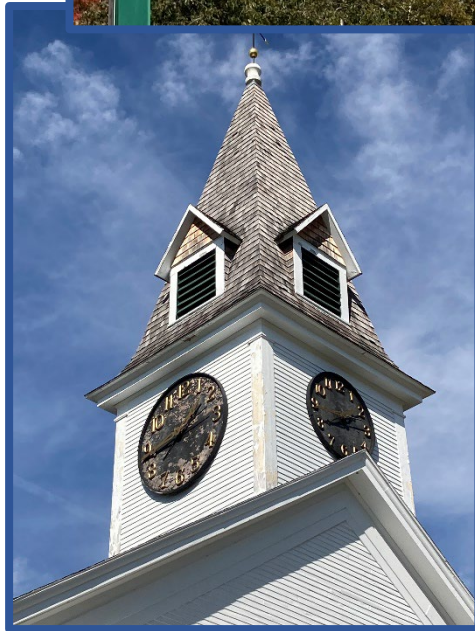


# Sugar Hill, New Hampshire



## 2025 Master Plan



Sugar Hill, New Hampshire

2025 Master Plan

Adopted June 4, 2025

Developed by the Sugar Hill Planning Board  
with the assistance of  
Community Planning Consultant Tara Bamford





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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction to Sugar Hill

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### A Snapshot

Sugar Hill is a town in Grafton County, New Hampshire. According to the US Census Bureau, the town has a total area of 17.2 square miles, of which 17.0 square miles is land and 0.2 square miles is water. Sugar Hill is drained by the Gale River and other tributaries of the Ammonoosuc River. The town is crossed by New Hampshire Route 117. Interstate 93 and New Hampshire Route 18 pass through the northeast corner of the town. The highest point in town is the summit of Bronson Hill, at 2,078 feet above sea level.

Sugar Hill is home to about 647 people (2020 US Census). Both year-round and seasonal homes are scattered amongst fields and forest, many with views of the Presidential, Franconia, Kinsman and Dalton ranges in the nearby White Mountain National Forest.

### History

Sugar Hill was part of the 1768 charter of Gunthwaite, which was renamed Lisbon in 1824. Though settled about 1789, this town is New Hampshire's second youngest, having incorporated in 1962 (Hart's Location in Carroll County incorporated as a town in 2001). After considerable litigation, it was carved out of Lisbon to be an independent voting unit. The name Sugar Hill comes from a large grove of sugar maples in the hills.

With clean air and panoramic views of both the White Mountains and Green Mountains from atop Sunset Hill Ridge, the community became a fashionable Victorian resort.

First attracted by paintings of White Mountain artists, the wealthy arrived by train to escape the heat, humidity and pollution of summers in Boston, Hartford, New York and Philadelphia. Several hostelryes were built, including the Hotel Lookoff. The grandest was the Sunset Hill



*The Sunset Hill House, Sugar Hill, NH; from a c. 1910*

House, built in 1880 after rail service arrived in neighboring Lisbon Village (Sunset Hill Station).

With the longest porch on a single side in New Hampshire, the Second Empire hotel accommodated 350 guests and 300 staff. Patrons found amusement in the casino, bowling alley, or on carriage rides touring nearby Franconia Notch. Built in 1897, the 9-hole Sugar Hill House Golf Course, together with its 1900 clubhouse, is the oldest in the state and now listed on the National Register. Bobby Jones played the links.

With the advent of automobiles came a decline in the grand hotels, as tourists were no longer restricted by the limits of rail service. The Sunset Hill House remained open until 1973, longer than many of its type in the region. It closed at season's end, when the furnishings were sold at auction. The aging structure was demolished in 1974, although its annex survived and now operates as an inn of the same name.



The first resort-based ski school in the U.S. was opened at Sugar Hill in 1929 by Katharine "Kate" Peckett with Austrian ski instructor Sig Buchmayer, both important figures in the history of skiing. The same year, organized ski trains from Boston began running to the White Mountains.

### Sugar Hill Today

Community involvement in current local issues is strong. Improvements to our community roads, bridges and recreation areas continue to be planned and executed as needed with careful management of our limited municipal budget and the active participation of community-based organizations such as the Sugar Hill Improvement Association, the Sugar Hill Historical Museum and the Sugar Hill Willing Workers group. Sugar Hill Improvement Association paid for the children's playground behind the Carolina Crapo Memorial Building (Town Hall) with a lovely gazebo, picnic table and chairs; the basketball half court and the benches that grace the lawn of the Carolina Crapo Memorial Building and the Meeting House.

The Sugar Hill Improvement Association has also taken the Sugar Hill Meeting House under its wing making major updates to the building. Great pride is taken in providing for amenities not funded through the tax base for the benefit of the community at large. In addition, the locally-founded Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust is continuing their program of acquiring and preserving our natural lands for the benefit of all.

## 1.2 The Master Plan

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### Purpose

The Master Plan is a guidance document developed and updated periodically by the Planning Board with input from the community about current and future development-related issues. This plan represents a comprehensive update of the 2014 Master Plan. The plan contains the Planning Board's recommendations, based on what we've heard from the community, on how Sugar Hill can best maintain the special character of the town while meeting the needs of current and future residents. The Master Plan provides the foundation for future activities of the Planning Board such as proposed amendments to the Sugar Hill Zoning Ordinance and review of subdivisions and site plans, as well as for other town initiatives.

### Survey

In July 2023 a survey was conducted to check in with the community and see if there were any significant changes to goals and desires since the 2014 Master Plan. The survey focused on the general priorities of local residents, landowners and businesses, and provided the opportunity to weigh in on some specific issues the Town was considering addressing in the near-term. The survey was available on-line via Survey Monkey and postcards containing the link were mailed to every address with a Sugar Hill zip code and to every out-of-town property-owner address. Paper copies were also offered at the Town Office. A total of 197 responses were received – 188 on-line and 9 paper. Of the 197 responses, 102 reported that they vote in Sugar Hill. The voter checklist included 498 registered voters in town. This means the response rate for voters was just over 20%.

The report containing the complete results for certain survey questions and summary data for open-ended questions is included as Appendix A. Some of the highlights that guided the master plan update are summarized here.

***Most Valued Qualities of Sugar Hill***

When asked “What do you like best about Sugar Hill?”, the responses received were largely in these categories:

- Scenic beauty and views
- Quiet and peaceful
- Community spirit, close community or sense of community
- The people that comprise the community, such as friendly or welcoming
- Small town
- Rural character
- “Quaint,” bucolic,” “classic New England village,” or “country living”
- Not commercial/no large developments/not much development
- Low population
- Safety
- Access to outdoor recreation
- Nature

A substantial number of respondents also provided positive comments about the way the town is run, the people involved and the services provided.

***Room for Improvement***

When asked “What would make Sugar Hill even better?”, many respondents mentioned:

- Road condition
- High speed internet
- More housing that is affordable, including for workers and to bring more young people to town
- Concern for Streeter Pond, specifically the vegetation around and in the pond
- Concern about speeding, including lack of enforcement and the speed limits
- Need for better cell phone service/coverage
- Concern about taxes
- Preserving views/vistas, including by controlling ridgeline development
- More conservation land

***Support for Environmental Protection***

When asked about planning and zoning tools to manage the siting and impacts of development to protect our natural resources, clean environment and scenic beauty, the majority supported all of the following:

- Enable more flexibility in the layout of proposed subdivisions to reduce their impact on important resources
- Require vegetated buffers to be left along rivers, ponds and brooks to protect water quality and fish habitat
- Restrict filling and draining of wetlands
- Restrict development close to wetlands when there is another option on the lot
- Restrict building in floodplains when there is another option on the lot

***Housing Choices***

When asked about the types of homes respondents would support making it easier to build in Sugar Hill to help with the shortage of housing for the area's workforce, young families, and seniors wishing to downsize, the two options favored by the majority were:

- Accessory dwelling units (smaller home or apartment on same property)
- Small or moderate sized homes clustered together

***Other Issues***

Other changes the majority of respondents supported:

- Strengthening outdoor lighting regulations in the zoning ordinance
- Regulating short-term rentals
- Participating in Community Power

***Adoption***

A public hearing was held on the draft plan on xxx, 2025. After careful consideration of the public comments, the plan was adopted on xxx, 2025. The final step will be implementation by town officials, voters and volunteers. An annual review of the policies and recommendations at a joint meeting of the Planning Board, Selectboard and Conservation Commission will help ensure that municipal activities and spending priorities remain consistent with residents' vision for the future of Sugar Hill.



## 1.3 Vision

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As we plan for the next ten years, our vision for the future of Sugar Hill, guided by the survey results and other sources, looks like this:

- Sugar Hill continues to be a small town known for its scenic beauty, with mountain views across open fields, and homes and businesses that complement the landscape.
- Residents and visitors enjoy peace and quiet, dark skies, clean water, and have easy access to the natural environment with a multi-use trail network for different abilities.
- Decision-making has considered the interconnectedness of natural systems, the relationship between public and private land use decisions and natural resources, and the relationship between Sugar Hill's natural resources and those of neighboring communities.
- Flexible land use regulations have furthered both the needs of residents for affordable homes and employment, and shared community goals such as protection of priority natural resources.
- Shorelines, wetlands and floodplains are recognized as providing more benefits to the community when left in their natural state.
- The village area continues to be a focal point and meeting place, somewhere to "connect with" the community. Local businesses consistent with the small town feel provide goods and services to residents and visitors, and contribute positively to the local economy without negatively impacting the local environment.
- The transportation system is safe, resilient and well-maintained. The Town and residents are working together to save energy and reduce the cost of energy. A up-to-



- date communications system connects residents, businesses and visitors with the rest of the world.
- Community spirit expresses itself in neighbors helping neighbors, and in support for good stewardship of local cultural, historic and natural treasures. Town government continues to be transparent and inclusive, with a focus on providing high-quality well-maintained essential facilities and services. Cooperation with local and regional organizations has continued to expand the scope of services available to the community.



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# Chapter 2.

## Community Profile

### 2.1 Population

Prior to incorporation in 1962, population for the area now included in the municipal boundaries of Sugar Hill was not reported separately by the US Census. However, growth and decline followed regional trends, which were in turn driven by national trends. The growth and development of the area was initially driven by agriculture and logging; by the mid-1800s the region was bustling with mills and other industry and commerce related to the agricultural base. The Civil War years and the opening up of the midwest and west for more productive agriculture saw an exodus from the farms of northern New Hampshire, and soon after, sale of forest lands from the state to private companies led to the depletion of the forest resource. With the decline in the agriculture and forest products industries, industrialization and WWI, the rural communities of northern New Hampshire in general saw a decline in year-round population until the 1970s. However, during the same period, the railroad brought seasonal visitors drawn by the scenery and four-season recreation opportunities.

POPULATION OF TOWNS IN SUGAR HILL AREA, 1850-2020

| Year | Lisbon | Sugar Hill | Bethlehem | Franconia | Landaff | Easton                                  | Littleton |
|------|--------|------------|-----------|-----------|---------|---|-----------|
| 1850 | 1880   |            | 950       | 584       | 948     |   | 2008      |
| 1860 | 1846   |            | 896       | 708       | 1012    | (Eastern Landaff became Easton in 1867) | 2292      |
| 1870 | 1844   |            | 998       | 549       | 882 >   |   | 2446      |
| 1880 | 1807   |            | 1400      | 550       | 506     | 302                                     | 2930      |
| 1890 | 2000   |            | 1207      | 594       | 499     | 248                                     | 3365      |
| 1900 | 2221   |            | 1261      | 655       | 500     | 249                                     | 4066      |
| 1910 | 2460   |            | 1201      | 504       | 526     | 226                                     | 4069      |
| 1920 | 2288   |            | 866       | 440       | 510     | 181                                     | 4239      |

| Year | Lisbon | Sugar Hill   | Bethlehem | Franconia | Landaff | Easton | Littleton |
|------|--------|--------------|-----------|-----------|---------|--------|-----------|
| 1930 | 2324   |              | 872       | 514       | 469     | 132    | 4558      |
| 1940 | 2103   |              | 935       | 568       | 389     | 156    | 4571      |
| 1950 | 2009   |              | 882       | 549       | 342     | 94     | 4817      |
| 1960 | 1788 > | incorp. 1962 | 898       | 491       | 289     | 74     | 5003      |
| 1970 | 1480   | 336          | 1142      | 655       | 292     | 92     | 5290      |
| 1980 | 1517   | 397          | 1784      | 743       | 266     | 124    | 5558      |
| 1990 | 1664   | 464          | 2033      | 811       | 350     | 223    | 5827      |
| 2000 | 1587   | 563          | 2199      | 924       | 378     | 256    | 5845      |
| 2010 | 1595   | 563          | 2526      | 1104      | 415     | 254    | 5928      |
| 2020 | 1621   | 647          | 2484      | 1083      | 446     | 292    | 6005      |

(Source: US Census, 1850-2020)

Except for the period from 2000-2010 that included the Great Recession, Sugar Hill's population has been growing significantly since incorporation in 1962.

#### POPULATION CHANGE IN SUGAR HILL, 1970 - 2020

| YEAR | YEAR-ROUND POPULATION | % CHANGE |
|------|-----------------------|----------|
| 1970 | 336                   |          |
| 1980 | 397                   | +18.2%   |
| 1990 | 464                   | +16.9%   |
| 2000 | 563                   | +21.3%   |
| 2010 | 563                   | NC       |
| 2020 | 647                   | +14.9%   |

(Sources: US Census, 1970-2020)

Population figures for the state have been projected forward from the 2020 US Census to the year 2050 by Robert Scardamalia of RLS Demographics for the NH Office of Planning & Development. The projected county populations consider data on births and deaths, and survival, fertility and age-specific migration rates. Scardamalia projects a leveling off of Grafton County's population between the years 2030 and 2040 and then a slight decline by 2050. In addition to considering each municipality's share of the county's past population growth, the allocation of the projected county growth to each municipality also considers known factors such as new housing development that is in the pipeline, new transportation infrastructure, and new commercial development that is likely to change employment

patterns. The resulting projection for Sugar Hill is a population of 694 in 2050 after a peak of 708 in 2040 (NH Office of Planning & Development, *State of New Hampshire State, County, and Municipal Population Projections, 2020-2050*, September 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic struck right after the 2020 US Census counts. Many northern New England towns experienced an influx of population in the last few years as a result. Many people moved into their former vacation homes year-round or purchased homes in northern New England to escape the rapid spread of the virus and indoor quarantines in more densely populated areas. This “COVID migration” will affect the reliability of the state’s estimates and projections that use the 2020 US Census as a base number. While it is too soon to tell to what extent this trend may affect Sugar Hill in the long run, there are indications that there will be some increase in population resulting from the pandemic. In the year 2022 there were 18 land sales and 13 homes sales in Sugar Hill compared with just one current listing ([www.zillow.com](http://www.zillow.com) accessed 4/18/23). The Town issued 10 permits for the construction of new homes in 2021 and 12 in 2022 compared with just 3 in 2020. Changes in the global economy, housing market trends in northern New England, the seasonal home market in the area, and regional job growth will all continue to influence Sugar Hill’s population. In addition, decisions made by individual owners of large parcels can have significant impacts on the population of a small town.

While the overall year-round population of the town has been growing, the make-up of that population has been changing. According to US Census counts and estimates, the number of year-round Sugar Hill residents who are age 65 and older increased 60% from 2010 to 2020, from 115 residents to 184, compared to just under 10% over the previous decade. Residents 65 and over are now estimated to comprise 28% of the town’s year-round population. In the North Country, this shift is caused both by the aging “baby boomers” and by the increasing popularity of the region with retirees. As shown in the table on the following page, this trend can be expected to continue into the next couple decades – *there are more than three times as many residents between 45 and 64 years of age than there are in the 25 to 44 age group.*

SUGAR HILL RESIDENTS BY AGE GROUP, 2010 - 2020

| AGE GROUP                  | 2010 | 2020 |
|----------------------------|------|------|
| Residents younger than 5   | 26   | 7    |
| % younger than 5           | 5%   | 1%   |
| Residents 5 – 17 years old | 77   | 69   |
| % 5 – 17                   | 14%  | 11%  |
| Residents 18 – 24          | 19   | 31   |
| % 18 – 24                  | 3%   | 5%   |
| Residents 25 – 44          | 85   | 76   |
| % 25 – 44                  | 15%  | 12%  |
| Residents 45 – 64          | 241  | 28   |
| % 45 – 65                  | 43%  | 43%  |
| Residents 65 and older     | 115  | 184  |
| % 65 and older             | 20%  | 28%  |

(Source: 2010 based on 2010 U.S. Census; 2020 based on applying the 2021 ACS 5-year estimates for age group % to the 2020 US Census population count)

Countywide figures tell a similar story – between 2010 and the most recent American Community Survey 5-year estimate (2021), school age children (age 5 – 17) decreased from 14% of the population to 12%, while those 65 and older increased from 15% to 21%. Even more telling are the rates of increase – *the population of Grafton County increased 2.2% over the ten year period 2010-2020; the population that is 65 and older increased 54.5% during the same period (US Census and ACS 5-year estimates).*

These changes in demographics have implications for the types of services and facilities that will be required to meet the needs of Sugar Hill residents in the coming years, including housing, transportation, access to healthy food, health care, and exercise, and the often forgotten social/spiritual needs that are integral to healthy aging.

In addition, the trend toward fewer young families – only about 12% of the town’s population is now between 25 and 44 – represents to some people a loss of community vitality, not only by virtue of age but also because children’s events and activities provide a common means to build community connections. On the plus side of the equation – after children leave home, many people find they have more time to volunteer, increasing the pool of knowledge and experience available for town boards and community activities. One challenge to ensuring that the community continues to be able to benefit from older residents’ wealth of knowledge will be to ensure assistive hearing devices are provided for gatherings, as well as carpooling and on-line participation options for those unable to drive to in-person evening meetings, or no longer able to drive at all.

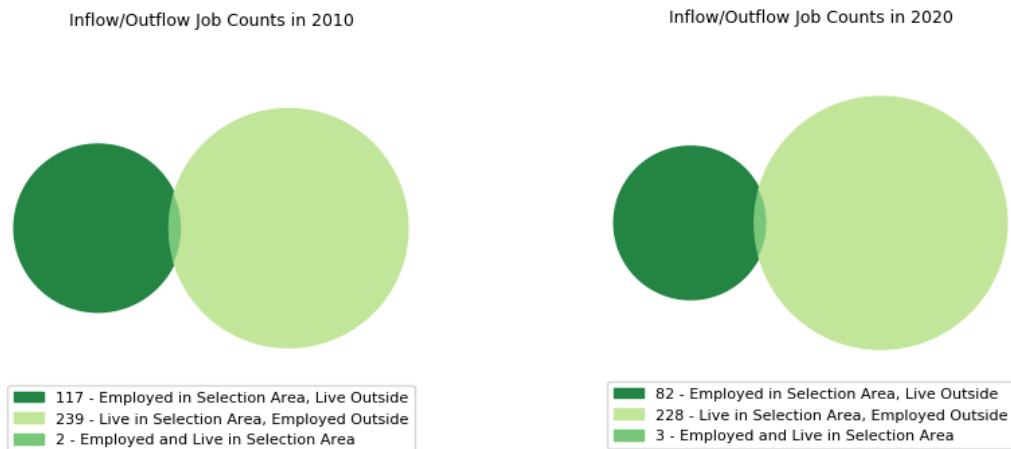


## 2.2 Employment and Incomes

### Employment

Sugar Hill residents are fortunate to live in a location that has the attributes of a small town but easy access to several of the region's job centers. This is reflected in a relatively short amount of time spent commuting back and forth to work. Over 60% of Sugar Hill residents who outside the home are employed less than 25 miles away (US Census Bureau, *OnTheMap*, 2020).

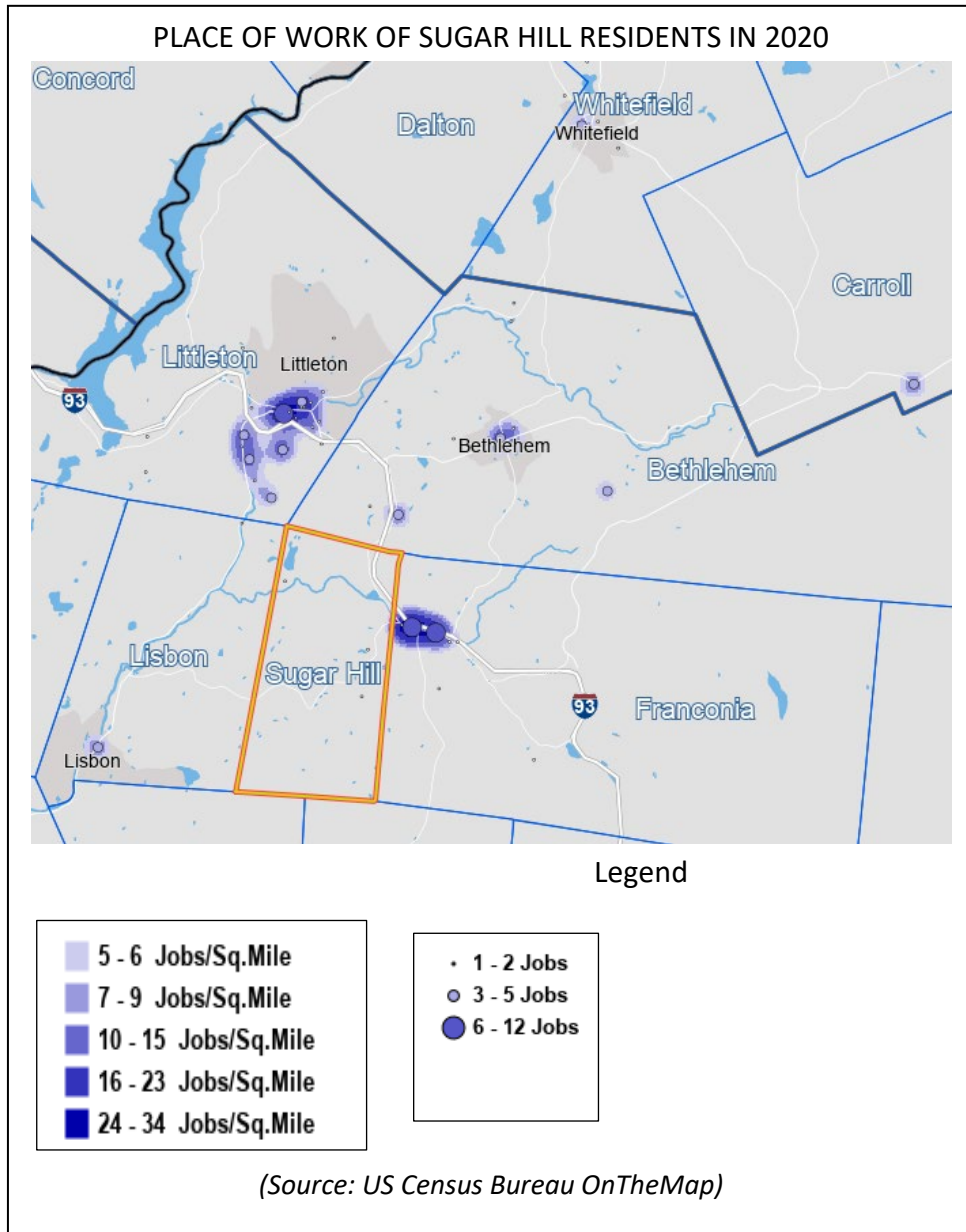
As shown in the following graphics, both the number of primary jobs in Sugar Hill and the number of Sugar Hill residents who work outside the home have decreased over the last ten years. During the same period the number of Sugar Hill residents who worked outside the home at jobs in Sugar Hill and the number of Sugar Hill households with self-employment income stayed about the same. Fifty-three households were estimated to have self-employment income in 2010 and 52 in 2020 (ACS 5-year estimates). The average annual unemployment rate in Sugar Hill was only 2.0% in 2022 (NH Employment Security).



(Source: US Census Bureau *OnTheMap*)

Jobs in Sugar Hill are provided by a number of well-established small businesses, such as Presby Construction, Polly's Pancake Parlor, Sunset Hill House, Harman's Cheese and Country Store and the Sugar Hill Inn. As shown on the map on the following page, the primary destinations for Sugar Hill commuters are Franconia and Littleton, both easily accessible via state highways. The largest employers in Franconia are Garnet Hill catalog sales, Franconia Notch State Park, Cannon Mountain, and Lafayette Center nursing home. In Littleton, five of the largest ten employers are in retail – Shaw's, Home Depot, Lowes, WalMart and the

Littleton Food Coop. Other large employers in Littleton's service sector are Littleton Coin and Littleton Regional Hospital. Manufacturing jobs are provided by Burndy Corporation (electrical connectors), Genfoot America (boots) and other occupants of the Littleton Industrial Park.



