

V. COMMUNITY FACILITIES, SERVICES AND UTILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The extent and adequacy of community facilities, services and utilities, whether publicly or privately operated, are dependent on residents' demand for or acceptance of the level of services provided. As the Town population grows, lifestyles change, and new types of development come to Town, the level and types of services provided will evolve to meet these future needs.

To plan for the community facilities and services, that will be needed in the future, it is first necessary to determine the extent of existing facilities, services and utilities. These existing facilities are listed in an appendix to this Chapter. This Chapter concerns itself primarily with the municipally-owned physical facilities and operating programs. Some non-municipally-owned services are also accounted for. In order to meet future needs, the suitability of the existing facilities, services and utilities must be accounted for, with consideration given to funding mechanisms, the ability of the Town to physically accommodate the use, and its impact on abutters. For each facility or service, information is provided regarding its adequacy for the next five to ten years.

In Plainfield, there are two distinct village areas to be served. In order to reinforce and preserve these villages, both must still retain residential, commercial and community service functions. However, over the years, where it has made sense, there has been consolidation of facilities and services, such as schools, town offices and police. Other community services found in both villages, such as water systems, should continue to exist independently. Whenever possible, when services exist in both villages, as do the libraries, there needs to be a high level of cooperation to minimize the duplication of services. As opportunities arise, consolidation and cooperation should be encouraged.

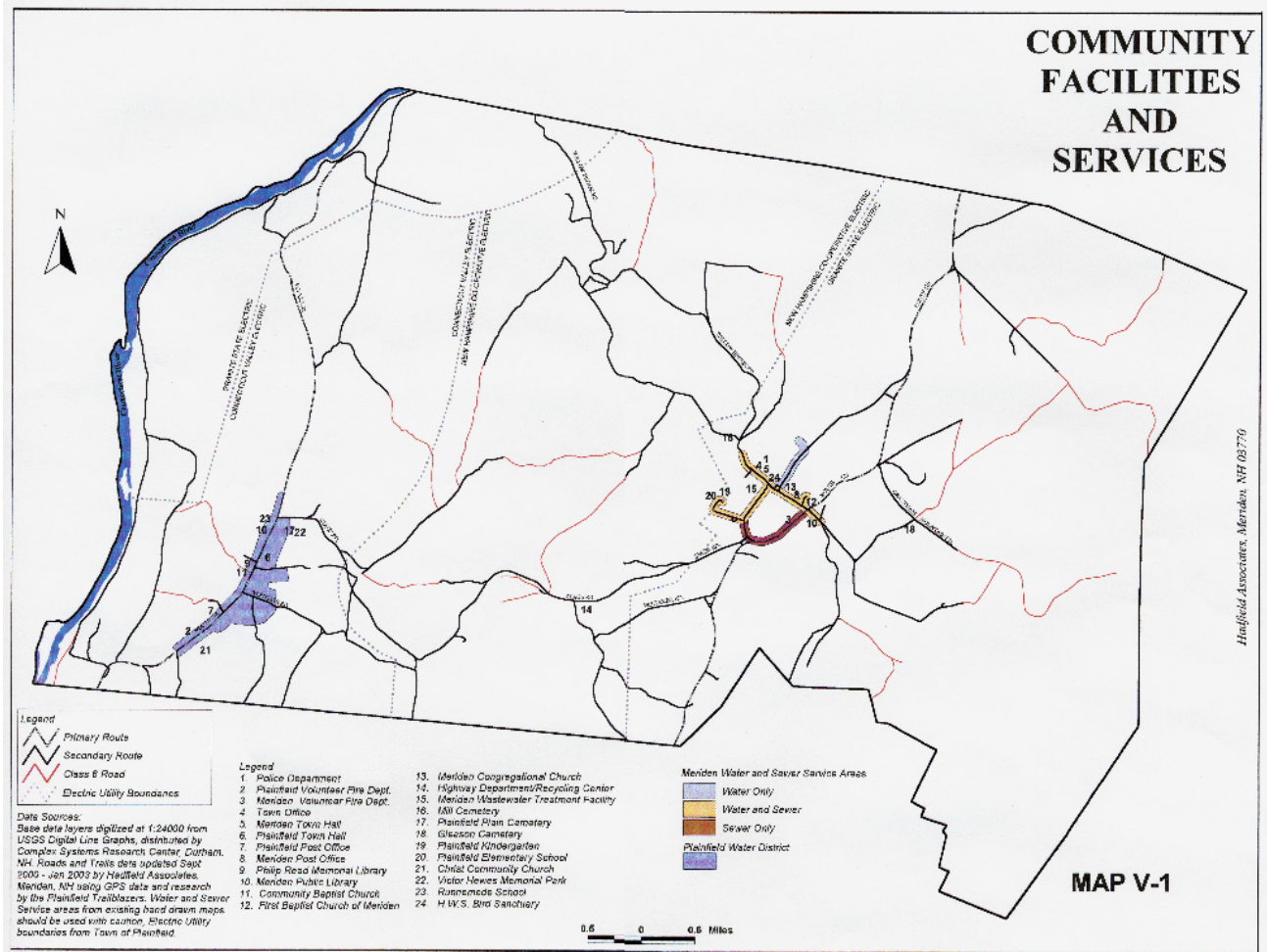
PLAINFIELD'S COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

