

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Atkinson's Setting**

The Town of Atkinson is located in Rockingham County, New Hampshire, in the lower Merrimack River Valley, on the northern border of State of Massachusetts. This region is one of the most rapidly developing regions in the United States. Rockingham County is one of the fastest growing counties in the southern New Hampshire Growth Belt. Over 60 million people live within a one day drive of the Merrimack Valley.

Atkinson is bordered by Hampstead and Derry to the north; Salem to the west; and Plaistow to the east. Salem and Derry comprise two of the six largest municipalities in the State of NH; the three largest, Nashua, Manchester and Portsmouth, respectively, are all within a 35 mile radius of Atkinson. Concord, the capitol of NH, is less than an hour drive from Atkinson via Route 93. Likewise, Boston, MA, an international, commercial and population center, is also within an hour drive from Atkinson, again via Route 93.

Atkinson is positioned in the middle of the New England Transportation Triad. Manchester Airport is easily accessible to the northwest, as is Pease International Trade Port to the northeast in Portsmouth/Newington and Boston's Logan Airport to the south.

NH Route 111, which runs east/west through the northern part of Atkinson, is heavily used by Town commuters, as is north/south Route 121 (Main Street) which bisects the Town. Additionally, Atkinson is located within close proximity to Route 125 to the east, Route 93 to the west, Route 101 to the north and Route 495 to the south in Massachusetts.

The Boston and Maine rail line, runs through the southern part of Atkinson, connecting Portland, ME, to Boston, MA. Commuter rail service from Portland to Boston is presently expected to be restored in 1999.

### **History of the Atkinson Master Plan**

The first Master Plan for the Town of Atkinson was prepared in 1980 to document the needs of the Town and desires of its residents. It also contained recommendations for improving the existing zoning ordinance and provided the necessary scientific data to support these changes. The 1985 Master Plan Supplement made recommendations to allow Atkinson to meet its obligation to provide its fair share of low-moderate income housing while continuing to maintain the Town's rural character. The 1990 Master Plan amended the original plan, bringing it up to date with the changing needs of the town.

## **VISUAL AND SCENIC RESOURCES**

### Introduction

In recent years, particularly as some of the attractive landscape in the community was consumed by development, the visual qualities of the community have become an increasingly significant part of the planning process. The following study deals with Atkinson's landscape and a way in which it contributes to the quality of life in the town. In developing the visual inventory and analysis, the following objectives were taken into consideration:

- 1 To create an increasing awareness of the community's inhabitants in identifying the visual quality in the hopes of protecting it. Although Atkinson may wish to protect this landscape through special review requirements, informed citizens, however, can greatly contribute to the aims of retaining this particular aspect of quality of life through voluntary control.
2. To provide a landscape analysis that can serve as a practical component in the development of Site Plan Review considerations. It is hoped that, in part, this visual analysis will contribute in the selection of land use density allocations in Atkinson. Wherever possible, the visual analysis should be applied in order to preserve the scenic qualities in the future developments of the community and avoid intrusions against these qualities (careful development in building locations).
3. To provide information to guide development in the town. It may be impossible to regulate all facets of visual qualities. However, the knowledge should be available and choices be made based on this information in order to help Atkinson's Planning Board in reviewing and negotiating with builders and developers.

The Following study is undertaken with the aim of maintaining visual quality in Atkinson that can have psychological, planning, and economic benefits to the community. It is urged that high-quality landscape areas be not only understood by the residents and the voters, but be protected as much as possible.

It is the protection of quality of landscape that lends to the quality of life in a community and can instill and retain community pride and the community's desire to continue the thoughtful use of its land.

It is hoped that in the Comprehensive Planning efforts, the town will use its review process to minimize impacts of development and, as far as possible, promote positive effects of developments by exposing views and retaining qualities of landscapes as identified.

In the preparation of the following inventory and analysis, the Consultant appreciates the assistance of Mrs. Evelyn Shore and Ms. Lynne Monroe. The visual analysis greatly benefited from the Cultural Resources Survey and Inventory conducted by the Strafford Rockingham

Regional Council in 1979. It is hoped that the incorporation of this Survey into the Comprehensive Planning process will be, in part, a contributing element to the retention of quality of life in Atkinson, while allowing and continuing orderly community growth.

### Contributing Elements to the Visual Quality of Atkinson

The basic elements of making an area one of pronounced quality is two fold:

1. The vista that a certain location renders.
2. The identification of short range, middle range, and long range views in the town's landscape.

### Areas of High Visual Quality

In Atkinson, a generally beautiful community, there are areas that are particularly high in visual quality. This survey differs from the identification of historic areas and areas of architectural significance. However, it does, as the Cultural Survey indicated, give, in many instances, a glimpse of "old" Atkinson. Many of these highly scenic areas are those that have been preserved for centuries. They are identifiable and are located on the map. They include:

1. Providence Hill area
2. Jericho Road - North Broadway view shed
3. Main Street - Sawyer Avenue section
4. Lower Maple Avenue
5. Lower East Road
6. Town Center - south
7. Town Center - north
8. Island Pond Road - Route 111 @ plain
9. Island Pond environs

In addition, long distance vistas of significance have been identified as:

1. Pine Knoll area
2. Maple Avenue - Bragg Hill section
3. Hogg Hill
4. Providence Hill - west

### Areas of Visual Quality

#### Providence Hill

This is the section that borders on Salem and is located in the southwest corner of Atkinson. It provides a view shed that is identifying agricultural meadowland encompassing an area of approximately one half mile. This area, though framed by mature forest stands and stone walls, gives one the feeling of spaciousness and of the "original" southern New Hampshire landscape.