Towns are organized into Labor Market Areas (LMAs) for the purpose of reporting, comparing and tracking area employment statistics. LMAs are delineated based on commuting patterns to enable comparison from one employment center to another. Sugar Hill is part of the Littleton LMA. The table below compares the number of employers, number of employees

and average weekly wages paid in the Littleton LMA for 2014 and 2021. As shown, slow job growth has been occurring in both the Goods-Producing and Service-Providing industries. The shift from Goods-Producing Industry jobs to Service-Providing jobs associated with the loss of manufacturing jobs in the Northeast seems to be slowing. Although Goods-Producing Industries continue to pay a higher average weekly wage, the average weekly wage for Service-Providing Industries increased more during this period – a 30% increase in the average weekly wage for Service-Providing Industries compared with 19% for Goods-Producing Industries.

| LITTLETON LABOR MARKET AREA EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES |       |                           |                     |       |                           |                     |
|--|-------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------|---------------------------|---------------------|
|  | 2014  |                           |                     | 2021  |                           |                     |
| Industry   | Units | Average Annual Employment | Average Weekly Wage | Units | Average Annual Employment | Average Weekly Wage |
| Total, Private plus Government                   | 898   | 11,429                    | \$704.24            | 904   | 11,538                    | \$895.03            |
| Total Private                                    | 791   | 9,716                     | \$704.33            | 801   | 9,839                     | \$902.40            |
| Goods-Producing Industries                       | 120   | 1,790                     | \$796.93            | 118   | 1,868                     | \$951.15            |
| Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting       | n     | n                         | n                   | n     | n                         | n                   |
| Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction    | n     |                           | n                   | n     | n                         | n                   |
| Construction                                     | 67    | 300                       | \$664.65            | 74    | 382                       | \$920.20            |
| Manufacturing                                    | 30    | 1,334                     | \$849.27            | 28    | 1,359                     | \$975.25            |
| Service-Providing Industries                     | 671   | 7,926                     | \$683.42            | 683   | 7,971                     | \$890.97            |
| Utilities  | n     | n                         | n                   | n     | n                         | n                   |
| Wholesale Trade                                  | 29    | 149                       | \$1,021.86          | 30    | 295                       | \$1,128.75          |
| Retail Trade                                     | 143   | 2,261                     | \$610.79            | 134   | 2,151                     | \$766.68            |
| Transportation and Warehousing                   | 22    | 274                       | \$658.74            | 23    | 429                       | \$813.91            |
| Information                                      | 21    | 121                       | 968.62              | 18    | 91                        | \$1,235.16          |
| Finance and Insurance                            | 41    | 186                       | \$723.21            | 38    | 169                       | \$1,047.61          |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing               | 31    | 144                       | \$749.30            | 30    | 155                       | \$1,108.36          |

|  |     |       |            |     |       |            |
|--|-----|-------|------------|-----|-------|------------|
| Professional and Technical Services          | 62  | 292   | \$1,009.08 | 54  | 313   | \$1,354.89 |
| Management of Companies and Enterprises      | n   | n     | n          | n   | n     | n          |
| Administrative and Waste Services            | 36  | 186   | \$627.89   | 53  | 266   | \$874.66   |
| Educational Services                         | 11  | 95    | \$676.87   | 15  | 135   | \$802.83   |
| Health Care and Social Assistance            | 95  | 1,848 | \$960.74   | 86  | 1,884 | \$1,232.53 |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation          | 22  | 451   | \$399.97   | 23  | 364   | \$478.87   |
| Accommodation and Food Services              | 93  | 1,596 | \$406.40   | 108 | 1,473 | \$555.27   |
| Other Services, Except Public Administration | 59  | 194   | \$499.70   | 60  | 177   | \$639.78   |
| Total Government                             | 107 | 1,713 | \$703.71   | 104 | 1,699 | \$852.39   |
| Federal Government                           | 13  | 86    | \$940.45   | 14  | 98    | \$1,019.31 |
| State Government                             | 48  | 348   | \$762.21   | 46  | 395   | \$881.75   |
| Local Government                             | 46  | 1,279 | \$671.94   | 43  | 1,207 | \$829.27   |

(Source: NH Employment Security, Economic and Labor Market Information Bureau)

Notes:

1. The oldest dataset available for the labor market area for comparison was 2014.
2. The New Hampshire economy was considered to have recovered from pre-pandemic levels in early 2021.
3. Sectors with too few employers to publish data without violating privacy are shown with an “n”.

To enable an assessment of the adequacy of weekly wages paid for area jobs, the hourly living wage calculated with MIT’s on-line Living Wage Calculator is shown in the following table. In the far right column, the living wage is shown as a weekly wage. Comparison with the previous table enables comparison of the living wage for Grafton County with the average weekly wages paid in various industries in the Littleton LMA.

## LIVING WAGE, GRAFTON COUNTY

| HOUSEHOLD TYPE                         | LIVING WAGE – HOURLY | LIVING WAGE - WEEKLY |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 adult                                | \$15.99/hour         | \$639.60             |
| 1 adult with 1 child                   | \$33.57/hour         | \$1,342.80           |
| 2 adults with 2 children, both working | \$23.67/hour         | \$946.80             |
| 2 adults with 2 children, 1 working    | \$36.94/hour         | \$1,477.60           |

(Source: [livingwage.mit.edu](https://livingwage.mit.edu), accessed 2/20/23)

## Incomes

The incomes of Sugar Hill residents are in general higher than county or state averages. The American Community Survey 5-year estimates for 2021 reported a per capita annual income of \$136,910 for Sugar Hill, \$42,336 for Grafton County, and \$43,877 for the state as a whole.

## ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

| INCOME | SUGAR HILL | GRAFTON COUNTY | STATE     |
|--------|------------|----------------|-----------|
| Median | \$113,438  | \$73,755       | \$64,664  |
| Mean   | \$201,260  | \$102,862      | \$108,061 |

(Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2021)

However, not all Sugar Hill residents are without financial challenges. The 2023 CDFA Community Progress Indicators shows that 14% of students qualified for the free or reduced price school meal program and 1.2% of households required the assistance of the SNAP program (Federal Fiscal Year 2021).

## 2.3 Housing

In 2020, the US Census counted a total of 384 dwelling units in Sugar Hill; approximately 86 of these were reported to be seasonal homes (2020 US Census; 2021 ACS 5-year estimates). Of the 384 dwelling units counted by the 2020 US Census, 337 were reported to be single family homes, 26 units were in two-family structures, and 21 units were in multi-family structures. An estimated 91% of the town's occupied housing units are owner-occupied (2021

ACS 5-year estimate). If accurate, this represents a significant decrease in the percentage of housing units available to renters from 19% in 2010 to only 9% in 2020 (ACS 5-year estimates).

#### HOUSING OCCUPANCY 2020

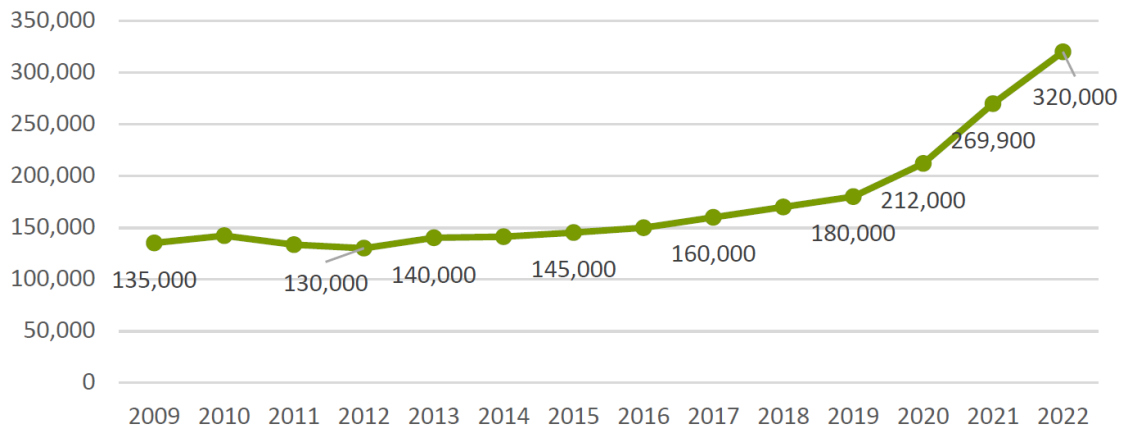
|   |     |       |
|---|-----|-------|
| Total housing units                           | 384 | 100%  |
| Occupied housing units                        | 282 | 73.4% |
| Vacant housing units                          | 102 | 26.6% |
| For rent                                      | 10  | 9.5%  |
| For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use | 86  | 84.5% |
| All other vacants                             | 6   | 6.0%  |

*(Source: Total, Occupied and Vacant Units from 2020 US Census; Type of vacancy 2021 ACS 5-year estimates percentages applied to 2020 counts)*

### Housing Cost and Affordability

In recent decades, home building has been relatively slow in much of the state, home prices have increased, and vacancy rates have been low. The result in much of the state has been a shortage of housing affordable to median income working families. COVID-19 migration from urban areas, investment in the short-term rental market, and high construction costs all contributed to the high level of sales in recent years as well as to increased costs. As shown on the next page, in northern New Hampshire, after years of slow growth after the “housing bubble” of the 2000s and the recession that followed, housing prices have doubled in the last five years. The current shortage of homes for sale has exacerbated this trend. Today, only one property is listed for sale in Sugar Hill on Zillow (zillow.com, accessed 4/18/23). Meanwhile, 19 homes in town are listed as short-term rentals (AirDNA, accessed 4/23/23). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition of some tourism from traditional vacation rentals to short-term rentals will not be known for a few more years.

## PURCHASE PRICE TRENDS - NORTH COUNTRY REGION

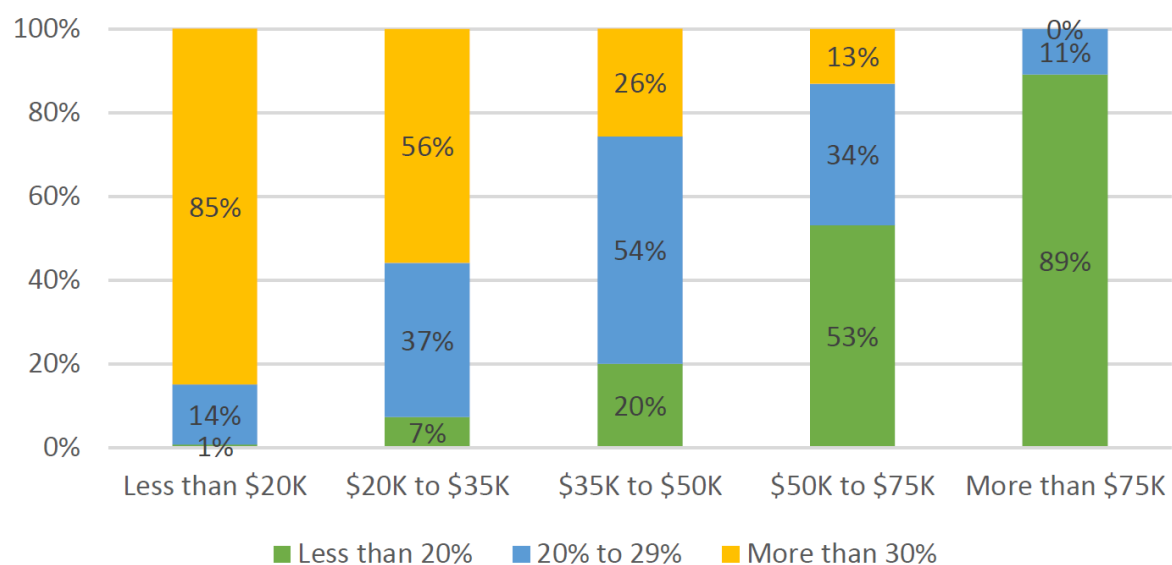


(Source: North Country Council, *Our Homes, An Assessment of Housing Needs in NH's North Country*, based on MLS sales, 1/13/23 Partial Draft)

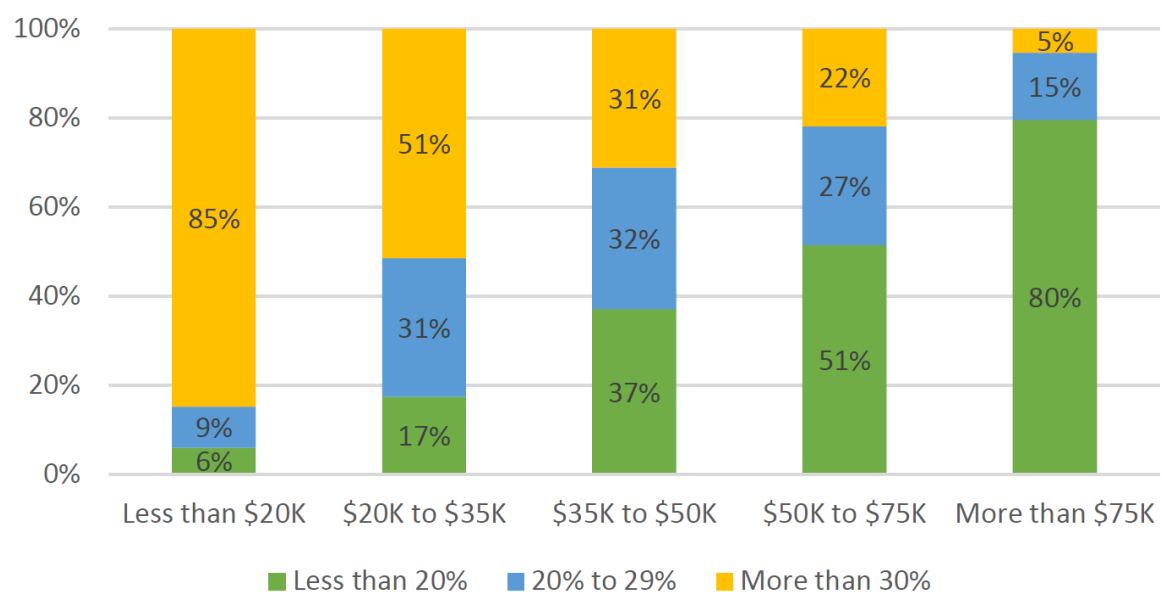
Paying over 30% for housing is considered to be overpaying; for many this means not enough money left in the household to pay for other basic necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, medical and dental care, and day care. The US Census Bureau no longer collects income and housing cost data at a level which produces useful information at the local level, but regional data are helpful indicators. The graphs on the following page show renters and homeowners in each income category. In each income category, the percentage of the household income going toward housing costs is shown. As these graphs show, for both renters and owners, more than half of households with incomes less than \$35,000 per year are paying more than 30% of that income for housing costs. This generally includes many on a fixed income such as retirees or disabled residents as well as those living alone. County-wide data indicate that in 2022 only 8% of 2-bedroom units were affordable to a household with the median income for renter-households (New Hampshire Housing, *2022 Residential Rental Cost Survey Report*). Adding to this challenge is very low vacancy rates; NH Housing reported that the rental vacancy rate was just 0.3 in Grafton County in 2022.



## 2020 RENTER HOUSING COST BURDEN BY INCOME – NORTH COUNTRY REGION



## 2020 OWNERSHIP COST BURDEN BY INCOME – NORTH COUNTRY REGION



(Source: North Country Council, *Our Homes, An Assessment of Housing Needs in NH's North Country*, 1/13/23 Partial Draft)

A common rule of thumb used by real estate agents is that in general the purchase price of a home should not be more than 2.6 times one's annual household income (Bloomberg.com CityLab). For a worker earning the average weekly wage in the Littleton LMA, this would translate to a purchase price of \$121,008 for a household with one person working or \$242,016 with two people working. To assess the ability of area employees to purchase Sugar Hill homes, the selling prices reported on Zillow.com were collected for the 13 homes that were sold in town during 2022. With the exception of one 480 square foot 1-bedroom camp, selling prices ranged from \$425,000 to \$1,950,000, well above what would be affordable to most of those working in the Littleton LMA.

Concern for housing costs outpacing incomes statewide led to the passage of SB 342 in 2008 (RSA 674:58-61) requiring all communities to ensure that local regulations "provide reasonable and realistic opportunities for the development of workforce housing, including rental multi-family housing." This means that in the majority of every town, zoning and subdivision regulations must not preclude developing housing affordable to a median income household. In addition, some part of each town needs to be zoned to allow multi-family workforce housing of at least five units. In 2016, RSA 674:72 went into effect requiring all municipalities to allow any single-family home with adequate water, sewer and parking to have an accessory dwelling unit attached or within the structure. The Sugar Hill Zoning Ordinance currently allows multifamily dwellings with a Special Exception in the General Residence and Rural Residence 1 zoning districts. Accessory dwelling units are allowed under certain conditions and can be either attached or detached.

## 2.4 Tax Base

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Since communities vary in their schedules for reassessments and their ratio of assessed value to true market value, equalized valuation per capita is typically used when discussing the tax base. As shown in table on the following page, Sugar Hill's per capita equalized valuation of \$276,257 is similar to that of Easton and a bit lower than Franconia, but substantially higher than other adjacent towns. The tax rate is also lower than all except Easton and Franconia. The variability in tax rates is affected by several other factors in addition to the strength of the tax base. These include the presence of seasonal homes and nonresidential property, the size of the population, and the level of services and infrastructure.

## TAX BASE AND RATES

| TOWN       | EQUALIZED<br>ASSESSED VALUE<br>PER CAPITA IN<br>2020 | FULL VALUE<br>TAX RATE IN<br>2021 |
|------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Bethlehem  | \$144,418  | \$17.26                           |
| Easton     | \$281,789  | \$8.85                            |
| Franconia  | \$333,782  | \$12.33                           |
| Landaff    | \$124,373  | \$18.12                           |
| Lisbon     | \$84,088   | \$20.70                           |
| Littleton  | \$168,812  | \$14.49                           |
| Sugar Hill | \$276,257  | \$13.35                           |

*(Sources: NH Department of Revenue Administration; 2020 US Census)*

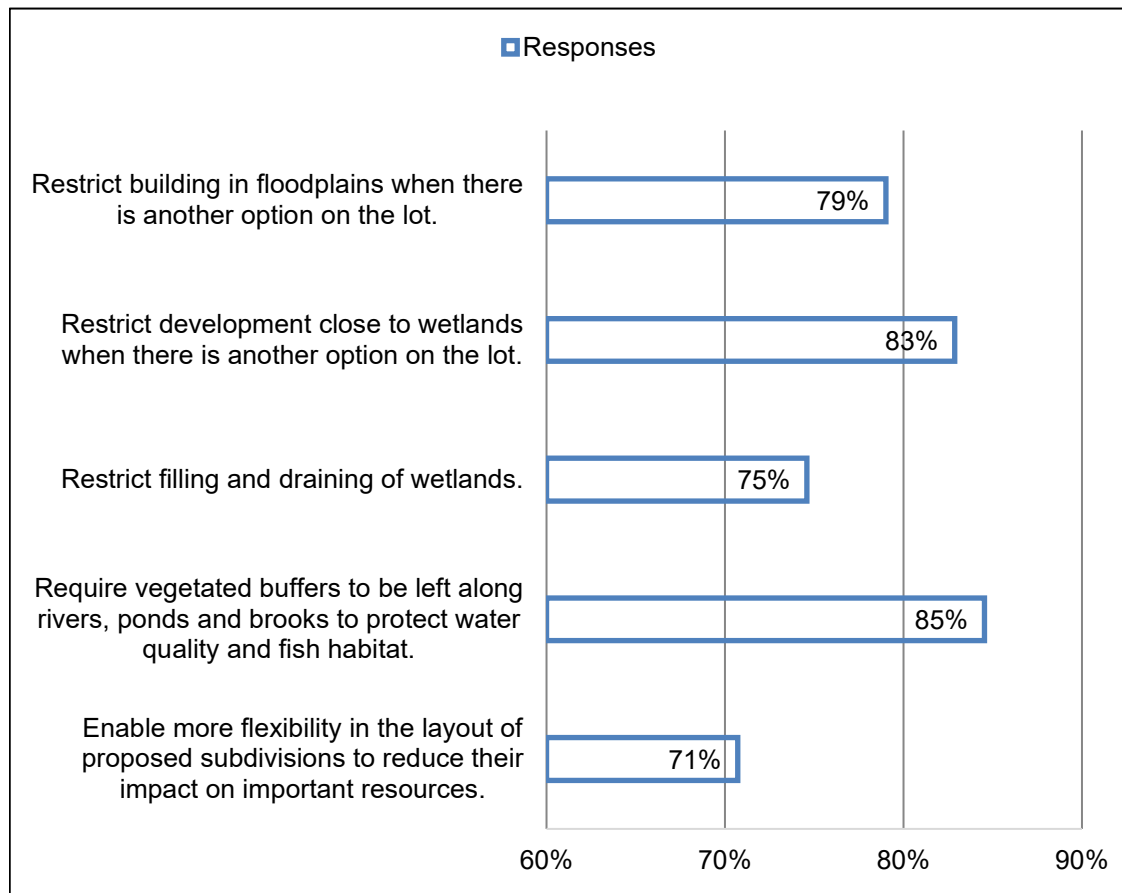
# Chapter 3.

## Natural Resources

### 3.1 Introduction

Sugar Hill's natural resources are important to residents and visitors alike. The scenic outdoor environment, and opportunities it provides, form an essential foundation of the community's character. As shown below, respondents to the 2023 Master Plan Survey showed strong

QUESTION 4: Our natural resources, clean environment and scenic beauty are key components of Sugar Hill's community character. Several planning and zoning tools are available for the town to manage the siting and impacts of development. Please check off ALL of the tools that you would support (if any):



(Source: 2023 Sugar Hill Master Plan Survey)

support for managing land use in a manner compatible with protection of the town's natural resources.

When planning for the continued growth of Sugar Hill, it is critical to ensure that high priority natural resource areas are protected, and that development is sited and managed in a manner compatible with continued enjoyment of a clean, scenic outdoor environment. Development should also occur in a manner compatible with natural resource-based enterprises. This chapter of the plan provides some background on several types of local resources, and some resource-specific recommendations. Conservation Commission volunteers contributed much of this information. Additional discussion and recommendations regarding some natural resource-based development considerations can be found in **Chapter 4. Future Land Use**.

## 3.2 Groundwater

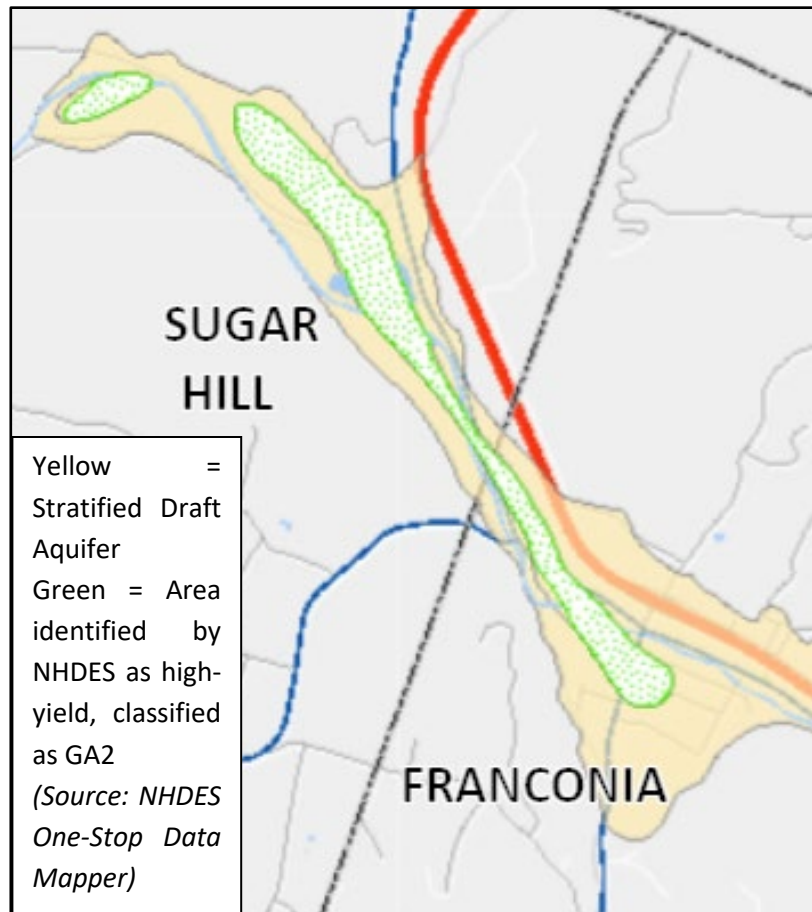
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Sugar Hill residents, visitors and businesses throughout town are currently entirely dependent on a continued supply of clean groundwater from private wells to meet their needs. Some of the land uses with the potential to contaminate groundwater include those which involve the production, sale, storage or transportation of fuel oil, gasoline, or other hazardous substances; disposal, processing or recycling of hazardous substances; septage lagoons; snow dumps; solid waste facilities; storage of road salt or other de-icing chemicals; and vehicle service and repair shops.

At this time, according to NHDES data, there are no businesses registered in Sugar Hill that use, handle or store registered substances in greater than household quantities, no junkyards, and only one known underground storage tank (NHDES OneStop Data Mapper, accessed 1/10/24). The Selectmen's actions in removing junk vehicle storage areas have prevented potential contamination from leaking oil and other fluids. There are currently only isolated areas of concern in town. One is heavy metals from old mine tailings uncovered by recent developments which will be monitored in the future. The old unlined town dump on Creamery Pond Road has been capped and is now being used for storage of gravel for Town roads.

