

Future Land Use Plan **DRAFT 4.4.2024**

Introduction

The purpose of the Future Land Use Plan is to identify areas of the community that are most well suited for future development in various forms, including residential, commercial, agriculture or forestry, and light industry, and to tie in strategies that the community could use to ensure growth is concentrated in these areas, and minimized in rural areas.

Background

The Existing Land Use chapter describes in detail the historic development patterns of South Berwick, and proposes a simple developable land analysis to better understand where development has occurred, and what areas still have potential for future development. The major takeaways include:

- Development has continued as expected, based on the ordinance; however, more development has taken place in rural areas than anticipated when compared to residential growth areas and developing zones.
- Most of the vacant developable land remaining in South Berwick is in the rural zoning districts. This means that development has successfully been concentrated in the village areas, but considerations should be made for future planning of the rural zones.

Developable Land	Acres	Percent of Total Acreage
Total Physically Developable Land <i>(No Physical Constraints)</i>	5,279.62	26%
Total Developable Land <i>(No Physical Constraints & Land is Readily Developable)</i>	4,624.04	23%
Total Vacant Developable Land <i>(No Physical Constraints, Land is Readily Developable & Not Already Developed)</i>	1,343.80	7%
<i>Source: SMPDC Developable Land Analysis, South Berwick Assessing Database</i>		

Developable Land by Zoning District			
Zoning District	Physically Developable Acres	Developable Acres	Vacant Developable Acres
B1	25.88	11.16	0.26
B2	19.70	16.10	0.00
I1	134.77	78.91	28.67
R1	526.07	420.88	106.14
R1A	82.30	80.61	0.00
R2	212.14	166.00	23.11
R2A	157.85	150.25	9.65
R3	2,387.07	2,070.25	648.58
R4	1,211.20	1,137.65	383.77
R5	522.65	491.76	144.09
<i>Source: SMPDC Developable Land Analysis, South Berwick Assessing Database</i>			

Identification of Zones

This Future Land Use Plan proposes areas which are simplified into growth, rural, critical rural and transitional areas.

Growth Areas: Areas where future strategies, regulations and planning should aim to direct growth, primarily residential, commercial or mixed use.

Rural Areas: Areas where future strategies, regulations, and planning should aim to discourage growth.

Critical Rural Areas: Areas where the presence of high-value natural resources should be prioritized for conservation and protected from future growth. These areas are also called Critical Resource Areas.

Transitional Areas: Areas where the community could consider expanding growth, rural or critical rural areas in a more distant future. In the case of growth areas, it is typically because more public investment is necessary in order for growth to be supported.

Each of these areas has been identified in the descriptions below. Any recommended public investment, land use changes, and other policies which help direct growth to where it is most suitable are also mentioned below and throughout the Goals, Policies, and Strategies matrix.

Growth Areas

South Berwick is historically a relatively slow-growing community, as described throughout the inventory section of this plan. However, as the housing market has become more demanding and population has increased across the state, the town will continue to experience increased future residential development. Based on the basic housing demand projection in the Housing Chapter, South Berwick may need between 190 to 350 new housing units by 2040, depending on the speed of population growth over that time. Recent efforts by the municipality to support businesses and create a stronger local economy, especially in the form of the Market Analysis, encourage commercial and retail development in certain areas.

The identified growth zone includes the greater downtown South Berwick area, including the whole upper northwest corner of town, bounded by Lovers Brook and the Great Works River – the area all currently zoned as B1, B2, BR, and R1. It then extends along the 236 corridor and includes the upper most section of the I1 and I2 zones, and the R3 area which connects them to downtown. This boundary follows the existing sewer force main to the Marshwood Pumping Station, although connections to this main still require investment for expansion.

Growth Focus – Route 236

The I2 and I1 zones are generally underdeveloped, likely due to some challenges such as the CMP corridor inhibiting roadside building, as well as lack of sewer and water. However, the I2 zone on the west side of Route 236 has always allowed for residential development, but little has gone in. The zone currently requires a 2-acre minimum lot size, which could be reduced to mimic a zone like R1 which allows 1 acre lots without sewer and 10,000 square foot lots with sewer. In addition, the town could consider shifting part of the I1 zone which is closest to downtown to I2, to allow for mixed use development on both sides of the corridor. The type of housing best suited for this area is likely multi-family, attached single-family, or mixed-use residential paired with retail or commercial on ground floors. Public infrastructure connections would be even more important for these denser housing types.

