

UNITY FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

Format:

DISTRICT TYPE

- **District Name**

- Vision (purpose of/concept for district)
 - Location/Boundary Description
 - Allowed Uses, Types and intensity of proposed land uses, residential density
 - Specific Development Standards
-

Development Trends since 1993

Commercial growth has been significant for a community of Unity's size, with most occurring downtown. Residential growth has been far more modest. Unity has seen a smattering of new single family homes, most of them in the rural area. Unity has also seen the development of many new rental units, most of them downtown. (This includes the rental complexes developed by Newell, Roberts, and Tozier.)

Downtown during this period has also seen growth in civic infrastructure, including an expanded post office, a new masonic hall, a new community center, a new recreational area (Field of Dreams), a new park (Triplet Park), the planting of over 70 street trees, some new sidewalks, a multi-use parking lots, a new fire station, and (most recently) a new town office. At the same time, the Unity Elementary School closed its doors.

Retail and Eateries have both grown. Mac's Hardware and the local grocery store (under various management) have both put on additions and added inventory. New retail stores include the Community Market, the Family Dollar, Verizon wireless, and a gift shop. New eateries include Dunkin Donuts, Crosstrax Deli and Catering, the Unity House of Pizza, China Jade, Subway, and Spanky's Pizza, while a restaurant in the former Homestead building has remained along with the sandwich bars in the Depot Store and the Pit Stop. Storage facilities have also been added.

Bangor Saving Bank and Downeast Credit Union both came to Unity during this period. Inland Hospital now runs a full-service Health Center in downtown Unity.

For the past decade or more, downtown Unity has experienced a bustle of commercial activity that didn't exist in 1993—and that has made Unity the envy of many neighboring communities.

The number of small farms has increased significantly during this period, with most of those farms raising vegetable or livestock for direct sale. At the same time, dairy farming has declined. Several former dairy farms are now occupied by Amish families. In service to the growing farming community, a long-vacant downtown building is being renovated to house a "food hub," which will aggregate, store, and help distribute local farm products.

Growth at Unity College includes more professors, more students, more staff, and a higher budget. Traffic in town is also up, perhaps due in part to the growth of neighboring commerce centers (primarily Belfast, Newport and Bangor)

Overall, Unity appears to have recovered reasonably well from the economic collapse in 2007.

Yet not all businesses have experienced growth. Economic decline has been evident in declining interest in the Unity Raceway, the closing of Chase's (a furniture, flooring and video rental store), and the closing of Thorndike Press. Thorndike Press was located in "the Hodges building" which now occupies a medical marijuana growing company. At this time, the marijuana facility employs fewer people than Thorndike Press did.

Residential house lots are in low demand and multiple subdivisions in Unity have vacant lots. The sales of single family homes are stable for the area but the lack of high-quality homes and "things to do" has driven some people to purchase homes in areas closer to Belfast and Augusta. This is particularly evident with Unity College faculty and staff.

The goal of the 1993 Comprehensive Plan to channel new development into a growth district (which in Unity is the downtown district) appears to have worked fairly well for commercial development, but not as well for residential development.

Overview

One of the appealing features of Unity and many other rural communities is that homes and businesses are not segregated. This gives maximum flexibility to the property owner, allowing (for instance) for the creation of a home-based business. This "mixed-use" is also the hallmark of the traditional "village center" that is so cherished throughout New England. In Unity, a mixed-use downtown increases the customers at local stores and reduces traffic on smaller, outlying roads. Another important aspect of positive planning for Unity is to prevent sprawl and preserve the rural aspect that residents and visitors cherish. The districts and the standards for each listed below aim to balance economic prosperity with the rural, small-town feel. One major and over-arching goal is to maintain flexibility and to streamline the permitting processes while preserving full enforcement of the land use ordinance and other ordinances, especially in regard to the preservation and improvement of the water quality in Lake Winnecook.

