

## **Memorandum Highlighting Major Policy Aspects of Proposed Brunswick Comprehensive Plan**

**To:** Brunswick Town Council and Planning Board  
**From:** Margaret Wilson; Chair, Comprehensive Plan Update Committee  
**Re:** Recommended Draft of Brunswick Comprehensive Plan dated July 12, 2006  
**Date:** July 24, 2006

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Starting in March 2003, first the Comprehensive Plan Review Committee and then the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee have analyzed Brunswick's existing Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in 1993, taken extensive public comment both on the existing Plan and the drafts proposed by the Committee, and we have now completed our update of the Comprehensive Plan. I am proud to present you with a document supported by each of the members of our committee. It details both where Brunswick is today and the specific actions the Town needs to take over the next 10 to 15 years to maintain the high quality of life in our Town in the face of intense growth pressures and the closure of the Naval Air Station Brunswick (NASB).

Many of the topics in the Recommended Draft of the Comprehensive Plan (Draft Plan) are dictated by the requirements of state law administered through the State Planning Office. That agency will review the Plan after the Town Council adopts it. The format of the Plan, however, was developed by the Update Committee to meet the needs of our community, to be clear, and to eliminate repetitive language. This memo will highlight the policy areas on which the Update Committee believes the Town must concentrate its energy and limited fiscal resources and will describe an implementation strategy for working to make sure that the comprehensive planning process results in the actions needed to preserve what is special about this Town.

The memo will also highlight the areas of the Draft Plan that have caused the most public comment. There has been constant public input as we have worked for the last three years – summarized in the Overview, starting on page 6 of the Draft Plan. The Update Committee prepared a special draft of the Draft Plan that incorporates public comment received and indicates why changes were or were not made in response to specific comments. This special draft is included with your materials and has been published, along with the Draft Plan and its Appendices, on the Town's Website.

Introductory Material: These sections contain much of the history of the Comprehensive Plan planning process and give an overview of the many studies that the Town has commissioned and whose recommendations the Update Committee has worked to incorporate into the Draft Plan. Please read the Introduction and Vision starting at page 4 as it summarizes the key elements we see making up the future of Brunswick.

Policy Areas on Which the Town Must Concentrate

Starting on page 15, the Draft Plan lists eight policy areas on which Brunswick must focus. Each of the policy areas has four parts: vision, what we currently have, objectives and related actions, and performance targets. Given our vision and what we have, the specific actions under each objective should work toward the vision. The performance targets will tell us whether or not we are meeting our objectives. Reading the eight visions for the policy areas gives an excellent overview of how the Town sees itself over the next decade. Most of the Policy Areas start with Objectives that deal with the Town's role in the NASB closure and reuse planning.

Policy Area 1 – Maintain and Financially Support a Quality Public Education System: Not all communities include education as part of their comprehensive plans. The Update Committee felt strongly that since more than half of Brunswick's budget goes to education and because of the school system is crucial both for the future of our kids and in attracting and retaining families in Brunswick, this had to be a core element in our Plan. Space needs in the schools must be addressed which will allow the programmatic actions to be carried out. The policy highlights the variety of programs needed to educate our citizens to give them tools for the future.

There was almost no public comment on this section.

Policy Area 2 – Long Range Planning for Municipal Facilities: The new policies ask that the Town look farther in advance than just the 5 year CIP process to identify municipal infrastructure needs, along with alternative options for re-use, regional planning, and financing. We should be establishing reserve accounts for known future needs.

Public comment in this area primarily helped us fine-tune details and supported the policies articulated.

Policy Area 3 – Promote the Desired Growth/Rural Pattern of Development: This key policy area focuses on the Growth Area boundary that divides the growth and rural areas of Town. Since the growth boundary was defined in the last Comprehensive Plan, it has been ineffective to influence growth patterns in Town. More than 50% of residential development has occurred in the rural area of Town since the 1993 Plan was adopted. The Draft Plan proposes that the zoning ordinance be amended to allow denser

development within the growth area and to restrict residential growth outside the growth area to 1/3 of new residential development. The means to restrict growth outside the growth area are not defined and their development will take thoughtful analysis to make sure such a policy is equitably applied and that it does not have unintended negative consequences for the Town. This is an area that should prompt substantial public discussion but the Update Committee heard no opposition to this proposal.

