Highland Plantation

2015 Comprehensive Plan

Draft: 9/23/15

Highland Plantation Comprehensive Plan
(Review Draft – 9/23/15)

Contents:

1: Highland Plantation's Heritage

A Brief History:

The first settlers in Highland Plantation probably arrived around 1800 as part of the Bingham Purchase. An early census in 1820 shows 28 settlers in Highland. Until 1830 it was called Smith Town probably after one of the prominent early families. By 1837 it had acquired the name Highland Plantation. Many town records were lost in a fire, which leaves gaps in our history that are hard to fill.

Highland touches on the upper end of the Lexington Flat -- a flat river bottom suitable for settlement. But most of the town's landscape is steep and mountainous. The area suitable for development is small and that is reflected in population size compared to neighboring towns. There is one paved road; it extends from North New Portland to the outlet of Flagstaff Lake. It is the only public road access through Highland, Lexington, Dead River, Carrying Place and Pierce Pond. The Long Falls Dam Road was originally the stagecoach road that connected several villages between North New Portland and Eustis. Later it was designated as Route 16. The creation of Flagstaff Lake in 1949 flooded the villages of Flagstaff, Bigelow Station, and Dead River and left Highland and the other townships isolated on a dead end road. The Route 16 designation was reassigned to the route through Kingfield and Carrabassett.

The first homesteads gradually grew into rural settlements based on lumber and agriculture. As more people arrived, it was inevitable that businesses were started to serve these communities. Recreation – hunting and fishing – also became part of the economic engine. Farms, stores, sawmills, brick yards, blacksmith shops and lodging places were located all along the old Route 16. There was steady growth until 1850 at the peak of the long log lumber years. Highland reputedly reached a population of 144, a mark which it has never since regained. That began a slow decline all the way to 1970 with only an occasional small rise.

By 1970 there were only 3 employers left in Highland: Pinkham's sawmill sawed hardwood bolts into rough squares for turning mills in Kingfield. The Highland Lodge provided lodging primarily for hunters and the lodge store had gas pumps and a lunch counter that was a local gathering place. The third and most promising employer was Driftwood Arts. This business gathered wood from Flagstaff Lake and turned it into aquarium stock.

With a shortage of land available for development, Highland always had a practical population limit. The more mountainous land was utilized for lumbering, first by families, then local lumber companies, and finally by large companies operating in a global market place with pulp stock being the dominant objective. In 1970 the population of Highland was down to 23 hardy souls.

During the 70's, big changes took place. These changes were not the result of local efforts; they were imposed by State government. In order to ensure a continuous supply of wood to paper and lumber mills, the State of Maine introduced the Tree Growth property assessment program, providing for a reduced tax valuation if the landowner keeps the land in production and imposing a penalty for acreage withdrawn from active forest management. Large ownerships (such as exists in a majority of Highland) were automatically enrolled at the State level, while smaller forest owners were given a choice. The Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) was established to plan for and regulate development in the unorganized territories – which included Highland Plantation. The State also assumed jurisdiction over public lots in the UT; management was taken over by the Bureau of Public Lands, mostly for timber production.

Highland once had extensive deer wintering areas. The Sandy Stream valley hosted not only a large deer yard but held several tributaries with fantastic wild brook trout habitat. The deeryard virtually disappeared with deforestation during the 70's and 80's and has yet to recover. One hundred fifty years of logging in the watershed and improved access to remote habitats has slowly changed the brook trout fishery, until it is less able to support historic populations.

As the quality of hunting and fishing declined, so did the recreation business, resulting in the closing of the Highland Lodge. The store sputtered along but the underground gas tanks were removed, foreshadowing the end. After several attempts at revival, the store now has shut down. Pinkham's Mill shut down in the 80's due to a lack of high quality wood supply, lack of investment, and cheap labor competition from other countries. The Driftwood Arts building burned and the owner was unable to replace it due to LURC shoreland setback issues. He moved his business to New Portland and we lost the last employer left in town.

Since 1970, the population of Highland has rebounded some. Part of that is a renewed interest in rural living and part is better road conditions for commuters. There are about 70 of us now. Our biggest expense is education for the children. If one family with several children moves to town it can cause quite a jump in property taxes. When the town had control of the public wood lots we could use wood revenues to cushion the blow – an emergency reserve.

In 2008, the mountains of Highland began to be eyed by developers with a plan for a grid scale industrial wind project. A grid-scale wind power development has the potential to change the character and quality of our lives completely. We discovered that, as in past

experiences, we would have no local control. Without our consent, we were placed on a map for expedited wind development and under LURC jurisdiction as with other UT towns we had no right of approval for any development. The application for a Highland wind project was submitted but withdrawn to better address environmental concerns but the project itself is not dead.

The people of Highland Plantation, whether in favor of the project or not, realized their vulnerability. We cannot predict the future, and without local control we are unable to protect our way of life. In March of 2014, we voted at town meeting to explore the process of withdrawing from LUPC and taking over our own land use regulation.

Highland is not an easy place to live. The winters are harsh and there are no jobs, no stores, and few public services. We have to travel long distances for nearly everything. The people who have settled here are willing to live with all that in order to enjoy this beautiful, quiet natural landscape. We have a history of having our future shaped by outside forces. Now, it is time for us to have a plan in place and ordinances that protect our quality of life.

Historical Assets and Preservation Efforts:

Highland's settlement pattern has been sparse in both space and time, and there is little in the way of archeological or historical artifacts to show for it. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) tracks and reports on historic assets, and has little on the record about Highland.

The MHPC does suggest that evidence of prehistoric settlement may exist along Sandy Stream and Michael Stream. Native Americans used stream valleys for travel and often camped on flat plains adjoining them. Since at one time there were more residents and businesses here, we should also find traces of early settlement in the valleys, such as evidence of log drives along Sandy Stream. The MHPC has identified one historic archeologic site at the base of Burnt Hill, but there could also be old cellar holes and trash piles along Long Falls Dam Road and the Sandy Stream valley.

The MHPC has not identified any historical buildings in Highland. The town has very few public or commercial buildings, which are usually the most likely candidates. The only one is the townhouse, a former one-room schoolhouse well-maintained and with the gravity of age but without unique architectural merit.

Highland cooperates with Lexington in an historical society. The historical society built and maintains a small building in Lexington, which houses a collection of artifacts, records, and other documents.

The town has no local control over development at this time. Any new development is reviewed by LUPC under their regulations which include archeological and historical protections.

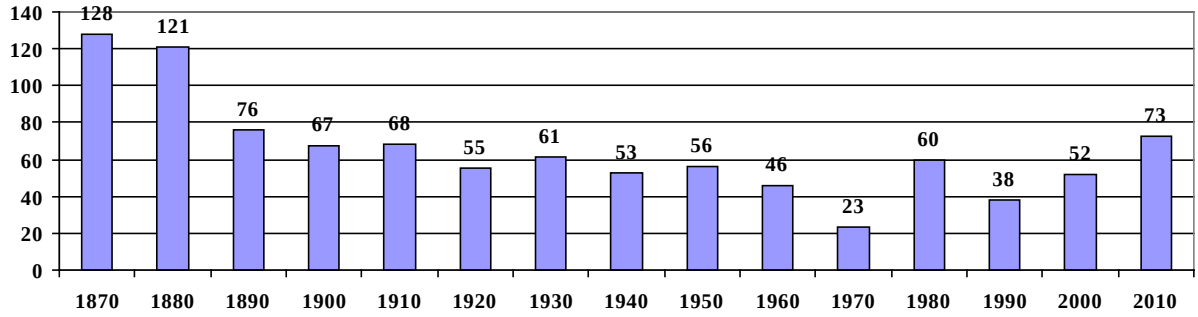
2: Population Trends and Issues

This chapter contains a profile of the people of Highland Plantation using data from State and Federal sources. While cold, hard data cannot draw a complete picture of the community, it can identify trends and relationships that the town can look at in planning for its future. It comes with a *caveat* however: census data can be misleading in a town of Highland's size. For example, the 2010 US Census tells us there were 73 residents, but the First Assessor, who can name every one of us along with the year we arrived in town, can only account for 53. This report uses the census number, only because all of the resulting census breakdown figures are based on it.

From the Past to the Present:

Any plan for the future must begin with a look at how we got to where we are today. The trends leading up to the present are likely to continue. The most easily-measured of these trends is Highland Plantation's population. Highland's demographic history begins in 1870, which was the first census year it was recognized as a separate place.

Figure 1: Highland Plantation Population, 1870-2010



The Nineteenth Century was a time when people had to live much closer to their work, and there was a lot of work in the woods or on small farms and businesses. As time progressed through the industrial revolution, two world wars and the depression, Highland's population gradually slipped. 1970 was the low-water mark (if the census can be believed). Since that time, Highland may have caught a small ripple of the back to the land movement and suburban sprawl.

Even though commercial activity has to a large extent disappeared, Highland's population is showing signs of recovering. There could be any number of reasons for this: improved roads, retirees and empty-nesters, low land prices, and so on. The remainder of this chapter will flesh out the trends in population.

Highland's population trends mirror those of the rest of the region to some extent. Somerset County has a much more diversified economy than Highland, but has only grown by about 44 percent since 1920. Embden's population hit its low-water mark in 1950, but has about tripled since then. Anson's population didn't suffer the dip that other towns did in the mid-1900's (because it had an industrial base), but has only gained 13 percent in 100 years. New Portland's long-term population fluctuation is almost a duplicate of Highland's, except where we've apparently gained 35 residents since 1990, they've lost 71.

It would be difficult to predict any general trends in Highland. Though fifteen of our residents are retired, it isn't a good place for elderly people. It is a long way to the hospital and even a grocery run is a long drive on bad roads. After high school, most kids leave Highland to continue their education or take jobs outside of town. There are no employers to retain or draw younger working people but in these times with internet access available it is possible that young professionals could live here and work from home. Some seasonal property owners may plan to retire here, adding to our full time residency.

We are starting to come out of this recession and that could mean buyers looking for property. We have had a recent sale of a property that had been a rental (unoccupied) for several years. A young professional couple bought it for a seasonal camp. We also have a family of 3 who have moved here recently to take a job in Madison. Two longtime residents have moved and put their homes up for sale and these could sell with an improving economy. However, the fact that we can put a face on all these trends shows how tenuous our predictions can be.

Highland has a significant number of camps, which could produce a bump in *seasonal population*. There are nearly as many camps (25) as year-round houses (32). Though seasonal populations are not included in census numbers, towns with a big seasonal bump must often make plans for an increase in traffic, commerce, or public services. In those towns, however, most of the camps are along lakes, and are full during the summer. In Highland, the camps are more sparely used, often as hunting or winter camps. Since hunting and winter recreation are more solitary lifestyles than lakefront living, any seasonal bump in population would be minimal and widely distributed in time and through the town.

The Changing Community:

There are only two means by which local population levels change: *migration* and *natural change.* Natural change is the difference between births and deaths within the community. A town with a younger population will see a lot of births, thus a natural *increase.* A town with a lot of elderly is likely to see a natural *decline*.

Between 1990 and 2000, Highland Plantation saw one birth and five deaths for a net decrease of four. Between 2000 and 2010, there were four births, but 6 deaths, for a net decrease of two. So for the 20-year period, the town has lost population to natural change.

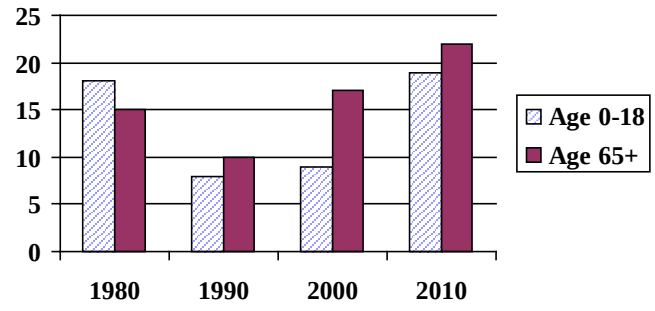
This is to be expected in an area with aging population and few young people and is characteristic of Somerset County in general.

In that twenty year period, Highland gained 35 residents. That means there was a net *in-migration* of 41. In-migration means people moving into town. Since there is no employment-related reason (the chief motivation of migration), the explanation for why Highland saw that in-migration would go a long way to predicting the future.

An *aging population* is a significant factor in many places in Maine. The "baby boomers" (children born in the decades after WWII) has been the dominant characteristic of the American population since 1950, and as it ages it pulls demand for local services along with it. When baby boomers were young, we needed many more schools; when they were a little older, they forced the creation of suburbs, now they are nearing retirement, we are about to be faced with a sudden jump in demand for elderly services.

Figure 2 shows recent trends among the critical age groups. Overall population dropped dramatically in 1990, but the trends are clear. In 1980, there were more children than elderly. In 1990, the percentage of elderly jumped ahead and has stayed there, although 2010 shows a remarkable surge in new children (19 of them). Even with that surge, there is only one more child now than in 1980, versus seven more over 65.

Figure 2: Highland Population by Age, 1980-2010

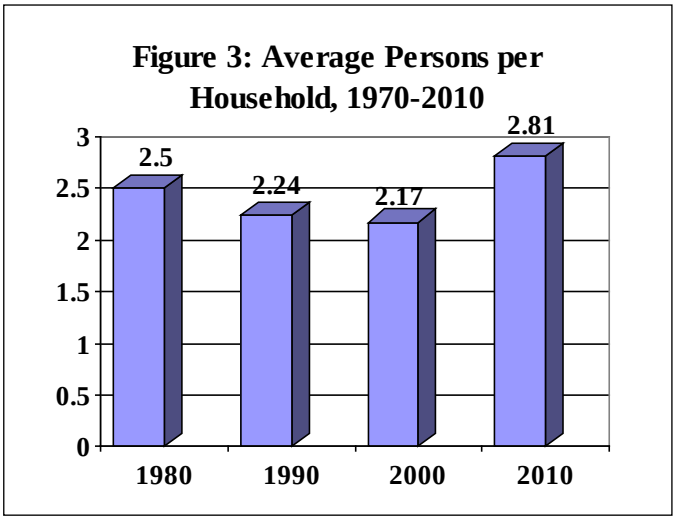


Nationwide, the aging of the baby boom will create economic issues such as a shortage of workers and increased demand for healthcare. While Highland will not have either of these issues locally, it will have more elderly. In 2010, there were 15 residents between age 50 and 65. That could almost double the number of elderly by 2025.

Any overall shift in the age of the population is reflected in the *median age*. The median age is the point at which half the people are younger; half are older. In 2010, Highland Plantation's median age was 53.5. That makes our population a lot older than Somerset County. Back in 1980, the town and county were almost exactly the same age, at 31.7, but in 2010, the median age of the county was only 43.6. New Portland's median age was 48.9 in 2010.

An aging population also has an impact on the *average number of people in a household*, though other factors come in to play, also. The average household size is a powerful statistic, because it indicates the need for housing (as will be discussed in Chapter 4). Household sizes have been dropping for many reasons nationwide: increased divorce rates,

smaller families, young people living alone or as couples longer before having families, and older people able to live independently.



Highland Plantation has a small enough population that national trends may not hold up. As figure 3, to the left, shows, the average household size declined steadily until 2000, when it suddenly jumped. Since there were only 26 households in town, this blip can be accounted for by only two or three new families moving in (or by the actual count of our First Assessor being more accurate). And even though the median age grew between 2000 and 2010, the growth was nowhere near as dramatic as in prior decades.

The census does actually count and report the number of people in each home. Out of the 26 households in 2010, 20 of them were families, but only five were families with children (making for a whole lot of empty-nest couples). Only two of them were a husband-wife family, while three were single-mother families. Two of the 26 households consisted of a single elderly person. Another 12 households had at least one person over 65 in them.

