North Hampton, NH Master Plan Land Use Chapter



Photo credit: Dan Derby

Adopted April 19, 2022

Land Use Chapter

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The purpose of the Land Use Chapter is to suggest prudent management, planning, and development principles of land use throughout The Town of North Hampton based upon resident input, the state of knowledge at the time of writing the chapter, and best practices.

Summary

- Land use patterns in the future should follow past practices of orderly, low density commercial and residential development with no change in zoning districts.
- Maintaining the rural character of North Hampton and protecting the quality of our drinking water are the highest priorities for residents and thus of this Land Use chapter.
- North Hampton's challenge is to embrace modest economic development that is in harmony with the rural character of the town. Wetlands comprise 37% of all land in the town, putting development pressure on a low inventory of buildable land and pressure to loosen wetland protection restrictions to free up more buildable area.
- Careful planning will be required to balance the rural atmosphere against the growth and development residents expect and provide opportunities to develop more affordable housing.
- The rail trail expected to begin constructed in 2024 will require serious consideration of how to manage commercial development that is likely to follow.

Introduction

North Hampton is a coastal community lying in the heart of seacoast New Hampshire. It cherishes its rural characteristics and is feeling development pressures as neighboring towns become more populous and increase commercial activity. The Town is primarily accessible by state-maintained highways Route 1 and Route 111 and is near the Hampton exit off Interstate 95. North Hampton's rural character and seaside location, therefore, are particularly attractive to people employed in Massachusetts, southern Maine and southeastern New Hampshire.

This Land Use Chapter aims to provide for prudent management, planning, and orderly development. Foresight is essential to build on a review of the previous Master Plan, associated surveys and the Town's land use regulations. Collectively, these sources make clear North Hampton's desire to remain a rural residential community which cares for and protects its natural resources.

As stated in the Master Plan Vision Chapter, residents seek to "encourage business development that residents desire and makes a net positive contribution in taxes to support Town services and facilities." Careful planning will be required while maintaining the Town's rural characteristics while promoting appropriate and sustainable development along Route 1.

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A second aim of this chapter is realistically to integrate concerns citizens have expressed about retaining the Town's current rural characteristics and community atmosphere. North Hampton's future land use pattern will closely resemble its existing land use pattern.

This Master Plan chapter recommends no major future modifications to established zoning districts for two reasons:

- 1. North Hampton has long recognized that it is primarily a residential community with limited, yet adequate, commercially zoned land. Both existing and future land use plans reflect this recognition.
- 2. North Hampton's development pattern is well established. Modifying zoning ordinances would likely cause hardships to property owners who purchased property with expectations based upon existing zoning ordinances regulating their properties.

However, this chapter does propose evaluating modifications to existing zoning ordinances to enhance the district to achieve goals expressed in the Master Plan's Vision Chapter, previous Master Plans, and citizen surveys. Residents have expressed interest in promoting a vibrant and sustainable community that allows modest residential, commercial, and industrial development compatible with the Vision Statement of the Town's Master Plan. The approach will build on existing assets in North Hampton to increase the likelihood of success and use limited resources wisely. At all times impacts on the long-term value of the Town's assets and compatibility with residents' long-expressed desires will be considered in this approach.

Overarching land use goals, along with challenges and opportunities they present, follow. These goals and actions to achieve them are further refined in the implementation plan at the end of this chapter.

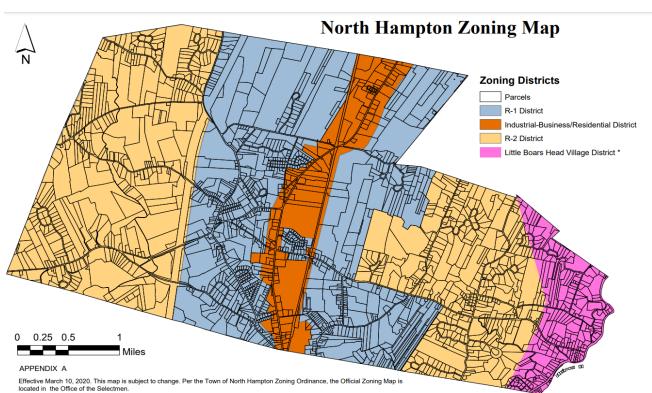


Figure 1 - North Hampton Zoning Map. A larger scale version can be found in Appendix A.

^{*}Parcels located within the Little Boars Head Village District are subject to the Village District's adopted zoning ordinances and not the Town of North Hampton's zoning ordinances.

GOAL 1 - Increase community connectivity and vibrancy.

