

## INTRODUCTION

A changing population, increased development, the desire for more diversified housing, and variations in the regional and local economy has had a direct impact on Alton's landscape. By analyzing the land use implications of these trends, we are able to better predict Alton's future. This understanding will enable the community to establish policies and programs that will help guide future development, ensuring that Alton maintains its existing attributes.

Alton is blessed with a vast, productive, and scenic landscape. As such, the town can expect to see increased growth pressures as people seek out our high quality of life. With an effective land use planning program in place, Alton can take advantage of this growth by steering development to areas appropriate for the landscape and infrastructure.

The Alton Master Plan recognizes the interrelationships between and among land use, transportation, economic development and environmental quality. Working from the goals, objectives, and recommendations of the Master Plan, the Planning Board and town will act by planning for the efficient movement of traffic and protection of critical natural features, while understanding and adjusting for changing populations and economic trends. The Future Land Use section of this chapter identifies what residents think Alton should become as we grow.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The following recommendations provide a framework for future land use within the town of Alton. The future land use proposals presented in this chapter are conceptual in nature and are intended to be used as a general guide for the Planning Board as it plans and deliberates future zoning changes and individual developments. They are intended to serve as a guide for possible zoning changes, but they do not represent a complete or final zoning scheme for the community. This future land use plan has been developed from an analysis of the current zoning ordinance and community input expressed in the community surveys of August 1997 and June 2005, previous master plans, and the input of town officials and employees, as well as new information detailed in this document.

### A. Relevance to Community Goals

The Vision Chapter and this Land Use Chapter, created from a public survey and public input in June 2005 for the Master Plan update, can implicitly guide development and land use regulations in Alton for the next several years. The recommendations set forth in this chapter (listed below) are consistent with the goals from the Vision Chapter. The goals are not ordered; each is as important as the others.

**Goal 1: To maintain and enhance Alton's rural character in all future land use decisions.**

*Objective 1.1:* To preserve specified open land, which includes agriculture lands, forestry lands, scenic vistas, wetlands and other important open space areas.

*Objective 1.2:* To establish measurable criteria that defines Alton's rural character.

*Objective 1.3:* To identify and encourage the use of appropriate regulatory and land use techniques designed to enhance the Town's rural character.

**Goal 2: To encourage new development to be physically and visually attractive.**

*Objective 2.1:* To strengthen the town's Subdivision and Site Plan Review Regulations for the purpose of encouraging attractive developments.

*Objective 2.2:* To establish design review guidelines.

**Goal 3: To encourage small-scale commercial and light industrial development consistent with the town's current land use and development pattern.**

*Objective 3.1:* To consider specific areas that could be zoned to accommodate commercial and light industrial development.

*Objective 3.2:* To consider the use of electric wind generation facilities consistent with the protection of mountain viewsheds.

*Objective 3.3:* To assess and plan for home occupations and their possible expansion.

**Goal 4: To strengthen the economic viability of Alton Village and Alton Bay by recognizing their interdependence and importance to tourism.**

*Objective 4.1:* To encourage economic activity in Alton Village and Alton Bay and to plan for the interconnection of the Village and the Bay.

*Objective 4.2:* To encourage public and private partnerships designed to improve and upgrade both the Village and Bay.

**Goal 5: To properly plan for commercial development along State and Town roads in the village centers and outlying Village Districts.**

*Objective 5.1:* To manage traffic congestion on arterial roadways.

*Objective 5.2:* To promote designs for commercial developments that are in keeping with the rural character of the town.

## **B. Recommendations Overview**

Alton will inevitably change in character, appearance, demographics, and economic base. The following are general recommendations that are intended to aid Alton in the process of managing change and future development. The following recommendations shall serve as a course of action and general guide for implementing the previously stated goals.

### **Action 1: Draft Comprehensive Amendments to the Alton Zoning Ordinance that Implement Provisions of the Master Plan**

The current zoning ordinance does not implement the goals of this Master Plan, nor the 1999 and 1990 Master Plans. In fact, some of the provisions are contrary to the Plan. A comprehensive re-write of the Zoning Ordinance will return consistency to the document, and provide for clearer guidance to applicants, the Planning Board, and the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

### **Action 2: Creation of Revised Rural Zoning Districts**

The existing rural zone encompasses the largest amount of land area in the community, but allows for only homogeneous lot sizes and general uses, ranging from single family dwellings to light industrial development and commercial excavations. It is suggested that the town:

a. Consider the combination of current rural and rural residential zones and then separate into multiple new zones to facilitate the creation of various use and density zones. Lot sizes would range from smaller sizes closer to Alton Village to larger sizes on the outskirts of the community.

b. Creation of provisions for innovative land use tools such as Conservation Design by Randall Arendt (a type of cluster zoning) and phasing for one or more of the above new zones. The Alton Zoning Ordinance should encourage well-designed and planned development where natural features, such as soils and topography are conducive to such development. Such developments should provide for open space, recreation, as well as visual buffers and buffers for preservation of valuable wetlands.

c. Eliminate most of the commercial uses from the new rural zones allowing for only traditional rural uses, such as single family dwellings, duplexes (two-family), agriculture (crops and livestock), forestry, and other similar uses.

d. Create zoning incentives for developers to preserve or install rural features, such as stonewall lined fields, tree lined roadways, open space, and other similar features.

**Action 3: Outlying Village District Areas**

Consider the creation of a new zone with a mix of residential and commercial uses for the "outlying villages" of East Alton, West Alton and South Alton. These are envisioned as relatively small zones with commercial uses meant to serve neighborhoods such as: auto service stations; convenience stores; barber/beauty shops; laundry/dry cleaning; pharmacy; restaurant; etc.

**Action 4: Alton Village Zoning District**

View the entire area on NH Route 11 from the Alton Circle north to the Bay along Main Street as well as side streets as the principal area for future business expansion in Alton while maintaining a mix of residential and commercial uses. Create a central business district that encourages mixed use development, encourages revitalization (pedestrian friendly design and municipal parking); encourages development of services/shops to serve seasonal and year round residents and takes parking requirements out of zoning (and into Site Plan Regulations).

**Action 5: Resort Commercial Zoning District**

The resort and tourism industry is important to Alton's economic vitality. Alton should adopt land use practices that encourage visitors to enjoy the waterfront. The Resort Commercial area should allow for uses such as restaurants, marinas and associated activities.

**Action 6: Aquifer Protection Amendments**

The town should amend the current zoning ordinance to restrict commercial excavation of gravel and other material over designated aquifer districts. Such intense use of land over the aquifer, and excavation into the aquifer can reduce the quality of water yielded from the resource, where sand and substrate that filters pollutants from recharge surface water have been reduced. In areas with known aquifers, the town should restrict other potentially harmful uses including, but not limited to, car washes, boat storage, gas stations, automotive repair facilities, dry marinas and other industrial uses, unless the applicant for the restricted use can prove that the said use has no adverse affect upon the aquifer.

**Action 7: Encourage Aesthetically Pleasing Development**

Community art and gathering places are keys to creating livable environments and a healthy economy. Alton should provide for the development of such features as community art, sidewalks, benches, bicycle paths, street tree plantings, stonewalls, and similar features that add to the community experience. In addition, the town of Alton should take the lead on this issue, and make the above mentioned features part of all new publicly funded projects.

**Action 8: Rural Design Standards**

The Planning Board should promote the development of a Community Design chapter for the Master Plan. The beginnings of these guidelines are

enumerated in Appendix A. The new Community Design chapter should create a set of guidelines to inform residential and commercial developers, what features the Planning Board promotes in new subdivisions and site plans. These rural design guidelines should identify what features the community considers rural. These could include provisions for stonewall lined roadways, installation of fences, provisions for tree lined meadows/fields, traditional architecture (pitch roofs, shingle/clapboard siding, sill skirts, etc.) and other features.

**Action 9: Limit Access on Arterial and Collector Roadways to Prevent Traffic Congestion and Typical “Strip Development”**

New developments, both residential and commercial, should create side streets that focus access points to specific locations. Preferably, these access points should be on side, collector streets and not arterial roadways.

New developments should also create linking roadways between developments so travelers do not have to use the larger arterial and collector roadways to leave one site to enter the next site.

Following the standards in the future Community Design chapter should eliminate roadway development from looking like the typical “strip development”.

**Action 10: Provide Alternative Subdivision Development such as Randall Arendt’s Conservation Design Subdivision<sup>1</sup>**

A form of cluster design that promotes the protection of the best qualities of land proposed for subdivision.

**Action 11: Make Regular Investments in Obtaining Photography and Maps to Monitor Land Use Trends in Alton for Planning Purposes**

In order to adequately monitor land use trends in Alton, the community should invest in regularly updated maps at a uniform scale, detailing tree lines, structures, and traveled ways of roads, as well as other features.

Photographs and maps are now available through private companies and internet sources. These photographs and updated maps would inform local land use boards when making determinations regarding individual applications, planning for the development of municipal facilities and creating long-term plans for the town.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **A. Development Patterns, Past and Present**

With 83 square miles of territory, Alton is one of the largest towns in the Lakes Region, and the state. Roughly 64.3 square miles, or 41,123 acres, is land, while

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<sup>1</sup> Randall Arendt, Conservation Design for Subdivision: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks, (Island Press, Washington, D.C., 1996).

approximately 18 square miles, or 12,608 acres, is water. The large land size gives Alton a relatively low population density of 76.5 people per square mile.

Alton saw significant growth from 1960 to 1990. The rate of growth decreased to a rate of 0.63% annually in the 1990's.<sup>2</sup> From 2000 to August 2005, Alton has been growing at 2.3% (average) annually.<sup>3</sup> Alton's growth pattern has followed that of the traditional New England town. Development is centered around the village area of the town, with more dispersed growth in the rural outlying areas. Alton Village has historically served as a location for local business and commerce, consisting primarily of professional offices, banks, eating establishments, retail shops, and similar land uses. Alton Bay development has been driven by its recreation amenities, drawing in second home dwellers and vacationers. From the early days of New Hampshire, Alton Bay has been the transportation hub for lake commerce and has also grown into a recreational getaway.

In addition to Alton Village and Alton Bay, the town contains five other "villages": East Alton, West Alton, Alton Shores, South Alton, and the Lake Winnepesaukee Islands. These villages arose largely due to Alton's geographical extent, and the existence of significant natural features such as Lake Winnepesaukee and the surrounding mountains.

### **Alton Village**

The primary center of the community, Alton Village houses the Town Hall, Gilman Library, Gilman Museum, Alton Central School, as well as the Police Station and Central Fire Station. This area is served by a small municipal water system, and could be referred to as "Downtown Alton." The Village contains a variety of land uses, including retail shops, restaurants, single and multifamily dwellings, as well as some professional offices.

Most of the businesses in the village are located on Main Street, and operate out of converted old colonial and cape houses. Residences located on Main Street and the side streets, are primarily populated with year-round residents. It is this "rural" mix of businesses and old homes that makes Alton Village a quaint neighborhood, and one on which to model other villages in the town. The major natural constraint for growth in Alton Village is the Merrymeeting River marsh. The wetland is a scenic treasure and offers excellent wildlife habitat. Residents and visitors enjoy the recreational and bird watching opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup>Municipal Population Projections: 2000 to 2020, NH Office of State Planning, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Comparison of 2000 census data and 2000 - 2005 occupancy permit data.

## **Alton Bay**

Though part of Alton geographically and legally, Alton Bay has a number of distinguishing features which make it unique from the rest of Alton, such as its own zip code, public lake access, and seasonal/second homes. Alton Bay is the principal “tourist attraction” within Alton. The Bay has a deep and rich history. It was the location where Royal Governor Wentworth constructed the schooner Rockingham, and also where the original *M.S. Mount Washington* was constructed at the turn of the century.

The development pattern of the Bay is very dense considering that no municipal sewer is available. This pattern emerged from the combined influence of the waterfront, limited areas where slopes are acceptable for structures, and the dominance of the railroad in the Bay in the late nineteenth century. Many of the existing homes and structures located in the bay, though seasonal in nature, are constructed on substandard lots. The Alton Bay Christian Campground Association, which offers seasonal and year-round programs, and occupies a significant area of the Bay and is the location of some of the densest development.

The Bay also serves several water-affiliated establishments, including three marinas, the Town Boardwalk and public boat docks, the Town Beach and swim areas. Several lodging and eating & drinking establishments cater to the many visitors of the area.

Alton Bay development constraints include Lake Winnepesaukee, the Merrymeeting River, steep slopes, and the lack of municipal sewer further inhibits its development. Dense private ownership along the waterfront limits opportunities for public lake access.

## **East Alton**

The center of East Alton is generally considered to be the historic settlement of “Gilman’s Corner” located near the Alton-New Durham town line. This area contains an old church and several homes dating to the 1700's. The settlement is of great historic value to Alton, and would make an excellent historic district. The village of Gilman’s Corner is an excellent example of the “village concept” that will be discussed in the Future Land Use section of this chapter.

East Alton has extensive shore frontage on Lake Winnepesaukee. In recent years, several of the youth summer camps along the shore have been subdivided into exclusive residential developments. When recently subdivided, Camp Alton, Camp Dewitt, and Camp Kehonka resulted in the development of 249 acres with 8,560 feet of frontage on Lake Winnepesaukee. East Alton has very limited public access to the Lake; future conversion of youth camps to residences will likely compound this problem.

Natural constraints in East Alton do not pose a significant barrier to development. Of greatest concern are the number of small brooks and wetlands that extend throughout the area. The limited road network in East Alton will also discourage near-term development.

The development pattern of East Alton is sparse and widespread, and the majority of the lots are sizable. In addition, many of the homes were built prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and are located close to local roads, thus contributing to Alton's rural character.

### **West Alton**

West Alton is centered at the West Alton Fire Station, near the intersection of NH Routes 11 and 11-A. Most development in this district though is located along the waterfront and east of Route 11. West Alton Marina, Minge Cove Marina, and Ames Farm in Gilford, serve as the primary access to Alton's Islands.

West Alton, like East Alton, has extensive shore frontage on Lake Winnepesaukee. Development along the shorefront generally occurred during the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is relatively dense and clustered. Most existing lots, located along the lake in West Alton, were created prior to zoning, and, thus, are often undersized and irregularly shaped. The predominant land use in West Alton is waterfront residential dwellings. Originally, many of the dwellings constructed in this area of the community were intended for seasonal use, however, in recent years these dwellings have been renovated to year round status, often by retired individuals moving to the community. The renovation of these homes generally located on or in close proximity to Lake Winnepesaukee, has led to community concern about the ability to adequately accommodate the increase in septage.

The westerly side of NH Route 11 contains a significant amount of open space and the Mount Major Recreation Area. This area of West Alton is generally characterized by steep slopes, dense forest cover, and has less residential or commercial development potential.