New Hampshire's important stratified drift aquifers have been mapped by N.H. Department of Environmental Services and U.S. Department of the Interior Geological Survey. The only stratified drift aquifer that has been identified in Sugar Hill is in the Gale River valley in the area of Coffin Pond as shown on the map on the next page. The high yield portion of this aquifer may have potential for a future public water supply or to supply a business that needs large volumes of water. As shown, this important aquifer is shared with neighboring

Franconia. Franconia has protected their portion with adoption of an Aquifer Conservation District overlay in the zoning ordinance. This overlay zone limits land above the aquifer to uses that aren't likely to lead to contamination of the groundwater by using hazardous or toxic materials or petroleum products in more than typical household quantities. Franconia's ordinance facilitates groundwater recharge with limits on impervious surface. Long-term protection of this resource will require the participation of both communities.



Land use must continue to be managed carefully throughout town to ensure that activities do not occur which could pose a threat to groundwater quality. The Zoning Ordinance does not contain any specific groundwater protection provisions, and, although most businesses of concern would require a special exception from the Zoning Board of Adjustment, there are no special exception criteria, special exception conditions, or performance standards specific to groundwater protection in Sugar Hill's ordinance.

Except for wells that are considered to be a public water supply due to the number of users, most wells in town are not tested regularly. The Conservation Commission has recommended that the Town perform a sampling of drinking water to establish a baseline for drinking water quality. In addition to bacterial contamination, the Commission recommends that water be analyzed for toxic minerals, nitrogen content, and a reasonable number of toxic chemicals

such as petroleum, pesticides and herbicides. This would be of use in determining whether future spills had any detrimental effect on water quality.

The impacts of the bottled water industry on local groundwater supplies has been a concern in some New Hampshire communities. The NH Department of Environmental Services now has adopted rules requiring a detailed site analysis and withdrawal tests to ensure that the source is sustainable at the volumes proposed without adversely affecting other users. Development siting and design can also be planned with regard to groundwater recharge. This includes designing the site to enable recharge, and also protection of wetlands and vegetated buffers to slow flow down and allow time for more recharge to occur.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

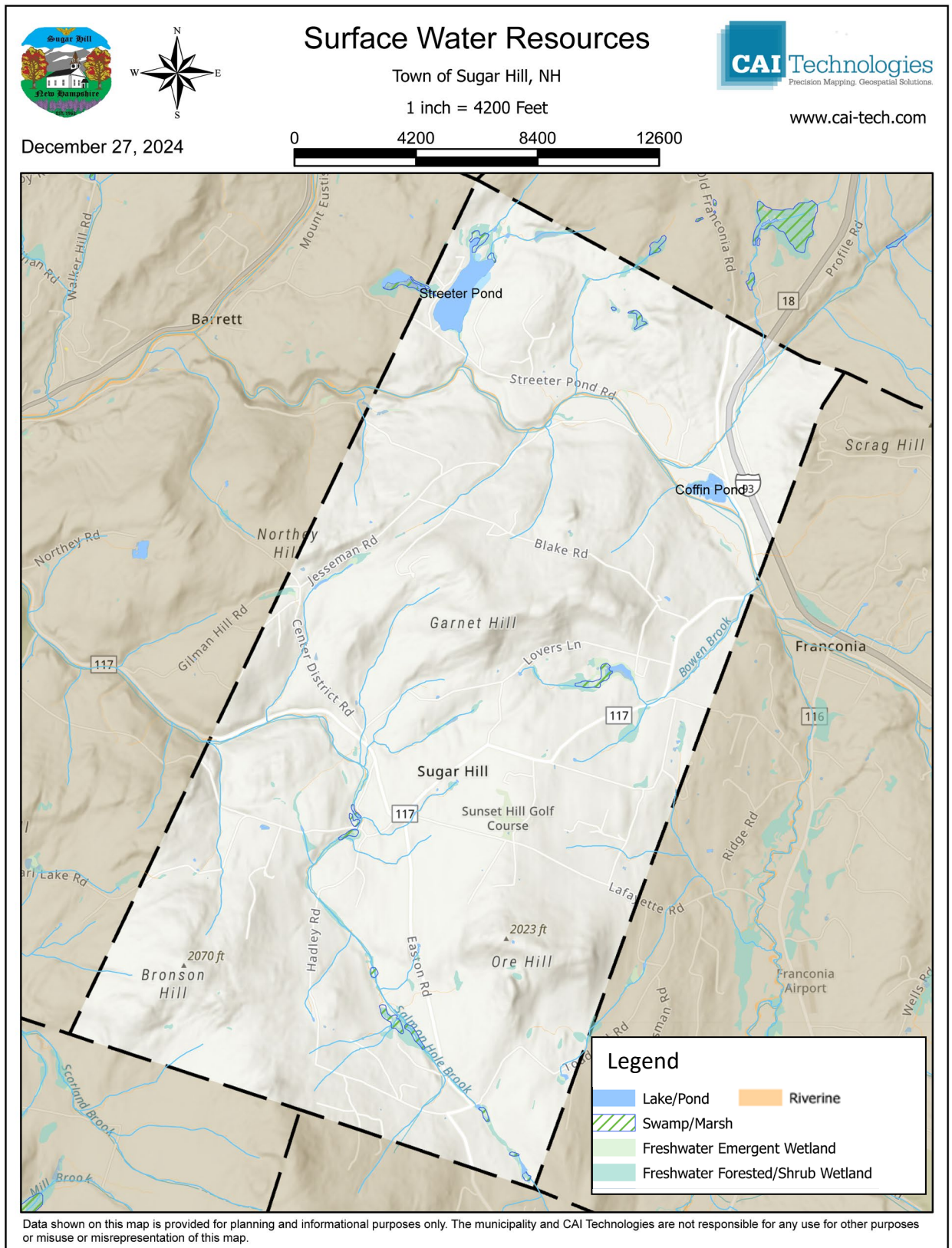
- Initiate a conversation with the Franconia Conservation Commission to discuss protection of the shared aquifer along the Gale River.
- Review and amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate water quality impacts in special exception criteria, and best management practices for the use or storage of hazardous materials in the list of conditions that the Zoning Board of Adjustment can apply when granting a special exception.
- Consider possible approaches for developing a water quality database through a voluntary testing program.
- Ensure that the Town's emergency response plan remains up-to-date and that resources are available to manage a spill of potential contaminants on state and town highways.
- Enforce the updated site plan and subdivision regulations requiring stormwater to be managed on the site in a manner that will maximize clean groundwater recharge.
- Ensure that the Town continues to follow best management practices for salt storage.

### **3.3 Surface Water Resources**

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The map on the next page shows the surface water resources of Sugar Hill. The Gale River is the only river in Sugar Hill, where it flows uninterrupted by dams. The eastern half flows through a floodplain only a few feet above normal high water which results in natural periodic flooding of adjacent property.





The Bowen Brook system drains northeastern Sugar Hill; the Salmon Hole system drains southwestern Sugar Hill in that direction. Unlike the Gale, many of these smaller streams have been dammed; some of these impoundment areas are associated with important wetlands which serve to slow water runoff and reduce erosion, while creating wildlife habitat. These dammed areas both large and small play an important role in mitigating the effects of poor logging practices which have occasionally plagued Sugar Hill, silting up streams, damaging roads and destroying trout habitat.



Streeter Pond and Bowen Brook Dam (Peckett's Pond) were originally streams flowing through wetlands which were dammed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to produce ponds. These ponds then developed more extensive wetlands. Beaver moved in and extended the dams, increasing the wildlife habitat further. Both of these complexes now have deep organic bottom layers. These two large wetlands provide some of the most important wildlife habitat in the town (see Wildlife Action Plan map on page 41). Coffin Pond is derived from a gravel pit dug for the interstate and has a hard bottom. Its level is regulated by a sluiceway to the Gale River. It has become a haven for birds.

In addition to these ponds there are numerous smaller ponds. In most cases these are associated with wetlands, but a few are man-made and surrounded by mowed grass. These decorative ponds are of some value in holding runoff and controlling erosion, but lack many

of the important advantages associated with naturally-vegetated wetlands. One concern is that if herbicides and other lawn chemicals are used near these ponds, or farm animals are pastured near them, they may constitute a water quality threat by providing a conduit to groundwater and downstream areas.

In addition to the larger wetland complexes visible on the Surface Water Resources Map on page 27, there are also numerous smaller seasonally wet areas that serve important functions as well. Depending on their type and location, wetlands provide important wildlife and plant habitat, groundwater recharge, and water quality protection, while slowing down stormwater to moderate floodwater flows.

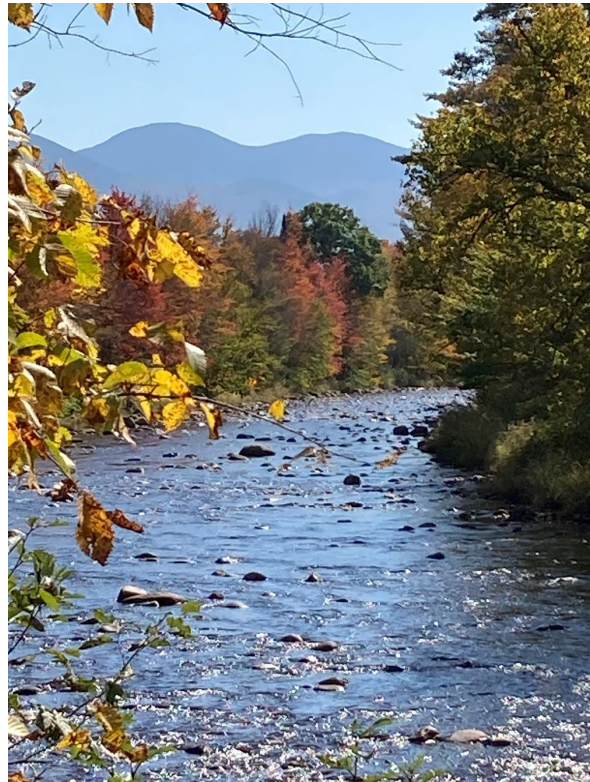
To maintain the high quality of Sugar Hill's surface waters and its healthy aquatic ecosystems, it is necessary to both keep development activities separated from the town's rivers, brooks and wetlands, and to maintain a vegetated buffer around these surface waters. Shoreline vegetation and the layer of organic matter that builds up underneath it slow down stormwater runoff and trap sediment and other pollutants before they reach the river or brook. Vegetation also provides for necessary shade for aquatic species and slows the advance of some harmful invasive species. Following a thorough review of available research and consultation with natural resource professionals and state and federal regulators, New Hampshire experts recommended a minimum naturally vegetated buffer width of 100 feet for removal of pollutants and some of the needs of wildlife (*Buffers for Wetlands and Surface Waters: A Guidebook for New Hampshire Communities*, Chase, Deming, and Latawiec, 1997). Subsequent research has continued to show that a 100-foot wide vegetated buffer is associated with a substantial removal rate (70% or better) for pollutants such as sediment and nutrients. Shoreline buffers are important for both open water such as ponds, brooks and rivers, and for wetlands. It should be noted that sensitive habitat areas and many wildlife species require larger buffers.

In Sugar Hill, the state Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act only provides some minimal protection for the Gale River, Coffin Pond and Streeter Pond, requiring only a fifty-foot setback for primary structures, and requiring 25% of the area between 50 feet and 150 feet to be maintained in its natural state. Groundcover must be left intact in the 50-foot buffer except for a 6-foot path; some trees and saplings can be removed within this 50-foot buffer according a point system. The town's Shorefront District provides some additional protection for these water bodies. The town requires a 150-foot setback for most uses and requires a special exception for the cutting of trees and other natural vegetation. However, no protection is provided for the town's other shorelines by either state or local regulations.



**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Maintain the Shorefront District in the Town's Zoning Ordinance.
- Increase awareness of our rivers and ponds to strengthen public support for conservation efforts. The Conservation Commission could prepare a brief pamphlet for the lower Gale River, Streeter Pond, and Coffin Pond, with maps showing access, points of interest and appropriate activities.
- Utilize the relationship with Plymouth State University to help create educational aids for educating landowners. Explore the possibility of creating a relationship between interested students at Profile and PSU.
- Educate the community, with special emphasis on landowners, on the benefits of wetlands and shoreline buffers, and on the benefits to the community of regulations to protect them. Many property owners are aware of state wetlands and shoreline regulations only when they apply for permits to build or when they learn that they have committed violations. Ways to conduct landowner education about common wetlands and shoreline infractions should be explored. Brochures and posters on how to enhance wetlands protection and restore vegetated buffers should be displayed at the Town Office. The Conservation Commission should sponsor one or more lectures on wetland and shoreline regulations each year, and assist with a field trip for students.
- Maintain the flood storage capacity of the town's wetlands and floodplains, and filtering capacity of its wetland buffers and vegetated shorelands as one way to mitigate the effects of increases in the frequency of severe storms.
- Strengthen efforts to enforce state wetlands and shoreline regulations. This includes both increasing awareness among developers and contractors, and engaging Town officials such as police and the Road Agent who may be the first to see a disturbance.



- Amend the Zoning Ordinance to protect vegetated buffers along the town's water courses that are not yet protected by either the state or town shoreland regulations, as supported by 85% of survey respondents to protect water quality and fish habitat.
- Amend the Zoning Ordinance to incorporate local protection for wetlands as supported by 75% of survey respondents, and for wetland buffers when there is another building site on the lot (supported by 83% of survey respondents) in order to fill the gaps left by state regulations and enable local enforcement.
- Implement the recently strengthened stormwater requirements in subdivision and site plan review regulations to reduce the potential for erosion and sedimentation.
- Work with conservation organizations and willing landowners to obtain conservation easements on undeveloped as well as high priority wetlands with emphasis on establishing linkages between existing conservation areas.
- Research and consider possible approaches to provide landowners with incentives to restore vegetated buffers along all of the town's smaller brooks as well as the Gale River.

### 3.4 Forest Lands

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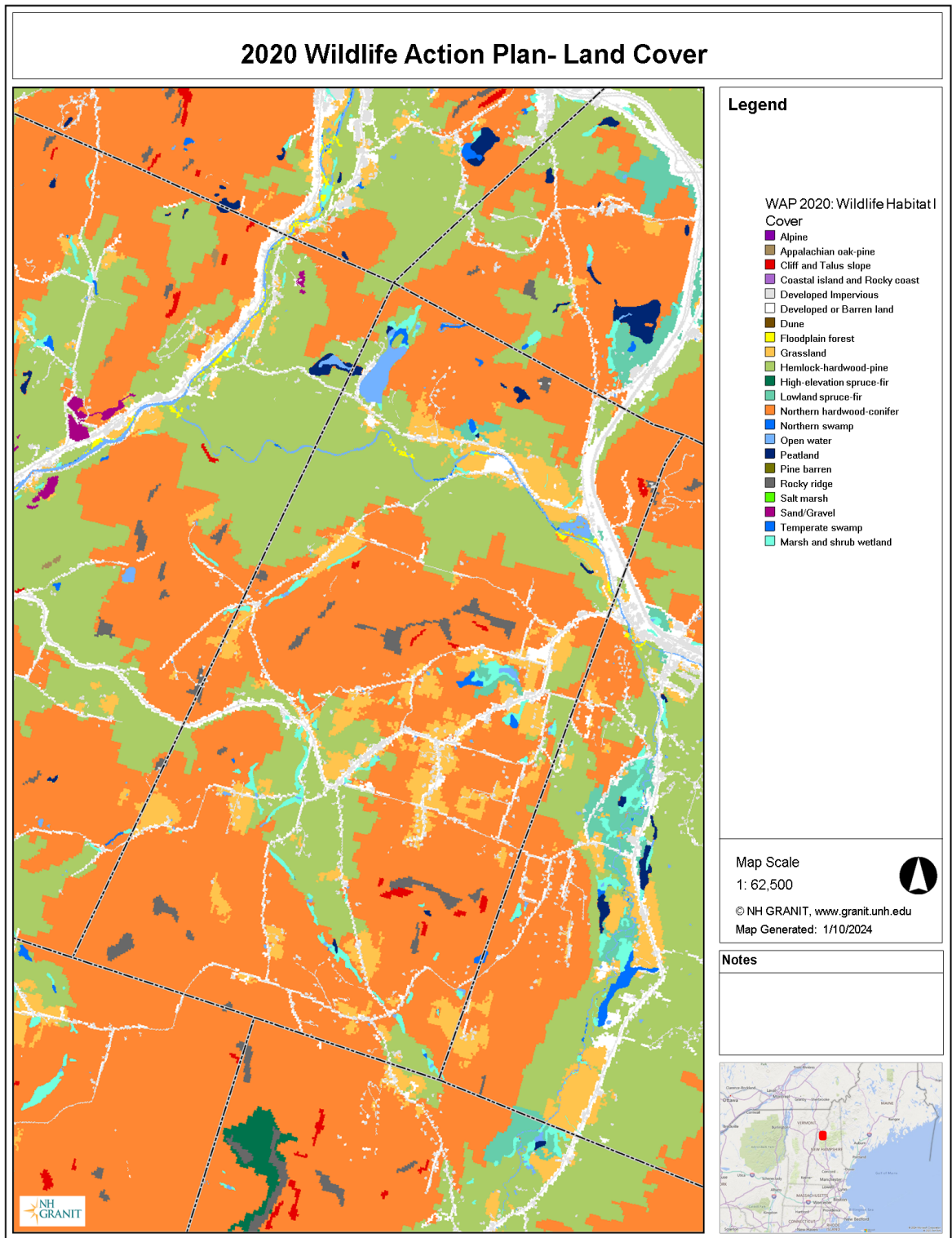
The forests of Sugar Hill have gone through many changes since the first European settlement. In the years since the settlers arrived, the forests have been utilized for construction; cleared to convert land to agriculture, both for crops and for grazing livestock; used to produce charcoal to fire the "Iron Furnace" and heat homes; cleared to open views for vacation homes; and utilized for industries such as furniture-making and area paper and pulp mills. Much land that was cleared for agriculture has now grown back to forest. Today, as shown in the orthophoto on the following page, the vast majority of the town is forested. Local forests continue to be valued by residents for their scenic, wildlife habitat and recreation benefits, as well as for fuel and forest products.



*(Source: 2021/2022 Orthophoto, NH GRANIT)*

As shown on the map on the next page, the majority of the forests of Sugar Hill are mixtures of the Northern Hardwoods forest type. This forest type is dominated by a combination of sugar maple, American beech, ash, and black cherry, with scattered large white pine, and mixtures of paper birch, big-tooth aspen, elm and red maple. In areas of sandy soil, white and red pine become more common as do red maple and balsam fir. In wetter areas, white pine, eastern hemlock, red maple and balsam fir often flourish.





Because of the heavy utilization of the forest, practically continually since settlement, the forest stands we see today are relatively young in respect to their successional stage of development. An example of this is the abundance of aspen and large limbed, mature paper birch in forest stands in Sugar Hill. These two early successional species are first to appear when a farm field or pasture is taken out of production because they will only germinate and thrive in full sunlight condition. When we see these species mixed in with the almost ubiquitous stands of sugar maple, beech and cherry, we know that the birch got its start first, as the farm was left to return to its native state. In the years to come, these “pioneer species” will become less and less of a feature of forest stands; however, they will remain in their place on the forest edge and in old fields that are left unmowed.



New Hampshire's forests help mitigate climate change by transforming carbon dioxide to oxygen and storing the carbon. However, climate change holds several threats to our forests. Several pests and pathogens are expected to increase in severity as winter temperatures are moderated by climate change. In addition, extreme weather events, and associated flooding and high winds, are expected to increase as sources of damage to local forests. Climate change is also expected to lead to shifts in the ranges of many tree species. It is important to keep our forests as resilient as possible for adapting to climate change and withstanding these factors. This means helping maintain forest health through good management practices, and



staying abreast of pest and disease outbreaks and responding quickly. In addition, a diversity of species will help mitigate the results of species shifts and pest and disease outbreaks.

One type of forest pest that the public has become more knowledgeable about is invasives. Invasive species pose a considerable threat to habitat biodiversity and to the forest products industry. The Balsam Woolly Adelgid, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Emerald Ash Borer, and Asian Longhorned Beetle (not yet documented in N.H.) are a few examples. Just as harmful are the invasive plants that crowd native species out of disturbed areas or new openings in the forest created by harvest operations. Bittersweet is an invasive vine that kills trees by girdling them and covering the tree's own foliage.

Landowners desiring to have their forests managed to support the continuation of the region's forest products industry, realize income from their woodlands, or diversify the wildlife habitat, often lack the personal knowledge needed to ensure that those working in the forest are following best practices. The results of disregard for best practices can be devastating erosion of productive soils, poor regeneration, loss of forest health, loss of habitat, siltation of surface waters, and damage to roads.

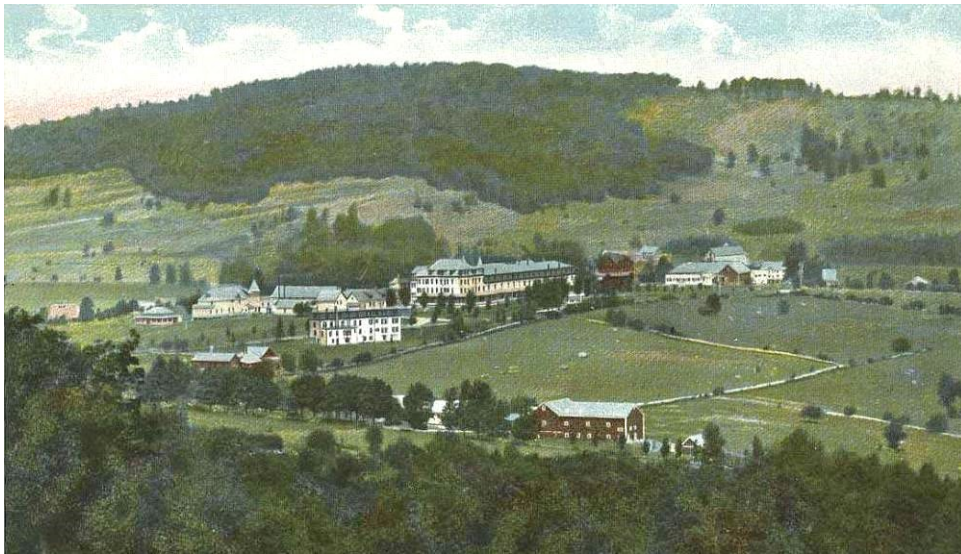
#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Increase education for forest landowners. Opportunities include providing copies of best management practices guides, a model harvest contract, and county forester contact information to large landowners and to those applying for building permits or subdivision approval. A pamphlet on best forestry/logging practices could be created for landowners filing Intent to Cut applications.
- Initiate program of training for and by Conservation Commission members on the identification of invasive species.
- Research and consider incentives that could be provided for implementing better forest management practices such as increased buffers along surface waters and trails, and protection of important habitat areas.
- Encourage landowners to manage their forest lands for timber, wildlife habitat, and public recreation where appropriate.

