



Summer 2005

Bolton Master Plan Update



Planning for the long term future of Bolton is one of the best opportunities to preserve its character. Our town is a green oasis along a sprawling Interstate, a town worth fighting for.

Any long term view of Bolton has to grapple with growth, as we are one of the fastest growing towns in the state. This will continue as more traditional houses are built, and even accelerate as many high density housing projects are now proposed.

Last year, the town appointed a Master Plan Committee (MPC) to consider where Bolton is headed in 20 years, and suggest what can be done to guide our growth so it does not consume what attracts residents in the first place. MPC has built on work done by the previous Long Range Planning Committee, hired a consultant, has been assisted by our new town planner, has met with many town groups, and has run two public workshops.

Recently MPC described several possible strategies to guide Bolton's growth, including:

Save Open Space when it Saves Taxes. Most new houses do not pay their own way, as they require more spending on schools and other services than they pay in taxes. When open space can be protected at a low enough cost per acre, it costs taxpayers less to borrow the money and protect the land than to see it developed. We should try to protect 800 acres of open space over the next ten years and avert nearly 300 more houses, to both help preserve rural character and slow tax growth.

Protect Bolton's Best Open Space. While the above strategy focuses on relatively low cost open space, this one focuses on somehow protecting many of our most important landmarks, which contribute much of our rural character. These are the priority one lands in the recently completed Bolton Open Space Plan. They are the largest

unprotected farms (Bolton Orchards, Morgan Horse Farm, Bolton Spring Farms, Lord, Wilson), the unprotected portions of three large forests (Powderhouse, Randall, Danforth) and the aquifer at Bolton Flats.

Implement the Community Preservation Act (CPA). This provides state funding for open space and other town needs that could save Bolton's taxpayers over \$300,000 per year. 100 towns have signed on, and Bolton should too, as without it the open space protection efforts will be limited.

Meet the State's 40B Affordable Housing Requirement Efficiently. This may be the biggest key to determine what Bolton will be like in twenty years. When a town has less than 10% of its housing as "affordable", the state lets developers bypass local zoning as long as their projects contain at least 25% affordable. As a result, Bolton is now faced with projects all over town that put a great many homes on very small parcels, and provide just one affordable home for every four built. Instead, MPC endorses efforts by our town's Housing Partnership to seek projects that have a lot more than the 25% minimum, such as senior housing with half the units counting as affordable, owner occupied multi-family homes that can all count as affordable, or even some small secluded apartments that all count. This would dramatically reduce the number of homes we need to build to get to 10%, and shave thousands off our projected population in twenty years. It would also increase the diversity of housing, and so attract seniors and young adults that are both net contributors to a town's finances.

More Businesses is not a Panacea. Some taxpayers wonder why Bolton doesn't add more business and industry to help shoulder the tax burden. MPC has found that towns that pursue this do not generally lower their tax rates, and instead often suffer a reduction in their character and property values.

Support Farms and other Compatible Businesses. These businesses reinforce the town's character while helping

with the tax burden. They form a “green business” or “agri-tourism” community that help each other, such as when people come to Bolton to pick apples, then visit a farm stand, attend an auction, go to Hebert’s, tour the winery, etc. MPC recommends a Right to Farm bylaw, and an Agricultural Commission to provide a voice for the farm community in town government.

Protect Bolton Center with a Local Historic District. Bolton has a classic New England town center in which two thirds of the buildings that were here in 1831 are still standing, and no huge ones have been added to detract. It is already a national historic district, but this provides very little protection, and so MPC is recommending that a local historic district be added that would prevent knock-downs. Design guidelines should also be considered for new buildings in the center, and for businesses along Main Street.

Guide the Fate of the Smith Property A key to the future of Bolton Center will be what happens to the Smith’s gas station in the very center. If it’s cleaned up and insurable, the town should try to buy it to be able to guide its development. The front portion of the parcel has Great Brook flowing under it, so cannot be developed with a new building. Instead, MPC suggests that the front could become a town common, and the developable back portion could be used for a future municipal building or sold to reduce the town’s cost.

