

**CONWAY PLANNING BOARD
AND MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE**

MINUTES

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

PAGES

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Work Session

**CONWAY PLANNING BOARD
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MINUTES

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

A meeting of the Conway Planning Board and the Master Plan Steering Committee was held on Thursday, February 9, 2023 beginning at 7:00 pm at the Conway Town Office, Conway, NH. Those present were: Chair, Benjamin Colbath; Vice Chair, Ailie Byers; Secretary, Erik Corbett; Bill Barbin; Eliza Grant; Mark Hounsell; Alternate Ted Phillips; Janine Bean; Jac Cuddy; Ben Wilcox; Kate Richardson; Jason Gagnon; Josh McAllister; Deb Haynes; Planning Director, Jamel Torres; and Planning Assistant, Holly Whitelaw.

WORK SESSION

The Board and Committee followed the attached Meeting Agenda.

The next meeting is March 23, 2023 at 5:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Holly L. Whitelaw
Planning Assistant



MEETING AGENDA

2.9.2023

5:30 – 7:00 PM

CONWAY MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE – MEETING #1

LOCATION: Conway Town Office
23 Main Street
Conway, NH

AGENDA DETAILS

NOTE: This meeting has been noticed as a work session of the Town of Conway Planning Board and will be open to members of the public.

5:30 – 6:00 pm

Welcome & Introductions

1. Staff Introductions
2. Consultant Introductions
3. Steering Committee Member Introductions

6:00 – 6:15 pm

Master Planning 101

1. State Laws
2. Process
3. Role of Steering Committee

6:15 – 6:45 pm

Open Floor – Steering Committee

Steering Committee members to share greatest hopes and fears for the Master Plan update process (2 minutes each)

6:45 – 6:50 pm

Open House Debrief

Sharing reflections from the community open house (to be held February 8TH)

6:50 – 7:00 PM

Review Project Schedule & Next Steps



MEMORANDUM

2.6.2023

CONWAY MASTER PLAN: POLICY CONTEXT

TO: Advisory Committee

FROM: SE Group

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a concise summary of existing local and regional plans that are relevant to the Master Plan update. This exercise provides important context for the work to update the Town Master Plan for several reasons:

- While the current Master Plan (adopted in 2003) is outdated, it is helpful to understand the planning priorities and strategies that were proposed at the time in order to evaluate their impact and efficacy.
- While the Town of Conway is not an active member of North Country Council Regional Planning Commission (NCC), the regional plans produced by NCC provide important information and context for local and regional conditions. These plans also have certain policy implications regardless of municipal membership status.

MUNICIPAL PLANS

2003 Master Plan

The Town of Conway Planning Board adopted the current Master Plan in 2003. The Town subsequently updated various chapters of the Master Plan to reflect changing local conditions and planning goals:

- Chapter 2 – Implementation Strategy: updated September 2008
- Chapter 6 – Recreation: updated September 2014
- Chapter 6-A – Trails Plan: updated May 2016

While built on a robust process, the current Master Plan features information and data that are decades old. However, there are relevant insights from the current Plan that may provide useful context for the development of the next iteration of the Master Plan.