## 3.5 Agricultural Lands

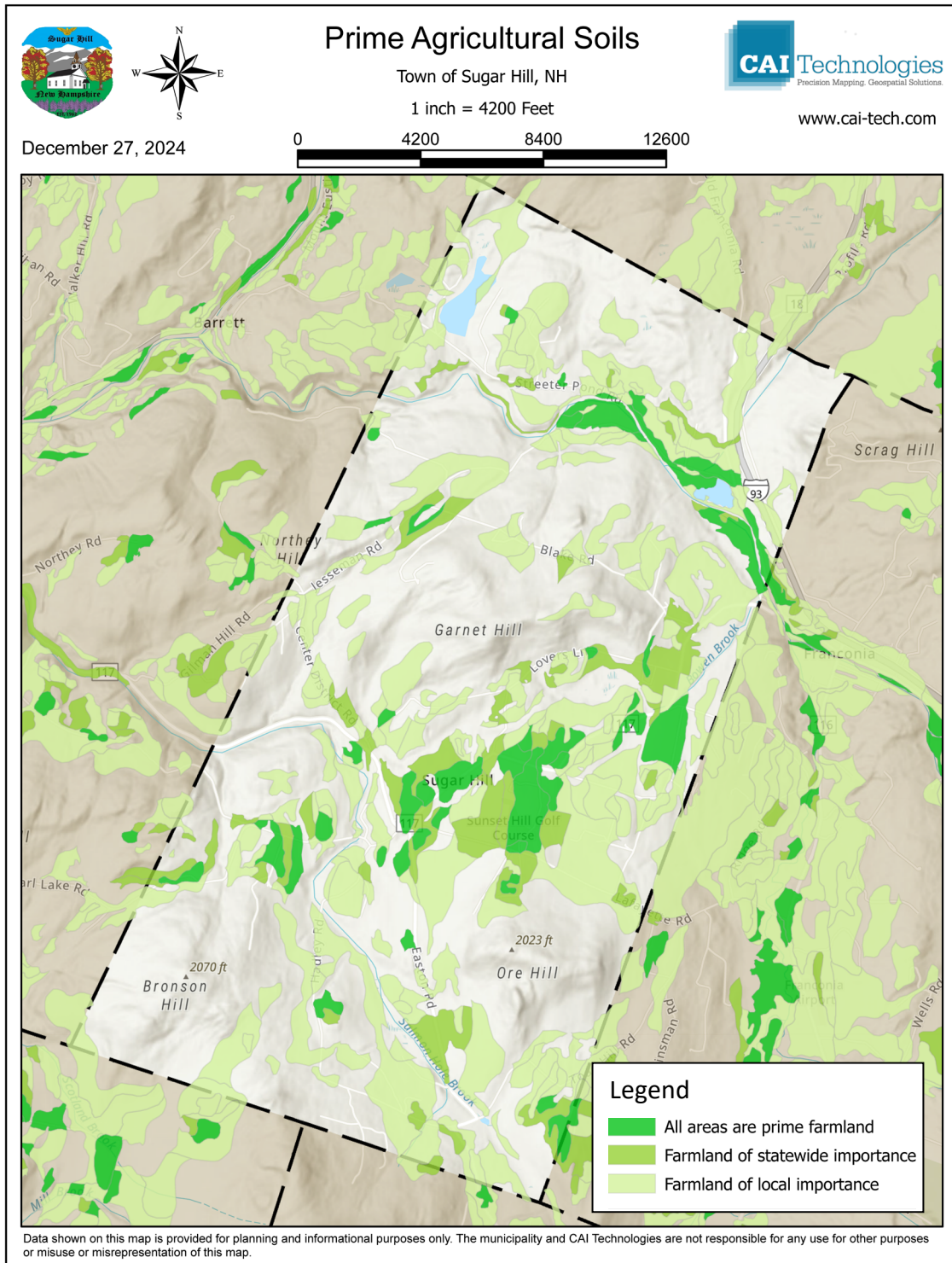
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Similar to the rest of the state, the amount of land in agricultural use in Sugar Hill has been declining over the years. Old photographs such as this 1906 postcard show that the land cover pattern was once the opposite of today's – cleared land with occasional forested areas rather than forested land with occasional open spaces. Reforestation occurred as New England's agricultural economy declined. The remaining open areas were easier and less costly to develop. Much of the land that remains open today is not being used to produce food for *people or animals*.



*The Sunset Hill House, Annex and Cottages, Sugar Hill, NH (from a c. 1906 postcard, Wikimedia Commons)*

Prime agricultural soils are those which are most productive for food, feed, forage and other crops due to their physical and chemical properties. In many cases, these are the same properties that have made them attractive areas for development – level and well drained. As shown on the map on the next page, Sugar Hill has significant acreage of prime agricultural soils; however, much of this has already been subdivided for residential use.





The state's current use program provides a tool for landowners wishing to keep their land in agriculture, forest or other open space use; land in current use is taxed on the value of the land as used today instead of its higher development value. In 2003 there were 141 owners participating in the program in Sugar Hill, including 239 parcels totaling 7,927 acres. Of this acreage, only 1,081 acres were considered farmland. In 2022 the number of owners participating had increased to 182, representing 276 parcels totaling 8,041 acres. While this represents 73.4% of the town's acreage, the acreage that was farmland has dropped to 891 acres. (NH DRA, 2022 Current Use Report)

Two significant farms in Sugar Hill and part of a third (the rest of the property is in Franconia) have been permanently conserved. These are the Ski Hearth Farm, Stewart Farm, and Toad Hill Farm. A portion of the open fields of Bronson Hill as well as the last open field of the former Whipple Farm on Route 117 have also been conserved. All of these lands are available for farming in the future.

Agricultural lands provide a fundamental element of the character of Sugar Hill. The scenic views the town is known for are dependent upon the views of mountains across an open foreground. Local products and agricultural activity are also essential ingredients of the town's rural character. The local and regional economy are dependent on this scenery and working landscape character.

Across New England, local food sources, and the opportunity to produce food locally by keeping prime agricultural lands open, are being recognized as important elements of community resiliency. It is also understood that a critical mass of agricultural activity



supported by regional networks, and the ability to be flexible and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and markets, are essential to the agricultural economy.

For a number of reasons, interest in building a local food system in northern New Hampshire has been growing. Demand for local food far outstrips supply in our region. A key strategy to meet the demand for food is to support and assist Sugar Hill residents in keeping their land open and available for agriculture, whether for grazing livestock, growing vegetables, harvesting hay, or just to maintain the open land.

The US Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years to report on every farm that sells at least \$1,000 worth of products each year. With the increase in interest in local foods and land stewardship, county-wide figures had shown a reversal in agricultural land loss trends when both the number of farms and the total acreage in the county in agricultural use increased between the 2002 and 2007. However, from 2012 to 2017, the number of farms in Grafton County dropped from 500 to 462 and the acreage in farming dropped from 82,372 to 73,575 (2017 US Census of Agriculture).



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Review the zoning ordinance and consider amendments that may make the town more “farm friendly.” Consider, for example, changes to the type of lodging allowed in the RR1 district when associated with an active agricultural enterprise, and the addition of a broader list of agritourism activities than required by state statute (RSA 21:34-a) to the uses allowed by Special Exception in the RR2. In addition, consider what the farm owner’s needs might be for worker housing and for processing and selling products jointly with other farms, and ensure the ordinance provides the opportunity to apply for a Special Exception for these activities.

- Amend the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations to enable the Planning Board to influence the siting of development in a manner which will maximize the remaining agricultural potential of the land; flexibility in the layout of subdivisions to reduce their impact on important resources was supported by 71% of respondents to the Master Plan Survey.
- Educate landowners on the agricultural potential and value of their lands.
- Ensure that the impacts of agricultural operations are properly managed and the scale is appropriate to the neighborhood.
- Use the Conservation Fund to help landowners conserve agricultural lands.

### 3.6 Wildlife Habitat

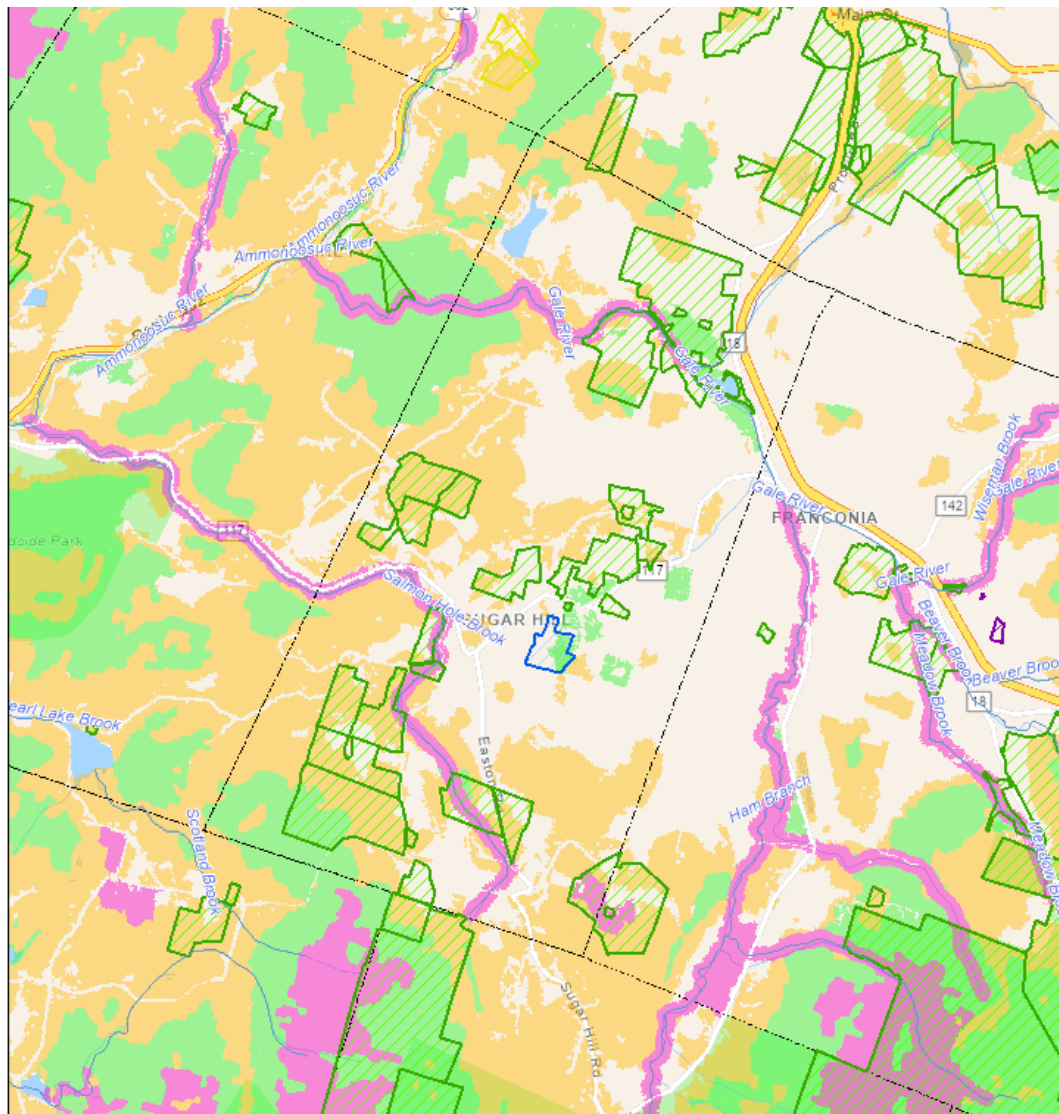
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As part of developing the state's Wildlife Action Plan, NH Fish and Game biologists ranked habitat condition throughout the state based on such factors as biodiversity, landscape and human impacts. As shown on the map on the next page, some of the state's highest ranked habitat is the riparian corridors shared with Lisbon along Salmon Hole Brook and the Gale River. Other areas of habitat important to the region and supporting landscape are shown throughout town.

Currently, the town has healthy populations of deer, bear and turkey. These animals can often be seen along field and forest edges in the early morning and at dusk in most of the town. The moose population in New Hampshire is on the decline and the population in Sugar Hill is not an exception. Sugar Hill also has an abundance of ruffed grouse, woodcock and various migratory and resident songbirds. Other wildlife inhabiting the fields and forests include coyote, fox, snowshoe hare, fisher, bobcat, and the state-endangered American marten.



# HIGHEST RANKED WILDLIFE HABITAT AND CONSERVATION LAND 2015 WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN



1/10/2024, 7:08:51 PM

1:100,000

- Streams
- Conservation Lands
- Permanent Conservation Land
- Unofficial Conservation Land
- Unprotected Water Supply Lands
- Unknown
- New Hampshire Towns
- WAP 2015: Highest Ranked Wildlife Habitat
- 0
- 1 Highest Ranked Habitat in NH
- 2 Highest Ranked Habitat in Region
- 3 Supporting Landscape

0 0.5 1 2 mi  
0 1 2 4 km

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

VCGI, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/ANSA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS | Sources: National Hydrography Dataset: USGS | BDY | NHDES | United States

Web AppBuilder for ArcGIS

People recreating along lakes, ponds, rivers and streams can find many different species of wildlife living in the immediate area. Salmon Hole Stream, the Gale River and area brooks boast plentiful native brook trout populations. The map to the right shows the Sugar Hill streams that NH Fish and Game has identified as having a “predicted coldwater fishery,” meaning that based on modeling they are expected to support a coldwater fishery year-round. Furbearing wildlife such as mink, otter and beaver can also be found in the rivers and streams flowing through town. Beaver are especially plentiful as they have limited predation and the ability to improve their own habitat.



*Predicted Coldwater Fishery*  
(Source: NH Aquatic Restoration Mapper)

As we have few productive farms at this time, crop destruction and ruminant predation is rarely an issue. As the town is comparatively thickly settled for the North Country, hunting is limited and not a major tourist attraction, although fishing is enjoyed by many in the town's rivers, streams, and ponds. Evidence of this can be seen at both Streeter Pond and Coffin Pond.

Streeter Pond, Coffin Pond and the lower Gale River offer the best fishing and some of the best wildlife viewing in town. We are fortunate that residents and visitors can view a variety of wildlife in a central location. Interested parties can see deer, otter, beaver, turtles, bald eagles, osprey, loons and many other waterfowl along with an unusual variety of migrant song birds, while enjoying wading, boating and even sailing on the ponds.

Like other towns in the North Country, we have nuisance bears and moose and deer that consume ornamental plantings; however, the principal challenge we face is in maintaining this balance between wildlife and development so there will continue to be wildlife to watch and enjoy. One of the challenges as the town grows in human population is to maintain habitat that wildlife use to travel to and from areas for foraging, denning, hunting, feeding, and



breeding. Travel corridors along waterways and through forested areas help wildlife move between larger forests, wetlands, meadows, and other habitats.

It is not just terrestrial species that travel. It is vital for fish and other aquatic species to be able to move up and down streams for spawning and feeding. Culverts have often been installed without regard to the ability of aquatic organisms to pass through to access different areas needed for different life stages, seasons or flow conditions. Although many



culverts in town have been replaced since that time, the inventory conducted in 2016 through the NH Stream Crossing Initiative showed very few culverts in town offered full passage for aquatic organisms at that time. Technical assistance is available from NH Fish and Game and nonprofit organizations for designing culverts and bridges with multiple goals in mind.

Biologists and conservation partners are working hard to identify what may be impacting specific animals and the resources on which they depend. Residents and visitors alike can control how they utilize land and interact with wildlife. Residents can make a positive impact on wildlife populations by following best forestry practices, being responsible around water and wetlands, and by conducting further research. Some additional ways for homeowners to coexist with wildlife are listed in **Chapter 4 Future Land Use** on page 66. If we collectively focus on improving habitat, wildlife populations will thrive for years to come.

Most of the wildlife populations inhabiting Sugar Hill appear to be doing very well. However, there are a few species that could fare better. While residents and visitors will see the occasional moose, the majority of the town does not have ideal moose habitat. Winter tick, brain worm, and collisions are all responsible for the diminishing moose population in the state. The moose population in Sugar Hill would benefit from selective cuts on some of the larger tracts of forest land. These cuts would provide a much needed food source in the area, as moose would be able to browse on the regenerated vegetation. Snowshoe hare and bobcat

in the area would also benefit from selective timber harvesting as the first growth in a newly harvested area often includes dense softwood understories.

Resource allocation and land conservation is an excellent way to protect and conserve key wildlife habitats. An excellent example of this land conservation is the Cooley-Jericho Community Forest. As shown earlier on the Wildlife Action Plan map on page 41, very little of our most valuable wildlife habitat is conserved. Some small parcels are conserved around Bowen Brook Dam (Peckett's Pond) and Coffin Pond. Acquiring larger land tracts in the future would provide the community the ability to improve habitat and effectively promote healthy wildlife populations.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Ensure that landowners are aware of the resources available for learning how to improve habitat on their land such as the UNH Cooperative Extension county forest resources educator, NH Fish and Game regional biologist, UNH Cooperative Extension wildlife biologist, Conservation Commission members, and NH Audubon.
- Work with conservation organizations and willing landowners to conserve important habitat and corridors around Streeter Pond and Gale River.
- Educate landowners on the importance of vegetated buffers along surface waters and wetlands.
- Use resources from NH Fish & Game, NH Audubon and NH Wildlife Federation to provide educational material to homeowners, and to those intending to build, on methods for minimizing the negative impacts of residential use on wildlife.
- Initiate a public education campaign with other groups on living with wildlife and use town events as one tool for outreach.
- Utilize the NH Stream Crossing Initiative and available funding to prioritize culvert replacements.
- When replaced or installed for the first time, culverts and bridges should be designed to accommodate aquatic wildlife passage.

### 3.7 Scenic Resources

When asked to list positive qualities or strengths of the town, respondents to the 2023 Master Plan Survey most often cited Sugar Hill's scenic beauty and views. Our mountains, hillsides and ridgelines, ponds, wetlands, streams, and amazing views continue to be very important elements to our economic well-being and quality of life in town. Key scenic views to protect include ridgelines, hilltops, and mountain peaks that can be seen from public locations, as well as spots from which to observe them.



The highest priority views include:

- Presidential and Franconia Ranges from Lover's Lane, Blake Road, Birches Road, and Sunset Hill Road
- Franconia Ridge and the Gale River Valley from Streeter Pond Road
- Viewpoints from Iris Farm, Polly's Pancake Parlor, Sunset Hill House, the former site of Peckett's on Lover's Lane, Community Church and St. Matthew's Episcopal Church on Route 117
- Sugar Hill and Garnet Hill from the viewpoint of Franconia Village and the Gale River
- Bronson Hill and the Cooley-Jericho Community Forest from Route 117 in the village center.

In many of these locations, open fields in the foreground are key elements of the quality of the view. Historical photographs of Sugar Hill from the 1800s and early 1900s show the abundance of open meadows, pasture and farm fields. Today many of the same views are often obscured by forests. In addition, development on ridgelines and hilltops has in some locations begun to detract from the views. The survey results indicated community support

for strengthening the tools available to the Planning Board to shape development in a manner more consistent with protection of the town's resources. Guidelines are available to reduce the impacts of hillside and ridgeline development on views. These include such things as limiting the amount of clearing, giving consideration to colors, reflectivity and lighting, and trying to screen the driveway. See page 65 for more details.

The following roads have been designated as scenic roads by the town:

- Lafayette Road from Sunset Hill Road to the Franconia/Sugar Hill Line
- Birches Rd from the Episcopal Church on Route 117 to O'Brian Road (Bickford Hill Road)
- Grandview Road from Center District Road to Lover's Lane
- Lover's Lane from Route 117 at the Community Church to Route 117
- Blake Road from Route 117 to Center District Rd also known as Jesseman Road
- Pearl Lake Road from Route 117 to the Lisbon Town Line
- Jesseman Road/Crane Hill Road
- Center District Road



This means when roadwork or utility work takes place, the Planning Board must hold a public hearing and review and approve removal of any trees or stone walls associated with that work. It is important to recognize the important role roadside trees and stone walls play in the town's scenic landscape on many of the other roads in town as well.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Preservation of scenic views highly valued by the community should be included in the Conservation Commission's land conservation priorities.
- Access to scenic views should be considered in forest management and roadside cutting plans.
- Adopt and implement flexible zoning techniques to site development in a manner compatible with maintenance of important scenic resources when possible. This includes both clustering/siting homes away from open areas that provide a foreground for the view, and also siting homes that are within important viewsheds in a manner that provides the maximum screening.
- Provide hillside and ridgeline guidelines regarding methods to reduce the loss of scenic value during development, e.g., clearing/landscaping, exterior colors, lighting and reflective glass, to new landowners, applicants for building permits, surveyors and others who may be involved in siting and design decisions, and encourage subdividers to consider them in lot layouts.
- Continue to manage the town's roadsides with sensitivity toward the contribution trees and stone walls make to the highly valued scenic quality of the town.



### 3.8 Air Quality

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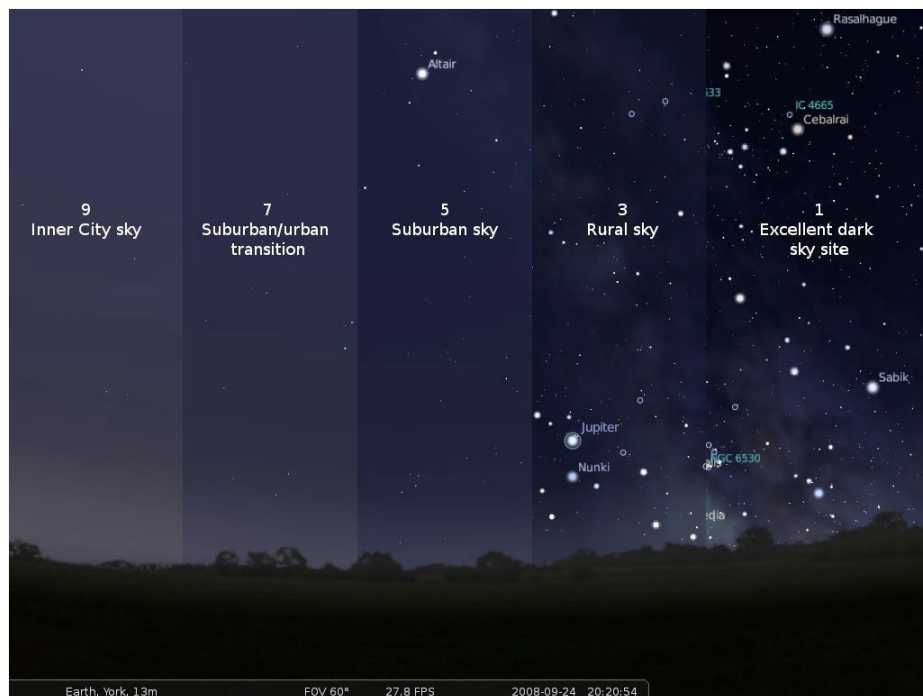
Air quality is strictly regulated and monitored by the state and federal governments. At present we do not have a major source of air pollution in the town. Continued diligence will be required to ensure that the increased use of biomass power generation for agriculture, hospitals and larger buildings does not degrade the region's air quality.

It is traditional to burn brush here; for small amounts this is not a problem. Like wood stoves and outdoor wood furnaces, increasing development density may lead to localized air quality issues.



### 3.9 Dark Night Skies

Being able to see the stars at night, and look around at dark hillsides, are important elements of the rural feel that is part of the quality of life in Sugar Hill. This is no longer possible in the commercial areas of Littleton or Franconia's Main Street due to street lighting. Currently, Sugar Hill's Site Plan Review Regulations provide clear, detailed but reasonable limitations on outdoor lighting for multifamily and nonresidential uses. The Zoning Ordinance, which applies to single family homes as well, contains only vague statements that don't translate into anything actionable. Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents supported amending the zoning ordinance to require that new light fixtures aim downwards and away from the sky and neighbors. However, regulations that apply to all of the lighting on all of the homes in town would be very difficult to enforce. The Selectboard would not only need to ensure that lighting installed in new homes complies with the Ordinance, but that all replacement lighting does as well, and that flood and spotlights are aimed appropriately. Another alternative to consider would be to encourage homeowners to voluntarily follow the same rules that are applied to businesses through site plan review and provide education regarding the benefits, not only for dark skies, but for neighbors, traffic and wildlife.



(Source: Stellarium & EdouardStenger.com)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Educate homeowners on the unintended consequences of their outdoor lighting choices and the benefits to their neighbors, traffic and wildlife of reducing lighting and using DarkSky-approved lighting that is aimed downward and shielded.
- Continue to monitor the necessity and type of street lighting in town.

### 3.10 Quiet

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Like darkness, quiet is one the important elements of the quality of life in Sugar Hill. In fact, peace and quiet was the second most common response to the question on the 2023 Master Plan Survey regarding the most positive qualities or strengths of the town. Zoning and site plan review can prevent excessive noise from nonresidential uses and ensure that those likely to be associated with high levels of noise or noise at odd hours are not sited adjacent to residential areas. Isolated issues are best dealt with on a case-by-case basis, utilizing the town's noise ordinance when necessary.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Ensure that the zoning ordinance and site plan review regulations and their administration adequately protect nearby residential uses from excessive noise from nonresidential uses. This includes consideration of the type of land uses, such as heavy equipment-related, and performance measures such as decibels at the property line, at what hours, and what percentage of the time.
- Enforce the town's noise ordinance as needed.

### 3.11 Recreation

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Outdoor recreation is an important foundation of the town's historical and cultural legacy. With the town's scenic views, open spaces, clean air and water, together with the rural atmosphere and proximity to the White Mountain National Forest, recreation and tourism continue to be important components of the town's economic base.

