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**Review of Past Studies
Findings, Recommendations and Implications**

The major past studies are the 1964 Master Plan Report by Planning Consultant Charles E. Downe and the town’s 1987 Open Space/Bay Circuit Plan by the Open Space Committee and IEP, Inc.

A. The 1964 Master Plan Report

This document analyzed the town’s land use patterns, undeveloped land, population trends, and influences on the community. It then discussed the need for community facilities, circulation improvements and utility needs, and recommended a future land use plan. Finally it set out an implementation strategy focusing on a recommended zoning bylaw and a set of subdivision regulations.

Land Use Findings

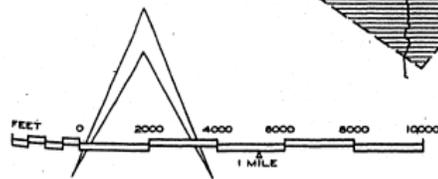
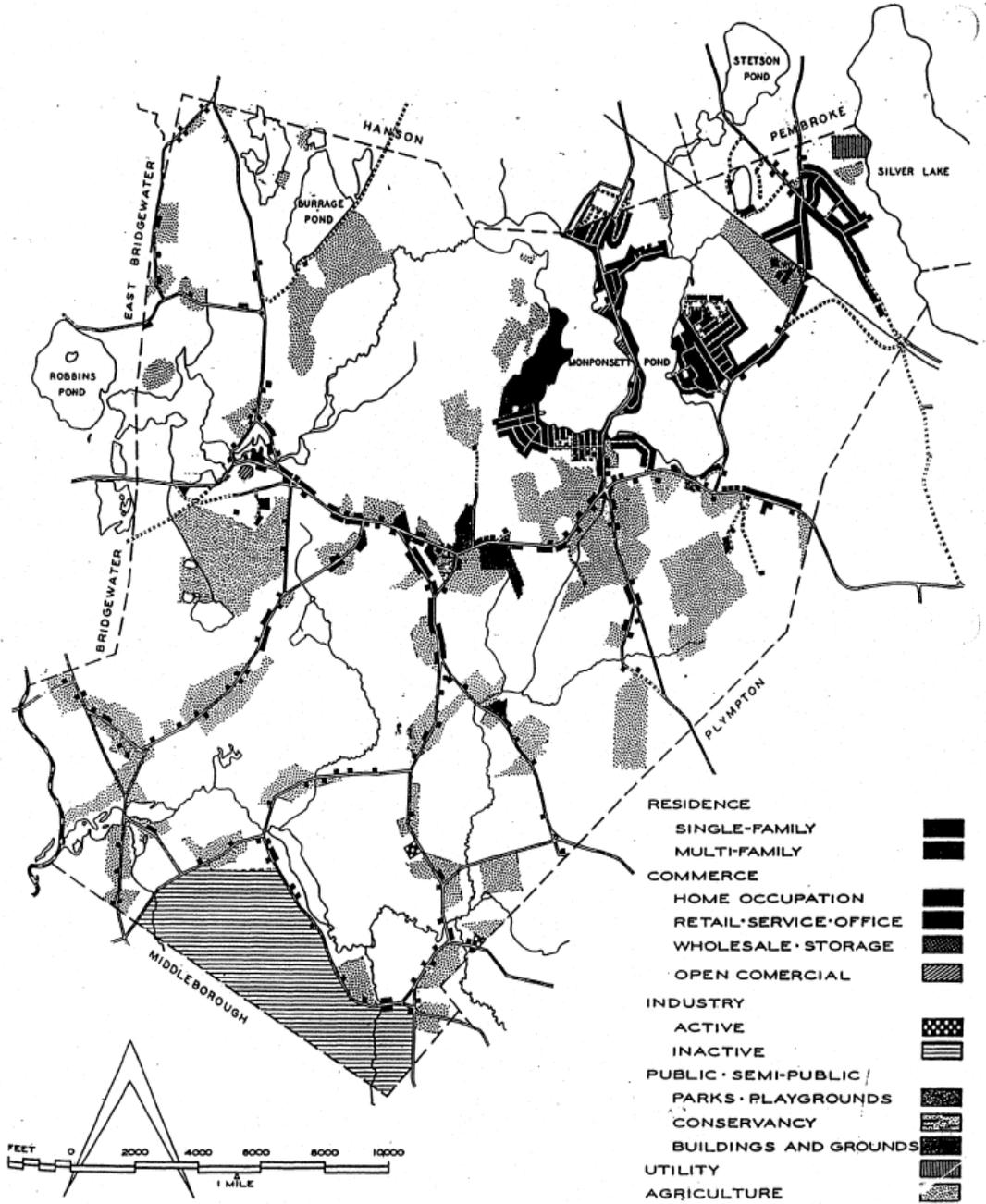
The study found the following overall land uses:

