

Section II

Land Use

Introduction

The character of Sunapee has changed with the land uses over the last two centuries. Beginning as a farm community, Sunapee emerged as a manufacturing center and a resort area during the early part of the 20th century. In the last forty years, rapid advances in transportation and technology have turned Sunapee into a recreation center and second home/retirement community.

Sunapee residents treasure the rural character of the area. An increase in environmental awareness has led to new environmental regulations which limit the size, location and rate of development. These regulations present both opportunities and challenges to communities, which desire preservation of rural character, while recognizing the need for economic growth.

This section reviews existing land uses, discusses land capability and community goals, and spells out a series of recommendations for future regulatory changes.

Existing Land Use

The existing land use patterns are still generally rural in nature. The vast majority of the town remains forested. Residential use increased during the last 30 years to become the second highest category of land use behind forest/wetlands. The most dense residential development has occurred in the three village areas of the town (Sunapee Village, Georges Mills, and Wendell) and along the shores of lakes and ponds.

The third major use is land set aside for conservation purposes. Conservation land has increased steadily over the years, but as noted in the Conservation Section of this plan, it is still below the State's recommended percentages of total land use.

The table on the following page gives a numerical breakdown of the current uses. The Existing Land Use Map may be found at the end of this section. A summary of each category follows:

Forest/Wetlands

The largest amount of land in Sunapee is still forested or wetlands. Over 2/3 of the land is forested. If we include conservation land, which is mostly forested, almost ¾ of the town's land area could be described as such. The most forested area is the northwest corner of town.

Table II - 1
Table of Existing Land Uses – December 31, 2008

<u>Land Use Category</u>	<u>% of Land Use</u>	<u>Approx. Acres</u>
Residential	14.3	2,000
Commercial	0.5	70
Industrial	0.1	10
Public Lands	1.4	190
Community Facilities	0.5	75
Cemeteries	0.1	15
Town Parks	0.7	100
Conservation & Public Lands	9.3	1,300
Highways	3.6	510
Power Line Easements	1.2	175
Agriculture	2.9	400
Other Forested/Wetlands	66.7	9,361
Total Land Area	100.0	14,016
Lakes & Ponds*		2,496
Total Area		16,512

- Lakes & Ponds comprise 15% of Sunapee's Total Area

Residential

As previously mentioned, land for residential purposes is the second highest usage accounting for just over 14% of all land. Aside from the three high density village areas, most of the town has fairly low density development. It is estimated that there are 2,500 residential dwelling units in the Town of Sunapee.

Conservation & Public Lands

Nearly 10% of the town is in conservation or public use. Most of the conservation land is in the southerly portion of town in several large forestry and agricultural tracts. The Town of Sunapee holds several moderate-sized parcels of land in conservation or for recreation.

Agriculture

A few farms still exist in town. The amount maintained in agriculture remains at approximately 3%. The Johnson farm on Route 103 is the largest and has some of the town's most productive farmland.

Commercial & Industrial

Less than 1% of the town is in commercial and industrial use. Most of these uses are in the village areas or along the state highways. The industrial uses tend to be small machine shops. Most of the commercial uses are small retail stores, a handful of restaurants, and several offices.

Summary of Growth Patterns (1998-2009)

The growth rate in Sunapee increased steadily from 1999 through 2005. The last three years, however, have seen a decline in building and subdivision activity due to a sharp downturn in the housing market.

Much of the building activity in Sunapee has occurred on lakefront property. Many older homes and cottages on the lake have been torn down to make way for larger homes. This process of "tear down/rebuild" is due to the lack of vacant lakefront lots. Many times the underlying lakefront land is worth substantially more than the existing house, making it a prime target for replacement.

A secondary area of recent growth has been in and around Sunapee Village. The Orchard Park Development is nearly built-out and Sunapee Center has completed a portion of its first phase. Three new apartment buildings have been completed on Maple Street and two more on Beech Street/Route 103B. Sunapee Harbor continues to see renovations of businesses. The Town of Sunapee has constructed a new Highway Garage and a Safety Services Building.

A third area that is beginning to experience growth is in the southeastern corner of town adjacent to Mount Sunapee. Two new developments, Mountain Home and Sunapee View, have just broken ground.

The balance of the growth has occurred randomly throughout the community, but at a rate somewhat less than in the aforementioned areas.