Regarding the rural areas of Town, the Draft Plan incorporates the excellent work of the Rural Smart Growth Study and the 2002 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plans. It emphasizes incentives and voluntary cooperation with landowners to promote open space and rural smart growth developments to protect the rural character of the Town.

Public comment in this area focused on the need to preserve the characteristics of existing downtown neighborhoods in the face of development. The Draft Plan seeks to balance the desirable attributes of a neighborhood with potential new development that is sited to be an asset to an area, not a detriment. Very broad support exists for concentrating growth within the Growth Area. If Brunswick continues to grow and we want the growth to be within the Growth Area, increased density is essential. Again, the zoning ordinance must be carefully amended.

Policy Area 4 – Support the Development and Maintenance of Infrastructure that Promotes Livable Neighborhoods and the Desired Pattern of Residential and Commercial Growth: Coordination of the water and sewer districts’ planning with the Town’s long-term planning is key to efficient and controlled growth. It is also vital to explore the Town’s role in facilitating water and sewer extensions into areas where the Town wants to grow. The Draft Plan also calls for a Master Traffic Study to be conducted, particularly in view of the redevelopment of NASB. The goal of this policy area is closely related to Policy Area 3 in seeking to use the Town’s infrastructure to maintain growth within the growth area.

Policy Area 5 – Encourage a Diversity of Housing Types in the Designated Growth Area and Facilitate the Preservation and Development of Affordable and Workforce Housing: The issue of increasing loss of affordable housing is a regional problem and the Draft Plan recognizes that it is impossible for the Town alone to control the local housing market. Public comment did make clear how important it is for the Town to have an economically diverse population throughout all parts of Brunswick. The Draft Plan thus suggests a number of ways that the Town can have an impact on this issue, focussing particularly on alternative funding strategies to encourage private developers to meet this key Town need.

No public comment disputed the need to encourage the diversity and affordability of housing.

Policy Area 6 – Protect Significant Open Space and Natural Resources and Provide Outdoor Recreational Opportunities: This policy area again draws on the Rural Smart Growth and Open Space Reports that have identified the need to set priorities for protecting important natural resources, high value open space, and recreational resources. The Draft Plan includes the creation of a Land for Brunswick’s Future Board to help in this process, but states that the Board will be responsible for finding the funding to meet stated protection goals. The Draft Plan particularly recognizes the importance of maintaining the health of Brunswick’s water resources.

The vast majority of public comment the Committee received was in favor of doing more than the Town is currently doing to protect these resources.

Policy Area 7 – Promote and Economically Viable, Attractive Downtown: Maine St. Station, safety issues, and a new Master Plan for Downtown are all the focus of key actions relating to Downtown. It is important that a new Master Plan interrelate economic, housing, and infrastructure issues to create an integrated vision for keeping the Downtown the cultural and social center of Brunswick. The Draft Plan envisions a larger geographic area under the jurisdiction of the Village Review Board.

Public comment in this area primarily helped us fine-tune details and supported the policies articulated.

Policy Area 8 – Promote a Diverse and Healthy Local Economy. A major criticism of the last Comp Plan was that it did not adequately address the needs of the business community. The Draft Plan makes this area one of its major policies. And, it is this part of the Draft Plan that received the most public comment, dwarfing any other issues raised. It would be very helpful for the Town Council and Planning Board to read the public responsiveness document that spends several pages going through specific arguments and issues relating to the business park and why the Draft Plan is written the way that it is. Many argue that any business park development should wait to be part of the NASB redevelopment while others believe that the NASB land will not be available until too far in the future to meet the immediate economic needs of the Town. What is known is that the Town needs more of a commercial tax base to balance the residential tax base of the Town. The Update Committee thus came up with a process the Town should go through to analyze this difficult and contentious issue. The analysis starts by looking first at what are the numbers and types of jobs and businesses that we wish to attract to the community – then we need to look at how those can be accommodated.

