

**The Master Plan For  
The Town of Randolph, NH**  
~~2016~~2019 2023

**FOR PUBLIC HEARING**  
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## **A Town Looks At Its Future**

“The past is the present, isn’t it? It’s the future, too,” remarked one of Eugene O’Neill’s characters in Long Day’s Journey into Night. In terms of the evolution of the Town of Randolph, there is much truth to this comment: Its present and future character is and will be determined by its past.

This fact has been recognized in all of the three important planning statements enunciated by the Town. The first was the master plan completed in 1980. This was followed by a second master plan, twelve years later, in 1992. In 2001 the creation of the Randolph Community Forest (RCF) by a vote of the Town at a special Town Meeting represented another type of planning statement. It was not a formal, finished document, like its predecessors, but it was, nevertheless, a powerful statement, and affirmation, of the ethos of the Town, and of the type of development its residents wanted for it. It was a graphic illustration of the utility of a form of “action planning.”

## **The Planning Philosophy**

Plans do not have to be comprehensive to be useful. “Action planning,” for instance, first used in Singapore in 1963, is an abbreviated planning process which focuses, not on the whole range of civic activity, but more narrowly upon those crucial public sector decisions which determine the essential nature of a community, and how it will develop in future. The process begins with a *reconnaissance survey* to quickly identify dominant problems and obvious opportunities. This survey leads to the formulation of a *guiding concept* which governs public officials’ decisions about the use and allocation of land. From then on, the process is dynamic and cyclical: the decisions lead to implementation of projects, which leads to further decisions reflecting the effect of the projects and so forth. The process is not static. It is a cycle of plans, decisions and projects inspired by the guiding concept. Hence, the title “action” planning.

The action planning process can be adapted for a small town, with some modifications. Where there is little call for directing growth through public investment in infrastructure the focal point would be not a guiding concept, but something more like a *guiding principle*; a guiding principle which represents the culture of the community and is derived not only from the actions of local officials but, perhaps more importantly, from the actions of private individuals and groups.

But the essence of the process remains the same: the actions of people – officials and non-officials, alike – create the culture, which determines the guiding principle and that, in turn, influences the planning board – and private landowners - in making land-use decisions.

Such an adapted version of action planning falls within the definition of a master plan in the New Hampshire statutes. Although the law also allows planning boards to include many additional areas of activity in a master plan, the essential requirements for a basic minimum plan do, in fact, resemble the ingredients of an action plan. The introductory paragraph of RSA 674:2, lays out the purpose: “to set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning board.” Significantly, the purpose is not to provide direction for the whole of town government; its scope is “to aid the [planning] board ...” in its work. The RSA goes on to say that the master plan should, as one of two minimum requirements, include a “vision section that serves to direct the other sections of the plan,” and which “articulate(s) the desires of the citizens affected by the master plan...It shall contain a set of guiding principles ...” The vision section corresponds to the guiding principle in the action planning format.

The other minimum requirement for a master plan is a section on land-use. This is a logical extension of the emphasis placed upon the plan as an aid to a planning board, since land-use is the special province of that institution.

### **The Vision Section: A Land Conservation Culture Grows in Randolph**

The guiding principle for the Town of Randolph has been defined by its history, from the mid-nineteenth century onward. When they welcomed the first “summer visitors” into their farmhouses, the early residents set in motion a process that would result in an unusual Town with an unusual ethos. Throughout the Town’s subsequent history the events most significant in shaping its culture were those which involved facilitating the public access to, and enjoyment of, the surrounding woodlands and mountain areas and the protection of those areas from being developed. Support for these activities brought together coalitions which spanned the summer and year-round resident distinction.

Outdoor recreation was an area of cooperation from the earliest days. At first the visiting climbers were guided to the summits by locals who had spent their

childhood hunting and hiking through the woods and knew them well. Later, the residents of Randolph collaborated on the construction of an extensive network of permanent trails. In 1910, following extensive logging that destroyed many of those trails, the Randolph Mountain Club (RMC) was born at the suggestion of one of the Town Selectmen. It has been a force for cohesion ever since.

Over the years shared and complementary interests grew into a shared vision of a town which preserved its rural atmosphere and character. As in any normal town, Randolph has seen the usual bickering and differences of opinion about many local issues. But there is one overriding concern which draws the townspeople together. That is the need to conserve land for hiking, hunting, snowmobiling, skiing and other forms of traditional outdoor recreation, for ecological protection and for supporting the local economy through the practice of sustainable forest management.

Expressions of this concern date back to the final quarter of the nineteenth century which saw the collaboration between some of the early summer residents and local townspeople in the construction of the first trails to the summits of the northern White Mountains. This was followed in 1910 with the formation of the RMC to preserve and maintain those trails. The membership of the RMC was largely drawn from Randolph's summer community, but selectmen and other year-round residents also joined the organization. Perhaps the most divisive issue to confront the townspeople was the question of the site of the highway when the new Route 2 was built in 1964. Even this issue can be seen to have involved land because the town did not divide along local versus summer resident lines but along location in town. No one wanted their part of town to be opened to the development which often accompanies the building of a road.

In 1960, the Ravine House (a landmark hotel in the Randolph Valley) went out of business and was razed. This event gave rise to the creation of the Randolph Foundation, another expression of the Town's collective vision of itself. The immediate purpose behind the formation of the Foundation was the purchase and protection of the bulk of the land previously owned by the hotel. The funds needed to finance the purchase were raised both by private donations and by carving out, and selling, three house lots along Durand Road. The land so purchased, including the Ravine House Pool and what is now Lake Durand, were placed in a trust and, in 1966, were formally transferred to the Town.

