

CHAPTER VIII: LAND USE

Introduction

The Land Use chapter is a critical component of the Wilton Master Plan. The decisions documented in the Land Use Chapter, where development should occur, what kind of growth the Town wants to encourage, and how much land should be protected, shape everything from Wilton's community character and natural resources to its transportation network and economic vitality. Looking back at the 2015 Land Use Chapter, the two main conclusions remain the same in 2026: balancing development opportunity against the preservation of Wilton's rural character and promoting economic health in the downtown without compromising small-town identity.

The major findings of this update, fully explored in the sections below, is that Wilton's zoning and land use patterns have only slightly changed since 2015. Additionally, Town sentiment for remaining a small town and resistance to large scale developments of either residential or commercial use continues to exist as a common theme. The following update provides new mapping for Wilton, land use data, and recommendations for the future of the Town. Ultimately, the slow growth of Wilton reflects Town sentiment towards future development, which is a strong desire to remain small and rural.

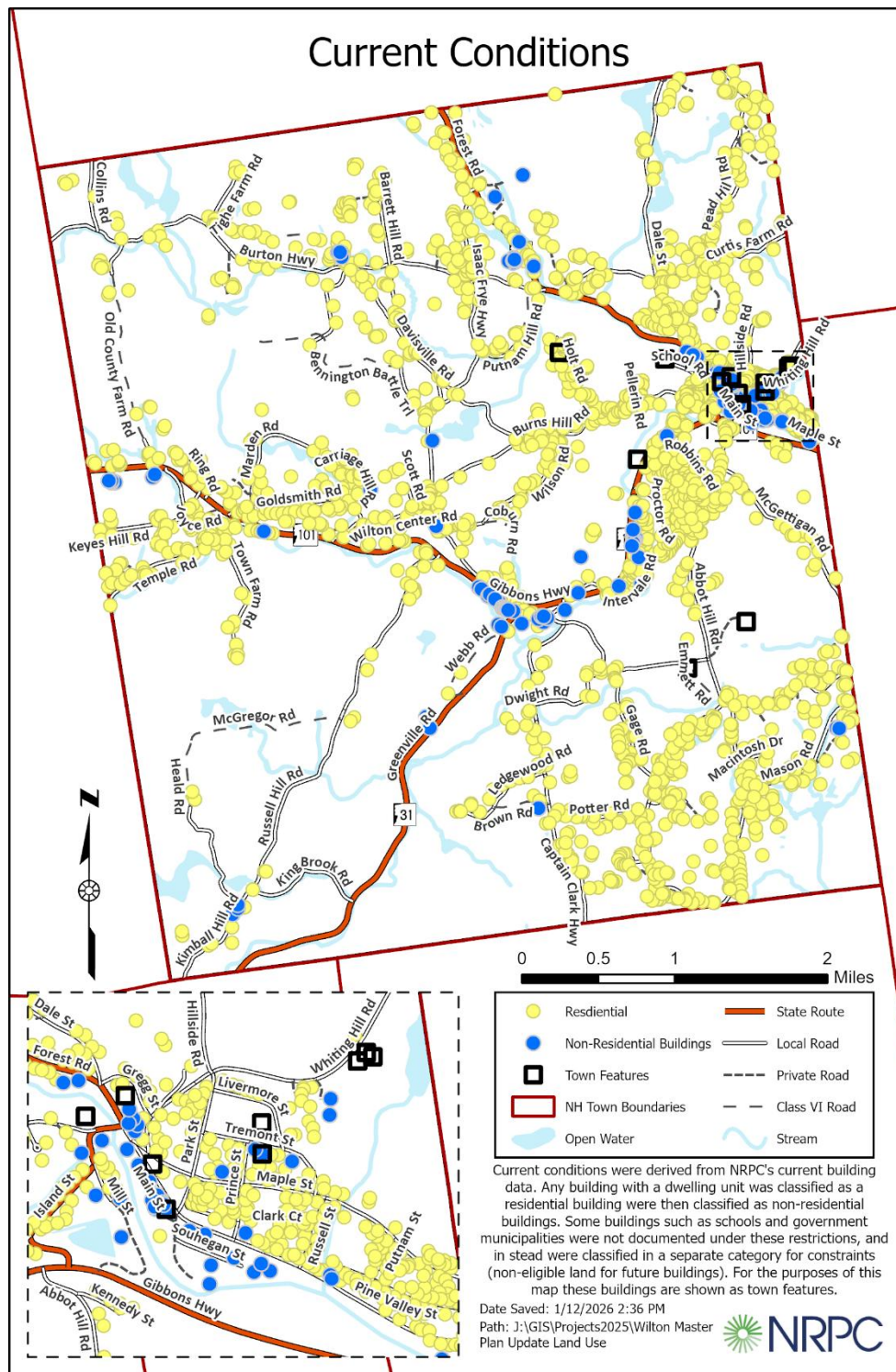
Section 1: Wilton Today

Current Conditions

As it was in the 2015 land use chapter, the Town of Wilton remains a rural, residential community. The updated Current Conditions map depicts essentially the same overall settlement pattern documented during the prior update. Residential use dots are scattered across nearly every road in town, with the densest concentrations on the east along Main Street and Intervale Road near Abbot Hill. For the most part, non-residential uses remain in the same spots along Main Street and NH State Route 101, leaving the same blueprint as 2015.

The only significant change to note is an increase in residential uses throughout Wilton. The Town has continued to grow, even if quite slowly (see also Chapter III: Population and Housing) . As the current conditions display, Wilton has grown at a rate consistent of its rural character, and while having slight growth in its residential zone continues to be a small, rural community.

