

Town of Hampton Master Plan

Master Plan Vision

March 2021

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

A **Master Plan** guides the overall character, growth, and development of a community. It is not a regulatory document, and does not define what can or cannot happen in a community; rather it presents a roadmap for what a community desires to happen. It is designed to aid community as it reviews subdivisions, site plans and capital investment.

The **Master Plan Vision** is a set of statements documenting the big-picture desires of the citizens affected by the master plan. It includes a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision.

(Adapted from the New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives)



Introduction

Current Conditions

The Town of Hampton, New Hampshire ties together farmland, residential neighborhoods, a highly popular beach destination, an active town center, a robust local economy, and breathtaking natural resources, in an area of less than 15 square miles. Hampton is located on major roadways amid extensive consumer services, indoor and outdoor entertainment venues, a variety of local retail establishments and several institutions of higher learning. In spite of the area's popularity among summer vacationers and its ongoing economic growth and development, Hampton continues to maintain a small-town feel, with residents reporting a strong sense of community and camaraderie. This identity is fostered by an active Recreation Department, a superb education system, and local "gems" such as North Beach remaining quiet and visited primarily by year-round residents.

The west side of town is characterized by forested residential streets and rolling fields, with a couple of working farms harkening back to the town's roots as an agricultural community. The residential neighborhoods throughout town attract families looking to take advantage of the town's parks and playgrounds, the community activities run by the Recreation Department, and the highly-rated schools. The Merrill Drive and Liberty Lane business parks host companies that create local jobs, and present opportunities for continued growth and construction, while preserving forested areas and maintaining green landscapes. The businesses along the Route 1 corridor provide easily accessible essential services to local residents while bringing money into the community from drivers passing through. Hampton's town center is a place for residents to dine and shop at local businesses. The Hampton shoreline, from south of the Harbor Inlet to Plaice Cove, houses both year-round and seasonal residents, and draws thousands of tourists and visitors from around the world every summer to picnic, sunbathe, swim, and shop, and surf. The shoreline is home to many stores, bars, and restaurants, and is a major economic driver for the town. And, of course, the natural resources of Hampton, including the Seabrook-Hampton Estuary, Meadow Pond, Harborside Dunes, Batchelder Park, and other open space areas are treasured for recreational, ecological, natural-hazard-mitigation, and aesthetic values.

Future Changes

While the town's year-round population has held steady for a number of years at around 15,000, a growing seasonal population (which pushes the local population as high as 100,000 during the summer) and economic development create pressures that represent both a challenge and an opportunity for the community. Hampton's location at the intersection of multiple state roads and highways, and in relative proximity to Boston, Portsmouth, and beautiful lakes and mountains, along with its identity as a world-renowned beach destination, mean that residential and commercial development may continue, and that a large visitor population will continue to be attracted to the community,.

Additionally, the ongoing effects of climate change and sea level rise will continue to change the community's exposure to natural disaster events while straining infrastructure, natural habitats, the built environment, and people. Continued development in low-lying and coastal areas, where it occurs, will lead to increasing stress on municipal, state, and federal services, maintenance activities, and emergency operations; Meanwhile, impaired real-estate values in low-lying and coastal areas, may create new development pressures in inland and upland locations.



A Holistic Approach

This Master Plan will guide Hampton to a future where the Town is able to sustain and enhance its historic, small-town New Hampshire quality of life, while promoting thoughtful commercial and residential development; all against a backdrop of a changing climate and rising sea levels that will cause town-wide impacts on this coastal community. Considering the current needs of Hampton residents as well as expected changes in the future will allow Hampton to benefit local residents, businesses, and visitors. Hampton will be a town that fosters neighborhood preservation, new development, and environmental conservation while providing a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable lifestyle for all.

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Guiding Principles and Priorities

Preserving a Sense of Place and Identity

Although Hampton will continue to grow and change in the future, residents and visitors will still be able to recognize their community. Preservation of existing landscapes, architectural styles, and unique neighborhood layouts will help maintain the town's beauty and identity. Continued municipal support of the Recreational Department, Lane Library, and school system, as well as expansion and improvement of community spaces, will help maintain the sense of a close-knit and friendly community.

This future will be achieved by:

- Supporting and strengthening the town's community organizations and municipal services to continue building relationships between residents and fostering a local sense of community, while attracting new residents and creating a population that is diverse with regard to age, race, and gender.
- Taking steps to maintain a robust local fishing and recreational boating industry, including through preservation of water access.
- Review its zoning ordinances to ensure they support the unique characteristics of each neighborhood
- Continuing to apply design guidelines for key locations to facilitate consistent architectural and landscaping styles
- Support preservation of historic structures and views.



Forward-Looking Development

A future Hampton will have grown and become more dense in some areas while preserving open space, protecting natural areas, maintaining existing low-density neighborhoods, retrofitting at-risk development to be resilient to coastal hazards, and returning some currently developed areas to open space to allow for the migration of coastal habitats. Development within coastal hazard zones will be limited, with new development and redevelopment focused within the town center, Route 1 Corridor, and other inland and upland locations. Residential density will be higher near the town center to facilitate continued population growth in the town, as well as the relocation of residents away from at-risk coastal areas.

