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TOWN OF BARRINGTON



# Vision and Community Character

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# FOREWORD

A municipal master plan is a unique document in New Hampshire. A master plan is not a legal document, and it is not required under the law; however, its purpose is to set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development, to aid the planning board in designing ordinances, and to guide the board in the performance of its other duties. According to New Hampshire state law, a master plan must include, at a minimum, two mandatory sections; a Vision chapter, which should direct all chapters of the plan, and a Land Use chapter. Developing an overall vision statement provides the inspiration needed to make necessary strategic planning decisions and achieve future success.

## A Vision Section...

"...serves to direct the other sections of the plan. This section shall contain a set of statements which articulate the desires of the citizens affected by the master plan, not only for their locality but for the region and the whole state. It shall contain a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision."

Source: RSA 674:2-II (a)

Even though a master plan in New Hampshire, unlike many other states, cannot be directly used to manage a community's growth and development, it does provide the underpinning for municipal land use regulations. Consequently a master plan needs to be periodically revised and updated, especially in rapidly growing communities.

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# INTRODUCTION

It has been roughly thirteen years since Barrington evaluated its community vision and future direction as part of the Town's master planning process. The 2004 Strategic Master Plan, which was the last in a series of updates over the past two decades (1989, 1995, 2002), was intended to serve as a guide to build upon the community's qualities and values, while continuing to create opportunities for securing a vital, healthy future for current and future residents. During these periodic updates, the plan has been a successful tool used to advocate for various community goals, including: maintaining Barrington's rural character and promoting a high quality community living environment for its residents; providing major services such as schools, fire, police, and public works at a moderate cost; encouraging the development of a town center and enhancing the town's recreational facilities; and balancing the need for economic development and growth in order to stabilize the town's tax rate while preserving and protecting the town's most important natural resources.

In 2016, the Barrington Planning Board, with support from the Strafford Regional Planning Commission, initiated a process to build upon the Community Profile event (2014), which was completed with UNH Cooperative Extension, to engage residents in envisioning Barrington's future. Results from that 2014 event were used to gain a better understanding of residents' near and long term views of the community. It also provided the Planning Board with ideas for addressing current and future challenges and promoting the community's strengths, resources, and assets. Relevant goals and recommendations established during the development of the previous 2004 plan, supplemented with specific feedback derived from the Town's visioning exercises, were used to generate a broad, updated community vision.

In this sequence of master plans, one plan does not end where the next one begins, but instead builds on the foundation laid by previous planning and implementation efforts. This is especially true for this 2017 Master Plan, which is regarded as an update, rather than a replacement, of previous master plans. From a holistic standpoint much of the underlying information presented in the 1989 Master Plan, and subsequent updates in 1995, 2002, and 2004 are still considered to be applicable.

This vision chapter is broken out into four primary areas. The first section briefly outlines the strategic visioning process, and how public input was obtained throughout the planning process to assist in the development of this chapter. The second section is the town's master plan vision statement. The third section outlines the five identified planning themes that were used as a framework to develop the town's vision statement and as a guideline representing town interests. Lastly, the fourth section presents a series of metrics that have been developed by the Planning Board and Strafford Regional Planning Commission in association with the public discussion that occurred as part of this visioning effort. These measures will help to guide and track the success of the community's actions over the coming years.



Stonehouse Pond (Credit: John Wallace)

## Did you know?

Communities are required to have a master plan in effect in order to exercise several basic land use controls, including adopting a zoning ordinance or historic district.

# STRATEGIC VISIONING PROCESS

The Barrington Steering Committee was formed in October 2013; it consisted of 15 community members who were charged with creating a portrait of the long-term desires and interests of the community. In order to accomplish this task, the Barrington Steering Committee, in partnership with UNH Cooperative Extension, held a Community Profile event on April 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The two-day event gave the 165 participating residents an opportunity to discuss eleven components of a strong community as drawn from the National Civic League and adapted by UNH Cooperative Extension. The Community Profile results helped municipal staff understand how residents saw the town in its current condition, and what it could look like in the future.

## Community Profile

The Community Profile is a process by which communities take stock of where they are today and develop an action plan for how they want to operate in the future. The process provides a method for citizens to affirm community strengths, find collaborative approaches to meet challenges creatively, and manage change. One of the major outcomes of the Community Profile is increased citizen participation in the community.

Source: UNH Cooperative Extension

In 2016, the Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) was hired to update the existing vision statement and associated chapter for the Master Plan. The summarized Community Profile report was provided to SRPC staff and five planning themes were identified as important focus areas that would serve as the framework for the vision chapter. Using public input from the Community Profile report, SRPC developed a vision statement for each planning theme in order to help inform the overall chapter. Due to the lapse in time since the 2014 Community Profile event, the Planning Board decided to host a workshop to review the vision statements developed by SRPC to ensure that priorities had not dramatically changed or shifted.



