

Chapter 2

Land Use



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Land is a finite resource, and the thoughtful use of land is a critical issue for all communities. The purpose of this chapter is to identify land use trends in Bridgewater, and suggest future land use policies for the community to pursue. How a community decides to use its land base clearly has a direct impact on natural resources, community character, transportation infrastructure, housing affordability, the tax base, and the cost of providing services. Changes in demographics, evolving housing needs, global energy issues, and the local economic and conservation needs discussed within this Master Plan have had, and will continue to have, a direct impact on the landscape of the community.

Attitudes toward the land have changed nationally over the past decade. Experience has taught us that land is a complicated resource, and that one parcel of land may be better suited to a particular use than another. Natural factors such as slope, soil, groundwater, and surface water may vary across the landscape and growing communities must take these factors into consideration when planning their future, or face a decreasing quality of life.

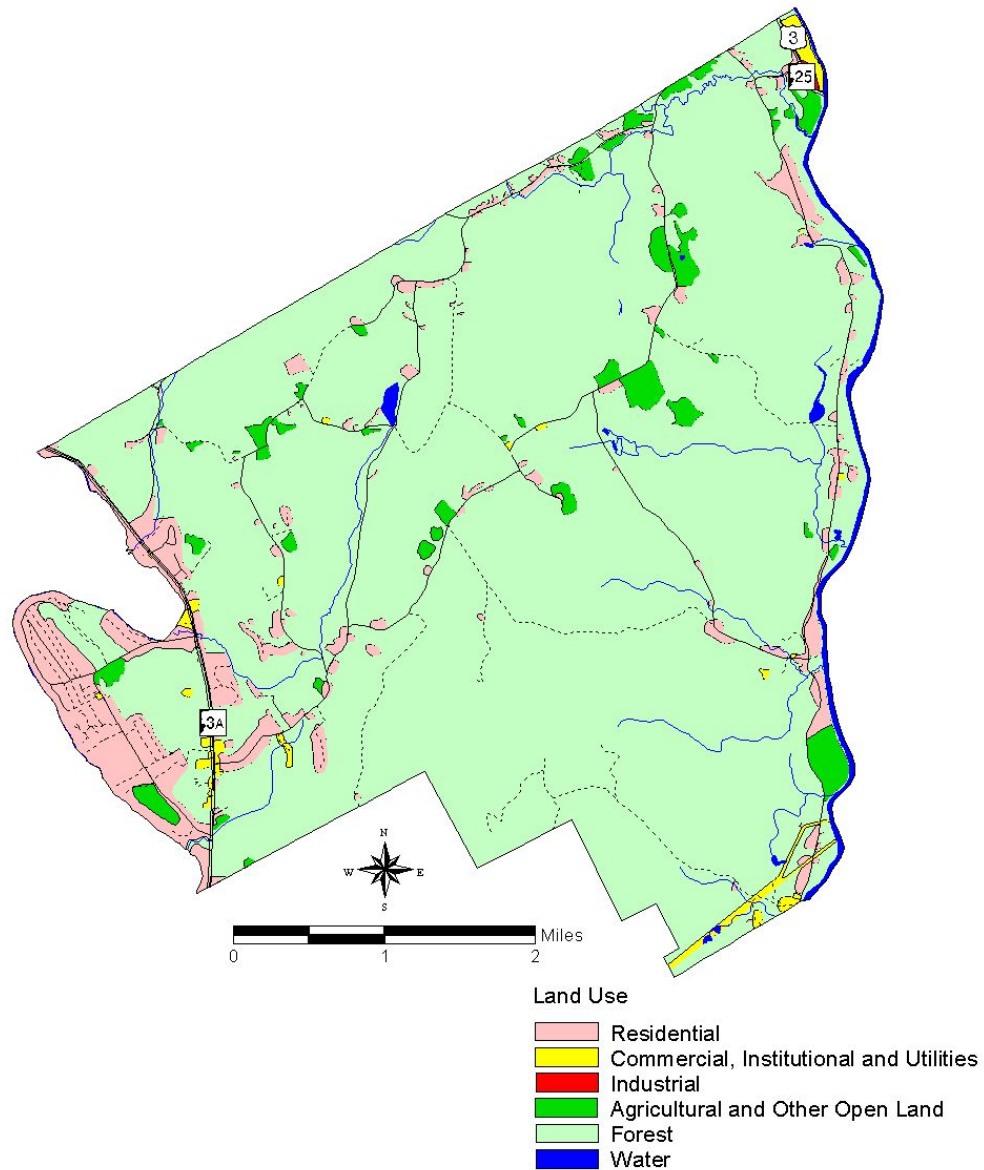
2.0 EXISTING AND HISTORIC LAND USE PATTERNS

Bridgewater's existing land use pattern is diverse in nature and consists of a wide array of uses. For the purpose of this master plan the existing land uses have been grouped into generalized categories in order to facilitate a better understanding of Bridgewater's existing pattern of development. They include:

- Residential
- Commercial, Institutional and Utilities
- Industrial
- Agricultural and Other Open Land
- Forest
- Water

The Existing Land Use Map of Bridgewater provides an image of the existing patterns of development and natural resource systems in the community.

CURRENT LAND USE



Bridgewater is a product of its location and environment. The town's natural features, such as the topography and geology, as well as its politics, transportation system, and economics has greatly influenced the scale and location of development. The highest concentrations of residential uses can be found along the west side of Whittemore Point on the eastern shore of Newfound Lake. Other small concentrations of residences can be found adjacent to Route 3A, and along the Pemigewasset River on River Road. Small portions of the town are open, agricultural land, but the majority of the community is forested. The limited commercial and

industrial activity in Bridgewater can be found mostly along the NH Route 3A and US Route 3 corridors.

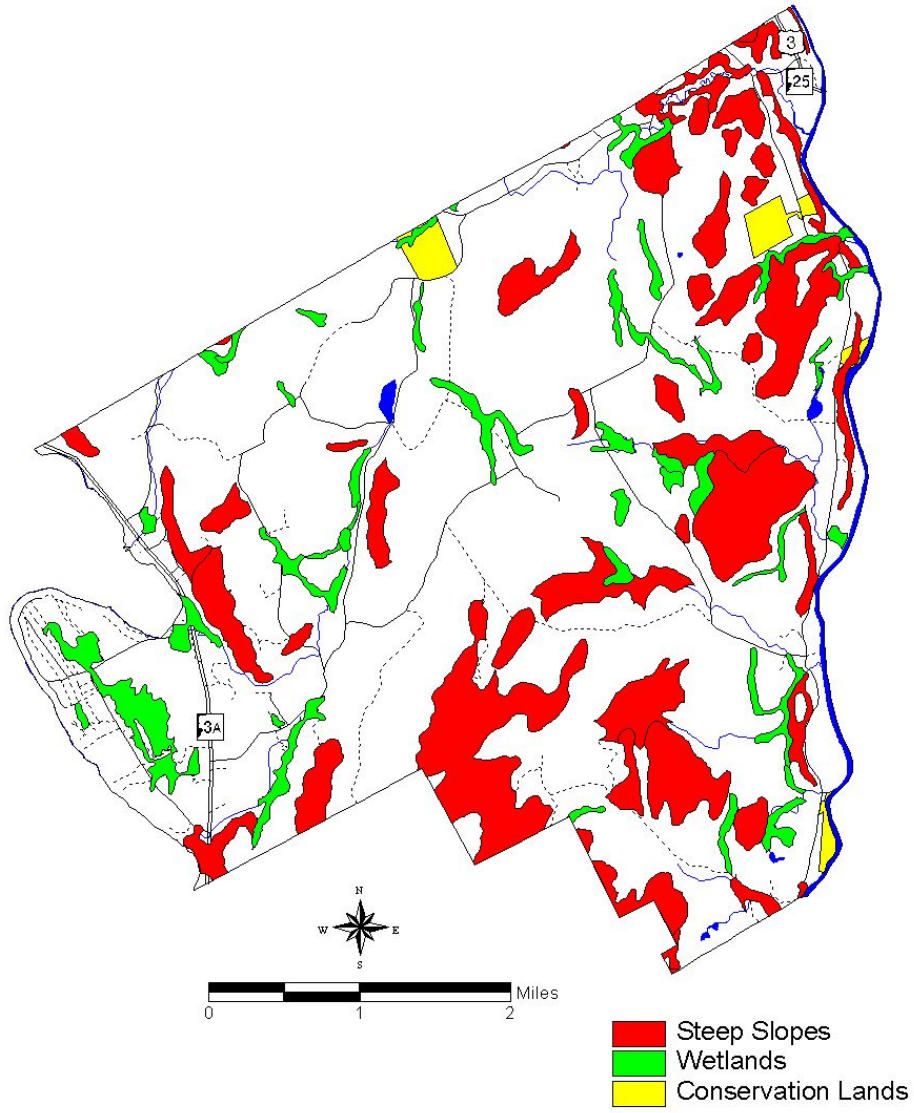
The Bridgewater Existing Land Use Map clearly shows that growth in the town’s population has shifted from the hills to the areas along the Pemigewasset River and on the shore of Newfound Lake. This shift graphically illustrates the need for new planning approaches and measures that will nurture a sense of community in the Town of Bridgewater.

