

Master Plan Update Committee Provides Details Behind Article 2

By Paul Currier
Master Plan Update Committee

Andover's growth control ordinance, the wall that has protected us from the wave of development washing over neighboring towns, expires in March 2007. Then Andover will be subject to the same pressure and the same resulting impact on our community life and our tax rate.

We can protect ourselves only with a well-thought-out zoning ordinance. The ordinance we have now was adopted in 1974 and plainly needs changes. But to be as good as it can be and to withstand legal challenge, that ordinance must be based on a good, up-to-date Master Plan. A broad-based community group, the Master Plan Update Committee, is working on that now. Additional volunteers are welcomed.

To build a good plan we need good tools, and Article 2 of this year's warrant requests the funds to buy those tools. What are those tools?

Good Digital Maps

Maps that accurately depict current conditions are the basis for future planning. Having a clear picture of where existing dwellings, commercial buildings, property lines, roads, bodies of water, topographical features, soil types, zoning districts, flood prone areas, and other characteristics are located is the only way that planning can move forward efficiently. From these maps we can project our future land development pattern based on our present ordinances and regulations and on proposed changes.

For example, most lots in town must be at least two acres and have at least 250 feet of road frontage. Do we save more natural space if we allow cluster housing? What happens if we rezone our forest areas for 10-acre or 25-acre minimum lot sizes, as some now suggest? Digital mapping using a geographic information system (GIS) database will let the Committee make maps to visualize the answers to questions like these.

The first step is to replace our existing tax maps with new, digital GIS maps. Terra-Map of Lebanon will do this for a one-time cost of \$13,525. New GIS maps will be valuable not just in town planning but in property assessment and the administration of town ordinances and regulations.

The next step is to make maps of all the limitations to development – slopes, wetlands, ridge lines, protected lands, valuable natural resources, and so on. Once this information is added to the GIS database, we can generate maps depicting any combination of the features described above, and thus have a comprehensive view of how parcels and existing development fit on the landscape. We will then map the maximum development density and patterns under existing zoning and under possible revised zoning.

The work for this phase will be done by the Lakes Region Planning Com-

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mission, with input on natural resources from the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests. This work will cost \$6,900. Because this information will be stored in the GIS database, the Planning Board can, at any time in the future, prepare maps that show actual development vs. current projections to better prepare future Master Plan revisions, as well as for future zoning changes.

A Good Survey

To be sure that the new plan accurately reflects what Andover's people really want, we need professional help in creating and administering surveys of community opinion. It's easy to ask a biased question, even without meaning to. "Do you think dogs are good pets?" Most of us do. But ask, "What pet would you personally prefer?" and you'll get a much wider array of answers, ones that don't necessarily favor dogs.

We need to ask some tough questions. "Do you favor more business and light industrial development? If so, where in town should be zoned for it?" We need the help of the professionals from the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service to be sure we ask the right questions and ask them correctly. Their help is priced at \$1,000.

The Total Bill

The total comes to \$21,425, or about \$8.54 on the tax bill for a \$100,000 property, most of which a positive vote on Article 2 will provide.

Sound like a lot? Nope. Andover is going to grow. You can bet on it. How we grow and how fast depends very much on the land use planning process, and the foundation of this process is the Master Plan.

We need to create defensible rules that will enable sensible development and let us keep our small town character, and our property tax costs, especially our school costs, under control.

The Budget Committee could not recommend Article 2 since the figures were not finalized by its last meeting. Now they are, and it only makes sense to do the best job we can. For that we need your help.

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Board Of Selectmen Sees Savings In Mapping Provisions Of Article 2

By the Board of Selectmen

Andover's Planning Board and Master Plan Update Committee have requested 2005 budget funds for more accurate mapping, a request the Board of Selectmen strongly supports. Indeed, if the planners had not asked for these funds, about \$13,525 for the relevant mapping, the Selectmen would have included them in our budget. And while the formal budget process deadlines have passed, we are making sure that the Budget Committee, our spending watchdog, gets all of these numbers well before Town Meeting.

We have been able to improve Town Hall's services and reduce overall costs by using appropriate technology as it develops. Global Information Systems (GIS) technology will improve both property assessment and the administration of Town ordinances and regulations by making both considerably more accurate. Town Hall will be able

easily to include professional surveys in our tax maps, which were originally founded on a private company's reading of deeds to Andover land. And by being able to see immediately and precisely how characteristics of land such as slope and wetlands intersect with property lines and zoning boundaries, questions ranging from the cost-effective laying out of new roads to proposed locating of structures close to flood zone areas to possible increases in Town services and cost estimates will be far more reliable than having to proceed through estimates of varying accuracy.

Having this ability means better local government sooner. It also means being able to use such data for planning purposes as well as town administration, a cost savings for which we can be grateful. Accordingly we urge your support at Town Meeting of Article 2 in this year's warrant.

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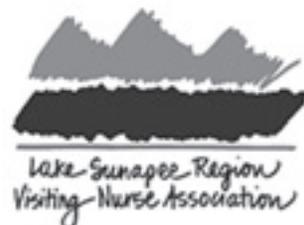
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