The language in the Articles of Agreement of the Randolph Foundation, however, contemplated a future role for the organization that was not limited to the initial property transaction. It included, as Foundation purposes, the promotion of “charitable” and “scientific” activities “within or of benefit to the Town of Randolph, and to the general benefit of its inhabitants, its visitors and to the adjacent area, including the United States White Mountain National Forest.”

The account of these various initiatives – by individuals, groups and local officials – shows how the vision of Randolph’s future emerges from actions taken in its past.

### **Applying the Guiding Principle: The Randolph Community Forest**

One resident has said that “the creation of the Community Forest was the best thing that has happened to Randolph since its founding in 1824.” While this may be a little hyperbolic, there is no doubt that it was a significant event.

The four-year effort to bring the Community Forest into existence was led by the Randolph Planning Board. The Board had long recognized the dominant land-use issue facing the Town. The earlier master plans had highlighted the potential danger posed by the existence, within Town boundaries, of a 13,000 acre tract of undeveloped commercial timberland. If the owners of that tract should ever decide to sell that land to developers, the effect on the Town would be devastating.

That tract of commercial timberland was, in many ways, at the heart of Randolph’s rural, sylvan environment. Except when active timber operations were in progress, the public was allowed to use the land freely for many forms of traditional outdoor recreation, and for more than a century Randolph residents had been taking full advantage of that allowance. They had built and maintained hiking trails through it; they had hunted its woodlands and fished its rivers; they had snowshoed and cross-country skied it in winter. They had come to consider it their own.

Moreover, the development of the land, whether for residential subdivisions or for a commercial recreation park, would impose enormous costs on what is a very small Town. The rugged nature of the topography meant that, to be economically feasible, any development, of whatever kind, would necessarily be a large one in order to justify the expenditures that a developer would need to make on infrastructure. A large development would burden the Town with servicing

costs, far beyond any reasonable returns it might receive in the way of taxes. These costs would be exacerbated by geographic factors: some of the most potentially desirable sites could, in fact, only be reached from the Town center by driving through a neighboring town, adding to the costs and complexities of providing such areas with municipal services. Neither master plan was able to propose any concrete steps to lift this burden from the Town.

But, in 1997, the Planning Board suddenly found itself presented with an opportunity to do something about the problem. It was discovered and reported to the Board, that two years earlier the commercial owners of the 13,000 acre tract had applied for a Federal Legacy conservation easement. The Federal Legacy Program is a means by which a state receives federal funds to purchase the development rights over lands that it wishes to preserve in their existing condition. The purchase pays a landowner who sells those rights to the state to give up the right to sell or subdivide the land for more intensive uses, while continuing to use it for its current purpose. In other words, it prevents the land from being developed.

When the Planning Board discovered that the owners were willing to place a conservation easement over the land in Randolph, it determined to help them do so. In making that decision, and later, when the owners wanted to sell outright, the decision to attempt to create a community-owned forest, the Board was unilaterally applying the guiding principle that existed for the Town of Randolph. There would be many public meetings and discussions with the community over how to raise the funds needed, what should be in the conservation easement, what kind of management structure would be required and other details, but the question of “why” did not arise.

In 2005, a master plan survey of the opinions of residents confirmed the accuracy of the Planning Board’s interpretation of the Town’s guiding principle. Overwhelmingly, the respondents said that they wanted the Town to preserve its rural character and favored conservation of its woodlands.

In the years that followed, this theme was repeated in the actions of individuals and by the entire Town in Town Meeting votes. On the one hand, four land owners permanently protected 443 acres of private land with conservation easements, and two others sold land to the White Mountain National Forest. On the other, as recorded below, other individuals have donated a total of 182 acres to the Town. In accepting these donations, and in approving other measures connected with conservation or woodland recreation, even some involving costs to the Town,

Town Meetings, year after year, have demonstrated that the guiding principle applied by the Planning Board in the acquisition of the Community Forest still motivates its residents.

At the 2006 Town Meeting, for instance, the Town voted to waive a land use charge which would otherwise have been due as a result of land being taken out of the current use category. The purpose of the change of use was to enable the Randolph Mountain Club to construct a base camp for hut and trail crews.

At the 2007 Town Meeting, the Town voted to make it easier for land to be made part of the Randolph Community Forest. It also voted to add another five acre parcel of land to the Forest, and it voted to authorize the Selectmen to enter into negotiations with the Town of Gorham with the aim of working out an arrangement under which Gorham would place its watershed protection land, located within the Town of Randolph, under a permanent conservation easement. (To date, this aim has not been achieved, but the effort is on-going.)

In 2008, the Town Meeting voted to authorize the Selectmen to purchase a ten-acre parcel of land for the purpose of establishing a permanently protected trailhead and parking lot [at the end of Randolph Hill Road](#) to improve access to the Randolph Community Forest. The vote also specified that the trailhead land, when purchased, would become a part of the Forest. In this case, the trailhead land was to be paid for with private funds and, in a separate vote, the Town established a trust fund to receive donations for the purpose.

On the 2012 Town Meeting Warrant, there were four different, but related conservation-oriented articles. The first would authorize the Selectmen to accept, and would designate as Town Forest land, two tracts of property straddling both Route 2 and the Israel<sup>2</sup>s River. The integration of this property into the Community Forest would provide a significant north-south corridor of protected land between the existing Community Forest and the White Mountain National Forest. In spite of the fact that it was noted at the Meeting that the loss of this property from the tax rolls would result in a significant reduction of revenue to the Town, the article was approved by an overwhelming majority.