Its retention should be accomplished by careful building placement, taking advantage of interfaces between open spaces and the forested areas.

#### Jericho Road - North Broadway Sector

This is a large area, nearly three quarters of a square mile in size and bound by Jericho Road on the south, Salem Road to the west, and North Broadway to the north.

It is one of the major areas in the community still in agricultural use and is indeed beautiful, restful to the eye, and rather unique in a community that is as heavily forested as Atkinson. Its active form use contributes to the uniqueness.

#### Main Street - Sawyer Avenue Area

This area is located in the southern portion of Atkinson, bordering Massachusetts. It is an area that has, in addition to historic significance, a short range view that is of decisive significance. Not only is it exposed to a large volume of passersby, but it has been virtually preserved by its marginal suitability for development. This marginal quality for development is one that should encourage the community to retain these characteristics of this view shed and render a setting to an identified historic area in the community.

#### Lower Maple Avenue

This area is one of uninterrupted view for approximately 2,000 feet to the west and encompasses nearly 4,000 feet in length along Maple Avenue. Because of the slope of Maple Avenue coming off from Bragg Hill, this is an area that is not only a short and medium range area, but has a significant long range view as well. The view shed is located generally between Main Street and Maple Avenue and is one that is characteristic of the high visual quality in Atkinson. It is an area that makes one wonder where the many people in Atkinson are actually residing. It is typical of the many open spaces that are still preserved and hopefully will be retained in the community's future landscape.

#### Lower East Road

This area is located in the southeast corner of the community and adjacent to Plaistow. Its significance is the large open area created by a high water table and marsh condition. Its beauty is framed by mature free growth located approximately 1,500 feet to the southwest of East Road.

The protection of this vista to the traveler along East Road is one of significance and should be preserved. In addition to its being a beautiful view, it is an introduction to an historic area identified as part of a Cultural Survey just south of Line Brook Road.

#### Town Center - South

Probably one of the most significant areas of visual quality in Atkinson is the view from the town center to the south. Not only is it an historic area from which the view is rendered, but it is one that encompasses both sides of Meditation Lane. It reaches from Main Street 180 degrees to

Bittersweet Lane area to the northwest.

For significant reasons, not only is this view an historic setting, but the open fields framed by stone walls in the background and foreground make this a viewshed that contributes greatly to the town's visual quality and should be protected.

#### Town Center - North

In the central part of town going north, just prior to reaching the low point before rising towards Hogg Hill, is a medium and short range vista to the north created by marsh lands and open lands framed by wooded areas. In a way, this is one of the more typical vistas in the Town of Atkinson and represents the kind of quality that makes Atkinson the pretty town that it is. It is a vista that should be protected.

#### Island Pond Road - Route 111 - Route 111 Area

This view shed is located in the northwest portion of Atkinson, framed by two highways rendering exposure to the traveling public. In addition to being one of the earlier settled areas in Atkinson, it is one that, for reasons of natural conditions because of high water tables and marsh areas, has been undeveloped, while in the easterly portion, particularly in the vicinity of the section of Main Street and Island Pond Road, agricultural endeavors have maintained the open space quality. Their quality is identified here and their protection should be accomplished, for it is one of the areas that create the landscape which is predominant and makes Atkinson a visually attractive community.

#### Island Pond Environs

Island Pond is generally visible only to private property owners save for a few key vistas. One of these is on the approach to Chose Island; the second one is on the northern portion of the Hemlock Heights development.

The view connected to Chase Island is one into a wetland area created by a cove on Island Pond and renders a rather unique area of wilderness - wetland area. The view from the Hemlock Heights development is one showing a portion of Island Pond and its beauty created by the forest-covered shoreline contrasting with the tranquility of a large water body. These elements are being identified here to record their significance for future consideration as permits are being issued for further development in that northern-most portion of Atkinson.

#### Maple Avenue - Bragg Hill

This point identified on the Visual Analysis Map is one that renders a great view towards the south and southeast from Maple Avenue. A possible visual easement consideration should be given to the retention of this long range distance view in the retention of visual qualities of Atkinson.

### Pine Knoll

In the extreme northeast portion of Atkinson is the Pine Knoll Crown Hill development area. Because of the high elevation of Pine Knoll, it does render an extremely beautiful view of the southern New Hampshire landscape. Much of the vista areas are occupied by private development and possible future visual easements should be given consideration particularly if the potential public access to an area providing an outlook over the southern New Hampshire landscape could be accomplished.

### Hogg Hill

Hogg Hill renders the most significant view towards the west from the Town of Atkinson. This view shed is a long distance view of the westerly portion of southern New Hampshire and is one similar to Pine Knoll, that of being increasingly absorbed by private ownership and development pressures. Possible acquisition of visual easements and a location of public lookout might be worthy of consideration in the town's planning efforts.