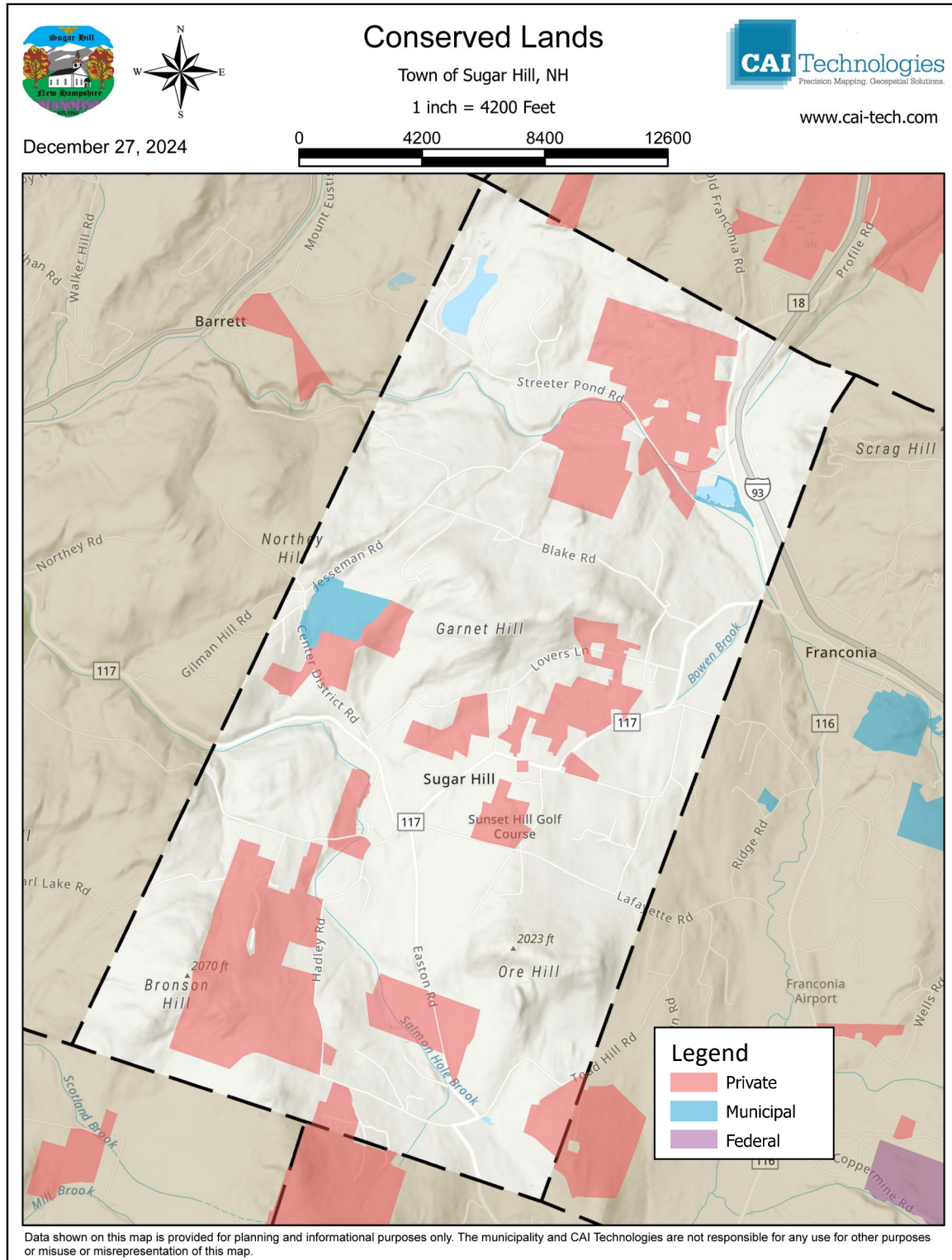
The town's natural resources provide a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. Many opportunities for hiking and biking on town roads and trails can be found here. Snowshoeing and glade and cross-country skiing are available on Town properties or on many of the locally-conserved properties shown on the map on page 51. The Phillip Robertson Town Forest located off of Center District Road has a network of trails. The

Foss Forest, MacCornack-Evelyn Forest, and the Bronson Hill Conservation Area, all permanently conserved, have a network of walking trails as well. The 840-acre Cooley-Jericho Community Forest managed by the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT) offers a multi-use trail network. Glade skiing trails are provided in partnership with the Granite Backcountry Alliance. The Whipple Field next to Polly's Pancakes is also permanently conserved for public use.

Hunting on private property is available only with landowner permission. There are an increasing number of lands posted against hunting and other passive recreation uses. The current use program provides one tool to ensure residents and visitors continue to have access to private lands for outdoor recreation. For land already in the current use program, a 20% discount is given for "recreation land," which means the owner has chosen to open their land to the public at no charge. There can be no prohibition of skiing, snowshoeing, fishing, hunting, hiking or nature observation unless such uses are incompatible with a particular tract. Some ACT conserved lands offer opportunities for hunting as well.

Streeter and Coffin Pond provide opportunities for fishing and boating. Both locations have easy access for launching kayaks and canoes, while Streeter Pond has a state-maintained boat launch. Shore fishing is convenient at Coffin Pond and is very popular with those without a water craft. In winter both ponds are used for skating, skiing and snowshoeing; ice fishing also occurs in Streeter Pond. All of our ponds, streams and wetlands provide opportunities for nature study. Wild orchids, insectivorous plants, songbirds, loons, ducks, osprey beaver, otter, moose and spring peepers are some of the wildlife to be seen and heard. Both the ponds and the Gale River are accessible to the public, offering recreation opportunities that are beneficial to our local tourist businesses. In late April through May and after some heavy rains, four miles of Class III-IV whitewater kayaking is even possible on the Ammonoosuc River with a put-in on Crane Hill Road.





**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Continue to develop and map a multi-use trail network for different abilities.
- Seek opportunities to develop family-friendly multi-use paths to separate walking and biking from roads.
- Work with landowners, adjacent towns and conservation organizations such as Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust to create trails through their land that would link conservation lands with trails for year-round use.
- Work with recreation groups to ensure there is communication between landowners and trail users.
- Recognize landowners who allow recreation on their property for the valuable benefit they provide to the community.
- Promote awareness of “Hunting with Permission Only” signs as an alternative to posting, and make them available for purchase locally.



# Chapter 4. Future Land Use

## 4.1 Introduction

Sugar Hill's land use pattern is a reflection of the area's rich history as a tourist destination and second home location for those seeking the quiet beauty and outdoor recreation opportunities. Development is somewhat denser in the town center where services and businesses are concentrated.



Iconic tourist businesses - the Sunset Hill House, Polly's Pancake Parlor and Harman's Cheese & Country Store - define the character of the town center. Development is also concentrated adjacent to Streeter Pond. The areas surrounding the town center and Streeter Pond are primarily wooded with scattered year-round and seasonal homes and a few open fields.





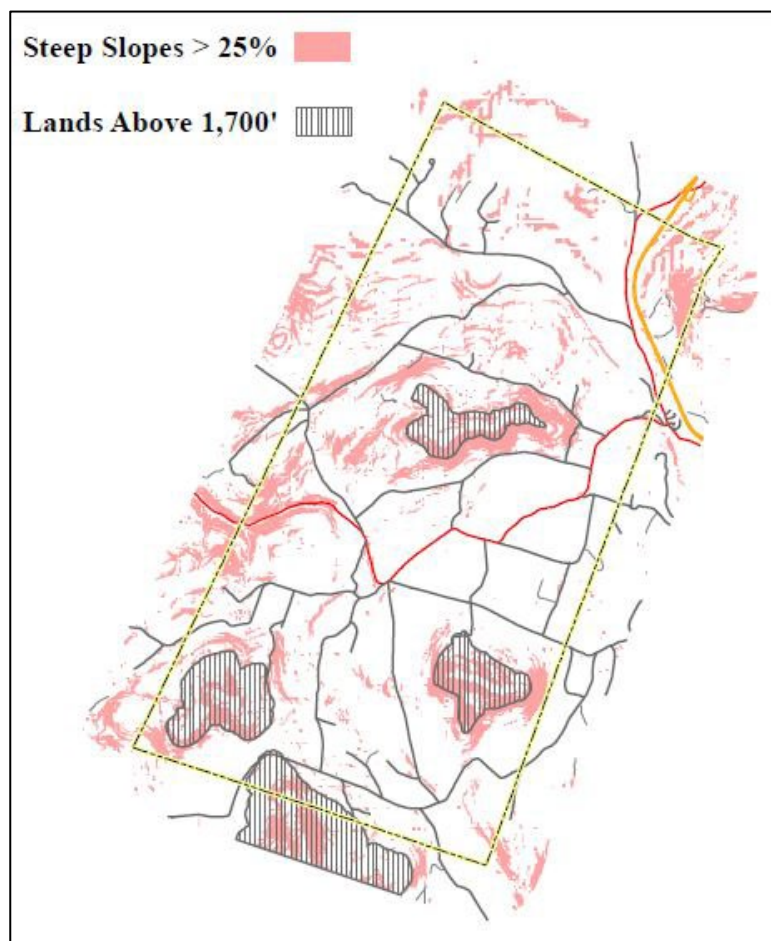
Growth has continued slowly, mainly through subdivisions of a lot here and there scattered throughout town. With 384 housing units counted by the 2020 US Census (approx. 282 occupied year-round, 86 seasonal, and 16 vacant), this translates to an average residential density of about one house per 28.5 acres, well below the 5 acre density of the town's most rural zoning district (RR2). This means that there is still tremendous growth potential even taking the limitations posed by topography, wetlands and the road network into account. The challenge as the community continues to grow and change will be how to hold onto the quiet scenic rural atmosphere vs. develop more of a suburban "feel." This will require thoughtful deliberate planning with an eye to protection of natural features and other key elements of the character of Sugar Hill important to year-round and seasonal residents and visitors.

## 4.2 Limitations to Development

### Steep Slopes

As shown in the image to the right showing steep slopes and high elevation lands, steep slopes are a concern in many areas of town, including but not limited to the larger hillsides such as Ore Hill and Garnet Hill. Slopes over 25% are not suitable for development due to the high potential for erosion and sedimentation and unsuitableness for onsite septic disposal. Development on slopes over 15% requires special consideration to ensure erosion and

sedimentation does not occur during or after development. Sugar Hill's Subdivision and Site Plan Review Regulations were recently updated to ensure that stormwater is properly dealt with when subdivision roads and commercial properties are developed.



*Natural Resource Co-occurrence inset map (Source: Society for the Protection of NH Forests, 2008)*

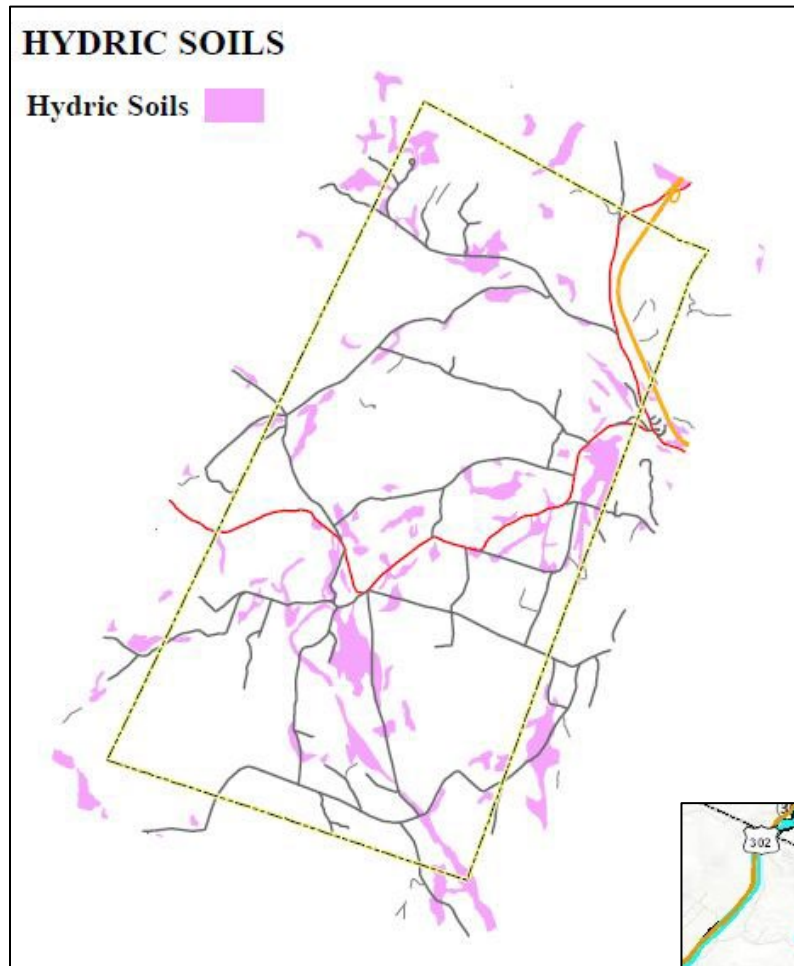
Access needs to be carefully evaluated as well, since response times in an emergency are affected by grade and drainage issues. Driveway permits only address the point where a driveway meets the road and potential impacts of the “curb cut” on the town road; limits on the grades of new driveways would need to be contained in the Zoning Ordinance. In addition, state law does require the Planning Board when reviewing applications to consider “any written recommendations of the municipal fire chief regarding fire department access, to include width, vertical clearance, grade, suitability of road surface, bridges, dead-ends, and the ability to pass and turn around once in the driveway” (RSA 153:5).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that the Fire Chief has an opportunity to review development applications and consider comments provided by the Chief in decision-making.
- Adopt driveway regulations to ensure that driveways are designed to prevent runoff of stormwater onto town roads.
- Provide recommendations with building permits regarding driveway safety and a reminder that the landowner is responsible for maintaining the driveway in a condition passable by fire trucks.

## Wetlands and Floodplains

As shown on the maps on the next page, much of the level land in town is wetland, as represented below by hydric soils, or is subject to flooding. These areas are unsuitable for development due to water quality and health and safety issues, as well as potential for structural damage. In addition, loss of flood storage capacity in one place leads to increased flooding someplace else, an issue that is of increasing importance as New Hampshire is experiencing more frequent severe storm events, and more of our winter precipitation is coming as rain (*Climate Change in Northern New Hampshire: Past, Present, and Future*, Cameron Wake et al, 2014). Restricting filling and draining of wetlands and development in wetland buffers and floodplains all received strong support from respondents to the 2023 Master Plan Survey.



*Natural Resource Co-occurrence inset map, (Source: Society for the Protection of NH Forests, 2008)*

*100 Year Floodplain  
(Source: GRANIT)*



Implementation of the recommendations in **Chapter 3. Natural Resources** regarding protection of wetlands and their buffers will also help prevent the hazards of building in wet areas. See **3.3 Surface Water Resources** on pages 26-31.

Some of the key components of floodplain ordinances that are designed to keep people and property safe while maintaining the flood storage capacity of the floodplain include:

- New principal buildings should not be allowed in flood hazard areas unless there is no other site available on a lot of record at the time of adoption.
- Uses with an especially high potential for causing hazardous conditions during a flood event should be prohibited.
- New structures and additions should be 1 to 3 feet above the base flood elevation.
- Fill or other encroachments should be mitigated by compensatory storage.

Many of these elements are FEMA Community Rating System (CRS) activities, which means the community would get points toward a reduction in flood insurance rates for residents. Many New Hampshire communities have stopped allowing new development in the floodplain including, in our area, Lisbon, Easton, Bath and Franconia.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- Amend the zoning ordinance to prevent new development in the floodplain when there is another option on the lot as supported by 79% of survey respondents; and prevent loss of flood storage capacity when development does occur.

## 4.3 Zoning for Future Land Use

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Sugar Hill's three-tier approach to zoning for future land use has been in place for many years. The three districts are General Residence, Rural Residence One and Rural Residence Two.

General Residence (GR) includes the areas of most activity in town – the area approximately ringed by the NH Route 117 corridor, the S Road and Lafayette Road, and the Franconia townline. Within this area is the traditional town center with churches, the town office and library, and other town services. The town's most well-known destinations are also located in this district – Sugar Hill Inn, Polly's Pancake Parlor, the Sunset Hill House, and Harmon's Cheese and Country Store. The Route 18 corridor from Franconia to Bethlehem is also zoned GR. The GR district allows for the highest level of activity with two-acre minimum lot sizes and the opportunity to apply for a Special Exception for uses traditionally located in the village

center such as duplexes or multifamily dwellings, schools, lodging, restaurants, light commercial, event venues and clinics.

Certain areas of town have been recognized as more difficult to develop due to lack of access. These areas are remote from town services. These areas are zoned Rural Residence Two (RR2). Agriculture and forestry are encouraged and single family homes are allowed on five-acre lots. Certain other activities such as outdoor recreation may be approved as Special Exceptions.

The remainder of town is zoned Rural Residence One (RR1). These areas are not as close to town services as the GR but have roads generally suitable for residential development with reasonable access by police and fire. In the RR1 a minimum lot size of three acres is required. A number of uses may be allowed by Special Exception such as duplexes or multifamily dwellings, light commercial, and event venues, provided the roadways are suitable for the expected level of traffic and it is not expected to adversely affect the character of the area.

This zoning scheme has been working well for the town and is recommended to remain in place for the foreseeable future. Minor changes to zoning district boundaries may be made as circumstances change such as particular roads being upgraded or downgraded, or a development trend that changes the nature of a particular area. Changes to the use tables are made periodically to ensure that the Zoning Ordinance remains current and addresses emerging land uses and land use issues.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Maintain the current approach to zoning with the General Residence (GR), Rural Residence One (RR1), and Rural Residence Two (RR2) Districts.
- Periodically review the Zoning Ordinance for minor changes to recommend to Town Meeting voters as needed such as adjustments to zoning district boundaries and new or emerging uses.

## **4.4 Specific Land Uses**

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### **Housing**

Minor changes in zoning can substantially improve the ability of the elderly, the disabled, and young families to remain in the community. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs), aka “in-law” apartments, whether an actual apartment in or attached to the main house, or a detached unit such as an existing garage or barn converted to living space, can provide an opportunity



for extended families to assist each other, or for an elderly or disabled resident to both receive income from their property and have the assistance of someone else living on-site.

With the current shortage and high cost of housing, ADUs are increasingly important as housing for the area's workforce as well. In response to the previous master plan survey in which respondents supported allowing accessory apartments in existing homes, existing accessory buildings, and also when added onto an existing home, the Zoning Ordinance was amended to allow any of these three configurations. Respondents to the 2023 Master Plan Survey again identified making the zoning less restrictive for ADUs as the top choice for providing housing in town with 82% choosing this option. In March 2024 Town Meeting voters made it a bit easier for homeowners to add an ADU by reducing the parking requirement for the ADU to one space. Zoning amendments passed in 2024 also added the opportunity for the owner of a two-family dwelling in the General Residential (GR) or Rural Residential One (RR1) Districts to apply for a Special Exception to add one accessory dwelling unit to a two-family dwelling, or for the owner of a single-family dwelling to add a second accessory dwelling unit under certain conditions.

Two-family dwellings can also help family members help each other or provide rental income to assist with mortgage payments. In March 2024, voters eliminated the need for a two-family dwelling to have double the acreage of a single-family dwelling; and, in the General Residential (GR) and Rural Residential One (RR1) Districts, eliminated the requirement for a Special Exception from the Zoning Board of Adjustment in order to convert an existing single-family dwelling to a two-family dwelling.

Two additional opportunities to make it easier for homeowners to add an ADU were not supported by voters. These were: removing the requirement that property with an accessory dwelling unit must be owner-occupied, and allowing an ADU in an existing accessory building on a lot that does not meet the current minimum lot size if it is within the existing footprint and in compliance with setbacks. Although there are likely few properties affected by the accessory building provisions, the requirement that a home with an ADU be owner-occupied has been identified as an obstacle to financing. Mortgage providers generally want to have the opportunity to rent out a home between foreclosure and resale and the requirement that the home be owner-occupied precludes this. It also limits options for a resident who may wish to continue to own their home and rent it out after relocating. Continued community discussions might result in a language regarding this topic that could result in a positive vote in the future.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Engage the community in continued discussions regarding the requirement that homes be owner-occupied in order to have an accessory dwelling unit and present to voters again.
- Stay abreast of changes in state law regarding accessory dwelling units and workforce housing.

**Agriculture**

Even though it is not a dominant land use in Sugar Hill, agriculture remains an essential ingredient of the scenic rural atmosphere of the town. In addition to the availability of local products and interaction with farming activity, many of the favorite scenic views include open fields. For agricultural land to remain open, landowners need to be able to respond to the economics of farming in northern New Hampshire. Two trends which are increasing opportunities for those interested in farming are the interest in local foods and agritourism. Farmers need to be able to respond quickly to changes and opportunities as these trends continue and others emerge. The state's "right to farm law" provides that agriculture "shall not be unreasonably limited by the use of municipal planning and zoning powers" (672:1, III-b) . Nonetheless, zoning ordinances and site plan review regulations meant to implement the local master plan can sometimes instead provide barriers to achieving the community's goal to protect farmland.



Sugar Hill's Site Plan Review Regulations explicitly exempt agricultural activities or structures that do not involve the onsite retail sale of products or services to the general public, and seasonal roadside farmstands limited to sale of the agricultural products produced on the

farm on which it is located or other agricultural properties owned or leased by the same agricultural enterprise.

The Zoning Ordinance does not currently support agritourism except what falls within the state's definition of agriculture (RSA 21:34-a). In the General Residence (GR) District, agriculture and the uses typically associated with agritourism such as tourist homes, hotels, and event venues, all require a Special Exception. In Rural Residence One (RR1) agriculture is permitted, and tourist homes and event venues can be allowed by Special Exception; however an inn would not be allowed. In the Rural Residence Two (RR2) where agriculture is a permitted use and encouraged, there is no opportunity for the operator to apply for a Special Exception for any of the activities typically associated with agritourism. Processing and selling products produced on the farm may also be difficult under the current zoning.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Review the zoning ordinance and consider amendments that may make the town more "farm friendly." Consider, for example, changes to the type of lodging allowed in the RR1 district when associated with an active agricultural enterprise, and the addition of a broader list of agritourism activities than required by state statute (RSA 21:34-a) to the uses allowed by Special Exception in the RR2. In addition, consider what the farm owner's needs might be for worker housing and for processing and selling products jointly with other farms, and ensure the ordinance provides the opportunity to apply for a Special Exception for these activities.

#### **Small Business**

Residents have expressed a desire for more businesses in the village area (General Residence District) of a nature that are compatible with the peaceful rural small town atmosphere. This means, for example, certain tourist businesses with a low volume of traffic, such as antique or book shops, art studios, galleries, cafes, shops with locally-made or grown products, bed and breakfasts, or a neighborhood grocery catering to the day-to-day needs of residents and guests. Some tourist-related businesses with a low volume of traffic might be suitable anywhere in town, such as summer camps and passive nonmotorized outdoor recreation. In general, agricultural or other natural resource-based businesses are considered to be compatible with the character of the community provided the potential negative impacts are properly mitigated. In addition, some services or professional offices such as a salon or law office might be compatible with neighboring residential uses in rural areas depending on the scale, operation and site design.

Throughout town, the size of the building or operation and potential impacts of a proposed business on the community and its natural resources are paramount in determining the suitability for Sugar Hill. This includes the amount of impervious surface, volume and nature of traffic, hours of operation, visibility to passers-by, odor, noise, unsightly outdoor storage, lighting, and signage. Although the Zoning Ordinance requires a Special Exception for many business types throughout town, the Ordinance does not provide the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) with adequate language to guide this review. The only criteria in most cases are: the character of the area in which the proposed use will be placed, the highways and sidewalks or use thereof located in the area, and Town Services and facilities. Language to define “the character of the area,” e.g, naming some specific factors for the ZBA to consider such as noise, air quality, noxious odors, vibration, traffic, lighting, glare, hours of operation, amount of impervious surface and building mass, would help ensure the review is performed consistently and adequately.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Review the Zoning Ordinance Special Exception criteria and add more details to ensure that the outcomes are consistent with the desires of the community. These details should include consideration of factors such as: amount of impervious surface, volume and nature of traffic, hours of operation, visibility to passers-by, building mass, noise, unsightly outdoor storage, lighting, glare and signage, air quality, noxious odors, and vibration.

## 4.5 Special Land Uses

Special land uses such as transmission lines, telecommunications towers, and large energy production facilities such as wind farms pose special challenges for small communities like Sugar Hill. In many cases federal and state regulations preempt local control. It is important for the town to participate proactively and to have a strong voice in state and federal review processes. Proposals should be consistent with the preservation of scenic views and other local goals, with careful attention to mitigation of negative impacts.





Large solar arrays can be unsightly to neighbors and sometimes produce glare to drivers. Even at the residential scale, alternative energy generation can pose conflicts with the enjoyment of neighboring property. Wind turbines can cause flicker and noise annoying to neighbors. Outside wood boilers can produce heavy smoke affecting neighboring residences even when in compliance with state regulations. Land use regulations should address potential negative impacts while allowing local energy production. Town Meeting voters approved the addition of a Solar Ordinance to the Zoning Ordinance; however, wind energy has not yet been addressed. Provisions for small wind energy systems for on-site use should be added to the Zoning Ordinance to address issues such as height, setbacks, noise and flicker. State law requires consideration of the special height requirements for wind energy and requires notification of abutters ( RSA 674:62-66).

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- Incorporate provisions for small wind energy systems for on-site use into the Zoning Ordinance.

## 4.6 Laying Out Future Development

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When laying out a subdivision, options are often available to reduce the impacts of key resources such as scenic views and high priority natural resources, such as agricultural land and important



habitat areas. For example, development in the middle of an open field that provides the foreground to a scenic view tends to detract from the quality of the view more than if the same development is sited near a wooded edge. If the open field is suitable for agriculture, this also means as much of the productive use of the land as possible is retained. Similarly, residential development scattered around on steeper slopes tends to impact forest

resources, scenic value, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities more than if concentrated in a lower-elevation portion of the land.

Sometimes rigid zoning requirements where each lot needs to have the minimum lot size precludes the siting of homes in a manner more beneficial to the community. To enable developers and the Planning Board to have more flexibility when designing subdivisions in the GR and RR1 districts, clustering provisions were added to the Zoning Ordinance several years ago and were recently strengthened. At the design review stage, the Planning Board should suggest consideration of this approach where appropriate, prior to the developer's investment in final plans and engineering. Clustering combined with Planning Board input during the design review stage can result in a development that is designed in a manner compatible with the protection of high priority scenic and natural resources.