### **Alton Shores**

Alton Shores is located near the Alton-Gilmanton border, and refers to a 600-lot subdivision. The area consists entirely of single-family residences, most of which are vacation homes situated on or near Hills Pond and Sunset Lake. Many of the lots in the area are a quarter of an acre or less in size. These small lot sizes make development difficult due to septic requirements. Narrow, substandard dirt roadways serve the vast majority of parcels in the Alton Shores area. Many of these roads have less than 50' rights of way, making improvements to meet Town Road Standards difficult.

The remainder of the area adjacent to the Alton shores is sparsely populated, and generally consists of large wooded parcels.



### **South Alton**

Of all the “villages” of Alton, South Alton is the most nebulous because it lacks a community center. Generally, South Alton is considered to be the section of town located south of Coffin Brook. Many residents of South Alton commute to work in Concord, Rochester, or Portsmouth.

Dominated by the profile of Prospect Mountain overlooking the Merrymeeting Marsh, this part of Alton includes one of the largest operating blueberry farms (Kardinal Farm) in the state of New Hampshire. It also boasts Halfmoon Lake with seasonal cottages, single-family homes, and a large summer camp. The majority of homes in this region are year round.

### **Winnepesaukee Islands**

The political boundary of Alton contains 11 named islands in Lake Winnepesaukee and numerous named and unnamed small rock islands. The named islands located in Alton include: Rattlesnake, Sleepers, Treasure (Redhead), Cub, Barndoor, Little Barndoor, Ship, Moose, Little Mark, Woodman Cove Islands, and Plum. The majority of land available on these islands has been subdivided, and due to the ever-increasing demand for lake access and shore front property, many of the islands have reached near build-out capacity, with only a few marginal lots remaining. Island use is generally seasonal, single family dwelling units. Current land use on the mainland of the lake provides few docking facilities for dwellings on the islands. In all, there are a total of 398 individual land parcels located on islands in Alton.

## **B. Land Use in Alton**

### **Open Space and Current Use**

Current Use is a state of New Hampshire initiative that allows landowners of ten undeveloped acres or more, or wetland areas of any size, to reduce their tax burden. A landowner who enrolls property in this program receives a reduced assessment in exchange for keeping the property in its undeveloped state. Should the landowner decide to develop any or all of the enrolled land, a penalty will be assessed for the portion of land removed from Current Use.

Participation in the program has been steadily increasing. In 1981, 16,377 acres were enrolled in Current Use in Alton. By 1989, that number had increased to 18,139 acres. By August 1999, landowners enrolled 22,483 acres in current use. As of April 2005, land in current use classification had increased to 23,911 acres.

Because of the numerous large tracts of land in the rural areas of the community, Current Use has been a driving factor in determining land use patterns in Alton. Of Alton’s 41,123 acres of land (excluding lakes, ponds, and rivers) 23,911 acres,

or 58.15% of the entire land area of Alton, is presently protected by Current Use assessment.

This figure increased 6,106 acres or a 37.2% increase between 1981 and 1999. As of August 1999, a total of 706 parcels totaling 22,483 acres were enrolled in Current Use in Alton. By April 2005, 794 parcels totaling 23,911 acres have been enrolled in Current Use, an increase of 1,428 acres.

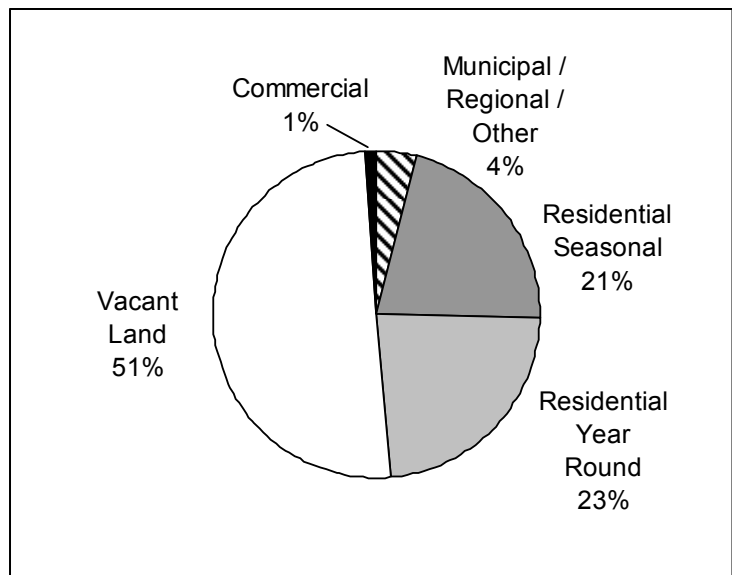
The majority of properties assessed with Current Use status are located in the remote portions of town, along the eastern and western areas. Much of the land enrolled in Current Use has poor soils and steep slopes, making development unlikely in the near term. Development of most properties enrolled in Current Use would require substantial infrastructure costs.

### Residential Uses

Residential is by far the most common land use in the town of Alton. Residential development is concentrated along the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee and the downtown village area. Most residential development is within close proximity to the main routes of town, including: NH Routes 11 and 11-D, NH Routes 28 and 28-A, NH Route 140, Alton Mountain Road, Chestnut Cove Road, and Robert's Cove Road.

As of April 2005, there were 3,784 dwelling units in Alton, nearly all of which are single-family homes. These homes are situated on parcels that cover 18,364 acres of land. Though it is possible that these lots will be further subdivided, they are considered to be primarily residential use. Other uses occurring on these parcels are accessory (such as farming, pasture, or idle forest) or occasional (such as timber production). To accurately gauge the number of homes that could be built on this acreage would require a "build-out analysis" a planning tool used to assess full development potential based on existing land use regulations.

**Chart 1: Existing Land Use – Alton 2005**



Largely due to the influence of Lake Winnepesaukee and other local water bodies, Alton is a vacation destination. Of the 3,784 dwelling units in Alton, over 1,816

(48%) are second homes.<sup>4</sup> Noteworthy is that waterfront land accounts for \$808,675,465 of the total valuation of \$1,492,567,534 (exempt property excluded). This waterfront value is 54.3% of the value contributed by 22% of the parcels that occupy 3% of the land.

### **Commercial and Industrial Uses**

Commercial activity in Alton is limited, serving little more than the minimum needs of residents and visitors. Most commercial enterprises in Alton are located in the Village, at the traffic circle, or in the seasonal hub of Alton Bay. Alton Village has a diverse mix of the more traditional downtown merchants and professionals, including law offices, medical offices, real estate offices, and banks. Other commercial examples include restaurants, grocery markets, and three hardware stores. Also included are municipal, state and federal buildings and services: Town Hall, the library, police department, fire station, state highway department facility, elementary school, and post office. Ninety-eight commercial/industrial businesses operate on 479 acres of land.<sup>5</sup>

Industrial development in Alton is very small scale and consists of a small number of automotive repair shops, manufacturing establishments and wholesale sites scattered throughout Alton. Sites which fall into this category include: Alton Town Transfer Station on NH Route 28-A, numerous gravel pits, machine shops, and a manufacturing facility on NH Route 28 North. See Alton Land Use Map, Appendix C.

### **C. Subdivision Activity: 1988 to 2005**

From 1988 to 1999 subdivision activity in Alton was greatly influenced by the economy of the region. In 1989, prior to the recession of the early 1990's, Alton approved 20 subdivision applications, which created 109 new lots. Subdivision activity in 1990 created 44 lots. Between 1991 and 1994, subdivision activity in Alton all but disappeared due to the poor economic conditions of the Northeast. In 1995 prosperity returned to the Northeast, and with it came increased subdivision activity.

During the period from 1989 to May 1999, a total of 254 lots were created from 82 approved subdivision applications. This is a significantly reduced figure from the period of 1983 to 1988, when Alton experienced the creation of 484 lots in 5 years. In addition to the subdivision of land during that time period (1986 to 1988) 282 new homes were built.

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<sup>4</sup> This figure is an estimate, based on an analysis of tax accounts.

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**Table 1: Overview of Subdivision Activity in Alton, NH, 1989 through August 2005**

	1989-1999	2000	2001	2002*	2003	2004	2005 (Jan.-Aug.)
Total Acres Subdivided	3,761.9	402.0	383.6	629.2	316.2	979.3	417.7
Total Lots	254	30	42	70	32	48	65
Total Approved Applications	82	12	7	18	13	11	11
Most Common Number of Lots Subdivided	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
Largest Subdivision	14.8	23	19	25	3	6	14
Average Lot Size Created (acres)	2.7	13.0	10.3	15.0	8.6	30.6	9.1
Median Lot Size Created	8.0	4.1	1.6	2.9	5.0	3.3	3.0
Total Lots Created: < 1 acre	80	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total Lots Created: 1.00 to 1.99 acres	34	7	21	13	1	2	4
Total Lots Created 2.00 to 2.99 acres	20	6	2	10	12	11	18
Total Lots Created: 3.00 to 4.99 acres	34	3	1	3	4	5	5
Total Lots Created: 5.00 to 7.99 acres		4	6	5	11	2	7
Total Lots Created: 8.00 + acres		8	5	12	8	9	9

\* Acreage for Merrymeeting Estates 25 lot subdivision has not yet been entered into this analysis

Source: Building Dept. and Planning Dept. Applications

**Table 2: Subdivision Activity in Alton, NH, 1989 through August 2005**

Total Acres Subdivided	3,128.1
Total Lots Created	287.0
Total Approved Applications	72.0
Most common size of subdivisions (lots)	2.0
Largest Subdivision (lots)	25.0
Average lot size created	14.3
Median lot size created (acres)	3.3
Total Lots Created: < 1 acre	1.0
Total Lots Created: 1.00 to 1.99 acres	48.0
Total Lots Created: 2.00 to 2.99 acres	59.0
Total Lots Created: 3.00 to 4.99 acres	21.0
Total Lots Created: 5.00 to 7.99 acres	35.0
Total Lots Created: 8.00 + acres	51.0

Source: Building Department and Planning Department Applications

From 1989 to 1999, a total of 3,761.91 acres were subdivided in Alton, resulting in the creation of 254 new lots. Of the 82 approved subdivisions created from 1989 to May 1999, 10 plans created 5 lots or more. The largest subdivision to be approved from 1989 to May 1999 created 14 new lots. The mean size of new lots created since 1989 is 14.81 acres, with a median lot size of 2.71 acres.

From January 1, 2000 to August 2005, a total of 3,128 acres of land were subdivided in Alton, resulting in the creation of 287 new lots.

Of the 72 approved subdivisions, created from January 1, 2000 to August 2005, 12 plans created 5 lots or more. The largest subdivision to be approved from January 1, 2000 to August 2005 created 25 new lots. The mean size of new lots created since 2000 is 14.28 acres, with a median lot size of 3.31 acres. From January 1, 2000 to August 5, 2005, Alton issued 425 occupancy permits.

**Table 3: Residential Occupancy Permits Issued**

Year	Permits Issued
2000	70
2001	62
2002	52
2003	99
2004	81
2005*	61

\* Through August 2005

Source: Alton Planning Department

### Historical Analysis

The period of 1983 to 1988 was abnormal for Alton. Development during that period was unprecedented due to a robust economy, not only in Alton, but the entire region. Conversely, the period between 1990 and 1994 was also abnormal, as the economy of the Northeast was in recession, and new development in New England was nearly nonexistent. From 1995 through 1999, Alton reverted to a more typical level of growth. In the five and a half year period 2000 – August 2005, Alton experienced the same amount of growth it saw in the 1990's

Alton is particularly sensitive to changes in the regional economy. As with many resort/recreation areas, booms tend to be bigger, and recessions deeper. These factors help explain the erratic history of subdivision activity in Alton.

**Table 4: Historical Overview of Subdivision Activity in Alton, New Hampshire, 1977 - August 2005**

Period	Number of Subdivisions	Number of Lots	Acres	Average Subdivision Size (lots)
1977 - 1984	118	503	4,266	4.7
1983 - 1988	39	484	unknown	12.4
1989 - May 1999	82	254	3,762	3.1
2000 - August 2005	72	287	3,128	14.28

Source: Alton Planning Department

## D. Site Plan Development

### 1989 - May 1999

Most site plans submitted to the Alton Planning Board were commercial in nature, with few multifamily houses or planned unit developments being proposed between 1989-1999. In that time period, Alton was faced with several controversial developments, such as the establishment of a McDonald's restaurant in 1995, and a Dunkin' Donuts in 1996. Residents expressed concern that this type of development would undermine Alton's character and sense of place. The Planning Board addressed these concerns by working with developers to construct sites which would complement the village character, by encouraging pitched roofs, traditional siding, attractive wooden signs, curbing, professional landscaping, and other design features.

In total, Alton received 64 site plan applications from 1989 to May 1999. Fifty-eight of these applications were for commercial development, while six sought approval for multifamily dwellings.

### 2000 – August 2005

The majority of site plans before the Alton Planning Board were also commercial in nature during 2000 to August 2005. Alton has had several, very large site plans approved in the last five years: Prospect Mountain High School, St. Katherine Drexel Church, and the Hannaford's Shopping Center.

From 2000 to August 2005, the Alton Planning Board reviewed 54 site plan applications and 41 were approved. Thirty-three of these approvals were for commercial development while five were for multifamily dwellings. The remainder included condominium conversion, duplexes, and apartments.

**Table 5: Alton Planning Board Site Plan Review and Approval 2000 – 2005**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	August 2005*	Total 2000 - Aug 2005*
Site Plans Reviewed	7	9	11	11	11	5	54*
Site Plans Approved	7	8	9	7	8	2	41
Source: Planning Department applications							
*some site plan reviews pending in 2005							

**Table 6: 2005 Alton Land Use Data**

Use	Parcels	Living Units / Parcel	Total Living Units	Total Acreage	Acres / Parcel	Acres / Unit
Single Family	2,129	1	2,129	16,213	7.62	7.62
2 Family	26	2	52	123	4.73	2.37
3 Family	12	3	36	76	6.33	2.11
Mobile Home	91	1	91	624	6.86	6.86
Mobile Home/No Land	218	1	218	0	0	0
Condo	10	1	10	0	0	0
Apt 4-8 units	11	4	44	99	9	2.25
Waterfront	1,204	1	1,204	1,229	1.02	1.02
<b>Residential Unit Totals</b>	<b>3,701</b>		<b>3,784</b>	<b>18,364</b>	<b>4.96</b>	<b>4.85</b>
Office	12			4	0.32	
Commercial Building	74			385	5.2	
Cottages	9			14	1.5	
Campground	3			76	25.33	
<b>Commercial Totals</b>	<b>98</b>			<b>478</b>	<b>4.88</b>	
Municipal Developed	28			191	6.82	
Religious	13			162	12.46	
Other uses	19			1,263	66.47	
<b>Municipal / Religious / Other Totals</b>	<b>60</b>			<b>1,616</b>	<b>26.93</b>	
Accessory Building only	236			1,091	4.62	
Common Land	94			142	1.51	
Municipal Vacant	50			793	15.86	
Vacant	1,052			6,039	5.74	
Vacant Commercial	6			11	1.83	
Farm Land	25			1,726	69.04	
Forest Land	175			10,863	62.07	
<b>Vacant Land Totals</b>	<b>1,638</b>			<b>20,665</b>	<b>12.62</b>	
<b>Overall Totals</b>	<b>5,497</b>		<b>3,784</b>	<b>41,123</b>	<b>7.48</b>	<b>4.85</b>
<b>Current Use</b>	<b>794</b>			<b>23,911</b>	<b>30.11</b>	

- Notes:
1. Current use acreage is associated with some residential land as well as vacant lands
  2. Municipal includes town and school
  3. All data was extracted from the tax assessment master file of 8/29/2005

## E. Summary of Land Use Changes

### *1985 to 1999*

From 1985 to 1999, Alton's development was overwhelmingly residential; 766 new homes were constructed. The Planning Board approved 58 site plan applications for commercial development. Of these, a portion involved a conversion from a different use. Also, during 13 of these years, mobile home development in Alton expanded by 63.5 acres. Other notable land use trends in

the community included municipal ownership of land and the subdivision of summer camps. In 1985, the town of Alton owned 387 acres of land, however, that number increased to over 900 acres by 1999.

