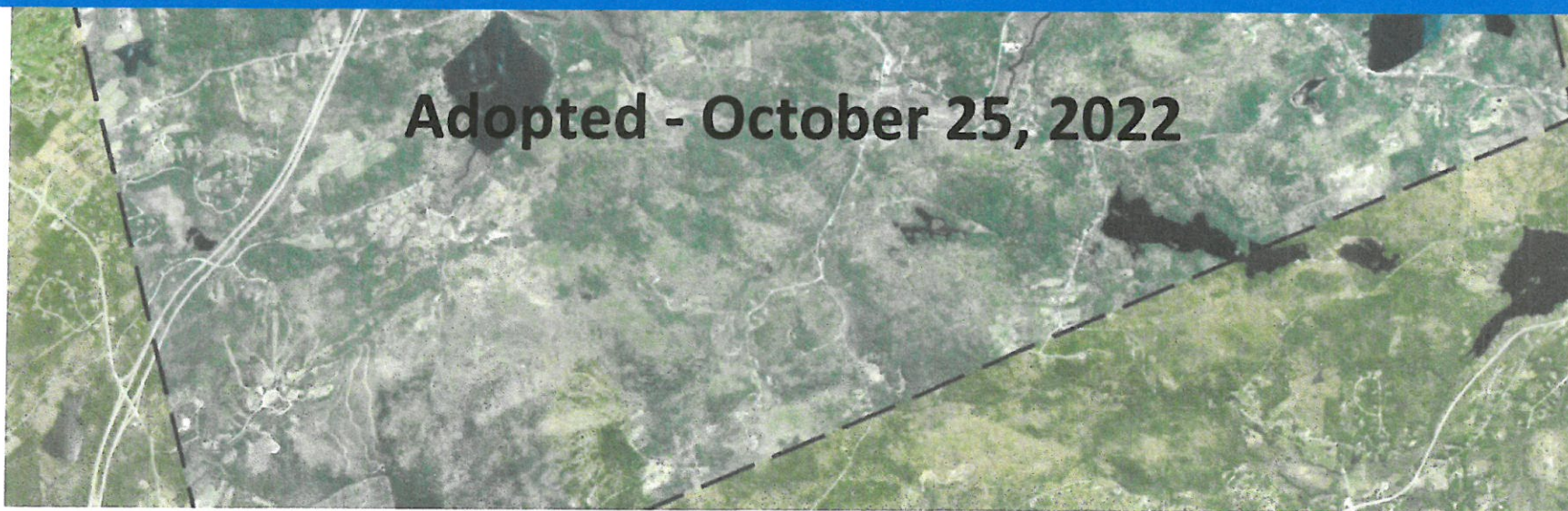


# 2021 SUTTON MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Town of Sutton, New Hampshire


**Adopted - October 25, 2022**






## CERTIFICATE OF ADOPTION

In accordance with New Hampshire RSA 674:4; Master Plan Adoption and Amendment, and New Hampshire RSA 675:6, Method of Adoption, the Sutton Planning Board, having held a duly noticed public hearing on October 25, 2022, hereby adopts and certifies the following chapters and appendices of the 2021 Sutton Master Plan Update: 1. A Quick Summary, 2. Sutton Tomorrow, 3. Sutton Today, 4. Our Services and Resources, 5. Existing and Future Land Uses, Appendix A: Community Input, Appendix B: Natural Resources and Features Update, Appendix C: Transportation Infrastructure and Resources Update, and Appendix D: Community Facilities and Resources Update.

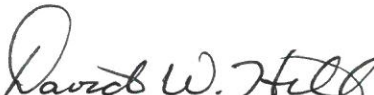
  
Glenn Pogust, Chair

  
Roger Wells, Vice Chair


  
Kristin Angeli, Alternate  
Member


  
Peter Blakemen, Member

  
Charles Bolduc, Member


  
David Hill, Member

  
Dane Headley, Ex-Officio

  
Christine Fletcher, Member

  
Jason Teaster, Alternate  
Member

This document was received and recorded by the <sup>Deputy</sup> Town Clerk  
on 12-28-22.

Signed:   
Sutton Town Clerk  
<sup>Deputy</sup>

Seal:

### **2021 Select Board**

Walter Baker, Jr. Chair

William Curless

Dane Headley

### **2021 Planning Board**

Roger Wells, Chair

Glenn Pogust, Vice Chair

Dane Headley, Ex-Officio

Peter Blakeman

David Hill

Christine Fletcher

Chuck Bolduc

### **Land Use Coordinator**

Peter Stanley

### **Consultant: Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission**

Michael Tardiff, Executive Director

Katie Nelson, Principal Planner

Craig Tufts, Senior GIS/Transportation Planner

**Public Hearing:** October 25, 2022

**Adopted:** October 25, 2022



## A QUICK SUMMARY

This **Master Plan Update** summarizes the shared vision of what we, as citizens of Sutton, want our town to be and to provide prioritized recommendations to help achieve that vision.

To begin this process, the Planning Board reached out to local groups for their input and issued an online survey to all town residents (approximately 250 combined responses).

As a result, it is clear to the Planning Board that there is a needed balance between those things we love and want to maintain and those things that need to change to address the challenges Sutton faces.

Three key themes have emerged as the essential issues that need to be addressed:

- Maintain the truly **RURAL ATMOSPHERE** of the town;
- Nurture the inherent **SENSE OF COMMUNITY** and the friendliness of our townspeople; and
- Protect, support and promote our **HISTORIC VILLAGES**.

Two of the greatest challenges that we face are:

- **ENABLING VARIED HOUSING OPTIONS** and
- **IMPROVING THE TOWN'S TAX BASE**.

These are essential so that Sutton remains a place that is an affordable and desirable place to live.

## A QUICK SUMMARY

*The following proposed KEY ACTIONS in this Plan are designed to help achieve these goals over time.*

### RURAL ATMOSPHERE

**Sutton's rural atmosphere can be protected through some modifications to the Zoning Ordinance that can further protect environmentally sensitive areas and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities. The Planning Board should:**

- Develop a **TABLE OF USES** in the Zoning Ordinance that specifies both the type and level of commercial uses permitted by right or special exception within the Rural/Agricultural District. This would improve the current situation where a wide variety of non-residential uses, through the Special Exception process, can be approved by the Zoning Board.
- Revise the Zoning Ordinance to address the location and intensity of limited commercial uses. These modifications would protect rural areas from impactful uses by focusing those activities in the most suitable areas. For instance, in the villages, and for any larger projects, in the vicinity of Exit 10 along Shaker Street and North Road.
- Review the Zoning Ordinance for Cluster Development to ensure that it meets the open space objectives of the Sutton Strategic Conservation Plan and does not become a vehicle to skirt Sutton's subdivision regulations.

**There are also opportunities for town boards, committees, and groups to further protect the town's environmentally sensitive areas and enhance recreational options throughout Sutton. The Conservation Commission should:**

Implement key strategies of the recently updated Sutton Strategic Conservation Plan. Some of these strategies are:

- Pursue partnerships with regional land trusts to help leverage significant conservation projects in Sutton;
  - Coordinate the findings of the Strategic Conservation Plan with the development of a town-wide trail system that links conservation lands throughout Sutton; and
  - Develop partnerships with neighboring towns aimed at conserving land in border areas of Sutton.
- Form and lead an assessment group to determine if additional town roads and adjoining setbacks need special visual protection. In addition, mountain crests and very steep-sloped areas should be considered for additional protection via visual controls and/or greater land use density restrictions.
- Continue to actively support deed restrictions and the acquisition of critical sites.

### SENSE OF COMMUNITY

**Sutton's sense of community can be strengthened with a wider range of housing choices, improved community facilities that include varied choices for outdoor recreation, reasonable tax rates, and options for employment closer to home. The town can do the following to help achieve these goals:**

- Recognize that housing for young families and old timers who have lived in Sutton for years needs to be available. Workforce housing needs to be provided for in the zoning regulations. Incentives that encourage this type of construction could be used.
- Permit and encourage deed restrictions for senior citizen housing and group living accommodations in appropriate areas.
- Make Town Facilities more available for community use and give assistance to local organizations in support of the “Friendly Community” concept.
- Form a leadership council to work on ideas for improving outdoor recreation. This could include better parking areas for walking trails, and deed-restricted trails for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.
- Support the objective of a local diverse employment base:
  - Form an Economic Development Committee to help bring appropriate types of uses to town to improve the tax base.
  - Create a new zoning district along Shaker Street/North Road near Exit 10 to provide for limited, light industrial, research and development and hospitality uses.
  - Consider the land abutting the Country Club of New Hampshire golf course for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) zone so that a new village could potentially be established.
  - Utilize available tax incentives, when and where appropriate, to encourage businesses and housing to locate in Sutton and thereby improve our tax base over the long term.
  - Consider using the Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) program, which allows municipalities to establish certain zones in a community where a business can then seek a credit on its New Hampshire Business Profits Tax.
  - Consider adopting The NH Commercial and Industrial Construction Exemption, which permits the Town to implement short-term incentives to encourage the construction of new structures or additions, renovations, or improvements to existing structures. This requires approval at Town Meeting.



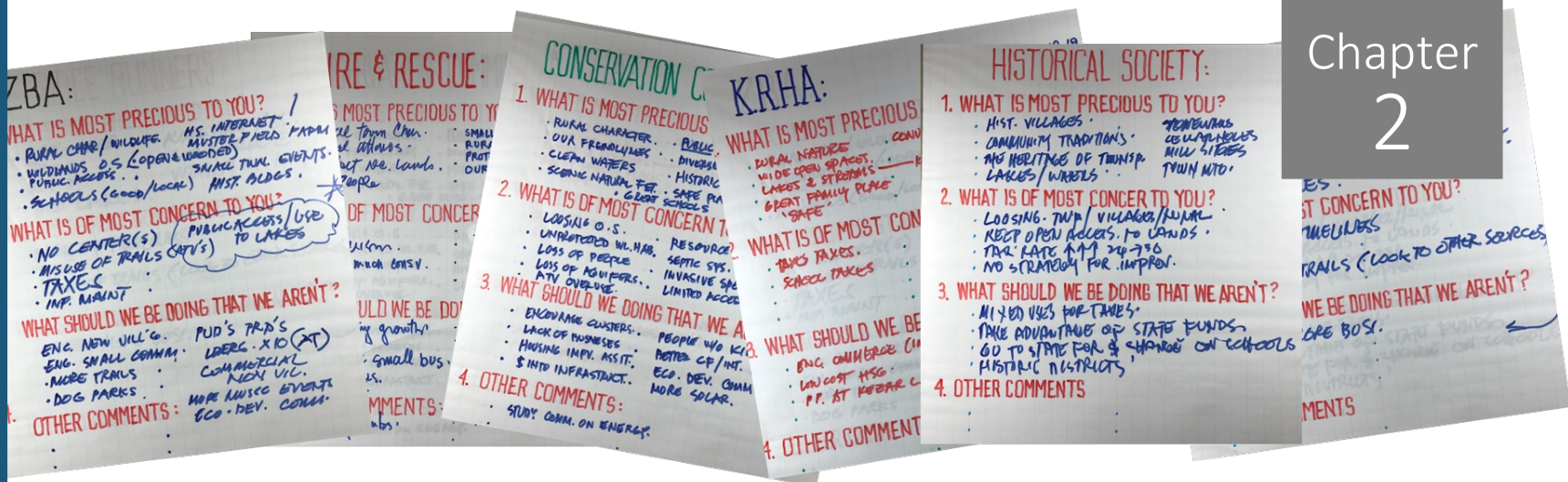
# A QUICK SUMMARY

## HISTORIC VILLAGES

**The Villages of Sutton Mills, North Sutton, South Sutton and Blaisdell Lake are the core of Sutton's small-town atmosphere. Current Zoning regulations do not adequately address the development patterns and potential uses that can restore the vitality of these historic villages without harming the small-town atmosphere. The following can be done:**

- Designate specific village zoning districts that address requirements such as lot size, setbacks, and minimum lot width to allow for appropriately scaled renovation and construction.
- Protect the historic nature of the villages through improved land use controls and historically based economic incentives. This should include incentives for the sensitive reuse of existing low functioning buildings such as barns and out buildings.
- Adopt the use of the NH tax relief incentives for property owners who replace or substantially rehabilitate their structures in the villages to encourage the rehabilitation and active reuse of under-utilized buildings and expand the tax base over the long term.
- Permit limited mixed uses in the villages with Planning Board oversight via Conditional Use applications. These mixed uses could include specified types of small commercial activity and limited multiple dwelling uses.