Sense of community



Natural Resources & Recreation



Agriculture & Energy



Growth & Development



Transportation

The Barrington vision chapter discussion was held on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017 with nearly 30 people in attendance. To kick-off the workshop SRPC, in partnership with the Barrington Planning Board and staff from UNH Cooperative Extension, gave a brief presentation on the Master Plan update schedule, provided local existing condition data, and reviewed what residents had previously said about the five planning themes. The remaining time was spent in small groups, where facilitated discussions addressed three questions about each of the five planning theme vision statements.

1. What are the most important concepts within each statement?
2. Are there changes in your priorities since the 2014 visioning event?
3. What are we missing? How can we improve this statement?

Barrington Visioning Event, February 2017 (Credit: SRPC)



## Did you know?

Over 160 residents attended the two-day Community Profile in 2014, and nearly 30 people attended the Barrington Visioning event in 2017.



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# MASTER PLAN VISION

The following statements are constructed in a way that is intended to present the Town's 2027 vision as realized.

*In 2027, Barrington continues to maintain its rural character, scenic beauty, and quintessential small-town traditions that promote its high quality of life. An agreed upon design concept for a well-planned village center showcases safe pedestrian access, a new library/community center, and offers a diversity of local businesses. Capital investments for infrastructure improvements to the village center are underway to attract environmentally friendly and clean industry businesses that provide a stable tax base, as well as create local job opportunities. Public transportation options, the creation of sidewalks, and a connected network of trails and paths that safely separate pedestrians and bicyclists from vehicle traffic, all enhance pedestrian safety and encourage alternative modes of transportation. A community-centered town park provides a large natural area for recreational enjoyment for families and community members to gather and socialize.*

*The town balances economic growth needs with land protection by guiding new development along existing commercial corridors and away from environmentally sensitive areas. Barrington offers a mix of attractive, affordable, and energy efficient housing options that are consistent with the town's community character and meet the needs of all ages. Preventative health and wellness care, and social services allow for residents to age in place and remain in Barrington.*

*Protection, stewardship, and management of the town's natural resources remain a high priority resulting in important land conservation efforts that offer ecological benefits to wildlife, improve water quality, and provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. A well-designed system of interconnected trails and paths allows for non-car options and accessibility to reach services, provides for an active and healthy lifestyle, and encourages outdoor activities such as walking, cross-country skiing, and biking.*

*A strong town energy policy encourages an efficient and sustainable energy system that helps to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels through alternative sources, in particular, solar. Many of the new municipal buildings are energy efficient and the town continues to provide educational and outreach materials to residents on air and water quality issues, the benefits of renewable energy, and homeowner sustainability practices. Barrington supports a wide range of local, organic foods and small scale farm-to-table initiatives, including agricultural cooperatives and community markets to improve healthy eating and to help bolster the local economy.*

*A strong sense of belonging is maintained by open and transparent communication between the town and its residents through an improved website and local newsletter. Civic engagement, volunteerism, and participation in town-wide issues are encouraged and help to create a welcoming and caring atmosphere. Barrington supports a strong school system with excellent education services for children and fosters a well-educated public.*

# BARRINGTON'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Based on the feedback that was collected throughout this visioning process, the Planning Board developed a series of vision statements for each of the five key planning areas that influence quality of life. These statements provide the framework for the overall vision of what Barrington will look like in 2027 and serve as a guideline that represents a variety of town interests.

## SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Barrington continues to maintain its rural character and its scenic beauty by providing recreational opportunities, and supporting small town traditions that promote a sense of belonging. The town enjoys a walkable town center that contains mixed-use development with two or more land uses, as well as being home to a number of municipal facilities, including a library and/or community center that offers meeting spaces for public use. People can walk from their homes to their jobs and to outlets that provide basic needs including groceries, pharmacies, town services, recreation, entertainment, training, and childcare, all within the town center. People passing through the primary corridors of Barrington notice the signage, buildings, and landscape portray a distinctive style distinguishing Barrington from other towns while also adding value and cache. Residents are proud of Barrington and enjoy living here.

Looking for Christopher Robin (Credit: John Wallace)



Residents display high levels of volunteerism and are connected with municipal officials and community leaders through active civic engagement. Participation in town-wide issues is encouraged and communicated through the use of an interactive website, social media, and a local newsletter. A strong school system, support for local teachers, and excellent educational services fosters a well-educated public and attracts younger families. Barrington is committed to life-long education through peer learning opportunities and programs for all ages. Adequate housing options, preventative health and wellness care, and social services allows for aging in place.

