

ACWORTH
New Hampshire
2025 Master Plan Update

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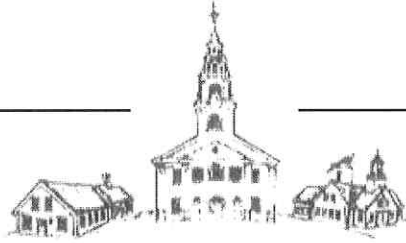
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Planning Board



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The Planning Board began working on the 2025 Master Plan edition in 2023 with a Town wide questionnaire. Responses to the questionnaire were similar to those from previous Master Plan questionnaires. Townspeople continued to express appreciation for our small town sense of community and our natural resources. However, in keeping with national trends, the questionnaire responses also included some concern for rising costs.

The last Master Plan edition was published in 2019 as part of a 40 year compendium that included the two previous plan editions. That compendium with the 1979 and 2008 editions is available on the Town website. The 2019 edition itself consisted of an updated Vision Statement and an updated Land Use and Community Design section. Those have been included in the 2025 edition for comparison.

The 2025 Master Plan also revisits each of the 1979 and the 2008 Plan sections although only the update of each section is included in the 2025 edition.

The Board appreciates the help of its loyal Master Plan Committee and all those who contributed to this edition.

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2019 Master Plan Update Vision Statement

The guiding principles of our Vision are based on the wishes of the people of Acworth (This update is based on citizen responses to a Planning Board questionnaire.) for a quiet, uncrowded, rural community. In this Vision, Acworth will maintain a balance between preserving its natural and historic resources and continuing its economic development for the benefit of its current and future residents, farms and businesses, and seasonal visitors. In this Vision we seek to:

Retain our rural, scenic and historic appearance and small town character;

Encourage jobs, housing and technology;

Support balanced and orderly development;

Encourage responsible agriculture;

Encourage natural resources preservation;

Encourage participation in Town government;

Encourage cooperation with neighboring communities;

And support citizens of all ages.

2025 Master Plan Update Vision Statement

Discuss high density, all age inclusive housing;

Discuss public and private transportation including:

- 1. Keeping all Class 5 roads in safe, passable, maintained condition;*
- 2. Encouraging access by and to public transportation as appropriate;*
- 3. Looking into EV charging stations when they become economically appropriate;*

Explore and support alternative power sources for community facilities;

Discuss improving economic opportunities including encouraging low impact business which enhances the tax base without jeopardizing our historic, rural character;

Develop robust communication strategies to reach and engage all Acworth residents, tax payers and voters;

Support a regional approach to the education of our children.

2019 Master Plan Update Land Use and Community Goals

Retain our appearance, encourage jobs and housing and support balanced development;

Encourage responsible agriculture;

Encourage preservation of resources;

Encourage connections to Town government, neighboring communities and citizens of all ages.

2025 Land Use and Community Planning

The original Future Land Use Map “combined Acworth’s existing conditions with its goals and policies, tempering the result with the realities and practices of Political, Legal, and Economic conditions.” The map recommended that “Acworth should remain a small rural community composed (as it is today) of the two village centers of Acworth and South Acworth and a lake residential area along the shores of Crescent Lake.” It also stated the remainder of the Town be developed within the natural restraints of the land (ie. topography, slopes, etc.), leaving agricultural and other sensitive areas protected from future development.

The eight Land Use classifications included 3 classifications of residential uses: family residence, farm residence and residence/business as well as Business/industry; Public; Institutional; Agricultural; Woodlands; and Undeveloped Land.

2025 Goals:

1. Retain our appearance, encourage jobs and housing and support development. There is a need to compromise the need for new business and industry that increase the tax base without destroying the quiet, rural community feeling our residents desire.
2. The results of the 2023 questionnaire revealed that an over-whelming number of respondents want the character of Acworth to remain unchanged. They like Acworth because it’s uncrowded, there are many opportunities for outdoor recreation, and they value the “Community Feel”. They support encouraging local farms, clean water, local businesses, land conservation and providing wildlife habitat. There was mild interest in encouraging vacation and recreation and new businesses and industry.
3. There needs to be some compromise in order to maintain the small, rural community that we all desire. To that end we need to investigate and encourage higher-density housing where appropriate. Adjust zoning to allow this and make mandatory conservation easements in those areas where this type of housing is approved. We also need to have realistic expectations regarding infrastructure and encourage and identify areas where light industry would be allowed.