*These key action items DO NOT include all of the topics or recommendations in this Master Plan. They are a summary of how we can address the most important issues we face. These efforts can protect Sutton's many assets and help plan for the future. For more details please read the entire Plan.*



## Sutton Tomorrow – Our GOALS in a NUTSHELL

Our last Master Plan was completed in 2005; it was extensive and thorough and many of the recommendations in that plan have been achieved. However, a number still remain to be done, and our town has experienced some changes in the last 15 years that need to be addressed.

This **Master Plan Update** summarizes the shared vision of what we, as citizens of Sutton, want our town to be and provides prioritized recommendations to help achieve this vision.

To begin this process the Planning Board reached out to local groups for their input and issued an online survey for input from all town residents (approximately 250 combined responses).

As a result, it is clear to the Planning Board that there is a needed balance between those things we love and want to maintain and those things that need to change to address the challenges Sutton faces.

Three key themes have emerged as the essential issues that need to be addressed:

1. Maintaining the truly **RURAL ATMOSPHERE** of the town;
2. Nurturing the inherent **SENSE OF COMMUNITY** and the friendliness of our townspeople; and
3. Protecting, supporting and promoting our **HISTORIC VILLAGES**.

Two of the greatest challenges that we face are **ENABLING VARIED HOUSING OPTIONS** and **IMPROVING THE TOWN'S TAX BASE** so that Sutton remains a place that is an affordable and desirable place to live.

*The proposed recommendations in this Plan are designed to achieve these goals over time.*



# SUTTON TOMORROW – OUR GOALS

## How Have We Changed Since 2005?

Our full time population has grown from 1,769 in 2005 to about 1,978 in 2020. Sutton remains a rural community with distinct villages, scattered houses along existing roads and acres of woodlands and open space.

Sutton has an aging population and slow overall growth. This trend is expected to continue, and there are current and future needs in housing, transportation, and accessibility that come with accommodating and serving an older community.

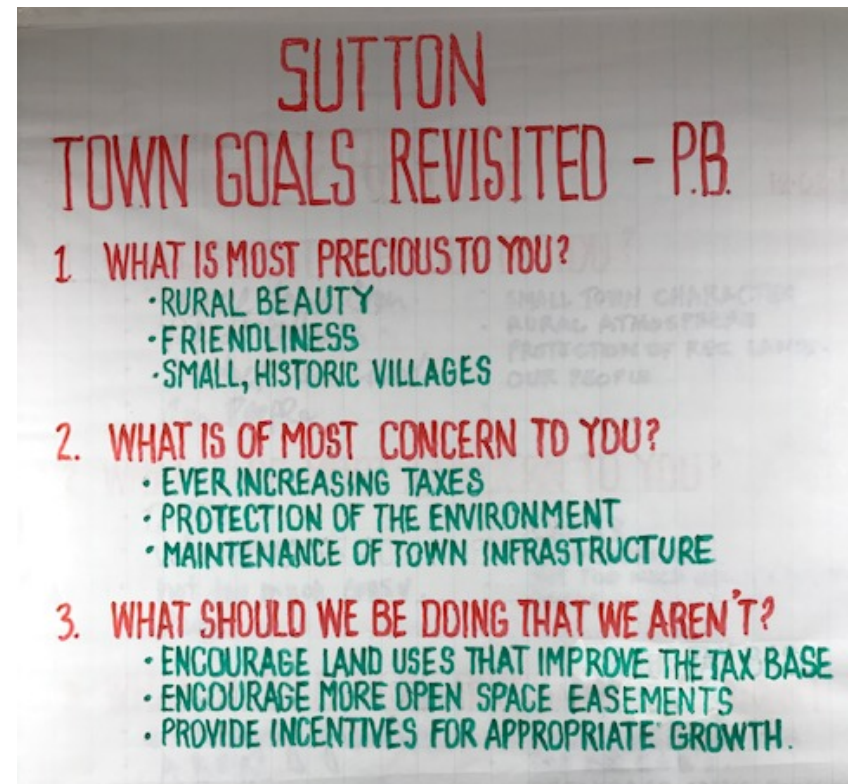
Our average household size continues to decrease, but construction of larger homes continues as the dominant building trend. As a result, there is a lack of adequate housing options for several segments of Sutton's existing and aspirational population. Choice and affordability for those on modest or fixed incomes and for seniors looking to "downsize" have become key issues.

Sutton's taxes have continued to increase due primarily to school costs. This is a significant direct impact on housing affordability because most towns rely primarily on property taxes for almost all of their revenue. These increases are significant to seniors who want to remain here but are often on fixed or limited incomes. Young homeowners who work in the area are also affected if they can't afford high taxes or expensive housing.

The COVID pandemic has affected everyone. City dwellers are moving to the suburbs and rural communities with many now working remotely from their homes. These changes can also have an impact on our community.

## Our Goals & Priorities

In preparation of this Master Plan Update, the Planning Board set out to gather meaningful input from the citizens of Sutton as to their most important goals and priorities. This process included several outreach events held in late 2019 and an online Community Survey that was available in early-to-mid 2020. In total, members of the Planning Board attended meetings with ten separate town departments, committees, boards, and community groups and 180 responses were gathered through the online survey. Utilizing all the input gathered, the Planning Board was able to establish the Plan's themes (see below).



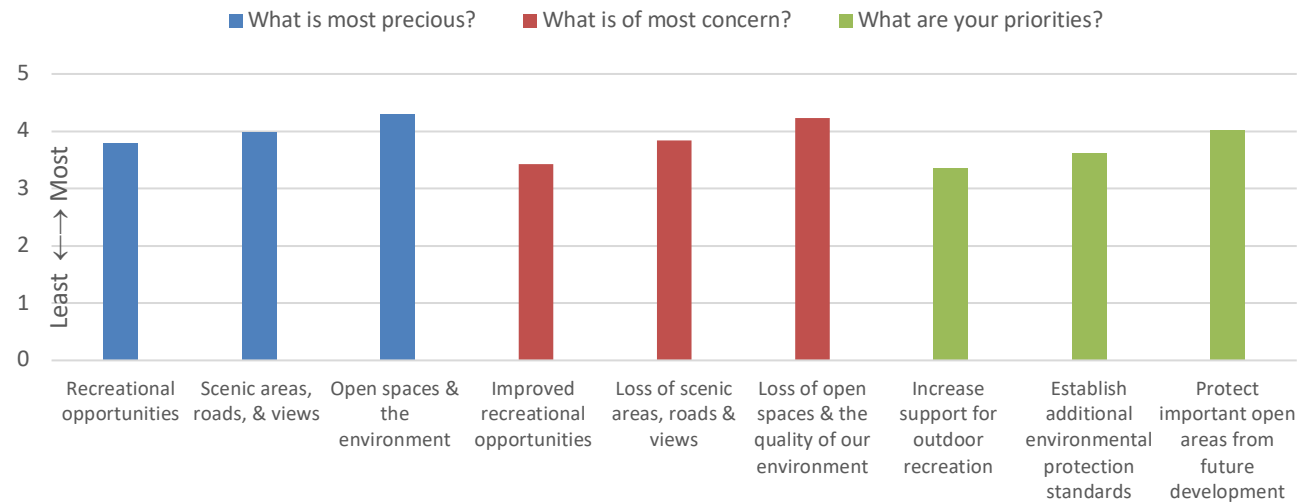
**OUR RURAL ATMOSPHERE** is our open space, protected water bodies and the town's overall environmental health. Preservation of our rural beauty requires effective stewardship of these natural resources.

Population trends will affect the need for a variety of recreation options and access to recreation areas and trails. Recreation opportunities accessible for all ages will continue to be important reasons for people to move to and remain in Sutton.

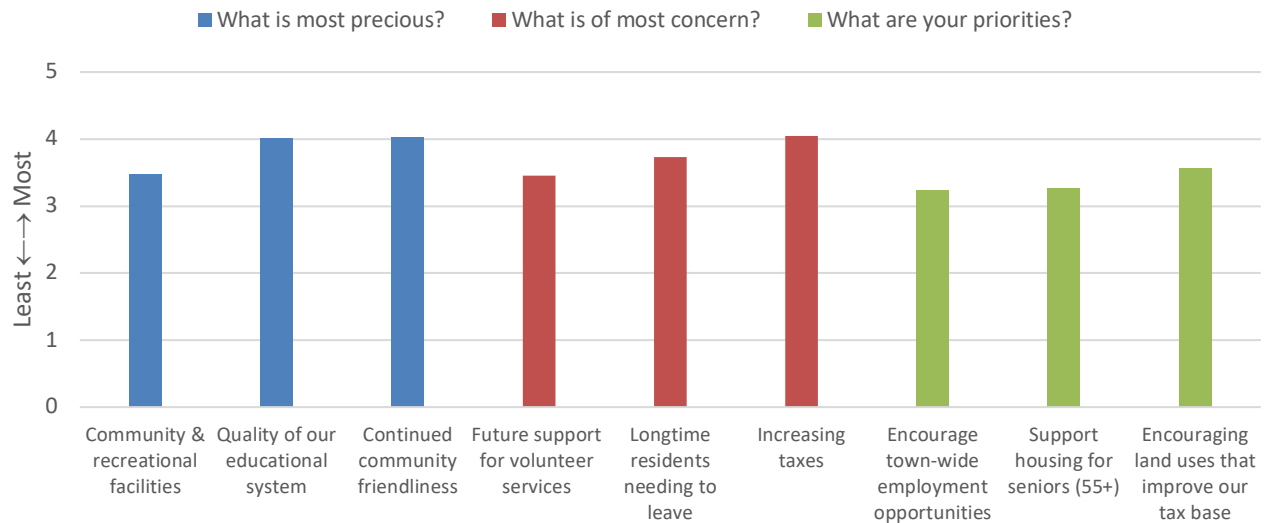
**A SENSE OF COMMUNITY** is critical to the welcoming atmosphere our town has historically valued. We all want a sense of peace, safety and belonging. Our cultural and civic organizations, community activities, events and volunteerism **ARE SUTTON**. As we try to attract new residents and a stronger employment base this value must be nurtured.