### ***2000 to August 2005***

For the past five and one-half years, Alton's development has been predominantly residential; 425 new home occupancy permits have been issued over these years. The Planning Board approved 33 site plan applications for commercial development. Of these, 20 involve the conversion from a different use, 11 expansion of use, and five multi-family dwellings. By August 2005, municipally owned land totaled 984 acres.

## **FUTURE LAND USE**

### **A. Introduction**

The citizens of Alton cherish its rural character and sense of place, as well as the recreational amenities often associated with rural areas, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, boating, skiing, and snowmobiling. Alton is a town with many faces. While genuinely rural by nearly everyone's definition, Alton also exhibits resort aspects with the influence of Lake Winnepesaukee, Mt. Major, and the Gunstock Ski Area. These are the qualities that bring people here and keep them here. These characteristics are also the ones we need to maintain and protect.

Of course, as the saying goes, you can't eat the scenery. Alton seeks to maintain and improve its rural and resort qualities, while providing increased opportunity for affordable housing and needed economic development. Establishing and maintaining this balance is crucial to Alton's future success.

The goal of this section of the Master Plan is to outline the type of community Alton residents want their town to become, and broadly discuss the actions that may make that desire a reality. The Master Plan is not a zoning ordinance. Instead, it forms the foundation for future amendments to the Alton Zoning Ordinance, as well as other regulations that will allow the town to achieve the goals of the Master Plan.

### **B. "Rural" Development**

Based on the community survey of 2005, a public forum held in the fall of 1997, and re-iterated through meetings since, Alton citizens have expressed the desire to maintain a small-town "rural" atmosphere. The next obvious question is - what is "rural"? To some it means cows in pastures, to others it's a yard with a dilapidated barn with rusted out equipment and vehicles. Yet others still might say "rural" is a small village - 20 homes with a general store and a church or the like.



Basically, what the people of Alton are describing is a community in which they know their neighbors, or at least who they are, and live in an area where there may be homes nearby, but there are also large expanses of pasture and forest. They are also describing property owner's ability to use their property as they wish within the guidelines of zoning, provided they don't interfere with their neighbors.

As with almost all towns, the people of Alton generally don't like regulations, but are willing to put up with some level of regulation in order to live harmoniously with their neighbors and the environment.

Although it is understood that there is no one definition of "rural", there are some common themes that Alton can promote in order to help maintain the "ruralness". When implemented through spending policies (Capital Improvements Program) and subdivision regulations and zoning ordinance, these themes will yield different results for individual parts of the community.

### **Streets**

Road type directly contributes to a sense of 'ruralness'. When a person drives down a single lane (10 feet wide) gravel road, bounded by stonewalls, with a full canopy of trees, he feels like he's in a rural area. One of the reasons is the narrow dirt road that makes a person drive slowly. The other is that, with such a road only so many homes can reasonably gain access, otherwise the road becomes unsafe and impassable.

The town does not promote the development of new 10-foot wide gravel roads. However, there are instances in which a road built to the town standard of 22' wide of paved asphalt is inappropriate. A narrower paved or gravel road, driven at slower speeds, will reinforce the rural feel of Alton, and still provide a high level of safety. For subdivisions that serve only a limited number of dwellings, the smaller road is less expensive, easier to maintain, controls speed, and generally provides a more livable environment.

Roads that are sized for a capacity much greater than necessary, such as a 22' road serving only 10 homes, encourage drivers to travel much faster than needed. The irony is that local streets that serve only a few homes have children playing adjacent to them more frequently than do the arterial streets. 'Super-sized' roads place children at risk, and discourage people from walking and bicycling on the street.

Roads that serve a large number of residents (25 or more homes) must be built to serve a greater number of vehicles, and thus be wider. For these streets, the town should adopt traffic calming standards to control the speed of drivers. In addition, all new streets should provide for street tree plantings.

The town should develop revised street standards that allow the type and size of streets for each subdivision to match the development needs and to reinforce the rural character of Alton.

### **Setbacks**

Perhaps one of the most rural areas of Alton is East Alton, and in particular, Gilman's Corner. There are several factors that contribute to this feeling. First, many of the homes in the area are more than 150 years old. This lends to their ability to transport the passerby to a time in which the pace of life was a bit slower. These homes also pre-date the enactment of zoning, which occurred in Alton in 1971. As such they are setback very little from the street.

These small setbacks can also be seen in Alton Village, where many of the buildings front right on the street. One of the features that make these places so attractive is their human scale. The pedestrian feels as though the building, sidewalk, road and trees are all part of the experience. The road itself does not dominate the surroundings. In the village areas of Alton, reducing the minimum setback requirement will reinforce the village feel.

In the sparsely populated and undeveloped areas, increasing the space between the roadway and buildings, as well as the distance between buildings and major arteries, promotes the "open feeling" of the rural parts of Town. Vegetative buffers guidelines should be established for visual and sound buffering in the sparsely populated areas. In short, when one travels from the village into the country, one should sense the difference. In the village one should be able to walk easily to a neighbor's home, while in the "country", the homes should be inconspicuous.

The Planning Board should consider establishing setback requirements that are tailored to the desired type of development for each area.

### **Density & Diversity**

While many of the New England villages created prior to zoning have small setbacks, they also exhibit a higher population and building density in these centers, with very low density in the surrounding countryside. This is a common planning theme to be encouraged in Alton: greater development near the village centers and less dense development elsewhere. Such a development pattern preserves open space, slows "suburban sprawl", and decreases the cost of delivering services such as highway maintenance, municipal water, and police and fire protection.

### **Commercial Development**

Most of the businesses in Alton Village are conducted in buildings that were formerly residences, or have been constructed with a residential design. These

structures are located close to the street, with parking in the rear or along the sides. The business uses also extend onto the side streets and are mixed with residential development, often in the same building. This type of development allows a person to park in one place, and shop for several different goods at different stores, without getting back into his car and driving to a different store. As such, it is more efficient, and safer.

Because Alton has several miles of high visibility state highway (NH Route 11, NH Route 28-North of Alton, and NH Route 140), most of which is undeveloped, Alton must be careful to avoid the type of “strip development” that has plagued many other communities. “Strip development” is characterized by commercial establishments strung out in a linear fashion along major roads with several access points. To avoid the typical “strip development” woes, commercial designs should follow guidelines set forth in Appendix A.

## **C. Future Land Use Districts**

### **Outlying Village District Areas**

Village District areas are characterized as areas that might serve the purpose of a village or meeting place for sections of Alton, i.e., East Alton, West Alton, South Alton, and Alton Shores. These areas would be a mix of residential and limited commercial uses. The commercial uses would be limited to professional, retail, and services normally associated with meeting local needs. Surrounding rural area development should be consistent with the Conservation Design Subdivision (Randall Arendt).<sup>6</sup> Ultimately there could be many such small areas within Alton. See Future Land Use Map, Appendix D.

### **Alton Village**

Alton Village is effectively “downtown” Alton and serves as the primary office, retail, governmental, financial and eating & drinking center. The architecture and street layout remains largely unchanged from 100 years ago. A historic district in part of this area would be appropriate.

In addition, the town should consider implementation of the “Main Street” program’s findings of “Streetscape Improvements Main Street “(October 2000) to encourage redevelopment of the area. The area will continue to face pressure from the Alton Traffic Circle, and must identify a niche for itself.

The October 2000, “Streetscape Improvements, Main Street,” findings grew out of a two day Design Charrette, which involved residents, consultants, and participants. The study area covered School Street to Old Wolfeboro Road and included the Depot Road Loop. Within that area, the participants concentrated on

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<sup>6</sup> Randall Arendt, Conservation Design for Subdivision: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks, (Island Press, Washington, D.C., 1996).

three sites, Ginny Douglas Park, Town Hall Plaza, and Depot Street Loop. They also considered a town entrance near the Dunkin Donuts.

The participants produced a Main Street Improvements document that provided design guidelines for future development as well as “do-able” projects. They listed forty-two (42) ideas that they condensed to the eleven Design Criteria listed below.

- Provide a village entrance
- Work with commercial property owners to set controls at driveway entrances
- Setback parking, alter obstructions at side street intersections for improved site distance
- Establish a uniform street cross section with parking where space permits
- Establish a uniform street cross section without parking where space is limited
- Accentuate crosswalks with patterned materials to be coordinated/compatible with sidewalks
- Standardize street furnishings
- Grind and set roadway cross sections to 2%
- Work with utilities to remove/relocate overhead wires along Main Street in the downtown
- Address underground utilities/drainage during the design process
- Upgrade/provide handicap access, as necessary

## **Industrial**

**Industrial Definition:** A business of manufacturing, assemblage, or technically productive enterprise. It may be for profit or not-for-profit. It is generally not open to the public, although it may welcome salespeople or visitors.

The town of Alton has very limited industrial development. Because of Alton’s natural link to resort and recreation development, only “light industry”<sup>7</sup>, with little nuisance production, would be appropriate. Uses that involve warehousing, light manufacturing, and technology, are most appropriate. Industrial development would require substantial water and sewer improvements.

Although several past Master Plans have called for identifying areas strictly for a “commercial/industrial” zone, that task has been difficult to accomplish and, yet, fit into the “rural” character of the Town. In order to accomplish this task, “commercial/industrial” sites must be selected so that they are well screened from the surrounding area – roadways, neighbors, viewscapes, lake, etc. Due to aquifers and wetlands, the “commercial/industrial” uses would need to match the groundwater capabilities at the sites.

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<sup>7</sup> Defined by the Alton Zoning Ordinance as “a use involving the manufacture of a product not requiring heavy, noisy, or otherwise objectionable machinery or transporting equipment”

## **Commercial**

Commercial Definition: A business that sells a product (products) or service. It may be for profit or not-for-profit. It may be professional, medical, health care, or commodity based. It is generally open to the public, although large order filling establishments are also included.

Some of the commercial uses, which are not appropriate in Alton Village, have begun to develop around the Alton Traffic Circle. Consideration should be given to expanding the commercial uses north and south of the Alton Traffic Circle in the proximity of NH Route 11S and NH Route 28N. The Planning Board will need to take special care in following the Community Design Guidelines in the Master Plan (Land Use Chapter: Appendix A) that will prevent “strip development.” New development should create side streets that focus access points to specific locations.

Assisted living facilities have been identified as appropriate large commercial uses in Alton.

In the village areas, limitations should be placed on gross floor area of commercial endeavors so that they do not overwhelm the character of the Central Village and Alton Bay.

## **Resort Commercial**

This area takes advantage of its location on Lake Winnepesaukee. In order for Alton to compete with, and supplement the resort and tourism development of other lakeside towns on Lake Winnepesaukee, the revitalization of Alton Bay must continue. Development of inns, restaurants, retail shops, marinas, and other water dependent uses are to be encouraged in this area.

Alton Bay is heavily developed with residential uses, and some commercial uses. Yet, without a municipal sewer system, further development potential is severely limited. The town should investigate options for providing a more efficient means of accommodating sewage disposal.

## **Residential - Low Density**

Areas identified for low-density residential development are intended to be more rural in nature, but developed exclusively for residential and accessory uses. Subdivisions in this area should be limited to lot sizes of two acres or more per dwelling.

## **Residential - Medium Density**

This area is located within the potential range of municipal water, and is thus able to handle a higher density. Minimum lot sizes should be dictated by the ability of

the land to sustain individual on-site septic systems. This area should also allow community septic systems and centralized development.

### **Residential – High Density**

High density, which for purposes of this chapter is defined as large multi-family residential buildings on small lots to maximize the number of people per square mile, is not compatible with the concept of the rural ideas and character of Alton, nor is it supported by the town's current resource inventory, and is therefore discouraged.

### **Residential - Lakeshore**

Lake Winnepesaukee is Alton's prime natural resource. As such, it faces severe development pressure. Though much of the west side has been developed with mostly seasonal cottages, those cottages are rapidly being demolished and replaced by larger year-round, second homes. The east side has seen several residential subdivisions in recent years and the establishment of multimillion-dollar homes. Development of the lakeshore should preserve the natural features, while allowing property owners to enjoy the lakefront.

The town should attempt to acquire property for a town beach, on both the east and the west sides of Alton Bay. In addition, uses in the area might include boys & girls' camps, inns, high quality resort facilities, and other uses that allow a public presence at the lake.

### **Open Rural**

The rural designation should apply to land that is fairly remote and unfragmented. At present, the Rural Zone comprises most of the land area in Alton and permits uses that are not compatible with the designation of "remote." Many commercial uses should be removed from the allowed uses.

The more fragmented land should be split into several existing or new zone designations, with uses that are more compatible in or near Outlying Village District areas (page 19). Conservation Design for Residential Neighborhoods<sup>8</sup> (a type of cluster zoning) should be considered as an overlay district for these new zones.

### **Conservation**

Conservation lands are "open spaces" that contain natural qualities that should be protected. Currently, they are distributed throughout the Town and consist of high value wetlands, ponds, large contiguous forested areas, and agricultural lands.

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<sup>8</sup> Randall Arendt, Conservation Design for Subdivision: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks, (Island Press, Washington, D.C., 1996).

The town of Alton should work with the state of New Hampshire to acquire easements for access and protection to the Mt. Major and Straightback Mountain areas. These mountaintops provide the beautiful back drop to Alton Bay and must be preserved from development. Mount Major is a major recreation attraction and, almost as large, is the Alton Mountain-Avery Hill area. This part of Alton is steep and difficult to develop.

