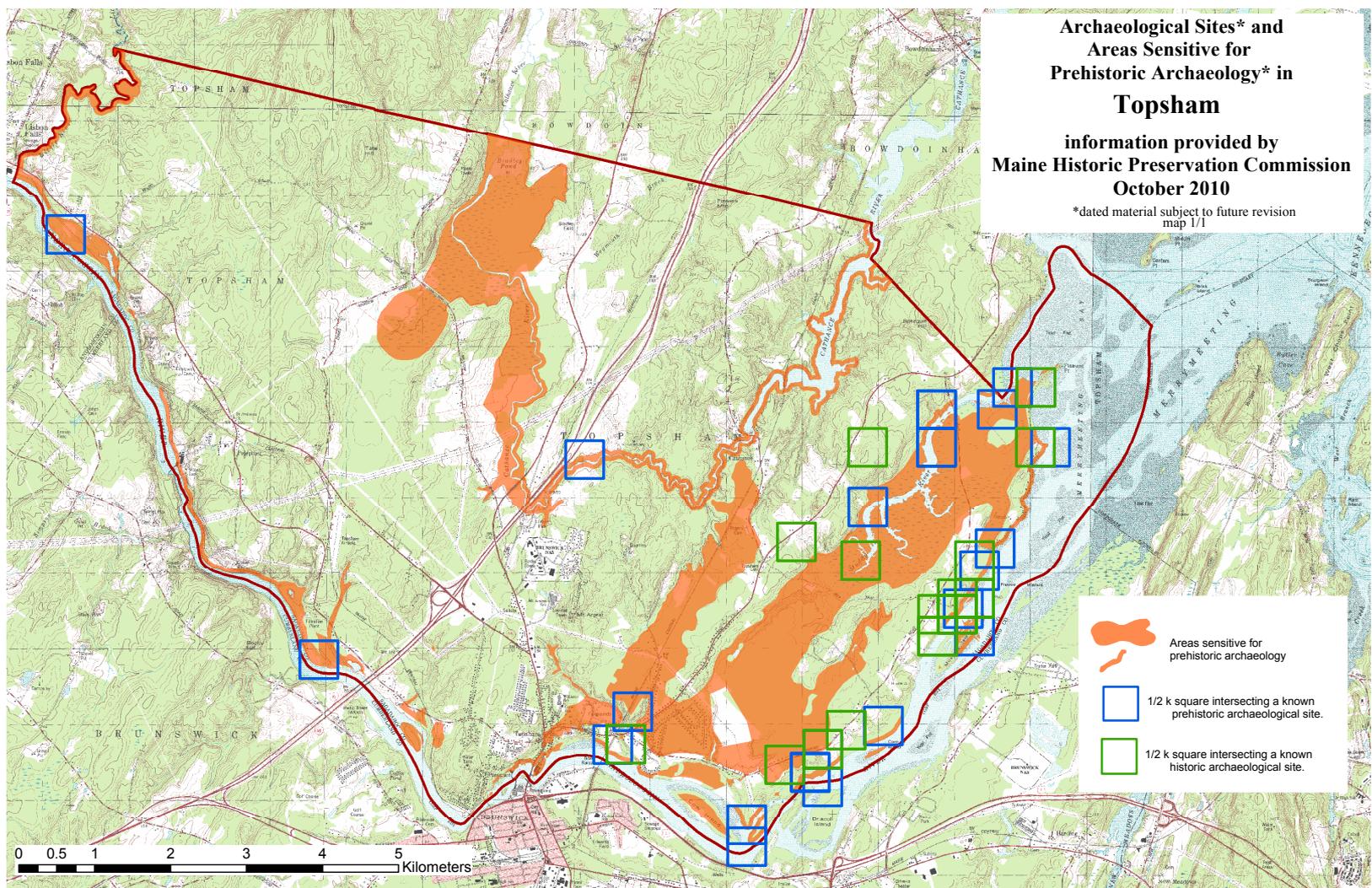
Wood Bridge was built and Main Street was realigned off the Mill Island – causing the last major reorientation of the village street pattern in the historic period (more than 50 years ago).

Throughout this period of significance, there was a continuing pattern of development, with commercial uses concentrated along Main Street between Elm Street and the Mill Island, Significant industrial uses concentrated on the island and along the Granny Hole Stream mill race channel, and residential development in the remainder of the area. In the residential areas, there was a consistent pattern of the earliest buildings being spread some distance apart, with infill development increasing the density along the streets as time passed.

## PREHISTORIC AND HISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

For centuries the town's waterways were its first highways; Native Americans and early European settlers used the nearby rivers, bays, oceans, and lakes as their major transportation corridors. Topsham's location at the juncture of two of the state's largest rivers (the Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers) as well as the smaller Cathance and Muddy River is the context in which the town's Native American history can be examined.

Prehistoric archaeological resources are largely Native American sites that predate 1700 – about the time of large-scale colonization by Europeans. Historic archaeological resources are largely European Colonial sites. It is difficult to 'see' the resources in the same



manner that one 'sees' a historic building, but a properly excavated archaeological site can speak volumes about the area's earliest residents.

Much work has been undertaken to understand the prehistoric and historic archeological resources present in Topsham.

In 2010, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission released a map overlaying areas sensitive for Prehistoric Archaeology with 1/2 km areas intersecting known prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. As of October 2015, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission has identified a total of twenty-three known historic archaeological sites in Topsham. Sites range from farmsteads to bridges to blacksmiths. The twenty-three sites are:

- Bay Bridge #1
- Mustard Farmstead
- Bay Bridge #2
- Gore/Purinton Homestead
- Lilac Foundation
- Bay Bridge #3
- Bay Bridge #4
- Bay Bridge #5
- Henderson
- Gray #1
- Hackett #1
- Pleasant Point #1
- Trafton Field

- Paine
- Hunter #1
- Hunter #2
- Hunter #3
- Ambrose
- Smith
- Hertlein
- D. Scribner Homestead
- Topsham Schoolhouse – Town Hall
- Cathance River Farmstead

## HISTORIC RESOURCES

Historic resources as a rule date after European settlement (around 1700) and include villages, historic districts, buildings, cemeteries, roads, bridges, and other similar resources.

As of 2015, Maine Historic Preservation Commission documents seven districts, properties, or sites containing buildings, structures and/or objects placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The seven National Register listings include:

- The Pejepscot Paper Company, located on the mill island beside the Androscoggin River, and listed on the National Register in 1974.
- Topsham Historic District, spanning the area from the intersection of Main and Elm Streets along Elm Street to the railroad tracks. The District also reaches up portions of Pleasant Street, Perkins Street, Town Landing Road, and Green Street. It includes 58 homes

and buildings, ranging in style from Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Ann, Colonial Revival, Eclectic, and Contemporary. In their many and varied styles, orientations to the street and each other, the buildings in the Topsham Historic District reflect the growth of the village as it occurred during its most important period of development.

- Hunter Site has a restricted address (to protect it from vandalism) and was listed on the Register in 1984.
- The Pejepscot Site also has a restricted address and was listed in 1987.
- The Purinton Family Farm, located at 65 Elm Street and was listed in 1989.
- The Topsham Fairgrounds Grandstand, which has been substantially updated, listed on the National Register in 1992.
- The Cathance Water Tower off of Cathance Road, listed on the National Register in 2001.

In addition to the seven National Register listings, numerous locally significant historic sites were identified in the 1992 Comprehensive Plan, including:

- Lover's Lane, one of Topsham's earliest roads, assumed to have been laid out sometime before 1764. Half of the original road is lost; one-quarter is a graded gravel road; and one-quarter is a two-wheeled path. Despite these changes, the look and feel of the original road is still very much in existence.
- First Parish Meeting House (demolished) on Middlesex Lane. While the building no longer exists, it is important because it was the first public building in Topsham and the locations of very few original meeting houses have been located statewide. In addition, the adjacent graveyard has many historically significant grave markers. Many of the grave markers are showing signs of age, sometimes caused by poorly repaired grave markers and sometimes by the effects of acid rain.
- The Cathance Mill area was the focus of significant interest for mill development back to 1717, there are no historical records indicating when mills were first constructed on this site. This is now the site of a public park.
- The Pejepscot Mills area is of particular interest for industrial historians and archaeologists. Much of the village still exists, which provides a good microcosm in which to study small mill village development. Mill workers' living conditions are an area of interest, given the number of boarding houses still standing and the archaeological remains of others.
- Pleasant Point Road was one of the first areas settled, and the early homes that have survived that period of development remain to be researched and documented. In addition, the Hunter Farm is significant primarily because the parcel is still intact from the water to the back lot, while many of the neighboring properties have been subdivided over the years.
- Further out on Foreside Road, the Randell-Hildreth

House of 1800 is a transitional Georgian-Federal design, exhibiting high style Georgian quoins, a low hipped Federal roof, and an added Greek Revival doorway. It was listed on the National Register in 2004.

- The site of the Bisson Farm on Meadow Road clearly shows a substantial family farm. The acreage of the fields, the location of the farm buildings, and the clear pattern of use are reminders of the town's history. The original settler, William Wilson, built a hip-roof Georgian farmhouse that was moved to its current location early in the 19th century, and remodeled under the Greek Revival influence.
- The Topsham Fair, owned and operated by the Sagadahoc Agricultural Society, has been operating since 1855 and remains a significant annual social and recreational event. The Grandstand is listed on the National Register. The fair has a wide range of exhibits and livestock on display with awards to the best in each class. The fairground is used for numerous other activities throughout the year.

## PROTECTIVE MEASURES

### Local Historic Entities

Topsham hosts several entities, both municipally-appointed and non-profit, helping to ensure the protection of prehistoric, historical and archaeological resources. The current entities include:

- The Topsham Historical Society, incorporated as a non-profit corporation in April 2012, has served as a valuable resource in collecting and preserving historic information and artifacts as well as through hosting various forms of historical education and outreach. The Topsham Historical Society is currently composed of an eight-person Board of Trustees.
- The Pejepscot Historical Society, has been serving the Topsham/Brunswick region since 1888. Its mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret history within the Pejepscot region, which includes Topsham, Brunswick, and Harpswell. The Pejepscot Historical Society's collections include many Topsham documents and artifacts.
- The Town of Topsham History Committee, engaged in the process of archiving the Town's historic records. Members of the History Committee are appointed by the Town Selectmen.
- The Topsham Historic District Commission, composed of five residents of Topsham and is charged with:
  - Local informational and advisory functions:
    - Inventorying cultural resources in Topsham,
    - Recommending methods and procedures to preserve historic sites and properties owned or operated by the Town, and reviewing the alteration, relocation, or demolition of historic sites.
    - Reviewing development proposals that affect properties within the Historic Overlay District or that are on the National Register of Historic Places.

- Recommend ordinances and provide information to the Town.
- Advise other officials and departments regarding protection of cultural resources.
- Act as a local liaison on behalf of local government.
- Promote and conduct educational and interpretive programs.
- Cooperate with federal, state and local governments in objectives of historic preservation.
- Participate in conduct of land use and other planning processes.
- State Historic Preservation Commission advisory functions:
  - Review all proposed National Register nominations
  - Review of applications for certificates of appropriateness:
    - Establish written guidelines for conservation of designated historic districts and designated landmarks.
    - Review applications for certificates of appropriateness.
    - Review all regulated activities affecting historic and prehistoric properties outside of the Town's historic overlay district.

### Local Regulatory Measures

Topsham has local regulatory tools in place to assist with the preservation of historic and archaeological resources. One zoning district has been established in Topsham, the Historic Overlay District. Topsham's Historic Overlay District promotes the "educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation and protection of buildings, sites, monuments, structures and areas of historic importance or interest...." The Historic Overlay District includes most of the older buildings in the heart of Topsham Village. In addition to regulatory measures, the town takes a flexible approach to allowing different ways to restore, rehab or renovate historic structures and provides assistance to property owners with the necessary paperwork.

- If a building, site, or structure is located in the Historic Overlay District, the town has historic preservation standards to review renovations and rehabilitation of structures within the district. To retain the historic character of the Village, major renovations or improvements to buildings within the Overlay District must apply to the Historic District Commission and receive a certificate of appropriateness.
- This certificate ensures that renovations or improvements are completed to The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings standards.
- In addition, Topsham's Building Code allows for flexibility when renovating and rehabilitating a historic structure.

Topsham participates in the Certified Local Government (CLG) program through the National Park Service. As one of ten municipalities with this distinction in the state of Maine, Topsham qualifies for technical support and matching grants to undertake a variety of projects, including studies, inventories, publications, and design guidelines. Topsham has taken advantage of its CLG status to inventory and preserve archaeological and historic resources in the community.

### Local Incentives for Historic Protection

The town encourages the protection of historic properties and resources and takes proactive steps by:

- Maintaining a webpage that has links to many different documents and other websites that describe the historic resources in town as well as how to preserve and maintain them properly.
- Providing an adopted set of recommended guidelines for the proper maintenance of historic structures.
- Maintaining modest Historic District Commission permit fees for residential and non-residential application review.
- Directing property owners to various economic incentives available to historic preservation projects at the state and federal levels.
- Directing property owners to federal government rehabilitation tax credits for qualified projects and properties.





# Housing

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of housing within Topsham.

This Chapter is organized into two sections:

1. Housing Stock
2. Housing Affordability

## HOUSING STOCK

In 2015, Topsham had an estimated 4,175 housing units and a population of approximately 8,751 residents, of which three quarters of the housing are single-family house type. With a population that is only projected to increase to 8,924 residents by 2024, if this projection holds true, the current housing stock is sufficient in number. However, the question may be does Topsham have the right type of housing to support its future population. Or, should Topsham be encouraging a certain type of housing to induce population growth?

The most recent housing data collected in 2016 shows that housing ownership in Topsham has become unaffordable in the past few years. The table below demonstrates the discrepancy between the median sale price of a house in 2016 and the median household income.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers households earning less than 80% of the area’s median income to be low-income households. In Topsham, the threshold for low-income households would then be households earning less than \$44,726. In 2016, 1,336 households in Topsham were unable to earn 80% of the median household income, about 35% of all households.

In terms of housing conditions, Topsham has a concentrated area of pre-civil war historic housing in addition to other historic homes located in the Heights and throughout town. Preservation and maintenance of historic homes is an ongoing and necessary activity to ensure integrity of older homes.

About 74% of housing units in Topsham are single-family units. 402 units are multi-family, making up most of the remaining quarter of housing units. This does not include

	Topsham	Bath	Brunswick	Durham	Freeport
Median Household Income	\$55,908	\$37,893	\$54,971	\$63,054	\$70,714
Affordable at Median Income	\$190,232	\$122,844	\$194,195	\$216,334	\$245,930
Income Needed for Median Price	\$64,657	\$46,138	\$60,153	\$70,608	\$90,574
Median House Sale Price	\$220,000	\$149,574	\$212,500	\$242,250	\$315,000
Households Unable to Afford Median Income	57.7%	56.8%	54.3%	58.7%	64.2%

group- or assisted-care facilities. Aside from single- and multi-family units there are also six mobile home parks in Topsham with a potential unit count of 195, though not all pad sites are currently occupied.

### **New Construction**

Since 2000, building permit data shows that approximately 900 new housing units have been built to date, representing almost 22% of Topsham's overall housing stock. Construction of new housing peaked in 2004 and 2005, followed by slowing and significant decline coinciding with the housing market crash in 2009. Since 2009, the number of new units built per year has been relatively stable at between 20 – 35 permits per year, with a spike of 47 permits in 2015, possibly coinciding with buyers returning to the ownership market. The majority of permits issued in the past 10 years have been for single family housing, with the exception of River Landing, constructed in 2015, creating 36 rental units and Oak Hill, constructed in 2017 and anticipated to create 68 condominium units.

## **HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

### **Diversity of Choice**

Over the past two decades, the Highlands and Highland Green have created more than 500 units of housing targeted to a specific demographic. The Highlands is a retirement community with 350 living units that are owned and rented. Highland Green is an active adult lifestyle community for residents ages 55 years and older. Highland Green currently has 190 custom built single family houses. Both retirement facilities maintain a relationship and continue to share resources. Highland Green has capacity in its master plan to create 369 additional units comprised of cottages, lodge/assisted living buildings, and multi-unit apartments.