Use	Acres	% of Town Area
Housing	774	7.5
Commerce	53	.5
Industry	516	5.0
Public/Semi-Public	127	1.2
Utilities	17	.2
Roads	157	1.6
Agriculture	1782	17.2
(Including 500 acres of Cranberry bogs)		
Total in Use	3426	33.2
Vacant	6910	66.8
Total	10336	100.0

The analysis found 2,465 acres with natural features (steep slopes and swamp) restricting development. This left 4,445 acres of vacant potentially developable land. Adding 1,237 acres of potentially developable agricultural land (“that not coincident with swamps”, i.e. cranberry bogs) produced 5,682 acres of potentially developable land.

Assuming .85 one-acre lots per acre (after allowing for roads etc.) this produced saturation (“build out”) potentials of 3,778 to 4,840 new lots. With a relatively high 3.5 persons per unit these produced theoretical maximum populations ranging from 15,516

EXISTING LAND USE



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to 19,236 persons. At the same time the report projected 1975 populations ranging from 3,165 to 4,731, depending on rates of house building.

Goals

The overall recommended Future Land Use Plan reflected a set of goals including:

- Offering desirable home sites without discouraging present agriculture
- Facilitating sufficient commercial development to meet the day-to-day needs of residents
- Reserving an appropriate amount of land for light industry
- Preserving the “Old New England” character of the Town civic-center by preventing further inconsistent development in its immediate area
- Conserving natural water retention areas and by doing so precluding development subject to inundation

Public Facility Findings and Recommendations

Schools - After reviewing population projections and land use/circulation patterns the report recommended adoption of a Neighborhood School policy (intended to meet school/playground needs with minimum busing by having approximately one-mile radius service areas), and early acquisition of four 10-12 acre long-term elementary school/playground sites. These would be on Elm St., Thompson St., Holmes St. and South St.

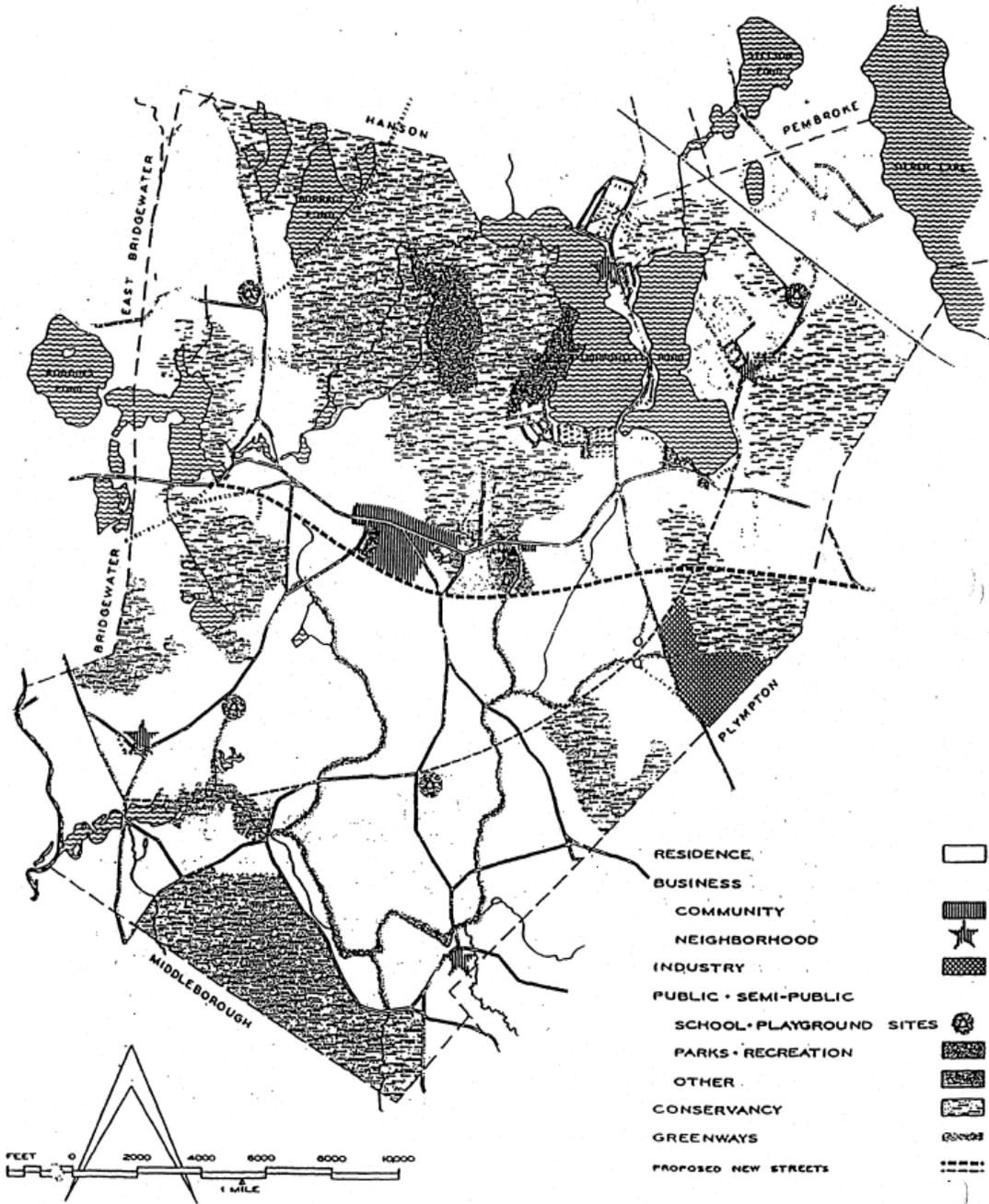
Recreation/Open Space - Finding very limited facilities (5-6 acres), the report recommended:

