

PLAINFIELD MASTER PLAN

Chapter 1 - Land Use

This Land Use Chapter of a Master Plan builds on the efforts and recommendations of the 2003 PLAINFIELD VISION & ACTION PLAN, a Community Development Plan developed under the Department of Housing and Community Development's E.O. 418 program. This Chapter identifies the town's present land uses and presents a guide for the distribution, location and inter-relationship of future public and private land uses in the community.

A key element of this Chapter is addressing the need of the town to promote and accommodate a growing commercial/industrial tax base to help increase revenues to allow the town to continue to provide a quality of life that Plainfield residents have become accustomed to. However this need for increased tax revenues presents a delicate balancing act in terms of preserving the existing character and neighborhoods of the town.

Overview

Two-thirds of Plainfield's land is protected either permanently or temporarily. Plainfield's residents wish to protect its undeveloped landscape, farmland, fields and waterways for the future but doing so puts increasing pressure on the existing small residential tax base. Plainfield's growth rate remains low as suburban residential development has not occurred as it has in other hilltowns closer to Greenfield, Northampton and Pittsfield. By planning where and how development can occur, Plainfield can proactively shape a future inclusive of the rural qualities it wishes to preserve.

Existing Conditions

Plainfield is a small rural community located in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains, 27 miles west of Greenfield, 22 miles northwest of Northampton and 24 miles east of Pittsfield. It is bounded by the small towns of Ashfield, Cummington, Hawley, Savoy and Windsor. Its 21.1 square-mile area is characterized by sloping terrain, extensive forest cover, a network of waterways, narrow roads, and sparse development (14.77 housing units per square mile).

Civic, social, and religious activities take place in churches, the senior center, municipal buildings and the fairgrounds located in or near the town center. The municipal buildings include the town hall, town offices and the town garage on route 116, and the new Fire Station on North Central Street.

Commercial activity is limited to approximately twenty businesses offering auto repair, tires, campgrounds, construction, soap, quilts, farms, stables and home-based businesses which are scattered throughout the town. A successful home based business recently had to relocate to

another community when its plans to expand met neighborhood opposition which prevented them from obtaining the required local permitting. Despite having a wealth of natural resources within its boundaries, Plainfield has few commercial ventures that might attract tourists who come to hike, fish, or enjoy water sports. There is little industrial activity, owing in part to Plainfield's remote location which can cause difficulties in getting products to market. Today a majority of Plainfield's residents commute to other communities such as Greenfield, Northampton, Springfield and Pittsfield to work.

Plainfield's pattern of development, both residential and economic, has been deeply influenced by the land's physical characteristics and its productive farming soils. Streams lace the landscape, carving out narrow valleys running primarily north and south, while large boulders and rocky outcroppings dot the hillsides and valleys. Small wooded and shrub marshes are scattered throughout the town with a significant wetland lying proximate to Crooked and Plainfield Ponds. Areas of Plainfield's rugged, steep and rocky terrain present significant constraints to development.

The town's main road, Route 116, runs easterly to Greenfield and South Deerfield and westerly to Adams. It extends for 7 miles between the Ashfield and Savoy Town lines, and is under the jurisdiction of the town. Classified as a Rural Major Collector, the section in Plainfield averages 1,000 vehicles per day (2012) at the Ashfield Town Line and 1,200 vehicles per day (2012) near the Savoy Town Line, amongst the lowest volumes along the entire length of Route 116. The roadway is characterized by its relatively narrow layout (24 feet from curb to curb), rolling hills, and curving geometry.

Due to its low traffic volumes, it is operating at a "Level of Service" of "A" (described as the highest quality of service when drivers are able to drive at their desired speed, the passing frequency required to maintain these speeds has not reached a demanding level, and drivers are delayed less than 40 percent of the time).

Land Use Pattern

Great swaths of forest punctuated by fields, farms, and the occasional single family home along the roads are typical sights in Plainfield, where most of the land remains undeveloped and wooded. The town is 85% forested and only 2.3% residential and commercial. The Route 116 corridor contains a significant portion of both the residential and agricultural lands in Town with approximately 41% of the total agriculture land and 48% of the residential land uses in town, found within a half mile of the Route 116 corridor.

There are some businesses currently operating in the town center although home-based businesses exist in other locations throughout the town. A substantial proportion of the land is protected from development.

Protected Lands

Temporary or permanent protection prevents development on a majority of Plainfield's 13,609 acres. There are more than 4,000 acres of land, or roughly 30% of the town, in Plainfield that is

provided with permanent protection. Much of this land is owned by either the state (Dubuque Memorial Forest, Deer Hill State Reservation) or a non-profit conservation organization (West Mountain Nature Preserve). These permanently protected lands are located in the northern and western part of town.

Table 1: Protected Open Space Acres

Area	Acreage	Level of Protection			
		Land with Permanent Protection (Chapter 97)	Land with Temporary Protection (Chapter 61)	Percentage of Land in Town that is Permanently Protected	Percentage of Land in Town that is Temporarily Protected
Townwide	13,650	4,050	4,205	29.7%	31.3%

Sources: MassGIS open space data, with updates by RPA staff.

Plainfield also has 512 acres of permanently protected farmland through the state’s Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program (APR).

Table 2: Properties with Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR)

FARM	DATE	ACRES
Davis	30-Jun-95	36
FLT/Waryiasz	15-Jun-04	433
Kalagher 1	26-Jun-13	15
Kohn 1	26-Jun-13	11.6
Moulton 1	26-Jun-13	8
Cummings 1	28-Jun-13	8.8
TOTAL		512.4

Approximately 4,205 acres of privately owned land in Plainfield (31% of the town) has been temporarily protected through Chapter 61, 61A and 61B. Protecting land through this program allows owners to be taxed at a lower rate. Chapter 61 land is considered a temporary protection because its status is renewable yearly and the land can be taken out of the program by its owner as long as the tax differences are paid. The Town of Plainfield has first right of refusal and is granted 120 days to purchase any Chapter 61 land as open space that is going to be sold for development. Although the town has this right, it is unlikely that it would be able to find the funds to purchase any land that did come up for sale. Plainfield depends on its conservation-minded land-owners to assist in protecting valuable land.