All residents are important parts of our community, from young children to aging seniors. We must maintain and provide a quality education system, affordable housing, and available town services to ensure that we all can continue to live here and that new residents will move here.

## When thinking of rural character:



## When thinking of sense of community:



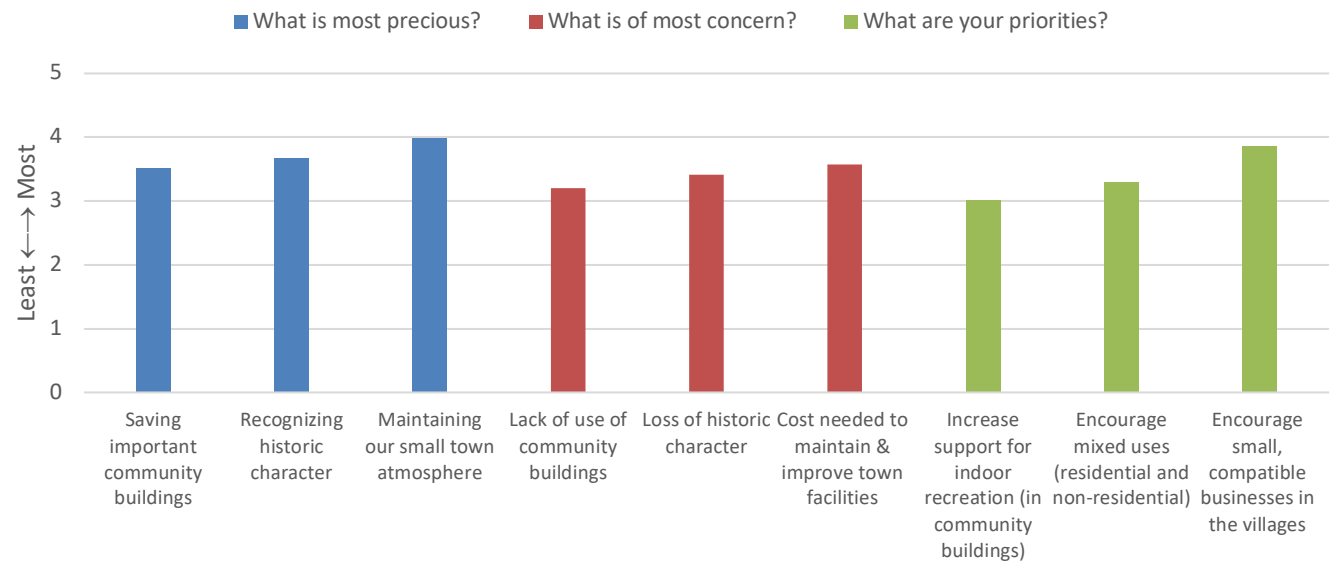
# SUTTON TOMORROW – OUR GOALS

## OUR HISTORIC VILLAGES

distinguish Sutton from its larger and more “commercialized” neighbors. To preserve that small-town atmosphere any efforts at development should be sensitive to and aim towards preservation of our historic villages, beautiful travel ways and historic sites.

Encouraging appropriate mixed uses and commercial development in the village areas will promote the future sustainability of the villages.

When thinking of existing villages:



## Key Action Items

The following are the Planning Board’s key action items to address the town’s high priority issues over the next five to ten years.

### RURAL ATMOSPHERE

**Sutton’s rural atmosphere can be protected through some modifications to the Zoning Ordinance that can further protect environmentally sensitive areas and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.**

- Develop a **TABLE OF USES** in the Zoning Ordinance that specifies both the type and level of commercial uses permitted by right or special exception within the

Rural/Agricultural District. This would improve the current situation where a wide variety of non-residential uses can be approved by the Zoning Board through the special exception process for any location within the district.

- Revise the Zoning Ordinance to address the location and intensity of limited commercial uses. These modifications would protect rural areas from impactful activities by focusing those activities in the most suitable areas. For instance, in the villages, and for any larger projects, in the vicinity of Exit 10 along Shaker Street and North Road.



**There are also opportunities for town boards, committees, and groups to further protect the town's environmentally sensitive areas and enhance recreational options throughout Sutton.**

- a. The Conservation Commission should work with the Planning Board on recommended land use controls that fairly and equitably direct development.
- b. The Conservation Commission should continue to support deed restrictions and the acquisition of critical sites.
- c. The Conservation Commission should implement key strategies of the recently updated Sutton Strategic Conservation Plan. Some of these strategies are:
  - i. to pursue partnerships with regional land trusts to help leverage significant conservation projects in Sutton;
  - ii. to coordinate the findings of the Strategic Conservation Plan with the development of a town-wide trail system that links conservation lands throughout Sutton; and
  - iii. to develop partnerships with neighboring towns aimed at conserving land in border areas of Sutton.
- d. The Conservation Commission should form and lead an assessment group to determine if additional town roads and adjoining setbacks need special visual protection. In addition, mountain crests and very steep-sloped areas should be considered for additional protection via visual controls and/or greater land use density restrictions.

- e. The Zoning Ordinance for Cluster Development should be reviewed to ensure that it meets the open space objectives of the Sutton Strategic Conservation Plan and is not a potential vehicle to skirt Sutton's subdivision regulations.

### SENSE OF COMMUNITY

**Sutton's sense of community can be strengthened with a wider range of housing choices, improved community facilities that include varied choices for outdoor recreation, reasonable tax rates, and options for employment closer to home.**

- a. The town needs to actively recognize that housing for young families as well as old timers who have lived in Sutton for years needs to be available and protected. Our zoning regulations need to specifically provide for workforce housing. Incentives that encourage this type of construction could also be used.
- b. Deed restrictions for senior citizen housing, and for group living accommodations need to be permitted in appropriate areas, encouraged and implemented.
- c. Town facilities need to be made available for community use and organizations need to be given assistance to support the "Friendly Community" concept.
- d. Local recreation groups should form a leadership council to work on ideas for improving outdoor recreation. This could include better parking areas for walking trails, and deed-restricted trails for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

# SUTTON TOMORROW – OUR GOALS

- e. The objective of a diverse employment base should be supported through a variety of actions:
  - i. Form an Economic Development Committee to help bring the appropriate types of uses to town that will improve the tax base.
  - ii. Create a new zoning district along Shaker Street/North Road near Exit 10 to provide for limited, light industrial, research and development and hospitality uses.
  - iii. Land abutting the Country Club of New Hampshire golf course should be considered for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) zone so that a new village could potentially be established.
  - iv. Utilize available tax incentives, when and where appropriate, to encourage businesses and housing to locate in Sutton and thereby improve our tax base over the long term.
- f. The Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) program allows municipalities to establish certain zones in a community where a business can then seek a credit on its New Hampshire Business Profits Tax.
- g. The NH Commercial and Industrial Construction Exemption, which can be adopted at Town Meeting permits the Town to implement short-term incentives to encourage the construction of new structures or additions, renovations, or improvements to existing structures.

## HISTORIC VILLAGES

**The Villages of Sutton Mills, North Sutton, South Sutton and Blaisdell Lake are the core of Sutton's small-town atmosphere. Current Zoning regulations do not adequately address the development patterns and potential uses that can restore the vitality of these historic villages without harming the small-town atmosphere.**

- a. Sutton should designate specific village zoning districts and address requirements such as lot size, setbacks, and minimum lot width to allow for appropriately scaled renovation and construction in Sutton's villages. The historic nature of the villages needs to be protected through improved land use controls and historically based economic incentives. This should include incentives for the sensitive reuse of existing low functioning buildings such as barns and out buildings.
- b. The Town can adopt the use of the NH tax relief incentives for property owners who replace or substantially rehabilitate their structures in the villages to encourage the rehabilitation and active reuse of under-utilized buildings and expand the tax base over the long term.
- c. Sutton should permit limited mixed uses in the villages with Planning Board oversight via Conditional Use applications. These mixed uses could include specified types of small commercial activity and limited multiple dwelling units.

*These key action items do not include all of the topics or recommendations in this Master Plan. They are a summary of how we can address the most important issues we face. These efforts can protect Sutton's many assets and help plan for the future.*



## Sutton Today – Our People, Our Housing & Our Economy

To better understand our community, we must review demographic trends and patterns of change and then identify positive influences and challenges. By combining the demographic data with the Planning Board’s public outreach responses, we can define how Sutton looks today and identify what needs to be addressed to accomplish our vision over the next 5-10 years.

Without a doubt, our rural “small town” feel is one of Sutton’s greatest strengths and is highly valued and treasured by residents. Sutton’s rural character can be defined in many different ways, including by its historic homes and buildings, open space, agricultural fields, stone walls, and low-density residential uses, extensive forested lands and water resources that support wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities. These factors provide a high quality of life and are a driving force that helps keep both long- and short-term residents in town.

The public input we gathered confirms that residents support preserving Sutton’s strengths while also providing the opportunity to draw new residents to the community. Although Sutton’s historic small village centers previously included local businesses and services, those have disappeared, leaving not only an absence of private services that could attract new residents, but also the lack of any commercial taxpayers. Lowering the tax rate, establishing local opportunities for employment, creating both affordable and senior housing, and encouraging appropriate uses that fit with Sutton’s rural and small-town feel were most commonly voiced in our outreach.

We must continue to protect and preserve Sutton’s natural, historical, and cultural resources and we must consider some additional actions to ensure that residents of all ages and income can call Sutton home.



## How “Old” are Suttoners?

From the 1960s through the 1980s, Sutton experienced substantial growth, nearly tripling the Town’s population. This trend slowed in the 1990s as it did statewide, due mainly to lower migration gains.<sup>1</sup>

Recently, population growth has started to increase but only slightly. Of the 1,054 residential properties, 780 have local ownership addresses and 274 have non-local ownership addresses, so about 25% of our properties are owned by seasonal residents.

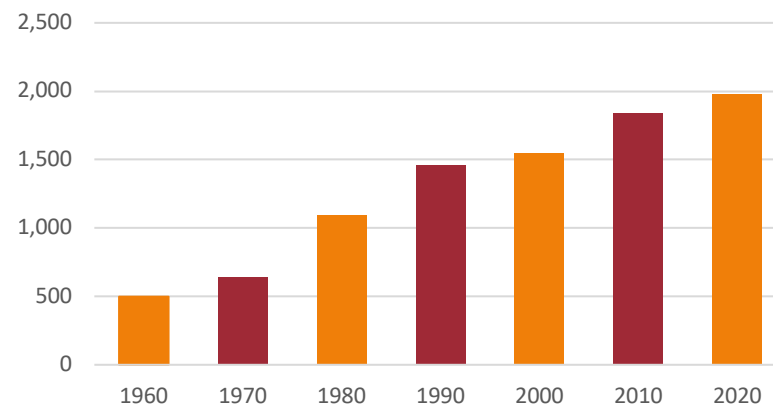
Also, the number of residents 45 and over has increased significantly compared to the modest changes in the younger population. This “Baby Boomer” population will increase the over-65 population in the next two decades.