FIRE DEPARTMENTS

The Meriden and Plainfield Volunteer Fire Departments participate in mutual aid with Cornish, Windsor, Claremont, Lebanon, Hartford and Hanover. They are both nonprofit organizations, which are financed by fund raising activities, as well as Town appropriations. MAP V-1

Survey respondents gave the Fire Departments high ratings, as 75 of the respondents rated their service as "good". The Plainfield Fire Department purchased land and built a new firehouse in 2000. The new firehouse is 60 by 84 feet. It has three bays, an office and a meeting room. The new site is located one mile south of Plainfield village at #1260 Route 12A. Thanks to a gift of land by Kimball Union the Meriden Fire Department now has enough area for a planned one bay expansion of their fire station.

MAP V-1 COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES



POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Police Department consists of three full-time, two part-time employees. Situated in the Meriden Town Hall, the Department's facility needs have been addressed for the present. A mutual aid agreement continues with Cornish and Lebanon.

The Police Departments service rated the highest of all Town services on the 1993 survey, with 86% of the respondents giving the police protection a "good" rating. Between 1983 and 1993, there has been a transformation of opinion about the Department, and now the Department has the full support of the community; this compares with the 40% of respondents to the 1983 Survey who felt the same way, this is a drastic improvement in perception of service.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE, AMBULANCE AND DISPATCHING

Dialing 911 accesses all requests for emergency services. Plainfield adopted the Street Numbering Ordinance on June 7, 1995..

The Cornish Rescue Squad, and ambulance services from both Windsor Vt Lebanon NH provide emergency medical care to Plainfield residents.

The Cornish Rescue Squad is made up of Plainfield and Cornish residents who provide first response emergency medical care for the sick and injured, and first aid coverage at structure fires. They do not provide transportation to hospitals. The vehicle and equipment, other than what rescue squad members personally carry, are housed in Cornish. The Town of Plainfield appropriates money each year for this service.

The Windsor Ambulance Service responds to calls from Plainfield Village and the southwestern portion of Town.

The Lebanon ambulance service covers the northern portion of Plainfield and Meriden Village. The Victor Hewes Memorial Field, on Stage Road on the west side of Town and KUA athletic fields are the designated landing areas for the Dartmouth-Hitchcock emergency helicopter.

Survey results indicate that respondents were very satisfied with the Rescue Squad, with 71% giving the Squad a "good" rating. The ambulance service received a lower rating, with only 48% selecting a "good" rating; however, a full 37% were uncertain about how to rate the ambulance service. More respondents were uncertain how to rate the ambulance service (37%) than the rescue squad (23%)

TOWN HALLS

There are two town halls, one in each village. Action taken at the annual Town Meeting in March of 1995 re-emphasized the 1993 survey results, which indicated that there was strong support for both town halls to be preserved for their historic value.

