

## V. LAND USE

The town's land use plan, as implemented by the municipal zoning and subdivision regulations, will determine the future development pattern for the Town of Sandgate. The land use plan should be reviewed periodically to assess whether or not full implementation of the plan is an accurate representation of the community's vision for its future. This chapter will discuss the factors that are important to land use planning in Sandgate, and will identify policies and recommendations that will result in future development that is both economically efficient and environmentally sound.

### 5.1 Current Zoning and Factors Affecting Land Use

The discussion of Sandgate's physiography (Section 4.1) pointed out that there are relatively few places in Sandgate that are well-suited to development. These areas are located in valleys where moderate slopes, deep soils, and adequate ground water supplies make development relatively easy. The highest concentrations of existing development are found in these areas, which are served by the two principal roadways in Sandgate: Sandgate Road and West Sandgate Road. Much of the land along these roads has been placed in the "Rural Residential" zoning district, which provides for the most dense development -- two acres per dwelling unit -- in town (Figure 5.1). According to the zoning bylaw, the Rural Residential district is intended to encourage development near existing roads, thereby minimizing future public infrastructure costs.

There are several other areas in town, either adjacent to the Rural Residential zones or along secondary town roads, where physical conditions and access do not present severe obstacles to development. Such areas are included in the "Forest #1" zoning district, a district intended to provide for development where it can be efficiently served by public roads and utilities while protecting important natural resources that are present. The minimum lot size in the Forest #1 district is five acres per dwelling unit.

Both the Rural Residential and Forest #1 districts also provide for certain limited commercial and public or institutional uses. Commercial uses are restricted to those that are appropriate given the town's remoteness and environmental constraints: agriculture and forestry, home occupations, and outdoor recreational facilities, for example. Some of the larger facilities that are permitted are classified as conditional uses and must meet specific requirements to ensure that impacts on the natural environment and quality of life in Sandgate are minimized.

The great majority of land in Sandgate does not fit into either the Rural Residential or Forest #1 categories. Most areas in Sandgate are remote from town roads and are characterized by steep slopes and shallow soils. There are, however, numerous individual sites scattered throughout the hills and hollows that are capable of supporting some type of development. The type, intensity, and location of land uses that occur in these backcountry areas is very important to the town. Development in these areas, zoned "Forest #2," could potentially have profound impacts on both environmental quality and municipal budgets.

The Forest #2 district is meant to protect important natural resources, recreational opportunities, and forest-related industries. The zoning bylaw notes that excessive development in these areas could damage sensitive environmental resources and lead to the inefficient development of roads and utilities. Consequently, permitted land uses are limited to agriculture, forestry, and recreational uses, with camps and year-round

residences restricted to lots of not less than 25 acres per unit. No permanent residences are permitted above 1,800 feet in elevation. Applications for new houses are also subject to special review to ensure that the environment is protected and that municipal facilities and services can accommodate the development.

## 5.2 Recent Development, Budget Growth, and Property Taxes

The town, highway, and school budgets have all shown steady growth since 1990 (Table 5-1). Average residential property taxes have also climbed steadily during this period.

Table 5-1. Public budgets, number of resident children enrolled in school, new housing units, and average residential property taxes in Sandgate, 1990-2000.

Source: Sandgate Town Clerk.

| Year | Town and Highway Budget | School Budget | Total Budget | School Children | New Housing Units | Avg. Res. (R1) Property Tax |
|------|-------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1990 | \$151,376               | \$241,682     | \$ 393,058   | 53              | 2                 | \$ 928                      |
| 1991 | 179,726                 | 305,232       | 484,958      | 55              | 2                 | 1,040                       |
| 1992 | 199,480                 | 308,692       | 508,172      | 47              | 4                 | 930                         |
| 1993 | 204,904                 | 368,764       | 573,668      | 59              | 3                 | 1,066                       |
| 1994 | 230,145                 | 402,351       | 632,496      | 61              | 2                 | 1,198                       |
| 1995 | 318,325                 | 406,034       | 724,359      | 62              | 1                 | 1,156                       |
| 1996 | 197,795                 | 465,671       | 663,466      | 67              | 2                 | 1,407                       |
| 1997 | 218,209                 | 393,915       | 612,124      | 67              | 1                 | 1,351                       |
| 1998 | 216,447                 | 429,196       | 645,643      | 64              | 3                 | 1,520                       |
| 1999 | 225,372                 | 340,829       | 566,201      | 51              | 2                 | 1,563                       |
| 2000 | 210,424                 | 577,780       | 788,204      | 50              | 2                 | 1,735                       |