- Expansion of Richmond Park along East Monponsett Pond
- Acquisition and development of 120 acres at Hemlock Island to a major park and playfield
- Improving the town beach with parking and a picnic area
- Acquiring or protecting 30 acres of 15' to 200' wide greenways connecting various parts of town, generally along water courses, e.g. along the Winnetuxet River from River St. to the Middleboro line.

Civic Center – Noting scattered commercial development along Rte. 106, the report recommended acquisition of nearby vacant land to preclude conflicting commercial development and allow expansion of the Town Hall/School/Library complex, thereby maintaining a non-commercial Civic Center. (An alternative might have been to also focus commercial zoning around the civic center in order to get a balanced, diverse multi-purpose town center).

Circulation – After defining and describing the circulation system and noting its traffic volumes (roughly ¼ to 1/3 of present flows) the report recommended:

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



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Construction of a new limited access of Rte. 106 south of the present alignment in order to improve east-west movement and access to the growing southern part of the town. It would leave the present Rte. 106 near Elm St in the west and rejoin it about 1500' into Plympton .

- Construction of a new SW-NE semi-circumferential route from River St. to Rte. 36 at Plymouth St.
- Improvement of the intersections of Pine/Plymouth Sts. And Holmes/South Sts., and conversion of the South/Fuller Sts. And Wood Rd/River St. intersections from a Y to a T configuration.
- Adopting an Official Map (under MGL 41.S.81), setting out an overall roadway system which would be binding on future subdivision approvals.
- Adopting new Subdivision Rules and Regulations setting higher standards for road construction
- Using the Circulation Plan and Official Map to guide future subdivision approvals and roadway projects.

Sewering – The study reviewed water quality issues, noting the risk of Monponsett Pond pollution given high densities, on-site disposal, and the use of the water by the Silver Lake system. It recommended:

- Relying on one-acre lots to preclude the immediate need for sewerage, while suggesting that future sewerage of some areas could allow half-acre lots and multi-family housing. (Yet the opportunities for higher-density village development might be lost given extensive one-acre development).
- Studying the eventual sewerage of the large portion of the town drained by the Taunton and Winnetuxet Rivers. (Though this would leave the Monponsett area unserved).

Water Supply – The study noted the town's use of the Silver Lake system and projected a possible growth in maximum daily demand from .175 million gallons/day (MGD) to an ultimate 1.5 MGD. It endorsed the then-underway development of the town's own supply at the Richmond Park well and recommended eventually adding other sources.

Recommended Future Land Use Plan

After reviewing the above findings/needs/recommendations, the report discussed the effects of soil types on development considered Halifax's likely long-term role as a residential/agricultural bedroom community, and proposed a plan (see following map) featuring:

- Use of 65% of the available, buildable land (5,120 acres) for housing while encouraging compatible agriculture.
- Use of 100 acres for low-density, freestanding, suburban style, locally oriented commercial development along Rte. 106, largely between Thompson St. and the Civic Center.