Goodwill Conservation Area (Credit: John Wallace)



## NATURAL RESOURCES & RECREATION

Barrington continues to place a high priority on the protection, stewardship, and management of its natural resources and the important ecosystems they maintain. The town has improved their environmental protection regulations by supporting buffer zones around wetlands, waterways, and other riparian areas. Ongoing land protection efforts have reduced the amount of land that could be developed. These practices have led to abundant conservation land and open space that offers ecological benefits to wildlife, improvements to water quality and flood storage, as well as recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. A well designed system of interconnected trails creates areas for picnicking and fishing, as well as promotes an active and healthy lifestyle by encouraging biking or walking the border of a river, pond or lake. A centrally located town park is recognized as an important asset that provides environmental, aesthetic, economic, and recreational benefits for the community.

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## AGRICULTURE AND ENERGY

Through the expansion of its agricultural activities, Barrington supports a wide range of local foods and farm-to-table initiatives including agricultural cooperatives and farmers markets. The town encourages sustainable local food enterprises that produce organic and nutritious food, conserves resources, and supports the local economy. Community gardens and greenhouses build stronger connections with residents and local food distributors by stimulating social interaction, encouraging self-reliance, and

creating an opportunity for healthy lifestyles. Barrington's strong energy policy promotes the creation of efficient and sustainable energy systems that reduce the reliance on fossil fuels through alternative sources. Town residents, governmental entities, farms, and commercial businesses can easily access reliable electrical power that is generated through the integration of solar panels with other major power sources. Barrington has a thriving greenhouse industry that was made possible through the ability to obtain heating and lighting power from solar energy.



Solar energy projects (Credit: ReVision Energy)

## GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Barrington offers a mix of attractive and affordable housing options for all ages. Available owner and renter-occupied housing choices provide flexible alternatives as housing preferences and population demographics shift. The Town balances economic growth needs with land protection by guiding development along existing commercial corridors and away from environmentally sensitive areas. Barrington has avoided strip commercial development and instead enjoys commercial parks that share parking. Barrington ensures that development is compatible with its community character by maintaining aesthetics through a regulatory review process and enforcing local architectural design standards.



TURBOCAM (Credit: TURBOCAM International)

A well-planned village center provides safe pedestrian access and offers a diversity of local businesses, shops, and restaurants. Capital investments for infrastructure improvements attract environmentally friendly and clean industry businesses that provide a stable tax base and create job opportunities. Barrington's commercial core has expanded and diversified tax revenues, which no longer have to rely as heavily on residential property to support local government and the school system. The town generates operating revenues more equally from both residential and commercial sources now that commercially zoned properties are developed and active and the town center exists and is thriving. Barrington has infrastructure in the form of solar power, industrial/commercial wells, high-speed internet connectivity, and pipelines that connect the town center and appropriate commercial zoning areas to regional wastewater treatment plants.

## TRANSPORTATION

Barrington boasts a comprehensive, multi-modal system that provides a variety of transportation options. This system includes safe bike paths, walkways, and public transportation services. Off-road paths for pedestrians and bicyclists reduce sight issues and avoid oncoming traffic in areas where there are dips and turns. Where possible, pedestrian and bicycle traffic are separated from vehicle traffic. Safety improvements in the downtown include sidewalks or paths, signage, and crosswalks that increase pedestrian accessibility. More efficient management of road space reduces traffic congestion at busy intersections, parking challenges and crashes. Public transportation and demand-response services provide access to surrounding regional job centers, medical facilities, and shopping opportunities. Coordination between local and state agencies improves the operation and maintenance of roadways throughout town.

# BENCHMARKS FOR SUCCESS

This series of benchmarks have been developed by the Planning Board and the Town’s Planning Department, in association with the public discussion that occurred as part of this effort. These measures will help to guide and track the success of the community’s actions over the coming years, and will be further developed in subsequent chapters.

