

# **Highland Plantation**

## **2015 Comprehensive Plan**

### **Review Draft**

**Highland Plantation Comprehensive Plan  
(Review Draft)**

**Contents:**

| <b>Chapter</b>                               | <b>page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| 1 Highland Plantation's Heritage             | 1           |
| 2 Population Trends and Issues               | 4           |
| 3 Economic Trends and Issues                 | 9           |
| 4 Land Use and Housing                       | 14          |
| Existing Land Use Map                        | 21          |
| 5 Land and Water Resources                   | 22          |
| Natural Resources Map                        | 26          |
| 6 Community Services and Facilities          | 27          |
| 7 Transportation and Recreation              | 31          |
| Transportation Map                           | 33          |
| 8 Planning for the Future                    | 34          |
| Vision and Public Participation              | 34          |
| Implementation                               | 35          |
| 9 General Planning Goals and Recommendations | 37          |
| Regional Coordination                        | 43          |
| 10 Land Use Plan                             | 45          |
| Land Use Plan Map                            | 49          |
| 11 Capital Investment Plan                   | 50          |

# 1: Highland Plantation's Heritage

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## A Brief History:

The first settlers in Highland Plantation probably arrived around 1800 as part of the Bingham Purchase. An early census in 1820 shows 28 settlers in Highland. Until 1830 it was called Smith Town probably after one of the prominent early families. By 1837 it had acquired the name Highland Plantation. Many town records were lost in a fire, which leaves gaps in our history that are hard to fill.

Highland touches on the upper end of a flat river bottom but most of the town's landscape is steep and mountainous. The area suitable for development is small and that is reflected in population size compared to neighboring towns. There is one paved road; it extends from North New Portland to the outlet of Flagstaff Lake. It is the only public road access through Highland, Lexington, Dead River, Carrying Place and Pierce Pond. The Long Falls Dam Road was originally the stagecoach road that connected several villages between North New Portland and Eustis. Later it was designated as Route 16. The creation of Flagstaff Lake in 1949 flooded the villages of Flagstaff, Bigelow Station, and Dead River and left Highland and the other townships isolated on a dead end road. The Route 16 designation was reassigned to the route through Kingfield and Carrabassett.

The first homesteads gradually grew into rural settlements based on lumber and agriculture. As more people arrived, it was inevitable that businesses were started to serve these communities. Recreation – hunting and fishing – also became part of the economic engine. Farms, stores, sawmills, brick yards, blacksmith shops and lodging places were located all along the old Route 16. There was steady growth until 1850 at the peak of the long log lumber years. Highland reputedly reached a population of 144, a mark which it has never since regained. That began a slow decline all the way to 1970 with only an occasional small rise.

By 1970 there were only 3 employers left in Highland: Pinkham's sawmill sawed hardwood bolts into rough squares for turning mills in Kingfield. The Highland Lodge provided lodging primarily for hunters and the lodge store had gas pumps and a lunch counter that was a local gathering place. The third and most promising employer was Driftwood Arts. This business gathered wood from Flagstaff Lake and turned it into aquarium stock.

With a shortage of land available for development, Highland always had a practical population limit. The more mountainous land was utilized for lumbering, first by families, then local lumber companies, and finally by large companies operating in a global market place with pulp stock being the dominant objective. In 1970 the population of Highland was down to 23 hardy souls.

During the 70's, big changes took place. These changes were not the result of local efforts; they were imposed by State government. In order to ensure a continuous supply of wood to paper and lumber mills, the State of Maine introduced the Tree Growth property assessment program. Tree Growth classification results in a lower tax if the landowner keeps the land in production and imposes a penalty for acreage removed from tree growth. The Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) was established to plan for and regulate development in the unorganized territories – which included Highland Plantation. The State also decided that the public lots in the UT were not being utilized enough so these were taken over by the Bureau of Public Lands to be managed mostly for timber production.

Highland once had extensive deer wintering areas. LURC's regulation allowed large scale industrial logging throughout the area. The result of 40 years of such "protection" is the loss of nearly all of our deer yard and a collapse of the deer herd. Logging in the Sandy Stream valley has clear cut nearly the entire lower watershed. The valley was not only a large deer yard but held several tributaries with fantastic wild brook trout habitat. The resulting change in water quality has degraded that fishery.

As the quality of hunting and fishing declined, so did the recreation business, resulting in the closing of the Highland Lodge. The store sputtered along but the underground gas tanks were removed, foreshadowing the end. After several attempts at revival, the store now has shut down. Pinkham's Mill shut down in the 80's due to a lack of high quality wood supply and cheap labor competition from other countries. The Driftwood Arts building burned and the owner was unable to replace it due to LURC shoreland setback issues. He moved his business to New Portland and we lost the last employer left in town.

Since 1970, the population of Highland has rebounded some. Part of that is a new interest in rural living and part is better road conditions for commuters. There are about 70 of us now. Our biggest expense is education for the children. If one family with several children moves to town it can cause quite a jump in property taxes. When the town had control of the public wood lots we could use wood revenues to cushion the blow – an emergency reserve.

In 2008, the mountains of Highland were eyed by developers with a plan for a grid scale industrial wind project. This project had the potential to change the character and quality of our lives completely and we discovered that, as in past experiences, we would have no local control. Without our consent, we were placed on a map for expedited wind development and under LURC jurisdiction as with other UT towns we had no right of

approval for this development. The permit for parts of this project was denied due to environmental impacts but the developers have promised to return.

The people of Highland Plantation, whether in favor of the project or not, realized their vulnerability. We cannot predict the future, and without local control we are unable to protect our way of life. In March of 2014, we voted at town meeting to explore the process of withdrawing from LUPC and taking over our own land use regulation.

Highland is not an easy place to live. The winters are harsh and there are no jobs, no stores, and few public services. We have to travel long distances for nearly everything. The people who have settled here are willing to live with all that in order to enjoy this beautiful, quiet natural landscape. We have a history of having our future shaped by outside forces. Now, it is time for us to have a plan in place and ordinances that protect our quality of life.

### **Historical Assets and Preservation Efforts:**

Highland's settlement pattern has been sparse in both space and time, and there is little in the way of archeological or historical artifacts to show for it. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) tracks and reports on historic assets, and has little on the record about Highland.

The MHPC does suggest that evidence of prehistoric settlement may exist along Sandy Stream and Michael Stream. Native Americans used stream valleys for travel and often camped on flat plains adjoining them. Since at one time there were more residents and businesses here, we should also find traces of early settlement in the valleys, such as evidence of log drives along Sandy Stream. The MHPC has identified one historic archeologic site at the base of Burnt Hill, but there could also be old cellar holes and trash piles along Long Falls Dam Road and the Sandy Stream valley.

The MHPC has not identified any historical buildings in Highland. The town has very few public or commercial buildings, which are usually the most likely candidates. The only one is the townhouse, a former one-room schoolhouse well-maintained and with the gravity of age but without unique architectural merit.

Highland cooperates with Lexington in an historical society. The historical society built and maintains a small building in Lexington, which houses a collection of artifacts, records, and other documents.

The town has no local control over development at this time. Any new development is reviewed by LUPC under their regulations which include archeological and historical protections.

## 2: Population Trends and Issues

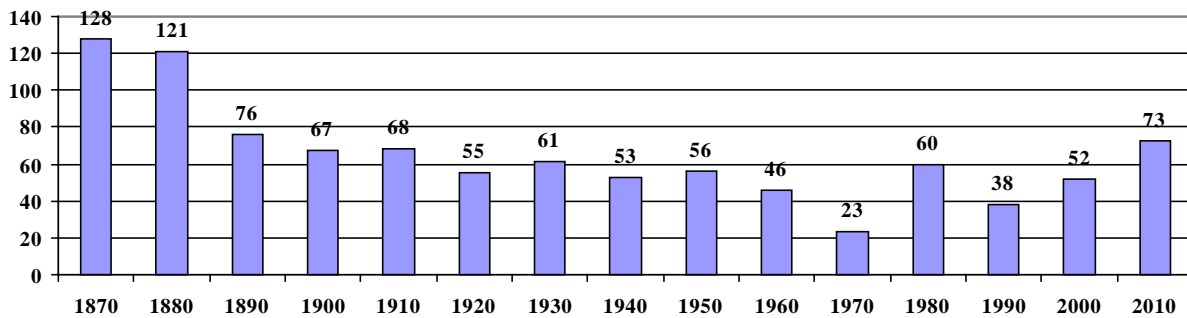
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This chapter contains a profile of the people of Highland Plantation using data from State and Federal sources. While cold, hard data cannot draw a complete picture of the community, it can identify trends and relationships that the town can look at in planning for its future. It comes with a *caveat* however: census data can be misleading in a town of Highland's size. For example, the 2010 US Census tells us there were 73 residents, but the First Assessor, who can name every one of us along with the year we arrived in town, can only account for 53. This report uses the census number, only because all of the resulting census breakdown figures are based on it.

### From the Past to the Present:

Any plan for the future must begin with a look at how we got to where we are today. The trends leading up to the present are likely to continue. The most easily-measured of these trends is Highland Plantation's population. Highland's demographic history begins in 1870, which was the first census year it was recognized as a separate place.

**Figure 1: Highland Plantation Population, 1870-2010**



The Nineteenth Century was a time when people had to live much closer to their work, and there was a lot of work in the woods or on small farms and businesses. As time progressed through the industrial revolution, two world wars and the depression, Highland's population gradually slipped. 1970 was the low-water mark (if the census can be believed). Since that time, Highland may have caught a small ripple of the back to the land movement and suburban sprawl.

Even though commercial activity has to a large extent disappeared, Highland's population is showing signs of recovering. There could be any number of reasons for this:

improved roads, retirees and empty-nesters, low land prices, and so on. The remainder of this chapter will flesh out the trends in population.

Highland's population trends mirror those of the rest of the region to some extent. Somerset County has a much more diversified economy than Highland, but has only grown by about 44 percent since 1920. Embden's population hit its low-water mark in 1950, but has about tripled since then. Anson's population didn't suffer the dip that other towns did in the mid-1900's (because it had an industrial base), but has only gained 13 percent in 100 years. New Portland's long-term population fluctuation is almost a duplicate of Highland's, except where we've apparently gained 35 residents since 1990, they've lost 71.

It would be difficult to predict any general trends in Highland. Though fifteen of our residents are retired, it isn't a good place for elderly people. It is a long way to the hospital and even a grocery run is a long drive on bad roads. After high school, most kids leave Highland to continue their education or take jobs outside of town. There are no employers to retain or draw younger working people but in these times with internet access available it is possible that young professionals could live here and work from home. Some seasonal property owners may plan to retire here, adding to our full time residency.

We are starting to come out of this recession and that could mean buyers looking for property. We have had a recent sale of a property that had been a rental (unoccupied) for several years. A young professional couple bought it for a seasonal camp. We also have a family of 3 who have moved here recently to take a job in Madison. Two longtime residents have moved and put their homes up for sale and these could sell with an improving economy. However, the fact that we can put a face on all these trends shows how tenuous our predictions can be.

Highland has a significant number of camps, which could produce a bump in *seasonal population*. There are nearly as many camps (25) as year-round houses (32). Though seasonal populations are not included in census numbers, towns with a big seasonal bump must often make plans for an increase in traffic, commerce, or public services. In those towns, however, most of the camps are along lakes, and are full during the summer. In Highland, the camps are more sparsely used, often as hunting or winter camps. Since hunting and winter recreation are more solitary lifestyles than lakefront living, any seasonal bump in population would be minimal and widely distributed in time and through the town.

### **The Changing Community:**

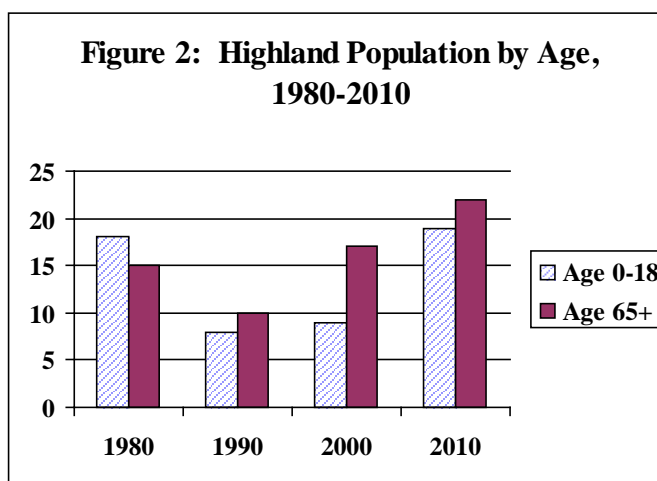
There are only two means by which local population levels change: *migration* and *natural change*. Natural change is the difference between births and deaths within the community. A town with a younger population will see a lot of births, thus a natural *increase*. A town with a lot of elderly is likely to see a natural *decline*.