Changes in Land Use and Development Patterns

Beginning in the 1950's the State of Massachusetts started an ongoing program of land use data collection of its cities and towns. Originally conducted by William MacConnell and the University of Massachusetts, the land use patterns of Massachusetts communities have been documented through the analysis and interpretation of aerial photography. Plainfield's aerial photographs were again taken and analyzed in 1971, 1985, 1997 and most recently in 2005 (the 2005 data was produced by the Sanborn Company). There a number of considerations that need to be taken into account when reviewing and comparing the data contained in these land use interpretations and mappings:

1. The need to aggregate land use categories into those identifiable from aerial photography and comparable over several decades of analysis, may result in some categories offering misleading information because of limitations of the technology and methodology. An example of this is how "Wetland" was categorized. This category did not necessarily reflect the vast majority of acreage consisting of Bordering Vegetated Wetlands, a resource area regulated under the Wetland Protection Act.
2. The 2005 aerial photography interpretation changed some of the classifications and created some new ones including:
 - a. "Forested Wetland" – prior to 2005 forested wetlands were not included in the "Wetland" category, but were included in the aggregate total of "Forest" lands. However, for the 2005 aerial photographs a new classification of "Forest Wetland" was established, which now changed the aggregate for the former Forest and Wetland (now labeled "Non-Forested Wetland") acreages from prior years.
 - b. "Residential Very Low >1 acres lots" was previously included in "Residential Greater than ½ acre lot"
 - c. "Open Land" no longer includes power lines.
 - d. "Urban Open, parks, institutional, cemeteries" was split into separate classifications
3. Because of technological advances in aerial photography and the ability to analyze and interpret them, the 2005 data is substantially more accurate than the data from previous years. Prior to 2005 the land use data was manually interpreted from aerial photographs. Beginning in 2005 the land use map was derived directly from an ortho image.

While all of the above new methodology maintains much compatibility with the older system, it also explains some of the significant changes in land uses since 1997 which previously may have been misinterpreted or classified and have skewed the percentage of change from 1997 to 2005.

Table 3: Changes in Land Use and Development Patterns in Plainfield 1971-2005

Land Use	1971		1985			1999			2005			1971-2005
	Acres	Use as % of Total	Acres	Use as % of Total	Change Acres (%)	Acres	Use as % of Total	Change Acres (%)	Acres	Use as % of Total	Change Acres (%)	Change Acres (%)
Forest	11,699	85	11,589	85	-110 (-.9)	11,491	84	-98 (-.8)	11,628	85	-137 (-1)	-71 (-.6)
Active Agriculture	762	6	761	6	-1 (-.1)	773	6	12 (2)	816	6	43 (6)	54 (7)
Pasture	445	3	489	4	44 (10)	408	3	-81 (-17)	253	2	-155 (-38)	-192 (-43)
Residential > ½ acre lot	198	1	265	2	67 (34)	438	3	173 (65)	295	2	-143 (-33)	97 (49)
Open Land (powerlines, no vegetation)	189	1	181	1	-8 (-4)	165	1	-16 (-9)	180	1	-15 (-9)	-9 (-5)
Water	136	1	137	1	1 (.7)	136	1	-1 (-.7)	142	1	-6 (-4)	6 (4)
Non-forested Wetlands	114	.8	114	.8	0 (0)	115	.8	1 (.9)	211	2	96 (83)	97 (85)
Recreation	24	.2	27	.2	3 (13)	34	.2	7 (26)	26	.2	-8 (-24)	2 (8)
Residential ¼ - ½ acre lot	18	.1	18	.1	0 (0)	18	.1	0 (0)	4	0	-14 (-78)	-14 (-78)
Woody, Perennial, Orchards, Nurseries	15	.1	15	.1	0 (0)	15	.1	0 (0)	11	.1	-4 (27)	-4 (-27)
Urban Open Parks, Institutional, Cemeteries	11	.1	13	.1	2 (18)	11	.1	2 (15)	14	.1	3 (27)	3 (27)
Commercial	10	.1	10	.1	0 (0)	13	.1	3 (30)	19	.1	6 (46)	9 (90)
Mining, Gravel Pit	2	0	2	0	0 (0)	0	0	-2 (-100)	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Industrial	0	0	0	0	0 (0)	3	0	3	3	0	0 (0)	3
Multi-Family	0	0	0	0	0 (0)	0	0	0 (0)	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Residential < ¼ acre lot	0	0	0	0	0 (0)	0	0	0 (0)	0	0	0 (0)	0 (0)
Other*	0		3	0	-	3	0	0 (0)	7	0	4 (133)	7
TOTAL ACRES	13,623		13,624			13,623			13,609			

*Other: Transportation & Waste Disposal
 - Negative numbers mean loss of land

As can be seen in the chart above, even with a relatively slow growth rate Plainfield has seen some changes in the usage of land in the community from 1971-2005. While the town has experienced a modest 7% increase in active agricultural uses (i.e. crops), most significantly the town has seen a reduction of its pasture land by 43% (a startling 38% from 1999-2005 alone). The amount of forested land declined .6% from 1971 to 2005. While the residential area increased a seemingly large 38%, it's percentage of the overall community increased from only 1.6% to 2%, still a relatively low number. As illustrated on the Land Use Map (in the Appendix) that correlates to Table 3 above, the town is very green, literally. 13,139 acres of Plainfield's 13,609 total acres (over 95%) is comprised of farmland, pastureland, orchards, forest, wetlands and parks.

