

Master Planning in New Hampshire

Information Guide #1 – Master Plan Overview

Land is a municipality's most basic resource. The use of land determines to a large extent the character and quality of life within the community. The rate, location and type of growth, and protection of unique features affect not only the municipality's physical appearance but also its need for public services and facilities. A municipality that plans wisely for its land use will be far better equipped to anticipate and deal with future demands and problems.

What is a Master Plan?

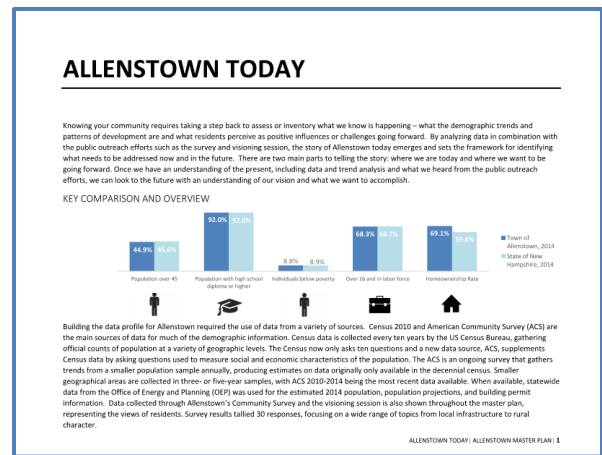
A master plan is a planning document that serves to guide the overall character, physical form and development of a community (*RSA 674:2*). It describes how, why, where and when to build or rebuild a city or town. It provides guidance to local officials making decisions on budgets, ordinances, capital improvements, zoning and subdivision matters, and other development-related issues.

While the master plan is not a legal document, it does provide the legal basis for zoning and other land use regulations. Specifically, in order to adopt a zoning ordinance (*RSA 674:18*), the planning board must have adopted a master plan with, at a minimum, vision and land use sections (*RSA 674:2*). In addition, certain types of ordinances cannot be legally adopted or certain grants may not be feasible unless an up-to-date master plan is in place.

Who is Responsible for the Master Plan?

The planning board is responsible for preparing, amending, and adopting the municipality's master plan (*RSA 674:3*). Many planning boards create committees that include non-planning board members to assist with updating the plan. The master plan can be amended and adopted one section at a time or as a whole. The planning board is required during the preparation of the master plan, to inform the general public and to solicit comments regarding the future growth of the community. The planning board is strongly encouraged to use various engagement tools to help maximize participation from residents.

The planning board also has the responsibility for promoting interest in and understanding of the master plan (*RSA 674:1*). Planning board members should be familiar with the master plan and frequently refer to it while performing their duties and proposing ordinance amendments.



Allenstown Master Plan 2016



New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning
107 Pleasant Street, Johnson Hall 3rd Floor, Concord, NH 03301
Phone: 603-271-2155 Web: www.nh.gov/oep Twitter: @NH OEP
www.nh.gov/oep/planning/resources/master-planning.htm