



City of Auburn, Maine

Economic & Community
Development

60 Court Street | Auburn, Maine
04210 www.auburnmaine.gov |
207.333.6601

To: Auburn Planning Board
From: Megan Norwood, City Planner II
Re: Comprehensive Plan discussion
Date: August 11, 2020

I. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OVERVIEW – A Comprehensive Plan is the adopted official binding document that addresses a broad range of topics in a unified way. The plan analyzes conditions and trends; sets forth goals, policies and strategies; describes and illustrates a vision for the physical, social and economic characteristics of a municipality; and outlines policies and guidelines intended to implement that vision. The plan serves as a guide for decisions the City must make about growth, development, redevelopment and change over a 10-20 year period. It was last updated with a full rewrite in 2010 and a new update is soon to be underway.

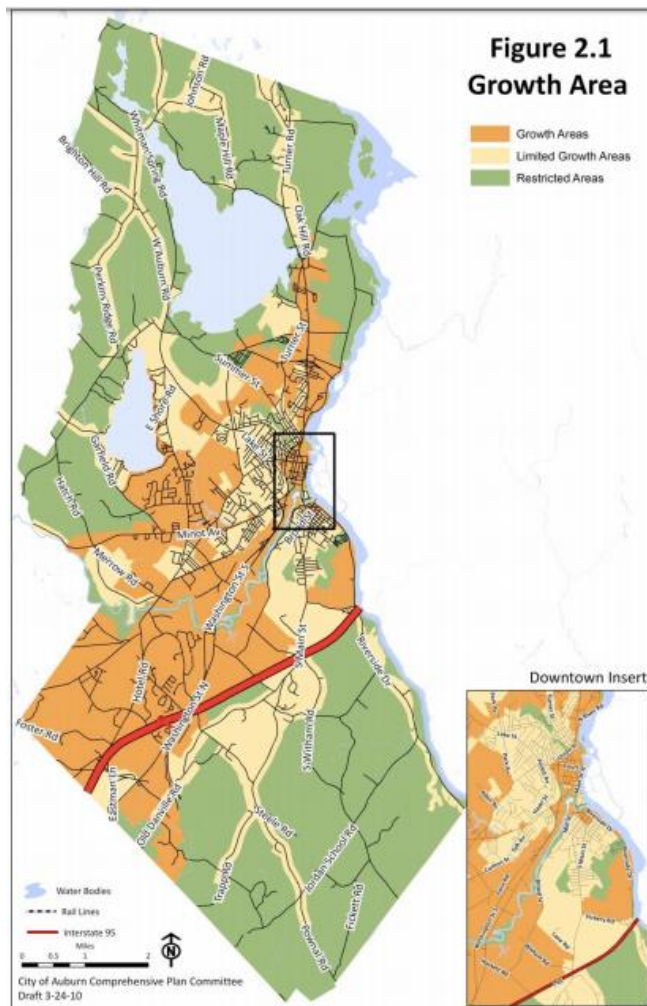
The comprehensive planning process provides a chance to look at programs including housing, economic development, public infrastructure and services, natural resources, demographics, local history, recreation, and land use. One of the most important functions of a comprehensive plan is to offer guidance to those in the public and private sector as decisions are made affecting the quality of life of current and future residents, business owners and visitors and the natural and built environment in which they live, work, shop, recreate, and enjoy.

The Plan is split into three working parts: Policy recommendations, actions needed to achieve the policies proposed and background information. The portion of the Comprehensive Plan that the Planning Board is most focused on is the Future Land Use Plan (FLUP). The FLUP is an overall view that serves as a guide for future land use policies and ordinances in the City. While it is not a formal zoning ordinance or map, it is used as the basis for creation of new zoning ordinances and maps. For this reason, the FLUP is one of the most important parts and most used sections of the entire Comprehensive Plan. It is also the section where the Planning Board can contribute the most. The plan should be a flexible document that is adjusted over time to respond to new challenges or opportunities.