Pleasant Woods is an eight-unit development owned and operated by the Topsham Housing Authority, built for working families on a previously vacant 2.7-acre parcel of land. The housing development, which includes a barn-like section, was built with design considerations aimed at blending the housing with the surrounding character of the neighborhood, a consideration that helps destigmatize low- and moderate-income residents. The eight units have been filled and Pleasant Woods now has a waiting list of at least a dozen applicants. Two of Pleasant Wood's eight units are subsidized and will house previously homeless families.

Oak Hill is a new community of condominiums, located at the end of Granite Hill Drive, which was constructed beginning in 2017 and has sold a majority of its anticipated 68 condominium units. The housing is connected and ranges between one and a half to two story condominiums in colonial, saltbox, and cape styles. Currently, Topsham has three low income housing apartment complexes limited to seniors and comprising 110 units in total. Most of the affordable housing options in Topsham are income-based. According to United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data, enlisting on a waiting list for affordable housing in Topsham lasts for an average of 43 months.

The three affordable apartment complexes in Topsham include:

- Barrons Hill Apartments I

A senior apartment complex housing tenants who are 62 years of age and older, and/or disabled. Barrons Hill consists of 32 units, all of which are assisted through Section 8 programs.

- Westrum House

A senior apartment complex offering 27 units of affordable housing to tenants 62 years of age and older. Westrum House property was built using funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD's) Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program. Because of this, residency is restricted to tenants who earn 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or less. As a rental assistance program, Westrum House sets tenant contribution to 30% of their income.

- Whispering Pines

An affordable housing complex comprised of 50 units. Whispering Pines has received funding in part through the Section 515 Rural Rental Housing (Section 515) program. Whispering Pines offers eligibility to Very low, low, and moderate income families, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities. Persons or families living in substandard housing have priority for tenancy.

### **Affordability Classification**

Affordable housing for homeowners is defined by Maine's Growth Management Act as housing in which the mortgage payment, taxes, insurance, condominium fees, and utilities do not exceed 33% of the homeowner's gross income. For renters, the standard is 30% of gross income for rent and utilities. Provision of affordable housing provides benefits to a community, aside from the fundamental need to support livable conditions for disadvantaged populations. Population diversity can only stand to benefit the vibrancy and integration of a town.

### **Local Housing Assistance**

The town of Topsham encourages the development of affordable housing through density bonuses embedded in its zoning ordinance. The performance standard for affordable housing developments was added to Topsham's zoning in 2006 and allows for a bonus density for subdivisions that provide affordable units. In order to qualify for a density bonus, the affordable units to be provided must meet specific requirements outlined in the affordable housing performance standard. The performance standard for elderly housing includes a provision allowing density bonuses to elderly housing projects that maintain income-based affordability levels.

The Topsham Housing Authority (THA) provides rental assistance to needy families in the community. It is directed by a board of commissioners that is appointed by the Select Board. The THA does not have any staff. Rather, it contracts with the Brunswick Housing Authority (BHA) to provide property management and development services.

The Topsham Housing Authority currently owns and

manages 15 units of affordable housing in Topsham. The 15 units were financed with various grants and loans and allows THA to set rents below the fair market rate. These units range in size from two-bedroom to three-bedrooms and allow the THA to serve the elderly and/or disabled and working families. Seven of the units were acquisition or rehab and the other eight are new construction. The waiting list for THA units currently totals approximately 80 households.

In addition, the Topsham Housing Authority works with the Brunswick Housing Authority in administering a federal Housing Choice Voucher program in the area, which includes approximately 50 families in Topsham.

There is more demand for affordable housing in the area than the Brunswick Housing Authority has vouchers to grant. According to the BHA, there is a waiting list of approximately 380 people at any given time on the BHA voucher waiting list.

### **Substandard Housing**

Census defined "Substandard Housing" represents, 46 units lacking complete kitchen facilities, 7 units lacking complete plumbing facilities, and 53 units having no telephone service available to them.

Relative to Topsham's total count of 3,778 occupied housing units in 2015, the numbers of substandard housing units are low. This data is self-reported data.



# Marine Resources

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of marine resources within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into two sections:

1. Water Bodies
2. Access

## WATER BODIES

Topsham, though primarily inland, features several miles of shoreline along Merrymeeting Bay and is home to tidal areas along the Muddy River, the Cathance River, and the Androscoggin River. For some time, Topsham's shoreline has been used for recreational, and no longer for commercial, purposes. Dedicated hunters across the nation are familiar with the waterfowl hunting in the area, and sturgeon, herring, smelt, salmon, alewives, shad, and sea bass attract sports fishermen throughout the year. Hikers, sightseers, and recreational boaters enjoy the impressive views and undeveloped shorelines of the Bay.

### Merrymeeting Bay

Merrymeeting Bay is the largest freshwater tidal bay on the eastern seaboard north of Chesapeake Bay, and the largest staging ground for migratory waterfowl in the northeast. It is formed by the confluence of six rivers, including Maine's second largest (the Kennebec) and third largest (the Androscoggin). These two rivers alone drain a combined 9,320 square miles – an area that is approximately the size of Vermont. Other minor rivers flowing into the bay include the Cathance, Eastern, Muddy, and Abagadasset.

Europeans first visited Merrymeeting Bay in the early 1600s. Since then, the Bay has been used for various industries including fishing, shipbuilding, ice cutting, transporting lumber, and recreation. Commercial activity on the Bay has largely disappeared. An eel fishery is still active in the Bay, but very little information has been collected on this activity.

Merrymeeting Bay is a precious and productive ecosystem that has been left to naturally restore itself following the negative effects of damming and pollution in the industrial era. It is the only estuary providing spawning and nursery habitat for all diadromous fish species in the Gulf of Maine, and it is home to a number of rare and endangered plant, and animal species including Parker's pipewort, stiff arrowhead, shortnosed sturgeon, Atlantic salmon and a recovering bald eagle population; the second largest in Maine. Ironically, the polluted waters of the Bay discouraged development, which led to the natural restoration of its waters and surrounding land area. In addition, organizations and researchers that recognize the significance of the Bay have taken impressive efforts to further its preservation, protection and improvement. One such organization, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB), formed in 1975 to organize a holistic effort to biologically and culturally protect the Bay by combining tools of research, education, advocacy, and land conservation. Currently, FOMB is composed of approximately 375 members, one staff person, and 125 volunteers contributing over 3,000 hours of service annually.

### Lower Androscoggin River

The Androscoggin River flows between Topsham and Brunswick to Merrymeeting Bay, where it meets the Kennebec River. The Androscoggin basin totals 3,450 square miles (80% of which is in Maine). The river winds 200 miles inland to its headwaters in Umbagog Lake. The lowlands bounding the river below Topsham Village

are routinely flooded during spring runoff, resulting in a shoreline that is mostly undeveloped outside of the Pleasant Point area.

## ACCESS

### **Harbor Areas, Moorings, Water-Dependent Uses**

Topsham has no formal harbor or mooring areas although boats do moor in the river between the Topsham and Brunswick shores. Much of the Topsham shoreline is undeveloped, although a portion (particularly in the Pleasant Point area) has dense residential development. The primary water-dependent development is a seasonal smelt fishing camp which provides access for ice-fishing during the winter and early spring on the Androscoggin River.

All-tide boat access to the Androscoggin and Merrymeeting Bay is available regionally. Brunswick has two access points, Bowdoinham has two access points, and Bath has one access point. Developing access to Merrymeeting Bay from Topsham's shoreline would at best be difficult to provide. The Bay's shallow depths and large tide range (5 feet) would require that an access point reach out into the Bay a considerable distance.

Through the town's planning efforts, including the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, the public was able to communicate a desire for more public gathering spaces, parks, and waterfront access. To acknowledge this priority, the town partnered with Wright-Pierce to conduct a Lower Village Waterfront Access Study in 2011. The study engaged the community and key public stakeholders to identify the constraints and opportunities to future decision making regarding waterfront access design efforts. Through the community input process, the plan identified the need for hand carry boat access to the river, while providing some public gathering space or area for a park. The plan identified the parcel that the Town owns along Green Street as most desirable for park development. However, utilization of the Green Street parcel required acquisition of additional lands or an easement from one or more of the abutting landowners who control waterfront access in the area.





# Natural Resources

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of natural resources within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into five sections:

1. Surface Waters
2. Groundwater
3. Soils
4. High Value Plant and Animal Habitat
5. Implications

Topsham is fortunate to host a variety of topographies that provide the Town with an abundance of natural resources. Long ravines and steep hills are prominent west of the Meadow Cross Road. The center of town is characterized by a large lowland area around Bradley Pond and the Bisson Farm. Long ridges are punctuated by the Cathance, Muddy, and Androscoggin Rivers in eastern Topsham.

The town recognizes that natural resources, though widespread, are finite. The pattern and pace of development could alter the abundance of resources by damaging habitat corridors and blocks, or by introducing exotic and invasive species. The cumulative impact of small changes, both local and regional, can add up to a significant impact. There are several local regulatory measures (described later) being used to ensure the protection of Topsham's critical and important natural resources.

## SURFACE WATERS

Tumbling creeks, wide rivers, waterfalls, and tidal marshes generally characterize the diversity of Topsham's water resources. Each water resource fills a different role in the town's natural environment.

### Little River

The Little River forms the town's boundary with Lisbon and is easily visible from Route 196 as it tumbles towards the Androscoggin River. The river's watershed includes rural areas of Topsham, Lisbon, and Bowdoin. The Little River watershed has approximately 17,500 acres, of which

82% is forest, 8% is grassland, 5% is urban and 2% cropland. The remaining watershed (3%) is made up of farmsteads, industrial/ mining sites, roads/infrastructure and open water. According to Mike Brown, Department of Marine Resources, numerous springs exist throughout the watershed which helps provide low temperature base flows in the Little River, enabling a highly valued coldwater fishery.

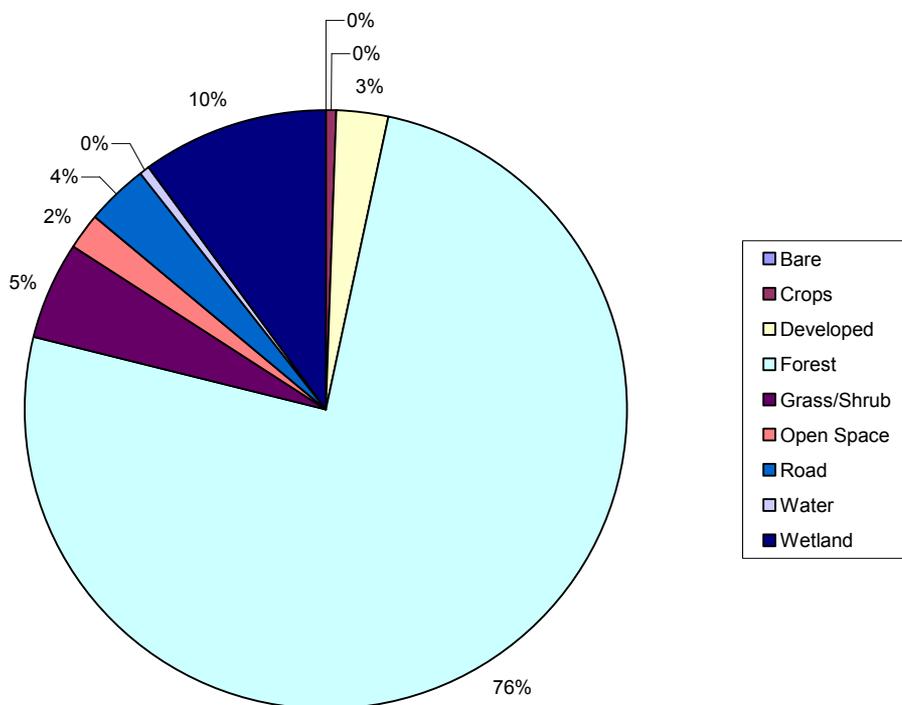
The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) considers the water in the Little River 'unimpaired,' which means the river can support wildlife habitat in its natural state.

### Muddy River

This appropriately named river, part of the Merrymeeting Bay ecosystem, drains an approximately 3.4 square mile area of northeast Topsham. The Muddy River watershed lies wholly within the Topsham town boundaries. This small watershed is an integral part of the Merrymeeting Bay ecosystem, and has been cited as a high priority area in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The Muddy River landcover analysis reveals an extensive riverine and emergent wetlands along the river, with some upland forest. The breakdown of landcover types is found below.

Muddy River Watershed Land Cover



Of particular note and importance:

- Nearly the entire watershed is identified as high value tidal wading and waterfowl habitat
- The watershed is enveloped by a statewide significant focus area
- Locally, the watershed is identified as a high priority conservation area

Extensive conservation efforts by the Nature Conservancy and Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIF&W) have occurred along the Muddy River.

**Androscoggin River**

Of all of the rivers in Topsham, the Androscoggin River is what conjures images of the Town of Topsham, both in a historical sense, and as a “backbone” for the community’s identity today. The banks of the Androscoggin River stretch over 15 miles in Topsham. As the river rolls through, it passes over two substantial dams, and quickly becomes “delta” like in its tidal portion where it eventually blends into Merymeeting Bay. The Androscoggin’s headwaters are in New Hampshire, and it has historically been heavily used for transportation and manufacturing; there are no fewer than 10 major dams on the Androscoggin in Maine as it flows through communities like Rumford, Livermore, Lewiston, Lisbon, and Topsham.

MDEP considers the Androscoggin a class C river – the lowest water quality classification. This low classification is largely the result of the river’s industrial past. Technological advances and water pollution regulations have improved the water quality significantly since the Clean Water Act of the (CWA) of the early 1970s. The intense use that industry, agriculture, and communities place on this water body continue to have impacts on water quality.

The Androscoggin forms Topsham’s southern border with Brunswick. Its watershed roughly parallels the river’s course and includes many of Topsham’s more developed areas.

Above the village, steep banks and the Brunswick – Lewiston railroad have historically limited development pressure along the immediate shoreline. Below the village, spring flooding cycles and poor soils for development have discouraged development along the riverbank.

Development along some of the Androscoggin’s tributaries could threaten the ecology of those smaller watersheds. Impervious surfaces (from buildings, roads, and large parking lots) in the Topsham Fair Mall area could decrease base flow in the river by reducing the amount of rain and snow melt that penetrates the soil. Nonpoint source pollutants (low-level pollution from surface runoff) could impair water quality and wildlife in the smaller rivers. Nonpoint source (NPS) pollution is a special concern in the Muddy River watershed, which is the largest tributary of the Androscoggin in Topsham.

The Topsham Fair Mall Stream is a small stream in a heavily developed area of Topsham. The 1.4 mile long stream flows through an area of high density commercial development and a section of Route 295, with small areas of residential development at the upper and lower edges of the watershed. The headwaters originate in the northeastern border of the watershed near Route 196 (Lewiston Road), and the stream flows southwest to its confluence with the Androscoggin River. Despite the impairments associated with development, data indicate that the stream is well oxygenated and groundwater recharge keeps temperatures low enough to make the stream a potentially valuable refuge for coldwater fish from the Androscoggin River. In addition, the stream’s

location in a high traffic area suggests that the stream offers potential recreational enjoyment for a large number of residents, employees, and other visitors. In 2014 the Town conducted a watershed based plan that is currently being funded and implemented with assistance from the Maine DEP. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection has identified the Topsham Fair Mall Stream as an “urban-impaired watershed”. A development in an “urban-impaired watershed” must obtain a state stormwater permit and is required to take action to improve the water quality of the stream. The state requirements encourage the development of local watershed management plans for urban-impaired watersheds.

The industrial past of the Androscoggin River is carved into Topsham’s history, and has left its mark on the river’s ecological integrity. Often cited as one of Maine’s most degraded rivers, the Androscoggin is beginning a slow “healing” process. As for current industrial uses, there exists the Pejepscot Hydro station and Grimmell Industries at the site of the old Pejepscot Village. The Bowdoin Mill is a renovated relic that sits on the bank of the river and is Topsham’s most recognized landmark. It is no longer an industrial site; instead it is the epicenter for business activity in Topsham’s Lower Village.

