

# Some History Of Planning And Zoning In Andover

By Laura Condon

Talk about a change in viewscapes, did you hear of the request for a building permit to erect a large apartment house complex and a sea of mobile homes along Route 11? How about the 35-house development at the corner of Emery and Dyers Crossing Roads? No more brook, no more pond, no more lush green field next to one of the two remaining working farms in Andover.

Seems out-of-state developers see dollar signs in these projects with little care as to how it will affect the town character. It appears that the rural landscape of Andover will be changed forever to some sort of city extension. How could this happen here in Andover?

Well, the good news is that it never did happen. The time was 1971, and these were the proposals on the table.

There was quite the development boom taking place in the early 1970s, and

smart towns worked hard to develop master plans and zoning ordinances to govern and protect such lovely communities. In Andover, community-minded citizens stepped forward, volunteered their time and rolled up their sleeves to work to protect the rural character that has always been so wonderful about Andover.

The first step was to contact the citizens and have their voices heard. Surveys were hand-delivered to every home in town and the response rate was an astonishing 71%. Of those responding, 63.7% agreed there should be some sort of protective zoning.

There was extensive review of what other towns were doing to protect their communities, and the New Hampshire Office of Planning was also a resource. Certainly Andover wanted to adopt the best practices.

Experts Theodore Kelsey of Durham, a member of the US Department

of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service, and Arthur Luce of the Merrimack County Soil Conservation Service addressed growth control factors. Large maps of the town showing soil conditions, topography, and suitability for septic systems were developed. Indeed it is soil conditions and topography that are controlling factors in determining appropriate development.

On October 2, 1973 the first Andover Master Plan was adopted. It was a plan two years in the making, involving over 50% of the townspeople in one way or another, 42 meetings of the Planning Board, 14 meetings of the Citizens Committee and eight informal public meetings of the townspeople.

At the same time it was necessary to develop a second set of guidelines for development of Andover, and that would be the zoning ordinances. Whereas a master plan is the big picture, the zoning ordinances provide the detail.

Again, much hard work went into that project, and as required by law, public hearings were held. Based on the feedback from the citizens, 26 changes were made, including:

- The original draft called for 15-acre lots in the FR districts, and that was cut to eight acres.
- The AR district lot size proposal was cut from five to four acres.
- A fourth village district was proposed for West Andover.

- Regulations for sand, gravel, and fill removal were dropped

Finally, the ordinances would be ready for vote at Town Meeting in March 1974. As with a democracy, the will of the people was heard. The ordinances were deemed too restrictive, and it was back to the drawing board for more revisions. The significant changes were again to lot size and road frontage requirements, allowing for one- to two-acre lots, depending on zone. It was at a special meeting of the town in June 1974 that the ordinance was adopted.

Changes to the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinances are permitted, and some changes have been made over the years to further guide and govern, including performance standards for commercial uses, personal wireless service facilities, temporary residential growth limitation, and floodplain development.

It is wise to continue to review these governing documents and update as appropriate and necessary. But it is the sweat and toil from the original participants in this process that laid the framework that has protected Andover for some 34 years so that it remains the picturesque community it still is today. Thank you, Gail Smith, Dorothy Eichell, Frederick Condon, Winslow Eaves, Wayne Headley, Stuart Humphrey, Jim Humphrey, Bob Ward, and those townspeople willing to participate and have their voices heard.

## Is Affordable Housing Really The Problem?

By Laura Condon

There is no doubt that the cost of housing has become more expensive for us all, as have other necessities such as food, clothing, gas, and cars. I remain unconvinced however, that the Andover Zoning Ordinance is to blame for such rising costs or that no more than one family is allowed per lot. In fact a review of the Zoning Ordinance shows that permitted uses in the Village district include two-family dwellings and apartments constructed by interior alterations to an existing building.

Indeed state legislation passed this year dictates that municipalities must provide a reasonable opportunity for workforce housing development to occur should such development proposals be presented for consideration. None of this legislation requires that there be a provision in the zoning ordinance requiring affordable housing, rather that it shall not be prohibited.

Workforce housing is defined as addressing the housing needs of those people whose income is generally below 120% of the area median income. It may include, but is not limited to, subsidized and affordable housing. Most importantly it should be sited near employment, as long commutes often make such housing prohibitive.

It is a misguided notion that the cost of housing for younger people has shifted the balance of the population from younger residents, to older residents. Housing costs really have nothing to do with this change. As Brian Gottlob of PolEcon Research has shown, aging is a permanent, irreversible consequence of low average family size and longer life expectancies in developed societies. Our whole nation is aging.

One critical factor in the age change in New Hampshire is that our state has the lowest fertility rate of any state in the nation. More than anything else this fact accounts for the increasing median age in New Hampshire. Where there is misinterpretation of the causes of an aging population, municipalities could institute changes that might not only be ineffective but actually detrimental.

### Strip Development

Strip development is the construction of commercial establishments one after the other along a roadway. This is often an unsightly method of development as businesses gobble up property most visible to the passers-through, paving parking lots clear to the street, and erecting unsightly signs.

Fortunately Andover has not yet been subjected to such development. Other municipalities have suffered the effects of such strip development and have instituted zoning changes to address the matter.

Ross Moldoff has done a nice review of four case studies in controlling strip development in his research for the 1998 National Planning Conference. He has reviewed the commercial growth and zoning ordinances of Salem, New Hampshire; Bedford, New Hampshire; Natick, Massachusetts; and Stowe, Vermont and the changes implemented to prevent further strip development. It seems that the best idea is to create retail clusters around major intersections and allow some transitional uses like professional offices along the rest of the road. Limiting both the depth and length of retail zones is crucial to preventing strip development.

Andover is a lovely community and I urge all the residents to become involved and support the efforts of the Master Plan Update Committee in developing appropriate changes in a positive and pro-active fashion.



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