

# STRATFORD 2020

## A Vision and Land Use Plan



for Stratford, New Hampshire

Adopted February 19, 2008

# Stratford 2020

## A Vision and Land Use Plan for Stratford, New Hampshire

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with assistance from North Country Council, Inc.

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## 1. THE STRATFORD COMMUNITY

### 1.1 Stratford History

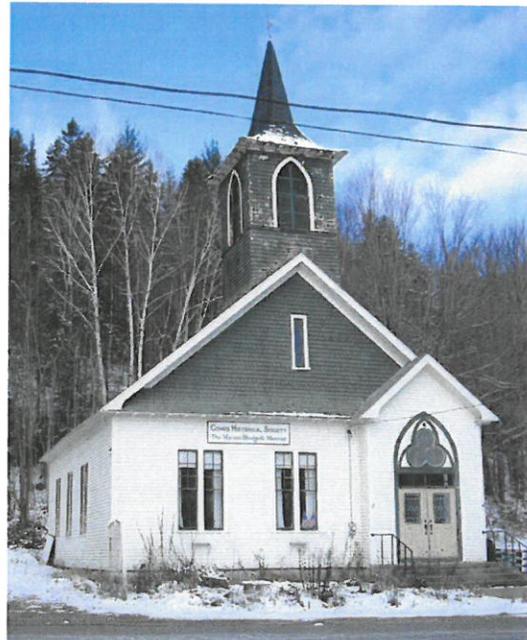
Stratford, incorporated in 1773, was originally called Woodbury. The town has a long history of ingenuity and creativity – nature lovers, loggers, hunters, storytellers, artists, and teachers have proudly and devotedly called it home, even in hard times. Known for its natural beauty and wild back country – mountains rich in local lore, wildlife, wandering brooks, wild flowers – the town has retained a sense of timelessness. Through the years, Stratford has quietly and stubbornly retained its scenic beauty, quaint charm, quiet pace, and dedication to individuality.

A farming and logging community until the late 1800s, small family farms dotted fields and hillsides and farmers made their living from sheep, cows, goats, and other animals, as well as vegetables raised for market. Remnants of old farmhouse and barn cellar holes remain.

Equally important were mills on small brooks, notorious for live bottoms and rolling rocks. Stave, shingle, saw, and grist mills employed residents then. Brooks and the Connecticut River served as a means to get products to market, as did the railroad.

The influence of the town's economic history can be seen on today's landscape, land use, and land ownership patterns. Like much of the North Country, most of Stratford was owned by paper companies. Today's forests represent regeneration following years of logging. Small ponds were created throughout the area by dams used to hold the water back until log drives to convey the pulp logs to the mills in downstream Groveton. Logging roads and camps on paper company land opened the doors for four-season forest recreation.

Sale of large tracts of paper company land enabled public acquisition of some of these



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lands for limited public recreation and conservation of the resource for the area's forest products industry. Nash Stream Forest, the largest of these acquisitions, lies in Stratford, Odell, Stark, and Columbia.

The railroad is also a key piece of the town's heritage. At one time, pulp was hauled by drays to the station and loaded on cars on the siding. The railroad served the large plywood mill once located in town. In addition to transporting goods and passengers, the railroad was also an important link in communications, used by both mail and telegraph.

For those wishing to learn more about Stratford's history, refer to Jeannette R. Thompson's [History of the Town of Stratford New Hampshire 1773-1925](#), available at the local libraries and for sale by the town clerk.

### **1.2 The Economic Base**

The wood products industry has continued to play a prominent role in Stratford's economy. In the 1950s and 1960s, Stratford Plywood Mill was the cornerstone of the vibrant community. In the mid-1960s when Brown Co. purchased the mill, between 400 and 600 people were employed there. In 1970 the mill was again sold, and closed soon after in 1972. The mill has since been used by a number of businesses, but none with sustained employment in significant numbers. Currently, only a portion of the building is being used. Although there are a number of jobs in town – 237 people reported Stratford as their place of employment in the 2000 U.S. Census - there is currently no large private business employer in Stratford. The school and town are the largest employers, and many of the jobs are part-time. Businesses typically employ 1 to 4 individuals.

Area jobs have been affected by regional and national economic forces. In early 2006, as part of major shareholder International Paper's restructuring, Groveton Paper Board just south of Stratford closed, laying off its 108 employees. The closing was due to a combination of manufacturing shifting overseas and the high energy and transportation costs in northern New England. The area's remaining large mill, Wausau Paper, closed its Groveton mill at the end of 2007. An additional 303 people were laid off. NH Department of Environmental Security modeling projects that an additional 321 Coos County jobs will be lost due to the loss of purchases made by the mills and the loss of mill worker wages for local purchasing.

Even in recent years, prior to these two mill closures, Stratford itself was the place of employment for the highest number of employed Stratford residents. The 2000 U.S. Census reported 77 of 392 employed Stratford residents working in Stratford. Groveton was next in importance with 67 Stratford residents employed there. Fifty-eight Stratford residents commuted further south to Lancaster, and 58 drove north to Colebrook. Fifty-seven worked in other New Hampshire communities, such as Berlin, Stewartstown, Dixville, or other towns. Sixty-four residents worked on the other side of the Connecticut River in Vermont, and 11 individuals working in other states called Stratford home.

The economy of Stratford has been invigorated in recent years by tourist interest in snow machines, all-terrain vehicles, and dog sled racing, as well as traditional hunting, hiking, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing—this interest is showing no signs of abating. The town has also been indirectly involved in multi-county and/or state canoeing and biking events. Two new campgrounds have sprung up, and a third pre-existing campground has been renovated, with additional cabins as well as camp sites. Public accommodation has increased, in part as a result of a favorable tax climate (Stratford was one of only two towns in the county to participate in a public accommodation tax incentive program for depressed areas). An old boarding house was renovated and opened, a new rental cabin was built, a bed and breakfast facility was expanded, and a multi-unit apartment building opened—all of which cater to tourists on a year-round basis. As a result of this tourist interest in Stratford, other “mom and pop” businesses in town have experienced increased grocery and gas sales. The population figures of Stratford do not reflect the seasonal population - on weekends and holidays the population of the town swells considerably. The vast majority of the town’s seasonal residences are filled then, and there is increased recreational trail activity and traffic along the town's back roads.