Table 1: Strategic Actions to Guide and Measure Success

Planning Theme	Goal	Benchmark for Success
Sense of Community	Improve the existing town-wide communication with residents to encourage increased participation and volunteerism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Update website to include more interactive features</li> <li>∴ Increase presence on social media (Facebook)</li> </ul>
	Improve and/or make updates to important municipal facilities and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Conduct an analysis to determine the most suitable locations and economic feasibility of constructing a library/community center</li> <li>∴ Create space for cultural events and town gatherings</li> </ul>
	Create space for cultural events and town gatherings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Identify land owned by the town, state, or a non-profit, where local organizations can host events; inventory should include indoor and outdoor spaces.</li> <li>∴ Seek input from private land owners willing to rent or make space available for local organizations and events.</li> <li>∴ Partner with business groups and event coordinators to develop a comprehensive list of public events sponsored by local organizations. Seek a partner, like the Chamber of Commerce, to maintain the list with event description, dates, and location(s).</li> </ul>
Recreation & Open Space	Increase and improve trail access to open space areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Develop resident identification stickers for cars that allow them to find parking near access points, where applicable</li> <li>∴ Work with UNH to improve access to Mendums Pond recreational center</li> <li>∴ Conduct an analysis to determine the most suitable locations and economic feasibility for new park land and public beach</li> <li>∴ Improve existing recreational facilities</li> <li>∴ Connect trails to improve accessibility</li> <li>∴ Work with the Conservation Commission Trails Sub-Committee to maintain and promote local trails.</li> <li>∴ Develop new trails to connect existing greenspaces; two new trails in five years is the goal.</li> <li>∴ Develop an outreach plan to approach local landowners who may grant easement access over their land for new trail connections. Examine properties in Current Use with Recreation designation for opportunities to partner in trail making. Develop a template indemnification document with town counsel, if necessary. Develop a template indemnification document with town counsel, if necessary.</li> <li>∴ Develop a Trail &amp; Open Space Plan; integrate the Conservation Commission’s Easements inventory.</li> <li>∴ Conduct neighborhood outreach meetings to identify and evaluate potential beach locations and access for town residents. Coordinate access point(s) with existing or proposed trails, and evaluate options for vehicle drop-off if an area for parking is unavailable.</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Strategic Actions to Guide and Measure Success**

Planning Theme	Goal	Benchmark for Success
	Continue to protect all of the town's natural resources and preserve rural character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Ensure existing regulatory measures are up-to-date and incorporate best management practices and performance standards</li> <li>∴ Establish wildlife corridors (and possibly trail links) between conserved lands</li> <li>∴ Provide education and outreach to encourage landowners to put properties into conservation</li> <li>∴ Develop guidelines for recreational uses and methods of enforcement to ensure there are no negative impacts to these areas</li> <li>∴ Research whether or not any endangered species protection is needed</li> <li>∴ Increase and improve trail access to open space areas</li> <li>∴ Inventory and rank the prime areas for wildlife habitat, forests, wetlands, and soils.</li> <li>∴ Identify the developable land in and around the prime resource areas and compare it to wildlife corridors, existing conservation lands, and transportation corridors, like scenic roads. Identify opportunities for connections and contiguous lands.</li> <li>∴ Integrate these evaluations into the Trail &amp; Open Space master plan chapter and share the information with our local land use boards and town departments.</li> </ul>
	Improve education and awareness programs on the importance of natural resource protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Work with Recreation Department to identify ways to improve both active and passive recreational programming</li> <li>∴ Integrate activities with school programs</li> </ul>
Agriculture & Energy	Encourage more sustainable practices and attempt to reduce reliance on fossil fuels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Determine feasibility of installing solar panels on certain municipal buildings</li> <li>∴ Adopt new, more efficient energy codes</li> <li>∴ Capitalize on existing resources available in town</li> <li>∴ Provide education and outreach materials on composting and reliability of energy sources</li> <li>∴ Research the possibility of EV charging stations</li> </ul>
	Support local, organic foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Hold a series of farmers' markets and community markets (crafts, etc.) in the summer</li> <li>∴ Identify innovative ways to encourage more agricultural activities within the town</li> <li>∴ Evaluate the remaining active agriculture parcels for opportunities to promote their products. Identify willing partners to collaborate (restaurants, caterers, event planners, etc) with local agriculture businesses.</li> </ul>
Growth & Development	Move forward with the development of the town center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Identify and approve funding for capital investments</li> <li>∴ Encourage new commercial buildings are energy-efficient</li> <li>∴ Promote Barrington for clean and environmentally-friendly businesses</li> <li>∴ Balance reasonable economic growth while protecting rural, quiet character of town</li> <li>∴ Ensure that people passing through the major corridors of Barrington notice that signage, buildings, and landscape portray a theme that distinguishes Barrington from other towns</li> <li>∴ Aim to have 50% of the land with the town center developed and 45% percent of the land within the regional commercial district developed over the course of the next decade.</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Strategic Actions to Guide and Measure Success**