2025 Transportation

Respondents to the 2025 Master Plan questionnaire overwhelmingly supported the improvement of roads and drainage also commenting in favor of long term planning in that regard. In Planning Board discussion leading up to the writing of this narrative, three relatively new developments were noted:

1. Unusually severe flooding in recent years caused road disruptions of major proportions;
2. Acworth has an aging demographic which could decrease taxpayers ability to finance expensive road projects and which could increase an interest in public transportation;
3. National attention is turning to the use of electric vehicles.

Acworth should continue to monitor emerging transportation technologies like electric vehicles. As these technologies mature, the town will need to consider the impact on its available infrastructure and work to enable the improvements that will allow for their use. New technologies should be evaluated for their impact on the environment (climate change) and their economy for Acworth's citizenry. Improvements to our current electric infrastructure to accommodate current usage and the existing potential for solar generation should be considered. Currently, existing businesses cannot expand their solar capacity due to the existing limitations of the electric grid.

As the town seeks to endorse investments in new technology, they should be evaluated as to the life-time effect on carbon generation, environmental concerns for waste and end-of-life disposal and overall sustainability.

Currently, we do not recommend that the town embrace changes for any specific technology like EVs but revisit this discussion in the future as our infrastructure improves and the cost-benefit of these technologies is better understood.

Goals:

1. Work with regional transportation companies to increase service to Acworth. Southwestern Community Services already supports the Volunteer Driver Program throughout all of Sullivan County.
2. Encourage town residents who are willing to use their own vehicles to provide no cost rides for those who can no longer drive, who no longer have a vehicle or those who have a specialized need for services. Volunteer drivers should be informed that they will be reimbursed at the Federal standard mileage rate for actual miles traveled.
3. Encourage town residents who need rides to call the Volunteer Driver Program to arrange for rides.
4. Publicize to the town of Acworth residents the existence of the Volunteer Driver Program to residents who need rides for routine or essential services such as doctor appointments, banks, grocery stores, social activities, and more.

Strategies to meet these goals:

1. Announcements at the annual town meeting.
2. Announcements at Select Board Meetings
3. Placing of official literature such as brochures at the Town Office

4. Placing of official literature such as brochures at the South Acworth Village Store

5. Articles or announcements in the Acworth Community Newsletter

2025 Community Facilities

Municipal Update:

1. The Acworth Highway Department has expanded its staff and currently employs 1 part-time administrator and 4 full-time employees.

Non-Profit Private Organizations Update:

1. In 2020 the Acworth Historical Society sold the Grange Hall. It is currently under private ownership and is undergoing a gradual restoration.

2. Following severe flooding to the Valley Church and Community Aid building in 2023, the United Church of Acworth plans to initiate a community discussion as to the future of those buildings.

Goals:

1. Maintain public buildings that support Town/resident services;
2. Enhance the Zoning Ordinance with related policies that support the Master Plan Vision;
3. Support Town Library services.

Strategies:

1. Support the Capital Improvement Plan process regarding buildings;
2. Explore alternative power sources for public buildings;
3. Review regulations for support of the Master Plan Vision;
4. Maintain the annual budgets for Highway, Library, Transfer Station and Town Hall/offices building maintenance.

2025 Utilities and Public Service

Acworth now has multiple broadband Internet providers. Broadband Internet has been installed throughout most of the town by two separate providers, New Hampshire Broadband (set up by New Hampshire Electric Cooperative) and Fidium Fiber Internet.

Goal: To encourage outside investment in broadband and cellular technology as they develop.

2025 Population and Housing

Acworth's population over the past 20 years has remained relatively consistent in size, peaking in 2010 at 891 and currently projected at about 854, where in 2000 the population was 836. (Census data was used for this analysis and is subject to some calculations based on actual responses. The 2010 data required some calculations based on historically available data.)

