

# Town of Windham

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**Comprehensive Plan Review Team  
Windham Veterans Center  
7:00 PM, Thursday, September 25, 2014**

## AGENDA

1. Introductions
2. The Comprehensive Plan
  - a. What is it?
  - b. Why is it important?
  - c. What will our Plan look like?
  - d. What is your job as a member of the Review Team?
3. Ground Rules and Meeting Procedures
4. Public Involvement Outline
  - a. Community Survey
  - b. Community-wide events
  - c. Targeted meetings with interest groups
  - d. Guest Speakers at Review Team meetings
  - e. Online (Town web site, Facebook, others?)
5. More on the Survey...
  - a. Kevin Fay, Critical Insights
6. Creating a draft Vision Statement
  - a. Mark Eyerman, Planning Decisions
7. Next Meeting
  - a. Visioning work with the Review Team
  - b. Review logistics for community visioning session

Town of Windham

Comprehensive Plan Review Team

Suggested Ground Rules – Draft March 6, 2014

The Review Team has been purposely structured to represent a wide range of groups, interests, and viewpoints. Each member of the Team is an equal participant in the process, and will have equal opportunity to voice opinions and express ideas. Differences in opinion are to be expected and respected.

As members of the Review Team, we will:

- Start and end meetings on time
- Be prepared and ready to participate by reading packets ahead of time
- Have meeting agendas and follow them
- Stay on task; no side conversations during meetings
- Listen actively and raise a hand when waiting for a turn to speak; no interrupting
- Be concise in our statements and not monopolize meeting time
- Avoid voting and operate on consensus – seek general agreements all can “live with”
- Show respect for other Team members and their views and opinions
- Notify staff if we cannot make a scheduled meeting, and make sure that any “homework” is submitted to be shared with the group
- Actively engage with members of the community between meetings regarding the Team’s work, and bring comments back to the group for all to hear.

Please note that the public is welcome to attend all meetings, review packet information, and listen to discussions. Even though our meetings will not be structured to take public comment, there will be many ways for the public to participate in the planning process.



Planning — December 2010

### Viewpoint

## There's Hope for the General Plan

By Robert Paternoster, FAICP



General plans have gotten a bad name as a failed planning tool — and often for good reason. Let's face it: We have been preparing general plans (or comprehensive plans) for well over a century with little to show for our labors, particularly when we're talking about the plans that languish on the shelves of older cities. I believe, however, that there's a way to make the general plan work, and that is by making it a tool for management as well as for planning.

My first experience with the general plan was in the 1960s as a young planner on the staff of Ed Bacon's Philadelphia Planning Commission. The city had just released its new comprehensive plan, a document that had taken a decade to prepare. But it wasn't long before it became clear that the plan had major shortcomings. For one thing, it was a long-range, 20-year, end-state plan, based upon the premise that its recommendations would stand up as a blueprint for city development. It did not anticipate the constant revision and updating that would be needed — but was never done. The second problem — typical of all master plans of that era — was that the document focused almost exclusively on the physical city, while ignoring Philadelphia's massive social and economic problems.

When I became planning director in Pittsburgh in 1970, I decided to take a far different approach. I initiated a six-year development programming process that resulted in a new plan every two years. While this process was based on the long-range goals that are typical of a traditional general plan, its focus was clearly on middle-range strategies to move the city forward. Every recommended program and project was funded over six years, much like (but broader than) a capital improvement program.

Moving to the West Coast in 1978, I found myself working in cities with a city manager form of government — a dramatic shift from the strong mayors I knew in the East. I was pleasantly surprised to find that city managers actually welcomed the advice of planners, and some viewed the general plan as a tool for better management. That was true both in Sunnyvale (part of Silicon Valley), where I served as community development director and helped to refine a sophisticated planning and management system (PAMS), and in Ontario (in Southern California), where planning director Jerry Blum teamed up with his city manager to produce a dynamic, online general plan and business strategy.

**What both of these cities have in common is that they began with a long-range vision** based on an extensive public outreach effort. The vision was translated into long-range goals and plans (including the traditional land-use plan), which were prepared by or in cooperation with the senior staff of the operating departments and adopted by the city council as the community's long-range general plan. But they didn't stop there. Each city has a continuous middle-range planning process (like Martin Meyerson's "middle-range bridge" for comprehensive planning) for plan review and implementation.

