EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Bedford Today

Located adjacent to the state’s largest city, among rolling hills and the western banks of the Merrimack River, Bedford is one of the largest and most sought after communities in Southern New Hampshire. Home to approximately 23,000 residents, Bedford is perhaps best known as a bedroom community with an excellent school system, owing to the Town’s many well established residential neighborhoods and its location at the crossroads of several major corridors within easy commuting distance of employment centers. However, Bedford hosts a thriving and growing business community of its own, with a variety of places to work, shop, dine, and achieve creative and entrepreneurial ambitions.

The majority of development in Bedford has occurred over the last 50 years, during which time the population has nearly quadrupled, and most of the Town’s developable land has been built out. At present, only about five percent of Bedford’s land is undeveloped. Bedford’s appeal and popularity has spurred discussions regarding the Town’s growth and its long-term consequences.

The Master Plan, updated in Bedford approximately every 10 years, provides a unique opportunity to evaluate existing conditions and forecast trends, and to engage with all members of the community to plan for the next 10 years of Bedford’s future.

What we heard

Bedford has successfully evolved in the last 20 years to stay relevant and desirable today.
Median Household Income: $137,525

Owner Occupancy: 86%

77% of housing is single-family detached

70,000 vehicles cross the interstate 293/NH Route 101 bridge every day.

8.4 acres of active recreation area per 1,000 residents

1.9 million sf of office space available

56% of participants support the need to build a community center

What we heard

“I really wish there were more sidewalks.”

“Would like to be able to age in place.”

“We need a community center!”

Source: Environics

Source: NHDOT

Source: Bedford Age Friendly Survey

Source: US Census Data


Source: Recreation Fee Update, 2015 and US Census population data

Source: US Census Data
Opportunities & Challenges

Bedford’s growth has generated a variety of positive outcomes, including better access to amenities and services, additional jobs available for residents, a large selection of attractive and desirable residential neighborhoods, and a more diversified tax base to support the school district and other town services. People continue to move to Bedford to take advantage of all the community has to offer.

Bedford’s growth has also presented some challenges for the community, including pressure on the Town’s transportation infrastructure, an increased demand for housing and declining affordability; heightened concern about preserving the Town’s character; loss of agricultural lands and open space; and an increasing cost of municipal services and infrastructure maintenance.

Understanding these challenges and opportunities, and hearing about them directly from the people who live and work in Bedford, was the first step in the Blueprint Bedford process. This Plan has three primary goals: protecting the characteristics of the community that are most important to residents; identifying specific areas where growth and redevelopment can occur; and providing strategies and recommendations to address some of the challenges at hand.

We Heard You!

Through a collaborative community engagement process that included public meetings and workshops, an interactive website, and a first-of-its-kind Planapalooza™, residents shared what they love about Bedford and their hopes and concerns for its future. Although opinions differ about the best path forward for Bedford, residents overwhelmingly indicated that they love the community and care deeply about its future. From the first day of the process, it was clear that residents find immense value in the existing residential neighborhoods and rural charm of Bedford. The community recognizes that growth will occur, but believes that future development should be limited to specific areas. The 2020 Master Plan update is rooted in these core values, while taking into account historic and forecast data collected throughout the process to help better understand demographics, trends, and fiscal conditions present in Bedford. The result is Blueprint Bedford, a toolkit to help the town preserve the past while moving into the future.
Guiding Principles & Big Ideas

Blueprint Bedford is organized around a set of six enduring “Guiding Principles,” created to ensure Bedford’s current and future quality of life and economic prosperity. The Principles embody the core philosophy and Town vision expressed by the community through the planning process. Secondary to each principle, a set of “Big Ideas” further clarify specific goals. The Guiding Principles and Big Ideas lay the framework for the recommendations or “Next Steps” included in the Plan.

What we heard

“A town, not a city.”

“Protect our water, wetlands and open spaces.”

“A thriving community for people of all ages.”

“Balanced growth! Avoid extremes.”

Implementation

Blueprint Bedford is an ambitious document, full of ideas and strategies to carry the Town ten, or even twenty, years into the future. Implementation of the Plan will be an ongoing process requiring collaboration between Town departments, boards, commissions, committees, and outside agencies. To help the community prioritize action and investment, the Plan summarizes all of the “Next Steps” into an Implementation Matrix. The Matrix recommends a time frame for each recommendation (“Short Term,” “Long Term,” or “Ongoing”), and assigns a “Responsible Party” (or in most cases, parties).

The success of the Plan will be determined by the support and engagement of the community in advancing its recommendations.
Maintain Bedford as an outstanding community to live
Thanks to dedicated citizens, careful governance, and thoughtful planning, Bedford is already a wonderful community. The community will work to preserve and enhance those features that make Bedford, well Bedford, including its high quality services, educational and cultural resources, manageable tax rate, and valued neighborhoods and natural areas.