Overall important goals to achieve in this plan are to:

- 1) Maintain flexibility to promote sustainable and manageable economic development downtown
- 2) Prevent Sprawl and encourage a walkable downtown commerce area
- 3) Protect Unity's agricultural viability and open space
- 4) Create a safe and vibrant place to work and live

LAND USE POLICIES

AFFECTING ALL OR MULTIPLE AREAS OF UNITY

The Comprehensive Plan Committee found one area of needed change for the future land use plan that affects all areas of town:

- 1) Amend the development review standard to include:
 - a. Crosswalks added where pedestrian traffic is increased by proposed development to a level where safety becomes a concern
 - b. Encourage building practices that are in line with the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code.
 - c. To prevent further taxpayer burden to repair and replace our roads, limit new development that would add potential for heavy weight traffic over our sensitive town roads (being all of them). Allow those developments with heavy road use to develop on Route 202/9, Route 139, or Route 220. To develop this standard, the Department of Transportation and applicable engineers should be involved. Exceptions from provision are for harvests of gravel, wood, and agriculture, and for residential development.

Furthermore, the committee found that many aspects of the current land use ordinance fit with the land use goals articulated in the vision and strategies of this new comprehensive plan. The provisions from the current ordinance that are listed below should all be retained in any future land use ordinance adopted under this new comprehensive plan. That is not to say that these provisions should remain exactly as they now appear. As changes to the current ordinance are developed, there is every reason to consider modest modifications to these provisions, but these provisions shall not be changed to the degree where their overall purpose, application, or impact is altered.

- **The Agricultural Protection Setback** which protects farmers from the “taking” of land by abutter’s development. Included in this is that wells installed must be at least 300’ from adjacent farmland and that principal structures must be at least 100’ from adjacent farmland (150’ and 50’ respectively in Downtown district)
- **Development Review Standards** for subdivisions and “high-impact” activities (as defined by the ordinance in Section X) that are in place to assure that the development will limit, as much as is reasonable, any negative impacts on the community.
- **Special Performance Standards** regarding parking, landscaping, commercial signs, lighting, commercial impacts, roads, mobile home parks, and wind turbines that lessen the artificial impact of development with its human connection and work to heighten the public’s pride, enjoyment and safety in relationship to the development.
- **Downtown Design Guidelines** that help preserve the historic visual character downtown by requiring new commercial development to follow basic standards (for roof pitch, window size ratios, etc.)
- **The rural district’s Farmland Protection Incentive Measure** that allows the use of smaller lot sizes in exchange for preserving a larger parcel of farmland or working woodland

- **Definition of Districts**, with the addition of the expansion for vehicle-based retail businesses.
- **Lot Size Density Bonus Incentive** that allows flexibility in lot sizes allowing larger lots to be interspersed with smaller lots as long as the overall density standards are not exceeded.

LAND USE POLICIES

GROWTH AREAS

Chapter 208 Section 4 numbers 3-A-(5-6) read: "Growth areas, to the greatest extent practicable, should be limited to an amount of land area and a configuration to encourage compact, efficient development patterns (including mixed uses) and discourage development sprawl and strip development"

This is the area where the Town wants growth and development to occur. The anticipation is that most residential and non-residential development over the next ten years will occur in these growth areas. Growth Areas include the areas with undeveloped land that is appropriate for development as well as developed areas where redevelopment or significant intensification of use is desired.

- **Downtown District**

- **Vision** – The Downtown District has a visual appeal and character that should be maintained without being overly restrictive. Downtown is where we celebrate our unique identity as a farming community, a market center, and a social hub.
- **Location** – The Downtown District is the generally more densely developed part of Unity that encompasses the traditional village and the economic development district, (both of which have overlay areas within the Downtown District). This district stretches to include Unity College, properties on the southern end of Unity Pond, Main St, Depot St and School St. It also corresponds with the area that is served (or could be served) by the Sewer District. The physical boundaries of this district shall stay the same as outlined in the current land use ordinance.
- **Allowed Uses** – In areas that are in the Downtown District and *not also* part of the Village or Economic Development District, all uses are allowed, except for non-owner-occupied retail. All uses are subject to development review, if triggered. Small lot sizes are allowed.
- **Development Standards** – The Downtown Design Guidelines and Special Performance Standards apply. The Development Review Standards apply, if triggered.