Bowdoin College Professor John Lichter has been studying the effects of land use on the Androscoggin River and the Merrymeeting Bay ecosystem for years. The publication, “The Ecological Collapse and Partial Recovery of a Freshwater Tidal Ecosystem,” authored by Lichter, describes the historical abundance of anadromous fish, and migratory waterfowl species falling victim to the impaired habitat due to industrial use and municipal wastes that degraded this ecosystem to a “collapsed” state. It goes on to report, “...the legacies of past human disturbance continue to impact this important ecosystem. Merrymeeting Bay is permanently shallower, its anadromous fish runs are vestiges of their former abundances, toxic substances remain in its biota and sediments, and it continues to receive excess nutrients from industrial and municipal sources. These legacies are varied and profound. Whereas some physical, chemical, and biological properties recovered rapidly with cessation of the disturbance, others will require considerable more time or may never fully recover.”<sup>1</sup>

Conserved lands along the Androscoggin include efforts between the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIF&W) as well as the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust (BTLT). The Town maintains two properties along the tidal portion of the river, where there are the Town Library and Parks & Recreation Fields. There are currently no officially protected shorefront lands above the Brunswick Hydro Dam. The only public access to the Androscoggin in Topsham is along the Lisbon Falls and Topsham boundary, where a State maintained boat launch exists. Other access sites are all in Brunswick.

1 Ecological Collapse and Partial Recovery of a Freshwater Tidal Ecosystem, The Northeastern Naturalist, 2006 by Lichter, John, Caron, Heather, Pasakarnis, Timothy S, Rodgers, Sarah L, Et al.

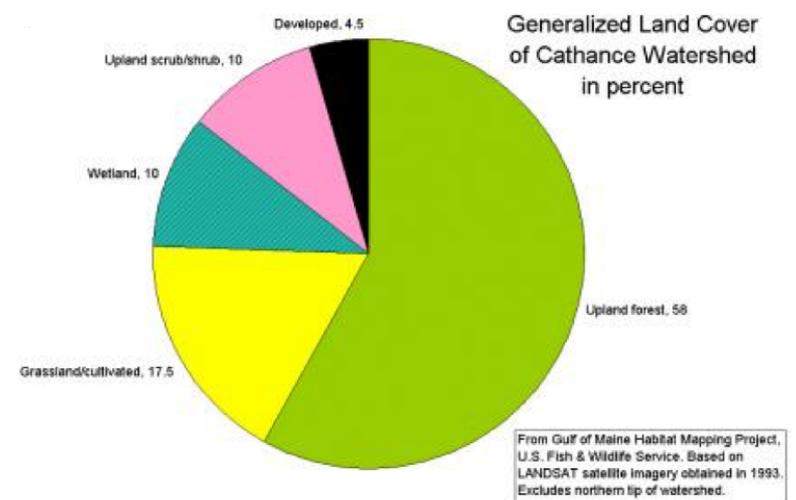
The tidal portion of the Androscoggin offers the most extensive fisheries in Topsham. This provides significant recreational and economic opportunities. Coastal fisheries in the Androscoggin include American eels, sea-run brook trout, shad, blue back herring, alewives, northern pike, and striped bass. Atlantic salmon have been identified entering the fish ladder at the Brunswick Hydro Dam Fish Ladder in the past, but in very small numbers. The Maine Department of Marine Resources operates a salmon trap on the Androscoggin River. As of November 2017, the count of returning salmon was zero<sup>2</sup>. Topsham does not have historic spawning areas for salmon, as the cold-water streams where spawning occurs are found in the headwater areas of the Androscoggin. That being said, land use decisions in Topsham have effects of the fisheries population of these anadromous fish, as cold-water Topsham tributaries serve as refuges during upstream migration.

### Cathance River

The Cathance River flows from Bradley Pond for 10 miles and into Merrymeeting Bay. The Cathance and Androscoggin watersheds contain most of Topsham. The upper third of the Cathance meanders through lowlands from Bradley Pond to Route 201 and is bounded by agricultural lands. The middle third has steep banks and is relatively inaccessible between Route 201 and the falls at Cathance Road. The lower third is tidal to Merrymeeting Bay and has a steep and relatively inaccessible shoreline.

The MDEP considers this an ‘unimpaired’ water body, although nonpoint source pollutants from residences and agricultural practices threaten the Cathance River’s water quality.

The Topsham Conservation Commission considers the Cathance River Corridor one of the Town’s highest priority conservation areas. Not only is conservation of the area’s ecological integrity a high priority, but the traditional recreational uses that occur along the river (hunting, fishing, paddling, swimming, hiking, etc.) are viewed as contributing to the quality of life. The Conservation Commission has worked with regional partners to assist in conserving high value conservation areas along the river.



2 Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission Website: <http://www.maine.gov/dmr/science-research/searun/programs/trapcounts.html>

## Bradley Pond



Bradley Pond, a 34-acre impoundment of the Cathance River located near its headwaters, does not have the assimilative capacity that the river has and is potentially sensitive to phosphorous loading – a nonpoint source pollutant associated with agriculture and residential development. The pond currently has a water quality classification of GPA, which means it is, “suitable for the designated uses of drinking water after disinfection, recreation in and on the water, fishing, agriculture, industrial process and cooling water supply, hydroelectric power generation, navigation and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life” (Maine State Statutes, Title 38, §465). There is limited potential for activities that would have a detrimental impact on the water quality of the pond since the pond is entirely surrounded by wetlands and conservation land.

Despite the tremendous amount of surface water that makes Topsham a virtual island, steep banks and tidal marshes occupy much of the town’s shoreline, limiting public accessibility. Inaccessibility has helped maintain the quality of the surface waters from the direct impacts of development, but indirect impacts to the surface waters could impair the water quality in the town’s surface waters.

### Zoning Protections

Streams, both perennial and intermittent, are another important resource. Topsham’s shoreland zoning was expanded in 2008 to include Maine’s Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA) definition of a stream. This expansion allows for a broader inclusion of water bodies, such as first order streams, and incorporates associated wetlands to the definition of a stream. While this was being undertaken, the Town had aerial images taken to capture its hydrological features. This produced more precise data than had been previously available.

Topsham treats shoreland zoning as a series of overlay districts that apply protections in addition to the underlying zoning requirements. The overlay districts include the following:

- Stream Protection
- Resource Protection
- Limited Residential
- Limited Commercial
- General Development

## Wetlands

Wetlands are an integral part of the hydrologic network that includes lakes, ponds, streams, brooks and estuaries. The ecological and economic benefits of wetlands can be grouped into three categories:

- Biological benefits include fish, shellfish and wildlife habitat (feeding, breeding, nesting, and cover) and travel corridors.
- Water quality benefits include groundwater recharge and discharge, stream flow maintenance, flood prevention, water quality maintenance, and shoreline protection from erosion.
- Human benefits include recreational uses such as hunting birding, fishing, boating, and hiking. Wetlands also provide important aesthetic and open space values to communities.

In Topsham, more than one-third of the town is covered by hydric soils – an important determinant for the presence of wetlands.

Topsham has two large concentrations of wetlands. The first is in the Muddy River/Princes Point area. There are a significant number of multi-function wetlands in this area, mostly associated with the extensive tidal marshes in the Muddy and Androscoggin Rivers. There are also small wetlands and vernal pools located throughout the Town, including beside the Mt. Ararat High School.

The second area is along the Cathance River corridor which includes a large wetland complex extending from the Route 201 corridor to Meadow Cross Road and a concentration of wetlands along the Lower Cathance.

Wetlands are some of the most important and vulnerable habitats in Topsham. Land use activities such as draining, clearing, filling, and waste disposal can significantly alter or destroy the functional ability of wetlands. Activities in the uplands surrounding wetlands can be equally as destructive to wetlands and can degrade them to the point where they are no longer able to function.

Wetlands are currently protected by the town’s Shoreland Zoning Overlay District. This district provides a greater level of protection within 250 feet of freshwater wetlands (greater than 10 acres) or marine wetlands.

### Merrymeeting Bay

Merrymeeting Bay is the largest freshwater tidal ecosystem north of Chesapeake Bay. The bay is formed by the confluence of six rivers (three of which are found in Topsham). Merrymeeting Bay, its tributaries, and its associated rivers are among the most important waterfowl staging areas along the Atlantic Flyway, and also provide vital spawning and nursery habitat for anadromous fish. This prime habitat area, located within the Kennebec Estuary which is defined by Beginning with Habitat (BwH) as a “Focus Area of Statewide Ecological Significance”, offers diverse plant and animal life:

- The Bay is an important feeding and resting area for both spring and fall migrating waterfowl. Black Ducks, Mallards, Green-Winged Teal, Blue-Winged Teal, Canada Geese and Mergansers occur in the

Bay in very large numbers. Goldeneyes, Buffleheads, Scaup and other waterfowl are also found in smaller numbers.

- Resident Great Blue Herons and other wading birds frequently feed in the area and the Great Black-Backed Gulls, Herring Gulls, Double-Crested Cormorants and other seabirds have been found in the Bay throughout the years.
- A diverse continuum of vegetation zones, including arrowhead/pickerel weed, wild rice beds, eel grass, alder swamps, and bordering red maple wetlands can be found around the Bay.
- Shad, alewives and striped bass spawn are reared in the Bay.
- Many mammals and reptiles utilize the Bay as a travel corridor.

Increases in the types and intensities of land use activities can negatively impact coastal wildlife by direct or indirect changes in water quantity and habitat availability.

## GROUNDWATER

Groundwater is water below the water table that saturates soil and crevices in bedrock. Groundwater is recharged by precipitation, which percolates into the ground and flows at very slow rates downhill. Rural residences rely on wells that pump groundwater to the surface to be used for potable water. Areas of the town served by the public water system rely on groundwater pumped through a series of much larger wells located in Topsham and Brunswick.

When this groundwater can be pumped to the surface fast enough to be economically useful, the saturated soil or bedrock is called an aquifer. An economically viable aquifer must be able to hold a large volume of water, which must be able to flow easily.

Topsham has bedrock aquifers and sand and gravel aquifers, both common to the state of Maine. Bedrock aquifers store water in cracks and fractures in the bedrock. Most aquifers are relatively small (about 10 gallons per minute), but large enough to supply individual households in rural Topsham. Because the bedrock fractures tend to be interconnected, bedrock aquifers are particularly susceptible to contamination. Sand and gravel aquifers store water in the pores between the grains of sand and gravel. Such aquifers can hold large volumes of water and can transport this water quickly, making them the most valuable groundwater aquifers with the most abundant yields.

In Topsham, most high-yielding sand and gravel aquifers are found in the Androscoggin River watershed and the Adams-Hinckley-Ninigret soil association.

Because much of the groundwater is recharged by rain and snowmelt, aquifers can be compromised in two significant ways:

1. Pollution that enters the ground can seriously impair an aquifer. Once the pollutants are in groundwater, they are very difficult to remove. For this reason

pollution sources around significant aquifers must be closely monitored. Some residents are supplied by well water. Property owners are responsible for non-mandated testing for contaminants (including arsenic and bacteria) which may be found in area wells. Even though these contaminants may be natural, they are a problem for potable water in the Town.

2. Depletion of the amount of groundwater available when the amount of recharge into an aquifer is reduced by creating too much impervious surface (buildings, roads, parking lots) or diverted.

The town enacted an Aquifer Protection Overlay District in the 1990s to ensure the preservation of pure, clean supplies of groundwater from land uses and activities which might otherwise degrade or destroy the use of aquifers for public and private drinking water supplies.

## SOILS

The health of Topsham's soils is critical to the functioning of wetlands and to the health of other important ecological areas and the habitats they host. The town is comprised of four major soil associations

- The Hollis-Sutton-Buxton association is shallow to deep, typically featuring moderately to well drained soils at the top of low hills and ridges. This association covers the tops of Mt. Ararat, Tate Hill, and other long ridges. These soils support naturally wooded areas in Topsham. Septic systems have serious limitations in these soils, and supplying drinking water can be a problem .
- The Scantic-Leicester-Scarboro association is deep soil that is poorly drained. These soils are generally wet, not well suited for development, and important places for diverse wetland habitats. Farming occurs on these soils, but it is generally for hay production or grazing. These soils line the lowlands in the Cathance River watershed and the Muddy River watershed.
- The Buxton-Hartland-Belgrade association is deep, moderately to well drained soil. These soils tend to be on steeper slopes, although flat areas are relatively common. This association is located above the Muddy and lower Cathance River estuaries, along the lower Androscoggin shore, and in west Topsham near the Little River.
- The Adams-Hinckley-Ninigret association is deep and well-drained soil. The topography of these soils varies widely from steep slopes to gentle fields. Much of Topsham's developed land is on this soil – the Village, Topsham Fair Mall, Routes 201 and 196, and Foreside Road.

Outside of the Brunswick Sewer District area, septic systems are required to support new development. Ongoing advances in wastewater treatment technologies will support development in areas traditionally lacking good soils.

### Large Undeveloped Blocks of Land

Large undeveloped blocks of land provide contiguous habitat areas for animals with large home ranges, such as bear, fisher, and moose. Undeveloped blocks of land

greater than 2,500 acres can host a full complement of species in a pristine Maine environment, whereas small blocks of land (less than 250 acres) tend to support species more typical of a suburban environment.

Topsham has several large undeveloped blocks of land, which are spread out across the northern half of the community into Bowdoin and Bowdoinham. The undeveloped blocks of land in Topsham are divided by larger transportation corridors such as I-95, Route 201, and Route 24, causing habitat fragmentation. The largest block, which encompasses more than 7,000 acres, is located between the Meadow Cross, Route 196, Lisbon Falls, and Route 125. Other large blocks are located around the Bradley Pond, the Upper and Lower Cathance River, and the Muddy River.

As development occurs in rural Topsham, large blocks of undeveloped land are going to be pressured. Future development can minimize fragmentation if it is designed to accommodate the wildlife corridors found amongst blocks of historically contiguous land.

### HIGH VALUE PLANT AND ANIMAL HABITAT

The availability of high value plant and animal habitat is essential to maintaining an abundant and diverse population for both ecological and recreational purposes. Topsham has several areas that offer quality habitat for a variety of species.

Many of the most important plant and animal areas in Topsham are aquatic habitats and the areas immediately adjacent to aquatic and wetland areas. Aquatic and wetland areas are where most of the town's threatened species and species of special concern are located. Aquatic and wetland areas are sensitive to change and vulnerable to degradation. The development pattern in neighboring communities 'upstream' from Topsham can have significant impacts on the water quality in Topsham.

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife has identified significant and essential habitats, endangered and threatened species, and species of special concern. For a map of habitats and ecosystems found in Topsham see the "Environmental Systems" map.

Invasive species are becoming more prevalent in the region and in Topsham. Topsham has a wide variety of known rare species and natural communities of state-wide significance, yet large areas of Topsham remain to be surveyed. Topsham has conducted two forest management plans and timber harvesting on town property that have identified and began invasive species management on these properties. A larger town-wide effort of invasive species management is beginning through efforts of the Topsham Conservation Commission.