For data reporting and analysis purposes, Stratford is considered part of the Littleton labor market area, along with Northumberland and Lancaster. However, the town's economic statistics are more closely aligned with those of the Colebrook area. The most recent available unemployment rate for Stratford, September 2007, was 4.4%, compared with 3.5% in Coos County as a whole and 3.2% statewide. This was an improvement over Stratford's rate of 5.3% in 2006, but the figure is expected to be higher in 2008 after the Wausau mill closure. However, unemployment figures will under-represent the true

impact of the mill closures on the community as some population loss is also expected to occur.

When using unemployment statistics, it is important to keep in mind that these figures underestimate the available labor force in an area as they reflect only those individuals eligible to collect unemployment benefits. The figures do not include those whose unemployment benefits have expired or who were not eligible to collect benefits, those working at jobs that pay well below a livable wage or working two jobs to make ends meet, or those bearing the high costs of a long commute without public transit.

Existing and future Stratford businesses benefit not only from Stratford's workforce, but also from easy access to the community from Colebrook, Groveton, Lancaster, and Berlin. In 2000, the U.S. Census reported that of 237 people employed in Stratford almost a third (77) were Stratford residents, but nearly that number, 67, commuted to work from Lancaster.

### **1.3 The Population**

Since the late 1800s, Stratford's population has experienced small increases and decreases depending on national, regional and local economic trends. The highest population reported by the U.S. Census was 1,128 in 1890; the lowest was 794 in 1920. In recent times, the town dropped from a peak of 1,029 in 1960 to 927 in 1990, then showed a small increase to 942 in the 2000 U.S. Census. NH Office of Energy and Planning estimates indicate this upward trend may continue – the OEP estimate for 2006 was 997. NH OEP records, as reported by the town, indicate that permits were issued for 29 more housing units than were lost to fire or demolition. Growth will, however, continue to be influenced by regional trends.

While the total population has remained relatively stable, the make-up of that population has not. Like many areas, Stratford has seen a decrease in the school-age population and an increase in those over 65. In the North Country, this is both because of the aging baby boomers and because of the loss of jobs in the area and increasing popularity with retirees. In 1980 the school age population (age 5-17) in town was 257 (26%), in 1990 201 (22%), and in 2000 174 (18%). County-wide, the average school age population in 2000 was also 18%. The population of those under 5 in Stratford fell from 99 (10%) in

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1980, to 68 (7%) in 1990, to 50 (5%) in 2000. Again, 5% was the average for Coos County. During the same period, the population 65 and over in Stratford grew from 85 (9%) in 1980 to 120 (13%) in 2000. This was less than the county-wide average of 18% in 2000.

Each of these population changes has special implications for the services needed and financial impacts of those needs. The decreasing school-age population has severely impacted the financial situation of the town as state aid for education is disbursed on a per pupil basis while many school costs remain the same despite falling enrollments. At the same time, the elderly require more assistance with health care, transportation, meals and other services.

### **1.4 Incomes**

The 2000 U.S. Census reported that in 1999 Stratford residents had the next to lowest median household income in the state (\$28,594) and the next to lowest per capita income (\$13,784). At that time, 14.33% of the town's population was below the poverty level compared with 9.98% county-wide.

### **1.5 Housing**

Stratford's housing supply grew substantially from 1990 to 2000, from 479 units in 1990 to 540 in 2000. The number of vacant units reported by the Census remained steady, 146 units in 1990 and 143 in 2000, as did the number of those that are seasonal homes, 108 in 1990 and 107 in 2000. The increase in the number of units was seen in both owner-occupied dwelling units and rental units. In 1990, there were 226 owner-occupied units reported by the Census and 107 rental units. In 2000, these figures had increased to 269 owner-occupied units and 128 rental units.

North Country Council conducted a housing needs assessment in 2004 to assist member communities in complying with RSA 674:2. III.I by including this information in local master plans (North Country Region Housing Needs Assessment, December 1, 2004). Housing trends and needs of the North Country region were assessed by subregions. Stratford was studied as part of the former Lancaster Labor Market Area (LMA), which also included Jefferson, Lancaster, Northumberland, and Stark. (The Lancaster LMA has since been combined into the Littleton NH-VT LMA.) The information

in the following paragraphs is based on this Housing Needs Assessment and U.S. Census data.

From 1990 to 2002, the number of housing units in the Lancaster area increased by 7% (from 3,963 to 4,118). This figure was just slightly lower than the rate for the North Country region as a whole (8%). During the same period, the Colebrook LMA grew by 16% and the Berlin area saw virtually no growth. Stratford's 66-unit increase (479 to 545) gave it the highest percentage in the Lancaster LMA (14%).

Similar to the rest of the North Country region, most of the housing as well as housing growth in the Lancaster LMA has been in single-family units. The Lancaster LMA actually lost multifamily units and manufactured housing from 1990 - 2002. This trend is of concern because multifamily housing and manufactured housing tend to be among the more affordable housing options.

Although housing costs tend to be lower in the North Country than in much of the state (average purchase price was \$110,000 in Lancaster LMA in 2003 vs. \$214,400 statewide), purchase prices in the North Country increased by 57% between 1999 and 2003, following statewide trends (+66%). Rental units have followed similar trends. The average cost for a 2-bedroom unit in the North Country in 2004 was \$609 per month, up 17% from 2000 figures. The statewide average was \$978, up 29% from 2000.

Despite lower prices, the housing cost burden for North Country residents is not less than that for the rest of the state - incomes are also substantially lower. In 2002 the average weekly wage was \$478 in the North Country compared with \$696 statewide.

Housing costs have an especially burdensome effect on the elderly. In 1999 almost 42% of renter households age 65 and over in the Lancaster LMA were estimated to be paying more than 30% of their incomes on housing. This compared with 19.5% of renter households under 65. Thirty percent is the generally accepted level above which insufficient household funds are available for other basic necessities, such as food, clothing, medical care, day care and transportation. For homeowners the differential is smaller - about 26% for those over 65 compared with just over 16% for those under 65, presumably because mortgages tend to be paid off by then.

The future need for housing in Stratford is difficult to predict. It will be closely tied to the regional economy, which, in turn, is affected by the global economy. The North Country's ability to adapt with tomorrow's products and services, a modern telecommunications system, and a multimodal transportation system, along with maintenance of the high quality of life sought by professionals, retirees and vacationers, will be key.

