

Norton Town Plan

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I. Introduction

A. Historic and Geographic Overview

Norton, located on the Canadian Border (Quebec) in northwestern Essex County, has the distinction of being the first town chartered in Vermont in 1769. When chartered, the town name was changed from Hamilton to Norton. The new name came from one of the largest holders of the original land grants, Jediah Norton. In later years as the lumber business thrived, the town name became Norton Mills. During its peak population years, Norton had a population of over 1000. In the 20th century, the town was renamed Norton following the closure of many of the once numerous mills. As of the 2010 census, the town's population had fewer than 200 persons.

Norton's historic ties to Quebec are especially important and must be understood to realize the character of this town.

The earliest settlers came south from the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Both French and English settlers migrated to Norton and the only major transportation routes were to the north into Quebec. When the railroad arrived in 1853, Norton became tied to America and shipment of lumber from Norton's many mills flowed into southern New England. Many of the settling families still live in Norton and are the backbone of the community.

As no roads existed into Island Pond or Canaan until the earliest part of the 20th century most trade and commerce was with Coaticook, in the Province of Quebec just 8 miles to the north. This trend continues for many today as Coaticook, with one major food markets, 2 hardware stores, dentists, restaurants, funeral homes, drug stores and banks provide many of the daily or weekly needs of the community. To the north just 30 minutes is Sherbrooke, a city of 100,000. Sherbrooke is the regional center of the Eastern Townships of Quebec. Sherbrooke/Lenoxville has two universities and the nearest locations for major shopping such as Home Depot, Wal*Mart, Costco, Sears, Hudson Bay Co., movie theaters and restaurants. Many of these services become more or less important as the currency exchange fluctuates bringing more shoppers from the north to Norton or from Norton traveling to the north.

Norton is bordered on the East by Averill and Canaan, on the North by Quebec, on the West by Holland, and on the South by Warner's Grant, Warren Gore, and Avery's Gore. It is located approximately 15 miles north of Island Pond, and eight miles south of Coaticook, PQ. There are no incorporated villages within the Town of Norton.

Norton is known as the most distant town north of the major New England cities, and the town remains a destination for hundreds of Vermonters. To our northern neighbors, Norton is "La Frontiere." The residents and landowners of Norton are fiercely proud of the traditional, rustic character of the town. There is a desire for Norton to grow and

prosper while retaining our character and remote identity. This Town Plan respects our rich heritage and presents a blueprint for our third century.

B. Purpose of Town Plan

The Norton Planning Commission is responsible for the development of this Plan. The town's previous Plan expired in 2011. Recent changes to the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act, along with a desire to control its own future aided Norton's decision to create this new Town Plan. The Plan forms the basis for updating Norton's land use regulations, and provides a valuable reference in the review of projects by local municipal boards, projects subject to Act 250 Review, and projects requiring review by the Vermont Public Service Board for the issuance of a "certificate of public good" (Section 248 proceedings). It also serves as a guiding document when making decisions on capital improvements within the Town.

The development of this Plan was funded by a *Municipal Planning Grant* from Vermont's Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

This Plan in its entirety spells out the general direction in which the Town of Norton wishes to proceed.

C. Public Participation

As part of the planning process for the 2006 Plan, the Norton Planning Commission conducted an extensive opinion survey of residents and landowners. The response was very good, with 110 individuals participating – nearly one-half of Norton's population. Of the survey respondents, 35% were resident homeowners and 50% were seasonal homeowners. Sixty percent of respondents were between the ages 41-64, and 36% were age 65 or older. Survey results have been incorporated into this document and are in a bulleted format. The Planning Commission believes that local opinions have changed little over recent years; therefore most recommendations are still valid for this 2013 update. The complete 14-page questionnaire and all responses are available for public review at the Town offices.

D. Organization of the Plan

The Plan is arranged in sections that comprise the elements required for municipal plans under the Vermont Planning and Development Act (24 V.S.A. § 4382). The Plan includes sections on:

- Land Use
- Economic Development
- Transportation
- Public Facilities and Utilities
- Education
- Natural, Scenic and Historic Resources
- Energy

- Housing
- Flood Resilience
- Plan Implementation and Compatibility with Region

The section on Flood Resilience is a new requirement for Town Plans effective July 1, 2014, based on a recently enacted amendment to 24 V.S.A. § 4382. This section addresses flood hazard areas in Norton, and recommends strategies to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, and municipal investments.

For each element of the Plan, “Existing Conditions” and “Planning Considerations,” including noted deficiencies or needs for the future of the community, are described. Relevant input from the 2006 community survey is included in each section of the Plan in the “Planning Considerations” subsection. At the end of each Plan section are “Goals and Recommended Actions” outlining how the Town wishes to proceed.

E. Overarching Goals

The Planning Commission has identified six major overarching priorities (goals) for the Town of Norton. They are equally important and appear throughout this document. Goals pertaining to specific elements of the Plan are included under the “Goals and Recommended Actions” of each individual section:

- *Traditional ways of life and land use patterns within the Town of Norton should be preserved.*
- *The number of town-maintained roads (class 3 and 4) should be kept to a minimum, and environmental quality should be given priority when new roads are constructed.*
- *Minimizing environmental degradation caused by development activities is a priority.*
- *Maintaining and protecting water quality in our lakes, ponds, rivers, wetlands, and streams is a priority.*
- *Maintaining and enhancing recreational opportunities for the residents and visitors of the Town of Norton is a priority.*
- *Land use should be based on the natural resource constraints of a particular parcel of land, and take into consideration special attributes such as wetlands, special flood hazard area, steep slopes, mountain tops, or special wildlife habitat.*

II. Land Use

A. Existing Conditions

Norton has total land area of 24,832 acres, or approximately 39 square miles; 85% of which is owned by large timber interests and the State of Vermont. Lands in State ownership include the Averill Mountain Wildlife Management Area, comprising 510 acres; the Bill Sladyk Wildlife Management Area, comprising 3,644 acres; and Black Turn Brook State Forest, comprising 593 acres. In addition, the State holds a non-fee interest (e.g., conservation easements) on 10,927 acres of land in the Kingdom State Forest that lie within Norton.

The land in Norton is primarily hilly, forested, and sparsely populated. The population as per the 2010 census was 169, which puts Norton's population density at about 4 persons per square mile. Farms and open areas border Vermont Route 114 and the Coaticook River where the bulk of Norton's resident population lives. Most residents work and shop in the neighboring communities of Canaan, West Stewartstown and Colebrook, NH, and Island Pond. Forestry, agriculture, and service industries are the primary economic activities.

Land uses

Land uses in town include forestry, agriculture, residential, commercial, public utility/community, and recreation/conservation. The Land Use/Land Cover map included in the appendix to this Plan depicts the locations of forested areas, open/agricultural areas, buildings, and developed areas. It is noted that the parcel boundaries shown on this map are based on 2003 data and do not reflect any subdivisions that occurred since then.

Land uses are characterized as follows:

Forestry: Over 90% of the land in Norton is forested, primarily hardwoods with occasional stands of softwood. Large timber interests own much of the forested land not owned by the State of Vermont (The Averill and Bill Sladyk Wildlife Management Areas and the Black Turn Brook State Forest encompass 4,747 acres). Harvesting practices have traditionally occurred in such a way as to allow multiple use of the forest for activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and snowmobiling.

Agriculture: There is one dairy farm remaining in Norton and several other land areas used for production of hay crops, woodlot use, and maple sugar production. These farm operations typically average 200 acres or more in size. We expect the agricultural trends in Norton to follow trends in the State of Vermont with fewer farms and/or traditional dairying moving toward less traditional agricultural uses such as sheep farming and beef production. Christmas tree farming, truck and organic farming, and recreational uses such as llama trekking and trail riding are also non-traditional forms of agriculture that have appeared in recent years. Areas in town with prime agricultural soils are depicted on Map 4, Soils Constraints, in the appendix.

Residential: As of 2010, there were approximately 87 year-round households in Norton – primarily in single-family detached dwellings. The greatest concentration of dwellings is along Route 114 in the vicinity of the Norton Country Store, Norton Post Office, and along Vermont Route 114 east of the Town Hall (former Village School). The remaining dwellings are scattered along town roads off of Route 114. There are a large number of camps, primarily located near Norton Pond and Averill Lake and extending in as far as one mile along the Gaudette Road. The camps are used for both summer and winter recreational purposes.

Commercial: Businesses in Norton are primarily service sector businesses with the exception of a logging/general contracting business. Most service industry businesses deal with the importation of commercial goods through the Port of Norton (U.S. – Canadian border crossing); either as customhouse brokerage firms or as distribution and transfer warehousing facilities. There are two local service station/convenience stores, one restaurant, and a few home-based industries. Ten respondents to the survey conducted at the time of the 2006 Plan indicated that they had a home-based occupation.

Public Utility/Community: Community uses in town include the post office, the waste transfer and recycling station, and the town garage/salt shed. The Village School closed several years ago and students from Norton attend school in the Town of Canaan. The basement level of the former school provides space for the Town offices, and the upper floor is planned for use as a local history museum. High-voltage electrical transmission lines entering from Canada and managed by the Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) extend along a right-of-way that bisects the eastern portion of the Kingdom State Forest in Norton from north to south.

Recreation/Conservation: Significant trails within the Kingdom State Forest include those maintained by the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST), the trail to Gore Mountain, which marks the northern boundary of the Nulhagen River Basin; and the Brousseau Mountain trail which leads to a dramatic lookout over Little Averill Lake and a nesting area for Peregrine falcons. There is also a network of trails that exists in the portion of the Kingdom State Forest on the west side of the railroad tracks. (See further description of the natural resource and recreational value of lands in Section VII : Natural, Scenic and Historic Resources).

The VAST trails intersect with Route 114 in the location of Gagnon Road, and again near the bend where Rt. 114 turns to the east, where the trail extends north to the Canadian border. The Gore Mountain trailhead is located on the east side of Route 114, about 1,500 feet north of Norton’s southern boundary. The Brousseau Mountain trailhead is located at the end of Brousseau Mountain Road, and crosses private land before entering the Kingdom State Forest.

Local Land Use Regulations

Norton has local zoning by-laws in effect that were last adopted in 1994. Norton does not have subdivision regulations.

There are currently three land use districts under the Norton zoning bylaw: Rural Residential District (RRD), Lakeshore and Streambank District (LSD), and the Agriculture and Forest District (AFD). These zoning districts are depicted on Map 6 in the appendix and described in the Norton zoning by-law.

As noted in the bylaw, the ***Rural Residential District*** is intended to “provide for residential and other compatible uses at appropriate densities while protecting the natural resource value of lands which are essentially undeveloped, lack direct access to public roads, are important for wildlife and wildlife habitat, have high potential for commercial forestry use or include significant natural, recreational or scenic resources.”

The RRD, as depicted on the zoning map, consists of the land approximately 500 feet from either side of Route 114 E ; and land 500 feet from the east side of Rt. 114 S, and land between the west side of Rt. 114 S and the LSD. Existing land uses include seasonal camps, year-round residences, commercial uses and public service uses, including Town Hall. Minimum lot size in this district ranges from 1 acre to 5 acres according to use.

The ***Lakeshore and Streambank District*** is intended to “provide management policies consistent with existing development and use, to provide for the beneficial use of public waters by the general public and to protect areas unsuitable for residential and commercial use.” The LSD includes lands adjacent to major streams and bodies of water and requires a 100-foot setback of structures from surface waters. Minimum lot size in this district also varies according to use, and ranges from 1 acre to 5.