II. FUTURE LAND USE PLAN & MAP – The FLUP (Chapter 2) starts on Page 73 of your Comprehensive Plan. It organizes the City into three distinct areas: Growth Areas (Orange on the Map)– Areas where the City wants growth and redevelopment to occur, the anticipation being that most residential and non-redevelopment over the next 10 years occurs in these areas. The City is required to designate growth areas to ensure planned growth, development and related infrastructure are directed to areas most suitable for such growth and development.

The State has review process for all Comprehensive Plan updates and the plans must be found to be consistent with the States requirements. For a portion of the City to be designated as a growth area, it has to be consistent with the following:

1. Lands where the City intends to direct a minimum of 75% of dollars for growth-related capital investment over the next 10 yrs. Think of new public infrastructure such as sewer, roads, sidewalks, drainage.



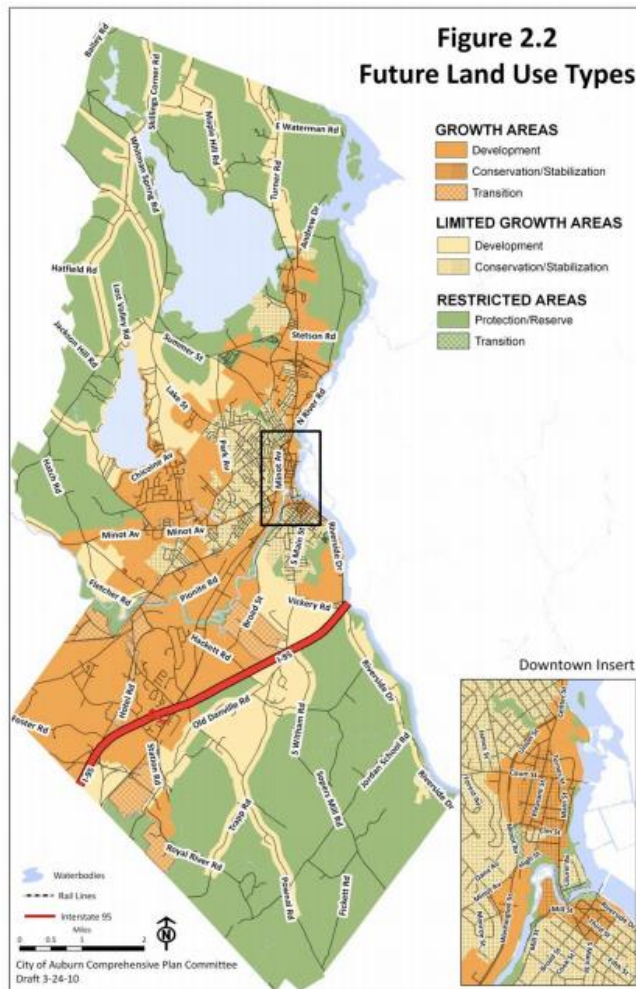
2. Developed areas that may not have capacity for further growth but require maintenance, replacement or additional capital investment to support existing and infill development.
3. Land areas that must be physically suitable for development or redevelopment. This includes ability to provide proper sewage and water service as well access to the transportation network. This is especially the case for growth areas that have no public sewer or water and where none is planned over the next 10 yrs.
4. Should be located adjacent to existing densely populated areas.
5. Limited to an amount of land area to encourage compact, efficient development patterns and discourage sprawl and strip development.
6. Areas along roads should be configured to avoid strip development and promote nodes/clusters of development.

Limited Growth Areas (Yellow)– Areas that are either essentially fully developed and have limited development potential or areas that have vacant and under-utilized land where the City wants a limited amount of growth and development over the next 10-years.