The Future:

The dynamics of the population can be turned into *projections for the future population*. The future population of Highland Plantation will change as a result of factors like the local economy, price and availability of housing, and the age of current residents. We can make a mathematical estimate of future population, but in a town as small as Highland Plantation a single family moving in or out can make the numbers look foolish.

Mathematical projections may be of little use in Highland, because they only work on large numbers. If we projected based on Highland's growth over the past 20 years (which is the normal way of projecting) Highland's population could grow to 90 by 2020 and over 105 by 2030. The official projections from the State of Maine are done this way and estimate that Highland Plantation's population will be 87 in 2020 and 100 in 2030.

A better measuring stick for a town the size of Highland is the change in the status and numbers of housing units. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the census reported that the town had 26 occupied housing units in 2010, compared to 24 in 2000. In 1990, however, the town had only 17 occupied homes and 23 fewer total units. So there was either a mini building boom in the 90's, or the census taker couldn't find a lot of houses.

Population growth is limited to the housing available. The census reported that as of 2010, five units were unoccupied (not including the 25 listed as "seasonal.") Four of those were for sale. The population could easily grow by a dozen if only those homes for sale were occupied. Another path to greater population would be conversion of seasonal housing units to year-round. This is a common occurrence in towns where the seasonal housing is on a lakeshore, but in Highland most of the camps would be hunting camps, limiting their utility or desirability for year-round use.

The final path to growth would be new home-building. Over the past 20 years, the census says there have been 24 new houses built in Highland, ten of them camps. But local records show that only a single new house (seasonal) has been built between 2000 and 2015. If there continued to be seven new houses built every ten years, that alone could add 15-20 residents per decade to the population. The drawback is that there is an extremely limited amount of available land, and new building lots would probably have to be created through subdivision. A more suitable estimate of future growth would be 1-3 new houses every ten years, and 3-9 new residents. That means a projection of 75-80 in 2020 and 85 or so by 2030.

Merging all of this information together, we get a picture of changes in Highland since 1990. Even though the population has been growing steadily since then, it hasn't been the same kind of growth. In the 90's, several new houses were built, but the people that moved in to town were older, without children. Since 2000, home-building essentially stopped, but young families took the place of older ones. Young families are the future of the town, and if we can determine why they came and what would keep them here, we can continue this trend into the future.

3: Economic Trends and Issues

Understanding the state of the local economy helps a town to plan for future growth or change. Though we know that Highland is not a center of economic activity, we can use the data we have to profile our current economic conditions and prospects for the future.

A note about the data in this chapter: Most of it comes from the U.S. Census. Beyond population and basic housing tallies, the census does not count every data bit. Economic numbers are based on a statistical sample. This sample used to be called the long form and was sent to only about one in six households, but now is called the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is updated every year, but is based on five years of tiny samples. This provides very accurate information for groups of thousands, but in a town the size of Highland may produce some wowsers. For example, Table 1 shows 70 residents of working age, even though the 2010 actual count listed only 58.

Workers and Employment:

The essential element of a local economy is the workforce. The "workforce" includes both those currently with a job and those unemployed. It is not exactly the same as the "working-age population," which is everyone over age 16, including retired and disabled. Table 1, below, provides a profile of the *workforce and employment* in Highland Plantation according to the ACS.

Table 1: Workforce Changes, 1990-2010

	1990	2000	Change from 1990	2010	Change from 2000
Male Working Age Population	14	20	43 %	30	50 %
In Workforce	9	8	-11 %	7	-12 %
Employed (April 1)	9	6	-50 %	5	-17 %
Female Working Age Population	18	29	61 %	40	38 %
In Workforce	10	11	10 %	9	-18 %
Employed (April 1)	10	9	-11 %	9	---

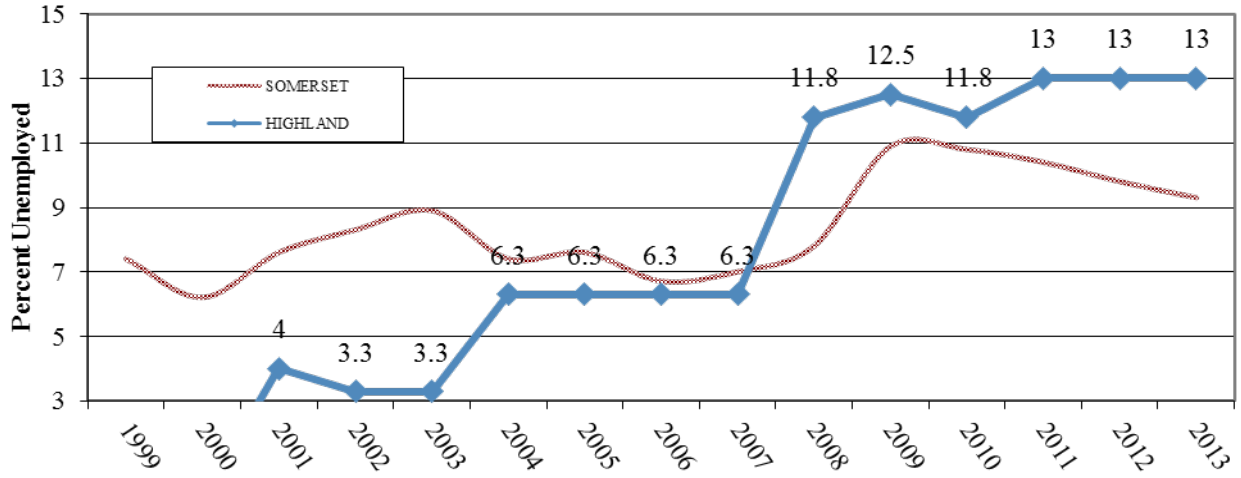
Source: US Census, American Community Survey

According to ACS estimates, less than half of the working age population is in the labor force. That means more than half are either retired or not seeking work. For both men and women, the number of people in the workforce has declined since 1990, again

suggesting an increased number of retired. We have a history of more working women than men, which is unusual for any community.

The American Community Survey is a poor estimator of actual employment, since it is the average of five years of statistical samples. More accurate and current figures are reported by the Maine Department of Labor (DOL). Figure 4 shows the average annual unemployment rates for both Highland Plantation and Somerset County since 1999.

Figure 4: Unemployment Trends, 1999-2013



Again, Highland's small population size makes data look a little odd. For most of the mid-2000's the unemployment rate looked stable because the DOL found only 16 workers from Highland and one of them was unemployed. In 2008, there were suddenly two unemployed, with 15 working. Since 2011, the workforce has been at 23, but there have been 3 persons unemployed. Somerset County has a lot larger population size showing more accurate economic trends, particularly the national recession in 2008-9 and subsequent recovery.

A workforce analysis is not complete without examining job opportunities available to the workforce Two aspects of this are the types of jobs occupied or available, and the level of qualification that residents have for those jobs.

Many jobs are dependent on a certain *level of education*. As a general rule, higher levels of education equate to better job opportunities and higher income levels (though there are plenty of exceptions). If we were to plan for economic development, it would not make sense to create professional jobs, for example, if there were few college graduates available in the labor force.

The ACS estimates the level of educational attainment in the community, figured as a percentage of the population over age 25 (estimated to be 68 in 2010.) In 2010, there were

six residents of Highland Plantation with a Bachelor's Degree, nine percent of the +25 population. Eighty-five percent of the +25 population – 58 residents -- were high school graduates, and some of those had some college education but not a degree. In 2000, Highland had 31 high school graduates (67 percent), including four college graduates. By way of comparison, 14.8 percent of Somerset County are college graduates, and 87 percent are high school graduates.

The ACS tracks the *Industry* and *Occupation* of Highland Plantation workers. This is intended to give a profile over time of how employment is shifting, but the census keeps re-defining the categories to make it difficult to compare.

In 2010, fully half of Highland's workers worked in either health care or education (combined by the ACS for unknown reasons). Nothing else was even close, although always remember it's a small statistical sample. It is probably fairly accurate, since in 2000, the census thought that 93 percent of workers (all but one) were in those industries. It can't be a surprise, then, that only half of all workers work in the private sector (although "self-employed" is not considered private sector employment).

The definition of "occupations" actually provides a better connection to the workforce than industry, as it describes the actual jobs that people are employed in. According to the ACS, 5 residents worked at management or business occupations, 5 in sales or service jobs, and 4 in production or transportation jobs. This is roughly the same as in 2000, with a small reduction in the latter occupation.

Since Highland Plantation is clearly dependent on a *regional economy* for its jobs, we realize that most residents drive to work, and some a considerable distance. According to the ACS, all but one worker drove to their jobs regularly, and the average commute was 52 minutes <u>each way</u>. (The average for Somerset County is only 25 minutes.) In 1990 the average travel time was only 22 minutes, but that was probably when the mill was still operating in New Portland.

The census reports much more specific data regarding the distribution of jobs in terms of commuting patterns, although, again, with a very small sample size. Their most recent estimate says that about equal numbers of residents work in Bangor, Jackman, Pittsfield, and Augusta. Strangely enough, not a single person commutes in to Highland for a job. Also, the census did not pick up anyone who both lived and worked in this town.

Household Incomes:

A final measure of the strength of the local economy is its *income levels*. Census data can provide information necessary to develop a general profile of the town.

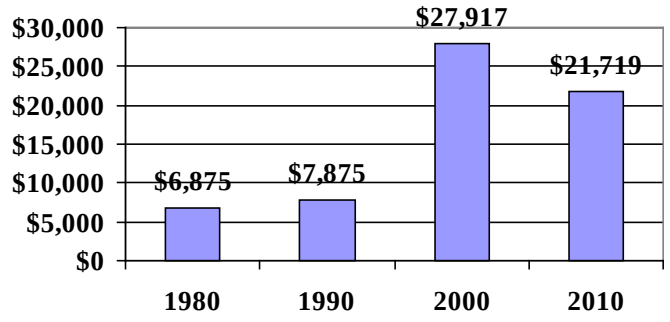
There are two common measures of income. Perhaps the most well-known is "per capita income." This is an artificial figure created by taking the entire income of an area

and dividing it by the population. Its only appropriate use is comparison between populations. The other is "median household income." The median is the point at which half of the households are above and half below, and households are the basic planning unit of the community, allowing us, for example, to determine whether housing in the town is affordable or not.

In 2010, Highland Plantation's estimated per capita income was $17,104. This is a substantial increase from the 2000 estimate of $10,038. By way of comparison, the per capita income figure for Somerset County was $21,025 in 2010, Franklin County's was $21,744, and New Portland's was $22,055. Rural areas tend to have lower income levels than a county average, so Highland's is in the expected range, and growing.

Figure 5 illustrates the growth in median household income in Highland Plantation. The item that sticks out in this chart is the 2000 median income. This is probably a sampling error. Median household income in 2010 was $21,719. If we throw out the 2000 number, it looks as if household incomes have almost tripled in 20 years. That is not quite as dramatic as it seems, however; inflation over that period was 69 percent. But it still indicates better income levels. This may relate to the data above which shows people forced to commute further for their jobs.

Figure 5: Median Household Income, 1980-2010



A household income is not equal to the wage earned by the principal breadwinner. If there were two or more wage-earners, the income would include all. If there were no wage-earners, the household would still show income from social security or another source. This is the case in Highland. The median wage in 2010 was $31,250 – higher than the median household income – but 75 percent of all households in Highland receive some form of social security. The average household income from social security is only $19,342.

Local Trends and Prospects:

There are no employers in Highland. The large landowners don't employ anyone from Highland at this time. Residents with jobs work outside of town. There are no water and sewer utilities, and even electric power is available in only limited areas, giving us extremely limited prospects for future commercial development.

There are four active businesses in town now and three employ only their owners. One of those is a self -storage business and the other two are recreational lodging businesses. Jack Pitch Lodge is open to anyone but the focus is hunting. Claybrook Mountain Lodge is

open year round for all types of outdoor recreation. The fourth business is the road contractor, who has an equipment base on Old County Road. There are some home businesses active in Highland, though the census failed to pick up any workers based here. That means they are probably secondary occupations, designed to supplement primary incomes; they can and do play a role in the local economy.

What kinds of prospects does this leave us? The limited reach of electricity and the lack of cell phone and high-speed internet, on top of the poor roads and lack of local labor supply, means that it would take a really unique type of business to be attracted.

A principle of economic development states that you should first look to leverage your inherent assets. In Highland, our asset is our landscape. Perhaps the best opportunity for bringing revenue and jobs into townis outdoor recreation. With the Huts and Trails System to our north, Highland could develop a connecting trail system and market itself as an access point. We already have good snowmobile trails in town but nothing designated as an official ITS trail. ATV's are growing in popularity. There is an ATV trail through Lexington and getting a connector trail to that from Highland would not be too difficult. Access points would need to be developed and supported. The vast majority of recreational trails in Maine are on private land, and Highland is no different. Trail development would be contingent on not only getting permission but working with various landowners in the town. By building the recreation business in this way we might attract enough people to the area to support a small convenience store again. This might also help our existing recreational businesses get on firmer footing.

Since Sandy Stream valley was once a major deer yard and wild brook trout nursery we could work with IFW to see if there is a way to restore or repair some of that critical habitat. Another related potential business is simply watching the wildlife.

With traditional resource-based industries evolving, new prospects have emerged, including development of wind power, mining, or extracting groundwater. A large industrial development will have economic impact even if it may result in few local jobs. In this event, it will be critical to have zoning control to protect the community. The town must maintain focus on its primary economic opportunity – that of encouraging outdoor recreation and tourism through our natural landscape – so zoning standards to protect the quality of the landscape must be implemented. The community is not interested in encouraging this type of business, however, so would not consider a TIF policy.

Planners in Somerset County recently completed an economic development plan for the upper part of the county. It addresses mostly the Kennebec Valley north of Bingham, but some of its recommendations could affect Highland:

- Strengthen marketing for Tourism and Recreation;
- Protect Access and Quality of Natural Resources;
- Support Manufacturing;

- Advance Healthcare;
- Invest in Connectivity;
- Prepare the Workforce of the Future;
- Foster a Culture of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development.

4: Land Use and Housing

Land Development Patterns:

Almost all development in Highland is residential, with only four active commercial properties. Three of these four blend well into residential neighborhoods. Traditionally, Highland's commercial or industrial activities have been small enough to be compatible with residential uses. With the potential for high-impact industrial development on the horizon, we should establish development rules to protect residential properties.

Residential development in Highland is confined to a small area from the south boundary on Long Falls Dam Road to a pair of camps 3 miles to the north, just beyond the crest of the hill. Almost all residences are located on one of four roads; Long Falls Dam Road, Sandy Stream Road, Old County Road, or Howard Hill Road (see *Existing Land Use Map,* page 23). Power lines end well before the roads do. Beyond are extensive industrial tracts and State-owned public lots. This establishes a practical limit on the area suitable for new development.

A landowner wanting to sell a lot can divide only once in five years without triggering subdivision review, which through the LUPC is time-consuming and expensive. Extending power more than a few hundred feet off its existing limits would make new development cost-prohibitive. Local rules making it easier to buy and build might attract new residents both seasonal and full time.

Although development is confined to roadsides in a small portion of town, there is not enough density within Highland to be construed as a village area. This may have been the case years back, when the Highland Lodge and store was still operating at the junction of Long Falls Dam and Sandy Stream Roads. Current LUPC zoning shows a small general development zone at the store and a somewhat larger area of d-res zone to the east and west (see *Map*). But there is no environmental or public service rationale for this or another portion of the settled area to be the nucleus of a new village.

