

5. Village Centers

Overview—*Historically, Sandwich had Several Villages.*

Sandwich has at least four places that have been called villages at various times in the town's history.

- Center Sandwich
- North Sandwich
- Sandwich Lower Corner
- Whiteface

While all these locations may have been significant in the past, only two can now be considered viable centers. A viable village needs to have a concentration of buildings, contain a mix of land uses and most importantly serve as a focal point for the community. In that context, Center and North Sandwich fit those standards, although to differing degrees. North Sandwich has a concentration of buildings, a post office and a general store, but it is at a much smaller scale than Center Sandwich. Center Sandwich is generally regarded as the activity center of the entire community owing to its greater number and concentration of buildings and its mix of residential, retail, government and institutional uses. It is also located at the convergence of several primary roads that pass through Sandwich.

Defining Features of Village Centers

- ♦ Concentration of buildings that result in a walkable compact development form,
- ♦ A mix of residential, commercial, institutional & government land uses,
- ♦ It is recognized as a focal point of the entire community for social, economic, government, religion and other purposes.

Sandwich Places High Value on Center Sandwich Village

Villages are important to a community for two primary reasons: they provide the visual anchor for the entire community and they are centers of social and economic activity for the town. The



community survey undertaken as part of this Master Plan highlighted the strong support for the historic architecture in the village, the fact that it is well maintained and that its setting is enhanced by the surrounding open space and the views that it offers. It is this visual character that truly establishes the positive image of the community for everyone. The second major feature that distinguishes the village from the rest of the town is the fact that it is the center of people activity, with a

concentration of community facilities and land uses including the school, retail, post office,

town offices, churches, the Benz Community Center and the library. People value their ability to gather and socialize when they come to the village. Another important asset to retaining small town character is that none of the roads running through the center of town is heavily traveled. Although it was not highlighted in the survey, North Sandwich also contributes to the positive image and social interaction of the community.

Community Attitudes— *We value our Cultural/Historical Identity and Mix of Social/Business Activities*

Many comments and ideas were received about Sandwich's villages in the three Master Plan forums held in 2008 and 2009, and through recent community surveys (both the citizen survey conducted for the Master Plan in 2009 and a Historic District survey conducted by Plymouth State University in 2008 for the Historic District Commission). In essence, Sandwich residents indicated they highly value the historic village setting and the cultural identity and sense of history that it provides. Center Sandwich also serves as an active town center where people reside, gather, interact and do business. The 2009 community survey provided feedback on a number of village center issues:

Business Activity

- The Forum highlighted that residents want to see the Historic District evolve so that it keeps pace with the town's needs and does not become a "museum."
- 81% want to have health practices in town (15% do not).
- 61% feel that more professional offices are desirable (32% do not).
- 72% want more business in Center Sandwich.
- 68% would favor more arts and crafts businesses (23% do not).
- Restaurants/café/coffee shops were desired by 63% (and not favored by 33%).
- 51% would like to see more tourism in town (41% would not).
- 54% do not want to see more gift shops (but 38% do).
- 77% do not want to see a shopping center (but 18% do).
- 84% do not favor motels in town (9% do).
- Conversely, 71% feel that bed and breakfasts or inns would be acceptable while 23% did not.



- 12% of the residents commented that they would like to see a general store re-established in Center Sandwich.

Historic & Visual character

- 80% would like to permit more modern building methods and materials while still preserving the overall appearance of the district.
- 41% of respondents were satisfied with the Historic District codes (but 29% were not).
- 47% do not favor creation of additional Historic Districts (29% do).
- 54% do not favor expansion of the Historic District (24% think it should be expanded).

Infrastructure

- About 60% of survey respondents felt that more sidewalks or parking were not needed.
- Regarding expansion of the sewer in Center Sandwich, 34% did not want to see it expanded but 32% think it should be.

Development

- A number of comments were received indicating that there is either too much growth/development/change town (19%), or that no new development is needed in town and we should just maintain what we have (8%) Conversely, sentiments were also expressed indicating that slow, reasonable growth was acceptable (4%), as is limiting development to a reasonable pace (8%). Others expressed a desire to balance affordability, aesthetics and growth (4%).