Other items on the 2012 Warrant established a ~~mechanism~~ trust fund for the purpose of purchasing land or conservation easements over land within or adjacent to the Israel<sup>2</sup>s River valley; authorized the selectmen to accept voluntary donations of conservation easements in that valley and to designate as Town Forest land a 4.5



acre parcel of Town owned land adjoining the first-mentioned property. All of these items were approved with few, if any dissents.

In 2014, the Town voted to authorize the donation by the Town of conservation easements to the State of New Hampshire of a number of parcels of land within the Community Forest which were not already covered by such easements. It also voted overwhelmingly to oppose the use of the pipeline running through the Town for the transport of tar sands oil from Montreal to Portland, Maine. The article emphasized the danger such oil posed to the environment of the Town, especially in light of the age and condition of the pipeline.

Finally, in 2015, the Town voted unanimously to accept, and designate as Town Forest land, a parcel of land encompassing Rollo Falls, a waterfall in the headwaters of the Moose River, which was purchased and donated to the Town. It, too, represented a loss of Town tax revenues, albeit not a substantial loss.

In 2019 about 200 acres of the Gorham Town Forest located in Randolph was purchased and transferred into the Randolph Town Forest. This new tract provides access to the Randolph Town Forest via Jimtown Road in Gorham for recreational as well as forest use. In addition, 32 acres of wetland on the Moose River and 16 acres of adjacent forest land were added to the Town Forest that year

This sustained pattern of Town Meeting votes provides further evidence, ~~if it is needed~~, of the Town's guiding principle, as identified by the Planning Board. That principle makes it very clear that the future of the Town lies in the promotion of conservation and woodland-based recreation.

~~Aside from envisioning the future of the Town, the other minimum legal requirement for a New Hampshire master plan is a land-use section.~~

### **Checking in with the Community**

In the summer of 2018, the Planning Board hosted a community conversation on the future of Randolph. (See the Summary Report in the Appendix.) Participants were asked what they value most about living in Randolph and a facilitated discussion took place to identify what is needed to maintain and build upon those qualities. Many of the most valued attributes of Randolph were related to the landscape and the opportunities it provides, such as forest, wildlife, streams, views, beauty, mountain living, trails, dark skies, fresh air and quiet.

Of equal importance to participants was a sense of community and the activities and events that play an important role in building community. There was

concern that changes in demographics and in the seasonal home market may be leading to changes that will weaken the connectedness of the community. Some of the changes observed are those experienced region-wide, such as the aging of the population as the mills have closed and young people and families have settled in other areas with more opportunity. At the same time, retirees have moved in. In just ten years, from 2000 to 2010, the median age in Randolph increased from 46 to 57 (U.S. Census). By the 2020 US Census this figure had again increased but by a smaller amount, to 59.7. Community connections were made as the children of local families found summer jobs, and families visiting for the summer formed lasting relationships with year-round residents and other summer residents. Short-term rentals are now becoming more common. There is concern that both of these factors are making it more of a challenge to build relationships and maintain some of the traditional activities and events.

From the 2018 Community Conversation, edits and updates to the 2016 version of the Master Plan were presented to the Town through a public hearing in August 2019. A variety of circumstances created delays in updating the Plan. In the summer of 2023, the Planning Board revisited the proposed changes and other updates. This resulted in a new version of edits to the Master Plan presented at a public hearing in the Fall of 2023 and adopted by the Planning Board in xxxxx.

### **A Snapshot of the Town: The Land-Use Section**

In keeping with the conservation-minded ethic which characterizes the Town of Randolph, much of the 30,170 acres of land within the Town is protected from development in one way or another.

#### **The White Mountain National Forest:**

The oldest, and largest, areas of protected land within the Town boundaries are those within the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF). Today, the WMNF comprises 13,574 acres of Randolph land. Its protection cannot, of course, be said to have been a unilateral accomplishment of the Town of Randolph, or its residents. But the passage of the Weeks Act in 1911 and the subsequent creation of the WMNF in the same year, represented the culmination of years of political pressure having been placed on the US Congress by many people and the summer residents of the Town were extremely active participants in that process. In the years since, generations of Randolph residents have benefitted from the existence of the WMNF, with its myriad hiking trails and other opportunities for traditional forms of outdoor recreation.

In recent years, the Town played a direct role in helping to enlarge the size of the WMNF. Between 1998 and 2003, the Town and the US Forest Service worked in tandem on the project that resulted in the creation of the Randolph Community Forest. As a part of that collaboration, a 3370-acre tract of land was added to the WMNF. This tract encompasses the historically important and locally popular Pond of Safety together with the region immediately around it. All of the added acres lie within the WMNF Proclamation Boundary.

The Forest Service is authorized to purchase lands within the WMNF Proclamation Boundary, which is a boundary that was established by Congress at the time the National Forest was created. Within the boundary, land may be purchased by the USFS from a willing seller without further authorization from Congress. To acquire land outside the boundary would necessitate such authorization by legislation.

In Randolph, the Proclamation Boundary abuts the Randolph Community Forest for lands north of US Route 2. South of Route 2, the boundary line runs roughly parallel to the old railroad line, and was probably determined by it. The recent purchase by the Forest Service of land in the vicinity of Bowman to establish the Castle Trailhead and public access to the northern Presidential Range is an example of its authority to acquire land within the Proclamation Boundary.