## **2. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

### **2.1 *The Process***

In 2006 the Stratford Planning Board embarked on this update to the 1992 Comprehensive Plan. Funds were included in the 2007 budget passed by Town Meeting to contract with North Country Council for professional planning assistance and a community attitude survey was conducted. The survey was distributed to the 631 voters and property owners. The response rate was 13% -- 53% of respondents were voters, 96% were property owners. About half of respondents own lots of less than 5 acres; however, 18 large landowners (50 or more acres) also responded. When asked to choose among a list of features that might cause one to find Stratford to be a desirable place to live, a majority chose:

- Small town atmosphere
- Uncrowded, quiet living conditions
- Outdoor recreation opportunities
- Friendly people
- Scenic, unpolluted natural environment

Employment opportunities, school system, and community spirit received relatively few responses.

Consistent with the above, a majority of respondents reported placing a high value on:

- Views of mountains
- Small town
- Forest lands
- Wildlife habitats
- Scenic roads
- Stream, ponds and bogs
- Farmlands and open fields



Given a list of general concerns to choose from, although economic development received the highest number of responses (49%), none were chosen by a majority of respondents. With a similar question focused specifically on environmental concerns, groundwater quality (57%) and noise pollution (57%) were chosen by a majority of respondents. Asked to fill in the blank - In the next 10 years, should Stratford encourage - respondents most often chose "retaining a rural residential community" (70%) and "outdoor recreation-related business" (60%).

A Master Plan Committee was formed comprised of the Planning Board and additional individuals with special knowledge of the community and an interest in volunteering to help collect information and guide the development of the plan. Committee meetings were held at Fuller Town Hall from May, 2007 through January, 2008. In August a flyer was developed and distributed in a few locations in town to obtain feedback on the Committee's draft vision statement. Only a few responses were received and all were positive, indicating to the Committee that they had captured the sentiments of the community for future direction. A draft plan was distributed and available for comment at the January 8, 2008 primary. After revisions were made, a public hearing was held on February 19, 2008.

## **2.2 The Vision of the Future**

The Stratford community envisions a future where the economic condition of the town has improved, the small town character is retained, residents' needs for services are met, and community spirit is high.

What this will look like in 2020:

- a few more businesses have come to town
- the tax base supports good quality education and other town services and well-maintained facilities without overburdening residents
- resident incomes are more closely aligned with regional figures
- no resident is below the poverty level or paying more than 30% of the household income for housing
- residents of all ages have the option of meeting their needs for employment and services without commuting long distances or relocating
- existing and future businesses have access to high-quality modern telecommunications and transportation infrastructure
- the unpolluted scenic rural landscape has been maintained
- landowners continue to enjoy freedom of choice regarding the use of their property and receive reasonable protection from serious negative environmental and economic impacts
- accessible public transportation is available to citizens
- visitors and residents continue to enjoy four seasons of motorized and nonmotorized outdoor recreation opportunities
- community pride has increased
- there is a high level of participation in town government and activities

### **3. LAND USE TODAY**

#### **3.1 Forest**

Most of Stratford's land area is forested. Since the late 1980s, more than half of the land area (over 24,000 acres) in town has had future uses restricted by public acquisition or conservation easements, protecting this resource for limited recreation, the needs of the forest products industry, and other forest values. [See below and Map 1]

Name of Tract in GRANIT Database (may be original grantor of the easement rather than current owner)	Type of Protection	Owner or Easement Holder	Approximate Acreage in Stratford
Nash Stream Forest	fee ownership	DRED	13,000
Vickie Bunnell Preserve	fee ownership	The Nature Conservancy	6,053
Augustus Hemenway Memorial Forest	fee ownership	New England Forestry Foundation	495
Bunnell Working Forest	conservation easement	The Nature Conservancy	2,779
Water Department	easement	Stratford Water Department	13 (wellhead protection area)
Marceau	conservation easement	Society of the Protection of NH Forests	1,300
Richardson Forest	fee ownership	Society of the Protection of NH Forests	14
Town Forest	fee ownership	Town of Stratford	100
Fort Hill WMA	combination	NH Fish & Game	424 – fee 65 - easement

The largest conserved tract is the Nash Stream Forest, purchased in 1988 through a cooperative project of the State, U.S. Forest Service, Nature Conservancy and Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. Thirteen thousand acres of the Forest are in Stratford, with the remainder of the 39,601 acres in adjacent Columbia, Stark, and Odell. The Forest was protected from development to ensure continued wood production and public access for recreation. A management plan was published in 1995 by NH Department of Resources and Economic Development, the lead agency in the Forest's management. The Plan was developed with the guidance of a gubernatorial-appointed Advisory Committee. Although the Committee represented a wide range of interests, local officials were not provided a seat on the Committee to advocate for the Town's interests. The Plan calls for more than half of the Forest to continue to be managed for timber, continued ability of those with camp lot leases to pass them along within their families, and continued public access for hunting, fishing, trapping and other recreation uses. Maintenance of the multi-use road/trail network was also provided for, including 37 miles of snowmobile trail.

The Management Plan called for a Citizen Advisory Committee to guide the management of the Forest on an ongoing basis. Each community has a seat on that Committee. In 2002 DRED issued Management Plan Updates and Revisions for the Nash Stream Forest, developed with the help of the Advisory Committee. The update reflected increased awareness of the importance of the area's tourist economy. The updated plan called for a pilot ATV trail project, which is now in place.

### **3.2 Agriculture**

Agricultural use has been mainly limited to the western side of town, including in the floodplain areas along the

Connecticut River. This remains one of the best uses for the floodplains, as it minimizes the risk to life and property. In 2006, 1,060 acres of agricultural land in town were enrolled in the



current use program, granting reduced property taxes to reduce development pressure. Agricultural enterprises add to the quality of life for residents and the marketability of the community to tourists, businesses, and those looking to buy or build a second home.

### **3.3 Residential**

Residential use is primarily clustered along US Route 3, either right on Route 3 or on smaller town and private roads off of it, on Bog Road, and in the two village areas known as "North Stratford" and "Stratford Hollow" (see Map 1). (The names "North Stratford" and "Stratford Hollow" are used throughout this document to denote the two more densely developed areas at either end of town. It should be noted that these are not village districts, or in any way separate communities within the Town of Stratford.) New residences are increasingly being built away from the main roads on private or public dirt roads.

Most new residences in recent years have tended to be second homes or retirement homes. In some cases, campers or trailers serve as camps or temporary homes.

Many of the subdivisions of the past have remained undeveloped. In most cases the lots have been sold; in a few cases they are still owned by the subdivider.

### ***3.4 Commercial, Industrial and Services***

Small businesses are found scattered along Route 3 throughout town (see Map 1). Active industrial facilities include the railroad repair building built in 1996 and petroleum tank farm built in 2000, both to the north of town. In addition, a natural gas pipeline was constructed through town in 1999, becoming the largest taxpayer and substantially adding to the tax base.