North Hampton has a variety of community assets and anchors, including retail establishments and services, restaurants, North Hampton Beach, the Route 1 commercial corridor, Centennial Hall, bandstand and Town common, and several sports facilities, recreational areas and hiking trails. Additionally, a rail trail will run through Town. Active religious institutions and fine cultural organizations are already experiencing growth, for example, in the new library and refurbished Centennial Hall. The near-term challenges and opportunities are to inform residents about what is available, to keep assets viable and enhance their value, and to create additional safe and efficient travel and access where possible.

GOAL 2 - Promote a vibrant and sustainable commercial area within the Industrial-Business/Residential District.

Residents consistently say they want improvements to the Town's commercial district. As indicated in multiple surveys beginning in the mid-1980s, features they want include:

- locally owned businesses,
- businesses that do not increase demands on Town resources,
- improved aesthetics and green space,
- connectivity between businesses where possible,
- development that does not impact wetlands and aquifers, and more specifically, restaurants, professional
 offices, and living opportunities for senior citizens.

Efforts to provide these features must focus on modest, incremental, and sustainable growth, consistent with residents' expressed desires about density and environmental and commercial sustainability.

GOAL 3 - Protect the environment and prepare for climate change impacts.

North Hampton is blessed with abundant natural beauty and recreational opportunities that are attractive to residents and visitors. Climate change is affecting our natural environment with greater extremes in temperature and rainfall, more frequent natural hazards such as floods and storms, extended drought, rising sea level, and impacts on precious water resources. In surveys, residents consistently rank protection of water resources as their highest priority. The Town must rise to this challenge to protect our natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and ecosystem in sustainable ways.

Primary references for guiding environmentally responsible land use and dealing with climate change impacts in North Hampton are:

- Natural Resource Inventory (2021)
- Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (2018)
- Coastal Hazards Master Plan Chapter (expected Spring 2022)

GOAL 4 - Ensure that North Hampton maintains or achieves its fair share of affordable housing for the region.

North Hampton faces challenges common to many areas -- increasing demand for housing and rising housing prices in the midst of a labor shortage. It is increasingly difficult for local residents of all family types to afford suitable housing. The retiree and elderly populations continue to grow with few available down-sizing or assisted living options. The opportunity is to identify the best means to use available land in Town to meet residents' evolving needs for affordable housing and to do so without compromising the Town's rural new England seacoast character.

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GOAL 5 - Maximize the value of the rail trail as a community asset for North Hampton.

The rail trail on the former train track from Massachusetts's border to Portsmouth offers a great opportunity for North Hampton. It will be a novel recreational asset and a catalyst for community connections and economic development. The planning challenges are to shape this new asset consistently with the Town's goals and to manage access and use over time. The intent is to increase the ability of residents and visitors to access and enjoy the entire length of the rail trail, especially in North Hampton.

See the Implementation Section on page 10 for details about actions to help achieve the goals outlined above.

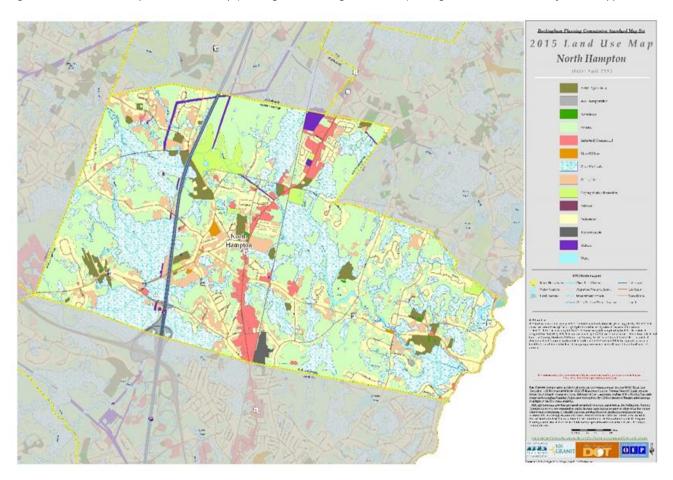
Background Information

Land use in North Hampton has been shaped by many factors. These include the location of tidal and inland wetlands and waterways, development of roadways and transportation networks, population growth and demands for housing, and development patterns of surrounding communities. The following information provides basic information about historical and current land use, transportation, housing inventory, and water resource considerations related to land use.

Land Use

North Hampton's land use pattern is predominantly rural with mixed forest and wetlands covering approximately half the Town. Table 1 and Figure 2 present data on existing land use conditions and the changes in land uses over the years from 1962 to 2015, along with the most current map of land use (2015). Several trends are evident from these data. In 1962, forested land use accounted for nearly 5,590 acres in Town. In 2015, forested land accounted for only 2,964 acres; this shift is due in part to development, but the majority of the shift is due to a change in methodology for calculating land use type (see Table 1 for additional detail). Agriculture use has also seen a steady decrease over time with over 1,300 acres of active agricultural land in 1962 falling to only 240 acres in 2015. Conversely, commercial, and residential land uses in North Hampton have increased, with both land uses nearly tripling. These changes make sense because the population in North Hampton has risen steadily over time with slower growth in the last twenty years, and new residential and commercial uses tend to develop on lands that were previously forest or used for agriculture.