While clustering is one form of lot size averaging, the same principle could also be applied to minor subdivisions in the rural areas of town zoned RR2. For example, a landowner with fifty acres of productive forestland who wants to sell one building lot might be allowed to create a one-acre lot and put a development restriction on four of the remaining acres to ensure that the eventual density never exceeds one home per five acres. In this way those four acres can remain part of the larger forest tract.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Encourage applicants to use the clustering provisions to minimize the impacts of development on the resources that are important to the character of the community for residents and visitors.
- Consider adding lot size averaging provisions to the RR2 for minor subdivisions.

## **4.7 Designing Future Development**

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Choices made by individuals at various points in the development process can make a significant difference in the level of impact a specific home or business has on the environment and the neighborhood. In some cases, the Zoning Ordinance or other land use regulations are used to ensure specific outcomes. In others, a robust public education campaign is considered to be a more appropriate fit for the Sugar Hill community. Three of these are development on hillsides and ridgelines, minimizing impacts on wildlife habitat, and lighting.



## Hillsides and Ridgelines

Sugar Hill's scenic resources are highly valued by residents and visitors. Guidelines are available regarding methods to reduce the loss of scenic value during development. These include:

- Keep the size of the building envelope to the minimum necessary. This may look like, for example, an up-slope boundary 40 feet or less from the building, side boundaries 40 feet or less from each side of the building, and a down-slope boundary 25 feet or less from the building.
- Limit the area cleared for views, for example, removing trees beyond the building envelope for a 25-foot width and extending outward therefrom at an angle of 45 degrees or less on both sides, to a point down-slope where the tops of the trees are at the same elevation as the ground floor of the building.
- Use natural/neutral colors.
- Minimize use of reflective glass.
- Use only low level, indirect lighting and avoid spotlights and floodlights.
- Site the building so that no portion extends above the elevation of the ridgeline.
- Use natural landforms and existing vegetation to screen structures from view from public roads and waterways to the extent practicable.
- Minimize cuts and fills, and where practical, screen driveways from public view.

*(Source: Innovative Land Use Planning Techniques (NHDES, NHARPCs, NHOEP, NHMA, October 2008))*

### RECOMMENDATION:

- Provide hillside and ridgeline guidelines regarding methods to reduce the loss of scenic value during development, e.g., clearing/landscaping, exterior colors, lighting and reflective glass, to new landowners, applicants for building permits, surveyors and others who may be involved in siting and design decisions, and encourage subdividers to consider them in lot layouts.

## Wildlife Habitat

As discussed in **Chapter 3. Natural Resources**, Sugar Hill has some areas of wildlife habitat identified as Highest Ranked in NH Fish & Game's Wildlife Action Plan. Throughout town, sightings of wildlife in our yards or when we are out for a walk or drive is an important element of the character of the community. There are a number of things that homeowners can do to ensure that the impacts of their homes on wildlife are minimized. These include:

- Maintain vegetated buffers around wetlands and vernal pools and along both year-round and seasonal streams.
- Learn about rare and endangered species that might be on the property and avoid activity in sensitive areas.
- Minimize the size of the lawn. Use instead a variety of native noninvasive plants.
- Keep a variety of vegetation sizes in the wooded areas, and a transition zone of native shrubs between the yard and woods.
- Ensure that rubbish and pet food are adequately enclosed so they don't attract wildlife.
- Shield and direct lighting away from natural areas to avoid disrupting natural behaviors.
- Avoid the use of pesticides.

There are also things subdividers can do to minimize impacts of a development on important habitat areas. These include first, identifying where the important habitat areas are, and then concentrating development away from them as well as leaving buffer areas in between. There are resources available to help with this planning, including



the NH Fish and Game Wildlife Action Plan and a checklist in the Habitat Management chapter in Innovative Land Use Planning Techniques (Chapter 2.3, NH Department of Environmental Services, NH Association of Regional Planning Commissions, NH Office of Energy and Planning, and NH Municipal Association, October 2008).

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Use resources from NH Fish & Game, NH Audubon and NH Wildlife Federation to provide educational material to homeowners, and to those intending to build, on methods for minimizing the negative impacts of residential use on wildlife.
- Initiate a public education campaign with other groups on living with wildlife and use town events as one tool for outreach.
- Develop an advisory handout on ways to include consideration of habitat when planning a development to provide with building permit and subdivision applications.

**Outdoor Lighting**

Seeing outdoor lighting from other properties at night is the one of the elements of development that can change the rural “feel” of our homes in Sugar Hill. The Planning Board recently strengthened the lighting requirements in the Site Plan Review Regulations which apply to all new or expanded businesses in town as well as multi-family homes. As discussed in **Chapter 3 Natural Resources**, zoning requirements that apply throughout town would be very difficult to enforce as they would apply to not only new construction but also to replacement lighting purchased and installed by homeowners. A public education campaign should be tried first, perhaps in conjunction with one or two other area communities. The Lisbon Conservation Commission is discussing this for their community as well.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Implement the Dark Sky recommendations as outlined in **Chapter 3 Natural Resources**:

- Educate homeowners on the unintended consequences of their outdoor lighting choices and the benefits to their neighbors, traffic and wildlife of reducing lighting and using DarkSky-approved lighting that is aimed downward and shielded.
- Continue to monitor the necessity and type of street lighting in town.

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# Chapter 5. Services, Facilities and Utilities

## 5.1 Introduction

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The provision of public services is an important element in protecting the health, safety and welfare of the community. This chapter reviews the facilities, or in some cases, cooperative arrangements with other communities, associated with these services. The need for community facilities is determined by a number of factors including: existing population, future population growth, demographics, land uses, changing state and federal requirements, and changing expectations of residents. Anticipated needs in the next ten years or so are included.

## 5.2 Transportation

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### Highway Department Facility

The Highway Department stores the equipment used to maintain the town roads at the town garage on South Road.



The Highway Department has equipment to do wintertime snowplowing and sanding, as well as culvert thawing. In warmer weather, other equipment is used to maintain paved and unpaved road surfaces, as well as roadside ditches and trees and brush along the town's roads. The town garage is also used to service and repair various trucks, loaders and other heavy equipment. The Highway Department also uses this location to store winter road sand and asphalt paving material.

The Highway Department building is served by an emergency standby generator. The facility also houses storage tanks for diesel and gasoline fuels used by the various town vehicles.

Several improvements have been made in recent years to increase energy efficiency as recommended in the 2014 Master Plan. These included installation of the following:



- solar array adjacent to the garage which meets all of the building's electrical needs plus surplus energy that results in a rebate from Eversource
- new outdoor wood boiler with catalytic converter
- new LED lights
- new, more efficient oil-fired furnace
- new garage doors

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Add one series of garage bays to the town garage to satisfy the need for more space.
- Continue periodic routine inspections of the Highway Department facilities to ensure best management practices are followed for the storage and use of fuels and other hazardous materials.



## Highways

Sugar Hill's highway system is comprised of 4.64 miles of Legislative Class I Primary Highway (Interstate 93), 4.73 miles of Legislative Class II Secondary Highway (NH 116/18 and NH 117), and 29.15



miles of locally-maintained Class V roads ( NHDOT 2019 Roads and Highways Town Centerline Miles by Legislative Class). NH Department of Transportation sends out an annual request for verification of the official town highway maps used to calculate the exact mileage of roads in each classification. These figures then form the basis for state aid to towns for highway maintenance.

The twenty-seven Class V roads are maintained by the Sugar Hill Highway Department. The Department is making a concerted effort to keep runoff under control but more frequent extreme weather events are making this a challenge. Culverts are replaced and upgraded on a regular schedule.

Paved and gravel roads are regularly maintained, however an increase in the paving budget is needed due to the rising cost of materials. Pavement should be resurfaced every seven years to maintain integrity.

The Sugar Hill Road Agent, along with the volunteer Roads Committee, assess road conditions and report to the Board of Selectmen. Maintenance and repairs are then carried out based upon those reports. It is important that this assessment be performed systematically with a long-range view. There are tools available to use for this called “road surface management systems.” Allowing a road that is going to be reconstructed soon to continue to deteriorate, and instead repaving one that appears to be in much better shape is often the wiser investment for the town’s paving budget. In this way costs are not increased by deferred maintenance.

There are over a dozen private roads in Sugar Hill, most serving a few homes each. Future private road construction needs to comply with the specifications found in the Town's Subdivision Regulations and be inspected by the Sugar Hill Highway Department or an engineer hired by the town while under construction. The regulations were recently updated and provisions regarding stormwater and the construction and maintenance of private roads were strengthened.

**Recommendations:**

- Update the NHDOT official highway map for the town any time a segment of private road is accepted by the Town to ensure the Town receives the correct amount of state aid for road maintenance.
- Continue to develop the annual road repair and maintenance budget based on a systematic assessment of repair and maintenance needs to ensure that funds are used in the most efficient manner.
- Ensure that construction of subdivision roads is carried out properly by requiring applicants to put money in escrow for the Town to pay an engineer for inspection prior to signing and recording the final plat.
- Before signing and recording a plat involving a new private road, ensure that covenants acceptable to the Town's attorney will be in place to provide for the long-term maintenance by landowners.
- Consider potential downstream benefits for transportation infrastructure when prioritizing wetlands, floodplains and vegetated buffers for protection.
- Ensure that today's best management practices, consideration of fluvial erosion hazards, and proper sizing and design of bridges and culverts, are incorporated into maintenance and design of stormwater facilities.

**Other Transportation**

There is no general public transportation available in Sugar Hill. There are limited services for medical appointments for seniors, those with disabilities, and those with certain medical issues, some provided by volunteer drivers. These nonemergency medical rides are coordinated or provided by the American Cancer Society, Tri-County Transit, Granite State Independent Living, the VA and volunteer drivers for rides covered by Medicaid.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- Advocate for regional efforts to improve access to transportation for all residents, for example, through the Grafton County Regional Coordinating Council.

## 5.3 Meeting House

Originally the Advent Church, the Meeting House was purchased by the Sugar Hill Improvement Association in 1952 for \$1.00. In 1963, a year after becoming a separate town from Lisbon, the town bought the Meeting House for \$10,000. The Meeting House was remodeled for use as a town building after that. The building is now used for town meetings, civic functions, and for private functions as approved by the Selectmen's office. In recent years new energy efficient windows



were installed, lightning protection, a new furnace and new hot water heater were added, the exterior was painted, and the hall was renovated with new insulation, sheetrock and an acoustic management system. Minor structural work is planned in the coming year.

### RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue to maintain the Meeting House in a manner that enables this historic building to continue to be used for community gatherings.

## 5.4 Carolina Crapo Memorial Building

Sugar Hill Town Hall is located at 1411 State Route 117, in the Carolina Crapo Memorial Building. Originally built in 1948 by Henry Crapo in memory of his wife "Carolina," the Carolina Crapo Building was first used as a town school. In 1996 the building was renovated to be used as town offices after being sold to the town by the Sugar Hill Improvement Association. The building currently houses the Town Clerk/Tax Collector, Selectmen, Police Department and the Richardson Memorial Library. Town Hall also contains a map room for use by the public to see where individual parcels of land and subdivisions are located. Sugar Hill Town Hall is

served by an automatic emergency generator in the event of any power outages, thus being designated as an emergency shelter for residents.



There are ongoing efforts to maintain and upgrade this building which in recent years have included energy efficient windows and doors, a new boiler, lightning protection, lighting upgrades, new sidewalks, new septic system pumps, a secure police department storage room and shower for emergency use.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- Continue to plan for upgrades and improvements to the Crapo Building as needed. In the near future these include repair of the cupola, new roofing, exterior trim repair/replacement, replacement of interior flooring/carpeting, painting, and additional energy efficient lighting.

## 5.5 Richardson Memorial Library

The Richardson Memorial Library is located in the Carolina Crapo Memorial Building and provides the community with a rich assortment of reading and cultural materials. The library is open a variety of hours, four days per week. The library houses a variety of books, research volumes, magazines and movies, and features programs for all ages. The library has been completely automated and connected to the Interlibrary Loan System. Wireless internet is available for guests.



**RECOMMENDATION:**

- To maintain this rich community resource, the Library Trustees should continue to monitor and address changing needs and technology as they relate to the library facility. Access to digital resources will be expanded in the future starting with State Library System (ILL).

## 5.6 Schools

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Sugar Hill is part of the Lafayette Regional School District that serves grades K-6. Lafayette Regional School serves students from the towns of Easton, Franconia and Sugar Hill. At the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year there were 98 students enrolled.

Profile School is a regional junior and senior high school that serves students in grades 7-12 from the towns of Bethlehem, Easton, Franconia, and Sugar Hill. At the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year there were 222 students enrolled. Profile Junior/Senior High School was ranked as one of the best high schools in the US News and World Report in 2024.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- Continue to participate in regional schools.

## 5.7 Waste Disposal

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### Tri-town Transfer Station

Landfill space continues to be limited, expensive, and subject to state and federal environmental protection requirements. To enable collaboration on these issues pursuant to RSA 53-B, Sugar Hill participates with eighteen other area communities through the Pemi-Baker Solid Waste District. District membership allows for the negotiation of disposal and hauling contracts as a District rather than individual towns among other benefits. For the last several years Sugar Hill has had a cooperative agreement with Franconia and Easton where the three towns operate and cost-share the Tri-Town Transfer Station located in Franconia. The percentage of cost paid by each town is based on population; Sugar Hill's current share is 32%. The waste is currently hauled by Normandeau Trucking to Mt. Carberry landfill in Berlin. The District recently signed a new waste disposal agreement giving District members a long-term waste disposal option with very competitive pricing for a five-year period commencing on January 1, 2025.

The towns have implemented an extensive recycling program over the past several decades including glass, aluminum cans, and newspapers since the early 1980s and tin cans, corrugated cardboard, and certain plastic containers since 1991. Construction debris, metal, furniture, electronics, tires, and landscaping debris is also separated and disposed of appropriately. A modest reuse center is maintained benefitting those in surrounding communities. Most recent figures (2023) pertaining to recycling volume include:

|                             |                       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Paper/Cardboard – 86.5 tons | Glass – 63.3 tons     |
| Plastics – 1.4 tons         | Steel cans – 5.8 tons |
| Scrap metal – 64.5 tons     | Tires – 3.6 tons      |

These efforts avoided 665 tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

### Hazardous Waste

As a member of the Pemi-Baker Solid Waste District, Sugar Hill participates in annual household hazardous waste collections at the Tri-Town Transfer Station in Franconia, where residents and small businesses can bring materials such as paint, fluorescent light bulbs, and electronics. The collection programs are expensive to hold on an annual basis, as such residents are reminded of the following tips to help keep costs down and reduce toxicity of the environment: (1) buy only what you need; (2) properly store leftover product to maximize long-term use; (3) use biological controls and organic products for pests and diseases in gardens where feasible; (4) apply chemical pesticides only as a last resort following instructions listed on labels; and (5) air-dry leftover latex paint for disposal as part of your household trash.

### Septage

RSA 485-A:5-b requires each municipality to provide or assure access to a NHDES-approved septage facility or NHDES-approved alternative option. (“Septage” is the material that needs to be periodically pumped out of septic tanks to prevent system failures.) Compliance is typically via a written agreement with a recipient facility indicating that the recipient facility agrees to accept septage generated in that municipality. The capacity needed to service the town is calculated as the number of households x 200 gallons (assumes each 1,000-gallon tank is pumped every five years). The Town of Sugar Hill has an agreement with Schofield’s to ensure haulers access to their disposal facility.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to participate in the Pemi-Baker Solid Waste District.
- Continue to comply with RSA 485-A:5-b.
- Continue to strive to decrease the volume of solid waste through recycling and composting.



## 5.8 Emergency Services

### Police Department

The Sugar Hill Police Department operates out of two offices in Town Hall for both everyday administrative activities and storage of equipment. The Department lacks the ability to process any persons arrested or detained; this as to be done at the Franconia Police Department. The Department operates on a 24/7 basis which is broken up as 105 hours in person present for duty and 63 on-call hours. The Department is under the direction of a full-time police chief and employs a second full-time officer as well as a part-time officer. Two police vehicles are used to respond to local calls for assistance as well as assisting other local departments through a mutual aid agreement. The Department contracts with the Grafton County Dispatch Center for all dispatch needs and with Littleton Police Department for prosecutor services. The Sugar Hill Police Department also assists the Town's Fire Department and the Town's Highway Department as needed.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Monitor the Police Department's space needs and address when necessary.

### Fire/Emergency Medical

Sugar Hill Fire-Rescue has been protecting the town since the department's inception in 1948. The department responds to approximately 75 fire calls and 60 medical calls per year, which is increasing as the population increases. The department is located in a 4-bay fire station, located in the center of town on NH Route 117. The station meets the current needs of the department. The station has a generator and can be utilized as the Emergency Operations Center.



The department is staffed by 22 firefighters who are paid for attendance at meetings, training and incidents. No firefighters are assigned to be in the station. The department is led by a part-time fire chief who typically works 15 to 20 hours per week. The firefighters are trained at varying levels of certification and are considered well trained. They have up-to-date personal protective equipment and train a minimum of twice a month. Several of the fire department members are trained emergency medical service providers who are able to respond and provide emergency care when needed

The department has two fire engines which each carry 1,000 gallons of water and have 1,250 gallons-a-minute pumps; these engines carry all equipment required by the National Fire Protection Association. The department also has a tanker that carries 2,000 gallons of water, a 500 gallons-per-minute pump, and a rescue truck.

The department analyzes the cost of replacing fire apparatus and equipment and seeks funding of a capital reserve from the town. The department specifies apparatus that is mounted on standard commercial chassis instead of “custom” chassis which saves a minimum of 20% in acquisition costs without sacrificing reliability or durability. Due to a preventive maintenance program and care of the fire apparatus the expected life is 25 years.

The two engines are critical as there is no town water system; one engine goes to the scene, while the other engine goes to a static water source to provide water. A ladder truck is available from adjoining towns and is automatically dispatched to structure fires.

Dispatching services are provided by the Grafton County Sheriff’s department for a fee. Radio communication is excellent throughout town. Firefighters are notified by pagers and through cell phones. Transport is provided by the Littleton Fire Department, which is dispatched automatically on all medical calls. The department is a member of the Twin State Mutual Aid Fire Association which provides additional resources as may be needed for an emergency. The Association is very active and is creating specialized teams for high-risk low frequency incidents such as hazardous material spills, swift water rescue, ice rescue, and high angle rescue. Regionalization for more services needs to continue to be explored.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Continue to provide the facilities, resources and training needed by firefighters in order to encourage participation by community members.
- Continue to ensure the community is provided with adequate Emergency Medical Services.
- Continue to take advantage of opportunities to regionalize emergency services when efficiency will be increased without a decrease in effectiveness.
- Continue to implement the planning and zoning tools necessary to prevent and fight fires including Fire Department review of subdivision and site plans regarding emergency access and water supply, and continued enforcement of the NH State Building Code.

## 5.9 Hazard Mitigation

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In 2024, the Town's Hazard Mitigation Planning Team completed the required update of the Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan. The Planning Team was comprised of the Town's Police Chief/Emergency Management Director, Fire Chief, Administrative Assistant, Road Agent, Select Board members, state officials and consultants. The Hazard Mitigation Plan examines a wide range of steps the Town can take to reduce and mitigate future losses from natural and other hazardous events. These include things like maintaining an up-to-date Emergency Operations Plan, improving warning systems, upgrading culverts, removing hazardous trees, maintaining dry hydrants and providing additional training. The plan also includes a number of recommendations for which the Planning Board is the lead. These include consideration of hazard mitigation and climate change impacts when updating this Master Plan, and the subdivision and site plan regulations, and when proposing amendments to the zoning ordinance or flood ordinance to Town Meeting.



With an increase in severe weather events in New Hampshire, and an increase in winter rains running across frozen ground into frozen watercourses, more attention is being paid to hazard mitigation as a means for increasing community resiliency.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Review the Hazard Mitigation Plan annually to ensure that steps are taken to prepare the community for continued changes to weather patterns and increases in flood events. This includes paying close attention to the needs for maintenance and upgrade of culverts and bridges, as well as consideration of potential road flooding and washouts relative to emergency response.
- Include Planning Board representation on the Hazard Mitigation Planning Team to strengthen implementation of Planning Board-related recommendations.

## **5.10 Recreation**

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Sugar Hill residents and visitors have access to a wealth of outdoor recreation opportunities, including trails for a broad range of activities such as walking, hiking, biking/mountain biking, snowshoeing, and Nordic and backcountry/glade skiing; conserved lands for birdwatching and hunting (in permitted areas); access to surface waters for fishing and boating; and tennis courts and a playground in the town center. Local organizations have vastly expanded the trail network and provide access and use information on their websites, including Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust, New England Mountain Bike

Association (NEMBA), Parker Mountain Trails and Bethlehem Trails Organization. Proximity to the White Mountain National Forest provides access to almost 800,000 acres for climbing, camping, fishing, hiking, hunting, and winter sports. Local businesses provide additional opportunities such as Sunset Hill's golf course.





## Town Recreation Areas

- Phillip Robertson Town Forest with parking off of Center District Road – multi-use trails
- Coffin Pond with parking on NH Route 18 - trails, shore fishing, canoeing and kayaking
- Asphalt tennis court on Main Street in the center of town
- Playground and picnic tables behind Carolina Crapo Memorial Building



### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Produce a map of all trails open to the public in town and make available on-line and at the Town Office.
- Continue the Town's cooperative relationship with local nonprofits such as the Sugar Hill Improvement Association and Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust, area schools, and Tri-Town Recreation Program to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.

## 5.11 Cemeteries

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The town maintains two cemeteries: Sunnyside Cemetery on NH Route 117 just west of the center of town, and Streeter District/Lucy Hannah Cemetery on Streeter Pond Road. In 2019, the Sunnyside Cemetery was expanded with over 200 new plots surveyed and marked with corner stones. The Spooner and Parker gravesites, after restoration of the iron fences, earned the town a New Hampshire Historic Preservation award for conservation. Streeter District was landscaped in 2023 and is a possible site for future green burials. In both properties, in 2020-2023 extensive repairs and removal of hazardous trees were necessary due to storm damage. Fencing has been updated and/or replaced. Repair and cleaning of monuments and updating of records are ongoing. In 2022, new regulations and cemetery rules were adopted by the Trustees.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Continue ongoing maintenance and needed repairs of the town's cemeteries.



## 5.12 Energy

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### Energy Policy

The Town of Sugar Hill, recognizing the principle of sustainable energy, has a policy in place for its implementation. It is intended to reduce the reliance on imported power, reduce harmful environmental impacts, reduce energy costs, promote sustainability and support state and local economies. It is intended to prevent the degradation of the landscape and maintain the rural nature of the town, promote tourism and provide for prosperity and employment of the people of Sugar Hill. The energy policy and future recommendations or amendments fall under the purview of the Sugar Hill Conservation Commission.



### Electric Service

Electricity for the town has been supplied by Eversource and the NH Electric Cooperative. Voters at March 2024 Town Meeting approved a change to Community Power. Through Sugar Hill Community Power, residents and businesses can choose clean energy sources or the lower rates associated with the collective bargaining. Those who don't wish to participate can opt out.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to implement the Town Energy Policy and update as needed.
- Monitor success of Sugar Hill Community Power in regard to participation and rates and stay abreast of other opportunities for residents and businesses to cut energy costs.

## 5.13 Communications

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### Telephone

Consolidated Communications and Spectrum/Charter Communications are the service carriers for telephone. Many households use the internet or cell phones to make calls.

### Cell phone coverage

There is cell phone coverage for much of the town depending on topography. The Selectboard continues to investigate better coverage.

### Internet

Consolidated Communications provides some Sugar Hill households with DSL. Starlink is another option for some community members depending on their location. The Town is working with the New Hampshire Electric COOP, Fidium Fiber, Spectrum, and the Grafton County Broadband Committee to bring high speed internet connectivity to every household in Sugar Hill.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to strive for adequate cell service throughout town.
- Continue to follow up on the work of the Grafton County Broadband Committee to bring high speed internet connectivity to every household and business.



## 5.14 Area Health Care and Social Services

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The area is served by a patchwork of agencies and nonprofits, each providing a specific service, or serving a specific population. Most of these organizations depend upon the annual support of communities to continue to be available when residents are in need.

### Hospitals/Clinics

Littleton Regional Healthcare provides the majority of hospital care for Sugar Hill residents and is located 15 miles to the north. A full complement of health care and specialty services includes significant investments made recently in the hospital campus and technology. Littleton and Franconia, NH serve as convenient locations for many of the region's physician,

chiropractor, dentist, therapist, and family health clinic offices. Ammonoosuc Community Health Services (ACHS) provides a network of primary health care and support services throughout the 26 communities they serve and in 1994 was designated as the region's Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) making all services available to members of the community regardless of social or economic status.

### Northern Human Services White Mountain Mental Health

Northern Human Services provides professional support and services to people affected by mental illness, developmental disabilities, substance abuse, acquired brain injury or related disorders. The organization serves residents of the northern counties in NH including Grafton County and the town of Sugar Hill. Nearby facilities are in Littleton, NH.

