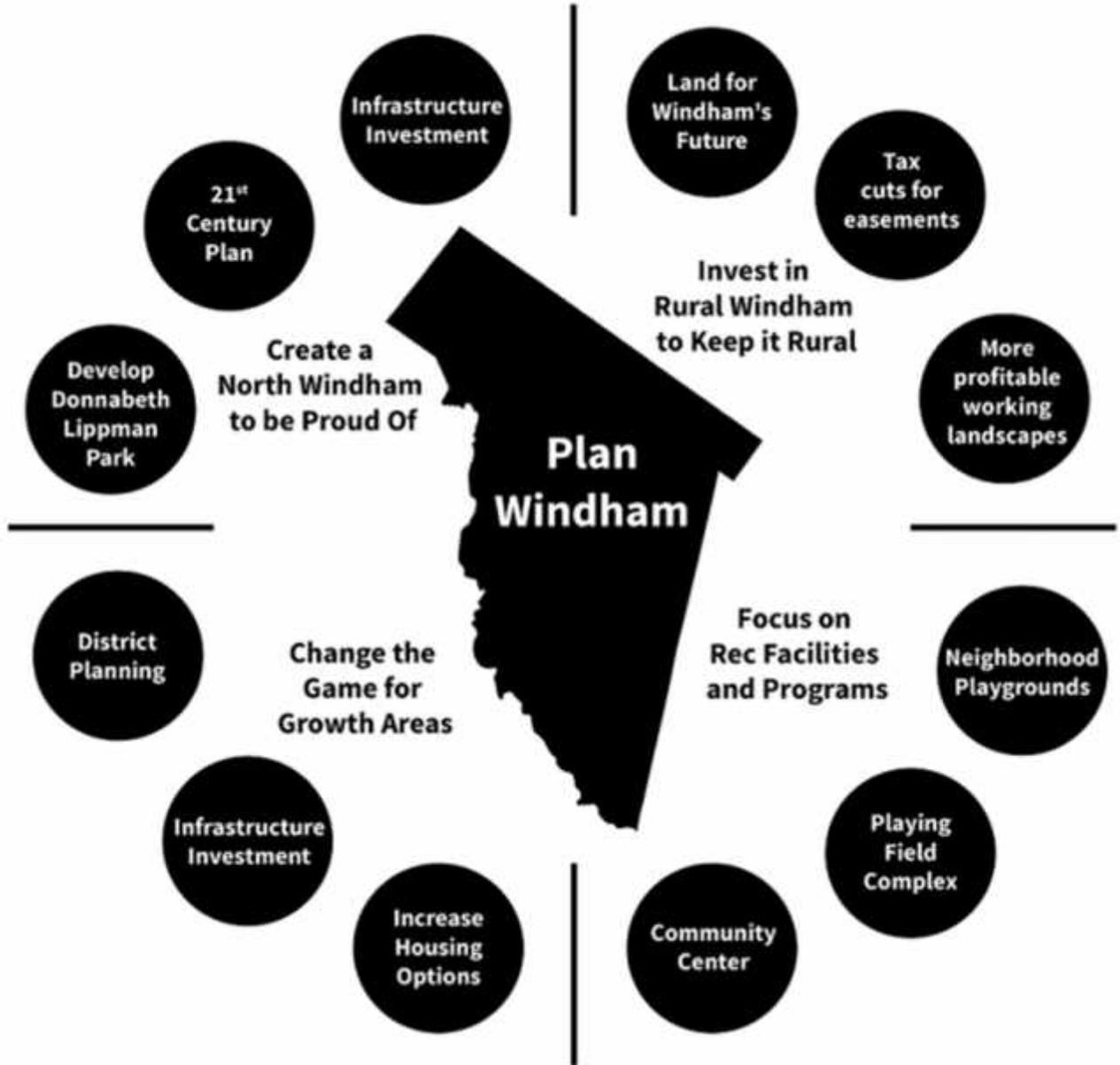


# Plan Windham



**2016 Update**

**Comprehensive Master Plan**

## Acknowledgments

Windham Town Councils: 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016

Town Manager & Staff

Planning Department

Members of the Comprehensive Plan Review Team

- Patrick Corey
- Michael Duffy
- John Eddy\*
- Marge Govoni
- Kenneth Grondin
- Sparky Hurgin
- David Lavigne\*
- Shawn Morrison\*
- David Nadeau
- Allan Phinney
- Tony Searles
- Frayla Shoenfeld
- Gene Tanguay\*
- David Tobin
- Elizabeth Wisecup\*

\*though all appointed at the same Council meeting in July 2014, not all committee members were able to participate through completion of the plan drafting process. Those who had to step away from the process before delivery of a plan document to the Council are noted above.

