

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary of the 1998 Kingston Master Plan is not intended to be a stand alone document, but simply a preview of its major points. Readers are urged to review the complete document, which is available at the Kingston Town Clerk's Office and at the Kingston Library.

INTRODUCTION

According to a recent study by the Harvard Graduate School of Design, the Old Colony Region is currently the fastest growing region in the northeastern United States. Kingston has been the fastest growing town in that region with a 15.5 percent growth rate in the 1990-1996 period. Overall, Kingston was the fifth fastest growing town within the entire Route 495 beltway during the same period. If this astonishing growth rate is allowed to continue unchecked, Kingston will undergo significant changes that will eliminate its small town character and rural atmosphere. These very traits were identified by citizens during the visioning process as two of the primary reasons why they choose to live here.

Kingston's first Master Plan was completed in 1970. The Town has undergone great changes in the intervening twenty eight years: the amount of potentially developable land has been reduced by roughly one-third; the population has more than doubled; the number of households has almost doubled and the overall population density has increased by approximately 50%.

Because this growth has happened so quickly, Kingston has often been caught in a reactive position rather than a proactive one. In an effort to change this paradigm and believing that the Town will "get what it plans for," the Master Plan Committee has addressed the major issues that Kingston faces now and well into the twenty first century. The Committee has drafted the plan with the objective that it will be the primary reference and "benchmarking" tool for Kingston citizens and Town officials. Addressing these concerns can be accomplished without significantly threatening the Town's enviable tax rate.

Kingston Visioning: Goals, Policies and Proposals drafted in June, 1996, (included in Section 1 of the Master Plan), served as the directional beacon for this Master Plan. The Master Plan Committee, with assistance from Beals and Thomas, Inc., prepared the Master Plan in the format prescribed by the Massachusetts General Laws. Each section is briefly outlined below.

Land use

The Land Use Section examines the competition between Kingston's rural town character and unrestrained growth that could undermine that character. From 1990 to 2000, Kingston is expected to experience a population increase of 33 percent, with an additional 22 percent increase anticipated between the years 2000 and 2010.

Under current zoning regulations, development of every available site in Kingston over the next thirty years would result in 2,391 additional homes, 279 additional commercial units and 158 additional industrial units. Based upon a conservative estimate of three persons per household, Kingston's population could be expected to increase by 7,173 people at full buildout. When added to the Town's 1997 population of 10,577, Kingston's population would stand at approximately 17,750. In addition, there would be an increase in the number of people traveling the Town's roads and demanding Town services caused not only by the additional residential units but also by the additional commercial and industrial sites developed within the Town's borders.

Consequently, now is the time to seize the opportunity to upgrade and streamline the Town's land use regulations to ensure that Kingston experiences the kind of growth its residents desire in the areas that they prefer.

This Section of the Plan recommends that the Town:

- Develop and implement a focused growth strategy that phases in and balances business and residential development with the existing land use patterns
- Create Kingston Historic District(s)
- Designate additional areas as Open Space
- Centralize the Town's planning efforts by creating a professionally staffed Planning Department
- Balance development costs between the Town and developers
- Explore and implement innovative zoning provisions that encourage managed growth, such as:
 - ⇒ Modified Cluster Zoning that utilizes density bonuses
 - ⇒ Planned Unit Developments
 - ⇒ Transferable Development Rights
 - ⇒ Development Impact Fees
 - ⇒ Point Based Systems (Incorporating requirements for adequate public facilities)

Housing

The Housing Section discusses the trend toward building large homes on oversize lots and the current need for smaller, more affordable homes. Such can be done through regulatory and other means, as enunciated in this Section.

In addition to past efforts by the Town to control the rate at which land is developed and to protect its natural resources (limiting building permits, Resource Protection Overlay Districts and a Cluster Development by-law), this Section of the Plan recommends that the Town adopt various innovative zoning concepts such as Transferable Development Rights, density bonuses for cluster developments, the creation of an Historic Overlay District(s) and the adoption of an Age Restrictive (“Empty Nester”) Housing by-law.

Unless measures are taken to better manage anticipated growth, the Town’s rate of development will likely accelerate as a result of planned infrastructure improvements.

Economic Development

The Economic Development Section balances the economic priorities of local employment opportunities and a sustainable tax base with the equally important priorities of preserving the rural character of Kingston and not outpacing the Town’s capacity for the provision of municipal services.