A process is then outlined for the Town Council to follow as it decides how commercial development will occur in Brunswick. In-fill development for commercial projects is the highest priority in Policy Area 8. If there are available sites that are financially feasible and have the potential to bring commercial development and good jobs, then Town must look for funding mechanisms to attract targeted businesses to Brunswick.

If, however, in-fill sites are inadequate or unavailable to provide space for identified desirable businesses, and also if there is no reasonable chance that any of the NASB land will be available earlier than the turnover of the 3,200 acres as a whole, then the Draft Update allows the Town to consider a new business park on Rt. 1 South. Key Objective #3, Key Action 3 (page 45) outlines an extensive feasibility analysis the Town Council should use to evaluate the desirability of building a business park at that location.

If a new business park is found to be feasible at the Rt. 1 South location, the growth boundary should be expanded to include both the Durham Road residential area and the land to be incorporated in the business park. Two new zoning districts would be created and the Future Land Use Plan contains the vision, allowed uses, and development standards for each of them (pages 67 and 71). If the business park is not found to be feasible, the growth area would not be expanded beyond its current location and the zoning in the area would remain a rural mixed-use zone.

Economic development of the Town involves more than just the business park discussion and the issues both of Bowdoin College's growth and the need to develop a marketing plan and strategy for attracting "new economy" businesses to our community are addition essential aspects of Policy 8.

Chapter 7 – Land Use Plan: The Land Use Plan describes geographically how the land use policies of the Town are to be applied to the landscape. The Draft Plan makes some modifications to the existing Land Use Plan but follows the basic concept adopted with the 1993 Plan that the Town should be divided into a growth area and a rural area. The Growth Area should accommodate most of the residential and commercial development as the Town grows and the Rural Area where intensive growth is discouraged. The Update Committee proposes three areas where the growth boundary should be expanded slightly, one where it should be reduced slightly, and leaves both the NASB land and the area in the vicinity of the controversial business park as areas where the land use is yet to be determined.

Rural Areas: There are two major changes suggested in the Draft Plan. First is that the existing Farm and Forest and Country Residential zoning districts be combined into a single zoning designation: Farm and Forest Conservation. This was in response to public comment requesting consolidation of the numerous zoning districts in Town and the Update

Committee's belief that the minimal zoning differences between the existing FF and CR districts did not reflect any policy need. No public comment was received as to this proposed change.

The second major recommendation is that the FF3 district along the New Meadows River should become a Coastal Protection zone. There are water resources in need to protection in the New Meadows watershed similar to the Middle Bay watershed protection issues that led to the creation of CP 1 and 2, and the Update Committee believes the long-term health of the watersheds must be a priority for the Town. The land use plan that would not change the lot size or residential density in the current FF3 zone but suggests increased resource protections (page 57). No public comment was received as to this proposed change.

Growth Areas: The Draft Plan includes a density increase and lot size adjustment for the Growth Area. The details are spelled out in a chart starting on page 73. Current lot size requirements must be changed both because growth must be accommodated within the growth area if it cannot go to the rural area and also because it would be impossible in many areas to build even to the density allowances contained in the current ordinances given the restrictions on lot size as the zoning ordinance is currently written. It is important that new development or redevelopment in existing neighborhoods be allowed to duplicate the existing conditions which is currently not possible under our zoning ordinance.

The land use section is organized around a different principle than our current zoning ordinance. It starts with the premise that there should be two dense cores in Brunswick: Downtown and the Cook's Corner Area. Concentric rings move out from the denser cores, each allowing less commercial and residential development. Except for density and lot size, little change is suggested for the zoning in these areas.

