

LAND USE in Central NH

INTRODUCTION

Land use is where the "rubber meets the road" for community development. Land use controls in the form of Zoning Ordinances and a Planning Board's Site Plan or Subdivision Regulations guide development in a community based on the recommendations of the Master Plan.

For the Central New Hampshire Region, there are several current issues local land use regulations should consider. Housing and economic development remain priorities, but so too does community character. Balancing these issues is key to any land use framework. Financial impacts, including costs and taxes, are to be notable concerns for residents and businesses.

New Hampshire's regulatory framework continues to change in the face of various challenges in the state, notably housing. Given these factors, land use changes should prioritize, among other items, the following:

- ☐ Working to encourage housing affordability by expanding housing stock and type.
- ☐ Fostering economic development through available tax incentives, updated zoning, and creative infrastructure funding.
- ☐ Balancing sustainable growth with the protection of community character, including architectural standards, rural character, agriculture preservation, recreational opportunities, and infrastructure needs.
- ☐ Ensuring compliance with evolving state laws.
- ☐ Preparing for the development pressures associated with emerging technologies such as data centers.

FACTS TODAY

Communities are working more with legislative and planning tools that enable local mixed use development and economic development. All land uses balance rural character with accommodating current goals and needs.

Indicator	In 2026
Communities with Mixed-Use Districts	11 Communities
Communities with Economic Revitalization or 79-E Zones	13 Communities
Communities with Medium (0.25-2 ac) or High Density (>0.25 ac) Residential Districts	8 Communities
Acres in Conservation	98,774 acres (21.3% Total Land Acres)

Source: NH GRANIT, CNHRPC, Town Zoning Ordinances, NH OPD
Communities may have delineated maps and/or assessing data available for a more accurate breakdown of land uses.

LAND USE

WHAT IS IMPROVING?

1 ___ Many CNHRPC Communities are responding to the housing crisis and legislative changes.

With the State Legislature implementing many changes to address housing costs and other issues, CNHRPC communities have responded to the challenge by proposing ordinance changes that seek to comply with new state laws, while addressing housing costs by seeking to encourage a greater variety of housing.

2 _ Community character continues to be a priority in regulatory discussions.

Even as communities seek to address challenging issues such as housing shortages and affordability, protection of community character continues to be a priority. This has taken the form of the protection of rural character and natural resources through enhanced cluster ordinances, shoreland protection, and even historic preservation through ordinances designed to allow for the reuse of large, older homes and farmhouses as multi-family buildings.

3 _ Residents continue to be engaged and participate in conversations about land use.

In the face of the Central NH Region's housing challenges, the changing state statutory environment, and economic development opportunities, CNHRPC citizens continue to be engaged in the public process and share their opinions. An increase in survey responses and participation in community engagement sessions across the region have been met with high public participation efforts that have helped to inform municipal governments and CNHRPC as we collectively shape our future.

4___ Reuse as a tool for sustainable development.

Reuse of a building or an underdeveloped area of a community is a great way to address multiple issues. First, it can breathe life into a underutilized portion of town. Second, the reuse of infrastructure and buildings can make development more affordable. Third, reuse can expand the tax base with limited costs to the municipality. As a case example, the community in Boscawen has focused on a multi-faceted effort to redevelop Commercial Street, which has included US EPA Brownfields Cleanup funds, establishing a TIF District, new, infill zoning, and the development of a neighborhood plan.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO WORK ON?

- ☐ **Responding to a changing the legislative environment.** Communities within the region should continue to explore ways to lower housing costs by encouraging the expansion of the number and type of housing units available.

- ☐ **Balance growth with character and infrastructure.** As the expansion of both the housing stock and economy continues to be a priority, the region's communities should continue to protect community character – including rural, historic, architectural, and agriculturally. At the same time, infrastructure development must be coordinated with growth.

- ☐ **Prepare for emerging land use trends.** Data Centers have been an emerging land use that communities are struggling to address across the country. At the same time, emerging technology will continue to create a demand for such uses. CNHRPC communities will need to work together regionally and locally to develop effective tools to respond to such pressures.