Community Respects Historic Character— *Some Would Like to See Added Design Flexibility and Variety of Land Uses.*

The community survey and the Public Forum held in November of 2009 pointed to a number of common themes and some issues over which there are differing perspectives on the future of the villages.

1. While nearly everyone places high value on the existing Center Sandwich village's historical quality and aesthetics, comments were made about not allowing it to become a "museum." Other comments supported use of more modern building materials, solar



and wind energy systems and potentially more contemporary architecture that can retain the scale and tempo of the existing streetscape without impairing the existing historic character.

2. More retail could also affect the quality of life for existing residents (both positively and negatively).
3. People value the village as a center of activity and some would like to see more vitality, but are concerned about the impact of additional traffic. Most survey respondents did not feel there was a need or desire to provide more parking and sidewalks in the village.
4. Underlying all of these topics is the question of what to do with the existing town sewage treatment system. The system is currently at capacity and may need to be repaired or replaced in the not-too-distant future. If there is currently no reserve capacity, any additional development or new, more people-intensive use would be precluded.

Historic District Survey – *Overall, the survey indicated strong support for retaining the appearance of buildings in the Historic District and developing zoning regulations specific to the district.*

In 2008, the Historic District Commission worked closely with the Plymouth State University, Center for the Environment to develop and conduct a survey of opinions about the Historic District. The survey was sent to all the residents of the Historic District as well as an equal number of residents from elsewhere in town. Of the responses received, 41% indicated that they did not live in the Historic District and 59% said that they did. Survey results covered a number of issues similar to those that were explored in the 2009 community survey. Many of the questions asked were on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being a favorable response and 1 being unfavorable. Strong support (4.1) was given to the statement: “the existence of the Historic District is a benefit to the community.” Positive support was also given to the following statements:

- ♦ The Historic District impacts my property value in a positive manner (3.7)
- ♦ It is important that economic/commercial activity is concentrated in a specific space in the Historic District (3.2)
- ♦ I am concerned about the possible impacts of the development of accessory dwelling units (3.1)
- ♦ The Historic District Commission should allow the development of multiple dwelling units on a property when the project adheres to the appearance standards of the Historic District (3.1)

Several questions related to the supply and appearance of parking in the Historic District. Existing parking was seen as adequate, but there was support for adequate parking being made

available for businesses, even though there was nearly equal concern for the appearance of that parking. There also appeared to be less support for additional street lighting and implementing measures to lower traffic speeds in the Historic District.

81% of the survey respondents were neutral about the current distribution of economic/commercial activity in the district. An equal percentage (9.6%) felt it was either not concentrated enough or too concentrated.

More than 80% of the survey responses indicated either neutral or positive support for Historic District Commission activities overall.

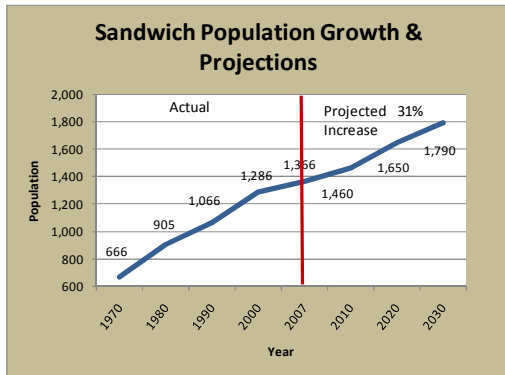
Another question asked how important a number of issues were for the Historic District Commission to address. This question was also on a 1-5 scoring structure, with the following results:

- ♦ Working to preserve open space within the Historic District (4.2)
- ♦ Conserving old and mature, historic trees (3.9)
- ♦ Working with land owners to establish conservation easements within the district. (3.8)
- ♦ Working with the Zoning Board more collaboratively on zoning code amendments (3.6)
- ♦ Placing utility lines underground (3.5)
- ♦ Working to establish specific zoning regulations for the Historic District (3.5)
- ♦ Offering aid to property owners trying to find funds to prevent demolition (3.2)
- ♦ Making sure that HDC codes are followed on all sides of homes, not just the “street side” (3.1)
- ♦ Establishing more sidewalks to ensure pedestrian friendly routes (3.1)
- ♦ Developing policies for temporary signs (3.0)
- ♦ Creating more parks and/or recreation areas within the Historic District (2.7)