Restricted Areas (Green) – Areas that are either unsuitable for development or areas where the City wants to see little or no growth and development over the next 10-years. These are also considered rural areas. The designation of rural areas is intended to identify areas deserving some level of regulatory protection from unrestricted development for purposes that support agriculture, forestry, open space, wildlife habitat, scenic lands, and away from development projected over 10 years. To meet the State requirements, designated rural areas must be consistent with the following:

1. Areas that include working farms, wood lots, critical natural resources, important natural resources, properties in tax programs associated with forestry, farming, open space.
2. Identify proposed mechanisms (regulatory and non-regulatory) to ensure that the type of development in the rural area is compatible with the rural character and does not encourage strip development along roads.
3. Compatible with designations in adjacent towns or provide buffers or transitions to avoid land use conflicts with neighboring communities (e.g. portions of Durham, New Gloucester, Turner, Greene, Minot, Lewiston,
4. Rural areas shall not include land areas where the town is actively encouraging new residential, commercial and institutional development.

The restricted areas also include areas of critical natural resources (referred to as Conservation/Open Space/Resource Protection in the FLUP). The City is also required to designate these areas. The designation of critical natural resource areas is intended to protect natural resources from the impacts of incompatible development. The FLUP must distinguish between where those resources are present and where they are absent. The FLUP must include a description of proposed regulations (including ongoing local, state, fed) and non-regulatory measures designed to ensure these resources are protected from impacts of incompatible development. Critical natural resources include ocean, wetlands, rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, agriculture land, forests. The goals, policies and strategies of the Comprehensive Plan all consider the location of these resources and establish growth goals that recognize them.



These three areas: Growth, Limited Growth and Restricted speak generally to where development should and should not occur in the City but the Comprehensive Plan breaks it down even further into 4 specific types of areas based on the character of the area and the way development should (or should not) occur (Pg. 76):

Development Areas: Areas with a significant amount of vacant or underutilized land that are capable of supporting new residential or nonresidential development.

Transition, Reuse, Redevelopment Areas: Developed areas where the City wants to encourage the type of use and/or pattern of development to change over time.

Conservation/Stabilization Areas: Areas where the City's policy is to maintain and enhance the current type and pattern of development.

Protection/Reserve Areas: Largely undeveloped areas that should remain undeveloped for at least the next 10 years.

Within each of the categories above are designations for residential and non-residential/mixed land uses. There is a Future Land Use Map available as a feature on the online GIS where the Planning Board can see each of these areas. Starting on Page. 85, the Comprehensive Plan has the specific Future Land Use Designations, objectives for each, suggested allowed uses and development standards/densities for the uses. **This is where the Planning Board review process really comes into play.** One important point to reiterate is that the Future Land Use Map was not intended to be used at a parcel scale. It is intended to provide a general overview of what an area should look like and is purposefully vague in where the lines are drawn. In fact, in some

communities the lines on the Future Land Use map are blurred where two districts intersect to make it obvious that the lines are not intended to be interpreted at a parcel level.

As discussed previously, the Future Land Use Plan is NOT a zoning map. It is intended to show, in a general sense, the desired pattern of future land use and development. The boundaries shown on the Future Land Use Map are general. They are intended to reflect the general pattern of desired future land use. The allowed uses and development standards set out for each land use designation are intended to serve as guidelines as the zoning ordinance is reviewed and revised. While the density listed in the Comprehensive Plan may be a guide for how the Zoning Ordinance should be reviewed and revised, the ordinance has not yet been amended and there is a often times a discrepancy between the two, which can pose problems for the Planning Board during project reviews.

III. HOW DOES THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPACT PB DECISIONS –

Section 60-1359(9) of the Subdivision Review Guidelines requires the Planning Board to find that a project is in conformance with a duly adopted subdivision regulation or ordinance, **comprehensive plan**, development plan, or land use plan, if any. So what does it mean to be “in conformance” with the Comprehensive Plan?

When the Planning Board looks at a general area for a project under review, there are both the current Zoning Designation and the recommended Future Land Use Designation to consider. During a recent project review, the Planning Board was tasked with reviewing a residential development project in which the current Zoning Designation was General Business (allowing for 17 residential units per acre) and the Future Land Use Designation was Limited Commercial (allowing for 10-12 residential units per acre). Since a comprehensive rezoning was not completed after the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Board is tasked with finding that projects be in compliance with two conflicting density recommendations/standards.