Table II-2
Approved Major Subdivisions in Sunapee
January 1998 – December 2008

<u>Subdivision Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Total Lots</u>	<u>Developed Lots</u>	<u>Remaining Lots</u>
Fieldstone Hills (2007)	Trow Hill Road	13	0	13
Mountain Home (2005)	Brook Road	24	0	24
Neuwirt (2006)	Nutting Road	4	1	3
Orchard Park Phase I (2000)	Sargent Road	4	4	0
Orchard Park Phase II (2003)	Sargent Road	12	11	1
Pensco Trust (2008)	Prospect Hill Road	13	0	13
Sunapee View Estates (2002)	Bradford Road	21	4	17
Subtotal		90	20	70
Minor Subdivisions	(35 Applications)	42	32	10
Mergers	(63 Applications)	(- 66)	---	---
Totals (Not including mergers)		132	52	80

Table II-3
PERMITS ISSUED FOR NEW DWELLING UNITS
1998 – 2009

<u>Year</u>	<u>Single Family</u>	<u>Multi Family</u>	<u>Manufactured Homes</u>	<u>Total Units</u>
1998	21	3	0	25
1999	15	0	3	18
2000	29	1	0	31
2001	20	2	0	22
2002	20	0	0	20
2003	29	1	5	31
2004	34	5	1	49
2005	42	1	2	46
2006	28	3	0	36
2007	22	2	0	29
2008	15	2	1	19
2009	8	0	1	9
Totals	283	21	13	335

Future Growth Potential

Land Capability

In order for a community to properly develop, there must be some assurance that the underlying land is suitable for the development proposed. Many new Federal, State, and Local regulations have been enacted since the 1970s that recognize the importance of protecting environmentally sensitive areas.

Water quality is the driving force behind many of the new regulations. These water quality protections extend to lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and aquifers. In order to maintain water quality, development is restricted on steep slopes, within buffer areas from water bodies, in areas of high groundwater yield (aquifers), and in poorly or very poorly drained soils (wetlands).

Soils also play an important role in land development. Soils that are poorly draining or shallow to bedrock severely limit the placement of on-site wastewater systems. Likewise, poor soils may make foundation placement and road construction prohibitively expensive.

Sunapee has many challenges arising from its diverse natural features. Difficult soils (poorly draining and shallow to bedrock) are the predominant soil type with only a few areas of well-draining sands and gravels. Steep slopes exist in many areas. There is relatively little level land available. Special care must also be taken in development planning to observe the strict shorefront standards on Sunapee's lakes, ponds, and fourth-order streams.

Community Attitudes

The Planning Board received extensive input during 2006 and 2007 from residents and town officials regarding future development in the community. This input occurred during a series of monthly meetings with all of the town's department heads, a visioning session which attracted nearly 90 residents, and a Master Plan survey which received over 600 responses.

The common theme of the majority of the residents who participated in the above forums was that they best liked the small town atmosphere and peace and quiet that Sunapee offered. This remained unchanged from the last two Master Plans.

In order to preserve this quality of life, many offered strong opinions against land uses which are contrary to rural life. This included the 89% of the survey respondents who were either against or strongly against both Heavy Industry and Strip Commercial Development. High levels of opposition were found to Mobile Home Parks (89%), Shopping Centers (70%), and Multi-Family Dwellings (64%).

The survey also indicated that over 69% of residents would support stricter regulations in the watershed to protect Sunapee's lakes and ponds. However, there was very little support for increasing lot sizes and/or decreasing densities to limit growth.

Future Land Use Plan

Future Land Use Needs

For the foreseeable future, the greatest land use need facing not only Sunapee but the entire region, will be affordable housing, currently known as workforce housing. As the population grows the need for dwelling units will increase. This, combined with a current unmet need, will continue to put pressure on housing resources.

Based on recent trends, it can be estimated that an additional 400-500 dwelling units will be needed to meet population growth in the next 20 years, with a mix of rental housing, single-family housing, and housing in nontraditional developments (i.e. cluster or planned unit developments) to meet this demand.

Pressures for new commercial uses will also increase with the population. While Sunapee is not likely to see a demand for large commercial developments in the next 20 years, because neighboring commercial centers seem to be growing to meet these needs, there will be a need for more small retail shops, restaurants, office space, and other small scale service industries.