Vernal pools are small spring pools created by winter runoff and spring rains. Vernal pools are important habitat for wood frogs, salamanders, fairy shrimp and other threatened and endangered species. By summer, pools dry out completely. (NEED TO ADD SAMP

### INFORMATION)

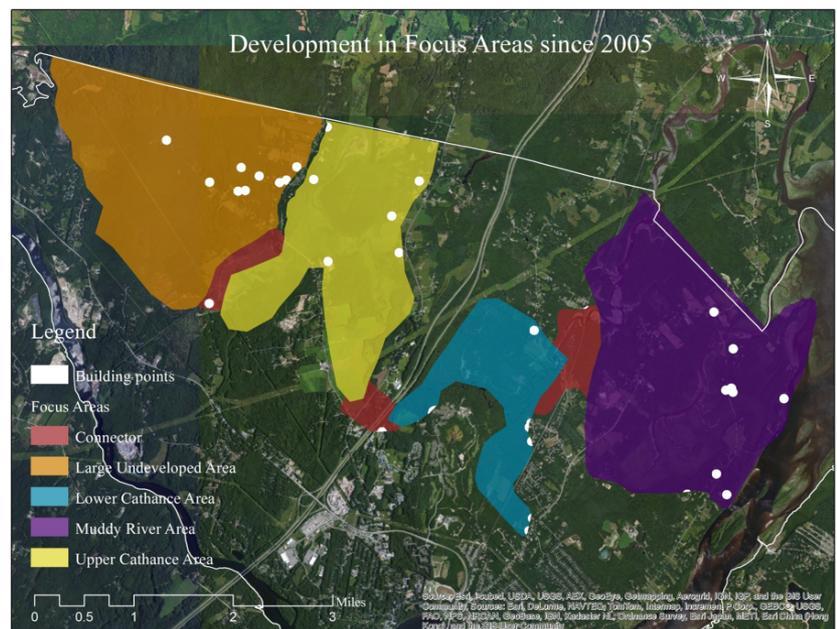
### IMPLICATIONS

#### Natural Areas Plan

Following the recommendations of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, the town formed a Natural Areas Planning Committee (NAPC). By 2010, the NAPC and the town had compiled and adopted a Natural Areas Plan inventorying important natural resources, analyzing their conditions and functions, and summarizing gathered community input on the value of natural resources and why they should be protected. Furthermore, the Natural Areas Plan puts together goals, recommendations, and strategies to further conservation. Through the creation of the Natural Areas Plan arose four local focus areas where high value conservation areas are to be prioritized:

1. Ward Road area
2. Bradley Pond/Western Cathance River Corridor
3. Eastern Cathance River Corridor
4. Muddy River area

The four focus areas were determined by combining an evaluation of the areas achieving natural resource and open space functions with the community's relative valuation of those functions. The plan also found that a majority of the development which was occurring at the time was in or very close to the four focus areas. Interestingly, the plan also pointed out that land which was likely to be available for development was also located in these focus areas. Mapping efforts conducted by the town in 2017 confirm that development continues to occur largely in the focus areas identified by the Natural Areas Plan in 2010. This combined map is shown below.



The Natural Areas Plan also created eight guiding principles:

1. Support long-term development opportunities consistent with the conservation of the Town's high value natural resources.
2. Support forestry and agriculture as a way to conserve rural land for future generations.

3. Work collaboratively with landowners, conservation groups, state and federal agencies, businesses, and other stakeholder groups to conserve natural resources.
4. Concentrate conservation efforts within the Focus Areas identified in the Natural Areas Plan.
5. Focus conservation efforts on larger blocks of ecologically viable rural land or connecting parcels.
6. Use the Geographic Information System (GIS) model described in this report to help set development and conservation priorities.
7. Continue to use the best scientific information available to identify natural resources of highest value within the Focus Areas.
8. Adjust the boundaries of Focus Areas as necessary as new information becomes available.

Implementation of the Natural Areas Plan has provided a new subdivision review process for the town, while adding in options for rural landowners in regards to subdividing their land. The plan ushered in new rules for a Development Transfer Overlay (DTO) district as well. Since this plan was implemented, the Town has seen little subdivision of rural land. An example where the Town approved a 42-lot "open space" subdivision resulted in a higher density neighborhood where the developer placed permanent protections on stream and wetland corridors associated with the urban impaired stream of the Topsham Fair Mall. The town continues to use GIS mapping to better understand the natural resource conditions within the town.

### Regional Cooperation

In striving to secure the longevity of Topsham's natural resources it is essential to consider the town's surrounding region and resources as well. Environmental stewardship cannot be delineated by municipal boundaries, and efforts towards conservation and preservation should be coordinated within the region. Rare areas and species in neighboring communities are dependent of the quality of Topsham's wildlife, and vice versa.

The Town continually collaborates with the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust (BTLT), Bowdoin College, Kennebec Estuary Land Trust (KELT), Cathance River Education Alliance (CREA), Merrymeeting Trail, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB), and University of Maine Orono (UMO) on natural resource planning activities:

- Watershed management
- Fish barrier surveys
- Climate change
- Sea level rise
- Conservation prioritization

### Measures to Protect Resources

Within Topsham there have been significant efforts to enforce state-mandated minimum protections and further protections of resources through zoning, tax incentives and local action. In June of 2007, Topsham adopted an ordinance that created the Topsham Conservation

Commission. The commission consists of five residents who are appointed by the Selectmen. Members are charged with acquiring, managing and improving land and easements, and educating the public in pursuit of the conservation goals of the town. Those goals have been laid out in the Natural Areas Plan adopted in 2010. The commission's projects include maintaining an inventory of town owned property, advising the Select Board on the disposition of property, advising the Planning Board on ordinance language that furthers the NAP goals, reviewing open space set asides proposed in new development, monitoring and maintaining existing easements, and coordinating with other conservation organizations on activities of mutual interest.

In 2012, open space subdivision performance standards were added to the town code to allow for development committed to conserving a minimum of 30% of the total acreage of the project. To qualify for this subdivision the developer must have an agreement with a 3rd party conservation organization (land trust) prior to any preliminary plan approval. The town has a conservation fund developed from in lieu fees of subdivisions that is spent on conservation.

In 2016, the town of Topsham adopted a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) in conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to create a "designated development area" where federal and state vernal pool regulations undergo a separate permitting requirement, and developers may choose a mitigation impact fee to avoid vernal pool permitting within this designated area. Topsham helped to create and was one of the first towns to participate in using this voluntary mitigation tool.

As part of its SAMP, the town enacted a Vernal Pools Overlay District in 2016 to allow for development in areas that are state or federally regulated due to their inclusion of vernal pool locations. The overlay district protects vernal pools while still allowing for flexible development. The ordinance benefits the environment and Topsham's growth, as it clarifies development potential of a property where vernal pools are located. Those wishing to build in proximity to vernal pools can comply with the applicable state and federal wetland regulations and associated requirements for the protection of vernal pools or choose to either pay a mitigation fee or undertake permittee-responsible mitigation activities in accordance with the provisions listed in the ordinance. All fees collected through this process are used only to fund vernal pool conservation projects and to permanently protect vernal pools in the rural area of Topsham.

Topsham adopted a Shoreland Zoning Ordinance in 2008, which complies with state law requiring the protection of shoreland areas through the regulation of the type of activity that is allowed in certain areas. Shoreland areas include areas within 250 feet of the normal high-water line of any great pond, river or saltwater body, areas within 250 feet of the upland edge of a coastal wetland, areas within 250 feet of the upland edge of a freshwater wetland except in certain situations, and areas within 75

feet of the high-water line of a stream. The areas to which this ordinance are applicable include the following zoning districts:

- Resource Protection
- Limited Residential
- Limited Commercial
- General Development
- Stream Protection

Topsham's Resource Protection District includes floodplains as designated by maps produced by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA), or the flood of record, or in the absence of these, by soil types identified as recent floodplain soils.

Finally, incentives such as Maine's Open Space Tax Law are put in place by the state to encourage voluntary protection of important natural areas. The Open Space Tax Law offers landowners a tax reduction of up to 95% in exchange for protection of the town's important scenic areas. The tract must be preserved or restricted in use to provide a public benefit, such as public recreation, scenic resources, game management and wildlife habitat. The town assessor only considers land which has a deeded or easement restriction. Many landowners in Topsham qualify for this reduction, which has no minimum acreage requirement. As of 2016, there are five parcels totaling 366 acres taking advantage of the Open Space Tax Law, making it the least utilized current use tax program in Topsham.





# Population

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of the population and demographics within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into four sections:

1. Population Projections
2. Aging Trends
3. Household Composition
4. Educational Attainment

The State of Maine is facing social and economic challenges pertaining to its loss of population, overall aging trends, and demographic homogeneity. Currently the oldest state in the United States, Maine needs to address its prospects for encouraging and then sustaining a diverse and well-connected population. While Topsham's demographics have been following along a similar trajectory to the State, the Maine Office of Policy and Management projects Sagadahoc County to increase. Topsham's share of this increase is 2%, or 204 residents, by 2024. The development industry has been building retirement-aged housing in Topsham, yet socially, Topsham residents expressed feeling disconnected and separated from one another by social delineations resulting from neighborhoods formed specifically around age or geographic location.

From 2000 to 2010, Topsham's population decreased from 9,100 residents to 8,784, a loss of 316 residents or approximately 3%. A negative population trend is pivotal for Topsham, which has experienced stable growth in prior decades (1970-1990). According to a census data estimate of 8,751 residents in 2015, population loss in Topsham continues.

Potential indicators for future population trends can come from breaking down population growth by age. The age group which has experienced the largest growth in Topsham has been with residents ages 20-24 years old. The number of residents ages 20-24 has increased from 345 residents in 2010 to 660 residents in 2014, a growth of 315 residents or approximately 91%. The age group

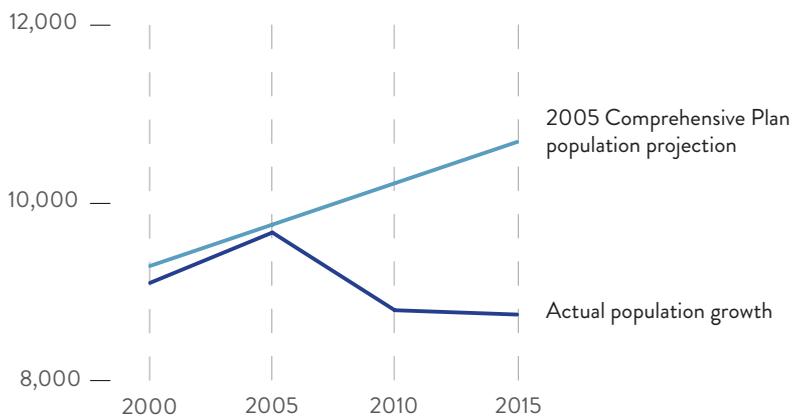
with the second largest growth in Topsham has been with residents ages 75-84 years old. From 2010 to 2014 the population of 75-84 year olds grew from 540 residents to 734 residents, a growth of 194 residents or an increase of approximately 36%.

## POPULATION PROJECTIONS, 2014-2024

In 2016, Maine's Office of Policy and Management (OPM) released its population projections for the state based on 2014 U.S. Census population estimates. The OPM generates its population projections first on a county-wide scale using the cohort-component method which utilizes births, deaths, and migration data. The city and town projections are then calculated by estimating a constant rate of growth for each town's share of the county population. Most counties in Maine are currently expected to decline in growth over the next two decades. Sagadahoc County is one of only four counties in the state that are expected to experience an increase in population between 2014 and 2034. The projections for Topsham indicate that its population will increase slightly from an estimated 8,750 residents in 2014 to 8,924 residents in 2024, an increase of 204 residents or approximately 2%.

The validity of the Office of Policy Management's projections is unknown at this time. For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey (ACS) reports, from 2010-2014 the number of residents ages 20 – 24 years old has grown by 315 people. That's more people than what OPM projects for total growth in all age categories from 2014 to 2024.

In 2005, the Comprehensive Plan made projections for population growth in Topsham up until 2015. Choosing not to use the State Planning Office projections (which had more moderate growth projections), the committee came up with their own projections using “local records, regional housing trends, and local demographic characteristics”. The actual population growth that Topsham saw between 2000 and 2015 did not align with those projections. Let this serve as insight that, no matter how thoroughly research is conducted, it is very difficult to predict what growth a town will experience. In order to counter the negative growth trend that the town has experienced, Topsham could choose to deliberately invite growth. Represented herein is a graph of the Topsham population projection made by the State Office of Policy and Management based on population estimates in 2014.



## AGING TRENDS

As a whole, Topsham’s population continues to age. In 2000, census data showed that the median age of Topsham residents was 36.3 years while the state of Maine had a median age of 38.6 years. By the 2010 census, Topsham’s median age had risen to 45.2 years, surpassing the state’s median age of 42.7 years. Across all age groups below 45 years, Topsham has lost residents. Across all age groups ages 45 years and over, Topsham has gained residents. A pattern of aging is reflected in statewide trends as well.

An older demographic is attracted to the elderly-services in the region, including elderly housing, recreation and medical facilities and the accessibility to nearby cities, rural areas, and the coast. The municipal effects of a substantially older demographic include increased demands on local services and facilities such as health services and recreation facilities and enhanced mobility. Topsham conducted an Aging in Place Community Survey and Focus Group in 2016, which found that respondents 50 years and older identified their own needs to be:

- The need for better communication about available social/civic/employment opportunities.
- The need to provide alternative transportation services.
- The need for services to help people stay in their homes.

## HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

The average Topsham household size has decreased from 2.6 persons to 2.3 persons between 2000 and 2010. This decrease may be reflective of a larger national trend towards a preference for a smaller family or due to any combination of factors including aging, divorce rates, and decreasing incidence of multigenerational households.

In Topsham, with enhanced elderly housing and services, a possible reason for the decreasing household size could be the number of retirees living alone or with no children in the household. ACS data shows that the number of single person households occupied by residents 65 years and older has increased from 350 households in 2010 to 550 households in 2015.

The number of single-person family households has had some fluctuation, with more growth occurring in male-householder family households. Single female-run family households have grown in number from 260 in 2009 to almost 350 in 2015. Single male-run family households have more than doubled from about 50 households in 2009 to 170 households in 2015.

The number of Topsham residents living at or below poverty level has risen over the past few years. Unemployment has dropped, but the town population below the poverty line has increased from about 5% in 2012 to 8.1% in 2015. Out of all the households in Topsham in 2015, 11% were receiving food stamps or SNAP benefits. Of the households receiving assistance, almost half housed one or more people 60 years and over. Out of 2,345 total families in Topsham in 2015, 122 families (5%) were below the poverty level. Families below the poverty level included about 200 children under the age of 18 years old.

### Seasonal Shifts

Topsham experiences some seasonal fluctuation in population for purposes of summer vacationing and retail shopping. Topsham’s housing stock includes a percentage of vacant housing, almost 11% of its total housing stock as of 2010. Of Topsham’s vacant housing stock, about 14% is used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. The number of seasonal housing units, 61 units in 2010, has almost doubled in comparison to a count of 35 units in 2000. Still, in terms of seasonal use, Topsham is more highlighted for its provision as a service center than one for lodging.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The rates of educational attainment in Topsham are increasing. In 2015, 95.5% of Topsham residents had at least a high school diploma, or equivalent, which is up from 92.5% in 2010. The average percentage of residents with a high school diploma or equivalent in the state of Maine, 91.6% in 2015, is lower than Topsham’s. Similarly, the percent of Topsham residents with at least a Bachelors degree has grown from 34% in 2010 to 39% in 2015, which is higher than the state’s average of 29%.

With a new high school under construction, Topsham could expect to see a spike of interest in its secondary

school system, which has been under capacity population-wise. Topsham's position as the home to a regional school district harbors great consideration towards the educational services it provides. With better facilities, Topsham will continue to excel in its academic performance and may attract additional young families.



# Public Facilities and Services

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of the public facilities and services within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into four sections:

1. Public Water Supply
2. Public Sewer Service
3. General Government
4. Public Works Facility
5. Safety Services
6. Public Education
7. Public Library
8. Regional Resources

The town of Topsham's leadership strives to provide strong fiscal management of funds to benefit a range of public facilities and services for its residents. Within every public department in Topsham, staff is committed to maintaining and improving its equipment, staffing levels, and availability of services and programs as is possible within the annual budget. Public input is welcome and incorporated in the priorities of the town's departments. Given its strong fiscal leadership, Topsham is in a fortunate and advantageous position to continue to generate the means to optimize its facilities and services.

## PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY

Within the denser areas surrounding Topsham Village and the Topsham Fair Mall, public water and sewer services are available. For the rest of the town outside of this area, water generation and septic disposal are an individual landowner responsibility.

With the physical connection of Topsham to Brunswick by the Frank J. Woods Bridge, the ability to share water resources became an attractive possibility. In 1903, Topsham and Brunswick joined their efforts and became an incorporated water district, with expanded drinking water and fire service extending to Topsham starting in 1908.

The Brunswick Topsham Water District (BTWD) is a quasi-municipal organization governed by a Board of Trustees. Of the six members of the Board of Trustees, four are appointed by the Brunswick Town Council and two members are appointed by the Topsham Board of Selectmen. All trustee appointments are for three-year

terms with two terms expiring each year. The BTWD is a self-supporting organization procuring its operating funds from user fees. The charter area includes the geographical boundaries of Topsham and Brunswick.

The District's source of supply is from groundwater with several wells and well fields in Brunswick and Topsham. In Topsham, the Jackson Station treatment facility located on River Road is supplied by two wells:

- the Holden Well, an 18"x24" gravel-packed well with a pumping capacity of 2,500 gallons per minute (3.57 MGD); and,
- the Air Force well, a 24" naturally developed well with pumping capacity of 2,500 gallons per minute (3.57 MGD).