Zoning

Zoning is the primary tool used by municipalities for guiding growth and development patterns in their community. The Zoning Bylaws dictate which uses are permitted in which Districts, and the Zoning Map illustrates where those Districts are located. In addition to land uses Zoning also regulates density, lot size, parking, signage, building heights, setbacks and numerous other items that contribute to developing and preserving the character and fabric of the community.

Plainfield’s development patterns have resulted from land use decisions made by the town over the years through the by-laws that have been adopted and the permits that have been issued. Plainfield’s Zoning Bylaw establishes only one Zoning District (Rural Residential/Agricultural), permitting residential (single-family dwellings and multi-family dwellings that have lot acreage of at least 3 acres per household) and agricultural uses by right as well as riding stables, bed and breakfasts, and small in-home occupations, and most business uses by Special Permit. Accessory apartments and all other businesses are required to obtain a special permit. The maximum height of any building may not exceed 35 feet. The Town does not have any overlay districts.

Having only one Zoning district can make it difficult to encourage business development due to its inability to adequately buffer itself from proximate existing residential uses.

For such a small town, overall Plainfield has done a good job keeping its Zoning Bylaws up to date with some “best practices” such as Accessory Apartments and Site Plan Review.

Table 4: Zoning Summary

Number of Zoning Districts Total (not including overlay districts)	Village zoning district(s) with higher densities and/or more allowed uses to promote development in the district(s)	Open Space Residential Development (also known Conservation Subdivision) provision	Flag Lot allowed	Accessory Apartment allowed	Site Plan Review	Wireless Telecommunications Facility Bylaw	Types of Overlay Districts
1	No	No	No	Special Permit	Yes	Yes	None

Table 5: Zoning District Dimensional/Density Regulations

District	Minimum Standards					
	Lot Size, total or for first housing unit (sq ft)*	Area for each additional housing unit (sq ft)	Lot Frontage (ft)	Front Yard (ft)	Side Yard (ft) ^a	Rear Yard (ft)
Rural Residential / Agricultural	130,680	130,680	300	50	50	50

* 21,780 square feet equals a half-acre; 43,560 square feet equals one acre; 87,120 square feet equal two acres

Source: Town of Plainfield Zoning Bylaw, January 1999.

As a result of rising home prices and few available rentals, there is concern (as recorded in public meetings) that young people are being forced to leave town to find affordable housing. Some residents hope to amend the zoning by-laws to permit accessory apartments of a larger size to accommodate families.

Plainfield did adopt a Right-to-Farm by-law which serves as notice to residents that farmers have the right to operate a farming business on land zoned for doing so.

Population and Housing Trends

While U.S. Census figures indicate that Plainfield’s increase in population over the past two decades (13%) is significantly higher than that of the state (9%) or Hampshire County (8%), that number could be more alarming than it really is as Plainfield’s population was very small to start with.

Table 6: US Census Population Increase Comparison

	Households			Population		
	% Change 1990 - 2000	% Change 2000 - 2010	% Change 1990 - 2010	% Change 1990 - 2000	% Change 2000 - 2010	% Change 1990 - 2010
Massachusetts	9%	4%	13%	6%	3%	9%
Pioneer Valley Region	5%	3%	8%	1%	2%	3%
Hampshire County	12%	5%	17%	4%	4%	8%
Plainfield	16%	11%	29%	3%	10%	13%

However, Plainfield’s demographics have changed, and the town has grown a lot older. While the median age has increased nearly 25% from 42.3 years to 52.8years, the percent of the population age 62 or older has increased over 103% from 28.3% to 57.6%. The percent of the population under 18 years of age has dropped 42% from 24.8% to 14.3%.

36.8% of Plainfield resident’s have lived in town ten years or less, a 35.5% decrease from 2000. 21.8% have lived in town more than 30 years, a 195% increase over the 2000 census’ figure of 7.4%.

The town’s population has seen a 14.5% increase in college graduates. Educational & health care services and retail trade continue to be the top two occupations of Plainfield workers, and even though agricultural/forestry/fishing/hunting has risen from last to 2nd to last, it has decreased 22%. However, 73.5% of residents have at least a 30 minute drive to their place of work.

Table 7: US Census Population Characteristics

U.S. CENSUS COMPARISONS		
Category	2010 Census	2000 Census
Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14.3% under 18 • 18-<62 • 62+ • Median Age 	14.3% 28.1% 57.6% 52.8	24.8% 46.9% 28.3% 42.3
Years a Resident <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 years or less • 24-30 years • 30 years+ 	36.8% 41.3% 21.8%	57.1% 35.5% 7.4%
Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high school graduate or higher • college degree 	91.1% 42.5%	88.7% 37.1%
Median Household Income <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % Below Poverty Level 	\$61,719 8.4%	\$37,250 8%
Transportation to work (workers over 16) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drive alone • work at home • 30+ minutes travel time • average travel time 	80.4% 11.7% 73.5% 36.8 Minutes	78.8% 10.9% 33.5 Minutes
Top 5 Occupations of People 16+ in the labor force <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational and health care services • retail trade • arts, entertainment and recreation • manufacturing • Other non-public serves • Agricultural, forestry, fishing, hunting 	18.7% 12.6% 10.8% 10.1% 9.7% 1.4% (2 nd last)	20.3% 9.6% 7.8% 10.3% 8.2% 1.8% (last)

Plainfield has an aging housing stock with 51% of its units being built over 53 years ago. While the median housing price jumped from \$121,000 in 2000 to \$227,500 in 2010, adjusted for inflation it represents an 81% increase. Over the past decade the percent of renters whose gross rent is more than 25% of their household income rose 11%.