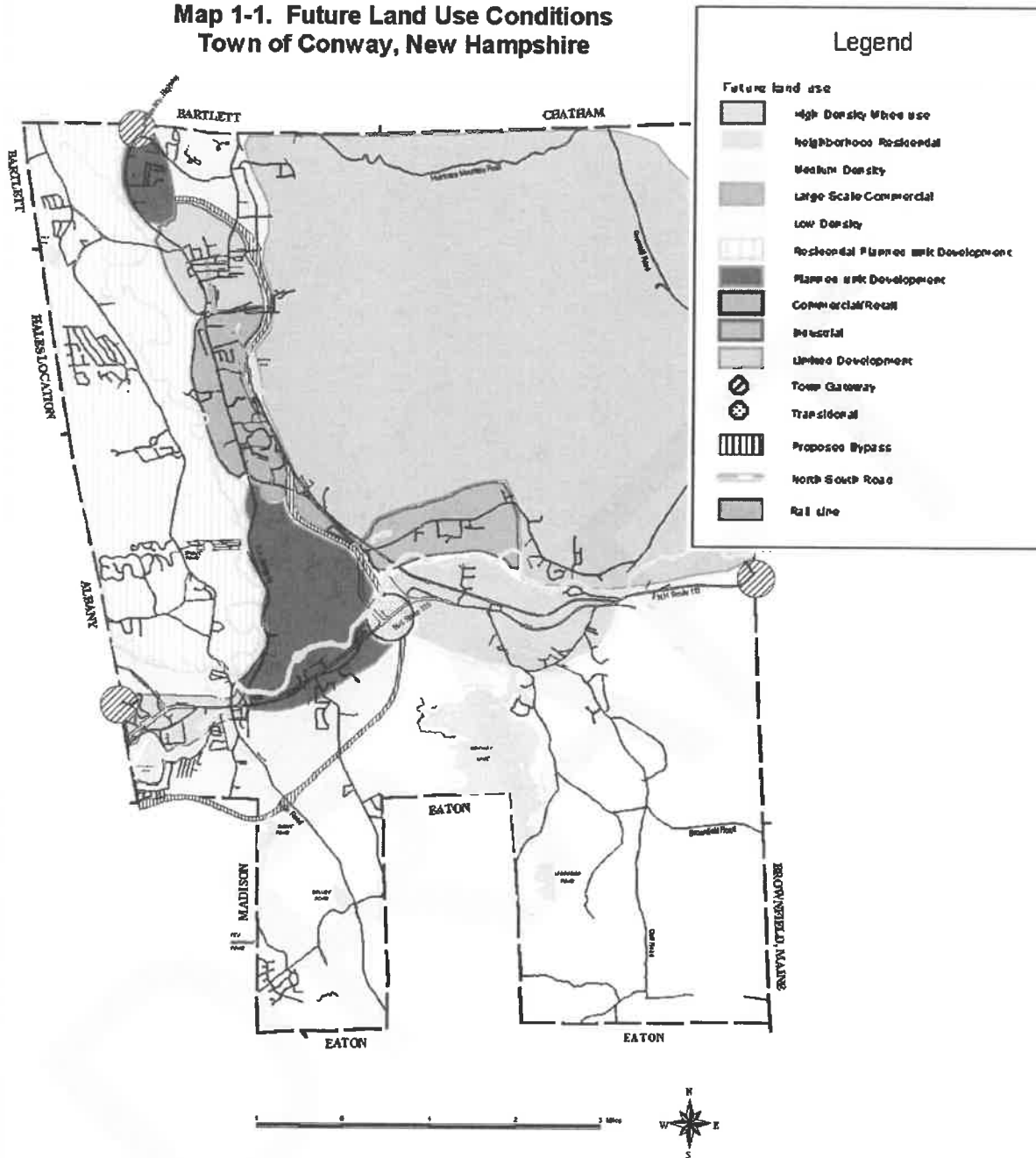
Chapter 1: A Vision and Future Land Use Plan for Conway

The Chapter includes the following mission statement for the Master Plan: *“Recognizing that our natural beauty is our greatest asset, our commitment is to balance growth with the needs of the environment and the community.”* The Chapter also includes goals for different planning issues to be addressed by the Master Plan. There are accompanying planning objectives presented for each goal as well:

- **Housing:** *“Due to increasing demand for housing caused by the centralized location and recreation aspects associated with Conway, coupled with a lack of housing units within lower price ranges, the Town of Conway should support the development of a range of housing choices for all ages and income levels.”*
- **Economic Development:** *“Recognizing that the key economic character of the community is its tourism-based economy, future economic development initiatives should strive to diversify the employment and business establishment base within Conway.”*
- **Municipal Services and Infrastructure:** *“Coordinate and harmonize existing municipal services and infrastructure providers in order to provide citizens with a high quality and efficient infrastructure and service network.”*
- **Roadways and Transportation:** *“The town should use roadway improvements to enhance the character of Conway’s villages, as well as introduce mechanisms and infrastructure to promote and encourage transportation system use by pedestrians and bicycle users.”*
- **Recreation:** *“Promote and support a variety of recreational opportunities, including outdoor activities, for Conway residents of all ages and income levels.”*
- **Sense of Community:** *“The Town should preserve and enhance the unique design characteristics, features and identity of each village while at the same time creating locations in Conway which connects and bonds the community.”*
- **Land Use:** *“Regulations, policies and guidelines used to manage land development in Conway should change. In non-village portions of the town these changes should focus on targeting areas for medium and low density residential development, commercial and light industrial development, and limited development (protected areas). Village areas should be designated for a mix of high density residential, commercial and institutional uses.”*

The Chapter includes a future land use vision and map for the Town as a guide for the orderly development of the community. This includes high-density, mixed-use areas in North Conway Village and Conway Village, large scale commercial development along US 302 from NH 16 into Redstone, and neighborhood-scale residential development in Center Conway Village. The Chapter presents various land use tools for achieving future land use goals, such as zoning district changes and lot size requirements.