The Comprehensive Plan has a number of moving parts to consider when making a decision, while it may recommend that a residential density be allowed at 10-12 units per acre, it also makes recommendations that the City explore the use of other measures of development intensity beyond the a maximum density of dwelling units. This gives the Planning Board some flexibility to consider if an alternative measure of development intensity is more appropriate to reflect the impacts of a proposed development.

Below are some suggested questions to ask as the Planning Board goes through the process of determining if a project is in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan. The list is a start and Staff recommends the Planning Board refine it as projects are reviewed and specific questions come up about how they conform to the Comprehensive Plan. There is usually a paragraph or two in the Staff Reports provided to the Planning Board regarding a projects conformance with the Comprehensive Plan, going through a guided process of answering questions to determine conformance will make the process more consistent and streamlined for all projects under review.

- 1. What type of area is the project located in according to the Future Land Use Map?**
 - a. Growth Area?
 - b. Limited Growth Area?
 - c. Restricted or Non-Growth Area?
- 2. Based on the character of the area and the Future Land Use Plan, how should development occur/not occur in this area?**
 - a. Development Area?
 - b. Transition/Reuse/Redevelopment Area?

- c. Conservation/Stabilization Area?
- d. Protection/Reserve Area?
- 3. **For residential uses, what is the suggested residential density category?**
 - a. Low Density?
 - b. Low/Moderate Density?
 - c. Moderate Density?
 - d. Medium Density?
 - e. High Density?
- 4. **Is the development located in an area where an alternative measure for development is appropriate? If so, what would that look like?** For residential uses, the Comprehensive Plan suggests that the City explore the use of other measures of development intensity (beyond maximum density in terms of dwelling units) when reviewing zoning requirements, if those alternative measures better reflect the intensity and impacts of a development. Alternative measures suggested: Floor area or Floor Area Ratio, number of vehicle trips, or the number of bedrooms.
- 5. **Is the project generally aligned with the objectives, allowed uses and development standards of the Future Land Use Designation it is located in?**
 - a. Keep in mind that the objectives often times go beyond simply explaining what an area should look like. They also may consider potential impact to road networks, infrastructure and public utilities.
- 6. **Is the project aligned with the overall vision set forth for the City of Auburn?**
 - a. For urban housing, the vision includes providing quality-housing options that include both mixed-income, multi-unit and single family developments which serve residents of all ages and incomes which are designed with infrastructure that enhances neighborhood connectivity.
 - b. For rural housing, the vision includes maintaining the rural and open-space character by limiting growth while continuing to allow low density development set back from the roadways.
 - c. There are also other visions that play a role in Planning Board decisions including *physical recreation* – maintaining and enhancing access to open space and recreational facilities, *cultural impacts* – providing a rich diversity of cultural activities with a focus on multi-use community space – will a project include anything like this? *Economic impacts* – fostering a strong, diverse economy with a focus on high quality, well paying, and skilled job opportunities – will a project increase job opportunities in the City? *Natural Resource impacts* – will a project protect rivers/lakes in Auburn while also allowing public access to them?
- 7. **Is the project aligned with the major policy directions incorporated into the land use designations?**
 - a. For Rural Areas this includes continuing to protect undeveloped rural areas such as North River Road, the Lake Auburn and Taylor Pond watersheds, and South Auburn from development. Continuing to allow low-density residential development along some rural roads in accordance with defined criteria. Allowing flexibility for where and how rural residential development occurs to minimize its impact on the rural character and agricultural uses.
 - b. For Residential areas this includes allowing new residential development at varying densities on the fringe of the built-up area where municipal services and utilities can be provided. Allowing infill development and redevelopment in established residential neighborhoods that is compatible with existing development patterns and densities. Encourage reinvestment in older higher density residential neighborhoods by allowing full utilization of existing buildings and flexible parking requirements. Expand the ability to create an

“accessory apartment” in existing single-family homes. Consider using “density-based” requirements for residential development in development districts rather than the current lot size requirements. Expand the ability to create residential uses in downtown neighborhoods.

