

PAXTON, MASSACHUSETTS 2008 COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN

INTRODUCTION

As with every entity, from the largest governmental and private organizations, to the individual family unit, the need to plan for the effective use of available resources is paramount. Without planning and structure, the chances of optimizing the best and highest value of human, natural and capital resources is diminished. In the case of community planning, small towns such as Paxton need a plan for managing its future growth. It is a fact of life that communities grow, whether through an increase in population, housing, and/or economic development activity. Managing growth has always been a considerable challenge for local governments. Towards this end, Paxton town planners have recognized the need for a community Master Plan in order to help local officials act in concert on a common agenda for the long-range good of the Town. Chapter 41, Section 81-D of Massachusetts General Law states that a community Master Plan shall be "...a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality." It further states that such a plan "...identifies the goals and policies of the municipality for its future growth and development." In a practical sense, community Master Plans have always been intended to serve as a land use and future development policy guide for local decision makers. Typically, a community Master Plan does five things:

- Articulates the goals and objectives of the community (i.e., what the community wants for its future, what type of community it wants to be);
- Outlines the existing resources and conditions of a community (this is usually done through a review of existing data sources, collection of new data, and updates of inventory information);
- Evaluates and assesses the existing resources and conditions with an eye towards identifying shortfalls and deficiencies;
- Projects the current trends and conditions into the future in an effort to identify shortcomings that can be corrected through advanced planning, as well as the future needs of the community;
- Sets forth a strategy for addressing the needs of the community.



Although a community Master Plan has the latitude to deal with a variety of issues and concerns, there are several subjects that such a plan must address by law. Chapter 41, Section 81-D states that community Master Plans must contain the following elements: a goals and policies statement; a land use plan; chapters that deal with economic development, traffic circulation, natural resources, open space and recreation, community services and facilities; and an implementation plan.

This Community Master Plan for the Town of Paxton sets forth the community's goals and provides the background data and analysis necessary for developing strategies to employ when guiding Paxton as it continues to grow and develop over the coming decades. The Master Planning Process in Paxton: The Master Plan was prepared by the Paxton Master Plan Committee, which was appointed by the Board of Selectmen with input from the Planning Board. The Master Plan Committee was composed of Paxton officials and residents, some with experience on local boards, and some with no previous municipal experience. The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) provided technical assistance throughout the entirety of this project. The Master Plan Committee met on a monthly basis and all meetings were open to the public. Several joint meetings were held with some of Paxton's municipal boards and committees including the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and other municipal department heads. During the initial stages of the Master Plan's preparation, interviews were conducted with all key municipal committees, boards, commissions and personnel. Everyone contacted was very helpful in terms of assisting with the update of inventory information, identifying upcoming needs, and providing candid assessments of the challenges they face. The Master Plan Committee reviewed this input in detail and is very grateful for the assistance rendered. To further increase the public's involvement in the Master Plan update process, the Committee prepared a citizen survey to solicit the opinions and desires of the people and businesses residing in Paxton. The survey was sent to every household and business in Town in late 2006 and received a very strong response rate of 41.3% (such surveys usually garner response rates anywhere from 15 to 25%). All told, the Paxton Master Plan Committee held close to thirty evening meetings (all open to the public) and four well-attended public forums. All Master Plan Committee meeting agendas and minutes are available for public review at the Town Clerk's Office.



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CHAPTER 1

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Paxton Master Plan Committee began its work in the Summer of 2006 and finished this Master Plan document in the Summer of 2008. Completing the Town's first Community Master Plan update in forty years in a mere two years is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Master Plan Committee, both its existing and former members. Since 2006, the Town has annually appropriated funds for the Plan's completion. The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) was hired to provide technical assistance throughout the process.

The Committee held monthly meetings and sponsored several public forums to solicit public input into the process. Public forums were held on the following dates:

- November 2, 2006 (Topic: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Exercise);
- February 7, 2007 (Topic: Results of the Townwide Citizen Survey);
- June 18, 2008 (Topic: Land Use and Zoning Chapter Recommendations);
- September 25, 2008 (Topic: Presentation of the Master Plan's Findings; and Recommendations).