**Map 1-1. Future Land Use Conditions
Town of Conway, New Hampshire**



Future Land Use Map prepared by K&O Associates, Inc., March, 2005
Map subject to revision.

Chapter 2: Implementation Strategy

The implementation strategy presented in Chapter 2 includes recommended actions for each of the seven goals presented in Chapter 1. The Town updated this chapter in 2008.

Summary of Implementation Strategies

- **Housing:** Encourage a variety of market-based and affordable housing options in the region through land use policy changes.

- **Economic Development:** Support the Mount Washington Valley Economic Council; provide water and sewer infrastructure to industrial zones; encourage commercial development on infill sites through land use regulation; establish Business Improvement Districts in Village areas.
- **Municipal Services and Infrastructure:** Prepare a Capital Improvement Plan for the Conway School District; encourage multi-purpose school and municipal facilities; interconnect the Conway Village Fire District and North Conway Water Precinct infrastructure systems; prepare a comprehensive water and sewer infrastructure plan, including expansions to non-precinct areas; promote coordination amongst fire and emergency service providers; establish a Capital Improvements Program Committee and maintain a six-year capital improvements program.
- **Roadways and Transportation:** allow for context-specific flexibility in street designs; encourage a more flexible and usable parking system; improve gateways at major entrance points to Conway; implement traffic calming measures in North Conway Village and Conway Village.
- **Recreation:** create a network of multi-purpose trails connecting athletic, recreation, and open space areas; prepare a bikeway plan that connects public spaces and addresses roadside and off-road bikeway trails; assess feasibility of new community recreation facilities.
- **Sense of Community:** Prepare village plans for North Conway Village, Conway Village, and Center Conway Village that identify infrastructure and aesthetic improvements and design standards.
- **Land Use:** Revise land use regulations to support the goals and policies of the Master Plan; consider performance-based zoning; consider zoning incentives such as density bonuses; revise zoning district boundaries; develop regulations specific to distinct areas of the Town (village and non-village areas); promote land conservation.

Chapter 3: Population and Housing

This chapter provides an overview of population trends and housing needs in Conway in the decades leading up to 2003.

Key Findings and Implications for the Master Plan Update

- The Chapter presents several anticipated implications of Conway's population and housing trends at the time, including:
 - An aging population and associated changes in demands for municipal services;
 - Providing an increased level of municipal services due to influxes of tourists, seasonal residents and the Town's role as a regional service hub;
 - Increasing demand for housing and a small supply of lower-priced units. The Plan states that "*failure to adopt measures that encourage the future development of affordable housing could constrict the availability of labor that might in turn negatively impact local economic activities.*"

Chapter 4: Economic Conditions

This chapter provides an overview of economic trends in Conway in the decades leading up to 2003.

Key Findings and Implications for the Master Plan Update

- Despite a strong local economy, there were concerns in the early 2000's over the lack of economic diversification, with 92% of jobs being service- or trade-related.
- In the early 2000's, approximately half of jobs in Conway were filled by residents of other communities, with 35% of workers commuting to Conway from outside the Mount Washington Valley. This reflects Conway's role as a regional service and employment hub,

but also is indicative of a lack of housing options that are affordable for the town's workforce.

- According to the Master Plan, there is a strong tradition of entrepreneurship in the Mount Washington Valley that significantly contributes to economic development in the region.

Chapter 5: Natural Resources

This chapter provides an overview of natural resources in Conway in the decades leading up to 2003.

Key Findings and Implications for the Master Plan Update

- There are significant water resources located in Conway, with 71 water bodies, 1,400 acres of surface waters, and 289 mapped wetland areas.
- Protection of water resources is a local priority. The Town's municipal water supply is entirely groundwater using several local aquifers. Surface waters provide important habitat as well as recreational opportunities that support the tourism economy and resident quality of life.
- The steep terrain of the Mountain Washington Valley and high concentration of river and streams results in periodic flooding in Conway. Steep slopes also constrain lands available for development.
- In the early 2000's, there were approximately 8,610 acres of conserved lands in Conway, with most protected land being located in northern Conway within the Mountain Conservation zoning district.
- In the early 2000's, there were 132 sites in Conway there were either contaminated with hazardous materials or tagged for potential contamination monitoring; most of these sites involved underground storage or heating oil tanks.
- The Chapter presents several planning implications of Conway's natural resources, including:
 - Permanent protection of environmentally-significant lands is needed, as the local economy and quality of life is strongly associated with abundant and accessible environmental features.
 - Wetland protection policies are needed, as the abundance of steep slopes in Conway increases development pressure on flat wetland areas.
 - Groundwater resources will need protections from future development pressure.