Windham Veterans Center and the Little Meetinghouse for hosting early meetings of the Review Team, and the RSU for providing a regular meeting place for the Review Team from 2015-2016.

Mark Eyerman, Planning Decisions, Inc., for assistance with meeting facilitation and organization of the Visioning Forums.

Critical Insights, Inc., for development and administration of the Community Survey.

Thanks to the greater Windham community, including residents, business owners and students for providing input and feedback throughout the planning process!

## Introduction

The Town Council approved the charge of the Comprehensive Plan Review Team on March 25, 2014. This group was charged with the responsibility:

- To assist in drafting an update to the Town of Windham's 2003 Comprehensive Master Plan, consistent with the State's Growth Management Act and direction of the Town Council,
- To report periodically to the Council regarding its progress, issues and problems, and
- To submit a recommended draft to the Town Council for its acceptance and adoption.

This document, along with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Downtown Plan for North Windham (adopted by the Town Council in 2013) and the Windham Economic Development Strategic Plan (adopted by the Town Council in 2013), represent the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of a recommended updated of the Comprehensive Plan for Windham. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Downtown Plan and the Economic Development Plan are included as Appendices to this plan document.

## Prior Planning Efforts

Since the adoption of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, the Town has been very active in planning on many fronts for the community. This update of the Comprehensive Plan builds on these efforts, which are listed and summarized below.

Comprehensive Assessment of Housing in Windham (2003)

Comprehensive Water System Master Plan for Town of Windham (2003)

Service Road Study (2007)

Wastewater Facilities Plan & Windham Sewer Route 302 Corridor Schematic Design (2011)

Town of Windham Energy Plan & Energy Inventory (2011)

Forest Stewardship Management Plan for Lowell Preserve (2011)

North Route 302 Corridor Plan (2011)

Pleasant River Watershed Management Plan (2011)

Lakes Region Transit Service Study (2011)

Economic Development Strategic Plan (2013)

21<sup>st</sup> Century Downtown Plan for North Windham (2013)

Space Needs Master Plan (2014)

## Public Process

### Comprehensive Plan Review Team

The Review Team was a 15-member committee whose members were appointed by the Town Council on July 24, 2014. This group met approximately once per month since September 2014 to organize visioning sessions, coordinate the annual Summerfest presence for this planning effort, and to review and provide comments on draft plan chapters. This group was made up of experienced planners and newcomers, long-time residents and those who have only been in Windham for a short amount of time. Members came from all corners of community, from private roads and public roads, and from rural areas and established neighborhoods.

### Community Brainstorming and Visioning

Early efforts at public outreach began in 2013, with the Planning Department's experiment with Mindmixer, an online interactive community engagement tool. It allowed staff to post questions, polls, and surveys for all registered users to participate in. Use of this system was relatively limited, even though it was initially publicized well and had a good number of registered users, due to the amount of time between starting that process and the official start of the planning process. Use was also likely limited by having a system in place that required registered users and log ins.

The low-tech version of Mindmixer was used in the first half of 2014. These were the Town Post-It note boards that rotated locations around the Town Office and Library. Specific questions like, "What do you love about Windham?" and "What is your big idea for Windham?" solicited lots of great feedback.

The Review Team held two community scale Visioning Forums in November 2014. These were held on the evening of Wednesday, November 19, at the Manchester School in North Windham and the Town Office Gymnasium/Community Center on Saturday morning, November 22, 2014. The Forums were structured so that an introductory presentation provided everyone with a baseline of information and context for the planning work they were about to participate in, and the remainder of the time was dedicated to small table work facilitated by members of the Review Team and reporting back to the large group.