Table 8: US Census Housing Characteristics

U.S. CENSUS COMPARISONS		
Category	2010 Census	2000 Census
Housing Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53 years or less • older than 53 years 	49% 51%	

Housing Value		
• <\$200,000	37.3%	
• \$200,000-\$499,999	56.8%	
• \$500,000 or more	5.9%	
• Median	\$227,500	\$121,000
Gross Rent as % of Household Income		
• less than 15%	27.8%	35%
• 15-24.9%	-	-
• 25-29.9%	27.8%	15%
• 30-34.9%	-	10%
• 35% or more	44.4%	40%

While Plainfield has not experienced an influx of suburban residential development or subdivisions, the relative ease of Approval Not Required (ANR) building can be seen in the flow of development occurring to the south and east of the town center. Unsurprisingly, all development is occurring along existing roads, particularly those roads that are paved or have good access to a paved road.

Of its five abutting communities, over the past ten years Plainfield has issued Building Permits for the second lowest number of housing units (17) behind only Hawley's 10. This is about half of the average (33.5 units) of the other four towns. While this 1.7 unit per year average may seem a like too much for many residents who want Plainfield to remain exactly as it is, the yearly average from 2003-2007 of almost 3 units is statistically much more than the 2008-20012 average of .6 units.

Table 9: Building Permit Comparison

	Building Permits Issued										TOTAL (yearly average)
	TOTAL HOUSING UNITS										
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
Ashfield	5	8	7	6	5	3	2	0	2	2	40 (4)
Windsor	2	7	5	4	3	3	4	4	2	2	36 (3.6)
Savoy	5	6	6	7	6	1	1	2	0	1	35 (3.5)
Cumington	6	3	3	2	2	2	2	0	1	2	23 (2.3)
Plainfield	4	2	3	3	2	0	0	1	0	2	17 (1.7)
Hawley	2	1	0	0	3	0	2	0	1	1	10 (1)

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, State of the Cities Data Systems (SOCDS) Building Permit Database. *Note:* Statistics provided in these tabulations are based upon reports submitted by local building permit officials in response to a mail survey. HUD makes adjustments to account for missing annual reporters if an official fails to respond.

Table 10: Plainfield New Housing Units

Housing Unit Building Permits for: PLAINFIELD TOWN, MA (Hampshire County)										
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total Units	4	2	3	3	2	0	0	1	0	2
Units in Single-Family Structures	4	2	3	3	2	0	0	1	0	2
Units in All Multi-Family Structures	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Units in 2-unit Multi-Family Structures	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Units in 3- and 4-unit Multi-Family Structures	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Units in 5+ Unit Multi-Family Structures	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In relation to its neighboring communities Plainfield residents have the second lowest property tax bill, yet the second lowest per capita income. Plainfield’s tax rates are the second highest in the area, falling only below Greenfield’s, and over the past five years the average property tax bill has risen over 7%.

Table 11: MA Department of Revenue Community Comparisons

Municipality	2010 Population	Land Area	Population Density	2012 Total Road Miles	2013 Average Single Family Tax Bill	2010 DOR Income Per Capita
Ashfield	1,737	40.3	43	83.1	\$3,589	\$23,826
Cummington	872	23.1	38	61.6	\$2,828	\$26,185
Greenfield	17,456	21.7	803	131.9	\$3,640	\$19,298
Hawley	337	30.9	11	48.5	\$3,404	\$12,024
Plainfield	648	21.1	31	48.7	\$3,061	\$17,895
Savoy	692	35.9	19	54.6	\$2,500	\$21,451
Windsor	899	35.0	26	76.3	\$2,408	\$23,838

Table 12: Community Tax Rates (MA Department of Revenue)

FY2013 Tax Rates by Class				
Municipality	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property

Ashfield	15.09	15.09	15.09	15.09
Cummington	12.34	12.34	12.34	12.34
Greenfield	20.72	20.72	20.72	20.72
Hawley	15.95	15.95	0.0	15.95
Plainfield	18.56	18.56	18.56	18.56
Savoy	16.81	16.81	16.81	16.81
Windsor	12.59	12.59	12.59	12.59

Table 13: Plainfield Average Tax Bills (MA Department of Revenue)

Average Single Family Tax Bills			
Fiscal Year	Average Single Family Value	Single Family Parcels	Average Single Family Tax Bill
2009	206,492	246	2,850
2010	201,150	247	2,925
2011	211,174	248	3,132
2012	170,015	246	2,972
2013	164,899	246	3,061

Buildout Estimates

Approximately 5,400 acres in Plainfield have no legal restrictions to development in place, though constraints like steep slopes, setbacks to waterways and wetlands and soils not conducive to septic limit the amount of land that could be reasonably developed. Developers have more technology available to them today to surmount septic difficulties and land is becoming scarcer so it is not practical to assume that development cannot occur.

As shown on the Land Development Environmental Constraints Map (in the Appendix) and in Table 13 below, a significant portion of Plainfield is development constrained due to environmental elements. While much of the town (33%) is comprised of protected and recreational open space due to the previously mentioned Dubuque Memorial Forest, Deer Hill State Reservation and West Mountain Nature Preserve, there is also significant floodplain and Natural Heritage Endangered Species Priority Habitat located along Mill Brook.