The first thing that is evident from Table 5-1 is that Sandgate's total budget has grown steadily -- more than doubled in size -- since 1990. While both the town/highway and school budgets have grown considerably during this period, the growth in the school budget has been most dramatic. Also evident from Table 5-1 is that development (new home construction) in the 1990s occurred at a slow, but steady rate throughout the decade.

## 5.3 Land Use Planning Recommendations

There does not appear to be any reason for Sandgate to alter the land use policies that have been espoused by the town over the past several years. The type, intensity, and location of development that is permitted under the municipal zoning and subdivision bylaws is appropriate to the town's environmental limitations and remote, rural character. An increase in the rate or intensity of development in backcountry areas of Sandgate most likely would lead to additional costs to the town, and could have deleterious impacts on the natural environment. Future growth should, therefore, be directed to areas along existing town roads where topographic and soil conditions can best support such growth. The existing Rural Residential and Forest #1 zoning districts should be retained to support such growth. The Forest #2 district should remain an area where the

wise use of natural resources, recreation, and environmental protection are emphasized, and limited development is permitted with proper controls.

The municipal zoning regulations have been drafted to ensure that they reflect these general land use policies. In addition to the use and dimensional requirements for each zoning district, the regulations contain provisions designed to protect important resources such as streams, ponds, and green spaces. "Cluster subdivisions" should be permitted in Sandgate as a way to promote efficient development patterns and protect important resources. In a cluster subdivision, individual lot sizes in a new development may be reduced (to not less than one acre), thereby allowing the preservation of open fields or other important resources. An additional benefit of this type of development is that economic efficiency is promoted since the length of roads and other infrastructure is reduced. The municipal planning commission should encourage developers to utilize clustering or other creative techniques to achieve the objectives of this plan: provision of attractive, efficient new development while protecting important natural resources.

One area of special interest to the town is the "town center," located in the vicinity of the Town Hall. This area has been identified as a potential site for a future school or other community facilities. The town should consider acquiring suitable land in this area, and should promote private development that will reinforce its traditional appearance as a rural New England hamlet.

#### 5.4 Planning for Affordable Housing

The town's existing land use policies do not discourage the development of affordable housing. The zoning bylaw even allows some added flexibility in the development of affordable housing by permitting the construction of a second dwelling unit on a lot that may be occupied by a (non-paying) relative or guest of the owner of the property. The town may wish to consider additional means of encouraging affordable housing, especially if rising real estate costs begin to make it difficult for Sandgate residents and their children to remain in town. One technique available to a rural town like Sandgate is to permit a "density bonus" for new subdivisions, provided that the additional lots/units are offered at prices that are deemed "affordable" by the town.

#### 5.5 Policies and Recommendations

1. The amount of land available for residential development should be sufficient to meet the needs of anticipated population growth. New development should be located principally along or near existing roads.
2. Residential growth in the Forest #2 district should be limited to those areas where new development will not result in damage to the environment or excessive costs to the town.
3. Rugged backcountry areas with poor access should remain free from permanent development, and should be reserved for forestry and recreational uses.
4. The town should encourage land uses and development patterns that will protect important natural resources, green spaces, and scenic views.
5. Sandgate's rural character should be maintained; a special effort should be made to preserve important scenic and historic resources.

6. Commercial and institutional uses should be limited to those that are identified in the zoning bylaw, and should be of a scale and design consistent with the town's rural character.
7. The following specific policies apply to new development:
  - \* The density of development must not exceed the amount that the land is physically capable of supporting. Development must be carefully planned in areas where natural land slopes exceed 15 percent; development is generally not suitable in areas where slopes exceed 20 percent.
  - \* During construction, all necessary measures should be taken to minimize soil erosion.