### North Country Home Health & Hospice Agency

North Country Home Health and Hospice Agency is a Medicare home health & hospice certified agency established in 1971 which provides home care and hospice services to a 21-town service area including Sugar Hill. In 2019 palliative care was added as well. Home care is a service to recovering, disabled, or chronically ill people who need medical treatment and/or assistance when a person requires care which family and friends cannot easily or effectively provide on their own. Services are provided to all ages, from infant to elderly. Payment sources include Medicare, New Hampshire Medicaid, private insurance and private pay with a sliding fee scale.

### Grafton County Senior Citizens Council

Grafton County Senior Citizens Council (GCSCC) works throughout the region to make sure that older and disabled members of the community receive services that help them remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible. As the number of seniors has grown, so have the services provided by GCSCC.

The Council operates eight senior centers, the closest being in Littleton, and sponsors Grafton County ServiceLink Resource Center. In addition to health, educational and social activities provided at the Littleton Area Senior Center, Sugar Hill residents receive home-delivered meals, wellness calls, assistance with problems, crises or issues of long-term care, and door-to-door on-demand rides.

### RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue to support area agencies providing health and social services to ensure that they remain available for when Sugar Hill residents face challenges in their lives.

## 5.15 Local Organizations Serving Sugar Hill

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### Sugar Hill Historical Museum

The Sugar Hill Historical Museum is a non-profit entity. Its purpose is to educate through the collection, preservation, research, study and exhibition of those objects that will serve to illustrate the history of Sugar Hill and the local region.

The Museum campus, located next to the Carolina Crapo Memorial Building, includes the Main Building, the Carriage Barn, the Sleigh Shed, and the Reid/Burpee House. The Museum and Town property occupy a continuous space open to the public that extends from the grounds of the Reid/Burpee House to the playgrounds and tennis courts adjacent to the Crapo Building. The Museum has a collection of over 18,000 items and receives up to 2,000 visitors per year from three dozen states and nearly a dozen countries.

The museum has long been closely affiliated with the Town of Sugar Hill and the Sugar Hill Improvement Association. The Main Building was originally built as the town's first fire station on land that was owned by the Sugar Hill Improvement Association (SHIA). In 2009, after the town constructed a new fire station, SHIA donated the building and land to the museum. The town provided initial support for turning the building into a museum, and SHIA has helped with major maintenance expenses. The boundary between the museum and the town passes through the parking lot, which serves both the museum, visitors to the town offices and library, customers of Harmon's Cheese, and tourists who take a walk about the common grounds of the town and the museum. The Town supports the museum by mowing the Museum lawns and plowing the parking lot in winter.



To provide more space, the museum is working on what is known as the "The Red Barn Project," which would expand or replace the Sleigh Shed. Ideally, this new structure would have efficient space heating that would allow it to be used for meetings and community events in the spring and fall when the Museum is not open. This meeting space will also enhance the museum's ability to coordinate with other museums and charitable



organizations in our area. The museum launched a three-year capital campaign in 2023 to raise funds this project and to increase the endowment.

### Sugar Hill Improvement Association

The Sugar Hill Improvement Association (SHIA) was founded in 1890 as a community based non-profit group dedicated to the betterment and beautification of the Town of Sugar Hill. In addition to its original purpose, it was later expanded to provide a trust to be exclusively used for educational purposes. Its revenue source is a trust fund derived of moneys received from the sale of properties donated by Henry H. Crapo in 1949. Membership is open to all residents of Sugar Hill.



A sample list of projects funded by the SHIA for the benefit of the town include the planting of sugar maple trees, Meeting House enhancements, Town Hall renovations, construction of Town basketball and tennis courts, improvements to the village green, playground and gazebo, American flags and winter banners for light poles along Route 117, lighting of the Sugar Hill Historical Museum Christmas tree, mountain identification sign on Sunset Hill Road near the Inn, and various speaker presentation.

### RECOMMENDATION:

- Continue the Town's beneficial cooperative relationships with the Sugar Hill Historical Museum, Sugar Hill Improvement Association and Sugar Hill Willing Workers Association.

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# Chapter 6. Action Plan

After careful consideration of Sugar Hill's high priority resources, demographic and land use trends, infrastructure and needs, the Planning Board developed the following Action Plan listing its recommendations for furthering the community's vision for the future. The Action Plan is intended to provide direction to municipal decision-makers and other partners regarding the town's future growth and development. Both recommended policies and measurable action items are included. Implementation of specific recommendations will occur at various paces depending on a multitude of factors such as the urgency of the need, available funding, staff capacity or volunteer time available, cooperation from other partners, and voter support. Implementation will be a collaborative community-wide effort.

| # | <i><b>Plan Section - Category</b></i> | <i><b>Action Item</b></i>  | <i><b>Responsible Party - Lead in Bold</b></i> |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | 3.2 Groundwater                       | Initiate a conversation with the Franconia Conservation Commission to discuss protection of the shared aquifer along the Gale River.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                 |
| 2 | 3.2 Groundwater                       | Review and amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate water quality impacts in special exception criteria, and best management practices for the use or storage of hazardous materials in the list of conditions that the Zoning Board of Adjustment can apply when granting a special exception. | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b>            |
| 3 | 3.2 Groundwater                       | Consider possible approaches for developing a water quality database through a voluntary testing program.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                 |
| 4 | 3.2 Groundwater                       | Ensure that the Town's emergency response plan remains up-to-date and that resources are available to manage a spill of potential contaminants on state and town highways.   | <b>Emergency Management Director</b>           |
| 5 | 3.2 Groundwater                       | Enforce the updated site plan and subdivision regulations requiring stormwater to be managed on the site in a manner that will maximize clean groundwater recharge.  | <b>Planning Board, Selectboard</b>             |

| #  | Plan Section - Category     | Action Item   | Responsible Party - Lead in Bold          |
|----|-----------------------------|---|---|
| 6  | 3.2 Groundwater             | Ensure that the Town continues to follow best management practices for salt storage.  | <b>Highway Department,</b><br>Selectboard |
| 7  | 3.3 Surface Water Resources | Maintain the Shorefront District in the Town's Zoning Ordinance.  | <b>Planning Board,</b> Town Meeting       |
| 8  | 3.3 Surface Water Resources | Increase awareness of our rivers and ponds to strengthen public support for conservation efforts. The Conservation Commission could prepare a brief pamphlet for the lower Gale River, Streeter Pond, and Coffin Pond, with maps showing access, points of interest and appropriate activities.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>            |
| 9  | 3.3 Surface Water Resources | Utilize the relationship with Plymouth State University to help create educational aids for educating landowners. Explore the possibility of creating a relationship between interested students at Profile and PSU.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>            |
| 10 | 3.3 Surface Water Resources | Educate the community, with special emphasis on landowners, on the benefits of wetlands and shoreline buffers, and on the benefits to the community of regulations to protect them. Many property owners are aware of state wetlands and shoreline regulations only when they apply for permits to build or when they learn that they have committed violations. Ways to conduct landowner education about common wetlands and shoreline infractions should be explored. Brochures and posters on how to enhance wetlands protection and restore vegetated buffers should be displayed at the Town Office. The Conservation Commission should sponsor one or more lectures on wetland and shoreline regulations each year, and assist with a field trip for students. | <b>Conservation Commission</b>            |

| #  | <i>Plan Section - Category</i> | <i>Action Item</i>  | <i>Responsible Party - Lead in Bold</i>                                 |
|----|--------------------------------|---|---|
| 11 | 3.3 Surface Water Resources    | Maintain the flood storage capacity of the town's wetlands and floodplains, and filtering capacity of its wetland buffers and vegetated shorelands as one way to mitigate the effects of increases in the frequency of severe storms.   | <b>Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Town Meeting</b>            |
| 12 | 3.3 Surface Water Resources    | Strengthen efforts to enforce state wetlands and shoreline regulations. This includes both increasing awareness among developers and contractors, and engaging Town officials such as police and the Road Agent who may be the first to see a disturbance.  | <b>Selectboard, Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Road Agent</b> |
| 13 | 3.3 Surface Water Resources    | Amend the Zoning Ordinance to protect vegetated buffers along the town's water courses that are not yet protected by either the state or town shoreland regulations, as supported by 85% of survey respondents to protect water quality and fish habitat.   | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b>                                     |
| 14 | 3.3 Surface Water Resources    | Amend the Zoning Ordinance to incorporate local protection for wetlands, as supported by 75% of survey respondents, and for wetland buffers when there is another building site on the lot (supported by 83% of survey respondents) in order to fill the gaps left by state regulations and enable local enforcement. | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b>                                     |
| 15 | 3.3 Surface Water Resources    | Implement the recently strengthened stormwater requirements in subdivision and site plan review regulations to reduce the potential for erosion and sedimentation.  | <b>Planning Board</b>   |
| 16 | 3.3 Surface Water Resources    | Work with conservation organizations and willing landowners to obtain conservation easements on undeveloped as well as high priority wetlands with emphasis on establishing linkages between existing conservation areas.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>  |
| 17 | 3.3 Surface Water Resources    | Research and consider possible approaches to provide landowners with incentives to restore vegetated buffers along all of the town's smaller brooks as well as the Gale River.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>  |

| #  | <b><i>Plan Section - Category</i></b>             | <b><i>Action Item</i></b>  | <b><i>Responsible Party - Lead in Bold</i></b> |
|----|---|--|--|
| 18 | 3.4 Forest Lands                                  | Initiate program of training for and by Conservation Commission members on the identification of invasive species.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                 |
| 19 | 3.4 Forest Lands                                  | Increase education for forest landowners. Opportunities include providing copies of best management practices guides, a model harvest contract, and county forester contact information to large landowners and to those applying for building permits or subdivision approval. A pamphlet on best forestry/logging practices could be created for landowners filing Intent to Cut applications.   | <b>Conservation Commission, Selectboard</b>    |
| 20 | 3.4 Forest Lands                                  | Research and consider incentives that could be provided for implementing better forest management practices such as increased buffers along surface waters and trails, and protection of important habitat areas.  | <b>Planning Board</b>                          |
| 21 | 3.4 Forest Lands                                  | Encourage landowners to manage their forest lands for timber, wildlife habitat, and public recreation where appropriate.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                 |
| 22 | 3.5 Agricultural Lands and 4.4 Specific Land Uses | Review the zoning ordinance and consider amendments that may make the town more "farm friendly." Consider, for example, changes to the type of lodging allowed in the RR1 district when associated with an active agricultural enterprise, and the addition of a broader list of agritourism activities than required by state statute (RSA 21:34-a) to the uses allowed by Special Exception in the RR2. In addition, consider what the farm owner's needs might be for worker housing and for processing and selling products jointly with other farms, and ensure the ordinance provides the opportunity to apply for a Special Exception for these activities. | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b>            |

| #  | Plan Section - Category                                   | Action Item   | Responsible Party - Lead in Bold            |
|----|---|---|---|
| 23 | 3.5 Agricultural Lands                                    | Amend the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations to enable the Planning Board to influence the siting of development in a manner which will maximize the remaining agricultural potential of the land. Flexibility in the layout of subdivisions to reduce their impact on important resources was supported by 71% of respondents to the Master Plan Survey. | <b>Planning Board,</b> Town Meeting         |
| 24 | 3.5 Agricultural Lands                                    | Educate landowners on the agricultural potential and value of their lands.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>              |
| 25 | 3.5 Agricultural Lands                                    | Ensure that the impacts of agricultural operations are properly managed and the scale is appropriate to the neighborhood.   | <b>Planning Board</b>                       |
| 26 | 3.5 Agricultural Lands                                    | Use the Conservation Fund to help landowners conserve agricultural lands.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>              |
| 27 | 3.6.Wildlife Habitat                                      | Ensure that landowners are aware of the resources available for learning how to improve habitat on their land such as the UNH Cooperative Extension county forest resources educator, NH Fish and Game regional biologist, UNH Cooperative Extension wildlife biologist, Conservation Commission members, and NH Audubon.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>              |
| 28 | 3.6.Wildlife Habitat                                      | Work with conservation organizations and willing landowners to conserve important habitat and corridors around Streeter Pond and Gale River.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>              |
| 29 | 3.6.Wildlife Habitat                                      | Educate landowners on the importance of vegetated buffers along surface waters and wetlands.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>              |
| 30 | 3.6.Wildlife Habitat and 4.7 Designing Future Development | Use resources from NH Fish & Game, NH Audubon and NH Wildlife Federation to provide educational material to homeowners, and to those intending to build, on methods for minimizing the negative impacts of residential use on wildlife.   | <b>Conservation Commission, Selectboard</b> |



| #  | <i><b>Plan Section - Category</b></i>                     | <i><b>Action Item</b></i>  | <i><b>Responsible Party - Lead in Bold</b></i>     |
|----|---|--|--|
| 31 | 3.6.Wildlife Habitat and 4.7 Designing Future Development | Initiate a public education campaign with other groups on living with wildlife and use town events as one tool for outreach.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                     |
| 32 | 3.6.Wildlife Habitat                                      | Utilize the NH Stream Crossing Initiative and available funding to prioritize culvert replacements.  | <b>Selectboard, Highway Department</b>             |
| 33 | 3.6.Wildlife Habitat                                      | When replaced or installed for the first time, culverts and bridges should be designed to accommodate aquatic wildlife passage.  | <b>Selectboard, Highway Department</b>             |
| 34 | 3.7 Scenic Resources                                      | Preservation of scenic views highly valued by the community should be included in the Conservation Commission's land conservation priorities.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                     |
| 35 | 3.7 Scenic Resources                                      | Access to scenic views should be considered in forest management and roadside cutting plans.   | <b>Conservation Commission, Highway Department</b> |
| 36 | 3.7 Scenic Resources                                      | Adopt and implement flexible zoning techniques to site development in a manner compatible with maintenance of important scenic resources when possible. This includes both clustering/siting homes away from open areas that provide a foreground for the view, and also siting homes that are within important viewsheds in a manner that provides the maximum screening.             | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b>                |
| 37 | 3.7 Scenic Resources and 4.7 Designing Future Development | Provide hillside and ridgeline guidelines regarding methods to reduce the loss of scenic value during development, e.g., clearing/landscaping, exterior colors, lighting and reflective glass, to new landowners, applicants for building permits, surveyors and others who may be involved in siting and design decisions, and encourage subdividers to consider them in lot layouts. | <b>Planning Board, Selectboard</b>                 |
| 38 | 3.7 Scenic Resources                                      | Continue to manage the town's roadsides with sensitivity toward the contribution trees and stone walls make to the highly valued scenic quality of the town.   | <b>Highway Department</b>                          |

| #  | <i><b>Plan Section - Category</b></i>                     | <i><b>Action Item</b></i>   | <i><b>Responsible Party - Lead in Bold</b></i>              |
|----|---|---|---|
| 39 | 3.9 Dark Night Skies and 4.7 Designing Future Development | Educate homeowners on the unintended consequences of their outdoor lighting choices and the benefits to their neighbors, traffic and wildlife of reducing lighting and using DarkSky-approved lighting that is aimed downward and shielded.   | <b>Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Selectboard</b> |
| 40 | 3.9 Dark Night Skies and 4.7 Designing Future Development | Continue to monitor the necessity and type of street lighting in town.  | <b>Selectboard</b>  |
| 41 | 3.10 Quiet  | Ensure that the zoning ordinance and site plan review regulations and their administration adequately protect nearby residential uses from excessive noise from nonresidential uses. This includes consideration of the type of land uses, such as heavy equipment-related, and performance measures such as decibels at the property line, at what hours, and what percentage of the time. | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b>                         |
| 42 | 3.10 Quiet  | Enforce the town's noise ordinance as needed.   | <b>Selectboard</b>  |
| 43 | 3.11 Recreation   | Continue to develop and map a multi-use trail network for different abilities.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                              |
| 44 | 3.11 Recreation   | Seek opportunities to develop family- friendly multi-use paths to separate walking and biking from roads.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                              |
| 45 | 3.11 Recreation   | Work with landowners, adjacent towns and conservation organizations such as Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust to create trails through their land that would link conservation lands with trails for year-round use.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                              |
| 46 | 3.11 Recreation   | Work with recreation groups to ensure there is communication between landowners and trail users.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                              |
| 47 | 3.11 Recreation   | Recognize landowners who allow recreation on their property for the valuable benefit they provide to the community.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>                              |

| #  | Plan Section - Category        | Action Item  | Responsible Party - Lead in Bold    |
|----|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 48 | 3.11 Recreation                | Promote awareness of "Hunting with Permission Only" signs as an alternative to posting, and make them available for purchase locally.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b>      |
| 49 | 4.2 Limitations to Development | Ensure that the Fire Chief has an opportunity to review development applications and consider comments provided by the Chief in decision-making.   | <b>Planning Board</b>               |
| 50 | 4.2 Limitations to Development | Adopt driveway regulations to ensure that driveways are designed to prevent runoff of stormwater onto town roads.  | <b>Planning Board</b>               |
| 51 | 4.2 Limitations to Development | Provide recommendations with building permits regarding driveway safety and a reminder that the landowner is responsible for maintaining the driveway in a condition passable by fire trucks.                                      | <b>Selectboard</b>                  |
| 52 | 4.2 Limitations to Development | Amend the zoning ordinance to prevent new development in the floodplain when there is another option on the lot as supported by 79% of survey respondents; and prevent loss of flood storage capacity when development does occur. | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b> |
| 53 | 4.3 Zoning for Future Land Use | Maintain the current approach to zoning with the General Residence (GR), Rural Residence One (RR1), and Rural Residence Two (RR2) Districts.   | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b> |
| 54 | 4.3 Zoning for Future Land Use | Periodically review the Zoning Ordinance for minor changes to recommend to Town Meeting voters as needed such as adjustments to zoning district boundaries and new or emerging uses.   | <b>Planning Board</b>               |
| 55 | 4.4 Specific Land Uses         | Engage the community in continued discussions regarding the requirement that homes be owner-occupied in order to have an accessory dwelling unit and present to voters again.  | <b>Planning Board</b>               |
| 56 | 4.4 Specific Land Uses         | Stay abreast of changes in state law regarding accessory dwelling units and workforce housing.   | <b>Planning Board</b>               |

| #  | Plan Section - Category           | Action Item   | Responsible Party - Lead in Bold                            |
|----|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 57 | 4.4 Specific Land Uses            | Review the Zoning Ordinance Special Exception criteria and add more details to ensure that the outcomes are consistent with the desires of the community. These details should include consideration of factors such as: amount of impervious surface, volume and nature of traffic, hours of operation, visibility to passers-by, building mass, noise, unsightly outdoor storage, lighting, glare and signage, air quality, noxious odors, and vibration. | <b>Planning Board</b>                                       |
| 58 | 4.5 Special Land Uses             | Incorporate provisions for small wind energy systems for on-site use into the Zoning Ordinance.   | <b>Planning Board, Town Meeting</b>                         |
| 59 | 4.6 Laying Out Future Development | Encourage applicants to use the clustering provisions to minimize the impacts of development on the resources that are important to the character of the community for residents and visitors.  | <b>Planning Board</b>                                       |
| 60 | 4.6 Laying Out Future Development | Consider adding lot size averaging provisions to the RR2 for minor subdivisions.  | <b>Planning Board</b>                                       |
| 61 | 4.7 Designing Future Development  | Develop an advisory handout on ways to include consideration of habitat when planning a development to provide with building permit and subdivision applications.   | <b>Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Selectboard</b> |
| 62 | 5.2 Transportation                | Add one series of garage bays to the town garage to satisfy the need for more space.  | <b>Highway Department, Selectboard, Town Meeting</b>        |
| 63 | 5.2 Transportation                | Continue periodic routine inspections of the Highway Department facilities to ensure best management practices are followed for the storage and use of fuels and other hazardous materials.   | <b>Highway Department</b>                                   |
| 64 | 5.2 Transportation                | Update the NHDOT official highway map for the town any time a segment of private road is accepted by the Town to ensure the Town receives the correct amount of state aid for road maintenance.   | <b>Selectboard, Highway Department</b>                      |

| #  | Plan Section - Category              | Action Item   | Responsible Party - Lead in Bold                      |
|----|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| 65 | 5.2 Transportation                   | Continue to develop the annual road repair and maintenance budget based on a systematic assessment of repair and maintenance needs to ensure that funds are used in the most efficient manner.  | <b>Highway Department,</b><br>Selectboard             |
| 66 | 5.2 Transportation                   | Ensure that construction of subdivision roads is carried out properly by requiring applicants to put money in escrow for the Town to pay an engineer for inspection prior to signing and recording the final plat.  | <b>Planning Board</b>                                 |
| 67 | 5.2 Transportation                   | Before signing and recording a plat involving a new private road, ensure that covenants acceptable to the Town's attorney will be in place to provide for the long-term maintenance by landowners.  | <b>Planning Board</b>                                 |
| 68 | 5.2 Transportation                   | Consider potential downstream benefits for transportation infrastructure when prioritizing wetlands, floodplains and vegetated buffers for protection.  | <b>Conservation Commission,</b><br>Highway Department |
| 69 | 5.2 Transportation                   | Ensure that today's best management practices, consideration of fluvial erosion hazards, and proper sizing and design of bridges and culverts, are incorporated into maintenance and design of stormwater facilities.   | <b>Highway Department</b>                             |
| 70 | 5.2 Transportation                   | Advocate for regional efforts to improve access to transportation for all residents, for example, through the Grafton County Regional Coordinating Council.   | <b>Selectboard</b>                                    |
| 71 | 5.3 Meeting House                    | Continue to maintain the Meeting House in a manner that enables this historic building to continue to be used for community gatherings.   | <b>Selectboard,</b><br>Town Meeting                   |
| 72 | 5.4 Carolina Crapo Memorial Building | Continue to plan for upgrades and improvements to the Crapo Building as needed. In the near future these include repair of the cupola, new roofing, exterior trim repair/replacement, replacement of interior flooring/carpeting, painting, and additional energy efficient lighting. | <b>Selectboard,</b><br>Town Meeting                   |

| #  | Plan Section - Category         | Action Item  | Responsible Party - Lead in Bold              |
|----|---------------------------------|--|---|
| 73 | 5.5 Richardson Memorial Library | To maintain this rich community resource, the Library Trustees should continue to monitor and address changing needs and technology as they relate to the library facility. Access to digital resources will be expanded in the future starting with State Library System (ILL). | <b>Library Trustees,</b><br>Town Meeting      |
| 74 | 5.6 Schools                     | Continue to participate in regional schools.   | <b>Town Meeting</b>                           |
| 75 | 5.7 Waste Disposal              | Continue to participate in the Pemi-Baker Solid Waste District.  | <b>Selectboard</b>                            |
| 76 | 5.7 Waste Disposal              | Continue to comply with RSA 485-A:5-b.   | <b>Selectboard</b>                            |
| 77 | 5.7 Waste Disposal              | Continue to strive to decrease the volume of solid waste through recycling and composting.   | <b>Selectboard, Everyone</b>                  |
| 78 | 5.8 Emergency Services          | Monitor the Police Department's space needs and address when necessary.  | <b>Selectboard</b>                            |
| 79 | 5.8 Emergency Services          | Continue to provide the facilities, resources and training needed by firefighters and EMS providers in order to encourage participation by community members.  | <b>Sugar Hill Fire-Rescue,</b> Town Meeting   |
| 80 | 5.8 Emergency Services          | Continue to ensure the community is provided with adequate Emergency Medical Services.   | <b>Selectboard,</b><br>Sugar Hill Fire-Rescue |
| 81 | 5.8 Emergency Services          | Continue to take advantage of opportunities to regionalize emergency services when efficiency will be increased without a decrease in effectiveness.   | <b>Sugar Hill Fire-Rescue,</b> Town Meeting   |
| 82 | 5.8 Emergency Services          | Continue to implement the planning and zoning tools necessary to prevent and fight fires including Fire Department review of subdivision and site plans regarding emergency access and water supply, and continued enforcement of the NH State Building Code.                    | <b>Planning Board,</b><br><b>Selectboard</b>  |



| #  | Plan Section - Category | Action Item   | Responsible Party - Lead in Bold                                       |
|----|-------------------------|---|--|
| 83 | 5.9 Hazard Mitigation   | Review the Hazard Mitigation Plan annually to ensure that steps are taken to prepare the community for continued changes to weather patterns and increases in flood events. This includes paying close attention to the needs for maintenance and upgrade of culverts and bridges, as well as consideration of potential road flooding and washouts relative to emergency response. | <b>Selectboard</b> , Highway Department, Emergency Management Director |
| 84 | 5.9 Hazard Mitigation   | Include Planning Board representation on the Hazard Mitigation Planning Team to strengthen implementation of Planning Board-related recommendations.  | <b>Emergency Management Director</b> , Planning Board                  |
| 85 | 5.10 Recreation         | Continue the Town's cooperative relationship with local nonprofits such as the Sugar Hill Improvement Association and Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust, area schools and Tri-Town Recreation Program to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.   | <b>Selectboard</b> , Town Meeting                                      |
| 86 | 5.10 Recreation         | Produce a map of all trails open to the public in town and make available on-line and at the Town Office.   | <b>Conservation Commission</b>   |
| 87 | 5.11 Cemeteries         | Continue ongoing maintenance and needed repairs of the town's cemeteries.   | <b>Cemetery Trustees</b> , Town Meeting                                |
| 88 | 5.12 Energy             | Continue to implement the Town Energy Policy and update as needed.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b> , Selectboard, Town Meeting             |
| 89 | 5.12 Energy             | Monitor success of Sugar Hill Community Power in regard to participation and rates and stay abreast of other opportunities for residents and businesses to cut energy costs.  | <b>Conservation Commission</b> , Selectboard, Town Meeting             |
| 90 | 5.13 Communications     | Continue to strive for adequate cell service throughout town.   | <b>Selectboard</b>   |
| 91 | 5.13 Communications     | Continue to follow up on the work of the Grafton County Broadband Committee to bring high speed internet connectivity to every household and business.  | <b>Selectboard</b>   |

| <b>#</b> | <b><i>Plan Section - Category</i></b>       | <b><i>Action Item</i></b>   | <b><i>Responsible Party - Lead in Bold</i></b> |
|----------|---|---|--|
| 92       | 5.14 Area Health Care and Social Services   | Continue to support area agencies providing health and social services to ensure that they remain available for when Sugar Hill residents face challenges in their lives.     | <b>Selectboard, Town Meeting</b>               |
| 93       | 5.15 Local Organizations Serving Sugar Hill | Continue the Town's beneficial cooperative relationship with the Sugar Hill Historical Museum, Sugar Hill Improvement Association and Sugar Hill Willing Workers Association. | <b>Selectboard, Town Meeting</b>               |

