

Report of the Community Facilities and Open Space Plan Committee

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

A. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES

At the March, 2004 Annual Town Meeting, the Town voted to appropriate Twenty-five Thousand Dollars (\$25,000) to be used by a Community Facilities and Open Space Plan Committee (the Committee) to develop a comprehensive plan for Town facilities and open space. A Committee comprised of members of Town boards, committees, commissions, Town departments, and citizens was appointed by the Selectmen on April 14, 2004. Shortly thereafter the Committee hired Jeffrey Taylor who had served as the head of the New Hampshire State Office of Planning for three (3) Governors as its consultant. Mr. Taylor worked in collaboration with the Architectural Firm of Corzilius, Matuszewski, Krause (CMK Architects) in assisting the Committee with its work.

During 2004 the Committee met 19 times. The Committee began by preparing an inventory of existing Town facilities and Town owned parcels of land. An Open Space Plan subcommittee (the Subcommittee) was appointed to develop recommendations for an Open Space Plan, which is included as part of this Report. The Committee held two (2) Public Hearings to obtain public input.

Evaluation:

- Both Police and Fire Stations are inadequate and need to be replaced.
- The Town Public Works facility no longer meets the needs of the Public Works Department. The existing site near Rindge Center is adequate for a new facility.
- The Town's main recreation facility is the Wellington Field area, which is currently overburdened and in need of expansion.
- The Town Office building is minimally adequate, with its primary shortcomings being lack of meeting and storage space.
- The Meeting House continues to be the centerpiece of the Town and has been restored and maintained in good condition.
- The Ingalls Memorial Library serves the Town well, with its only need being additional parking and better traffic circulation.
- The Rindge Historical Society and museum building is in need of upgrades so as to be adequate for preservation of valuable Town items and documents.

Recommendations:

After completing the inventory and evaluation of the Town's existing facilities, the Committee focused on prioritizing those facilities in most need of repair or replacement.

- Top priority is the replacement of the existing Fire and Police Stations with a new Public Safety Complex, housing both Police and Fire Departments, which would be located on the present site in Rindge Center. Purchase of a small parcel of land behind the present buildings may be necessary.
- Construction of a new Public Works facility at its present site should be presented for a vote by the Town at the March 2005 Town Meeting.
- Expand the Recreation Department into a Parks & Recreation Department, and move forward with the expansion plan for the Town's Recreation Facilities at Wellington Field.
- Explore the purchase of the Martin House near the Converse Meadow land, which could serve as the Recreation Department Office, thereby making available additional office and storage space in the Town Office Building.
- Reserve five acres of land owned by the Town, abutting the Town Office parcel for future expansion of Town Offices.
- Continue to maintain the Town Meeting House in its current excellent condition.
- The Museum building has space and charm and the Historical Society would like to restore the building to the attractive home it was in the past. The committee recommends that the artifacts, owned by the town, be kept in a climate controlled environment.
- Continue to support the concept of a community center and senior housing in close proximity to Rindge Center.
- Continue to investigate opportunities for public/private partnership for senior housing, and for the restoration of economic activity in Rindge Center.
- Preserve as much land as possible near the Town center for Town use.
- Adopt a mechanism to acquire important land or buildings that may become available for future community facilities.

B. SUMMARY OF OPEN SPACE PLAN

Evaluation:

The Town currently owns land that is not developed for municipal facilities but is retained as vacant open land. Some of this land has been acquired by the Town for conservation purposes. Other land that has been deeded to the Town by various means (either donation, tax lien, etc.) is important for conservation purposes and has been earmarked as such by the Conservation Commission. However, to date there is no formal plan or methodology involved in acquiring and/or permanently protecting land for the future as open space.

Even without this formal plan the Town has shown a commitment to this process, most recently by the purchase of Converse Meadow. In addition, several private landowners have placed conservation easements on their property, permanently protecting it for the future. The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests recommends that all New Hampshire Towns set aside a minimum of 25% of land in the town as permanently protected open space. This will help ensure that future generations have drinkable water, renewable forest resources, and productive agricultural lands while protecting key habitats as well as the uniqueness of the community that many identify as the rural character of the Town.