- Provision for four scattered neighborhood-serving local shopping centers at Thompson/Walnut Sts., Annawon Dr./Holmes St., Upper Monponsett St. and Fuller/South Sts.
- Use of 130 acres along Monponsett St. near the Plympton town line for light industry.
- Considering long-term industrial use of the former firing range (now Cumberland Farms property) on Wood St., though this site was recommended for initial Conservancy use.
- Preservation of 3,300 acres of swamp, related uplands and the former firing range as Conservancy land. This was to be used for water retention/flood protection, wildlife and scenic values, avoidance of development impact costs, and cranberry growing. It was to be protected by a Conservancy zoning district allowing many institutional and farming uses but excluding housing (a specially permitted use in the current Conservancy District), and by some assisted acquisitions.

Implementation

The Plan was to be implemented by adopting a much-strengthened zoning by law, a set of Subdivision Rules and Regulations, and the Official Map, along with implied town/state/federal funding of land acquisition, roadways and other public improvements. There was not explicit capital budget component.

The proposed zoning bylaw text was very much like the present bylaw except the Conservancy District excluding all housing. The proposed zoning map (following) resembles the present map except that:

- The Conservancy District has been expanded to cover some upland agricultural areas east of Thompson St.
- The Industrial areas have been expanded to include land along the railroad north of Garden St. extensive area north and south of the BFI landfill on the East Bridgewater line, and across Rte. 106 from the landfill, a small area south of Monponsett St. on the Plympton line, and the former firing range.
- The Commercial and Business District has been expanded to allow scattered/strip development along about 64% of Rte. 106 west of Rte. 58; on all quadrants of the Rtes. 106/58 intersection; and at the northern end of Monponsett St.

Results

Housing development has continued in the most buildable areas as anticipated. The only industrially zoned land to be even partially developed is the visually prominent area north of Rte 106 and south of an extensive water resource area. In contrast, much of the Commercial/Business-zoned land has been developed. This is clearly meeting market demand for accessible moderate-cost space, but it is eroding the visual character of Plymouth St. and denying the town the convenience of one diverse commercial center. At the same time, only upper Monponsett St. is zoned for neighborhood shopping, though an apparently grand fathered store exists at Holmes St. and Annawon Dr.

Implications

Some opportunities noted or implied in the 1964 plan still exist to some degree. These include:

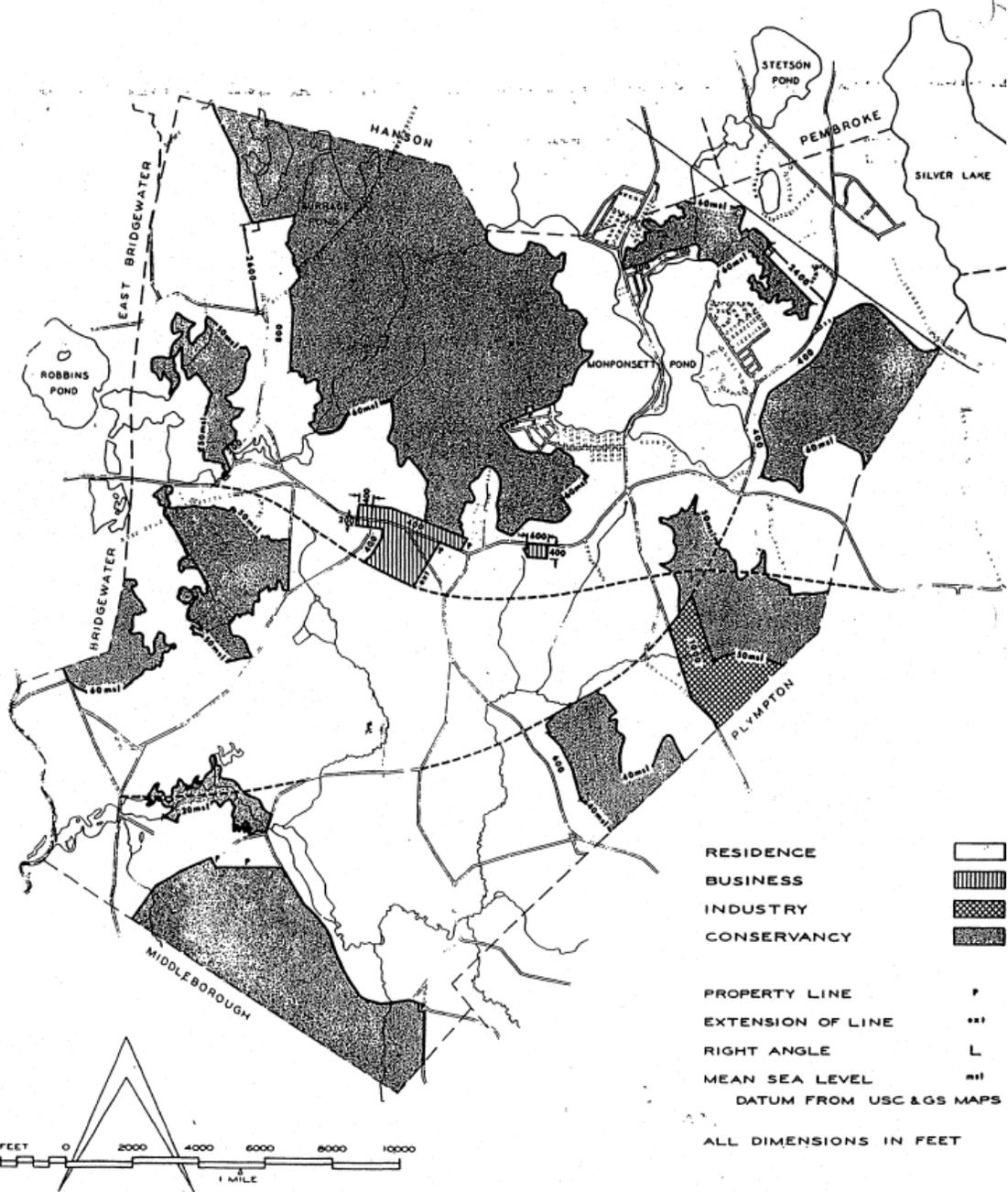
- A Hemlock Island Park – depending on Audubon Society policies.
- A Greenways system
- Carefully selected industrial areas.
- Pockets of higher-density housing in a village setting.
- Development of added water supplies
- Selected sewerage projects.
- The relocated Rte. 106. The need/benefit of this would depend largely on the plans for Rte. 106 in other communities and region's need for improved east-west movement. Local volumes do not appear to require it now or in the near future.
- The proposed circumferential road. As in many communities, improved local circumferential capacity could be useful.
- Remaining opportunities to lessen pollution threats to Monponset Pond and Silver Lake include strengthening of the recently passed water supply protection zoning bylaw and proposals for a package treatment plant serving the Halifax/Hanson Monponsett neighborhood.
- The water supply has been expanded with a YMCA campsite well, and opportunities were explored in the Stump Brook area, but instead a second well will be developed at the Y site.

The relevance of the proposed neighborhood schools will depend on the relation between current school expansion programs and longer term needs.

Other opportunities, such as those for concentrating commercial development, have greatly diminished. Yet there may still be a chance to lessen sprawl and get the maximum benefit from the emerging commercial center at Rtes. 106 and 58.

Suggested Zoning Map

SUGGESTED ZONING



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B. The 1976 Local Growth Policy Statement

The Growth Policy Statement was response to the detailed questionnaire issued by the Dukakis Administration's Office of State Planning implementing the Massachusetts Growth Policy Act under the direction of Frank Keefe. The intent was to give communities an "opportunity to describe the major growth-related problems and opportunities confronting (the) community and to make specific recommendations to address these issues "and to open discussion on these important issues and perhaps ...begin to build consensus around a specific course of actions...."

The Statement was prepared by a broad-based 23-person Local Growth Policy Committee.

Findings

Present Conditions

- The town was evolving away from an agricultural economy to a service economy with harmful effects on natural resources, blue collar job opportunities, and lower cost housing, but with only neutral impacts on town character, and a mixed overall impact.
- Public water supply added in the early 1960a and the town's attractive character had increased residential growth and service demands.
- The previous 10-15 years'moderate commercial growth along Rtes, 106 and 58 had been an asset. "Downtown.doesn't apply", suggesting the lack then of a significant concentration
- There had been no significant industrial growth
- Harmful effects included taxing farm land at residential rates.
- In response to growth, the Town had created zoning allowing low-density housing , protecting conservations land and farm land, allowing apartments only by special permit, zoning large areas for industry, and prohibiting (unlimited ?) strip commercial development .
- There had been little state investment beyond highway maintenance since the water system was financed locally, but sate mandates do not fit local needs, cost money, and weaken home rule.
- Growing interest in conservation was evidenced by creation of a Conservation Commission separate from the Selectmen.