Between 1990 and 2000, Highland Plantation saw one birth and five deaths for a net decrease of four. Between 2000 and 2010, there were four births, but 6 deaths, for a net decrease of two. So for the 20-year period, the town has lost population to natural change. This is to be expected in an area with aging population and few young people and is characteristic of Somerset County in general.

In that twenty year period, Highland gained 35 residents. That means there was a net *in-migration* of 41. In-migration means people moving into town. Since there is no employment-related reason (the chief motivation of migration), the explanation for why Highland saw that in-migration would go a long way to predicting the future.

An *aging population* is a significant factor in many places in Maine. The “baby boomers” (children born in the decades after WWII) has been the dominant characteristic of the American population since 1950, and as it ages it pulls demand for local services along with it. When baby boomers were young, we needed many more schools; when they were a little older, they forced the creation of suburbs, now they are nearing retirement, we are about to be faced with a sudden jump in demand for elderly services.

Figure 2 shows recent trends among the critical age groups. Overall population dropped dramatically in 1990, but the trends are clear. In 1980, there were more children than elderly. In 1990, the percentage of elderly jumped ahead and has stayed there, although 2010 shows a remarkable surge in new children (19 of them). Even with that surge, there is only one more child now than in 1980, versus seven more over 65.

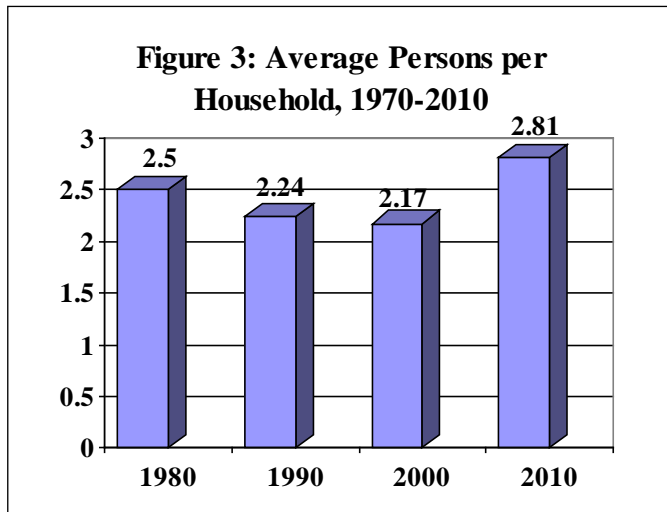


Nationwide, the aging of the baby boom will create economic issues such as a shortage of workers and increased demand for healthcare. While Highland will not have either of these issues locally, it will have more elderly. In 2010, there were 15 residents between age 50 and 65. That could almost double the number of elderly by 2025.

Any overall shift in the age of the population is reflected in the *median age*. The median age is the point at which half the people are younger; half are older. In 2010, Highland Plantation’s median age was 53.5. That makes our population a lot older than Somerset County. Back in 1980, the town and county were almost exactly the same age, at 31.7, but in 2010, the median age of the county was only 43.6. New Portland’s median age was 48.9 in 2010.



An aging population also has an impact on the *average number of people in a household*, though other factors come in to play, also. The average household size is a powerful statistic, because it indicates the need for housing (as will be discussed in Chapter 4). Household sizes have been dropping for many reasons nationwide: increased divorce rates, smaller families, young people living alone or as couples longer before having families, and older people able to live independently.



Highland Plantation has a small enough population that national trends may not hold up. As figure 3, to the left, shows, the average household size declined steadily until 2000, when it suddenly jumped. Since there were only 26 households in town, this blip can be accounted for by only two or three new families moving in (or by the actual count of our First Assessor being more accurate). And even though the median age grew between 2000 and 2010, the growth was nowhere near as dramatic as in prior decades.

The census does actually count and report the number of people in each home. Out of the 26 households in 2010, 20 of them were families, but only five were families with children (making for a whole lot of empty-nest couples). Only two of them were a husband-wife family, while three were single-mother families. Two of the 26 households consisted of a single elderly person. Another 12 households had at least one person over 65 in them.

### **The Future:**

The dynamics of the population can be turned into *projections for the future population*. The future population of Highland Plantation will change as a result of factors like the local economy, price and availability of housing, and the age of current residents. We can make a mathematical estimate of future population, but in a town as small as Highland Plantation a single family moving in or out can make the numbers look foolish.

Mathematical projections may be of little use in Highland, because they only work on large numbers. If we projected based on Highland's growth over the past 20 years (which is the normal way of projecting) Highland's population could grow to 90 by 2020 and over 105 by 2030. The official projections from the State of Maine are done this way and estimate that Highland Plantation's population will be 87 in 2020 and 100 in 2030.

A better measuring stick for a town the size of Highland is the change in the status and numbers of housing units. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the census reported that

the town had 26 occupied housing units in 2010, compared to 24 in 2000. In 1990, however, the town had only 17 occupied homes and 23 fewer total units. So there was either a mini building boom in the 90's, or the census taker couldn't find a lot of houses.

Population growth is limited to the housing available. The census reported that as of 2010, five units were unoccupied (not including the 25 listed as "seasonal.") Four of those were for sale. The population could easily grow by a dozen if only those homes for sale were occupied. Another path to greater population would be conversion of seasonal housing units to year-round. This is a common occurrence in towns where the seasonal housing is on a lakeshore, but in Highland most of the camps would be hunting camps, limiting their utility or desirability for year-round use.

The final path to growth would be new home-building. Over the past 20 years, the census says there have been 24 new houses built in Highland, ten of them camps. But local records show that only a single new house (seasonal) has been built between 2000 and 2015. If there continued to be seven new houses built every ten years, that alone could add 15-20 residents per decade to the population. The drawback is that there is an extremely limited amount of available land, and new building lots would probably have to be created through subdivision. A more suitable estimate of future growth would be 1-3 new houses every ten years, and 3-9 new residents. That means a projection of 75-80 in 2020 and 85 or so by 2030.

Merging all of this information together, we get a picture of changes in Highland since 1990. Even though the population has been growing steadily since then, it hasn't been the same kind of growth. In the 90's, several new houses were built, but the people that moved in to town were older, without children. Since 2000, home-building essentially stopped, but young families took the place of older ones. Young families are the future of the town, and if we can determine why they came and what would keep them here, we can continue this trend into the future.

### 3: Economic Trends and Issues

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Understanding the state of the local economy helps a town to plan for future growth or change. Though we know that Highland is not a center of economic activity, we can use the data we have to profile our current economic conditions and prospects for the future.

A note about the data in this chapter: Most of it comes from the U.S. Census. Beyond population and basic housing tallies, the census does not count every data bit. Economic numbers are based on a statistical sample. This sample used to be called the long form and was sent to only about one in six households, but now is called the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is updated every year, but is based on five years of tiny samples. This provides very accurate information for groups of thousands, but in a town the size of Highland may produce some wowsers. For example, Table 1 shows 70 residents of working age, even though the 2010 actual count listed only 58.

#### Workers and Employment:

The essential element of a local economy is the workforce. The “workforce” includes both those currently with a job and those unemployed. It is not exactly the same as the “working-age population,” which is everyone over age 16, including retired and disabled. Table 1, below, provides a profile of the *workforce and employment* in Highland Plantation according to the ACS.

**Table 1: Workforce Changes, 1990-2010**

|                               | 1990 | 2000 | Change<br>from 1990 | 2010 | Change<br>from 2000 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|
| Male Working Age Population   | 14   | 20   | 43 %                | 30   | 50 %                |
| In Workforce                  | 9    | 8    | -11 %               | 7    | -12 %               |
| Employed (April 1)            | 9    | 6    | -50 %               | 5    | -17 %               |
| Female Working Age Population | 18   | 29   | 61 %                | 40   | 38 %                |
| In Workforce                  | 10   | 11   | 10 %                | 9    | -18 %               |
| Employed (April 1)            | 10   | 9    | -11 %               | 9    | ---                 |

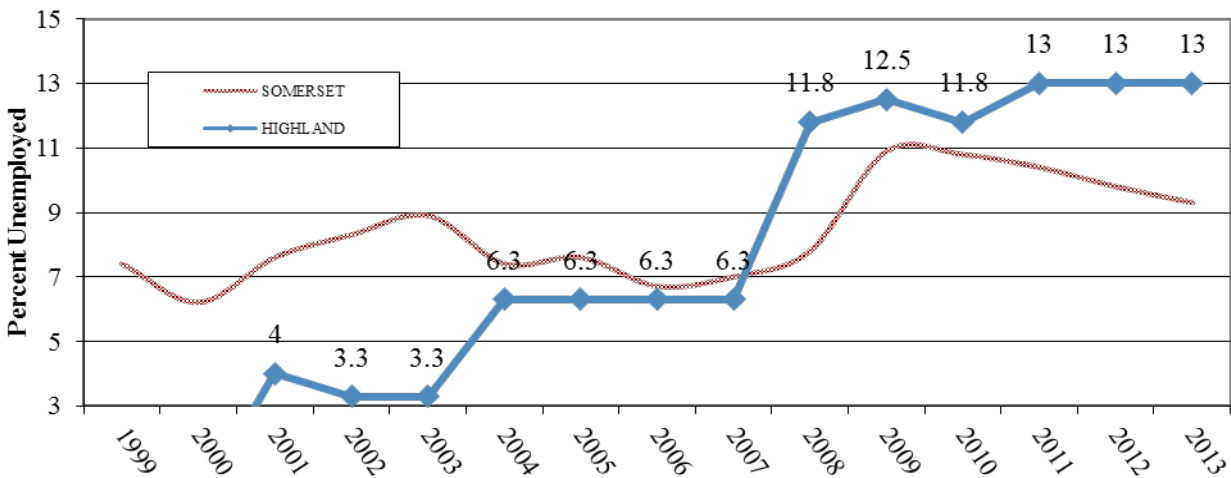
Source: US Census, American Community Survey

According to ACS estimates, less than half of the working age population is in the labor force. That means more than half are either retired or not seeking work. For both men and women, the number of people in the workforce has declined since 1990, again

suggesting an increased number of retired. We have a history of more working women than men, which is unusual for any community.

The American Community Survey is a poor estimator of actual employment, since it is the average of five years of statistical samples. More accurate and current figures are reported by the Maine Department of Labor (DOL). Figure 4 shows the average annual unemployment rates for both Highland Plantation and Somerset County since 1999.

**Figure 4: Unemployment Trends, 1999-2013**



Again, Highland’s small population size makes data look a little odd. For most of the mid-2000’s the unemployment rate looked stable because the DOL found only 16 workers from Highland and one of them was unemployed. In 2008, there were suddenly two unemployed, with 15 working. Since 2011, the workforce has been at 23, but there have been 3 persons unemployed. Somerset County has a lot larger population size showing more accurate economic trends, particularly the national recession in 2008-9 and subsequent recovery.

A workforce analysis is not complete without examining job opportunities available to the workforce. Two aspects of this are the types of jobs occupied or available, and the level of qualification that residents have for those jobs.

Many jobs are dependent on a certain *level of education*. As a general rule, higher levels of education equate to better job opportunities and higher income levels (though there are plenty of exceptions). If we were to plan for economic development, it would not make sense to create professional jobs, for example, if there were few college graduates available in the labor force.

The ACS estimates the level of educational attainment in the community, figured as a percentage of the population over age 25 (estimated to be 68 in 2010.) In 2010, there were

six residents of Highland Plantation with a Bachelor's Degree, nine percent of the +25 population. Eighty-five percent of the +25 population – 58 residents -- were high school graduates, and some of those had some college education but not a degree. In 2000, Highland had 31 high school graduates (67 percent), including four college graduates. By way of comparison, 14.8 percent of Somerset County are college graduates, and 87 percent are high school graduates.

The ACS tracks the *Industry* and *Occupation* of Highland Plantation workers. This is intended to give a profile over time of how employment is shifting, but the census keeps re-defining the categories to make it difficult to compare.

In 2010, fully half of Highland's workers worked in either health care or education (combined by the ACS for unknown reasons). Nothing else was even close, although always remember it's a small statistical sample. It is probably fairly accurate, since in 2000, the census thought that 93 percent of workers (all but one) were in those industries. It can't be a surprise, then, that only half of all workers work in the private sector (although "self-employed" is not considered private sector employment).

The definition of "occupations" actually provides a better connection to the workforce than industry, as it describes the actual jobs that people are employed in. According to the ACS, 5 residents worked at management or business occupations, 5 in sales or service jobs, and 4 in production or transportation jobs. This is roughly the same as in 2000, with a small reduction in the latter occupation.

Since Highland Plantation is clearly dependent on a *regional economy* for its jobs, we realize that most residents drive to work, and some a considerable distance. According to the ACS, all but one worker drove to their jobs regularly, and the average commute was 52 minutes each way. (The average for Somerset County is only 25 minutes.) In 1990 the average travel time was only 22 minutes, but that was probably when the mill was still operating in New Portland.