**[Include information on mini-Forums, December 2014- January 2015]**

A complete summary of the visioning process and information collected is included in an appendix to this plan.

### Community Survey

Critical Insights, a Portland based polling and public opinion company, was hired to design and administer a survey of Windham households and businesses in 2014. Two focus groups were held in September 2014 to give the organization a sense of important issues and attitudes that should try to be quantified in the larger survey effort. The survey period was open in October and November of 2014, and surveys were mailed to 6,856 households and 529 businesses. Respondents could respond to the survey by phone or online. Responses were received from 1,024 residential households (14.9% response rate) and 42 businesses (7.8% response rate). Because of the impressive response rate on

behalf of Windham households, the community can have a high level of confidence that the responses received are representative of the community at large. A report of focus group discussions and final report of survey results are included as an appendix to this plan.

### Town Council Check-in Workshops

[insert dates of Town Council check-ins for

- Values Vision Statement (Jan/Feb 2015),
- Amended timeline (Aug 2015), future land use map (March 2016),
- 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of Plan (TBD, Summer 2016)]

### Community Review of Draft Plan

[Summerfest 2016, description of meetings TBD Summer/Fall 2016]

## Vision & Values

### Core Values

During the discussions about the future of Windham, a number of values emerged over and over again. These core values represent what the residents of our Town feel strongly about – what is important to them about Windham as a community.



Open fields, forested land, and working farms are important to residents. These resources are valued for the recreational, scenic, and quality of place benefits they provide. These lands provide a connection to Windham’s rural past as well as a bridge to the future. As Windham continues to grow and develop, it is imperative that the most important of these areas be preserved for the future.

**Implication: We should preserve important open spaces, forested lands and working farms.**



Residents value the accessibility and convenience that Windham provides. At a regional level, this means the ease of access to Portland and the amenities of the Lakes Region and White Mountains. On a local level, it means the convenience of local shopping, dining, services, and entertainment as well as access to nature, trails and the water, such as the Mountain Division Trail and Dundee Park.

**Implication: We should preserve and improve accessibility and connections to local and regional destinations.**



Residents appreciate that [Windham is a growing regional jobs center](#) and recognize the need for investments to enhance this regional economic role and to increase and diversify the job opportunities found here.

**Implication: We should increase Windham's role in the regional economy by increasing the numbers and types of jobs available in Windham.**



Residents value that [Town services are provided in a fiscally responsible manner](#). At the same time they recognize that the Town must make targeted investments in roads and other infrastructure to enhance the quality of life for residents and to support economic and job growth, while being mindful of the property tax implications of these investments.

**Implication: We should make smart, targeted investments in infrastructure to shape future growth and to improve municipal services.**



[Windham is, and should continue to be, a community for people of all ages and economic means](#). More diversity in housing types will serve Windham well and maintain a diversity of ages and income levels in the community. Single family homes will continue to be the predominate style of residential development in Windham, but there is a recognition that building on smaller lots and building more apartments, townhouses, and senior housing in proximity to the existing built-up areas, where infrastructure allows, will add to the economic vitality and community life of areas like North Windham and South Windham Village.

**Implication: We should increase the availability of housing options beyond single family homes.**



Residents value [Windham's heritage and its rural roots](#) and want to assure that the connections to its past are both preserved and celebrated.

**Implication: We should celebrate community and connections to Windham's past.**

## **Our Vision for Windham**

Windham continues to evolve as a community. Windham is one community but it is a community of different neighborhoods and different areas, each with a distinct character. As the Town grows, this diversity is maintained and even reinforced. This provides the opportunity for a range of residents and businesses to call Windham home.

We are a proud, dynamic town. We are a town where young families and seniors can find community and live healthy, fun and engaging lives. We are a growing, exciting community that still retains the qualities of a small town. We take care of each other and we respect and celebrate our heritage. We support our schools, local arts and cultural events and the community that they create. We want to continue to improve as a community, and be a place where we are proud to say “I live in Windham” or “My business is located in Windham.”

Windham continues to grow and develop but our development is balanced by the preservation of important open space and agricultural land to maintain the rural character of our Town and to provide scenic, recreational, and economic benefits for our residents.