Foster a healthy and active, multi-generational, and socially connected community
Bedford is a healthy, welcoming, and inclusive community both for longtime residents and newcomers. The Town promotes a spirit of voluntarism and public service to help advance community goals. Cultural and recreation opportunities are high quality and abundant. Housing opportunities are available for residents of all generations and household sizes.

BIG IDEA #1:
Preserve and Enhance Bedford’s Unique Character
By evaluating zoning and land use regulations to ensure conservation of the qualities that make Bedford special, like its agricultural heritage, peaceful neighborhoods, and attractive gateways and corridors.

BIG IDEA #2:
Implement Best Practices in Community Design & Architecture
Through guidelines that carefully direct the design, architecture, and placement of buildings and parking areas; and that help improve connectivity and walkability.

BIG IDEA #3:
Ensure Balanced Growth to Realize a “Right-Sized” Bedford
By encouraging growth in the Performance Zone and limiting it in established residential neighborhoods; and by monitoring the impacts of development on municipal services and quality of life.

BIG IDEA #4:
Provide Opportunities for Housing Choice
By evaluating opportunities to provide additional housing types that are compatible with Bedford’s existing single-family housing, particularly for older persons and young adults.

BIG IDEA #5:
Promote Expanded Social and Civic Engagement
By supporting community organizations, providing meeting spaces, encouraging participation in governance and elections, and expanding recreational, social and educational programming.

BIG IDEA #6:
Provide High Quality Municipal Facilities & Services
By implementing related Town plans; by evaluating opportunities to expand public infrastructure; and by ensuring that public services are accessible to all.
Preserve open spaces, rural and historic character, and existing neighborhoods

Recognizing that Bedford has limited areas to support new development, the community will work to preserve its rural landscapes, open spaces, and historic resources. The community will maintain its existing residential neighborhoods while providing opportunities for development in areas where appropriate.

**BIG IDEA #7:**
Steward Conserved Land, Trails, and Outdoor Recreation Amenities
By investing in trails, conserving land and other natural resources; and by developing and implementing stewardship plans for public lands.

**BIG IDEA #8:**
Preserve Bedford’s Rural, Historic & Residential Character
By maintaining the existing Historic District Commission, preserving the character of Bedford’s Town Center and neighborhoods, and increasing awareness and protection of historic resources.

Support innovation, entrepreneurship, and a vibrant and dynamic local and regional economy

Bedford provides opportunities for entrepreneurs to enter the marketplace and thrive. The community supports both a thriving small business community and a strong base of national and international employers. Bedford is a trusted partner to support regional initiatives, including education and workforce training programs, and works cooperatively with peer communities to advance the region’s economy. Bedford leads by example by embracing technological and economic change to deliver higher quality, streamlined and more cost-effective services.

**BIG IDEA #9:**
Tell Bedford’s Story & Advocate for the Business Community
Through branding and marketing efforts, promote Bedford as a great place to do business, with continued support of the town’s businesses, employers, and entrepreneurs.

**BIG IDEA #10:**
Focus Economic Development in the Performance Zone
By promoting and marketing the district as a vibrant and attractive destination for commercial and mixed-use development; and by implementing design standards to ensure high-quality building projects.

**BIG IDEA #11:**
Identify Barriers to Expanded Economic Development
By making information understandable and accessible to all business owners; and by ensuring clarity of ordinances and regulations while continuing to allow flexibility in the development review process.
Advance transportation and infrastructure connections
Bedford is an accessible and connected community. The Town supports a safe, innovative, and efficient transportation network and leverages opportunities to enhance connectivity for all travel users, including drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders. Where appropriate, the community pursues opportunities, at both the local and regional level, to expand technology and infrastructure connections to support the community’s quality of life and achieve desired growth.

**BIG IDEA #15:**
Promote Safer, Less Congested, and Better Connected Streets
Through traffic calming and control strategies; continued cooperation with NHDOT; and the implementation of related transportation plans and initiatives.

**BIG IDEA #16:**
Promote Alternative Travel Modes & More Complete Streets
By balancing safe, efficient travel options for all modes of transportation; to expand pedestrian and bicycle facilities; and to plan for future public transit and rail service.

**BIG IDEA #17:**
Promote Regional Collaboration and Innovation
By continuing to collaborate with neighboring communities and state and regional agencies to solve problems and further common goals.

Conserve the natural environment and manage change
A pristine natural environment and a growing economy are not mutually exclusive goals in Bedford. Local government, residents, and businesses are careful stewards of the environment. Bedford supports growth in areas where it is appropriate, including areas where infrastructure is available, and in a manner that is minimally impactful to the environment. The Town works with residents and the private sector to realize environmental goals, including clean air and water and energy conservation. The community is prepared for a changing and dynamic environment, including extreme weather events.