The WMNF land within the Town of Randolph is in two sections. One is part of the Presidential unit and is located on the south side of Route U.S. 2, from the general area of the Pinkham B Road (a.k.a. Dolly Copp Road) on the east to the Town line on the west. The other, a part of the Kilkenny Management Area, includes the northern slopes of the Crescent Mountain Range on the northern edge of the Town. Together, these large tracts of National Forest land account for some 45% of the total land mass within the Town.

While the Forest Service does not pay taxes to the local community, it compensates by making "Payments in Lieu of Taxes" (PILT), based on population, receipt sharing payments, and the amount of Federal land within an affected county/town. In addition, the Town receives compensation from what is known as the Twenty Five Percent Fund which is based on the total receipts received by the National Forest in that town's respective county. These include monies from timber sales, campground fees, and special use fees such as ski areas and private leases. 25% of all the fees collected each year are paid to the county, which then pays to each town its proportionate share, based upon the percentage of the total acreage administered by the Forest Service in that town. Federal payments to

towns, however, are subject to the whims of the congressional budget process: when the Forest Service is not fully funded, it cannot meet its financial obligations and towns and counties are shortchanged as a result.

With the creation of the Randolph Community Forest, a strategic link of conserved lands was created between the WMNF's 700,000-acre Presidential unit to the south and the 150,000-acre Kilkenny area to the north which provides ecological connectivity, an important wildlife corridor, and recreational access and uninterrupted space.

### **The Randolph Community Forest:**

Next to the WMNF, in terms of the number of acres of land permanently conserved within the Town, is the Randolph Community Forest (RCF). The land within the Forest is owned by the Town under a conservation easement held by the State of New Hampshire. When originally constituted, in 2001, ~~the Forest~~ included 8983 acres within ~~Randolph and the Town. (It also included~~ 1215 acres in the neighboring ~~Town of Jefferson.)~~ Since then, it has grown in modest, but important, ways. In Randolph 182 acres have been added, and in Jefferson 138 acres have been added. This brings ~~to bring~~ the total acreage of the Forest to 10,518 with of land in Randolph to 9,165 acres in Randolph and 1,353 in Jefferson. (10,380 acres overall.) Those additions have brought to the Forest a diversity of natural environmental conditions. Land at the headwaters of both the Moose and the Israel's River are now part of the RCF, giving it some important riparian and wetlands areas. Other additions have provided sites for trailheads and improved accessibility to the Forest. Today, the RCF accounts for 35% of the land within the Town.

Because the RCF makes up such a large part of the land area of the Town, its management represents land-use decision-making on a large scale. For this reason, the ultimate responsibility for its supervision was placed in the hands of the Randolph Planning Board. This five-member board of elected officials, including *ex officio* representation from the Board of Selectmen, is responsible for approving all major decisions relating to Forest management. These include all contracts extending for terms of more than one year, all proposed timber harvests and the annual budget. All decisions by the Board are taken after publicly-notified hearings.

The annual budget is the budget of the Forest Revolving Fund. In order to facilitate long-term contractual obligations necessary for forestry operations, Randolph was allowed, by a special act of the state legislature, to establish a

management fund which is not subject to votes at the annual Town Meeting. The monies in the fund's come from private gifts and donations and, more importantly, from the revenues derived from timber harvests and other profitable uses of Forest resources.

During the effort to create the Community Forest, a promise was made that the RCF would be economically self-sustaining. In the early days there was some concern that the 1998 ice storm had done so much damage that the Forest would have to wait 20 or 30 years to become profitable. This worry was fortunately unfounded. During its first decade as a Community Forest, the RCF has paid its own management costs, generated over \$200,000 in revenue to the Town in timber tax receipts and has now begun to pay the Town an annual sum of \$5000, as a payment in lieu of taxes (PILT.) No Town tax money has ever been needed for either the acquisition or operation of the Community Forest.

Subject to supervision by the Planning Board, responsibility for forestry operations has been assigned to a commission composed of five members, three of whom are appointed by the selectmen and two of whom are *ex officio*, one from the Conservation Commission and one from the Planning Board.

The Forest Commission, with Planning Board approval, hires a professional forestry team to help carry out its goals. The three basic goals enunciated in the conservation easement are (a) sustainable forest management, including selective timber harvesting; (b) encouragement of traditional forms of outdoor recreation; and (c) preservation and enhancement of wildlife habitat. More specific goals were elicited from area residents at a community wide meeting and enshrined in the first ten year stewardship plan. They include the following:

Encourage the growth of high quality saw timber when conditions are favorable;

Earn profits from responsible timber harvesting for the benefit of the town;

Use best practices harvesting techniques and minimize the visual impact in those areas easily seen from roads;

Continue traditional recreational uses;

Promote animal and plant diversity;

Ensure the protection of water resources, streams, and wetlands;

Maintain the Pond of Safety road in a condition to be used by high clearance vehicles; and

Encourage the use of the forest for research and educational activities.

The professional team is also responsible for evaluating wildlife habitat, timber stands for future harvesting, GIS mapping of roads, culverts, wetlands, and wildlife zones, and for the myriad of other tasks involved in managing a large working forest.