Due to our location and the NH tax advantage that comes with being a border town, Rindge will always be an ideal place for families and businesses to locate. Without a formal open space plan, we will be unable to preserve the land that should be set aside to meet the goals, not only set forth by the Society for the Protection of NH Forest, but also to provide for the same kind of quality of life for future generations to enjoy.

Recommendations:

- Adopt a mechanism to provide permanent protection for conservation lands owned by the Town of Rindge via a Warrant Article at Town Meeting March 2005.
- Provided the Warrant Article to permanently protect conservation land is passed, permanent protection should immediately be placed upon the following Town owned lands: Converse Meadow, the Town Forest and Tetreault Park. These are primary targets of conservation importance. Other town lands may be deemed important for permanent protection in the future.
- Support the Planning Board's efforts to revise the Open Space Chapter in the Town's Master Plan.
- Proceed on the plans proposed and funded by the Conservation Commission to complete a Bio-Diversity Study and incorporate this into a Natural Resources

Inventory of the Town. (This will be done in coordination with Planning Board efforts.)

- Expand the current Recreation Department into a Parks and Recreation Department to implement the management plan developed by the Conservation Commission for open space land that can be used either partially or wholly for Recreation purposes
- Complete an analysis of large parcels in town, including land in Current Use to identify land that may be important for future protection as well as conservation priority areas.
- Establish a Town Agricultural Commission that includes local farmers.
- Encourage private landowners to consider protective easements.
- Adopt a mechanism to acquire important open space land that may become available.

II. INTRODUCTION

In February 2004 the Budget Advisory Committee recommended to the Board of Selectmen the development of a long-range plan for community facilities and open space. In the past projects had been tentatively approved (the new Highway Garage) and some rejected (a Town Office expansion) by Town Meetings without the benefit of a long range plan. Priorities for these and other proposals and a location and financial plan had not been developed as part of a whole plan for the future.

The Board of Selectmen included an article in the warrant for the 2004 Annual Town Meeting to appropriate \$25,000 to be used by a committee appointed by the Selectmen to develop a comprehensive plan for Town facilities and open space. The plan was also to include the financial implications to the Town as well as the potential uses for town-owned parcels, and be completed by the end of 2004. This article was approved by Town Meeting, and on April 14, 2004, the Selectmen appointed the Committee.

III. METHODOLOGY

Early in its deliberations, the Committee decided the services of a planning consultant would be required. The Committee interviewed two candidates: Jerry Coogan, who had served as a part-time consultant for the Planning Board in the past, and Jeffrey Taylor, President of Jeffrey H. Taylor & Associates. Taylor had served as the head of the New Hampshire State Office of Planning in three administrations. Taylor also enlisted the services of Fred Matuszewski from the architectural firm of Corzilius Matuszewski Krause

(CMK Architects) with experience in the design and cost estimating of municipal buildings. The Committee decided to hire Jeffrey Taylor as a consultant for the study.

The first task of the Committee was to define the size and condition of existing facilities and identify and evaluate town-owned parcels of land. Details of these findings are in a permanent file in the Town Office, this report, and the final report issued by Taylor and CMK (See Appendix J for facility floor plans).

The Subcommittee volunteered to define the characteristics of town-owned lands as well as develop criteria for land that should be considered for inclusion in an Open Space Plan. The maps for the open space portion of the project were generated using a desktop GIS system. Data were collected from a variety of sources including

NH GRANIT, Southwest Region Planning Commission, and the NH Fish and Game Department. A complete identification of what should be included in the Open Space Plan will comprise the major conclusions of a chapter of the Town's Master Plan, assisted by the knowledge acquired in a Bio-Diversity Study currently underway.

The Committee decided to hold two hearings to obtain public input. These were held in July and November.