### Providence Hill - West

The descending topography on Providence Hill Road, along with a view shed identified earlier, is also a long distance view rendered to the traveler. If possible, visual easements by controlling vegetative growth and development along particularly significant areas of exposure to this long range view should be accomplished through identification in the Comprehensive Plan expressing town-wide concern by retaining this unique view and protecting it for future generations.

MAP

(The original document contained a map which cannot be read. I assume it is a map showing natural and scenic areas in Atkinson. *MSB*)

## PLANNING ISSUES

### Introduction

The purpose of identifying planning issues is to articulate issues unique to the Town of Atkinson in order to assure that the underlying problems of the community are acknowledged and dealt with to the greatest extent possible, through both local and state enabling legislation. The information included in this section is based on the Consultant's observations and review of surveys conducted by the Master Plan Coordinating Team.

### Planning Issue No. 1 Maintenance of Quality of Life in Atkinson

When Town Meeting voted for the two-acre zoning, the primary purpose of this was to maintain Atkinson's residential features. Subsequent surveys conducted by the Master Plan Coordinating Team have indicated that the people prefer the small town atmosphere; they like Atkinson because of its good air and quaintness.

An expressed concern and an issue to be addressed is the maintenance of a slow rate of growth in order to provide the services necessary to maintain the community atmosphere and quality of life that exist today.

### Planning Issue No. 2 Town Government vs Individual Rights

Many communities, as they face the question of how to protect the land resources over which they have jurisdiction, have faced the equally perplexing dilemma of curtailing individual freedoms. The residents of Atkinson have indicated a high degree of willingness to yield some measures of personal freedom in exchange for an attractive and healthy town by adopting two-acre zoning and, thereby a land use restriction.

Continued community participation is important to the predominance of the community over individual, indiscriminate development. The issue is: as one gains protection, one must give up certain rights. The majority must exercise their right in controlling the community's destiny over short term individual gains at the expense of the town.

### Planning Issue No. 3 Adequate Town Services

Atkinson has maintained adequate community services with a minimum of "dipping into the public trough". This is to say that Atkinson, save for the large school budget, has maintained a frugal and prudent local administrative operation. As the community grows, these services must be continued and can be continued as long as the growth is moderate and within acceptable numbers.

One issue to be addressed in the planning process is the provision for more recreational and open space, which is important as land becomes consumed by the small property owner through the continued subdivision of land.

Planning Issue No. 4 Preservation of Historic Characteristics and Open Spaces

A planning issue must be the identification and preservation of historic sites, historic areas and those areas that are visually unique,

Planning Issue No. 5 Critical Areas of Preservation

An issue is the protection of identified critical land areas. These consist of wetland areas, high water table situations, areas of shallow bedrock and other identified land areas in the Natural Resources Inventory.

As the Master Planning process continues, additional planning issues may be identified and addressed, and suggested implementation measures will be considered at subsequent town meetings.



## PLAN ALTERNATIVES

### Introduction

The Planning Board, by nature of its function and as provided for under New Hampshire enabling legislation, has been charged with the responsibility of providing the community with measures that will guide future development of a municipality. The Master Plan, by its very nature, is not a stagnant document, but is a guideline that represents the end result of a series of studies. The alternatives, one or a combination of several that ultimately spell out the program, will be translated into a comprehensive Master Plan to be adopted by the Planning Board and serve as a basis for recommendations through legislative and regulatory measures acted upon by citizen vote. At this point, the alternatives submitted are offered for perusal by the Consultant. The Consultant will submit these alternatives and utilize citizen and committee input in order to devise a Land Use Plan and subsequently a comprehensive Master' Plan reflecting the community's choice and based on experience, legislative feasibility, and practicality.

- Alternative I: Continuation of Present Zoning Provisions
- Alternative II: Emphasis on Residential Development
- Alternative III: Emphasis on Conservation
- Alternative IV: Emphasis on Economic Development
- Alternative V: Emphasis on Slow Growth

### Alternative 1: Continuation of Present Zoning Provisions

With little planning justification, the town is requiring two acres per dwelling unit. This has led to it-i at-ion and a temporary slowdown in application for subdivisions. In spite of this and a fight money market situation, the community has still grown. The present concept is one allowing for relatively low density development and recognizing the need for some community services in the form of industrial development along Route 111 and commercial development in the center of town and at the southern border near Route 125. The present Zoning Ordinance obviously reflects the wishes of the majority of people in Atkinson. In order to be valid, the Ordinance must be subject to the test of justification under New Hampshire statutes.

### Implications of This Alternative

One implication of this alternative is the continued rate of growth in Atkinson. Atkinson has established itself sufficiently in the larger regional content and is a desirable community in which to reside.

A second implication is the continued pressure on the small amount of land areas remaining that are suitable for development. Even though Atkinson has adopted a wetlands regulation protecting these wetland areas, it is this pressure that may ultimately lead to a two-acre density provision rather than the two acre lot size.