The current median age of Sutton residents is in the mid-40s, meaning that a large portion of our population is working age. In the next ten years, this group will be in their 50s and 60s. Without younger families, the number of school-aged children will decrease.

Meeting the needs of day-to-day living is an issue for an aging population. Many retirees remain in rural areas to be close to family or for nearby scenic and recreational amenities. Therefore, providing accessible, year-round outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities is increasingly important. The demand for smaller houses for downsizing families will continue as the average household size decreases.

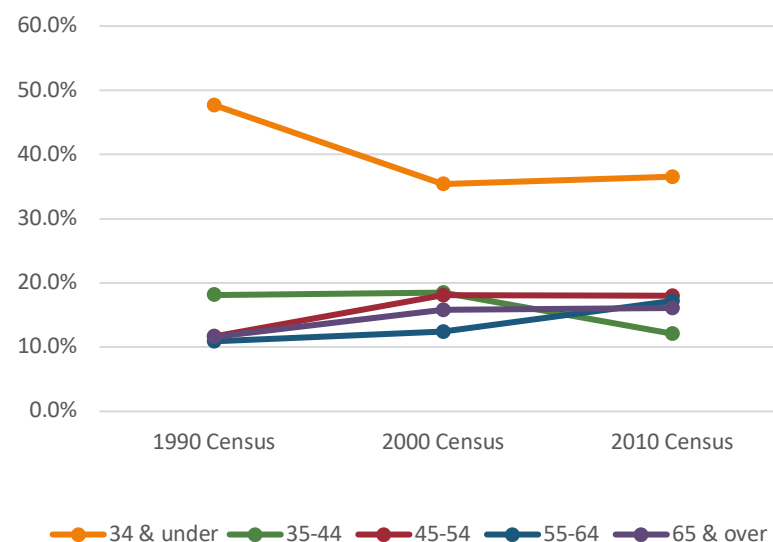
Sutton's Population

Decennial Census Records



Sutton's Historic Population by Age Group

Decennial Census Records



<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Johnson, New Hampshire Demographic Trends in an Era of Economic Turbulence, <https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/nh-demographic-trends>.

# SUTTON TODAY – OUR PEOPLE, OUR HOUSING & OUR ECONOMY

In addition to the needs of our seniors, there are several ways we can enable new workforce and affordable housing to attract younger households to the community while also supporting households on fixed incomes.

## Where are the School-Aged Children?

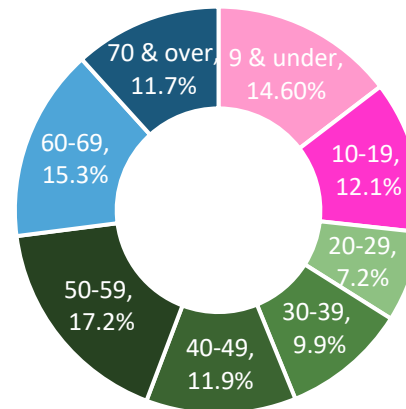
The number of children enrolled in our public school system is decreasing, as it is across the state. Many rural, regional school districts are facing challenges with maintaining enrollment.

Sutton's student population has varied over the past five years, the lowest being in 2019 with a total of 263 K-12 students.

Since so much capital has already been invested in the school system, attracting younger families to the community will be increasingly important. Trends indicate that young people in their 20s and 30s have begun to look for options away from city living. A town that is welcoming to all age groups will become more and more important. Drawing younger families to Sutton will require an inventory of smaller and affordable housing, as well as entry- and mid-level employment positions in the surrounding region.

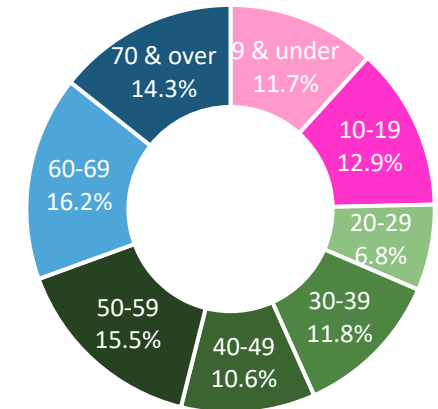
Sutton is not alone. Many other New Hampshire rural communities have similar situations. It is important therefore, that we address this before it becomes a significant issue.

Population By Age of Sutton  
American Community Survey 2006-2010



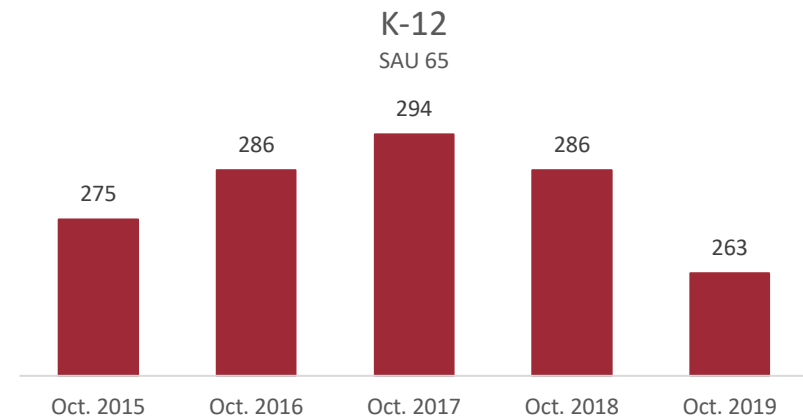
Median Age 45.2 years

Population by Age of Sutton  
American Community Survey 2015-2019



Median Age 45.9 years

Total Enrollment of Sutton Children, Grades



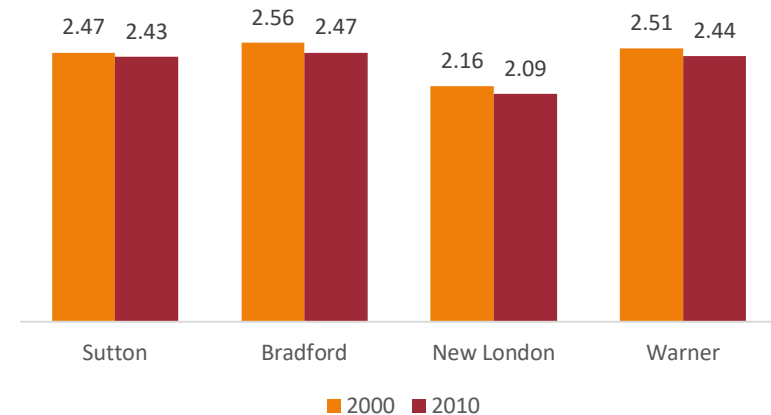
## Housing for All

Like many communities in New Hampshire, there are demographic indicators in Sutton that can drive the housing need. One is the age of the population, which suggests a need for housing that is better suited to senior citizens, including single floor living, smaller living space, and lower costs. Older residents are likely to seek to “down-size” to smaller living arrangements, yet in both Sutton and statewide, housing units of 3, 4, or more bedrooms far outnumber one- and two-bedroom units. The group most likely to purchase larger homes, those aged 35-54, is expected to decline statewide, and it is unclear whether the larger units built for Boomers during their child-rearing years will draw sufficient interest from buyers in future years.

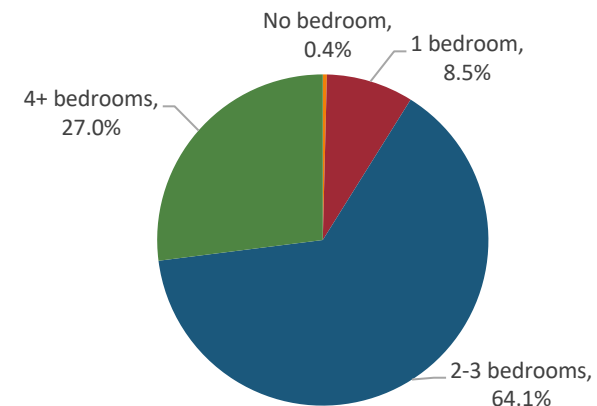
In addition, expanding the housing available to the workforce population can be a worthwhile economic development strategy. It requires attracting those who are in the workforce today and in the future. Much of the housing this group requires is similar to that sought by downsizing baby boomers: smaller homes near amenities and places of employment.

The trend for families to have fewer children is another indicator of an increasing need for smaller housing units and demonstrates the shifts in supply and demand now occurring in the housing market.

Average Household Size  
Decennial Census Records



Occupied Housing Units with Number of Bedrooms  
American Community Survey 2015-2019





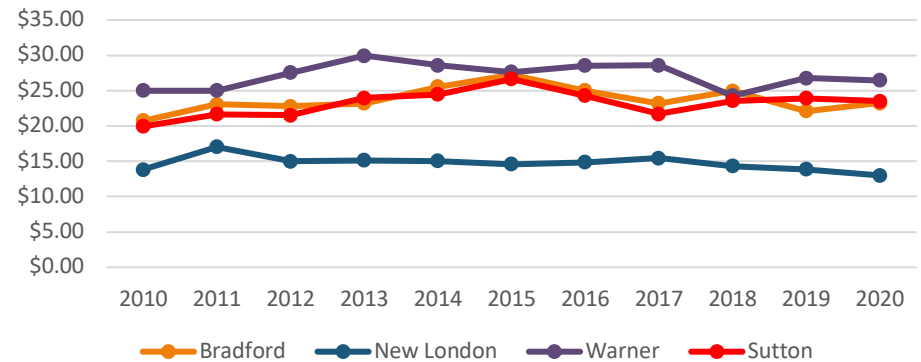
## Increasing Tax Rates

Sutton's tax rate has increased significantly since 2010. The rate in 2020 was \$24.87<sup>2</sup>, approximately four dollars higher than the 2010 rate of \$20.83, or almost a 20% increase. As seen below, much of the tax rate can be attributed to the local education and municipal rate, both of which have increased significantly since 2010.

Sutton's full value tax rate<sup>3</sup> compared to abutting communities shows a rate of increase most similar to Bradford, which of our neighboring communities has the most similar total population.