The Committee believes the time frame of its recommendations cannot be determined precisely, given the uncertainty in the growth rate of the Town, but felt its task was to make recommendations that would be valid through the period 2015-2020. However, the Committee concluded some facilities need immediate attention and should be constructed soon with enough capacity through 2020.

Financial estimates included in this report (see Appendix C) are based on current costs and are prorated from recent municipal projects undertaken by CMK Architects without the benefit of any detailed designs specific to Rindge's facilities. The actual costs for these facilities will depend on when they are approved and on the final design details.

IV. COMMUNITY FACILITIES REPORT

A. Evaluation of Existing Community Facilities

Rindge's public safety functions are currently housed in buildings assessed by our consultant, town officials and this committee to be completely inadequate.

Police Station

The police station, formerly the post office, is too small, difficult to heat, has inadequate detention areas, and is lacking general and evidence storage. Also the water and septic systems need replacement. A local contractor has estimated that it would cost \$350,000 to \$400,000 to bring this building up to Code.

Fire Station

The fire station is also inadequate. It is too small. The roof leaks. There are no fire detection or sprinkler systems. There is limited storage and the building has the same water and septic problems as the police station. The same contractor has estimated that it would cost \$600,000 to \$650,000 to renovate this building.

Department of Public Works

The Town's Public Works Facility is located on 7.7 acres of land on Main Street. The facility consists of a recycling building, a salt shed, an abandoned salt shed, a garage to house vehicles and a rented trailer for office space. The garage was built in 1972 and is generally considered inadequate to meet the needs of the department. The salt shed is two years old and is adequate. The Recycling Center meets the needs of the town; however, it could use some exterior improvements. The old abandoned salt shed needs some structural improvements and can be used for limited storage for the recycling operation. It is the general opinion that the site is adequate for a new Town Garage.

Recreation Department

Active outside recreation facilities consist of Wellington Field, Cromwell Drive tennis courts and Rindge Memorial School ball field (soccer/baseball combined) with playgrounds at Wellington Park, West Rindge and at the Rindge Memorial School totaling an area of 8.5 acres. Nationally, developed recreation space averages 4.7 acres per 1000 residents. For the Town of Rindge, (approximate population of 6000) 30 acres would be recommended.

Wellington Field has two tennis courts, one full sized basketball court, an outdoor volleyball court, a single youth instructional field and a combined soccer/baseball field. This site is overburdened but there is room for further expansion.

The Cromwell Drive, Converse Meadow and Tetreault Park present opportunities for passive recreation such as hiking, birding cross-country skiing, kayaking, canoeing and other outdoor activities. These properties may also be tied in with other Town and State owned lands to form green corridors, expanding passive recreation even further.

Though the Town has many bodies of water within its borders, water access is limited. The few public access points are less than ideal for swimming and would not support a Recreation swim program.

Indoor recreation opportunities are limited to the Rindge Memorial School gymnasium and cafeteria. Availability is determined by the school district's schedule and demands for use by school related programs.

The Recreation Department office is currently in the Town Office building with limited staff and storage space.

Town Office

The Town Office building, located at 30 Payson Hill Road, is minimally adequate for the town's current needs. This facility was totally renovated and expanded twelve years ago. The electrical service needs to be replaced. The building needs a better source of water. The major shortcomings of the facility are its lack of meeting space for the town's various boards, commissions, and committees, and inadequate storage space.

Meeting House

The Meeting House continues to be the Town's gem. It is a well kept and maintained building, having had major renovations in 2001 including a new roof, siding, complete paint job, new windows, insulation and a sprinkler system. Part of the first floor, which is used for Town functions, small meetings, weddings, dinners and special events, has a new hardwood floor, paint job, and refurbished stage.

Library

The Ingalls Memorial Library dates from 1896 and continues to serve the Town well. The total useable area is approximately 6300 square feet, and it has the structural requirements for a third floor addition when needed. The major immediate problems with this facility are parking and egress from the parking lot.