Present conditions, with the continued development patterns as they exist based on studies of soil and subsoil conditions, will not provide for the continued potability of private water supply realizing the continued disposal of liquid wastes into the ground. Unless additional restrictive measures are taken, increased developments will ultimately affect the ground water situation as it already has done in some areas.

A further implication of the continuation of this growth pattern is the enforcement of rules and regulations designed to protect the health and safety of those residing in Atkinson.

Should development continue, the possibility of a required public sewer system will be necessary, certainly in areas that indicate waste water seepage into the groundwater table. This would be at a considerable expense to the community and certainly to those required to hook on to such a system.

Growth at the existing rate will place an increased burden on community services as is beginning to be demonstrated through public sentiment. Atkinson has managed to provide excellent community services for its residents to date. Adjustments must be made and can be made without a great increase in the taxes if diligent growth management were applied. The continued two-acre approach does not seem to have the slowing down effect that some may have expected.

This alternative would have a dispersed demand on community services and facilities. This means that rather than provide services in key locations where development is planned to take place, dispersed and therefore expensive community services will need to be provided. Among these are highway improvements, public safety improvements (fire and police), and dispersed open space recreational facilities.

Two-acre zoning throughout the community will have a scattered development pattern as its end result, which is not only expensive to maintain but difficult to provide with simple services. This alternative will continue to provide for a rural residential environment. Careful location of drives and buildings must be practiced in order to avoid giving Atkinson the typical "suburban look" which, thus far, it has managed to avoid.

In evaluating the highway network, this Consultant concludes that two-acre patterns will require highway improvements in order to provide services equal to today's standards.

### Alternative II: Emphasis on Residential Development

This alternative, in contrast to the present two-acre zoning, would be one that would allow for indiscriminate residential development requiring a minimum of land area, yet still protecting the wetland areas. The emphasis would be on creating a residential environment that would be conducive to building single and multi-family homes requiring services and increased recreational and open space needs. Along with this would be the increased demand for road construction and road maintenance. Atkinson could adopt such an alternate indicating their desire to develop to maximum density. The most tangible implication would be the necessary provision of either municipal sewer or water and ultimately, both. The ultimate demand would be to create a water system that not only would render potable water but would render a water supply adequate for fire protection.

A residential community generally insists on services not only by the town but for shopping and conveniences. Offices and stores will have to be part of the community plan, to a larger extent.

Experience has shown that once a large number of people congregate in a community, the desire for employment opportunities increases and fosters industrial development. A residential community ultimately seeking industrial development to support its economic base would find it difficult to adopt and practice growth management to a measurable benefit.

Atkinson would develop to a higher density than presently envisioned. The remaining 3,825 acres would, as in the case of nearby communities, accommodate by allowing densities of two families per acre (or easily an additional 20,000 people or a designed population of 25,000) in contrast to the 11 000 designed population under the two-acre proviso. Such an alternate has been adopted by other communities, and the long-range implications of such densities can be observed in communities like Salem and Derry.

### Alternative III: Emphasis on Conservation

By connotation, such an alternative would mean the protection of the natural environment. The protection of the natural environment would preclude excessive development and require most careful planning and, in particular, location of any manmade changes to Atkinson's natural environment.

### Implications of the Plan

Plans for conservation could essentially have as its implication a no-growth plan. Aside from the conservation of natural resources, it would also mean a conservation of financial resources of a community. The realities of community government, particularly in southern New Hampshire, would make a conservation plan too ideal to be acceptable.

A conservation alternative would be most protective of present private investments. It would encourage historic preservation and stabilize community services and functions. Signs of development such as leach field effluents, advertising signs of home occupations, increased surface runoff through pavements indicate an ever-growing community. Conservation as an alternate would preclude industrial and commercial development of any kind. It would leave Atkinson depending on services and employment opportunities rendered elsewhere.

Nonetheless, in part, conservation must be an element in the Comprehensive Plan and for this reason should be considered as an alternative, parts of which should be incorporated into an ultimate Master Plan for the town.

### Alternative IV: Emphasis on Economic Development

Many communities are developing industrial parks designed to provide employment opportunities for the residents of the community and the residents in the surrounding areas. Such industrial parks are often an asset to the community; and, while they do provide employment opportunities for the residents of the area, they place a burden on the services that the community provides.

An alternative of this nature would have to focus on the accessibility to Atkinson via Routes 111 and 125. A strategic location for such a development would be in the southeast corner of the town where not only access to the interstate is available within two miles, but where rail access could be available.

In the long range, such an alternative would have to be designed in a manner to allow for expansion should the community be successful in attracting large scale and small scale manufacturing industries and warehouse operations.

### Implications of the Plan

A plan of such a nature would require needed services such as sewer and water. If they could not be provided by the community itself, the money could be raised through federal economic development assistance. The expectation of having manufacturing establishments provide their own water supply necessary for fire protection and waste disposal facilities would place Atkinson in a relatively unfair position competitively speaking.

The second implication of such a measure is Atkinson's shortcomings as far as large-scale community services are concerned. Fire protection and public safety services, while adequate to serve the present residential community, would not be capable of handling any kind of economic development endeavors.