Figure 2 - 2015 North Hampton Land Use Map (Rockingham Planning Commission). A larger scale version can be found in Appendix B



North Hampton has sought to protect key properties in Town from development to help protect natural resources and environmental functions, retain open spaces, and maintain rural characteristics. As of 2021, North Hampton had a total of 1,779 acres of conserved land or approximately 19.5 percent of the land in Town.

Figure 3 – 2019 North Hampton Natural Resource Inventory Conservation & Public Lands Map. A larger scale version can be found in Appendix C.

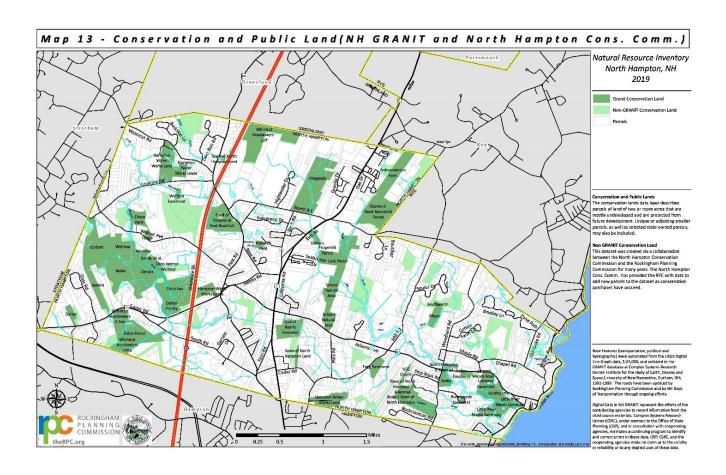


Table 1 - North Hampton Historical Land Use (Acres)

		DIC I HOICH	aptost	orical Lana O	3C (7 (C) C3)			
Land Use Type	1962	1974	1998	2005	2010	2015	2010 to 2015 Total Change	2010 to 2015 Percent Change
Active Agricultural	1,323.5	797.5	400.8	236.5	233.6	239.8	6.2	2.7%
Aux Transportation				58.6	58.6	58.0	-0.6	-1.0%
Farmsteads	19.2	18.0	4.5	7.3	12.4	8.8	-3.6	-29.0%
Forested	5,590.7	5,539.7	5,438.2	3,032.1	3,009.7	2,964.1	-45.6	-1.5%
Industrial/Commercial	83.4	160.3	251.8	280.6	281.8	289.1	7.3	2.6%
Mixed Urban	114.1	150.3	201.4	13.9	13.9	13.9	0.0	0.0%
Open Wetlands	434.7	433.2	543.4	2,487.0	2,486.2	2,484.6	-1.6	-0.1%
Other/Idle	505.5	756.7	465.2	651.8	646.0	619.3	-26.7	-4.1%
Playing fields/Recreation				194.1	190.0	183.0	-7.0	-3.7%
Railroad				8.9	8.9	8.9	0.0	0.0%
Residential	676.0	864.5	1,387.6	1,581.9	1,611.8	1,666.1	54.3	3.4%
Transportation	141.5	160.8	178.5	239.8	239.8	256.7	16.9	7.0%
Utilities				74.6	74.6	74.8	0.2	0.3%
Water	34.2	42.0	51.3	55.6	55.6	55.6	0.0	0.0%
Grand Total						8,922.7		
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^{**} Note: Years 1962,1974 and 1998 were compiled with a slightly different methodology than 2005, 2010, and 2015. Aux Transportation, Playing Fields and Utilities are categories only broken out in 2005, 2010, and 2015. Classification of wetlands was improved between 1998 and 2005. Due to lesser quality aerial photos many wetlands were classified as 'Forested' before 2005. Many Playing Fields were changed in 2015 to ensure that those in proximity to a school were classified as Education (Industrial/Commercial).

Transportation

North Hampton lies in the heart of the seacoast of New Hampshire. The Town has carefully protected its rural characteristics as other regional communities have become more densely developed and urbanized. The Town is primarily accessible by three state-maintained highways, US Route 1 (Lafayette Road) which runs north and south, Route 111 (Atlantic Avenue) which runs east and west, and Route 151 (Post Road) which runs north and south. In 2008 the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) completed the *US Route 1 Corridor Study* that proposes improvements to the entire Route 1 Corridor. In 2012 North Hampton's Planning Board held a public visioning session to gather residents' input regarding these recommendations. Recommendations included improvements to specific intersections, traffic calming measures and ways to increase safety for non-vehicular traffic.