Acworth, like Sullivan County and New Hampshire, continues to see an aging of its population with fewer children (under 5) and more seniors (over 65) based on a comparison of the 2000, 2010, and 2020 (2022 ACS) census data. This ageing trend is further supported by the fact that the portion aged between 18-65 remains relatively consistent. The median age has risen by about 3 years in that 20-year period, consistent with the

county and state. One difference recorded for Acworth is that the population is skewing female where the country and state remain relatively equal in their split. These trends will affect many aspects of the town from education with the potential for less school children, housing with the need for the town to consider zoning regulations to all for higher density housing configurations and transportation friendly options for citizens who wish to remain in the town but are looking for more accessible housing. The town will also need to continue to explore options for shared transportation with the country and other organizations if it wishes to retain these long-term citizens.

| Population | | | NH | | Sullivan County | | Acworth | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|--------|---------|------|
| 2000 | Total | | 1,235,786 | | 40,458 | | 836 | |
| | Male | | 608,140 | 49.21% | 19,923 | 49.24% | 421 | |
| | Female | | 627,646 | 50.79% | 19,923 | 49.24% | 425 | |
| | Median Age | | 37.2 | | 40.1 | | 42.6 | |
| | Under 5 | | 75,446 | 6.11% | 2,256 | 5.58% | 44 | |
| | 18 and older | | 926,224 | 74.95% | 30,819 | 76.18% | 621 | |
| | 65 and older | | 147,970 | 11.97% | 6,398 | 15.81% | 127 | |
| | White | | 1,186,851 | 96.04% | 39,687 | 98.09% | | |
| | Total | | 1,319,939 | | 43,643 | | 891 | |
| | Male | | 648,504 | 49.13% | 21,431 | 49.11% | 460 | |
| | Female | | 665,435 | 50.41% | 22,212 | 50.89% | 431 | |
| 2010 | Median Age | | 40.3 | | 43 | | 49.50 | |
| | Under 5 | | 68,873 | 5.22% | 2,307 | 5.29% | 35 | |
| | 18 and older | | 1,030,995 | 78.11% | 34,216 | 78.40% | 791 | |
| | 65 and older | | 179,649 | 13.61% | 7,013 | 16.07% | 173 | |
| | White | | 1,238,424 | 93.82% | 42,364 | 97.07% | 859 | |
| | 2023 | Total | | 1,402,054 | | 43,529 | | 854 |
| | | Male | | 699,878 | 49.92% | 21,858 | 50.21% | 362 |
| | | Female | | 702,176 | 50.08% | 21,671 | 49.79% | 492 |
| | | Median Age | | 43.4 | | 47 | | 46.4 |
| | | Under 5 | | 62,779 | 4.48% | 1,938 | 4.45% | 26 |
| | | 18 and older | | 1,151,339 | 82.12% | 35,678 | 81.96% | 663 |
| 65 and older | | | 289,958 | 20.68% | 10,062 | 23.12% | 186 | |
| White | | | 1,227,179 | 87.53% | 40,174 | 92.29% | 773 | |

2025 Economy

Questionnaire respondents continue to support maintaining our rural character with relief from taxation.

Goal: To improve economic opportunity by encouraging low impact business which enhance the tax base without jeopardizing our historic, rural character.

2025 Natural Resources (From the Conservation Commission Conservation Plan)

In 2023, the Commission ambitiously decided to revisit and consolidate all past goals and efforts through extensive new research. The result is a comprehensive up to date Conservation Plan. This includes priority topics identified by townspeople over the years such as clean water, endangered wildlife habitats, forest and land conservation and climate adaptation. A detailed look at the contents of the 2024 Plan will clarify the scope of work of the current Commission. Highlights from the Conservation Plan are included here as input to the Master Plan.

The Commission has identified the 4 areas of focus for our efforts in 2024 and going forward. These topics will be revisited annually, and updates will be posted to the Conservation Plan. Please refer to the Conservation Plan for a complete description of our natural resources and our efforts.