The voters addressed the underutilization of the Meriden Town Hall by appropriating funds for it to be converted to the Town and Police Offices. Construction of these new offices was begun in 1995 and completed in 1995. The Meriden Town Hall became Plainfield's municipal building at that time.

Voters approved appropriations to repair and restore the Plainfield Town Hall. A full schedule of repairs and restorative work was completed in 1998. In 200X a working kitchen was installed. To justify its preservation and maintenance it is hoped that the Town Hall will be utilized for both public and private functions. It is the only town owned building large enough

for a gathering of over forty people in the Plainfield Village. Due to its small lot size and the close proximity of abutters, parking is a concern about its future use. There is handicapped parking available on-site, but most of the other parking is on Route 12A. A nearby municipally-owned parking lot could alleviate that problem in the future.

TOWN OFFICES

The Town Office is located in the municipal building (former Meriden Town Hall) at 110 Main Street in Meriden Village. The Selectmen's office is open Monday thru Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 p.m. The full time Town Administrator and full time Town Clerk work out of the Selectmen's office and are available full-time during the week. Vehicle registration is available 5 days per week. The Tax Collector, Treasurer and Building Inspector all utilize the municipal building and are accessible to the public through part-time office hours during the week.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

The Highway Department's garage is located at 351 Stage Road. The site and its structures, the garage, a salt shed and equipment shed, are thought to be adequate for the daily operations of the Department for the next ten years.

GRAVEL EXCAVATION

Sand and gravel resources are important for highway maintenance and construction purposes. The Town owns its own gravel pit on Ferry Hill Road and from this pit removes approximately 10,000 yards of sand and gravel per year for municipal operations. Bohn & Associates of Wilder, VT conducted a gravel pit inventory in May 1997. The inventory indicated an excess of 70,000 cubic yards of gravel (30 years supply) in the pit on Ferry Hill Road. The inventory also revealed 162,000 cubic yards of coarse sand (10 years supply) and an adequate supply of mixing sand to extend the gravel.

The town, through a donation of land, recently acquired 10 acres adjacent to the gravel pit. The possibility of exists to acquire an additional 10 acres. This doubling of the gravel pit parcel would extent the useful life of the gravel pit for at least another 30 to 40 years.

SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL

Plainfield is one of the few Upper Valley towns with townwide municipally-sponsored curbside collection of both garbage and recyclables . Garbage is disposed of at the Lebanon land fill the recycling is marketed by the town's hauler.

In 2008 the town closed its drop off recycling shed, Plainfield residents may now, for those items not collected at the curb, utilize the Lebanon full time recycling facility.

LIBRARIES

The Town of Plainfield has two public libraries: one located in Plainfield Village and one in Meriden Village. Both are presently funded by a combination of Town appropriations, trust funds, fund raising and gifts. The two public libraries cooperate to avoid duplication of materials, services and hours. Both libraries are part of the Statewide Library Development System, which means they must meet the standards set by the State Library Commission for a town of Plainfield's size. The required standards for each level of library use are set according to a town's population.

The Philip Read Memorial Library in Plainfield Village was built in 1921 and housed a donated collection of 1,200 books at that time. Over the past 75 years, the collection has expanded to over 17,000 new books and many new services have been added. The changing times and the changing make-up of the community are creating an ever-increasing demand for services.

Between 1974 and 1990, circulation increased 560 percent. During this time, the only changes that have been made to the building were:

In 1971, half the basement was remodeled into a meeting room.

In 1974, a bathroom and small children's room were added onto the back of the building; and

In 1989, a portion of the remaining basement was remodeled into a junior room.

The Philip Read Memorial Library underwent a major expansion in 2002. The final phase of this project is the finishing of the basement level of the new addition. This work is planned for 2010 and will result in a meeting room and enhanced children's room.

The current Meriden Library building in Meriden Village was built in 1965. In addition to the library function, the building provides meeting space for many local groups and organizations. The building received a new roof in 1993 and is structurally very sound. In 1995, interior renovations were completed to increase the available shelf space within the existing building. Patron parking is inadequate and should be improved. When needed, the existing lot and building are well suited to accommodate a library addition.