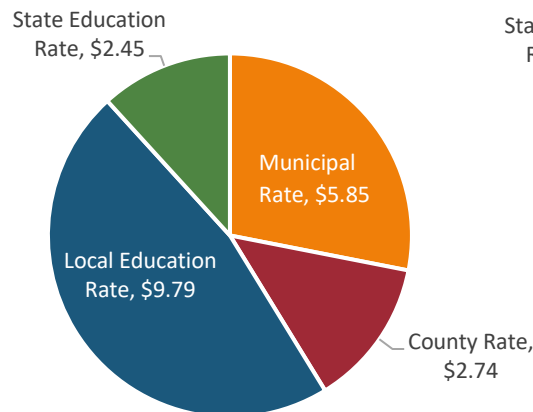
Historic Full Value Tax Rate of Sutton & Abutting Communities

NH Department of Revenue Administration



Sutton's 2010 Tax Rate

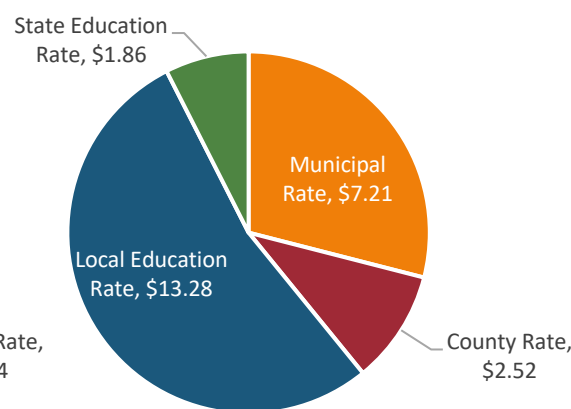
NH Department of Revenue Administration



**Total Rate \$20.83**

Sutton's 2020 Tax Rate

NH Department of Revenue Administration



**Total Rate \$24.87**

## What did the Community Survey say?

Public input gathered through the Community Survey highlighted concern over the rising taxes. Many cited taxes as a driving force to relocate out of Sutton.

Support was expressed for an improved tax base to help offset the tax rate, but only in a way that fits with Sutton's rural feel and character. It was also noted that there are no shops in Town. Examples of preferred local businesses include agricultural trades, small retail such as a food market, and a restaurant or coffee shop.

<sup>2</sup> Sutton completed a town-wide reassessment for 2020. This resulted in a decrease in the tax rates, but that decrease was due entirely to the increases in assessed values for Sutton properties and not to a decrease in costs.

<sup>3</sup> The full value tax rate represents the estimated tax rate for a municipality if all the taxable property was assessed at 100% and includes the equalized value of properties for which a payment in lieu of property taxes is made. It can only be used to make a limited comparison of what a property in one municipality would pay for taxes to a property of equal value in another municipality.

## Increasing Median Household Income

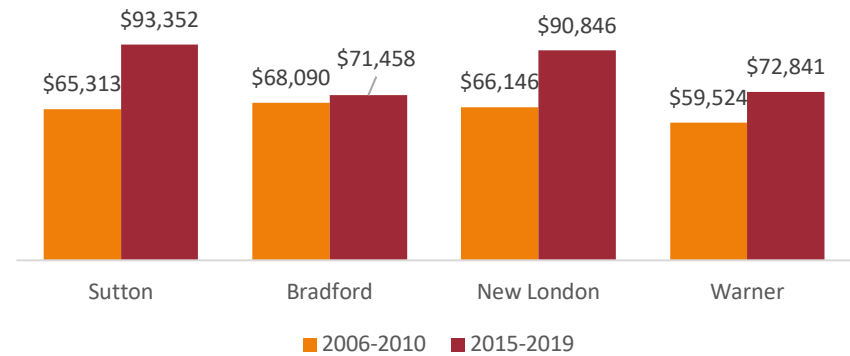
New Hampshire generally has a high median household income in comparison with other states, indicating a productive economy with good jobs and competitive salaries. According to ACS data for 2010 and 2019, Sutton's median household income has increased, especially compared to neighboring communities. This also may indicate that we have a high percentage of residents who are nearing retirement, are at the peak of their earning potential, or who are wealthy retirees.

## Maintaining A Small Town Way of Life

Low density isn't the only or perhaps even the best way to maintain a small-town way of life. As Suttoners, we recognize the treasure we still have as a rural, friendly town. If we continue to grow in a scattered way along our existing roads, however, we will eventually become more and more suburban in feel. Change, if properly managed, can help us keep the things we cherish. It is not uncommon to want things to stay as they are – to restrict change – but our villages were once thriving bustling rural centers with homes, farms and businesses. To preserve what we cherish while also enabling the things we want requires planning, diligence, and patience. We do not need or want rapid growth or excessive commercialization but we do want a diverse population set in a bucolic open environment with a few vibrant villages.

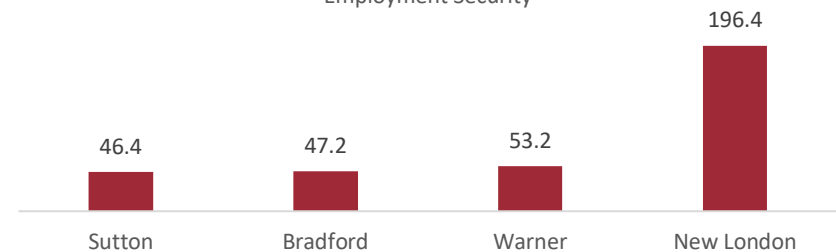
### Current & Historic Median Household Income

American Community Survey 2006-2010 & 2015-2019



### Persons Per Square Mile of Land, 2019

2020 Census, Economic & Labor Market Information Bureau, NH  
Employment Security



### What's the difference between the Census and the American Community Survey?

Census data is collected every ten years by the US Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS), supplements Census data by asking questions used to measure social and economic characteristics. The ACS is an ongoing survey that gathers trends from smaller population samples annually. At the time of this Plan's development, some of the 2020 Census data has been released and incorporated where appropriate.



## Our Services & Resources

Sutton is home to a small community living within a large area with abundant natural resources and forested areas. The Town is situated at a prime location along I-89 at Exit 10. NH 114 is the main north south link to adjoining communities. Villages emerged where residents and services historically clustered, including North Sutton, South Sutton, Sutton Mills, and Blaisdell Lake.

### Demographics that Support Community Services:

- The Town contains 42.6 square miles of land and 0.8 square miles of water bodies; this is a geographically large community for the region.
- Four villages concentrate people and services; North Sutton, Sutton Mills, South Sutton, and Blaisdell Lake (i.e. Town Hall, Police and Fire Station, Highway Garage, post offices, schools, and public library.)
- Sutton's full time population was 1,881 in 2019 as reported by the New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives, or a population density of 44 persons per square mile.
- Sutton's population is growing older, as seniors choose to age in place.
- Sutton's residential property owners generally pay real estate taxes that are relatively higher than real estate taxes paid by residential property owners in nearby communities.



## OUR SERVICES & RESOURCES

### What Did Our Residents Say?



Retain the small-town, friendly atmosphere.



Maintain current facilities and services at reasonable tax levels.



Increase road maintenance.



Encourage small businesses in village areas.



Protect natural water resources.



Ensure that open space and the environment are protected.



Expand the trail system.

### Accomplishments since 2005:

- Established additional Capital Reserve Funds Accounts to help in the financing of large purchases.
- Upgraded several Town facilities to address deficiencies, functional needs, and ADA compliance.
- Hired additional administrative support staff for the Land Use Department.
- Made digital tax maps available on the Town website.
- Increased broadband availability and speeds with fiber optic and technology improvements.
- Completed the Sutton Strategic Conservation Plan (Natural Resources Inventory) in 2019.
- Protected over 1,500 acres of conservation lands since 2016.
- Added the Old South Sutton School House (District #9) to the State Registry.
- Reorganized the Old Store Museum (Town- owned) for visitors.
- Received a Land and Community Heritage Investment Grant for renovations to the South Sutton Meeting house.
- Made improvements to the Zoning Ordinance and Land Use procedures.

## Town Services Today & Tomorrow

### Meeting the Need: Facilities, Staffing, & Equipment

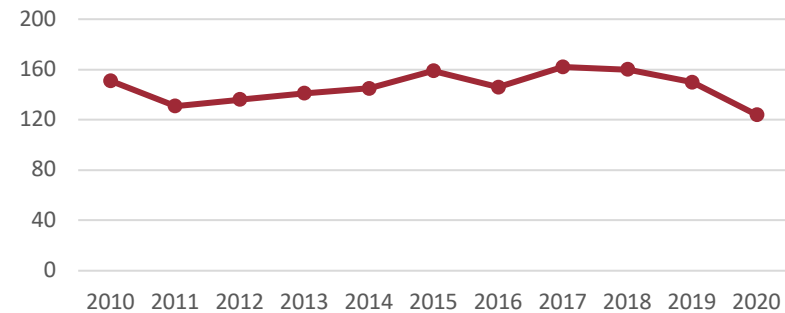
Community service needs are often a challenge for small towns. As a Town's population grows, needs will change. Additional staff may be required, as well as additional office, meeting, training, and storage space. Money for regular maintenance, construction of new facilities or additions, or purchasing new or replacement equipment is not always immediately available. Funding can be difficult to secure or may require a bond.

The Planning Board should participate with Town Departments in an annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP) update process. This is an important community planning and fiscal management tool that can aid the Budget Committee and Select Board by planning for capital improvements over multiple years. Prioritizing large municipal expenditures using this process can provide stability in the municipal tax rate by planning and budgeting well in advance for major expenditures. With input from the CIP, the town should continue to build its Capital Reserve Funds with annual deposits voted for at Town Meeting.

For example, we can help determine public safety needs by reviewing calls for service to the Police and Fire Departments. As shown in the adjoining charts, the number of calls for service decreased in 2020 for both departments. Since this was the year of COVID-19, a review of trends over last decade tells a different story.

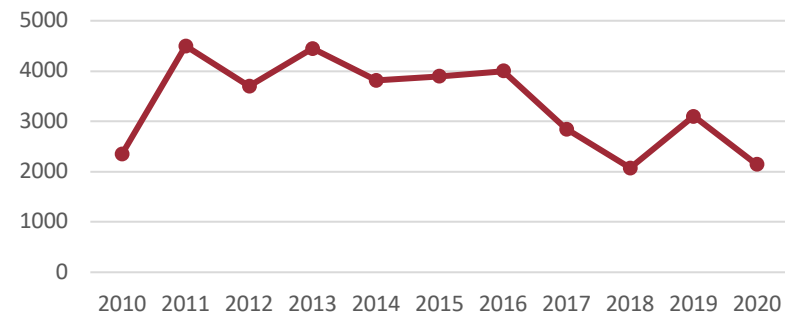
### Fire Department Calls for Service

Sutton Annual Reports



### Police Department Calls for Service

Sutton Annual Reports



Further analysis of the data may indicate that some specific needs must be considered. For instance, our volunteer fire department can only work if there are enough capable and willing residents who live and work locally. Without such a base the town may be forced to consider a paid rather than volunteer fire department. Regular review of this type of data and recent trends for all of Sutton's departments can help identify our current and anticipated needs.

## OUR SERVICES & RESOURCES

### **Funding for Road Maintenance and Improvements**

Throughout the public input process, concern was raised about the level of ongoing maintenance of town roads. Revenue for town roads comes from the State Highway Aid Program (state gas tax), automobile registration fees, and local property taxes. In New Hampshire, local communities are responsible for the majority of all road miles in the state but are restricted by state statute from specifically taxing for this purpose.

Sutton has worked with the Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission to implement a Road Surface Management System (RSMS). This program is designed to help prioritize road improvements and to develop a transparent system for short, medium and long-term improvements made by the Town. Larger projects would be programmed for and eventually funded through the NHDOT 10 Year Plan, which is updated every two years. Due to limitations in such funding, successful projects require building a strong case and continued support over many years.

