

PLANNING THE TOWN WE WANT

BACKGROUND

The town of Rochester last updated its Master Plan in April of 2000. In April 2005, the Planning Board appointed a Steering Committee and the process of updating the 2000 Master Plan was begun. The Steering Committee solicited volunteers from the community to spearhead focus groups on the various components of the Master Plan.

The focus groups were asked:

1. to review the 2000 Master Plan;
2. to provide an evaluation of whether the goals and action items of that Master Plan had been met;
3. to evaluate whether those goals and action items were still appropriate;
4. to make recommendations for goals and action items going forward.

The various focus groups met frequently and conducted various public outreach activities. Proceeding with these contributions, the Steering Committee has prepared this updated Master Plan.

WHY PREPARE A MASTER PLAN?

When approached, most people question why a Master Plan is prepared for a community. The simple answer is that the entire process is an opportunity for the community to evaluate what it has become, to explore what it would like to be and to develop a plan to

guide it towards the intended destination. The resulting Master Plan can then be used as a guide by all of the boards and committees to help them shape actions, zoning by-law and rules and regulations to achieve the desired goal.

The process of preparing the Master Plan is extremely useful. It is a time for people to pause, review the goals that people had established in the prior exercise, evaluate whether those goals are still appropriate, given present conditions and the makeup of the community, and finally to establish a pathway for the future.

The land, its blessings and limitations, has brought us through the past to the present. That which we decide to save and change is all-important in preserving what we like most about the place we call home.

*The 2000 Rochester Master Plan
Committee*

WHAT'S IN THE PLAN?

The Master Plan of 2000 identified *The Town We Want* as rural. That objective holds true today as the country setting and rural, residual flavor is why people continue to savor the life style and why outsiders continue to move into Rochester.

Like the previous Master Plan committee, the people that participated in the preparation of this Master Plan all echoed the same sentiment that is they liked the town "the way it is". When asked to define

what that meant, many people gravitated towards the use of the word rural. It is clear however, that "the way it is" refers to something that cannot be condensed to a single word, rather involves a feeling which more closely resembles the essence of the community which in turn involves many facets of the community.

Coincidentally, the various components that are required of a Master Plan which include land use, community facilities, economic development, housing, natural resources, open space, circulation and historic preservation are the same components that make up the essence of the community. If we use the word rural to describe the essence of the community, by inference, we mean that each of the components also has a rural flavor.

The use of the word rural as a descriptor of each of the components will have slightly different meanings for each. For example, from a land use perspective, rural is the condition which exists as uncharted wilderness only begins to yield to an agrarian economy: winding roads through deep woods, occasional fields and pasture, farm buildings abutting the roads and occasional villages with the residences nestled closely together. Cottage industry is mixed with purely residential use as people conduct an assortment of businesses from a homestead. Farm animals abound and the presence of wild creatures, the spring peepers, the deer as well as the woodchucks and coyotes, is very evident. Likewise, rural as a descriptor of schools may mean smaller facilities with students getting

more personal attention than the larger municipal and regional school systems. Rural as a descriptor of town government may mean less central government with more division of responsibility among elected officials thus providing more direct responsibility to the citizens.

Maintaining the concept of rural as a descriptor of the essence of the community will allow us to define *Planning The Town We Want* as "the way it is." In doing this we will try to maintain the appearance of our town from the streets we use to go to work, get groceries or take the kids to lessons. Tree lined streets with the stone walls left over from farms are important, as are sections of woods and/or fields. A barn or two at the street level, like the one on Rounseville Road west of Vaughan Hill says "rural", as does an antique house set closer to the road than current zoning permits. Of course, cranberry bogs and pump houses also help to set the tone. Beyond appearance, the rural objective includes a diverse, cohesive and cordial population. Accelerated growth in a community which mostly works outside of town can cause isolation and a loss of a sense of the cohesiveness present in a rural community. In addition, without intervention, the economics of housing drives a community to a monolithic "up scale", suburban flavor which is so evident in many towns.

We actually enjoy most of *Planning The Town We Want* criteria right now. This Plan attempts to define the specific challenges to retaining what

we have, to identify the steps necessary to do so, and to respond to the inexorable outside pressures for change with planning and grace.

MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL LAW

Massachusetts General Law charges the Planning Board with the responsibility to create a Master Plan and to keep it current. The Board is charged by Chapter 41, Section 81 D which states that a Planning Board - - “shall make a master plan - -and from time to time may extend or perfect such plan. - - -. Such plan shall be made, and may be added to or changed from time to time, by a majority vote of such Planning Board and shall be public record. - - -“. Paragraph 9 of that section provides for implementation as follows: “An implementation program element which defines and schedules the specific municipal actions necessary to achieve the objective of each element of the master plan.”

As this excerpt suggests, a Master Plan is never “in cement” but is intended as an on-going set of planning objectives and implementation tasks. In the *Implementation* section at the end of this document, the Planning Board identifies a dynamic process of implementation and/or re-evaluation of objectives.

PLAN ORGANIZATION

As can be seen from the above sections, this plan is simply the sum of its parts. Each of the remaining sections in this plan presents a description of each of the components (*Land Use, Community Facilities, Economic Development, Housing, Natural Resources, Open Space, Circulation and Historic Preservation*) that represent the essence of the community. For each of these components, the discussion is presented with regard to the goals, objectives, and recommendations of the previous Master Plan, as well as a summary of the present status and recommendations for future actions. Each of these components has been studied and recommendations given, keeping in mind the community's desire to maintain a rural essence.

Because of the pressures from surrounding towns and the economic “drivers” which impact development, it is crucial that all of the Master Plan recommendations contained herein be pursued proactively. In order to facilitate the implementation of this plan, the final section of the Master Plan presents a plan for the implementation of the recommendations contained herein. This section should be considered to be the critical steps necessary to maintain and achieve *Planning The Town We Want*.