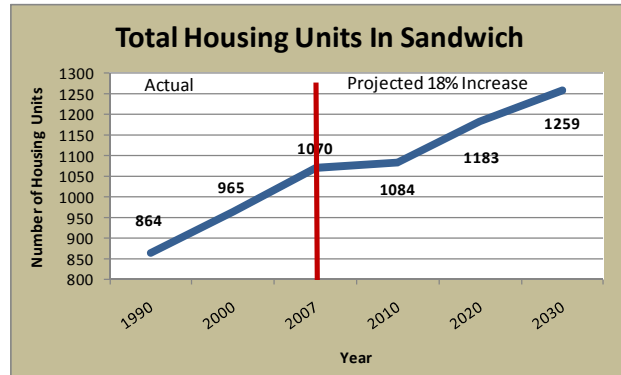
A question was also asked about whether the Historic District boundaries should be kept where they are (200 feet on both sides of the street centerlines) or expanded to include the entirety of the properties in the district. Two similar questions were asked on this issue, with 55-58% favoring expansion of the district to include the entirety of the properties in the district.

Planning for Incremental Growth

While there were differences of opinion on the vision for the future of Sandwich’s villages (and particularly Center Sandwich), all indications are that the town will continue to experience modest population growth. With that growth will come more houses and automobiles. More people and more houses may generate an increased desire for more convenient services closer to where people live, but, realistically, there still may not be a sufficiently large population to attract and sustain such businesses.



Source: NHOEP



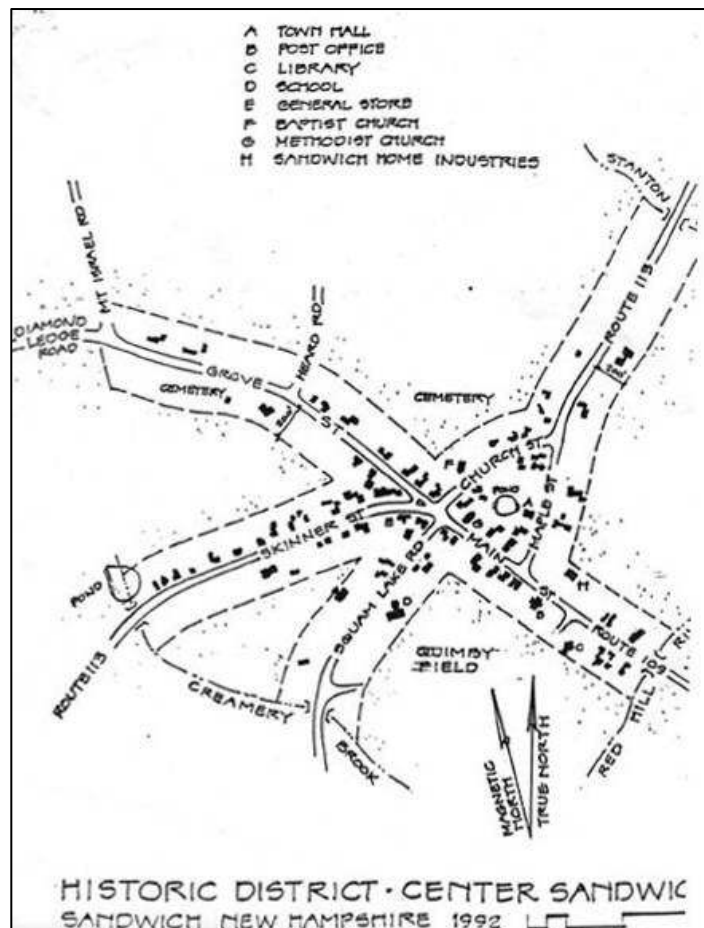
If the population projections produced by the state Office of Energy and Planning do materialize, and the town does grow to nearly 1,800 people - a 31% increase over the next twenty years, where will those new homes, businesses and services be located? In order for Sandwich to achieve its most highly valued asset—the *preservation of its natural resources and rural character*—and preserve the architectural and historic quality of its villages, thoughtful and strategic planning will be necessary. The preservation of rural character is being addressed in the Natural Resources chapter of this plan. But how does the town keep the small town, traditional New England architectural quality of its villages and still allow modest growth to meet increasing population needs?