SCHOOLS

Plainfield Elementary School

Most children in grades K--8 attend the Plainfield Elementary School. In 1999 Plainfield became a stand alone 'school administrative unit SAU32. The Plainfield School District operates the Elementary School and under an AREA agreement, sends high school students to Lebanon High School. Plainfield, like many communities has been dealing with declining enrollments.

The Plainfield School, through its facility committee, has recently undertaken projects to realize significant long-term energy savings at the school. Included in this work is a prototype class room approved at the 2009 town meeting.

Kimball Union Academy

Kimball Union Academy, a secondary boarding school, is located in Meriden Village. KUA has been generous in allowing Plainfield elementary students to use the skating rink and swimming pool. Also, advanced elementary students have been able to take advantage of some of KUA's math and language classes.

CHURCHES

The 1993 Community Attitude Survey indicates that the churches are a special part of Plainfield for their historical aesthetic and cultural appeal. They are also an important part of the social fabric of the Town.

Church facilities provide meeting space for many Plainfield community-oriented groups. Three churches in Town faces a parking problem. The parking problem is best addressed in an overall parking study done for both villages. For the churches, because their facilities are used primarily during non-business hours, an efficient parking solution would be to coordinate with businesses not in operation during the evening or on Sundays. On-street parking may be a preferred solution for the churches, since the facility use is sporadic and during non-business hours. Creation of a large expanse of parking area for the exclusive use of each church is not recommended as a preferred use of the scarce village land. Instead, a multi-purpose,

efficiently designed and carefully located parking area would be more suitable to Plainfield's villages.

In July 1999, The Christ Community Church purchased the former snath factory plus 70 acres from the estate of Sid Hammond and subsequently erected a 12,000 square foot church. As part of the Planning Board site review, the church offered the use of its facilities as an emergency shelter for the town. It can house 300 people with kitchen/dining facilities and has its own generator.

CEMETERIES

In addition to an unknown number of private burial grounds, there are fifteen Town-maintained cemeteries in Town. All of the cemeteries were established prior to 1815. Plainfield Plain Cemetery and Gleanson Cemetery are is the largest and have the most potential for expansion in the future. Recently efforts have been made to improve record keeping for the sale of cemetery lots. Surveyed lots now exist for sale in the Plainfield, Gleason and River Cemeteries.

RECREATION FACILITIES AND SERVICES (Municipally Owned)

The Recreation and Open Space Chapter addresses the recreation opportunities in Town, including Burnaps Island and the Victor Hewes Memorial Field, listed in Appendix A at the end of this Chapter.

The 1993 Attitude Survey results show that less than half the respondents considered recreation services to be "good" (48.7%). Another 25% of the respondents rated recreational services as "fair", with 6% giving recreation in Plainfield a "poor" rating. Approximately 20% of the respondents were uncertain. The written comments about recreation ranged from "fair for kids" to "What recreation?" to "Not a TOWN requirement".

The 1993 survey also shows that 30% of the respondents thought that commercial recreational facilities could be located throughout the Town. Some respondents felt that they should be located in the village areas only (28.6%); others (14.3%) thought "in rural areas only"; and 27.2% were uncertain where they would be best located. 49.3% of survey respondents thought tax dollars should be spent on purchasing conservation easements on property for recreational purposes.

In 1996, The Plainfield Trail Blazers formed in response to the Community Profile work. They work with The Conservation Commission to establish interconnected trail networks across private and public lands.

A cooperative project between the School District, the Town and private parties resulted in the construction and dedication of the Sarah and Ira Townsend Bridge located on conserved land adjacent to the school. This bridge and the resulting expanded trail network allow access to the French's Ledges area from the Plainfield School property. Groomed cross country ski trails and mowed mountain biking trails are now available to the public at this location.

POSTAL SERVICES

Although Post Offices are not municipally-owned, postal services are an important component of the bundle of services expected in American communities.. The Plainfield Post Office is a new modern facility. The Meriden Post Office is substandard and there is general concern within the village that this post office could be lost as part of the larger downsizing of the US Postal Service. The Meriden Post Office lease expires in 2010.