Map 1 – Current Conditions (2026)



Existing Land Uses

Land use describes the type of activity that occurs on a parcel of land. Existing land use is influenced by natural resource constraints and opportunities, accessibility, and zoning. The land uses described and mapped in this chapter were derived by the Nashua Regional Planning Commission using a combination of assessing data interpretation, field surveys, parcel-based data, and input from the Wilton Planning Board. They are meant to be general in nature. Classifications and calculated acreages are based on Town assessing data from March 2025. For the purposes of this Master Plan, land uses in Wilton have been consolidated into the following categories:

- **Residential**—this category includes single family, two family, and three family dwelling units. In Wilton, residential development primarily consists of single-family homes. Residential land can be found throughout town, with the highest densities in the downtown and Abbot Hill Acres area.
- **Commercial**—Wilton has very limited commercial land use. The highest concentration of commercial activity is located along Main Street, with additional development along Route 101 and Route 31.
- **Industrial**—in addition to industrial development, this land use category includes utilities and mining and waste disposal. Industrial activity does not comprise a substantial portion of land use in Wilton, although there are several large industrial parcels. Sand and gravel operations make up a majority of industrial land use, occupying over 450 acres in the southwest portion of Wilton along Greenville Road and roughly 180 acres in the northern portion of town along Forest Road.
- **Natural Resources**—this land use category includes agriculture, open space, recreation, and surface water. Natural resources are an essential component of Wilton’s rural character and quality of life. According to the Town of Wilton’s 2025 “Natural Resources Inventory,” over 3,993 acres or 23.8% of Wilton’s land is permanently protected. The following table, taken from the same report, highlights important natural resources in town, their acreage, and level of protection. Note: some natural resource types overlap, so the percent of land base values do not add to 100%
- **Municipal/Government/Institutional**—this category includes municipal government facilities, such as Town Hall, Police Department, and Ambulance Service; the library; public and private schools (not including daycare centers); and churches. This category does not include town- owned recreation land, which is included under natural resources. Wilton’s municipal facilities are in the eastern portion of town near the downtown. High Mowing and Pine Hill Schools occupy several large parcels along Abbot Hill Road and Pine Hill Drive. Churches can be found along Route 101 and Isaac Frye Highway.
- **Vacant**—vacant land is located throughout town and is defined as any parcel that does not have a

structure or specific use assigned to it.

Table 1 – Wilton Natural Resources

Natural Resource	2015 Acres	2026 Acres	Net Change	2026 % Land Base	2026 Acres Protected	2026 % Protected
Forest Cover	12,690	11,961	-729	73%	3,324	87%
Productive Forest Soils	11,892	12,138	+246	74%	2,788	23%
Best Agriculture Soils	1,596	6,301	+4,705	38%	1,398	22%
Agriculture Land Use	1,335	1,161	-174	7%	356	31%
Wetlands and Hydric Soils	1,489	1,887	+398	11%	512	27%
Riparian & Shoreland Buffers	2,786	2,950	+164			
Aquifers	3,370	3,374	+4	21%	884	26%
Drinking Water/Wellhead Protection Areas	1,740	1,995	+255	12%	444	22%
Wildlife Habitats	2,414	11,165	+8,751	68%	3,547	32%

The key findings found in **Table 1** highlight some of the important changes, or lack of changes regarding Wilton's natural resources. First off, the category of Wildlife Habitats has been dramatically expanded in its definition. The 2026 figure of 11,165 acres of wildlife habitats comes from the use of the GRANIT Wildlife Action Plan, which has a much broader definition of the data set used in 2015. The same rationale applies to the Best Agriculture Soils category, as the methodology has changed rather than signifying landscape changes.

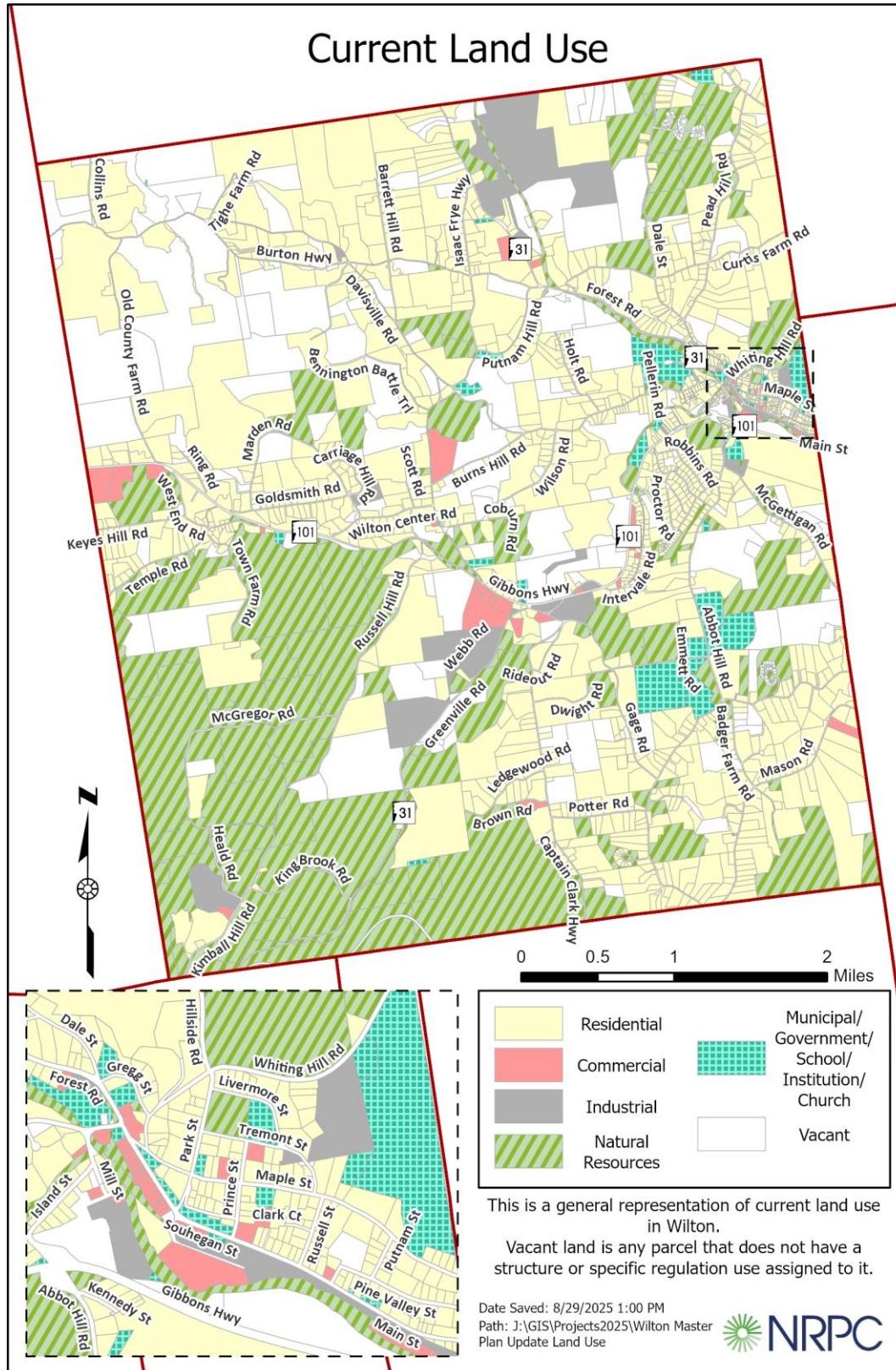
Secondly, the most important finding relating to Wilton's land use strategies can be seen in the decline of forest cover. Over the past ten years, Wilton has lost 729 acres of forest cover, according to 2025 assessing data. This can be directly attributed to Wilton's increase in single family lots, and it's two acre per