Problems

Sand and Gravel removal
 Landfill
 Agri.-Business
 Drinking Water System purchase
 Multi-family dwellings
 Excess State regulation

Opportunities

Recreation areas
 Town Open Space and
 Waterfront protection
 Connecting local roads
 Transportation Improvements
 Restored Rail service
 Elderly Tax Relief
 Reduced Property taxes

Needed Actions

New bylaws
 New site / methods
 State / Local Regs.
 Financing System
 New bylaws
 More Home rule
 Land Purchase
 Land Purchase

Relation to the Future**Assets**

Central Location
 Good Schools / Library
 Local Shopping
 Lakes and Water
 Town Character
 Recreational Facilities

Liabilities

Lack of Public Transportation
 Freight Trains
 Lack of Light Industry
 Limited Medical Services
 Dependence on Residential Taxation
 Potable Water Supply

- Other assets noted were Halifax's agricultural land and activity, its water resources and its historic buildings
- Expectations (Possible Futures desirable or not)
 - Airport
 - Refinery / Oil Tank farm
 - State Highway extension
 - Regional landfill
 - More regulated residential growth
 - Loss of family farms to high taxes and production costs
 - Town ceasing to be agro-residential
 - Continued corporate acquisition of large tracts of land
- Expected Impacts
 - Traffic growth on Main Roads
 - Increased service demands

Increased water demands
Need for local or regional sewerage
Higher taxes
Flooding from increased runoff
Best impact is from controlled steady growth
Worst impact is from service demands imposed by State and Federal bodies.

- Possible Responses to Excess Rapid Growth
Local control
Rigid enforcement of bylaws and zoning
- Potential Impacts of Possible New Types of Growth
Destruction of the character of the town, lowering of taxes, complete devastation of the town.
- Desired Futures

Controlled growth, strict adherence to local laws protecting the town's character, "Leave us alone" attitude prevails, "The town prefers to decide "What comes to Town," a stable tax base, remaining a pocket of semi-rural serenity.

- Use of regional approaches to promote desired futures

Yes, selectively with elected officials with a county preferences

- Potentially significant outside / regional decisions

Highway construction
Relocation of Ocean Spray from Hanson
Operation of the Silver Lake Water system
Halifax Mobile Home Community affecting other towns
Regional Schools
See selves in a voluntary cooperative region with Pembroke, Kingston, and Plympton (i.e. School District, but w/o Hanson?) but oppose further regional efforts
Would support environmentally safe efforts to inundate the Cumberland Farms operation
Expecting state road and rail investments to attract houses.

- Needed State Efforts
Various support for Agriculture, Yes selectively
Support for experts supporting local boards
Honest support for Home Rule
Support for community efforts when requested, minimal interference.

C. The 1987 Open Space/Bay Circuit Plan

The 1987 Open Space/Bay Circuit Plan was done to plan for open space and recreation land acquisition, particularly to develop projects, which would help to affect the long proposed Bay Circuit regional open space plan. This was originated by Charles W. Eliot II when Director of the Trustees of Reservations in the 1920's.

The study reviewed the town's overall development patterns and the influences on further development presented by soil types, current policies, and market forces. Its findings and conclusions include:

Background Data and Concerns

- The need to protect the town's fields from development, and its forests from both development and clearance for agriculture.
- The loss of much of the northern portion of the Greater Cedar Swamp to land clearing for cranberry growing.
- The presence of Species of Special Concern to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program, the Plymouth Gentian and the Spotted Turtle, in the Winnetuxet River floodplain.
- The extensive water bodies covering at least 10% of the town's surface and offering water resources, wildlife habitat and many opportunities for linked open space holdings.
- The particular value of the Taunton and Winnetuxet Rivers.
- The anticipated growth in the southern portion of the town due to development of the northern section's course soils and the limitations of its extensive wetlands and bogs.
- The mixture of rural and growing suburban character along Plymouth St. (Rte. 106).
- The existence of 2,374 acres of agricultural land protected by Ch. 61a present use assessment 1,500 acres of which were owned by one firm, the United Cape Cod Cranberries Company.
- The absence of any farmland protected under the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) development rights acquisition program.
- The town's significant housing growth, an 89% increase from 1970 to 1980.
- The need to protect existing and prospective wells.