Streams, aquifers, wetlands, and floodplains should be considered for conservation land in addition to the already identified conservation areas. These features, and their immediate surroundings, need protection from indiscriminate development. Implementation of Conservation Design such as the concept developed by Randall Arendt (a type of cluster zoning) would marry the two concepts of responsible development and conservation of lands. Ideally, conserved lands from one subdivision to another would be stitched together to form potential green belts or wildlife habitat.

### **Aquifer Protection**

In 1995, the town adopted an Aquifer Protection Overlay District to help ensure a safe drinking water supply. Development over the aquifers is allowed, but special care should be taken to prevent contamination. Waste discharge must be strictly controlled.





## APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY DESIGN

**2005 GOAL:** Alton should develop design standards to guide commercial, residential, and non-profit endeavors to maintain the rural character.

Alton, through the 2005 community survey and Master Plan rewrite process, desires to develop performance standards for high quality commercial/resort facilities along our major transportation corridors and lake areas, and to encourage standards for commercial enterprises within the Village and Bay areas. Alton should develop a **Design Guideline Document** that will guide both commercial and residential growth in the villages and the countryside. The purpose of the guide is to strengthen the town's subdivision and site plan review regulations, in the areas of buffering, setbacks, landscaping, and lighting. It should also encourage attractive development, and protect the viewsheds and waterways that define the rural character of Alton.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**GOAL:** To retain Alton's rural character by guiding the design of the built environment, encouraging thoughtful stewardship of the natural environment and carefully blending the two, so that neither adversely impacts the other.

The 1985 Master Plan called for, among other items, performance standards for commercial uses. This recommendation was reiterated in 1990. However, at that time, performance standards were viewed as being supportive to the more perplexing problem of identifying and setting aside areas of Alton that were appropriate for commercial uses.

The Planning Board acted on the 1990 recommendation by proposing and ultimately having approved by Town Meeting a modest increase in the area of town zoned Residential Commercial. The Board also undertook an effort to define and delineate the zone boundary between the Residential Zone, Commercial Zone, and the other residential zones. That effort was approved as well.

The Planning Board has made incremental progress in putting forth performance standards and, while not comprehensive, the efforts have had the intended positive impact. An example of the impact is the effect the Appearance Review (Zoning Ordinance - Section 235) has had on commercial architecture approved since enactment. The Appearance Review Section was put forth in 1996 and was amended in 1998 and 2004.

Amendments to state statutes concerning Master Plan content, effective 2002, provided new impetus for the Planning Board to put forth performance standards. Specifically, Section III (k) of RSA 674:2 provides for a Community Design Section of the Master Plan to identify positive physical attributes of the town and

provide for design goals and policies for specific areas to guide private and public development.

Given the impetus provided by the recently amended statute, and the historical goal of providing performance standards for commercial uses, the Vision Chapter also includes a Community Design Section. As described by RSA 674: III (k), a Community Design section deals with more than just commercial uses. Accordingly, the following section includes design goals, which are applicable to commercial and residential projects as well as publicly funded or non-profit endeavors.

## COMMUNITY DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### A. Connected Architecture – Strip Development

Alton seeks site plans and architecture, which differ from what one would typically associate with strip development. The two prominent features of strip development **to be avoided** are 1) parking lots between the buildings and road; and 2) common façade architecture where the roofline of a structure doesn't change with the individual units. The preferred site plan and architecture is New England farm-style connected architecture, sometimes referred to as Big House, Back House, Little House, or Barn. (See pictures below). In this preferred mode, interior units would correspond with the exterior elements, provided the flexibility to adjust to interior space needs is maintained. The long axis of the structure should be perpendicular to the road with the “Big House” element set back 25' – 35' from the road to promote typical village setbacks.

Examples of Connected Farm Buildings Located in Alton N.H.





Parking should be along either side of the structure. Parking lots should be provided with connections to adjacent properties / parking lots. Where an adjacent property has not received site plan approval, an access strip should be reserved for future connection. This requirement would apply equally to the patron and service sides of the site. The intention is to avoid vehicles having to enter and exit the road in order to access the next site. The patron and service sides of the site should be connected behind the back or “Barn” element.

**If parking is intended between the main street and the facility, the depth of the vegetative buffer should be more than adequate to obstruct the view of the structures and parking lot from the road – 50’ to 100’ or more if necessary.**

## **B. Large Parking Lots between Structures and Roads**

Where side lot parking cannot provide the level of service required for a commercial development, the closest lane which runs across the front of the facility should be designed as a road with all the features of a rural village road, i.e. 1) the building should have the normal setbacks as from a village road (25’); 2) be constructed with curb lines for drainage; 3) be provided with drop inlets to culverts; 4) have overhanging street trees; 5) have a side walk in front of the facility; and 6) have a fire lane in place of the typical road shoulders.

Parking lanes used for maneuvering vehicles in and out of stalls should be of sufficient width to accommodate extended cab pickup trucks, SUVs, pickup trucks with attached plows, i.e. the vehicles likely to be used by visitors and residents of a rural community.

### **Mature Trees in Large Parking Lots**

Alton intends to protect its large park trees as part of its rural character. Alton seeks, that prior to construction of large parking lots, there be an investment of time to identify and preserve mature broadly spreading types of trees and/or stately trees within or bordering parking areas. The focus should be on deciduous trees, in particular, as they provide dense shade in summer without much of the pitch problems presented by the conifers, as well as providing little shade in the winter minimizing winter deicing impacts.

**Some of the best shade should be provided for those with the most difficulty with mobility. It is preferred that the double row of parking stalls aligned with a facility’s main entrance doors be separated by a continuous tree island, a minimum of 5’ in width. The spaces in the shade, closest to the doors should be reserved for handicapped patrons.**

### C. Large Parking Lot Access Roads

The width of access roads around parking lots should be limited to such width as would promote speeds below 25 mph, i.e. 18' width. Mitigating circumstances may require that traveled way widths be increased where; for instance, parallel parking is proposed along an access road. Traveled way width should be increased to provide clearance for vehicle doors. Parallel parking along an access road should also trigger a requirement for the installation of pedestrian ways. Pedestrians should be provided with an alternative to walking on the access road or close by the parked cars. A treed, grass strip should be employed to set the pedestrian ways back away from the parked cars and access road. Parallel parking along access roads should not be allowed within 200' of the intersecting collector road.

**Access roads around parking lots should be designed as rural roads.**

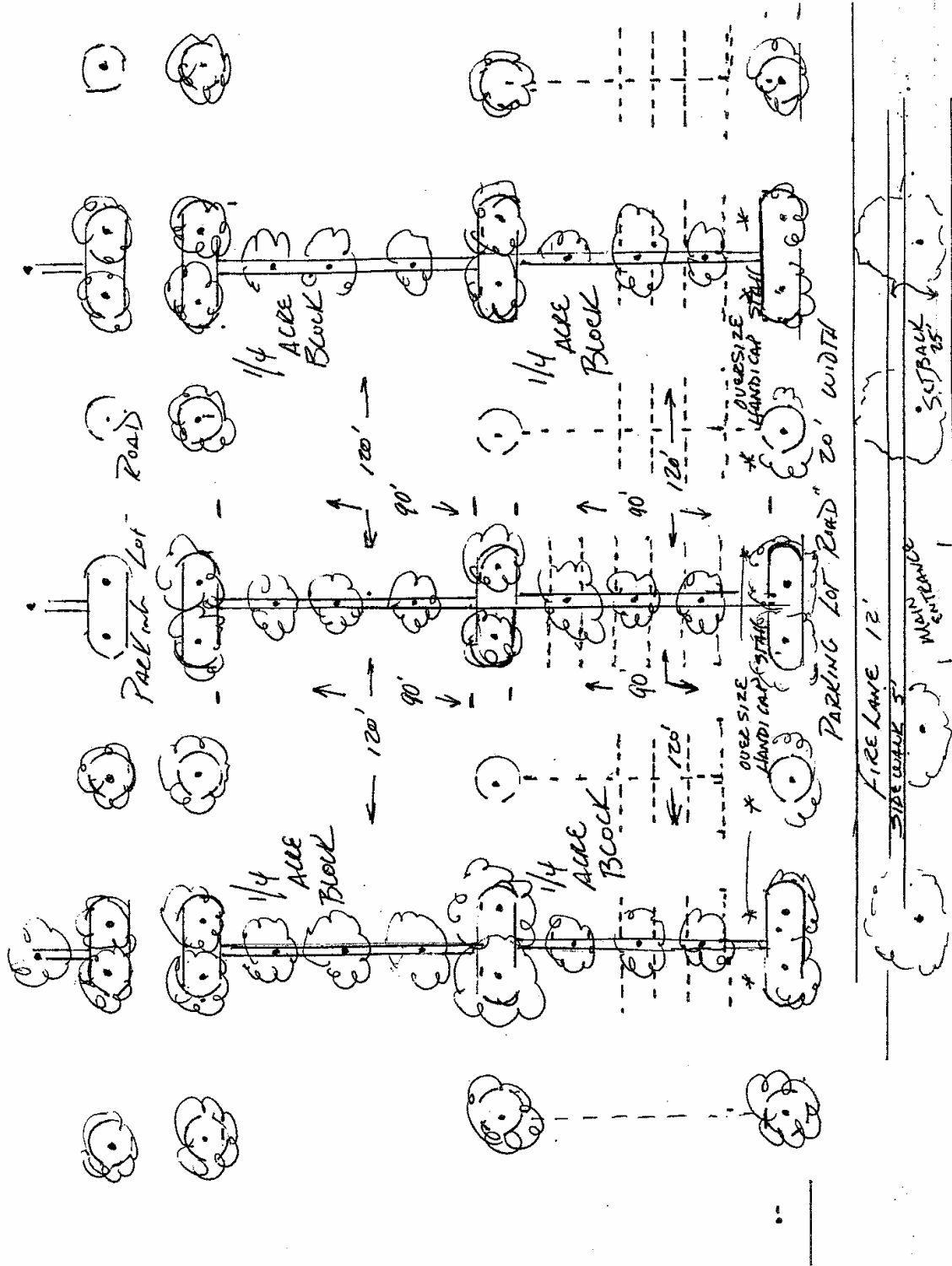
### Parking Lot Blocks

Alton seeks to avoid the construction of parking lots, which, visually amount to little more than vast expanses of pavement. It is preferred that parking lots be divided into ¼ acre blocks, each ringed by tree islands and drainage structures. Adjacent blocks would share tree islands and drainage structures (See diagram on next page).

It is recognized that snow removal and storage could be more conveniently provided with a “wide open” parking lot, however, the shade, wind break, and multi season beauty provided by trees is found to better provide for the general welfare of the citizenry and commercial success of the related facility.

Alton seeks to achieve visual buffering from state and town roads. The intent is not to see development and to provide vistas or large wooded corridors between developed areas.

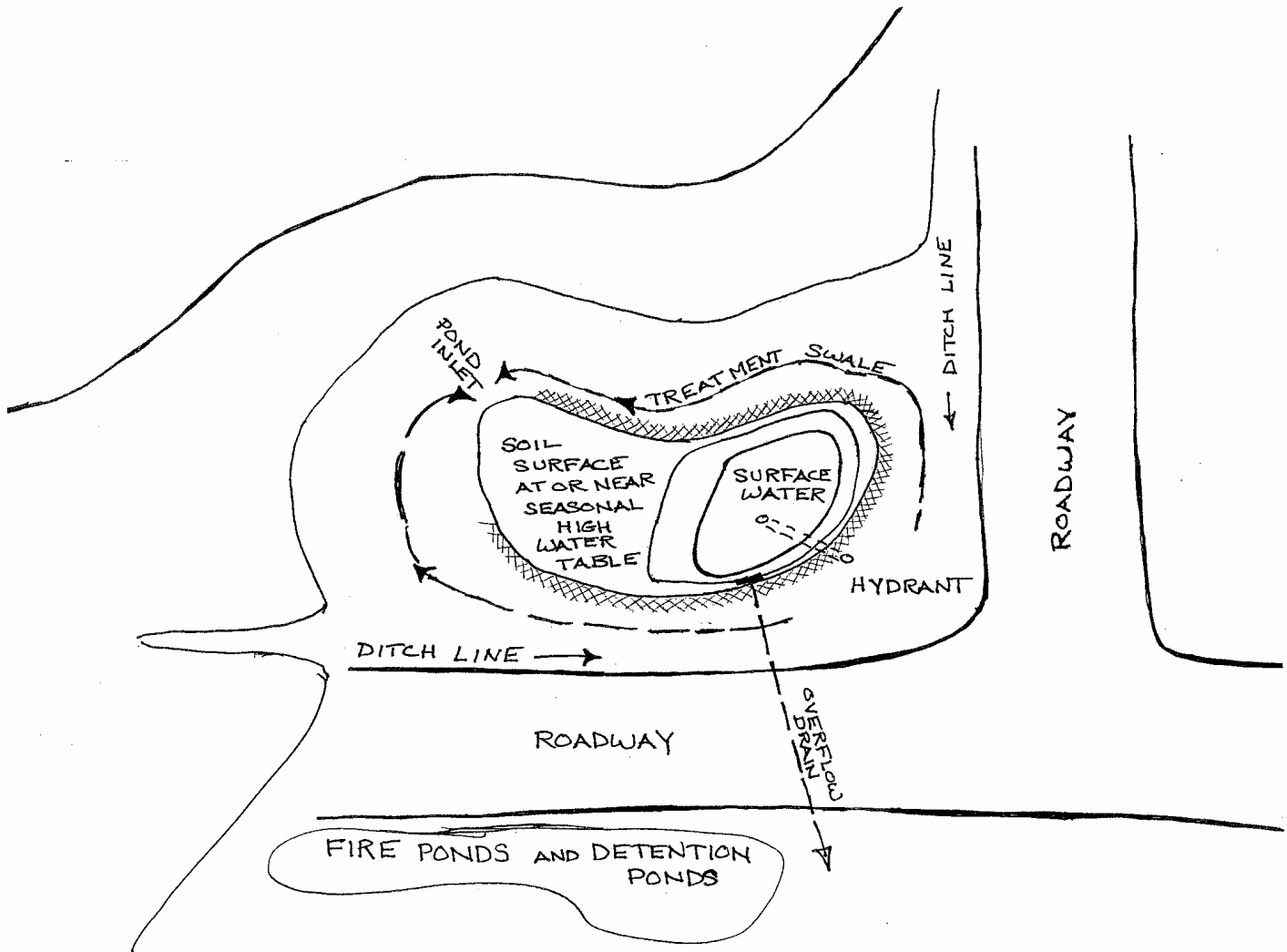
Buffering should be less prevalent within the village areas where setbacks are desired to be closer to the roads.



Typical facility  
 1/4 ACRE  
 PARKING LOT BLOCKS  
 one inch = 50' approx.

### D. Fire Ponds and Detention Ponds

Ponds and wetlands are an integral part of Alton's rural character. Alton places a high value on fire and detention ponds. However, it seeks to avoid the construction of fire and/or detention ponds which would constitute a "convenient nuisance" in the eyes of insurance professionals or which would otherwise require fencing. It is recognized that fencing ponds constitutes a visual nuisance in that a fenced pond is generally unsightly and not in keeping with what one would expect to see in the natural environment.