The Town and the US Forest Service have, over time, developed a close working relationship. It was born during the collaborative effort which brought into being the RCF and the Pond of Safety addition to the Kilkenny section of the WMNF. Politically, each was able to play a supportive role to the other. When the congressional allocation of Land and Water Conservation funds was made to support the acquisition of the Kilkenny addition, which includes the Pond of Safety, the following language was attached:

*The Committee recommends that the acquisition by the Forest Service of the Pond of Safety tract ... shall be made with the clear expectation and understanding that these productive forest lands shall remain available for recreational uses traditional to the North Country of New Hampshire and for continued sustainable forest management and that the management of this tract shall be planned and undertaken in consultation with the elected officials of the town in which it is located.*

This language came out of discussions between Town officials and local Forest Service officers who jointly recognized the value of managing these now divided tracts of forest land with as much cooperation as possible. Both parties have continued to observe the intent behind it and the relationship has been cemented by several contractual agreements and by annual meetings between Forest Service officials and members of the Forest Commission. Several of the main logging roads giving access to the Pond of Safety, and the region around it, are cooperatively managed. More generally, however, the USFS and the Town are working together, and sharing information on a wide range of initiatives relating to forest management.

### **The Gorham Town Forest:**

Just as the Randolph Community Forest includes land within the Town of Jefferson, so the Gorham Town Forest includes land within Randolph. This land, encompassing 2757 acres in Randolph, is not permanently protected from development, although in recent years some Gorham officials have been flirting with possible initiatives which would have that effect. But, as it stands, the land

does have a measure of protection because it is the source of Gorham's water supply.

The Town of Gorham purchased the land for the purpose of protecting its water supply during the Great Depression of the 1930s. At first, it was regarded by Gorham residents as having the one purpose only: to safeguard their water sources. In more recent years, however, the town has begun managing it for sustainable timber harvesting. It is also used as an educational asset for children from the schools in town. With its long history, there is no reason to believe that Gorham would be likely to sell or develop this land, at least not unless another water source has been discovered and made operational. Therefore, the Gorham Town Forest land can be considered as conserving another 9% of the total land area within the Town of Randolph.

### **The Town of Randolph:**

The Town of Randolph is, of course, the owner of the land in the Community Forest. But, it also owns four parcels of property, totaling 71 acres. Most of these date back before the Community Forest came into existence. They provide space for municipal buildings, [library](#), two cemeteries, and 61 acres classified as parks including the Carol Williams Memorial, Cold [bB](#)rook Falls, Durand Lake Recreation Area, Peek Park, Randolph Spring and the Ravine House site. Of these lands, only Cold [bB](#)rook Falls is permanently protected from development, but, given the sentiment prevailing in the Town, it is unlikely that they will be sold or developed.

### **Conservation of Private Holdings:**

The collective sentiment of a town is of course made up of the sentiments of the majority of the members of the municipal community. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that a number of Randolph landholders are protecting some of their land in a couple of different ways: by conservation easements and by placing them in current use.

[About](#) 443 acres of private land are permanently protected under conservation easements, while [approximately](#) 2408 acres are in Current Use. Land in Current Use is not permanently protected but the State of New Hampshire allows land to be so designated in order to encourage owners of undeveloped land of 10 acres or more to keep the land as open space. Current Use lands are taxed at lower than normal rates and a penalty of 10% of market

value is levied on them if they are taken out of Current Use.

### **Residential Land Use:**

Historically, growth in Randolph has mostly taken the form of residential uses, including many seasonal residences. In 2010, the US Census counted 310 year-round residents in Randolph, a decrease from 339 residents counted in 2000. By the 2020 US Census, the town's population had partially rebounded from 310 to 328 year-round residents. Although many northern New England towns experienced a sudden influx of population in the last few years associated with the COVID-19 pandemic as people from urban areas moved into their seasonal homes year-round or bought up available property, this COVID migration would not yet be reflected in the 2020 Census counts. Prior to COVID, Randolph's housing stock of 297 dwelling units was evenly split between units occupied year-round (148) and those that were vacant (149), comprised primarily of seasonal units. Between now and the next Decennial Census, school enrollments, voter and car registrations may give us some indication of what impact COVID migration had on Randolph's year-round population.

Residential development has occurred predominantly along US Route 2, Durand Road, Valley Road and Randolph Hill Road. Aside from the Town offices on Durand Road, Randolph does not have a town center.

There are 4160 acres of land available for residential or other private development within the Town of Randolph. Since Current Use lands are not permanently protected, they are included, but it is likely that most of those lands will remain undeveloped. Some are in areas where building would be difficult. Even where that is not the case, most owners will be reluctant to take their land out of Current Use, paying the penalty for doing so, unless there are pressing personal reasons or unless the financial rewards are substantial. Personal reasons may account for a few developments in the near future, but there does not appear to be a looming demand for new housing in Randolph. In 2016~~3~~, the New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning, in its NH Population Forecasts, estimated the population of the Town would not grow in the foreseeable future, and might even continue to decline. This means that, for the most part, the land which is currently developed will continue to provide the living space needed by the residents of Randolph.

### **Agriculture:**

Randolph is a single-zone Town. Within that zone, agriculture is a use which is permitted as of right. Consequently, mMany of the residents involve themselves



in agricultural pursuits with differing degrees of intensity. But, aside from one parcel of agricultural land on which hay is grown and harvested, and several ~~small-scale~~ maple sugaring operations, there are no commercial farms within the Town.

### Utility, Commercial, Institutional:

The largest nonresidential land uses on privately-owned land in Randolph are both energy corridors - the Portland Montreal Pipe Line and the Eversource transmission line. Both corridors cross town in an east-west direction roughly parallel to US Route 2, the main artery through town. The pipeline was originally constructed in 1941 to safely transport crude oil to Montreal's refineries. In recent years plans to reverse the flow to transport tar sands oil to Portland have raised concerns due to the toxicity of the substances used to dilute this material and the lack of data to guide spill clean-up and remediation.