In addition to the abandoned store and lodge, a self-storage business is located near the crossroads. The Claybrook Lodge is located on Howard Hill Road and the Jack Pitch Lodge well up Long Falls Dam Road. The contractor's salt shed is on Old County Road. An old mill building (no longer salvageable) sits on Long Falls Dam Road about ¼ mile north of the Sandy Stream crossroads and adjacent to the fire house. The townhouse is a further mile-plus along the road. The town doesn't have its own town garage for road

maintenance. Our contractor does plowing, sanding, and road maintenance out of Old County Road. Though his building was permitted by LURC there is concern over ground water contamination from salt-laden runoff leaking from the facility. That is the sum total of commercial and public buildings in Highland (See *Map).*

Our greatest asset is our wild undeveloped landscape. Protecting it is one of our main objectives. We wake up to it every morning and it is where we see the last light of each day. Establishing land use standards for this sensitive area will be a priority. A map of development zones is essential and records of all development will be kept.

In contrast to potential industrial development, adding a few homes, camps, or small businesses would increase our tax base without having much impact on the character and quality of this place. Protecting our mountain views and rugged streams and protecting critical habitats might attract new residents. With interest generated by the new Huts and Trails System, the Bigelow Preserve, Flagstaff Lake, and the popularity of people powered recreation, more people are discovering our area. Working with neighboring towns and landowners to add connecting trails – both non-motorized and motorized – might make living or starting a business in Highland more attractive.

In general the existing LUPC regulatory structure (*LUPC Rules*, Chapter 10) fits well with the rural character of Highland. The LUPC districts are shown on the *Existing Land Use Map.* Protection zones cover areas roughly equivalent to floodplains and municipal shoreland zones, and development zones include areas near the crossroads and on Howard Hill Road. The majority of Highland (not labelled) is the M-gn (general management) zone. Chapter 10 includes basic dimensional standards:

- 40,000 square feet per lot,
- 100 foot road frontage for residential, 200 foot for commercial,
- 75 or 100 foot setback from shorelines,
- 50 foot setback from roads, 15 foot setback from side and rear lot lines,
- Maximum 30 percent lot coverage.

Should we add protections for landowners who anticipate future residential development on more remote properties? Would LUPC-based rules be adequate to protect residential areas from problems with small industrial activities? We will need to establish a planning board and board of appeals, although qualified volunteers will be at a premium. Our new permitting standards should be efficient and simple but effective. Our CEO will need to stay abreast of current best practices with adequate training

Forestry and Farming:

There are no longer any farms in Highland; once-cleared open fields have grown back to forest except for three properties. Along Sandy Stream Road there is a small field that is still mowed. The Marjorie Gray property includes an overgrown twenty acre field

and there is a two acre field at Claybrook Lodge. These old fields provide a diversity of habitat beneficial to several species of birds and animals. Based against the elevation of the height of land the fields are important resting places for annual bird migrations. There are only two other open spaces and both are rapidly growing in.

At least 95 percent of the land area in Highland Plantation is forested or managed for forest production and undeveloped. Of the 28,000+ acres of forested land, 23,900 acres (83 percent) of it is in Tree Growth, with another 1,000 or so in public lots. Highland has more land and a higher percentage in Tree Growth than all but two towns in Somerset County (Caratunk and West Forks.) The majority of land in Highland is in a single ownership managed almost exclusively for timber production (with lands also open for recreation).

There are five public lots managed by the Bureau of Public Lands in Highland, ranging from 130 to 400 acres and totaling about 1,100 acres. They are a valuable resource for public use. At this time they are managed for timber production. The State has not in the past reached out to the town on its management strategies. In theory, a portion of harvesting revenue comes back to the town, but it may be that the county receives it instead.

The most recent Maine Forest Service harvesting data is from 2012. In the ten-year period between 2003 and 2012, total harvesting affected 10,512 acres, more than 1/3 the land area of Highland. Of that, about 4,300 acres were selectively harvested, 5,100 harvested by shelterwood, and 1,000 by clearcut. (shelterwood is a two-stage practice, with harvesting separated by ten years or so, so it is possible that some of this acreage is double-counted.) That encompassed 86 operations. The largest single year was 2003, when 93 acres were selectively cut, 639 clearcut, and 1,050 cut by shelterwood. In 2012, 742 acres were selectively cut, 187 clearcut, and 545 by shelterwood.

The slow rate of residential and commercial development in Highland has no effect on forestry operations. Commercial forestry activities continue on both small private wood lots and with the large landowners. The large operations are using mechanical harvesting on most of their lands while wood lot owners most often rely on hand crews. Both large and small ownerships, if enrolled in Tree Growth, must have forest management plans. These are not required to be filed with the town, but may be reviewed on request. Copies of harvesting notices are sent to the town, and the Maine Forest Service, which is responsible for enforcing the Maine Forest Practices Act, has not recorded any violations.

The majority of forest lands in Highland are third-party certified as operating sustainably. Certification is granted to owners who have demonstrated compliance with the principles and criteria that define sustainable forest management, including protection of natural attributes such as water resources, biodiversity, wildlife habitat protection, species regeneration, etc. The certification must be audited regularly by field visits and a summary of the results is available for the public.

Despite this, there is a perception among townspeople of cases of poor logging practices. Some of this may be held over from the era prior to the Forest Practices Act (1989), but some may be current. Residents want to ensure a sustainable, multi-use forest. The solution to this situation should be to improve communications through regular contact with the Forest Service and forest landowners. Since Highland's forests have been regulated by LUPC for such a long time, this communication may have been lacking in the past.

Residents are also concerned with the possibility of sale of the lands into "wilderness tracts," as has been done in other parts of Maine. The likelihood of this is remote in the case of the largest landowner. The company has a long-term wood supply agreement with a Rumford pulp and paper mill which not only requires active forest management but that the lands remain 3rd party certified. Current LUPC rules do not allow subdivision in that area.

Residential Development in Highland:

The existing supply, quality, and availability of housing in Highland Plantation is a factor in the overall growth and health of the town. Although town government has very little control over housing stocks, it could possibly get involved in addressing problems. If a large proportion of housing is unsafe, for example, or not energy-efficient, there are grants that the Town can apply for to help. If housing prices rise to the point where new houses are not affordable, that presents a whole new set of problems in getting people to move to town, considering our job prospects.

The 2010 census indicated that there were 31 year-round houses in Highland and 26 camps. An actual windshield count in 2015 came up with 30 year-round houses and 23 camps. Table 2, below, shows the progression of housing by type. The housing counts reflect the population trends in Figure 1 (Chapter 2). There is no housing increase in the 2000's to correspond to the population increase, but the average household size increased.

Table 2: Highland Plantation Housing, by Type and Occupancy, 1980-2010

	1980	1990	2000	2010
Total Housing Units	30	33	56	57
Year-round Homes	24	18	30	31
Mobile Homes	2	4	6	14
Seasonal	6	15	26	26
Rentals	0	2	3	0

Source: US Census

The total number of housing units rose between 1980 and 2010, with the growth of year-round housing at 30 percent (nearly all in the 1990's) and a huge increase in camps in the 80's and 90's. The number of mobile homes has increased substantially, but they have only recently become worth considering in our climate. Some of the mobile homes in town may also be classified as "seasonal." There is no indication from the numbers that seasonal houses are being converted to year-round, although any new seasonal construction in

Highland is likely to be built to year-round standards. Year-round occupancy in a house formerly classified as "seasonal" would help to build Highland's total housing stock.

There were no renters found in 2010, although there were several vacant houses that could have been "for rent." With few rentals, one could assume a fairly slow turnover in population. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), just over half of 2010 residents moved into their current homes in the 1990's.

The growth in housing units seems dramatic, but is not too unusual for this area. As Table 3 shows, other towns in this areas, particularly small towns, share similar growth rates, often extending into to 2000's. Between 1990 and 2010, New Portland increased their housing stock by 30 percent (even though their population has dropped) and Embden by 33 percent. Many of New Portland's additional homes were classified as "seasonal," while even Kingfield and Anson, neither known as resort areas, gained 60 or more seasonal homes. In Emben, over half their total housing stock is seasonal.

Table 3: Housing Stock by Town, 1990-2010

	Total Housing			Seasonal Housing		
Town	1990	2000	2010	1990	2000	2010
Anson	1029	1193	1300	52	99	110
Embden	713	893	950	362	501	516
Industry	432	487	625	166	158	210
Kingfield	594	659	695	123	164	193
New Portland	465	504	605	126	200	224
Highland	33	56	57	15	26	25

Source: US Census

Very little data exists on the *age and condition* of the town's housing stock. The census does ask questions such as how old a house is and whether it has modern plumbing and heating, but this is based on the ACS statistical sample, and the samples are so small that in a town the size of Highland Plantation, the figure is little more than a guess.

According to the ACS, about 18 percent of the houses in Highland Plantation were built prior to 1940. The percentage of pre-war homes in Highland is relatively low, however. On average in Somerset County, 28 percent of homes were built before 1940, and in New Portland, the figure is 33 percent! Pre-war homes tend to be very well constructed, but may have outdated plumbing and electrical systems and inadequate insulation.

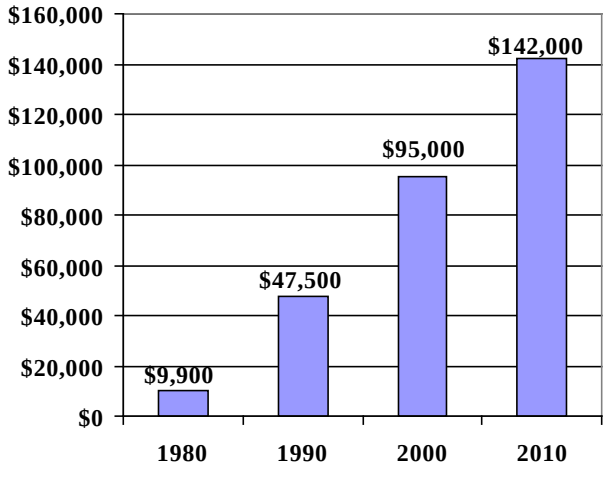
Successive censuses indicate that a large number of houses were built in the 1990's. Housing values also increased dramatically (see below) so we can make a guess that the new homes built were of quite good quality, on average. The ACS estimates that only two year-round housing units lack a complete kitchen, and all have adequate plumbing. The ACS also estimates that 1/3 of the town heat their homes primarily with wood, while the rest use oil.

Housing Prices and Affordability:

The price and affordability of housing is often a significant factor in the economic life of a town. Housing prices are generally set by the open market, but if supply and demand get out of whack it can result in insufficient housing for prospective residents, or price inflation driving out elderly residents.

Figure 6 charts the progression of housing values in Highland Plantation according to the ACS. These are median values, meaning half are above and half below, and they are not actual sale prices but homeowners' estimates of value. They also do not include camps or mobile homes, or houses on properties where the acreage is worth more than the house.

Figure 6:
Median Home Values, 1980-2010



According to these estimates, housing values have risen briskly since 1980. The trend is on an upward trajectory and the 2010 median value of $142,000 exceeds every town in Somerset County except Embden and Ripley. In all of Somerset County, the 2010 median is just shy of $110,000.

Because this trend is so dramatic, we have to question whether it is accurate. Ordinary inflation accounts for some of the increase, but over the past two decades, it has been 32 and 28.5 percent per decade, accounting for about a 69 percent rise. Far more likely is that the actual housing stock has turned over. It's likely that in 1980, much of the housing was very basic and utilitarian. Since then, new homes have been built that were well up in the price range. Remember from Figure 5 (Chapter 3) how household incomes have tripled since 1990. The trebled income levels are mirrored in housing prices. The data seems to indicate a large turnover to households that can afford nicer homes.

This brings forward the reason why home values are important. If they become a financial burden on households, the town's economy (and tax revenues) can decline. The general rule is that housing costs should not exceed 30 percent of a household's income. That's a selling price between 3 and 3.4 times the annual income, depending on the interest rate available. Highland Plantation's median household income of roughly $22,000 should only be able to afford a $66-75,000 home. What is happening in Highland? There are two possibilities: first, that the census estimate is wrong and the median income is a lot higher than sampled; second, that new residents in town are bringing their money with them when

they build new homes, so don't have to rely on income. This might be the case if the newcomers were retirees or wealthy.

At any rate, there is not a very strong link to housing market conditions in Highland simply because of the factors involved. Land is limited because of a few large ownerships and the lack of widespread power, yet demand is limited by the lack of economic opportunity. People are drawn to Highland by choice, not necessity. The only time that those high housing prices will come into play is when the owners seek to sell.

Because affordability is a national concern, the ACS asks homeowners about the relationship between their housing costs and ability to pay. It reports households' housing costs as a percentage of their income. In Highland, about 25 percent of households are paying more than 30 percent of their income for their current homes. Chances are, these are retired households who are using savings to augment their income. There are no renters in town (according to the census), so there are no "temporary" financial situations.

The state's planning law requires towns to look at availability of affordable housing not only for median income households but for a household making 80 percent or less of the median. In Highland, 80 percent is about $17,000, making an affordable house somewhere in the $50-60,000 range. According to the ACS, there are only two houses currently valued in that range and there are five households with that income or below. However, the ACS does not include mobile homes in their computations of value, which may provide more options in that price range.

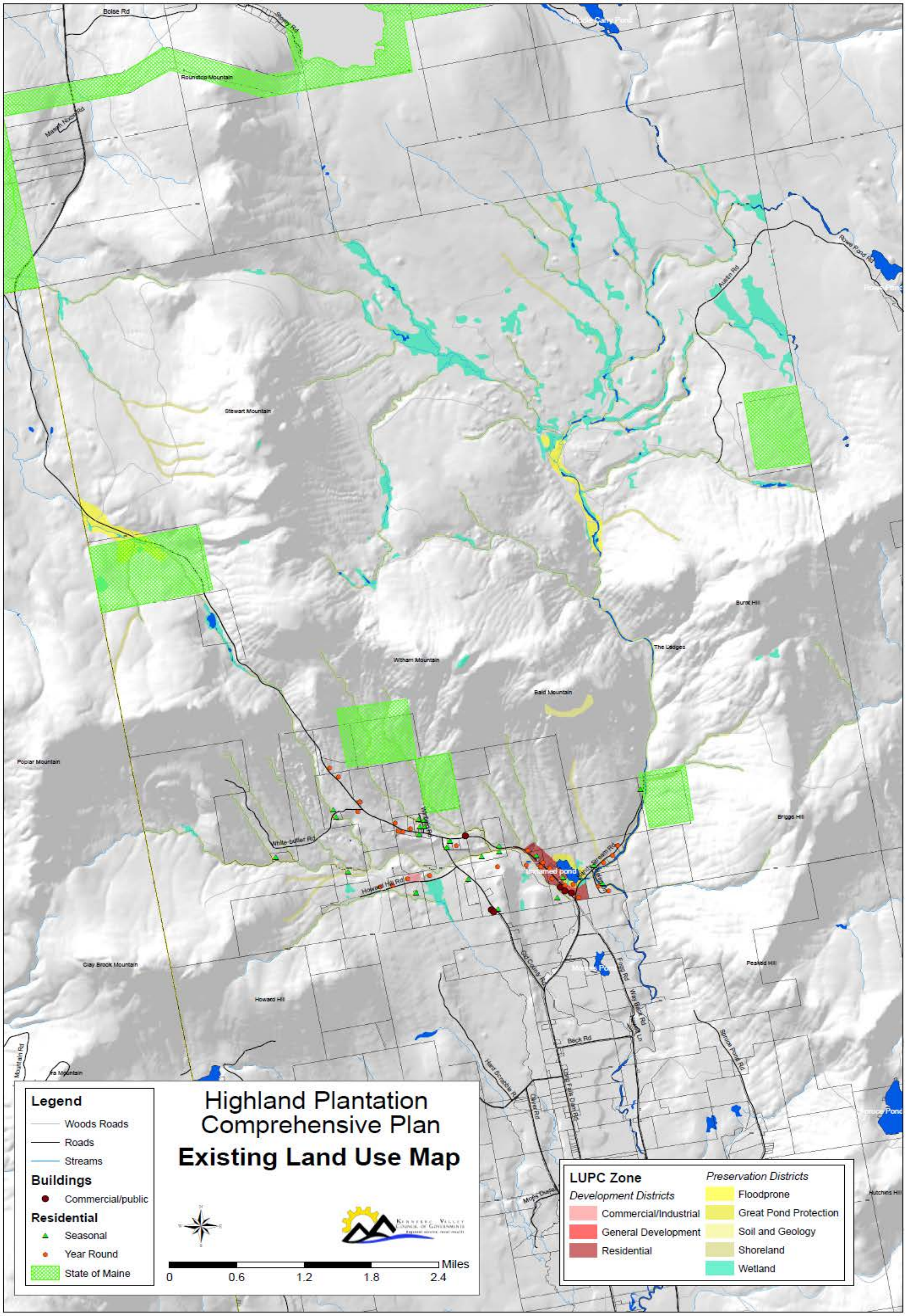
Given the small population of Highland Plantation and the limited supply and demand for housing, it is difficult to predict the future. As described in an earlier chapter, the past two decades have seen an average of seven new homes per decade – but local records indicate only two (including one camp) built between 2000 and 2015. There is no pressure for that trend to change or increase.