The census reports much more specific data regarding the distribution of jobs in terms of commuting patterns, although, again, with a very small sample size. Their most recent estimate says that about equal numbers of residents work in Bangor, Jackman, Pittsfield, and Augusta. Strangely enough, not a single person commutes in to Highland for a job. Also, the census did not pick up anyone who both lived and worked in this town.

### **Household Incomes:**

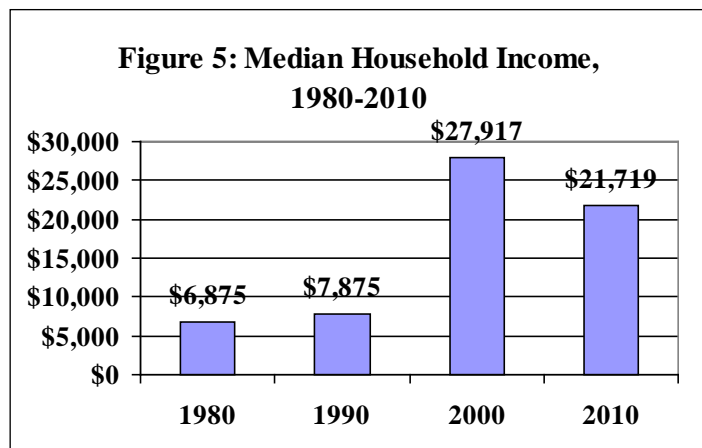
A final measure of the strength of the local economy is its *income levels*. Census data can provide information necessary to develop a general profile of the town.

There are two common measures of income. Perhaps the most well-known is "per capita income." This is an artificial figure created by taking the entire income of an area

and dividing it by the population. Its only appropriate use is comparison between populations. The other is “median household income.” The median is the point at which half of the households are above and half below, and households are the basic planning unit of the community, allowing us, for example, to determine whether housing in the town is affordable or not.

In 2010, Highland Plantation’s estimated per capita income was \$17,104. This is a substantial increase from the 2000 estimate of \$10,038. By way of comparison, the per capita income figure for Somerset County was \$21,025 in 2010, Franklin County’s was \$21,744, and New Portland’s was \$22,055. Rural areas tend to have lower income levels than a county average, so Highland’s is in the expected range, and growing.

Figure 5 illustrates the growth in median household income in Highland Plantation. The item that sticks out in this chart is the 2000 median income. This is probably a sampling error. Median household income in 2010 was \$21,719. If we throw out the 2000 number, it looks as if household incomes have almost tripled in 20 years. That is not quite as dramatic as it seems, however; inflation over that period was 69 percent. But it still indicates better income levels. This may relate to the data above which shows people forced to commute further for their jobs.



A household income is not equal to the wage earned by the principal breadwinner. If there were two or more wage-earners, the income would include all. If there were no wage-earners, the household would still show income from social security or another source. This is the case in Highland. The median wage in 2010 was \$31,250 – higher than the median household income – but 75 percent of all households in Highland receive some form of social security. The average household income from social security is only \$19,342.

**Local Trends and Prospects:**

There are no employers in Highland. The large landowners don't employ anyone from Highland at this time. Residents with jobs work outside of town. There are no water and sewer utilities, and even electric power is available in only limited areas, giving us extremely limited prospects for future commercial development.

What kinds of prospects does this leave us? The limited reach of electricity and the lack of cell phone and high-speed internet, on top of the poor roads and lack of local labor supply, means that it would take a really unique type of business to be attracted.

There are four active businesses in town now and three employ only their owners. One of those is a self-storage business and the other two are recreational lodging businesses. Jack Pitch Lodge is open to anyone but the focus is hunting. Claybrook Mountain Lodge is open year round for all types of outdoor recreation. The fourth business is the road contractor, who has an equipment base on Old County Road.

Perhaps the best opportunity for bringing revenue into town, if not jobs, is outdoor recreation. With the Huts and Trails System to our north, Highland could develop a connecting trail system and market itself as an access point. We already have good snowmobile trails in town but nothing designated as an official ITS trail. ATV's are growing in popularity. There is an ATV trail through Lexington and getting a connector trail to that from Highland would not be too difficult. Access points would need to be developed and supported. By building the recreation business in this way we might attract enough people to the area to support a small convenience store again. This might also help our existing recreational businesses get on firmer footing.

Since Sandy Stream valley was once a major deer yard and wild brook trout nursery we could work with IFW to see if there is a way to restore or repair some of that critical habitat. Another related potential business is simply watching the wildlife.

With traditional resource-based industry in decline, new prospects have emerged, including development of wind power, mining, or extracting our groundwater. A large industrial development will have economic impact even if it may result in few local jobs. In this event, it will be critical to have zoning control to protect the community, existing land uses and the landscape, as well as giving us leverage in any negotiations. The community is not interested in encouraging this type of business, however, so would not consider a TIF policy.

Planners in Somerset County recently completed an economic development plan for the upper part of the county. It addresses mostly the Kennebec Valley north of Bingham, but some of its recommendations could affect Highland:

- Strengthen marketing for Tourism and Recreation;
- Protect Access and Quality of Natural Resources;
- Support Manufacturing;
- Advance Healthcare;
- Invest in Connectivity;
- Prepare the Workforce of the Future;
- Foster a Culture of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development.

## 4: Land Use and Housing

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### Land Development Patterns:

Almost all development in Highland is residential, with only four active commercial properties. Three of these four blend well into residential neighborhoods. Traditionally, Highland's commercial or industrial activities have been small enough to be compatible with residential uses. With the potential for high-impact industrial development on the horizon, we should establish development rules to protect residential properties.

Residential development in Highland is confined to a small area from the south boundary on Long Falls Dam Road to a pair of camps 3 miles to the north, just beyond the crest of the hill. Almost all residences are located on one of four roads; Long Falls Dam Road, Sandy Stream Road, Old County Road, or Howard Hill Road (see *Existing Land Use Map*, page 21). Power lines end well before the last camps. Beyond the camps are extensive industrial tracts and State-owned public lots. This establishes a practical limit on the area suitable for new development.

A landowner wanting to sell a lot can divide only once in five years without triggering subdivision review, which through the LUPC is time-consuming and expensive. Extending power more than a few hundred feet off its existing limits would make new development cost-prohibitive. Local rules making it easier to buy and build might attract new residents both seasonal and full time.

Although development is confined to roadsides in a small portion of town, there is not enough density within Highland to be construed as a village area. This may have been the case years back, when the Highland Lodge and store was still operating at the junction of Long Falls Dam and Sandy Stream Roads. Current LUPC zoning shows a small area of d-gn zone at the store and a somewhat larger area of d-rs zone to the east and west (see *Map*). But there is no environmental or public service rationale for this or another portion of the settled area to be the nucleus of a new village.

In addition to the abandoned store and lodge, a self-storage business is located near the crossroads. The Claybrook Lodge is located on Howard Hill Road and the Jack Pitch Lodge at the upper end of Long Falls Dam Road. The contractor's salt shed is on Old County Road. An old mill building (no longer salvageable) sits on Long Falls Dam Road about ¼ mile north of the Sandy Stream crossroads and adjacent to the fire house. The townhouse is a further mile-plus along the road. The town doesn't have its own town



garage for road maintenance. Our contractor does plowing, sanding, and road maintenance out of Old County Road. Though his building was permitted by LURC there is concern over ground water contamination from salt-laden runoff leaking from the facility. That is the sum total of commercial and public buildings in Highland (See *Map*).

Our greatest asset is our wild undeveloped landscape. Protecting it is one of our main objectives. We wake up to it every morning and it is where we see the last light of each day. Establishing land use standards for this sensitive area will be a priority. A map of development zones is essential and records of all development will be kept.

In contrast to potential industrial development, adding a few homes, camps, or small businesses would increase our tax base without having much impact on the character and quality of this place. Protecting our mountain views and rugged streams from further degradation and allowing critical habitats to recover might attract new residents. With interest generated by the new Huts and Trails System, the Bigelow Preserve, Flagstaff Lake, and the popularity of people powered recreation, more people are discovering our area. Working with neighboring towns to add connecting trails – both non-motorized and motorized – might make living or starting a business in Highland more attractive.

In general the existing LUPC regulatory structure (*LUPC Rules*, Chapter 10) fits well with the rural character of Highland. The LUPC districts are shown on the *Existing Land Use Map*. Protection zones cover areas roughly equivalent to floodplains and municipal shoreland zones, and development zones include areas near the crossroads and on Howard Hill Road. The majority of Highland (not labelled) is the M-gn general management zone. Chapter 10 includes basic dimensional standards:

- 40,000 square feet per lot,
- 100 foot road frontage for residential, 200 foot for commercial,
- 75 or 100 foot setback from shorelines,
- 50 foot setback from roads, 15 foot setback from side and rear lot lines,
- Maximum 30 percent lot coverage.

Should we add protections for landowners who anticipate future residential development on more remote properties? Would LUPC-based rules be adequate to protect residential areas from problems with small industrial activities? We will need to establish a planning board and board of appeals, although qualified volunteers will be at a premium. Our new permitting standards should be efficient and simple but effective. Our CEO will need to stay abreast of current best practices with adequate training

### **Forestry and Farming:**

There are no longer any farms in Highland; once-cleared open fields have grown back to forest except for three properties. Along Sandy Stream Road there is a small field that is still mowed. The Marjorie Gray property includes an overgrown twenty acre field

and there is a two acre field at Claybrook Lodge. These old fields provide a diversity of habitat beneficial to several species of birds and animals. Based against the elevation of the height of land the fields are important resting places for annual bird migrations. There are only two other open spaces and both are rapidly growing in.

At least 95 percent of the land area in Highland Plantation is forested (or cutover) and undeveloped. Of the 28,000+ acres of forested land, 23,900 acres (83 percent) of it is in Tree Growth, with another 1,000 or so in public lots. Highland has more land and a higher percentage in Tree Growth than all but two towns in Somerset County (Caratunk and West Forks.) The majority of land in Highland is in a single ownership managed exclusively for timber production. Management plans are not required to be filed with the town and there is no indication that it is managed sustainably. Poor utilization and clearcuts with poor regeneration are common sights.

The most recent Maine Forest Service harvesting data is from 2012. In the ten-year period between 2003 and 2012, harvesting amounted to 10,512 acres, more than 1/3 the land area of Highland. Of that, about 4,300 acres were selectively harvested, 6,200 acres – 22 percent of Highland – were clearcut (including shelterwood). That encompassed 86 operations. The largest single year was 2003, when 93 acres were selectively cut and almost 1,700 clearcut.

Commercial forestry activities continue on both small private wood lots and with the large landowners. The large operations are using mechanical harvesting on most of their lands while wood lot owners most often rely on hand crews. The large landowners have reduced their inventory of mature wood and the mountains in Highland are covered with recent cuttings and crisscrossed with logging roads. Residents are concerned with the impact of these operations on habitat, on the visual appeal of the town, and on other environmental factors. There is also the concern that, once the marketable timber is gone, forest land could be sold for “wilderness tracts”. Overall, it is felt that large, absentee landowners do not pay the kind of attention to land stewardship that they should.

### **Residential Development in Highland:**

The existing supply, quality, and availability of housing in Highland Plantation is a factor in the overall growth and health of the town. Although town government has very little control over housing stocks, it could possibly get involved in addressing problems. If a large proportion of housing is unsafe, for example, or not energy-efficient, there are grants that the Town can apply for to help. If housing prices rise to the point where new houses are not affordable, that presents a whole new set of problems in getting people to move to town, considering our job prospects.

The 2010 census indicated that there were 31 year-round houses in Highland and 26 camps. An actual windshield count in 2015 came up with 30 year-round houses and 23 camps. Table 2, below, shows the progression of housing by type. The housing counts

reflect the population trends in Figure 1 (Chapter 2). There is no housing increase in the 2000's to correspond to the population increase, but the average household size increased.

**Table 2: Highland Plantation Housing, by Type and Occupancy, 1980-2010**

|                     | <u>1980</u> | <u>1990</u> | <u>2000</u> | <u>2010</u> |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total Housing Units | 30          | 33          | 56          | 57          |
| Year-round Homes    | 24          | 18          | 30          | 31          |
| Mobile Homes        | 2           | 4           | 6           | 14          |
| Seasonal            | 6           | 15          | 26          | 26          |
| Rentals             | 0           | 2           | 3           | 0           |

Source: US Census

The total number of housing units rose between 1980 and 2010, with the growth of year-round housing at 30 percent (nearly all in the 1990's) and a huge increase in camps in the 80's and 90's. The number of mobile homes has increased substantially, but they have only recently become worth considering in our climate. Some of the mobile homes in town may also be classified as "seasonal." There were no renters found in 2010, although there were several vacant houses that could have been "for rent." With few rentals, one could assume a fairly slow turnover in population. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), just over half of 2010 residents moved into their current homes in the 1990's.