Plan for Schools and other Town Buildings One of the master plan’s most difficult challenges is all the new municipal buildings needed by a surging population. Bolton recently built Florence Sawyer School, expanded the high school and rehabbed half of Emerson School, but the relentless growth of student population has led MPC to recommend that land be bought now for a site for the next school, and that a school building needs committee be formed. Planning ahead can save money, rather than scrambling to build a school. Specifically, the town should buy the Taggart land near the high school, one of the few sites in town that the Long Range Plan Committee identified for a new school. After schools, it doesn’t get any easier, as our library is too small, our town offices are bursting at the seams, and our police station is the worst in our region.

The Proposed Library. In November, Bolton’s voters will decide whether to accept a state library grant of \$2.5 million by voting the balance of the \$7 million cost that

is not raised by donations. Bolton is one of only seven towns in the state to get funding in this round. It would expand our current one story library of 1,625 square feet by adding 5,341 sq. ft., and a second story of 5,305, for a 7.5 fold increase in the accessible space. Some MPC members support the proposal as is, but most would prefer to only triple the size of the library at this time, in order to provide more funds for schools and other town needs.

A Work in Process The master plan is a work in process. MPC is collecting input on the above strategies and considering many others, including several new zoning possibilities. For example, it may be possible to change our open space zoning (FOSPRD) so that new housing developments conserve 50% of their sites, not just 33%, and so the town has more leeway to protect the most important parts of each site.

Citizen Input Encouraged. You can learn more and provide input to the master plan in several ways:

- Contact any MPC member
- Come to an MPC meeting in the town hall which is usually every other Monday night
- Send an e-mail to Bolton’s town planner, Nat Tipton, at planner@townofbolton.com
- Come to the MPC’s public meeting this fall, when the master plan suggestions are presented
- Ultimately, the best way to get involved is to vote when the parts of the plan come up for decision, starting with the special town meeting on November 14th.

----- Bolton Master Plan Committee

Margaret Campbell	Brad Reed
Stephen Garner	Mickie Simpson
Dick Heaton	Mark Sullivan
Russ Karlstad	Ken Swanton

with Chris Slade from Advisory Committee

(The Bolton Conservation Trust has taken an active role in the town of Bolton’s planning efforts. Trust Director Bob Roemer chaired the Long Range Planning Committee, and now Trust Director Ken Swanton co-chairs the follow-on Master Plan Committee.)

Preserving Bolton’s Rural Character
The Trust thanks Jane Moosbrucker for her generous donation to the Stephenson Land Purchase.

Bolton Fair September 24th and 25th
Look for the Bolton Conservation Trust Information Booth! See you at the Fair!

NASHUA RIVER CLEANUP VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Saturday, September 17, 2005

The Friends of the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, Bolton Conservation Trust and Lancaster Land trust are conducting the seventh annual Nashua River Cleanup Day. We invite your participation.

The River Cleanup is scheduled for Saturday September 17, 2005 from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM. Rain date is Sunday, September 18, 2005.

This year's cleanup again will focus on the Nashua River from Rt. 117 in Lancaster to the Still River Oxbow entrance in Harvard. We will meet at the Nashua River bridge crossing in Lancaster on Route 117. Parking is available west of the bridge. At the end of our cleanup, transportation will be provided from our take out point at Still River back to our starting point in Lancaster.

Bring a canoe, paddles and water safety jacket if you have them. If you do not have a canoe, you

may reserve one. Nashoba Paddlers of Groton is generously providing canoes and equipment for this river cleanup. The number of free canoes available is limited so you must call to reserve one. They will be assigned on a first come, first served basis. Please call Rona Balco at 978-779-2259 for reservations.

Wear old sneakers and your grubbiest clothes, a hat for sun protection, and gloves for handling debris. Also, bring dry clothing in a waterproof bag, drinking water, snacks and a long handled three or four pronged cultivator to snag trash.

Please join us to help restore the Nashua River to its former beauty and habitat for wildlife.

Tom Wessels Returns!

Save Saturday, October 1st, from 1-5 p.m.
Tom Wessels will lead a tour of the *Levison Land* to introduce the town to the features and treasures of this latest addition to the Preservation of Bolton's Rural Character.

Bolton Conservation Trust

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Thank you for your support

The Bolton Conservation Trust

Established 1974

Dedicated to its mission, "to assist in and promote the preservation of the rural character of Bolton, to preserve and maintain conservation areas, and to educate the public concerning the use of natural resources."

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