Chapter 6: Recreation

This chapter provides an overview of recreational resources in Conway in the decades leading up to 2003. The Chapter was updated in 2014.

Key Findings and Implications for the Master Plan Update

- Conway is "rich" with recreational resources and programming, which is supported by a number of public, private, and non-profit agencies. There were over 30 managed recreation facilities in Conway in the early 2000's.
- The Town should improve coordination with local schools and other organizations for recreational resources and programs.
- The Town was lacking an integrated greenway and multi-purpose trail system. This was seen as the Town's only major recreation deficiency. In addition to a master plan for trail development, the Town should also consider amending regulations to facilitate trail system development.
 - Note: the Town prepared a Trails Master Plan in 2016 to develop a vision and implementation strategy for an integrated trail system.

Chapter 6-A: Trails Plan

The Town developed a Trails Plan and incorporated it into the Master Plan in 2016. The goal of the Trails Plan is to promote and facilitate the development of trail system that is used for recreation and non-motorized transportation, including snowmobiling in the winter months. The Plan includes a goal of “creating a coordinated trail system linking Conway’s housing, shopping, education, medical, recreation, and government resources” by 2025. The Plan also includes objectives around improving pedestrian and bicycle travel on or along roadways.

Key Findings and Implications for the Master Plan Update

- The Plan includes recommendations for revising subdivision and site plan regulations to mandate and/or incentivize trail connections in new developments. Recommended provisions include mandating sidewalks along all roads (unless a suitable alternative is identified) as well as trail design standards.
- The Plan includes recommendations for an inventory of pedestrian, cycling, and recreational resources, future public engagement, and additional planning work to designate bike routes on the existing road network.
- The Plan does not include any specific proposed pedestrian and bicycle facilities, trails, or safety improvements.

Chapter 7: Transportation Assessment

This chapter provides an overview of the transportation system in Conway in the decades leading up to 2003. Information on both the local and regional transportation system is provided.

Key Findings and Implications for the Master Plan Update

- Multiple state and federal highways converge in Conway (US 302, NH 16, NH 112, NH 113 NH 153). As a result, Conway experiences high daily traffic volumes, as well as additional seasonal peaks associated with tourist traffic.
- In the early 2000's there were minimal public transportation options in Conway, and service levels had recently declined. Public transportation services including daily intercity bus service and independent human service programs.
- There were not major rail operations in Conway in the early 2000's, other than the Conway Scenic Railroad. Both regional rail connections (Maine Central and Boston & Maine) are not in active use. The Eastern Slope Regional Airport in Fryeburg, ME provides limited regional air service.
- The Town maintains a significant local road network (82 miles as of 2003). There 665 total public parking spaces, mostly in North Conway Village, with noted increases in demand at the time.
- Sidewalk networks were mostly confined to North Conway Village and Conway Village.
- In the early 2000's, there were two major road construction projects being considered in Conway: the North-South Rd and the Conway Bypass. The North-South Rd was intended to serve as a local bypass of NH 16 from Redstone to North Conway Village and was constructed in 2007. The Conway Bypass was intended to be an 11-mile re-route of NH 16 around Conway Village and North Conway Village – this project was officially dissolved by the NH Department of Transportation in 2020 primarily due to cost.
 - The Chapter includes several issues related to the construction of the North-South Rd, including careful monitoring of traffic at the northern terminus (Kearsarge Rd/Mechanic St), corridor access management, and use by pedestrians and bicyclists.
- The Chapter includes a recommendation to reconsider local road design standards to be more context-specific.
- The Chapter includes a goal to keep regional traffic flowing “slow and steady” to minimize traffic delays while limiting impacts of high-speed traffic on the community.

Chapter 8: Municipal Services and Infrastructure

This chapter provides an overview of municipal services and infrastructure in Conway in the decades leading up to 2003, including the Town Hall, first responder services, libraries, public works, and schools. Information on both the local and regional transportation system is provided.