The ***Agricultural and Forest District*** is intended “to protect lands which are best suited for agricultural use and are now essentially undeveloped except for uses associated with agriculture.” It covers all lands not in the RRD or the LSD, which includes the privately held lands within the Kingdom State Forest, a conservation easement over which is held by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. Existing uses within this district include residences, agriculture, forestry, seasonal camps and outdoor recreation. The minimum lot size in this district is currently 1 acre. Although the zoning district regulations permit only “farm dwellings” and “seasonal recreational camps,” in reality, a number of non-farm, year-round dwellings exist in this district.

B. Planning Considerations

The Planning Commission supports the traditional use of land, whether it is timber harvesting, camp/recreational uses, residential development, or commercial development. Continued use of Norton’s woodlands for commercial forestry purposes is in the best interest of the town. Some of this land is also suitable for low density housing and recreational camps. Besides its economic importance, agricultural land in Norton provides open space for recreation and is important in terms of attractive open vistas providing visual diversity.

Use Value Appraisal Program and Conservation Easements

The Vermont Department of Taxes' Use Value Appraisal Program (also known as "Current Use") is a tax program designed to support the state's agriculture and forest products economy. While enrollment in current use does place a lien on the property which remains in place until the Land Use Change Tax is paid, it does not place a permanent deed restriction on the property like a conservation easement would. The Land Use Change Tax is due when property is developed or withdrawn from the Current Use program, which provides a significant financial incentive to landowners to keep the land in productive farm/forestry use rather than develop it for other residential or commercial uses. The land can be developed with structures associated with the farming or forestry use of the property without penalty.

Map 1 in the appendix depicts land in Norton that is enrolled in Forestry Current Use, that is owned outright by the State, and that is covered by conservation easements held by the State (shown as "public lands") and by the non-profit Vermont Land Trust.

Property enrolled in Current Use can be developed under local zoning standards just as any other land in town is permitted to be developed, as long as the landowner pays the required penalty tax. It is possible for landowners who have enrolled their land in current use to have also voluntarily terminated the development rights to the property through the sale or donation of conservation easements. Land encumbered by conservation easements are generally not permitted to be further developed.

Kingdom State Forest

The Town of Norton places high value on the recreational opportunities available on land within the Kingdom State Forest. The terms of the easement held by the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation currently prohibits the development of any new buildings or structures, except temporary structures and roads necessary for forest management activities, or structures to improve wildlife habitat. The easement agreement also allows for the construction and maintenance of recreational trails. Public access to these lands is permitted for "dispersed recreational activities" including hiking, cross-country skiing, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, and nature observation.

The town of Norton supports the continued conservation of State-owned lands and private lands within the Kingdom State Forest for their scenic and habitat value, and supports continued and enhanced access by the public for recreational purposes. In the event that the public access provisions or the development restrictions currently in place on these conserved lands were proposed for amendment, Norton would want to ensure that continued public access to important recreational and scenic resources is retained. Any permitted development should be low density, and located so as to prevent the fragmentation of significant forested areas and wildlife habitats, and to prevent negative impacts to scenic resources.

Commercial and higher-density residential uses

The current zoning districts in Town do not include one specifically for commercial or higher-density residential uses. Commercial uses are permitted as Conditional Uses in the Rural Residential District (RRD).

Existing land uses, the location of infrastructure (including both public roads and VAST trails), and environmental constraints should direct the creation of a district that would allow certain commercial uses as-of-right, along with higher density residential uses. A type of residential use that is beneficial to both the Town and the region, and which is not currently provided for in Town, is an assisted living facility. An appropriate location would be along Route 114, within reasonable proximity of Town Hall and other existing community service and commercial retail uses.

Flood Hazard Areas

Two sections of Norton's current zoning ordinance contain provisions that provide a degree of protection from flood hazards: the Lakeshore and Streambank district, which requires that structures maintain a 100-foot setback from the mean water mark of lakes and major streams (see Natural Resources section of Plan for discussion of lakeshore standards); and Section 311, which requires any development within the flood hazard area obtain approval by the Zoning Board of Adjustment. However, Section 311 does not contain all the provisions required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to qualify Norton for participation in the National Flood Insurance Program. In addition, the current flood hazard regulations do not address erosion hazards associated with rivers and streams. For these reasons, a new Flood Hazard Overlay District is proposed to be added to the Town's zoning ordinance, designed to comply with current FEMA standards, and to reflect the mapped State River Corridors (see Map 5 in appendix).

Agriculture, Forestry and Conservation

While the current Agriculture and Forestry District (AFD) is intended to preserve agriculture and forestry uses, and while most existing lots in this district are over 15 acres in size, this district currently allows the creation of one-acre lots -- a higher density than that permitted in the Rural Residential District (RRD). Although only farm dwellings and seasonal homes are permitted, this district contains several year-round, non-farm dwellings and there is no clear local mechanism that prevents the conversion of seasonal dwellings to year-round homes. One approach to more appropriately zone the land would be to reduce the size of this zoning district and re-align the boundary so that it more closely follows the limit of the lands currently within the Kingdom State Forest and other state-held lands, as well as land containing slopes greater than 20%. The Rural Residential District, which currently permits a lot size of 2 acres, could be expanded to the areas formerly within the AFD.

A study of existing lot sizes and areas containing important natural features would establish a basis for a newly configured district and an appropriate residential density that would better serve the uses of agriculture, forestry and conservation. In both the RRD and the AFD, Planned Unit Developments would allow more flexibility in siting residential developments, allowing smaller lot sizes in conjunction with the preservation of large blocks of contiguous open space. PUDs could be permitted as a Conditional Use in both the RRD and the AFD zoning districts. The PUD development standards would include limits on site disturbance, guidelines on the avoidance of steep slopes and

significant natural features, and requirements for the mitigation of development impacts, such as stormwater runoff.

The addition of a requirement for the review of minor subdivisions by the Planning Commission would allow a greater level of oversight regarding future development patterns.

Timber Harvesting

We are concerned about the impacts of logging on water quality, and endorse the “*Acceptable Management Practices for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont (1987)*”. Minimizing soil erosion caused by logging or new developments is a priority. We recognize that clear cuts are an acceptable silvicultural practice, but we are concerned about their environmental and visual impacts. Therefore, we discourage their use in favor of strip cuts, block cuts and selective cuts. We encourage timber owners, loggers, and contractors to rethink their harvesting methods to minimize wastes and improve the general condition and sustainability of the area’s forests.

Residents have expressed that logging roads, when no longer needed, should revert to a natural state.

Mining

We recognize the possibility of mineral extraction within the town; and if sites of this type are developed, they should be done in an environmentally safe manner with particular attention paid to water quality. Once such a mine ceases operation, the area should be returned to (as close as possible) condition as it was originally. In addition to any local regulations that pertain to mining operations, these activities may also require State Act 250 review. The State Division of Geology and Mineral resources reviews projects following the guidelines of Criterion 9E “Extraction of Earth Resources.”

There are several abandoned gravel and sand pits in the town at present, and residents support further usage as long as activities go through a proper review process.

Access to land on west side of railroad

The Town is bisected from north to south by State Rt. 114 and the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad, which runs parallel to it. While there are numerous private crossings of the railroad right-of-way, there are only two locations where town roads cross: Nelson Road, which passes under the train tracks at the northern end of Town; and Gagnon Road, a Class 4 town highway. Land uses to the west of the railroad include residential uses on Norton Pond, farm fields, and forestry. Black Turn Brook State Park is also located to the west of the railroad tracks. The private access roads across the railroad tracks are subject to agreements between the land owners and the railroad company.

There have been some access problems in recent years where private roads have been blocked by the railroad. This could cause significant problems if access by emergency vehicles is impaired, or if farmers trying to work agricultural lands lose access.

Property Rights

Norton residents fully support individual property rights. Yet, we also recognize that no person has the right to adversely impact another's rights whether it is through polluting their ground water via a faulty septic system, causing increased erosion due to timber harvesting, or any other activity occurring on one person's property and negatively impacting another person's land. Future resource scarcity and increased populations in Norton may make the balancing act more difficult and frequent in the years to come.

In general, we discourage the use of eminent domain, and strongly encourage all land transactions to be on a willing seller/willing buyer basis. However, all residents, landowners, and others should be aware of and obey local and state regulations.

Responses to 2006 Survey Regarding Land Use:

- *66% (72) of respondents believe that minimum lot sizes should be required for construction. Lot sizes should differ depending on location.*
- *Most respondents (60%) feel that current zoning setback requirements are adequate.*
- *59% of respondents (65) believe that Norton should establish a commercial zone for the future. Thirty-two respondents believe that the commercial area should be near the U.S. Customs building, while 25 people feel that the zone should be located along the state highway.*
- *A majority of respondents (62 to 46) feel that this plan should not support resort development along lakeshore land.*
- *By a margin of 55 to 41, survey respondents believe that zoning regulations for waterfront areas should differentiate between lake, river, pond, and streams. Sixty-eight respondents feel that waterfront setbacks should be greater than they are at present.*
- *63% of respondents think that some agricultural lands should be reviewed and re-zoned due to a decline in local agriculture. Respondents were divided on whether the land should be re-zoned for residential use or for conservation (natural preserves).*
- *76% of respondents do not believe privately owned forest and agricultural areas should be re-zoned. If these lands were re-zoned, the largest majority of respondents (52%) feel that the minimum lot building sizes should be five acres or larger in size.*
- *77% of respondents indicated that they would not support zoning by-laws that allowed the construction of gambling casinos.*
- *84% of survey respondents would not support the construction of a federal or state correctional facility in the area.*
- *Regarding junk or scrap yards, respondents feel that zoning regulations should include greater setback and screening requirements.*
- *A majority of respondents (55%) feel there is no need to specifically plan for "big box stores".*
- *70% of survey respondents support the operation of a 24-hour truck stop/restaurant facility.*

C. Goals and Recommended Actions for Land Use:

1. Continue to ensure the protection of wildlife habitat, scenic resources and recreational resources currently present on lands within the Kingdom State Forest.

- Assure that any proposed amendments to easements currently restricting development on private lands within the Kingdom State Forest maintain these important resource values.

2. Assure that permitted land uses are appropriate based on natural resource constraints and existing infrastructure.

- Until re-evaluation of the Agriculture and Forestry District boundary is completed, increase the minimum lot size from one acre to two acres for residential uses in the AFD, recognizing that farm dwellings and seasonal camps have the potential to be converted to year-round residences. Permit Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) as a Conditional Use in the RRD and AFD to allow smaller lot sizes in conjunction with the preservation of open space.
- Re-evaluate the district boundaries and district regulations in the Agricultural and Forest District to provide for appropriately-sited residential development based on natural resource constraints and existing infrastructure.
- Examine the permitted and conditionally-permitted land uses in all districts and revise as necessary.
- Revise local zoning regulations to include a flood hazard overlay.
- Continue to conditionally permit extraction of soil, sand and gravel in accordance with specified conditions for this use.
- Local officials shall ensure that the appropriate state permits are in place for forestry and mining activities. Monitor forestry and mining activities to ensure that these activities are in accordance with best management practices and do not conflict with adjoining land uses or those in adjoining districts.
- Include language in the Town's existing zoning regulations that will require review by the Planning Commission of minor subdivisions that fall below the threshold of Act 250 review.

