

# Nottingham

## 2011 Master Plan



### Nottingham, New Hampshire

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Prepared By:

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Nottingham, New Hampshire

with assistance from:

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# Introduction and Community Vision

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## *The Master Plan is a Blueprint for the Future*

This Master Plan for Nottingham is a publicly prepared “blueprint” that represents the citizens’ view of what the town should look like in ten to twenty years (*The Vision*) and how they intend to achieve it (*Implementation Guide*). This document includes maps, charts and supporting text arranged in chapters that describe the current conditions and trends within Nottingham. This plan also addresses issues of concern, such as protection of community character, and provides guidance to help Nottingham manage change and growth in a manner that is orderly and meets its Vision.

## *Master Planning has a Legal Basis*

In New Hampshire, one of the major responsibilities of the Planning Board is to prepare and update Master Plans (RSA 674:1-4). It is recommended that these plans be updated every five to ten years.

“The purpose of the master plan is to set down as clearly and as practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning board, to aid the board in designing ordinances that result in preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture of New Hampshire.....” (RSA 674:2)

## *Nottingham Has an Existing Plan and Land Use Regulations*

Nottingham’s most recent full Master Plan was prepared in 1987. In 1990 the town updated this Master Plan with inclusion of data from the 1990 Census. In 2004 Nottingham updated the plan again and included a Vision chapter as well as Chapters on Population, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Natural and Historic Resources, Community Facilities, and Existing and Future Land Use.

Since the middle 1990’s there has been much growth and development both within Nottingham and the Seacoast Region. While the town has had a zoning ordinance as well as subdivision and site plan regulations in place to manage growth, it was felt that updating the Master Plan would provide the basis for policies and regulations to better accommodate the town’s more recent growth and changes. This plan is intended to guide the town in land use, development and planning decisions for the next 5, 10, and 20 years. The plan does not supplant the town’s previous work – much of the information and concepts outlined in the 2004 plan update are still relevant and do not need updating. Furthermore, many of the recommendations and actions outlined in that plan are still applicable and should continue to be revisited.

Throughout the planning process, the town identified several important community values that provided the foundation for the Master Plan Update:

- Protection and conservation of the town’s natural environment—both land and water, and
- Maintaining our small town, rural character.

## *The Nottingham Master Planning Process*

In September of 2008, the Town of Nottingham was awarded a state funded grant from the New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning under the Housing and Conservation Planning Program

(HCPP) for a Stage 1 Project. The Stage 1 program encompassed an inventory and analysis of the town's historic and natural resources as well as its population and economic trends and housing resources. This stage also required an analysis of the potential build-out of Nottingham under current zoning. The buildout analysis is incorporated in this Master Plan Update.

The town selected an HCPP Advisory Committee to manage the project that included the following individuals:

- Deb Stevens
- Amy Plante
- Joe Welch
- Peter Bock
- Chet Batchelder
- Scott Canney
- Mike Russo

This Committee selected a planning consultant in November of 2008 to assist them with the HCPP project. During the next 12 months the Committee and consultant (Mettee Planning Consultants) prepared working papers for each of the major HCPP tasks:

- Population and Economic Trends
- Housing
- Natural Resources including a map set of nine (9) maps
- Historic Resources including a map set of four (4) maps
- Build-out Analysis

Over the course of this project the Committee met with the consultant in public workshop sessions five (5) times and held three (3) public forums to present the results of the project at different stages. A final HCPP report was completed in January of 2010. The data, information and analysis that were compiled for this report formed the basis for continuing the community planning process to update the Master Plan.

After completion of the HCPP project, the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board established a Master Plan Update Committee to complete the remaining chapters of the Master Plan in cooperation with Mettee Planning Consultants. The Committee included:

- Charlene Andersen
- Gary Anderson
- Susan Mooney
- Skip Seaverns
- Mike Russo

This Committee added the following chapters to the HCPP project to complete the full Master Plan Update:

- Land Use
- Transportation including
- Community Facilities

- Energy
- Implementation Guide

The Committee reviewed and updated all of the HCPP chapters and added specific goals and action plans for plan implementation. Similarly, the Committee incorporated action plans in each of the additional chapters. Each of the action plans were then combined into a summary document—the Implementation Guide. This Committee met in public workshop sessions more than two dozen times.

The result of this process is a completed Master Plan Update that is in three parts:

- *An Introduction and Vision Section* that provides an overall view of the Master Plan Update, documents the public outreach process, and includes a Vision for Nottingham.
- *An Implementation Guide* that provides a list of the Master Plan actions, a priority rating for each and the entity responsible for completing the action.
- *A Complete Master Plan Inventory* that includes a full inventory and assessment of the community along with an Action Plan for each chapter.