## **A Tour through Windham in 2030**

While no one can foresee the specific property by property changes that will take place over a decade of continued growth, Our Vision for Windham can be translated down into images of what specific parts of Windham will become. Continued growth will bring change to all corners of Windham, but the pace of change and how much development occurs in specific areas will not be equal. Some parts of Windham will remain relatively unchanged over this time period, while others will see much more intensive development.

In that spirit, imagine that you have to temporarily move or go on a trip that takes you away from Windham for the next ten years or so. The Windham you return to will be very recognizable but you will also notice some significant changes. There has been ten years of population growth with the commensurate demand for new housing. There has been ten years of new commercial development around the community. The community has made targeted investments that have resulted in community and neighborhood improvements. Let’s start the tour!

North Windham continues the transformation that has already begun from a regional retail and convenience center to true town center with a mix of uses and activities that is a destination within the Greater Portland region. As the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Downtown Master Plan is implemented, North Windham evolves into a place where people chose to live, work and play due to improved traffic flow, the creation of pedestrian and bicycle networks, quality architecture and streetscapes, and open space. Activity in North Windham is bolstered as more homes and mixed-uses develop within the core commercial area.

Residents find a more diversified jobs center in North Windham. The diversification in jobs is led by the traditionally strong retail sector and supported by gains in manufacturing, restaurants, and

professional offices. This growth as a job center is enabled by smart investments in infrastructure needed to support these activities.

South Windham attracts new village-scale residential growth by capitalizing on the neighborhood's assets including a rebuilt River Road, the existing sewer system, improvements to Town-owned spaces (including streets), state improvements to the Mountain Division Trail, and access to the Presumpscot River. New single family homes on small lots and town-house style multifamily unit buildings are built next to and among the existing, upgraded and refurbished housing stock. New residents support small, local businesses on Main Street. Cooperation with the Town of Gorham and the Little Falls community on the other side of the Presumpscot ensures that a revitalized South Windham melds with Little Falls as a single community.

If North Windham is the commercial core of Windham, then Windham Center is the civic core. Windham Center takes advantage of the location of school and municipal facilities, along with the Windham Land Trust's Black Brook Preserve, the skate park, and the Community Garden, to become a different type of "village" in the geographic center of the Town. This "civic village" focuses on increasing the number of single-and two-family homes on smaller lots, resulting in a neighborhood that is attractive to families with school-age children who want to live within walking distance of schools, the library, recreation facilities, playing fields, and conserved open-space.

Other existing residential neighborhoods (such as those in the Varney Mill Road area, the Cornerbrook and Brookhaven neighborhoods just off Roosevelt Trail, and the Timberhill and Evergreen neighborhoods along Park Road) are valued for their sense of community. The character of these areas remains essentially unchanged. These neighborhoods accommodate limited additional single family homes that fit the existing character of these neighborhoods, either within the neighborhoods as "infill" development or on adjacent parcels that are incorporated into the existing neighborhoods.

Rural areas of Windham are valued by the community for the recreational, scenic, cultural, and quality of life benefits they provide. The Town continues to recognize that agriculture and forestry are important pieces of the local economy and works to encourage and support new agricultural uses on the rural landscape. The community identifies the most important and scenic open spaces and undeveloped properties including agricultural land, and works with land owners and partners in the non-profit community to permanently protect these areas to proactively ensure that there will be conserved open space and productive working farmland available for future generations, and that the most scenic and iconic views of rural Windham are preserved.