- c. For Commercial/Mixed Use areas this includes requiring “better quality design” for new commercial development. Continuing to promote development/redevelopment/reuse in in-town areas that reinforces the traditional development pattern and increases pedestrian use. Establishing a “Village Center” in New Auburn to promote reinvestment in that area. Designating the Stetson Road area east of Route 4 for business/office park development. Allowing the reuse of a portion of the Garcelon pits for high quality business park development done in a manner that protects Lake Auburn. Allowing the development of the Delekto farm as a mixed-use planned development, done in a manner that creates an attractive gateway to New Auburn and the City. Continuing to focus larger-scale retail development in the Mall/Center Street/Union Street area and the Minot Avenue corridor. Identifying transition areas that are appropriate for the orderly conversion to commercial use in the future. Upgrading the gateways to the downtown area. Allowing mixed-use occupancy in older neighborhoods adjacent to downtown Auburn and New Auburn while maintaining the residential character of these areas
- d. For Industrial areas this includes continuing to focus near-term industrial growth on the Exit 75/Airport/Intermodal Center area. Reserving land in the Hackett/Witham Road area of New Auburn for future industrial/business park development. Allowing the transition of the pit areas in Danville to industrial use over time. Identifying other transition areas that are appropriate for the orderly conversion to industrial use in the future.
- e. For Resource Protection/Open Space areas this includes protecting significant resources along the rivers, streams and high value wetlands in a Resource Protection designation. Designating land preserved as conservation land/open space. Expanding access to the rivers by creating a Riverfront Transition designation around the confluence of the Androscoggin and Little Androscoggin Rivers.

The Comprehensive Plan lays out goals and strategies to achieve each of these overall objectives on Pages 3 through 72. Depending on the type of project under review, Staff can pull out the specific goals and strategies for that area/type of project and provide them in the Staff Report that is provided to the Planning Board. If the Planning Board can find that a project meets most if not all of the items above, it should be considered to be in general conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS – This Staff Report is intended to provide a general overview of what the Comprehensive Plan is and what role it plays in the decision making process of the Planning Board. As the update process gets underway, the Planning Board will have a role in making recommendations to the City Council on areas of the Comprehensive Plan that warrant some further consideration, review and updating. In a recent correspondence to the City Council, the Planning Board requested involvement in the update process. Staff has provided some recommended items for the City Council to consider based on language in the Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Plan:

1. Future Land Use Map – Potential Turnpike Exit near 136 and/or South Main Street.

2. Future Land Use Map – Industrial Transition Zone near Broad and South Witham Road.
Council, ^{[[L]]}_{SEP} Planning Board and Staff and Landowners have considered this as a potential residential growth area ^{[[L]]}_{SEP} that would require less infrastructure than an industrial change. Easy Turnpike access from Exit 75.
3. Future Land Use Map – Consider expanded Downtown form-based code to reduce setbacks and density limitations in urban neighborhoods. Ensure consistency with existing development patterns or forge ^{[[L]]}_{SEP} new direction in certain areas.
4. Recreation and River Access. Review status, identify opportunities, needs and update implementation ^{[[L]]}_{SEP} plans. Include recreation open space priorities, resources access and policy towards subdivision ^{[[L]]}_{SEP} requirements that currently pose a challenge to urban developments.
5. Future Land Use Map – Downtown. Review current tasks, progress to date and adjust policy as needed ^{[[L]]}_{SEP} with a focus on walkability, livability and economic expansion opportunities.

Staff recommends the Planning Board take a look at the suggested questions to ask during the project review process to determine conformance with the Comprehensive Plan and make recommendations on how the Board sees those questions fitting into the decision-making process. Staff will plan to include the questions and responses in the Staff Report to help make the process more streamlined for projects under review where a Comprehensive Plan conformance determination has to be made.

The Planning Board should also begin working on a list of priority items that the board feels should be considered during the Comprehensive Plan update process.