### **Broadband Availability**

Available and reliable broadband internet is critical to not only sustain a high quality of life for residents, but also to keep Sutton a desirable community within the region. Broadband has become increasingly intertwined with daily life, impacting all ages of the population. With available broadband, small businesses can thrive in rural areas without being tied to urbanized centers. High-capacity, fast internet technology allows students to receive a high level of education, whether in the classroom or from home. Access to online health care has become increasingly common. The internet has become a

critical resource in emergency management operations, as well as other public safety procedures. Sutton has full broadband availability, but as needs and technologies change the Town should seek to improve service and expand providers as opportunities are presented.

### **Recreation Considerations**

Recreational needs of the older population need to be considered as the population ages. As more residents stay in New Hampshire year round this will become increasingly important. There is also the desire and need to attract younger families and therefore we must plan for their recreational needs as well.

Underutilized or vacant town-owned property can sometimes be used to expand recreational opportunities. As land parcels become available that would be suitable for recreational uses, the town should consider “land-banking” or purchasing these parcels for future use. Additionally, a local community center potentially using existing buildings could be evaluated.

### **Trails, Walking, & Bicycling**

As an important component to a high quality of life, trails provide a much-needed means of stress reduction and physical well-being. Recreation facilities also provide residents with a place to interact and create a sense of community that is beneficial to residents of all ages.

Sutton has many trails in town, and there are opportunities for the creation of both new trails and connections to larger trail networks within the region and surrounding communities. Trails range from short walks, to long distance trails like the Sunapee-Ragged-Kearsarge Greenway that

passes through Sutton. Among the most promising trail areas in Sutton is the King Hill Reservation, which includes portions of the former ski area. This property of more than 400 acres near the New London town line has become popular for hikers, skiers, and other trail users in all four seasons. There is interest in enhancing this trail system by building a new trail within the right of way of I-89. This trail would enable the completion of a loop, and improve access to the Reservation. The trail could be built in the forested area of the right of way and thereby avoid crossing private property.

Towns can create Town-maintained trails on their currently unmaintained Class VI roads. This can be done by designating specific Class VI roads as Class A Trails at Town Meeting. The ideal candidate roads have little development along them, are scenic, have no inherent liability concerns, already allow public access, and also serve to connect large areas of open space, conservation, and/or agricultural lands. By reclassifying certain Class VI roads to Class A Trails, the community could take a step toward expanding a community-wide system of greenway trails. This is something the Conservation Commission and/or a Recreation Committee should pursue.

Sutton's Villages - North Sutton, Sutton Mills, South Sutton and Blaisdell Lake - are nodes of activity that are suitable for improvements that support walking and bicycling. Pedestrian and bicycle connections within and between these villages would enhance the experience and improve access for both recreation and transportation. Accommodations such as sidewalks, trails, roadway shoulders, bike lanes, or lane

striping are among a range of treatments that may help enhance non-motorized travel in Sutton.

### Environmental Resources Today & Tomorrow

#### Water Quality & Stormwater Management

Water quality and stormwater management go hand in hand. Nearly everyone has seen the effects of stormwater at one time or another: streets and basements have flooded, erosion threatened properties, and drinking water sources became compromised. However, there are other implications of stormwater that are not so easily seen. For example, without properly maintained stormwater infrastructure, oils and sediments can eventually be deposited into Sutton's surface waters, deteriorating the water quality and in turn impacting plants, wildlife, and the people who enjoy them. Without proper land use planning, the quantity and quality of the primary aquifer in the town can also be threatened.

Educating the community about water quality and stormwater controls should be a priority so that our residents become aware of why they should care about stormwater. Town stormwater management bylaws and regulations, utilizing best management practices, for both commercial and residential development should continue to be adopted and enforced.

#### Permanent Land Protection

Within Sutton, there are several town and privately owned properties that have conservation easements in place. These sites are permanently protected as conservation land. The list



## OUR SERVICES & RESOURCES

of Conservation Lands, located in Appendix B, shows the town-owned parcels.

Many other parcels appear to include large areas of open space without any permanent legal protection through conservation easements or deed restrictions to keep those open areas intact. Without permanent protection, those open spaces are susceptible to future development, even though they may have ecological significance or are valued as open spaces.

### **Flooding & Dams**

A classified Significant Hazard dam in Sutton is the Chadwick Meadows Wildlife Refuge Dam along Lyon Brook. There are two Low Hazard dams, Blaisdell Lake Dam along a tributary of the Warner River and the Cascade Brook Dam along Cascade Brook. These areas are unlikely to flood but still have the potential of breach or failure.

Beaver dams carry a high probability of flooding and potential for property damage. Beaver dams are located throughout the Town. One prominent location is the upstream side of Kezar Lake near Penacook Road/Kings Hill Road. Beaver dams at this site have historically been a problem and caused damage to those roads. Another location is Beaver Dam Pond on Beaver Pond Road.

However, beavers are natural creators of ponds and these waters are an important part of our valued open space. The Town should use new management techniques to address this issue.

### **Habitat Loss and Fragmentation**

Habitat loss and fragmentation of open space is a challenge that many rural communities face. Ideally, we would like to have a contiguous network of open space for the purposes of wildlife migration and ecological connectivity. Practically, this can't always be the case due to both the manner and the timing that open space parcels are acquired. A cohesive open space plan and criteria for high value natural resources can help determine which properties to prioritize for this purpose.

This is and should continue to be a high priority concern of the Conservation Commission (see appendix B).

Habitat loss occurs most frequently through scattered and cumulative development patterns that disturb the natural landscape. Since Sutton is home to many wildlife species, it is especially important to preserve their habitats. So it is important to create awareness about the threats to our wildlife and to implement plans for habitat protection.

It is equally important to preserve ecologically fragile and significant habitat, like wetlands and vernal pools, which serve as feeding and breeding areas for many species. Actively maintaining Sutton's natural resources and wildlife will help to maintain Sutton's rural character. Maintaining an accurate list of wetlands that would benefit from restoration efforts or that are particularly vulnerable to habitat loss is an important way to assure that these areas are protected.

### **Future Drinking Water Protection**

Sutton contains one aquifer with high potential to yield good water. This aquifer is located in the northeastern portion of town and is therefore, one of the town's significant water

resources. While the aquifer is not currently subject to groundwater threats, future development within the aquifer, especially within the aquifer charging area, could potentially impact this resource. Other aquifers in Sutton with limited potential to yield groundwater are detailed in Appendix B. Since all of Sutton's drinking water currently comes from wells, protecting the quality and availability of safe and plentiful drinking water is extremely important.

### **Cultural & Historic Resources Today & Tomorrow**

#### **Stewardship and Volunteerism**

Sound and responsible stewardship of our historic and cultural resources is tied to a level of responsibility needed to protect, manage and provide education about these resources.

The challenge is to engage the community at multiple levels, about what they can do with their own property and how they can participate in the protection of the Town's irreplaceable resources.

The historic nature of much that still exists in our villages both public and privately owned, is an extremely important part of what makes Sutton so special. This atmosphere needs to be carefully nurtured and protected while still preserving the rights of individual property ownership. In other communities, Historic Districts have been established to mandate the preservation of historic structures and sites. This does not seem appropriate or necessary in Sutton. There are ways to encourage and support financially the creative use of old

buildings and thereby maintain what is so special about our villages while also allowing them to grow and change.

Volunteerism is tied very closely to stewardship of our cultural and natural resources. It plays a large role in the success or failure of many activities. Why an individual decides to volunteer is instrumental in understanding how to approach recruitment of a broader base of volunteers in our community. Specifically, it is critical that we figure out what will attract younger residents to participate in more of our local and regional boards and committees.

New Hampshire communities like Sutton have a long tradition of reliance on volunteerism to fulfill many local functions. Volunteer efforts to support cultural events such as Old Home Day and other initiatives are often critical to the success of the event. Looking for new and creative partnerships to help with a specific project can be invaluable to getting a project off the ground and engaging new residents in town activities. How Sutton responds to the reality of an aging population, a declining pool of a younger residents ready to take over, and the overall drop in the volunteering rate is going to be critical to maintaining the integrity and sense of community so valued by residents.

With all this being said, it is important to acknowledge all of the residents who have served as volunteers, giving their time and service to our community. It is the ability for all of us to work together that has so greatly contributed to Sutton's high quality of life and sense of community for all.

# OUR SERVICES & RESOURCES

## Action Items

### Service Resources

- a. Initiate a long term improvement plan for town facilities and staffing needs.
- b. Implement a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) so that the Town can afford large municipal expenditures with limited impact to the tax rate.
- c. Use the Town's Road Surface Management System (RSMS) to better prioritize road improvement projects.
- d. Support available transportation resources that serve Sutton's aging population.
- e. Implement full cellular and improved broadband internet coverage of the community, including making such services available from multiple providers.
- f. Promote and establish local and regional trails to connect to established regional trail networks.
- g. Develop and improve trailheads with kiosks and adequate area for parking and supportive signage.

### Environmental Resources

- a. Conduct outreach education on protecting Sutton's natural resources, such as permanent land protection, invasive species control, and stormwater management.
- b. Actively support the Conservation Commission's implementation of their Strategic Conservation Plan.
- c. Develop stewardship programs for better understanding of the importance of wildlife habitat protection.

- d. Continue the Land Use Change Tax Conservation Fund for the purchase of appropriate open space and habitat parcels.
- e. Protect potential future drinking water resources, including the high-yielding aquifer in the northeast corner of town.
- f. Monitor the condition of dams, including beaver dams, and budget for needed improvements and new management techniques.

### Cultural and Historic Resources

- a. Engage volunteer participation in town projects, local town boards, committees, and commissions.
- b. Improve town and community facilities for use by community and local organizations.
- c. Support the creation of a leadership council to work on ideas for improving outdoor recreation within the town.
- d. Develop stewardship concepts that support and encourage historic conservation of our villages, special buildings and sites.
- e. Adopt land use regulations that both protect the historic fabric of our town while protecting individual property rights and the need for the town to grow and change appropriately.



## Existing & Future Land Uses

Sutton's land uses range from historic villages to wide swaths of undeveloped forested areas, steep slopes, and sensitive natural resources. This chapter outlines the Planning Board's strategy for protecting Sutton's natural resources while setting the stage for a future that includes appropriate levels of economic growth.

### **Important issues to support Sutton's sustainable future:**

- Sutton's small-town atmosphere is embodied in the villages of Sutton Mills, North Sutton, South Sutton, and Blaisdell Lake. The protection and enhancement of the villages can be achieved through zoning changes and the use of incentives. Initiatives to enhance and protect the villages should include the appropriate use of a Village based Cluster Development option and provisions allowing limited mixed-use opportunities.
- Sutton needs to strengthen opportunities for housing for all residents, from young families to those seeking to age in place. A variety of housing choices will help assure Sutton's sustainable future.
- More sensitive land use controls that would still allow for appropriate construction in the rural areas of the town and that can at the same time help avoid major visual or environmental impacts in these areas.
- There is potential for limited commercial and light industrial uses in specific areas of the town. This could improve the tax base while also assuring that these uses are situated only where they are best suited.
- The Sutton Strategic Conservation Plan offers a strategy to continue to protect Sutton's natural resources while proactively working to develop the town trail network.