3. Identify area/areas in Town that can best accommodate growth of commercial uses and higher density residential uses.

- Identify an appropriate boundary, dimensional standards, and permitted uses for a new commercial/residential district. Consider the location of infrastructure and public facilities, and existing natural resource constraints such as flood hazard areas and soil suitability for septic systems.
 - Include assisted living facilities as a permitted or conditionally permitted use.
4. Explore ways to improve access currently impeded by the railroad for property owners and emergency vehicles.
- Contact railroad officials and work towards improved access options.

III. Employment/Economic Opportunity

A. Existing Conditions

Norton's estimated median household income according to the American Community Survey's 5 year estimates (2007-2011) was \$29,231 and the median family income was slightly higher at \$39,375. Both these figures were substantially (41%-45%) lower than the median incomes State-wide. The per capita income for the same period was \$22,040 in Norton, which was about 22% lower than the State figure.

According to the Vermont Department of Labor, the labor force for the Town of Norton was 30 persons in 2012 and the unemployment rate for the same period was 29%. This number is significantly higher than the percent unemployment reported for this same year in all of Essex County (7.2%) and State-wide (5%).

Norton has one active logging business in Town, and there are four customs brokers with offices in Norton.

There is an important international rail crossing from Norton into Quebec, which is valuable to the development of commercial/industrial uses in Town. Norton, like the rest of the Northeast Kingdom, is part of a federally designated Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) service area. Importing and exporting businesses are able to locate in Norton and apply for FTZ benefits.

Although the railroad is currently used only for freight service, an overnight passenger train between Boston and Montreal called the "Hotel Train" has been proposed by a Canadian-based entrepreneur.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy developed by the Economic Development Council of Northern Vermont (EDCNV) has identified eco-tourism as an important asset that can be tapped to develop the local economy.

B. Planning Considerations

Providing long-term economic development opportunities is important to us, and we are concerned about changing economic conditions in the future.

The Town is opposed to placing additional large areas of the town off-limits to industrial and/or commercial development, including through the sale of development rights or placement of conservation easements upon lands in the town, unless there is local support. We strongly wish to continue as a small, rural and wild part of the Northeast Kingdom. However, we will endorse economic development opportunities that fit our vision of this town as a small, rural area remote from urban lifestyles.

Eco-tourism

As noted in EDCNV's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Norton is an important port of entry to the Burke Ski Resort in the winter and Quebec travelers heading to the Maine coast in the summer. It is also the year-round port of entry for shoppers traveling to New Hampshire for shopping. Norton can capture the business of those passing through the area as well as attract new visitors to experience the hiking, nature watching, boating, and other eco-tourism opportunities available in Norton. Improvements that could build upon this economic resource include the development of a Town website, a new visitor parking area, and welcome kiosks. If the proposed plan for an overnight passenger train from Montreal to Boston comes to fruition, this may also provide an opportunity for increased tourism if a stop is planned in Norton.

The Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association (NEKTTA) maintains a website for the Northeast Kingdom Byway at www.travelthekingdom.com. Although Route 114 is not officially part of the byway, it is included as one of the sidetrips on the website's interactive map. The site identifies Route 114 in Norton as a bike route, and provides information on the Gore Mountain and Brousseau Mountain Trails.

NEKTTA is working on a Destination Development Initiative that focuses on northern Essex County. The goals of this initiative include developing a regional place brand, strengthening the region's infrastructure for economic growth, including business organizations; and increasing and enhancing public use of the region's natural and cultural resources. Coordination with NEKTTA and other business organizations in the region could greatly enhance Norton's positioning as an important eco-tourism destination, and would support new and existing local businesses.

Other organizations that are important partners in eco-tourism are the Northwoods Stewardship Center and the Green Mountain Club, which develop, maintain and map trails in the Northeast Kingdom.

Foreign Trade Zone

The Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) program was created by the Federal Government in the 1930's, the purpose of which is to facilitate trade and increase the global competitiveness of U.S.-based companies.

Legally, an FTZ is an area within the United States that the Government considers outside the country, or at least, outside of the U.S. Customs territory. Certain types of merchandise can be imported into a Zone without going through formal Customs entry procedures or paying import duties.

The FTZ designation, combined with the presence of a rail line at the international border crossing, provides economic incentives for the development of commercial uses in Norton, such as a freight or warehouse facility.

Village Center Designation

The Vermont village center designation program, administered by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, recognizes and supports local revitalization

efforts. State statute defines "Village center" as "a traditional center of the community, typically comprised of a cohesive core of residential, civic, religious, and commercial buildings, arranged along a main street and intersecting streets. Industrial uses may be found within or immediately adjacent to these centers."

In a designated village center, building owners, lessees and the municipality are eligible for the following benefits:

- 10% historic tax credits are available as an add-on to approved Federal Historic Tax Credit projects. Eligible costs include interior and exterior improvements, code compliance, plumbing and electrical upgrades.
- 25% façade improvement tax credits are available for eligible facade work up to \$25,000.
- 50% code improvement tax credits are available for up to \$50,000 each for elevators and sprinkler systems and \$12,000 for lifts. Eligible code work includes ADA modifications, electrical or plumbing up to \$25,000.
- Priority consideration for Municipal Planning Grants and funding from Vermont's Community Development Program.
- Priority site consideration by the State Building and General Services (BGS) when leasing or constructing buildings.
- May create a special assessment district (also known as special benefits district or business improvement district) to raise funds for both operating costs and capital expenses to support specific projects in downtown.

Further study is needed to determine if Norton has the existing resources and building stock that would benefit from such a designation.

A step-by-step guide to the application process for village designation can be found at the following link:

http://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accd/files/Documents/strongcommunities/cd/designations/130531_Village_Center_Application_Guidelines_Final_web.pdf

Input from 2006 survey regarding economic development:

- *When asked for the single most important area for the planning commission to work on in the future, the greatest number of survey respondents (26%) indicated that attracting new businesses should be a priority.*
- *A favored area for dense commercial development is between the U.S. – Canada border and the old drive-in (45% of survey respondents).*
- *66% of respondents support the conversion of old housing for commercial use.*
- *In the survey people responded that most all of the growth, housing, commercial etc. should be along rt. 114 and U.S. Customs, the Norton Store to the Norton Restaurant.*

C. Goals and Recommended Actions

1. Encourage development in areas not already restricted by conservation easements to improve the local economy and tax base. Discourage the establishment of *new* conservation easements in Town.
 - Make clear in a written statement to legislators and policy-makers the Town’s policy regarding conservation easements and long-term land use restrictions.
 - Substantial development proposals should include information outlining potential impacts on the local tax base
2. Investigate and adopt ways to encourage new development in appropriate areas of Town such as near the Norton Port of Entry, Town Hall, and the Post Office.
 - Investigate potential for Village Center designation by the State
3. Build upon Norton’s potential as a destination for ecotourism.
 - Coordinate public outreach efforts with NEKTTA
 - Coordinate with state agencies and non-profit trails organizations to install informational signs identifying the location of State Parks and hiking trails in the Kingdom State Forest.
 - Develop a town website
 - Investigate the possibility of a stop by the “Hotel Train” in Norton to accommodate visitors to local and area attractions, such as the nearby Quimby Country lodge.
4. Promote the region’s Foreign Trade Zone to attract businesses to the community.
 - Coordinate efforts with other towns and business organizations in the region.

IV. Transportation

A. Existing Conditions

As depicted on the Vermont Agency of Transportation maps, there are approximately 16 miles of public highways in Norton. These include: 10.7 miles of state highways (Route 114, Route 147 and Norton State Highway), 4.8 miles of class 4 roads, .58 miles of class 3 roads, and .4 miles of class 2 roads.

Town highways are numbered 1 through 14 and are named as follows: Nelson Road (TH 1), Marsh Road (TH 2), Church hill Road (TH 3), Leo's Lane (TH 4), Henry Road (TH 5), Gaudette Road (TH 6), Brousseau Mountain Road (TH 7), Cottage Road (TH 8), Baumann Road (TH 9), Railroad Ave.(TH 10), Gagnon Road (TH 12), and O'Brien Lane (TH 14).

Overall, roads are in generally good condition.

Currently, town roads receive snow plowing and sanding services in winter months, and structural maintenance in summer months. Not all town roads are maintained in winter months. See Map 7, Town of Norton General Highway Map, in the appendix.

The town garage is located on the west side of Rt. 114 S north of Church Hill Road, and sand and salt storage sheds are located here.

The Town undertook a culvert inventory in the summer of 2013, although data on size and condition was not recorded. A culvert on Baumann Road that was deteriorated was replaced in 2013.

An ongoing problem area has been the bottom of Gaudette Road, near its intersection with Route 114 E. The lower part of the road was washed out during a flooding event in 2011. The area continues to experience seasonal flooding every year, and the road-side ditches that accommodate stormwater flows from upland areas have eroded significantly. The culvert that conveys water under the road at this location is not sufficient to handle flows, and needs to be replaced. In March of 2014 the Town applied for a grant through VTrans to fund the culvert replacement.

The Nelson Road Bridge, which provides access to an active dairy, has a deteriorated deck which needs to be repaired or possibly replaced. The Town is coordinating with VTrans and NVDA to have this project added to the state's Town Highway Bridge Program through the Regional Project Prioritization List. This is coordinated by NVDA. This program will require a minimum 10% match and will likely take at least a few years to move through the process of scoping to implementation.

Automobile Use

According to the American Community Survey's 5 year estimates for 2007-2011, the average Norton resident's travel time to work was about one hour (one-way). Of the 61

employed residents, 35 drove alone to work, 6 walked and 20 worked at home. The majority of working residents (74%) had access to two or more vehicles. All those in the work force had access to at least one vehicle.

Public transit services do not exist in the community. Public transit is available in Island Pond on a limited basis. This is primarily for accessing goods and services not available in the local area. In the absence of public transit, the Town supports the use of park and ride facilities so that individuals can carpool when necessary. The lot at the Town Office is an available park and ride facility.

Other Transportation Facilities

There is freight rail service operated on the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad that runs through Norton. It is one of two lines in the Northeast Kingdom region that crosses into Quebec, and is therefore important for international trade. Limited passenger rail service between Montreal and Boston has been proposed by a private venture (the “Hotel Train”).

State-owned airports in the region include the Caledonia State Airport in Lyndonville, the John H. Boylan State Airport in Island Pond (which is only available to ski-equipped aircraft in the winter), and the Newport State Airport in Newport, which is currently planning an expansion.

Other transportation routes in Town include snowmobile trails maintained by the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST), which are also used by Nordic skiers. There are about 10 miles of All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) trails in Town, mainly across private property. At the 2014 Town Meeting, voters rejected proposals to permit ATV use on Town roads.

Bicycle riders make seasonal use of State Route 114. There are also bike paths identified in the Sladyk Wildlife Management Area, located in the western part of Norton.

B. Planning Considerations

Due to long term maintenance costs, the town does not wish to assume control over additional public roads unless such roads have been constructed to Vermont State Standards.