In order to achieve the optimal balance between these sometimes competing priorities, it is recommended that the Town:

- Adopt a “Focused Growth Strategy”
- Employ Town resources to attract businesses which are compatible with achieving the Town’s goals and preserving its character
- Establish a design review process as an integral part of a streamlined and integrated permitting process which will allow the Town and developers to work together to provide that development in Kingston is not contrary to the Town’s best interests

Natural and Cultural Resources

The Natural and Cultural Resources Section is a compilation of the natural, historical and scenic resources available to the residents of Kingston. It delineates the geological and topographical features, water resources, wetlands, plant communities, fisheries and wildlife present in Kingston. The Historic Resources Section includes a brief history of the community and a list of historic sites and their history. Specific scenic locations in Kingston are identified and briefly described.

This Section of the Plan recommends that the Town:

- Eliminate pollution of water resources and protect drinking water
- Protect the Town’s natural resources including Open Space, water bodies, waterways and the regional aquifer
- Restore the natural resources of shellfish beds and fishing in the rivers and Kingston Bay

- Establish measures necessary to preserve and protect the historical properties and sites in Town
- Establish historic district(s), where appropriate, for the protection of the Town's heritage
- Retain the Town's sense of spaciousness and its rural surroundings

The principal recommendations of the Natural and Cultural Resources Section of the Master Plan emphasize the fragile nature of our water resources and the necessity for the Town to take action now, before irreparable harm is done to them. There are fourteen specific actions recommended in this Section of the Master Plan to achieve this goal.

Open Space

The Open Space Section is based on the Town's blueprint for acquisition, i.e. the 1995 Open Space and Recreation Plan adopted at the Annual Town Meeting in 1996.

Since that plan was written, there have been losses and gains. An extensive portion of what was to have been a major greenway was purchased by a private developer who is in the process of building some 190 homes and an 18-hole golf course. On the other hand, the 277-acre Kelleher parcel in the far northwest section of the Town - with cranberry bogs and two major tributaries of the Jones River running through it - became available and was approved for purchase by Annual Town Meeting in 1997.

This Section reflects the Open Space Plan's vision of connected greenways that will provide passive recreation opportunities for residents and preserve wildlife habitat. It also calls for the establishment of a Town Parks Department, staffed by paid personnel. Currently, the Town ball fields and open space are managed by several different departments, and opportunities for economies of staffing and of purchasing services are being missed. Additionally, some new responsibilities, such as the maintenance of the Town's open space, need to be addressed and need to be integrated into the Town's management structure.

Public Services and Facilities

The Public Services and Facilities Section identifies and addresses the numerous services provided to Town residents with an eye to ensuring that such services and their attendant physical facilities will be appropriate and sufficient in the years to come.

At a public citizens' forum held in late 1996, participants gave high marks to public safety, schools, library and water distribution system, while roads, parks and human services were thought to be in need of some improvement.

This Section of the Plan recommends that the Town:

- Implement the 1998 Kingston Master Plan
- Synchronize the Town Budget and Capital Plan with the goals, policies and recommendations of the Master Plan
- Involve citizens in the Town's planning processes to a greater degree
- Implement the Town's sewerage plan including the current phase as voted at Annual Town Meeting '97 and subsequent phases
- Continue to work toward an exemplary school system K-12, using regional resources as appropriate
- Establish a Parks Department, with professional staff, to improve management and use of Town parks and recreation areas
- Improve Town Landing and the harbor for shell fishing and boating uses
- Re-establish a Town Government Study Committee to review the recommendations of the prior study committee and to make additional, appropriate recommendations for changes, if needed, in present Town Government

Transportation

The Transportation Section assesses municipal transportation needs, reviews possible transportation alternatives and suggests a direction for achieving Kingston's goal of improving traffic circulation throughout the Town.

In addressing the transportation needs of Kingston, it is essential that Town transportation planning and management functions be integrated. Specifically, the Town Planner and departments such as highway, police, fire, planning and finance must work closely together to establish a common set of transportation infrastructure and management priorities. In addition, resolution of many of the challenges confronting Kingston will require the development of more effective working relationships at both the regional and state levels.

Consequently, key to resolving Kingston's transportation issues is the development and implementation of a Comprehensive Traffic Infrastructure Plan, based upon careful analysis of collected data. This Comprehensive Traffic Infrastructure Plan, by incorporating an analysis of suitable alternative modes of transportation, must be able to justify the expenditure of public funds to make the infrastructure changes required to address the traffic circulation challenges confronting Kingston.

Ultimately, resolution of the myriad transportation issues confronting Kingston will require deliberate planning and the political will and commitment to implement meaningful solutions.

Conclusion

Careful and deliberate implementation of the recommendations contained in the Master Plan can ensure that in the future Kingston will experience the advantages of controlled growth; growth that will enhance, not detract from living in Kingston.