### **Future Land Use Map**

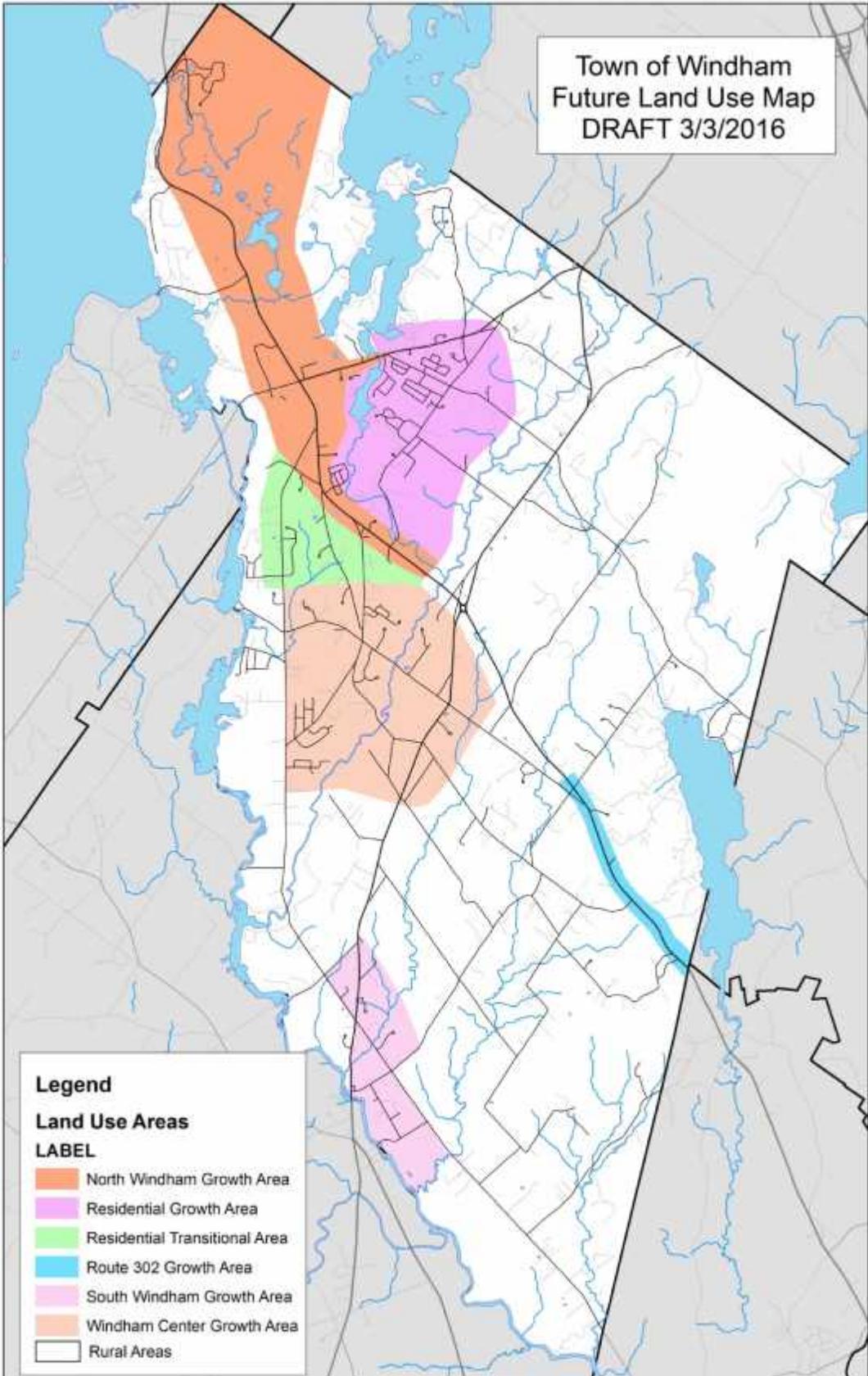
Mapping out where growth and changes are desired and where they are not desired in a central component comprehensive planning. It is graphic that shows the general areas of Windham that should be targeted for growth and those that are important to the community to keep at low development levels.

As noted earlier, change and development pressure will not be felt equally across the entire town. Part of that is based on market demands and partly by circumstance. Through this Plan, the Town will make certain that community character and cost to provide services will also factor into where future growth occurs.

Growth Areas are the parts of the community where most of Windham's future growth is to be targeted and encouraged or incentivized. It is also where most of the investment in new community infrastructure and facilities should be located. Later in the Economy Chapter of the Plan, these are referred to as Activity Areas. On the other hand, Rural Areas are the places where future development is to be directed away from. Transitional Areas are the places between the Growth and Rural Areas, where further development will not necessarily be encouraged or discouraged. Moderate growth is appropriate for these areas.

Another way to think about these areas might be that Growth Areas will have a relatively faster rate of change and that Rural Areas will have a relatively slower rate of change.