In recent years, North Hampton has seen additional changes to its transportation network, including:

- Updates to the North Road bridge structure and intersection realignment slated to begin in 2023.
- Upgrades and reconfiguration of the intersection of Route 111 and Route 151 near the Bandstand/Centennial Hall for safety purposes.
- Acquisition of the former Boston-Maine rail line by NH Department of Transportation for use as a multimodal recreational trail.

Housing

Residential property comprises the largest single use of developed land in North Hampton at over 1,600 acres out of a total of nearly 9,000 acres. In 2019 NH Office of Strategic Initiatives estimated that there were 2,071 housing units in Town -- including 1,518 single-family homes, 180 multi-family units, and 373 manufactured homes. The most densely populated area is between Route 1 and Interstate 95, south of the Rye/North Hampton border. This area includes two manufactured home parks, one community for residents 55 years of age and older, and several older subdivisions where lot sizes are-less than one-half acre. Other densely populated areas include the Pine Road and southern Mill Road areas, Woodland Road and the eastern end of Atlantic Avenue near the coast. In 1973 the Town increased the minimum lot size to two acres, and that has resulted in lower density in developments since then.

	Existing Units									Total Units	
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2019
North Hampton	1914	34	17	26	25	7	10	8	9	5	2055

*NH Housing Supply: Current Estimates and Trends – December 2021 (NH Office of Strategic Initiatives)

Water Resources

Historically water resources have played a key role in North Hampton's land use and must do so in planning for future changes. Since 1978 North Hampton has restricted development of wetlands and areas surrounding wetlands for the purposes of protecting public health and aesthetic characteristics of the Town and for preserving ecological functions and natural services like stormwater storage and groundwater recharge. Wetlands cover nearly a third of the Town; therefore areas available for development are limited.

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The Town has also responded to concerns about water protection with the adoption of an aquifer protection ordinance in 2006 (and updated in 2021) to enhance protection of private wells and wells for public drinking water sources. The main public drinking water sources are assets of the Aquarion Water Company. Most of Aquarion's wells are in the northwest corner of North Hampton and south of Mill Road near the Hampton border. These wells service most of North Hampton that is east of I-95 and a portion of the Town of Hampton.

As land is increasingly covered with pavement, buildings, and other compacted surfaces that are impervious to water, significant changes in water quality and quantity result. Impervious surface coverage in North Hampton has increased over the past few decades with increased development. The most recent data available indicate that North Hampton's impervious surface coverage is 15.3 percent of the Town's surface area (UNH Complex Systems, 2010).

Implementation Section

The following section includes land use goals and actions developed to help ensure that North Hampton's land use and development in the future will meet desires that have been expressed by North Hampton residents and that are consistent with the overall Master Plan Vision.

Chapter Goals and Actions Implementation Plan

GOAL 1	Increase community connectivity and vibrancy.								
		Responsible Party	Timeframe (mid- term >3 years, long- term> 7 years.)	Cost (if known)	Funding Source				
CCV 1.1	Promote pedestrian and bicycle connections between and among the bandstand/Centennial Hall area, the Industrial-Business/Residential District, Town Complex, North Hampton School, North Hampton State Beach, and the new rail trail.	Planning Board, Select Board, Rails to Trails Committee	Near-term and long- term.		NHDOT and Municipal funds				
CCV 1.2	Explore partnering with private entitiessuch as churches, popular eateries, and other gathering places to assist in building community connectivity and vibrancy with information, events, and activities.	Select Board, Planning Board, North Hampton Business Association, and private partners.	1-3 years, and as opportunities arise.						
CCV 1.3	Explore new opportunities for gathering/rest spots within the Industrial- Business/Residential District and along the new rail trail.	Select Board, Heritage Commission, Conservation Commission	1-3 years, and as opportunities arise.						
CCV.1.4	Upgrade technology infrastructure throughout the Town to enhance long-term stability of home occupations, safety, education, employment, and economic growth for residents.	Select Board	Long-term						
CCV 1.5	Promote pedestrian accessibility and where possible, connectivity between community anchors and commercial activity on Route 1.	Planning Board, Select Board	Mid-term						