### ***Many People Contributed to this Master Plan***

The Town of Nottingham would like to acknowledge the efforts of many groups and individuals that assisted with the preparation of this plan. The initial effort was undertaken by the HCPP Committee. A major effort was also led by the Master Plan Update Committee which was established by the Board of Selectmen. Over a period of almost two (2) years this group met, selected a consultant and worked with the consultant to develop the final plan.

In addition to the Committee members mentioned earlier, municipal employees were particularly helpful in providing information to the consultant and answering the many questions the consultant had about Nottingham. Department Heads were instrumental in providing information about the various community facilities and services. The Conservation Commission provided input for the Natural Resources Chapter. Members of the Nottingham Historical Society provided information for the Historic Resources Chapter.

### ***Next Steps—Plan Implementation***

Once the Planning Board adopts this Master Plan, it will become a working document to be implemented over the next five to ten years. During this period the Planning Board along with town boards and departments should work cooperatively to ensure the plan recommendations are considered and implemented. The Implementation Guide will assist the Board in determining priorities. This Guide should be reviewed annually and adjustments made as needed. In this way the Master Plan will be a living document and not a plan that “sits idly on the shelf”. By approximately 2016, the Planning Board may want to update this plan.

# A Vision for Nottingham

Nottingham, while geographically large, defines itself largely on its small town, rural New England character that has an abundance of natural and historic resources and small villages. It is this character that Nottingham would like to maintain in the future.

Since 2000 there has been significant growth in Nottingham, yet the community still retains much of its rural charm. This rural quality is the result of a community with shared values for natural resource protection, maintaining attractive village centers, providing a quality education system, and a small responsive local government that provides services in an efficient manner.

The following vision statement reflects these common values and defines the future of Nottingham—a community that will be prepared to accommodate future growth and change. It also offers the guiding principles and priorities upon which this master plan is based. While the vision does not have the force of law, local officials and the public should consider the vision statement in all local plans, actions and decisions.

Nottingham will be a desirable place to live and work by retaining its rural landscape, historic villages and values of community. Nottingham will also preserve its rural character through preservation of its natural resources as well as its cultural and architectural heritage for current and future generations. Nottingham will be a vibrant and diverse community by promoting social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for all age groups. Nottingham will maintain the high quality of community facilities and services at a reasonable cost. Nottingham will provide opportunities for small-scale businesses and agricultural enterprises that are consistent with our rural landscape and community.

The following definitions describe the characteristics associated with use of these words—rural character, village and sustainable community.

**Rural Character**—A community with some or all of the following characteristics:

- Open farm fields; farm buildings/barns
- Unfragmented forests
- Stone walls
- Tree-lined, scenic roadways
- Dark Skies
- Slopes and hilly terrain
- Ponds, streams and waterways of high water quality for fishing and boating
- Small, historic villages and crossroads
- Historic homes in the New England vernacular

**Village**—An area with some or all of the following characteristics:

- Compact development
- Mix of uses
- Pedestrian oriented
- Public buildings
- Historic monuments
- Public gathering place(s)

**Sustainable Community**—A community that:

- Engages in stewardship of natural resources—farmlands, forests, water and wildlife.
- Provides opportunity for economic well being.
- Fosters opportunity for inter- and intra-generational social interaction and fulfillment.

## ***Guiding Goals***

To maintain these qualities for our community now and in the future, Nottingham will strive to:

1. Preserve the town’s rural, small town character by promoting patterns of development that respect and reinforce the natural landscape and the traditional New England style of its villages.
2. Provide opportunity for small business activity that is consistent with the rural and village qualities that the town values.
3. Provide a variety of transportation modes that meet the full range of our citizen’s needs with well-maintained public roadways while encouraging opportunities for pedestrians, bicyclists and recreational users.
4. Protect Nottingham’s natural environment and rural landscape that provides open space and wildlife habitat, and preserves clean water through well-managed growth that directs development away from sensitive resource areas.
5. Provide housing choice opportunity for age and income diversity.
6. Support, in a cost effective manner, quality municipal services and facilities.
7. Encourage and support recreational opportunities for all ages.
8. Foster a community that retains its rural qualities and values the long-term sustainability of our social, economic and natural resources.
9. Preserve and protect Nottingham’s historic resources.

The following discussion provides much of the basis for the Master Plan Steering Committee’s Vision Statement for the town.

