

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

REDEVELOPMENT OF THE ROUTE 108 SUNOCO PROPERTY

The first and highest priority among our recommendations is the need for the Town to take the lead in the redevelopment of the Sunoco gas station property at the intersection of Route 108 and Main Street. The size, prominence, and location of this property in the Route 108 gateway makes the development of this property in a productive and acceptable manner critical to our Town.

The owner has clearly expressed his desire to sell the property, and a decision on future development makes particular sense during the upgrade of Route 108. The funds provided by the State to move the gasoline tanks could be used by a new owner to offset the development cost of the property.

We strongly urge the Planning Board to consider the issue immediately, and in turn, to recommend to the Town Council that funding be made available for two projects to begin immediately and to run concurrently, followed by a third action.

- A. The first is that the Town Administrator, or other appropriate representative, be authorized to enter into negotiations with the owner to:
- ensure the property is not sold to another party during the period required to evaluate the property and determine Town support and priorities; and

- ensure the Town has first option to purchase the property at a price agreeable to the Town.
- B. During this six to nine month period, a committee should be formed and/or a consultant hired to perform a program analysis, and to conduct a site analysis to study the feasibility, affordability, and appropriateness of the site and other appropriate sites for a Town or Community Center. See Chapters 2 and 3, pages 2.4 and 3.30 for details.
- C. If the Sunoco site is found appropriate for use as part of a larger Community Center, the Town should negotiate the purchase of the property, so long as a mutually agreeable price can be achieved.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the "Town Center" section of the *Sense of Community and Town Facilities* chapter (Chapter 2), and the "Gasoline Alley" section of the *Downtown and Commercial Core* chapter (Chapter 3).

IMPLEMENTATION OF ZONING CHANGES AND THE CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Throughout the Master Plan, changes are recommended to the Town's Zoning Ordinance and development regulations as a means to implement the vision of the Plan. One of the changes recommended that will likely have the greatest impact on the future of the Town is the recommendation that the Town enact a Conservation Development provision in the Zoning Ordinance.

Conservation Development, as described in the "Residential Development and Subdivision Design" section of the *Land Development Regulations* chapter (Chapter 9), is a zoning tool used to address many aspects of the Master Plan. It will encourage the retention of the "small" town/rural character of the Town we all cherish. It will also constrain and improve the quality of residential development, thus helping to protect the Town's natural resources and tax base. This approach will be appreciated by developers that really want to become active participants in positive growth.

The spirit of this new approach is also represented in new zoning suggestions throughout the Town, but in the downtown area in particular. Here we believe the recommended changes will result in increased

business investment, improvements in aesthetics, and concentration and management of student housing.

REVIEW THE SCHOOL DISTRICT FUNDING FORMULA

The current formula for determining the allocations of costs to the participating towns is, in the eyes of the Steering Committee, unfair to Durham. We believe Durham residents are bearing an uneven share of the costs to operate the Oyster River School District.

We realize any change in the formula that benefits Durham will be at the expense of the other towns participating in the District. This will strain relationships and create political divisions within the Town and with our neighbors.

In spite of the potential ramifications, the Steering Committee feels compelled to give high priority to a review of the fairness of the formula. This review could result in a substantial reduction in school costs for Durham residents.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the "Public Schools" section of the *Tax Stabilization* chapter (Chapter 8).

SUPPORT OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Conservation easements may be the best tool to protect our scenic viewsheds, wildlife habitat, and natural resources, including drinking water, while managing the growth of single family homes.

The Town should encourage private landowners, particularly those with land in areas identified in this Plan for conservation, to consider placing their land under a conservation easement. Land under conservation easements continue to contribute to the tax roles, albeit in a limited amount, while keeping the property from the fragmentation and development that often occurs as land is passed through succeeding generations.

The Town and the University hold significant parcels of land in Durham. Both should inventory and assess the existing conservation restrictions, evaluate the level of protection provided, and investigate selling easements to conservation organizations, particularly for those properties within

areas identified for conservation in this Plan. This action would be both a means of generating revenue and ensuring conservation.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the "Lands Identified for Conservation/Greenways" section of the Sense of *Environmental and Cultural Resources* chapter (Chapter 4).

PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE TOWN AND CITIZEN COMMUNICATION

Durham enjoys the benefit of an active calendar of events. However, many events go unheralded because of a lack of communication or, worse yet, miscommunication that is the result of no readily available medium to keep all of its citizens informed. In the past, a local newspaper or a Town sponsored newsletter filled the void, but no such communication vehicle exists today.