The zoning ordinance does not regulate the location, setbacks or impacts of development on neighboring properties, or protect business uses from the results of incompatible uses next door. None of the businesses in town employ more than a handful of people.

### ***3.5 Excavations***

The town has several small, active grandfathered excavations as follows:

Redimix – US Route 3 north of town

Cloutier – Bog Road

Marceau – Town Line Road

Marquis – Reservoir Road

The town implements RSA 155-E, the state's requirements for permitting and reclaiming sand and gravel excavations.

### ***3.6 Regulation of Land Use***

True to the independent Yankee spirit, the Stratford community has preferred minimal land use regulations. The Town's Land Use Ordinance, adopted in 1995, prohibits waste dump sites of any kind – municipal, medical, hazardous, industrial or radioactive. All other uses are permitted so long as they do not "produce or emit excessive smoke, fumes, dust, odor, refuse material, noise, vibration, radiation, or the like condition, or that

may disturb, or endanger the health, safety, peace, or enjoyment of the community..." State laws such as wetland, stormwater and septic regulations are relied upon for managing the impacts of development. In addition, state laws governing junk yards are administered by the Selectboard. Enforcement costs are an issue for Stratford, as is true for most small towns.

#### 4. THE INFRASTRUCTURE

##### 4.1 Transportation

###### Roads

Stratford is fortunate to have as its transportation backbone US Route 3, connecting Quebec to the US Interstate highway system. Bog Road is a relatively well-maintained state and town road with the potential to connect large tracts of undeveloped land to the west of the Nash Stream Forest with US Route 3. Off of US Route 3 and Bog Road are several public and private roads serving scattered homes and camps. Logging roads also provide access to the forests for recreationists as well as logging. NH Department of Transportation data (2003) show the following public highway mileages for Stratford:

Class I	Primary State Highways	11.393 miles
Class II	Secondary State Highways	4.112 miles
Class V	Town Roads	8.696 miles
Class VI	Other Unmaintained Public Ways	4.468 miles

There are also many miles of private road.

###### Rail

The St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad through Stratford is part of the former Grand Trunk Eastern. According to the NH Rail Plan it is a regionally significant connection between Portland/Auburn, Maine and Canada. This railroad transports bulk and container traffic via a connection with the Canadian National Railway near Montreal. The line was rehabilitated in 1996 from Shelburne to "North Stratford" using a state revolving loan fund. Plans are now being developed to further improve and upgrade the line.

The New Hampshire Central Railroad operates the state-owned North Stratford-Beecher Falls Line. Aggregate, wood products and bulk fuel are transported on this line. Seven miles of this line were rehabilitated in 1995 using state and private funds. The state has also repaired two bridges. New Hampshire Central owns a repair facility to the north of town.

#### Air

Small commercial airports are located nearby in Berlin and Whitefield.

#### Special Needs

There is no fixed route service for nondrivers in Stratford to access jobs or shopping and services in Colebrook or Lancaster. With advance notice, North Country Transit's Senior Wheels Program provides transportation to area residents 60 and over to medical appointments, hairdressers, grocery shopping, social events, senior meals, and employment in the area. Volunteer drivers for medical appointments out of the area are coordinated by Tri-County Community Action Program, Inc.

#### **4.2 School**

The 2-story 36,000 square foot brick building located off US Route 3 in "North Stratford" houses grades K-12. The building was expanded in 1961. More recently, a multipurpose room



was added. In addition, the emergency management office doubles as a music room. Needed renovations include handicap accessibility, including an elevator, and security.

The school has been experiencing declining enrollments over the past two decades, as have many school districts in the area. Enrollments have declined from over 300 students in 1980 to roughly half that figure in 2007. The enrollment figure of 152 in August 2007 included 12 kindergarten students, 92 students in grades 1 through 8, and

48 students in high school (grades 9 – 12). Thirty-seven of these students were tuition students from Bloomfield, Brunswick, and Maidstone. These enrollment figures represent smaller class sizes and lower student to teacher ratios, which have enabled more individualized attention, a benefit for the students educationally. State and national assessment scores are at or above average. The high school was recently named a Bronze medal winner as one of the nation's best high schools by US News and World Report.

#### **4.3 Town Buildings**

##### Town Hall

Fuller Town Hall on US Route 3 in "North Stratford" was built in 1990 to replace the previous town hall, which burned down. The Town Hall houses the planning board, police department, and sewer lab and office. It is also used for senior



meals, various meetings, and elections, and is occasionally rented for other functions. The building is adequate at this time, but long-term plans might include more room for the police department and an elevator to facilitate handicap access between the two floors. In addition, inadequate parking continues to be an issue.

##### Town Office

The town offices have been located in the fire station on Town Common Road in "North Stratford" since the original town hall burned down. One side of the 1975 building houses the town office and the Stratford



Public Library. The other side continues to serve as the fire substation and is used for the storage of the ambulance, police cruiser, lawn maintenance equipment, and fire

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vehicles. The brick and block building has experienced some structural problems which will need to be addressed at some point. In addition, parking is very limited, and space for the town vault is inadequate.

### Fire Department

The main station is at "Stratford Hollow." (Also a substation at "North Stratford", see above.) The 1981 wood-frame building houses the frontline vehicles, including jaws of life. The roof was recently replaced.



The town's second library, Laura Johnson Library, has also been housed in this building since having to move out of the private home it was originally located in.



The old fire station building, currently used by the Knights of Pythias, is in need of substantial work. It is currently used to house the town's sewer truck. The roof was recently replaced.

### Highway Shed

The current pole barn structure, used by the contracted road agent for storage of sand, salt, and equipment, is in the process of being updated and repaired. (The contracted road agent performs all highway department services.)

### Railroad Station

The Grand Trunk railroad station in "North Stratford" was purchased by the town in 1988. Renovations to the 1852 wood-frame building are underway using town and grant funds. Much has been accomplished – the roof has been replaced, the building was raised up and a foundation put under it, wiring has been installed, the walls have been insulated and renovated, an outside deck has been installed, a bathroom has been installed and water and sewer piped to it. Planned uses after renovations are complete include a new location for the Stratford Public Library and a museum area celebrating the town's railroad heritage.



A community meeting room with computers with internet access is also being explored. When completed, the project has the potential to serve as the centerpiece of the village area.

### Grange Hall

The Grange Hall, built in 1820, is the oldest town building. It is currently used in nonwinter months by the Grange. Grant funding for restoration/renovation should be explored.