Roads and infrastructure in close proximity to streams and rivers are particularly exposed to damage not only by flash flooding, but by bank failure and stream channel dynamics. Portions of both State Route 114 and the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad cross lands in the FEMA-mapped flood hazard area and the State-mapped River Corridors. Portions of Gagnon Road, Nelson Road and Baumann Road (all Town Roads) cross both the FEMA-mapped flood hazard area and State River Corridors. The section of Averill Lake Road near its intersection with Rt. 114 E crosses the Averill Creek River Corridor. (See also Section X. Flood Resilience)

A culvert and bridge inventory noting the location, size and condition of all culverts and bridges in Town should be recorded in the Vermont Online Bridge and Culvert Inventory Tool (VOBIT). This database is a good resource for local officials, planners, and state agencies. The Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) can provide assistance with this.

Participation of local officials in NVDA's regional Transportation Advisory Committee meetings is important, since projects endorsed by the TAC receive additional consideration at the state level.

VAST trails, cross-country ski trails, and bicycle routes are important transportation systems that support eco-tourism in Town.

Responses to 2006 survey regarding transportation

- *81% of respondents support the development of multi-purpose trails in Blackturn Brook State Park (formerly Earth People's Park). The most popular uses mentioned were bicycling, horseback riding, snowshoeing, and bird watching.*
- *For those respondents who feel that zoning setback requirements need to be re-examined, Route 114 was a particular area of concern.*
- *On the issue of maintenance of Class 4 roads, 42% of respondents believe the town should be responsible for maintenance while 49% of the people feel that the landowner should be responsible.*
- *37% of respondents think the town should provide winter maintenance of Class 4 roads. Fifty-five percent of respondents think the town should not maintain these roads in the winter.*
- *A majority of respondents (66%) feel the town should allow private organizations to provide winter maintenance for Class 4 roads.*

C. Goals and Recommended Actions:

1. Keep state transportation officials and policy makers at all levels aware of local opinions on issues affecting transportation in our local area.

- Participate in NVDA's regional Transportation Advisory Committee meetings so as to gain support for local projects at the State level.

2. Encourage and accommodate multiple modes of transportation, including walking, biking, and snow travel.

- When state roads are resurfaced or rebuilt, request that road shoulders be widened to accommodate bicycles.
- Parking areas with approved signage should also be developed near trailheads for recreational users. Gore, Averill, and Brousseau Mountains are sites where parking areas should be considered.

3. Develop formal policies governing the maintenance of public and private roads in the Town of Norton (i.e. roads other than state-owned roads).

- Monitor local road maintenance costs closely. Consider contracting out road maintenance work when costs are excessive.
- Develop local road standards that include specifications for the construction and maintenance of ditches and culverts to reduce or prevent erosion of roads and banks.
- Maintain an up-to-date inventory of bridges and culverts, especially on roads within the flood hazard area, to assure the ability of these structures to accommodate increased flows. Enter this data into the Vermont Online Bridge and Culvert Inventory Tool (VOBIT).

V. Community Facilities & Utilities

A. Existing Conditions

1. Water Supply/Sewage Disposal

Norton has no central or public water supply or sewage disposal systems to operate or maintain. Water supply and sewage disposal is, therefore, the responsibility of each property owner. Springs and wells are the primary sources of water in the town, with possibly some lakeside camp owners drawing water from the lake. Residents utilize septic tanks and leach fields to dispose of sewage.

All newly installed systems are required to be designed to meet State of Vermont's *Wastewater System and Potable Water Supply Rules* for water supply and sewage disposal. Any new construction, change of use, enlargement of an existing structure, or subdivision of land requires a permit from the wastewater management division of the Vermont Department of Conservation, prior to the issuing of a local permit from the Town Zoning Administrator.

2. Solid Waste Disposal

Norton has a solid waste transfer station located on Route 114, and an active recycling program. Norton is a member of the Northeast Kingdom Waste Management District, and works cooperatively with the District to manage the solid and hazardous wastes in accordance with the District's solid waste implementation plan.

There are no active dumps or landfills in Norton. The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources' online *Natural Resources Atlas* identifies the sites of two closed landfills in Town.

3. Law Enforcement/Fire Protection/Emergency Services

Law enforcement in Norton is provided by the Vermont State Police, the Essex County Sheriff's Department, and federal law enforcement agencies such as the U.S Department of Homeland Security. The Office of Field Operations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection is located in Norton.

Although Norton has a fire warden, it does not have its own volunteer fire department. Fire services are provided through a contractual arrangement with the Beecher Falls Fire Company.

Norton receives ambulance and/or EMT service from Lyndon Rescue, which has a base in Island Pond.

Norton maintains a Basic Emergency Operations Plan and is part of the Local Emergency Planning Commission (LEPC) #10, which covers 32 communities in Essex and Orleans counties. The LEPC provides a forum for emergency management agencies, responders, industry and the public to work together to evaluate, and communicate with each other

about floods, hazardous material spills, wildfires, and natural disasters that may affect the communities.

4. Health Care Facilities

North Country Hospital in Newport and the Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital in Colebrook, NH are the two closest full-service health care centers.

5. Public Buildings/Properties

Municipally-owned buildings in Norton include the Town Office (formerly the elementary school), the Norton transfer station/recycling center and the Norton Firehouse (located on the east side of Route 114 S) and the Town garage and salt storage shed (located on the west side of Rt. 114 S, near Church Hill Road). There is also town-owned property located on the south side of Route 114 E that is the site of a former town dump.

Construction on the Town Office (formerly school) was completed in 2005. Town offices are located in the basement level, while the upstairs of the building is being planned for use as a local history museum. Recently completed electrical upgrades and window renovations have been made to the upper floor through a historic preservation grant.

Norton does not have its own public library, but provides an appropriation to libraries in Canaan and Island Pond, based on submission of a petition.

6. Public Utilities: Electric and Telecommunications

Norton is served by the Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC), which is a consumer-owned cooperative administered by a 12-member Board of Directors.

High voltage transmission lines extend south from the Canadian border through the eastern part of Norton, along Gaudette Road and along a right-of way through the Kingdom State Forest.

A microwave tower owned by the New England Power Company is located on the top of Brousseau Mountain Road.

There are two dams in Norton (one on Norton Pond and one on Great Averill Pond) that are owned and operated by Coaticook Hydro to support downstream power generation in the village of Coaticook, Quebec. Because they are associated with a hydroelectric project they are under the jurisdiction of the Vermont Public Service Board.

At present, Norton receives landline telephone and high speed internet services from Fairpoint, Inc. Where landline high speed internet is not available, it is available via satellite from Hughes, Starband and WildBlue communications. Verizon and AT&T provide cell and wireless internet service. There is no available cable television service in Norton.

The Vermont Telecommunication Authority's Northeast Kingdom Fiber Network Project will bring broadband internet and cell service via fiber optic cable to Norton. The entire Northeast Kingdom network is scheduled to be completed by December 2014, with the Beecher Falls to Norton section along Route 114 completed in March 2014.

7. Recreation

There are no formal public recreation facilities in Norton.

Much of Norton offers excellent opportunities for outdoor recreation; particularly hunting, fishing, and winter sports including snowmobiling, skiing and snowshoeing. Horseback riding, hiking, and fishing are also popular. Abandoned and open farmland, and soft and hardwood forests are favorable locations for small game, deer, bear, and moose hunting. The State of Vermont owns and maintains over 10,000 acres of land in the Wildlife Management Areas and State Forest within the town.

Snowmobile trails including connectors to trails in Canada are maintained by local snowmobile clubs and VAST (Vermont Association of Snow Travelers). The Snow Blasters has 170 members and is the local club. It maintains 63.5 miles of trails within the Town. We have seen trail usage increasing as "green winters" are a rarity in this area. Nordic skiing is increasingly popular within the town, and it is expected to increase along with snowshoeing on area snowmobile trails or elsewhere in the town.

All-terrain vehicle (ATV) use is a common recreational activity. Moose Trail Riders is the local ATV club in the area, and the club participates in VASA, the statewide association for ATV riders. There are approximately 10 miles of trails for ATV use, mainly across private property.

VT Route 114 from Island Pond to Norton has become attractive for cycling. This route is part of a road loop and cycling network identified by the regional planning commission.

Town Administration

The Town of Norton has a Selectboard consisting of 3 members, a Planning Commission consisting of 4 members, a Zoning Board of Adjustment, consisting of 3 members, a Zoning Administrator (also known as the "administrative officer"), a Town Clerk and an assistant Town Clerk.

The local Zoning Bylaw is administered by the Zoning Administrator (ZA), whose duty it is to receive all applications for land development (including subdivisions) and either issue permits in accordance with the local law, or refer the application to the appropriate municipal panel for review. The ZA is also responsible for notifying applicants of any required state or federal permits or review necessary for development.

Among the duties of the Selectboard are the appointment of members to the Planning Commission, the Zoning Board of Adjustment (or Development Review Board, if established) and the appointment of the Zoning Administrator.

Primary duties of the Planning Commission include the preparation of, and amendment to, the municipal plan and bylaws. The Norton Planning Commission also has the quasi-judicial duty of reviewing and holding hearings on applications for land development, including site plans or subdivisions, and certain conditional uses.

Duties of the Zoning Board of Adjustment include the review of applications for conditional use, appeals of the administrative officer decision, and requests for variances from the zoning bylaw.

B. Planning Considerations

1. Water Supply/Sewage Disposal

Norton residents recognize the value of high quality water and want to maintain and improve overall quality which exists today in this area. We fully endorse the efforts of the State of Vermont to regulate those activities which decrease water quality. We recognize that seasonal camps, homes, and other land use activities that occur near the water's edge have both a short-term detrimental effect on water quality and the potential for permanent degradation to the water. Norton endorses the strict enforcement of the State of Vermont regulations pertaining to on-site water and wastewater disposal systems.

There are alternative methods of sewage disposal that may be more effective than individual septic systems to accommodate existing and future development in Norton. A publication of the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, *Wastewater Solutions for Vermont Communities* (2008) presents alternative, cost-effective solutions for communities seeking to address wastewater issues, while encouraging compact development in and around existing settlements and planned growth centers.

The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) provides direct funding and technical assistance to small communities without sewers to help them evaluate and plan for their wastewater needs. The lack of adequate wastewater capacity can affect the Town's economic viability, since commercial or residential growth is limited due to the limiting soil conditions for septic system leachfields. (See Map 4 "Soils Constraints" in appendix).

2. Solid Waste

Residents and landowners are very concerned about the amount of pollution within our local area. While recognizing individual property rights and the need for a dynamic economy, we want to reduce the overall amounts of air, water and land pollution in our area.

We strongly discourage careless handling, disposal, and discharge of any pollutants into the water, land, or air. We also believe that hazardous materials and municipal wastes should be stored and disposed of in approved landfills. We do not agree that a low density population should be seen as a positive when siting landfills for municipal or hazardous wastes.

Norton sponsors local collection days allowing residents to properly dispose of household hazardous wastes and large/bulk items.

Under Vermont's new Universal Recycling Law (Act 148), all municipalities are required to implement variable rate pricing systems (pay as you throw) that charge for the collection of residential solid waste by volume or weight by July 1, 2015. The Solid Waste Management Program of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation is making a guide to the new regulations available to all Vermont municipalities.

The full extent of the law will be in effect by 2020, and will mandate the recycling of materials in nine categories, in addition to leaf and yard debris, and food scraps.

3. Law Enforcement/Fire Protection/Emergency Services

Following the spring flood events in 2011 in which the community experienced significant damage, Norton residents expressed an interest in participating in FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Participation could positively benefit residents and the town in the event of future disasters. The adoption of special flood hazard area regulations is necessary for NFIP participation (see Section IX of this Plan).

