



## **Community Technical Assistance Program** **Community Assessment Report** **for Pelham, NH**

### **History and Purpose:**

The Community Technical Assistance Program (CTAP) was implemented to help communities grapple with potential growth issues due to the expansion of Interstate 93 in New Hampshire from Salem to Concord. There are 26 CTAP-designated communities with three located in the Nashua Region, including: Hudson, Litchfield and Pelham. The first phase of the five-year CTAP process was to develop and administer Community Assessments to determine whether communities have policies and regulations in place to manage potential growth effectively. Potential growth impacts for these CTAP communities could include, among others, an increase in population, traffic, and a greater demand for housing. Consequently, if growth does occur in some or all of these areas, increased demand in municipal services across the board will be expected. CTAP communities will have to plan accordingly. The result of this project will be a report which will identify a number of issues that communities can implement and be more prepared to deal with growth.

More than 100 questions were developed in an effort to determine if CTAP communities have policies and regulations in place to adequately address potential growth issues. Questions were developed by professional planners and municipal officials involved in the CTAP process.

In addition to benefiting from the survey regarding planning and growth issues, CTAP communities have also profited from the process by identifying and isolating potential projects that could be initiated through the CTAP grant process.

## CTAP COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT REPORT for the Town of Pelham

Many of the Community Assessment questions provided insight as to the status of growth policies and the vision of the Town of Pelham towards its future development. Questions from the assessment dealt with many different planning issues including: land use and mixed-use policies, zoning, minimum-lot requirements, historic preservation, open space, environmental protection, housing, water quality, economic development, and transportation. Another purpose of the Assessment was to gauge the levels at which public participation are present in your community.

The survey, which consisted of more than 100 questions, centered around four major planning themes which include:

*Theme A – Community Infrastructure and Regional Cooperation*

*Theme B – Environmental Protection, Land Use, and Open Space*

*Theme C – Downtowns, Village Centers, and Community Vitality*

*Theme D – The Local Economy*

The questions developed from these themes address most of the growth concerns of the various municipalities affected by the entire I-93 Reconstruction project. The Assessment was completed through a collaboration of elected officials, town employees, and staff at the Nashua Regional Planning Commission.

The assessment consisted of three steps:

Step 1: Assessment Coordination

Step 2: Verification of Assessment Results

Step 3: Drafting of the Assessment Report

**Step 1:** The Assessment Coordination consisted of a meeting between NRPC and the Pelham CTAP Subcommittee comprised of town staff, municipal officials and volunteers to discuss the preliminary findings and any possible growth issues that have come to light as a result of conducting the survey. This served as a discussion venue where municipal officials and volunteers could voice concerns and ask questions.

**Step 2:** Since the goal is to create a report that is a useful tool for the community in implementing codes and policies that address growth-related issues, NRPC met with the Pelham CTAP Subcommittee again to verify the answers and ensure that the assessment was complete. This served as an educational opportunity, as well, to better understand Pelham's practices and create an awareness of any inconsistencies between the Master Plan and the regulations.

**Step 3:** A draft of the Assessment report was the last step in this project and is included below. The Assessment report is two-part: Part I is a "bookmark" that

serves as a snapshot of the community's current regulatory and policy measures, and Part II is a more comprehensive review of the growth issues at hand and how the community might begin to address them. The results should provide community leaders with a basis to make decisions concerning the future implementation of policies to address potential growth issues.

NRPC has considered the community's insights, concerns, and recommendations resulting from the Assessment Coordination and other communications throughout the process and has included these where appropriate. The Final Community Assessment Report should be viewed as a starting point or a guide for future planning activities and goals.