#### **4.4 Water and Sewer**

##### Water

The North Stratford Water Department serves approximately 300 people at 109 connections (DES, 2003). The system serves the millhouse and "North Stratford" village areas and includes wells, a 300,000 gallon storage tank and pumping station. The 1920 reservoir was abandoned in the 1990s. Although there is excess capacity, expansion of the system is deemed cost prohibitive due to the surrounding topography.

##### Sewer

Sewer systems were built in 1985 to serve the millhouse and "North Stratford" village areas. The system includes 3 pump houses, a lagoon, sand filter and disinfection treatment system. The system was recently renovated to send effluent to the Connecticut River instead of Kimball Brook. The village district is designed to handle 56,000 gallons per day. The mill house district is designed to handle 24,000 gallons per day. Both have on occasion been over capacity. This has not been due to excess hook-ups but to a number of other factors including flooding of the system itself due to spring snowmelt, heavy rains and ice dams, leakage of stormwater into the system, and, in the past, flooding of basements with the water pumped into the system, and people leaving water running to keep pipes from freezing. The town has been working hard to address the last three issues, but the main problem, flooding of the system, is a siting issue which can not be overcome.

#### **4.5 Solid Waste**

The town has a recycling center/transfer station (quonset hut) that is considered to be adequate for current and future needs. The town contracts with a private hauler to bring the solid waste to the Berlin landfill. Disposal continues to be paid for with taxes rather than user fees. The town is a member of the Northeast Resource Recovery Association.



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The land on which the recycling center/transfer station is located has the potential to serve additional town needs in the future, such as new town offices.

The former town landfill is tested and reports submitted to the state as required.

### **4.6 Cemeteries**

The town owns Baldwin Cemetery, Burnside Cemetery, Stratford Center Cemetery, and Haynes Cemetery. Two private cemeteries in town are the Fairview Cemetery and Sacred Heart Cemetery. Several of these cemeteries have room for expansion. The existing land should be adequate for the next ten years.

### **4.7 Recreation**

Stratford is fortunate to have a wide variety of developed and undeveloped recreation areas. In addition to the opportunities provided by the Nash Stream Forest, residents and visitors enjoy a town-wide system of multipurpose trails, largely on private lands. The 120 mile North Country ATV Trail system is shared with the Stratford Nighthawks snowmobile club. The entire trail system is maintained by volunteers. The trail system has enabled Stratford to host such events as dog sled races, a triathlon, and mountain bike race.

There are several town parks in Stratford:

- Town Common - gathering place with veteran's monuments and benches
- Stratford Hollow Memorial Common - cement floored pavilion with playground equipment
- Village Park - Playground equipment, picnic tables and 3 grills





Town-owned recreation facilities include:

- Ice Skating Rink - Town Common
- Tennis Court - village
- Full Basketball court - village
- Half basketball court – Stratford Hollow Memorial Common
- Baseball field – south end of Main Street

Several canoe and car-top boat launches provide access to the Connecticut River:

- Bog Road at Maidstone-Stratford bridge on the Connecticut
- South end of Main Street before the railroad tracks on the Connecticut
- Near the tennis court on the Connecticut

#### **4.8 Utilities**

The town is served by PSNH and Verizon. In addition, homes in "North Stratford," along US Route 3, in "Stratford Hollow," and along a portion of Bog Road, are also served by cable television.

Cellular phone service and high-speed internet access are a high priority for Stratford as for other unserved parts of the North Country. The town has been exploring a grant for high-speed internet access.

#### **4.9 Medical**

Ambulance service is provided primarily through a contract with Groveton. Stratford also has its own ambulance department staffed with volunteers, but it is difficult for volunteers to find adequate time to participate in the required training. The vehicle is over ten years old and is used for transport only.

Residents' medical needs are served by a variety of facilities and programs. Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital, 13 miles north of town in Colebrook, provides 24 hour emergency services and walk-in clinic 365 days per year, as well as home health services. Weeks Medical Center, 13 miles south of town in Lancaster, also provides home health and hospice services to residents. Both Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital and Weeks Medical Center provide home health care to those unable to pay. Androscoggin Valley Hospital in Berlin also serves the area. Specialized medical care is provided to North Country residents by the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon. In addition, Northern Human Services is a mental health agency that provides emergency services, counseling, and drug and alcohol treatment and education.

In July 2007, a physician's office, Clinic Sans Frontieres, was opened on Main Street in Stratford. After decades without a doctor in town, the opening of this office brought, not only a needed medical capability to the town, but also a sense of new life to Main Street. The previously dilapidated old building on Main Street, once a hub for businesses and professionals, has been modernized while retaining its historical appearance.

#### **4.10 Social**

In addition to two churches and a variety of local organizations that enable residents to connect around shared interests and activities, there are several area agencies serving Stratford:

Northern Human Service's Vershire Center provides vocational and social training and support to individuals with disabilities. The Center provides training and support for over 60 area residents in cooperation with over 50 employers.

Tri-County Community Action Programs, Inc., assists low income, elderly and handicapped persons to solve problems and meet their physical and financial needs. Services provided to over 200 Stratford households include fuel assistance, weatherization, food distribution, homelessness prevention and electric assistance.

North Country Elder Programs provides a senior meals program at Fuller Town Hall and Meals on Wheels for those who are homebound. In 2007, congregate meals were

served to over 625 Stratford area residents and 12,685 meals were delivered to area homes.

## 5. THE TAX BASE

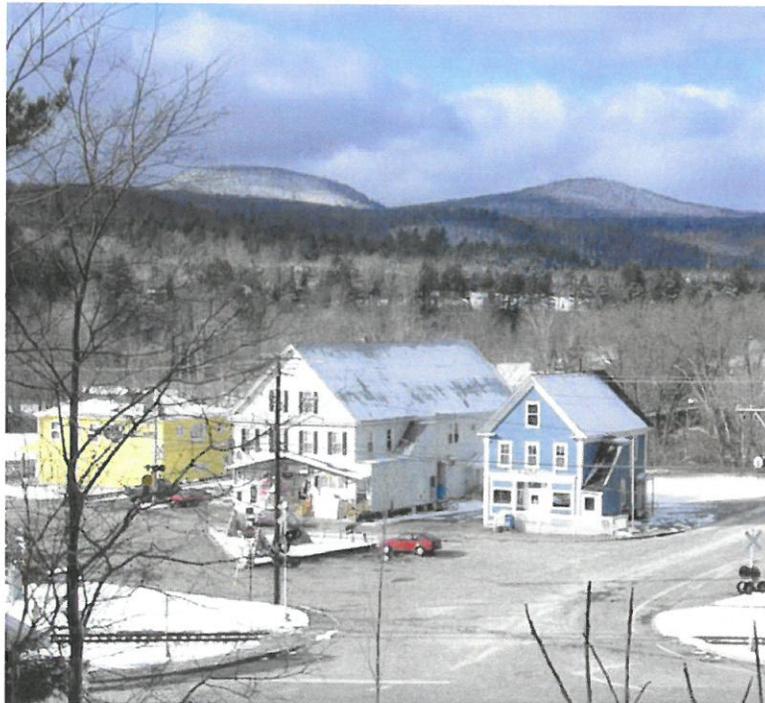
The assessed value in town has increased substantially over the last 15 years, from just under \$16 million in 1992 to over \$73 million today. One big increase in the tax base in 1998/99 was due to the construction of the natural gas pipeline through town. During this period, the expense of running the town and school have doubled with the cost of living – total property taxes increased from \$638,221 in 1992 to \$1,293,425 in 2007. In addition to the introduction of the state school tax and addition of the gas pipeline to the tax base, tax rates have fluctuated a great deal with revaluations and spending.