Current Regulations

Most of the Town of Sandwich is zoned Rural/Residential, which defines the permitted land uses and dimensional requirements for the entire community. There are a number of other zoning classifications that add additional restrictions and standards in those districts. One of these is the Historic District, which encompasses only the core of Center Sandwich village.

Historic District Boundaries

The Historic District boundaries are set at 200 ft. from the centerline of the streets in the district (see map at right) and bounded by Red Hill River, Stanton Brook, Creamery Brook and Mt. Israel Road. Everything beyond the



200 ft. boundary is zoned Rural Residential. Center Sandwich village has the only local Historic District in town.

Land Use Regulation—Permitted Uses

The Rural/Residential District lists the following as permitted uses:

- Single-family unit, cluster single-unit, residential multiple-unit, mobile homes and manufactured housing dwellings.
- Rural/residential accessory structures such as private garages, accessory dwellings, enclosures or partial enclosures for the housing or storage of farm equipment, pets, livestock, merchandise, property or firewood.
- Home occupations, professional practices, business offices (such as, but not limited to, real estate offices and insurance agencies), located on the premises and employing not more than the equivalent of four full-time employees (excluding the residents), provided such use is secondary to the use of the premises for dwelling purposes, provided that:
 - (a) The premises can provide parking for employees and customers;
 - (b) The business does not generate excess trips, traffic or deliveries; and
 - (c) The business does not materially harm or affect the residential or rural quality of the area.
- Day care within the home of a child-care provider; up to six full-time preschool children and three part-time school-age children.
- Agriculture uses, including all recognized forms of farming, truck gardening, silviculture, livestock raising, tree, shrub, plant or flower nurseries and roadside stands for the sale of produce grown primarily on the premises.
- Recreational uses consistent with the preservation of open spaces and natural resources, and which do not materially harm or affect the residential or rural quality of the area.
- Gravel pits complying with the Sandwich Excavation Regulations.
- Churches, parks, playgrounds, public and private schools, non-home-based child day care, respite center, and municipal buildings. Commercial cable TV reception equipment for Town franchised cable television systems, including necessary tower(s), antenna, associated reception equipment, transmission lines and building(s)."

The Historic District allows the following uses:

- All uses permitted in the Rural/Residential District except mobile homes, manufactured housing, commercial cable TV tower(s)/antenna(e) and gravel pits.
- The uses permitted in a Historic District will be such as to preserve and safeguard the historic heritage of the Town of Sandwich. Primary consideration shall be given to those buildings and features that reflect elements of the Town's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history. Similar consideration shall be given to the conservation of property values, the fostering of civic beauty, strengthening of the local economy (including the establishment of retail businesses, professional offices, craft shops, and the like) and to the promotion of the district for the education, pleasure and welfare of the community. It shall be the function of the Town's Historic District Commission to develop a policy for the achievement of the district's purposes in accordance with applicable state laws and through the authority vested by the Town of Sandwich.

Uses that require a special exception from the Zoning Board of Adjustment in the Rural/Residential District are:

Auto service and repair shops, sawmills, inns, retail stores, restaurants, business and professional offices and studios. Common carrier wireless exchange access services are only permitted in the Rural/Residential District pursuant to issuance of a special exception and site plan review approval.

Special Exception uses in the Historic District are:

Inns, retail stores, restaurants, professional offices, studios and banks. The Board of Adjustment shall hear and decide special exceptions within all districts. Within the Historic District, however, the Historic District Commission shall have the power to accept, review and act upon all applications for building permits within its boundaries. Such power of review and approval or disapproval shall be limited to those considerations which affect the relationship of the applicant's proposal to its surroundings, to the location and arrangement of structures, to the architectural treatment of the exterior features and finish of structures, and the

compatibility of land uses within the districts as they may be deemed to affect the character and integrity of said districts to achieve the purposes of the Historic District. In carrying out the foregoing duties, and in its relations with other Town authorities, the Historic District Commission shall act in consonance with the provisions of RSA 674:45 through 674:50.