Given that this area is slightly further from the downtown core, investment in connectivity could also improve development potential, mitigate traffic impacts from increased density, and support public safety access. Throughout the growth area, the town should prioritize development patterns that discourage dead ends and cul-de-sacs and allow for through traffic to collector roads. For residents, off-road connections to downtown would also be an asset to this satellite area, which should be considered as the Eastern Trail plans to extend through South Berwick.

Growth Focus – Village & Lower Main Street

For the most part, the greater village area of town is already the most densely developed in the community. However, there are areas within the village, between Main St and Agamenticus Estates which are relatively open and developable. There are also areas along Agamenticus Rd beyond the golf course which are similar. Within the downtown core, there is still potential for infill development, which would prioritize redeveloping underutilized lots, blighted properties, or shifting the current use to something with more dynamism. One area where this could become a focus is the Lower Main Street stretch between the intersection with Route 236 and the Rollingsford town line. The area is largely zoned as B1, which does not have a minimum lot size requirement, and allows for greater flexibility of uses. Although the area is primarily residential, there are a handful of small businesses, and with a greater focus and investment, the neighborhood could become more of an extension of the Main Street village development. Immediately across the bridge into NH, Rollingsford has a concentration of businesses within the Mills at Salmon Falls, most of which are family-focused, arts, recreation, personal services, or small-scale manufacturing which suits the demographic of South Berwick as well.

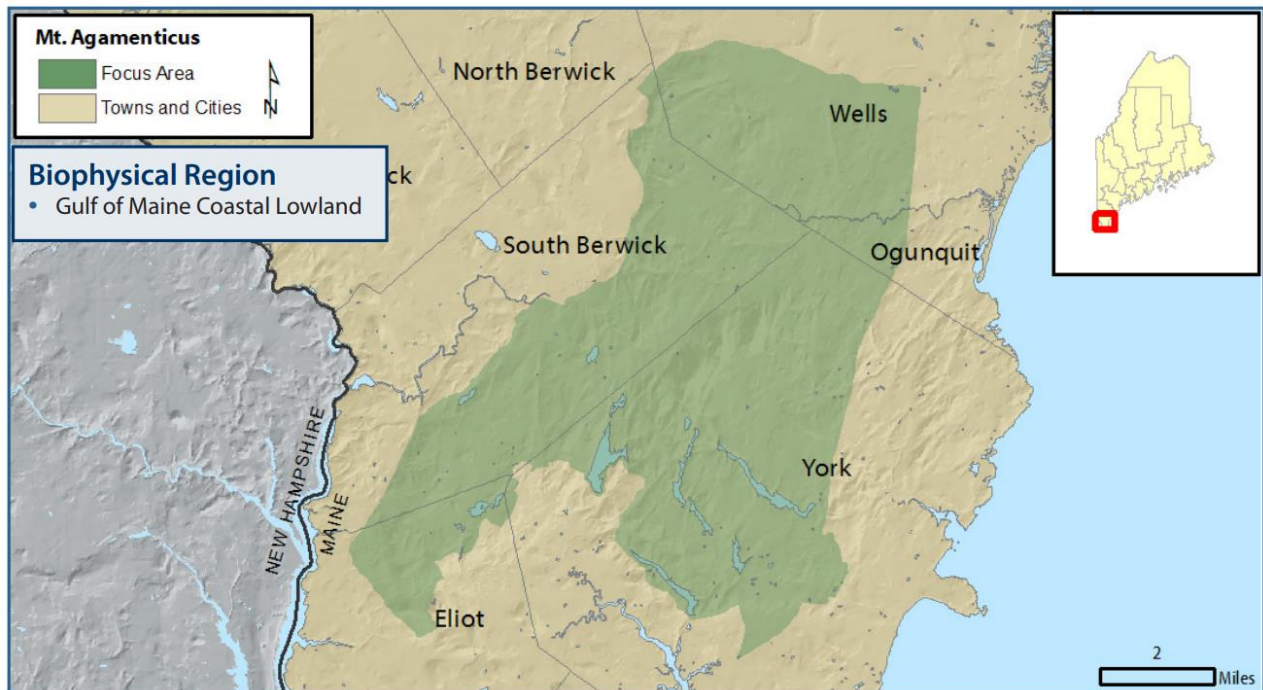
One challenge with this area is parking, both for businesses and rental properties. This is one area in town where relaxing the overnight parking prohibitions could support more apartment style units. Several buildings have walkable entrances or storefronts that are underutilized, or if they are in business, feel detached from the main village. The town could consider future investment in the form of a public parking lot, or better walkability from the village or other existing parking. A small pocket park, potentially with public access to Driscoll Brook or the Great Works River could provide a gathering place that would draw visitors. Small changes, like extending the seasonal flags along Main Street into this mixed-use area, could bring interest and beautification.