The Jackson Station treatment facility was originally constructed in 1971 and renovated in 1991, and treats raw ground water with a greensand filtration system and chemical addition prior to distribution.

The water from the wells is treated for trace amounts of iron and manganese. Chlorine and fluoride are added for public safety and a corrosion inhibitor is added to maintain the water distribution system. In 2013, two new residual handling lagoons for Jackson Station were constructed. The earthen lagoons collect filtered backwash wastewater that is discharged from the treatment plant.

However, The Jackson Station facility does not have the

capability to remove organic carbon, which contributes to disinfection by-products. The facility is scheduled to be replaced in 2020, at a total project cost of \$25 million dollars. The new facility will be designed to address this deficiency along with the building and space deficiencies identified in a 2012 facilities report prepared for the district. The BTWD is presently piloting technologies to identify the best treatment approach to be utilized by the new facility.

### **Water Distribution Network**

The Water District's distribution network currently consists of 123 miles of water mains ranging in size from 1" to 20", 7,000 water service lines and approximately 790 fire hydrants. Water mains typically run underneath roadways and deliver the water from storage tanks to each user's water service line. Much of the distribution system is built on the area's sandy soils, which helps to maintain the excellent shape of the Water District's distribution system.

The Water District currently has two water storage tanks, one in Brunswick and one in Topsham. The storage tank in Topsham is located off of Oak Street and has a capacity of 4 million gallons. This tank was built in 2005, replacing the previous tank built in 1912.

Because the distribution system is gravity fed, there is an elevation limit to how high water will flow to homes and businesses. Using the existing infrastructure, the effective limit of the current water distribution system is 150 feet above sea level. Areas that are higher than 150 above sea level are likely to have low water pressure levels. If an expansion of the distribution network were to occur above the 150-foot level, a booster system would have to be installed to provide adequate service.

In 2017, Topsham water consumption averaged 2.26 million gallons per day with a peak day of 4.41 million gallons. According to an engineer at the BTWD, the Water District does not have any issues in handling these peak days, and does not expect any issues to arise in the future. The water system has the capacity to store seven million gallons and for short periods of time has the ability to produce up to 7.5 million gallons per day (MGD). Even with an extreme change to the volume of water consumption, the system could handle peak days of over 12 MGD.

### **PUBLIC SEWER SERVICE**

Topsham has a limited public sewer system provided by the Topsham Sewer District, a quasi-municipal organization created by the state legislature. The district's chartered service area is located within a two-mile radius of the intersection of Main and Elm Streets. The Sewer District is a collection system only and has no treatment plant, pumping sewage across the Androscoggin River to the Brunswick Sewer District Treatment Plant. The District presently operates a system of gravity lines, force mains, and pressure effluent systems. As with the public water system, expansions to the sewer system are built to meet the requirements of the sewer district and paid for by developers. Ownership of the expansion is then given to the Sewer District to operate and maintain.

Currently, the Topsham Sewer District has a contractual agreement with the Brunswick Sewer District that specifies payment terms for the treatment for all the sewage produced by Topsham until the year 2023. Topsham is billed monthly for the percentage of the Brunswick plant's operating costs corresponding to the amount of waste it brings into the system. After 2023, a new contract will need to be negotiated. Regardless, Brunswick is required by state law to accept Topsham's sewerage. While the two towns have a history of working closely together, the towns do not have a consolidated sewer district, each having independent boards of trustees appointed by the Brunswick Town Council and the Topsham Board of Selectmen.

### **GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

Topsham's Municipal Complex, located at 100 Main Street, is the center of the town's government. The complex is comprised of two buildings located adjacent to each other: the Town Office, and the Public Safety building. Constructed in 2007, the Town Office is a 10,000 square foot, two-story structure which houses most of the administrative offices of the town. The building includes a meeting room for the Board of Selectmen and other town boards to conduct regular business, and a second floor conference room. Civic space in the town office includes a main floor lobby space that is sometimes used for public displays. There is further potential for this community space to benefit public engagement, and the town is open to considering uses in these areas as they are proposed.

### **PUBLIC WORKS FACILITY**

The Public Works Department in Topsham manages and maintains all of the town's public roads, 14 miles of sidewalk, traffic signals, winter plowing and stormwater maintenance. It is staffed by full-time employees (director, foreman, and operators), part-time employees (clerical assistant, laborers), and seasonal part-time employees.

The department resides in a facility adjacent to the Coastal Connector. The 22-acre parcel has a 16,000 square foot main building and a 9,600 square foot sand storage building. All of the department's equipment is stored in the facility. The main building also has office space and a lift for equipment maintenance. The department relies on two enclosed storage containers at the facility and four storage containers at the town's solid waste facility.

The Public Works Department has expressed a desire to increase its staffing capacity in order to work more effectively, in particular as traffic calming, bicycle and pedestrian facilities are expanded. Furthermore, the department emphasized a need for the town to consider funding resources and budgeting to accommodate the ongoing maintenance of new infrastructure expansions. Improvements such as bicycle and pedestrian paths need to be maintained all-year, including winter months, and having the appropriate staff and equipment to anticipate this flow of maintenance would help relieve the strains on the department and its labor and time management. Public concerns related to the prioritization of winter snow removal could be better addressed with increased

funding.

### **Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling**

The Solid Waste Department operates the solid waste transfer station and recycling center on Foreside Road. Residents are responsible for transporting their wastes to the facility individually or via a private hauler. The Town has a contract for waste disposal with Pine Tree Waste to transport the town's waste to landfills. This contract runs through 2019. There is no limit on the volume of wastes that can be disposed of through this arrangement.

The facility is equipped with a two-container trash compactor. The recycling center is housed in a 40 foot by 80 foot steel building and includes five bailers and two glass crushers. The recycling facility can handle all types of material. The Town composts yard waste at the site. Other recyclable materials are processed and sent to various places.

In 2016, the residents of Topsham recycled over 1,146 tons of recyclable material, reducing disposal costs to the town. The Solid Waste Department of Topsham estimates that in 2016 the recycling rate for the town was 36%, as reported in the Town's Annual Report. The Solid Waste Department prides itself on expanding its services and increasing public awareness and education of best recycling practices. The department has expanded to include the means to recycle cooking oil, which can be converted into biodiesel. The department hosts public events, such as Household Hazardous Waste days to support the removal of pollutants from Topsham households.

According to the Solid Waste Director, the Town's current system is adequate to meet the Town's waste disposal needs and can handle the increased volumes resulting from modest growth. The Town does not anticipate making any changes in its system except for adjustments needed to comply with any changes in state regulations or requirements.

### **Stormwater System**

Topsham has a separate stormwater system to manage runoff. The condition and adequacy of the various elements of the system vary and are related to when the various portions of the system were installed. According to the Public Works Director, there are issues with maintenance of the system's infrastructure and its capacity. Certain areas, such as the Highlands, are expanding and so the town must adapt its infrastructure to balance the increased load this can place on the system at large.

The stormwater systems in Elm Street and Winter Street in the Lower Village were installed in the late 1970s. As most recently reported by the Public Works Director, the storm drains along these streets are in poor condition. The piping is in fair condition, but the overall structures need replacing.

The town's stormwater systems built in developments pre-1990 are either not large enough or not interconnected enough throughout the developments to work properly.

The Public Works Director reports that, while the stormwater systems are functioning, the systems need attention to continue to manage flow properly. Furthermore, the existing piping capacity of these systems is too small to add increased stormwater flow from new developments. Specifically,

- the Topsham Heights area system is built with metal pipes and hand-built basins. There have been several projects targeted to address the worst issues of the Topsham Heights system, and though it needs more maintenance work, the system's function has improved;
- the Arbor Avenue system is made up of metal pipes and metal basins. The Arbor Avenue system needs upgrades and additional basins;
- the Barrows Drive area and the Pinewood Drive area need further improvements. The Barrows Drive area is built with plastic pipes and concrete basins. The stormwater system in the Barrows Drive Area has had several projects completed to help increase its capacity and replace its structures. However, the Barrows Drive area needs further attention, specifically targeted at the homes located behind Patricia Drive. Both Barrows Drive and Pinewood Drive are older stormwater systems that need rebuilding.
- The Bay Park drainage system was installed in order to manage the height of the water table, and not for the purpose of handling major rain events. The current condition of the Bay Park system, as described by the Public Works Director, is very poor. The drainage system is at the level of the water table level and water flow is minimal due to elevations and pipe conditions. The way to fix this issue now is to engineer and install a new system.

The stormwater systems installed post-1990 are in satisfactory condition and are working properly. Most of these systems are constructed with plastic smooth bore pipe and concrete basins.

In 2017, concerns were raised in regards to the conditions of a 48-inch culvert starting on the north side of Elm Street Extension and crossing under Main Street. A capital improvement project is in the works to address necessary improvements to the drainage system in the Lower Village area. Economic development funds have been set aside for addressing the potential replacement of the drainage pipeline.

A current list of the town's majorly impaired culverts includes:

- Elm Street near the cemetery;
- Granny Hole outfall to Elm Street extension (major drainage culvert under/along Main Street in the Lower Village
- Meadow Cross Road about a half mile from Route 196; and,
- Tedford Road there a (2) 24" culverts side by side that need replacing.
- River Road (Topsham Fair Mall Stream)

The town does not meet the population requirements

to be designated as a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) community under the US Environmental Protection Agency, Stormwater II program. However, the Town has undertaken a watershed planning effort associated with the Urban Impaired Stream within the Topsham Fair Mall area. The effort has provided the Town an opportunity to qualify for MDEP 319 funding and undertake projects to improve the stream quality. The stream is found to not meet water quality attainment goals largely due to chloride levels associated with the impervious area within the watershed. A Technical Advisory Committee that includes local engineers, landowners, developers, conservation commission, and citizens was created to assist both the planning and implementation efforts. To date, some of the products that have resulted from this planning effort include:

- Land use ordinance amendments
- Catch basin filter inserts throughout watershed
- River Road culvert replacement funding
- CCTV analysis of infrastructure condition in portions of the watershed

## SAFETY SERVICES

### Police Department

Topsham's Police Department is happy to be operating at full capacity with a full-time staff of 16 officers including the chief, lieutenant, detective, sergeants, officers, and two reserve officers. The department is located at the center of Topsham's Main Street in the Public Safety Building.

In 2015, Topsham reported 119 indexed crimes (violent crimes and property crimes), or a rate of approximately 13.67 crimes for every 1,000 residents. Topsham's crime rate is similar to that of Sagadahoc County, which has a rate of 12.79 crimes for every 1,000 residents, and is lower than that of the state's, which has a rate of 19.56 crimes for every 1,000 residents. According to the department, the biggest reported change that has occurred in the types of calls received by the police department is an increase in the volume of calls for overdoses, particularly in the 18-35 year old age group, and mental illness.

Despite operating at full capacity for the first time in at least a decade, there is concern for the prospects of police recruitment. According to the department, the number of applications that the department receives has decreased by more than half in recent years. Further, police recruitment has become a competitive market as nationwide trends have turned to a serious decline in police employment due to factors such as low pay, high risk, rigorous training and applicant requirements, and a recent negative public opinion of the police force in general. The younger contemporary workforce is prioritizing work-life balance and flexibility, whereas the police force is traditionally a job involving overtime and a lifestyle commitment. To mitigate this trend, Topsham's police department rotates its staff schedule every six months.

The department also noted that potential new officers graduating from the police academy as well as current officers employed by Topsham's police department are

actively scouted by local and state police departments. Offers may include recruitment bonuses, better health insurance packages, a larger agency, and higher pay make it hard to compete. Towns are also releasing their residency requirements, making it possible for officers to apply for agencies outside of their local area. Topsham's police department offers a retirement package that helps to keep the town competitive. With several Topsham police staff up for retirement, it is critical to retain officers and push recruitment in order to sustain the future presence of the police department.

It is important to Topsham's police staff to maintain good community relations and to emphasize their role as a resource for education as well as enforcement. The police department has an exceptional relationship with the local school district. There is a police officer regularly stationed at the high school that offers the opportunity for students to understand the public service aspect of the police department and to feel comfortable utilizing and trusting this relationship and resource.

### Fire Department

The Fire Department is staffed by two full-time employees, including the fire chief, and a total of 48 volunteers. The volunteer force is a combination of call-force workers, paid per hour, and per diem workers, paid per day that they are on site and on call. Through mutual aid agreements, Topsham's fire department provides and receives emergency assistance from all its surrounding towns.

Firefighters are also first responders for emergency care. Topsham is fortunate to have a Chief of Police who was the former head of ambulance services, as the police and fire departments must work closely together. According to the Fire Chief, the majority of calls that the fire station receives today, about 75%, are Emergency Medical Service (EMS) calls. The remaining 25% of calls are for fire emergencies.

The fire department provides a fire safety education program to students in the local public elementary schools. The fire department also provides public outreach through regular programming, such as an open house during its annual fire prevention week, and by offering its services, such as smoke detector installation for those who cannot afford them. According to the Fire Chief, the number of fire emergency calls has been decreasing over the years. The department attributes this change to stronger fire safety awareness achieved through its educational programming.

Since moving to a new and centrally located fire station, the fire department is happy with the condition and efficiency of its facilities. The department's average response time to a call is under two minutes, and the time it takes to arrive to the emergency is between 12 to 15 minutes. Through sound fiscal management, the station can afford to replace six sets of gear annually, ensuring that equipment is up to date. This replacement schedule is part of the town's Capital Improvement Plan.

Considering the future, the Fire Department is trying

to address staffing issues related to recruitment of new volunteers. The Fire Chief reports that, like other towns in the region, there is a lack of interest in fire employment. The Chief feels this may be resulting from requiring applicants to complete a thorough training and certification process, a process that is time consuming and may be intimidating. As such, the department is considering a transition to more full-time positions.

## PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Town of Topsham is a member of Maine School Administrative District No. 75 (MSAD 75). MSAD 75 is a quasi-municipal agency, governed by a Board of Directors consisting of 14 elected representatives: two from Bowdoin, two from Bowdoinham, four from Harpswell, and six from Topsham. Four of the District's schools are located in Topsham including: Mt. Ararat High School, Mt. Ararat Middle School, Williams-Cone School, and Woodside Elementary School.

Within the MSAD 75 district and the region, private schools offer alternatives to public education, including the charter school, Harpswell Coastal Academy (HCA). In 2013, HCA was created as a small charter school focused on project-based learning. The HCA has grown from six educators and 60 students in 2013 to more than 20 staff members and a current enrollment of about 200 students, 22 of which are from Topsham. The HCA intends to retain its intimate size, with no anticipation of significant expansion. Other private schools offering high school programming within a short commute to Topsham include Maine Coast Waldorf School (Freeport), Hyde School (Bath), and North Yarmouth Academy (Yarmouth).

### Population Change in the District

Population changes within age groups of children and adults, have ripple effects on the demands for school services. According to a 2015 study, prepared for the district by Planning Decisions, the district will experience continued enrollment decline. As a means of grounding future school enrollment projections, Planning Decisions summarized these findings:

- Declining birth rates, causing downward pressure on the size of the population entering first grade classes
  - The average number of birth rates over the five-year period of 2009-10 to 2013-14 were lower than the previous five-year period of 2004-05 to 2008-09. The average number of births between these five-year spans dropped from 193 births to 167 births.
  - Most recent birth rate estimates from the American Community Survey show a still declining birth rate, with a total of 128 births estimated in 2016.
- Net preschool out-migration trends
  - The average migration trends of preschoolers in Topsham changed from an in-migration in the five-year period of 2003-04 to 2007-08 to an out-migration in the five-year period of 2008-09 to 2014-15.

Based on the findings above, Planning Decisions made

the following projections for the school district through to 2024-25:

- Declining K-5 enrollment, perhaps leveling off following 2019-20
- Declining Grades 6-8 enrollment in MSAD 75, but increasing charter school enrollment for this age group
- Declining Grades 9-12 enrollment in MSAD 75, but increasing charter school enrollment for this age group

So far, the enrollment projections by Planning Decisions have held true. The most recent 2017-18 Opening Day Enrollments summary, generated by the school district, shows declining enrollments across all grades of Topsham's school system. Grades K-5 in MSAD 75 have reached a total of 1,090 enrollments in 2017-18, consistently decreasing from 1,295 enrollments in 2005. The middle school has lost enrollments consistently as well, with a total of 586 enrollments in 2017-18 as opposed to 747 enrollments in 2005. The high school has faced a decreasing population, with 706 enrollments in 2017-18 as compared to 1,071 enrollments in 2005.