Observations on Land Use Regulations

There are a number of uses defined in the Rural/Residential District that may not be appropriate to permit in areas of the town where very small lot sizes exist, such as are found in both Center and North Sandwich. The exclusion of “mobile homes, manufactured housing, commercial cable TV tower(s)/antenna(e) and gravel pits” from the historic district would not prevent them from being established in or near the village, just outside of the historic district. Likewise, the public comments summarized earlier in this chapter indicate that there is an interest in allowing additional retail, office and service business activity in Center Sandwich village. In order to accommodate any such changes and preserve the historic qualities of the villages, the town should carefully examine a distinct set of permitted uses for the villages of Center and North Sandwich.

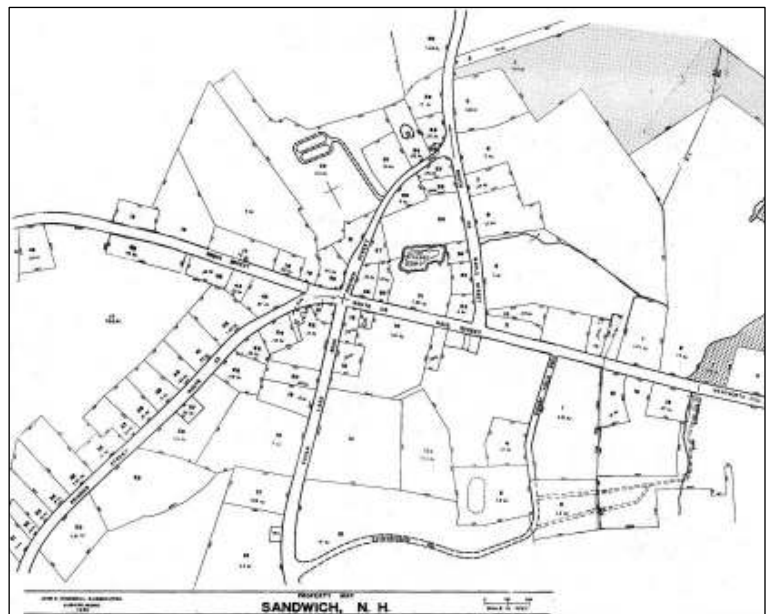
Current Dimensional Standards in the Rural/Residential and Historic Districts

- Minimum lot size: 100,000 square feet (175,000 sq.ft. for multifamily).
- Minimum lot frontage: 160 ft. (for multi-unit structures – as determined by the Planning Board).
- 32 ft. maximum building height (height above natural ground to highest point).
- Building setbacks: 75 ft. from centerline of street; 50 ft. side and rear.
- Septic systems: 25 ft. from lot lines; 125 ft. from lakes, ponds, streams.
- Wells: 75 ft. from septic systems & property lines.

Observations on Dimensional Standards:

The present dimensional requirements would not allow the construction of most of the buildings that exist today in either Center Sandwich or North Sandwich villages. Likewise, most of the lots are considerably smaller than the 2.3 acre minimum required by the current ordinance (note the large number of small parcels on the Center Sandwich Property Map). Buildings in the existing villages are generally 19th and early 20th century structures that were constructed fairly close to the road,

Center Sandwich Property Map





many within 10-20 feet of the edge of the roadway. The illustration to the left shows the location of the current 75 foot setback. In order to adequately plan for incremental growth that is forecasted to occur, yet preserve the visual character of the villages, the town should consider amending dimensional standards so that new buildings or building additions maintain the present ambiance and character that people value.

Architectural Design Standards

The current Historic District design guidelines seek to maintain and replicate the architectural qualities that are represented in the district. The guidelines reference the building scale, basic shapes and window sizes and proportions that are found in the existing buildings. These design guidelines only address buildings within the Historic District, and do not provide any design guidance for possible new structures that might be built in the village, in the Rural/Residential District that directly abuts the Historic District.