At this time, we believe that current levels of police service will be adequate for the foreseeable future.

Responses to 2006 Survey

- *on the issue of emergency services (fire, police, and ambulance), a majority of Norton residents (48% to 42%) feel that current services are insufficient.*
- *51% of respondents would like to see the town establish a local fire department.*
- *36% of survey respondents would like the town to have local ambulance services*

4. Health Care Facilities

Norton residents appreciate the quality medical care we receive from our adjacent communities. We fully recognize that we depend on these facilities and organizations. We support a portion of their operations with grants for ambulance service, maintenance of emergency room staffing, etc.

Responses to 2006 Survey

- *61% of survey respondents believe that any nursing facility should be located in the village center.*

5. Public Buildings/Properties

Town Hall is served by high-speed internet. By providing residents with an ability to log onto the internet from Town Hall, this location could become an important focal point of community life, especially in the summer months when residents could sit outside and access the internet. The development of a playground on the Town property adjacent to Town Hall would provide a multi-service community gathering place.

➤ 60% of survey respondents feel that the Norton Village School building should be dedicated to an individual. The person most often cited was Miriam Nelson, a former town clerk for more than 50 years.

6. Public Utilities and Telecommunications

Access to high speed internet and cell service is important to economic development and tourism in town. The completion of the Vermont Telecommunication Authority's Northeast Kingdom Fiber Network Project will bring broadband internet and cell service via fiber optic cable to Norton.

7. Recreation

Private property

Norton residents commend the private land owners who allow free public access to their private lands for recreational purposes. We recognize that public access is a privilege, and not a responsibility of the land owner. We fully understand the positive impacts that free public access to private lands has on the local economy and the way of life in Vermont.

We would not like to see access limited or removed and therefore support public access to private lands within guidelines developed by the landowners. Because the issue of liability is a concern for all landowners, the burden of landowners' liability for public use of their lands should be removed by legislation. Under current state liability law, "An owner shall not be liable for property damage or personal injury sustained by a person who, without consideration, enters or goes upon the owner's land for a recreational use unless the damage or injury is the result of the willful or wanton misconduct of the owner." (12 V.S.A. §5793)

State lands

The use of State lands and private lands with state-held easements for recreational use is limited due to lack of visibility of access points, lack of parking areas at trailheads, and other impediments to public access. Part of the problem with access to state lands on the western side of town is due to the barrier presented by the railroad.

Another factor limiting public access to State lands is the prohibition on motor vehicles entering Blackturn Brook State Forest by means of the state-held right-of-way which crosses the railroad tracks. Although a small public parking area is located in the space between the roadway of Rt. 114 and the railroad, park patrons need to walk around the locked gate, across the railroad tracks and approximately 3/10 of a mile across a farm field to reach the entrance to the park. The parking area off Route 114 at the access to Blackturn Brook State Forest is not maintained in the winter months, preventing convenient access by the public for winter recreational activities such as snowshoeing or cross-country skiing.



Parking lot at entrance to Blackturn Brook State Forest on Route 114 South

Town Beach

Norton Pond provides four-season recreational opportunities, including fishing, swimming, boating, nature watching, and ice fishing. While there is a public access to the southern part of Norton Pond in Warren Gore, there is no convenient public access from within the Town of Norton.

Although there is public support for the purchase by the Town of land along Norton Pond for a public beach and boat launch, private roads that have the potential to provide public access to land adjacent to Norton Pond are subject to private agreements with the railroad that restricts access.

Recreational Facilities

The Town lacks structured recreational facilities such as ballfields, playgrounds, tennis courts or basketball courts. The lack of these facilities is especially felt in the summer months when children from Norton are not able to easily access the school athletic facilities in Canaan, and when the population swells with summer visitors. A playground with swing sets, basketball courts, and other playground equipment would be beneficial to town residents and visitors alike.

Responses to 2006 Survey:

- *When survey respondents were asked for the most important tourism activity for Norton's future, snowmobiling was by far the activity most often cited (60%).*
- *75% of survey respondents indicated that should waterfront land become available on either Norton Pond or Big Averill Lake, the town should consider purchasing or accepting that land for the establishment of a public beach.*

- *81% of respondents support the development of multi-purpose trails in Blackturn Brook State Park (formerly Earth People's Park). The most popular uses mentioned were bicycling, horseback riding, snowshoeing, and bird watching.*
- *50% of survey respondents believe that Norton does not have adequate youth recreational facilities.*
- *47 of 110 survey respondents would like to see Norton host an annual town/family reunion weekend with food, music, and games.*

8. Town administration

An alternative to the Planning Commission/Zoning Board of Adjustment (PC/ZBA) organizational model -- which Norton currently has -- is the Planning Commission/Development Review Board (PC/DRB) model. Under the PC/DRB model, the Planning Commission becomes a purely legislative entity, with authority to draft the municipal plan and create regulatory (e.g., zoning) and non-regulatory (e.g., infrastructure planning) tools that implement the plan. The Development Review Board becomes the quasi-judicial entity responsible for reviewing all applications for development review, including site plan, subdivision, variance, conditional use, and any other reviews authorized by the bylaws. Separating the legislative and quasi-judicial functions in this way allows more planning to occur and simplifies the process for applicants. There is no conflict for members who wish to serve on both the PC and the DRB, and this is often the case in Towns with small populations and low development activity. A DRB requires a minimum of five members.

The Planning Commission depends on accurate information regarding parcel boundaries and covenants or restrictions affecting individual parcels in order to understand development patterns, future development potential, and to make informed planning decisions. Although easements held by the Vermont Land Trust are available as a data layer and are depicted on Map 1 in the appendix, the parcel boundaries shown on this map are based on data from 2003. The Town has recently contracted with a consultant to update the parcel maps in Norton. The presence of other covenants or easements that may affect how individual parcels of land can be developed is not generally known by the Planning Commission. The updated parcel maps and the compilation of existing deed restrictions affecting future development will provide useful information to guide planning decisions.

- *73% of survey respondents believe that the town should develop a website for the distribution of municipal information.*

C. Goals and Recommended Actions

1. Water Supply/Sewage Disposal

1. Maintain and improve overall water quality

- Insure that State laws pertaining to on-site wastewater and potable water supply rules are adhered to and enforced.

- Gather information on the number and condition of wastewater systems bordering water bodies in Town. Investigate funding opportunities to complete this assessment.
- Investigate feasibility of community septic systems for properties bordering water bodies.

2. Solid Waste

1. Continue membership and involvement with the Northeast Kingdom Solid Waste District.
2. Educate residents on local recycling and composting programs.

3. Law Enforcement/Emergency Services:

1. Continue contractual arrangements with medical and fire service providers to ensure coverage.
2. Educate residents on the need to clearly display house numbers for emergency responders.
3. Educate residents and land owners on laws regulating outdoor burning.
4. Take the necessary steps to participate in FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program, including flood hazard area regulation.
5. Monitor criminal activity and law enforcement services to ensure that local police protection is adequate.
6. Establish formal contracts with law enforcement agencies to ensure coverage.

4. Health Care Facilities

1. Formalize policies on funding contributions for the operation of health care facilities in adjoining communities.
2. Encourage location of an assisted living facility in Town.

5. Public Buildings and Properties

1. Monitor local demand to determine if additional municipal facilities are needed in the future.
2. Continue plans to develop the upper levels of the town office building for a local history museum.
 - Investigate funding available for collections management and programming.

6. Public Utilities and Telecommunications

1. Facilitate access to high speed internet service for all areas of Town.
2. Provide free wireless internet access to all Town residents at the Town Hall property.

7. Recreation

1. Investigate ways to improve access to recreational resources of Norton Pond and state park lands on the west side of the railroad tracks from locations in Norton.
 - Enter into a dialogue with the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Road to negotiate an access agreement across the railroad tracks that would permit year-round access.
2. Explore opportunities to purchase lakefront land for creation of a town beach on either Norton Pond or Great Averill Lake, and for access for swimming, boating, cross country skiing and ice fishing.
3. Improve access and recreational use of State lands.
 - Work with State Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, the Green Mountain Club, and the Northwoods Stewardship Center to develop new trails in Blackturn Brook State Forest.
 - Identify locations where the development of parking areas at trailheads would improve public access to state lands for recreational purposes.
 - Develop improved access to Coaticook River for fishing.
 - Work to eliminate potential conflicts between the various types of trail users.
 - Investigate the potential impacts of increased recreation on the natural resources.
4. Pursue the development of a playground with swing sets, basketball courts, and other playground equipment on town land adjacent to Town Hall.

8. Town Administration

1. Weigh the benefits and potential drawbacks of the creation of a Development Review Board to take on the quasi-judicial functions currently handled by the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Adjustment.
2. Research land records to create a list of covenants or easements (including easements over buried utilities) that affect how individual parcels of land may be developed in the future.
 - Coordinate task among the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Zoning Administrator, Town Clerk, and Listers.

VI. Education

A. Existing Conditions:

Norton is part of the Essex North Supervisory Union, which also includes the Vermont Towns of Brunswick, Bloomfield, Lemington, and Canaan. The Norton Elementary School was closed in 2005.

As of January 2014, Norton tuitioned 12 students to area schools. Eleven students were enrolled in the Canaan Schools and one student was enrolled in Newport. Nine students were enrolled in grades K through 6 and three were enrolled in grades 7 through 9. One student in Norton was home-schooled.

The Canaan Memorial Schools serve just fewer than 200 students in grades K – 12. The high school offers technical education through the Canaan Career Center. There are technical program offerings in two separate tracks: (1) business administration and technology; and (2) building construction and restoration carpentry.

Some adult education opportunities in the area that are important for work-force development include: North Country Career Center in Newport; Community College of Vermont (CCV) in Newport and other locations; and Lyndon State College (LSC).

B. Planning Considerations

We believe the most cost effective way to educate our children is to utilize adjacent community schools and home instruction. We do not anticipate a need to alter arrangements in the near future.

Although there has been discussion about the consolidation of school districts with SAU 7 in New Hampshire in order to address rising per pupil costs, the formation of an Interstate School District Planning Committee to study the issue has been put on hold due to a lack of volunteers to serve on the committee.

Responses to 2006 Survey

- *48% of survey respondents feel that funding decisions for elementary education should be left to the parents. 36% of the respondents felt that the school board should endorse the funding of Canaan District schools.*
- *A large majority of respondents (79%) believe that the town should provide bus transportation for school age children.*
- *Residents are divided (48-44) on the issue of forming a Norton Village School Alumni Association.*

C. Goals and Recommended Actions:

1. Continuously monitor the situation to ensure our education policy is still valid.
2. Promote adult education and workforce training opportunities.

VII. Natural, Scenic and Historic Resources

A. Existing Conditions:

Natural Resources

Over 90% of the land area in Norton is forested, and is an important resource for both wildlife and for forestry operations, which is the dominant land use in Town. The Town contains a total of 1666 acres of classified agricultural soils, 1137 acres of Vermont Statewide Important Soils, and 529 acres of federally-classified Prime Agricultural Soils. The topography is hilly, with 1200 acres of land with slopes of 20% or steeper. (See Maps 3 and 4 in appendix).