Table 13: Plainfield Environmental Constraints to Development

Environmental Constraint	Total Acres (% of Town)
Protected & Recreational Open Space	4,535 (33)
Slope >15%	3876 (28)
Natural Heritage Endangered Species Priority Habitats of Rare Species	750 (5.5)
Wetlands	484 (3.5)
Water Bodies	142 (1)

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) produced buildout analyses for every community in Massachusetts in 2001. These analyses were based on local zoning regulations and the maximum new development that could be allowed by right under current zoning. It is important to note that there is no time frame or demographic trends associated with it and no considerations were made for bedrock or high water tables. Permanently protected land was excluded from the analysis but Chapter 61 land was not since under that program, the land is temporarily restricted from development, and its status can change. The EOEA's results for Plainfield showed 9,445 developable acres, resulting in a potential 3,765 housing units. Estimating an average household size of 2.6 people, this could result in a population of 4,566, eight times today's population. These numbers may seem extreme, since Plainfield's slopes and soils do pose real limitations to development. Calculated another way, total existing, undeveloped road frontage (counting both sides of the streets) could provide minimum frontage for 1,756 new residences. Perhaps what the EOEA's analysis demonstrates most accurately is that in the future, Plainfield's zoning by-laws may not work to preserve the rural qualities that its residents most cherish.

Potential for Future Development

The center of Town is the portion of Route 116 that would be the most likely candidate for development. A Buildout Analysis conducted by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission in 2003 identified approximately 9,400 acres of land that could be developed in town, for an additional 2,504 residential units. This takes into account the Town's current zoning ordinance of a 3-acre minimum lot size for each household. The town does not have any municipal water or sewer system, and without this infrastructure a substantial increase in development is unlikely.

As illustrated on the Development Density Map (in the aAppendix) development is uniformly scattered throughout the town along the frontages of its existing streets. The only real development concentration is in the vicinity of the triangle of Main, Union and North Central Streets. Not coincidentally, most of Plainfield's developed land is not in environmental constrained areas.

Plainfield has distinctive rural residential patterns with homes, businesses and farms distributed along existing roads, with many located along Route 116. Because of Plainfield's slow growth rate, typical subdivision development is not likely to occur as the long-term sale of the lots would not support the carrying costs of construction, thus continued ANR development along the existing roadways can be anticipated. However, other types of development should be considered to avoid a strip development look to the town such as encouraging homes to be located farther back on their lots surrounded by forest.

PUBLIC INPUT

The Master Planning Committee undertook a public participation effort to solicit the feelings and attitudes of Plainfield residents.

Stakeholder Meetings

In August the Committee held Stakeholder Meetings with town officials and the business community. While the complete comments from these meetings are contained in the Appendix, the following were identified as the town's major opportunities:

- the Conservation Commission worked well with the applicants
- the small friendly community
- the town's rural character
- farming use is expanding

The following were identified as the town's major challenges:

- need younger volunteers (fire, ambulance, etc.)
- many volunteers work out of area and aren't available during the week
- big city retirees – new people coming in with different expectations
- US Post Office being scaled back
- lack of sufficient internet and cell phone service
- lack of young family housing
- community attitude is not business friendly
- ZBA too restrictive (larger home occupations)
- lack of Jobs
- need to balance commercial growth with maintaining town character
- have only one large residential zone, need a business zone where people can do things
- need more development alternatives/options besides residential sprawl
- contradictory & vague bylaws
- newcomers want to keep town "picture postcard" just the way when they moved in, with no changes

Survey

In September the Committee undertook a community wide survey distributing a questionnaire to all households through the Plainfield Post, offering it on an interactive website, and providing them to all town boards and departments. A table was also set up at the Volunteer Fire Departments' Annual Barbeque from which they were distributed.

[Survey results from Leslie]

Public Forum

In November the Committee held a Public Forum at which the results of the Stakeholder Meetings and Survey were presented and discussed, and series of maps (Land Uses, Development Density and Development Environmental Constraints) were reviewed. The forum was attended mostly by town officials. The dominant conversation at the Forum quickly turned

to the difficulty of a small town being able to afford to continue to provide the services at a level to which its residents have become accustomed. This was also consistently the primary theme of all of the public participation venues. There was a strong sentiment that the town needed to take measures to provide more business opportunities to broaden the town's commercial tax base. Ideas discussed included creating a new Village Center zone where new businesses could be established and growing home occupations could relocate to. The idea of renting underutilized town properties as commercial and incubator space was also discussed.

Defining Plainfield

With its slow growth rate and older homes and buildings Plainfield has retained much of the historic "rural character" from an earlier time. It has its own blend of a lot of the past with a few dashes of the present. While a few vistas across farm fields remain nearly unchanged from one hundred years ago, many of the views have been lost as former farmland has returned to forest. New residents base their impressions on what they see around them currently, while long-time residents have already seen changes that development has brought. This can sometimes be in conflict as newcomers want to keep the town just the way it was when they moved in, while long-time residents see the need for some change to provide an opportunity for their grown children to remain living in the community.

Plainfield has seen many changes over the years. As the farming uses have declined, while many residents in the past were able to work in the community, most people must now commute to jobs in other communities. Many people must work at two jobs. Keeping Plainfield the way it is seems to be a common thread running through many of the comments received during the public meetings, but there is also strong sentiment to be more business friendly and expand the town's commercial tax base.

Many of the newcomers to Plainfield are retirees. With an aging population the need to provide additional and expanded senior services will likely emerge and the portion of the town's budget dedicated to providing senior services will likely have to increase.

Plainfield's residents have made it clear in public meetings that they highly value the undeveloped lands, the wildlife habitat these lands represent, and rural qualities that have drawn them to live here. At odds are the continuing protection of land important to Plainfield and the small tax base that must support the town. Protecting land under Chapter 61 provides a tax break to land-owners. Residents have limited interest in acquiring or preserving additional open space because of the existence of the large swaths of forest and wildlife habitat already preserved by the state and Audubon Society. Taxes have been rising as education and school busing costs continue to grow. The conflicting desires to keep taxes as low as possible while continuing to provide the municipal services that residents expect are not easy to balance. However the realization that steps need to be taken (even small steps) which move towards the longer-range goals of expanding the town's tax base and creating jobs, can be effective means to that end.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Plainfield's signature isolation has delayed it from growing as large as other neighboring hilltowns but the trend identified in the population and housing growth pattern portends that planning for growth is both necessary and timely. Zoning by-laws are the primary tools that allow a town to guide where and how development can occur.