residential unit zoning requirements. This has allowed for a significant decrease in available forest cover and will continue to do so. Admittedly, this decline in forest cover does not address if the cause of it is due to foresting operations in the Town, which could be contributing to the decline. That being said, there is a clear correlation between the decline of forest cover and urban sprawl, which typically occurs through 2-acre lot zoning.

Additionally, the amount of farmland and agricultural land in Wilton declined by a little less than 200 acres; however, the amount of protected agricultural land increased from 18% to 31% over the past ten years. This shows a concerted effort by the Town to protect and sustain its agricultural land. This same sentiment was shared by Wilton residents in the 2026 outreach and is a clear priority for residents.

Similarly, the amount of protected land grew from roughly 3,200 acres to a little over 4,200 acres, as noted in the 2025 Natural Resources Inventory and the total Conserved Lands from the assessing data. This is around 26% of the Town's total acreage and reflects the Town's active, and effective stewardship of conservation lands. A gain of 1,000 acres in protected lands shows that the zoning and land use strategies implemented by the Town have been effective for protecting these coveted, natural resources.

Map 2 – Current Land Use



Land Use Relative to Zoning

The Wilton Zoning Ordinances divides the town into special districts, and establishes regulations concerning the use, placement, spacing, and size of land and buildings within the respective district. Zoning is intended to avoid disruptive land use patterns by preventing activities on one property from having detrimental effects on other properties. Zoning is an essential tool for implementing Master Plan goals, protecting community resources, and guiding new development. In turn, the Master Plan can be used to guide future zoning. There should be a clear link between zoning ordinance requirements and the goals of the master plan.

All land in Wilton is located within one of the following primary zoning districts: Residential, General Residence and Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Office Park. In addition, Wilton utilizes the following overlay zones: Research and Office Park, Gravel Excavation, Floodplain Conservation, Wetlands Conservation, Aquifer Protection, Age-Restricted Housing, Watershed, Personal Wireless Service Facilities, Downtown Residential, Main Street, and the Downtown Industrial Adaptive Reuse Overlay Districts.

RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

Acreage—463 acres (2.82%)

Location—primarily located in the eastern portion of town along Intervale Road, Burns Hill Road, between Gibbons Highway and Abbot Hill Road, and north of Main Street.

Permitted Uses— single family and duplex family dwellings and accessory uses, multi-family dwellings containing three dwelling units with site plan approval by the Planning Board.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone— the Current Land Use map shows that the actual land use in the Residential District is consistent with zoning.

Implications for Future Land Use—this district requires a minimum lot size of one-half acre per dwelling unit when served by both public water and sewer and one acre per dwelling unit for lots not served by both public water and sewer. Therefore, future expansion of public water and sewer would impact the density of housing in this district.

RESIDENCE-AGRICULTURE DISTRICT

Acreage—14,959 acres (90.97%)

Location—throughout Wilton

Permitted Uses—single family and duplex family dwellings and accessory uses, multi-family dwellings containing three dwelling units with site plan approval by the Planning Board, all general farming and forestry activities

Current Land Use Relative to Zone—the Current Land Use map shows that the actual land use in the

Residence-Agricultural District is consistent with zoning. It should be noted that several large parcels in the District along Route 31 fall under the Gravel Excavation overlay district. Given the limited amount of residential land use in this area, disruption to private residents is likely to be minimal.

Implications for Future Land Use—the minimum lot size in the Residence-Agriculture District is two contiguous acres of land per dwelling unit. This requirement may seem beneficial to preserving Wilton’s rural character but may eventually lead to the lack of forest cover and other natural resources within the Town. Apart from approved home occupations, no commercial, industrial, or office activity is permitted in the Residence-Agricultural District. This limits the amount of non-residential development that can occur in Wilton given that this district encompasses 90% of the Town.

COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

Acreage—63 acres (0.38%)

Location— Commercially zoned parcels can be found along Main Street, Frye Mill Road, at the intersection of Isaac Frye Highway and Greenville Road, and the south side of Route 101 near Temple Road.

Permitted Uses—any use permitted in the General Residence-Agricultural District; duplex and multi-family dwellings, inns, tourist courts, cabins, and bed & breakfasts; restaurants and other retail establishments; garages, parking lots, and filling stations; business and professional offices; theaters, halls, clubs, and amusement centers; greenhouses and florist shops; funeral homes; wholesale establishments in connection with permitted retail establishments, warehousing, or merchandise for retail sale within the District; houses of worship; hospitals, emergency medical centers, and clinics; schools, kindergartens, preschools, and daycare centers, including in-home childcare.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone— Current land use in the Commercial District is consistent with the zoning. A variety of uses can be found in this zone, including residential, office, retail, houses of worship, professional services, salons, theaters, and restaurants.

Implications for Future Land Use—although this zone is small, non-residential commercial uses are also permitted in the industrial zone. Even so, these zones represent a small portion of Wilton, which limits the amount of commercial development that can occur in town.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

Acreage—883 acres (5.37%)

Location—Industrial zoning can be found along Route 31/Forest Road, south of Main Street along the Souhegan River, and along Route 101/Gibbons Highway and Greenville Road.

Permitted Uses—manufacturing, compounding, processing, packing, treatment or warehousing of goods and products; research and/or testing laboratory; offices; non-residential commercial uses

Current Land Use Relative to Zone—permitted uses in the Industrial zone are wide ranging and as such, so

are the current land uses found in the zone. They include land uses traditionally thought of as industrial such as sand and gravel, auto salvage, and aluminum casting operations. However, they also include large parcels of natural resources as well as smaller pockets of commercial and grandfathered residential development.