State Lands

There are a number of state agencies involved with the conservation and preservation of natural areas through ownership and management in Norton , along with some non-profit conservation organizations. A total of 4,747 acres in Norton are in state ownership: 593 acres in Blackturn Brook State Forest, 510 acres in the Averill Mountain Wildlife Management Area, and 3,644 acres in the Bill Sladyk Wildlife Management Area. In addition, 10,927 acres of privately-owned land in Norton is conserved within the Kingdom State Forest.

Blackturn Brook State Forest contains one of the largest winter deer habitats in the region. It also contains significant natural communities including lowland spruce forest, northern white cedar swamp, and important wetland areas which are home to rare and endangered plant and animal species.

The Averill Mountain Wildlife Management Area contains forested steep slopes, with red and sugar maple, yellow birch and beech trees, and provides habitat to various species including black bear, moose, red fox, bobcat, and ruffed grouse.

The Bill Sladyk WMA, which extends into the Town of Holland on the west, is forested with a mix of red and sugar maple, yellow birch, beech, balsam fir, and red and white spruce. There are wetlands, streams and ponds providing habitat for beaver, brook and rainbow trout, and chain pickerel. Beaver, Duck and Halfway ponds are managed as walk-in fisheries. Birding opportunities are good for boreal species.

Water Resources

Norton is within the Coaticook River watershed, which is part of the larger St. Francis River Watershed. It is within Vermont Planning Basin #17.

The Coaticook River traverses the town from its origin at the outlet of Norton Pond northeasterly to the Canadian border. Tributaries include Station Brook, Sutton Brook, Davis Brook, Gaudette Brook, Moser Meadow Brook, Number 5 and Number 6 Brooks, and Averill Stream which drains Great and Little Averill ponds. The Town contains 1,403 acres of wetlands.

Water quality in Norton's water bodies and wetlands are very high. A January 2012 Water Quality Management Plan prepared by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for Planning Basin #17 notes that the area within this watershed in Vermont is well-known for its clear waters, deep lakes and exceptional fisheries. Biological sampling has shown very high quality water quality in streams located in Norton: Mosher Meadow Brook, Number Six Brook and Sutton Brook had been sampled and all had notably high water quality according to this report. Norton Pond and Great Averill Pond are listed as "altered" due to the presence of dams and water level fluctuations. Norton Pond provides important habitat for rare aquatic plants and wildlife, including loons.

Historic and Scenic Resources

The Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, through a 1979 survey of historic sites and structures, identified five buildings of historic significance within the town. These were: the Averill Lumber Company House - Lakeside Inn, the Nelson Store – formerly the Town Clerk's Office, the Nelson House, the Hadlock House, and the Norton Border Station. The Norton Border Station has also been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Grand Trunk Railroad, which came to Norton in the mid-nineteenth century, is important to the history of the development of town. While passenger service was stopped over 50 years ago, the railroad is still an important freight route, now operated by the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad.

The view of Little Averill Pond and the surrounding hills is an important scenic resource that is available from the top of Brousseau Mountain, reached by means of the trail leading from the end of Brousseau Mountain Road. The cliff at this location is also a significant peregrine falcon nesting area.

Other historic and scenic resources in Norton include two historic cemeteries, one adjacent to the St. Bernard Catholic Church on Church Hill Road, and the other (the "Old Town Cemetery") located on a lot about 1000 feet to the south; Ulrich Farm, views along the Gore Mountain hiking trail, and views along the shores of Norton Pond and Averill Pond.

B. Planning Considerations:

Water Quality

The Agency of Natural Resources, in its January 2012 Basin 17 Water Quality Management Plan, has noted the concerns of local residents regarding high and low water levels at Norton and Great Averill Ponds, and possible impacts on erosion of the lakeshore in some locations. ANR has stated that it will work with local residents, Hydro Coaticook, and the Public Service Board to identify and address water resource concerns associated with water level fluctuations. Considerations associated with water level

management in these water bodies include loon nesting, wetlands, aquatic habitat in the lakes and ponds, and downstream flow regulation.

Water quality in the Town's many streams, water bodies and wetlands depends on careful land management. In addition to faulty septic systems, non-point-source pollution includes sedimentation of rivers and streams resulting from land development and loss of riparian vegetation, which can significantly affect water quality.

Norton residents recognize the value of high water quality and want to maintain and improve the overall quality which exists today in this area. We fully endorse the efforts of the State of Vermont to regulate those activities which decrease water quality. We recognize that seasonal camps, homes, and other land use activities that occur near the water's edge have both a short-term detrimental effect on water quality and the potential for permanent degradation to the water.

Norton has a Lakeshore and Stream District (LSD) which requires structures to be set back 100 feet from the shore of major lakes and streams. In addition, the proposed new Flood Hazard Overlay District will place restrictions on development in flood hazard areas, and will require a 50 foot setback from all smaller streams not zoned LSD.

Effective July 1, 2014, the Vermont Legislature passed shoreland regulations that apply to activities within 250 feet of a lake's mean water level for all lakes greater than 10 acres in size. This would include both Norton Pond and Great Averill Pond. The Shoreland Protection Act (V.S.A Chapter 49A, §1441 – 1452) defines standards for the creation of buildings, driveways, and cleared areas in shorelands. Shoreland properties that are already developed or are small lots that cannot meet the new standards are "grandfathered" until the owner proposes redevelopment. In these cases state officials will work with homeowners so that standards are met to the extent possible. Standards for vegetated buffers adjacent to the lakeshore, and limits on impervious surfaces within the regulated area are designed to protect water quality in the lakes.

The Unified Towns and Gores, which border Norton on the south and on the east, have a regulated lakeshore district that, like the proposed state legislation, extends 250 feet from the mean water line.

Natural, Scenic and Historic Resources

We generally support the preservation of identified rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic resources and historic resources within the Town of Norton. It is noted that Norton's historic and scenic resources are an important draw for tourism.

Any designation of scenic roads or historic resources must be initiated at the local level.

Responses to 2006 Survey:

- *A large majority of survey respondents (72%) feel that Norton should establish a local historical society.*

- *A majority of survey respondents (56%) feel that zoning by-laws should address lighting to avoid “light pollution”.*

C. Goals and Recommended Actions:

1. Preserve important historic resources in Town.
 - Explore grant opportunities to preserve and interpret historic resources within the town.
 - Work with the Catholic Diocese to develop a long-term maintenance policy for the historic Catholic cemeteries in town.
2. Increase recognition of historic and scenic resources.
 - Consider installing historic signage in Norton for tourism purposes.
 - Investigate Vermont’s village center designation program and the local designation of historic landmarks
 - Improve access and signage on Route 114 for the Gore Mountain and Brousseau Mountain Trails.
 - Replace sign identifying the 45th parallel.
3. Preserve important natural and scenic resources in town
 - Consider adopting a Lighting Standard for the town to minimize light pollution at night.
4. Ensure protection of water quality in lakes and streams
 - Consider amendments to the Town’s Lakeshore and Streambank District (LSD) to make it more closely consistent with regulations of adjacent towns within the UTG, as well as with the State’s Lakeshore protection legislation in regards to regulated area, vegetated buffers, and limits on impervious coverage.
5. Assure that water levels on local lakes are maintained to support recreation and aquatic habitats, and to prevent erosion of the shoreline.
 - Maintain a dialogue with the Agency of Natural Resources, Coaticook Hydro, and the Public Service Board to address concerns with water level fluctuations.

VIII. Energy

A. Existing Conditions

Infrastructure

Electrical power is supplied in this area by the Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC) through a feed from Canada with a tie into the New England Power Pool.

High voltage transmission lines extend south from the Canadian border through the eastern part of Norton, along Gaudette Road and along a right-of way through the Kingdom State Forest.

Dams on the Coaticook River (Norton Pond) and on Averill Creek (Great Averill Lake) are the only electrical generation facilities in the town. Both are owned and operated by Coaticook Hydro to support downstream power generation in the village of Coaticook, Quebec.

In 2013 VEC finished installing automatic transfer technology to enable remote switching in Norton, so that if Hydro Quebec is having problems that affect electric service in Norton, power can be restored from Canaan.

Other fuel sources

Adjoining communities supply the town with bottled gas service, fuel oil, and other forms of energy. According to the American Community Survey 5 year estimates for 2007 – 2011, the three types of home heating fuel used in Norton included fuel oil, bottled gas and wood. Of all occupied housing units, 10.7% used bottled gas, 29.8% used wood, and 59.5% used fuel oil for heating.

B. Planning Considerations

The Vermont Electric Cooperative has noted that the Kingdom Community Wind project, consisting of 21 wind turbines in Lowell, is VEC's lowest cost resource for meeting its renewable power obligations set by the Vermont legislature. However, VEC is opposed to additional large-scale wind projects because the grid in the Northeast Kingdom is currently at its limit.

Based on the 2010 census data, both population and housing units have decreased in Norton since 2000 (see Housing section), accompanied by a decreased demand for electricity. Since we envision slow growth during the next few decades, installed electrical capacity appears to be adequate to meet demand.

Renewable energy devices

In order to encourage the use of renewable energy devices, the Vermont State Statutes at 24 V.S.A. Section 4413 exempts from local regulation the installation of rooftop renewable energy devices that serves to heat water, space, or generates electricity; and

does not permit local bylaws to prohibit the installation of other types of solar collectors or energy devices based on renewable resources.

Net Metering

Net metering allows property owners who have a renewable energy system on their property, such as a roof-top solar system or windmill, to feed excess energy back into the power grid. In Vermont, utilities are required to accept net metering projects until their combined capacity reaches 15 percent of the utility's peak load.

PACE Program

The State of Vermont and the regional planning commission support local participation in the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Program. Town participation in the program helps eligible residents finance weatherization and efficiency improvements or install renewable energy systems on their properties. The value of those improvements is added to the assessed value of the property with the cost of the improvements paid back as an assessment over a period not to exceed twenty-years. Since the payments are tied to the property rather than the owner, PACE financing payments can be transferred to a new homeowner at any time. For more information see the "PACE Decision Making Packet" prepared by Efficiency Vermont and available on their website:

http://www.encyvermont.com/docs/about_ency_vermont/initiatives/pace/PACE-Decision-Packet.pdf

Energy Standards for New Construction

Recently enacted State legislation supports the application of energy efficiency in new construction. An amendment to 24 V.S.A. § 4449, requires that when a municipal land use permit is sought, the administrative officer shall provide the applicant with a copy of the applicable building energy standards under 21 V.S.A. §§ 266 (residential building energy standards) and 268 (commercial building energy standards). The administrative officer may provide a copy of the Vermont Residential Building Energy Code Book published by the Department of Public Service in lieu of the full text of the residential building energy standards.

Development patterns

Future development in town should be placed so as to utilize existing road and utility infrastructure, and to make pedestrian and bicycle use a viable transportation option. Energy can be better conserved by avoiding dispersed development that requires utilities to be extended long distances, and that requires the construction of extensive new roads.

We encourage energy conservation and energy efficiency, and support the use of local, small-scale renewable energy resources such as wood, solar, hydroelectric, and wind.

Responses to 2006 Survey:

- *84% of survey respondents feel that zoning bylaws should encourage energy conservation and efficiency.*

- *65 of the survey respondents indicated that Norton's zoning by-laws should be amended to address wind energy.*

C. Goals and Recommended Actions:

1. Monitor the energy situation to ensure that local demand is being met in an affordable manner.

- Consider amending local regulations and adopting formal positions on proposed commercial energy generation projects in our area.
- The town should consider voting to become a Clean Energy Assessment District and establish a Property Assessed Clean Energy program to enable residents to cost-effectively install clean energy projects on their property that can be net metered.