In Sunnyvale, the city manager and department directors convene annually to evaluate implementation strategies and recommend new policies and programs to the city council. In Ontario, an annual tracking and feedback process measures progress toward implementing each goal of the general plan. Nine interdepartmental management teams have been formed around the nine major elements of the plan. In both cities, this inclusive planning process has helped council members to understand their role as policy makers, as distinct from management's role as policy implementer. The result is less council meddling in day-to-day operations. (Ontario's constantly updated plan is online: [www.ontarioplan.org](http://www.ontarioplan.org).)

The success of these cities is part of the reason that I believe that there is hope for the general plan — so long as it is used as a central management tool as well as a primary planning tool. But success requires collaboration between the city manager (or mayor) and the planning director, and must involve the senior staff of all the operating departments. Success also requires reaching out to residents and businesses.

Most important, the focus of this effort must be on a continuous planning process, one that allows for change through the middle-range strategic planning and programming process. That's how we can transform the general plan into a powerful new tool for planning and management.

*Robert Paternoster served as community development director in Sunnyvale, California (2001–2007); director of planning and building in Long Beach, California (1978–2001); and planning director in Pittsburgh (1970–1978). He and Jerry Blum were part of a panel on "The General Plan as a Management Tool" (S565) at the 2010 National Planning Conference.*

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Business

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## **In new-home market, Windham is tough to beat**

**Location and affordability drive the town's fastest rate of building in a decade, outpacing new construction in 40 other towns stretching from Lewiston to York.**

By JENNIFER VAN ALLEN Staff Writer



Rob and Samantha McNamee pose in the home they built in Sebago Heights Estates in Windham. “Our money goes a lot farther in Maine than in Massachusetts,” Rob McNamee says. Photos by Gordon Chibroski/Staff Photographer

When Rob and Samantha McNamee wanted to move out of Framingham, Massachusetts, they considered buying a house in another Boston suburb. Then they realized how little space their \$300,000 new home budget would buy and redirected their search northward.

“Our money goes a lot farther in Maine than it does in Massachusetts,” said Rob McNamee, an engineer who can work remotely. They were able to build a three-bedroom, 2.5-bath colonial on a little more than an acre in Sebago Heights Estates in Windham while staying under their budget. They moved in on Valentine’s Day.

**Additional Images**



Portland, 64 building permits for single-family homes were pulled in the first six months of this year – more than were issued in any full year since 2007, according to information collected by Construction Data New England.

“Builders are looking for land. Everybody’s jumping on it like vultures to build houses,” said Todd Harvey, a broker with Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate The Masiello Group in Windham. “It’s becoming a town of choice. People recognize it’s a great central location, with retail and services that you don’t have to go all the way to Portland for.”

Aside from Gorham, Windham gained more new residents since 2013 than any other town in Maine, according to population estimates from the U.S. Census. Windham’s population hit 17,443 last year, up 2.6 percent from 2010. Just three other towns gained 400 people or more in the same time span.

And the building activity hasn’t been limited to just residences. During the town’s last fiscal year, 300 building permits for commercial buildings and renovations were pulled, nearly double the number for the fiscal year ending in 2011.

A 58-room Microtel is scheduled to open in December. The Seacoast Fun Park and Snow Park is adding a restaurant, more water slides and snow-tubing runs. Auto Zone and Aroma Joe’s are building locations there. Smitty’s Cinema, which returned to Windham in 2013, added an eighth screen and 200 seats. Other small businesses, like Danielle’s Diner, and Bombshell Hair and Nails, are moving into spaces that have long sat vacant.

Director of Code Enforcement Heather McNally is receiving a flurry of calls from people asking about zoning and land-use criteria.

“It really is amazing seeing the life within the community,” McNally said.

## **LOCATION, LOCATION**

To some extent, the factors driving Windham’s growth are the same as they’ve always been: a 30-minute commute to Portland, land that’s more available and affordable than in neighboring towns, easy access to the lakes, the mountains, St. Joseph’s College in Standish and the University of Southern Maine’s Gorham campus. In 2011, Bloomberg Business Week named North Windham as one of its Top 20 places to Raise Kids, lauded for its low crime and above-average schools.