GOAL 2	Promote a vibrant and sustainable commerc	ial area within the Industr	ial-Business/Resid	ential Dis	strict.
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		Responsible Party	Timeframe (mid- term >3 years, long- term> 7 years.)	Cost (if known)	Funding Source
IBR 2.1	Evaluate and analyze potential development and redevelopment of property within the I-B/R District that will not compromise aquifer protection zones, wetlands, wetland setbacks, and conservation land.	Planning Board, Select Board, NHDOT	1- 3 years		
IBR 2.2	Assess desirable patterns for commercial development, including businesses residents have consistently identified as desirable in surveys while factoring in zoning challenges, environmental constraints, and any other relevant considerations.	Planning Board, Conservation Commission	1- 3 years		
IBR 2.3	Contract for a full build-out analysis of the I-B/R District.	Select Board	1- 3 years		
IBR 2.4	Evaluate access to the I-B/R District with respect to existing constraints for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists	Select Board, Planning Board, Highway Department	Mid-term		Town and State Funds
IBR 2.5	Improve I-B/R District aesthetics with functional landscaping for businesses, residents, and visitors that is consistent with the highly valued rural and historical characteristics of North Hampton.	Planning Board, Heritage Commission, North Hampton Business Association	Mid-term		
IBR 2.6	Explore 1) opportunities to promote business development and a unique identity for the evolving I-B/R District and possible partnerships to do so, and 2) how continually to make needed information for interested parties easier to access and understand.	Select Board, North Hampton Business Association	Mid-term		
IBR 2.7	Explore state and regional resources that may assist with improvements in access management in North Hampton and the I-B/R District.	State Representative, Select Board, Planning Board	Mid-term		

GOAL 3	Protect the environment and prepare for cli	Protect the environment and prepare for climate change impacts.								
		Responsible Party	Timeframe (mid- term >3 years, long- term> 7 years.)	Cost (if known)	Funding Source					
E&CC 3.1	Preserve the quality and sustainability of North Hampton's natural environment by ensuring protection, conservation, and resiliency of its ecological and water resources, shoreline, open spaces, and conservation land.	Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Little Boar's Head	Ongoing and perpetual.							
E&CC 3.2	Conduct an annual review of land use regulations that protect water resources against stormwater pollution and that ensure the health of groundwaters, wetland, and wetland buffer areas.	Rockingham Planning Commission, Planning Board, Conservation Commission	Annually							
E&CC 3.3	Explore various options (e.g., grants, warrant articles, current use funds) for identifying and preserving ecologically sensitive areas, including those identified in the Natural Resource Inventory.	Planning Board, Conservation Commission	As opportunities arise.							
E&CC 3.4	Review annually the forthcoming Coastal Hazards Chapter of the Master Plan and, when possible, implement actions that can achieve multiple community goals.	Rockingham Planning Commission, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Little Boar's Head	Annually							
	E&CC 3.4.1 Communicate findings of the Coastal Adaptation Master Plan chapter to residents and businesses. Emphasize reasons that action is needed. Continue to inform residents of Town actions and environmental developments (e.g., water resource and energy issues, ways homeowners can contribute at home or in the community, reasons that regulations are as they are) to keep them informed and engaged.	Planning Board, Select Board, Little Boar's Head,	Routinely, through local communication mechanisms and community organizations (e.g., Town Newsletter, Channel 22, Library, LBH Garden Club etc.)							