Town of Windham  
Future Land Use Map  
DRAFT 3/3/2016



- Legend**
- Land Use Areas**
- LABEL**
- North Windham Growth Area
  - Residential Growth Area
  - Residential Transitional Area
  - Route 302 Growth Area
  - South Windham Growth Area
  - Windham Center Growth Area
  - Rural Areas

## The 4 Big Things

There are 38 Goals laid out in the Inventory Chapters that follow, and 91 strategies to implement these Goals. Many of these are required by Maine's Growth Management Act and associated departmental rules that lay out the State would like to see addressed in a municipal plan. The Goals and Strategies at the end of each of the Inventory Chapters are related to the specific topic of that chapter, so that Transportation goals are included in the Transportation Chapter, Public Facilities and Service goals are in the Public Facilities and Service Chapter, and so on.

Based on all the public comment we have received, we have tried to boil all of these goals and strategies to their most essential essence. The goal of this Plan is to present a manageable number high-priority, crosscutting challenges to meet over the next few years, rather than present a long and unprioritized laundry list of items to pick off over the next ten or more years. By moving the ball forward on these focused areas, the Town will be making progress on the most important issues Windham faces right now.

Each of the Big Things are high priority subject areas, meaning that they are not presented in prioritized list. They are all important, and the list is small enough that it should be possible to make progress on all of them at the same time. Each also is listed with Goals and Strategies from the various Inventory Chapters they touch on.

With these aims in mind, here are the Big 4 things that the Town Council and community at large need to work together on in the short term, along with graphics that represent the Core Values addressed by making progress on each one:

### Big Thing #1 – Change the game for Windham's Growth Areas: North Windham, Windham Center, South Windham



Windham needs to begin thoughtfully and proactively laying the groundwork for these three traditional activity centers to become true centers for Windham. As envisioned above, these three areas are very unique within Windham, and these differences are great strengths that allow for different types and scales of neighborhood development that will truly make Windham a community for all people, ages, and economic means. This Big Thing is all about expanding the range of options available for people to choose from when considering Windham for a home or a place to start or expand a business.

Transportation Goal 6.1.d and Economy Goal 3.2.f – Create Windham Center and South Windham district plans that focus on transportation and land use. This would be similar in concept to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Downtown Plan for North Windham, but appropriately scaled to the context for each area.

Future Land Use Plan Goals 9.5.a and 9.3 – Support a financial commitment to infrastructure in Growth Areas, with a goal of having 75% of all new Town infrastructure and facility investment occurring in Growth Areas.

## Big Thing #2 – Create a North Windham to be proud of



North Windham is the economic and social center for the community. Here you will find two major supermarkets, almost all of the restaurants, clubs and social organizations in the community, multiple department stores and almost all of the smaller scale retail uses, the movie theatre, building supply and hardware stores, an amusement park and more. Most in the community feel that we should be building on North Windham's success to ensure that it is successful economic and social center for future generations to come. In order create a place that inspires pride of place and transforms North Windham from a major convenience retail center to a place where people chose to also spend time, play and recreate, work and live, improvements and investments need to be made. These upgrades include changes to North Windham's transportation network, installation of new infrastructure for wastewater treatment and high speed broadband, and doing our best to ensure that when new development or redevelopment is proposed, sites are designed to become high-quality assets to the community.

## Big Thing #3 – Invest in Rural Windham to keep it rural



Preservation of rural character and protecting important open spaces and scenic views has been enshrined in all of Windham's past Comprehensive Plans. These are the places that tie long-time residents to the land, places where traditional outdoor recreational activities and access have been available for many decades, working land that has been passed down through generations, and the very places that have made Windham an attractive location for new families in the greater Portland area since the 1970s. There is also an understanding among many community members that rural land has a much lower demand for municipal services that house lots or commercial development and therefore keeping rural spaces in the town can be a way to avoid the costs of new or expanded municipal services. We need to get serious about open space and preserving working land within the time horizon of this plan or there will be little left to preserve and protect going forward. Getting serious about Rural Windham means making investments to purchase outright, or at least the develop rights, to the most special and iconic rural land in the community, knowing that it is not practical to keep all of the undeveloped land in Windham in its current undeveloped state. Getting serious also means working with farmers, wood lot owners, and others who earn their living from the land to make it easier to establish other rural uses and accessory uses to provide additional income streams to their operations. When rural land is productive and profitable, it is much easier to perpetuate into the future.