Goals

The study then proposed goals to guide development of a statement of needs and recommendations. These were to:

- Protect present and potential water supplied and recharge areas.
- Preserve valuable land areas by acquisition and regulation.
- Preserve, protect and promote the historical and scenic character of the town.
- Protect and preserve all surface waters in Halifax.

- Encourage and develop citizen participation in order to promote conservation and recreation.
- Propose measures to reduce air, noise and water pollution.
- Develop/promote open space linkages with surrounding communities.
- Encourage recreational opportunities for all citizens.

Open Space, Recreation and Related Water Supply Protection Needs

After reviewing the town's limited publicly held open space and recreation facilities, the study drew on a resident survey and on nationally recommended standards to identify the following needs and opportunities:

- Acquisition of the YMCA Camp land on East Monponsett Pond for water supply, open space and recreation purposes.
- Protection of water supplies by water supply protection zoning and/or land acquisition.
- Protection of scenic and ecological resources.
- Addition of trails, soccer and softball fields, 4 tennis courts, multi-purpose courts and indoor recreation spaces.
- Development of linkages to adjacent communities by land and/or water, especially along the Wampanoag Canoe Passage, and increased access to the passage.

Recommendations Included:

- Definition of the recharge areas for the Richmond Park Well. (Since done)
- Continuation of the Open Space Plan Committee to pursue the Plan's recommendations.
- Designation of the Great Swamp in the northern park of Halifax as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. (Proposed as part of a "Monponsett Corridor" ACEA, but not implemented).
- Establishment of a local historic district to protect the Town Hall area
- Encourage use of the APR (development rights acquisition) Program.
- Mapping all of the town's wetlands.
- Passing a local wetlands protection bylaw. (Since done)
- Seeking restriction of certain wetlands under the state's Wetlands Restriction Program (MGL 131, S.40a).
- Increasing limitations on development in the 100-year flood plain.
- Acquiring land for public access along major streams.
- Establishing mandatory referrals of sensitive projects to all town boards (Done through Site Plan Review).
- Developing a site plan review process for areas such as Rte. 106 (Done town wide)
- Provision of a dirt bike riding area

- Reserving land for recreation facilities in the southern part of town, particularly through the Subdivision Control Law; seeking to work with developers early in the process to avoid wasteful roadway construction and acquire land at a “Wholesale” rate.
- Developing an exercise loop or other facilities/programs for older citizens.

These concerns and recommendations were incorporated in the following required Five Year Action Program.

Year One

1. Appropriate money to study potential well sites
2. Acquire the YMCA property with any available assistance or by town funds alone if necessary.
3. Seek easements, especially for access to the Wampanoag Canoe Passage.
4. Develop the above-mentioned mandatory referral system for major projects and a site plan review process.
5. Continue Open Space planning efforts, work with the new interagency Halifax Planning Council and seek SCS soils maps for town reference.

Year Two

1. Seek funds for wetlands mapping
2. Plan for historic preservation
3. Appropriate funds for tennis courts and seek Federal assistance.
4. Seek town funds for open space/recreation maintenance and development
5. Adopt water supply protection zoning (the Plan included a draft) and a local wetlands bylaw.
6. Encourage/assist farmers to use the APR program.

Year Three

1. Develop and mark a town-wide trail system
2. Acquire high priority multi-purpose lands
3. Seek to establish 100 foot no development setbacks along major streams.
4. Include water quality issues in special permit review criteria.
5. Establish a Town Hall Historic District.

Year Four

1. Begin to develop a Town Master Plan.
2. Develop a multi-recreation court facility.
3. Begin requiring developers to provide open space (actually to reserve it for purchase) under the Subdivision Control Law, Ch. 41, S 81-U.
4. Hire a full time recreation director.

Year Five

1. Examine progress under this plan and begin its updating.
2. Develop handicapped access to all town-owned facilities and recreation sites.

D. The 1998 Draft Open Space Plan

The draft 1998 plan built on the background and concerns of the 1987 Plan updated to reflect recent development refined and updated with the help of an extensive citizen survey.