Alton prefers man made ponds that are not so steep to warrant fencing. It is also preferred that conditions favorable to the formation of wetlands be incorporated into the design of the ponds. The primary pond inlet should be designed to direct water across the potential wetland before flowing into the surface water of the pond (as illustrated above). By directing inlet water across the potential wetland it is desirable that man made ponds not only look natural but function in a manner consistent with a natural pond. The ultimate achievement would have the

potential wetland trapping sediment and filtering nutrients from adjacent built environments.

#### **E. Pitched Roofs**

Pitched roofs are found to be a defining feature of Alton's rural character. Alton seeks the construction of structures with pitched, gabled, or hipped roofs where such buildings would contain less than 9,000 square feet of gross floor space. A pitch of 4 inches of rise over 12 inches of run or more is preferred. Typical roof mounted equipment should be mounted under and adjacent to open roof gables.

For larger buildings, roofs should appear to be pitched to the greatest extent possible.

#### **F. Franchise Architecture**

Franchise architecture is specifically prohibited under Zoning Ordinance Section 335, Appearance Review. The Planning Board has found that if a franchise can be identified simply by its architecture then, the architecture itself constitutes excessive signage and is therefore not allowed.

Particular attention should also be paid to franchise colors, stripes, and logos, etc., which make a franchise or national business easily identifiable. This should also be discouraged. Alton seeks to remain a tourist destination. Accordingly, Alton feels a strong need to differentiate itself from other places "along the way".

**Vernacular architecture is sought, particularly the connected architecture type.**

#### **G. Big Box Architecture**

It is recognized that truss roof construction for larger buildings (in excess of 9,000 square feet gross floor area) becomes increasingly difficult with increased size. While difficult, pitched roof construction for large buildings is certainly not impossible; the Alton Town Hall presents an excellent example. There is a point, however, where a pitched roof simply becomes overwhelming and at odds with the height restrictions of the Zoning Ordinance.

Large grocery, department stores and, in particular, the combined super-centers require enormous roofs, which would be even larger if pitched. The objective with such large structures is to construct the roofs in a manner that makes them appear pitched. Alton seeks to have interesting roof elements utilized. Such features include gables, hips, valleys, dormers and to a lesser extent mansard sections. Gable sections are particularly sought as they present an application for



cupola construction. Cupolas are found to be a defining characteristic of a rural environment. Accordingly, their inclusion in large roof design is prized.

The overall strategy should yield a roof that lacks long horizontal skylines at the wall/roof interface on at least three sides of the building. The net result should be a building that does not look like a big box with some ornamental design treatment.

#### **H. Setbacks for Seasonal Cottages and Individually Owned Structures on Common or Rented Land**

At present the zoning ordinance provides setbacks for structures from property lines. There is no setback provision which separates privately owned structures from other privately owned structures where no boundary line exists between them. Similarly, there is no setback between seasonal cottages or condominium owned structures on common land.

The lack of a private-structure-to-private-structure setback has resulted in a landform of packed buildings. The landform has also presented major fire fighting challenges over the years. An example is the 1945 fire at Alton Bay where 260 cabins were consumed on the Second Advent Camp Meeting property.

**Where no boundary line separates privately owned structures, seasonal cottages, or condominium buildings, a structure-to-structure setback of 50' is sought. Where buildings are consumed by fire, or are demolished by some other disaster or voluntary act, their "footprints" should be extinguished by zoning.**

#### **I. Sign Construction**

For signs not mounted on a building, Alton seeks to encourage the construction of signs that reflect the architecture of the structure and/or the landscape with which it is associated. Such reflection of architecture could include a roof over the sign with the same pitch, roofing material, and trim treatment as the main structure. Alternately, the landscape architecture could incorporate the signage into the landscape. An example is a sign built into a field stonewall or terrace.

**Signs on exposed poles or masts are discouraged.**

#### **J. Conservation Design for Residential Neighborhoods**

Alton seeks the conservation design of residential subdivisions as opposed to the stereotypical, congested, metropolitan suburb design. The conservation design, sometimes referred to as cluster development, seeks to save 50% of the buildable land under conservation easement. This differs substantially from older style

cluster developments where the wetlands and steep slopes were “saved” under conservation easement and all remaining land was platted for residential occupancy.

Under conservation design, half of the buildable land is saved via conservation easement. The land can be used for such things as septic systems, unimproved ball fields, village greens, view sheds, and walking trails. It could be leased for agricultural use. The overall density of the site is controlled by what the zoning provisions allow for the particular zone in question, i.e. 20 dry, gently-sloping acres could potentially yield 10 homes in a zone where 2 acres per unit is required. However, rather than spread the 10 homes over the 20 good acres, the homes would be sited on half-acre or larger lots with the net impact of lots and roads not to exceed half of the otherwise buildable land.

Ideally, most of the half-acre lots would abut the conserved land, making them appear larger and more widely spaced. Also, ideally, conserved lands from one subdivision to another should be stitched together to form potential recreational green belts, or wildlife habitat.

### **Village Greens**

Village greens are a defining rural characteristic of New England which are particularly sought as a component of a conservation design neighborhood. Ideally, a village green would be rectangular, 2 acres in size; roads on at least 3 sides would enclose it. It could be used for septic systems with pipes running to it below the roads. It could look like an undeveloped ball field. It could be park-like.

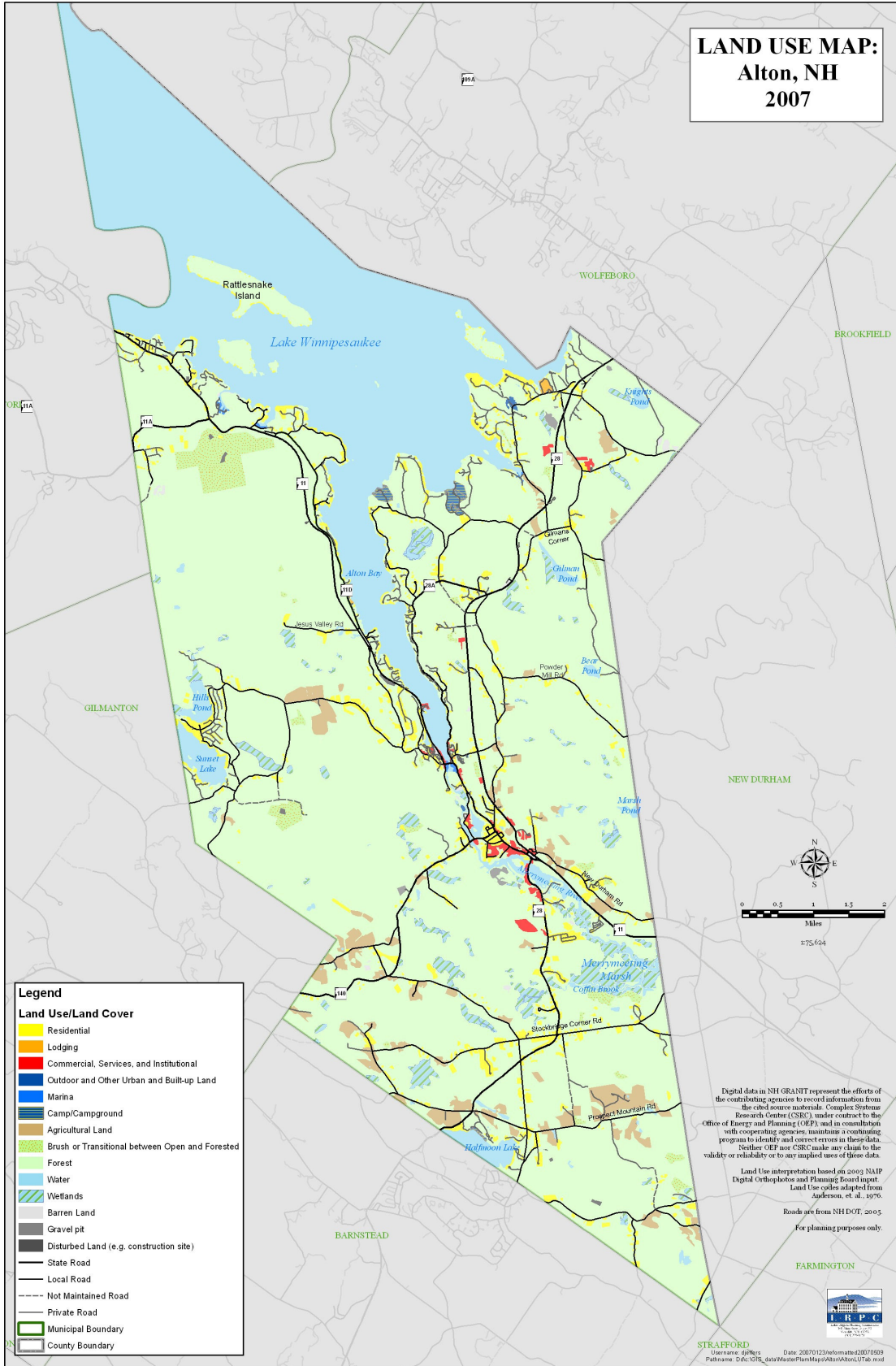
It is noted that construction of a village green does not allow homes to be built on both sides of the adjacent streets. It is also noted that conservation design does not require nearly as much road to be constructed as a typical subdivision. It preserves more open land for community use or potential views. This concept is a win/win situation for Alton’s planners, conservationists, developers, future homeowners, and Alton’s citizens at large.

## **APPENDIX B: PROTECTION OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES**

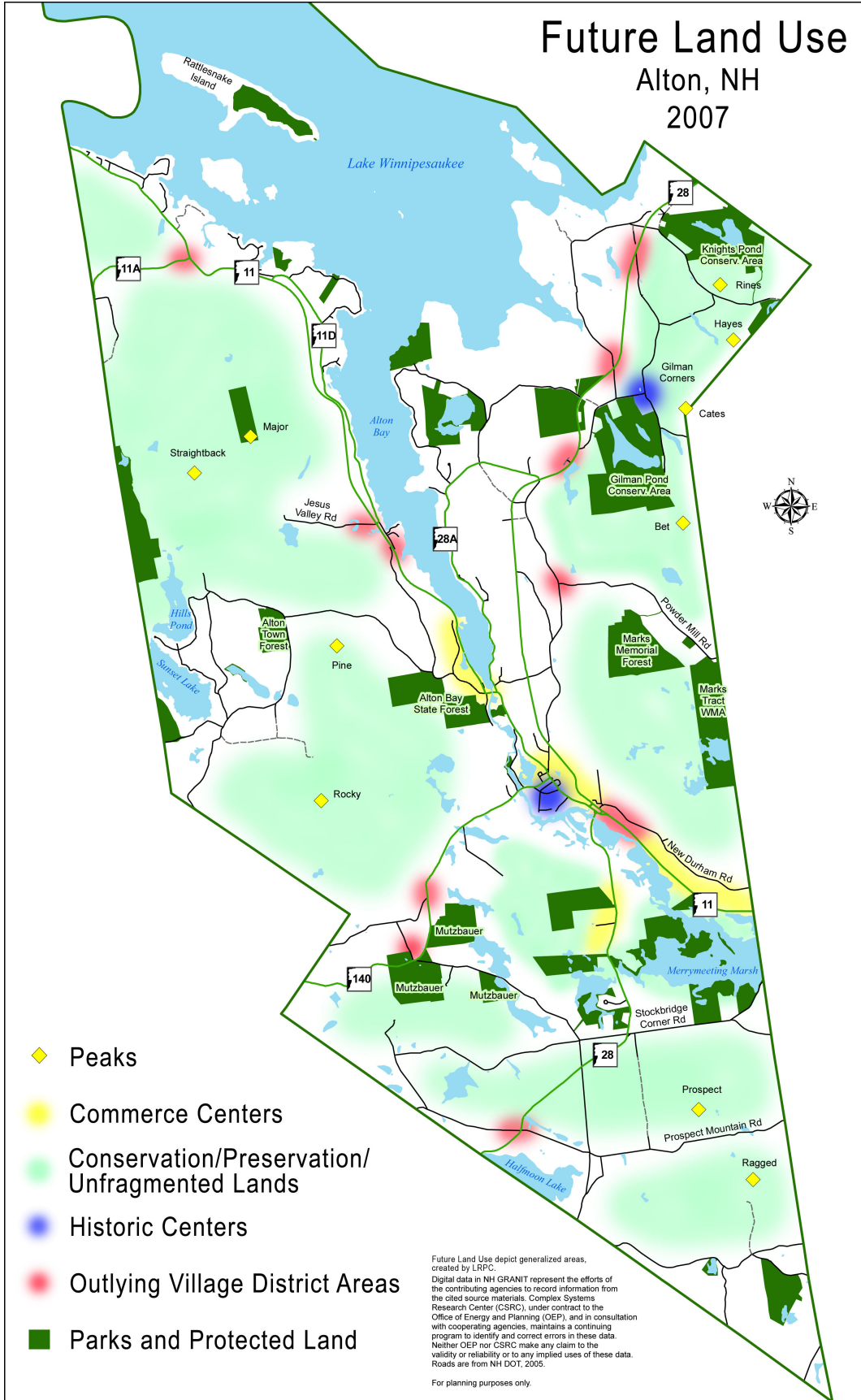
In 2005, a committee comprised of staff from the Historical Society, the Gilman Museum, and the Gilman Library held seminars and workshops to help residents with the methodology to research their property for historical significance and important features. This committee is in the process of developing a guide, listing contacts, agencies, and information necessary to place a structure on the National Registry of Historical Places.

In July 2002, the state of New Hampshire enacted RSA 79 D:3 the “Discretionary Preservation of Historical Agricultural Structures” act: (including the land necessary for the function) which afforded tax relief for easements granted to cities or towns for 10 or more years. Alton adopted this RSA at Town Meeting in March of 2004. The criteria for granting this easement is to prove demonstrable benefit to the public of structures that are 75 or more years old and that comply with the following: a) Scenic enjoyment of the public by road or water; b) The structure is of historic importance to local, region, state or national districts or is located in an historic district; and c) The structure’s physical aesthetic features convey the historic or cultural integrity of the property. The application, once completed is forwarded to the town assessor for an on-site visit. The town assessor visits the property and recommends to the selectmen an abatement percent (between 25% and 75%) of assessed value based on the degree of compliance with the RSA.











## INTRODUCTION

“The relevant question is not simply what shall we do tomorrow, but rather what shall we do today to get ready for tomorrow?”

