

MASTER PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall Goals and Priorities for Implementation

This Executive Summary presents the key goals, findings, and recommendations of the Orange Master Plan, and a priority list of action items for implementation. The Orange Master Plan incorporates work completed for the Orange Space and Recreation Plan (2001) and the Orange Community Development Plan (2004), as well as new sections on community facilities and services, and land use and zoning. The Community Development Plan included chapters on housing, economic development, and pavement management. Each section of the Orange Master Plan assesses current conditions and provides recommendations in the topic areas. There are a few sections in a typical Master Plan, such as a historic and scenic resources chapter and a full transportation chapter, that were not part of the Orange Master Planning process due to budgetary constraints. However, the Master Plan is still a comprehensive document which is designed to help guide future Town activities and planning in Orange, and to help realize residents' and Town officials' goals and vision for the Town's future.

The idea of creating a Master Plan for Orange had been considered for some time, and is one of the recommendations of the Orange Open Space and Recreation Plan. The Master Planning process was launched in August 2002 with the mailing of a detailed community survey to all Orange households. The survey sought to gather residents' views on a variety of community topics, and found that residents' top concerns for Orange related to the creation of jobs, the revitalization of the downtown, the improvement of Town infrastructure including schools and roads, and the preservation of Orange's rural character and natural resources. Also, as part of the planning process, the Town of Orange conducted a public forum in July 2003 to hear residents' ideas about ways to improve the downtown and address current concerns.

The results of the survey and public forum were used to help establish the goals and objectives for the Master Plan, and to create community strategies and priorities for achieving them. The recommendations and strategies presented in the Master Plan reflect the following overall goals for Orange:

Overall Goals

- To promote a more diverse mix of businesses and housing to help stabilize the tax base;
- To support the revitalization of the downtown and the creation of new employment opportunities;
- To encourage desired development and address development pressures through land use planning and zoning; and
- To balance development with the preservation of Orange's natural, scenic, and historic resources.

This Executive Summary presents highlights of the Orange Master Plan, and gives goals, key findings, and recommendations for each of the subject areas covered by the Plan. Based on the recommendations in the different sections of the Orange Master Plan, and on community values and concerns, the Orange Master Planning Committee has identified the following top priorities for implementing the Master Plan:

Priorities for Implementation

- Pursue the establishment of a riverfront park in the downtown. A riverfront park is currently being designed for the site of the old Town Barn downtown, and the Town of Orange is seeking funding to construct the park once the design phase is completed. The riverfront park will provide a downtown green space and better access to the Millers River. The park and the planned adjacent boat ramp could also help revitalize the downtown and create numerous job opportunities related to tourism and outdoor recreation, including new retail establishments.
- Change the Orange Zoning Bylaws to encourage desired patterns of residential growth. An important goal of the Master Plan is to allow for development while preserving open space and other important natural and scenic resources. The Master Planning Committee supports reforms to the Zoning Bylaws in pursuit of this goal. These reforms include modifying the Town's Open Space Development Bylaw to mandate or encourage developers to build conservation subdivisions (clustered housing with open space set-aside) over conventional subdivisions. The recommended reforms also include a bylaw to allow accessory units by right in all areas of Orange to create additional housing units within the current housing stock. This recommendation has already been implemented; an accessory apartment bylaw was adopted at Orange's Town Meeting in the spring of 2005.

- Promote appropriate types of business development. The Master Planning Committee and Planning Board have drafted performance standards that allow business uses in appropriate areas based on their impacts on other properties. These performance standards will help encourage desired business types in town. The Master Planning Committee and Planning Board have also created a right-to-farm bylaw to promote agricultural businesses in town. The right-to-farm bylaw was adopted by Town Meeting in the spring of 2005, and the performance standards are likely to be considered by Town Meeting in the fall of 2005.
- Work to protect rural areas and areas with important natural resources from development which could have future adverse impacts. It is especially important that the Town work to preserve areas that could provide potential future water supplies for the Town. If those areas are developed, these potential supplies may become inaccessible to the Town, and the quality of these water resources could be impacted. In addition, the Water Department, with Town Meeting approval should seek to purchase land within the Zone I wellhead protection areas surrounding Wells #1, #2, and #3 to protect the Town's existing drinking water supplies. The Master Planning Committee also encourages the Select Board to establish a growth boundary for future public water and sewer line extensions to direct development to suitable areas.
- Implement the recommendations of the Orange Pavement Management Study. The pavement management study that was conducted for the Community Development Plan reviewed the conditions of the current Town road network and then developed recommendations regarding how the Town's road maintenance funds could be spent most cost-effectively. The results of the pavement management study could help the Town of Orange prioritize future road projects. The Orange Highway Superintendent will play a key role in this process.

Master Plan Chapter Summaries

Natural Resources and Open Space

The Natural Resource and Open Space chapter of the Master Plan is based upon the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), which was completed in 2001 and approved by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services. During the Master Planning process, the information from the Open Space and Recreation Plan on open space in Orange was updated to reflect the land parcels that became protected after the OSRP's completion. Since the publication of the 2001 OSRP, the amount of protected land in Orange has increased by approximately 4,000 acres (140%). Based on current data (April 2004), an estimated 6,800 acres of land in Orange are now permanently protected from development; 54 percent of this land is privately owned, the remainder is publicly owned. The protected open space parcels account for 30 percent of the Town's total land area (23,045 acres).

Main Goals (from the Open Space and Recreation Plan)

- Ensure that the Town of Orange retains its predominantly rural character and maintains or improves the quality of its air and water and the diversity and integrity of native flora and fauna, through the conservation of locally and regionally important natural and cultural resources.
- Ensure that the Town of Orange improves the quality, quantity, and accessibility of its recreational resources for current and future generations.

Key Recommendations and Action Steps (from the Open Space and Recreation Plan)

The Orange Open Space Planning Committee that developed the Open Space and Recreation Plan identified priority recommendations and action steps for implementing the Plan. These included the following:

- Support the development of a riverfront park, which would add needed public access to the Millers River and, which could provide an opportunity to create handicapped accessible open space in the downtown area.
- Create and empower an officially appointed Open Space Committee.
- Identify key parcels of land in Orange Center for play areas and sports fields by conducting a survey within each neighborhood to ascertain the recreational and open space needs of these residents, and a parcel level analysis of all vacant land in Orange Center.
- Support farmland preservation through the Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program by determining farmers' interest in protecting their lands and sponsoring a Town Meeting Warrant article setting a yearly contribution from the Town to match APR funds.
- Promote and help protect historically significant landscapes including the National Historic District in downtown Orange and the North Orange and Tully village centers by developing a portfolio for each parcel that describes its historic value. Partner with local land trusts and state conservation agencies.