The Draft Plan consolidates current I4 and MU4 into a zone called Exit 28 Mixed Use Area. The vision, allowed uses, and development standards are all new and intended to shape this area of Brunswick that has the potential for substantial growth. Buffering commercial development from residential areas is emphasized.

Commercial Connectors connect the centers of the community. They should remain commercial with new residential development discouraged.

The Draft Plan introduces the concept of gateways to the Town (page 77). These should become new overlay zones. Gateways require additional development standards to define a transition from parts of town to others; or from one Town to the next— part of what gives Brunswick its character. It is important that there be separation along Route 1, for instance, between a rapidly developing Freeport and Brunswick. The Bowdoin Pines announce arrival into downtown from the Bath Road commercial connector.

If a new business park is to be built on Route 1 South, the Draft Plan labels the area I6 and it would become part of the Growth Area. Starting on page 71, the vision, allowed uses, and 14 development standards are described. The needs of commercial development must coexist with the nearby existing Durham Road residential area. It is intended that light and sound from the park be effectively buffered and that transportation safety and access issues be specifically addressed. These development standards have been developed in response to the public comment the Update Committee received. The Durham Road residential area would remain a mixed use zone with the same allowed uses and development standards as presently apply but it would be incorporated into the Growth Area so that the Growth Area is all contiguous. The opposition to the business park proposal centered on the incompatibility of the business park and an adjoining residential area. There was no opposition to the current suggestion that the existing mixed use zoning would remain in the Durham Road residential area, while there had been opposition to making it a purely residential zone with no commercial development allowed.

Implementation Strategy: The Draft Plan recommends that a new permanent Town committee be created to oversee the implementation of the actions contained in the Comprehensive Plan. Other communities have had good success with such a committee. It would be charged with long range planning for the community and would work to keep the priority actions of the Comp Plan in the public eye. The Update Committee attempted to focus on the actions the Town must take in the near and longer term, but given the complexity of Town government, it is not possible to make a neat list of 12 things the Town must do. There are numbers of interrelated ideas that will be carried out by numerous Town staff over the next 10 to 15 years. Beyond the redrafting of the zoning ordinance, many of the actions mandated in the last Comprehensive Plan have not been implemented because the everyday business of running the Town tends to overwhelm the attention of staff and our diligent public officials. An implementation committee would take over some of the longer term planning functions of the Planning Board, allowing that board to concentrate on short-term development projects, while helping to ensure that community members are continuing to look at the long-term.

There was a single comment from the public that this committee would increase the bureaucracy of the Town and would make decision-makers more insulated from their constituents. It seems to the Update Committee that it would be a forum for increased public involvement. The Town Council would retain authority to enact all recommendations coming from the Implementation Committee just as they do from the Planning Board or other Town Committees currently.

Regionalization: Chapter 10 starting on page 99 details the efforts Brunswick is currently working regionally and proposes additional actions that could be taken so the Town can be fiscally responsible and efficient in delivery of its services. This area is key to the future as municipalities are under enormous financial pressure to provide services without raising local taxes.

NASB: The base closure was announced when the Update Committee was nearing the end of its process and we have taken substantial additional time to address issues raised by the closure. One of the previous drafts that went to public had little reference to the base and broad public comment helped us shape our response to the problems and opportunities raised through NASB redevelopment.

What happens in redeveloping the base must incorporate the themes that run through the rest of the comp plan. The growth area boundary drawn within the base should reflect the policies articulated in our plan by separating natural resources and desirable open space from land better suited to residential and commercial development. Residential development within the growth area should be dense, with interconnected streets and provision of pedestrian and bike safety. Commercial areas are needed to increase the non-residential tax base in the community and should be planned taking long-term infrastructure needs into account. The Town will not oversee the new development at the NASB, but our zoning ordinances can shape how the redevelopment progresses and it is incumbent on Brunswick staff and elected officials to work closely with the ongoing redevelopment process to ensure that the necessary inventory and long term planning is being carried out.