*Peter Drucker*

Alton’s original Master Plan was developed in 1965 by the planning board, town officials, selectmen and an outside consulting firm. The report was an accumulation of monthly studies obtained through the cooperation of department heads and residents from each of the five village district areas in the town of Alton: Alton Village, Alton Bay, West Alton, East Alton and the islands. Since then, the town has held a charette, community forums, and distributed surveys in 1985, 1989, 1990, 1997, and again in 2005 in an effort to update the master plan. Many of the original goals have been accomplished; some remain and are still relevant today. The results of the 2005 community survey (see Vision Chapter - Appendix: A) form the basis for updating community goals and exploring opportunities to revitalize and enhance Alton.



## **PURPOSE OF THE PLAN**

The Master Plan is a living document that serves to direct and guide the development of the town and to be the foundation for local regulations and zoning ordinances. The intended results of implementing this plan are to preserve and enhance the unique quality of life and culture in Alton. This Master Plan is the cumulative expression of a series of citizens' surveys and community planning sessions. Each section of this Master Plan shall be consistent with the others in its implementation of the Vision Section.

## **VISION**

### **A. Vision Statement**

Alton desires to grow within the capabilities of the town's resources in a manner that is in harmony with its natural environment and provision of municipal services. The purpose of this Vision Chapter is to foster practices that will promote the wishes of the citizens of Alton and to prepare the town for future growth. The town desires to plan for reasonable growth and yet preserve its "small town rural New England atmosphere." The residents of Alton value the lakes and the mountains as tremendous assets to its recreational and economic base as well as to the scenic beauty of the area.

Alton, once a sleepy small town, is on the move. The town is home to many working families who enjoy the diversity of its landscape, its rural character, and value the advantages of raising a family in a safe and friendly community. The town includes long established families as well as a growing number of highly educated, upwardly mobile individuals that desire to work from home or take advantage of its convenient central location within the state (see Appendix A). The town is also home to many older residents who move to Alton to retire, many of whom convert their summer camps to year-round homes. Alton's reasonable tax rate, small town environment, and good school system offer many desirable benefits to its residents and, as such, Alton is a magnet for development opportunities.

Alton is limited by topography and geography; Lake Winnepesaukee not only separates East Alton from West Alton, but also separates the Town from communities to the north. The hills and the Merrymeeting River that confine the area between Alton Bay and Alton Village severely restrict the area to be developed and force development to be located along the existing roads.

## **B. Implementation of Vision**

The following section elaborates on the community vision by providing a list of goals, a brief explanation, and guiding principles that will aid the implementation of each goal.

### **Goal 1: Redefine the rural zones to reduce land use conflicts.**

#### **Guiding Principles**

Currently, the Rural Zones are so permissive that there is no adequate way to achieve the goal of maintaining “the rural atmosphere” or “small town” feeling because almost everything is permitted in the Rural Zone. By having several zones that gradually grade from least rural (most fragmented lands) to most rural (unfragmented lands), the town can retain a gradation of uses that taper from most developed to least developed.

Alton’s vision is to preserve open spaces, natural vistas and rural images. It also envisions keeping construction/subdivision development set back, out of sight on characteristically rural roads. Typical roadside strip development will be avoided, while a more rural character of development will be encouraged.

The rural designation should apply to land that is unfragmented (has little or no improved road access) and has little access. At present the Rural Zone comprises most of the landmass in Alton and permits uses that are incompatible with the existing area. In these rural areas, many types of commercial uses are inappropriate.

Rural areas with more developed road access, should be designated as new zones with permitted uses that are more compatible in/or near village districts.

We should consider new regulations that encourage open space subdivisions such as Conservation Design Subdivisions for residential neighborhoods; a type of cluster zoning that could be incorporated as an overlay district for these refined rural zones.

### **Goal 2: Encourage the development of tourism related facilities in areas which are best suited for such development.**

#### **Guiding Principles**

Alton should include zoning standards that encourage development of tourist-related businesses, such as restaurants, small shops, recreational sporting goods rentals, and lodging establishments.

Alton has played a significant role in the history of Lakes Region tourism. To a decreasing degree the town continues to play a role. A handful of small to medium size hospitality businesses continue to support tourism. Overall, however, Alton's neighbors on Lake Winnepesaukee play the significant role.

Lodging establishments, located on the Winnepesaukee waterfront, were built prior to the exclusionary lakeshore residential zoning that is now in place which only allows single-family homes to be built along the lakeshore. The present zoning ordinances should be modified to allow for moderate expansion of these "grandfathered" establishments to help alleviate the present shortage of rooms in Alton.

Resort facilities could provide four-season recreational activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling on the town's existing trail network. They could also provide excellent views of the lake and surrounding mountains.

**Goal 3: Alton should ensure that its community facilities continue to grow with the town.**

### **Guiding Principles**

Following the examples established by the Downtown Revitalization Committee, which is working towards building a park, and the Beach Committee, which is working on establishing a new town beach, committees can perform studies as the town's needs change due to population and growth to determine whether current facilities and infrastructure are able to effectively serve the citizens.

When examining future facilities needs, technology should also be examined. The town should improve upon the existing technology infrastructure, improving to modern communications and information systems standards. Updating computers, software, web presence and interdepartmental communications within town government will improve communication with the citizens of Alton. Web based communications between the various town departments and the community at large should be a high priority and every effort should be made to keep technologies updated.

**Goal 4: As the community grows, issues of septic and sewage need to be addressed carefully in the Village and Bay area with periodic review.**

**Goal 5: Alton should continue to expand its recreational facilities and programs in a cost efficient manner.**

## Guiding Principles

1. Provide additional space for outdoor recreational activities.

The town of Alton has made significant improvements to its public recreational areas to increase recreational opportunities for children. In 1990, Alton upgraded the public swim dock at Alton Bay from a small platform to a large octagonal platform. At Liberty Park, the town reconstructed existing tennis courts and added a new basketball court, a skateboard park and a sand volleyball court. Several upgrades to Jones Field were also completed including the addition of new playground equipment, “Little Fenway”, a practice soccer field, a softball field and a batting cage. The town’s green spaces are being further expanded with the construction of the Alton B & M Railroad Park which will provide a walking path from Depot Street to Ginny Douglas Park, a children’s play area, an educational wetland, and areas for picnicking, barbecuing, badminton, and music concerts.

Although several upgrades have been made over the last 15 years, there is a need for additional outdoor recreational space. According to the Parks and Recreation Department, the town’s current athletic fields are overcrowded. Frequently, our town uses New Durham’s fields for soccer, baseball and softball activities. The town needs to increase its athletic field space to support current youth and adult athletic programs and anticipated growth.

2. Expand Alton’s Recreational Green Space Corridor.

The results of the 2005 community survey emphasized the need for additional green space for outdoor recreational activities. For example, the requests for bike paths and running/walking paths were repeated in the surveys. It is recommended that the town acquire lands contiguous to our existing parks for further expansion of the town’s “green space corridor.” Currently, the town’s green spaces lie in a belt that stretch from the fields and playgrounds of Alton Central School, through Liberty Park, on to Mill Pond, to the trails leading to Jones Field, and on to Levy Park, ultimately reaching the town’s recreation properties at Alton Bay. To fulfill the vision of a walking/bike path, it is recommended that the town stitch together these green spaces by acquiring additional land or the rights to use non-public land that currently separate the existing green spaces. Future green space corridor expansion specifically to promote less pedestrian and bicycle traffic on the highways should be considered to connect other schools and new recreation areas to the town centers. The need for revising the zoning permitted uses under “outdoor recreation” to include other types of outdoor recreation uses to meet this vision is reiterated here.

3. Explore opportunities to acquire additional public beach space.

Alton desires to acquire additional public beach space. The results of the 2005 community survey reiterated the community's desire for a new town beach. A committee for this purpose has been formed and is actively seeking lakefront property with adequate parking space.

Further, the permitted zoning uses of "Public Recreation" need to be changed to allow parks, ball fields and a town beach in Lakeshore Residential and Rural Residential Zones.

4. It is recommended that a recreation chapter be added to the Master Plan with input from the Parks and Recreation Committee.

**Goal 6: Encourage businesses that promote indoor recreational activities.**

Alton should draft zoning changes to allow businesses that promote indoor recreational activities.

**Guiding Principles**

Alton desires to attract businesses that promote indoor recreational activities. The survey comments suggest a movie theater, a bowling center, an indoor ice rink, a roller-skating rink, and a fitness center would all enhance the quality of life in Alton.

**Goal 7: Restoration and protection of historic structures and features.**

Alton should support community and individual efforts to preserve its cultural and historic structures and features.

**Guiding Principles**

In the 2005 survey the residents of Alton placed a high priority on promoting the restoration and protection of historic structures. Alton desires to promote the wise and adaptive reuse of historic buildings with well-maintained exterior appearances, in keeping with the *Community Design Section of the Master Plan* (see Land Use Chapter: Appendix A).



**East Alton Meeting House**

A healthy, successful community values its past as well as its future. Alton needs to develop new ways to support citizens or organizations within the town that undertake the preservation of their historic buildings, structures, and Alton's cultural interests.



### **Goal 8: Protect Alton's natural resources, watersheds, wetlands, and viewsheds.**

#### **Guiding Principles**

Public planning forums held during the spring of 2005 found many residents concerned with water quality. Respondents to the community survey ranked protection of water resources high on the list of priorities. A step toward protecting these resources should involve adopting wetland buffers based on the size and functional value of the wetlands. Surface water, including streams, should be afforded the same protection. Wetland and surface water buffers will serve to maintain the integrity of the contributing water drainage into the Merrymeeting River, Lake Winnepesaukee, and Alton's other lakes and ponds.

Residents also expressed concern regarding the long-term protection of the town's groundwater aquifers. Careful planning and zoning should direct environmentally friendly uses in the aquifer areas. Additional overlay districts should be utilized to ensure the long-term viability of the resource.

Along with water resources, the townspeople felt that long-term protection of the Belknap Mountains, including Mount Major, should be a priority. Mount Major is one of the most climbed mountains in the state of New Hampshire. Currently, only Mt. Major's summit is permanently protected by the State. It is important that the town work to secure long-term easements and protection for this area, as it is a matching gem to Lake Winnepesaukee.

The view of the Lake and surrounding mountains is considered one of the most beautiful views in the Lakes Region. Every effort should be made to preserve the natural scenic beauty of Alton viewsheds.

Alton desires to protect its valuable wetlands and water resources by adopting zoning regulations that establish wetland buffers. Alton should develop zoning standards that buffer and protect our natural resources

**Goal 9: Maintain a high quality transportation system, which retains efficiency and rural character.**

**Guiding Principles**

1. Arterial Roadways

The traffic circle was also laid out in a manner to maximize efficiency. A type of traffic circle was devised which would allow some traffic to pass thru without yielding to traffic already in the circle. The unique design functions as intended. However, the uniqueness of the design also leads to confusion and frustration. The design forces drivers within the circle to yield to traffic entering; the opposite of what drivers familiar with typical traffic circles are accustomed. Signage has not alleviated the confusion. The situation has caused the NH DOT to consider major changes for the traffic circle. Alton prefers the changes to result in an improved, large traffic circle. A multi-lane signalized intersection is not sought. NH Route 140 provides an example of an arterial road where the characteristic look of a northern New England country road has been maintained.

Among the factors Alton wants to consider for the new design are efficiency, aesthetics, and environmental preservation. Currently, the interior of Alton's traffic circle includes a stonewall, an open perennial brook, a field, a wildflower meadow, and a stand of trees. Alton places a high value on maintaining all of these rural elements within the circle. Conversely, a large intersection such as what replaced the Weeks traffic circle in Dover is viewed as being more appropriately located within the confines of an urban environment.

The Town prefers that NH DOT not limit improvements to arterial highways solely within their existing right-of-ways.

2. Rural Collectors

Alton has an extensive network of rural collector roads including NH Route 28A and former state routes including Roberts Cove Road, Route 11D, Rand Hill Road, New Durham Road, and Gilman's Corner Road. The former state roads were given to the town upon completion of the arteries they parallel. Directing access for new development along collector roads with help insure that the efficiency of arterial roads remains into the future.

Other significant collectors include Old Wolfeboro Road, Alton Mountain / Avery Hill Road, Stockbridge Corner Road, Chestnut Cove Road, and Prospect Mountain Road. It is expected that sections of these roads will experience the greatest increase in volume in the future. **Care must be taken to preserve the rural character of these roads while accommodating the likely increases in volume.**

### 3. Country Lanes and Streets

The extent of Alton's streets and lanes was discovered with the recently completed effort to name and number all roads in Alton. The process caused more than 50 previously unnamed streets to be given "fire lane numbers". Prior to the addition of the fire lanes, Alton had already identified and depicted more than 200 other streets and lanes on its Official Map (Adopted January 14, 1991).

Some of the streets and lanes pose difficult access issues for Alton's first responders. Even though their location is now easily ascertained, they remain difficult to traverse, particularly in inclement weather.

The majority of the streets and lanes, where access is an issue, are privately owned and were established prior to the adoption of Planning and Zoning (1970). In some cases the streets were not fully constructed; in others, maintenance efforts were abandoned, rendering sections of streets impassable. What remains passable, marginal as it may be, is experiencing development pressure. **The town should look for opportunities to improve the quality of these roads while preserving their rural characteristics.**

#### **Goal 10: Design roads to maintain the rural character of the town.**

Alton should develop road standards that are based on intended speed and usage in order to promote and maintain the rural character.

#### **Guiding Principles**

Roads Design – Rural roads are characterized by being narrow, winding, and tree canopied. They are often lined by stonewalls, and have large, open spaces between developed areas. In village centers, roads sometimes have granite curbing, narrow sidewalks, smaller building setbacks, and possibly a village green.

#1 Design Factor to be considered for new road construction is the desired speed for residential neighborhoods and parking lot access roads. Alton seeks to maintain lower speeds in these areas. It is recognized that roadway width influences speed more than any other factor. Therefore, where the design speed is intended to be below 25 mph, roadway width should be limited to 18'. Where the design speed is 35 mph, 20' roadway width would be appropriate. For speeds intended to be greater than 35 mph, 22' roadway widths or greater would be required.

Smaller building setbacks (e.g. 25') from roads also contribute to lower traveling speeds and should be promoted in Alton Village and other village nodes.

#2 Design Factor to be considered is the environmental impact posed by roadway maintenance and runoff. To decrease potential negative environmental impacts,



Alton seeks to have larger roads located away from surface waters including large brooks.

It is recognized that an overhanging tree canopy is a defining characteristic of a rural road. Therefore, Alton intends to have new roads, including large parking lot access roads, constructed in a manner that will preserve and/or promote the establishment of an overhanging tree canopy. Preplanning for electric service may be critical for achieving the overhanging tree canopy. Roadway construction which requires large-scale blasting and rock removal is found to be inconsistent with the intention of preserving and/or creating an overhanging tree canopy on roadways, and is discouraged unless mitigating measures are taken to replace the lost vegetation.

#3 Design Factor is aesthetics. Outside the village nodes, Alton should require new developments to have larger setbacks from town roads and state highways in order to maintain Alton's rural character of large, open spaces between developed areas.