Goals/Objectives

1. Preserve valuable land areas through acquisition and regulation
 - A. Identify, protect and purchase land next to sensitive eco-systems
 - B. Identify / protect parcels near existing protected open space to create more diverse holdings
 - C. Identify / protect parcels improving public access and serving wildlife corridors
 - D. Pursue new bylaws enhancing open space in newly developed neighborhoods
2. Meet overlapping pond neighborhood needs for conservation, access, recreation, and septic regulation compliance
 - A. Find / purchase land in dense lake neighborhoods for clustered septic treatment and recreation use.
 - B. Increase public access to Monponsett Pond .
 - C. Establish lake-side trails
3. Develop / promote open space linkages with surrounding communities
 - A. Work with the Bay Circuit Alliance, and with East Bridgewater, Hanson, Plympton,
 - B. Kingston, and Bridgewater, to complete the Trail
4. Expand Recreation Opportunities for Halifax Residents
 - A. Explore opportunities to broaden recreation on existing town land
 - B. Increase handicapped access for all
 - C. Explore opportunities to expand facilities to larger, more accessible sites
5. Clarify responsibilities of Conservation Commission, Park Commission, Youth and Recreation Commission and Highway Dept. for acquiring a/o operating town-owned land a/o programs

Summary Five Year Action Program – Major Elements

1998-99

1. Begin appropriating \$100,000 / year to Conservation Acquisition Account
2. Acquire land along Stump Brook Flood
3. Begin writing Cluster Zoning Bylaw and related guidelines.
4. Discuss protection strategies with land owners
5. Begin identifying and acquiring lots with potential for shared septic disposal areas open space use in dense lakeside neighborhoods
6. Work regularly with Bay Circuit Alliance on Trail completion .
7. Work with South Halifax land owners on east-west corridor for people and wildlife.
8. Begin building a wheels park at Central School as per 1998 Town Meeting

9. Add two Pieces of equipment (one handicapped accessible at HOPS playground)
10. Design recreation fields for potential Stump Brook open space site
11. Begin defining roles of all open space / recreation related bodies

1999-2000

1. Seek land at end of Lake St. for Stetson Brook Mouth parks / conservation area tying into a reported trail along NE edge of the East Monponsett Pond for acquisition in 2000-2001
2. Seek public access along to private land on NE East Monponset Pond Trail, and establish a trail maintenance group
3. Meet with adjacent towns and all other parties to implement Bay Circuit Trail, particularly a segment through Halifax.
4. Design lighting at Elemenary school and court complex
5. Begin ADA work
6. Create neighborhood Open Space Associations to oversee local holdings

2000-2001

1. Follow through on tasks begun above
2. Develop a trail for all users on West Monponsett Pond at YMCA Camp well site.
3. Acquire rights of way for proposed So. Halifax East – West Trails
4. Complete Stump Brook Park and recreation area
5. Improve play sites in dense neighborhoods

2001-2002

1. Explore protection of land south of School holdings through Conservation Commission
2. Continue buying small multi-purpose sites in dense neighborhoods
3. Prepare brochure on Halifax portion of Bay Circuit Trail
4. Develop a dock at YMCA Camp land
5. Continue improving play areas

2002-2003

1. Prepare to update this plan
2. Continue developing trails and water access for the handicapped at the YMCA camp land
3. Begin a sailing program at YMCA camp land

Implications

While some of the items proposed, such as acquisition of the YMCA land, development of an additional well, establishment of a site plan review process, and adoption of a Water Supply Protection zoning bylaw have been accomplished, many others are still in process or yet to be begun. One item in process is the effort to acquire streamside open space linkages. Another major proposal dating from the 1964 plan, acquisition and development of Hemlock Island, has occurred through its donation by the United Cape Cod Cranberry Company to the Audubon Society. However, the land is managed for very limited public use. A much greater accomplishment is the recent acquisition of the extensive Northland Cranberry Bogs in Halifax and Hanson.

The main lesson and implication of the 1987 Open Space Plan is the need for continuing planning and for imaginative, persistent pursuit of implementation opportunities. In particular it is important to look for opportunities to use open space to shape development, to provide open space near major developments, and to do open space planning as part of the master planning process. It should be done with an overall vision in anticipation of development, and then be implemented in cooperation with all actors including developers and major landowners.

As noted earlier, Halifax's remaining extensive open space areas and its increasing awareness of development pressures give the town great needs and opportunities to control its future development and character. Technical changes such as the increased regulatory acceptance of private sewage treatment plants will make many marginal areas developable. Hence it is all the more important to have clear land use preferences and policies.

In all, the implication of both the 1964 Master Plan and the 1987 Open Space Plan is that Halifax's extensive open lands leave it subject to far more change than has yet occurred. The resulting alternatives require a current stocktaking and close study with informed, active citizen participation.