Implications for Future Land Use—given that commercial activities are allowed in the industrial zone and that there are more industrial zoned acres than commercial acres, it is possible that future commercial land use could be accommodated in the industrial zone. There is a cluster of industrial zoned parcels on the east side Route 31 in southern Wilton between King Brook Road and the Everett Well that have no natural resource constraints and could be developed.

Additional industrial zone parcels can be found along Route 101 in the Intervale Road area; however, their development potential is somewhat limited by environmental constraints.

OFFICE PARK DISTRICT

Acreage—75 acres (0.46%)

Location—two parcels west of West End Road between Gibbons Highway and Keyes Hill Road.

Permitted Uses— corporate offices, research facilities, farming uses.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone—the larger parcel is currently categorized as having a natural resources land use, which falls under the permitted farming use. The smaller parcel is currently categorized as commercial and is an office park.

Implications for Future Land Use—although the Office Park District only includes 2 parcels, there is opportunity for additional office land use on parcels included in the Research and Office Park overlay district. In addition, parcel C-127 in the Office Park District has limited natural resource constraints and could be developed into corporate offices or research facilities.

OVERLAY DISTRICTS

An overlay district applies additional standards on top of the base zoning district. For the most part, Wilton's existing overlay districts provide either additional environmental protection or designate specific areas for development.

RESEARCH AND OFFICE PARK DISTRICT

Location- this district applies to two defined areas across town seen in the Lots E-21- E-36 with some exceptions and Lots G-23-G37 with some exceptions, and lots C-127 to C-128.

Permitted Uses- research and development facilities, light manufacturing carried on entirely within a structure, corporate offices and professional offices. The district is designed to attract uses that prefer a rural campus setting as opposed to a traditional industrial location.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- the majority of the southwest cluster along Route 31 remains in

natural resource or low-intensity agricultural use. The western cluster near Temple contains a singular office park and surrounding open space and forest land.

Implications for Future Land Use- the Research and Office Park overlay creates significant commercial development potential in two rural locations in Town that would typically only allow residential or agricultural uses. Due to the rural and somewhat remote settings of the overlay districts, the Research and Office Park overlay is unlikely to see significant future development of office parks.

GRAVEL EXCAVATION DISTRICT

Location- the Gravel Excavation District is defined by the active and permitted excavation sites throughout Wilton where excavation of earth materials is authorized. These are primarily located in southwestern Wilton, west of NH Route 31, east of Russell Hill Road and Kimball Road, south of NH Route 101, and north of King Brook Road.

Permitted Uses- excavation of earth materials including sand and gravel.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- active sand and gravel operations dominate the overlay area. Current land use is consistent with the permitted excavation use.

Implications for Future Land Use- as operations reach the end of permitted excavation, parcels must be reclaimed under state law. Post-reclamation status for underlying parcels should be monitored and identified by the Planning Board.

FLOODPLAIN CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Location- the Floodplain Conservation District encompasses all land within the regulatory floodplain as depicted on the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Wilton.

Permitted Uses- uses are restricted to be consistent with the National Flood Insurance Program. No new residential structures are permitted in the floodway, and structures must be elevated to or above the base flood elevation.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- this land is predominately natural resources and open space land.

Implications for Future Land Use- This overlay has some significant constraints upon it which makes any future development improbable. Future land use will most likely be consistent with open space and natural resource areas.

WETLANDS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Location- the Wetlands Conservation District encompasses all areas in Wilton that meet the statutory definition of wetlands, and it applies wherever wetlands or hydric soils are present on site.

Permitted Uses- any use that does not results in the erection of any structure or alter the surface configuration by the addition of fill or by dredging and that is otherwise permitted by this ordinance, forestry, agriculture, wildlife refuge, parks, recreational uses, conservation, nature trails, open space,

natural drainage ways, water impoundments, and wells for water supply.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- Due to the heavy constraints upon developing wetlands, the current use is consistent with the permitted uses of the district.

Implications for Future Land Use- once again, due to the heavy constraints upon developing these wetlands, the future land use will most likely remain consistent with heavy conservation, open space, and recreational uses.

AQUIFER PROTECTION DISTRICT

Location- the outermost edge of the surficial extent of all aquifer deposits presently designated as stratified drift. Essentially, any parcel touching the boundary or within any Town aquifers.

Permitted Uses- almost all uses of the underlying zoning district are permitted with constraints upon how they are developed. Importantly, the district distinguishes a large amount of prohibited uses largely associated with hazardous effluents.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- There are a variety of existing uses including residential, commercial, and industrial.

Implications for Future Land Use- Any new development proposed within this district will have limitations to it as well as additional review standards.

AGE-RESTRICTED HOUSING DISTRICT

Location- permitted by special exception in the commercial and residential districts where Town water and sewer infrastructure exists.

Permitted Uses- age-restricted housing of no greater than twenty-four units per gross tract acre for one-bedroom units, and the associated requirements with age-restricted housing.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- There are no parcels that currently operate as an active age-restricted housing use.

Implications for Future Land Use- the further expansion of Town utilities, such as water and sewer will permit more opportunities for age-restricted housing opportunities. Senior housing could be effectively implemented in the downtown areas where there is pre-existing infrastructure that promotes senior living such as easy access to services and sidewalks.

WATERSHED DISTRICT

Location- the Watershed District encompasses all land and water areas in the Town which, by seepage or flow, introduce water into the old and new reservoirs of the Town.

Prohibited Uses- notably, unlike the other categories, the Watershed District boasts prohibited uses in order to protect the water quality of the Town such as the use of any hazardous or toxic materials or liquids in setback areas, the pasturing of livestock or fowl within setback areas, no filling, excavation, or

grading of the land that will cause erosion, and all uses other than residential or agricultural.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- this zone contains primarily low-density residential, forest, and agricultural uses.

Implications for Future Land Use- Development within this overlay will most likely stick to low-density residential uses due to the restrictive regulations.

PERSONAL WIRELESS SERVICE FACILITIES DISTRICT

Location- town-wide

Permitted Uses- personal wireless service facilities including towers, monopoles, and antenna arrays. All of which are subject to design, setbacks, and screening standards.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- there are a handful of wireless facilities currently in use in Wilton, however, they are properly screened and sited through this ordinance.

Implications for Future Land Use- The ordinance allows for the development of wireless facilities where appropriate screening, setback, and design standards can be met.