Looking forward, Superintendent Bradley Smith reports anticipated growth in school population due to the following: 1) potential addition of a public preschool program; 2) incorporation of students previously served by the Child Development Services (CDS) system; 3) a renewed interest in the new high school; and, 4) the potential increase in young families attracted to the planned new housing to be built in close proximity to the middle and high school campuses.

### Expenditures on New Facilities

The most significant upcoming expenditure is for the new Mt. Ararat High School. The existing high school building was built in 1973 and serves students from all four communities in MSAD 75. It is an older facility built as an open-concept design, considered today by the district as an impediment to the learning environment and enrollment. In 1999, MSAD 75 began to apply for state funding to construct a new high school. In March 2017, the district was approved for state funding and has since fully involved itself with the construction and integration of a new, more traditionally designed, high school. The new high school in Topsham is planned to open in the Fall of 2020. The cost of the high school project is \$60,704,671, of which approximately 90%, or \$53,486,792, is funded by the state. The remainder of the project costs are covered through local funding. Most recently, MSAD 75 has undertaken the construction of a new baseball and training field on the school campus. With the creation of a new high school, Topsham expects to see a renewed interest in attendance and a correlative rise in its school enrollment numbers.

### Provision of Special Education Services

Special education at the elementary level is provided district-wide at Woodside elementary school. Students with disabilities are bussed from across the district to receive personalized attention and support. There are an

estimated 35 students currently enrolled in the special education program.

### **Provision of Public Preschool Programs**

In 2014, the Maine Legislature passed a law to establish public preschool programs at all Maine school districts by the 2018-2019 school year. In 2016, about 64% of the school districts in Maine offered public preschool programs. However, only about one-third of Maine's four-year-olds were enrolled at that time. Research shows that providing the universal opportunity for quality early education has significant and worthy impacts on a child's success and performance throughout the entire remainder of their education in school and later on, their aptitude and potential in life. MSAD 75 would like to move in the direction of including a public four-year-old program but will have to anticipate the resources required for supporting such a program, particularly when changes such as the incorporation of CDS are expected.

### **Adult Education Services**

Merrymeeting Adult Education was founded in 1978 as an organization funded by the Brunswick School Department and MSAD 75 to provide residents with interrupted educations an opportunity to complete their GED. Since its creation, the organization has expanded greatly to include extracurricular courses to fulfill other learning interests, such as crafts and vocational skills. With federal and state grants, the organization has grown to include courses in literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), and college preparation. Merrymeeting Adult Education currently offers hundreds of courses and workshops and provides an important resource to Topsham residents.

### **TOPSHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY**

The Topsham Public Library provides a wide range of services to the residents of Topsham, Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, and Harpswell and operates as a mission-based, modern day library for community gathering and enrichment. The library is governed by a 12-member Board of Trustees, including a student member, responsible for setting policy and overseeing the overall operation of the library. Funding for the library is generated primarily through an annual appropriation from the Town's budget, which covers 85% as designated in the last Memorandum of Understanding (2015). The Library raises the remaining 15% from supporters. In 2017, the library received \$545,677 from the town, \$84,239 from its own fundraising efforts, and \$16,789 from The Friends of the Topsham Public Library (a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to supporting the library).

The library is staffed by four full time employees and ten part time employees that total approximately 4.7 additional full time employees. The library relies heavily on volunteers whose efforts make many of the its services possible. In 2017, 99 volunteers served 2,942 hours to assist with the operations and event programming of the library. There are approximately 40,000 items in the library's collection, not including those available through interlibrary loan. As a member of the Minerva consortium of 60+ libraries in Maine, the Topsham Public Library is

required to maintain its collection/materials budget at a three-year average and pay regular service costs.

Demand for services and programs has steadily increased and has reached a consistently booked out programming schedule. In looking forward, the library has compiled and continues to update its Long Range Plan (2016-2019). In its plan, the library targets goals of expanding its staff both in diversity of personnel and hours, bolstering its volunteer program, and preemptively coordinating its development to meet its growth and ensure the maintenance of current programs and services. Additionally, space for a growing collection will be a concern. Whether the library can reconfigure space or will need additional space is an open question at this time but should not be precluded from any long range plan. External garden areas and other amenities will also need updating and care, done by volunteers, staff, and local professionals.

## **REGIONAL RESOURCES**

### **Regional Health Care**

Topsham is fortunate to host an array of health care services for the wellbeing and comfort of its residents. Many services are geared towards Topsham's growing elderly population, providing resources to help residents stay healthy in their homes or in assistance facilities. Locally-based organizations include:

- Comfort Keepers is an organization throughout the Mid Coast that began providing non-medical in-home care and senior services to Topsham in 2012. Comfort Keepers works closely with local hospitals, assisted living facilities in the community, and the local hospice program. Comfort Keepers also organizes a food drive program called Feed Seniors Now which helps ensure food security in the local elderly population;
- Northern Sun Family Healthcare and Birth Center is based in Topsham, providing comprehensive primary naturopathic healthcare and midwifery services;
- The Mid Coast Medical Group is prominent in the area, and has a family practice as well as an adult care and internal medicine center located in Topsham; and,
- Planned Parenthood has an office on Bowdoin Mill Island, that offers a range of women's health care, family planning, and general health care services.

In Brunswick, Topsham residents have access to additional health care services, including:

- Mid Coast Hospital
- Martin's Point Health Care Center
- U.S. Healthworks Medical Group
- Community Health and Nursing (CHANS) Home Health and Hospice
- Parkview Medical Center

Other regional health care services include:

- Central Maine Family Practice (Lewiston)
- United Way of Midcoast Maine (Bath)

### **Regional Social Services**

It is important for Topsham residents and families to

be connected to caring resources that can provide assistance in cases of hardship. Topsham participates in the state's General Assistance Program, which assists residents of Topsham with basic necessities when the need is immediate and the individual is unable to provide the basic necessity essential to maintain themselves or their family. The state reimburses Topsham for 70% of the program's expenditures. The General Assistance Program is available to all persons who are eligible to receive assistance in accordance with the standards of eligibility as provided in the state's General Assistance Ordinance.

Active regional social services available to Topsham residents cover a range of needs.

In Brunswick, social services organizations include:

- Oasis Free Clinics
  - Health clinic, dental clinic, and prescription assistance clinic
- Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program
  - Food pantry
  - Soup kitchen
- Spectrum Generations
  - Meals On Wheels and general senior services
- Addiction Resource Center (ARC) at Mid Coast Hospital
- Tedford Housing
  - Homeless shelter
  - Housing and homeless prevention services
- The Gathering Place
  - Daytime homeless shelter

Other regional social services organizations include:

- Habitat for Humanity, 7 Rivers (Topsham)
  - Creates housing opportunities for families with limited incomes
  - Builds sustainable housing, and repairs, weatherizes and modifies existing homes
- Lisbon Area Christian Outreach (Lisbon)
  - Food pantry
  - Clothing bank
- Salvation Army Food Pantry (Bath)
- Midcoast Maine Community Action (Bath)
  - Supports a Head Start preschool program based in Topsham
- YMCA (Bath)
- YMCA (Casco Bay)
- Healthy Kids (Damariscotta)
  - Child Abuse and Neglect Council
  - Community based family and professional network
- Good Shepherd Food Bank (Auburn and Hampden)
  - Largest hunger relief organization in Maine



# Parks, Recreation and Open Space

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of the diverse recreational opportunities within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into three sections:

1. Recreation to Accommodate Demographic Change
2. Recreational Facilities
3. Water Access

With the existing recreational opportunities available throughout town, and according to input received during our Plan Your Topsham event, Topsham residents are generally living more active and outdoor-oriented lifestyles. The Town's geographic location gifts it with a large inventory of natural recreational opportunities for hiking, bicycling, paddling, snowmobiling, fishing and hunting. Outdoor conservation areas and private open spaces are supplemented by public and private facilities providing more organized recreational activities. Considering Topsham's outdoor recreational resources, the town could proactively encourage more growth and investment by further enhancing programming and facilities for specific age demographics, and by exploring ways to increase access to trails, shoreland, and water. Topsham's recreation department should continue to do what it has been doing well to date: to thoughtfully consider the trends affecting the population (who is here now), and keep an open dialogue with the community about what people want and need to live an active, healthy, socially-enhanced lifestyle.

## RECREATION TO ACCOMMODATE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

According to the Director of Parks and Recreation, in her time with the department she has observed a number of trends that she feels shapes the kinds of recreational programs the Town needs to offer. First, the Director has observed that the nature of the family has changed in terms of family structure (single parent heads of household, blended families) and 2-parent working families. Coupled with technology rising as

the forefront of entertainment, the Director feels it has become more important for the department to encourage active recreation and healthy diets for children in the community, and consider programming geared towards younger children ages three to five who are not yet enrolled in school. The department currently helps support the programs of Let's Go!, an obesity prevention initiative organized by MaineHealth. Let's Go! is actively integrating evidence-based strategies for healthy living into the Topsham schools, child care, and after school programs.

## RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The Town has a close relationship with the school district, which allows the public to access many of its facilities for regular use and for events programming.

The department has been using a wide variety of indoor spaces for its recreational programming. The gymnasiums at the elementary schools are used extensively, and the library is used for several programs. Additionally, the Town sponsors a partnership with the public school district and Bowdoin College, which allows for free public swimming at Bowdoin College every Sunday. School Administrative District (SAD) 75 facilities available for recreational programming include the following:

- The Williams/Cone School has two outdoor basketball courts, a playground, a playing field, a gymnasium, and three miles of hiking trails.
- The Woodside Elementary School has a gymnasium, a 90' baseball diamond, a playground, and a soccer

field.

- Mount Ararat Middle School has four outdoor basketball courts, a 60' softball diamond, a 90' baseball diamond, and two multi-purpose fields.
- Mount Ararat High School has two outdoor basketball courts, a soccer field, a 90' baseball diamond, two multi-purpose playing fields, two 60' baseball diamonds, five tennis courts, a 440-yard track, a gymnasium, a stage/auditorium, and 5.5 miles of cross country trails. With the state funding that was approved for Topsham in 2017 for the construction of a new high school comes funding for a new baseball field and two multipurpose competition fields, which are currently being built. After the completion the new high school, there will be an athletic track and field facility built on the existing land of the old high school.

The Town is currently assessing the need for the possibility of more indoor recreational space, such as a community center. The areas of need identified include:

- Programming for before and after school care
- Seniors
- Community Rooms
- Fitness
- Sporting Events

Topsham has centralized its publicly-maintained outdoor recreation facilities to one central recreation complex. The Foreside recreation complex on Foreside Road includes the following amenities:

- Three 60' baseball diamonds
- Seven multi-purpose playing fields
- One full-size soccer field
- Two outdoor basketball courts
- 2.5 miles of hiking trails
- Two winter skating rinks
- One handicap-accessible concession pavilion with restrooms and kitchen facilities
- One playground

The Town Selectmen also created the Townsend Way Recreational Area in 1997. While this area has not been developed, there are two ponds for fishing and approximately 160 acres of fields and woods. There are developed trails for hiking, biking, skiing and snowmobiles within the forested area. The trails are part of a larger network of private trails that weave in and out of the surrounding neighborhoods. The ponds of the recreational area prohibit swimming.

### **Private Recreational Facilities**

In addition to school or publicly run facilities, nearby private recreational resources are available to the public including a range of facilities in Brunswick, Bowdoin College, hiking trails at Bradley Pond and The Highlands, Cathance River Preserve, private fitness centers, water access points to the Androscoggin River and Merrymeeting Bay, a golf course at Highland Green, and the Brunswick Golf Club.

### **A Need for Improved Services or Facilities**

Topsham's diverse landscape has provided the opportunity for a network of extensive and captivating trails. Topsham's trails provide a means for the community to be immersed in nature as well as to be connected to its surrounding communities. The role of a trail network to create natural corridors is essential to the preservation of habitat and ecosystems.

In Topsham, existing trails include:

1. Paved ADA accessible facilities:
  - Androscoggin Riverwalk and 'Bridge to Bridge' Path
  - Topsham Trail Multi Use Path (Topsham Fair Mall to Community Drive)
  - Androscoggin River Bike Path (Connecting to Brunswick)
  - Topsham Fair Mall Road Loop
2. Hiking Trails
  - Bradley Farm Pond Preserve
  - Cathance Nature Preserve
  - Cathance River Corridor Heritage Trail
  - Cathance Water Tower Trails
  - Mt. Ararat High School Trails
  - Public Library Eagle's Path
  - The Ravine Trails
  - Recreation Fields Trails
  - Town Forest Trail
  - Transfer Station Trails
  - Topsham Fair Mall Road Loop

While the Town has a robust trail network and conservation open space, the Town currently has no formally designated parks within its neighborhoods for public gathering and play. Children living near school sites have opportunity to use school playgrounds only. Seniors do not have access to formal public gathering spaces, with exception to the Topsham Town Library gardens.

The residents of Topsham are very trail- and access-oriented, and the department has received feedback from the community asking for more trails, parks, and outdoor recreational opportunities. The department supports this interest but is sometimes challenged by ensuring the maintenance of new facilities due to a lack of staffing and funding. However, even with these challenges, Topsham continues to plan for the expansion of its trail network. The Town is in an ongoing partnership with the Merrymeeting Trail initiative, a plan to create a 32-mile regional rail-with-trail from Topsham through Bowdoinham and Richmond to Gardiner. Once complete, the trail will provide an alternative transportation route as part of Maine's Capital to the Coast Trail System, connecting Augusta to Bath. The quality of life impact of the manifestation of the Capital to the Coast Trail System will be significant. In 2010, 122,250 people, or 9.2% of Maine's population lived within 10 miles of the proposed trail system. In addition to recreation and mobility opportunities, the trail will also serve as a means of community revitalization, bringing in consumers, tourists, businesses and jobs.

## **Snowmobile Trail Network**

The local Topsham Trailrider's Association (TTA) supports regional ATV and snowmobile riding by encouraging the establishment of trails in a manner that minimizes environmental impact and general disturbance to private property. The TTA generates a map of local trails (online), which includes 15 miles of trails accessible by ATV and 30 miles of trails accessible by snowmobiles.

## **WATER ACCESS**

### **Water Access to the Androscoggin River**

Despite having a lengthy shoreline, the Town has no water access to the Androscoggin River within its boundaries. Access for hand-carry and put-in motorized boats is limited to facilities in Brunswick, located on Old Bath Road, Water Street, and River Road (Pejepscot Fish Park). Currently, the Androscoggin Riverwalk provides scenic views to the river, with some informal paths leading from the Riverwalk down to the riverfront. There are also four pocket park scale areas with visual waterfront access areas (two in the Lower Village, one above the dam on Summer Street and one immediately across the Frank Wood Bridge in Brunswick). All of the pocket park areas with visual access and informal trails to the shoreline that primarily serve as access for shore fishermen are privately owned and maintained.

The town's Lower Village Plan includes a waterfront park that would provide access to the lower Androscoggin River as well as walking trails along the river. Pedestrian access exists to the Muddy River from two state owned parcels, but no parking facilities are available. Parking along the shoulder of this stretch of Foreside Road can be dangerous. When all phases are complete, the 1.25-mile long walking loop will connect the Towns from the Frank J. Wood Bridge to the historic Androscoggin Swinging Bridge.

The project first began in 2006 with funding from the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) to rehabilitate the Swinging Bridge for pedestrian use. Two parking lots were created on either end of the Swinging Bridge in 2007. In 2012, the Mill Road section was constructed through the woods in Topsham with MDOT grant funding. The Mill Road section of the Riverwalk links the Swinging Bridge to the Summer Street sidewalk. Future phases include: improvements along the busy Mill Street Route One connector in Brunswick and the Fort Andross area in Brunswick, and a riverfront park at the Priority Business Center in Topsham.

