

*RSA 674:2,II - A vision section that serves to direct the other sections of the plan. This section shall contain a set of statements which articulate the desires of the citizens affected by the master plan, not only for their locality but for the region and the whole state. It shall contain a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision.*

## **VISION**

This chapter replaces the “Vision” chapter of the 2007 Master Plan.

For this 2017 revision, the Planning Board relied on survey results that were incorporated into past revisions of this Plan, on the annual town meeting and town vote, the capital improvement program, impact fee updates, on our own experience, on input from other town boards, and on community survey conducted this spring and early summer. The 2017 survey results were especially helpful, reiterating many of the 2007 vision statements and shedding additional light on community goals and priorities. Our thanks go to the citizens who took time to participate in the survey.

This revision places renewed emphasis on the use of the Master Plan by the Planning Board. In complex applications, effective Planning Board decisions are, as a practical matter, as much about negotiation as they are about enforcing each separate rule, or ruling on each separate waiver. Consequently, as the Board exercises its discretion, this Master Plan plays a critical role. This Plan lays out the ultimate goals of the town, which serve as the underlying rationale and justification for the entire Planning process. It is against these goals, as well as town ordinances and regulations, that Board members should measure every decision they make.

### **1. Housing**

Housing diversity is a key component of the rural character of a small town and often hard to achieve.

#### **A. Single Family Housing & Conservation Subdivisions**

The top two types of housing that should be encouraged by Epping are single family housing and conservation subdivisions according to those who took the survey. Epping repealed the ordinance permitting conservation subdivisions in 2014. This may be a topic that the Board should consider revisiting.

#### **B. Workforce Housing**

Epping residents continue to support affordable housing opportunities for all segments of the population. Since the 2007 update, the Planning Board implemented a “workforce housing ordinance” to address concerns of the region however, Epping does have a large portion of its existing housing stock that meets the requirements for workforce housing.

Survey results show that 58% of the community believes that Epping has its fair share of work force housing while 32% believe there is a need. That need (according to those who took the survey) is in the form of elderly housing and apartments that are close to downtown and the retail complexes on Route 125. Affordability was a main concern for those looking for apartments.

Residents were also asked what areas of Town would be the best for residential development. No one area was picked, but the common theme was keep the farm land undeveloped and open and keep new housing near the areas that are already developed.

The Planning Board must review the tendency of recent subdivisions to create only high-end housing, and should also investigate methods to concentrate housing towards the center of Epping, rather than in the town's more rural areas. The Board must continue to protect residential areas from incompatible non-residential development.

## **2. Community Facilities and Services:**

Residents were asked to rate the following facilities and services as either excellent, good, adequate, poor or don't know. While some of these facilities and services are outside of the Planning Boards purview, the results may help direct other Boards.

- a. The police and fire departments received mainly good/excellent reviews. This department has seen an increase in demand with the increase population and businesses over the past few decades. The Police Department calls (2015) break down to the following: 49.5% commercial, 45.7% residential, 4.8% other. The Fire Department calls (2015) break down the following: 32% commercial, 56% residential, and 12% other. recently went to a two day on two day off adjust to department demands. The Town Planner holds technical review meetings with these departments to ensure that their concerns are addressed early in the project since they do put a demand on their services.
- b. The school system received mainly adequate/good reviews. While the housing stock in Epping has been increasing, the number of children in the school system has not been reflecting this change. It has remained relatively stable.
- c. The library received mainly adequate/good reviews. The past two years they have been working toward a plan to add on the library but have not been successful at Town vote.
- d. The recreation department offers summer programs as well as programs for before and after school. These were rated to be good/adequate.
- e. Recreational Areas and Facilities received adequate/good reviews. Recently a park area was added to Mary Blair Park, the basketball court by the SAU was refinished. The recreational department is housed in Watson Academy which was

closed for a period of time for repair. The Town was reviewing the possibility of a new recreation facility, possibly a joint venture with the School Department but it never gained much traction once Watson academy was operational again.

- f. Road Maintenance & Reconstruction received mainly adequate/good reviews. When large projects come before the Board, they do require offsite improvements of the road system when deemed appropriate. Transportation and road network needs are discussed in a later section.
- g. Transfer Station and Recycling received mainly good/adequate reviews. There has been some discussion about going to single stream recycling but cost seems to be the main deterrent. The Town is always investigating ways to make the transfer station operate efficiently while being cost affective.
- h. Building Inspections & Code Enforcement received mainly don't know/good reviews. The department recently added online permitting to make obtaining permits easier.
- i. Land Use Planning received mainly don't know/adequate reviews. This service will be reviewed more in the land use and growth management section.
- j. Health and Welfare received mainly don't know/adequate reviews. This service is not used by everyone in Town which may have led to so many don't know responses.
- k. Animal Control received mainly don't know/good. This service may only be used when there is an obnoxious or dangerous animal.
- l. Tax Assessing & Collection received mainly a rating of adequate/good. Since the 2007 update, this department has relocated to a larger office and hired another employee.
- m. Town Administration received mainly a rating of good/adequate. This department is responsible for the oversight of all Town departments and makes sure the Town is running as smooth as possible.
- n. Cemetery Maintenance received mainly a rating of don't know/good. The Town recently voted to make Prescott Cemetery a Town cemetery. The cemetery trustees and the Town clerk have been working to create a digital inventory of plot locations.
- o. Community Access Television received a rating of good/don't know. ETV along with the meeting room, relocated to the renovated third floor of the Town Hall to have better communication with meetings while they are happening. They also updated their system to streamline broadcasting and online viewing.