The growth in housing units seems dramatic, but is not too unusual for this area. As Table 3 shows, other towns in this areas, particularly small towns, share similar growth rates, often extending into to 2000's. Between 1990 and 2010, New Portland increased their housing stock by 30 percent (even though their population has dropped) and Embden by 33 percent. Many of New Portland's additional homes were classified as "seasonal," while even Kingfield and Anson, neither known as resort areas, gained 60 or more seasonal homes. In Emben, over half their total housing stock is seasonal.

**Table 3: Housing Stock by Town, 1990-2010**

| Town         | Total Housing |      |      | Seasonal Housing |      |      |
|--------------|---------------|------|------|------------------|------|------|
|              | 1990          | 2000 | 2010 | 1990             | 2000 | 2010 |
| Anson        | 1029          | 1193 | 1300 | 52               | 99   | 110  |
| Embden       | 713           | 893  | 950  | 362              | 501  | 516  |
| Industry     | 432           | 487  | 625  | 166              | 158  | 210  |
| Kingfield    | 594           | 659  | 695  | 123              | 164  | 193  |
| New Portland | 465           | 504  | 605  | 126              | 200  | 224  |
| Highland     | 33            | 56   | 57   | 15               | 26   | 25   |

Source: US Census

Very little data exists on the *age and condition* of the town's housing stock. The census does ask questions such as how old a house is and whether it has modern plumbing and heating, but this is based on the ACS statistical sample, and the samples are so small that in a town the size of Highland Plantation, the figure is little more than a guess.

According to the ACS, about 18 percent of the houses in Highland Plantation were built prior to 1940. The percentage of pre-war homes in Highland is relatively low, however. On average in Somerset County, 28 percent of homes were built before 1940, and in New Portland, the figure is 33 percent! Pre-war homes tend to be very well constructed, but may have outdated plumbing and electrical systems and inadequate insulation.

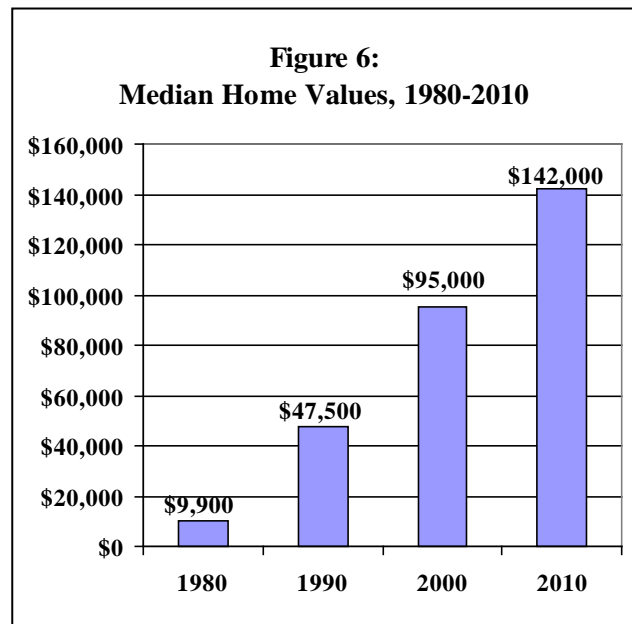
Successive censuses indicate that a large number of houses were built in the 1990's. Housing values also increased dramatically (see below) so we can make a guess that the new homes built were of quite good quality, on average. The ACS estimates that only two year-round housing units lack a complete kitchen, and all have adequate plumbing. The ACS also estimates that 1/3 of the town heat their homes primarily with wood, while the rest use oil.

### Housing Prices and Affordability:

The price and affordability of housing is often a significant factor in the economic life of a town. Housing prices are generally set by the open market, but if supply and demand get out of whack it can result in insufficient housing for prospective residents, or price inflation driving out elderly residents.

Figure 6 charts the progression of housing values in Highland Plantation according to the ACS. These are median values, meaning half are above and half below, and they are not actual sale prices but homeowners' estimates of value. They also do not include camps or mobile homes, or houses on properties where the acreage is worth more than the house.

According to these estimates, housing values have risen briskly since 1980. The trend is on an upward trajectory and the 2010 median value of \$142,000 exceeds every town in Somerset County except Embden and Ripley. In all of Somerset County, the 2010 median is just shy of \$110,000.



Because this trend is so dramatic, we have to question whether it is accurate. Ordinary inflation accounts for some of the increase, but over the past two decades, it has been 32 and 28.5 percent per decade, accounting for about a 69 percent rise. Far more likely is that the actual housing stock has turned over. It's likely that in 1980, much of the housing

was very basic and utilitarian. Since then, new homes have been built that were well up in the price range. Remember from Figure 5 (Chapter 3) how household incomes have tripled since 1990. The trebled income levels are mirrored in housing prices. The data seems to indicate a large turnover to households that can afford nicer homes.

This brings forward the reason why home values are important. If they become a financial burden on households, the town's economy (and tax revenues) can decline. The general rule is that housing costs should not exceed 30 percent of a household's income. That's a selling price between 3 and 3.4 times the annual income, depending on the interest rate available. Highland Plantation's median household income of roughly \$22,000 should only be able to afford a \$66-75,000 home. What is happening in Highland? There are two possibilities: first, that the census estimate is wrong and the median income is a lot higher than sampled; second, that new residents in town are bringing their money with them when they build new homes, so don't have to rely on income. This might be the case if the newcomers were retirees or wealthy.

At any rate, there is not a very strong link to housing market conditions in Highland simply because of the factors involved. Land is limited because of a few large ownerships and the lack of widespread power, yet demand is limited by the lack of economic opportunity. People are drawn to Highland by choice, not necessity. The only time that those high housing prices will come into play is when the owners seek to sell.

Because affordability is a national concern, the ACS asks homeowners about the relationship between their housing costs and ability to pay. It reports households' housing costs as a percentage of their income. In Highland, about 25 percent of households are paying more than 30 percent of their income for their current homes. Chances are, these are retired households who are using savings to augment their income. There are no renters in town (according to the census), so there are no "temporary" financial situations.

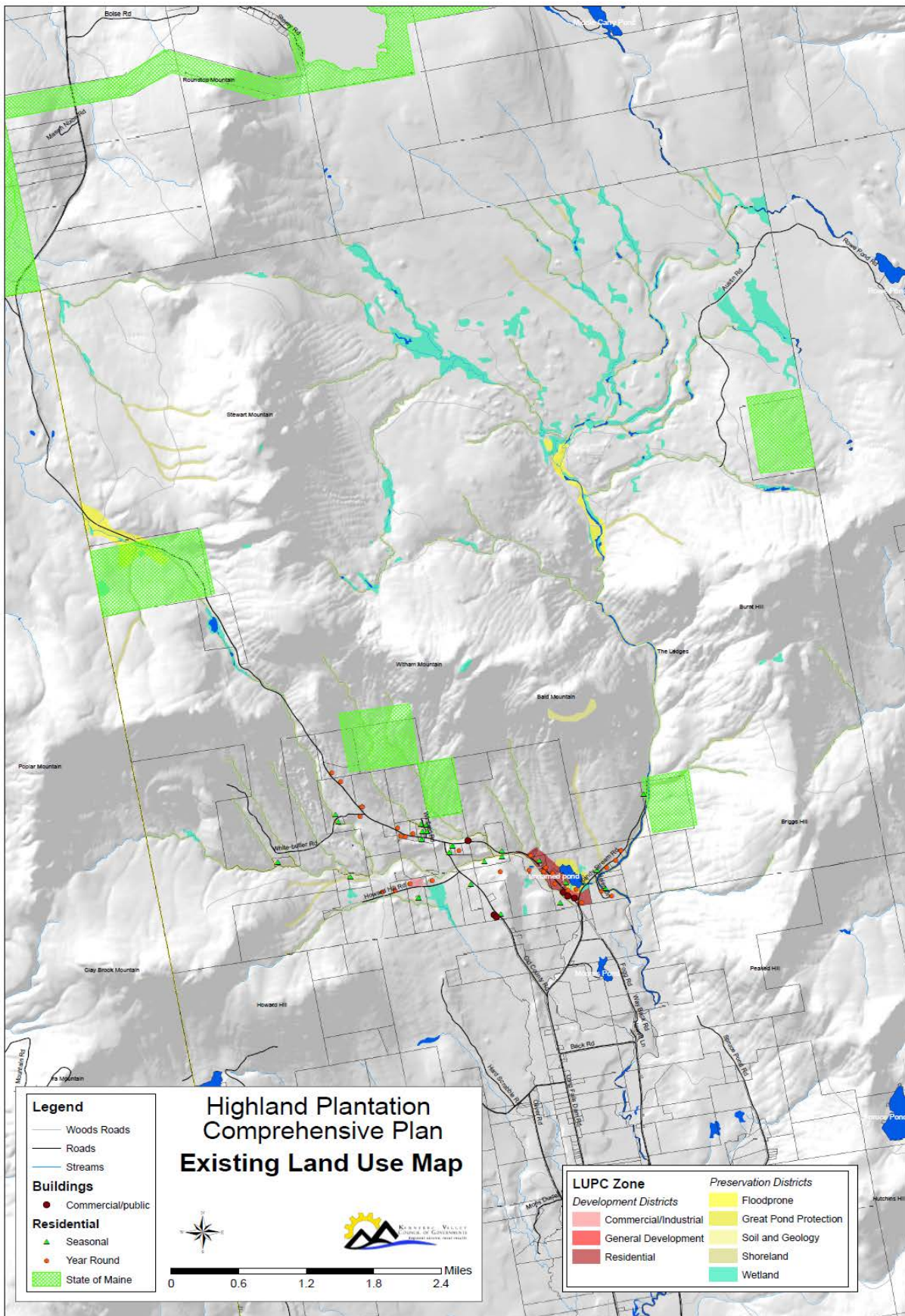
The state's planning law requires towns to look at availability of affordable housing not only for median income households but for a household making 80 percent or less of the median. In Highland, 80 percent is about \$17,000, making an affordable house somewhere in the \$50-60,000 range. According to the ACS, there are only two houses currently valued in that range and there are five households with that income or below. However, the ACS does not include mobile homes in their computations of value, which may provide more options in that price range.

Given the small population of Highland Plantation and the limited supply and demand for housing, it is difficult to predict the future. As described in an earlier chapter, the past two decades have seen an average of seven new homes per decade – but local records indicate only two (including one camp) built between 2000 and 2015. There is no pressure for that trend to change or increase.

There is plenty of subdividable land. State law requires that any property divided more than once every five years must be reviewed as a subdivision. A local authority such as a planning board, must be set up to review applications, but local subdivision review is very fast and much less expensive than LUPC. The cost of surveying, road-building, and bringing power in would be much more significant.

If, as the numbers show, new homes in town coming in over \$142,000, that should be plenty of incentive for development of new lots, but it would be for a limited market, which would not include current residents. The additional issue comes when current residents eventually want to sell at the prices they bought or built for. Those prices may be sustainable for another ten years or so, as retiring baby boomers flood the market, but may eventually have to come down.

If household incomes remain low, there will also be pressure to bring in lower-cost mobile homes for affordable housing. Some rural towns in Somerset County have become dumping grounds for older, low-value mobile homes. State law does allow towns to regulate the construction quality of mobile homes being imported into the town and the design and location of mobile home parks.



## 5: Land and Water Resources

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### Land-based Resources:

State-generated data on natural resources for Highland Plantation is limited, if only because it is remote and undeveloped, with an abundance of resources. Except for logging roads, which seem to run everywhere, access to much of the town is limited to walking or snowmobiling. Much of the resource has not been mapped, including soils maps. Other maps, for instance those produced by Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW), show that any deer wintering areas magically stop at the Lexington town line.

Highland nestles at the base of the Appalachian Plateau, known locally as the height of land. The narrow valley where most development is, sits at an altitude of 5-600 feet. Witham Mountain, less than a mile and a half from “downtown” Highland, reaches 2,301 feet. To the northwest of that lies Stewart Mountain, rising to 2,671 feet. Perhaps 20 percent of the land area of Highland is undevelopable on the basis of steep slopes alone. (see *Natural Resources Map*, page 26.)

Until the late 1960’s, Sandy Stream valley above the height of land was known as a major winter habitat for Whitetail Deer. Heavy logging destroyed that habitat until deer no longer wintered there. Less than 5,000 acres in the entire town today are designated as “softwood,” with most in new growth. Neighboring towns have experienced similar deer yard destruction, though not so complete as Highland. The result is severe mortality in any big snow winter. The population begins to rebound in mild winters only to be decimated again when the snow is deep. The tagging rate dropped to all-time lows in the 70’s, rebounding in the 80s but never close to what they were before the decline.