In addition to the public forums noted above, the Master Plan Committee also employed a townwide citizen survey, asking each Paxton household a series of questions covering such topics as: housing, economic development, town government, open space, recreation, natural resources, zoning, land use and transportation. The Master Plan Committee also reached out to other local boards, committees, commissions and departments along the way, with each entity providing valuable input. In the end, the Master Plan Committee is proud to set forth the following goals and objectives aimed at plotting a smart and prudent direction for Paxton's future development.

Land Use – Goals

- Preserve Paxton's rural character while promoting the preservation and management of open space.
- Recreate a lively and eye-catching mixed-use village center.

Land Use – Objectives

- Manage the Town's growth while retaining the openness and mixture of architectural styles that has long characterized Paxton.

- Define the boundaries of what will be Paxton's Town Center and limit commercial development to this area only.
- Enact zoning tools that will create an active town center containing a mixture of businesses, residences, municipal government offices, institutional uses and service providers.
- Enact zoning tools that encourage the location of new businesses and service providers that will compliment Paxton's existing landscape and offer the amenities that residents desire.
- Achieve consistent, coordinated planning and administration among the Town boards.

Housing - Goal

- Provide housing opportunities while ensuring that new residential development is created in a controlled and well-planned manner that is consistent with the preservation of Paxton's rural small-town character.

Housing – Objectives

- Ensure the enforcement of the Town's housing-related bylaws and regulations.
- Provide housing opportunities that will allow residents to remain in Paxton through all stages of life and allow children of residents to establish families in Town.
- Require developers to incorporate open space provisions into new housing projects.
- Maintain the 60,000 square foot lot size requirement for the General Residential District B (GRB) zoning district.
- Increase the efficiency and quality of the review process for new residential development through increased training for land use boards.
- Ensure that housing regulations and bylaws are kept current to address changing concerns and legal precedents.
- Encourage the use of environmentally sensitive development strategies, including Low Impact Development techniques.

Town Government - Goal

- Paxton desires to have a forward-looking town government that is accountable, efficient, professionally managed and fiscally responsible, where citizens are encouraged to participate in town government and community life and the Town's rich cultural/historic legacy and natural environment are valued.

Town Government – Objectives

- The Town should commit itself to following through on the recommendations contained herein and strive to maintain the Master Plan as a living document, including periodic reviews and updates.
- The Town should work towards full compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations.
- The Town should ensure that Paxton's future growth does not overburden its infrastructure and the Town's ability to provide municipal services.
- The Town should develop a municipal building and infrastructure preservation or replacement program to ensure that these resources continue to meet the needs of its citizens. The overall effort should attempt to exclude piecemeal corrections of infrastructure deficiencies and include a long-term maintenance program and the continual devotion of sufficient resources for implementation.
- The Town should provide adequate resources for technological improvements to ensure that municipal employees can perform their duties as efficiently as possible, while simultaneously providing town residents with greater access to timely information and electronic services.
- As Paxton's town government is comprised of many entities that rely on volunteers for their operation, the Town should encourage greater citizen volunteerism in town government and actively promote opportunities to serve on municipal boards, committees and commissions.
- The Town should ensure that municipal departments have the necessary staff and capital equipment to provide high quality services for its citizens.
- The Town should look upon the acquisition of open space as one approach to enhance the quality of life, provide passive recreational opportunities to local residents and enhance property values.

Economic Development – Goals

- Paxton aims to maintain the Town's rural character while managing the growth and stability of the Town's commercial uses.
- Economic Development should expand options for employment, serve commerce needs for Paxton residents and provide new business opportunities.

Economic Development – Objectives

- Plan for new economic development in a comprehensive manner that discourages the use of variances and special permits for the location of individual businesses.