DOWNTOWN RESIDENTIAL OVERLAY DISTRICT

Location- All lots located in the Residential District north of NH Route 101 and east of Holt Road, as well as the lots in the Residential District with frontage on Intervale Road, in each case where Town water and sewer are available and utilized.

Permitted Uses- all uses permitted in the Residential District, except the minimum lot size requirement has been reduced to 1/3 acre per dwelling unit.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- this district contains on average older housing stock than the rest of the housing supply in Wilton on much smaller lots.

Implications for Future Land Use- the Downtown Residential Overlay District provides the opportunity for redevelopment of existing housing as well as new development of accessory dwelling units.

MAIN STREET OVERLAY DISTRICT

Location- the Main Street Overlay District encompasses area in Downtown Wilton north and south of Main Street from the intersection of Forest Road to the intersection of Park and Howard Streets.

Permitted Uses- Any use permitted in the Residential District except where prohibited, commercial uses such as bed and breakfasts. Retail services, parking garages, business and professional offices, community buildings, greenhouses, florists, houses of worship, preschools, medical offices, veterinary offices, libraries, adult day-care facilities, nanobreweries and light industry. Filling stations and automotive services, residential uses on the ground floor, schools and kindergartens, funeral homes, wholesaling, and inns are prohibited in this District.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- current land use in the Main Street Overlay District is consistent with

the typical small town New England commercial streetscape.

Implications for Future Land Use- The current regulation allows for the redevelopment of existing spaces with challenging setback requirements. The streetscape requirements allow for potential mixed-use development in existing buildings while preserving the overall character of the downtown.

DOWNTOWN INDUSTRIAL ADAPTIVE REUSE DISTRICT

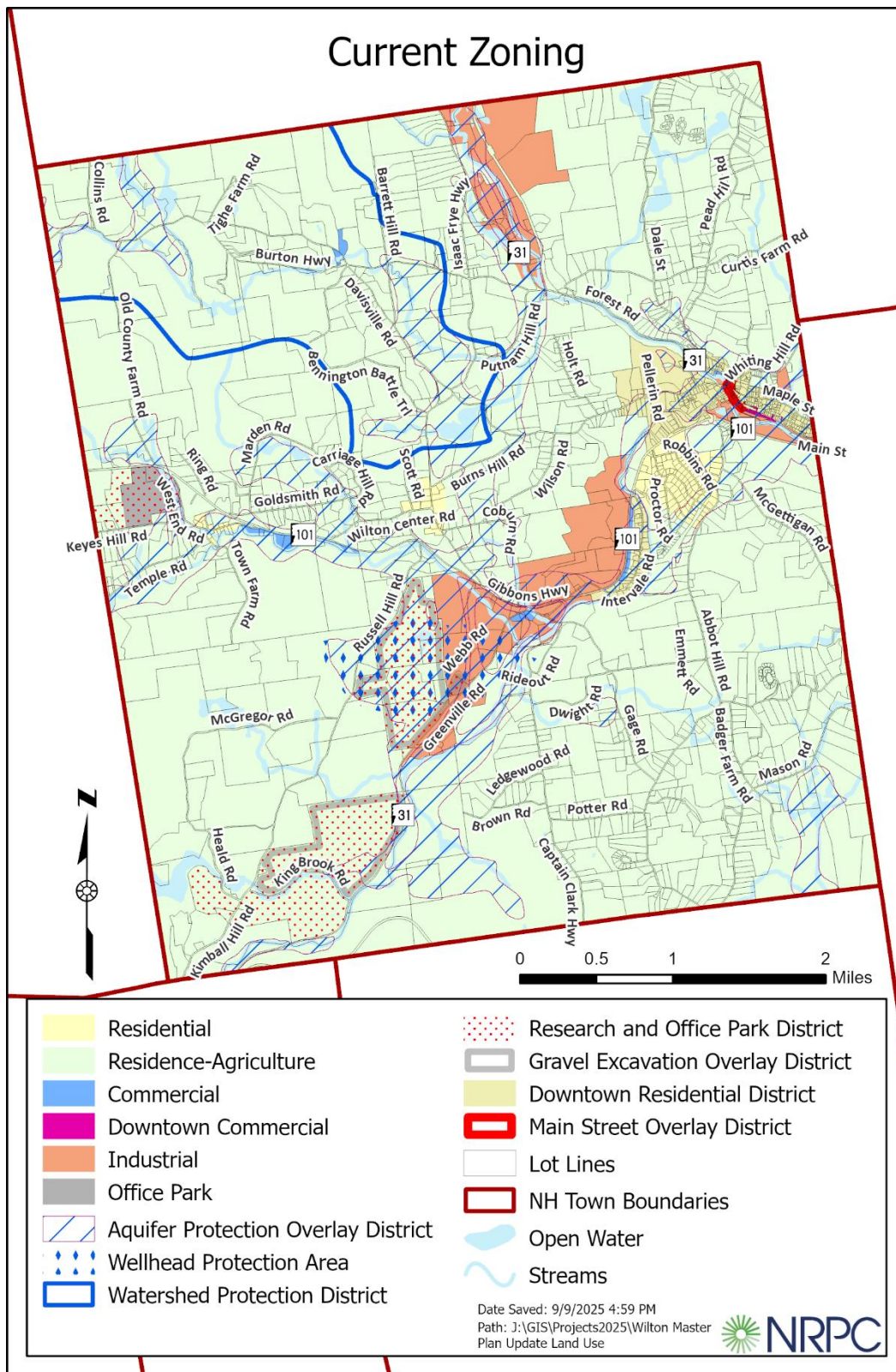
Location- applies to parcels within the Industrial District that are located south of Min Street and north of the Souhegan River

Permitted Uses- this district permits a wide variety of commercial, residential, light industry, and mixed uses all aimed around the rehabilitation of existing structures within the overlay.

Current Land Use Relative to Zone- the current land use of the overlay consists of light industry and existing parcels with substantial redevelopment potential.

Implications for Future Land Use- this is the newest redevelopment and affordable housing tool the Town has utilized. In the future, this overlay will hopefully incentivize developers to pursue mixed use development near and in the Wilton downtown while preserving the existing small town New England character.

Map 3 – Current Zoning



Section 2: Future Land Use

Where Can Future Development be Located?

Future development in Wilton will be driven by the availability of developable land and opportunities for redevelopment. The Town's strong preference for preserving conservation land and prioritizing natural resources, will limit the number of opportunities for expansive development. Furthermore, infill development within the downtown and more urbanized area of Wilton will be seen as higher priorities for development.