1. Water Quality

Water quality has declined over the past 30 years in our major surface water sources--Crescent Lake, Cold River and other watersheds. Concom will develop short- and long-term actions with help from numerous organizations and agencies, including a) the Department of Environmental Services (DES), b) Rivers Management and Protection Program, c) the DES Lakes Management and Protection Program, d) Lake Sunapee Protective Association, e) Crescent Lake Water Quality Group and f) Crescent Lake Association. The actions will i) address current impairments, ii) continue to protect against known hazards such as cyanobacteria and milfoil and iii) respond to climate change impacts. Specifically:

- Participate in a county-led effort to address water quality issues in Crescent Lake.
- Support Crescent Lake Association efforts to monitor water quality.
- Investigate 2009 DES reporting on impairments in Crane Brook that required mitigation actions.
- Review permits and address complaints and violations as required.
- Leverage Lake Sunapee's "Let's Be Clear" campaign to educate and engage Acworth citizens in actions to address the issues.

1. Forest and Wetlands

The Town's Forest management plans need review and revision. Specifically,

- The Gove Road Town Forest Management Plan has not been updated in the last 20 years.
- The South Acworth Forest (Hilliard Road) is mostly an old conifer forest without much new growth. This type of forest has limited wildlife and limited carbon sequestration value. The Commission is assessing the forest with the goal to improve biodiversity and improve forest resiliency and wildlife habitats through professionally advised harvest operations.
- Assess an opportunity to conserve 18 acres on Crescent Lake (2 lots) that have significant conservation value.
- Monitor the addition of conservation easements across 2300 acres of conserved land. Review permits and address complaints and violations. Confirm annual monitoring for another 800 acres of other conservation easements.
- Provide educational opportunities for the importance of healthy forests and the positive impacts to global warming.
- Review permits and address other complaints, violations as required.

None of Acworth's many wetlands, including Keyes Hollow, likely the Town's most extensive and important wetland, has undergone formal wetland assessment. The Commission is rigorously documenting these wetlands through "co-occurrence" analysis to determine whether formal wetland assessment is warranted.

1. Wildlife Habitat Management

Private ownership characterizes most land in Acworth. Unfortunately, each year more land is removed from current use and made available for additional activities such as development. Loss of valuable wildlife habitat frequently results.

Possible actions include:

- Continue the wildlife corridor initiative that was initiated by the 2004 Conservation Commission. Extend the location analysis utilizing current co-occurrences assessment. Determine opportunities to work with landowners to conserve parcels within the corridor. Provide educational opportunities to landowners.
- Provide education about the identification and management of endangered, threatened, and invasive species.

1. Climate Impacts

Despite ongoing debate about climate change, Acworth's climate has modified over the last several decades. This change affects the Town's natural resources and their possible uses. In response, the Commission intends to

- Obtain regional and local assessments of predicated climate change impacts.
- Assess impacts to determine what possible actions might be taken and assess the efforts and their potential for success.
- Take actions that are consistent with other conservation goals, e.g., maintaining healthy multi-generational, diverse forests; increase carbon sequestration by 30%; place lands in conservation with easements that require proper forest management practices.

Focus Areas

- Improve Water Quality in major waterbodies (lakes, ponds > 10 acres, 3rd and 4th order rivers and streams e.g. Dodge Brook and Cold River)
- Improve Forest and Wildlife Habitats of our town owned properties.
- Increase Wildlife Habitats – increase amount of conserved lands & begin creating wildlife corridors.
- Protect Wetlands – Assess the state of our major wetlands (> 10 acres) and determine best management practices (BMP); add identified BMPs to Conservation Plan (CP).
- Address Climate Change – Assess town/county climate change ecological impacts and determine applicable adaptative measures and add to our CP.
- Engage the Community via education, training and volunteer events. This could be a separate effort or part of any of the identified topics above.

Conservation Commission Actions

- Increased conserved wildlife habitats – Survey of 18 acres of undeveloped town owned wetlands on Crescent Lake. The goal is to determine through a town vote if we can put these high valued acres into a conservation easement.
- Conduct a timber harvest in the South Acworth Forest to improve wildlife habitats, increase resiliency to climate change and address any invasive species concerns if possible.
- Conduct a wetland assessment of Keyes Hollow to ensure wetlands and high priority wildlife areas are protected and improve the overall health of the wetland which in turn will aid in wildlife management and flood control.
- Support the Crescent Lake Water Quality Group's effort to protect the water quality of Crescent Lake through their in-progress watershed assessment.

Continue with the following annual activities: Support the annual water quality monitoring on Crescent Lake and Cold River.