Issues and Challenges

Sandwich places a high value on its villages. Participants in the 2009 community survey expressed strong support for the historic architecture in the village, the fact that it is well maintained and that its setting is enhanced by the surrounding open space and the views that it offers. The challenge for Sandwich will be to maintain this village character as the town evolves. To address this challenge, there are several issues that need to be considered.

Permitted Uses

The town's base zoning, the Rural/Residential District (that incorporates the current village areas), allows a variety of uses, many of which may not be reasonable in areas where there are very small lot sizes, such as Center and North Sandwich. At present, such uses as Inns, retail stores, restaurants, professional offices, studios and banks are allowed only by special exception within the Historic District. Based on the 2009 community survey, many residents supported the desire to have a mix of uses in Center Sandwich. The town may wish to re-evaluate the current zoning provisions to allow such uses by right in these village areas.

District Boundaries

The Historic District overlay, created in 1982, is currently being used as a de facto village center zoning classification, but it does not address the broader needs of the town to allow incremental compact development in and around the existing town center. At present, the village center is

within the Rural-Residential district. The zoning requirements for this district do not reflect the dimensional characteristics currently found in the village center. In addition, they do not provide the detailed regulatory guidance, such as dimensional standards, needed to retain the historic compact character of the village. Nor do these requirements enable appropriate incremental growth and a mix of residential, retail and office uses just beyond the present Historic District boundaries. Further, if new development or changes were to be proposed immediately adjacent to the Historic District boundaries, how would that affect the views from the village to the countryside and the overall “feel” of the village?

New zoning classifications, which could eventually bear different names but will be referred to here as the “Center Sandwich District” and the “North Sandwich District,” could define a larger area of similar uses within the town center and/or North Sandwich. They could serve to “buffer” the existing villages against encroaching development that would have a significantly different appearance and “feel.” This would not affect the boundaries of the existing Historic District. Such new zoning districts could, for example, establish appropriate lot sizes, building setbacks, use standards and modest design controls that are in keeping with the vision for the village centers, consistent with this Master Plan. Perhaps a good point of departure would be to seek a broad consensus on how best to ensure that, over the next 20 or more years, any growth or change in use, either in or near the current villages, does not diminish the present character and appearance that citizens so highly value. Establishing these new zoning classifications could allow for incremental additional growth of the villages, while ensuring that new or changed structures are in harmony with the scale and architectural character of the present villages; in the case of the Center Sandwich District the point of reference would likely be the Historic District.

Design Standards

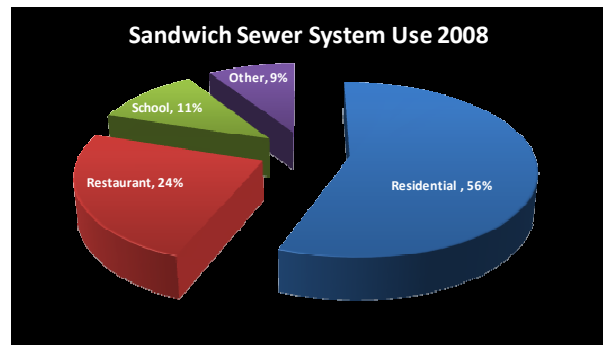
Since Sandwich created the Historic District and adopted the present design standards, design control guidelines generally have continued to evolve. While it may be appropriate to maintain the current design controls on historic buildings, the town should consider somewhat more flexible standards that would apply to new buildings or building additions, particularly in the suggested Center Sandwich District and North Sandwich District. New buildings would need to retain the same basic form and scale as adjacent historic buildings, but they would not be required to replicate every design detail. A recent publication entitled “Neighborhood Heritage Districts – A Handbook for New Hampshire Municipalities” suggests that preserving neighborhood character may place a greater emphasis on “*the shared features of buildings located there, rather than details, such as window sash, doors, and trim, pertaining to individual buildings.*”¹ Greater design flexibility may also be desirable to permit introduction of modern building materials and new technologies (e.g. solar power).