Tom Bartell, executive director of the Windham Economic Development Corp., said the town has benefited from the growth of Portland-area businesses like WEX, Idexx and Unum.

“A lot of those professionals are working there and living here,” he said.

New residents can get more home for their money than they can in nearby towns. The average price of a newly built home, excluding land, in Windham is \$168,891, according to data from

Construction Data New England, a Windham-based firm. That compares to \$217,800 in Naples, \$179,278 in Standish and \$172,286 in Gorham.

Among the wave of newcomers is Diane Durgin. When she and her husband were considering moving out of a condo in Windham, they checked out houses in Standish and Gorham. But the opportunity to have an acre of land, views of the White Mountains, the lakes and woodlands kept drawing her back to a building lot in Windham.

“We just kept coming back, and coming back and coming back,” said Durgin, who built a two-bedroom, 1.5 bath house in Sebago Heights Estates in 2012. “We wanted to be in a community, but we wanted the quiet and we didn’t want to be right on top of somebody else.”

Greg McCormack, one of the developers of Sebago Heights Estates, broke ground on the 91-home development in 2008, just before Wall Street giant Lehman Bros. collapsed and the national economy contracted. He continued building through the recession, albeit at a slower pace, doing three or four houses per year. This year he plans to build 10 units. He also started marketing the final phase of the development, which calls for 31 houses ranging in price from \$200,000 to \$300,000.

“People find that you’re going to pay 10 to 20 percent more for the same house in other nearby areas like Scarborough or Gorham,” he said. “People like the lake, and the fact that there’s an entire shopping district that you don’t have to go to Portland to find.”

In response to its growing population, Windham officials are working to cultivate the town as a hub for the Sebago Lakes Region, and not just for tourists. The Sebago Lakes region drew about 313,334 overnight visitors and 236,578 day visitors in 2013, according to estimates from the Maine Office of Tourism. In 2012, the town commissioned a retail analysis to assess its consumer base and to attract retailers and service providers to the commercial district in North Windham. The intersection of U.S. routes 302 and 202 near Tractor Supply Co. store has 400 acres of commercially zoned property that’s suitable for retail and mixed-use development. Town officials have shared the results of the analysis with existing retailers to analyze their current product lines and markets.

But its reputation as a tourist destination has had a hand in its recent population and building surge. James Skvorak, senior mortgage adviser at Windham-based Homestead Mortgage Loans, said some of the new-home demand is coming from people who rented vacation homes for years and are now deciding to build a home of their own.

“I can only assume that consumers are more comfortable and have more confidence and job security, that they’re willing to make that investment,” he said.

He also noted that people are buying bigger houses than they have in the past. A few years ago, he was seeing ranches and colonials in the \$190,000 range. Now he’s seeing them more in the \$250,000 range.

“In the past six months, there’s been a big difference. It seems like new construction keeps springing up all over the place,” he said.

In January 2013, the city adopted a downtown plan to improve the capacity of Roosevelt Trail – Route 302, the main thoroughfare through Windham – to renew its sense of place and commercial center, increase access to open space, and spark economic development. Part of the plan calls for building more sidewalks and crosswalks, and connecting parking lots with more streets.

“We want to establish it as a service center for the lakes region in its own right, not just a bedroom community,” said Ben Smith, Windham’s planning director.

Officials point to the construction of a new Microtel on Route 302 as a sign that this is happening.

Beyond the jobs it will create – the hotel will employ roughly 20 people – “it gives local businesses that are bringing people to the region a place where they can stay so they don’t have to go to Portland or South Portland,” Bartell said.

It’s an indication that the business community has confidence that Windham’s economy chugs along all year long, not just during the May-to-October tourism season.

“It’s definitely a good sign,” said Aimee Senatore, executive director of the Sebago Lakes Chamber of Commerce. “They’ve done their research so clearly they see that there’s enough to keep you open year-round.”

Not everyone is glad to see the growth, though. Lifelong resident Marc Whitaker, who built a new home in Windham 10 years ago, commutes 45 minutes to his job at Arlberg Ski and Surf in Scarborough. His wife works in Gorham.

“The good part is that there are more people, and the bad part is that there are more people and more traffic,” he said. “But I’m five minutes from the water and the mountains, and I’m where I want to be on my days off.”

Web Producer Christian Milneil contributed to this report.

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