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# Appendix A

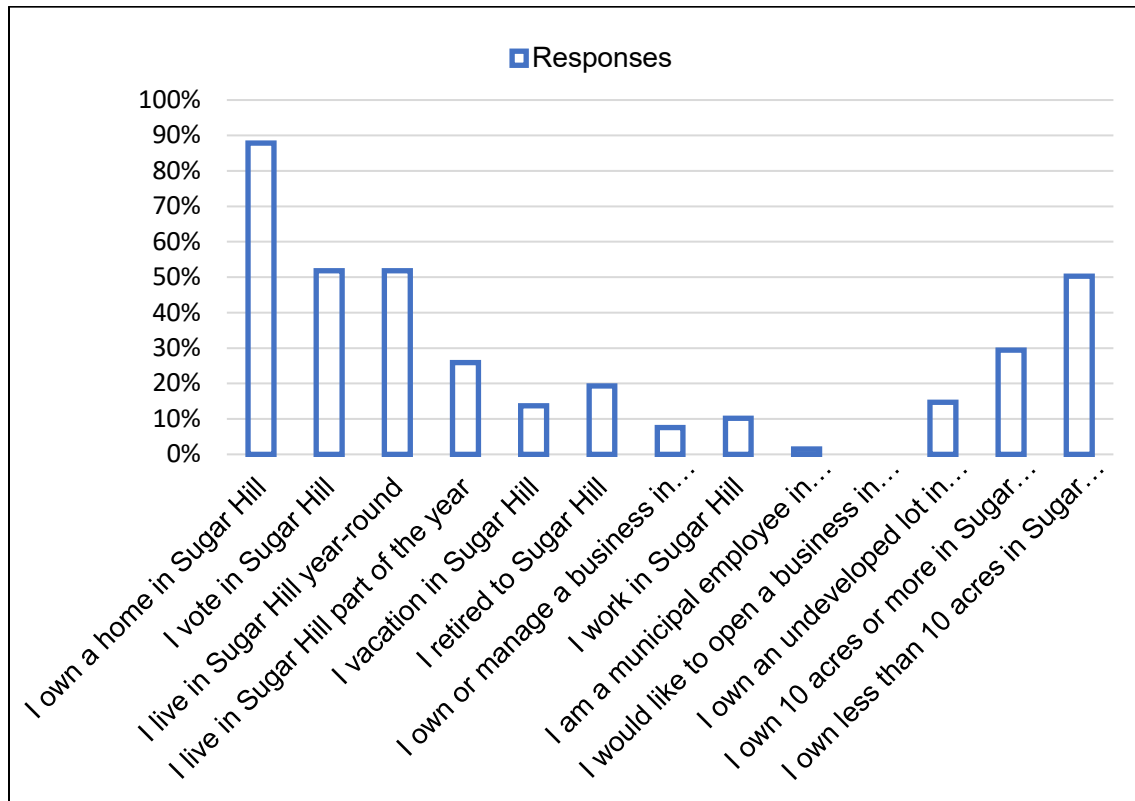
## 2023 Sugar Hill Master Plan Survey Results

During the month of July 2023, the Planning Board began gathering input for the Master Plan update by conducting a survey about the general priorities of local residents, landowners and businesses, and providing the opportunity to weigh in on some specific issues the Town was considering addressing in the near-term. The survey was available on-line via Survey Monkey and postcards containing the link were mailed to every address with a Sugar Hill zip code and to every out-of-town owner address. Paper copies were also offered at the Town Office. The public was asked to respond within two weeks to enable the Planning Board to gather some preliminary data to guide its work, however the collector was not closed until the end of the year.

197 responses were received – 188 on-line and 9 on paper. Of the 197 responses, 102 reported that they vote in Sugar Hill. The voter checklist included 498 registered voters in town. This means the response rate for voters was just over 20%.

The following report contains the complete results for certain questions and summary data for open-ended questions. The complete results for the open-ended questions are available at the Town Office.

Question 1: What is your relationship with the town of Sugar Hill?  
(Please check ALL that apply.)



| Answer Choices                                | Responses       |            |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| I own a home in Sugar Hill                    | 88%             | 173        |
| I vote in Sugar Hill                          | 52%             | 102        |
| I live in Sugar Hill year-round               | 52%             | 102        |
| I live in Sugar Hill part of the year         | 26%             | 51         |
| I vacation in Sugar Hill                      | 14%             | 27         |
| I retired to Sugar Hill                       | 19%             | 38         |
| I own or manage a business in Sugar Hill      | 8%              | 15         |
| I work in Sugar Hill                          | 10%             | 20         |
| I am a municipal employee in Sugar Hill       | 2%              | 3          |
| I would like to open a business in Sugar Hill | 0%              | 0          |
| I own an undeveloped lot in Sugar Hill        | 15%             | 29         |
| I own 10 acres or more in Sugar Hill          | 29%             | 58         |
| I own less than 10 acres in Sugar Hill        | 50%             | 99         |
|   | <b>Answered</b> | <b>197</b> |
|   | <b>Skipped</b>  | <b>0</b>   |

Question 2:       What do you like best about Sugar Hill? Please list up to three positive qualities or strengths of the town.

**183 respondents provided 534 responses.**

Categories with ten or more responses are summarized below:

- Over 100 responses were in the category of scenic beauty/views.
- Quiet/peaceful received over 60 responses.
- Over 40 respondents mentioned positive qualities of the community, such as community spirit, close community or sense of community.
- Closely related, over 40 respondents mentioned the people that comprise the community, such as friendly or welcoming.
- Over 40 respondents provided positive comments about the way the town is run, the people involved and the services provided.
- Over 30 respondents mentioned small town.
- Closely related but not quite the same, over 20 respondents mentioned rural character.
- Over 20 respondents used other terms to describe the town's character, such as "quaint," bucolic," "classic New England village," or "country living."
- Several specific qualities related to small, rural towns each received over 10 responses – not commercial/no large developments/not much development, low population, safety.
- Over 20 respondents mentioned access to outdoor recreation.
- Over 20 respondents mentioned nature.
- Over 10 respondents mentioned easy access to larger communities/activities.
- Over 10 mentioned location.

Complete responses are available from the Town Office.



Question 3:       What would make Sugar Hill even better? Please list up to three issues or needs you think should be addressed in the Master Plan.

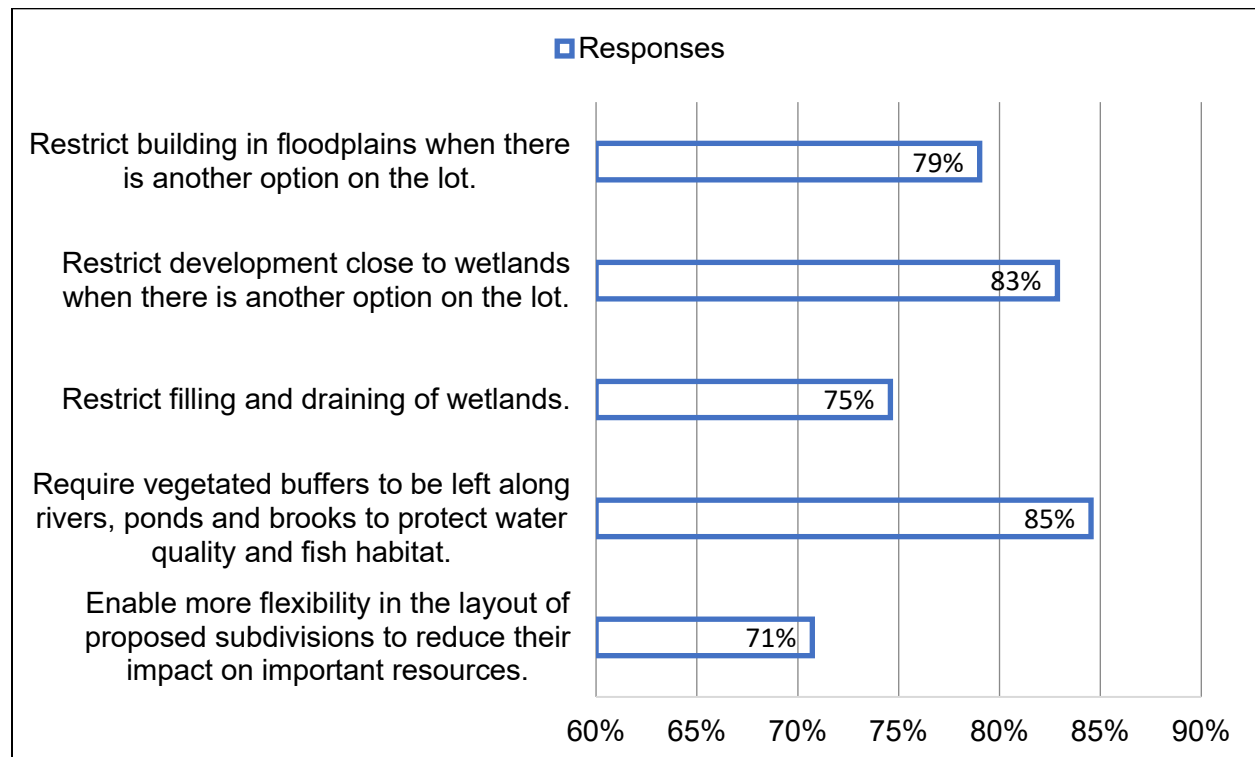
**172 respondents provided 408 responses.**

Categories with ten or more responses are summarized below:

- Road condition was the subject of the highest number of responses, with over 20 mentioning road improvements and about 15 specifying better road maintenance.
- Next was high speed internet with over 20 responses.
- About 15 respondents mentioned the need for more housing that is affordable, including for workers and to bring more young people to town.
- Over 10 respondents expressed concern for Streeter Pond, specifically the vegetation around and in the pond.
- Over 10 respondents expressed concern about speeding, including lack of enforcement and the speed limits.
- Over 10 respondents mentioned the need for better cell phone service/coverage.
- About 10 respondents mentioned taxes as a concern.
- About 10 respondents mentioned preserving views/vistas, including by controlling ridgeline development.
- About 10 respondents would like to see more conservation land.

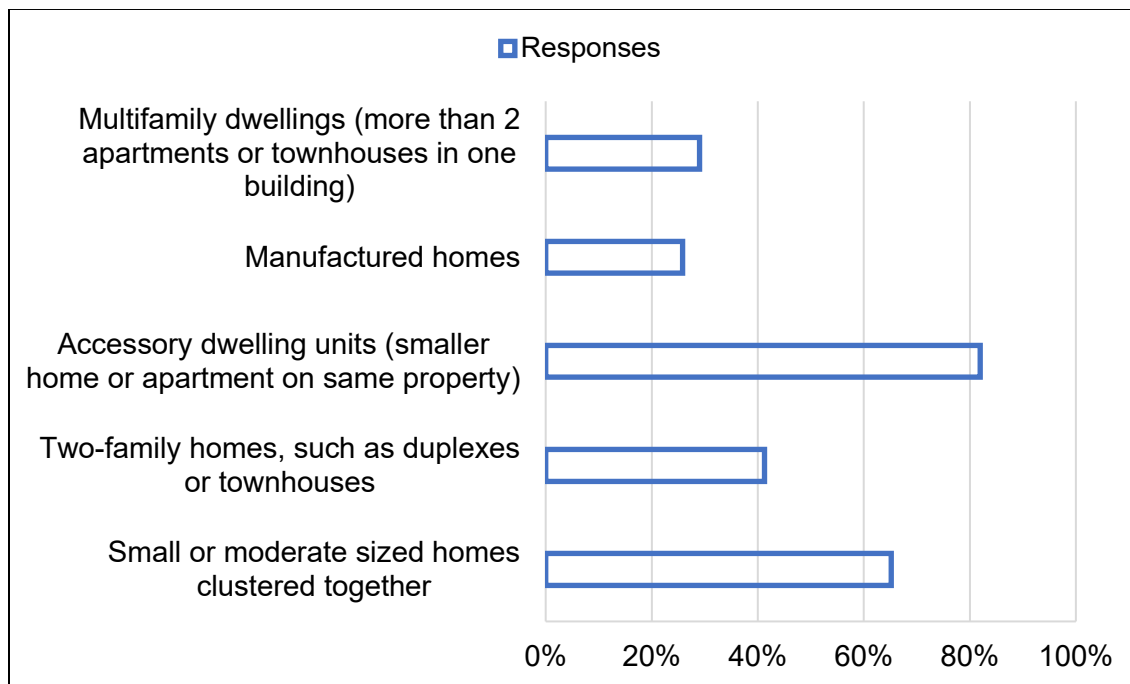
Complete responses are available from the Town Office.

Question 4: Our natural resources, clean environment and scenic beauty are key components of Sugar Hill's community character. Several planning and zoning tools are available for the town to manage the siting and impacts of development. Please check off ALL of the tools that you would support (if any):



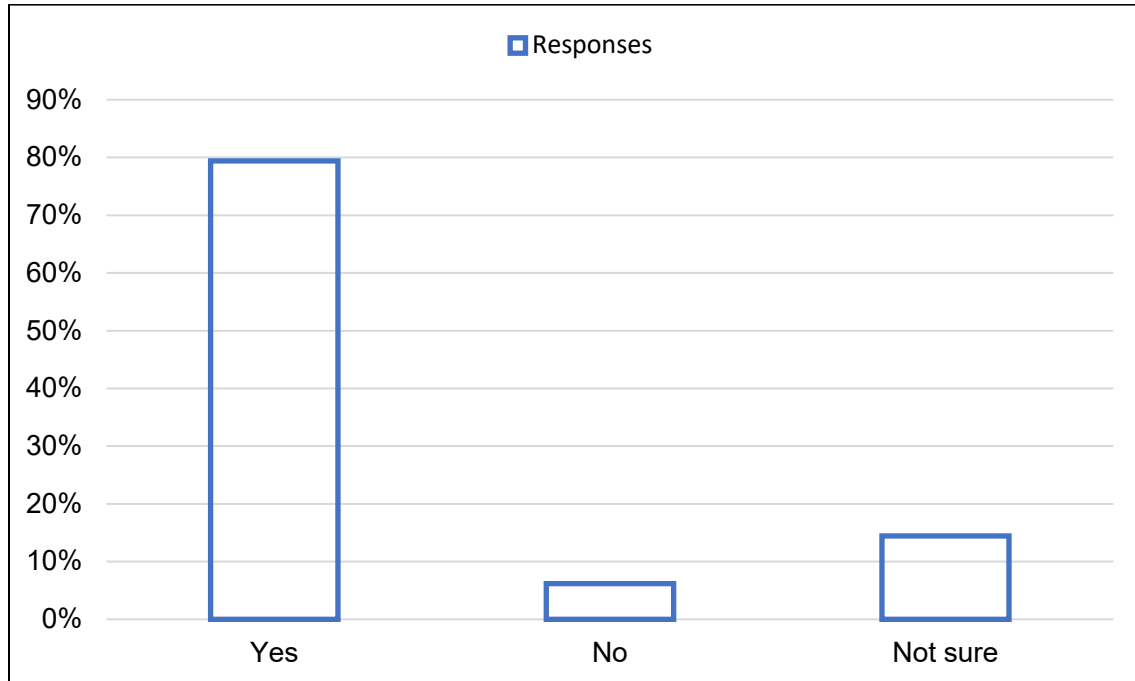
| Answer Choices   | Responses       |            |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| Enable more flexibility in the layout of proposed subdivisions to reduce their impact on important resources.  | 71%             | 128        |
| Require vegetated buffers to be left along rivers, ponds and brooks to protect water quality and fish habitat. | 85%             | 153        |
| Restrict filling and draining of wetlands.   | 75%             | 135        |
| Restrict development close to wetlands when there is another option on the lot.                                | 83%             | 150        |
| Restrict building in floodplains when there is another option on the lot.                                      | 79%             | 143        |
|  | <b>Answered</b> | <b>181</b> |
|  | <b>Skipped</b>  | <b>16</b>  |

Question 5: Like many New Hampshire communities, Sugar Hill has a shortage of housing for the area's workforce, young families, and seniors wishing to downsize. Please check off ALL of the types of homes you would support making it easier to build here by making the zoning less restrictive (if any):



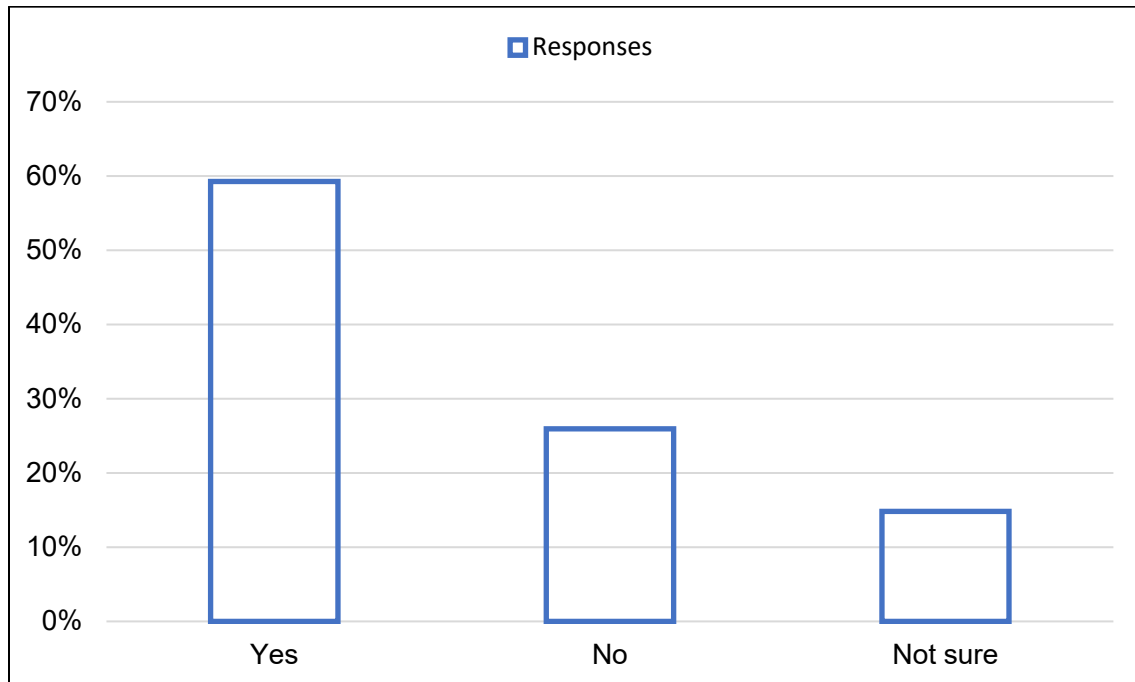
| Answer Choices   | Responses       |            |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| Small or moderate sized homes clustered together                             | 65%             | 101        |
| Two-family homes, such as duplexes or townhouses                             | 41%             | 64         |
| Accessory dwelling units (smaller home or apartment on same property)        | 82%             | 127        |
| Manufactured homes   | 26%             | 40         |
| Multifamily dwellings (more than 2 apartments or townhouses in one building) | 29%             | 45         |
|  | <b>Answered</b> | <b>155</b> |
|  | <b>Skipped</b>  | <b>42</b>  |

Question 6: Sugar Hill's existing zoning ordinance contains only general language about outdoor lighting, referring to suitable protection for adjacent homes. Would you support making this zoning provision more specific to require that new light fixtures aim light downward away from the sky and neighbors?



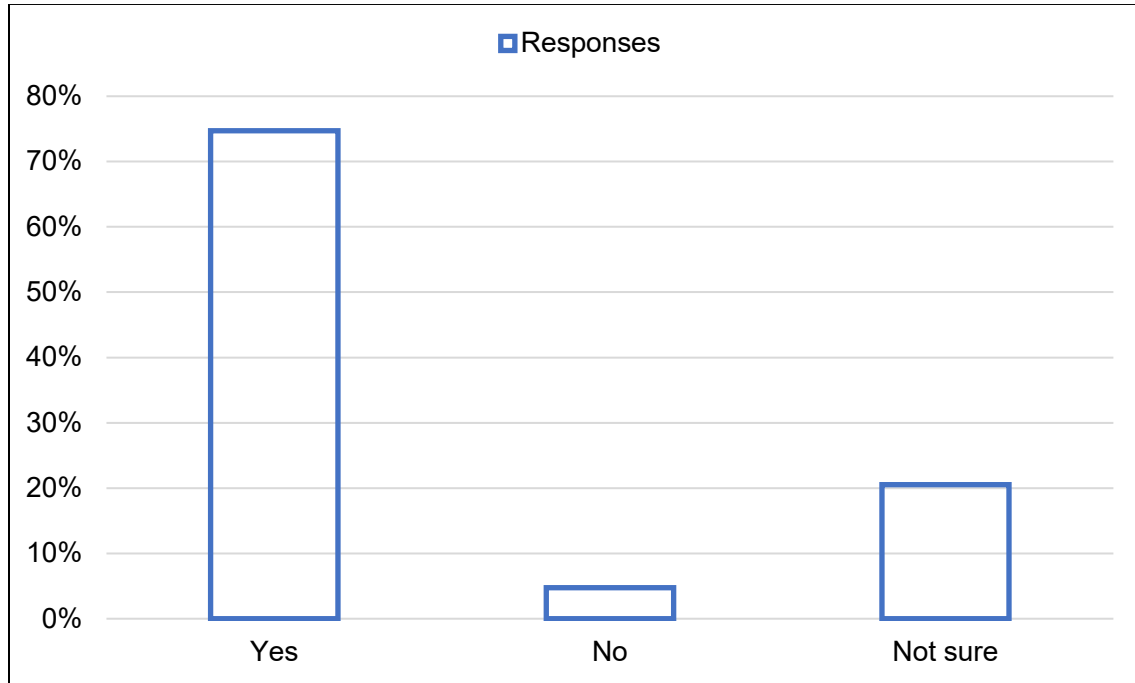
| Answer Choices  | Responses       |            |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| Yes   | 79%             | 154        |
| No  | 6%              | 12         |
| Not sure  | 14%             | 28         |
| If you chose "Not sure," what factors would make you support or not support this zoning change? |                 | 33         |
|   | <b>Answered</b> | <b>194</b> |
|   | <b>Skipped</b>  | <b>3</b>   |

Question 7: Should Sugar Hill adopt regulations for short-term rentals?



| Answer Choices   | Responses |    |
|--|-----------|----|
| Yes  | 59%       | 11 |
| No   | 26%       | 49 |
| Not sure   | 15%       | 28 |
| If you chose "Not sure," what factors would make you support or not support regulating short-term rentals? |           | 35 |
|  | Answered  | 18 |
|  | Skipped   | 8  |

Question 8: Community Power allows local governments to buy electricity for all of their residents and small businesses at wholesale rates. It is a bulk purchasing program for electricity. Do you support the town developing a community power plan to be voted on at town meeting in 2024?



| Answer Choices   | Responses |    |
|--|-----------|----|
| Yes  | 75%       | 14 |
| No   | 5%        | 9  |
| Not sure   | 21%       | 39 |
| If you chose "Not sure," what factors would make you support or not support Community Power? |           | 44 |
|  | Answered  | 19 |
|  | Skipped   | 7  |





We the undersigned members of the Town of Sugar Hill Planning Board do hereby adopt this Master Plan pursuant to RSA 675:6 on this 4th day of June 2025:

Phil A. Hayward  
Amy Van

James C. Kaefer  
John C. Miller

Russell M. Doherty

Michael R. Valente  
John Holberton  
Debbie J. Coase

Received by Town Clerk:

Lisa M. Boudreau

6/5/25  
Date