As might be expected, there are massive areas of undeveloped forest blocks in Highland, the largest of these extending into Carrying Place and Pleasant Ridge, estimated at 88,500 acres. This area should be able to support all manner of large game, however it has been degraded by logging and logging roads, and the limiting factor of winter habitat, so that it has nowhere near the carrying capacity that it should. Wildlife crossings should be expected and have been observed on roads throughout the town, but traffic is light enough to not pose much of a threat.

A great number and diversity of aerial wildlife has been observed in town, and it has become something of a drawing card for tourists. The wind turbine application that was denied a couple of years ago was in part because biologists found the “greatest



concentration of migrating birds and bats ever observed in Maine” along the spine of Witham Mountain. It would be helpful if IFW would conduct a study or make information available on other rare species and on the bird and bat migrations on Witham and surrounding mountains.

Highland is almost totally forested with most of the land under Tree Growth. Since we are interested in maintaining a wild undeveloped landscape, the Tree Growth designation fits well. However, aggressive logging practices in the past few years have resulted in high grading, clear cutting, and liquidation. This interferes with the overall quality of the landscape and habitat capacities as well as scenic vistas which are of high value to us.

*Beginning with Habitat* (BWH) is a cooperative program that assembles and propagates data from a number of state agencies and private conservation organizations. It is recognized as the clearinghouse and information center for habitat information in Maine. BWH, via the Maine Natural Areas Program, lists one exemplary natural community in Highland. Its designation is “Spruce Rocky Woodland” and it covers the eastern face of Bald Mountain. Spruce Rocky Woodland is described as “barren rocky slopes dominated by a thin overstory of red spruce and understory of holly and lowbush blueberry,” which is a very apt description of the slope.

There are five public lots owned by the Department of Conservation in Highland, ranging from about 100 to 600 acres. They are a valuable resource for public use. At this time they are managed for wood harvest. After harvest, the access roads are usually blocked making the lots difficult to access. There are no other mapped conservation lands or interests.

A significant sand and gravel aquifer underlies the southern portion of Sandy Stream and Long Falls Dam Road, providing homes there with abundant water. The Highland Lodge was here, but the underground fuel tanks were removed long ago, and there is no sign of contamination, nor threats from other sources. There is local concern about potential salt contamination from a contractor’s salt shed located on Old County Road, but it is not technically over the aquifer. There are no other groundwater threats.

There are no public water supplies or protection areas. There may be interest at some point in outside interests mining our groundwater, which should be addressed in any future regulation.

Unlike on the “Lexington Flats,” Sandy Stream and its tributaries in Highland are fairly tightly confined. The impact of floodplains is not a significant factor in the developed portion of town. Poplar Stream flows north towards Flagstaff Lake at the upper end of Long Falls Dam Road, with an area that is designated by LUPC Zoning as a floodplain protection district, but it is miles from any development and partially located in a public lot. Federal floodplain maps do not cover Highland.

## **Scenic Assets:**

Highland today is a remote quiet undeveloped place. When you reach the "Lexington Flat" on Long Falls Dam Road you can see all the way to Witham Mountain and the height of land. It is a spectacular view dominated by a looming mountain landscape. Witham Mountain caps the valley where Highland begins and it is the defining feature of our town.

Once you reach Highland on the Long Falls Dam Road, the forest closes in and vistas, while still breath-taking, are intermittent. The important element common to the scenic experiences are the mountainsides. Depending on your orientation, Briggs Hill, Claybrook Mountain and Stewart Mountain rise up in your view. Logging on the south face of Witham Mountain, and on neighboring mountains, has a significant negative impact on the scenery. The town fears that additional development, such as cell towers or wind turbines, could have even more devastating and long-term effects on the scenic resource.

The mountain vista is highly valued by all of our residents and needs to be protected. Further industrial development of Highland, including potential cell towers and wind farms, must be regulated to eliminate or minimize visual impacts. Excluding towers from the most scenic views would still leave a huge fraction of Highland available for development.

As Sandy Stream descends from the height of land there is a series of water falls with beautiful granite pools that is a popular swimming and picnic place. The view down river from the top of the falls is spectacular.

## **Water Resources:**

Surface waters in Highland consist mostly of brooks and streams with only the Highland Bog containing enough flat water to qualify as a great pond. The Highland Bog is maintained by a dam at the outlet. It is a fertile habitat supporting a great variety of warm water species including Painted, Snapping, and Wood Turtles. The bog is listed as one of many "unnamed ponds" in state databases and there is no available water quality information on it.

Sandy Stream is the most important water resource in our town and is the result of a complicated network of wetlands and tributaries. The upper portion above the height of land consists of two branches. The west branch comes from Middle Carry Pond in Carrying Place and the east branch from Rowe and Jewett Ponds in Pleasant Ridge. There are several smaller, spring-fed tributaries that feed into Sandy Stream, draining the valley surrounded by mountains. Some of the major ones are Michael Stream, Little Michael, Little Alder, Britenell Brook, Barker Brook and Stoney Brook. There are also large and small wetlands that are essential to this ecosystem.

Almost every part of the system is inhabited with wild Brook Trout. Logging along the streams has resulted in thermal pollution and sedimentation, degrading the habitat. IFW biologists have found Spring Salamanders and Roaring Brook Mayflies in the cold flowing waters high up on the mountains. The mayfly is listed as an endangered species and the *Natural Resources Map* identifies critical habitat along Stoney Brook below the north face of Witham Mountain based on BWH data. IFW has also found evidence that suggests the possibility of Bog Lemmings in an alpine wetland on Witham Mountain. The wet land is formed by a mountaintop spring that is the source of Britenell Brook. The headwaters of the Barker Brook flowage have a major wetland and several springs that flow out of the base of Witham and Stewart where they join. Beaver activities create temporary impoundments that fill with trout and the springs are filled with trout fry.

The entire northeast quadrant of Highland – the upper reaches of Sandy Stream and its tributaries – is a patchwork of wetlands and rivulets. The extent and value of the wetland complex is not well-documented, as even maps of the area show different configurations and boundaries. Some of these appear on BWH maps as waterfowl/wading Bird habitat. Some (but not the same boundaries) are protected by LUPC protection districts. Taken as a whole, the interaction of mountain slopes, springs, wetlands, streams, and forest constitute a critical slice of Maine landscape.

Much of the Sandy Stream ecosystem is critical habitat, though not so identified on BWH maps. It has not been studied in detail. It should be, in order to determine where the most sensitive areas are. In the early 1900's, Highland residents often hiked into the valley to catch trout for subsistence and barter and came home with pack baskets full. Logging and road building have changed all that but it is still a significant resource.

There are four significant vernal pools mapped in Highland. One is near Sandy Stream and three are on Briggs Hill. None are threatened by development.

About the only watershed in Highland that does not end up in Sandy Stream is Poplar Stream, flowing north from the height of land along Long Falls Dam Road. There is a mapped wetland complex at the upper end.



# Highland Plantation Comprehensive Plan Significant Natural Resources

## Legend

- Inland Wading Bird/Waterfowl Habitat
- Rare Natural Community
- Aquifers
- ★ Significant Vernal Pools
- Wetlands
- Significant Forest Areas



All information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only and non-regulatory. Boundary data is based on digital sources and may differ from ground-based observations.  
Data Sources: Maine Office of GIS, Maine IFW

## 6: Community Services and Facilities

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Since Highland is so remote and lightly populated, we don't have services like public water and sewer. As a plantation, we have limited capacity as well. Central Maine Power maintains a power line up to but not over the height of land so all of our full time residents have access. Telephone lines go through Highland along Long Falls Dam Road and through the woods to Pierce Pond Camps. Most recently the local telephone company has made Wi-Fi available to Highland.

### **Public Education:**

- Expended 2014: \$88,162
- Five-year average: \$93,323
- Five-year trend: -1.4 % per year

The biggest expense the town has is education; because students are tuitioned, changes in the number of school age children reflect directly on our financial contribution. Students from Highland attend schools in RSU 58, centered in the Kingfield area. Highland's enrollment dropped from 13 students in 2008-09, to 10 in 10-11 and eight in 14-15. Dropping enrollment is not limited to Highland; it's typical throughout Maine. Enrollment in the district has been dropping as well – from 892 in 08-09, to 807 in 11-12, to just 729 in 14-15. Enrollment statewide has dropped about five percent since 08-09.

Dropping enrollment puts a burden on the financial capacity of the schools, as there are fixed costs to be paid regardless of enrollment. RSU 58 has an average cost per pupil of \$11,869. This is slightly less than the statewide average of \$12,056 per pupil. Highland currently pays tuition of \$10,000 per student, plus a share of administration, special education, and transportation.

### **Public Safety:**

- Expended 2014: \$42,134 (Fire: \$22,207, ambulance: \$6,134)
- Five-year average: \$35,519
- Five-year trend: 6.2 % per year

Somerset County Sheriff's Department and State Police are our law enforcement, with no local police. Emergency services are dispatched through the Somerset E911 system.

Highland shares a Fire Department with Lexington. Because Lexington is a township, Somerset County pays their share of fire protection. The firehouse is located on

Long Falls Dam Road, a few hundred yards north of Sandy Stream Road. The firehouse has three bays and has no maintenance or upgrade needs. The department has four trucks: one tanker, two pumpers and a forestry truck. None are in need of upgrade or replacement. Having enough man power is always an issue; only a few of the volunteers have the state-required level of training.

Ambulance service comes from Northstar which is a part of the Franklin Memorial Hospital. The town pays an annual fee. The ambulance is dispatched through the 911 system from both Somerset and Franklin Counties. The town has a resident EMT. The town has its own emergency management director and works with Somerset County EMD on emergency planning. The town has no designated emergency shelter, although probably the entire population could fit into the townhouse if need be.

**Public Works:**

- Expended 2014: \$48,322(summer roads: \$580, winter roads: \$44,271, trash: \$9,126)
- Five-year average: \$50,073
- Five-year trend: 2.2 % per year

Other than education, public works is the largest budget expenditure in Highland, and the lion's share of that is winter snow plowing. This budget item fluctuates from year to year, depending on how much summer maintenance is necessary. We hire a contractor to do snowplowing and road maintenance. He maintains a salt sand facility in Highland. There is concern in town about runoff seeping from the facility. He keeps two plow trucks and a grader on site in a maintenance garage. One of the plantation assessors acts as road commissioner and identifies maintenance priorities.

The town contracts with a trash hauling company for curbside pick-up. There is no landfill in Highland and no facility for recycling. As a plantation, we are not required to report our waste tonnage to the state.

We have a cemetery in town and the town hires local people for maintenance.

**General Government:**

- Expended 2014: \$33,064
- Five-year average: \$33,842
- Five-year trend: -3.8 % per year

Municipal officers consist of a Board of Assessors. Other officials include a plantation clerk/treasurer/registrar (elected), a tax collector (elected), fire chief, constable, school agent, and election clerks.

Highland’s townhouse isn’t a town office but we use it for Town Meetings, community gatherings, and the assessors’ meetings. The three assessors do the majority of work in town government. Each of our town officers has an office in their home.

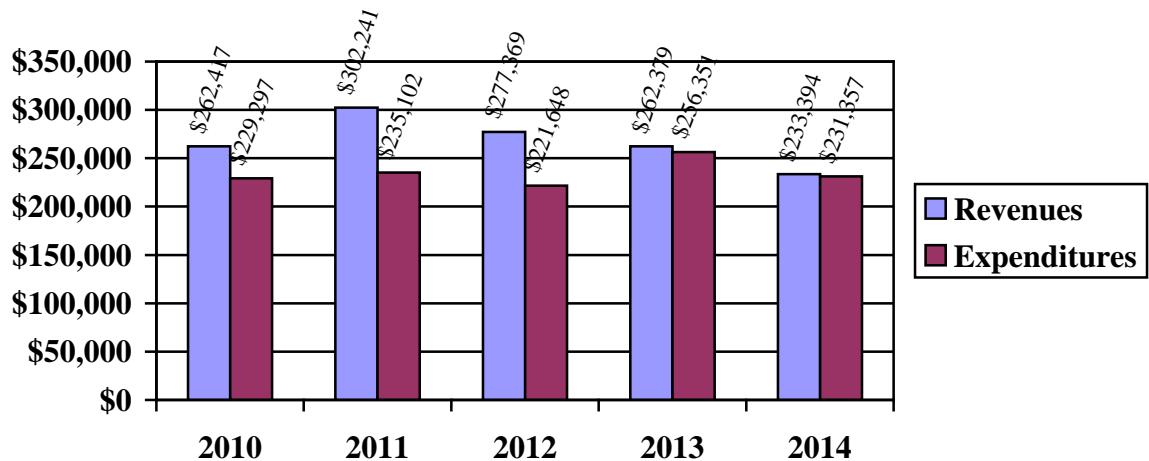
The townhouse is old but well-maintained. Each year there is some maintenance done and occasionally a contractor or volunteers do an upgrade. The town pays a small annual stipend to New Portland for their library and support of their newsletter.