Planning Theme	Goal	Benchmark for Success
	Encourage shops and services in Town Center and Village zoning districts and destination or specialized businesses in the Regional Commercial district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Build community support for Impact Fees to implement Town improvements: sidewalks, benches, lighting, etc.</li> <li>∴ Develop an organizing and outreach plan to build support for a policy to incentivize business growth, such as local Tax Increment Financing (TIF).</li> <li>∴ Create a business resource guide for potential business owners wishing to locate in Barrington with statistics on demographics, vehicle traffic counts, and available resources at the state and local levels. Identify a town staffer, a Business Ombudsman, as the single point of contact, to advise prospective business owners on permitting and available resources.</li> <li>∴ Evaluate the needs of niche industrial &amp; manufacturing businesses through coordinated outreach with the local Chamber of Commerce and State business development officials.</li> <li>∴ Partner with Chamber of Commerce, real estate industry group, or similar local organization to track and promote available commercial real estate.</li> <li>∴ Audit town regulations for barriers to business development in each zoning district. Some businesses require unique building heights or utility needs; develop a process for zoning exceptions to accommodate novel requests. Additionally, evaluate the effectiveness of recent zoning amendments to attract new development; speak to the developers for suggestions to amend.</li> </ul>
	Encourage low-density housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Review the Conservation Subdivision zoning ordinance section and the projects built under this regulation and discuss the effectiveness with project applicants. Evaluate similar ordinances in neighboring towns for best practices and ideas to improve Barrington's ordinance.</li> <li>∴ Research and evaluate additional options to meet housing demands and affordability while maintaining rural character, such as Transferrable Development Rights or Inclusionary Zoning.</li> </ul>
	Provide housing options for all ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Ensure there is a mix of affordable housing options that meet the needs of all demographics.</li> <li>∴ Encourage a variety of senior housing choices to allow residents to remain in Barrington via aging in place within existing homes or relocating to other housing opportunities in town.</li> <li>∴ Ensure the current zoning allows for such a use in viable locations</li> </ul>
	Ensure development is compatible with its community character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Maintain aesthetics through the regulatory review process and enforcing local architectural design standards.</li> <li>∴ Guide development along existing commercial corridors and away from environmentally sensitive areas.</li> <li>∴ Evaluate methods to support a more diversified tax base through changes to minimum lot size.</li> <li>∴ Ensure that the opportunity for development and redevelopment within the Town of Barrington allows for moderate priced housing and maintaining rural character.</li> </ul>
Transportation	Maintain a safe and efficient local highway network that balances access to local destinations with mobility of vehicles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Develop projects at critical points along NH125 (Calef highway) to increase safety for travelers and visibility of local destinations or access points.</li> <li>∴ Along numbered state routes, cluster new commercial developments to share driveways and parking.</li> <li>∴ Require all new commercial developers along numbered state routes to consult with regional fixed route transit providers on site design of parking and access to enable future public transportation service.</li> <li>∴ Ensure transportation services provide older adults and people with disabilities with on-demand access to critical services.</li> <li>∴ Identify road for connections and prioritize interconnectivity of road networks.</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Strategic Actions to Guide and Measure Success**

Planning Theme	Goal	Benchmark for Success
	Have zero crashes that result in fatalities and serious injuries on roads in Barrington.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Identify priority locations for installing or retrofitting built infrastructure to reduce vehicle speeds.</li> <li>∴ Using police knowledge, local crash data, and results of the survey mapping exercise, develop a prioritized list of intersections and road segments for safety improvements and future funding.</li> <li>∴ Realign heavily skewed intersections to improve sightlines.</li> <li>∴ Secure funding for a corridor study of NH125 (Calef Highway) to ensure future development and travel demand are balanced with accessibility and safety.</li> </ul>
	Increase the safety and accessibility of the local road network for all users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Prioritize the separation of non-motorized users from vehicles along roadways when possible.</li> <li>∴ Develop a warrant article regarding a local capital reserve fund specifically for non-motorized facility construction projects.</li> </ul>
	Connect important destinations with safe walkable and bikeable routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Identify destinations with the greatest potential or value for pedestrians and prioritize them for safety improvement.</li> <li>∴ Identify sites where non-motorized road crossings are unsafe and prioritize them for improvement.</li> <li>∴ Investigate the feasibility of redeveloping the Boston &amp; Maine railroad right-of-way paralleling NH125 as a multimodal rail trail connecting to Gonic/Rochester. Form a committee to begin outreach to abutting landowners and partner with Rochester Riverwalk committee.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Local recreation sites are accessible to people of all ages and abilities</li> <li>∴ Expand the local trail network and increase its interconnectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∴ Identify and prioritize opportunities to connect isolated trails and recreation sites.</li> <li>∴ Identify and prioritize specific trailheads and other recreation access points to increase safety and accessibility.</li> <li>∴ Investigate feasibility and potential sites for a town beach.</li> </ul>