## Big Thing #4 – Focus on Community Facilities and Programs



There are really two components to this Big Thing. The first is prioritizing the basic maintenance of existing facilities, which include roads, municipal and school buildings, and park and recreation lands. Windham is currently building a new larger South Windham Fire Station from an existing steel building in South Windham Village. This is the first new municipal facility since 1989, almost 30 years ago. The Town faces a backlog of deferred maintenance on many of the Town's buildings and there are many efficiency related improvements that could pay for themselves in 5-10 years but need to be budgeted for. The Town's roads are in relatively good shape, and the Public Works Department is flat out every construction season milling and paving local roads and conducting ditching and mowing operations around the community. It is imperative that Windham keep up on local road maintenance which costs a fraction of complete road rebuilds when maintenance is deferred too long.

Secondly, the Town needs to address the needs of a growing community from the standpoints of athletic facilities and community center space. The Town recently sold the Gambo Road Soccer Fields to the Windham Youth Soccer Association. This leaves the community with the Falmouth Road Little League Field as the only municipally owned playing field. The rest of the playing fields in Windham are on school district properties. There are public playgrounds at the Primary School and Town Office properties in Windham Center and at the Manchester School and Donnabeth Lippman Park in North Windham. The community needs to invest more in recreational space for organized youth and adult sports. There is a similar shortage of indoor recreational facilities, along with a shortage of community meeting and flex space for senior, youth, and general community activities and events. It has been suggested several times in recent years that a Community Center could serve many purposes in Windham, and data from the Community Survey indicates support for the concept. All of these needs are the result of sustained residential growth, and all indications are that Windham will remain on a growth path for at least the remainder of this planning period.

### Plan Implementation

The success of a plan is measured in how well it is implemented. Many comments were heard during the Visioning process that had to do with follow through on planning efforts. Comments similar to "Why are we doing a whole new plan when we still have so many items from the last plan that haven't been done yet?" or "Why bother planning for improvements/facilities/infrastructure when we know we can't afford to pay for them?" or "Why go through effort of planning only to produce another document that will sit on the shelf for 10 years?"

This Plan is not meant to be a document on a shelf. This Plan is a tool for community decision makers to use for making progress in the areas Action Plan that will have the biggest positive impacts for Windham's current and future residents.

The Comprehensive Plan Review Team recommends that the Town Council adopt a charge for and appoint members to a Long Range Planning Committee. A charge for this group should include coordinating the implementation of the Big Ideas detailed in this update to the Comprehensive Plan, implementing other Town plans and policies, such as the Complete Streets Policy adopted in 2015 and recommendations from the Energy Plan adopted in 2011. This group should be tasked with preparation of any of the district or topical plans or studies called for in this Comprehensive Plan.

[Recommend the likely responsible party – LRPC, Town Departments, others – for carrying out work required to implement the Big Things. We should include a spreadsheet or other list of all the Goals and Strategies in the Inventory Chapters, but unless they are associated with Big Things, they don't need a timeline or responsible party]

## Performance Measures

Of course, this document includes many policy goals and suggested strategies that will allow the town to make progress toward each of those goals. What we should care about, though, and what we want to measure, are the things that the community told us they care about. We want to be able to show progress in areas that are most relevant to the people of Windham.

These performance measures should be updated and reported out to the Town Council and community on an annual basis.



### **Preserve important open spaces, forested lands and working farms**

- Number of acres of land protected through the acquisition of development rights, conservation easements or Town gift/purchase.
- % new dwelling units permitted in growth areas relative to rural areas



### **Increase Windham's role in the regional economy and increase and diversify the jobs available in Windham.**

- Total number of jobs in Windham.
- Ratio of the number of retail jobs relative to the total number of jobs in Windham



## **Preserve and improve accessibility and connections to local and regional destinations**

- Feet of new sidewalk constructed in Growth Areas
- Ridership on Lakes Region Explorer



## **Make smart, targeted investments in infrastructure to shape future growth and improve municipal services**

- % of infrastructure funds spent in growth areas
- Number of residential and non-residential connections to a public sewer system.