Plainfield's current zoning by-laws could be improved to ensure that future development better reflects the nature of its current land uses and provide guidance for development planning that is sensitive to landscape character or existing infrastructure conditions. Continuing to craft bylaw changes that work towards preserving Plainfield's rural assets is an important step towards realizing the future as residents want it to be. This can be balanced with the town official's desire to broaden the town's tax base through additional thoughtful commercial development.

1. Village Center Zoning

It is difficult to spur economic development and expand the town's tax base when a community only has one Zoning District, and it's Residential.

The town should consider identifying a location that is suitable for commercial development and develop a Village Center Zoning District for the purpose of creating and perpetuating the characteristics of a small-scale mixed use town center. The standards of the district with respect to allowed uses, dimensions and setbacks, parking, signs, lighting and landscaping should be modeled after other successful village centers (eg. Williamsburg). The goal is to create a dynamic mix of commercial, residential, governmental and civic uses that will make the town center an attractive place to live, work and visit.

2. Develop Commercial Design Guidelines

To ensure that new commercial development conforms to and complements the existing historic rural character of Plainfield, the town should adopt design guidelines. These design guidelines strive to maintain and enhance a community's rural character, historic value and scenic charm. Their overriding objective is to ensure that new development and renovation/alterations and additions fit in well with its surroundings. They should encourage the use of forms and materials that are human in scale and allow expression of Plainfield's sense of its small town way of life through commercial development.

Design guidelines should have an emphasis on siting and design conditions to guide the design of new development in a manner that strikes a balance between maintaining the small town atmosphere and qualities that have historically characterized Plainfield, while accommodating new development that provides the opportunity for a broader mix of businesses and services, employment and an expanded tax base. Properly administered, these design guidelines should ensure that new development enhances the rural qualities valued by the townspeople and creates a pattern of development that is pedestrian friendly built to human-scale, character and function.

3. Utilize Town Buildings as Incubator Space for Developing Businesses

For those home occupations that may have outgrown their neighborhoods or for people wanting to start up a commercial enterprise but don't have the resources for developing their own site, the town could begin a program for using underutilized town buildings and properties by renting space to interested entrepreneurs. This serves a number of purposes, better utilization of vacant or underutilized public properties, saving these properties from further deterioration, providing much needed space for potential commercial enterprises that may not qualify as Home Occupation or Cottage Industry, and creating a modest revenue stream for the town.

Hathaway Hall (the former fire station) have been suggested. This will likely require some zoning changes.

4. Upland Requirement for Building Lots

In addition to the basic area requirement for building lots in Plainfield's agricultural/residential zoning, an upland requirement stipulates that a certain percentage of the lot's minimum area must be buildable (e.g., not a wetland). This measure prevents development of "islands in the swamp" and reduces the likelihood of human encroachment into wetland areas and their buffer zones. A zoning by-law like this would help Plainfield protect larger portions of upland in proportion to wetter areas.

5. Open Space Design

This type of zoning by-law allows for a concentration of housing on a portion of a parcel with the balance preserved as open space for recreation, conservation, agriculture or forestry. On appropriate sites, this measure would allow developers to reduce the size of house lots and building setbacks, in exchange for permanently protecting large, contiguous bands of undeveloped land.

As an alternative to strictly ANR development, this could preserve the rural character of Plainfield's existing public ways by encouraging development of lots further back on a parcel. An example of how this might work in Plainfield would be to allow building lots to be reduced to 1 ½ acres with the remaining 1 ½ acres being combined into a larger open space area or buffer. The direct benefit of this technique is a more harmonious relationship between new residential development and the existing rural landscape, plus it also has the advantage of retaining/creating wildlife corridors.

6. Consider Alternatives to Standard ANR Development

Utilizing Common driveways (where one driveway is utilized for providing access to more than one lot), especially when used in consort with Flag Lots, can reduce the number of curbs-cuts and turning movement points along a public way and reduce the amount of surface run-off. Unpaved common driveways could be utilized instead of a standard paved subdivision road as a way of making it affordable to locate the developed portion of a parcel further back from the view of the public way, maintaining the appearance of a rural road.

7. Scenic Upland Zoning

Scenic Upland Zoning can be established to protect mountain summits, ridgelines,

fragile hillsides, or other areas of unique visual appeal and scenic quality from aesthetic or environmental degradation. This bylaw regulates alterations of land that can have significant adverse effects on natural resources or scenic qualities, such as ridgeline or hillside development.

Several of Plainfield's roads provide sweeping views of hillsides, even with existing vegetation. A by-law to protect certain viewsheds and fragile hillsides could be crafted to require a site plan review or a special permit before certain types of development activity could occur.

8. Community Preservation Act

While only 54% of the survey respondents felt that the town should attempt to preserve more open space, 53% said that they would not support a 1-3% CPA surcharge on their property tax.

CPA funds however can also be used for preserving Historic properties, developing and improving recreational areas, and promoting affordable housing. While the time may not be right now, Plainfield should continue to think about and work towards consideration of passing the Community Preservation Act (CPA). This program allows the town to add a 1-3% surcharge on residential and commercial property taxes (many town's exempt certain income ranges and/or the first \$100,000 in property value). Whatever amount the town pledges to collect qualifies them to receive additional CPA funding from the state each year. The funds can be used for land protection, affordable housing, and historic preservation. The state's portion (which comes from Registry of Deed fees from house sales) is entirely within the jurisdiction of the town to allocate as it sees fit within the three categories listed above, and it does not all have to be spent in the year it is received; the funds can be reserved until a sufficient quantity builds up.