There is plenty of subdividable land. State law requires that any property divided more than once every five years must be reviewed as a subdivision. A local authority such as a planning board, must be set up to review applications, but local subdivision review is very fast and much less expensive than LUPC. The cost of surveying, road-building, and bringing power in would be much more significant.

If, as the numbers show, new homes in town coming in over $142,000, that should be plenty of incentive for development of new lots, but it would be for a limited market, which would not include current residents. The additional issue comes when current residents eventually want to sell at the prices they bought or built for. Those prices may be sustainable for another ten years or so, as retiring baby boomers flood the market, but may eventually have to come down.

If household incomes remain low, there will also be pressure to bring in lower-cost mobile homes for affordable housing. Some rural towns in Somerset County have become dumping grounds for older, low-value mobile homes. State law does allow towns to regulate the construction quality of mobile homes being imported into the town and the design and location of mobile home parks.

There are no regional initiatives to create more affordable housing. Despite the statistics for Highland, property values and the cost of development in this part of Somerset County is universally considered to be low. No public investment is seen as necessary to promote more low-cost housing.


Highland Plantation
Comprehensive Plan
Existing Land Use Map
Legend
Woods Roads
Roads
Streams
Buildings
Commercial/public
Residential
Seasonal
Year Round
State of Maine
0
0.6
1.2
1.8
2.4
Miles
LUPC Zone
Development Districts
Commercial/Industrial
General Development
Residential
Preservation Districts
Floodprone
Great Pond Protection
Soil and Geology
Shoreland
Wetland
Stewart Mountain
Witham Mountain
Bald Mountain
Poplar Mountain
Clay Brook Mountain
Howard Hill
Burnt Hill
The Ledges
Briggs Hill
Peaked Hill
Roundtop Mountain
Boise Rd
Beck Rd

5: Land and Water Resources

Land-based Resources:

State-generated data on natural resources for Highland Plantation is limited, if only because it is an unorganized territory with little development pressure on an abundance of resources. Except for private logging roads, access to much of the town is limited to walking or snowmobiling. Available resource maps are lacking in information. The soils mapping is only at low intensity; wetlands maps show three different layouts of wetlands in the upper Sandy Stream valley; deer wintering area maps show deeryards stopping at town lines. As a result, the observations of local residents, who live in and around these resources on a daily basis, are often more accurate than state databases.

Highland nestles at the base of the Appalachian Plateau, known locally as the "height of land." The narrow valley where most development is, sits at an altitude of 5-600 feet. Witham Mountain, less than a mile and a half from "downtown" Highland, reaches 2,301 feet. To the northwest of that lies Stewart Mountain, rising to 2,671 feet. Topography is a significant attribute of Highland's resource base. Up to 20 percent of the land area of Highland contains slopes above 35 percent and thus unsuitable for any type of development requiring foundations or septic systems. (see *Natural Resources Map,* page 30.)

Until the late 1960's, Sandy Stream valley above the height of land was known as a major winter habitat for Whitetail Deer. Heavy logging in the 70's followed by the Spruce Budworm outbreak and salvage logging in the 80's greatly reduced the quality of the habitat. Neighboring towns experienced similar deer yard destruction. The result is severe mortality in any big snow winter. The population struggles to rebound in mild winters only to be decimated again when the snow is deep. This has affected the quality of the hunting experience, with tagging rates dropping to all-time lows in the 70's, rebounding in the 80s but never close to what they were before the decline. At this point, it would take a cooperative and proactive effort to restore the Sandy Stream deeryard.

Beginning with Habitat maps show a deeryard associated with Little Adler Brook in Lexington that abruptly ends at the Highland town line. (*Beginning with Habitat* (BWH) is a cooperative program that assembles and propagates data from a number of state agencies and private conservation organizations. It is recognized as the clearinghouse and information center for habitat information in Maine.)

As might be expected, there are massive areas of undeveloped forest blocks in Highland, the largest of these extending into Carrying Place and Pleasant Ridge, estimated at 88,500 acres. However, there is no mapped winter habitat in the entire extent, and locals have observed a general decline in big game populations. The town should reach out to IFW biologists and landowners to see what it would take to improve the habitat. Numerous potential wildlife crossings are shown on BWH maps and wildlife has indeed been observed on roads throughout the town, but traffic is light enough to not pose much of a threat.

A great number and diversity of aerial wildlife has been observed in town, and it has become something of a drawing card for tourists. The wind turbine application that was withdrawn a couple of years ago was partially because biologists found the "among the greatest concentrations of migrating birds and bats ever observed in Maine" along the spine of Witham Mountain. This information came about only in response to a project proposal; it would be helpful if IFW or other professionals would explore and make more information available on other rare species and on the bird and bat migrations on Witham and surrounding mountains.

Highland is almost totally forested with most of the land under Tree Growth. Since we are interested in maintaining a wild undeveloped landscape, the Tree Growth designation fits well, as long as forest management does not impact the overall quality of the landscape and habitat capacities as well as scenic vistas which are of high value to us.

BWH, based on information from the Maine Natural Areas Program, lists one exemplary natural community in Highland. Its designation is "Spruce Rocky Woodland" and it covers the eastern face of Bald Mountain. Spruce Rocky Woodland is described as "barren rocky slopes dominated by a thin overstory of red spruce and understory of holly and lowbush blueberry," which is a very apt description of the slope. Its extent is shown on the Natural Resources Map. The IFW has also documented occurrences of Lynx (a federally threatened species) and Bicknell's Thrush (a state species of special concern) in Highland, though these are not shown on BWH maps so cannot be placed on our map.

In summary, critical natural resources in Highland are not well-documented. Much of our information comes from private sources or local observations. It is difficult to assess the threat to these resources without adequate information. State laws provide a degree of protection from poor land management or new development, but the town is concerned that insufficient attention has been paid to identifying valuable resources. Our isolation also works against us, as current resource protection efforts are managed by the LUPC or Somerset County, and are spread too thinly to provide a basis for cooperative efforts.

There are five public lots owned by the Bureau of Public Lands in Highland, ranging from 130 to 400 acres. They are a valuable resource for public use. At this time they are managed for wood harvest. After harvest, the access roads are usually blocked according to best management practices. This limits erosion but also limits vehicle access to the lots. They are still accessible on foot. There are no other mapped conservation lands or interests.

Unlike on the "Lexington Flats," Sandy Stream through the developed portion of Highland is fairly tightly confined. The impact of floodplains is not a significant factor in the developed portion of town. Sandy Stream above the height of land shows an area that is designated by LUPC zoning as a floodplain protection district, as does Poplar Stream flowing north towards Flagstaff Lake at the upper end of Long Falls Dam Road, with an but both are miles from any development. Federal floodplain maps do not cover Highland, but a future zoning ordinance will have to contain federal floodplain management standards.

Scenic Assets:

Highland today is a remote quiet undeveloped place. When you reach the "Lexington Flat" on Long Falls Dam Road you can see all the way to the height of land five miles distant. It is a spectacular view dominated by a looming mountain landscape. This is the primary scenic asset worth preserving in town.

There are no identified scenic resources of national or statewide significance in Highland, except that portions of the mountainscape may be visible from the Appalachian Trail to the north. This is clearly not the perspective of residents. In order to better define the town's scenic assets, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments utilized a public meeting format to identify and prioritize assets of local or regional significance.

The meeting identified four separate vantage points of two viewscapes. The two viewscapes are panoramic ridgelines: 1) Witham and Bald Mountains and 2) Burnt Hill, Briggs Hill, and Peaked Hill (in Lexington). Witham and Bald Mountains can best be viewed from the south on Long Falls Dam Road on the Lexington Flats, and also from the west near the junction of Ware-Butler Road. The Burnt Hill-Briggs Hill ridgeline can best be seen from Sandy Stream Road and from Old County Road. (*see* Natural Resource Map)

Though reluctant to set priorities, the meeting generally agreed that Witham Mountain is the defining landform in Highland. It represents the gateway to the height of land, the boundary between the developed flatlands and the wild hills. It defines "home" to many residents, and may be the inspiration to the town's name.

The two ridgelines are highly valued by all of our residents and need to be protected. Further industrial development of Highland, including potential mineral extraction, cell towers, power corridors, and wind turbines, must be regulated to minimize visual impacts. Excluding towers from the most scenic ridgelines would still leave a huge fraction of Highland available for development.

As Sandy Stream descends from the height of land there is a series of water falls with beautiful granite pools that is a popular swimming and picnic place. The view down river from the top of the falls is spectacular.

Water Resources:

Surface waters in Highland consist mostly of brooks and streams with only the Highland Bog containing enough open water to qualify as a great pond. The Highland Bog is maintained by a dam at the outlet and its watershed is entirely within Highland. It is a fertile habitat supporting a great variety of warm water species including Painted, Snapping, and Wood Turtles. The bog is listed as one of many "unnamed ponds" in state databases and there is no available water quality information on it.

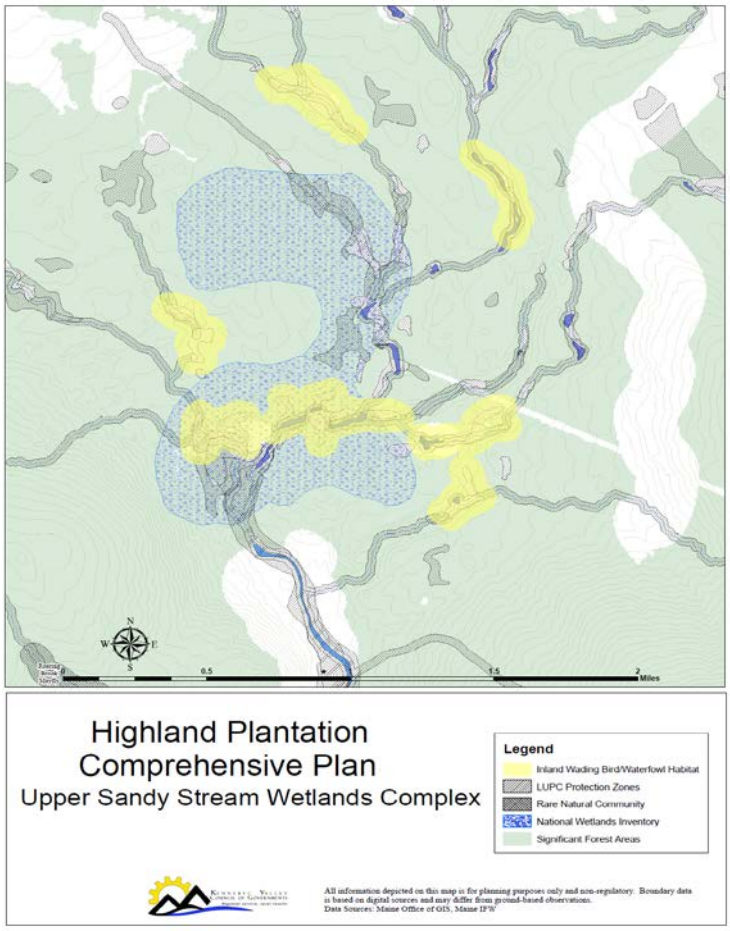
Sandy Stream is the most important water resource in our town and is the backbone of a complicated network of wetlands and tributaries. The upper portion above the height of land consists of two branches. The west branch comes from Middle Carry Pond in Carrying Place and the east branch from Rowe and Jewett Ponds in Pleasant Ridge. There are several smaller, spring-fed tributaries that feed into Sandy Stream, draining the valley surrounded by mountains. Some of the major ones are Michael Stream, Little Michael, Little Alder, Britenell Brook, Barker Brook and Stoney Brook. There are also large and small wetlands that are essential to this ecosystem.

Almost every part of the system is inhabited with wild Brook Trout. Logging along the streams up to the 70's resulted in thermal pollution and sedimentation, reducing the habitat. It has since been partially restored, in part due to regulation of tree-cutting adjacent to streams in shoreland zoning requirements to provide shade and reduce erosion. The town should work with IFW biologists to identify opportunities to enhance stream habitat. Grants are available through the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture Program to conduct habitat mitigation.

Biologists have identified the Northern Spring Salamander (species of special concern) and Roaring Brook Mayfly (state-listed endangered) in cold flowing waters high up on the mountains. The mayfly is listed as an endangered species and the *Natural Resources Map* based on BWH data identifies critical habitat along Stoney Brook below the north face of Witham Mountain. Biologists have also found evidence that suggests the possibility of Bog Lemmings in a series of wetlands on Witham and Stewart Mountains. Detailed information on identification and protection of these species and their habitat is available from the Maine Natural Areas Program.

The headwaters of the Barker Brook flowage have a major wetland and several springs that flow out of the base of Witham and Stewart where they join. Beaver activities create temporary impoundments that fill with trout and the springs are filled with trout fry.

The entire northeast quadrant of Highland – the upper reaches of Sandy Stream and its tributaries – is a patchwork of wetlands and rivulets. The extent and value of the wetland complex is not well-documented, as even maps of the area show different configurations of wetlands. (*See* inset below) Some of these appear on USGS wetlands maps; BWH maps show some (but not the same boundaries) as waterfowl/wading Bird habitat. A different extent is shown as LUPC protection district. Taken as a whole, the interaction of mountain slopes, springs, wetlands, streams, and forest constitute a critical slice of Maine landscape. LUPC zoning is the only protection for the area; LUPC has shoreland and wetland protection districts in the town.



Much of the Sandy Stream ecosystem is potentially important habitat. It has not been studied in detail. It should be, in order to determine where the most sensitive areas are. Local and landowner knowledge, combined with professional investigation, could better define the value and extent of the habitat, and whether it is associated with rare, threatened, or endangered species.