ELECTRICITY

There are three different companies that provide electric service in the Town of Plainfield: Public Service of New Hampshire, National Grid and New Hampshire Electric Cooperative Inc.. Recent experiences with ice storms have demonstrated a need for enhanced communication with the utility companies. For example, during the ice storm of 2008 it became very difficult for subcontractors working on behalf of the utilities to fully understand coverage areas and to make necessary repairs.

CABLE TELEVISION

In New Hampshire, cable television franchises are awarded to cable companies on a town-by-town basis. Comcast is franchised to serve Plainfield. The cable head (source of signal) comes from Lebanon. Cable lines are run on existing power poles where possible. It provides service to 400 residents.

BROAD BAND COVERAGE

Plainfield is fortunate in that residents with TDS phone service and or Comcast Cable have access to high speed Internet service. The availability of high-speed service or lack of is a real limiting factor for properties and is real issue for rural communities like Plainfield. Expanding access, particularly on the Plainfield Village side of town needs to be a priority.

WATER DISTRICTS

Each of Plainfield's villages is served by a water system. In Meriden, there is also a sewage treatment plant.

The Plainfield Village Water District serves approximately one hundred subscribers, including a 12-unit condominium, a mobile home park and several businesses. A drilled well located off Peterson Road is the district's main source. The Water Commissioners, elected from the users, are responsible for the daily operation and maintenance of the system. Expenses and debt retirement are offset by the income from a base rate and a per gallon charge.

In 2001, The Plainfield Water District constructed a 130,000-gallon storage tank on Sugar Hill Road, intended to enhance customer service. It fills during the night, so there is water available during daytime hours. Another improvement in the town's water resources is that all of the fire hydrants now operate and can be utilized properly.

The Meriden Village Water District, supplied by a well near Blood's Brook, has about 60 customers, including KUA, two churches, the library and several businesses. The system has adequate supply and capability for expansion. Along with water, the Meriden Village Water District has a sewage line and wastewater treatment plant that serves about 34 customers, including KUA and some businesses. This facility has potential to expand operations at this site.

FUNDING COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

In Plainfield, like other towns, finances are an ongoing concern. Decisions concerning availability and quality of facilities and services affect residents and their experience, not only as Plainfield residents, but also as Plainfield taxpayers. The budget cycle begins in July when the Planning Board and Town Administrator request departmental input pertaining to capital needs and use this information to revise the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). The Capital Improvements Plan identifies and prioritizes the Town's capital improvement needs and

recommends a schedule for funding and purchase or construction of those improvements. A capital improvement is a major expenditure or project undertaken by the Town or School District that is generally not recurring. The capital improvements program is used by the Selectmen and Budget Committee to formulate budgets for both operating and capital expenditures. The budget cycle ends at Town Meeting when voters take action on warrant and ballot articles.

Reserve funds are used extensively by the Town to pay for capital items. Money is set aside each year in different accounts in anticipation of major capital expenditures. In this way, the Town positions itself as an interest earner, rather than an interest payer.

In rare cases, such as the renovation of the Meriden Town Hall, the Town incurs debt to finance capital improvements.

Capital budgeting assists in managing growth. Public expenditures for capital projects, such as road improvements, can influence the location and timing of development. A CIP provides a mechanism to wisely plan for those public expenditures.

In order to assure that development will not cause an undue financial burden on the Town, the Planning Board should review each proposal in light of its fiscal impact. The CIP is a good guide to use in the review, as it documents planned expenditures for the next five to seven years. Where municipal services would be overburdened or the Town faced with undue fiscal hardship, the development can be deemed scattered and premature.

GOAL

To sustain the desirability of the Plainfield living environment by maintaining and expanding community services in an economically responsible manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The town should look to expand access through down to high speed internet service. The town should support efforts to insure that the lease for the Meriden Post Office is renewed.

The Town should continue to promote recycling and proper disposal of household hazardous wastes at regular household hazardous waste collections.

A committee charged with finding land for community facilities, such as off-street parking in both villages, should be established.

The Town should continue its practice of capital budgeting using the CIP to establish budget priorities, develop a revenue policy for each capital expense, and stabilize the tax rate.