An alternative with economic development in the form of manufacturing industry, warehousing, and large-scale service and shopping facilities would have a severe impact on the community both financially and physically. Such a plan alternative would be topping the community's resources beyond which Atkinson appears to be financially capable.

Economic endeavors apparently carried out in Atkinson largely through home occupations are of significance. The community has accepted such home occupations 'in the past, but the fact that they are increasing must be recognized in the Comprehensive Planning efforts. Areas must be set aside for the location of such "home occupations" which are growing to the point where they are creating adversities in residential neighborhoods.

### Alternative V: Emphasis on Slow Growth

A slow growth alternative has less land use implications than it does socioeconomic implications. A slow growth plan alternative takes into consideration the community awareness for the preservation of the quality of life in the Town of Atkinson.

A slow growth alternative would establish protectorates of areas unsuitable for development without large scale expenditures for public sewer and water supply. It would require the establishment of lot sizes recognizing the capability of lands beyond the presently established two-acre limitations. In addition to the recognition of the land's limitation to absorb development, a public policy must also follow that will bring about a greater growth management within the community's fiscal capabilities.

### Implications of the Plan

A slow growth plan would place the community in control of future development based on the town's capability to provide adequate services, protect the presently developed areas, and place future developments in locations where soil capabilities exist to carry such development without large scale community investments.

A slow growth plan alternative would require a slowing down of growth from the present rate of 5% to a lesser rate approaching 20% per year or 20% per decade.

In contrast to the other plan alternatives, it would establish a definite time schedule for growth and community investment, recognizing the implications of such growth on the obligations of the community to provide municipal services.

A slow growth policy might have a curtailment of subdivision of land areas (as it is presently experiencing as a result of the two-acre zoning). However, such an initial curtailment in marketability of land areas would have a long-range effect (as experienced in other communities) of increased land values. It would allow for a community development pattern to accommodate not only single-family housing but multi family housing in a cluster development concept basis.

A slow growth plan alternative would recognize conversions of seasonal homes, particularly in the Island Pond area. To slow such conversions, stringent enforcement of year around requirements for water supply and sewage disposal facilities (the requirements of distances to water etc.) should be met, hopefully discouraging conversions from taking place.

The slow growth plan alternative would have as its basis the designation of developable land areas and assigned priorities for development based on community services, both public and private, necessary to support such limited growth.

It would be the responsibility of the Planning Board to supervise the growth, approve subdivision lots on a scheduled basis, paying heed to the community's ability to support growth and development, and, through the Board of Selectmen, curtail issuances of building permits.

A slow growth plan alternative would be a two-fold approach to comprehensive planning and plan implementation. The first would be the physical plan development, the town setting aside areas for development and assigning such developments on a priority basis. The second would be the community's fiscal capability to furnish required services, taking into consideration the realities of local assessment and taxes to be raised.

## ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

### Introduction

Towns like Atkinson are subject to growth because of inherent employment opportunities in the nearby employment centers. In the determination of influences on the economic base, population growth, and Atkinson's particular natural resources, local employment opportunities (or the lack thereof) and commuting patterns are most significant.

Based on the 1978 survey, Atkinson's residents are relying on employment opportunities available in nearby Massachusetts. They also are commuting to nearby communities which gives the town a population characteristic that reflects a suburban demographic picture, (see Population Report). This suburban community pattern for Atkinson indicates that there are limited employment opportunities available within the community. However, it does render a natural and sociological environment that the community prefers. (Were Atkinson combined with Haverhill and Andover, the result would reflect a central city community structure providing employment opportunities and would reflect a larger percentage in the employable age group rather than in the younger school age population.)

With the lack of employment opportunities available and the lack of shopping and other services, the town has a limited economic base, if one considers that the economic base describes employment opportunities and services rendered within the town.

For purposes of town planning, this situation is one that is significant. It would indicate that only limited areas must be set aside for employment opportunities. On the other hand, the Plan must reflect the quality of life that the citizens are seeking and enjoying, namely a suitable environment for residential endeavors. In fact, the creation of major industrial developments and major service industries could possibly be in conflict with the quality of life that Atkinson is providing to date. With a regional setting that does provide employment opportunities within commuting distance, this is an acceptable community pattern and should be evaluated in the determination of a Land Use Plan and comprehensive development for the town.

### Employment Characteristics

Based on the census conducted by the Strafford Rockingham Regional Council in 1973, the distribution of employment by occupations reveals some interesting tangible data. 872 people or 22.1% were either in professional or managerial positions. There were 316 clerical and sales people. (As stated, this is based on 63% return of the questionnaires.) A surprisingly large number of retired people, 225 or 5.70% were counted, surprisingly so because of the suburban characteristics of the community. Table VII shows the Distribution of Employment by occupations and reflects the total population as calculated on the 1978 survey.

### Places of Employment

Based on 1,052 responses, the same survey reflected a commuting pattern of suburban characteristics. As Table VIII shows, only 15.5% of those reporting were working in the Town of Atkinson, meaning that 84.5% of the population were leaving the community to go to work.