### Town Fiscal Management

Highland Plantation has limited self-government authority, but does have the power to impose property taxes and expend to manage local services.

According to audit reports, in 2014 Highland spent \$231,357 (see Figure 7). This is slightly below the five-year average expenditure of \$234,751. As Figure 7 shows, total expenditures have ranged from \$220,000 to over \$250,000 in five years. The variability in the budget is attributable to education assessments and public works projects.

**Figure 7: Highland Revenues and Expenditures, 2010-2014**



In 2014, Highland’s revenues totaled \$233,394. This is considerably below the five-year average of \$267,560. Total revenues have declined steadily since 2011, primarily due to a decline in property tax revenue. Revenues still exceed expenditures, though, and have every year for at least the past five.

When revenues exceed expenditures, the excess is put into surplus, adding to the town’s assets. Auditors recommend maintaining a healthy surplus, to avoid having to borrow money or experience cash flow problems. Highland also uses surplus to fund capital improvements. Highland’s net assets, as of 2014, were \$537,060, of which about 30 percent were capital assets.

Local property taxes account for about half of the total annual revenue for the town. Excise taxes and state revenue sharing comprise most of the remainder. Property tax revenue does not represent an accurate accounting of local property valuations, because there is such a large chunk in Tree Growth, but a portion of the revenue lost is reimbursed by the state. The total value of property in Highland, according to the Town, was \$9,370,520 in 2014. It has grown gradually every year for the past five. The Town's valuation for 2013 (most recent figures available) was slightly above the State's of \$8,600,000. If our valuation were much below the state number, we would be required to do a formal revaluation.

The mill rate hit a high point of \$17.41 per thousand dollars of valuation in 2011, but has declined every year since, and in 2014 stood at \$12.20. Mill rate is calculated based on total dollars raised from taxation, known as the "commitment," which has dropped as well. The commitment in 2014 was \$114,320, down from the high in 2011 of \$148,194. These numbers resulted in the gradual decline in revenues on Figure 7. It should be noted that in 2011, the town had a surplus of almost \$70,000 of revenues over expenditures, so the decline in tax rates is possible without affecting spending levels.

In Highland, school enrollment drives variations in expenditures, but next in importance is the occurrence of one-time expenditures such as road improvements or fixes to the town house. Since the town has just three miles of town road and two public buildings, these do not occur very often.

It is the Town's practice to use its reserves to fund capital purchases. Reserves are adequate to meet needs without jeopardizing cash flow. The Town does have a dedicated account for capital road improvements, funded in part by the annual Maine DOT grant. One of the assessors acts as road commissioner and identifies needs and priorities for the road system.



## 7: Transportation and Outdoor Recreation

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### Transportation Facilities:

Highland Plantation is highly dependent on transportation. With no local jobs, stores, or school, the transportation network is the lifeline of the community. But as the cost of maintaining the system grows, we are faced with hard-to-maintain roads, little chance of improvement or expansion, and no alternatives.

Highland's transportation network is exceedingly simple. The only paved road is Long Falls Dam Road. All residents rely upon it to get anywhere. It originates at Route 16 in North New Portland and ends at a bridge over the Dead River at the outlet of Flagstaff Lake. The road was originally a state highway (Route 16) but was downgraded when Flagstaff Lake flooded it as a through route. The total length is about 25 miles, with about 6 ½ miles in Highland.

Long Falls Dam Road is maintained primarily by the Maine Department of Transportation (DOT). The road has a section repaved from time to time, so there are always some smooth places but it has never been built with a proper base, so will always be behind in maintenance. Heavy log trucks do a lot of damage. Shoulder and drainage work was done in 2014, and the portions of the entire road will be repaved in 2016.

According to DOT traffic counts, the road at the boundary with Lexington averaged 460 vehicle trips per day in 2011, down very slightly from 1998, when it averaged 500. Traffic levels declined in the interim, but have been increasing some with new Huts and Trails traffic every day in winter and summer.

There are three public gravel roads in Highland totaling about three miles; Sandy Stream Road (0.7 miles), Old County Road (0.9 miles), and Howard Hill Road (1.4 miles). Town roads are maintained by a local contractor, with the board of assessors setting priorities and assigning work. The town receives grant funds from Maine DOT for capital improvements to the network (\$9,820 in 2014) and keeps those in a separate, dedicated account. All of the roads are in good condition, passable during all seasons. There are a few camp roads and innumerable woods roads maintained by private individuals or companies, not included in this inventory.

The DOT lists two bridges in Highland. The bridge on Long Falls Dam Road is actually a culvert. It was replaced in 2014. The other bridge is on Old County Road,

spanning Michael Stream. It, too, is a large steel culvert. At its last inspection in 2011, it was in satisfactory condition.

There are very few alternatives to transportation by private vehicle in Highland. Other towns may have access to buses, trains, airports, even carpooling opportunities; none of these are available in Highland. Highland residents with special needs could request transportation from Kennebec Valley Community Action Program, but there is no scheduled service available to the general public. The nearest general aviation airports are Gaddabout Gaddis in Bingham and Sugarloaf regional in Carrabassett, but neither provide any service or opportunities to local residents. There are no designated walking or biking facilities in Highland, although there are plenty of roadsides and informal trails through the backcountry. The traffic is light enough on Long Falls Dam Road for biking, but the shoulders are not in good condition. ATV's in summer and snowmobiling in winter are popular, with no designated local routes but connections to ITS trails outside the town.

There are no public parking areas except graveled spots at the townhouse and Fire House. Noise and light pollution from the transportation system is not an issue. Wildlife is abundant all along Long Falls Dam Road and occasionally there are collisions with deer or moose. However, with the low volume of traffic, vehicle crashes of any kind are rare and there are no known dangerous intersections or road segments. The most common form of crash would be running off the road from snow, ice, or mud.

The transportation system as a whole serves the needs of Highland residents adequately, though Long Falls Dam Road is perennially under-maintained. In the future, needs of elderly residents to get around without a car may emerge as a significant issue.

### **Recreation Facilities:**

Our greatest economic and recreational asset is our wild undeveloped landscape. Highland residents take full advantage of traditional outdoor pastimes such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and snowshoeing. For the most part, we are free to do this throughout town as long as we don't get in the way of active logging operations. However, degradation of habitat through questionable logging and management practices has resulted in fewer opportunities for activities like hunting and fishing.

There are plenty of properties open for recreation but none are owned by the town. Many private landowners allow access to their lands and the large landowners generally have an open road policy which allows public access on logging roads. This is not the case with public lots owned by the State, which closes off its roads when not used for logging. Public lots do provide several hundred acres of woodland, but access to those sometimes requires crossing other private properties.

Where Sandy Stream comes off the height of land, there is a series of waterfalls, making for a popular, though informal, hiking and picnicking spot. There has been

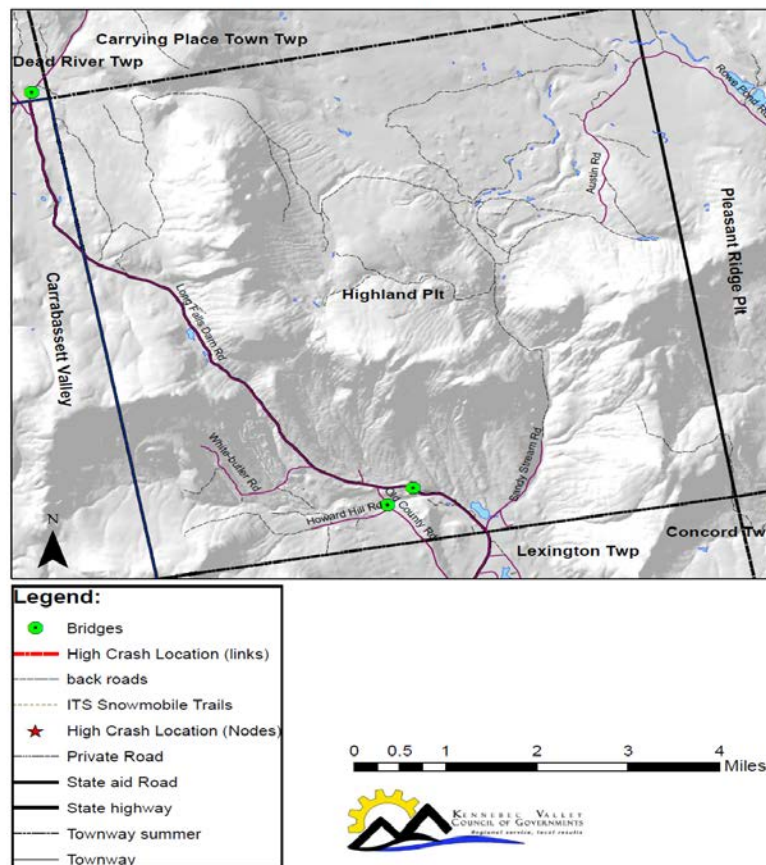
discussion of developing the area, with a formal trail, parking spots, and tables. It would require cooperation from the landowner and possibly road improvements.

Highland supports the local snowmobile club financially, through a disbursement of local registration fees. The club maintains a trail system that crosses private properties with landowner agreements. This trail system is open free for the public. Some of these trails, as well as others, are used by ATV's, though there is no organized group to develop those trails. Claybrook Mountain Lodge maintains cross country ski trails on private lands and those are free and open to the public. The snowmobile club and other entities sometimes work with neighboring towns to promote connectivity.

Long Falls Dam Road provides access to both the Appalachian Trail and the Maine Huts and Trails system, as well as Flagstaff Lake and the Bigelow Preserve. With the growing popularity of people powered recreation, we're seeing more through traffic. Working with neighboring towns to add connecting trails – both non-motorized and motorized – might persuade people to stop and help to build the local economy.

The town does not have any playgrounds, playing fields, or other “active” recreation facilities, nor are there any towns in the area with which we could cooperate.

Transportation Map for Highland



## 8: Planning for the Future of Highland Plantation

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Throughout the long history of Highland Plantation, our population and prosperity has fluctuated, but in all cases our future has been dictated by others. It may have been state agencies, the Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC, now LUPC), large landowners or corporations, the common element has been the lack of regulatory or fiscal authority to determine our own future as a town.

The rising presence of mega-impact projects, such as proposed wind farms, as well as ongoing issues with forest management practices, has led Highland to conclude that, in one way at least, the town can assert local control. By developing its own comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances, the town can manage its own land use regulatory system.

We took our first steps in this regard in early 2014 by contacting LUPC as well as other state agencies about the process of asserting local control. As it became clear that this step required more than just a nod from LUPC, the Town formed a comprehensive plan committee and voted to proceed with development of a plan and associated ordinances that would form the basis of local land use control. This is not a process to be taken lightly; with the small population and administrative capacity of the town, it will take additional effort to form a planning board and board of appeals, as well as hiring a local code enforcement officer. The town is committed to this path and has looked to towns like New Portland and Caratunk as examples of the small town planning process.

### **Public Input and the Vision:**

Part of the requirement to prepare a local comprehensive plan is to provide for public input into its development. Fortunately, with only a handful of households it is relatively easy. Our first full public visioning meeting in early 2015 drew 20 percent of the town's population for a discussion of the range of issues required to be addressed in the planning process.

The town hired Kennebec Valley Council of Governments to organize public participation and add necessary elements to the plan. KVCOG led the discussion at the public session. Discussion highlighted many of the issues associated with lack of local control over affairs of the town. Among the issues discussed were:

- Protection of the overall rural character and scenic vistas in town,

- Need to assert local control,
- Need to protect public health as well as land values,
- Lack of state agency support and oversight in management of Highland's resources,
- A concern with ongoing forest practices – what appears to be liquidation harvesting and poor utilization of timber,
- Potential for game-changing development proposals, such as wind generation or water extraction,
- Condition of Long Falls Dam Road.

The group brainstormed several ideas and recommendations for land use and other changes. These ranged from connecting recreational trails to establishing a TIF policy to addressing possible salt contamination from the local salt shed. The group agreed that the VISION for Highland's future can be contained in the following statements:

- Bring in more young people and families,
- Encourage small-scale, local business with low environmental impacts,
- Transition from a wood products-based economy to a recreation-based one,
- Partner to improve access to broadband internet and cellular services,
- Do a better job of protecting natural resources, including restoration of degraded wildlife and fisheries habitat,
- Protect groundwater quality and supplies,
- Improve reviews of small subdivision proposals, and
- Assert local control over development proposals with potential for major impacts on the town.

Following development of the draft plan, the planning committee held a second public meeting in June of 2015. Again attended by 14 people, the meeting included an explanation of the plan's recommendations, discussion of several aspects of the plan, and close examination of the land use plan. Additions and corrections were made for the draft, with the understanding that it would be submitted to the State's Municipal Planning Assistance Program for review.