## **Part I - Community Assessment Report: The Key Recommendations**

After an in depth review of Pelham's land use regulations and town policies and procedures, six main categories were identified as key issues:

- 1. Economic Development Plan**
- 2. Town Center Zoning/Village Plan Alternative**
- 3. Affordable Housing**
- 4. Energy Conservation/Renewable Energy**
- 5. Water Resources (including Stormwater)**
- 6. Open Space and Natural Resources**

Due to the fact that community planning is multi-disciplinary, some of the recommendations can be grouped into more than one category. For instance, local tax exemptions for alternative energy installation can be grouped into economic development, affordable housing and the village plan alternative. With this in mind, Pelham can take a more holistic approach to community planning by implementing several recommendations such as considering Pelham's long-term water supply needs including protection, while also updating the current Aquifer Protection Overlay District to reflect any of the needs identified in the study. Growth affects many aspects of your community, so a "big-picture" approach allows you to consider the many ways your town could be impacted and plan accordingly.

What follows is a determination of findings based on the Subcommittee's review of the land use regulations and town policies and procedures. They are grouped by CTAP goals, with findings and recommendations that fit into the six main categories identified above. The goal is that implementation of these recommendations will place Pelham in a position to best address future growth.

## **Part II – Community Assessment Report: The Full Analysis**

The following report contains findings within the four CTAP theme goals. This section is intended to give the Town of Pelham details on the specific recommendations that have been derived from the community assessment process and serve as a roadmap for future updates to the appropriate land use regulations and policies in Pelham.

### **Theme A: Community Infrastructure and Regional Cooperation**

The purpose of this theme was to determine how Pelham has planned for the future in terms of the provision and funding for increased municipal services. This may include new facilities and other infrastructure improvements to help meet these needs. In addition, Theme A analyzed how effective communities have been, and will be, regarding regional cooperation with other local municipalities in an effort to better serve constituents. Special attention was given to communication strategies and cooperation initiatives between communities within regions.

Theme A consisted of 42 questions dealing with the funding and delivery of municipal services, regional cooperation among local governments, housing, and transportation.

The Steering Committee identified a number of broad goals that CTAP-designated communities should strive to accomplish which are outlined below:

#### **Goals**

- Promote the establishment of consistent funding approaches to help pay for improved and expanding public infrastructure and services. Local governments should make certain that their funding strategies are adequate to meet the new level of service provision to meet projected growth needs.
- Evaluate the need for regional cooperation between local governments. Regional approaches can often embellish the delivery of public services and environmental quality, avoid the possible duplication of services, and better allocate financial resources.
- Plan for an adequate supply of housing. The housing stock should reflect local needs and priorities and include housing for a range of income levels.
- Implement strategies to promote safe and efficient multi-modal transportation systems.

#### **Findings:**

- Current Impact Fees only cover the School District and Fire Department
- There is no plan in place for the provision of future utilities

- Pelham does have a lighting ordinance, but it could be updated to encourage energy efficient lighting and accommodate solar panel options.
- The town does mention the need to plan for solid waste and recycling in the Master Plan, but a formal plan addressing the future needs of the town is still pending.
- The Master Plan includes detailed sections about the need for workforce housing and regional housing needs. The regulations, however, are still focused on single family and Elderly housing as options for residential development.
- Sidewalks required in regulations, but not enforced.
- Pelham updates their Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) on a yearly basis, and includes important infrastructure improvements such as a fire station, new schools and a senior center.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop a Master Plan for current and future utilities. Southern New Hampshire is experiencing rapid development and sprawl with a number of major utility advancements in cable, high speed internet and availability of town water and gas to accommodate this growth. "Catching up" to these technologies and planning for future advancements is necessary to be prepared for additional residents and businesses coming into Pelham. It was recommended that the Town consider green technologies like the *Living System* when planning for potential town sewer needs.
2. Continue to update the CIP and plan accordingly for important infrastructure needs. These needs should be considered when investigating the potential of broadening the impact fees or other mechanisms to fund these infrastructure improvements.
3. Develop a Solid Waste and Recycling Plan. When discussing future utilities, this plan should also include, or at least mention: future water supply needs, solid waste and recycling and how to incorporate energy efficiency and alternative energy sources to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
4. Continue to address Pelham's long-term water supply needs, including protection. In addition to assessing the water quantity, it is recommended that the Town consider the water quality, which includes an assessment of the land uses surrounding the water supply and potential impacts to that water quality **as well as** quantity for future residents. It is also recommended the Town investigate the potential of participating in a regional mutual aid study or program.
5. Broaden the types of Impact Fees collected. Development can place a burden on a community's public serves. Many communities have asked developers to pay for some of the costs associated with this growth and resulting expansion of public services by applying impact fees. The Town may want to consider broadening the impact fees to potentially include recreation and stormwater.
6. Diversify the housing types allowed in the zoning ordinance to accommodate more diverse and accessible housing options. Teachers, town employees, service industry employees and fire/police officers should be able to live in the community where they work. Pelham has identified the need for affordable housing in the Master Plan, the next step is to allow for more diverse housing types including: duplex and multi-family housing, manufactured housing, disabled and universal designs, etc. This could be accomplished by adopting an inclusionary housing ordinance.

