

Town of Lincoln Comprehensive Plan



Prepared by
The Lincoln Planning Board
and
The Lincoln Comprehensive Plan Update Advisory Committee

Acknowledgments

The Advisory Committee and the Lincoln Planning Board wish to thank the citizens and local officials who assisted the Town in the preparation of this plan.

The 2003 plan recognizes the effort put into the 1992 Plan while addressing major challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in the 21st Century.

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**with consulting assistance from
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Interpretation of the Plan

- 1. What significance does this Plan have for Lincoln?** Because of state legislation, the Lincoln Comprehensive Plan has "legal status". This means a number of things. First, it was prepared in compliance with the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act ("Planning Act"). Second, it provides the basis for zoning and subdivision regulations, all municipal land use decisions and state agency plans and projects. The Planning Act requires that all municipal land use decisions and state agency plans and projects "conform" to the plan. If state agency plans or projects do not conform, the Planning Act establishes a procedure that state agencies must follow. The Zoning Enabling Act requires zoning to be consistent with the Plan and the Subdivision Control Act requires subdivision regulations to be "consistent".
- 2. Which parts of the Plan are intended to provide the basis for decision making?** The entire Lincoln Comprehensive plan, with the exception of the following sections or items, is to provide the basis for determining whether plans, regulations, projects or actions are "consistent" or "conform".
- 3. When does the Plan begin to have legal status?** Once the town council and the State Planning Office have approved the Plan, it becomes the basis for land use decision making.
- 4. What do "consistent" and "conform" mean?** The entire Plan is intended to provide the basis for determining whether zoning or subdivision regulations are "consistent" and whether municipal land use decisions and state agency actions "conform." In the event there is ambiguity with respect to the language of the Plan or any of the maps, the language of the Plan shall govern. On this basis, the Lincoln Planning Board shall make the final determination of whether a proposed regulation is or is not "consistent."
- 5. Can the Plan be changed?** The Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act provides that a town can amend its plan up to four times a year. It does not limit the number or extent of the amendments that can be made each time the plan is "amended." The intention of the Lincoln Comprehensive Plan is not to set in stone requirements that the town must follow, but rather to record policies and actions proposed to be taken in the future that make sense in light of today's environment.

Table of Contents

I.	Overview of the Plan.....vi	vi
	Introduction: Maintaining a Balance in Planning.....vi	
	What is a Comprehensive Plan?.....vii	
II.	Plan Preparation Summary.....ix	ix
III.	Objectives Critical to the Success of the 2003 Plan.....x	x
IV.	A Vision Statement for Lincoln.....xi	xi
	A Townwide Vision Statement.....xi	
	A Village Vision Statement.....xii	
V.	Land Use Element.....LU-1	LU-1
	Introduction.....LU-1	
	Strategy Summary.....LU-25	
	Actions.....LU-37	
VI.	Housing ElementH-1	H-1
	Introduction.....H-1	
	Strategy Summary.....H-37	
	Actions.....H-39	
VII.	Economic Development ElementED-1	ED-1
	Introduction.....ED-1	
	Strategy Summary.....ED-18	
	Actions.....ED-22	
VIII.	Natural & Cultural Resources Element.....NC-1	NC-1
	Introduction.....NC-1	
	Strategy Summary.....NC-36	
	Actions.....NC-39	
IX.	Services and Facilities ElementSF-1	SF-1
	Introduction.....SF-1	
	Strategy Summary.....SF-34	
	Actions.....SF-36	
X.	Open Space and Recreation Element.....OSR-1	OSR-1
	Introduction.....OSR-1	
	Strategy Summary.....OSR-42	
	Actions.....OSR-44	

XI. Circulation Element	C-1
.....	
Introduction.....	C-1
Strategy Summary.....	C-12
Actions.....	C-16
XII. Heritage Corridor Element.....	BRV-1
Description of Corridor Program.....	BRV-1
Strategy Summary.....	BRV-13
Actions.....	BRV-14
XIII. Planning Administration Element.....	PA-1
Actions.....	PA-2
XIV. Action Matrix By Element.....	AM-1
Actions.....	AM-2
XV. Appendix	
Plan’s Compliance with State Guide Plan and Other Relevant Documents	
Consistency with Contiguous Municipalities' Plans	

Maps (located at the end of the plan)

Figure A	Village Boundary Map
Figure B	Buildout Analysis Map
Figure C	Future Land Use Map
Figure D	Areas of Planning Concern Map
Figure E	Zoning Changes for Consideration
Figure F	Open Space Map
Figure G	Townwide Roads
Figure H	Water Resources
Figure I	Waterbodies and Wetlands
Figure J	Floodplains
Figure K	Natural Resources
Figure L	Cultural and Natural Resources
Figure M	Archaeological Sites

Overview of the Plan

Introduction: Maintaining a Balance in Planning

The major theme running through this plan is that of "balance". Lincoln has focused on developing a good balance between growth and conservation. This plan seeks to support and continue past successes. The town recognizes that good management puts the town in a much stronger position to address the challenges of the future.