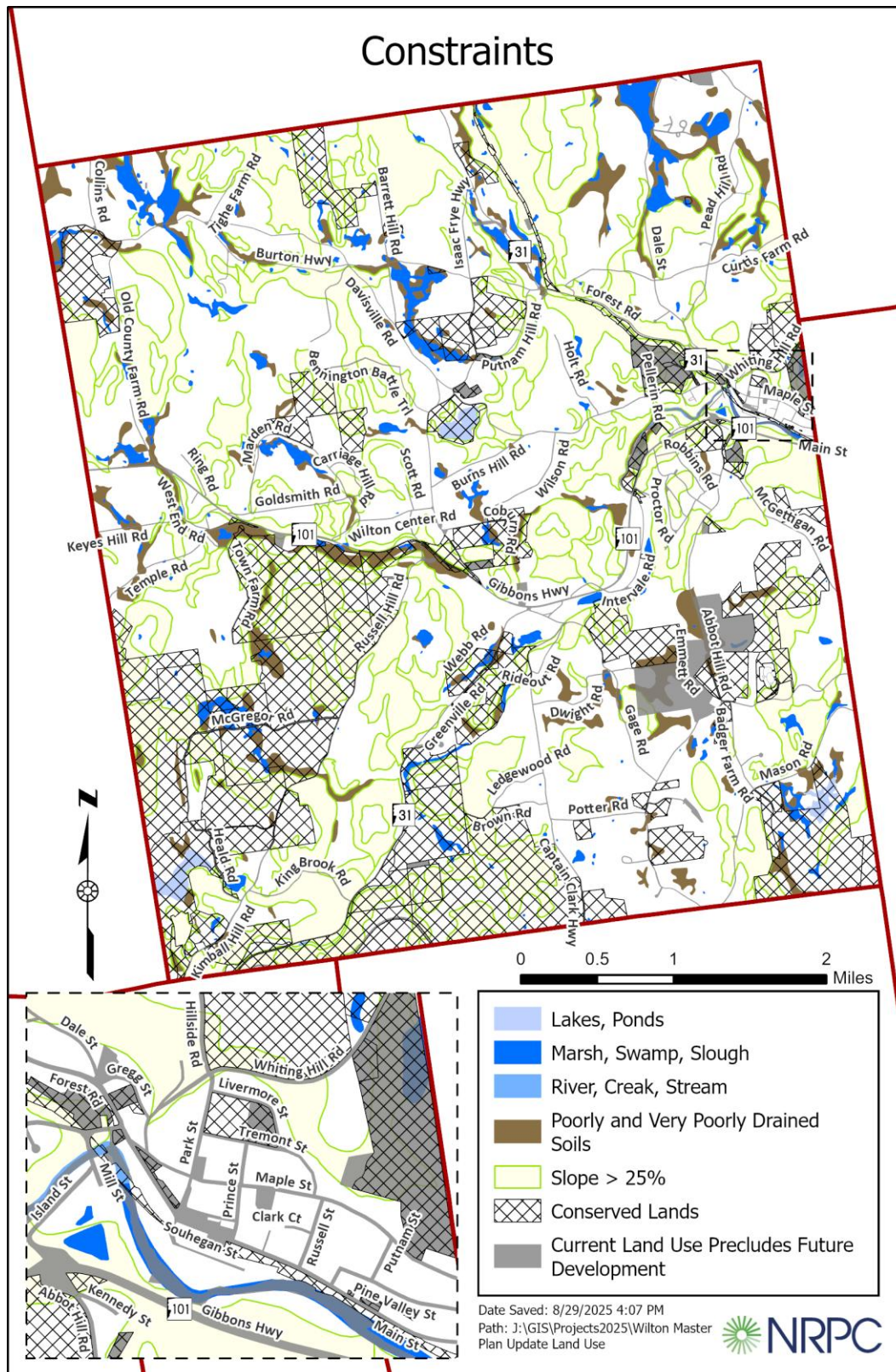
Developable Land

Developable land can be thought of as vacant or partially developed parcels with no significant natural, legal, or practical constraints on their development. For the purposes of this Master Plan, constraints on future development in Wilton include:

- **Water Bodies and Wetlands**—water bodies and wetlands can be found throughout Wilton. There are a variety of streams, rivers, ponds, and watersheds located in Wilton, which are protected by the Wetlands Conservation Overlay District, the Aquifer Overlay District, the Floodplain Conservation District, and the Watershed Overlay District.
- **Conserved Land**—as of the 2025 Natural Resources Inventory, more than 3,900 acres or roughly 23% of Wilton's land area, was permanently protected. These lands can be found throughout town, with the largest concentrations in the southwestern quadrant.
- **Steep Slopes**—this includes parcels with slopes greater than 25%. Steep slopes limit development potential due to site grading and erosion considerations. Wilton has a hilly topography, with steep slopes found throughout large portions of town.
- **Current Land Use**—in some cases, current land use is unlikely to change and therefore precludes future development. In this plan, current land use constraints include roads and road right of ways, municipal/government facilities, and schools. There are a limited number of parcels that fall under this category in Wilton.
- **Poorly and Very Poorly Drained Soils**—these soils result from repeated, prolonged periods of saturation or inundation. They pose significant challenges to development and their active use for development purposes is prohibited under the Wetlands Conservation District.

Map 4 – Land Constraints illustrates that a significant portion of town has limitations on its development potential. Steep slopes can be found throughout town and large parcels of conserved land are prevalent in the southwest quadrant. The abundance of wetlands and other high-priority natural resources do not allow for ample development within the Town. The topography of Wilton presents itself as a substantial challenge to all types of development within the community.

Map 4 – Land Constraints



Redevelopment Opportunities

Redevelopment in Wilton should continue to be encouraged to accommodate future growth in Wilton that is consistent with Town character. Existing sites along the downtown and throughout Town should provide additional economic benefits and redevelopment opportunities since they have preexisting infrastructure. This sentiment is shared by Wilton residents and supported by the outreach results.

“Let’s do our best to utilize spaces that already exist before encouraging new development. A slower, steadier way seems prudent” - Wilton Resident 2026

This type of redevelopment would align with the Town’s desire to revitalize and improve its existing downtown. The newly adopted Downtown Industrial Adaptive Reuse Overlay District, along with the existing 79-E Revitalization zone, will provide ample opportunities for redevelopment of existing town infrastructure and buildings, helping to maintain town character and ensure that Wilton does not become overdeveloped.