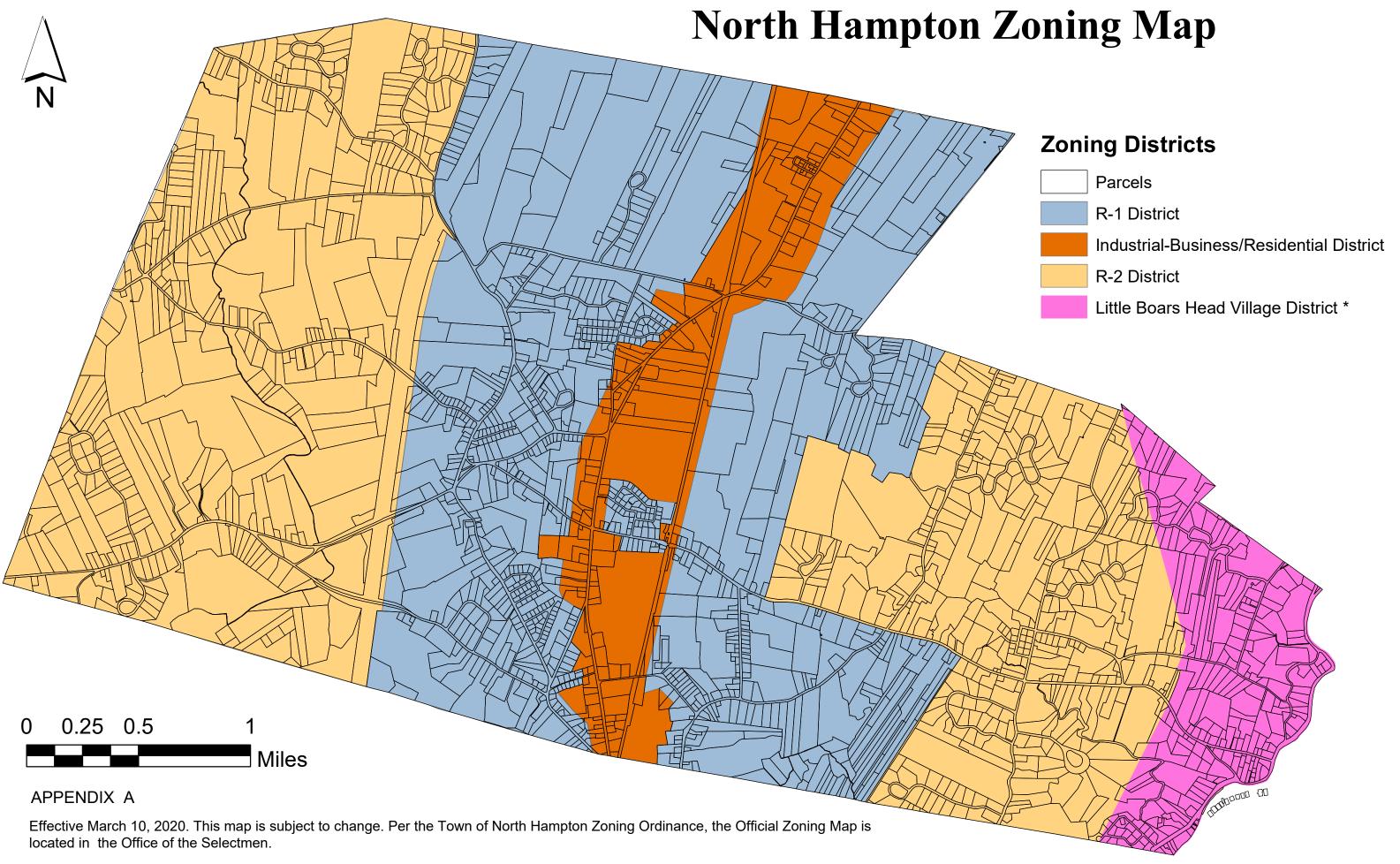
E&CC 3.4.2 Responsible parties collaborate with local partners who can help identify local impacts and communicate with the community.	Planning Board, Select Board, Police & Fire Departments, Conservation Commission, Little Boar's Head	Routinely, and every 5 years with update of update of Hazard Mitigation Plan (next update in 2023).	
E&CC 3.4.3 Work with the state on addressing impacts of sea-level issues on resources, property, and infrastructure.	State Representatives, Select Board, Planning Board	As opportunities arise.	

GOAL 4	Ensure that North Hampton maintains or achieves its fair share of affordable housing for the region.							
		Responsible Party	Timeframe (mid- term >3 years, long- term> 7 years.)	Cost (if known)	Funding Source			
RH 4.1	Provide opportunities for diverse housing options for individuals and families of all ages and income levels.	Planning Board	Long-term					
RH 4.2	Evaluate options for diversifying housing and housing developments that keep pace with changes in population, demographics, economic drivers, and job growth by updating the Housing Master Plan Chapter.	Planning Board	1-3 years					
	RH 4.2.1-Review and consider current demographic and economic trends in North Hampton when amending or creating housing regulations.	Planning Board, Select Board	1-3 years					
RH 4.3	Consider benefits of incentives for residential and business development that advance energy and water conservation measures.	Planning Board, Select Board	Mid-term					

GOAL 5	Leverage the potential of the rail-trail for use as a community asset for North Hampton.							
		Responsible Party	Timeframe (mid-term >3 years, long-term> 7 years.)	Cost (if known)	Funding Source			
RT 5	Use the rail trail as a central connection to spur activity and development.	Select Board, Planning Board	Mid-term					
	RT 5.1.1. Identify places along the rail trail where connections are desirable for commerce and community enhancement	Select Board, Planning Board, Rails to Trails Committee	1-3 years, and as opportunities arise.					
	RT 5.1.2 Develop a connection plan for the rail trail to and from the I-B/R and provide access opportunities for neighborhoods.	Select Board, Planning Board, Rails to Trails Committee	1-3 years					
	RT 5.1.3 Modify site/subdivision regulations to facilitate connections from the plan developed in 5.1.2.	Planning Board	1-3 years					
	RT 5.1.4 Identify and work with public and private partners and adjacent towns on rail trail and adjacent development.	Select Board, trail-adjacent businesses	Ongoing					