Table 2.1 Land Uses in Bridgewater by Valuation

Land Use	Acres	Percent	Total Value	Percent
Residential	4,341	34%	272,001,700	85%
Commercial/Industrial	142	1%	7,850,700	2%
Utilities	NA	NA	41,071,900	12.75%
Current Use	8,417	65%	804,300	.25%
Total Taxable Land	12,900	100%	321,728,600	100%

The Bridgewater Development Constraints Map reveals areas with significant building limitations due to slope and wetlands. Nearly a fifth of the forested and undeveloped land in the town includes slopes of 25 percent or greater (red areas). As much as 10 percent of the town may also be classified as wetlands. These are key resources to protect from development. They provide important wildlife habitat, protect water quality, and add to the character and quality of life in Bridgewater. The largest concentration of these resources is within the central part of the community on Bridgewater Mountain and the surrounding hills. This area also has limited year round access, and a very low density of development. This area was known historically for creating a division of the town, but in the future it may prove to be the resource that truly unites the community.

DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS



3.0 FUTURE LAND USE

This Future Land Use Plan is a blueprint for how to guide land use changes in Bridgewater over time. It establishes land use policy, and can then be implemented by regulatory and non-regulatory means. The framework of open space, the natural constraints (soils, wetlands, floodplains, and steep slopes), the pattern of existing development, the location of infrastructure and services, and the amount and type of growth anticipated or desired suggest the basic options open to the community. Within these opportunities and limitations, alternative patterns and policies for future growth are considered. The Future Land Use Plan consists of two major components – the future land use map and the future land use policies.

Future land use policies should be based on the conditions identified during the development of the master plan, and on community goals and objectives. These policies should encourage development in areas that can accommodate it, and have been designated for preferred growth. The ability to protect and enhance Bridgewater’s community character depends on thoughtful planning of both location and design of future development.

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As the community vision statement indicates, Bridgewater citizens place a high priority on the rural features of the Town and want to see these qualities retained in the future. Since the community’s interest is in retaining a “rural” character, the Board infers that most citizens earnestly want to preserve both the forested and the agricultural character of the community while accommodating screened residential development, and well positioned and designed non-residential development. By “rural” the Board also infers that the community wishes to see only modest commercial or light industrial development, and the placement of only small businesses to serve the basic needs of local citizens.

The following Future Land Use Plan for Bridgewater has been developed by the Bridgewater Planning Board using the following information:

- The recently completed Master Plan Review Survey; and
- The inventory information, land use implications, and potential actions compiled in this Master Plan.

The plan is intended to follow the community vision to achieve the following:

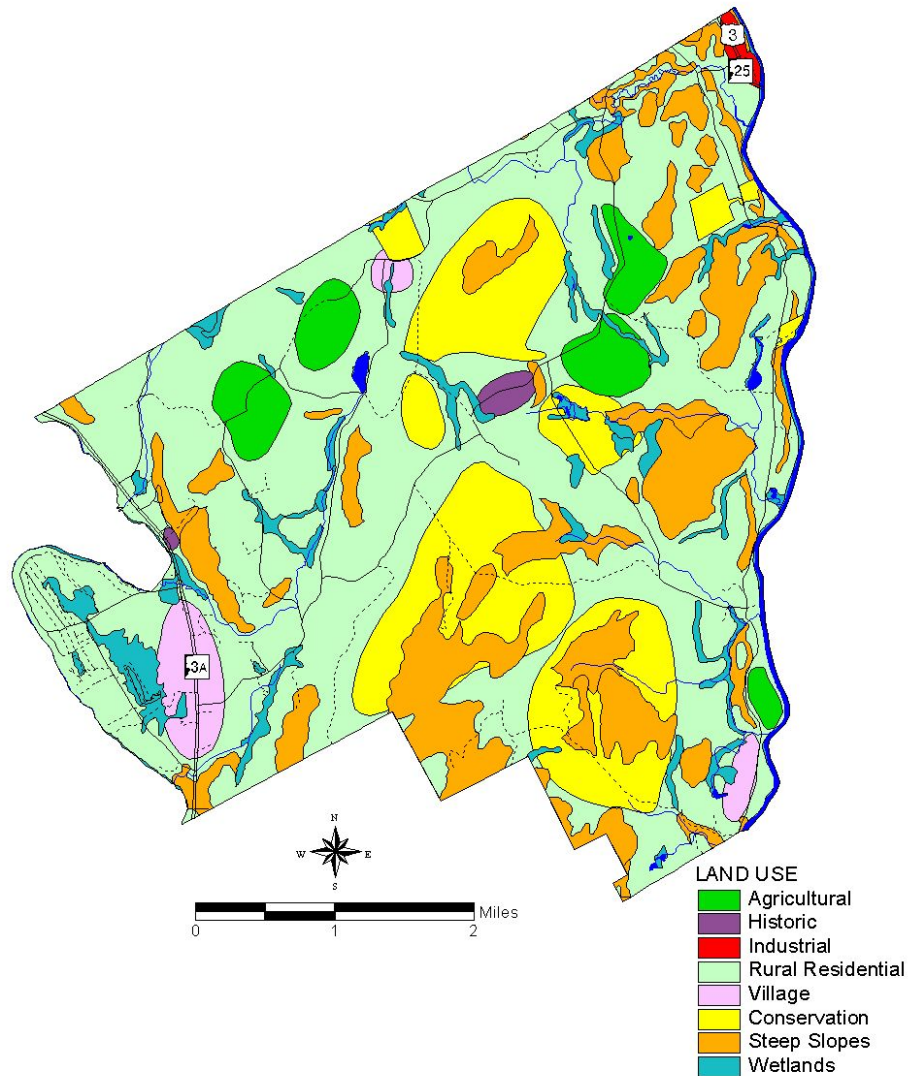
- Protect the community’s rich natural and cultural resources;
- Avoid costly sprawl development patterns;
- Accommodate future development in appropriate areas;
- Promote an efficient transportation system with a range of options; and
- Keep the tax rate low.

4.0 FUTURE LAND USE PLAN – KEY THEMES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Bridgewater’s desired future land use pattern should be driven by all of the previous elements. It should reflect the vision statement, which speaks of accommodating development while protecting the small town feeling and the natural surroundings. The future land use pattern should be driven by the content of this Master Plan, and by the need to reflect the likely development pressure that Bridgewater will experience.

The nature of that anticipated growth and development, and its placement on the landscape, will be driven by market forces, by individual landowner’s preferences, and by Bridgewater’s land use policies and ordinances: zoning ordinance; site plan and subdivision regulations; capital improvement plan; and others. The Future Land Use Map outlines how Bridgewater would like to see all of these forces brought together.

FUTURE LAND USE



What follows is a written summary of the desired future outcomes. As envisioned by the Bridgewater Planning Board, after a review of the community survey, and the Vision outlined in the beginning of this master plan, accommodating **new growth should retain the essential community character, meet market forces, and protect the community's natural resources as follows:**

- **Promoting resource protection in the community** – Protecting the natural resources in Bridgewater, and reducing the impact of development on these resources is important to existing and future generations of residents. This may be accomplished with regulatory and non-regulatory approaches. Conservation easements and specific resource overlay districts are just two techniques that should continue to be pursued. The central portion of the community specifically could be protected from sprawling and costly development with the use of new zoning language and a land protection campaign.
- **Fostering a village development pattern** - An important feature of the Future Land Use Map is the delineation of three areas where future village development may take place. The initial emphasis should be on identifying the location, scale, and mix of uses for such a district on Route 3A. Then, land use regulations must be crafted to provide the framework for this type of development. This would be an ideal location for service based businesses that could meet the basic needs of citizens.
- **Accommodating residential development using innovative development options** – Open space cluster development and other innovative land use regulations need to be available as tools for the community and potential developers to use in the future. These regulations will allow for creative alternatives for providing housing units while protecting open space.
- **Creating voluntary design guidelines for all non-residential development** - There is a concern that some non-residential development, particularly along the state routes where the traveling public gets its primary view of Bridgewater, has not always been of the highest quality. Not only does this create a poor image of Bridgewater, but it uses up valuable land resources in a manner that does not contribute as much as possible to the local tax base. The community should establish a set of voluntary design standards, and then use these standards at the Board level to provide guidance to developers on the character and quality of design that is expected for non-residential properties in Bridgewater.