Rindge Historical Society and Museum

The Rindge Historical Society and Museum building has humidity and moisture problems that affect the long range preservation of artifacts. A new heating system was recently installed extending heat to areas not previously heated. Insulation has also been installed in some areas where it had not existed.

B. Recommendations for Community Facilities

The Rindge Community Profile of 1999 and the Rindge 2020 Project of 2002 both concluded that village centers are an important part of Rindge's past and future. This was reinforced by the dialogue held at the public forum in July 2004 as part of this Committee's work. Several of the options proposed by Jeffrey Taylor and Associates and CMK Architects, and some of the recommendations of the Committee, were influenced by the desire of the Town to revitalize the Town Center. The Committee also concludes that Town-owned land near the Town Center should be preserved for Town use.

Public Safety Complex

The Committee has made a new public safety complex housing police and fire its top priority. The chiefs and some committee members visited several public safety complexes in New Hampshire and all agreed that a building similar to, but slightly smaller than the one recently built in Moultonborough, would suit the needs of Rindge. The Committee also unanimously agreed that the new safety complex should be located on the present site of the police and fire stations. In order to remain operational during construction, the new safety complex could be built behind the present stations that would be demolished following occupancy of the new facility. The purchase of a small parcel of land of approximately 1½ acres behind the present buildings may be necessary. (Appendix K)

The elevation of the land behind the present fire station indicates that a certain amount of fill may be required to make the area level for construction. (See Appendix A).

The Committee feels that a new public safety complex is urgently needed by the Town of Rindge to provide adequate operating facilities and to minimize capital expenditures to keep the present facilities operational. We recommend preliminary designs for a new safety complex in 2005 and construction in 2007, on the present police and fire station site.

In response to the high priority placed on a new public safety building, the Capital Improvement Committee has recommended an appropriation within the CIP for \$30,000 in 2005 for feasibility, schematics and a cost estimate for the new public safety complex. The CIP also includes \$40,000 in 2006 for design engineering and bid documents for the public safety complex. In 2007 the CIP includes bonding for \$3,000,000 to erect and outfit a new public safety complex with all debt service (bond interest and amortization) included in the CIP as CIP expenditures (See CIP Summary, Appendix B).

Department of Public Works

The Highway Department has been housed at the present site for over thirty years. Considering that a previous committee recommended to construct a new Town Garage on that site, and the fact that Town Meeting has already approved a portion of a new Town Garage by approving engineering fees, construction of a salt shed and purchasing a tract of land from the Church, the Committee agreed that the proposal being considered at this time by the Selectmen be presented to Town Meeting for their deliberation.

Recreation Department

The Recreation Department should proceed with development design for expansion plan of Wellington Field. The Committee's other recommendations are as follows:

The Martin House, adjacent to Converse Meadow, has been offered for sale to the Town. Explore the purchase of the Martin house for office, meeting and storage space, as well as a gateway to Converse Meadow.

Develop a long-range plan for recreation and open space opportunities at Cromwell Drive.

Expand the Recreation Department into a Parks and Recreation Department.

Develop a long-range plan for a public beach.

Town Office

Since the Town Office is centrally located, and abuts the 16-acre parcel of Town land, it is the recommendation of the committee that five acres of land should be reserved for future expansion of the Town Offices. The Committee also recommends that the Town Office share a new source of water with any development that occurs on the 16-acre parcel. It is generally agreed there is a need for meeting space, but this issue may be resolved with a new Public Safety Facility and/or the purchase of the Martin Property.

Meeting House

The Meetinghouse Oversight Committee has been created by the Board of Selectmen. This committee should be encouraged to continue to implement its charge of maintaining the Meeting House, by coordinating the efforts of the Town, Congregational Church and Trustees of the Ward Fund. It is the general consensus that this facility should be kept and maintained so that it does not fall into disrepair as it did in the 1980s and 1990s.