## **Windham should continue to be a community for people of all ages and economic means**

- Number of age-restricted dwelling units permitted as a percent of total dwelling units
- Number of multiunit dwellings built relative to single family homes
- Number of accessory dwelling units permitted



## **Celebrate community and connections to Windham's past**

- Estimated number of attendees at community events like Summerfest and the Tree Lighting.
- Number of attendees at Windham Historical Society events.
- Number of Windham youth sports participants
- Estimated number of library patrons or number of items checked out.

## **Future Comprehensive Plan Updates**

The Long Range Planning Committee should be charged with annual reporting on the performance measures suggested above, as well as adding to or changing the performance measures to improve how progress implementing the plan is moving forward.

The Plan should also be updated on a regular basis, perhaps every three years or so, to keep the information in the inventory chapters current and to add or change to the Big Ideas as they are implemented or priorities change or new opportunities present themselves.

Going back out to the community for structured input in the form of surveys and visioning sessions is also recommended, though the Community Values and Vision should be considered to be more constant than the underlying technical information in the Inventory Chapters. As such, the community might not need to update that portion of the plan for a longer time period.

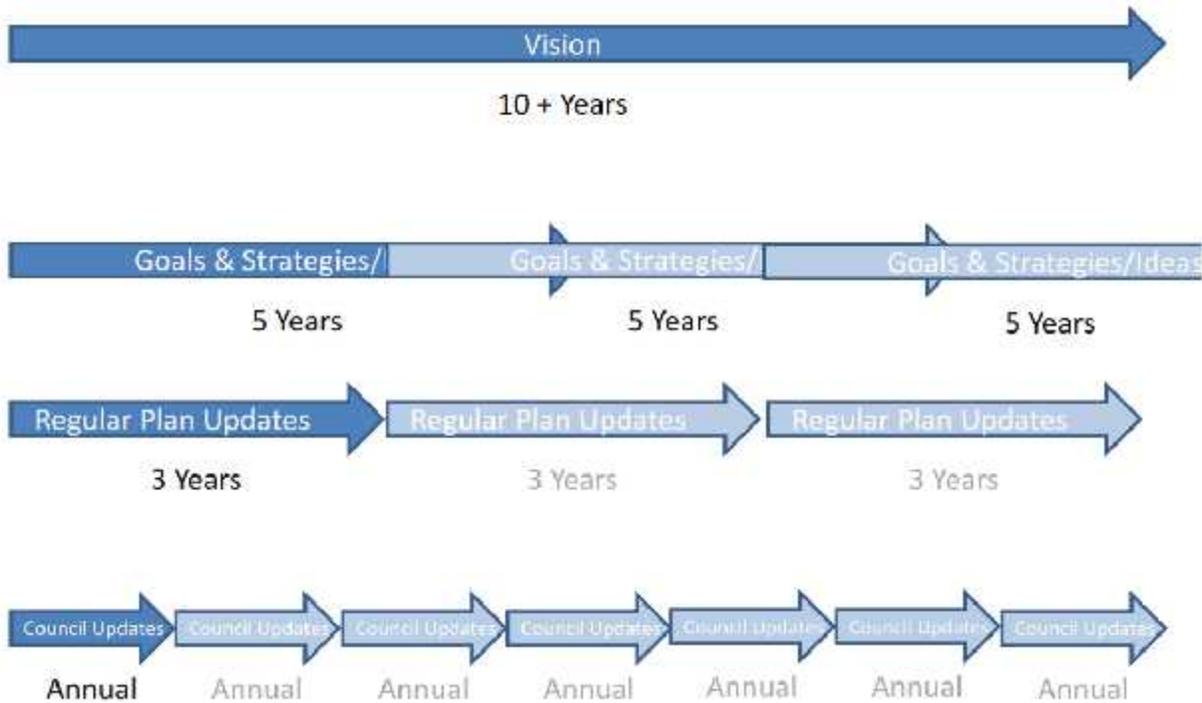


Figure 1 - Recommended Update Schedule