In 2011, the Lower Village Waterfront Access Study was completed to understand the physical opportunities and constraints of creating a public gathering space and waterfront access to the Androscoggin River. The study evaluated the physical site composition of the area, environmental constraints, and reviewed utility, transportation, storm water and pedestrian infrastructure (within the Lower Village and in connection to immediately adjacent and regional systems). The study arrived at multiple points of community consensus, including that access should be for hand-carry boat access, and public

space should provide visual access to the river. Future construction and development at two sites in the Lower Village could improve water access: the Fire Barn has been demolished, and the Frank J. Wood Bridge is scheduled for replacement. Both projects create an opportunity for the Town to work collaboratively with landowners to further goals of enhanced public access to the river.

### **Water Access to Muddy River**

The mouth of the Muddy River borders the Towns of Bowdoinham and Topsham. The river outlets into Merrymeeting Bay at Pleasant Point in Topsham. Muddy River is a popular spot for small boats, as it is surrounded by freshwater tidal marsh, inhabiting tidal freshwater species and features. Muddy River is noted for its birdwatching opportunities, archaeological artifacts, and evidence of use by Native Americans (Brunswick Topsham Land Trust). This area is also highly utilized by anglers and duck hunters during their respective seasons. Conditions for formal access are constrained on the west side by private ownership, and the east side (state-owned) by significant wetlands. Though no formal public access exists, permission may be granted from the landowner to the river for hand-carry boats.

### **Water Access to Little River**

Little River is a small, narrow 2.5-mile tributary of the Androscoggin River on the border of Lisbon and Topsham. Little River is used for small boats, wildlife watching, and trout fishing. The tributary is special in that it is very remote and isolated. The Brunswick Topsham Land Trust has established access to the Little River within Topsham, by preserving a 4.7 acre parcel with 1,500 feet of shore frontage, accessed off Route 196 on the Topsham-Lisbon boundary.

### **Water Access to the Cathance River**

The Head of Tide Park, created in 2011, is the only publicly-owned waterfront park in Topsham. Located on Cathance Road, the five-acre park built in collaboration with the Brunswick Topsham Land Trust (BTLT) provides opportunities for hikers, canoeists, and picnickers to enjoy wildlife, fishing, duck hunting, and access to tidal waters. The park also includes two pavilions for picnicking, handicap-accessible outhouses, access to the upper and lower Cathance River, and hiking trails that meander through private easements to the Cathance River Corridor Historical Trail. Parking and daylight access to the Head of Tide Park are available to the public.

To improve access to and awareness of the Cathance River, the Cathance River Education Alliance (CREA) was formed in 2000 following an agreement between Central Topsham Associates, LLC and the citizens' group Topsham's Future to establish the 235-acre Cathance River Preserve. This large parcel of land along the Cathance River is used by CREA as the base for nature-based education programs and resources. CREA works with schools and the public to promote hands-on learning and ecological awareness. In addition to its

school component, CREA offers community programming and events, open hours of its ecology center, spring and summer camps, and environmental youth leadership programs.

The Town also owns the Rogers property (across the Cathance Road from the water tower), which abuts the Highlands North property along the shores of the Cathance River. This 32-acre parcel features 1,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline and was acquired by the Town through an easement. The parcel is part of a set of Brunswick Topsham Land Trust (BTLT) properties that serve to protect an important recreation and wildlife conservation corridor from the Cathance River Preserve to Head of Tide Park. Currently the property contains a small network of public trails, including the Cathance River Trail, a through trail along the river. In 2012 the Town of Topsham, via the Topsham Conservation Commission's Town Owned Land Inventory Report, donated five Cathance River frontage town-owned parcels to the BTLT to be preserved in perpetuity with public access allowance. In total this amounts to over 90 acres of land along the Cathance River that is forever protected and publicly accessible.

In looking forward, the Parks and Recreation Department is pursuing grant money to create local water access to the Upper Cathance and Upper Androscoggin areas.





# Transportation

This chapter of the Topsham Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of the transportation systems within Topsham and the surrounding region.

This Chapter is organized into three sections:

1. Local Street Networks and Safety
2. Regional Context
3. Alternative Modes of Transportation

## LOCAL STREET NETWORKS AND SAFETY

Topsham's transportation network relies heavily upon a street network that has been planned to move vehicular traffic efficiently. Although in recent years there has been a focus of inclusion of all users within the street network, currently the singular mode of preferred travel within Topsham is the automobile. This is partially due to Topsham's geographic location, which serves as a major crossroad of state routes and interstate corridors. With this distinction, the Town suffers from the paradox of providing easy access for commuters and visitors, while the local in-town traveler has difficulty traveling around town. This difficulty of travel is especially acute for those who are not using an automobile for travel.

The types of streets in Topsham and their functionality varies dramatically, from the long private residential gravel lane to the high-speed Interstate highway (I-295) which bi-sects the Town. The major transportation routes that connect and pass through Topsham may be beneficial to the Town's role as a regional service center, yet the design and function of streets and the transportation network also impacts the lives of the people who live in Topsham. Future planning and investment in the transportation network should be approached with a sense of equity and balance for all users of the system, so residents of all ages can be connected to the entire Town.

### Local Streets and Sidewalks

The Town maintains a total of 85 miles of roads and streets and nearly 13.5 miles of sidewalks, primarily located along urban arterials where the potential conflict

between vehicles and pedestrians is greatest. Many of Topsham's existing neighborhoods do not have sidewalks, though some newer neighborhood developments have included sidewalk facilities. The Town's current subdivision standards require street connectivity. Current subdivision standards prohibit dead-end streets, unless a waiver is submitted and approved by the Planning Board.

The Town does not currently have a Complete Streets Policy, however the Climate Action Plan (2012), developed by the Topsham Sustainability Committee, recommends implementing one.

In 2016, the Town began a transportation study of the Topsham Fair Mall (TFM) area. The master plan was initiated to strategize multi-modal improvements to this center of commercial activity, with an objective to make the area safe and balanced amongst various modes of transportation. In addition to transportation modeling and analysis, public outreach events were held, informing the plan's recommendations. Using a combination of public input, a report of existing conditions, and an analysis of future capacity, the following key findings resulted:

1. Desire for a more local feel/reflection to the Topsham community through:
  - Improved pedestrian facilities
  - Enhanced landscaped areas (more trees)
  - Improved/thematic signage through mall area;
2. Four lane road sections beyond the "Hannaford" intersection are unnecessary given future growth/capacity projections, found in the study;

3. Current pedestrian facilities are either non-existent or lack safe accommodating facilities both in the public and private realm; and,
4. Retrofitting Topsham Fair Mall Road (TFMR) as a more town like street is an important infrastructure investment to maintain the commercial viability of the TFM.

In the existing conditions report, the plan conducted volume counts for pedestrians and bicyclists during the area's peak hours. The pedestrian volumes are low, and only one bicyclist was recorded. These findings provide substantiation for the plan's goals, which are broken into categories of safety, aesthetics, and better planning. The safety category lists these measures:

- Calm traffic and speeds - while meeting existing and future capacity needs for diverse growth;
- Reduce points of conflict on TFMR and adjacent sites. Create intuitive and functional vehicular and pedestrian patterns;
- Make accommodations for safe bicycle/and pedestrian connections; and,
- Encourage people to walk and bike within and to the study area. Foot traffic = increased financial sustainability and integration with community.

In order to achieve the safety measures prioritized in the master plan, some specific recommendations for changes to TFMR specifically addressing pedestrian and bicycle safety including adding crosswalks, bicycle lanes, and shared use paths in strategic locations.

The TFM Road Transportation Master Plan is being utilized by the Planning Office, landowners and Planning Board during project review. Implementation of the plan is a long term goal of the community, working in tandem with the ongoing development in the mall area. The visioning work conducted during the Plan Your Topsham public design charrette builds off of this study and the two efforts should support each other. Key recommendations of the study should be reviewed for consistency, and adjusted if necessary.

### **Rail Network**

Topsham has two railroad freight lines that provide inter-city connectivity to both Augusta and Bangor, and Lewiston. Both lines are not being actively operated. The Kennebec Valley Railroad line is owned by the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT), and connects Brunswick and Topsham to Augusta and Bangor. The line traverses the Androscoggin River south of the Frank J. Wood Bridge, runs adjacent then under the Coastal Connector, and continues north through the Cathance up the Kennebec River Valley to Augusta and Bangor. This line has no operator. The MDOT has kept the rail line to Augusta serviceable, but there has been no freight service on this line since the closure of the Maine Yankee Nuclear Power Plant in Wiscasset in 1996.

The second rail line located in Topsham is called the Lewiston Branch of the Maine Central Railroad (formerly the Androscoggin Railroad), connecting Brunswick and Pejepscot Mills in Topsham to Lisbon Falls, Lisbon and

Lewiston. The line is also owned by MDOT, but operated by Pan Am Railroad (Maine State Freight System, 2016). According to the Town Manager, this line was last serviced about 10 years ago, including improvements to the rail bed, rails and drainage (other work may have been done at that time, but Topsham was not a party to the project). The rail line has been paved over as the line approaches Lisbon, so no service to Lewiston is currently possible without remedial work. One local business, Grimmel Metal Recycling, has utilized, or attempted to utilize rail to service its facility, but regular service has not proved possible.

### **Integration of Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities into the Community's Transportation Network**

Topsham's local streets policies support development of new pedestrian facilities as part of site plan and subdivision review, though the Town has not yet adopted a formal Complete Streets policy.

Some notable pedestrian and bicycle facilities include the Androscoggin River Path, the Merrymeeting Trail, and the new Topsham Trails Multi Use Path. a shared use rail-with-trail. The Androscoggin River Path is a 2.6 mile 14-foot wide mixed-use path that connects Brunswick to the Cook's Corner area, with access to the bike path from Topsham via the Merrymeeting Bridge and via Elm Street. The Merrymeeting Trail is a planned 32-mile regional rail-with-trail from Topsham through Bowdoinham and Richmond to Gardiner. The Topsham Trails Multi Use Path is a four-phase project expanding connectivity and mobility from the Topsham Fair Mall to the Androscoggin River Path. So far, the trail has been completed through Phase 1A, creating a path that travels alongside Monument Place from the Topsham Fair Mall Road, crosses Main Street at the Town Hall location, and continues alongside the Coastal Connector until it reaches Community Way (Topsham Fairgrounds and Highlands). The path has been well utilized, verifying support for its future phases.

In 2013, the Town's Lower Village Development Committee conducted the Topsham Town Landing Trails Feasibility Study. The goal of the study was to identify a preferred route extending upstream and downstream from the existing Lower Village urban core. The waterfront in Topsham is inaccessible and underutilized, and this plan arose from the desire to not only take advantage of the waterfront but also create a riverfront network connecting the Riverwalk trailhead eventually to the Town's bike path. With the recommendations of the study, Topsham would be able to provide open public access to approximately 635 linear feet of riverfront, to improve approximately 900 linear feet of existing path along river edge and to construct approximately 850 linear feet of new path and/or extensions. The goals of this plan were to substantiate the possibility of generating commercial development in a walkable lower village, providing the Town with a park that includes river access, and to promote and protect non-vehicular mobility for the Town's residents and visitors.

Street design and acceptance standards are found within Chapter 185 of the Topsham Code. When subdivisions are reviewed by the Town the standards of this section

are reviewed for compliance. The town defines the following roads:

1. Arterial
2. Collector
3. Local Major Access
4. Local Minor Access
5. Private Road

The Definitions are based upon function of the street and the average daily trips the street is intended to carry.

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

### Network of Arterial Roadways

**Route 196:** Route 196 is the backbone of the Town's transportation network, especially the length of road between I-95 and Main Street (Route 201). The Rt 196 Corridor Plan developed in 2013 identifies the western portion of the corridor as, "[representing] one third of a regionally significant transportation corridor between Topsham/Brunswick and Lewiston/Auburn. Officially designated by the Maine State Legislature as a "Corridor of Economic Significance", this route connects not only the two major population centers but also includes all of Lisbon's villages and commercial areas" (Wright Pierce, 2013). Nearly all of the arterials and collector streets feed into this short corridor located between the I-295 interchange and the Lisbon town line. The Topsham section extends approximately 5 miles, a little more than one third the distance between the Topsham I-295 interchange and the Lewiston I-95 interchange. As part of a larger regional connector between Topsham/Brunswick and Lewiston/Auburn, the corridor bears the burden of high commuter volumes; locally, it is a largely low-density corridor characterized as a predominantly wooded route with high speeds, serving several residential neighborhoods, small businesses, and the Town's only Industrial Zone.

Route 196 experiences congestion due to commuter traffic that gets stalled by traffic lights and attempts to compensate for lost time by taking advantage of the high speeds and low levels of turning traffic, particularly in the section between the Topsham Fair Mall area and Lewiston's I-95 interchange. Historically, there was an issue with traffic congestion related to users on Route 196 trying to access the Topsham Fair Mall. This was addressed by the creation of an egress road, Monument Place, in 2007 as recommended by the 2005 Topsham Transportation Plan.

**Coastal Connector:** The Coastal Connector was built in 1998 to alleviate some of the traffic congestion on Route 196 and to improve safety. The Connector extends Route 196 from its intersection with Main Street (Route 201) and across the Androscoggin River to Route 1. The Coastal Connector has relatively maintained its level of usage since it first opened, with most recent counts showing an Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) volume of 8,990 vehicles at the intersection of the bypass with Route 201, as reported in 2013.

**Route 24:** Route 24 is a 44-mile state highway providing access through the central coast area. Route 24 starts

in Harpswell and runs through Brunswick, Topsham, Bowdoinham, Richmond, terminating in Gardiner. Along its path, Route 24 primarily overlaps with Route 1 and Route 196. Route 24 was modified in order to bypass downtown Brunswick, merging with Route 1 and then Route 196 to cross into Topsham via the Coastal Connector. Once across the Androscoggin River, Route 24 diverges off of Route 196 eastward at Middlesex Road, crossing into Bowdoinham along the coast. According to MDOT annual traffic count reports, Route 24 maintains a relatively low number of vehicles when compared to the other state routes that traverse the area. Where Route 24 runs along the bypass, traffic counts report an AADT of approximately 3,500 vehicles in 2013. There is a spike in vehicles where Route 24 splits off of the bypass. The intersection of Bypass Drive and Route 24 increases to an AADT of 7,400 vehicles, as reported in 2013. This peak traffic location along Route 24 also correlates with one of the top high crash locations in Topsham from 2015-2017, with a total of 12 crashes reported in that timespan at the intersections of Bypass Drive, Bypass Road, and Middlesex Road (MDOT Public Crash Query Tool). Further along Route 24's section through Topsham traffic reduces again, with an AADT of 2,020 vehicles reported in 2013 at the intersection of Route 24 and Old Middlesex Road.

**Route 201:** Route 201 (US 201) is a spur route of Route 1 (US 1) beginning in Brunswick at the intersection of Maine Street, and continuing north for 157 miles throughout the entire state, ending at the border of Quebec. Route 201 is distinct in that it is Maine's sole intrastate highway, and one of the few remaining of such routes in the country. Route 201 is known for its scenic views and as an alternative route to enter Canada. Because of the connection it provides, Route 201 still serves a role as a trade route between Canada and the US. In Topsham, Route 201 is also Main Street, and because of this the traffic counts are higher in the Lower Village area, starting at its origination in Brunswick. As Route 201 intersects with Elm Street, traffic counts report an AADT of 12,070 vehicles as reported in 2013. North of Elm Street, however, traffic diminishes, with an average count of around 5,875 vehicles along the remainder of its portion in Topsham, as reported in 2013.

### Budgeting for Roads

The Town has incorporated annual allocations into its Capital Improvement Plan for the funding of road reconstruction.

Topsham's most recent road reconstruction budgets have totaled:

- \$400,000 in Fiscal Year 2016
- \$450,000 in Fiscal Year 2017
- \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2018, with an additional \$250,000 allocated for the drainage work under Main Street

With current projections, which are based on what is known about equipment replacement, bond payments, and other capital needs, the Town expects the future road reconstruction budget to be:

- \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2019
- \$600,000 in Fiscal Year 2020
- \$350,000 in Fiscal Year 2021
- \$550,000 in Fiscal Year 2022
- \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2023
- \$550,000 in Fiscal Year 2024
- \$450,000 in Fiscal Year 2025
- \$800,000 in Fiscal Year 2026

With the future transportation budget, the Department of Public Works Director has expressed the priority of increasing its workforce. The department expects to be short one or two people in the next 10 years, due to turnover caused by attrition, and so is looking to expand its staff from 10 employees to 12 employees. According to the department, its equipment maintenance and replacement schedule is up to date and sufficient.