Of these, 707 or 67.1% were actually commuting to Massachusetts, 54 were employed in Salem, 40 in Milton, 18 in Sandown and 46 in other communities. With the ever increasing cost of travel, the long range impact of this large percentage of commuters must be of consideration. There are two possibilities: either people will seek residences closer to their place of employment or they will move their place of employment closer to Atkinson. Experience has shown that, in most instances, people will seek employment closer to their primary residence because of the educational or social connections in the community. On the other hand, commuting patterns are generally maintained, considering the cost of moving and relocation.

It is anticipated that for Atkinson, particularly with the relatively high income per household, commuting will continue to be a preferred way of getting to work rather than relocation.

### Income Distribution

Table IX shows the distribution of income and puts Atkinson well in the upper average income bracket. This is in spite of the fact that in Atkinson, 6.2% have an income that is below the poverty level. In contrast, Salem only has 3.2% of families with an income that is below the poverty level. On the other hand, Epping has 8.1%. Atkinson does have a median family income of \$19,374 or the third highest median family income in Rockingham County. Only Windham and New Castle reported a higher family income than Atkinson.

What is probably significant is the observation that from 1969 - 1977, Atkinson's rank increased from 192 to 203 and at present is 214. This means that not only has Atkinson's median family income increased, but it has increased at a greater rate than communities throughout the state.

The implications of this are that Atkinson is a desirable community in which to reside and does provide for 6.2% of its families who have an income that is below the poverty level.

(Source: New Hampshire Office of State Planning, February 1980).

### DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
Professional, Technical, Managerial	872	22.1
Clerical, Sales	316	8.0
Service Occupations	123	3.1
Farm, Fish, Forestry	12	.3
Processing Occupations	8	.2
Machine Trades	40	1.0
Bench Work Occupations	99	2.5
Structural Work	111	2.8
Miscellaneous	95	2.4

Retired	225	5.7
Military	12	.3
Homemaker	462	11.7
Student	822	20.8
Not Employed	755	19.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,952</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Strafford Rockingham Regional Council, 1978 Census

### PLACES OF EMPLOYMENT

Place	Number	Percent of Total
Massachusetts	707	67.1
Atkinson	163	15.5
Salem	54	5.1
Hampstead	18	1.7
Milton	40	3.7
Sandown	18	1.9
Exeter	6	0.6
Other Towns	46	4.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,052</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Strafford Rockingham Regional Council, 1978 Census  
Economic Considerations (Continued)

### DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Income Level	1970	Percent	1978	Percent	% Change
0-5,000	76	12.4	59	4.5	-7.9
5,001-10,000	157	25.7	139	10.6	-15.1
10,001-15,000	163	26.6	212	16.1	-10.5
15,001-25,000	195	31.9	508	38.7	6.8
25,001-50,000	16	2.6	352	26.8	24.2
50,000 +	5	.8	43	3.3	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,313</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Strafford Rockingham Regional Council, 1978 Census



Observations

1. The household income for Atkinson is above the state and national average, attributable to the quality the residents have created for themselves. In spite of this, Atkinson accommodates 6.2% of its families having an income that is below the poverty level.
2. The Town of Atkinson is a community that relies predominantly on its employment opportunities and services in nearby communities both in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. It is a typical residential community, and the Master Plan must reflect a continued desire to avoid conflict between its residential pattern and commercial/industrial areas.
3. The Master Plan must consider the "quality of life" sought by its residents.
4. With the ever-increasing cost of commuting, the possibility of creating local employment opportunities may become more realistic and desirable and should be reflected in the Land Use Plan.
5. Above all, the Plan must continue to provide an attractive community setting and residential environment and to balance this with an economic growth rate not in conflict with this environment.

## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES**

### **Introduction**

Presented below is a discussion of the goals, objectives and policies that are submitted for consideration by the Planning Board, which is assisting the community in updating the Master Plan. It is important that these goals, objectives and policies be adopted by the Planning Board and supported by the Board of Selectmen, so that subsequent planning recommendations can be set forth affording the voters the opportunity to guide the development of the Town of Atkinson.

These Goals, Objectives and Policies are part of the Master Plan and serve as an overall umbrella for the Town's development plan.

**Goals:** A Goal is defined as a fundamental purpose that requires the application of long-term effort and energies of the Town. It is designed to give direction, guidance and coordination to the Town's changes and future development.

**Objectives:** As part of the attainment of goals, specific objectives are designed to make recommendations that contribute to the fulfillment of the established goals for Atkinson.

**Policies:** The Planning Board may suggest policies to the Selectmen and the Voters. The legislative body should make decisions that implement policy recommendations. In order to realize goals and objectives, policies must be consistent with the Master Plan.

### **Recommended Goals**

The following are goals submitted for consideration by the Planning Board.

1. **Retention of the Quality of Life for Atkinson Residents**

This basic and broad goal is one upon which subsequent goals must rest. It is stated here, though broad, for true value and planning purposes. This goal assures the continued focus on the quality of life in Atkinson.

**Objective:** In order to attain such a vast goal, the Town must accept the responsibility of creating conditions for all citizens that may best meet basic human needs and are commensurate with the common good. To attain this, it is important that both the individual and the community follow through with a plan that has as its aim a balanced program for change and development.