Rural Areas

Everywhere else in the community, not defined as a growth area, is identified as rural areas. South Berwick is firstly a rural community, and once you leave the village area, single family homes or farms on larger lot sizes, open fields, and expansive wooded areas are the primary land uses. This has remained the case for many years, although development in the rural areas continues due to the desirability of the rural neighborhood and character. Strategies to direct development to the growth areas should also include protection of open space, natural resources, and limiting sprawling development throughout these rural areas. This includes larger lot sizes, which already exist in all the rural residential zones, as well as incentives to shape subdivisions which prioritize creating open space and limit the developments impact on the landscape.

Critical Rural Areas

The Critical Rural area encompasses the northeastern most areas of town, which is predominantly covered by the Mount Agamenticus conservation area, and the significant natural communities that expand beyond the conserved areas. The area has a large tract of conserved land, covering high-value natural resources. The area is included in a Beginning with Habitat Focus Area of Statewide Ecological Significance for its abundance of vernal pools, rare species, and special natural communities. This area is already zoned as R5, the most limited zone in terms of allowed uses, and which requires the largest minimum lot size. This area should continue to be prioritized for protection, and the most limited growth allowances in the community.



Source: *Beginning with Habitat, Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance*

Transition to Critical Rural Areas

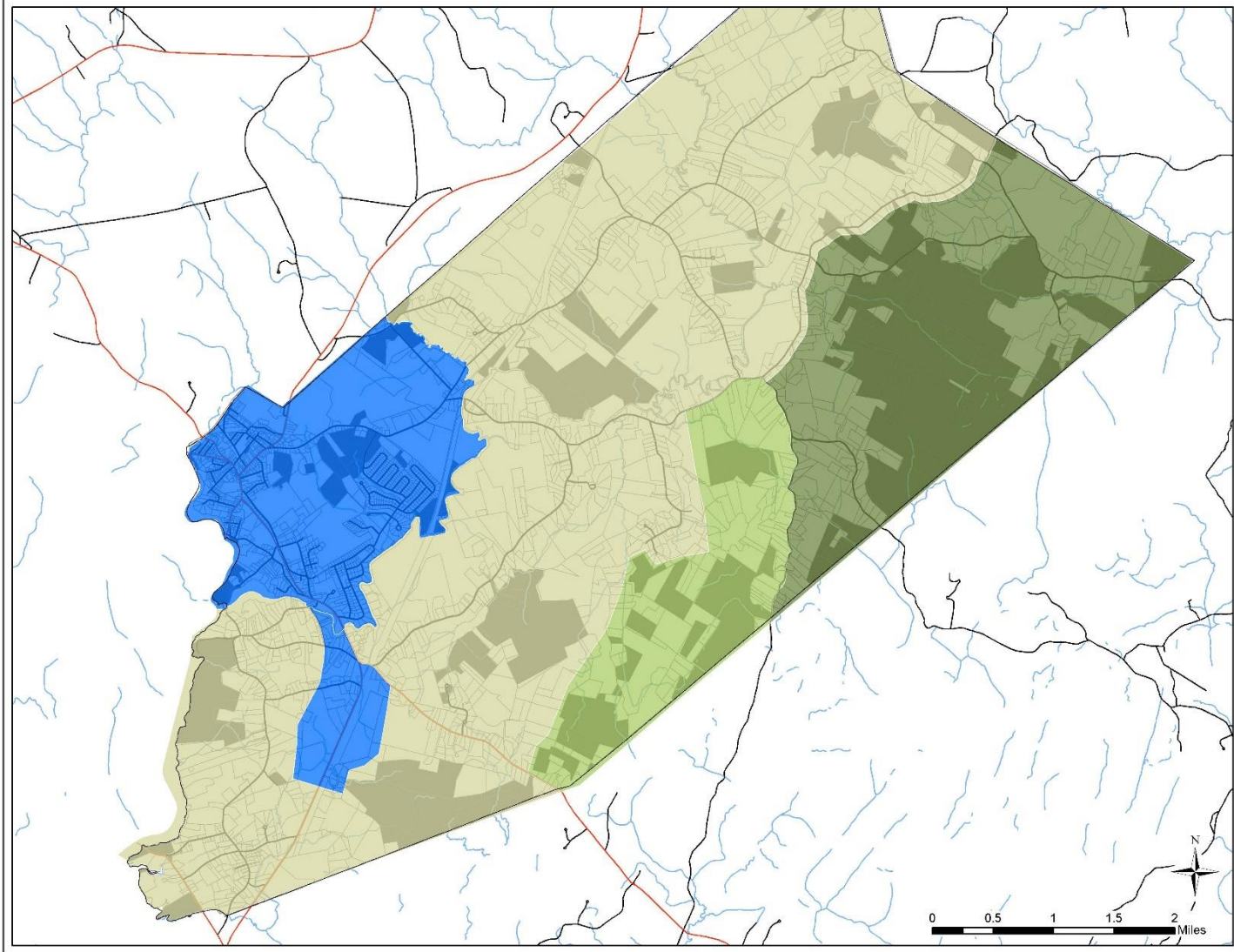
One area of the community, a portion of the R3 zone which abuts the R5 zone, was identified a potential area to transition to critical rural. The area is already comprised of several different conserved areas and preserves, including parts of the Mt. Agamenticus conservation area, town-owned land, and Great Works Regional Land Trust lands, and is encompassed by the Beginning with Habitat Focus Area. Across the town line, the area abuts other Mt. Agamenticus conservation land. There is also very little in terms of infrastructure, including roads. To continue to direct growth away from these important habitats and resources, it could eventually shift to an extension of the R5 zone, which would result in increased minimum lot sizes and slightly more restrictive use allowances.