# EXISTING & FUTURE LAND USES

## Existing Land Uses

The total land area of Sutton is approximately 26,000 acres. The single-family/duplex designation accounted for just under 968 acres. Agricultural lands accounted for almost 570 acres. Outdoor recreation space totals at just over 530 acres, which includes playing fields, trails, and the golf course at the Country Club of New Hampshire. Commercial retail uses account for less than 7 acres. Commercial, mixed use and other commercial accounts for more land at just under 64 acres. Institutional properties such as schools, churches, and governmental utilize about 90 acres. The table shows these active land uses plus those areas that are open space, road pavement surface, and the remaining acres of undeveloped lands. These land uses can be seen on the **Existing Land Use Map** at the end of this Chapter.

## Building Trends

Residential building trends indicate an increase in housing units in recent years, reflective of the growing economy since the 2008 recession. As shown in the graphic, a net of five new residential building permits were issued in 2020, following a high of eight permits in 2017. It should also be noted that the number of building permits issued is a net change in dwelling units and does not include demolition permits to replace existing residential structures.

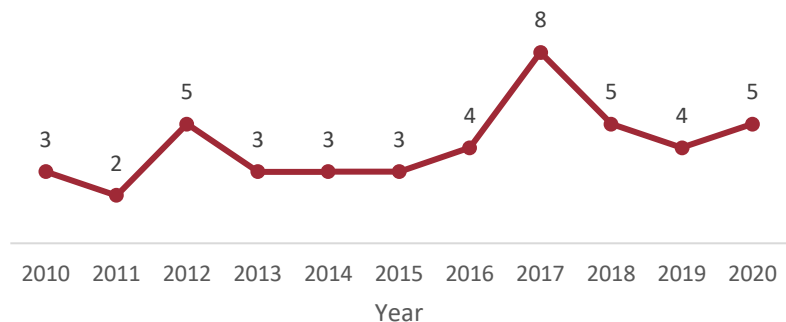
## Current Land Uses in Sutton

*Land Use Map*

Land Use Category	Acres
Single Family Duplex	967.8
Multi-Family	0.3
Other Residential	10.9
Commercial Retail	6.8
Commercial Mix / Other Commercial	63.9
Agricultural Land	569.6
Developed Agricultural Land	89.8
Outdoor Recreation	530.3
Institutional	89.5
Industrial	18.8
Gravel Pits	15.0
Communication	6.8
Cemeteries	5.0
Road Pavement Surface	237.0
Other Transportation	170.8
Undeveloped Land	23,038.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26,014.6</b>

## Sutton's Net Change in Housing Units

NH Office of Strategic Initiatives & Town of Sutton



The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on personal incomes, business opportunities and where people may choose to live makes it difficult to predict future trends in terms of residential building permits. Without any changes to our current land use regulations it is reasonable to assume that Sutton may not have the ability to protect our Town from inappropriate uses.

## “Current Use” Trends

Current Use is a property tax incentive to make it easier for landowners to keep their open space undeveloped. Instead of being taxed at its real estate market value as a potential site for construction, land in “Current Use” is taxed on its income-producing capability, i.e., as a woodlot, or a farm. Current Use keeps property taxes for sites 10 acres or larger at a lower, more predictable rate.

Lower taxes on land in Current Use may be an incentive to limit development of open land, but the Current Use designation is not permanent, because land in Current Use can in fact be developed. Property owners can remove all or a portion of their land from Current Use at any time and pay a Land Use Change Tax to the town. Sutton is fortunate that the Land Use Change Tax is used for conservation purposes. In 2020, \$2,549 was collected in Land Use Change Tax when 14.12 acres were removed from Current Use.

As of 2020, 69.5% of all land in Sutton is in Current Use, much of which is classified as forestland. In 2020 alone, 54.74 acres were added. Comparing 2020 to 2010, the amount of total land in Current Use has increased, as has the number of Current Use parcels.

## Current Use Trends – Comparative of 2010 & 2020

*NH Department of Revenue Administration and Town of Sutton Annual Report*

Year	Total Acres in Current Use	Total Current Use Owners	Total Current Use Parcels
2020	18,944	372	484
2010	17,559	301	428

## Sutton’s Zoning and Land Use Regulations

The following is a summary of Sutton’s existing zoning and land use regulations.

### Zoning Ordinance

The Town of Sutton is divided into only two zoning districts - a Residential District and a Rural-Agricultural District. The locations of these Districts can be seen on the **Future Land Use with Existing Zoning Map** with the areas designated as the Rural Agricultural District being by far the largest.

In critical areas Overlay Districts have been superimposed on the two base zoning Districts so that additional regulations can be applied. There are currently three overlay districts: Steep Slopes, Wetlands/Shoreland, and Floodplains. These lands may be used under rules established for each base zone plus any requirements specific to the relevant overlay district.

The Development Constraints Map in Appendix B of this plan shows the location of the wetlands (National Wetlands Inventory), steep slopes (derived from DEM data) and floodplain overlay districts (floodplains from FEMA Flood Insurance Rates Maps), which are mapped using GIS data available from NH GRANIT. A potential Aquifer Protection

# EXISTING & FUTURE LAND USES

Overlay Zone could be developed in the same manner if the Conservation Commission or the Planning Board recommends that such an additional overlay would be helpful to conservation and land use planning.

## Other Zoning Ordinance Provisions

In addition to the Zoning Ordinance, Sutton has other Land Use Regulations that influence and help shape the land use patterns in Town. Some of these regulations are specific to a District, while others can be applied to the entire Town when certain criteria are met.

### Special Exceptions

A use which may be approved by the Zoning Board of Adjustment in Districts where the use is specifically authorized by Special Exception when the Zoning Board of Adjustment finds that such use can be developed in accordance with the provisions of Article VI of the Zoning Ordinance. In the two base districts a wide variety of uses are allowed by Special Exception. In particular, *any type of industrial, commercial, or agricultural use* can be allowed by Special Exception in the Rural/Agricultural District.

### Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act

Public water bodies are defined by the Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act, NH RSA 483-B, which establishes rules for buffers and setbacks required. In Sutton these include Blaisdell Lake, Billings Pond, Kezar Lake, Gile Pond, Loch Lyndon (Newbury) Reservoir, and Russell Pond. Sutton has approved additional buffers under certain conditions.

## Summary of Sutton's Current Zoning

### Residential District

- Permits single-family dwellings & accessory buildings; manufactured homes on single lots; rooming or boarding houses; home occupations; farm stands.
- Additional uses permitted by special exception.

### Rural/Agricultural District

- Permits uses outlined in the Residential District as well as forestry and accessory buildings.
- Additional uses permitted by special exception.

### Wetlands Overlay District

- Protects the public health, safety and general welfare by controlling and guiding the use of land areas which have been found to be saturated or subjected to high water table for extended periods of time; including established and seasonal wetlands.

### Steep Slope Overlay District

- Limits the nature and intensity of development of steep slopes to those uses which can be harmoniously, appropriately, and safely located on steep slopes and thereby serve the additional objectives to prevent soil erosion; protect surface waters from sedimentation, turbidity, runoff of storm water and effluent from sewage disposal systems; preserve tree cover and other vegetative cover; protect wildlife habitat; preserve scenic views; protect natural areas; and maintain ecological balance.

### Floodplain Development Ordinance

- Sutton is a participating community in the National Flood Insurance Program and agrees to comply with the requirements of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 as detailed in the ordinance.

### Subdivision and Site Plan Regulations

The Planning Board's process and standards for the subdivision of land and the review of commercial and non-single family residential site plans is outlined in the Town's Subdivision and Site Plan Regulations. Originally enacted in 1970 (subdivision regulations) and 1974 (Site Plan Regulations) and most recently updated in 2018, the regulations lay out the procedure for the Planning Board's review of applications, the information that must be prepared by applicants, and specific design standards as applicable to a particular application. The Planning Board will, in certain situations, approve waivers to some of these requirements as well as Conditional Use Approval where permitted.

### Cluster Development

The purpose of the Cluster Development provision is:

1. to encourage the preservation of open space,
2. to promote more efficient use of land in harmony with its natural features and limitations,
3. to accommodate flexibility and variety in residential development within prescribed limits, and
4. to enhance and protect the health, safety, convenience, and general welfare of the residents of Sutton.

The Cluster Ordinance also sets rules to help assure a level of minimum privacy for residents; safety for children, pedestrians, and bicyclists; and to enhance aesthetic enjoyment through interrelating open spaces. The use of the cluster option can be a key method of promoting sustainable and appropriate housing development in Sutton. Applications for Cluster Developments must also comply with the

Subdivision and Site Plan Regulations. Options for the potential update of the Cluster Development provision are described later in this chapter.

### How to Support a Sustainable Community

**A sustainable community is one that plans for and implements strategies that protect what is most valued and presently exists while at the same time allows for and manages necessary change to meet evolving needs.**

Based on input from our fellow citizens, the Planning Board has determined that sustainable development in Sutton has three objectives:

1. nurture the rural atmosphere,
2. reinforce the sense of community, and
3. protect the essence of the historical villages.

There are a number of tools and approaches available to support and promote sustainable residential and commercial development in Sutton. These approaches include modifications to zoning in Sutton's villages as well as in the area of Exit 10 and the area in the vicinity of the Country Club of New Hampshire.

Economic incentive options include the use of tools such as the Community Revitalization Zone (ERZ) program or the Commercial and Industrial Construction Exemption.

**Approaches for securing Sutton's future are more fully described in the next section.**



# EXISTING & FUTURE LAND USES

## Future Land Use - Key Action Items

The following are the Planning Board's key Land Use action items for the next 5 to 10 years. These actions items support the Master Plan's three themes: Rural Atmosphere, Sense of Community and Historic Villages.

### Rural Atmosphere

The protection of Sutton's rural atmosphere can be achieved through changes to the Zoning Ordinance as well as by the town and local groups and committees. The focus should be directed toward environmentally sensitive areas and outdoor recreation.

#### The Planning Board should:

Propose modifications to the Sutton Zoning Ordinance to address the location and intensity of appropriate mixed use, light industrial and commercial uses. The modifications would be designed to better protect rural areas from impactful activities while at the same time focusing those uses in areas that are more suitable. Implementation actions are:

- a. to create a **TABLE OF USES** that specifies the type and level of non-residential uses permitted by right or by Special Exception within the Rural/Agricultural District.
- b. to permit low impact light industrial, research and development and hospitality uses along portions of Shaker Street/North Road in the vicinity of Exit 10 (see **Future Land Use with Existing Zoning Map**).
- c. to review and revise the Cluster provision of the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that it meets the objectives of the Sutton Strategic Conservation Plan.

- d. to modify the Cluster provisions to allow cluster development as either a Permitted or Conditional Use in the Rural/Agricultural District instead of through the current Special Exception Process. Particular emphasis would be placed on trail development, the protection of wildlife habitats and the improvement of critical components of open space.
- e. Evaluate whether very steep-sloped areas should have additional visual controls and/or greater land use density restrictions through an update of the Steep Slope Overlay District.
- f. Consider proposing the creation of an Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone to protect the aquifer in the northeastern portion of town that has a high potential to yield good water.