2. Water level fluctuations on local lakes associated with the dams owned by Coaticook Hydro should be monitored to prevent adverse impacts on recreational resources and aquatic habitats, and to prevent erosion of the shoreline.

- Maintain a dialogue with the Agency of Natural Resources, Coaticook Hydro, and the Public Service Board to address concerns with water level fluctuations.

IX. Housing

A. Existing Conditions

The greatest concentration of dwelling units in Norton is along Route 114 in the vicinity of the Norton Country Store and Norton Post Office, and bordering Route 114 east of the former Village School. The remaining dwellings are scattered along town roads near Route 114. There are many seasonal camps located near Norton Pond and Averill Lake and extending in three miles along the Gaudette Road. The camps are used for both summer and winter recreational purposes.

Table I below highlights population and housing data in Norton, Essex County and the State from 2000 to 2010, based upon the most recent available data from the U.S. Census. It is noted that there is conflicting data regarding number of total housing units in Town, with the 2010 Census showing a significant *decrease* in both total housing units (-15.5%) and vacant housing units (-21.7%), while more recent estimates show an *increase* in both

**Table 1. Population and Housing Stock
2000-2010**

	Norton			Essex			Vermont		
	2000	2010	% change	2000	2010	% change	2000	2010	% change
Population	214	169	-21%	6459	6306	2.4%	608,827	625,741	2.8%
Families	52	50	-3.9%	1807	1814	0.4%	157,763	160,360	1.7%
Total Housing Units	252	213*	-15.5%	4762	5019	5.4%	294,382	322,539	9.6%
Occupied Housing Units (Households)	91	87	-4.4%	2602	2818	8.3%	240,634	256,442	6.6%
Total Vacant Housing Units	161	126	-21.7%	1941	2201	13.4%	53,748	66,097	23.0%
Vacant units used seasonally	139	124	-10.8%	1844	1928	4.6%	43,060	50,198	16.6%

Source: Census 2010, American Community Survey 2007-2011 Estimates, Housing Data.org

Notes: The total number of housing units in Norton based on the 2010 Census was 213, 87 of which were occupied and 126 vacant; however, the Census Bureau's 2007-2011 American Community Survey estimated a total of 272 housing units in Town, 84 occupied, and 188 vacant. A review of Norton's grand list for 2012 indicates that a total of 182 properties are in residential categories, including 70 in Residential 1 and 2, 103 in Seasonal 1 and 2, and 9 mobile homes. Only 66 properties are declared as homesteads. It is noted that this count doesn't reflect multiple housing units on one property.

categories (see notes in table 1). However, notwithstanding the rate of growth or loss of seasonal properties, the decrease in year-round population and number of occupied housing units (or households) is meaningful. Population decreased by 45 persons (21%) and households decreased by 4 (4.4 %) from 2000 to 2010. By comparison, population in Essex County decreased by 2.4%, and there was growth of 5.4% in housing units (about 257 new units county-wide) and 8.3% in households (about 216 new year-round households). State-wide, there was modest population growth of 2.8%, an increase in total housing units of 9.6%, and an increase in number of households of 6.6%.

Table 2 highlights incomes and the value and affordability of housing in the region. It is noted that reliable data on sales of primary residences and on the affordability of rental housing in Norton, due to the small sample size, is not available. However, information on the median price of a primary residence for the county as a whole provides some indication of affordability of housing in Norton as well. In addition, average monthly owner costs for housing are provided, as well as data on the income that the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has determined is needed in order to afford a market-rate rental in the county and state.

In general, a household for which rents or housing costs exceed 30 percent of household income is considered financially stressed.

As indicated on Table 2, the data available from federal and state sources indicates that while median incomes are relatively low in Norton, home-ownership is affordable, due to

Table 2
Income and Cost of Housing

	Norton	Essex County	Vermont
Median Household Income	\$29,231	\$37,679	\$53,422
Median Family Income	\$39,375	\$45,500	\$66,340
Median family adjusted gross income, 2011*	\$28,090	\$36,635	\$59,315
Median Price of primary residences sold, 2012	N.A.	\$124,750	\$196,000
Median Price of vacation residence sold, 2012	\$155,000	\$120,684	\$281,117
Median monthly owner costs	\$645	\$728	\$1195
Median monthly owner costs as % of household income	20.8%	22.7%	23.2%
Per capita income	\$22,040	\$20,641	\$28,376
Income needed to afford an apartment at HUD's Fair Market Rent for 2013:			
0 bedroom unit	\$23,080	\$23,080	\$30,290
1 bedroom unit	\$25,440	\$25,440	\$33,119
2 bedroom unit	\$30,160	\$30,160	\$42,156
Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2007-2011); Vermont Housing Data (www.housingdata.org)			
Notes: * from the Vermont State tax forms of families.			

the relatively low price of homes in the region. Median monthly ownership costs were well under 30% of household income. However, rental housing is extremely scarce, and the estimated income needed to afford market-rate rents in the region is higher than the median per capita income in Town.

B. Planning Considerations

We support the notion that housing should be affordable. While Norton does not have the public infrastructure or population to support traditional forms of affordable housing such as multi-unit dwellings, mobile homes and accessory dwelling units are recognized throughout the state as forms of affordable housing and both are permitted in the Town of Norton. Title 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, Section 4412 prohibits municipalities from excluding mobile homes, modular housing, or prefabricated housing from the municipality, except upon the same terms and conditions as conventional housing is excluded. Moreover, under state law, accessory dwelling units located within or belonging to owner-occupied single-family dwellings are treated as a permitted use.

Norton's natural features, such as wetlands and river corridors; the current profitable use of the land for forestry; and the large areas of parkland and wildlife management areas owned by the State, are all factors that influence where future residential development can and should occur. As noted in the "Economic Opportunity" section of this Plan, village center designation may be a way to promote the revitalization of the Town's village center. Any new residential development would ideally be located within and adjacent to the village center.

The provision for "Planned Unit Development" as a conditional use in Town would allow for more compact residential development, while protecting important natural features.

Several of the comments from the 2006 resident survey support the development of affordable housing, retirement housing and assisted living facilities within the village center area. Senior housing that incorporates on-site medical services would allow older residents to more easily stay in the community. It would also provide employment in town to health care service providers. An appropriate location would be along Route 114, within reasonable proximity of Town Hall and other existing community service and commercial retail uses.

Responses to 2006 Survey:

- *62% of residents/landowners believe that this plan should encourage single-family residential development.*
- *A majority of respondents (41%) believe that low-income housing should be located in the village center.*
- *63% of respondents feel that retirement housing should be located in the village center. 67% of respondents believe that single-family senior housing should also be located in the village center.*

- *A majority of respondents (46%) expressed that multi-family housing should be encouraged in the village center.*
- *Assisted living facilities should be located within the village center (68% of respondents).*

C. Goals and Recommended Actions

1. Update zoning regulations to provide opportunities for compact residential development and housing that will serve the region's aging population, and to establish clear standards for affordable forms of housing

- Include provisions for mobile home parks, accessory apartments, assisted living facilities, and planned unit developments.

X. Flood Resilience

A. Existing Conditions

Norton is within the Coaticook River watershed, which is part of the larger St. Francis River Watershed. It is within Vermont Planning Basin #17.

The Coaticook River originates at the outlet of Norton Pond and flows northeasterly for over six miles passing into Canada. Tributaries in the U.S. include Station Brook, Sutton Brook, Davis Brook, Gaudette Brook, Moser Meadow Brook, Number 5 and Number 6 Brooks, and Averill Stream which drains Great and Little Averill ponds.

In 2011, flooding caused the lower portion of Gaudette Road to wash out. Although the road was repaired this location continues to experience seasonal flooding every year, and the road-side ditches that accommodate stormwater flows from upland areas have eroded significantly. The culvert that conveys water under Gaudette Road at this location is not sufficient to handle flows, and needs to be replaced with a larger one. In March of 2014 the Town applied for a grant through VTrans to fund the culvert replacement.

The Town undertook a culvert inventory in the summer of 2013, although data on size and condition was not recorded. A culvert on Baumann Road that was deteriorated was replaced in 2013.

Existing Structures in the Mapped Flood Hazard Areas

The Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) for Norton was prepared in 1975. Based on a review of the FIRM and the location of existing E-911 addresses in Town, there appear to be 18 E-911 addresses, both residential and commercial, within the FEMA-mapped flood hazard area.

Fluvial Erosion Hazard Area maps, or River Corridor Maps, have been developed for rivers and streams in Norton (See Map 5 in Appendix). Much of the area within the river corridors is within the Kingdom State Forest and the Black Turn Brook State Forest, so potential impacts due to future land development are somewhat limited. Based on the location of E-911 addresses in Town, two (2) addresses located in the FEMA flood hazard area are also located within the mapped Coaticook River Corridor. In addition, there are three (3) mapped E-911 addresses within the Averill Creek River Corridor.

Portions of both State Route 114 and the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad cross lands in the FEMA-mapped flood hazard area and the State-mapped River Corridors. Portions of Gagnon Road, Nelson Road and Baumann Road (all Town Roads) cross both the FEMA-mapped flood hazard area and State River Corridors. The section of Averill Lake Road near its intersection with Rt. 114 E crosses the Averill Creek River Corridor.

The Nelson Road Bridge, which crosses the Coaticook River and provides access to an active dairy, has a deteriorated deck which needs to be repaired or possibly replaced. The

Town is coordinating with VTrans and NVDA to have this project added to the state's Town Highway Bridge Program through the Regional Project Prioritization List.

Existing Local Regulations/Plans

Two sections of Norton's current zoning ordinance contain provisions that provide a degree of protection from flood hazards: the Lakeshore and Streambank district, which requires that structures maintain a 100-foot setback from the mean water mark of lakes and major streams (see Natural Resources section of Plan for discussion of lakeshore standards); and Section 311, which requires that any development within the flood hazard area obtain approval by the Zoning Board of Adjustment. However, Section 311 does not contain all the provisions required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to qualify Norton for participation in the National Flood Insurance Program. In addition, the current flood hazard regulations do not address erosion hazards associated with rivers and streams.

Norton has a Basic Emergency Operations Plan that was last updated in November of 2013. Norton prepared an All Hazards Mitigation Plan (AHMP) in July 2005, which is now expired.

B. Planning Considerations

Inundation Areas

Flood areas identified by FEMA on Norton's Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) are inundation areas, that is, areas that may become flooded by rising water levels.

Any mortgages, grants, or loans (including disaster aid) to a structure in the FEMA-identified Special Flood Hazard Area must secure flood insurance. Federal capital funds may not be invested in facilities located within the 0.2% and 1% annual chance flood hazard areas.

River Corridors

Land located in close proximity to streams and rivers is particularly exposed to damage not only by flash flooding, but by bank failure and stream channel dynamics. While the FIRM maps in Norton identify inundation areas, the River Corridor maps developed by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation identify the fluvial erosion hazards associated with rivers and streams.

Transportation infrastructure

A culvert and bridge inventory noting the location, size and condition of all culverts and bridges in Town should be recorded in the Vermont Online Bridge and Culvert Inventory Tool (VOBIT). This database is a good resource for local officials, planners, and state agencies. The Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) can provide assistance with this.