Support the annual conservation easement monitoring of 2,300 acres of conserved land.

Review permits, complaints and violations and support as needed.

2025 Recreation

The Town's original Master Plan, written in 1979, listed 5 Recreation Goals:

1. To preserve our rural quality of outdoor recreation;
2. To raise and spend money for recreation;
3. To use Town owned lands for recreation;
4. To obtain easements to important recreation areas;
5. To provide for recreational use of forest/agricultural areas.

As Policies to reach those goals the 1979 Plan recommended, in addition to spending Town money, obtaining property or easements on land for a ballfield, for public access to Cold River, the Deep Hole, Mitchell Pond and Mill Pond. Some of these goals have been accomplished. There is a Town ballfield. Mill Pond Acre with its access to Cold River, and capacity for an ice skating rink, is now owned by the Town. What is notable about both the 1979 Goals and Policies is their overwhelming reliance on the Town to protect and provide recreational opportunities for its citizens.

In the 2008 Addendum to the Master Plan there is one Goal: To support recreational activities for the people of Acworth. The Policies to reach that Goal rely primarily on supporting and assisting the Recreation Committee. The Addendum's Recreation narrative explains Acworth has "natural recreation available" and lists additional opportunities provided by association with out of Town entities such as interschool sports and snow mobile clubs. A notable difference between 1979 and 2008 is less emphasis on Town financial support of recreation for its citizens. It should also be noted that the Recreation Committee is no longer active.

Of respondents to the questionnaire for this 2025 update of the Master Plan 73% said they enjoyed Acworth's outdoor recreation. It should also be noted that climate change has reduced winter recreation and declining school enrollment has reduced interschool sports.

For 2025 we have looked at our historic Recreation Goals through the lenses of the most recent questionnaire and the current conditions of climate change and school enrollment to develop these goals:

1. Continuing to preserve and protect our rural quality of/for outdoor recreation;

2. Budgeting for Town supported recreational activities which, in the absence of a Recreation Committee, may originate from non-municipal entities based in Acworth;
3. Working with and through the Conservation Commission, to support activities for and use by the public of the Town Forests, Wetlands and the Crescent Lake boat landing site over which the Town has jurisdiction and creating public outreach around those activities.

2025 Cultural and Historic Resources

In the Town's original Master Plan, written in 1979, Cultural and Historic resources are listed separately. Among the Cultural goals is listed "to foster, allow, cultivate and provide for...cultural opportunities" and the possibilities listed include the Grange service club, and the Library. It should be noted here that the Grange building is now owned by neighboring property owners and is undergoing a gradual restoration. Among the Historic goals is listed "to protect, improve, enhance and maintain...historic areas." And among the policies for attaining that goal is listed "Our historic buildings and Town Common should be preserved."

In the 2008 Addendum to the Master Plan we find the Cultural and Historic resources combined and a restatement of the goals to "Promote and encourage community cultural events" and to "Protect and preserve historic Town owned structures". In addition, the Addendum called for the creation of safe storage for archival materials. It has been noted that Town records are stored in the Town offices, the Library and the State archives making it cumbersome to protect or access them. Whether there needs to be a central repository for Town records and what that would look like is a discussion worth having.

Each edition of the Master Plan beginning in 1979, has been initiated by a Town wide questionnaire asking Acworthians for input about what they value and what they aspire to as a community. Cultural and Historic resources of the Town have consistently had the support of Townspeople including in the questionnaire for this, 2025, Master Plan edition.

For 2025 we retain the goals of:

1. Promoting and encouraging community cultural events;
2. Protecting and preserving historic structures and places;
3. Discussing the creation of safe storage for archival materials.

(See Community Facilities for locations which with overlapping significance.)

2025 Regional Concerns

Water Shed Planning: In the flood disaster declared in 2023 Bowers Brook overran its banks, created a new channel, and flooded South Acworth Village. Citizen volunteers worked with the State Department of Environmental Services (DES) to restore the brook to its original channel with funding provided by DES. During the project DES recommended the Town include Water Shed Planning in the Master Plan so that the Town would be eligible for grant funding for future projects which could take a proactive approach the river management. This could include efforts to keep river channels clear of surface and in-stream debris and silt accumulation.