Commercial property accounts for approximately 36 acres of Randolph's tax base. Most of these businesses are found along US Route 2. This includes a garage, several lodging facilities, and associated activities such as snowmobile rentals and a country store-yarn shop. Several other small businesses and home businesses are found throughout town. ~~What little commercial development has taken place in Randolph in recent years, has occurred along Route 2, which is the main artery through the Town.~~

~~Commercial activities include motels, of which there are two, one B&B, a garage-cum-convenience store, a yarn shop and a construction business. There are also several home-based businesses. All told, the acreage that can be confidently ascribed to commercial uses amounts to 36 acres.~~

Twenty-two~~22~~ more acres of land in Town are used by tax-exempt organizations including the Roman Catholic Church, which owns and operates a youth camp, the Randolph Foundation, Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, the Randolph Church and the Randolph Mountain Club. In addition, -the Dartmouth Outing Club owns the Billings Lodge.

### **Recreation:**

One of the most important uses of land within the Town of Randolph is recreation. From its earliest days as a hiking and climbing center, the Town has recognized its regional role as that of providing a peaceful and danger free environment for pedestrian recreation.

Over the years, the modes of recreation encouraged in Randolph have

been expanded to include cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, dogsled mushing, horseback riding and cross-country cycling. Winter snowmobile riding does take place on specified trails in the Community Forest and along the rail trail. But, true to its original focus, the Town does not want or encourage any motorized use of its trails during summer months, when they are likely to be heavily used by hikers, cyclists, birders and others enjoying an outdoor experience free from the interference that motors can cause.

In 2001, the Town, as the culmination of a four-year effort, succeeded in protecting from development the land within its boundaries of the Randolph Community Forest (RCF). This land, together with a roughly equivalent number of acres of Town land within the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF,) is open to the public. It is used for hiking, hunting, fishing, cycling, birding and other non-motorized pursuits in the summer, and for snowshoeing, skiing, dog-sled mushing and other winter sports when the snow is on the ground. Because of the reduced likelihood of conflict between motors and pedestrians in the winter months, snowmobiling on prescribed trails is allowed as an exception to the general rule.

The Town has built, and maintains, many trails for use by the public. The Community Forest contains many miles of hiking and cross-country skiing trails, maintained by the Randolph Mountain Club (RMC). Moreover, numerous public hiking trails on the northern slopes of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) are also maintained by the RMC. Throughout the Town there are numerous local trails which, although used mostly by residents, are open to the public, as well. In designing new trails, and in making new use of old ones, the Town seeks to create networks, with linkages that allow users to make loops and circles so that they do not have to retrace their steps to return to their starting point.

The Presidential Rail Trail, which runs east and west through the Town, south of U.S. Route 2 and parallel to it, was purchased by the State to preserve the corridor for a possible reopening of rail service. It, too, is open for public use and, since the rails and ties have been removed, it has been incorporated into the Town's summer public trail network. It provides an important amenity for those who may no longer be able to hike more difficult trails but who still enjoy mild exercise, opportunities to view birds and other wildlife and other attributes of the outdoor experience.

Recognizing that the summer use of off-highway recreational vehicles (OHRVs) is becoming a widely used outdoor recreation activity in much of Coos County, the residents of Randolph believe that there is a need for space where

those who prefer to experience the outdoors at a slower pace are welcome. For far longer than the influx of OHRV riders, hordes of ~~summer~~-hikers have also provided the Town, and the North Country in general, with economic benefits. As they have done for a century and a half, the residents of Randolph willingly share their land with these users and work to make it more hospitable for them.

A recent concern of residents has focused on the summer use of the rail-trail, which crosses several of the most popular trailheads leading up onto the northern peaks of the White Mountains. The feeling in the Town is widespread that the hiking experience would be greatly lessened if it were to be interrupted by the need to dodge motorized traffic. Echoing that concern, the residents, at the 2014 Town Meeting, voted to approve, with near unanimity, the following warrant article:

*The residents of the Town of Randolph hereby record their opposition to any future non-winter use of the rail trail through this town by ATV's. Such use would deprive people of the ability they now have to use the trail for walking, biking, and enjoying peaceful scenery. This is especially important for those less ambulatory, who still deserve to enjoy these beautiful areas.*

By these words, Town residents clearly and resoundingly expressed their desire and determination that the Town remain dedicated to the vision, which it has held for 150 years, of providing a safe and friendly place for people to enjoy the out of doors without mechanization.

In the summer of 2015, that message was underscored by the creation of a new organization. It was established by Randolph year-round and summer residents and has grown to include members from surrounding communities, but is open to all. Its organizing statement reads:

*The Friends of the Presidential Rail Trail have joined together to promote, protect, and maintain New Hampshire's Presidential Rail trail between Gorham and Whitefield for non-motorized recreation during the snow-free times of the year.*

The statement clearly contemplates a trail of many uses. It is being used for walking, cycling, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, geocaching and the driving of dogcarts (in preparation for the mushing season.) The trail also parallels the course of the currently pristine Moose and Israel Rivers, and passes through important habitat areas. These include birding "hot spots," forested expanses and wetlands. There is concern that motorized vehicles may disrupt the nesting season of migratory birds. The corridor also supports moose, deer, beaver, otter, fisher,

mink, and bear populations, as well as connecting habitat north and south of U.S. Route 2. The Friends of the Presidential Rail Trail, and the Randolph community as a whole, welcomes any other uses of the Trail that do not involve mechanized locomotion and do not negatively impact important habitat.