#### The Conservation Commission should:

- a. Implement key strategies of the Sutton Strategic Conservation Plan which are:
  - i. to pursue the expansion of a trail system that links conservation lands throughout Sutton.
  - ii. to partner with regional land trusts to help leverage significant conservation projects in Sutton.
  - iii. to work with neighboring towns to conserve land in the border areas of Sutton.
  - iv. to form and lead an assessment group to determine if more town roads and adjoining setbacks need additional visual protection.

- b. Pursue the protection of important environmentally sensitive areas with land use controls that fairly and equitably restrict impactful development.
- c. Prioritize obtaining new permanently protected conservation land over the aquifer.

### Sense of Community

A sense of community will be strengthened with a range of housing choices in town; ample community facilities including varied outdoor recreation areas; reasonable tax rates; and employment opportunities close to home. The following are action items in support of these goals:

- a. The Town needs to actively recognize that housing for young families as well as old timers who have lived in Sutton for years needs to be both provided and protected.
  - i. Workforce housing needs to be specifically allowed and encouraged through zoning regulations and incentives applicable to appropriate areas.
  - ii. Deed restricted housing should be provided for those 55+ years old.
  - iii. Group living should be permitted in appropriate areas to provide affordable alternatives for seniors.
- b. The Town should support development of a diverse employment base primarily by allowing limited commercial uses in appropriate areas of Town.

- c. The town should form an Economic Development Committee to help bring the appropriate types of uses to Town that will improve the tax base.
- d. The Town should delineate and zone for a Hospitality, Research/Development, and Light Industrial District along portions of Shaker Street/North Road in the vicinity of Exit 10.
- e. The Town should consider designating the land abutting the Country Club of New Hampshire golf course as a Planned Unit Development (PUD) that could eventually be the core of a new village.
- f. The Town could utilize available tax incentives, when and where appropriate, to encourage businesses and developers to locate in Sutton and improve our tax base long-term.

The NH Economic Revitalization Zone (ERZ) program allows a business to seek a credit on its NH Business Profits Tax if they are within such a zone.

Commercial and Industrial Construction Exemption (if approved at Town Meeting) could be used to encourage the construction of new commercial structures additions, renovations, or improvements to existing structures.

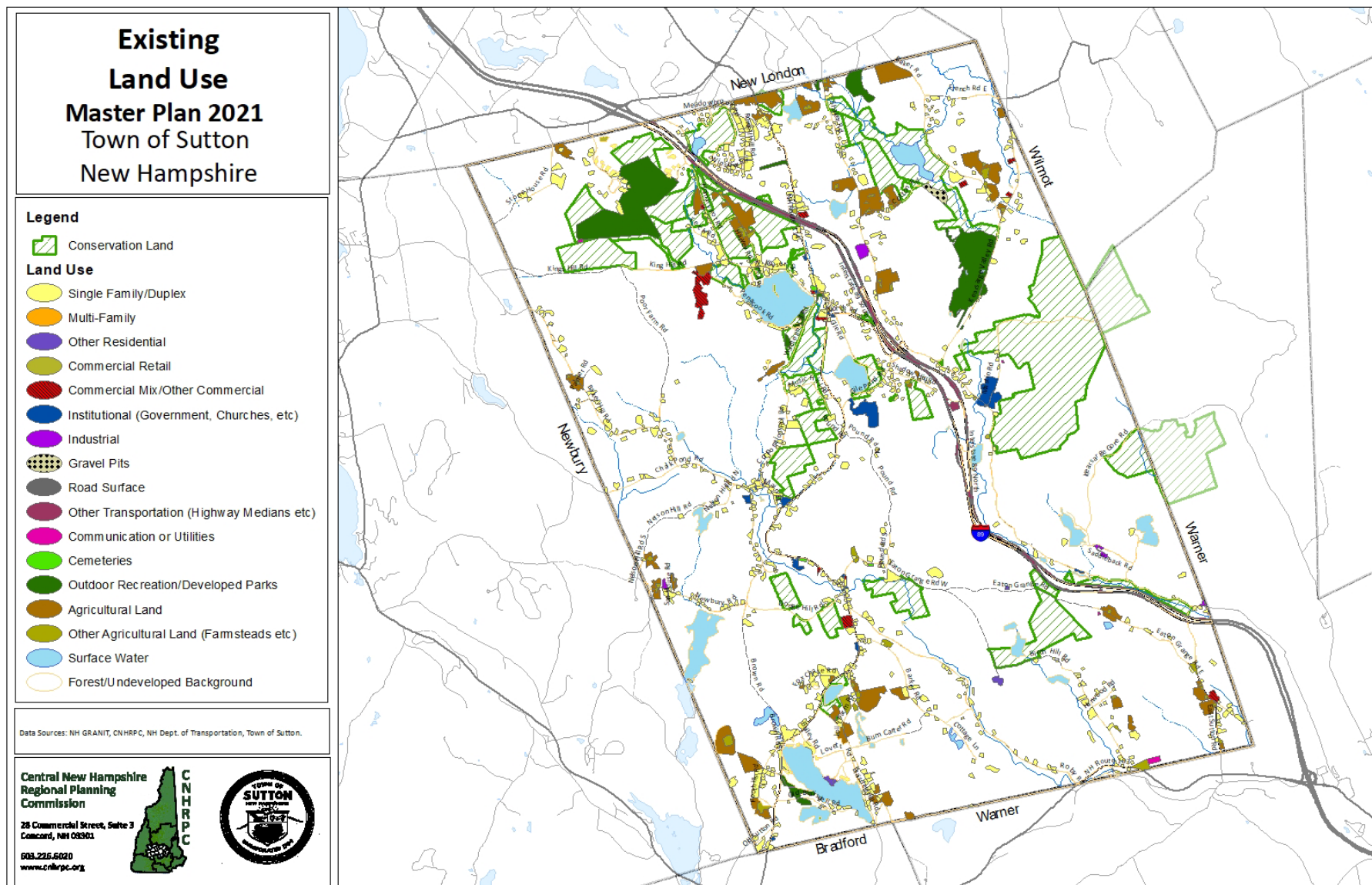
## EXISTING & FUTURE LAND USES

### Historic Villages

Current zoning does not allow construction patterns and potential uses that would help restore the vitality of the four historic villages without harming the small-town atmosphere.

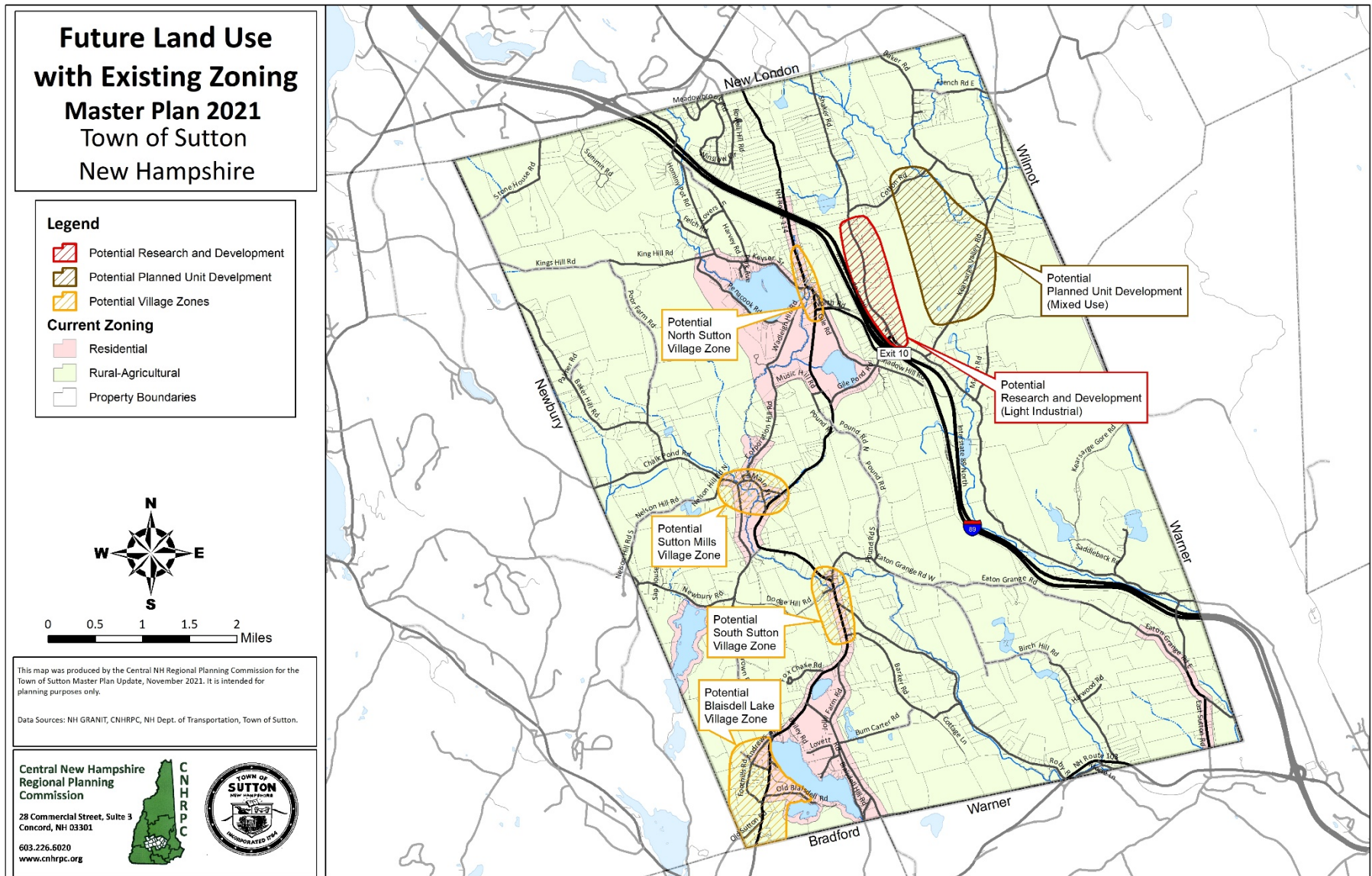
Toward that end the following action items are proposed:

- a. Sutton should designate specific village zoning districts that address lot size, setbacks, and minimum lot width, and require appropriately scaled buildings.
- b. The Town should adopt improved land use controls to protect the historic nature of the villages. This should include incentives for the sensitive reuse of existing low functioning buildings such as barns and other structures.
- c. Sutton should allow specific, limited and small- scale mixed uses in the villages. These mixed uses could include specified types of commercial uses, and modestly sized multiple dwellings. Planning Board oversight via conditional use applications could be used to manage these changes so that they are compatible with existing buildings within the villages.
- d. If adopted at Town Meeting, the Board of Selectmen can use the Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive (NH RSA 79-E) for structures within the village areas. This allows for the delay of any increase in taxes for property owners in the designated village zone for a period of 1 to 5 years if they replace or substantially improve their property and the work enhances the village area. The goal is to encourage the rehabilitation and active reuse of under-utilized buildings.





# EXISTING & FUTURE LAND USES



**Copies of the 2021 Sutton Master Plan Update are  
available at the Sutton Town Hall and online at  
<https://www.sutton-nh.org/>**