Land use Recommendations from the 2003 PLAINFIELD VISION & ACTION PLAN still worth considering:

Strategy #3 – Work with owners of land in farming and forestry to find ways to agriculture a viable business in Plainfield and to help keep farm and forest land in productive agricultural use.

1. Recruit a Plainfield volunteer to be the local contact with Communities Involved in Sustaining Agriculture [CISA]. Make sure that Plainfield farmers are included in CISA's outreach and regional meetings with farmers to talk about marketing and other technical assistance that might be useful to them.
2. As the community begins to consider how flexible development standards might work in Plainfield's Zoning Bylaw [see below], visit owners of land in farming and forestry to talk about how this might increase their range of choices in future years.

Strategy #4: Encourage future development to locate where the land and the landscape can best sustain it, trying to avoid the special areas identified in Map #3.

1. Include Map #3 in the neighborhood discussions regarding cooperative compacts, so that property owners may consider how to conserve the most important resource areas.

2. Begin community discussion regarding changes in the Zoning Bylaw to allow flexible development standards as an alternative to continuous roadside development under the state's Approval Not Required [ANR] procedure. Use the zoning outline in the appendix and Map #3 to help townspeople consider how this more flexible approach might help conserve rural landscape character.

Strategy #8: Amend the zoning provisions for Accessory Apartments to make them a more attractive option for homeowners.

1. Initiate community-wide discussions about Plainfield's option to amend the zoning provisions for accessory apartments. Use the zoning outline in the appendix and recommendations from the September 24 meeting to prompt feedback regarding the decisions & choices that need to be made in order to help accessory apartments fit in Plainfield and be a more attractive option for homeowners.
2. Compare zoning provisions in other rural towns, especially as they relate to design standards and maximum allowable size.
3. Update townspeople with frequent articles in the *Plainfield Post*. Give clear examples of how more flexible accessory apartment regulations could help older residents, young people starting out, and others whose needs are not met through large homes on their own lots.
4. Work for enough informed support to craft detailed, warrant-ready amendments to present for Town Meeting vote.

Appendix

- **Stakeholder Comments**
- **Survey Results**
- **Land Use Map**
- **Land Development
Environmental Constraints**
- **Development Density Map**

**PLAINFIELD STAKEHOLDER'S MEETING COMMENTS
8-14-13**

TOWN OFFICIALS ATTENDING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy Committee • Library • COA • Newsletter • ZBA • Fire Chief • Conservation Commission • Recreation Commission • Police • Agricultural Commission 	
Opportunities	Challenges
Conservation Commission Work well with the applicants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly small projects, additions, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weeds in pond
Energy Committee - want to be a Green Community (not everybody agrees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar Bylaw failed – too long
Ag. Comm. - 4% of town is prime agricultural land	
Fire Dept.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long, narrow driveways
ZBA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly dimensional variances • Special Permits (home businesses, accessory apartments) • Sect. 8 Findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ZBA too restrictive (larger home occupations)
GENERAL COMMENTS	
Sense of Community	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small friendly community • Rural forested character of the town • Many old Historic Home (demolition delay bylaw?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need younger volunteers (fire, ambulance, etc.) • Many volunteers work out of area and aren't available during the week • Big city retirees – new people coming in with different expectations • Burning complaints • Animal complaints • Potential for Overdevelopment • Scaling back post office • No longer bulk mailing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sufficient internet and cell phone service • Lack of young family housing • Difficult (regional) educational system – discourages young families from moving there • Addressing the needs of an aging population
Business	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ commercial wind and solar ○ farming ○ trades ○ small manufacturing • Small home occupations are o.k. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need better internet and cell phone service • Climate adaptation – hardening up the infrastructure • Commuters shop on way home, not in town • Community attitude is not business friendly, who’d want to come here? • Lack of Jobs • Larger home occupations Special permits get neighborhood opposition • Regulations discourage new businesses and expansions • Need to balance commercial growth with maintaining town character • Have only one large residential zone, need a business zone where people can do things • Whole area (including neighborhood towns) needs to change its attitude
Land Use	
Farming use is expanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character threatened by ANR development • Affects/disrupts wildlife corridors • Need more development alternatives/options besides residential sprawl • Contradictory & vague bylaws • Low population density influences land uses • What will children do with inherited properties • Newcomers want to keep town “picture postcard” just the way when they moved in, with no changes •

PLAINFIELD COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

The Plainfield Planning Board/Master Plan Committee

September 2013

PLAINFIELD LAND USE SURVEY

PART A: COMMUNITY VALUES – These questions build on the work undertaken in the 2003 Plainfield Vision and Action Plan.

Values Statement #1 - I want Plainfield to continue as a small, rural town with scenic vistas, woodlands, working farms, roadside trees, and historic buildings. (Please feel free to add additional comments.)

29 Strongly Agree _10_ Agree _3_ Neutral _2_ Disagree _2_ Strongly Disagree

Values Statement #2 - I want Plainfield to be a vibrant and sustainable community, where residents and their children can make a living. (Please feel free to add additional comments.)

22 Strongly Agree _10_ Agree _9_ Neutral _2_ Disagree _1_ Strongly Disagree

Values Statement #3 - Natural resources need to be preserved, including ponds, streams, and wildlife. I want to avoid the loss of these resources to housing and commercial/industrial development. (Please feel free to add additional comments.)

28 Strongly Agree _9_ Agree _2_ Neutral _2_ Disagree _2_ Strongly Disagree

Values Statement #4 - Peace and quiet matter to me. (Please feel free to add additional comments.)