- **Economic Development District (Overlay on *Downtown*)**

- **Vision** – Given that the span of the Economic Development District encompasses a large amount of undeveloped land close to town, this is where retail development is encouraged. The purpose is to maintain a market center, allow development growth, and keep retail shops within walking distance of each other.
- **Location** - The Economic Development District encompasses all lots bordering School St from Main St to Sandy Stream. The physical boundaries of this district shall stay the same as outlined in the current land use ordinance.
- **Allowed Uses** – All uses are allowed in the Economic Development District, subject to current Development Review Standards. This district is the most flexible location to locate development in Unity.
- **Development Standards** – The Downtown Design Guidelines and Special Performance Standards apply. The Development Review Standards apply, if triggered.

LAND USE POLICIES

LIMITED GROWTH AREAS

● Village District (Overlay on *Downtown*)

- **Vision** -- Retain our small town character, and the historic and distinctive look of downtown. Encourage a walkable village area, with sidewalks, seating, and other opportunities for citizens to interact.
- **Location** – The Village District comprises the older village center of the Downtown District. It consists of those portions of Main Street, Depot Street and School Street that lie at the heart of downtown. This area is already developed and shall maintain the same physical boundaries as outlined in the current land use ordinance.
- **Allowed Uses** – All uses are allowed except for retail businesses that exceed a building footprint of 2,000 square feet, except that the Planning Board may approve footprints of up to 4,000 square feet where the site has been creatively designed and laid out in a manner that does not detract from the historic, small town character of the Village District. All uses allowed in the Rural district are also allowed in the Village District.
- **Development Standards** – If the use is retail, the building footprint may not exceed 2,000 square feet, or 4,000 square feet if approved by the Planning Board. The Downtown Design Guidelines and Special Performance Standards apply. The Development Review Standards apply, if triggered.

● Vehicle-Based Retail Expansion Area

- **Vision** – The purpose of this “expansion area” is to further provide flexibility of where retail businesses can locate. Those businesses which are not likely to be patronized by pedestrians, and which take up a significant amount of land (including building footprint, parking, and outside storage of goods), are allowed in this area in addition to the Economic Development District. Such businesses may include a lumber yard, agricultural good/feed store, auto dealership, or landscaping products store.
- **Location** – The land encompassed in this expansion area includes properties on which other retail businesses have already developed (under the existing home-based business rule). Specifically the expansion area is an overlay on a portion of the Downtown district and a portion of the Rural district and includes only the lots that abut the Thorndike Road from Route 202/9 to Leelyn Drive.
- **Allowed Uses** – Retail activities are allowed only if they require a vehicle to transport away the purchased goods by the consumer. All uses allowed in the Rural District also apply in the Vehicle-Based Retail Expansion Area.
- **Development Standards** – The Downtown Design Guidelines and Special Performance Standards apply. The Development Review Standards apply, if triggered.

LAND USE POLICIES

RURAL AREAS

Chapter 208, Section 4 number 3-E-2 reads: “The Future Land Use Plan must identify proposed mechanisms, both regulatory and non-regulatory, to ensure that the level and type of development in rural areas is compatible with the defined rural character and does not encourage strip development along roads.”

- **Rural District**

- **Vision** – This is the area of town that lends greatly to the “rural feel” that the community and its visitors are drawn to in Unity. Forests, Farms, Homesteads, and Scenic Vistas welcome visitors on every route in town that leads from the rural area to the downtown. There should be a distinct visual difference from being in the rural district to being downtown, generated mostly by the difference in density.
- **Location** – The Rural District comprises all of Unity that is outside of the Downtown District.
- **Allowed Uses** – All uses are allowed except non-owner-occupied retail.
- **Development Standards** –
 - The rural district shall include a Farmland Protection Incentive Measure that allows the use of smaller lot sizes in exchange for preserving a larger parcel of farmland or working woodland. An Agricultural Protection Setback shall also be in place to protect farmers from the “taking” of land by abutter’s development. Included in this is that wells installed must be at least 300’ from adjacent farmland and that principal structures must be at least 100’ from adjacent farmland.
 - As a way to prevent strip development, lots shall not be required to have a 200’ minimum of road frontage. A shared access road shall be allowed rather than each lot being serviced by the primary road.
 - In order to prevent the creation of long narrow lots (which often restrict access to and the productivity of the contiguous back land) no newly created lot shall have a ratio of length to width of greater than 5:1.
 - Protect remaining extensive large habitat blocks from development pressures, particularly those that support high value plant and animal communities. Also promote connectivity between these blocks.
 - Encourage the retention of open land, particularly along roadsides.
 - The Downtown Design Guidelines Special Performance Standards apply. The Development Review Standards apply, if triggered.

