



**Town of North Hampton
Master Plan
Vision Chapter**

A Vision for North Hampton

North Hampton Planning Board

Adopted: 17 January 2006

A Vision for North Hampton

Introduction

Summary

North Hampton citizens envision a town that preserves its rural New England seacoast character and heritage in the midst of a region, county, and state that will very likely experience rapid growth and development during the next 20 years. They value their Town's natural resources, and they want to protect them.

They also expect their Town's governance and administration to reflect traditional New England values. These expectations include carefully managing operating expenses and capital investments, providing expected levels of service, maintaining sound facilities, effectively and broadly engaging citizens in important decisions, relying on volunteers to conduct many aspects of Town business, and establishing close cooperation and extensive sharing of resources among Town departments and functions.

Finally, they envision open, honest, and frequent communication among Town departments, between Town departments and residents, and among residents. Effective communication is essential to ensure that citizens are well educated about Town affairs and that the character of the Town continues to express citizens' desires and to reflect *their* vision for *their* Town.

General Principles

Responses to North Hampton's "2005 Community Survey" and comments by participants in two Vision Forums suggested three dominant themes for a vision statement for North Hampton's Master Plan:

1. As the state and region develop in the future, North Hampton should maintain its rural New England seacoast character and heritage.
2. North Hampton should continue to spend wisely for municipal services and facilities – that is, the Town should exercise "Yankee thrift" in all decisions about expending taxpayers' funds.
3. North Hampton should strengthen the Town's methods for building a sense of community.

Results of recent elections have been consistent with the first and second principles above. For example: In 2001 over 70% of voters in Town Meeting voted to appropriate \$4.0 million for open space conservation, and in 2005 Town Meeting, voters rejected proposals to fund construction of a new highway department facility and a number of other articles appropriating funds for capital expenditures.

Principle 1:

As the state and region develop in the future, North Hampton should maintain its rural New England seacoast character and heritage.

In response to question 14 in the Survey, which specifically asked to what extent the respondent agreed with this principle, 70% indicated that they “Strongly Agree” and another 23% indicated that they “Agree” with it. This overwhelmingly favorable response was consistent with responses to related questions in the survey, including the following:

The feature of North Hampton that respondents most often chose as the one they liked most about living in North Hampton was “Near ocean/natural features,” and the second most often chosen feature was “Rural atmosphere.” (Question 2) Respondents indicated stronger support for pursuing more “Protected open space” and more “Resident parking at the beach” in question 8 than for any other item listed.

Responses to question 11 about needs for facilities, services or regulations indicated “a strong affinity for the natural environment: almost 90% of respondents felt that protecting aquifers; and preserving forests, wetland, and mature trees along roads either might be needed or were definitely needed” and “80% of respondents think preserving stone walls and historic public buildings might be needed or is definitely needed.”¹

63% of respondents indicated that they support the use of “conservation subdivisions,” as defined in the Survey.

Implementation Strategies

Four implementation strategies were indicated by responses to the Survey -- especially to questions 8, 11 and 13 – and in Vision Forum discussions:

1. Protect natural resources – water, forests, pastures, wildlife and their habitats.
2. Preserve the Town’s heritage by maintaining and restoring historic public buildings (e.g., Old Town Hall, Bandstand and Commons), antique houses and barns, and old stone walls.
3. Use “conservation subdivisions” to help protect undeveloped land and natural resources.
4. Develop the Industrial-Business/Residential District in a manner that encourages locally owned, small businesses, rather than national chains, franchises and “big-box” stores; that improves the appearance of Route 1; and that limits the number of businesses of one type.

¹ Analysis of Survey Results by Mr. Thane Harrison in “Facilities, Services, and Regulations” under section “Land Use, Conservation, Planning and Zoning.”

Principle 2:

North Hampton should continue to spend wisely for municipal services and facilities – that is, the Town should exercise “Yankee thrift” in all decisions about expending taxpayers’ funds.

Survey respondents were generally satisfied with current services and facilities. They indicated willingness to invest in vehicles and equipment necessary for maintaining current levels of services and facilities, but reluctance to invest in expanding or building new facilities. Responses to Survey question 12 were the strongest indicator of this principle: 83% of respondents said that they were “very willing” (49%) or “willing” (34%) “to accept current levels of Town services and facilities” to limit tax increases.

Responses to other questions on the Survey were consistent with this principle:

Responses to question 9 about levels of satisfaction with aspects of the Town indicated “Neutral Satisfaction” with “Cost of Town services” and “Neutral/Low Satisfaction” with “Cost of public education,” and “Low Satisfaction” with “Property taxes.” In conjunction with responses to question 12, these responses to question 9 suggested that “respondents are not thrilled about taxes, but [are] satisfied with current levels of services.”²

Responses to question 10 about satisfaction with the quality of Town services indicated high levels of satisfaction, with the exceptions of “Zoning Enforcement” and “Tax Assessment.”

Responses to question 11 -- which asked for opinions about the need for various facilities, services or regulations -- indicated reluctance to invest in new or expanded facilities, with the possible exceptions of a new highway department garage and an expanded library building. However, respondents indicated that they supported purchasing vehicles and equipment for the highway, police and fire/EMS departments.

Implementation Strategies

Responses to the Survey and comments by participants in the Forums led to six implementation strategies for the principle of “Yankee thrift:”

1. Respond to residents’ expectations for services and facilities.
2. Respect residents’ willingness to provide funding for vehicles, equipment, and facilities necessary to maintain the quality and level of services.
3. Manage capital expenditures wisely within a plan that coordinates actions to meet those needs across all Town departments and functions, including the school.
4. Encourage business development that makes a net positive contribution in taxes to support Town services and facilities.
5. Establish funding and procedures for routine maintenance of all facilities and equipment.
6. Implement an energy conservation plan for all Town facilities and equipment.

² Thane Harrison, Analysis of Survey Results, section “Satisfaction with Aspects of the Town.”

Principle 3:

North Hampton should strengthen the Town's methods for building a sense of community.

Although the Survey did not specifically address the question of building a stronger sense of community in North Hampton, in breakout group discussions during the two Vision forums there was a common theme about the benefits of improving communications between Town government and residents, among Town departments and boards, and between Town government and North Hampton School. Participants indicated that there was a need to educate residents about needs for new or expanded facilities, about potential benefits from new approaches to planning and zoning, and about using existing facilities more efficiently and for multiple purposes. Participants indicated that, if residents are reluctant to appropriate funds for projects that some believe are critical, communication and education are necessary to ensure that decisions made by voters are informed and prudent.

Implementation Strategies

In discussions of the Vision forum breakout groups five implementation strategies emerged:

1. Use the public access channel on cable television to broadcast public meetings and important public events.
2. Ensure coordination between departments and between departments of the Town and the public school, especially for efficient use of facilities for recreation and meetings.
3. Look for new ways to reach out to residents and to provide attractive opportunities for them to get involved in Town affairs.
4. Continue restricting commercial development to the Route 1 corridor and strengthen the municipal complex as a "Town Center."
5. Develop funding sources, other than local property taxes, and alternative means to provide recreational features and infrastructure such as sidewalks and bicycle paths, crosswalks at traffic signals, activities for all age groups, better public transportation and more parking at the beach for residents.

Appendices

Appendix 1: 2005 Community Survey: Report to Residents

A: 2010 Community Survey

**Appendix 2: North Hampton Master Plan Visioning Forum:
November 9, 2005**

**Appendix 3: North Hampton Master Plan Visioning Forum II
Report: November 16, 2005**