To maintain this balance, the plan addresses issues at several levels. The plan gives special attention to the large parcels of land that could change dramatically in the next decade. It explores ways to maintain the town's strong tax base. It also identifies continued strategies for reaching the town's 30% open space goal. Finally, the plan identifies actions to strengthen the character of Lincoln's existing neighborhoods and business areas. Together, these actions give the town a strategy that continues Lincoln's history of balance in its planning efforts.

Lincoln has achieved positive results through a relatively low level of regulation. Basic zoning coupled with high levels of professional staff review and high levels of public process negotiation have been the standard for Lincoln. This plan seeks to maintain that balance between solid public regulation and a willingness to acknowledge market demands. Although there are new regulations clearly needed and therefore recommended (e.g. site plan review and rural protection zoning), there is as great an emphasis placed on defining non-regulatory policies that will guide pre-project submission planning and encourage dialog and cooperation between property owners and the town. These policies highlight, in general terms, the types of land uses preferred by the town and the types of land uses that would not be appropriate. They define critical natural or cultural resources that must be protected under all circumstances. They define general standards for how use of a given parcel must interact with surrounding land uses. The policies also emphasize the need for communication between property owners and public agencies. Finally, the policies acknowledge the need for the town to respond to changing market conditions.

The areas in town where these detailed policies have been defined are referred to as "Areas of Planning Concern" (APC's). The designated APC's are as follows: the Lonsdale Drive-in, the Lonsdale Industrial Park, Lincoln Park, the National Register Historic Districts, the Moshassuck River Valley, the Gisele's Kitchen site, the Lincoln Mall area, the south-east side of Route 116 and the Conklin Quarry area. Several of these areas have been permanently protected from further development but have yet to be removed from the designation as an APC. It is in these areas where this plan sees either the most potential for change in the future and therefore the need to clearly define public preferences regarding land use, or it is in these areas where there are natural or cultural resources that bear continued attention and protection.

There is a multitude of sensible strategies lying between what have too often in the past been defined as mutually exclusive positions (e.g. conservative vs. liberal, no regulation vs. extreme regulation, environmental protection vs. economic growth). The concept of "sustainable development" is a good example of this lesson and its acceptance as philosophy for community development is growing both in this nation and in the world. As widely cited by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Lincoln's past planning actions and the future planning defined by this document are both based on this concept of sustainable development, which in the case of Lincoln we define as follows:

*Protect the critical natural and cultural resources of our town,
and around that foundation, build a dynamic economic and social
community in which people can live secure, creative lives.*

This plan is dedicated to that goal.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a broad strategy regarding the major areas in which town government affects the functioning of a community. Rhode Island legislation has defined those broad areas as land use, housing, economic development, natural/cultural resources, open space and recreation, municipal services and circulation. A comprehensive plan sets long-term goals for what a community wants to be like in the future. Lincoln last prepared a comprehensive plan in 1992 and 1974. Rhode Island legislation requires that every town in the state prepare an update to its previous plan every five years, while amendments may be added on a continual basis.

Decade Comparison (1990-2000)

The following table addresses the major components of change that affected the community over the last decade. The greatest disparity is seen in the rise in school population (40%) and median housing price (68%). Population growth and housing units increased at an accelerated pace during the decade. As such, the pace of development requires the need for additional services as well as measures for the protection of open space and evaluation of commercial land uses. Even so, proof of Lincoln's viability is evident in this change since it reflects the attractiveness of the community.

Components of Change	1990	2000	% Change*
Population	18,045	20,898	16%
Number of Jobs	9,221	9,769	6%
Housing Units	7,281	8,508	16%
Median Age	36.2	39.8	
Open Space	2,511 acres	2,577 acres	1% (22% total*)
Tax Rate	\$24.77	\$23.98	
Median Housing Price	\$139,250	\$234,750	68%
School Population	2,862	3,990	40%

**Percentages are rounded.*

Plan Preparation Summary

The Lincoln Planning Department, the Lincoln Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, the Lincoln Planning Board, and Edwards and Kelcey, Inc. prepared this plan with involvement of several town agencies. Five public meetings were held to solicit public comment and to review progress with the Advisory Committee. The sequence for plan preparation was as follows:

1. Project start up: February 6, 2002. Initial kick-off meeting with the Planning Board.
2. Preparation of inventory and analysis: February – May 2002. February 28, 2002 Orientation/Visioning Meeting with Advisory Committee. April 11, 2002 Working Session with Advisory Committee to present updated inventory.
3. Preparation of geographic information system and buildout analysis: June 2002. Use of the 2001 Blackstone Valley Buildout Study and updated by Edwards and Kelcey, Inc.
4. Town agency interviews and meetings: February – June 2002. A total of five public meetings and 10 interviews were held during this period.
5. Preparation of draft action strategy: May – June 2002. May 22, 2002 working session with Advisory Committee and June 11, 2002 public meeting to present draft recommendations.
6. Plan revision: June 19, 2003
7. Final plan hearings and review: August 19, 2003
8. Completion of state review: September 20, 2004

Objectives Critical to the Success of the 2003 Plan

The key issues shaping this plan are presented below. They were identified through the inventory, analysis and public participation phases of the project. It is on these issues where Lincoln must place its maximum effort in the years ahead.

1. Amend Lincoln's zoning ordinance to comply with the requirements of the Rhode Island Zoning Act (Section 45.24) and to bring the zoning ordinance into consistency with the Lincoln Comprehensive Plan.
2. Pursue opportunities to increase the amount and value of office and industrial development within the Industrial Corridor planning area. In general, seek to maintain the current ratio of the amount of residential to business land of 3.6 to 1. Most recent land use data available through the Rhode Island Geographical Information Systems as of 1995 indicates a 3.535 to 1 ratio.
3. Prepare development and protection guidelines for the following APC's and overlay districts: the Lonsdale Drive-in, the Lonsdale Industrial Park, Lincoln Park, the National Register Historic Districts, the Moshassuck River Valley, the Gisele's Kitchen site, the Lincoln Mall area, the south-east side of Route 116 and the Conklin Quarry area.
4. Maintain alternative access routes for cars and walkers from Route 116 to the Kelley House and Blackstone Corridor.
5. Explore zoning techniques that will allow residential developers to group single family homes in one area of a tract of land and to save the remaining land as open space. No increases over the densities allowed today should be allowed.
6. Maintain the town's stance of prohibiting strip commercial development directly on all Lincoln roadsides.
7. Adopt a process for protecting the historic structures and landscapes of Lincoln. This includes a set of standards for protecting roadside character while also making necessary safety improvements.
8. Adopt site plan review provisions within the zoning that provide for clearer standards for environmental and design review for new commercial and industrial projects.
9. Carry out a comprehensive review of town, state and federal environmental regulations that apply to Lincoln and identify gaps in those protection efforts. Currently, there are no local environmental regulations. The conservation commission efforts are to preserve open space but are not required to review development proposals, as do other towns. Environmental regulations should be adopted to discourage development on physically constrained land.
10. Work toward maximizing the benefits and planning for potential impacts from the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and its associated tourism activity.
11. Revise the Airport Hazard Zone to comply with the Rhode Island Airport Corporation's areas of influence around North Central State Airport to ensure safety and land use compatibility.
12. Encourage brownfield redevelopment of abandoned mill sites to primarily accommodate mixed-use development.

A Vision Statement for Lincoln

What will Lincoln be like in the future if it follows this plan?

A Townwide Vision Statement

Unlike many suburban towns, Lincoln encourages a variety of housing alternatives, industry and business. It recognizes the value of investing today to preserve open spaces and to provide the infrastructure necessary to support the town and protect the environment. Lincoln must maintain that perspective into the future and maintain a balance between all necessary uses.

The Lincoln of the 21st century will be a model suburban community in that it will offer an unusual variety of choice for its visitors, residents and businesses.

- Lincoln will offer the unusual urban/mill village environments of Manville, Albion, Lonsdale, Saylesville, Fairlawn, Quinville, Industrial Corridor, and Limerock while just minutes away one can find hundreds of acres of unspoiled natural landscape.
- Lincoln will offer a rural environment with a transportation system that places residents within minutes of downtown Providence and within an hour of airports and other major cities of New England.
- Lincoln will have over 30% of its area preserved as open space and within that open space will be a wide array of environments and activity choices.
- Few suburban towns will have a population as diverse as Lincoln with housing choices ranging from large apartment and condominium projects to small apartment buildings to many two family houses to single family homes set on lots of between just 7000 square feet up to several acres.
- Lincoln will have a state of the art industrial base, utilizing former brownfields serviced by regional arterials that leave neighborhood streets lightly traveled.
- Lincoln will continually enhance the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor as a local and regional recreational asset.

A VILLAGE VISION STATEMENT

Lincoln is a community of urban mill villages, each with its own distinct character. It is important to recognize what is unique about each village, even as we seek to unite ourselves as one town.