The Town needs, more than ever, to promote a sense of connectedness between local businesses, the University of New Hampshire, local organizations, and the community. This seemingly modest need was cited in all of our surveys, public workshops, and public comment forums as well as the 1995 Community Development Plan. It is a low cost/high impact project that will be widely appreciated and could help with implementation of the rest of the Master Plan.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the "Communications" section of the *Sense of Community and Town Facilities* chapter (Chapter 2).

CONTINUATION OF THE MAIN STREET PROGRAM

The Main Street Program has already had a positive impact on Durham, but it has been funded only through the year 2000.

The Town Council, the Main Street Program, and the University of New Hampshire should continue to work together on a permanent basis to provide the stability and continuity that will foster continued momentum.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the "Communications" section of the *Sense of Community and Town Facilities* chapter (Chapter 2).

DEVELOPMENT OF A JOINT TOWN/UNH OFFICE PARK

Preliminary discussions indicate willingness by the University of New Hampshire to consider the joint development of an office/research park on University owned land in the Mast Road area. There appears to be demand for quality commercial space near the University and both the Town and University could benefit greatly from such a project.

The University would receive land-lease revenues as well as the synergy that emerges from the involvement of faculty, students, and institutional involvement.

The Town would receive tax revenue as well as increased downtown business support from development that is acceptable to its citizens.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the *University Relations* chapter (Chapter 10), and the "Durham Business Park" section of the *Tax Stabilization* chapter (Chapter 8).

IMPLEMENT A NORTHWEST/SOUTHEAST TRANSPORTATION LINKAGE STUDY

The idea for a "Northern Connector" was first introduced during the design of the Route 4 Bypass. It was agreed that the Northern Connector would be a solution for the future need of providing access to the University of New Hampshire without traffic going through residential areas. The need for traffic relief is obvious as we witness traffic jams at the Whittemore Center and high traffic counts on Madbury Road and Edgewood Road. The proposed addition of a University Performing Arts Center and a passenger train station in the same area will add to the problem.

While the need may be obvious, not all parties agree on the solution. A thorough study to finally determine the necessity and feasibility of the options for improved transportation from the northwest should be conducted to gather the necessary data to finally resolve the best means to provide traffic relief.

The Southern or Southeastern linkage is inextricably intertwined with the Northern Connector and must be included in the study.

Should the state continue to ignore our pleas for funds to conduct the study that will document the need and recommend the best solution, then the Town should fund the study.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the "Historic Traffic Circulation Recommendations" and "Recommendations" section of the *Transportation* chapter (Chapter 6), and the "Downtown" section of the *Downtown and Commercial Core* chapter (Chapter 3).

COMPLETE THE MAIN STREET AND DOWNTOWN STREETScape IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Since results of the first phase of the Main Street Enhancements have been so well received, it is recommended that planning and funding assistance immediately be sought for the continuation of the project on Main Street, Pettee Brook Lane loop, and Jenkins Court. By continuing this project, the Town will have a comprehensive traffic calming effort in the downtown area that results in a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists. In addition, the project will result in significant aesthetic improvements to the downtown area and show the community and downtown businesses that the Town supports its downtown. The hope is that the Town's investment in infrastructure will result in private sector investment in improvements to the downtown businesses.

We have demonstrated the ability of the Town and the University of New Hampshire to work together for the benefit of both, and such a spirit of cooperation should continue.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the "Downtown" section of the *Downtown and Commercial Core* chapter (Chapter 3), and the "Town Appearance" section of the *Sense of Community and Town Facilities* chapter (Chapter 2).

EXAMINE CONSOLIDATION OF WATER AND SEWER UTILITIES

The Town and the University of New Hampshire should jointly conduct a feasibility study of the advantages of an independent sewer and water authority. The University currently owns and manages the water treatment plant and the Town owns and manages the sewage treatment plant. Both are well run and comply with existing rules, but both will require significant future capital improvement to satisfy growth and

stricter federal requirements. Having a unified authority will improve the bonding capability, improve the management structure, and improve long-term capital planning.

For a complete discussion of this issue, see the "Wastewater" and "Water" sections of the *Public Utilities and Services* chapter (Chapter 7), and the *University Relations* chapter (Chapter 10).