New areas to be considered for lesser building setbacks would be in Conservation Design for Residential Neighborhoods, as long as the new cluster or village area is well buffered from town roads or state highways. This buffering would ensure that only large open spaces between developed areas are seen along the main travel ways.

The building of stonewalls along roadways is encouraged to maintain the rural character of Alton. In the village areas, granite curbing is also encouraged for sidewalks.

The design of gentle, meandering roadways is to be encouraged for aesthetics, as well as a deterrent to excessive speeds. Building roads in a grid patterns is to be discouraged. While typical of urban environments a grid is not in keeping with Alton's rural character.

Alton also encourages the creation of village greens as a typical rural feature. It is also noted that smaller, narrow roads encourage recreation, such as walking, cycling, ball playing (all types) and horseback riding.

### **Goal 11: Maintain long-term staffing of planning and code enforcement personnel.**

Alton should seek the most qualified individuals for employment, and encourage their retention for the consistent delivery of municipal services, particularly with regard to enforcement of the town's ordinances and regulations.

### **Guiding Principles**

Alton intends to enforce its ordinances and regulations. The Planning Board recognizes that effective enforcement is directly related with consistent review and interpretation of the ordinances by staff. Accordingly, Alton places a high value on the retention of staff's "institutional memory".

Alton further recognizes staff's impact on the review and development of the Town's Master Plan. The Master Plan serves as the guide for the Zoning Ordinance as well as the Subdivision and Site Plan Review Regulations. These regulations are not static; as the Town changes, the regulations must be updated to reflect those changes. Similarly, changes brought upon the Town by the N.H. Legislature and Judiciary must be accommodated.

### **Goal 12: Develop community design standards used to evaluate proposed development.**

#### **Guiding Principles**

Alton should develop design standards to guide commercial, residential, and non-profit endeavors in order to maintain the rural character.





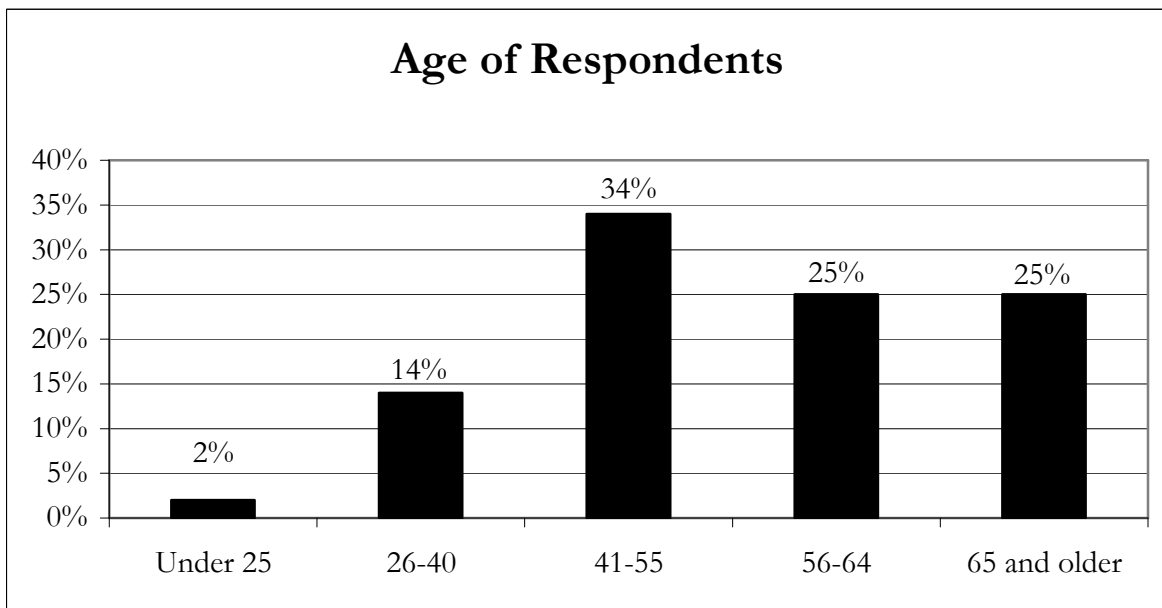
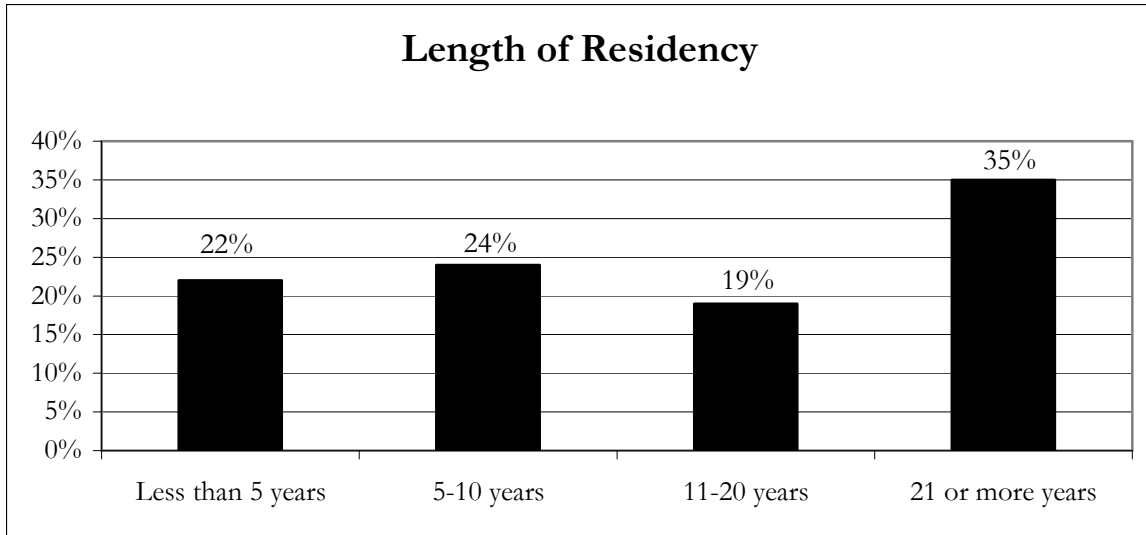


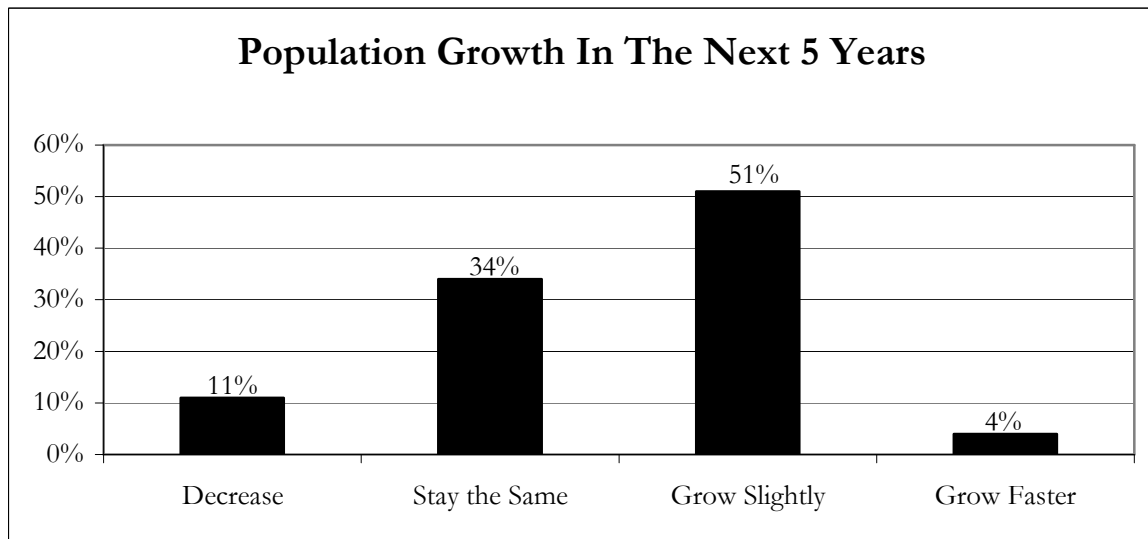
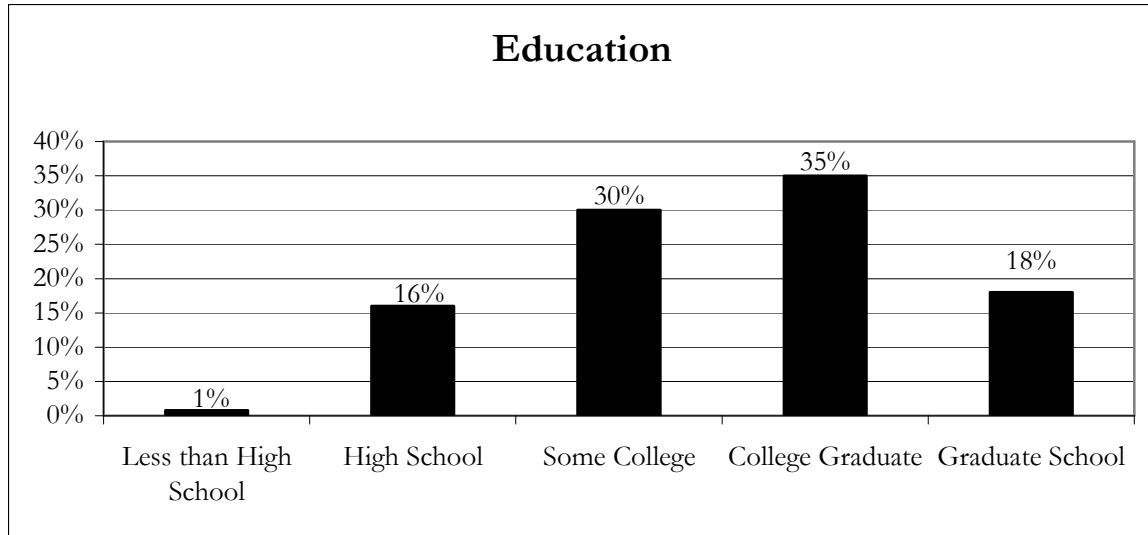
**APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS**



*MASTER PLAN 2005*

**COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS**





### What Makes Alton A Good Place To Live?

	<u>Number of Responses</u>
Small town atmosphere	272
Scenic, natural environment	265
Lakes	249
Uncrowded & quiet living conditions	233
Low taxes	182
Outdoor recreation opportunities	163
Friendly people	117
School system	87
Community spirit	67
Proximity to major employment centers	32



### The Most Serious Problems In Alton?

	<u>Number of Responses</u>
Excessive housing development	168
Loss of open space	152
Quality of water in Alton Bay	145
Traffic/roads	142
Lack of land use control	127
Lack of commercial development	117
Lack of public sewer system	91
Lack of affordable housing	77
Lack of industrial development	61
Lack of public water system	40
Lack of community buildings	35
Lack of multi-family housing	33
Lack of housing development	19
Commercial signage	15

### Conservation

	<u>Rating Responses</u>	
The protection of the quality of Alton's lakes, ponds and streams	4.4	345
The level of protection of clean groundwater	4.2	316
Preservation of open space and woodlands	4.2	344
Protection of the Belknap Mountains, including Mt. Major	4.2	343
The amount of wildlife habitat protected	4.1	336
Protection of views (i.e., viewsheds)	4.1	332
Preservation of agricultural land	4.0	325
The amount of wetlands protected	3.9	334

	Much Less	A Little Less	The Same	A Little More	Much More
The protection of the quality of Alton's lakes, ponds and streams	-	1.2%	15.1%	29.6%	54.2%
The level of protection of clean groundwater	-	.6%	23.7%	29.7%	45.9%
Preservation of open space and woodlands	.9%	2.3%	21.2%	23.5%	52.0%
Protection of the Belknap Mountains, including Mt. Major	1.7%	.9%	22.2%	26.5%	48.7%
The amount of wildlife habitat protected	.3%	1.8%	30.7%	22.6%	44.6%
Protection of views (i.e., viewsheds)	.9%	2.1%	27.4%	23.8%	45.8%
Preservation of agricultural land	.3%	5.5%	29.8%	24.3%	40.0%
The amount of wetlands protected	1.8%	5.4%	32.3%	20.7%	39.8%

	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Identify and develop a plan to protect historical buildings	4.1	356
Develop architectural standards for new development in the downtown area	3.9	352
Appropriate money annually for important land conservation purchases	3.7	349

	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Accept gifts of land and/or development rights in exchange for conservation rights	3.5	309
Require land to be dedicated for town use as part of development approval	3.4	335

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Identify and develop a plan to protect historical buildings	2.2%	5.3%	12.4%	44.4%	35.7%
Develop architectural standards for new development in the downtown area	6.0%	7.4%	11.6%	37.2%	37.8%
Appropriate money annually for important land conservation purchases	5.4%	10.3%	16.9%	41.3%	26.1%
Accept gifts of land and/or development rights in exchange for conservation rights	10.4%	11.3%	13.9%	38.5%	25.9%
Require land to be dedicated for town use as part of development approval	10.1%	11.6%	26.6%	33.4%	18.2%

### Land Use

	<u>Number of Responses</u>
Remain primarily a rural residential community	290
Improve town beach facilities	263
Revitalize the Alton Bay area	220
Revitalize the downtown Alton Village area	213
Encourage outdoor recreation-related businesses	176
Encourage tourist-related businesses	149
Encourage non-polluting, light industry	127
Encourage home occupation/cottage industry	105
Encourage commercial development	104
Not encourage any business or industry	54
Encourage development of second homes	45

### Housing Development

	<u>Number of Responses</u>
Single family residences	253
Senior housing	180
Cluster housing	123
Affordable housing	104
In-law/accessory apartments	88
Manufactured homes on individual lots	60
Condominiums	40
Conversion of large homes to apartments	35
Two family residences	34
Multi-family apartment buildings	21
Manufactured homes in parks	20

### Location of New Commercial or Light Industry

	Commercial	Industrial	Commercial and Industrial	None	No Answer	Total Responses
a. Alton Village	153	4	13	119	69	289
b. Route 11, south of Traffic Circle	77	52	73	80	69	282
c. Route 11, north from Traffic Circle to Alton Bay	118	4	8	145	82	275
d. Route 11, north from Alton Bay to Sandy Point	59	1	5	213	77	278
e. Route 11, north from Sandy Point to Route 11a	52	11	14	201	71	278
f. Route 11, north from Route 11A to the Gilford line	25	15	13	205	83	258
g. Route 11A	14	8	6	213	103	241
h. Route 28, south of Traffic Circle	71	47	55	114	66	287
i. Route 28, north from Traffic Circle to Bay Hill Rd	82	40	65	106	60	293
j. Route 28, north from Bay Hill Rd. to Route 28A	45	37	46	154	69	282
k. Route 28, north from 28A to the Wolfeboro line	54	40	48	150	54	292
l. Route 140	32	33	30	186	60	281