Vision statements for each of the seven villages and the Industrial Corridor are presented below. Policies and goals for the villages are presented at the end of each element. Village identity is critical to the Governor's Growth Planning Council on Growth Centers: *Recommendations for Encouraging Growth and Investment in Economically and Environmentally Sound Locations in Rhode Island*. This "smart growth" initiative helps protect the character of our villages while preserving rural areas of town from development

LONSDALE VISION

The village of Lonsdale offers an unusually diverse environment for its residents. Within Lonsdale one can be within walking distance of the protected farm landscape of the Chase Farm, the old houses of the Great Road historic area, the 500 acre Lincoln Woods State Park, neighborhood commercial services, the Blackstone River and the exceptional marshes that lie to the south of Lonsdale. The homes of Lonsdale offer both renters and prospective purchasers a wide choice ranging from multi-family developments and small single family homes located in the historic mill village, to single family homes on lot sizes ranging from 7,000 sq. ft. up to an acre. The vision of the village of Lonsdale is that this exceptional natural and cultural environment should be protected and that access for residents to the natural and historic resources should be enhanced through an improved sidewalk and trail system and increased riverfront access. In addition, the tradition of industrial uses within the industrial park should be encouraged while zoning flexibility should be provided to allow mill-building owners options for other uses.

SAYLESVILLE VISION

Saylesville consists of two parts. The first is the residential area; the second is the industrial area in the Saylesville industrial park. Saylesville will continue to be a village where the residential neighborhoods are protected and remain stable into the future and where the industrial properties are encouraged to grow and work toward becoming even stronger centers for jobs and tax base. The key challenge for Saylesville will be protecting the residential areas along Smithfield Avenue and those abutting the industrial areas.

FAIRLAWN VISION

Fairlawn is and will continue to be a neighborhood of single and two family homes on smaller lots along with a healthy commercial area on Smithfield Avenue. As with the other villages, the policy of Lincoln is that the Fairlawn area should develop its own identity. The village of Fairlawn will be enhanced through increased open space and recreation areas and through a village identity campaign that defines the borders of the village and emphasizes the elements of Fairlawn that make it a distinct village.

QUINNVILLE VISION

Quinnville will continue as a small, quiet, residential village separated from other neighborhoods of Lincoln. Historic structures should be protected and new housing developments should gradually blend in with the historic sections of Quinnville as landscaping matures. Although commercial development pressure may be expected along Lower River Road as tourism increases to the canal, bike path, and to the Kelly House, this development should not be allowed.

LIMEROCK VISION

The village of Limerock contains the majority of developable land in Lincoln and as such, it will see the most changes from growth in the coming decades. Limerock should continue to be a single-family residential sector of Lincoln. Of importance is the maintenance of tree-lined country roads, varying setbacks of single-family homes, views of farmland and easy access to public open spaces. The natural views from Old River Road and Great Road and the historic qualities of Great Road and the Lincoln Lime Quarry should all be protected. The Moshassuck River runs through this area and should be protected from surface runoff and other pollution.

Limerock will see office or light industrial development along Route 116 east of Old River Road. This non-residential development should not encroach upon Quinnville or upon the expected rural protective residential development that should occur on the lands across from town hall. Efforts must continually be made to buffer the residential neighborhoods from expanded or changed institutional and commercial uses. Regulations on the Lincoln Park site should contain sufficient flexibility to allow commercial uses that will not increase, and would perhaps decrease, traffic, light and noise impacts on the nearby neighborhoods. Further roadside commercial development should not be allowed.

ALBION VISION

Albion will continue to offer the advantages of a range of housing choices in a setting that offers easy access to commercial services in Albion Village, Cumberland and the Lincoln Mall. In addition, residents are close to natural resources such as the open spaces of the golf course and the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor. Albion also lies in closest proximity to all the villages, the town library, schools, town hall and interstate access ramps. In the future, Albion Village should have more small businesses to serve the needs of village residents and residents of the nearby Albion Mill Condominiums. The result will be a livelier village center to act as the anchor for these two planning areas.

MANVILLE VISION

Manville has a personality unlike any other village in Lincoln, and it is the vision of the Town to maintain that character into the future. The essence of protecting Manville's character will be to ensure that the homes of Manville do not gradually deteriorate due to absentee ownership and

that the environment surrounding Manville does not make the village an unattractive place to live. Manville will not return to the days of having as active a commercial economy as it once had, but creative reuse of first floor commercial spaces should be encouraged through zoning and public policy.

THE INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR AND INDUSTRIAL PARK VISION

This part of Lincoln is and will continue to be the heart of commercial and industrial activity in the town. Given Lincoln's central location within Northern Rhode Island, this planning area has the potential to be a suburban business center for the entire region. Lincoln will work to encourage and provide the types of services and amenities that will make this corridor a center for business and cultural activity and the site of the most valuable real estate in Northern Rhode Island.