### MDOT Investments in Topsham

The Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) creates three-year work plans outlining the projects and activities they are planning on a Town-wide basis. The plan includes: capital projects and programs; maintenance and operations projects, and activities; and, all the administrative functions of the department. The most recent MDOT Work Plan, covering the years 2018-2020 includes several projects solely in Topsham and several others in regions that include Topsham.

The projects outlined for 2018 include:

- Bicycle-pedestrian improvements between the Swinging Bridge and the Frank J. Wood Bridge;
- Bridge and structural maintenance to the Muddy River Bridge;
- Custodial maintenance along Route 1, Route 196, and Route 24;
- Converting maintenance buildings to LED lighting in Topsham and Gray; and,
- Paving of Meadow Road beginning at Route 201 and extending north.

The projects outlined for 2019/2020 include:

- Removal of the Edgecomb Bridge between Topsham and Lisbon;
- Replacement of the Frank J. Wood Bridge, a two-year project that is unique in that it will be able to remain open for use for 1.5 years until the last six months of the project which will require its closure;
- Highway safety improvements and intersection improvements at the intersection of Route 201 and Route 24; and,
- Highway safety improvements along the Interstate 295 corridor between Falmouth and Topsham.

### Transportation System Concerns in the Community and Region

Locally, Topsham experiences safety issues due to the concentration of traffic that flows in and out of the community on arterial roads connecting to state highways. The way the state roads are designed with multiple lanes merging and diverging creates local traffic

issues. For example, the Coastal Connector can create a bottleneck traffic pattern caused by several changes in the number of lanes on Route 196. Additionally, the Topsham Police Department has reported a number of crashes at merge points due to competitive driver behavior. Any issues regarding state roads must be addressed in partnership with the state’s Department of Transportation (MDOT). Topsham’s Department of Public Works does not have jurisdiction to make direct changes to MDOT roadways without MDOT approval.

### Conflicts Caused by Multiple Road Uses

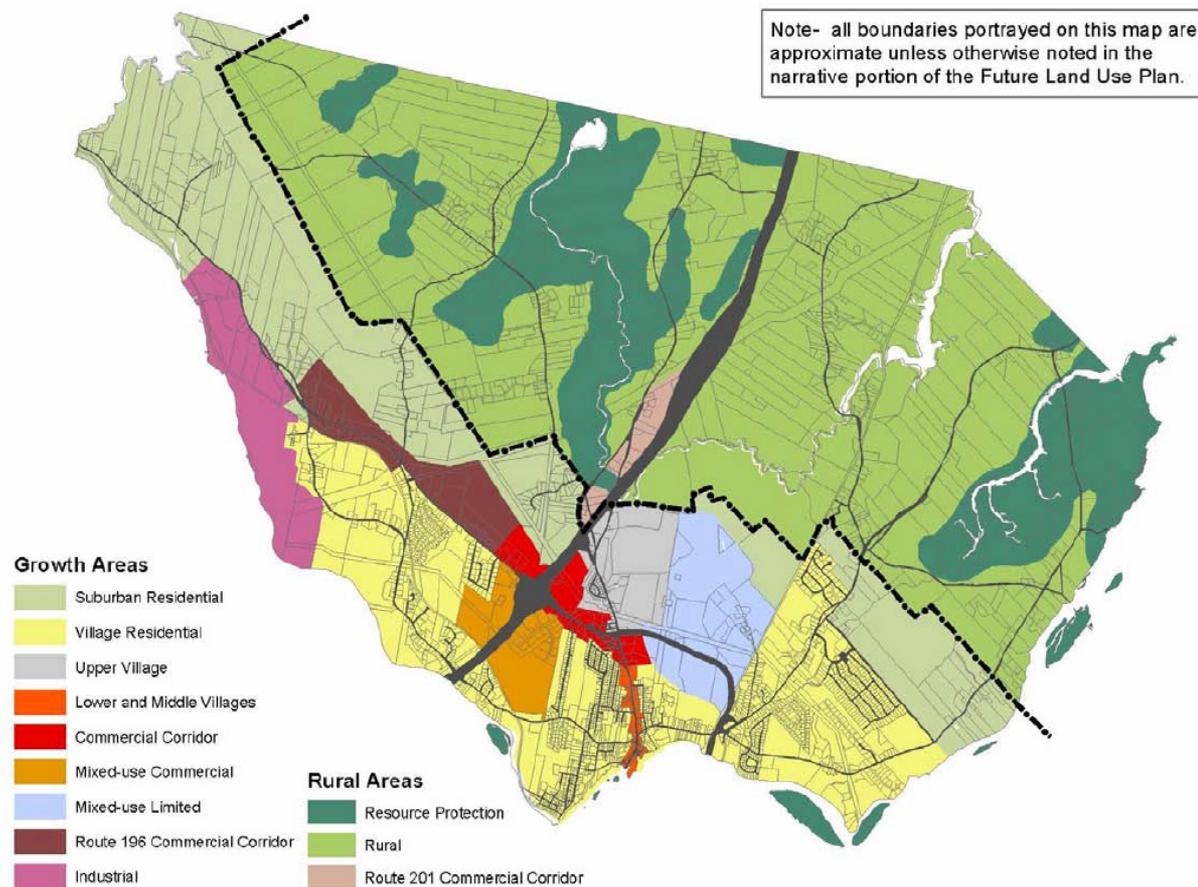
To avoid issues caused by regional connectors, particularly Route 196, local residents take alternative roads, such as Winter and Summer streets, to access major destinations like the Mall and Brunswick. This in itself can cause conflicts between a road’s intended use and actual use. For example, Winter Street is being used by delivery and commuter traffic that is avoiding Main Street traffic but then overloading a road intended for residential use. Similar issues arise from the conflict of uses on River Road, which picks up commuters from Lewiston.

### Network Safety

A number of High Crash Locations are located in Topsham, particularly involving intersections of local streets with regional routes. MDOT High Crash Locations data referenced herein are from 2015-2017 (MDOT Public Crash Query Tool). High Crash Locations data tracks accidents and measures potential safety problems by looking at the total number of accidents in a location and comparing this to the number that may be expected given the type of roadway involved and its traffic volume.

Location	Total Crashes	Percent Injury	Fatalities	Injuries
Int. Lewiston Rd Ramp A off to Lewiston Rd	13	30.8	0	4
Int. Hamilton Court and Monument Pl	9	22.2	0	2
Int. Bypass Dr and Bypass Rd and Middlesex Rd	12	16.7	0	3
Int. Lewiston Rd ramp F1070 RD INV 23G1070	33	33.3	0	14

Between 2015 and 2017, nearly all of Topsham’s high crash locations were located in the Route 196 corridor between Interstate-95 and the Coastal Connector. High traffic volumes, stoplights, curb cuts, multi-lane roads, and other traffic and design conditions are prevalent in this corridor.



Above, the 2007 Comprehensive Plan Designated Growth map.

### Network Capacity

To better understand the implications of local and regional traffic growth on the Town’s street network, a Town-wide transportation study was conducted in 2005. The study projected potential future development in Topsham and assessed the traffic implications of growth in combination with growth in background traffic volumes through 2024. The study recommended the implementation of two network improvements that have since been constructed: the construction of a connector road from Topsham Fair Mall Road to Monument Place; and, the Routes 201/196 Eastern Connector.

In addition to the 2005 study, two in-depth studies of state arterials were completed in 2013, including the Route 196 Corridor Plan (Wright Pierce, 2013), and the Route 24 Corridor Management Plan (Midcoast Council of Governments, 2013).

### Route 196 Corridor Plan

The Route 196 Corridor Plan addresses the western portion of the corridor between I-295 and the Lisbon Town line. The objectives of this plan include:

- Create a Route 196 Corridor Plan, to supplement the Comprehensive Plan;
- Define a vision for the future of this corridor;
- Assess issues of land use and future growth, transportation, utilities, visual character, and zoning;
- Coordinate with state and regional agencies, and other partners;
- Develop a set of recommendations in support of the vision, identifying short-term and long-term strategies; and
- Designate priorities for the implementation of the Corridor Plan.

The 2007 Comprehensive Plan envisioned significant suburban residential and commercial growth on and adjacent to the corridor, with designated growth areas extending the entire western length of the corridor (see map above). The plan defines an outer corridor and inner corridor, and draws the following vision based on the 2007 Comprehensive Plan:

“Generally this corridor should be managed and developed to have a parkway aesthetic, emphasizing limited (or shared) access points for turning traffic and a landscaped or tree-lined visual character. For future growth, the section between I-295 and Pejepscot should support more commercial development, while the outer corridor towards Lisbon should support low to medium density residential and the industrial uses between Route 196 and the river.”

The Town may want to revisit the visions of the 2013 corridor study to ensure the visions align with the visions of this Comprehensive Plan update. Statements such as these, for example, may no longer reflect the community’s desired vision for growth and prioritization of infrastructure expenditures:

- “The commercial growth opportunities envisioned in this area could support the need to expand utilities. This vision is echoed in the Town’s 2006 study and recommendations on the I-295/Route 196 Intersection (see 1.4 Related Studies, below). The significant costs to extending infrastructure to this area warrant a combination of public and private investment.”
- “The road itself is likely to see substantial changes as traffic increases with development and regional transportation demands; the Town should prepare to see additional lanes added...”

## Route 24 Corridor Management Plan

The Route 24 Corridor Management Plan was developed by the Midcoast Council of Governments (MCOG) based on a recommendation of the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan, Connecting Maine 2008 – 2030. Connecting Maine identified Route 24 as a Priority #2 Corridor of Regional Economic Significance. The purpose of the corridor plan is to define a prioritized list of transportation strategies and guide investment to meet the following regional objectives:

- Ensure safe travel for all corridor users, including vehicle drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Maintain the capacity of the corridor;
- Provide coordinated signage and marketing;
- Address storm surge and future inundation, particularly with regard to emergency routes; and
- Re-route Route 24 out of the downtowns of Brunswick and Topsham to remedy high traffic impacts, with consideration for Business 24 designation of the existing route in those Towns.

The corridor plan cites the 2007 Comprehensive Plan's vision for the area as follows:

“The comprehensive plan proposes that redevelopment in the lower and middle village areas complement the existing dense, mixed-use pedestrian scaled village, and that the Town ensure traffic along Main Street is not harmful to the pedestrian-oriented businesses in the Lower, Middle, and Upper Villages. Route 24 in Topsham goes through residential zones (Urban, Suburban and Residential), as well as mixed use, pedestrian scale areas (Lower Village and Middle Village (Figure 12).”

The vision for Main Street (Lower, center, Upper) expressed in this Comprehensive Plan update is consistent with the 2007 vision. The corridor plan's recommendations to rehabilitate or replace the Frank J. Wood bridge and to re-route Route 24 traffic off Main Street in Topsham aligns with this Comprehensive Plan update.

### Parking Issues

The Town of Topsham does not have any issues with the availability or operation of municipal parking in the community. Topsham has a large off-street surface parking lot at the Municipal Complex, in addition to a generously sized lot at the Topsham Library. The small parking lot at Green Street is undesignated in terms of use/function and has historically served to provide a meeting point for ride shares to BIW. There are no municipal or state-designated park and ride facilities in Topsham, however Go Maine has an arrangement with Home Depot on Topsham Fair Mall Road to provide 40 parking spaces and two handicapped parking spaces for ride share (updated 9/2017, GoMaine.org).

In 2017, the Town, TDI and the Lower Village Development Committee inventoried available on-street and off-street parking (both private and public) to better understand the parking assets and opportunities in the

Lower Village. The inventory identified the following: 355 Designated Parking Spaces; 7 Potential Parking Spaces; 124 Opportunistic Parking Spaces; and 45 Public Parking Spaces. Opportunistic parking means the space is owned by a landowner, and understood to be generally available to the public for purposes of frequenting local businesses, walking trails or serving as parking or overflow parking for any special events. Information gathered from this inventory can support future economic development efforts, project permitting and site plan review.

### Parking Standards and Impact to Development

Over the years the Town has been moving towards reduced parking standards. This policy change aligns with the nationwide trend to re-evaluate how much parking we are requiring developers to build. According to the Planning Department, the Planning Board considered amendments to set maximum parking standards, but chose not to adopt proposed new standards. Applicants currently have three potential options to achieve reductions in parking: 1) request a waiver of parking standards from the Planning Board; 2) create a parking plan based on known data for use; and/or, 2) during site plan review, request that an area of the site be reserved for future parking if/should additional parking spaces be needed.

To date, the largest private lot constructed in the Lower Village occurred in tandem with the 2005 renovation of the Bowdoin Mill and adjacent buildings. The developer acquired land from private owners and the Town to meet the required parking standards. Even though parking standards have since been relaxed, the ongoing predominant trend in Topsham is to still overbuild regardless of location in the village or suburban commercial corridor context. However, River Landing, an age restricted (55+) affordable housing development constructed in 2015, counters this trend. The context of the project (walkable neighborhood) combined with target market demographic (55+) meant the project could support reduced parking provisions.

### Local Transportation Initiatives

A number of local and state initiatives have been undertaken in Topsham influencing how people move about the community today. The Climate Action Plan (2012), developed by Sustainable Topsham (a sub-committee of the Conservation Commission) encourages bicycling and walking as a safe and efficient means to travel around Topsham. The Climate Action Plan identified a number of actions for the Town to take in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, including, “Encourage bicycling and walking as a safe and efficient means to travel around Topsham”. The plan includes specific strategies to help achieve its goals, including support for the adoption of a Complete Streets policy. The Climate Action plan has been adopted by the Board of Selectmen.

The MSAD 75 has engaged in the Maine's Safe Routes to School program (SRTS) to support and encourage children to walk and bike to school. Efforts undertaken by the district's School Health Coordinator have included

Walk to School days and Walkability Audits to determine potential expansion of walking routes to school. Through the auditing process, MSAD 75 was able to use models from SRTS to run several Walking School Bus (WSB) events, in which groups of children are accompanied on the walk to school each morning by trained adult volunteers. Because so many of the district's schools are not in a safe walking zone, MSAD 75 decided to promote an After School Bike Club at the Mt Ararat Middle School. The club operates with the assistance of community volunteers from the Merrymeeting Wheelers, student mentors from Bowdoin College, and trained bicycle instructors from the Bike Coalition of Maine.

## ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

### **Adequacy of Available Community Transit Services**

The need to provide alternative transportation services was also cited as a key issue in the 2016 Aging in Place study, conducted in partnership with the Town, Spectrum Generations and AARP. Survey respondents identified the lack of public transportation in Topsham as a challenge for aging in place. Just under half of the 302 survey respondents said it is, "Extremely or Very important" that Topsham has a bus service. Similar percentages of respondents said it is "Extremely or Very important" that Topsham has Coastal Trans, a taxi service, and the Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN). Topsham's Climate Action Plan also cites the promotion of public transit, working collaboratively with regional stakeholders, as a recommended action that can both address climate change and provide a beneficial public service for residents, employees, and visitors.

Community transit service for Topsham residents is significantly limited. The Coastal Trans service was discontinued on April 22nd, 2016, after losing its primary income source from Maine Care Services ridership. Maine Care patients accounted for approximately 75% of Coastal Trans ridership (MCH Executive Director, Lee Karker, in Bangor Daily News, March 24, 2016). In 2013, the State switched to a new transportation brokerage system for its Maine Care members. Topsham is now served by Midcoast Connector, which is a transportation broker that works with various taxi companies in the area to provide rides to Maine Care members.

Just across the bridge, the Brunswick Explorer provides a valuable transportation amenity to residents in Brunswick. This service currently does not cross the bridge to serve Topsham destinations.

### **Passenger Rail**

The nearest passenger rail service available to Topsham residents is provided by the Amtrak Downeaster with service between Boston and Brunswick. Expansion discussions ebb and flow, with potential for seasonal expansion connecting Boston to Rockland. Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) is currently adding a second track along the line in Cumberland and Falmouth, enabling the Downeaster to expand its number of daily roundtrips.