## ***Nottingham is Geographically Distinct***

Nottingham is a distinct community geographically:

- It contains large areas of undulating topography to the east and central portions of the community that provided opportunity for agricultural activity for much of the town’s history, but also for more recent residential development.
- To the west, Nottingham is much hillier with elevations generally over 500 feet and Mount Pawtuckaway at over 1000 feet. This hilly terrain is directly related to the resistant bedrock,

much of it composed of hardened volcanic magma that formed many thousands of years ago. This rugged terrain lent itself to forestry and, more recently, scattered large lot residential development and protected open space including the approximately 5,500 acre Pawtuckaway State Park.

- The town is also characterized by a large man-made lake—Lake Pawtuckaway—that is primarily incorporated within the state park which attracts many seasonal visitors to the community.

These areas are linked by the major roadways in Nottingham—NH Route 152 that runs east-west and Route 156 that runs north south before connecting with 152 at Nottingham Center.

### ***Community Outreach Points toward Retaining Small Town Environment***

In June of 2000, Nottingham undertook a Community Profile with the cooperation of the UNH Cooperative Extension. This two-day activity involved the participation of numerous citizens to identify issues of concern at that time and the key issues of concern for the future of Nottingham. The residents identified several future issues that should be implemented or addressed. These include:

- Engaging in long-term (master) planning,
- Providing a central gathering place for citizen engagement and activity,
- Maintaining Nottingham’s rural character,
- Establishing a community identity that included protection of cultural and historical resources,
- Better maintaining and upgrading town buildings, and
- Protecting natural resources and open space.

In March of 2009 the HCPP Advisory Committee held a Kickoff Community Forum at the Nottingham Community Center. The purpose of this forum was to elicit from the public what it sees as Nottingham’s strengths and challenges for the next 5 to 10 years.

Each participant was given an opportunity to suggest and vote on a number of community strengths. Based on the results of the voting, Nottingham has a strong affinity for the natural environment—natural character, farming & agriculture and woods-wildlife—and small government. The top six strengths are listed below:

- Rural character
- Farming and agriculture
- Woods and wildlife
- High water quality
- Dark skies
- Small government

The group was then asked determine the key challenges facing Nottingham in the next 5-10 years. Again each participant was given an opportunity to identify the town’s challenges and prioritize the challenges. The “higher vote getters” are listed below with the most highly ranked challenge at the top. Interestingly, there were two priority challenges relative to management of the town’s financial

policies—one to keep taxes low to allow elderly to stay in their homes and the other to make multipurpose use of infrastructure.

- Staying small, retaining rural character
- All that makes Nottingham desirable is pressure from I-93 expansion
- Developing good zoning regulations to help retain what we have
- Keeping taxes low/affordable so elderly can stay in homes
- Multipurpose use of infrastructure to minimize need for expansion
- Continued monies for land protection/conservation

Based on these results, it would appear that the participants felt that the biggest challenges would be to maintain and preserve the type of rural community it currently has—staying small, retaining rural character; developing good zoning regulations to help retain what we have and continued monies for land protection/conservation. More specifically, the following themes were incorporated into the planning process.

- Retaining Nottingham’s rural character and community identity
- Protection and conservation of Nottingham’s natural/historic resources, open spaces and agricultural qualities
- Maintaining Nottingham’s small, efficient government operations
- Providing opportunity for a range of housing, particularly the elderly
- Managing growth—both timing and scale—by encouraging a balance of uses that reflect Nottingham’s small town character—residential, small business and institutional

### ***Numerous Changes to Nottingham since 2000***

Since 2000 there have been a number of changes in the town—changes that have made a mark on the landscape and affected the quality of the community.

- There were approximately 460 housing units constructed—from approximately 1590 in 2000 to 2055 in 2009.<sup>1</sup> In just this ten-year period Nottingham’s housing stock increased by almost 30%.
- A new Fire Station was built in 2007.
- During this same ten year period Nottingham also protected 2,275 acres of the town through donations or easements. The largest such conservation easement of land was the 2000+ acre Fernald property, known as Mulligan Forest.

There was an approval of a major commercial water bottling plant in 2001 with a capacity to process almost 400,000 gallons per day withdrawal from groundwater in Nottingham. Subsequent to this decision, there have been several years of litigation against the applicant. The town has also adopted several ordinances to prevent the development of similar water withdrawal and bottling operations.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on most recently published residential building permit data (2009) from NH OEP.

## *Future Changes to Be Considered*

As Nottingham continues to grow and change, there will be new issues to consider and address. For instance:

- New residential activity
- Businesses along US Route 4
- Small scale businesses within Nottingham Center
- Home occupations carried on within existing houses.
- Natural resource protection
- Senior housing
- Increased demand on community services
- Increased protection for historical and agricultural resources

For the future, Nottingham will need to prepare and implement Master Plan updates that recognize static and dynamic community features to guide the town towards a common vision for the future.