**BIG IDEA #12:**
Protect Water Resources
By continuing to monitor Bedford’s water supply and storm sewer systems and water quality and working to reduce stormwater pollution.

**BIG IDEA #13:**
Promote Energy Efficiency and Sustainability
By developing a Sustainability Plan and encouraging energy-efficient building construction, solid waste and transportation solutions.

**BIG IDEA #14:**
Plan for Changing Climate, Demographic and Technological Conditions
By updating Town plans and regulations and promoting a spirit of preparedness across the community.
Conservation & Development Map

The public input process was an opportunity for residents to prioritize future planning efforts in Bedford. Overall, the community’s feeling was that conservation land and existing residential neighborhoods should be maintained as-is, while opportunities for redevelopment were limited to existing activity centers, particularly along the Route 3 corridor and Route 101. This input led to the creation of a Conservation & Development Map which organizes the community into Sectors prioritized for varying degrees of land conservation, including both permanently protected and recreational open spaces, existing developed neighborhoods, and mixed-use/commercial sectors that support existing and proposed walkable, complete activity centers. The five sectors are described below and depicted on the map that follows.

C-1 Conservation Land Sector
The C-1 Conservation Land Sector includes land that is already under conservation, either through easements or ownership by the Town or other conservation entities like local land trusts. Many of these areas have been set aside to be protected in perpetuity through easements or deed restrictions. These areas include surface waterbodies, protected wetlands, floodplains, protected habitat, riparian corridors, purchased open space, conservation easements, wildlife transportation corridors, and open space areas part of cluster subdivisions as well as transmission line corridors and cemeteries. Moving forward, efforts should be focused on expanding and connecting conserved areas, including conserved areas in neighboring town, to improve connectivity for outdoor recreation and natural resource protection.

P-1 Preservation Sector
The Preservation Sector makes up the largest proportion of the Town; and encompasses the areas developed with low-density neighborhoods and agricultural lands (some with water and sewer, but most with on-site systems) that should remain “as is.” This area is defined by conventional suburban development patterns of primarily detached single-family houses. A few significant tracts of rural undeveloped land remains in this Sector. These areas should be either preserved or developed as cluster subdivisions with significant areas of protected open space. The use of accessory dwelling units should be continued to provide more housing choice and flexibility in these areas.

D-1 Locally Serving Development Sector
Locally Serving Development Sectors are smaller nodes of activity that are mostly developed but still contain underutilized parcels. Most of these areas were developed in a conventional, auto-oriented suburban pattern located along Routes 101 and 114. Buildings have smaller footprints and target primarily local customers and patrons passing through the area. Zoning in the Route 101 commercial areas is stricter in terms of maximum heights and building footprints. The Locally Serving Development Sector should allow for changes in development patterns while maintaining the scale of buildings and requiring high quality architectural and site design. The area of this Sector encompasses the existing commercial areas; no significant expansions should be planned. Instead, redevelopment and the reuse of existing land and buildings should be encouraged to better meet the local goal of achieving more engaging patterns of development. Even though access to these various nodes will likely continue to be via automobile, a sensitive approach to redevelopment in the future would allow for the creation of a more walkable environment. New development should be carefully designed to complement Bedford’s rural character.

D-2 Regionally Focused Development Sector
The Regionally Focused Development Sector generally encompasses the South River Road corridor and surrounding areas. This area presents the greatest opportunity for regional-scale commercial development and job creation. Existing development in the D-2 sector has occurred in a conventional, auto-oriented suburban pattern, and includes several big-box retailers and office park environments. Some newer development has begun to take a mixed-use approach. Moving forward, the Town should carefully evaluate in what areas of the corridor mixed-use development should be permitted and develop design standards to ensure development reflects the community’s vision. New development, redevelopment, or the reuse of existing land and buildings should be encouraged to help achieve more walkable and bikeable corridors including improvements to the Heritage Trail and greater public access to the Merrimack River. The southern part of this sector may also present opportunities for transit-oriented development, should a passenger rail station come to fruition at the Bedford/Londonderry border.

P-2 Traditional Neighborhood Sector
The Traditional Neighborhood Sector include areas of medium-density neighborhoods of homes set on smaller lots, many within neighborhoods of a gridded street pattern with strong street connectivity. These neighborhoods offer more compact housing options in neighborhoods and include pockets of small-scale commercial uses. This area would benefit from a neighborhood plan to carefully evaluate existing regulations and opportunities for traffic calming and expanded recreation and pedestrian bicycle facilities. Commercial uses that provide neighborhood amenities, including coffee shops, boutiques and small offices, may be considered in limited areas that do not detract from residential character.
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