Key Findings and Implications for the Master Plan Update

- This Chapter includes detailed information about the condition of municipal facilities and infrastructure as of the early 2000's, some or all of which may no longer be relevant.
- At the time of Plan writing, the Town Hall was condition but lacking adequate storage and office space. Fire District/Precinct facilities were in good condition with the exception of the East Conway Precinct fire station. All Conway School District schools were at or above enrollment capacity (except for the Pine Tree Elementary School) with many needed renovations and upgrades. The Conway Recreation Center needed upgrades.
- At the time of Plan writing, there were recently completed public water and sewer master plans for the North Conway Water Precinct (NCWP) and Conway Village Fire District (CVFD). Priorities at the time included connecting the CVFD water treatment and distribution system to the NCWP system, which necessitate upgrading existing infrastructure and constructing new pump stations and wastewater collection systems.
- The Chapter presents several planning implications for Conway's municipal facilities and infrastructure, including:
 - The continued growth of the Conway School District and strain on educational facilities;
 - The need for shared service/equipment agreements between various municipal districts and precincts, particularly fire districts;
 - Educating residents on the benefits of the proposed NCWP and CVFD interconnection.

Chapter 9: Land Use and Community Design Features

This chapter examines land uses, potential future build-out, and existing community design features and aesthetics as of 2003.

Key Findings and Implications for the Master Plan Update

- As of 2002, the majority of land in Conway was undeveloped. Undeveloped properties accounted for 57% of land area in the Town. Approximately one-quarter (24%) of land in the Town was used for residential purposes, and commercial land uses accounted for 5% of land area.
- The Chapter includes recommended design improvements, including improved lighting standards to reduce light pollution, protecting ridgeline development at lower elevations, reevaluating current sign regulations, developing a streetscape master plan, revising community design guidelines to reflect the individual character of different village areas and corridors, and considering the development of a municipal campus near the police station.
- The Chapter presents several planning implications for Conway's municipal facilities and infrastructure, including:
 - Balancing anticipated population and commercial growth with preserving undeveloped land;
 - Maintaining community character through future residential and commercial development.

Our Homes: North Country Regional Housing Needs Assessment (Partial Draft, January 2023)

Our Homes is the official Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) for northern New Hampshire, prepared by North Country Council Regional Planning Commission (NCC). A draft of the RHNA was released in January 2023, and an updated draft is anticipated in the coming months. New Hampshire regional planning commissions are required by state law to produce an updated RHNA every five years. The geographic scope of the RHNA includes all of Coos County, northern Grafton County, and northern Carroll County, including Conway and the Mount Washington Valley.

While Conway is not currently a member municipality of NCC, the provisions of the RHNA apply to the town in several important ways:

- The RHNA includes pertinent data and recommendations related to housing needs in Conway and the Mount Washington Valley.
- The RHNA provides a legal basis for evaluating compliance with New Hampshire workforce housing law (RSA 674:58-61). The statute requires municipalities to provide reasonable opportunities for the development of workforce housing and contribute its “fair share” of workforce housing towards regional targets.¹
- The RHNA includes a required Fair Housing Equity Assessment that examines barriers to affordable and equitable housing choices.

Key Findings, Themes, and Recommendations

- Much of the data presented in the plan is for the 50-town NCC planning region. Key findings with implications for Conway include:
 - The population of the region is projected to increase through 2035, and decline back to 2020 levels by 2050, which complicates projections of future housing supply and needs.
 - The population of the region is aging, with implications for household sizes, housing design, labor force availability, and school enrollment numbers.
 - Housing costs are affecting large swaths of the population. The percentage of moderate- and higher-income households that are cost-burdened (paying over 30% of household income towards housing costs) has increased significantly in recent years.
 - There is a significant shortage of rental units that are for very low income households (those making less than 30% of area median income).
- Additional findings specific to Carroll County, the Mount Washington Valley, and Conway include:
 - To achieve a healthy 5% rental vacancy rate and 2% ownership vacancy rate by 2025, there would need to be 336 new rental units and 804 ownership units constructed in Carroll County. This includes 79 new rental units and 163 new owner-occupied units in Conway.
 - To help ensure market stability through 2040, Conway would need to add 191 new rental units and 384 new owner-occupied units.
 - To meet regional needs for workforce housing by 2040 in the greater Conway labor market area, there would need to be 129 units affordable to renters making less than 60% of area median income (AMI) and 441 owner-occupied units affordable to households making less than 100% of AMI. To meet the regional “fair share” target, Conway would need to provide approximately 45% of these units.