The tax revenue from a small portion of the land in town must pay the bulk of the town's costs. This is due to the fact that a large area (over 24,000 acres) of the town is either publicly owned or under conservation easement, and so limited in future development potential. The vast majority of the town (34,000 acres) is enrolled in the current use program, which means the town is able to tax it at only the value for forest management or agriculture rather than development potential.

## 6. THE PLAN

### 6.1 *Future Land Use*

Future development patterns will continue to be heavily dependent on US Route 3. Denser residential and commercial development in and around existing village areas will serve to drive the economic health of these villages while providing walkable communities.



Land to the north of Bog Road seems to have the best potential for the future growth of "Stratford Hollow," given the steep terrain to the south and floodplain areas to the west. In "North Stratford," denser residential and commercial development should be encouraged to the east both north and south of the existing village area. (See Maps 2 and 3.)

Encouraging and accommodating new businesses is a high priority of the town. One area identified with high potential for industrial uses is on both sides of US Route 3 in between "Stratford Hollow" and "North Stratford." (See Map 3.) A major employer or several smaller employers in this area would facilitate easy access for residents from all over Stratford.

For the developer seeking a large tract for a four-season residential recreation community, the large expanse of undeveloped forest adjacent to public lands in the Sugarloaf-Bog Brook area has high potential.

### ***6.2 Stratford's Role in the Region***

The lack of a strong local economy leads to high school graduates leaving town to find jobs in other areas. The problem is circular, as this out-migration results in lack of a local workforce to attract businesses to town. To a large extent, the local economy is affected by forces beyond the town's control. For example, the closing of the mills in Groveton, which employed large numbers of Stratford residents, was influenced by the global economy, i.e. competition from other areas with cheaper labor, energy and transportation.

The tourist economy provides potential economic development opportunities for the town. Many visitors currently come for either snowmobiling or ATVing. Obviously visitation from snowmobilers varies year to year according to the weather, and, to some extent, gas prices. The ATV market is dependent on continued development and maintenance of the regional trail system in addition to gas prices. Both snowmobiling and ATVing are dependent on the good will of private landowners who allow the trails across their land.

## A Vision and Land Use Plan for Stratford, New Hampshire

Higher end development is hampered by the lack of land use regulations and a faltering economy. Again, the problem is circular with a poor economy providing a lack of both incentive and funds for improvements.

Stratford's success in the future will be dependent upon the community's ability to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in and benefit from today's regional economic development initiatives. In response to area mill closings, North Country Council (NCC) has been obtaining federal EDA funding to organize and administer a variety of economic development planning and assistance initiatives in Coos County. Some of the activities with potential benefits for Stratford include:

- 5-Year Coos County Economic Action Plan – detailed strategic economic adjustment plan being developed with steering committee of county leaders
- NH Business Resource Center Project – expanded and enhanced services to retain and expand existing businesses and recruit new business to locate/expand in Coos County
- Division of Forest and Lands Wood Supply Study – to determine long-term availability of timber species, products and volume for wood products facilities in Coos County
- Engineering study to develop cost estimates for improvements to health sciences and technology wing of NHTC–Berlin to enhance employee training and business assistance
- Arts Alliance creative economy inventory of available facilities and sites
- NH Rural Development Council Telecomm Phase III Feasibility Study – analysis of existing infrastructure and options for expansion
- Business and Entrepreneurial Technical Assistance (BETA) program – business coaching to be provided in Colebrook/Groveton area in January 2008
- CDFA Downtown Resource Center market study for Groveton

Another federal EDA grant is enabling North Country Council to work together with the Northern Forest Center (NFC) on the Northern Forest Sustainable Economy Initiative. This project focuses on planning strategic initiatives that will lead to a sustained improvement in the economy of the forested north country of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. The initiatives are being developed by a steering committee

## A Vision and Land Use Plan for Stratford, New Hampshire

made up of leaders from all four states based on research being commissioned by NCC and the NFC.

As a result of local economic development initiatives in Colebrook and Groveton, as well as NCC involvement in master plan efforts in Stratford and Whitefield, work is underway to develop grant applications for a locally driven economic development planning effort from Whitefield to Colebrook. The foundation of the plan would be a corridor plan for US Route 3 as the economic backbone of the area.

### **6.3 Goals, Objectives, Policies and Recommendations**

#### Goal

- Improve the economic condition of the town.

#### Objectives

- Attract a few more employers to town.
- Support the efforts of local entrepreneurs.
- Ensure that Stratford and its residents benefit from regional economic development initiatives.
- Ensure that the tax base supports good quality education and other town services and well-maintained facilities without overburdening residents.

#### Policies and Recommendations

- Develop and implement a viable economic development plan for the community.
- Actively participate in and support regional economic development initiatives, including those focused on job creation in nearby job centers, job training and business owner assistance, and expansion of access to high-speed internet and cellular telephone service.
- Engage the assistance of regional and state economic development agencies to attract small businesses appropriate for Stratford.
- Work collaboratively with other area communities.
- Include strategic plan to increase the benefits of the recreation industry to Stratford, including further development of organized four-season trail system.
- Engage residents and landowners in an effort to encourage larger commercial and industrial uses in appropriate areas of town.
- Encourage development that will result in a greater amount of tourism and second home dollars in the local economy, such as lodging and restaurants.
- Use UNH Cooperative Extension and other resources to help landowners use idle land to generate more income, through cash crops and biofuels for example.
- Explore opportunities for cottage industries and engage support services for small business owners.