**Policy:** The Master Plan must provide the framework for the continuation and improvement of policies aimed at providing for the well being of the citizens of

Atkinson and for providing for growth and change without undue hardship in retaining the quality of life established to this date.

2. **Atkinson's role in the Regional Setting**

The Town should not be expected to provide employment opportunities and services, and thereby accepts a continued dependence on outlying communities.

**Objectives:** The Town must maintain a Land Use Plan that primarily retains a desirable residential environment.

**Policy:** The policy must be one that continues an attractive residential community.

3. **Retention and Protection of Property Values**

The Town must recognize the importance of the protection of existing property values within Atkinson, the maintenance of open spaces, fostering of community pride and protection of natural resources.

**Objectives:** The objective is to provide for balanced growth and change while maintaining the existing rural character of the community. The objective must reflect the densities and specific uses permitted within certain areas of the community. The careful identification of land uses and their interrelationship and coordination with soil and subsoil is imperative.

**Policy:** The adoption of subdivision regulations and zoning ordinances that are designed to be commensurate with the community's capacity to assume growth and change must be kept in mind.

4. **Recreation**

Atkinson should make every effort to expand recreational opportunities for the town. This goal is to provide for the continued opportunity for residents to enjoy physical activities.

**Objective:** The objective is the establishment of a long-range open space and recreational improvement program that provides for strategic locations of publicly accessed land.

Any recreational program must recognize the need for balanced year round recreational opportunities.

**Policy:** The policy necessary for the continued progress towards acquiring open space and

developing recreational opportunities in the town is to adopt a long-term plan, and to seek all possible sources of funds to make appropriate purchases.

## 5. Streets and Highways

The goal should be to provide for a street and highway network that will discourage major through traffic and be one that is primarily designed to serve the residents of the community. In addition, Atkinson must actively cooperate with area towns to assure that regional highways meet the needs of all communities. Traffic congestion on regional arterials is an increasing source of frustration to the residents

**Objectives:** The objective of this goal is the maintenance of a residential community environment. This means that access should be provided, but that fast and high volumes of traffic should be limited to certain areas of town. The creation of road and highway networks should primarily serve the residents of Atkinson.

The Master Plan and Capital Improvement Plan must spell out a comprehensive roadway strategy. Since roads represent the most significant part of Atkinson's budget, it is recommended that a professionally prepared maintenance/reconstruction/construction plan be developed.

**Policy:** The policy is to adopt road and highway standards that retain the scenic roads, encourage the continuing maintenance of the road network, and adopt standards and specifications that are designed to meet the needs for the assigned functions.

Although road maintenance is not strictly under the jurisdiction of the Planning Board, except for its responsibility to prepare a Capital Improvements Plan, the Master plan and Capital Improvements Plan should serve as a catalyst for all involved parties (Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Road Agent) to agree on a long-term road maintenance/reconstruction/construction strategy.

## 6. Sewage Disposal and Water Supply

The goal is to maintain a sufficiently low development density that will allow for individual sewage disposal facilities and individual water supply. Such a goal is to be established under the existing water quality laws of the State of New Hampshire and those health regulations in the Town of Atkinson.

**Objective:** The objective is to avoid the large capital expenditure required to provide public sewer and water services. To assure the avoidance of town water and sewer, an objective is to provide for continued measures that allow such densities and such regulations addressing subsoil conditions that will keep individual water supplies and sewage disposal systems efficient without ground water or surface water pollution.

**Policy:** The policy to attain such a goal and accomplish the objective is to provide for a detailed project review that will address soil and subsoil conditions. This will also require sufficiently low densities throughout the community so that water pollution will not occur, ensuring safe and sufficient water for the foreseeable future.

## **7. Maintenance of the Master Plan**

A master plan is not a static document. Information and conditions change, and the citizens of Atkinson need to provide continued input to the planning process.

**Objective:** The Master Plan and associated capital improvement program will be kept up to date on an ongoing basis.

**Policy:** The Master Plan and CIP will be reviewed annually by the Planning Board to determine if significant changes have occurred in its underlying assumptions. Any changes of these underlying assumptions will be cause for an update.

### **Summary:**

It should be recognized that the articulation of goals and the establishment of objectives along with the policies necessary to carry out these goals are an ongoing process. Goals and objectives along with the appropriate policies for implementation may be added to, amended and changed as necessary and should be addressed as a basic element in the Master Planning process.



At the time of preparation of the 1980 Master Plan, Atkinson was coming off of the rapid growth period which had occurred in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and the Planning Board was looking for ways to avert similar growth patterns in the future. At the same time, the Planning Board recognized the need for zoning which was based upon scientific documentation. The Town was learning to recognize a need to integrate the rights of the individual landowner with restrictions designed to protect the rights of many to enjoy their property and preserve their property values. Thus, the Introduction of the 1980 Master Plan includes an extensive treatise on the importance of land-use regulations to promote orderly growth and protect the larger community from the actions of individuals.