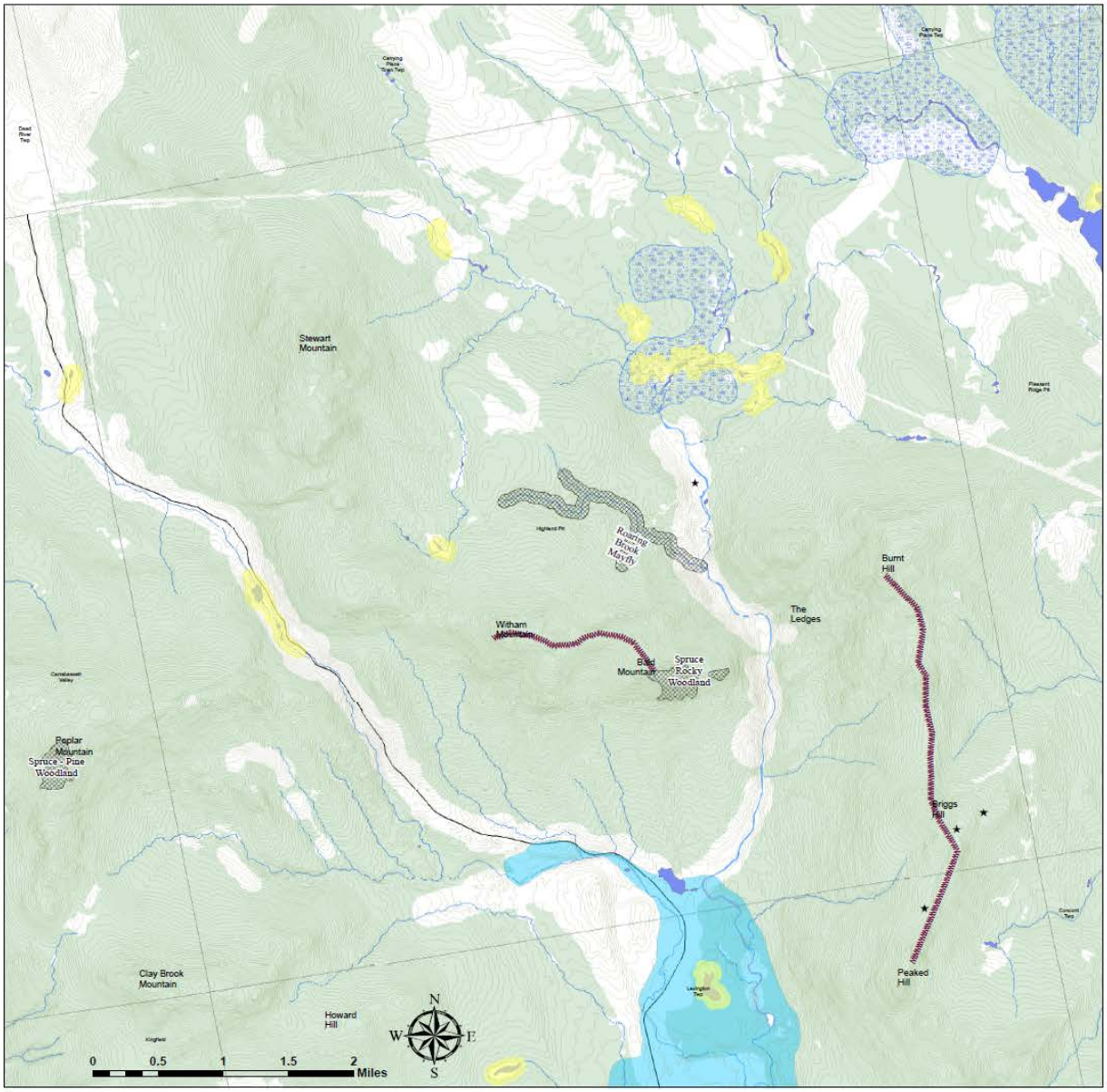
There are four significant vernal pools mapped in Highland. One is near Sandy Stream and three are on Briggs Hill. Vernal pools can only be identified by a trained observer, and usually only in springtime; no statewide inventory has been done, so these four may not be the only ones in Highland. None are threatened by development.

About the only watershed in Highland that does not end up in Sandy Stream is Poplar Stream, flowing north from the height of land along Long Falls Dam Road. There is a mapped wetland complex at the upper end.

A significant sand and gravel aquifer underlies the southern portion of Sandy Stream and Long Falls Dam Road, providing homes there with abundant water. The Highland Lodge was here, but the underground fuel tanks were removed long ago, and there is no sign of contamination, nor threats from other sources. There is local concern about potential salt contamination from a contractor's salt shed located on Old County Road, but

it is not technically over the aquifer. Underground fuel tanks at the Highland Store (which is located over the aquifer) were removed at least thirty years ago. There are no other groundwater threats.

There are no public water supplies or protection areas. There may be interest at some point in our groundwater as a marketable resource, which should be addressed in any future regulation.



Highland Plantation Comprehensive Plan

Significant Natural Resources

Legend

- Scenic RidgeLine
- Inland Wading Bird/Waterfowl Habitat
- Rare Natural Community
- Aquifers
- ★ Significant Vernal Pools
- Wetlands
- Significant Forest Areas

Kennebec Valley Council of Governments
Regional service, local results

All information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only and non-regulatory. Boundary data is based on digital sources and may differ from ground-based observations.
Data Sources: Maine Office of GIS, Maine IFW

6: Community Services and Facilities

Since Highland is so remote and lightly populated, we maintain a minimal service capacity – as described below. Services are considered adequate, however, by local residents, and since anticipated growth will be low and slow should be adequate well into the future. Public utilities limit our growth to some extent. Central Maine Power maintains a power line up to but not over the height of land so all of our full time residents have access, but there is no three-phase access. Telephone lines go through Highland along Long Falls Dam Road and through the woods to Pierce Pond Camps. Most recently the local telephone company has made Wi-Fi available to Highland.

Public Education:

- Expended 2014: $88,162
- Five-year average: $93,323
- Five-year trend: -1.4 % per year

The biggest expense the town has is education; because students are tuitioned, changes in the number of school age children reflect directly on our financial contribution. Students from Highland attend schools in RSU 58, centered in the Kingfield area. Highland's enrollment dropped from 13 students in 2008-09, to 10 in 10-11 and eight in 14-15. Dropping enrollment is not limited to Highland; it's typical throughout Maine. Enrollment in the district has been dropping as well – from 892 in 08-09, to 807 in 11-12, to just 729 in 14-15. Enrollment statewide has dropped about five percent since 08-09.

Dropping enrollment puts a burden on the financial capacity of the schools, as there are fixed costs to be paid regardless of enrollment. RSU 58 has an average cost per pupil of $11,869. This is slightly less than the statewide average of $12,056 per pupil. Highland currently pays tuition of $10,000 per student, plus a share of administration, special education, and transportation.

Public Safety:

- Expended 2014: $42,134 (Fire: $22,207, ambulance: $6,134)
- Five-year average: $35,519
- Five-year trend: 6.2 % per year

Somerset County Sheriff's Department and State Police are our law enforcement, with no local police. Emergency services are dispatched through the Somerset E911 system.

Highland shares a Fire Department with Lexington. Because Lexington is a township, Somerset County pays their share of fire protection. The firehouse is located on Long Falls Dam Road, a few hundred yards north of Sandy Stream Road. The firehouse has three bays and has no maintenance or upgrade needs. The department has four trucks: one tanker, two pumpers and a forestry truck. None are in need of upgrade or replacement. Having enough man power is always an issue; only a few of the volunteers have the state-required level of training.

Ambulance service comes from Northstar which is a part of the Franklin Memorial Hospital. The town pays an annual fee. The ambulance is dispatched through the 911 system from both Somerset and Franklin Counties. The town has a resident EMT. The town has its own emergency management director and works with Somerset County EMD on emergency planning. The town has no designated emergency shelter, although probably the entire population could fit into the townhouse if need be.

Public Works:

- Expended 2014: $48,322(summer roads: $580, winter roads: $44,271, trash: $9,126)
- Five-year average: $50,073
- Five-year trend: 2.2 % per year

Other than education, public works is the largest budget expenditure in Highland, and the lion's share of that is winter snow plowing. This budget item fluctuates from year to year, depending on how much summer maintenance is necessary. We hire a contractor to do snowplowing and road maintenance. He maintains a salt sand facility in Highland. There is concern in town about runoff seeping from the facility. He keeps two plow trucks and a grader on site in a maintenance garage. One of the plantation assessors acts as road commissioner and identifies maintenance priorities.

The town contracts with a trash hauling company for curbside pick-up. This arrangement meets our current and anticipated needs. There is no landfill in Highland and no facility for recycling. As a plantation, we are not required to report our waste tonnage to the state.

We have a cemetery in town and the town hires local people for maintenance.

General Government:

- Expended 2014: $33,064
- Five-year average: $33,842
- Five-year trend: -3.8 % per year

Municipal officers consist of a Board of Assessors. Other officials include a plantation clerk/treasurer/registrar (elected), a tax collector (elected), fire chief, constable, school agent, and election clerks.

Highland's townhouse isn't an administrative office but we use it for Town Meetings, community gatherings, and the assessors' meetings. It is centrally located on Long Falls Dam Road. The three assessors do the majority of work in town government. Each of our town officers has an office in their home.

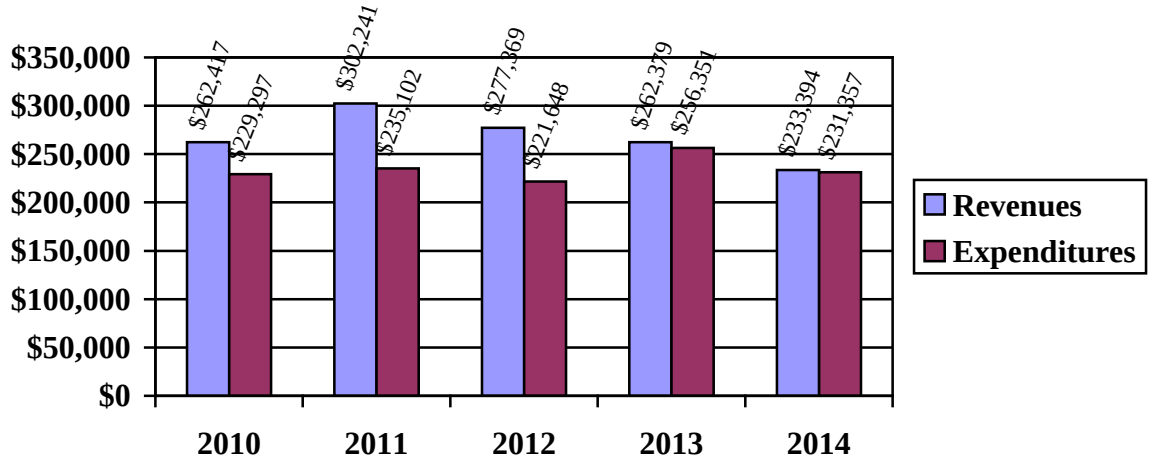
The townhouse is old but well-maintained. Each year there is some maintenance done and occasionally a contractor or volunteers do an upgrade. The town pays a small annual stipend to New Portland for their library and support of their newsletter.

Town Fiscal Management

Highland Plantation has limited self-government authority, but does have the power to impose property taxes and expend to manage local services.

According to audit reports, in 2014 Highland spent $231,357 (see Figure 7). This is slightly below the five-year average expenditure of $234,751. As Figure 7 shows, total expenditures have ranged from $220,000 to over $250,000 in five years. The variability in the budget is attributable to education assessments and public works projects.

Figure 7: Highland Revenues and Expenditures, 2010-2014



In 2014, Highland's revenues totaled $233,394. This is considerably below the five-year average of $267,560. Total revenues have declined steadily since 2011, primarily due to a decline in property tax revenue. Revenues still exceed expenditures, though, and have every year for at least the past five.

When revenues exceed expenditures, the excess is put into surplus, adding to the town's assets. Auditors recommend maintaining a healthy surplus, to avoid having to borrow money or experience cash flow problems. Highland also uses surplus to fund capital

improvements. Highland's net assets, as of 2014, were $537,060, of which about 30 percent were capital assets.

Local property taxes account for about half of the total annual revenue for the town. Excise taxes and state revenue sharing comprise most of the remainder. Property tax revenue does not represent an accurate accounting of local property valuations, because there is such a large chunk in Tree Growth, but a portion of the revenue lost is reimbursed by the state. The total value of property in Highland, according to the Town, was $9,370,520 in 2014. It has grown gradually every year for the past five. The Town's valuation for 2013 (most recent figures available) was slightly above the State's of $8,600,000. If our valuation were much below the state number, we would be required to do a formal revaluation.

The mill rate hit a high point of $17.41 per thousand dollars of valuation in 2011, but has declined every year since, and in 2014 stood at $12.20. Mill rate is calculated based on total dollars raised from taxation, known as the "commitment," which has dropped as well. The commitment in 2014 was $114,320, down from the high in 2011 of $148,194. These numbers resulted in the gradual decline in revenues on Figure 7. It should be noted that in 2011, the town had a surplus of almost $70,000 of revenues over expenditures, so the decline in tax rates is possible without affecting spending levels.

In Highland, school enrollment drives variations in expenditures, but next in importance is the occurrence of one-time expenditures such as road improvements or fixes to the town house. Since the town has just three miles of town road and two public buildings, these do not occur very often.

It is the Town's practice to use its reserves to fund capital purchases. Reserves are adequate to meet needs without jeopardizing cash flow. The Town has no debt (though does have a $40,000 line of credit) and the school department, paying tuition, has no debt liability. The Town does have a dedicated account for capital road improvements, funded in part by the annual Maine DOT grant. One of the assessors acts as road commissioner and identifies needs and priorities for the road system.

7: Transportation and Outdoor Recreation

Transportation Facilities:

Highland Plantation is highly dependent on transportation. With no local jobs, stores, or school, the transportation network is the lifeline of the community. But as the cost of maintaining the system grows, we are faced with hard-to-maintain roads, little chance of improvement or expansion, and no alternatives.

Highland's transportation network is exceedingly simple. The only paved road is Long Falls Dam Road. All residents rely upon it to get anywhere. It originates at Route 16 in North New Portland and ends at a bridge over the Dead River at the outlet of Flagstaff Lake. The road was originally a state highway (Route 16) but was downgraded when Flagstaff Lake flooded it as a through route. The total length is about 25 miles, with about 6 ½ miles in Highland.

Long Falls Dam Road is maintained primarily by the Maine Department of Transportation (DOT). The road has a section repaved from time to time, so there are always some smooth places but it has never been built with a proper base, so will always be behind in maintenance. Heavy log trucks do a lot of damage. Shoulder and drainage work was done in 2014, and the portions of the entire road will be repaved in 2016.

According to DOT traffic counts, the road at the boundary with Lexington averaged 460 vehicle trips per day in 2011, down very slightly from 1998, when it averaged 500. Traffic levels declined in the interim, but have been increasing some with new Huts and Trails traffic every day in winter and summer.

There are three public gravel roads in Highland totaling about three miles; Sandy Stream Road (0.7 miles), Old County Road (0.9 miles), and Howard Hill Road (1.4 miles). Town roads are maintained by a local contractor, with the board of assessors setting priorities and assigning work. The town receives grant funds from Maine DOT for capital improvements to the network ($9,820 in 2014) and keeps those in a separate, dedicated account. All of the roads are in good condition, passable during all seasons. There are a few camp roads and innumerable woods roads maintained by private individuals or companies, not included in this inventory.