- p. Water and Sewer received a rating of don't know/good. Many individuals who live outside of the water/sewer district do not realized they are utilizing these services when they visit the shopping centers in town. The availability of water and sewer has been an important element for the Town to attract commercial development.

**3. Land Use and Growth Management** - The following questions were asked regarding some potential land use and growth management options for the Town.

	Yes	No	Maybe
1. Permit higher residential and commercial density in existing developed areas to preserve rural character elsewhere?	41%	26%	33%
2. Permit higher residential density for creation of affordable housing?	22%	59%	19%
3. Smaller minimum lot sizes in specific residential zones?	21%	63%	16%
4. Create larger minimum lots sizes in the rural area?	55%	24%	21%
5. Purchase open space with town funds if taxes are raised?	38%	38%	24%
6. Expand water and sewer for commercial projects?	34%	34%	32%
7. Expand water and sewer to allow for denser residential development?	27%	49%	24%
8. Should water and sewer be supplied to surrounding communities?	9%	66%	25%

- a. Density - Based on the first four question, citizens would like to allow denser development along the corridors that are already developed to protect the rural areas in Town. They also support larger lot sizes in rural areas. The Board may want to review the lot size requirements in these areas.
- b. Open Space – The Town voted to helped protect Kennard Hill at the past Town meeting, but those who took the survey seem indifferent toward protecting open space. The size and quality of the open space is most likely a deciding factor. Natural resources and open space will be further discussed in another section.
- c. Water and Sewer – With the purchase of the wells behind Walmart completed the Water and Sewer department now has more capacity. The residents seem indifferent to expanding for commercial but do not support denser residential development or selling water to surrounding communities.

**4. Transportation**

It is no coincidence that Epping’s main commuting roads are State routes. The summer months create added congestion for people headed to the lakes region. The Planning Board does have some input of the design of connections to these roads but the power is at the State level. That is why it is important for the Board to require cross connections between projects so individuals can move between sites without returning to the main road.

Epping's residents were asked the following questions surrounding transportation in the survey:

- a. Which road or intersection in town poses the most serious threat to safety?

The intersection of Route 27 and Main Street was considered the most serious threat to safety (43.5%). Reason included were speed, visibility, and traffic. Five corners in West Epping was considered the second unsafe intersection with (17%). Intersections on Route 125 with no traffic light were also considered unsafe. Since these are intersection with state road, the Town will have to work with the State to address these concerns.

- b. Which road or intersection in town has too much traffic, considering its design and surrounding setting?

Route 125 was considered the road with the most traffic (38%). The common theme in responses were Route 125 should be widened, lights should be better timed during peak traffic times, and enforcement of individual running red lights. The second problem intersection was Route 27 & Main St (20%). Suggestions for this intersection were adding a light or making it a four-way stop. Also, there were many comments about Main St and Route 27 becoming a cut through when traffic is congested on Route 125.

- c. Which road or intersection in town requires the most visual improvement?

This was answered more generally by residents. The Main Street and Route 125 intersection was viewed as the gateway to the city and should be better maintained. Also, road side mowing and tree removal was viewed as Town and citizen issue, exposed the stone walls and remove the invasive species.

As noted above a concern of many citizens is the traffic on Route 125 during the summer and peak commuting times; left hand turns onto Route 125 at unlighted intersections was also a concern. Middle turn lanes or lights should be reviewed by the Town and State. The widening of Route 125 is on the 10-year list of projects for the State. The Town should continue to work with the State to address these issues and make sure the plan becomes a reality.

Public transportation was mentioned by citizens in the survey as a pressing transportation issue and remains a largely unattained goal. The Park-and-Ride, together with the extensive use of Route 125 as both a commuting and tourist road, should make Epping a natural bus stop route for Trailways, Greyhound, C&J, or COAST. In addition, in-state bus service to Portsmouth, Manchester, Dover, Durham, or Exeter would benefit Epping residents. Exeter is of special interest because of its rail connection, and of course its hospital.

## 5. Natural Resources, Open Space, and Cultural Resources

Those who took the survey were asked to rank the following items on level of important; 5 being the most important and 1 being the least important.