## A Vision and Land Use Plan for Stratford, New Hampshire

- Ensure that grant programs, such as the Brownfields program administered by North Country Council, are used whenever possible to help redevelop and attract investors to former industrial sites in town.
- Incorporate the benefits of the small school with individualized attention into marketing strategies.
- Seek opportunities to use the railroad line as an asset to future businesses.
- Develop minimum standards for manufactured housing parks and campgrounds, including buffers from neighboring uses, and ensure that state requirements such as compliance certificates are adhered to.
- Ensure that junkyards apply for a license from the Selectboard and comply with state statute RSA 236:111-129.

Objective

- Lower property taxes for residents and ensure that future land uses do not financially burden the town.

Policies and Recommendations

- Participate through local legislators in the state school funding issue to ensure the concerns of the Town are addressed.
- Investigate use of alternative energy sources, including wind, hydropower and woodchips, to keep the town and school energy costs down.
- Develop, implement, and regularly update a capital improvements program to ensure cost efficiency in the maintenance and upgrade of town buildings, equipment and facilities, including town roads and bridges, to prevent costly future reconstructions.
- Encourage continued professional development of town employees and contractors through such activities as the trainings on current road maintenance topics offered by UNH Technology Transfer Center.
- Ensure that centralized town services and facilities are developed when more efficient and cost effective.
- Evaluate adequacy of existing road standards and policies to ensure that development on substandard or Class VI roads does not create a financial burden or liability for the town.
- Authorize Selectboard to issue driveway permits for all proposed driveways on all town roads, including Class VI, to ensure safe sight distances and proper drainage.

## A Vision and Land Use Plan for Stratford, New Hampshire

- Regularly update the town's subdivision regulations to ensure compliance with state laws.
- Continue to examine off-site impacts of proposed developments and require developers to pay for inspection fees and improvements needed as a result of their developments to the extent permitted under state statute.
- Limit height of new buildings to that which can be served by the fire department's existing equipment.
- Work toward long-term goal of establishing one central town center.

Goal

- Ensure that the town retains its small town character as it grows.

Objectives

- Maintain the unpolluted, scenic rural landscape.
- Continue to respect landowners' needs and interests in their property.
- Ensure that visitors and residents continue to enjoy four seasons of motorized and nonmotorized outdoor recreation opportunities.

Policies and Recommendations

- Develop a water resource protection plan including protection of public drinking water sources, groundwater, riparian buffers and wetlands.
- Engage property owners in developing acceptable approaches to managing potential negative impacts of certain land uses, such as groundwater contamination and erosion.
- Promote best management practices in the town-owned forest and use as an educational opportunity for forest land owners.
- Enforce all existing local land use and health regulations and cooperate with state efforts to enforce state regulations.
- Ensure that the Stratford community voices its priorities for management of the Nash Stream Forest through the liaison appointed by the Selectboard to fill the town's seat on the Citizen Advisory Committee.

Goal

- Meet the needs of residents for housing and services.

Objective

- Ensure that all residents have safe and affordable housing.

Policies and Recommendations

- Ensure that any future changes to local land use regulations do not create an additional impediment to affordable housing.
- Continue to allow for the conversion of large single-family dwellings into multifamily, elderly or other smaller affordable dwelling units.
- Continue to allow accessory (in-law) apartments.
- Continue to allow manufactured homes that meet HUD standards and fire safety codes.
- Consider adopting a system of building and occupancy permits.

Objective

- Develop transportation choices for residents.

Policies and Recommendations

- Participate in regional and state initiatives to expand rural public transit.
- Support ride-sharing services and facilities for commuters.

Goal

- Improve community spirit.

Objectives

- Increase participation in town government.
- Facilitate implementation of Stratford 2020.

Policies and Recommendations

- Attempt to engage out-of-town large landowners in planning for the town's future and building community spirit.

## A Vision and Land Use Plan for Stratford, New Hampshire

- Establish a program to involve young people in town government through creative programs, such as a student seat on the school board.
- Promote respect for preservation and conservation of historic and cultural resources, e.g. through school programs and community projects such as the railroad station rehabilitation.
- Focus on town events and projects that will serve to unite residents.
- Use school resources and facilities to engage and unite the community.
- Work toward long-term goal of establishing one central town center.

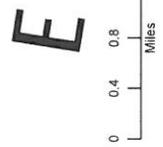
### **7. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN**

Maintaining the high-quality natural and recreational resources of Stratford and improving the economy of the town will require residents to support community programs and the local boards endeavoring to accomplish positive change. The Planning Board will annually review the policies and recommendations contained in this plan and report to the community on achievements and next steps.

# MAP I

## Existing Land Use

- Stratford Roads**
- State-maintained Roads
  - Selected Other Roads (Data Incomplete)
- Surface Waters**
- Small Rivers & Streams
  - Major Rivers, Ponds & Lakes
- Other Features**
- Land Conserved by Fee Ownership or Easement
  - Mixed Land Use
  - 100 Foot Contours
  - Stratford Town Line



Projection: NH State Plane, NAD83  
Map Scale - 1:60,000



# STRATFORD



**Cartographer's Notes:**

Map orientation slightly off north to allow for better viewing. See North Arrow.

**Data Sources:** NH Department of Transportation, 1:24,000 scale, revised February 2008; available from NH DOT  
Existing Land Use: NCC based on 2003 USDA, OnRoads  
Conservation Society for the Protection of NH Forests, 1:24,000 scale, revised February 2008; available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
Surface Water: USGS, USEPA, Complex Systems Research Center, 1:24,000 scale, revised June 2006; available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
Town Line: Digital Line Graphs, USGS, 1:24,000 scale, revised June 30, 1996; available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH

This map is for planning purposes only and may not be used for legal purposes. The map is based on the best available data. Corrections, additions or deletions should be directed to North County Council.



