
I. INTRODUCTION

The Colrain Town Plan identifies the means by which the Town proposes to guide its growth and development. The official adoption of the Town Plan represents a conscious community decision about the Town's future character, its priorities for land use, and conservation of natural resources.

The goals, policies and recommendations in this Town Plan reflect the wishes of Colrain's residents and should be used along with the Town Plan Maps to provide guidelines to the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen in developing local regulations and ordinances. The Town Plan should also serve to guide the regional planning commission and state agencies in their planning efforts; and to guide those persons interested in subdividing and developing land in the Town of Colrain. This Town Plan becomes effective upon adoption by the Town Meeting after required public hearings.

A. SUMMARY

The Town Plan is divided into six major sections - the Community Profile, a description of Community Development, Natural Resources, Community Facilities and Services, Implementation Strategies and the Town Maps. Each of these sections has a set of recommendations that correspond with the goals and the specific needs of the particular section.

The Community Profile section includes a brief history of the Town, a description of Community Facilities and Services, a description of the local topography, political boundaries and population trends. This section is designed to give a brief overview of the physical, historical and human characteristics of the Town.

The section describing Community Development describes how the community has grown over the years. This includes a description of the housing stock and trends and a description of the employment opportunities available to residents and the local economy. An important element of the local economy has traditionally been the Agricultural sector - part of the community development section is specifically devoted to an analysis of the farms in Town and their contribution to the economy.

Much of the history of Colrain has been shaped by the natural resources available in Town. Section V describes the Town's Natural Resources, including air and water, recreation areas, fish and wildlife, and the geological resources available for future development or preservation.

Growth in Colrain has recently strained the Community Facilities and Services available to residents. Shortfalls in these areas are attributable to a number of factors, not the least of which is the constraints posed by Proposition 2 1/2. Section VI describes the community facilities and services that the town currently offers.

At the end of each section, Goals and Policies are described that can help address problems and insure the orderly and sustainable growth in Town. Section VII summarizes the policies of each section and outlines implementation strategies that each board in Town will have to take to insure that the policies are carried out and the goals are met.

Section VII includes Maps of the Town. These maps should be referred to as a guide for areas in Town that need to be protected and areas which can absorb more development. Section VIII is a list of definitions.

B. STATEMENT OF GOALS

The statements listed below represent the overall goals of the Town of Colrain and further establish a foundation upon which specific Town Plan policies and recommendations will be based. Policies are statements which define a settled course to be followed to achieve the Town's goals. Recommendations are suggestions for further work to be conducted by the town; regional, state and federal entities; and the general public.

In the wave of dramatic growth and development which has swept through the Pioneer Valley and Southern Vermont, Colrain has remained a small and fiscally challenged agricultural community, but with greater numbers of people being forced to leave town to find work - making it more of a bedroom community year by year. With this development trend expected to continue, Colrain is ill equipped to have control over how, when and where development occurs. Presently our only tools in managing Colrain's growth lie with the Zoning Bylaws which do not reflect the patterns of development people in Colrain would like to see. In addition, some Colrain citizens have expressed a strong interest in bringing industry and commerce to the currently impoverished Town to add to the tax base. Though large parcels of land have been zoned for industrial development, specific guidelines relating to

what types of industry would be allowed and restrictions therein have largely been overlooked. Managing growth is a conscious process of directing development to appropriate locations and on a manageable timeline. The process requires a commitment on the part of a community to set a course for its future and to employ all of the tools available to stay that course. This Town Plan should provide the framework for managing Colrain's future growth.

It is the GOAL of the Town of Colrain.....

1. To protect rural/agriculture character and existing open space.
 - a) continued availability and good management of lands for agriculture forestry, and earth/mineral extraction and thus;
 - b) assure adequate income for existing and new farmers;
 - c) conserve and protect valuable natural resources.
2. To preserve and enhance the community's cultural, historical, architectural, recreational and scenic resources;
 - a) to revitalize and create a true "downtown" in the Town Center of Colrain
 - b) to provide Town residents with opportunities for passive and active recreational and cultural opportunities consistent with the character and public capacity in Town.
 - c) to protect historic landmarks and buildings.
3. To ensure that any land development proceeds in an orderly fashion consistent with the best interests of the community as a whole and to discourage uncoordinated and incompatible development that may jeopardize or overburden public and private investment, or damage the Town's resources and rural character.
4. To plan for minimal population growth through guided residential development which will not overburden town resources.
5. To ensure that the basic needs of health, safety, education, and welfare of the Town's residents will be met and maintained at optimum levels;
6. To provide the highest quality education for the children in Town.
7. To promote affordable housing for residents of different ages and income levels.
8. To promote and support appropriate local economic development, increase the tax base and the development of adequate infrastructure for industry in order to provide good jobs at good wages.
9. To provide a safe, convenient and scenic road network capable of accommodating traffic for the benefit of the residents of Colrain.

10.To foster the recycling of waste materials as far as possible.

11.To ensure that decisions and policies made at the local, regional, and state levels are implemented in harmony with the needs and concerns of the Town and existence of a continuous planning process in order to accommodate the changing needs of the Town.

C. IMPLEMENTING THE TOWN PLAN

Effective implementation of the Town Plan requires careful consideration and action by the townspeople, Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and other organizations. Among the many available methods which should be considered are the following:

1. Land Use Regulation: Land use regulation at the local level is most effective when it is specifically directed to public health and safety, the prohibition of unsuitable uses, and the protection of water and air quality and highly valuable natural resources. The Massachusetts General Laws specify three mechanisms for implementing the goals and policies of the Town Plan:
 - * zoning bylaws
 - * subdivision regulations
 - * an official map
2. Capital Budgeting: Budgeting provides for control of development pressure by providing public services and facilities according to projected need and the Town's ability to fund improvements. Capital budgeting also increases the efficiency and economy of town government by foreseeing and planning needed capital expenditures well in advance. A capital budget and program lists and describes capital projects to be undertaken during the next five fiscal years, their estimated costs and proposed methods of financing.
3. Land Acquisition: The most certain methods for protecting and assuring controlled public use of valuable recreational resource and scenic lands are via gift, purchase in fee simple, lease, or by acquisition of easements or development rights. Land being taken out of Chapter 61A should be closely reviewed for preservation as agricultural land.

4. Taxation: Massachusetts G.L. Chapters 61, 61A and 61B enable landowners who choose agriculture or forestry as long term uses of their property to have that land taxed accordingly. The Program encourages the maintenance of undeveloped land for farming, forestry and public recreation. Towns are directly reimbursed by the State for lost tax revenue. Towns may also provide property tax relief for qualifying farm, forest and open space landowners by adopting tax stabilization programs to reduce local property tax burden.
5. Voluntary Action: The following methods would help to ensure Town Plan implementation:
 - * privately-agreed covenants binding on purchasers of land;
 - * special attention and consideration given by private landowners to the objectives of the Town Plan and its policies when they decide to build or subdivide;
 - * formation of non-profit conservation land trusts to acquire resource lands; and
 - * participation in the town planning process by organizations and citizens concerned with the future of Colrain.
6. Economic Development Initiatives:
 - * Infrastructure Planning
 - * Coordinating all boards
 - * Marketing Plan
 - * Public/private partnership building
 - * Exploring regional options for economic development
7. Public Consensus Building
 - * Holding public meetings and hearings
 - * Coordinating various public and private interests
 - * Creating community events
 - * Publishing a local and regular newsletter