### Considerations for Future Land Use

As discussed above, Randolph has done a good job of maintaining the character of the landscape that residents and visitors to town have come to expect. This has been accomplished through public ownership and conservation easements. Future development will likely occur within the relatively narrow corridor which runs east-west through the town bounded by the Randolph Community Forest on the north and the White Mountain Community Forest on the south. To the west, this corridor includes US Route 2, the Israel River, the Presidential Rail Trail, the Eversource transmission line easement and the Portland-Montreal Pipeline. To the east, the corridor includes the Moose River, Durand Road, US Route 2, the Presidential Rail Trail, the Eversource transmission line easement, the Portland-Montreal Pipeline, and the Randolph Hill area adjacent to the Gorham town line.

Underlying much of the two river corridors are important stratified draft aquifers, and adjacent to them are several valuable wetlands. Both *Functional Assessment of Wetlands Throughout the Israel River Area of Randolph, NH* (Watershed to Wildlife, December 2011) and *Functional Assessment of Wetlands Throughout the Moose River Area of Randolph, NH* (Elise Lawson, October 2017) reported the importance of these aquifers and the interconnectedness of the aquifers, wetlands and other surface waters. Numerous tributary streams flow through private lands to the Moose and Israel, often on steep terrain with shallow soils.

NH Fish & Game's Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) identified the Israel River corridor, the Carlton Brook corridor and portions of the Moose River corridor as some of the highest ranked habitat in the state. Much of the remaining private land in town is considered by the WAP to be important supporting landscape to habitat lands in the Community Forest and WMNF which are ranked as some of the most important in the region and state.

All of these land uses and important natural resources existing together in a narrow corridor means changes or increases in activity in the major man-made corridors such as US Route 2 or the Rail Trail affect all of the residents of town, and almost all development has the potential to negatively impact the town's important water resources and wildlife habitat. It is critical that the town continue to participate with

a strong voice in decisions made by others, such as the State of New Hampshire, Eversource and Portland Montreal Pipe Line, and review its own development review process to ensure interactions with important water resources and wildlife habitat are adequately addressed.

Randolph has for the most part avoided sprawl and its negative consequences due to the topographic constraints, White Mountain National Forest, and location of transportation infrastructure. As additional development occurs in Randolph, it is important, both for maintenance of the character of the community and for natural resource protection, that the current development pattern continues. This means concentrating development into areas of town where infrastructure and development already exist. Consideration should be given as to appropriate locations for commercial development vs. residential development and the compatibility of these types of uses, especially as the economy changes and online or social media marketing alters businesses and advertising. It is also important to take with precautions to protect water quality and wildlife corridors. -The town's rivers and streams and unfragmented forestlands provide important corridors for wildlife, including connectivity between the Kilkenny Unit of the White Mountain National Forest and the Presidential Range.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

Over the years respondents to various surveys have been consistent in their opinion that Randolph's rural atmosphere needs to be retained. Key features of that rural atmosphere are the natural and scenic resources. For that to be accomplished, the Town, and specifically the Planning Board, need to be sure that it has the following tools in place:

1. Land use~~Subdivision and site plan review~~ regulations which encourage developers to design their projects with preservation of the rural atmosphere in mind.

The Board has amended its subdivision and site plan review regulations to give developers more freedom to design lots and roads in keeping with the Town's character. They allow roads to be narrower and provide for open space development, encouraging the dedication of larger parcels of undeveloped land. The Open Space Development section of the Land Use Ordinance could also be amended to give the Planning Board more control over subdivision layout and provide a stronger linkage between the flexibility granted to the developer and the protection of features which contribute so strongly to the Town's distinctive character such as nonmotorized outdoor

recreation and snowmobiling; areas of ecological importance; scenic views, outlooks and vistas; and preservation of the overall natural setting.

2. Adequate authority for the Planning Board to regulate the placement, height and utilization of various types utilities such as solar panels and - of towers for uses such as telecommunications, wind power and cell phones to protect the Town's scenic beauty.

The Town has adopted regulations regarding telecommunications towers, wind power installations and cell phone structures to make sure that it has effective tools to protect the Town's scenic beauty and viewing locations. But, these technologies are in a constant state of flux; therefore the Board will need to be vigilant in staying abreast of technological changes/developments to ensure that it can respond appropriately to proposals for the construction of new towers and other emerging technology. The Town has also expressed support for energy conservation and renewable energy sources so it is important to encourage energy alternatives while making sure they do not conflict with Randolph's scenic aspects and views or traditional land uses.

3. Measures in place to encourage the ~~private~~-protection of property by conservation easements or other means.

One of the most important ways in which the Town's rural nature can be preserved is through the actions of ~~private~~-landowners who wish to protect their properties. ~~This is not something that can be required or legislated, but it can be encouraged in the way the land regulations are implemented. The town should encourage and support conservation projects which further the community's conservation properties. This would include projects that would enhance the Randolph Community Forest, protect the public's use of recreation resources, or protect important habitat, riparian corridors, or scenic viewsheds.~~

4. ~~Traditional p~~Planning regulations which mandate such things as setbacks and vegetated -buffer zones between development and wetlands, rivers and brooks and ~~less traditional provisions which encourage landowners to protect existing hiking, snowmobile and cross-country ski trails,~~ to protect water quality and important aquatic and wildlife habitats. and water sources and to preserve the overall natural setting.