LAND USE POLICIES

CRITICAL NATRUAL AREAS

Must include map(s)

● **Shoreland District**

- **Vision** – The vision for all Shoreland Zones is to dramatically improve the water quality of Lake Winnecook and its watershed.
- **Location** - The Shoreland Zone is an overlay district that surround certain bodies of water as defined by the State of Maine Shoreland Zoning Law
- **Allowed Uses** – Being an overlay district, the allowance of a use is first dictated by the district it's in as dictated by the Unity Land Use Ordinance. The use is then further restricted by the State of Maine Shoreland Zoning Law.
- **Development Standards** –
 - Land use activities and recreational activities must not harm the water quality in Lake Winnecook and its watershed.
 - Specific development standards are otherwise dictated by the state of maine shoreland law. The town may decide at a later time to further restrict development than as outlined by said law in order to further protect the lake and its watershed.

● **Aquifer Protection Overlay District**

- **Vision** – The vision for the Aquifer Protection District is to protect the aquifer for future use by the town. The town should identify sites for a future aquifer system for the town, and acquire those sites for the public good. Additionally, all land use activities conducted over the aquifers must not harm these valuable sources of groundwater.
- **Location** – There are two primary aquifers: 1) the sand and gravel aquifer associated with Sandy Stream, and 2) the bedrock aquifer underlying the downtown area. An aquifer is a naturally existing body of water beneath the earth's surface, and the protection district surrounds them as they naturally occur and as established by archeological studies done for the Unity Comprehensive Plan of 1993.
- **Allowed Uses** – No use is restricted solely by the aquifer protection district, but certain applicants will have to explain how they will prevent contamination, if requested to by the Planning Board.
- **Development Standards** –
 - All applicants for a building permit or a development permit who propose activities in the Aquifer Protection District which have the potential to contaminate groundwater as determined by the Planning Board shall include as part of their applications descriptions of:

- a) their intended use of ground water; b) the potential sources of ground water contamination from any of their proposed land use activities; and c) their proposed means of preventing any potential contamination.
- Provision shall be made to protect against discharge or loss of toxic or hazardous materials resulting from corrosion, accidental damage, spillage, or vandalism. These provisions shall include: spill control measures at hazardous material delivery, storage and transfer points; secured storage areas for toxic or hazardous materials; and indoor storage provisions for corrodible or leachable materials. Handling and storage of toxic and hazardous materials shall meet performance standards established by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.
 - For uses that involve significant volumes of liquid chemicals, all activities shall be conducted under cover and over an impermeable surface. Use of dikes, liners, or other effective techniques will be required to enable collection of any spill that might occur. All materials will be handled and stored in properly covered and secured containers and disposed of according to all applicable federal and state regulations.
 - Proposed activities shall not negatively impact the quality or quantity of the groundwater.
 - Proposed "high-use" wells located within the Downtown District shall demonstrate that no adverse impact shall occur to any existing well as a result of the proposed well's operation. (NOTE: A "high-use" well is any well that will pump a long-term average rate of 1 GPM if located within 200 radial feet of other wells or 2 GPM regardless of location.)
 - All new wells of any intended pumping rate located in the Downtown District shall be located at least 85 radial feet from neighboring wells, unless a Maine certified geologist can demonstrate to the Planning board's satisfaction that due to relative depth or other factors, there is no scientific likelihood of well interference posed by the proposed well.