The intent of the town as expressed in these meetings is to vote on adoption of this plan in a special town meeting in early September, and to begin work on an ordinance immediately.

### **Implementation of Planning Recommendations:**

The town is on a fast track to implement the plan's recommendations regarding land use controls, because it involves the additional step of LUPC approval. It is our intent to have a zoning ordinance ready for adoption in the fall of 2015. Because this will be our first attempt at enacting and enforcing an ordinance, we do not expect to get it right all at once,

so we have an expectation to do a thorough review and make necessary revisions within five years.

The remaining recommendations will be more challenging, simply because Highland has limited municipal capacity. All staff and officials of the town are on a part-time basis, and financial and volunteer resources are also tight. The largest immediate expense could be hiring a code enforcement officer, even if only for five or ten hours a month. The plantation will have a newly-appointed planning board, who may be assigned to undertake some of the projects; the remainder will be the responsibility of the assessors.

The chairman of the planning board should be expected to give a report on the status of the planning recommendations at the annual town meeting. This should include recommendations for changes if necessary.

Time lines for individual recommendations appear in the next chapter alongside each recommendation.

## 9: General Planning Goals and Recommendations

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It is the intent of Highland Plantation to develop a comprehensive plan that will meet the requirements of Maine's Growth Management Act and allow the town to assert local control over its land use and development future. The goals of the Growth Management Act are listed below, and act as a guideline for the organization of this plan and the following recommendations.

### **State Growth Management Goals:**

1. To encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of each community while protecting the state's rural character, making efficient use of public services, and preventing development sprawl.
2. To plan for, finance and develop an efficient system of public facilities and services to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.
3. To promote an economic climate that increases job opportunities and overall economic well-being.
4. To encourage and promote affordable, decent housing opportunities for all Maine citizens.
5. To protect the quality and manage the quantity of the state's water resources, including lakes, aquifers, great ponds, estuaries, rivers and coastal areas.
6. To protect the state's other critical natural resources, including, without limitation, wetlands, wildlife and fisheries habitat, sand dunes, shorelands, scenic vistas, and unique natural areas.
7. To protect the state's marine resources industry, ports and harbors from incompatible development, and to promote access to the shore for commercial fishermen and the public. (Not applicable to Highland)
8. To safeguard the state's agricultural and forest resources from development which threatens those resources.

9. To preserve the state’s historic and archeological resources.
10. To promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities for all Maine citizens, including access to surface waters.

The most significant obstacle that we face in developing recommendations is the limited capacity and authority of a plantation form of government. With a limited budget, no full-time town employees, and only 52 adult residents, we will be challenged to implement more than the bare minimum of proposals. Nor can we rely on regional cooperation to any great extent. While we already work with the county for some services, the nearest organized town by road – New Portland – itself does not offer a broad range of services.

### **Orderly Growth and Development:**

Highland has seen extremely low levels of new development over the past twenty years, and can anticipate very little additional. The principal form of new development would be single family homes and camps or mobile homes, though new building sites are limited. We have averaged seven new homes per decade, but most were in the 90’s and some have been replacements. Two types of new commercial development are anticipated: potential home-based businesses with few if any outside employees and large, industrial-scale developments to exploit our natural resources. We expect to be prepared if any do appear.

There is no focused settlement area in Highland. The “main intersection” consists of three houses and an abandoned store, plus the fire station. The town’s principal interest is in regulating industrial activities in the currently undeveloped areas.

“Orderly growth and development” includes the development of a Land Use Plan (described in the following chapter). The recommendations here apply generally to the town’s authority to manage development.

*Policy:* Encourage residential and small commercial growth in town while limiting high-impact commercial or industrial development to the extent that they would threaten scenic or natural resources or community character.

#### *General Development Recommendations:*

1. Appoint a planning board and board of appeals. This will be done by authorization of town meeting upon adoption of this plan.
2. Appoint a certified Code Enforcement Officer. This will be done by the assessors by authorization of the town meeting, with a code enforcement officer in place by



January, 2016. It is anticipated that the CEO will be part-time on an hourly basis and shared with other local governments.

3. Develop a zoning ordinance. The ordinance will be based on the Land Use Plan and draw from standards in the current LUPC Zoning Ordinance, models and samples from other towns, and required shoreland zoning. It should be adopted by town meeting no later than January, 2016.
4. Monitor land use and regulatory activity and amend zoning ordinance as necessary within five years. Since this will be Highland's first attempt at local regulation, it will be important that the planning board and assessors evaluate how well it operates and make necessary changes promptly.
5. Incorporate subdivision review and shoreland zoning into the zoning ordinance. The town meeting will approve a subdivision review procedure as part of the zoning ordinance, consistent with state law and making for a quick and efficient local review process. Shoreland zoning elements will be incorporated. This should be completed by January, 2016.

#### **Efficient Public Facilities:**

Highland offers limited public facilities and services – two public buildings, three roads, and shared schools and emergency services – and continues to seek efficiencies in a challenging situation with limited infrastructure and low population density. Emergency services are shared with Somerset County, and road maintenance with the state. The principal local expense is education, which is an enrollment-based fee. Capital investments are few and far between.

*Policy:* Continue to provide public services in the most cost-efficient manner available.

#### *General Public Facility and Transportation Recommendations:*

6. Implement the Capital Investment Plan (chapter 11) beginning with the next annual town meeting.
7. Continue to work with the county and other local governments on sharing of public services and equipment. Ongoing activity by the assessors.
8. Support and seek funding for development of trail heads and picnic areas in town. The assessors and planning board should work with landowners and neighboring jurisdictions to develop a plan and funding strategy to improve recreational opportunities, with planning beginning in 2017.
9. Maintain funding for the fire department. Ongoing town meeting authorization.

10. Purchase a computer for the town and develop the town's website. The computer should be earmarked in the capital investment plan. The website is a matter of finding a local individual to volunteer their time.
11. Work with the road contractor to mitigate the potential for groundwater contamination from the salt shed. Meet with DEP and the contractor in 2016 to determine if there is a problem and what can be done to fix it.
12. Include driveway entrance (drainage) and private road construction standards in the development of the zoning ordinance. Enacted by January, 2016.
13. Continue with the current system of identifying and funding road maintenance priorities. Ongoing, assessors' responsibility.
14. Communicate the with the Maine DOT on road funding and improvement needs on Long Falls Dam Road. Assessors will advocate through DOT channels for improvements on a continuing basis.

### **Economic Development:**

In Highland, local economic opportunity is virtually non-existent, and all employment is outside of town. The town does have its natural resource base as an economic asset to draw on, however the exploitation of those resources in a non-sustainable manner is viewed as a threat. There is potential to develop some recreation-based business if the natural resource base is not further compromised.

*Policy:* Support small business development in Highland, especially activities that leverage our natural assets and opportunities, while managing the impacts of industrial resource development.

#### *Recommendations to Build the Local Economy:*

15. Build on opportunities to develop, access, and market a recreational trail system. Partner with Lexington, Carrabassett Valley, New Portland, Pleasant Ridge, and Somerset County on expansion of recreational trails and marketing recreation opportunities (local/regional trails map). Beginning in 2016.
16. Incorporate strong performance standards for wind and solar power development, cell towers, mining, and water extraction within the critical resource zone in the zoning ordinance. Enacted by town meeting, by January 2016.
17. Provide information/assistance for small business development. The town will set up a system to distribute literature to be available on small business counselling and

financing, beginning immediately. Include links to resources and Sugarloaf Area Chamber of Commerce on town website.

### **Housing:**

While the state goal in this area is to ensure safe, sanitary, and affordable housing, the housing stock in Highland is so small that it is difficult to influence. We have averaged seven new year-round houses every ten years, but most of that was in the 90's. Affordable housing is not seen as a local issue. It does appear as if the newer housing is of higher price and quality, but it is being custom-built to suit the means of the owners. The town should encourage a wider choice in housing by helping to increase the supply of building lots. There is no prospect for multi-family housing in the foreseeable future.

*Policy:* Support the development of new, affordable housing opportunities.

*Recommendations to Build the Housing Stock:*

18. Assign the Code Enforcement Officer to permit and inspect new internal and subsurface plumbing installations. Beginning by January, 2016.
19. Use new local subdivision review process and standards to facilitate small subdivision development. Town meeting enact ordinance by January, 2016.
20. Permit mobile home parks of up to five lots per year in development and rural zones. Adopt as part of zoning ordinance by January, 2016.

### **Natural Resource Protection and Management:**

Highland Plantation contains a wealth of natural resources, and we are determined to protect them. In fact, many of us live here exclusively for its closeness to nature, and are quite concerned whenever it is threatened. Local knowledge of vital resources, especially habitat, seems to outstrip state-level data. Residents are particularly concerned with the loss of deer wintering habitat due to overcutting, and the potential for loss of scenic resources. Streams are the only significant water resources, and stream habitat is also threatened by poor forest management practices.

*Policies:* Provide strong protection for Highland's natural resources. Manage our forest resources to provide sustainable yields and adequate habitat protection. Protect Highland's scenic views as seen from the developed areas of town.

21. Incorporate LUPC resource protection standards, shoreland zoning elements, and Beginning with Habitat maps into new zoning ordinance. Include strong erosion control and stormwater management rules. Enacted by town meeting before January, 2016.

22. Establish a Critical Resource Zone. Incorporate areas identified by Beginning with Habitat maps as critical habitat, the wetland complex in the northeastern part of town, areas with significant visual impact, steep slopes and elevations over 1,500 feet. Provide for strict standards for industrial development in the Critical Resource Zone as part of the new zoning ordinance, enacted by January, 2016.
23. Establish forest practice standards, in consultation with Maine Forest Service and large landowners. Include provisions to reclaim cutover deer wintering areas, protect the Sandy Stream watershed, and protect scenic views. To be enacted as an amendment to zoning ordinance, since it will take longer to develop. Complete in 2016, adopt 2017.
24. Prohibit or strictly regulate visual impacts of cell towers and wind turbines within the view area of Long Falls Dam Road. Incorporate into zoning ordinance, to be enacted prior to January, 2016.
25. Ensure that the Code Enforcement Officer is certified and trained in resource protection regulations. Assessors will hire CEO and provide training funds if necessary, beginning January, 2016.
26. Work with IFW and landowners to identify and provide additional protection for habitat areas within the town. Habitat areas and issues not currently mapped include trout spawning areas and bird and bat migration routes. Planning board and assessors, ongoing effort.
27. Provide information to landowners on maintenance of private roads to minimize erosion and sedimentation. The town will establish availability of printed information to be available, beginning immediately.
28. Ensure that the town road contractor has necessary erosion control practice training. Assessors will write into next contract.

### **Preservation of Historic and Archeological Resources:**

Highland has few remarkable historical assets. The townhouse is a classic but architecturally generic one-room schoolhouse. There are undoubtedly many cellar holes on undeveloped land and prehistoric artifacts along Sandy Stream. Highland and Lexington share an historic society and a building where artifacts and documents are kept.

*Policy:* Protect the historic and archeological assets of the town.

*Recommendations for Preservation of Historic Assets:*

29. Support the Highland-Lexington Historical Society. Ongoing support as needed from town meeting.
30. Require that new commercial/industrial development townwide and all new development in shoreland areas include an analysis of the potential for archeological assets, and if identified, measures to preserve and protect them. Incorporate into zoning ordinance, to be enacted by January, 2016.

### **Outdoor Recreation:**

Outdoor recreation in Highland is a way of life, and generally a solitary pursuit. Our “backyard” consists of several thousand acres of accessible forest land. Accessibility, though, is limited to existing woods roads, even on the public lots. We recognize that outdoor recreation, in addition to being a pastime, has the potential to be an economic driver. In order to do this, we need to improve points of access to the resource.

*Policy:* Develop/improve access to the natural recreation assets of the town.

*Recommendations to Improve Outdoor Recreation:*

31. Establish a regional cooperative relationship with the County and neighboring towns to expand and connect the recreational trail system in Highland. The assessors will reach out to begin coordinating efforts in 2017, earlier if the county establishes their own trails program.
32. Identify, improve, mark, and market recreational trail access. Assessors will appoint a committee in 2017 to study and seek grant funding for development in 2018.
33. Work with Department of Conservation to improve access to public lots in town. Assessors initiate contacts in 2016.
34. Explore feasibility and cost of building a day use picnic area at the falls on Sandy Stream. Assessors appoint a committee in 2017, possible land acquisition and development 2018.

### **Regional Coordination:**

Highland Plantation is isolated from neighboring towns. Long Falls Dam Road goes through six miles of Lexington Township before entering another municipality. The plantation does abut Carrabassett Valley to our west and Pleasant Ridge to our east, but there are no road connections going through to settled areas of either town. This makes it difficult to engage in any regional relationships.