Along with pressure on the land for development, there will be an equal pressure to preserve areas of town for recreational and conservation purposes. It will be important that there be cooperative efforts between the town, conservation groups, and individual landowners to see that more tracts of land are preserved, especially those with unique recreation or conservation features.

Land Use Goals

The following goals and objectives should be incorporated into the future land use plan:

1. Encourage a residential development pattern which will provide for higher density housing in areas served by public utilities and near village centers. Housing densities should be progressively lower the farther away a project is from these centers.
2. Encourage commercial development in village and mixed use areas which are traditional centers of commerce.
3. Allow limited commercial development along state highways only with strict controls on road access, landscaping/buffering, and traffic circulation.
4. Encourage preservation of significant historic, natural, and scenic resources.
5. Protect large tracts of conservation land by utilizing zoning controls which will maintain the character of the entire area.
6. Develop plans to insure that recreational lands are preserved to meet the needs of a growing population.
7. Encourage the development of trails, bikepaths, and other recreational ways.

Future Land Use Summary

The Town of Sunapee should continue to be regulated by the district structure implemented in the Zoning Ordinance in the year 2000. The land uses that are the underlying purpose of each district are shown on the Future Land Use Map found elsewhere in this section.

In general, the town should continue to be patterned after the typical New England community with three village centers of high density residential and commercial land uses, with areas of residential land uses, where densities would be determined by proximity to public utilities and community facilities (i.e. the farther away the property from these utilities/facilities the lower the density), radiating out from these villages.

Conservation lands should be found in the northwest corner and south-central parts of the town. These areas should be within the Rural Lands zone which has the lowest densities and least impacting uses. Any future planning regulations should protect areas identified as unique or sensitive from an environmental perspective.

Overlay districts should continue to be used as tools to protect water resources. These districts include shoreline, wetland, and aquifer overlays. Restricting building and development in these overlay zones will protect the town's most valuable asset.

Land Use Recommendations

- 1. Increase the minimum lot sizes and reduce allowable densities in the existing Rural Lands Zone. Review uses allowed in this zone and eliminate any that are not compatible with conservation. Create an additional Rural Lands area in the west-central part of town.**

Propose changes to the Zoning Ordinance which would lessen the future development impact in the Rural Lands zone. This would include limiting uses, increasing minimum lot size, and decreasing allowable densities.

- 2. Increase Shoreland Protections to certain streams and improve regulations for stormwater management.**

Propose changes to the Zoning Ordinance to provide additional protections to selected streams entering lakes and ponds, including limits on cutting/clearing, limits on lot coverage, requirements for erosion control, and monitoring of water quality.

- 3. Enhance Route 11 in Sunapee Village to have the character of a typical Main Street rather than a highway.**

Work with the Board of Selectmen and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation to create a safety enhancement plan for Route 11 in Sunapee Village from Sargent Road to Winn Hill Road. The plan would include traffic calming measures to slow traffic as well as the installation of sidewalks and landscaping.

- 4. Create a special district in Harbor area recognizing it as a Town Center**

Propose a new zoning district in the Harbor area which would recognize it as a Town Center and propose appropriate Zoning Changes. This area would encompass the Ben-Mere property, Town Dock, Sunapee-Harbor Riverway properties and properties along Main and River Streets.

- 5. Rezone certain residential areas within the current Village District of Sunapee Village to have less intensive permitted uses.**

Propose the rezoning of areas such as Central Street and Maple Street into a new Village-Residential District to recognize that these areas are predominantly

residential. There would be higher densities and more uses in this new sub-district than the standard Residential District but the uses would be less intense than the commercial areas of the existing Village District. This new Village-Residential District would also include the westerly end of Lower Main Street which is now residential.

6. Rezone areas around the outer perimeter of the Georges Mills Village District from Residential to Village-Residential.

Propose the rezoning of an area located approximately 1000' outside the current Village District radius of Georges Mills from Residential to Village Residential. This will help recognize the existing moderate to high densities around the existing village area and make the best use of properties with municipal water and sewer availability.

7. Rezone the northerly portion of Avery Road into a Mixed-Use District.

Propose the rezoning of an area located at the northerly half of Avery Road into a mixed-use type district. This district would have similar dimensional requirements as the current Mixed-Use District in Sunapee but would have fewer allowable uses. The allowable uses would be service and industry related businesses, such as contractor yards and light industry.