## **Theme B: Environmental Protection, Land Use, and Open Space**

Theme B focused on how Pelham has planned for the protection of land in a way that is consistent and compatible with future growth trends. To achieve these goals communities must focus on future land use strategies and determine how these would help to promote the preservation of natural resources, open space, and agricultural resources.

Theme B consisted of 38 questions dealing with natural resources, green infrastructure, parks and recreational opportunities, rural character, and the preservation of agricultural lands and forests.

The Steering Committee identified a number of broad goals that CTAP-designated communities should strive to accomplish which are:

### **Goals:**

- Promote the preservation and protection of natural resources when addressing the economic needs of the community and region.
- Protect natural resources and the environment including ground water, aquifers, wildlife, and wildlife corridors
- Establish and conserve an interconnected green infrastructure and ensure public access to open space, parks, and other recreational opportunities.
- Maintain rural character whenever possible, especially forests and farms.

### **Findings:**

- The current land use regulations establish minimum dimensional requirements, but could go one step further to specify minimum densities to promote the efficient use of land.
- The Town Center is the focus of a Context Sensitive Solutions project to redesign an intersection in the center of town. There are some wonderful opportunities to take this one step further to develop a Village Plan Alternative to encourage denser growth and further location of town services in the Town Center.
- RSA 72:61-74 allows a tax exemption for alternative energy installations if proposed at a Town Meeting. This has not made it to Town Meeting in Pelham yet.
- The Town is taking proactive steps to adopt a Stormwater Management Plan.
- Pelham has an Aquifer Protection Overlay District.
- Numerous Prime Wetlands have been designated by the Town over the past 20 years.
- The Town recognized that Open Space is a priority and has proved this through permanent protection of hundreds of acres of the past 10 years.
- The Town adopted a Natural Resources Inventory in 2001.

- The Conservation Commission has both an active land purchase sub-committee and a land oversight/maintenance committee.
- The Town's land use boards are currently drafting a conservation development ordinance.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Establish minimum density requirements. This will allow the Town to use land more efficiently. This is done by requiring a minimum amount that a lot needs to be developed, instead of there a maximum amount allowed. It would require lots to be developed more efficiently than putting small buildings on large lots with huge setbacks.
2. Consider the Village Plan Alternative. This would be a nice follow up to the Context Sensitive Solutions project. Continue the positive energy created around this intersection.
3. Research the tax exemption for alternative energy installation and place it on the Town Ballot for consideration.
4. Incorporate Low Impact Development techniques in the Stormwater Management Plan. This will underscore the town's priorities regarding aquifer protection and long-term preservation of your water supply.
5. Consider revisions to the current Aquifer Protection Overlay District. These revisions could be based on the findings from the upcoming study with NRPC.
6. Add Wellhead Protection measures for all wells to the land use regulations. The pilot project that Pelham is working on to determine the Potential Contaminant Sources around some of its unprotected wells will provide some recommendations for protection of these wells to ensure their long-term quality and quantity. These recommendations should be integrated into the land use regulations.
7. Map the current Prime Wetlands. There currently is not a map of all of the prime wetlands based on the year they were designated. A map would serve as a wonderful tool to begin coordinating the designation of future prime wetlands as well as coordinating future development to provide additional protection of currently designated wetlands. This information should be coordinated with the most recent Natural Services Network and Wildlife Action Plan data developed at the State level through the CTAP program and NH Fish and Game.
8. Develop an Open Space Plan. Although recommendations for open space protection can be found in the Master Plan and a Natural Resources Inventory has been developed, the next step is to develop a plan that identifies and outlines how priority parcels are to be protected. The final step would be to adopt the Natural Resources Inventory as a chapter in the Master Plan.
9. Research zoning districts and other open space protection strategies that fit best for the Town of Pelham. After an Open Space Plan is developed for the Town, the Land Use boards and Conservation Commission should work together to activate this plan and develop specific tools that can be used to protect open space. This could be done through the conservation development ordinance currently being developed requiring developers to plan according to your Open Space Plan, etc. The key here is to work with the Land Use boards and Conservation Commission to develop this