	5	4	3	2	1
Protect drinking water supply	82%	11%	3%	1%	3%
Protect surface water (ponds and rivers) quality and quantity	66%	22%	8%	2%	2%
Preserve forest land through conservation easements	55%	25%	12%	4%	4%
Protect wildlife corridors and habitats through greenways	53%	26%	15%	3%	3%
Protect open space	53%	25%	16%	3%	3%
Preserve high quality prime agricultural lands	52%	26%	16%	4%	2%
Identify and protect prime wetlands	50%	27%	13%	6%	4%
Protect floodplains and reduce flood hazards	46%	35%	13%	4%	2%
Protect hillsides and steep slopes (greater than 25%)	27%	29%	30%	11%	3%

Protecting water is the most important to the residents in Epping. The Board created the Wellhead Protection Area to the Zoning Ordinance in 2015. The Town does have its own riverbank setback but should consider other ways to protect surface water. The Board does have other avenues to create open space and preserve land with Site Plan and Subdivision Regulations. These should be reviewed and updated regularly.

Residents were asked if the Town could purchase one area for permanent protection against development, what or where would it be and why? The predominant answer was Harvey's Hill and the land surrounding it. Reasons included protecting wild life corridors, views, outdoor recreation, and protecting farmland. The second area that citizens believed should be protected was land abutting waterways, lakes, and ponds. They were viewed as important areas for wildlife and keeping water quality healthy. Another item mentioned in survey results was a park near the downtown area for farmers markets, a playground, and citizen events.

With limited financial resources to protect land, the Planning Board must pursue creative options for setting aside open space and farmland for future generations. It must work with the Conservation Commission in prioritizing and protecting natural areas. And it must investigate passive, as well as active, recreation areas in subdivisions of all sizes, and perhaps in commercial developments as well.

## 6. Economic Development

Citizens were asked what is missing in Epping. Smaller local businesses was one of the top responses, in particular a bakery or brewery. Also, better restaurant options other than fast food. Most residents felt that there were enough retail establishments in Town and

that the focus should be on drawing in businesses that create jobs such as light manufacturing and industry. Therefor trying to get Epping to shift from a bedroom community to one where people come to work and spend their money during the week.

Community spaces were stressed as being important. In particular dog parks, ballfields, and recreational buildings, such as a boys & girls club or something similar to Hilltop in Somersworth.

Those who participated were also asked where they would like to see development happen. Route 27, particularly east of Route 125 was the only area of Town on the list where the currently isn't any dense development. The 125 corridor in the area of Main Street and Fresh River Road seemed to generate the most interest, keeping development where it currently exists and can make use of the existing infrastructure.

## **7. Administration and Public Participation**

The Planning Board faces the ongoing challenge and responsibility of ensuring that its members are adequately versed in a variety of technical, engineering, and legal areas. The Board should consider implementing periodic education sessions, or other methods of addressing this need.

The town of Epping has made significant improvements to its land use regulations over the past years. A key requirement of continued improvement, indeed of the continued function of a volunteer town government, is active citizen involvement. The Planning Board, along with all other boards in town, must continue to reach out and actively involve all residents of Epping in the government and planning process.

## **8. Best, Worst, and Community Vision**

The survey included the question: what is the best thing about Epping? The small town local feel, the people, and its location were overwhelming the main answer. The ability to get all your shopping done in town while still being able to go for a hike in the woods or a dip in the Lamprey were all things people loved about Epping. The fact that it is a short drive to Manchester, Portsmouth, Boston, mountains, or beaches is an added bonus. Epping is of course the center of the universe.

The Board should try to maintain the balance of business and development along Route 125 while keeping the other areas in Town rural. This can be down through zoning, site plan and subdivision regulations.

The survey also included the question: what is the worst thing about Epping? The common trend in the answers was traffic. The main issues listed were summer traffic, commuting traffic, and cut through traffic. Again, the Town needs to work with the State to help alleviated these concerns. Rising taxes were also considered a negative quality about Epping. Citizens do not understand why businesses locating in Town has not

relieved some of their tax burden. Rapid growth and development, lack of public space, and the school system were also seen as needing improvement in Town.

Residents were asked to rank several items that should be address in the next five years. It should not come as a surprise that the top four items were: tax burden, preserving educational quality, protecting drinking water quality and supply, improvements to Route 125. These issues have been a common theme throughout the results of the survey.

Residents were asked: if you could identify one vision for Epping what would it be? The overarching theme was to keep development located along Route 125 and Route 27 to preserve the rural character in the other areas of Town. Improve the walkability of downtown, invest in infrastructure (roads, water & sewer, etc.), and create community spaces (small local business, coffee shops, art studios) Epping is unique, you can do the majority of your shopping on Route 125 then escape to farm areas to get the country feel.

Another vision for the Town was to invest in the school system and possibly revisit the idea of a regional high school. Some individuals think Epping is too small to support its own high school and that adding children Towns would allow the school to offer more classes and help with the cost.