This future will be achieved by implementing a development strategy that addresses the current economic needs of the town while considering likely future economic, social, and environmental conditions. This forward-looking approach will foster continued economic growth while preserving Hampton's small-town feel and unique neighborhood characters, as well as accounting for the town-wide impacts that a changing shoreline will have on existing and future development patterns.

Features of this approach will include:

- Limit new development within existing and projected coastal hazard zones
- Incentivize retrofitting of the existing properties in coastal hazard zones to better withstand hazards such as flooding and high winds
- Prioritize protection of critical facilities and infrastructure to support emergency evacuation and response
- Redirect future development to inland locations at lower risk
- Focus increased residential density near the town center
- Preserve existing open spaces
- Enable and support property buyouts, managed retreat, and creation of open space when desired by, and appropriate for, property owners, residents, and local neighborhoods.



A Robust and Resilient Economy

A future Hampton will continue to be home to a diverse, year-round economy supporting a similarly diverse and year-round local workforce. Local small businesses will sustain the unique identity of the town, while larger corporations located in the Merrill Drive and Liberty Lane business parks, as well as along Route 1, will provide a consistent job base. Hampton's water-dependent business activities, including marinas, fishing and shellfishing, and water-based recreation, will highlight the community's coastal character.

Hampton will achieve this future by:

- Encouraging economic diversity.
- Supporting the local business ecosystem.
- Prioritizing water-dependent uses in some areas and preserving water access for such businesses.
- Expanding business development in the Town Center, along the Route 1 Corridor, and in other areas outside of current and projected future coastal hazard zones.
- Providing guidance and incentives to businesses building their resilience to natural hazards, public health emergencies, and other disruptions.
- Fostering a robust year-round economy that provides jobs and services without increasing dependence on the seasonal tourist population.



Open Space and Natural Resources

A future Hampton will continue to recognize the value that open spaces and natural areas provide with regards to recreation and tourism, environmental and ecological benefits, and coastal hazard mitigation. Hampton will be a community that continues to be identified by its extensive coastal wetlands, and that provides recreational opportunities to residents and visitors in its forests, lakes and other natural features.

Hampton will achieve this future by choosing to proactively protect open space, preserve natural ecosystems, and expand outdoor recreation opportunities. Hampton will also facilitate the inland migration of coastal habitats as sea levels rise. Specific aspects of the Town's conservation strategy will include:

- Continuing to support the Parks and Recreation Department.
- Leveraging the town's existing natural areas.
- Considering the changing climate, rising sea level and groundwater levels, and changing water currents and salinity levels.
- Minimizing stormwater pollution to wetlands, lakes, and coastal ecosystems.
- Promoting the accessibility of open space and recreational assets to all of the town's residents
- Supporting development of the New Hampshire Seacoast Greenway.
- Setting aside new conservation land when appropriate, prioritizing areas in flood hazard zones and that can facilitate marsh migration.
- Utilizing green infrastructure and living shoreline approaches for capital improvement and hazard mitigation projects when possible.



Connected Community

A future Hampton will have a town-wide community that is connected both as practical matter and with regards to the identity of residents and visitors.

One important aspect of this vision is connecting Hampton's beach areas, inland neighborhoods, and western corner through bike-paths, sidewalks, public transit, and way-stops. This increase in transit availability will increase travel between these different parts of the community, and cause co-benefits of reducing vehicular traffic and fossil fuel use while increasing positive public health outcomes.

Hampton will work to reduce vehicular traffic in other ways as well, including through route planning, parking management, and infrastructure upgrades. Reduced traffic backup will improve the quality of life for residents, support local businesses that rely on the use of Hampton's roads for their livelihoods, and attract visitors and investors.

Over the long term, this increased connectivity, and the improved the accessibility of Hampton's coastal recreational and natural resources from the rest of town, will encourage development in, and migration to, the town's inland areas as rising sea levels and changing shorelines limit development and living opportunities on the coast.

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A Regional Voice

Hampton will leverage its relationships with state and regional agencies and institutions, many of which have offices and facilities located within Hampton, to advance policies at the state level, support academic research, and influence regional planning decisions so that the perspectives and interests of Hampton and other coastal New Hampshire communities are recognized and pursued.

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Vision Statement

These Guiding Principles and Priorities, as well as other considerations and findings, have led to the development of the following Vision Statement for the Master Plan Update. The intent of the Vision introduction to the Master Plan is to provide direction to guide the structure and content of the Hampton Master Plan. The Vision is not a list of to-do items.

The Town of Hampton will leverage its existing community strengths to foster economic development in a closely connected beach community and village-like town center, both populated by thriving small businesses, while preserving the rural character of the west side. Multi-modal transportation interconnections between the beach communities, town center, and west side will help form an overall sense of place despite the different characters of these neighborhoods. The Town will further strengthen its coastal neighborhoods by making existing housing and infrastructure more resilient to flooding and climate change while facilitating the gradual and equitable movement of some residents to areas of lower risk within Hampton, preserving the Town's economy and making it possible for families to remain in Hampton over the long term.

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