¹ Elizabeth Durfee Hengen, *Neighborhood Heritage Districts – A Handbook for New Hampshire Municipalities* (Concord, NH: NH Division of Historical Resources, 2008)

Infrastructure

Center Sandwich has an established sewer service area that makes it possible for the village to maintain its present compact development pattern. Anticipated future growth and possible changes of use in the mix of residential and non-residential properties in Center Sandwich village will cause incremental demand for sewage capacity. Given current capacity limitations, a detailed engineering study of the sewer system needs to be undertaken and decisions made about whether it could be upgraded or expanded.

In 2008, residential activity accounted for 56% of the total system use, which was at 98% of the system's capacity. In 2009 that figure had dropped to approximately 86%, due primarily to the closing of the general store. There is a known problem of groundwater infiltration – in most years it has exceeded the total inflow from system users –severely limiting the capacity available for users. The ongoing maintenance and operation of the system is paid for by the 74 system users. Small changes in the intensity of land use activity, even within existing buildings, could push the sewer system beyond its ability to meet the town's needs.



Other features that can contribute to village character are sidewalks, street trees and parking. Two out of three people who responded to the 2009 survey did not feel a need for either more sidewalks or parking in the village center. The 2008 Historic District Commission survey provided a different perspective. Those survey respondents felt that current parking was adequate to meet existing needs, but it was felt that adequate parking should be provided for businesses, and that the design of new parking would have to be treated carefully to fit in with the village center.

Residents appear to be satisfied with the current status of sidewalks and parking in the village, but there is a nearly even split, with many "don't knows", when it comes to sewer system expansion. Because, as discussed above, the sewer system is running at capacity, the Town needs to begin looking into alternatives for its long term future.

Action Plan

Vision Goal for Village Centers

Preserve the town's rural, small town character and the traditional New England style of its villages.

Objective VC.1: Maintain the ambiance and character of the existing village centers – Center Sandwich and North Sandwich.

Actions

VC1.1: Maintain a mix of residential, commercial and civic service properties and uses in the Historic District that is consistent with natural and historic resource preservation and respects the wishes of both the neighborhood and wider community.

VC 1.2: Review current zoning regulations to determine whether the villages should continue to be subject, in the main, to the same requirements as the Rural/Residential District.

VC 1.3: Explore creating a Center Sandwich District and North Sandwich District with boundaries that would encompass the existing villages and include some space for incremental new growth around both.

The intent of establishing these districts would be to develop potentially unique zoning requirements to ensure that growth or change in or around the villages over the next 20 year or longer period preserves the character and appearance of today's villages that residents value. The existing Historic District boundaries would not be affected.

To initiate this effort, one or more design workshops or charrettes should be conducted to explore in detail how the Town would like to see the villages grow and evolve over time, leading to development of a long range plan.

VC 1.4: Identify key open spaces and vistas that need to be protected and consider acquisition, easements or other alternatives to permanently protect these visual resources.

VC 1.5: Encourage a program of town beautification including but not limited to planting and preservation of trees, shrubs and flowers.

Objective VC.2: Review design standards for the Historic District and, if created, adopt design standards for the portion of the Center Sandwich District outside of the Historic District and North Sandwich District that are consistent with the traditional New England village.

Actions

VC 2.1: Retain the current design guidelines for buildings in the Historic District, incorporating sustainability and energy efficiency initiatives wherever they do not detract from the visual harmony of the District.

VC 2.2: If zoning districts are created for North and Center Sandwich, develop design standards for additions, renovations and new construction outside the Historic District, that are compatible with existing historic building shapes, scale and character.

VC 2.3: Provide additional tools, including demolition review, for the HDC to preserve architectural features, including buildings and open spaces, in the Historic District.

Objective VC 3: Provide infrastructure to support future needs within the villages.

Actions

VC 3.1: Provide appropriate opportunities for safe pedestrian and bicycle circulation within the village, including, if created, the Center Sandwich and North Sandwich Districts.

Where possible, do so without increasing paved surfaces, favoring permeable and green alternatives that reduce storm water runoff.

VC 3.2: Develop a long range plan for parking in the villages, including, if created, the Center Sandwich and North Sandwich Districts -- one that minimizes visual impacts and emphasizes sharing existing resources to avoid paving new areas.