Library

The library facilities should remain at the current location for the foreseeable future. The Library Trustees are developing a plan which would result in increased parking and improved traffic circulation at the library. Although this plan has not been finalized, it would involve an increase in the number of parking spaces near the entrance to the parking lot on Main Street; relocating the septic system and providing additional parking where that system is now located; and improving the egress from the parking lot by widening the current access and egress driveway. Money has been included in the Capital Improvement Plan in 2005 and 2006 for design and construction of an improved parking area. No additional expenditures are forecast until after 2011, although it is anticipated that a third floor will be needed in the 2012-2015 time frame.

Rindge Historical Society and Museum

The Historical Society building has space and charm and the Society would like to restore the building to the attractive home it was in the past. The committee recommends that the artifacts, owned by the town, be kept in a climate controlled environment. Supplies that would protect individual records and photographs should also be purchased.

Proposed Community Center

Rindge public opinion has generally supported the concept of developing or redeveloping village centers and particularly Rindge Center. One strategy recommended in "Rindge 2020 Mapping Our Future" (10-10-02) is to "foster a sense of community" and attract residents to Rindge Center by constructing support facilities. These could be buildings that support various groups of citizens and activities, bringing people together. A community center building could help to restore purpose and life in Rindge Center. Numerous discussions have taken place regarding a desire for such a facility, over the years

In a practical way a community center could provide urgently needed space for Historical Society displays, general meetings and some indoor recreation. It could also provide room for other social, cultural and educational events, while at the same time alleviating pressure on shrinking town office space. Such a concept has been proposed by Jeffrey H. Taylor & Associates in their report "Community Facilities Study" (12-04) on page 14.

Upon becoming familiar with the history and physical conditions of our town-owned buildings and land, some things immediately become clear. It is evident that very little useable land, currently owned by the town, rests in or adjacent to Rindge Center. Since there is a general consensus that long-range plans for municipal development should energize the village center, any available parcels in the center have high value to the town.

The largest town-owned parcel currently located adjacent to Rindge Center is lot 28-13. This is a 16-acre site directly behind the current Town Office building. Here there is sufficient useable space for expansion of the Town Offices and additional facilities. It is the opinion of the Committee that a portion of this land should be reserved for a community center that would be in close proximity to the Town Office Building, the Meeting House, the Rindge Memorial School, the Historical Society Museum and the Library.

As this concept develops, other structures that would complement one another could be added. A senior housing complex is one idea.

Public/Private Partnership

The relocation of Rte. 202 followed by the removal of the Post office, bank and closure of the Village Store all have combined to significantly diminish the economic vitality of Rindge Center. However there are a number of sites in or near Rindge Center where business and professional office development could occur. There has been interest expressed in the possible location of medical office facilities in Rindge Center, and a Village Store similar to that which was historically located in Rindge Center. Those could be gathering places for Town citizens.

Thrasher Hill is an attractive site for senior housing. It has the advantage of being close to the Town Center and within walking distance to the Church/Meeting House, Library, Town Office and School. Senior housing would also help provide the added activity necessary to support business/professional office development in Rindge Center.

In October of 2004 the Rindge Economic Development Committee was formed for the purpose of "recommending to the Board of Selectmen any matters that the Economic Development Committee may determine to be in the economic best interests of the Town." One of the ideas being discussed by the Economic Development Committee is the organization of an Economic Development Corporation. This would be a nonprofit corporation which could acquire, develop lease and sell business property. The enabling legislation (RSA 162-G:2) provides: "It is further declared that the acquisition of title to such facilities through a nonprofit corporation, and the lease or sale of such facilities as provided hereunder is a public purpose and shall be regarded as performing an essential government function in carrying out the provisions of this chapter." This kind of an entity could play a role in revitalizing Rindge Center.

The Committee recommends that sites be identified in and around Rindge Center where business and professional offices could locate. The Committee also recommends that Village zoning regulations be examined and if necessary amended so as to allow such business/professional uses and that Town officials and the Rindge Economic Development Committee look for opportunities to work in concert with private parties to encourage small business and professional office development in and around Rindge Center.