Map Prepared By:  
North County Council  
107 Gleason Road  
Barkham, NH 03574  
February 1, 2007

# MAP 2

## Development Limitations

### Stratford Roads

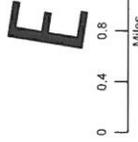
- State-maintained Roads
- Selected Other Roads (Data incomplete)

### Surface Waters

- Small Rivers & Streams
- Major Rivers, Ponds & Lakes

### Other Features

- 100 Year Flood Plain
- Land Conserved by Fee Ownership or Easement
- National Wetlands Inventory
- Stratified Drift Aquifer
- Slope of 25% or More
- 100 Foot Contours
- Stratford Town Line



Projection: NH State Plane: NAD83  
Map Scale - 1:50,000

### Cartographer's Notes

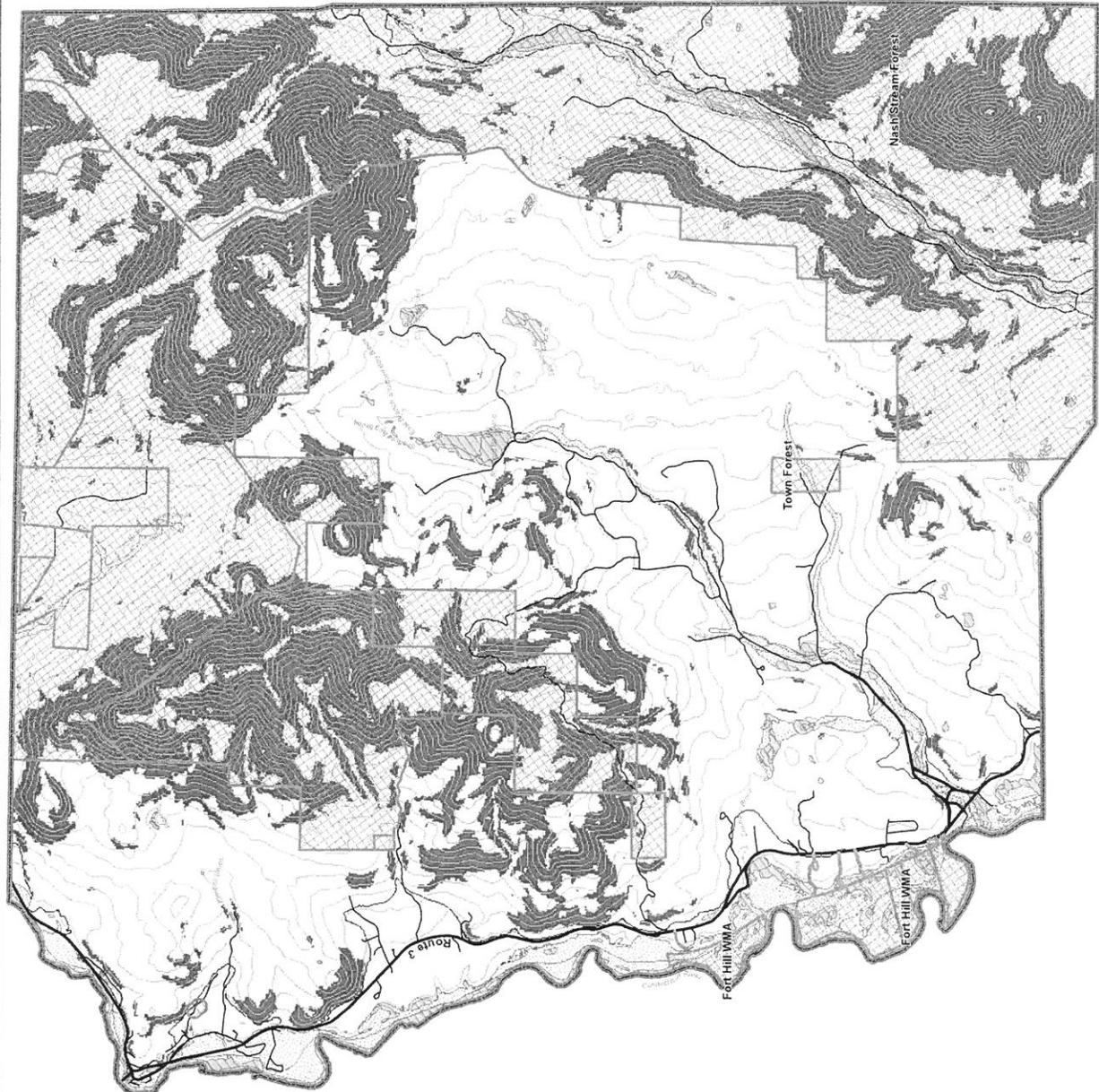
Map orientation slightly of north to allow for better viewing. See North Arrow.

### Data Sources:

Road Data: NH Department of Transportation, 1:124,000 scale; revised, February 2008; available from NH DOT  
 Contour Data: USGS, 1:24,000 scale; available from NH DOT  
 Conservation: USGS, 1:24,000 scale; available from NH DOT  
 Systems Research Center, UNH  
 Surface Water: USGS, USEPA, Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
 National Wetlands Inventory: USGS, 1:24,000 scale; available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
 Town Line: Digital Line Graphs, USGS, 1:24,000 scale; revised March 2008; available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
 Flood Data: FIRM data from FEMA in draft; not for replication  
 Wetlands Data: US Fish & Wildlife, 1:24,000 scale; revised March 2008; available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
 Aquifers: USGS, 1:24,000 scale; NH State Plane NAD83  
 Center, UNH  
 Slopes: Derived from USGS Digital Elevation Models; revised Feb 2000; available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
 UTM Meters: 7.5-Minute Quadrangle; revised March 1999; available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH

This map is for planning purposes only and may not fully represent geographic conditions. Boundaries are known to exist in these data layers. Boundaries should be checked to North Country Council.

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Stratford, NH 03274  
February 1, 2007



# STRATFORD



# MAP 3

## Potential Future Land Use

- Stratford Roads**
- State-maintained Roads
  - Selected Other Roads (Data incomplete)
- Surface Waters**
- Small Rivers & Streams
  - Major Rivers, Ponds & Lakes
- Other Features**
- Land Conserved by Fee Ownership or Easement
  - 100 Foot Contours
  - Stratford Town Line
- Stratford Potential Future Land Use**
- Existing Mixed Use
  - Potential Business Growth
  - Potential Commercial Recreation & Residential
  - Potential Village Growth

**E**



Projection: NH State Plane, NAD83  
Map Scale - 1:60,000

**Cartographer's Notes:**  
Map orientation slightly off north to allow for better viewing. See North Arrow.

**Data Sources:**  
Road Data: NH Department of Transportation, 1:24,000 scale.  
Existing Land Use: NCC based on USDA 2003 Orthoquads.  
Potential Future Land Use: Stratford Master Plan Committee, 2007  
Contours: 100-foot contours based on 1:24,000 scale revised (December 2007) available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
Surface Water: USGS, USEPA, Complex Systems Research Center, UNH  
Town Line: Digital Line Graphs, USGS; 1:24,000 scale, revised (December 2007) available from Complex Systems Research Center, UNH

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# STRATFORD