¹ For more information on New Hampshire’s workforce housing law, consult the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority’s fact sheet: https://www.nhhfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NH_Workforce_Housing_Law_Summary.pdf

- To meet local and regional needs for housing, municipalities and partner organizations will need employ a variety of strategies and tools, including revising land use regulations, invest in municipal water and sewer infrastructure, building out the region's broadband network, expanding childcare options, address home health issues such as lead paint and radon, ensure accessibility for residents with limited mobility and other disabilities, and address complaints of housing discrimination within the region.
- At the time of writing, the New Hampshire Regional Planning Commissions are working collaboratively to develop a statewide housing needs toolkit that will include additional strategies and recommendations.

Implications for the Master Plan Update

The previous town Master Plan included significant objectives and recommendations for addressing housing needs in Conway. The findings included in the RHNA confirm that housing is still a significant challenge in Conway and the broader region. The final RHNA should serve as a useful reference for defining and quantifying the housing challenge in Conway throughout the master planning process and will eventually present detailed strategies and policy recommendations that the Town can consider incorporating into the Master Plan. In particular, the various housing needs targets included in the RHNA can be used to evaluate the need for, and impact of, various implementation strategies, such as zoning changes and water and wastewater infrastructure expansions. In accordance with state workforce housing law, the planning process should also factor in current and projected workforce housing needs and strategies to meet regional "fair share" targets. Lastly, the RHNA can inform considerations around current workforce commuting patterns, and how housing availability impacts commute times, transportation needs, and traffic impacts in the region.

North Country Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS): 2023-2028 (DRAFT)

Conway is included in the North Country Council Economic Development District (EDD), a federal designation that qualifies the region for additional support and funding opportunities from the US Economic Development Administration (EDA). The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is developed by EDD staff (in this case, North Country Council) and a regional CEDS Committee to provide a "roadmap for resilient economic development" and identify priorities for (and access to) EDA funding programs. The CEDS vision statement is "*the region values its people, landscape, unique places, and regional collaboration while supporting a resilient, inclusive, and caring economy that can withstand, adapt, innovate, and transform to meet present and future needs.*"

Key Findings, Themes, and Recommendations

- The CEDS recommends a "triple bottom line" approach to economic development – balancing People, Planet, and Profit.
- The CEDS focuses on different forms of "community capital" to support long-term and equitable wealth creation in rural communities. This broadens the typical definition of capital (financial) to recognize that there are other economic development assets in the region. Examples include natural capital (i.e., land and water), social capital (i.e., networks and relationships), and cultural capital (i.e., traditions and customs).
- The CEDS highlights a number of themes that cut across different economic sectors and associated economic development strategies. Overall, there is a strong focus on collaboration, leveraging shared community assets, investing in key supporting infrastructure and services (e.g., housing, childcare, transportation, water and wastewater, conservation), promoting a balanced and diversified regional economy, investing in

innovation, education, and workforce development, and emphasizing the region's cultural and quality of life.

- Retaining skilled workers, improved communications infrastructure, and an adequate supply of homes that are affordable are economic development needs that cut across all top regional industries.
- Natural assets (lakes, mountains, trails, etc) are one of the region's strongest assets, but could be at risk of being "overcapitalized" from high use levels and development.
- Socioeconomic challenges include a decline in the working age population and increasing senior population (most notably in Carroll County), poverty rates that exceed the rest of New Hampshire, and housing cost burden.
- There are notable regional industry clusters in Carroll County for hospitality, leather products, and metalworking.
- The CEDS includes a detailed SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis for the region's finances, markets, people, places, and land uses.

Implications for the Master Plan Update

The CEDS provides a useful blueprint for considering the next era of economic development in Conway. By considering the different forms of "community capital" and shared economic assets in Conway, the Master Plan process can help identify economic development objectives and strategies that promote long-term and equitable wealth creation in a way that builds community strength. This can help the Town establish priorities for future commercial development, as well as community facilities, programs, and partnerships. Additionally, the Town should consider how local economic development priorities align with the CEDS, which could have implications for eligibility for future EDA grant programs.

North Country Council Regional Transportation Plan (2023)

North Country Council Regional Planning Commission prepares and maintains a *Regional Transportation Plan*, an advisory plan that documents regional transportation conditions, needs, and priorities for maintenance and improvement projects. The *Regional Transportation Plan* informs which transportation infrastructure projects in the region are prioritized the state *Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Plan* ("Ten-Year Plan") and other federal grant funding sources. The current *Regional Transportation Plan* is from 2015; an updated plan is anticipated in winter 2023. This memorandum will be revised to include a summary of the update once it is released.