The current Town regulations contain -a one hundred foot setback between structures and paved areas and perennial -streams. Some of the elements the

Planning Board should consider adding to the Ordinance to protect water resources:

a. Require a vegetated buffer between structures and Moose River and Israel River and all perennial streams. Development along small headwater streams is of particular concern for downstream water quality because the shallow soils on steep slopes erode easily when disturbed.

b. Prohibit development in wetlands associated with Moose River and Israel River.

~~The current Town regulations contain a full range of traditional requirements in connection with subdivisions and commercial developments. There are, however, additional provisions that can be added which may not require, but strongly encourage, the protection of those other ingredients which contribute so strongly to the Town's distinctive character: hiking and other recreational trails, areas of protected ecological importance and scenic views, outlooks and vistas.~~

5. Regulations to ensure that businesses coming to town will be compatible with the character of the area, and will not adversely affect important natural resources.

The Land Use Ordinance currently allows a variety of businesses with approval from the Board of Adjustment. The Planning Board should consider strengthening the Ordinance to incorporate consideration of noise, vibration, traffic, lighting, glare, hours of operation, amount of impervious surface, building mass, and protection of surface and groundwater quality in the Special Exception criteria. Additionally, the Planning Board should consider that historical mixed uses may change and the appropriateness of commercial businesses in areas that are predominately residential may create land use conflicts that can be mitigated by changes to the Land Use Ordinance.

6. Regulations that keep up with changing vacation markets.

The vacation market is shifting increasingly toward short-term rentals arranged directly between homeowners and visitors on-line. As a result, the line between residential uses and lodging is getting blurred. The short term rental market data company airdna reported that eleven Randolph homes are currently listed as short term rentals on sites such as airbnb and vrbo

(www.airdna.co, accessed 9/15/23.) State enabling legislation and court decisions have not yet provided clear guidance for communities. Now that guidance is available from NH Municipal Association and the courts, the Planning Board should solicit input from the community to identify the right balance between homeowner rights and community impacts for Randolph and then review the Land Use Ordinance to identify any needed changes to preserve housing for residents and minimize the potential impacts from short-term rentals.

#### 7. Guidelines for development on slopes and ridgelines to minimize scenic impacts.

The scenic quality of Randolph is an important part of the character of the community valued by residents and visitors. Information is available to help the Planning Board integrate design guidelines into the Land Use Ordinance, not to prohibit development, but to ensure that the visual impact is minimized when development occurs.

Some features of GorhamRandolph valued by residents will require both local action and regional cooperation. For example, to improve the protection of dark skies the Planning Board could strengthen the Land Use Ordinance to require use of light fixtures that reduce glare and are “dark skies compliant,” i.e., full cutoff. More developed communities such as Gorham and Berlin and large sites such as the prisons will continue to have more impact on the enjoyment of dark skies by Randolph residents.

The challenge to attract younger residents and families is a region-wide issue dependent in part on economic development. With new broadband services available and more people working from home, Randolph may become a more desirable place to live either seasonally or full-time. Randolph has no desire to become a job center community, but should continue to participate in the efforts of regional economic development groups such as North Country Council and Coos Economic Development Corporation. The availability of full-time housing (either owned or rented) is related to economic development so this should also be considered. Regionalization of services should also be reviewed periodically.

The noise from traffic on US Route 2 and the noise that would result from OHRV use in Randolph are both areas where the town is dependent on state decision-makers. The Portland-Montreal Pipeline is another land use upon which the town may be impacted by decisions made elsewhere. Town officials and state representatives need to continue to be vigilant on these issues.



The threads that weave the fabric of community will continue to change over time. Randolph is fortunate to have events and activities that bring people together to enjoy the outdoors, facilities like Town Hall and Library for community gatherings, and the support of the Randolph Foundation with its wonderful publications. New residents and visitors will continue to bring new ideas and technology will continue to bring new ways of connecting and interacting. Some ways to incorporate these changes include increased use of the social web to build and maintain connections among residents and visitors.

### **Conclusions**

The prevailing view of residents, as expressed through repeated surveys, Town Meeting votes and other opportunities for registering attitudes, is that of satisfaction with the landscape of the Town the way it is. A gradual and relatively small amount of development is expected to occur over the years and is seen as healthy. Most of this development will involve residences and small subdivisions, but a modest growth in some commercial activities is likely and would not be unwelcome.

However, there is widespread feeling that commercial establishments should only be encouraged if they do not conflict with the existing rural nature of the Town.

Continued management of the Community Forest to encourage traditional forms of recreation, wildlife habitat protection and sustainable timber harvesting was seen as an important contribution to the preservation of the Town's way of life.

The public or private preservation of additional parcels of land to protect the aesthetics of the Town or to further the management purposes of the Community Forest would likely be supported by most residents.

With these sentiments so strongly expressed, the Town's vision of its future is one which anticipates little change to the built environment. Most townspeople would agree with the sentiments of Patrick Henry who once said; "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past." However, the landscape is just the foundation upon which community is formed. Community is woven from many threads and those threads change over time. For many years community in Randolph has meant a mix of year-round and seasonal residents, connected through town activities and events, summer jobs for youth, a shared love for the mountain setting and recreational opportunities. The community's institutions, the Randolph Mountain Club and Randolph Foundation, provide an important

framework along with the land itself. As the pattern of family-owned vacation homes is replaced with the sharing economy, it will be important for Randolph to look forward to new ways people can build and maintain community.