Flood Hazard Overlay

Following the flood events in 2011 in which the lower portion of Gaudette Road washed out, Norton residents expressed interest in participating in FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program. Participation in the NFIP could positively benefit the residents and the town in the event of future disasters. In order for Norton to qualify to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, it needs to adopt flood hazard regulations that conform to FEMA's standards. The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation has developed a model for flood regulations that conform to FEMA's requirements and also address hazards associated with fluvial erosion (erosion caused by the movement of rivers and streams). The model regulations were adapted to be incorporated as a new Flood Hazard Overlay (FHO) district in Norton's existing zoning ordinance. The extent of the overlay district is the boundaries of the Special Flood Hazard area identified by FEMA on the FIRM maps, and the River Corridors developed by the State. The regulations would also apply to land within 50 feet of smaller streams in Town.

Vegetated buffer areas

The maintenance of vegetated buffer areas adjacent to streams helps prevent potential sedimentation of streams and water bodies.

The Town should consider amending its Lakeshore and Streambank district regulations to require the maintenance of vegetated buffers along lakes and streams, and to expand the regulated area around lakes to 250 feet. Limiting impervious surfaces in areas close to lakes and streams helps reduce stormwater runoff that could contribute to downstream flooding.

Upland and wetland areas

The management of upland areas plays a role in flood hazard management. Limiting the extent of disturbance and development of impervious surfaces on upland slopes will help reduce the amount of stormwater runoff, and avoid overwhelming existing stormwater infrastructure such as roadside ditches and culverts. Avoiding steep slopes greater than 20% when clearing and developing land, and requiring that stormwater runoff from new development be managed on-site will also help mitigate future flood hazards.

Wetlands provide an important floodwater storage function, storing stormwater runoff and flood waters that overflow riverbanks. As flood waters recede, the water is released slowly from the wetland soils. By holding back some of the flood waters and slowing the rate that water re-enters the stream channel, wetlands can reduce the severity of downstream flooding and erosion. The State of Vermont regulates activities in and adjacent to wetlands in accordance with the Vermont Wetland Rules. These rules apply to the wetlands and buffer zones within 100 feet of Class I wetlands, and 50 feet of Class II wetlands. Any activity in a Class I or Class II wetland or their associated buffer zones, with certain exceptions, requires a Wetland Permit from the Agency of Natural Resources. A permit can only be issued if it is determined that the use will have no undue adverse impact on protected functions, unless such impacts are mitigated. Mitigation measures include avoidance and minimization of wetland impacts.

Wetland areas are depicted on Map 3 “Natural Resources Constraints” in the appendix; however, there may be wetlands present that have not been mapped, and a jurisdictional determination would be needed by the Vermont Wetlands Program if there is any question regarding the presence of a wetland.

Emergency Planning

Norton will need to update its Local Emergency Operations Plan every May. This plan identifies emergency responders and local contacts. Norton’s All Hazards Mitigation Plan was prepared in 2005 and needs to be updated to meet FEMA’s current standards. This plan identifies critical facilities in Town, including the Border Crossing, the dams on Averill Pond and Norton Pond, and emergency shelters and emergency operations centers. It also outlines mitigation measures that can lessen the severity of emergency events, such as flooding.

Community Rating System

FEMA’s Community Rating System (CRS) program can benefit communities with a large number of structures already in the flood hazard zone. The CRS program provides a discount on premiums to flood insurance policy holders in towns that choose to participate. Points are earned for activities such as outreach events, stormwater maintenance, and other actions. When local flood hazard regulations have been adopted, the Town should investigate the CRS program to determine if it would be beneficial to Norton.

ERAF

The Emergency Relief Assistance Fund (ERAF) helps Vermont municipalities repair damaged infrastructure after a presidentially-declared disaster. ERAF funding typically covers half the required 25% non-federal match for approved projects.

After October 23, 2014 Towns must adopt four flood hazard mitigation measures in order to maintain level state funding in the event of such a disaster: 1) Adopt Flood Hazard Regulations that meet minimum standards for enrollment in the National Flood Insurance Program; 2) Adopt the most recent Agency of Transportation Road and Bridge Standards; 3) Adopt a Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP); and 4) Update and adopt a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and submit to FEMA for approval.

C. Goals and Recommended Actions:

1. Mitigate flood hazards, qualify the Town to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, and enable residents to obtain flood insurance for properties within the FEMA-mapped flood hazard area.

- Amend the local zoning ordinance to include a Flood Hazard Overlay District. Regulations will cover areas depicted on the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the erosion hazard areas identified on the State “River Corridors” maps.

- Continue to enforce the required setbacks from lakes and streams established by Norton's "Lakeshore and Streambank District" regulations. Setbacks and buffer standards from other streams not identified on Norton's zoning map should be based on default geomorphic standards from VT DEC (generally, a 50-foot setback). Limits on impervious surfaces and restrictions on clearing of vegetation within the district will also be considered.
- Establish a flood hazard area education effort to benefit local residents.
- Explore participation in the FEMA Community Rating System (CRS) so as to secure a discount on flood insurance.
- Update the Norton Emergency Operations Plan and All Hazards Mitigation Plan.
- Consider the relative costs and benefits of adopting the latest version of the Agency of Transportation's Road and Bridge Standards.
- Maintain an up-to-date inventory of bridges and culverts, especially on roads within the flood hazard area, to assure the ability of these structures to accommodate increased flows.

XI. Regional Compatibility

A. Impacts on Adjacent Communities

Norton is located on the Canadian Border (Quebec) in northwestern Essex County. It is bordered on the east by Averill and Canaan, on the north by Quebec, on the west by Holland, and on the south by Warner's Grant, Warren Gore, and Avery's Gore. It is located approximately 15 miles north of Island Pond, and eight miles south of Coaticook, Quebec.

The Towns of Averill, Avery's Gore, Warren Gore, and Warner's Grant are all part of the Unified Towns and Gores (UTG). The UTG has a Local Development Plan and Zoning Regulations in effect. The Town of Holland, located west of Norton, has a Town Plan in effect. The Town of Canaan, located to the east, has a Town Plan and a Zoning Bylaw in effect. The goals in this Town Plan are not in conflict with the existing plans or bylaws in adjacent communities.

It is noted that Norton's existing Lakeshore and Stream District (LSD) regulations regulate only the 100 feet adjacent lakes and streams, whereas, the UTG lakeshore regulates 250 feet from the lakeshore. Both regulations require a 100 foot setback from the lakeshore. However, the UTG also regulates impervious surfaces within the 250-foot adjacent area, and regulates clearing of natural vegetation with the 100 foot buffer. Norton will consider amending its LSD regulations to be more closely consistent with UTG's Lakeshore regulations, as well as pending state legislation.

The international border (Port of Norton) has become increasingly important over recent years primarily due to security issues. Any federal plans could certainly impact local development, so this should be monitored for the future. Information on the international boundary that Norton shares with the Province of Quebec can be found at the International Boundary Commission's site www.internationalboundarycommission.org. There are limits on what development can occur near the international boundary line.

Norton and our adjacent communities are very closely linked. We depend on each other to maintain the traditional way of rural life. We support adjacent communities by providing labor for their jobs, by supporting their community endeavors, and by providing an area for their outdoor recreational opportunities. We shop for services and goods in two countries and two states, and support directly and indirectly the local service and hospitality industries. Our interlinked relationships have been mutually rewarding and we expect this to continue well into the next century.

Norton residents rely primarily on the towns of Canaan, Island Pond, West Stewartstown (NH) and Coaticook, Quebec for most basic goods and services. Route 114 is the primary road linking Norton to these neighboring communities.

B. Recommended Actions:

1. Continuously monitor the situation in adjacent towns to ensure that relationships continue to be positive.
2. Establish and maintain regular communications with the various federal agencies involved in U.S. and Canadian border issues
3. Partner with adjacent communities to address issues that impact us all.
4. Investigate the land use designations in adjacent towns when zoning regulations are being revised.

XII. Plan Implementation

This plan recommends many different actions to work toward our vision for the Town. This section prioritizes these actions and suggests those that should be completed first. Planning is a dynamic process and this list may change as local priorities change.

Recommendations for Implementation (in order of priority)

1. Review and update local zoning regulations to ensure they will allow us to meet the goals, policies, and recommendations of this plan.
2. Undertake a detailed study of existing land uses, and acquire updated parcel maps in order to determine appropriate boundaries for a new commercial/mixed use district, to re-align the boundaries of the AFD and RRD, and to establish an appropriate residential density in each of the districts.
3. Educate landowners and developers to observe local zoning regulations and deed restrictions. Lake and/or homeowner associations shall comply with their specific organizational rules and regulations.
4. Educate property owners in Norton about the opportunities for net metering and the financial benefits of establishing a local Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Program.
5. Establish cooperative, working relationships with neighboring communities, state and federal agencies, and others to strengthen the community and minimize problems.
6. Review this plan annually to ensure that goals are being achieved and the needs of residents and land owners are being met.
7. Consider surveying community residents and businesses to gauge their opinions on issues of regional importance – e.g, industrial scale wind development, or the protection of lands important for agriculture and forestry.

APPENDIX 1 – REQUIRED ELEMENTS

The following chart identifies the 12 required elements for municipal plans in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 4382, and the location of the element in the Plan.

Required Element	Location
(1) A statement of objectives, policies, and programs of the municipality to guide the future growth and development of land, public services and facilities, and to protect the environment	Section I. E; Sections II – X, subsection C
(2) A land use plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses, indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture (using the agricultural lands identification process established in 6 V.S.A. § 8), residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses and open spaces reserved for flood plain, wetland protection, or other conservation purposes; and setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity, and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and service	Section II and Maps 1,2, 4, 5, and 6 in Appendix 2
(3) A transportation plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities showing existing and proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads, and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority of need	Section IV and Map 7 in Appendix 2
(4) A utility and facility plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for community facilities and services, with indications of priority of need, costs and method of financing	Section V and Map 1 in appendix 2
(5) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources	Section VII
(6) An educational facilities plan consisting of a map and statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system	Section VI
(7) A recommended program for the implementation of the objectives of the development plan	Section XII
(8) A statement indicating how the plan relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities, areas and the region developed under this title	Section XI
(9) An energy plan, including an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems within the municipality, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy, including programs, such as thermal integrity standards for buildings, to implement that policy, a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy resources, a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation of energy	Section VIII
(10) A housing element that shall include a recommended program for addressing low and moderate income persons' housing needs as identified by the regional planning commission pursuant to subdivision 4348a(a)(9) of this title. The program should account for permitted accessory dwelling units, as defined in subdivision 4412(1)(E) of this title, which provide affordable housing	Section IX

<p>(11) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth</p>	<p>Section III</p>
<p>(12) (A) A flood resilience plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, based on river corridor maps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 1428(a) or maps recommended by the Secretary, and designates those areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property; and (ii) recommends policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated under subdivision (12)(A)(i) of this subsection and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments. <p>(B) A flood resilience plan may reference an existing local hazard mitigation plan approved under 44 C.F.R. § 201.6</p>	<p>Section X and Map 5 in appendix 2</p>

APPENDIX 2 – MAPS

Map 1: Town of Norton Base Map

Map 2: Land Use/ Land Cover

Map 3: Natural Resource Constraints

Map 4: Soils Constraints

Map 5: Flood Hazard Areas

Map 6: Zoning District

Map 7: Town of Norton General Highway Map