Highland and Lexington Township share some facilities, although Lexington's share is supported by Somerset County. This includes the historical society and the fire service. Highland and Lexington citizens have occasionally discussed merging into a single entity, but Lexington has been reluctant to absorb the added financial burdens.

Highland raises a small annual stipend for services from New Portland, including support for their town newsletter and library.

Highland is not a part of a school district, but tuitions its students to RSU 58. Highland also contracts for ambulance service from Franklin Memorial Hospital.

Highland relies to a high degree on services from Somerset County. The county sheriff provides police services, and county emergency management does emergency management planning for the town. The county is responsible for maintaining a portion of Highland's road system.

Highland shares its mountain resources with the entire Western Maine community. There are few opportunities to coordinate resource protection activities with the lack of organized towns and manpower, but individuals within the town participate in several resource protection groups.

This plan identifies some added opportunities for regional cooperation. Recommendations include:

- #2 – appoint a code enforcement officer. We will not be able to afford our own CEO, but should be able to share one with some of the neighboring towns.
- #7 – regional opportunities. The assessors will be alert for opportunities to save money or expand services through working with the county and other jurisdictions.
- #15/31 – recreational trail system. We will work with Somerset County, as well as Lexington, New Portland, and other abutting towns to expand the recreational trail network.

## 10: Land Use Plan

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Highland Plantation is currently under the jurisdiction of the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC), which has established a blanket zoning rule for unorganized territories and some plantations. The primary motivation for this plan is to assert local control over our land use decisions with a prospective zoning approach. While LUPC's Chapter 10 is not necessarily faulty, it is reactive, it does not reflect local values, and its administration is burdensome. It is the intent of this plan to add to the basic protective standards of Chapter 10, while expanding and simplifying development district areas.

In order to be granted local jurisdiction, Highland will have to show the LUPC that it has established regulation that is no less protective of the State's resources than the LUPC rule. In addition, local control means adoption of a mandatory shoreland zoning, floodplain management, and enforcement of state subdivision law through local regulations or, preferably, an ordinance. Since the town is also concerned over potential impacts of large industrial development, we will pay special attention to these areas.

It is the intent of this plan that we enact a single ordinance for Highland Plantation that will incorporate protection of shoreland zones, permit review for subdivisions and large commercial/industrial development, and protection of critical natural resources, including floodplains and groundwater. The ordinance begin with a simplified, customized version of the existing LUPC zoning.

LUPC zones are classified into three major categories:

- Protection Districts, which are intended to restrict development in favor of significant natural, recreational, or historical resources;
- Management Districts, which allow residential, recreational, and resource management activities and may be rezoned into development districts if requested; and
- Development Districts, which exhibit existing patterns or prospects for residential, recreational, commercial, or industrial uses.

This plan recommends that the town establish three zones, in addition to the required shoreland zones. The first zone will be the **Development Zone**, where there is some concentration of existing development and facilities, and where commercial and small industrial development would be appropriate. The second zone will be the **Rural Zone**, where either power or roads are not generally available, and development should be limited to single family homes, camps or self-contained activities. The third zone will be the **Critical Resource Zone**,

where visual impacts, topography, elevation, wetlands, habitat areas or other natural resource factors limit development. The **Future Land Use Plan** (page 49) illustrates the proposed extent of these districts.

### **Development Zone:**

The Growth Management Act requires local identification of a “Growth Area,” except in cases where towns have severe physical limitations, minimal existing and future development pressure, or no village or densely developed area. Technically, Highland meets these criteria. Most of the town has severe physical limitations. Statistically, Highland has seen a jump in population and housing, although relatively speaking we are talking about 14 new homes and camps from 1990 to 2010, and only one since 2010. The most “densely developed area” – the crossroads of Long Falls Dam Road and Sandy Stream Road – has a total of five homes and an abandoned store within a half-mile diameter circle.

The town also does not have the capacity to direct growth or investment in public services into a growth area. We have two existing municipal structures, a fire station near the crossroads and the townhouse about 1 ¼ miles away. No roads are paved outside of Long Falls Dam Road, and there are no public water or sewer systems, sidewalks, recreation facilities or other public facilities in town.

The LUPC has established a development zone along one side of Long Falls Dam Road for about ¾ of a mile north of the intersection with Sandy Stream Road. This plan proposes extending the development zone approximately 1 mile further, to a point about ¼ mile beyond the Winfield Road. This will encompass the townhouse and several additional homes. The zone should also extend to the end of power on Sandy Stream Road and Howard Hill Road. At a width of 1,000 feet, this would incorporate about 300 acres of the town’s nearly 29,000. This will serve as Highland’s “growth area.” A future concentration of growth anywhere within this area could serve in the future as a more well-defined growth area, in which we could actually direct and encourage growth, but cannot be identified at this time.

Any type of housing, subdivision, or commercial (including small-scale industrial) or public development will be allowed, subject to suitable performance standards, primarily to protect neighborhood values. The LUPC’s current dimensional standards – 40,000 square foot lot size, 100 foot road frontage (200 foot for commercial), 50 foot setback – will be retained, except that homeowners may put a second dwelling unit on lots between 40,000 and 80,000 square feet if suitable conditions for septic systems are available. Subdivisions, including mobile home parks, will be limited to five developed lots per year, to minimize impact on public services.



**Rural Zone:**

Areas not within either the development zone or critical resource zone will be classified as rural. This includes almost all remaining property below the height of land – virtually all private, non-industrial ownerships.

Only a portion of this area has access to power, making it less financially feasible to develop, but year-round and seasonal housing and subdivisions will be permitted. As opposed to the development zone, the only forms of commercial/industrial development permitted will be those related to natural resources or recreation (including recreational lodging) or home businesses. Permitted operations could include gravel, mineral, or water extraction, subject to performance standards. Since land in the rural zone could conceivably be moved into the development zone at some point, dimensional standards will be the same as in the development zone.

**Critical Resource Zone:**

The Critical Resource Zone is intended to provide strong protection from development and resource exploitation that would impact our critical natural resources, including mountaintops, unique natural areas, wildlife and fishery habitat, scenic vistas, and steep slopes. It will include all elevations over 1,500 feet, all large expanses of slopes over 35 percent, wetland complexes and individual wetlands rated moderate or high value for habitat, and enough connecting land to establish a large undeveloped habitat block.

Practically speaking, this means that the zone will cover at least 75 percent of the land area of Highland. The boundary of the Critical Resource Zone is depicted on the Land Use Plan Map in general terms. The boundary will be refined for the zoning ordinance.

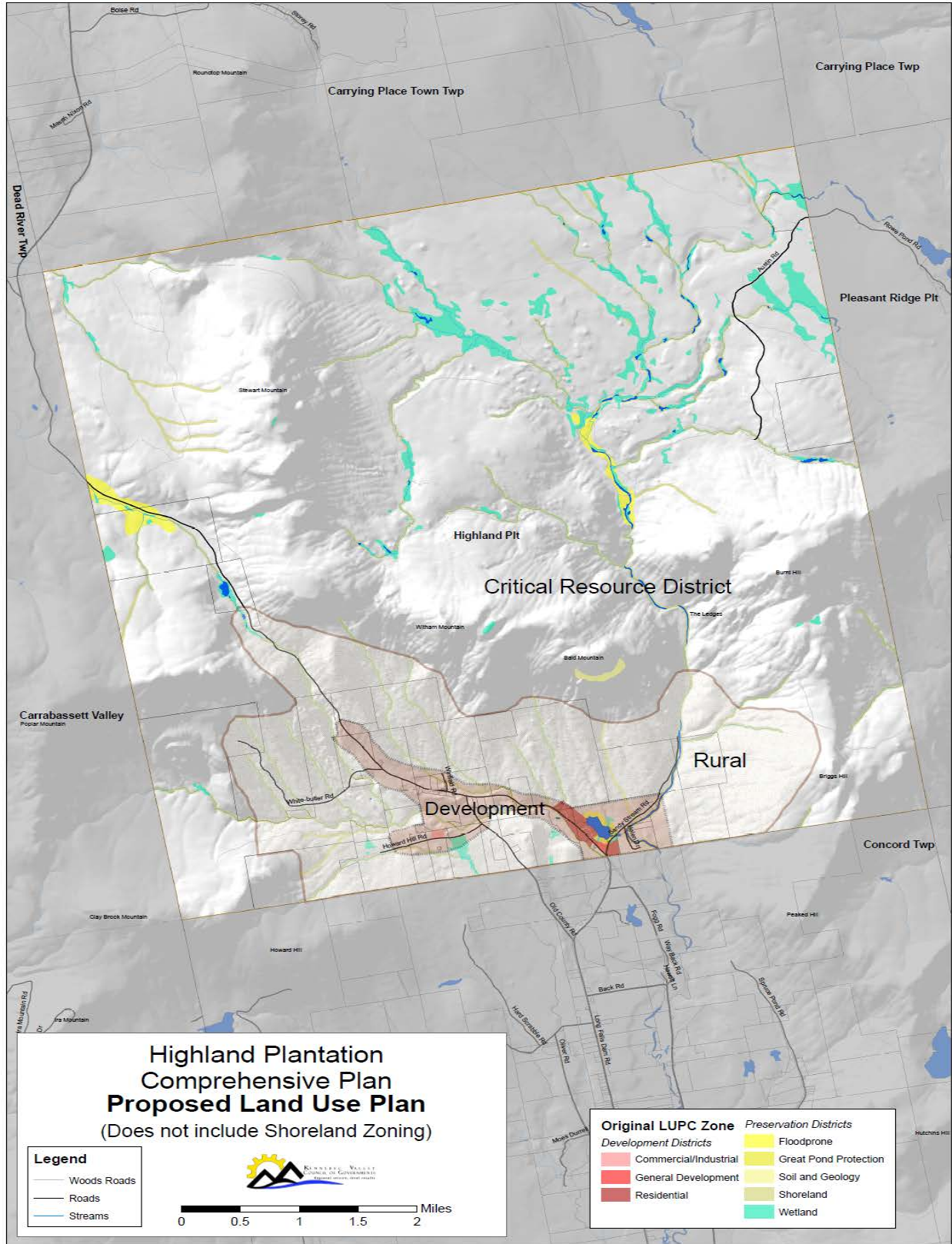
Proposed protective measures for this district will be:

- Resource protection standards and permitted uses similar to LUPC protection districts and shoreland zoning resource protection district,
- Prohibition on subdivision and building development, except for primitive camps and lodging places.
- Prohibition on clearcutting and visible industrial development on areas with high visual impact (south and east faces and peaks of Witham Mountain, Bald Mountain, west faces and peaks of Burnt Hill, Briggs Hill),
- Forest practice standards to restore deer wintering areas and stream habitat,
- Strong environmental protection standards for road building and industrial development such as mining, water extraction, communication towers, and wind and solar farms.

**Shoreland Zoning:**

Highland has very little open water, but will incorporate mandated shoreland zones into the zoning ordinance and map, unless the underlying zone has stronger protections. These include:

- Limited Residential District 250 foot buffer surrounding Highland Bog;
- Stream Protection District along ALL perennial streams not located within the Critical Resource Zone (minimum 75' setbacks will apply to streams in the CRZ) ,
- Resource Protection District only if any areas triggering this district fall outside of the Critical Resource Zone.



## 11: Capital Investment Plan

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The limited extent of public facilities and services in Highland means that planning for capital improvements can be a brief, annual exercise. The capital assets of the town, in total, are:

- The townhouse: meeting space in former one-room schoolhouse, handicapped access is in place.
- The fire station, three bays, well-maintained.
- Fire equipment, including one tanker, two pumpers, forestry truck, turnout equipment.
- Three unpaved roads, totaling 3 miles.

The total value of all capital assets, according to the 2014 Audit Report, is \$158,016. The town has no ownership interest or management authority in school facilities.

The town's only dedicated source of funding for capital projects is for road improvements. As of 2014, the town had a carryover in the capital improvements account of \$50,113, and was receiving \$9,820 from DOT (annual grant). The town can draw from its undesignated fund balance (reserves) for other capital needs, requiring a town meeting vote. The town could also apply for grants if a project was identified.

This plan has identified two future capital investments:

- A town-owned computer. This would be for use of the town clerk and such other staff as need be. Since the town does not have a formal town office, it would make sense for this to be a portable (laptop) computer, at an anticipated cost, including software (but not assessing software), of \$1,500. For the security of town documents, this acquisition should be a priority for purchase within the next five years.
- A day-use picnic area at the falls on Sandy Stream. This would be on leased land. One-time costs would include road and parking area improvements, signage, trail construction, and picnic facilities (fire pit, trash cans, tables). No estimates have been done, so the cost is unknown. The largest variable would be the cost of road improvements. The State provides funding for public recreation facilities. Since this is a low priority, the town could hold off until adequate grant funding was assured.