By the mid 1970's, it was apparent that the majority of Atkinson citizens recognized a need for strong, but fair, land-use regulations. In 1976, a separate Conservation Commission was appointed which, two years later, prepared a Wetlands Ordinance, subsequently adopted by the Town. This measure was supported strongly in all community surveys. In the following years, Atkinson completely revamped its regulations and repeatedly supported this process at the polls. In addition to comprehensive zoning and revised and strengthened subdivision regulations, the town adopted Site Plan Review regulations, an Excavation Regulation, road construction specifications, and National Fire Association Standards.

Atkinson residents place a significant value on the preservation of the rural character of the Town, as shown by the results of all four surveys conducted over the past 18 years. The 1985 survey indicated that 58% of the residents chose to live in Atkinson for this reason, and the 1998 survey results confirm the residents' desire to maintain the Town's rural character. The strong value placed on maintenance of open space and preservation of wetlands, along with the related desire to responsibly control growth, must be recognized in developing future land-use regulations.

### **The 1998 Update**

This most recent update to the Master Plan strives to incorporate the history of prior planning efforts in Atkinson, along with current data, philosophy and citizen opinion. In addition, a new format has been introduced with the hopes that from this update forward the Plan itself becomes a usable "living document" that is both easy to comprehend, utilize, and update. Individually, the chapters stand alone for comprehensive treatment of particular issues and for ease of updating on a singular approach; together they form a more complete and in-depth picture of the current status of the Town of Atkinson and a more tangible and direct vision of specific issues and solutions for Atkinson's future.

First, there are larger margins. These margins are provided to allow people using this document to keep notes and maintain a constant "file" of data with the Plan itself, for when updates are necessary or when decisions and interpretations are made that enhance the usability and understandability of the document. Second, the document itself is presented in a three-ring binder format to allow for individualized updating when needed. Rather than viewing the

document only as a comprehensive singular statement, this choice reinforces the concept that the Master Plan is a compilation of statements of a variety of issues and that each chapter presents its own unique policy. This format eases individualized updating and permits the involvement of numerous town boards and commissions in the process. Furthermore, changes in the status of public facilities or policy shifts regarding public services can be reflected in an update to that chapter without having to reproduce the entire plan. Chapters can be easily discarded, making way for the new, and the Plan will thrive as the living changing document it is meant to be.

Each Chapter will be individually numbered and provided with its own date of revision. Furthermore, with each revision a sheet at the front of the Plan will include the latest update for each chapter. Recommendations will appear both at the end of each individual chapter, as well as within a separate recommendations section which can be more easily reviewed.

In preparation for the writing of this Master Plan, the Planning Board conducted an informal survey, the goal of which was to ascertain how Atkinson residents feel about their community, what they feel are the Town's strengths and weaknesses, what is special about Atkinson and how they would like to see their community develop in the future. The results of this survey have influenced the production of this Master Plan.

The Master Plan provides the basic data and rationale and expresses the broad principles which serve as guidelines to the Planning Board, Selectmen, and other town bodies as they plan for the future.

The Planning Board is authorized under the provisions of RSA 674 et seq. to develop a strategy, in the form of a Master Plan, to guide the future growth of the community.

This document is that plan. It replaces the existing plan and brings it up to date with respect to the changing needs of the community.

The Plan serves many purposes. It brings together an analysis of the social, economic and physical characteristics of the community, the distribution of population, income statistics, where people work, the capacity of public facilities, and the amounts of open space, forest, and playgrounds. The Master Plan also provides a means to coordinate land development with Town facilities, including schools, recreation, police, and fire, as well as other services provided by the Town. The Plan serves as a guide in the making of daily decisions regarding development and the use of land in terms of their long-range consequences.

Today more than ever, planners must become ever more involved with environmental concerns. The conflict between growth and preservation of natural and cultural resources becomes more and more apparent as the amount of open, developable land diminishes. The balance between property rights and regulation becomes more focused as governments struggle to preserve disappearing resources that are an integral part of community identity, health, and well-being. The Master Plan must provide a statement concerning the objectives for the protection of wetlands, streams, forests and floodplains. The tenets of historic preservation strive to keep important the buildings that are a part of the permanent environment. Through these actions our



future generations and current citizens will be able to connect with and learn the lessons of our past, while looking toward the future.

The people we serve are the people of Atkinson. This is not just the people who vote at today's election, but our ancestors, and most importantly our children who stand to inherit the results of our decisions and actions. It is they who will benefit from the solid and well-reasoned decisions we make today; they will be forced to suffer the consequences of our mistakes. This Master Plan must reflect these interests and priorities, and the programs that are implemented must help the community survive and maintain the desired quality of life which is a critical aspect of Atkinson's identity as a town. At the same time, we must be aware that people have also become more sophisticated in pursuing special interests. They are better informed, understand the laws and procedures have greater political skills, and are more persistent. They have learned that planning brings order to change, and therefore, seek to influence the process of planning. The challenge of planners is to balance the demands of competing interests into a dynamic community consensus sufficient to enhance their decisions.

In the future, planners will continue to work under conditions of scarce economic resources and will constantly be faced with the competing priorities of residents, neighborhoods, interest groups, and both resident and non-resident developers. The delivery of adequate public services will pose serious problems for the foreseeable future. As our town continues to grow, it will undergo recurring adjustments. It is the task of the planners to minimize the impacts these cycles of change have on the town's residents.