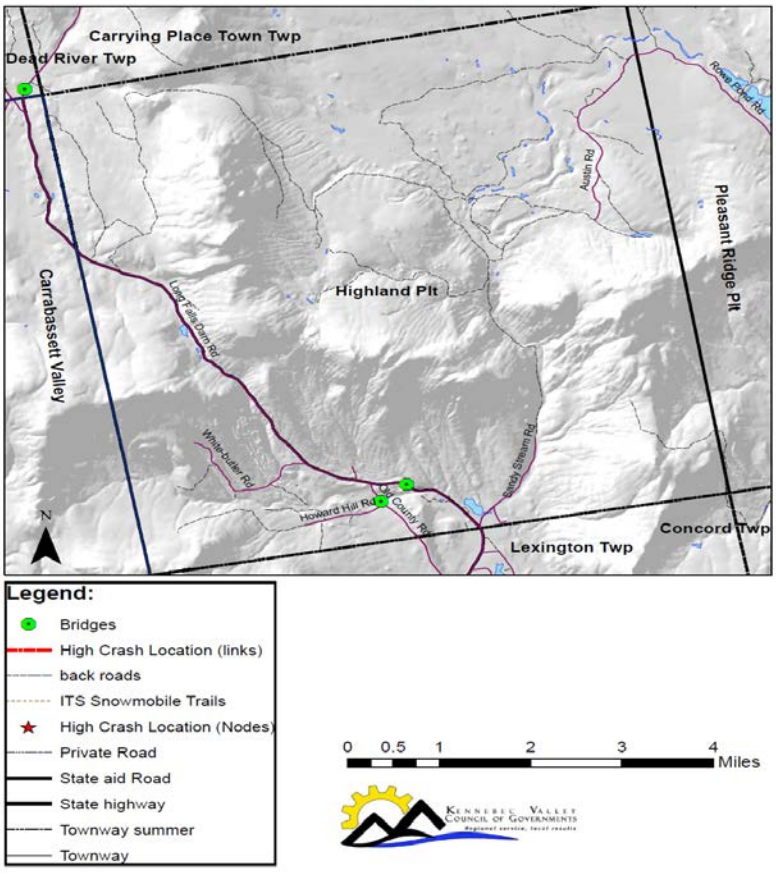
The DOT lists two bridges in Highland. The bridge on Long Falls Dam Road is actually a culvert. It was replaced in 2014. The other bridge is on Old County Road,

spanning Michael Stream. It, too, is a large steel culvert. At its last inspection in 2011, it was in satisfactory condition.

There are very few alternatives to transportation by private vehicle in Highland. Other towns may have access to buses, trains, airports, even carpooling opportunities; none of these are available in Highland. Highland residents with special needs could request transportation from Kennebec Valley Community Action Program, but there is no scheduled service available to the general public. The nearest general aviation airports are Gaddabout Gaddis in Bingham and Sugarloaf regional in Carrabassett, but neither provide any service or opportunities to local residents. There are no designated walking or biking facilities in Highland, although there are plenty of roadsides and informal trails through the backcountry. The traffic is light enough on Long Falls Dam Road for biking, but the shoulders are not in good condition. ATV's in summer and snowmobiling in winter are popular, with no designated local routes but connections to ITS trails outside the town.

There are no public parking areas except graveled spots at the townhouse and Fire House. Noise and light pollution from the transportation system is not an issue. Wildlife is abundant all along Long Falls Dam Road and occasionally there are collisions with deer or moose. However, with the low volume of traffic, vehicle crashes of any kind are rare and there are no known dangerous intersections or road segments. The most common form of crash would be running off the road from snow, ice, or mud.

Transportation Map for Highland



The transportation system as a whole serves the needs of Highland residents adequately, though Long Falls Dam Road is perennially under-maintained. In the future, needs of elderly residents to get around without a car may emerge as a significant issue.

Recreation Facilities:

Our greatest economic and recreational asset is our wild undeveloped landscape. Highland residents take full advantage of traditional outdoor pastimes such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and snowshoeing. For the most part, we are afforded free access to private land to do this throughout town as long as we don't create environmental damage or impede active logging operations.

There are plenty of properties open for recreation but none are owned by the town. Many private landowners allow access to their lands and the large landowners generally have an open road policy which allows public vehicle access on logging roads. Public lots provide 1,100 acres of woodland, but access to those sometimes requires crossing other private properties. Roads into these lots are usually blocked off when not being used for active management, requiring foot access into them. (BPL's current plan calls for signing the boundaries of the lot that intersects Sandy Stream Road for ease of identification for the public.) The town does not have the capacity to acquire or administer open space lands on its own, but would consider partnering with a land trust, if the occasion presented itself. Somerset Woods Trustees is the land trust that operates in Somerset County, but it does not yet have a presence in this area.

Where Sandy Stream comes off the height of land, there is a series of waterfalls, making for a popular, though informal, hiking and picnicking spot. There has been discussion of developing the area, with a formal trail, parking spots, and tables. It would require cooperation from the landowner and possibly road improvements. BPL is open to the possibility of building a small parking area on its lot for falls access.

Highland supports the local snowmobile club financially, through a disbursement of local registration fees. The club maintains a trail system that crosses private properties with landowner agreements. This trail system is open free for the public. Some of these trails, as well as others, are used by ATV's, though there is no organized group to develop those trails. By law, ATV use must have written landowner permission. Several large landowners have worked with the State ATV Program to designate trails. These agreements usually require the State or a designated local club to sign and maintain the trails. As noted, there are no designated trails in Highland.

Claybrook Mountain Lodge maintains cross country ski trails on private lands and those are free and open to the public. The snowmobile club and other entities sometimes work with neighboring towns to promote connectivity.

Long Falls Dam Road provides access to both the Appalachian Trail and the Maine Huts and Trails system, as well as Flagstaff Lake and the Bigelow Preserve. With the growing popularity of people powered recreation, we're seeing more through traffic to the trailheads. This suggests that we could add our own trailheads. Working with neighboring

towns or trail groups to add connecting trails – both non-motorized and motorized – might persuade people to stop and help to build the local economy.

The town does not have any playgrounds, playing fields, or other "active" recreation facilities, nor are there any towns in the area with which we could cooperate.

8: Planning for the Future of Highland Plantation

Throughout the long history of Highland Plantation, our population and prosperity has fluctuated, but in all cases our future has been decided by others. It may have been state agencies, the Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC, now LUPC), large landowners or corporations, the common element has been the lack of political, regulatory, or fiscal authority to determine our own future as a town.

Highland citizens have concluded that, in one way at least, the town can assert local control. By developing its own comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances, the town can manage its own land use regulatory system and have some power to direct development.

We took our first steps in this regard in early 2014 by contacting LUPC as well as other state agencies about the process of asserting local control. As it became clear that this step required more than just a nod from LUPC, the Town voted to proceed with development of a plan and associated ordinances that would form the basis of local land use control. This is not a process to be taken lightly; with the small population and administrative capacity of the town, it will take substantial effort and dedication to form a planning board and board of appeals, as well as hiring a local code enforcement officer. The town is committed to this path and has looked to towns like New Portland and Caratunk as examples of the small town planning process.

Public Input and the Vision:

Part of the requirement to prepare a local comprehensive plan is to provide ways for the public to participate in its development. At the 2014 Town Meeting, a planning committee was established and a call was put out for members. Although only four residents volunteered at the time, we have kept the channels open for the rest of the community, posting all meetings at the town house and fire hall and trying (unsuccessfully) to interest media in what was happening here. It is important to remember that Highland is a very small and isolated place, and the committee membership represented over five percent of the adult population.

In an effort to achieve maximum citizen participation in such a context, we scheduled our first full public discussion (visioning meeting) in March, 2015 to piggyback our annual Town Meeting. Over ¼ of the town's adult population attended (14 people)! The group engaged in a broad discussion of the range of issues required to be addressed in the planning process.

The town hired Kennebec Valley Council of Governments to organize public participation and add necessary elements to the plan. KVCOG led the discussion at the

public session. Discussion brought forward many of the issues associated with lack of local control over affairs of the town. The following issues showed up on the flip chart:

- Protection of the overall rural character and scenic vistas in town,
- Need to assert local control,
- Need to protect public health as well as land values,
- Lack of state agency support and oversight in management of Highland's resources,
- A concern with ongoing forest management – what appears to be poor harvesting practices,
- Potential for substantial development proposals, such as wind generation or water extraction,
- Condition of Long Falls Dam Road.

The group brainstormed several ideas and recommendations for land use and other changes based on some work that had already been done by the committee. These ranged from connecting recreational trails to establishing a TIF policy to addressing possible salt contamination from the local salt shed.

The group agreed a VISION for Highland's future can be described as follows:

- We will bring in more young people and families,
- We will encourage small-scale, local business with low environmental impacts,
- Our economy will transition from a wood products-based economy to a recreation-based one,
- We will find partners to improve access to broadband internet and cellular services,
- We will do a better job of protecting natural resources, including restoration of lost wildlife and fisheries habitat,
- We will protect groundwater quality and supplies,
- We will make it easier to approve small subdivision proposals, and
- We must have something to say about substantial development proposals with potential for major impacts on the town.

A draft of the plan followed fairly quickly upon the visioning session, based on work the committee had completed in the first year. The planning committee held a second public discussion in June of 2015, prior to submission to the State's Municipal Planning Assistance Program for review. This was not to be a Town Meeting, so in an effort to again ensure maximum citizen input, committee members made a copy of the plan for each household and distributed them door to door. Again attended by 14 people, the meeting included an explanation of the plan's recommendations, discussion of several aspects of the plan, and close examination of the land use plan map. Some errors were noted and additions and corrections were made to the draft.

The intent of the town as expressed in these meetings is to vote on adoption of this plan as soon as possible and to begin work on an ordinance immediately. Since the ordinance must be consistent with the plan but not be consecutive, work has already begun.

A draft of the plan was submitted to the State in June, and generated several comments. The comments were judged to be serious enough that further amendments are warranted. The comments also pointed out the need to involve non-resident landowners. The committee invited and met with this group on September 9th. The meeting resulted in multiple changes to the proposed plan.

The required public hearing was held on September 12th. This date had been scheduled and advertised as a follow up to the State's review but since we suspended the review process to make changes to the plan, we utilized the time for extended discussions of the proposed critical rural area and scenic resources. Both of the meetings on the 9th and the 12th were followed by committee meetings to prepare portions of the zoning ordinance.

Implementation and Evaluation:

The town is on a fast track to implement the plan's recommendations regarding land use controls, because it involves the additional step of LUPC approval. It is our intent to have a zoning ordinance ready for adoption in the fall of 2015. Because this will be our first attempt at enacting and enforcing an ordinance, we do not expect to get it right all at once, so we have incorporated a recommendation to do a thorough review and make necessary revisions within five years.

The remaining recommendations will be more challenging, simply because Highland has limited municipal capacity and authority. All staff and officials of the town are on a part-time basis, the plantation form of government has limited authority, and financial and volunteer resources are also tight. Of necessity, we will have to merge and double up on some strategies. The largest immediate expense could be hiring a code enforcement officer, even if only for five or ten hours a month. The plantation will have a newly-appointed planning board, who may be assigned to undertake some of the projects; the remainder will be the responsibility of the assessors.

The chairman of the planning board should be expected to give a report on the status of the planning recommendations at each annual town meeting. This should include and evaluation of the degree to which the plan's strategies have been implemented and the location and amount of new development within each land use district. He or she will make recommendations for changes if necessary.

Time lines and responsible parties for individual recommendations appear in the next chapter alongside each recommendation.

9: General Planning Goals and Recommendations

It is the intent of Highland Plantation to develop a comprehensive plan that will meet the requirements of Maine's Growth Management Act and allow the town to assert local control over its land use and development future. The goals of the Growth Management Act are listed below, and act as a framework for our planning recommendations.

State Growth Management Goals:

1. To encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of each community while protecting the state's rural character, making efficient use of public services, and preventing development sprawl.

2. To plan for, finance and develop an efficient system of public facilities and services to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.

3. To promote an economic climate that increases job opportunities and overall economic well-being.

4. To encourage and promote affordable, decent housing opportunities for all Maine citizens.

5. To protect the quality and manage the quantity of the state's water resources, including lakes, aquifers, great ponds, estuaries, rivers and coastal areas.

6. To protect the state's other critical natural resources, including, without limitation, wetlands, wildlife and fisheries habitat, sand dunes, shorelands, scenic vistas, and unique natural areas.

7. To protect the state's marine resources industry, ports and harbors from incompatible development, and to promote access to the shore for commercial fishermen and the public. (Not applicable to Highland)

8. To safeguard the state's agricultural and forest resources from development which threatens those resources.

9. To preserve the state's historic and archeological resources.

10. To promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities for all Maine citizens, including access to surface waters.

The most significant obstacle that we face in developing recommendations is the limited capacity and authority of a plantation form of government. With a limited budget, no full-time town employees, and only 52 adult residents, we will be challenged to implement more than the bare minimum of recommendations. Nor can we rely on regional cooperation to any great extent. While we already work with the county for some services, the nearest organized town by road – New Portland – itself does not offer a broad range of services.

Encourage Orderly Growth and Development:

Highland has seen extremely low levels of new development over the past twenty years, and can anticipate very little additional. The principal form of new development would be single family homes and camps or mobile homes, though new building sites are limited. We have averaged seven new homes per decade, but most were in the 90's and some have been replacements. Two types of new commercial development are anticipated: potential home-based businesses with few if any outside employees and large, industrial-scale developments to exploit our natural resources.

There is no focused settlement area in Highland. The "main intersection" consists of three houses and an abandoned store, plus the fire station. The town's principal interest is in regulating industrial activities in the currently undeveloped areas.

"Orderly growth and development" includes the development of a Land Use Plan (described in the following chapter). The recommendations here apply generally to the town's authority to manage development.

Policy: Encourage residential and small commercial growth in town while limiting high-impact commercial or industrial development to the extent that they would threaten scenic or natural resources or community character.

General Development Recommendations:

1. Appoint a planning board and board of appeals. This will be done by authorization of town meeting upon adoption of this plan.

2. Appoint a certified Code Enforcement Officer. This will be done by the assessors by authorization of the town meeting, with a code enforcement officer in place by January, 2016. It is anticipated that the CEO will be part-time on an hourly basis and shared with other local governments.

3. Develop a zoning ordinance. The ordinance will be based on the Land Use Plan and draw from standards in the current LUPC Zoning Ordinance, models and samples from other towns, and required shoreland zoning. It should be adopted by town meeting no later than January, 2016.

4. Monitor land use and regulatory activity, evaluate impacts, and amend zoning ordinance as necessary within five years. Since this will be Highland's first attempt at local regulation, it will be important that the planning board and assessors evaluate how well it operates and make necessary changes promptly.

5. Incorporate subdivision review and shoreland zoning into the zoning ordinance. The town meeting will approve a subdivision review procedure as part of the zoning ordinance, consistent with state law and making for a quick and efficient local review process. Shoreland zoning elements will be incorporated. This should be completed by January, 2016.

Efficient Public Facilities and Services:

Highland offers limited public facilities and services – two public buildings, three roads, and shared schools and emergency services – and continues to seek efficiencies in a challenging situation with limited infrastructure and low population density. Emergency services are shared with Somerset County, and road maintenance with the state. The principal local expense is education, which is an enrollment-based fee. Capital investments are few and far between.

Policies: Continue to fund and provide public services in the most cost-efficient manner available. Preserve and improve the transportation system and other infrastructure, while managing new development to efficiently utilize that infrastructure.

Maine Minimum Strategies (Reference to Highland Recommendations):

(general) (1) Identify any capital improvements needed to maintain or upgrade public services to accommodate the community's anticipated growth and changing demographics. (Reference #6, 8-10))

(2) Locate new public facilities comprising at least 75% of new municipal growth-related capital investments in designated growth areas. (N/A)

(3) Encourage local sewer and water districts to coordinate planned service extensions with the Future Land Use Plan. (N/A)

(4) If public water supply expansion is anticipated, identify and protect suitable sources. (N/A)

(5) Explore options for regional delivery of local services. (Reference #7)

(Transportation) (1) Develop or continue to update a prioritized improvement, maintenance, and repair plan for the community's transportation network. (Reference #12)

(2) Initiate or actively participate in regional and state transportation efforts. (Reference #8)

(3) Maintain, enact or amend local ordinances as appropriate to address or avoid conflicts with:

a. Policy objectives of the Sensible Transportation Policy Act (23 M.R.S.A. §73);
b. State access management regulations pursuant to 23 M.R.S.A. §704; and
c. State traffic permitting regulations for large developments pursuant to 23 M.R.S.A. §704-A. (Reference #12)

(4) Maintain, enact or amend ordinance standards for subdivisions and for public and private roads as appropriate to foster transportation-efficient growth patterns and provide for future street and transit connections. (Reference #12)

Highland's Public Facility and Transportation Recommendations:

6. Implement the Capital Investment Plan (chapter 11) beginning with the next annual town meeting.

7. Continue to work with the county and other local governments on sharing of public services and equipment. Ongoing activity by the assessors.