strategy - open space protection requires more than one tool and needs participation from many boards to make it happen.

10. Develop a more formal land protection committee or land trust to oversee protected land. As the town begins to protect more land, it could get more difficult to manage the uses and protect the natural resources on these parcels. There is currently no land trust in Hillsborough County, however, there is the possibility of working with the Rockingham Land Trust.

## **Theme C: Downtown/Village Centers and Community Vitality**

In Theme C, Pelham was assessed by how it has planned for the development and preservation of vibrant community centers which would include an extensive array of cultural and recreational resources. The overall intent is to enhance public participation by establishing areas for community activities around the downtown or common community center which would add rural character and promote a sense of vitality to the village center.

Theme C consisted of 16 questions dealing with the development of village center districts and the promotion of walkable downtown areas in an effort to maintain the small town New England community tradition. Special emphasis was given to the development of main streets, historic preservation, and landscaping.

The Steering Committee identified a number of broad goals that CTAP-designated communities should strive to accomplish which are outlined below:

### **Goals:**

- Develop or enhance downtowns and village centers through the reuse of existing infrastructure and the rehabilitation of buildings with historic value.
- Promote the development of walkable downtown areas which are consistent with historic patterns.
- Enhance Main streets and promote a small community, New England town atmosphere.

### **Findings:**

- Although there is a Town Center area in Pelham, nothing is currently in place to develop the services and amenities of a traditional town center.
- Many of the town's facilities and services are currently located in the Town Center.
- There are many historic buildings in Pelham which are currently not provided any permanent protection.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Consider developing and adopting a Village Master Plan or a Village Plan Alternative Ordinance for the Town Center. This would include allowing for new public buildings to be placed near the town center, infill development requirements, regulatory relief for businesses that locate in the town center, and allowance for mixed-use development.
2. Develop a Tear-down policy or Demolition Delay regulation for Historic Structures. In addition to a formal policy or regulation, criteria need to be developed in which to consider these buildings before they are demolished.
3. Designate a Historic District and form a Historical Commission.

## **Theme D: Local Economy**

Theme D looked at what policies were in place that promote economic viability, foster a prosperous business environment, and support agricultural development. The development of a strong local economy should result in increased local employment opportunities and livable wages.

Theme D consisted of 15 questions dealing with the development of economic development strategies, commercial and agricultural development, and tax incentives to attract new business development

The Steering Committee identified a number of broad goals that CTAP-designated communities should strive to accomplish which are outlined below:

### **Goals:**

- Support sustainable and balanced economic growth that reflects the current tax base.
- Strengthen local agriculture and forestry through the support of related infrastructure and economic systems.
- Support the development of new jobs and livable wages.

### **Findings:**

- Much of the commercial and industrial development in Pelham is concentrated in two areas in town: the Industrial Park and along the Route 38 corridor.
- The Town has been awarded a CTAP Discretionary grant to conduct an Economic Development Assessment which will result in an Economic Development Plan.
- The town does not currently provide regulatory relief for businesses which are located in the town center.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Draft and Adopt the Economic Development Plan as a chapter in the Master Plan. This will give future land use regulations a leg to stand on. Included in that plan should be consideration for regulatory relief or tax incentives for businesses that locate in the town center, identification of anchors that could spur economic activity in the town center, and accommodations for infill along the current business corridors.
2. Identify areas in town where mixed use development would be appropriate. This will be the precursor to updating the zoning ordinance to allow for these mixed uses.