Other Strategies for Directing Growth

Other strategies for directing growth can be found throughout the Goals, Policies and Strategies proposed for each chapter. With a focus on residential development, it is recommended that the land use regulations within the growth areas are reviewed to identify areas with potential to increase density allowances or consider relaxing parking requirements. The zoning should also be reviewed to ensure

that adequate mixed-use and multi-family housing is allowed in the downtown area, and that alternative housing types are not prohibited, such as single-family attached housing or tiny homes. The town already has a differential growth cap which only affects rural areas, but this policy should be reviewed over time to ensure that prospective growth areas are not unnecessarily capped, and rural and critical rural areas have appropriate growth controls. It is also recommended that growth related capital investments, such as added infrastructure and amenities, be concentrated in identified growth areas. To this point, several strategies in the plan are related to the improved coordination between the town, the South Berwick Water District and the South Berwick Sewer District. These include the development of a Route 236 corridor infrastructure plan to assess capacity and expansion, evaluating the fee structure, and designating a council member to regularly engage with both quasi-governmental agencies.

When it comes to the rural areas, the first priority should be conservation. Especially when it comes to protecting natural resources and water quality, finding ways for the town to incentivize and partake in conservation, current use taxation, and the creation of open space will have the most lasting impact. This could include the creation of an open space fund, policy incentives for the donation of land to the town and updating and implementing the Open Space Plan. However, living in rural South Berwick will continue to be desirable to some, so ensuring land use regulations in the rural areas help shape development in a way that is most suitable is also important. These strategies may include incorporating a conservation checklist into the Planning Board development review process, and ensuring that the Conservation Commission is well informed about potential projects. Ensure the zoning ordinance supports and encourages the creation of Conservation Subdivisions which prioritize conserving the most sensitive or high priority areas of a parcel when designing the lots, and require that any open space created through subdivisions be contiguous with existing abutting conserved lands, if applicable.



South Berwick Future Land Use

South Berwick
Comprehensive Plan

Future Land Use

- Growth
- Rural
- Critical Rural
- Transition to Critical Rural
- Conserved Lands
- Parcels

*This map is not authoritative. Data should be used for planning purposes only.
Source: Town of South Berwick*