### Municipal Services

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Total Responses
Library	.3%	6.6%	29.4%	40.3%	23.4%	320
Fire Protection	1.8%	10.1%	34.8%	37.2%	16.1%	336
Schools	2.1%	11.0%	33.3%	37.1%	16.5%	291
Municipal Office Services	2.1%	9.5%	40.2%	33.9%	14.3%	336
Police Protection	3.6%	12.1%	37.9%	30.5%	16.0%	338
Library	.3%	6.6%	29.4%	40.3%	23.4%	320
Parks & Recreation	5.9%	17.5%	43.1%	22.2%	11.3%	320
Road Maintenance	9.0%	22.1%	38.7%	23.8%	6.4%	357
Road Construction	9.6%	29.8%	34.8%	21.7%	4.0%	322
Zoning Enforcement	19.1%	27.0%	35.9%	15.2%	2.7%	256





## APPENDIX B: HISTORICAL COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

The Alton Planning Board considers the following historical review of Alton's past to be instructive as planning officials and townspeople attempt to deal with Alton's future in the 21st Century.<sup>(1)</sup>

Long before the seacoast was a concern to its European settlers, Alton was a focus of their Native American predecessors, who gathered at Merrymeeting Bay, now called Alton Bay, where the Merrymeeting River meets Lake Winnepesaukee.<sup>(a)</sup> In 1722 the land Proprietors of seacoast and the government proposed to build a blockhouse on the eastern shore of the Bay to defend would-be settlers against Indian hostilities. Although the blockhouse was never built, the name Fort Point Road still remains. Settlement in the interior of what was to become New Hampshire was very risky during the French and Indian Wars; many settlers were killed and houses burned. Prior to General James Wolfe's victory over the French at the Battle of Quebec in 1759, settlers feared to remain on their plots during the winter and retreated to the coastal towns. (It was in honor of James Wolfe that the town of Wolfeborough was named.) The end of the Indian Wars made possible the settlement of Alton and other regional areas. It was not until 1765 that the first subdivisions of land were made; the wealthy merchants from Portsmouth, the Proprietors, hired a surveyor to draw up a plan and lay out lots of "New Durham Gore". Each of the Proprietors was charged with finding colonists to take up the lots and settle the land

In 1770, the three Glidden brothers bought lots on Coffin Ridge. Like most in the "Gore", Alton's first name, they settled on the higher land where frost would slide by on cold night; it was only later, when the good high land was taken, that the new arrivals moved to the valleys where the lure of waterpower offered opportunity. Early settlements were scattered, and for many years, people kept to themselves; survival was hard work. A number of the earliest homesteads still stand, including the Chamberlains' 1770 and 1771 house on the New Durham line. Many more cellar holes remain hidden by the encroaching forest.

Among the first to arrive in New Durham Gore was Lieutenant James Rogers, an agent of the Portsmouth Proprietors, who set him up in trade in 1772 on the Merrymeeting River, where it flows into Alton Bay. Rogers' barn quickly became one of the busiest warehouses north of Rochester, and he soon found it necessary to enlarge his house to accommodate the traffic. By the end of 1779, the one road from the seacoast ended at his dock, where heavy freight for Wolfeborough or Centre Harbor could be transferred from ox wagons to gundalows for ease of travel by Lake Winnepesaukee. Rogers was the first to dare the winds and waters of Winnepesaukee, piloting the cross-lake trade that would drive Alton to prominence and prompt the growth of other lakeside settlements. His first trade was transport of barrel staves with oxen across the ice, and by the mid 1770's he was using gundalows, clumsy open sailing scows.<sup>(b)</sup> The wide-open market also encouraged Eleazer Davis, who shipped Winnepesaukee farm products to coastal towns. By the early 1800's Davis had a foothold in Meredith where he owned a

mill and in Gilford where he owned Davis (Governor's) Island. Brisk trade prompted Enoch Sawyer to build the inn that still stands at the corner of School and Main Streets.<sup>(d)</sup> Ever the entrepreneur, Rogers built the town's first sawmill about 1776, later replaced by the Wentworth Mills and a modern dam among the scattered blocks of the old dry laid foundation. The Town also boasted deposits of clay used to make bricks for Governor Wentworth's chimneys in Wolfeboro.<sup>(b)</sup> There was also a small clay pipe manufacturing industry in East Alton.

Although farming was the mainstay of life for almost a century and half, there are fewer working farms in town today; horticulture and specialty crops represent today's agriculture plus a few small operations representing animal husbandry. At the peak of its population in the mid 1800's over two thousand people made their living on the land. Discouraged by the marginal sandy and rocky hill farms and competition from far-away lands, farmers began to abandon their land or left for the Civil War. Other events that sped the flight were the invention of the steel plow that made the bottomlands and clay soils tillable; the development of the western railroads during the Civil War made vast rich western lands available and desirable. It was a long time before the population rose again

It took some time for the independent-minded people of Alton to agree upon a name for the town and to incorporate. Neighboring towns were much quicker to organize and incorporate; while Alton debated and argued over alternate names Wolfeborough, on the east, claimed a whole range of lots and Gilford did the same on the west. New Durham Gore wrapped around Alton Bay creating awkward communication and transportation. Historically, Alton has suffered in organization because of the lack of a central source; the Town at 80 square miles is huge and the settlers were spread out. Town meeting was the cause for a real gathering. After much debate Alton finally incorporated in 1796. The source of the name "Alton" is England but the reason behind the choice has never been discovered.

As the focal point of communication with the coast, Alton was a natural funnel for religious ideas of the day. A persuasive evangelist by the name of Benjamin Randall came to neighboring New Durham in 1778, and founded the Free Will Baptist Church two years later. His Church soon became the most powerful social influence in rural New Hampshire and other northern New England states,<sup>(b)</sup> often converting followers from the established Congregational churches. New Durham was the mother church of the Free Will Baptist, but the second was in East Alton in the first decade of the 1800's and the third followed soon after on New Durham Ridge. A visit by Rev. Randall in 1805 led to the Alton Monthly Conference and several Free Will Baptist ministers were ordained here.<sup>(b)</sup> Alton lay at a key point in the trade route well beyond Winnepesaukee: produce from northern New Hampshire and even northeast Vermont came down to the Big Lake for transfer to Alton and coastal ports. This traffic mattered so much that plans were actually laid to rearrange the landscape to build a canal connecting the Merrymeeting River with the Ela and Cocheco Rivers in Farmington to allow goods to move directly by water from the opposite end of Winnepesaukee all the way to the sea.<sup>(i)</sup> Ironically, while Alton-based lake travel was state of the art, beginning with

Governor Wentworth's two-masted schooner "Rockingham", road conditions were so miserable that the settlers complained to the Town's Proprietors in 1779. It was fifty years before the roads allowed the fragile wheels of a stagecoach to complete the entire five-hour trip from Portsmouth to Alton intact. In 1833 the first stage line from Dover to Alton connected with the maiden voyage of the lake's first steamer, The "Belkap", a transportation link refined in 1851 when the Cocheco Railroad took over the stage route to meet the "Dover" at the wharf.<sup>(e)</sup> The railroad's arrival at Alton took care of the road woes once and for all. The Cocheco Railroad's charter allowed it to connect Dover with Meredith Bridge on the opposite side of the lake, but the company ran out of money at Alton Bay in 1851 and the tracks stopped there for forty years until the Lake Shore Line was completed through Gilford. In the meantime, the end of the line at Alton Bay became the beginning of busy stage routes connecting all the towns not yet served by the railroad including Gilford, Wolfeborough, and beyond.<sup>(e)</sup> The Dover-based Cocheco Railroad pitched itself into fierce competition with the Boston-based line running to the other end of the Big Lake, and both railroads enlisted the best local shipyards to build steamers to further their lake trade. Alton Bay had a solid shipbuilding tradition that began in 1774 with the "Rockingham" and continued with the Rogers' gundalows. The "Dover", Alton's first steamer was soon rebuilt and enlarged as the "Chocorua" and drew freight and passengers for the Cocheco Railroad. She lies deep in Alton Bay today. The Steamship "Mount Washington" was Alton's finest shipbuilding achievement in 1872.

The railroad and its steamships intensified trade and industry in Alton. Cattle drives across the ice brought beef to the seacoast market,<sup>(e)</sup> and the local shoe-making business went full tilt in 1883 with the construction of a huge shoe factory that dominated Alton Village at the corner of Main Street and Gilmanton Road (Rt.140), and was a major employer until it burned in 1930. Not so small mom-and-pop home industry continued as well. William Clough invented a machine to manufacture corkscrews, turning them out in the barn behind his house on the Gilmanton Road.

The railroad also brought lots of people. They not only filled the old taverns, but also convinced a number of farmers to clean the cobwebs out of empty rooms and eventually add wings to their farmhouses to accommodate boarders. Inns and boarding houses went into brisk business in Alton Village and Alton Bay, with amenities such as saloons, stables, carriages for hire, and consulting blacksmiths. The Fifield House, later known as the Munroe House, burned in 1970, but the Savage House, later the Cocheco House, survives still at the intersection of Rt. 140 and Main Street. Shorefront cabin colonies grew as the automobile gave the visitor increased freedom.

Alton's geographic diversity and size allowed the growth of multiple village centers, each with its own personality and history, and its own, one-room schoolhouse. Alton may hold the record for the highest number of schools per square mile: 27 in the Town's heyday before education began to centralize.<sup>(k)</sup> Many of the smaller schoolhouses were on skids so that they could be moved



where needed.

SOUTH ALTON, which was most accessible for settlers coming from the seacoast, and Coffin Ridge, now known as New Durham Ridge and Prospect Mountain were the first districts settled.

Until mid-century a prosperous farming community of some 350 people gathered in the hills of EAST ALTON, with Gilman Corner at its center. Insulated from the busy lakeshore, railroad tracks, and the political activity down in the village, East Alton faded into the background with the coming of the railroad, and now has the peaceful look of a hamlet frozen in the pre-railroad era. The steeple of its early 1800's First Free Will Baptist Church, set on a high point of the old road from Farmington to Wolfeborough (the Moultonborough Road of 1771), gave the lake navigators a reference point for two centuries. This survivor of Alton's early meetinghouses is now under the watchful care of the East Alton Meeting House Society.<sup>(h)</sup>

ALTON VILLAGE, also called Alton Corner, developed at the junction of two roads near a sawmill. John Rawlings was a hundred or so years ahead of his time when he drew up a subdivision plan with his two partners for the land on which the village sits. Their action resulted in a streetscape that recalls the 1810-1825 period when most of the original buildings arose.<sup>(d)</sup> In 1844, Joseph Mooney figured out how to bring water to village pumps through an aqueduct, providing the first municipal water supply in the region.<sup>(c)</sup> Alton Corner built the second meetinghouse in Town in 1797-98. Recognized as a unique example of a rural meetinghouse with a vaulted ceiling, the historic structure nevertheless succumbed to development pressure and was razed in 1978.<sup>(b)</sup> The Corner remained a sleepy crossroads town until the day in 1851 when the railroad arrived in its front yard. This fit right in with Mooney's plan; a leading industrialist in Alton Village, his large, well-situated house soon became the railroad headquarters and he found a new career.<sup>(e)</sup>

ALTON BAY has had many faces. The early warehouses and gundalow piers gave way to a railroad hub that included an engine house, station, shop, freight house, and several dwellings, almost all of which were lost in a 1907 fire. The big icehouses on the bay at Mount Major, which stored Winnepesaukee ice for rail shipment to Boston, are also gone. The third depot was built in 1907, and kept company with the curious aquatic bandstand, the 1885 Busy Corner Store and the Alton Bay Inn at the head of the Lake. The tourists kept coming and after the 1921 roller skating pavilion burned, a new one opened the next year in 1922. The waterfront turned from producing freight-bearing steamers to renting speedboats to summer people and there was always a crowd out on the ice in the 30's and 40's for ice buggy racing.<sup>(g)</sup> Once the Lake Shore Railroad tracks were torn up in 1935, the road to Gilford continued on their old path.

For many, Alton Bay means the Camp Meeting. The Second Advent Camp Meeting, a religious group preparing for the second coming of Christ, held its first gathering in 1863 on land leased from the Boston & Maine Railroad on the west

shore of the Bay. The Meeting was incorporated in 1876, and by 1900 over 10,000 worshippers flooded Alton Bay each summer. The Camp grew as tiny cabins were built, sometimes only a foot apart, on the platforms intended for tents. A third, devastating fire in 1945 spread quickly in spite of the efforts of 12 companies of firefighters, burning 260 cabins, 3 chapels, and other buildings. The area was leveled and rebuilt in a less crowded manner, and the campground continues successfully today

WEST ALTON was a prosperous farming community 150 years ago, oriented around Samuel Small's 1802 store and 1808 tavern, which for 30 years were a regular stop on the way from Alton Bay to Meredith. The Mount Major Grange Hall, a key community gathering place for many years, remains along with a very few survivors of earlier times, and three tiny railroad depots: Spring Haven, West Alton, and Loon Cove.

Alton remains a town of many faces, from the beckoning views up the long, great bay, or the cellar holes resting under years of fallen leaves in the hills above. The new diesel-powered "Mount Washington" continues the 150-year-old tradition of its forbearers, linking the Alton Bay Wharf with its fellows around the lake, and churns over the timbers of the "Dover" resting at the bottom of the Bay.

### References and Notes

- a) "Merrymeeting Bay" was often known as "Merry Meeting Bay" but time has Condensed the name of the bay and river of the same name. See Ancient Indian Camps and Relics 1889-1907, by S.S. Parker, Farmington, N.H. (pers. Comm. Judy Fry, July 26, 1996)
- b) Fisher, Albert V. History of Alton 1770-1880, unpublished manuscript
- c) -----History of Alton 1774-1843
- d) -----History of Alton 1800-1830
- e) -----History of Alton 1840-
- f) Hunt, Elmer Munson, New Hampshire Town Names 1970, William L. Bauhan, Publisher, Peterborough, N.H.
- g) Alton: A Town to Remember, Alton Old Photograph Committee, Alton, N.H. 1987, Kingwood Press, Wolfeborough, N.H.
- h) "The East Alton Meeting House at Gilman's Corner, Formerly the First Free-Will Baptist Church of Alton" unpublished paper.
- i) Hay, Warren, "The Cochecho Railroad" in B&M Bulletin Summer 1977, pp 6-14

- j) Philbrook, Dana, Lake Shore Railroad; the First Forty Years” in B&M Bulletin, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp 12-29
- k) Judy Fry, Director Alton Historical Society, personal communication, June 8, 1996
- l) Adair Mullighan - compiled the historical narrative from the above references on behalf of the Lake Region Heritage Round Table (“corrections by the Vision Committee 2005”)