- Identify areas of Town for new economic development that will serve the residents of Paxton while maintaining the Town's rural character.
- Identify the desired character and design features for new commercial zones in Paxton.
- Revise zoning standards for the Town's Business districts to reflect the desired character and design features, as well as to foster new economic development that is compatible with Paxton's small town rural character.
- Expand retail and service opportunities to reflect the desires expressed in the Master Plan citizen survey.

Open Space and Recreation - Goals

- Protect and preserve aesthetic, natural, and historical resources.
- Protect and preserve water resources and supplies.
- Provide inclusive (i.e. handicapped and elderly accessible) active recreational opportunities, resources and facilities.
- Provide and promote inclusive passive recreation opportunities.
- Identify and develop funding sources and other resources to further the goals, objectives and strategies of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Open Space and Recreation – Objectives

- Enhance the aesthetic appeal and historical character of Paxton by preserving historic landscapes and contained structures and visually appealing properties along the public thoroughfares.
- Identify parcels of land for acquisition that contain historic value or potential conservation and/or recreation use.
- Identify parcels of land for potential acquisition that protect rare and endangered plant or animal species, or unusual natural communities.
- Preserve contiguous tracts of open space by providing connections between protected parcels, thereby reducing fragmentation of plant and animal populations, maintaining animal migration routes and facilitating public use of protected land.
- Establish a historical district encompassing town center to preserve the aesthetic appearance of Paxton and encourage an historical application.

- Protect the three watershed areas in town through targeted acquisition of environmentally sensitive parcels for open space and water supply protection.
- Encourage citizens to appreciate the importance of protection of both upland and wetland open space to the quality of water resources.
- Plan for the development of new active recreation opportunities as identified in the public participation process and the identification of funding sources.
- Create new fields, parks, and recreational facilities, while upgrading and maintaining existing recreation facilities.
- Identify and correct obstacles to the full enjoyment of existing recreational facilities by all members of the Town.
- Cooperate with neighboring towns to create, connect, and extend regional trail systems where possible.
- Identify and publicize existing open spaces and trail systems.
- Investigate the possibility of developing new nature trails contiguous to school or park property for educational purposes.
- Identify those historic scenic vistas, conservation properties, and open spaces that may appeal to special needs, senior, or handicapped populations and ensure their physical accessibility for the greatest enjoyment and enrichment.
- Acquire, maintain and create access to greenways, including nature trails, hiking areas, and cross-country ski trails on contiguous tracts of conservation land.
- Research and identify potential sources of funding from state and federal governments, local and regional charitable and education foundations for the acquisition and protection of open space and the construction and rehabilitation of recreational facilities.
- Encourage dialogue between various community, government and civic groups in Paxton to share ideas, partner on initiatives, and avoid duplication of efforts designed to attain the goals and objectives as described above.
- Develop strategic partnerships with boards, commissions, charitable foundations, and civic and conservation groups to enable the town to seek funding for unique initiatives designed to implement the goals, objectives and strategies of this plan.
- Pursue the feasibility of conducting various fundraising initiatives designed to generate funds to implement those strategies required for the attainment of the objectives outlined in this plan.

Transportation – Goal

- To provide a transportation system that is adequate, safe and well maintained for all users, while working to increase safety and reduce noise.

Transportation – Objectives

- Ensure that Paxton’s transportation system has sufficient capacity to handle projected use.
- Increase pedestrian safety through the construction of a more comprehensive sidewalk network and fund its continued maintenance and repair.
- Reduce the use of local roads for cut through purposes by large commercial trucks in order to increase pavement life and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- When reconstructing roads Paxton should address the condition of the roads’ substructure, the need for widening and the inclusion of sidewalks where applicable.
- Support and implement the findings and recommendations of the Rt. 122 Scenic Byway Management Plan.
- Increase enforcement of local and state traffic laws in order to increase safety.
- Encourage the expansion of regional mass transit options in an effort to reduce traffic congestion and increase mobility for all residents of Paxton.