

Paxton Town Hall
697 Pleasant St.
Paxton, Massachusetts 01612

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2008 Paxton Master Plan A Summary



Based on the Paxton Master Plan
Adopted by the Paxton Planning Board 2008

Prepared with the Assistance
of the
Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
(CMRPC)



Letter to the Residents from the Master Plan Steering Committee.

January 2009

To All residents of Paxton and other Concerned Parties:

In 2006, the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board appointed a Master Plan Steering Committee to guide our community in the creation of a new Master Plan for the Town of Paxton, a process that was last undertaken in 1968.

After two years of work by many members of the community, the 2008 Paxton Master Plan is now complete.

As this Plan was being created, draft copies of each section were posted on the Town website for public viewing and comment, a survey was sent to every residence in the Town and four public information hearings were held at critical points in the Plan's development. The Paxton Planning Board officially adopted the 2008 Paxton Master Plan on December 8, 2008.

This Summary of the Master Plan is being made available to all residents so that it can serve as an active tool in helping to guide the growth and development of our community. The complete plan can be found on the Town's website www.townofpaxton.net and copies can be viewed at the Town Hall and Richards Memorial Library.

We deeply appreciate the broad community interest that was shown during the creation of this Plan. The next step will be the appointment of a Master Plan Implementation Committee and we encourage your active participation as we make progress toward our stated goals and objectives.

Sincerely,

Charlie Blanchard, Town
Administrator

Anita Fenton, Historical Committee/
Resident

Richard Fenton, Finance Committee/
Resident

Fred Goodrich, Selectman

Robert Hall, Resident

Paul Robinson, Zoning Board of
Appeals

Joanne Savignac, Assessor/Resident

Hank Stidsen, Planning Board

Chris Baehrecke, Resident

Transportation

Existing Conditions: With few large traffic generators (businesses or institutions), the majority of Paxton's traffic consists of local residents traveling within town and to work and others passing through to other destinations.

Goal:

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



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.

Recommendations:

1. Prepare a Pavement Management Program
2. Formalize the Town's Roadway Improvement Plan
3. Investigate the Possibility of Regional Mass Transit
4. Address Problem Intersections
5. Explore Further Trail Development
6. Investigate the Creation of Truck Exclusion Zones
7. Work with The Route 122 Scenic Byway Advisory Committee (or its successor in interest)

Preface to the Master Plan Summary

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.

In a practical sense, community Master Plans have always been intended to serve as land use and future development policy guides for local decision makers.

This brochure summarizes the goals and objectives, as well as the key recommendations of each of the chapters detailed in the full plan:

- Land Use and Zoning
- Housing
- Town Government
- Economic Development
- Natural Features, Open Space and Recreation
- Transportation

A recurrent theme through the entire Master Plan is our desire to maintain the rural character and quality of life in Paxton while planning for the inevitable growth of our community in the coming years.

The success of our efforts will depend on the thoughtful implementation of this Master Plan as part of the decisions made by Town Boards and Committees, and at Town Meetings. Your responsibility is to become familiar with the issues addressed in this Plan and to participate in this decision process in order to have an impact on what Paxton will be like in the future.

Land Use and Zoning

Existing Conditions: Paxton's land use pattern can be divided into two distinct segments: the town center and the rural residential areas that dot the outlying areas of Paxton and are comprised of existing and former farms. In Paxton, 99.8% of the land is zoned for residential use, while only 0.2% for commercial purpose s.

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.



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.

Recommendations:

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| 1. Adopt the Community Preservation Act. | 8. Limit the Amount of Commercial Floor Space Per Business: |
| 2. Investigate the Adoption of a Local Wetland Protection Bylaw | 9. Expand the Amount of Land Area Zoned Business: |
| 3. Work With Area Land Trusts | 10. Investigate the Creation of an Agricultural Business District Bylaw |
| 4. Create a Lot Coverage Limit | 11. Investigate the Expansion of the Accessory Apartment Bylaw to the Business District |
| 5. Develop a Description of Character for Paxton Center | 12. Support Local Housing Partnership |
| 6. Review and Revise the Zoning Bylaw's Use Schedule: | |
| 7. Review and Revise the Site Plan Approval Bylaw: | |

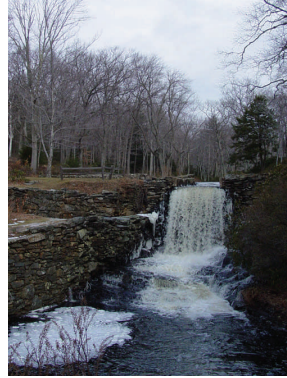
- Encourage citizens to appreciate the importance of protection of both upland and wetland open space to the quality of water resources.
- Plan for the development of new active recreation opportunities as identified in the public participation process and the identification of funding sources.
- Create 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/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 property, 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 conserved 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.

Natural Features, Open Space & Recreation

Existing Conditions: Paxton is home to many beautiful and unique open spaces and many popular recreational facilities. 32.06% of Paxton's dry land is permanently protected—much of this for water resource protection. A swimming pool, miles of hiking trails, playing fields and courts, and playgrounds are available for residents.



Goals:

- Protect and preserve aesthetic, natural, and historic 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 recreational opportunities.
- Identify and develop funding sources and other resources to further the goals, objectives and strategies of the Open Space & Recreation Plan.

Objectives:

- Enhance the aesthetic appeal and historical character of Paxton by presenting 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/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 an historical district encompassing the town center to preserve the aesthetic appearance of Paxton and encourage an historical appreciation.
- Protect the three watershed areas in town through targeted acquisition of environmentally sensitive parcels for open space and water supply protection.

Housing

Existing Conditions: Over 95% of the housing stock in Paxton is comprised of single-family units. The lack of housing diversity limits the housing opportunities for current and future residents of Paxton, particularly low and moderate-income families, young professionals, the mature children of current residents, and aging residents looking to downsize as their children move out. Paxton falls 133 units short of meeting the state goal of 10% affordable 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.



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 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.

Recommendations:

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| 1. Obtain Planning Board Procedural Training | 5. Adopt the Community Preservation Act |
| 2. Obtain Training on Chapter 40-B Housing Proposals | 6. Partner with a Non-Profit Housing Trust |
| 3. Investigate LIP/Friendly 40B | 7. Investigate Self-Help Housing Programs |
| 4. Investigate Housing Rehab Programs | 8. Identify Tax Title Property that is Suitable for Housing |

Town Government

Existing Conditions: Paxton's municipal operating budget for fiscal year 2007 was \$4,146,654.



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.

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 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 town 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

Existing conditions: Paxton commercial and industrial entities contribute about 3.2% of the Town's tax base. The number of workers in town has been between 586 and 707 in 69-81 institutions, between the years 2001 and 2005.

Goal :

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.



Objectives:

- Plan for new economic development in a comprehensive manner that reduces the reliance on 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, to foster new economic development that is compatible with Paxton's rural character.
- Expand retail and service opportunities to reflect the desires expressed in the Master Plan citizen survey.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a Local Economic Development Commission
2. Develop a Description of Character for Paxton Center
3. Survey Business Owners in Paxton
4. Review and Revise the Site Plan Approval Bylaw
5. Limit the Amount of Commercial Floor Space Per Business
6. Develop a Computerized Database of Available Commercial Property
7. Identify New areas in Town Suitable for Commercial Development