“Repurpose the mill building. Stop building huge four-bedroom homes and encourage ADUs” – Wilton Resident 2026

The Downtown Industrial Adaptive Reuse Overlay District was developed with these redevelopment goals in mind. Specifically for parcels located in the downtown area for mixed use development. The zoning requirements for this district were created to be much more relaxed than other districts in Town, allowing for a prioritized development area to be created. Design standards aimed towards preserving the natural, rural feel of the Town help to promote redevelopment, while retaining town character. Future redevelopment in this area of Wilton will contribute to efforts for infill development and improvements to the downtown.

Sand and gravel pits in Wilton may also offer additional redevelopment opportunities. NH RSA 155-E sets out reclamation standards for areas affected by excavation activities. The ultimate goal of the reclamation is to restore the former mining site so that it can be redeveloped without any environmental restrictions. However, it should be noted that many of the existing sand and gravel operations are located in the Residence-Agricultural district, which prohibits their redevelopment for commercial or industrial uses.

New Commercial and Industrial Development Opportunities

There are limited opportunities for future commercial and industrial development in Wilton. Future development will likely occur along a main transportation corridor, such as Route 101 or Route 31. Route 31 South has several limitations on its development potential. A few large parcels along the corridor are conserved while others fall within the flood zone, aquifer protection overlay, and wellhead protection overlay. Route 31 North has natural resource constraints related to Stoney Brook and traffic to access

these developments would flow through downtown, which would be undesirable. Route 101 has fewer environmental and logistical limitations on its development potential.

Importantly, Town sentiment towards commercial and industrial development is quite low. In 2026, when residents were asked to select multiple options for “What uses would you like to see more of in Wilton over the next 10 years?”, 58% of respondents chose small businesses such as boutique shops or barber shops, 48% supported agricultural businesses, 41% selected conservation land, and 37% picked restaurants. On the other end of the spectrum, big box development like Walmart or Target received less than 5%, along with businesses with drive-throughs and gas stations. Ultimately, the appetite for large scale commercial or industrial development in Wilton is relatively non-existent, which matches the opportunities available for this sort of development.

Residential Development Opportunities

Residential development, and more importantly residential use, is the main characteristic of Wilton.

Single-family homes on rural roads make up the overwhelming majority of the built environment, and new homes have continued to increase across Wilton. This growth occurred in the largest zoning district, Residence-Agricultural District, which covers 91% of the Town. Developers have the opportunity to pursue cluster developments which are currently permitted on sites of fifteen or more acres, with a requirement of 50% of the site being permanently preserved as open space. Utilizing cluster developments would allow for increased residential growth, while preserving forests, open space, and natural resources.

The 2026 outreach produced a significant amount of support for accessory dwelling units as a new tool in Wilton to promote affordable housing and aging in place. Residents wished for the opportunity to remain members of the community while downsizing their property or creating a more accessible living space. Accessory dwelling units would provide the Town with a unique way to create more housing stock at the same time as moving away from conventional subdivision developments.

We really need affordable housing for current senior residents: small, one-story homes with no more than two bedrooms. Re-purpose the mill building. Stop building huge four-bedroom homes and encourage ADUs. – Wilton Resident 2026

Multi-family development, and frankly, any type of significant development is frowned upon by Wilton residents. The community wishes for the Town to stay as it is and supports small scale opportunities for new development. Preserving Town character is of the highest priority to community members, and the current land use regulations allow for Wilton to grow slowly, helping to diversify their community while maintaining their rural, small-town feel.

Where Should Future Development be Located?

Land Use Vision

The land use vision for Wilton is grounded in the community's input from 2026 community engagement results. The following land use vision statements were created in 2015 and have been updated to directly reflect the growing needs of the Town and residents' feedback for the future of Wilton.

1. To encourage the balance of residential, commercial, and clean industrial development while protecting the town's natural resources, rural character, small town feel, and the integrity of existing residential neighborhoods ensuring that growth occurs at a scale and in locations compatible with the community that already exists.
2. To promote economic vitality, employment, and an expanded non-residential tax base of Wilton by redeveloping existing downtown areas and building new commercial and clean industrial development along major transportation corridors where appropriate in accordance with existing regulations and goals.
3. To enhance the community character and rural visual, natural, and historic identity through thoughtful land use regulation.
4. To protect valuable agricultural land, open space, and natural resources through active conservation efforts.
5. To support housing options that allow Wilton residents to remain in town through every stage of life, including accessory dwelling units, cluster developments, age-restricted housing, and scaled infill development that respects the existing neighborhood character.

Section 3: Strategies and Recommendations

The following are recommendations based off the Land Use Vision section which may be implemented by the Town to pursue their Vision Goals. These implementation strategies are in no way binding, and the Town may choose to pursue other planning tools to achieve their Land Use Vision Goals.

LAND USE VISION GOAL 1— Encourage the balance of residential, commercial, and clean industrial development while protecting the town’s natural resources, rural character, small town feel, and the integrity of existing residential neighborhoods ensuring that growth occurs at a scale and in locations compatible with the community that already exists.

To balance residential, commercial, and industrial uses, Wilton must continue to utilize their existing zoning districts to give direction and separate incompatible uses. Ongoing use of its buffering and screening requirements will continue to protect its small-town feel, especially when faced with a cluster subdivision and future residential growth. The Town’s current use of overlay districts, specifically the Downtown Industrial Adaptive Reuse District, help to encourage growth in specific areas of town that have the existing infrastructure and demand for change. Wilton should aim to fine tune its land use regulations to achieve their first land use vision goal.

Strategy 1.1— Continue to promote the use of buffer zones to minimize the potentially negative visual, auditory, and ecological impacts of new development on important natural features and key community resources.

Strategy 1.2—Evaluate the existing cluster development regulations to promote residential subdivision that is in-line with Town character and supports ongoing conservation efforts.

Strategy 1.3—Review the existing Zoning Ordinance, Site Plan Regulations, and Subdivision Regulations and develop design standards that will preserve Town Character.

LAND USE VISION GOAL 2— Promote economic vitality, employment, and an expanded non-residential tax base of Wilton by redeveloping existing downtown areas and building new commercial and clean industrial development along major transportation corridors where appropriate in accordance with existing regulations and goals.