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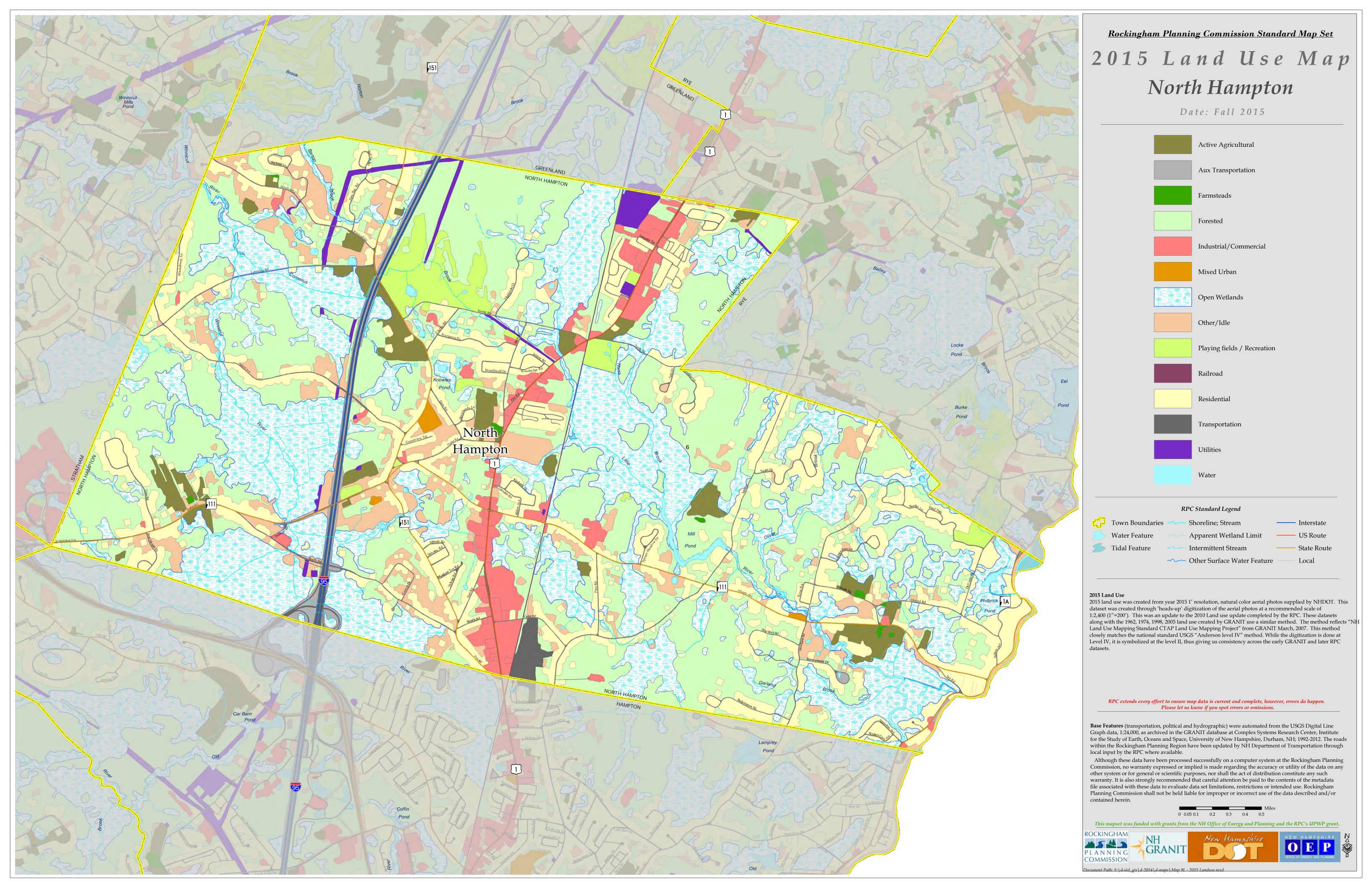
Appendix A – North Hampton Zoning Map