8. Support and seek funding for development of trail heads and picnic areas in town. The assessors and planning board should work with landowners and neighboring jurisdictions to develop a plan and funding strategy to improve recreational opportunities, with planning beginning in 2017.

9. Maintain funding for the fire department. Ongoing town meeting authorization.

10. Purchase a computer for the town and develop the town's website. The computer should be earmarked in the capital investment plan. The website is a matter of finding a local individual to volunteer their time, an ongoing effort.

11. Work with the road contractor to mitigate the potential for groundwater contamination from the salt shed. Meet with DEP and the contractor in 2016 to determine if there is a problem and what can be done to fix it.

12. Include driveway entrance (drainage) and private road construction standards in the development of the zoning ordinance. Enacted by Town Meeting, 2016.

13. Continue with the current system of identifying and funding road maintenance priorities. Ongoing, assessors' responsibility.

14. Communicate the with the Maine DOT on road funding and improvement needs on Long Falls Dam Road. Assessors will advocate through DOT channels for improvements on a continuing basis.

Promote Overall Economic Well-being:

In Highland, local economic opportunity is extremely small, and all employment is outside of town. The town has no local infrastructure for economic development, but does have its natural resource base as an economic asset to draw on. There is potential to develop some recreation-based business if access to the natural resource base can be leveraged.

Policy: Support small business development in Highland that does not require infrastructure, especially activities that leverage our natural assets and opportunities, while managing the impacts of industrial resource development and supporting regional economic development.

Maine Minimum Strategies (Reference to Highland Recommendations):

(1) If appropriate, assign responsibility and provide financial support for economic development activities to the proper entity (e.g., a local economic development committee, a local representative to a regional economic development organization, the community's economic development director, a regional economic development initiative, or other). (N/A)

(2) Enact or amend local ordinances to reflect the desired scale, design, intensity, and location of future economic development. (Reference #16, 18)

(3) If public investments are foreseen to support economic development, identify the mechanisms to be considered to finance them (local tax dollars, creating a tax increment financing district, a Community Development Block Grant or other grants, bonding, impact fees, etc.) (N/A)

(4) Participate in any regional economic development planning efforts. (Reference #15)

Highland's Recommendations to Build the Local Economy:

15. Build on opportunities to develop, access, and market a recreational trail system. Joint planning with Lexington, Carrabassett Valley, New Portland, Pleasant Ridge, and Somerset County as well as landowners and the State of Maine on expansion of recreational trails and marketing recreation opportunities (local/regional trails map). Beginning in 2016.

16. Incorporate specific performance standards for wind and solar power development, cell towers, mining, and water extraction within the resource zone in the zoning ordinance. Enacted by town meeting, 2016.

17. Provide information/assistance for small business development. The town will set up a system to distribute literature to be available on small business counselling and financing, beginning immediately. Include links to resources and Sugarloaf Area Chamber of Commerce on town website.

18. Promote small-scale forest management operations throughout town with provisions allowing on-site processing, etc. Incorporate into zoning ordinance standards, to be enacted in 2016.

Affordable, Decent Housing Opportunities:

While the state goal in this area is to ensure safe, sanitary, and affordable housing, the housing stock in Highland is so small that it is difficult to influence. We 've had 14 new year-round houses in 25 years, but most of them were in the 90's. Affordable housing is not seen as a local issue. It does appear as if the newer housing is of higher price and quality, but it is being custom-built to suit the means of the owners. The town should encourage a wider choice in housing by helping to increase the supply of building lots. There is no prospect for multi-family housing in the foreseeable future.

Policy: Support the development of new, affordable housing opportunities as needed, while encouraging quality construction through land use controls.

Maine Minimum Strategies (Reference to Highland Recommendations):

(1) Maintain, enact or amend growth area land use regulations to increase density, decrease lot size, setbacks and road widths, or provide incentives such as density bonuses, to encourage the development of affordable/workforce housing. (N/A)

(2) Maintain, enact or amend ordinances to allow the addition of at least one accessory apartment per dwelling unit in growth areas, subject to site suitability. (See Land Use Chapter – Development zone)

(3) Create or continue to support a community affordable/workforce housing committee and/or regional affordable housing coalition. (N/A)

(4) Designate a location(s) in growth areas where mobile home parks are allowed pursuant to 30-A M.R.S.A. §4358(3)(M) and where manufactured housing is allowed pursuant to 30-A M.R.S.A. §4358(2). (Reference #21)

(5) Support the efforts of local and regional housing coalitions in addressing affordable and workforce housing needs. (N/A)

(6) Seek to achieve a level of at least 10% of new residential development built or placed during the next decade be affordable. (Reference #22)

Highland's Recommendations to Build the Housing Stock:

19. Assign the Code Enforcement Officer or Local Plumbing Inspector to permit and inspect new internal and subsurface plumbing installations. Beginning by January, 2016.

20. Use new local subdivision review process and standards to facilitate small subdivision development in development zone. Town meeting enact ordinance by 2016.

21. Permit mobile home parks of up to five lots per year. Adopt as part of zoning ordinance, 2016.

22. Monitor new home prices to determine whether ten percent of new housing is in the affordable range for local incomes. Planning board, commencing 2017.

Protection and Management of Critical Natural, Water, and Forest Resources:

Highland Plantation contains a wealth of natural resources, and we are determined to protect them. In fact, many of us live here exclusively for its closeness to nature; we know what is out there, and are quite concerned whenever we perceive it being threatened. Residents are particularly concerned with maintaining wildlife habitat, and significant scenic resources. We need better information on the Sandy Stream wetlands complex, and on other wildlife habitat. Streams are the only significant water resources and stream habitat is a primary concern.

Policies: Provide strong protection for Highland's natural resources. Protect surface and groundwater supplies from pollution. Encourage forest resources to be managed sustainably for economic viability and adequate habitat protection. Protect Highland's scenic views as seen from the developed areas of town. Reach out to the County, neighboring towns, and private conservation groups to cooperate on identification and protection of resource values.

Maine Minimum Strategies (Reference to Highland Recommendations):

(Water) (1) Adopt or amend local land use ordinances as applicable to incorporate stormwater runoff performance standards consistent with:

a. Maine Stormwater Management Law and Maine Stormwater regulations (Title 38 M.R.S.A. §420-D and 06-096 CMR 500 and 502).
b. Maine Department of Environmental Protection's allocations for allowable levels of phosphorus in lake/pond watersheds.
c. Maine Pollution Discharge Elimination System Stormwater Program. (Reference #23)

(2) Consider amending local land use ordinances, as applicable, to incorporate low impact development standards. (Reference #23b)

(3) Where applicable, develop an urban impaired stream watershed management or mitigation plan that will promote continued development or redevelopment without further stream degradation. (N/A)

(4) Maintain, enact or amend public wellhead and aquifer recharge area protection mechanisms, as necessary. (N/A)

(5) Encourage landowners to protect water quality. Provide local contact information at the municipal office for water quality best management practices from resources such as the Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, Maine Forest Service, and/or Small Woodlot Association of Maine. (Reference #28)

(6) Adopt water quality protection practices and standards for construction and maintenance of public and private roads and public properties and require their implementation by contractors, owners, and community officials and employees. (Reference #29)

(7) Participate in local and regional efforts to monitor, protect and, where warranted, improve water quality. (Reference #30)

(8) Provide educational materials at appropriate locations regarding aquatic invasive species. (N/A)

(Critical natural) (1) Ensure that land use ordinances are consistent with applicable state law regarding critical natural resources. (Reference #23)

(2) Designate critical natural resources as Critical Resource Areas in the Future Land Use Plan. (See #24 and chapter 10)

(3) Through local land use ordinances, require subdivision or non-residential property developers to look for and identify critical natural resources that may be on site and to take appropriate measures to protect those resources, including but not limited to, modification of the proposed site design, construction timing, and/or extent of excavation. (Reference #23)

(4) Through local land use ordinances, require the planning board (or other designated review authority) to include as part of the review process, consideration of pertinent BwH maps and information regarding critical natural resources. (Reference #23d)

(5) Initiate and/or participate in interlocal and/or regional planning, management, and/or regulatory efforts around shared critical and important natural resources. (Reference #27)

(6) Pursue public/private partnerships to protect critical and important natural resources such as through purchase of land or easements from willing sellers. (Reference #30)

(7) Distribute or make available information to those living in or near critical or important natural resources about current use tax programs and applicable local, state, or federal regulations. (Reference #28, 31)

(Farm/forest) (1) Consult with the Maine Forest Service district forester when developing any land use regulations pertaining to forest management practices as required by 12 M.R.S.A. §8869. (See #24)

(2) Consult with Soil and Water Conservation District staff when developing any land use regulations pertaining to agricultural management practices. (N/A)

(3) Amend land use ordinances to require commercial or subdivision developments in critical rural areas, if applicable, maintain areas with prime farmland soils as open space to the greatest extent practicable. (N/A)

(4) Limit non-residential development in critical rural areas (if the town designates critical rural areas) to natural resource-based businesses and services, nature tourism/outdoor recreation businesses, farmers' markets, and home occupations. (N/A)

(5) Encourage owners of productive farm and forest land to enroll in the current use taxation programs. (Reference #31)

(6) Permit land use activities that support productive agriculture and forestry operations, such as roadside stands, greenhouses, firewood operations, sawmills, log buying yards, and pick-your-own operations. (Reference #23c)

(7) Include agriculture, commercial forestry operations, and land conservation that supports them in local or regional economic development plans. (Reference #33)

Highland's Recommendations for Natural Resource Protection:

23. Land Use Regulations:
    a. Incorporate LUPC resource protection standards, shoreland zoning elements, and Beginning with Habitat maps and management.
    b. Include erosion control and stormwater management rules consistent with existing State regulation.
    c. Permit normal forestry and forest-related operations in all zones.
    d. Utilize *Beginning with Habitat* maps and other information, including requirements for developer studies, in planning board reviews.

    Enacted by town meeting in 2016.

24. Ensure that critical resources, such as streams, wetlands, wildlife habitat, steep slopes, and scenic views are protected with strong standards for regulation of development. Shoreland zoning with option for the Forest Service to administer and enforce forest harvesting practices. Enacted by town meeting in 2016.

25. Prohibit or strictly regulate visual impacts of large-scale development within the identified significant scenic resource area. Incorporate into zoning ordinance, to be enacted by town meeting in 2016.

26. Ensure that the Code Enforcement Officer is certified and trained in resource protection regulations. Assessors will hire CEO and provide training funds if necessary, beginning January, 2016.

27. Work with IFW, local or regional conservation groups, and landowners to identify and provide additional protection – such as expanded Resource Protection Zones -- for habitat areas within the town. Habitat areas and issues not currently mapped include trout spawning areas and bird and bat migration routes. Planning board and assessors, initiate in 2016 and ongoing effort.

28. Provide information to landowners on maintenance of private roads to minimize erosion and sedimentation and on management to protect habitat and other natural

resources. The town will establish availability of printed information to be available, beginning immediately.

29. Ensure that the town road contractor has necessary erosion control practice training. Assessors will write into next contract.

30. Engage in regional efforts to better identify, manage, and protect Highland's land and water resources. Joint efforts with State and landowners to coordinate habitat and watershed identification, land trust acquisitions, as available. Assessors and planning board, beginning 2016 and ongoing.

31. Encourage landowners to enroll land in current use tax programs. Assessors, ongoing.

32. Establish an annual meeting between Planning Board and large landowners to discuss concerns and items of mutual interest. As a priority, explore the feasibility of enhancing deer wintering areas and stream habitat with IFW and landowners. Planning Board initiate beginning in 2016.

Preservation of Historic and Archeological Resources:

Highland has few remarkable historical assets. The townhouse is a classic but architecturally generic one-room schoolhouse. There are undoubtedly many cellar holes on undeveloped land and prehistoric artifacts along Sandy Stream. Highland and Lexington share an historic society and a building where artifacts and documents are kept.

Policy: Protect the historic and archeological assets of the town.

Maine Minimum Strategies(Reference to Highland Recommendations):

(1) For known historic archeological sites and areas sensitive to prehistoric archeology, through local land use ordinances require subdivision or non-residential developers to take appropriate measures to protect those resources, including but not limited to, modification of the proposed site design, construction timing, and/or extent of excavation. (Reference #34)

(2) Adopt or amend land use ordinances to require the planning board (or other designated review authority) to incorporate maps and information provided by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission into their review process. (Reference #34)

(3) Work with the local or county historical society and/or the Maine Historic Preservation Commission to assess the need for, and if necessary plan for, a comprehensive community survey of the community's historic and archaeological resources. (Reference #33)

Highland's Recommendations for Preservation of Historic Assets:

33. Support the Highland-Lexington Historical Society. Ongoing support as needed from town meeting.

34. Require that new commercial/industrial development townwide and all new development in shoreland areas include an analysis of the potential for archeological assets, and if identified, measures to preserve and protect them. Incorporate MHPC maps and other information into review process. Incorporate into zoning ordinance, to be enacted in 2016.

Promote and Protect the Availability of Outdoor Recreation:

Outdoor recreation in Highland is a way of life, and generally a solitary pursuit. Our "backyard" consists of several thousand acres of accessible private forest land. Accessibility, though, is limited to existing woods roads, even on the public lots. We recognize that outdoor recreation, in addition to being a pastime, has the potential to be an economic driver. In order to do this, we need to improve points of access to the resource.

Policies: Acquire, develop and improve access to the trails, streams, and other natural recreation assets of the town. Work with landowners to preserve access to existing privately owned lands.

Maine Minimum Strategies(Reference to Highland Recommendations):

(1) Create a list of recreation needs or develop a recreation plan to meet current and future needs. Assign a committee or community official to explore ways of addressing the identified needs and/or implementing the policies and strategies outlined in the plan. (Reference #38)

(2) Work with public and private partners to extend and maintain a network of trails for motorized and non-motorized uses. Connect with regional trail systems where possible. (Reference #35, 36)

(3) Work with an existing local land trust or other conservation organizations to pursue opportunities to protect important open space or recreational land. (Reference #35)

(4) Provide educational materials regarding the benefits and protections for landowners allowing public recreational access on their property. At a minimum this will include information on Maine's landowner liability law regarding recreational or harvesting use, Title 14, M.R.S.A. §159-A. (See #32, 37)

Highland's Recommendations to Improve Outdoor Recreation:

35. Establish a regional cooperative relationship with the County, Somerset Woods Trustees, landowners, and neighboring towns to expand and connect access to open space and the recreational trail system in Highland. The assessors will reach out to begin coordinating efforts in 2017, earlier if the county establishes their own trails program.

36. Identify, improve, mark, and market recreational trail access. Assessors will appoint a committee in 2017. Committee will work with landowners to demonstrate benefits and protections of allowing public trail access, and will study and seek grant funding for additional trail development in 2018.

37. Work with Department of Conservation to improve access to public lots in town. Assessors initiate contacts in 2016.

38. Explore feasibility and cost of building a day use picnic area at the falls on Sandy Stream. Assessors appoint a committee in 2017, possible land acquisition and development 2018.

Regional Coordination:

Highland Plantation is isolated from neighboring towns. Long Falls Dam Road goes through six miles of Lexington Township before entering another municipality. The plantation does abut Carrabassett Valley to our west and Pleasant Ridge to our east, but there are no public road connections going through to settled areas of either town. This makes it challenging to engage in any regional relationships.