Expanding the non-residential tax base of Wilton is a major concern for a lot of Wilton residents, as 79% of respondents listed high taxes as their most prominent issue facing the Town. Through overlay zoning and tax incentives, the Town has provided developers and commercial business ventures with the appropriate

tools to start a business in Wilton. Unfortunately, the Town of Wilton may not be the most suitable place to start a small, boutique business, as it does not draw a large amount of traffic or tourists. It will continue to be a challenge to encourage businesses to relocate to Wilton due to the Town's small town feel and lack of major economic draw. That being said, the Town should support ongoing efforts for redevelopment of the downtown and economically viable areas.

Strategy 2.1—Reevaluate the economic development strategy of the Town and current incentives for businesses like the existing 79-E Revitalization Zone.

Strategy 2.2—Draft or develop economic development tools like a Planned Unit Development Ordinance or a Tax Increment Financing District to provide the Town with the tools to hand tailor development.

Strategy 2.3—Promote awareness of current business opportunities within the Downtown through public awareness campaigns, social media, and board meetings.

Strategy 2.4—Ensure that subdivision and site plan review regulations allow for reasonable development of businesses and do not serve as an impediment to potential or current business owners.

Strategy 2.5—Review the existing Home Occupations requirements to encourage flexible and robust business opportunities that are compatible with residential use in the Town.

LAND USE VISION GOAL 3—Enhance the community character and rural visual, natural, and historic identity through thoughtful land use regulation.

Enhancing and preserving the community character of Wilton is of the utmost importance to residents. Currently, the Town's zoning allows for specific, thoughtful development in Town that will preserve the current Town Character. This should continue to be updated to match the current character of the Town through the existing Zoning Ordinance, Site Plan Regulations, and Subdivision Regulations.

Strategy 3.1—Evaluate the existing Site Plan Regulations, Subdivision Regulations, and Zoning Ordinance, to ensure they promote uses supported by the Town.

Strategy 3.2—Develop a Historic Zoning District with specific reclamation and reuse requirements that will preserve the existing historic infrastructure of the Town.

Strategy 3.3—Examine existing landscaping and buffering requirements to certify that they continue to promote a small town feel.

LAND USE VISION GOAL 4—Protect valuable agricultural land, open space, and natural resources through active conservation efforts.

Natural resources contribute to Wilton's rural character, quality of life, and recreation opportunities. They also provide valuable services to the Town free of charge, including drinking water, flood storage, clean air, water purification, productive soil, wildlife habitat, waste recycling, and temperature moderation. Loss of these services would impact human health, safety, the economy, and quality of life. Wilton currently protects its natural resources, agricultural land, and open space quite adamantly through zoning and should continue to do so.

Strategy 4.1—Continue to safeguard valuable natural resources through zoning regulations such as zoning overlays, buffer requirements, and zoning restrictions.

Strategy 4.2— Evaluate and pinpoint parcels in Wilton with natural resources, agricultural land, or open space for conservation purposes and pursue protecting them through conservation easements or targeted land acquisition.

Strategy 4.3—work with the local business, civic, and community organization to help implement the recommendations established in this chapter in relation to protecting natural resources.

Strategy 4.4—Review current lot size requirements in the Residential Zone and evaluate alternatives that will help to prevent urban sprawl, such as infill or cluster development.

LAND USE VISION GOAL 5— Support housing options that allow Wilton residents to remain in town through every stage of life, including accessory dwelling units, cluster developments, age-restricted housing, and scaled infill development that respects the existing neighborhood character.

A new land use goal for this chapter is one pertaining to the development of residential housing stock that not only is in-line with current Town Character but also provides opportunities for affordable housing or aging-in place. As residents in Wilton get older, they wish to remain in their lifelong homes but due to high property taxes and fixed incomes, they struggle to do so. On the other hand, younger residents of New Hampshire may wish to move to Wilton but struggle to do so due to a lack of affordable housing options. Taking a hard look and amending current housing policies may permit more opportunities to both groups while continuing to support Wilton's small-town feel.

Strategy 5.1—Evaluate current accessory dwelling unit regulations to address a growing demand for alternative housing for both seniors and younger residents.

Strategy 5.2— Encourage mixed-use development that provides an opportunity for young professionals to establish themselves within Town.

Strategy 5.3—Review landscaping, buffering, and driveway requirements to ensure that they are

accessible to all residents.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The findings of this chapter will help to inform land use regulations and future policy for the Town of Wilton. What they describe is not a community in any immediate crisis but a community whose values in regard to land use have remained quite consistent over the past decade, whose landscape has shifted in unsubstantial, subtle ways, and whose regulatory framework continues to protect important Town resources, while stagnating on others. The 2015 Wilton Zoning Map and the 2026 Zoning Map are essentially identical, showing little to no change concerning land use. The most significant finding is the slight decrease in available forest cover across Town which has declined by over 700 acres. Some of this may be due to foresting practice, but some of it may be due to the Town's steady 2-acre zoning requirements which will slowly promote urban sprawl.

It is abundantly clear that Wilton residents wish for the Town to remain small, rural, and importantly Wilton. In reviewing the public input from 2015, compared to the input from 2026, it is quite apparent that resident's sentiment truly has not changed. They wish for their farms to continue farming, forests to remain forested, and their rural town to keep being rural. There is increased support for a revitalized downtown which has been supported through Town incentives such as overlays, tax credits, and targeted economic development. Ultimately, residents wish for the Town to continue to feel the same, which is an important item to consider. Community members are not opposed to growth, that is an inevitable factor, they are rather much more oriented towards specific, thoughtful development.

The Town aims to provide the opportunity for all types of development while incentivizing development that better fits Wilton's character, such as redevelopment, infill, cluster, and smaller residential uses. Structuring development requirements in a way that aligns with Wilton's small town, New England character will serve as an essential guide for the community over the years ahead. For the upcoming years, Wilton should aim to continue to promote thoughtful development in its specific areas of Town, such as the downtown or along NH Route 31. The Town has worked diligently to protect its natural resource base, which will remain the highest priority for its land use vision. This document aims to be used as a working reference for future subdivisions, developments, and land use policy for the Town and its residents. Finally, the measure of this chapter's success will be whether the evaluations in a future update reflect a Wilton that protected more of what it valued, grew targeted areas of its economy, and most importantly, remained, unmistakably, itself.