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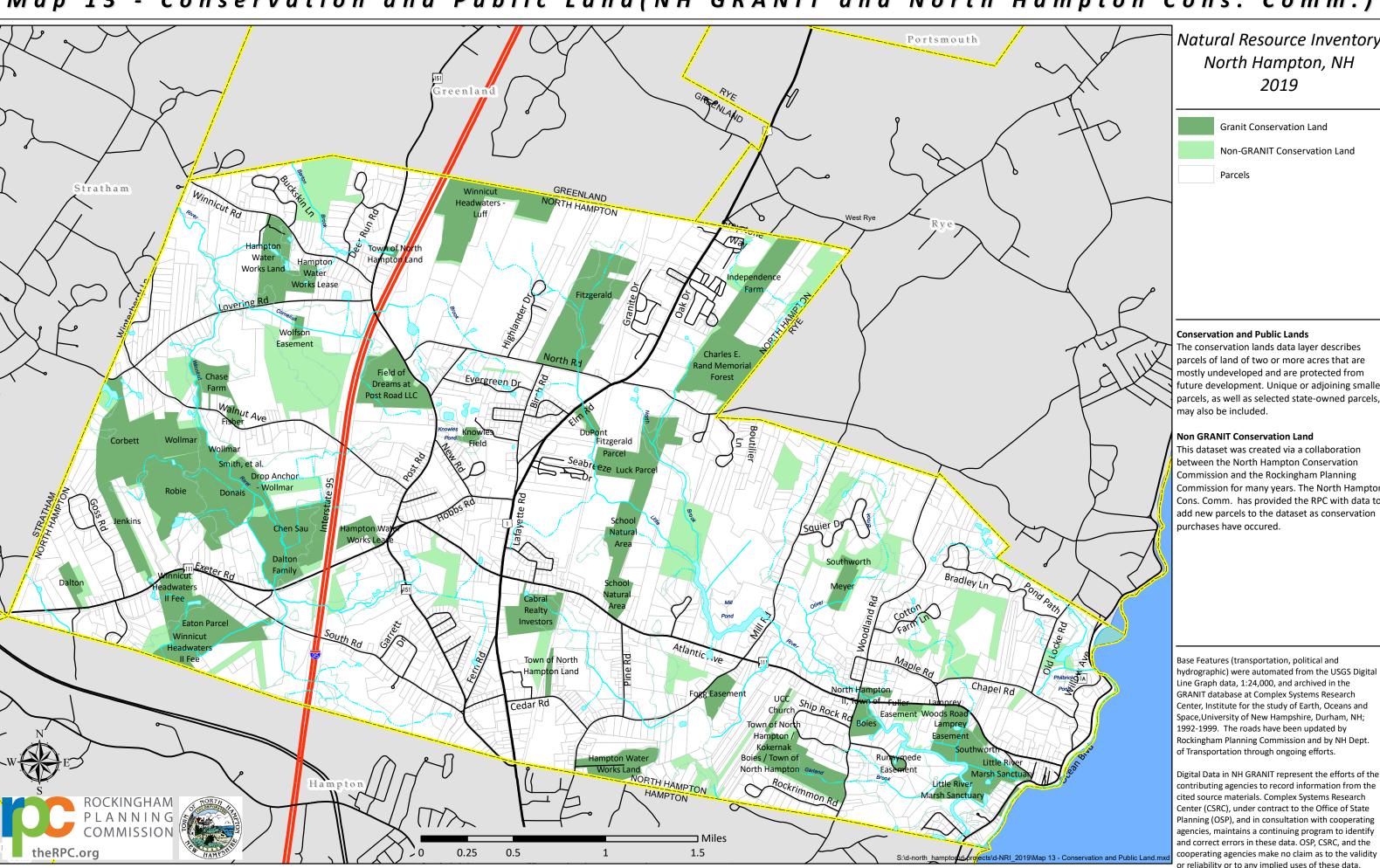
Appendix B – North Hampton Land Use Map 2015



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Appendix C – North Hampton Conservation Land Map (2021 Natural Resources Inventory)

Map 13 - Conservation and Public Land(NH GRANIT and North Hampton Cons. Comm.)



Natural Resource Inventory North Hampton, NH 2019

Granit Conservation Land

Non-GRANIT Conservation Land

Conservation and Public Lands

The conservation lands data layer describes parcels of land of two or more acres that are mostly undeveloped and are protected from future development. Unique or adjoining smaller parcels, as well as selected state-owned parcels, may also be included

Non GRANIT Conservation Land

This dataset was created via a collaboration between the North Hampton Conservation Commission and the Rockingham Planning Commission for many years. The North Hampton Cons. Comm. has provided the RPC with data to add new parcels to the dataset as conservation purchases have occured.

Base Features (transportation, political and hydrographic) were automated from the USGS Digital Line Graph data, 1:24,000, and archived in the **GRANIT database at Complex Systems Research** Center, Institute for the study of Earth, Oceans and Space, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH; 1992-1999. The roads have been updated by Rockingham Planning Commission and by NH Dept. of Transportation through ongoing efforts.

Digital Data in NH GRANIT represent the efforts of the contributing agencies to record information from the cited source materials. Complex Systems Research Center (CSRC), under contract to the Office of State Planning (OSP), and in consultation with cooperating agencies, maintains a continuing program to identify and correct errors in these data. OSP, CSRC, and the or reliability or to any implied uses of these data.