Highland and Lexington Township share some facilities, although Lexington's share is paid for by Somerset County. This includes the historical society and the fire service. Highland and Lexington citizens have occasionally discussed merging into a single entity, but Lexington has been reluctant to absorb the added financial burdens.

Highland raises a small annual stipend for services from New Portland, including support for their town newsletter and library.

Highland is not a part of a school district, but tuitions its students to RSU 58. Highland also contracts for ambulance service from Franklin Memorial Hospital.

Highland depends on Somerset County for some services. The county sheriff provides police services, and county emergency management does emergency management planning for the town.

Highland shares its mountain resources with the entire Western Maine community. There are few opportunities to coordinate resource protection activities due to the lack of

organized towns and manpower, but individuals within the town participate in several regional conservation groups.

This plan identifies some added opportunities for regional cooperation. Recommendations include:

- #2 – appoint a code enforcement officer. We will not be able to afford our own CEO, but should be able to share one with some of the neighboring towns.

- #7 – regional public service opportunities. The assessors will be alert for opportunities to save money or expand services through working with the county and other jurisdictions.

- #15/35 – recreational trail system. We will work with Somerset County, as well as Lexington, New Portland, and other abutting towns and private landowners to expand the recreational trail network.

- #27/30 – conservation efforts. State and regional conservation entities will assist in Highland's efforts to better identify and protect resources and habitat.

- #33 – support for the joint Highland-Lexington Historical Society.

10: Land Use Plan

Highland Plantation is currently under the jurisdiction of the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC), which has established a blanket zoning rule for unorganized territories and some plantations. The primary motivation for this plan is to assert local control over our land use decisions with a prospective zoning approach. While LUPC's Chapter 10 is not necessarily faulty, it is reactive, it does not reflect local values, and its administration is burdensome for local developers. It is the intent of this plan to add to the basic protective standards of Chapter 10, while expanding and simplifying development district areas.

In order to withdraw from LUPC jurisdiction, Highland will have to show the LUPC that it has established regulation that is **no less protective** of the State's resources than the LUPC rule. In addition, local control means adoption of state-mandated shoreland zoning, federal floodplain management, and enforcement of state subdivision law through local regulations or, preferably, an ordinance. Since the town is also concerned over potential impacts of large industrial development, we will need some form of commercial site review.

It is the intent of this plan that we enact a single ordinance for Highland Plantation that will incorporate protection of shoreland zones, permit review for subdivisions and commercial/industrial development, and protection for critical natural resources. The ordinance will be based on a simplified, customized version of the existing LUPC zoning, to accommodate the fact that Highland does not have the staff resources of the LUPC to evaluate and administer permits.

LUPC zones are classified into three major categories:

- Protection Districts, which are intended to restrict development in favor of significant natural, recreational, or historical resources;
- Management Districts, which allow residential, recreational, and resource management activities and may be rezoned into development districts if requested; and
- Development Districts, which exhibit existing patterns or prospects for residential, recreational, commercial, or industrial uses.

This plan recommends that the town establish two zones, in addition to the required shoreland zones. The first zone will be the **Development Zone**, where there is some concentration of existing development and facilities, and where commercial and small industrial development would be appropriate. The second zone will be the **Rural Zone**, where either power or roads are not generally available, and development should be limited to single family

homes, camps or self-contained activities. In lieu of LUPC Protection Districts, the ordinance will utilize use limitations and performance standards to protect significant natural resources from incompatible development in the rural zone. The **Future Land Use Plan Map** (page 61) provides a general illustration of the proposed extent of these districts.

Constraints to Development:

The Growth Management Act requires that future land use decisions be within the context of the constraints to development. "Constraints" are natural, legal, or infrastructure considerations that would affect development decisions. "Significant" natural constraints include many environmental factors that are already accounted for by state or federal law: floodplains, wetlands, endangered species habitat. "Moderate" constraints include many elements that are not already protected, but can be a community decision that they need protection.

Most of Highland suffers from infrastructure constraints. Long Falls Dam Road is the only paved road in town, and there are just a handful of town-maintained roads. There are several private roads, including dozens of miles of woods roads, but there has been little-to-no development pressure on them. Electric power is only available less than half the length of Long Falls Dam Road, and for short stretches of Sandy Stream, Old County, and Howard Hill Roads. Three-phase power is not available at all. Public water or sewer service is not available.

Much of Highland is also subject to natural constraints of one form or another. These are mapped on the *Natural Resources Map* at the end of Chapter 5, except for floodplains, which have not been mapped in Highland. Also to be considered is the lack of information on some potentially important resource constraints. This is the natural result of a lack of population and development pressure in much of the town. As development pressure increases, the town will have to add to its store of information on critical resources.

Development Zone:

The Growth Management Act requires local identification of a "Growth Area," except in cases where towns have severe physical limitations, minimal existing and future development pressure, or no village or densely developed area. Highland meets these criteria. Most of the town has severe physical limitations. Percentage-wise, Highland has seen a jump in population and housing, although in reality we are talking about 12 new homes from 1990 to 2000, one between 2000 and 2010, and one since 2010. The most "densely developed area" – the crossroads of Long Falls Dam Road and Sandy Stream Road – has a total of five homes and an abandoned store within a half-mile diameter circle.

The town also does not have the capacity to direct growth or investment in public services into a growth area. We have two existing municipal structures, a fire station near the crossroads and the townhouse about 1 ¼ miles away. No roads are paved outside of the State's

Long Falls Dam Road, and there are no public water or sewer systems, sidewalks, recreation facilities or other public facilities in town.

However, the LUPC has established a development zoning district along Long Falls Dam Road for about ¾ of a mile north of the intersection with Sandy Stream Road. Planning for future growth, it makes sense to be extend the district part way along Long Falls Dam Road, and onto side roads, so that it will contain virtually all existing year-round homes as well as some subdividable land. This plan proposes extending the development zone approximately 1 mile beyond its current extent, to a point about ¼ mile beyond the Winfield Road. This will encompass the townhouse. The zone should also extend to the end of power on Old County Road, Sandy Stream Road, and Howard Hill Road. At a width of 1,000 feet, this would incorporate about 300 acres of the town's nearly 29,000. This will not be a growth area in the formal sense, but will be the nexus for future growth and investment. A future concentration of growth anywhere within this area could serve as a more well-defined growth area at some point in the future, into which we could actually direct and encourage growth, but cannot be identified at this time.

Any type of housing, subdivision, or commercial or institutional development will be allowed in this district, subject to suitable performance standards, primarily to protect neighborhood values. The LUPC's current dimensional standards – 40,000 square foot lot size, 100 foot road frontage (200 foot for commercial), 50 foot setback – will be used, except that homeowners may put a second dwelling unit on lots between 40,000 and 80,000 square feet if suitable conditions for septic systems are available. Subdivisions, including mobile home parks, will be limited to five developed lots per year, to minimize impact on public services.

Rural Zone:

Areas not within the development zone will be classified as rural. For the most part, this area has no access to power, making it less financially feasible to develop, but year-round and seasonal housing will be permitted. As opposed to the development zone, the only forms of commercial/industrial development permitted will be those related to natural resources or recreation (including recreational lodging) or home businesses. New subdivision will not be permitted. The objective is to be generally consistent with uses permitted in the LUPC Management District. Permitted operations could include campgrounds, sawmills, gravel pits, mineral or water extraction, subject to performance standards. Since land in the rural zone could conceivably be moved into the development zone at some point, dimensional standards will be the same as in the development zone.

Protection for Critical Resources:

The State's Growth Management Rule suggests that towns establish a *Critical Rural District* in locations where there are critical resources, such as water, habitat, scenic vistas, or forest or agricultural resources, that are threatened by inappropriate development. Highland considered creating such a district, but there were issues of how to define the boundary of such

an extensive area, as well as the fact that most of the rural area is under a limited number of landowners and not threatened by development, except in very limited circumstances. In this case, it was felt that a comprehensive set of development standards within the Rural District could substitute. This does leave the issue of mimicking the LUPC protection subdistricts.

Existing LUPC protection subdistricts in Highland include: Soils and Geology, Floodprone, Great Pond Protection, Shoreland, and Wetland. In lieu of protection districts, the Highland Zoning Ordinance will include resource protection performance standards as well as the required municipal shoreland zoning elements. Municipally established shoreland zoning districts will duplicate Shoreland, Wetland, and Great Pond Protection subdistricts for the most part (see below).

Forested wetlands as well as wetland interiors are not regulated by shoreland zoning, but the LUPC Rule has development standards for wetlands alterations which should provide adequate protection. Required federal floodplain management will substitute for the floodprone subdistrict. There are no federal flood maps for Highland, so the existing floodprone district maps that LUPC uses will substitute.

Locally significant scenic views are not protected by any state or federal standard, but the LUPC Rule has scenic character protection standards, which can form a basis for regulation. Highland's two scenic ridgelines will be called out in the new ordinance

In order to provide for protection for critical rural resources which have not yet been identified or mapped, the following standards should also be written into the zoning ordinance.

- Protection of steep slopes by prohibition of buildings requiring a permanent foundation or septic systems on slopes exceeding 35 percent, and on roads on slopes exceeding 60 percent.

- Environmental studies would be required prior to review of all potentially incompatible development in the rural district, including biological and geological reviews and visual impact, where appropriate.

- Vigorous environmental protection standards would be put in place for industrial development such as mining, water extraction, communication towers, and wind and solar farms.

Shoreland Zoning:

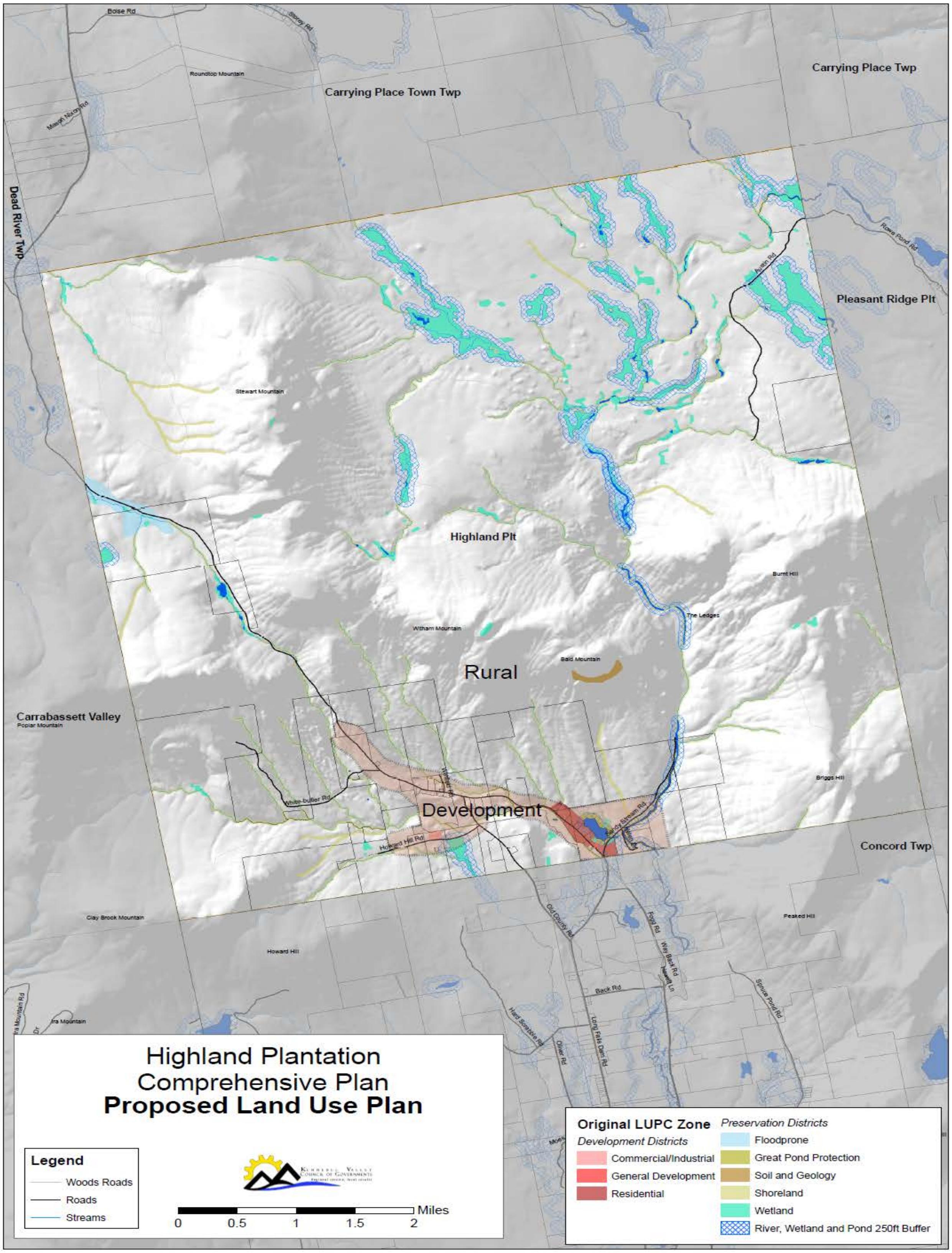
Highland's resource subject to shoreland zoning consist primarily of non-forested wetlands. It should be noted from the Land Use Plan (following page) that LUPC designates the wetlands themselves as their protection subdistrict, whereas shoreland zoning applies to the 250 buffer area. The Land Use Plan applies both of these standards to show protected resources.

The lower part of Sandy Stream is classified as a river for shoreland zoning, but otherwise Highland has very little open water. Shoreland zoning districts will include:

- Limited Residential District 250 foot buffer surrounding Highland Bog and along lower Sandy Stream;

- Stream Protection District along ALL perennial streams,

- Resource Protection Districts in areas surrounding freshwater wetlands and elsewhere if required.


Carrying Place Town Twp
Carrying Place Twp
Dead River Twp
Pleasant Ridge Plt
Highland Plt
Rural
Development
Carrabassett Valley
Concord Twp
Highland Plantation
Comprehensive Plan
Proposed Land Use Plan
Legend
Woods Roads
Roads
Streams
0
0.5
1
1.5
2
Miles
Original LUPC Zone
Development Districts
Commercial/Industrial
General Development
Residential
Preservation Districts
Floodprone
Great Pond Protection
Soil and Geology
Shoreland
Wetland
River, Wetland and Pond 250ft Buffer

11: Capital Investment Plan

The limited extent of public facilities and services in Highland means that planning for capital improvements can be a brief, annual exercise. The capital assets of the town, in total, are:

- The townhouse: meeting space in former one-room schoolhouse, handicapped access is in place.
- The fire station, three bays, well-maintained.
- Fire equipment, including one tanker, two pumpers, forestry truck, turnout equipment.
- Three unpaved roads, totaling 3 miles.

The total value of all capital assets, according to the 2014 Audit Report, is $158,016. The town has no ownership interest or management authority in school facilities.

The town's only dedicated source of funding for capital projects is for road improvements. As of 2014, the town had a carryover in the capital improvements account of $50,113, and was receiving $9,820 from DOT (annual grant). The town can draw from its undesignated fund balance (reserves) for other capital needs, requiring a town meeting vote. The town could also apply for grants if a project was identified.

This plan has identified two future capital investments:

- A town-owned computer. This would be for use of the town clerk and such other staff as need be. Since the town does not have a formal town office, it would make sense for this to be a portable (laptop) computer, at an anticipated cost, including software (but not assessing software), of $1,500. For the security of town documents, this acquisition should be a priority for purchase within the next five years.
- A day-use picnic area at the falls on Sandy Stream. This would be on leased land. One-time costs would include road and parking area improvements, signage, trail construction, and picnic facilities (fire pit, trash cans, tables). No estimates have been done, so the cost is unknown. The largest variable would be the cost of road improvements. The State provides funding for public recreation facilities. Since this is a low priority, the town could hold off until adequate grant funding was assured.