26 Strongly Agree _13_ Agree _2_ Neutral _3_ Disagree _0_ Strongly Disagree

Values Statement #5 - Please put a check mark next to the **TOP FIVE** land uses that are important to your quality of life in Plainfield. (If you would like to include additional items, please add them under "Other"):

- _5_ residential development
- _5_ professional services (e.g., tax preparer, attorney, financial advisor)
- _17_ small retail stores (e.g., groceries, antiques, etc.)
- _19_ light manufacturing and crafts (e.g., pottery, clothing, etc.)
- _14_ automotive shops (e.g., tire sales, car repair)
- _14_ hospitality (e.g., restaurants, B&Bs)
- _32_ working farmland
- _26_ water quality and water resources (e.g., rivers and Plainfield Pond)
- _28_ forest and wildlife habitat
- _23_ historic sites (e.g., mill sites, historic buildings)
- _24_ open space for scenic value
- _13_ spaces for recreational use
- ___ Other: _____

Values Statement #6 - The quality of community life is important to me. In a large part, my sense of being part of a community comes from social interactions, and getting together for community and cultural events for all ages.

16 Strongly Agree _14_ Agree _12_ Neutral _2_ Disagree _1_ Strongly Disagree

Values Statement #7 - Although our schools are located outside of town, education contributes to our vitality and future.

25 Strongly Agree _14_ Agree _7_ Neutral _0_ Disagree _0_ Strongly Disagree

Values Statement #8 - It would be good to have more small local businesses and services, in buildings that fit into our landscape.

23 Strongly Agree _11_ Agree _4_ Neutral _5_ Disagree _0_ Strongly Disagree

Values Statement #9 - I would like a little more community activity at our town center, such as recreation and small businesses, but we want to be careful to preserve historic structures.

11 Strongly Agree _11_ Agree _13_ Neutral _7_ Disagree _0_ Strongly Disagree

Values Statement #10 - (Please check *ALL* of the following that you agree with. If you would like to include additional items, please add them in the "Other" space.)

As building development continues in Plainfield, I would prefer:

- _11_ Houses sprawled along roadways, with just the minimum required frontage and lot.
- _15_ Houses that are clustered more closely together, with larger areas of land and longer stretches of road frontage left open between the clusters.
- _15_ Stores and businesses spread across town.
- _4_ Stores and businesses grouped into commercial areas.
- _8_ Stores and businesses in residential village clusters.

PART B: PLAINFIELD LAND USES

1. Are you a resident of Plainfield?

43 Year round _2_ Seasonal _0_ No

If yes, how many years have you been a resident of Plainfield?

5 0-5 _1_ 6-10 _8_ 11-20 _5_ 21-30 _7_ 31-40 _8_ 41-50 _5_ 51+ _0_ N/A

2. Do you participate and vote at Town Meetings? _31_ Yes _10_ No

If No, why not? _____

3. Are you: _17_ Male _27_ Female

4. What is your age? _0_ 14-19 _2_ 20-29 _0_ 30-39 _3_ 40-49 _12_ 50-59 _19_ 60+

5. Are you retired? _16_ Yes _22_ No _6_ Partially

6. Do you work in town? _12_ Yes _21_ No _9_ N/A (Fully Retired)

7. Do you work at more than one job? Yes _14_ No _22_

8. Do you earn money working from home? Yes _16_ No _24_

9. Are you disabled? Yes _1_ No _41_
10. Do you have a special needs adult child living with you? Yes _0_ No _40_
11. How many residents live in your household? _8_ 1 _26_ 2 _1_ 3-4 _3_ 4+
12. What is your household income? _17_ \$0-\$49,000 _15_ \$50,000-\$99,000
2 \$100,000-\$149,000 _3_ \$150,000+
13. Do you attend or have children in: (Choose all that apply)
3 Public Schools _0_ School Choice _0_ Private School _2_ Home Schooled _36_ N/A
14. Please indicate whether you are a: _27_ Homeowner _6_ Renter _0_ Other
15. I would like to see the town of Plainfield promote the following housing types: (Choose all that apply)
23 Detached single family homes _8_ Duplex homes _22_ Accessory apartments
7 Conversion of single family to multifamily units
16. Do you believe there are sufficient housing options that your children can afford in Plainfield when they are ready to move out? _13_ Yes _20_ No
17. Do you believe the town should attempt to preserve more open space?
23 Yes _19_ No
18. Would you support a 1-3% surcharge on your property tax (partially matched by state funds) that would be used to preserve open space & farmland, create and support affordable housing, and preserve historic buildings and landscapes? _20_ Yes _23_ No
19. What should we use as a model for the way Plainfield should grow and look in the future? (Choose *all* that apply)
15 A residential community without a commercial center or significant commercial development (e.g. Westhampton)
15 A rural residential community with a small commercial center (e.g. Huntington)
7 A mostly residential “bedroom” community with dispersed small-scale commercial development along main roads (e.g. Granby)
4 A community with a mixed-use center with a variety of housing options and commercial developments (e.g. Easthampton)
0 A community that promotes large scale commercial development along main roads and preserves outlying open space (e.g. Hadley)
_ Other: _____
20. With regard to the historic village center of Plainfield, do you:
24 Like it just as it is _10_ Want to see it developed with more commercial, civic, and residential uses

21. Where should the town encourage new commercial development? (Choose all that apply)
8 Along the whole length of Route 116 _8_ Near the historic village center _13_ Nowhere
_____ Other (please specify): _____

22. Regarding Plainfield's Zoning Bylaws:

Are they effective in guiding the town's growth? _13_ Yes _4_ No

Do you feel the Zoning Bylaws have problems? _10_ Yes _3_ No

What amendments are necessary? _____

If you are interested in participating in the Plainfield Master Plan Land Use Public Forum please enter your email address to receive information and updates: _____

Please use the space below for additional comments about Plainfield and its growth (likes, dislikes, etc.) _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!