

# Chapter 1

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The Lincoln Comprehensive Plan represents more than three years of work by citizens and town staff to create a guidance plan for Lincoln's future. The planning process was led by a five-member Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and enhanced by the efforts of five subcommittees, each charged with contributing their ideas to two elements of the Comprehensive Plan: Land Use and Economic Development; Housing and the Built Environment; Cultural and Historic Resources and Governance; Services, Facilities and Circulation and Transportation; and Open Space and Natural Resources. In addition to the many working meetings conducted by the Steering Committee and subcommittees, the planning process included public workshops in July 2007 and February 2008, a discussion session at the State of the Town Meeting in November 2008, and a presentation of the draft Comprehensive Plan goals and recommendations at the Annual Town Meeting in 2009. Throughout, the Town Administrator's office, Planning Department, and Conservation Department offered staff support for the work of volunteers. In August 2007, the Planning Board hired a consultant to assist with preparing the new Comprehensive Plan.

### Comprehensive Plan Elements

The Comprehensive Plan contains eleven major elements, or chapters devoted to specific planning topics. Most are required by the state's master plan law, M.G.L. c. 41, § 81D. Each element includes comprehensive plan goals, policies, and recommendations to address Lincoln's current and future needs.

- ◆ **Land Use.** The land use element describes Lincoln's physical evolution and town character, existing land uses, zoning history, and policies for managing growth. It also discusses the land use challenges that currently face the town and others that are likely to materialize in the near future: reaching consensus about opportunities for housing and commercial development around Lincoln Station, accommodating the potential for redevelopment of institutional properties, and balancing the town's long-standing desire to limit growth with other community needs and market pressure for new development. In addition, the land use element outlines a process for considering rezoning proposals from landowners and developers and provides guidelines for reviewing those proposals. Finally, it reviews a series of regulatory strategies to encourage creative projects and identifies aspects of the Lincoln Zoning Bylaw that need to be updated.

#### *Land Use Goals:*

LU-1: Create a compact, dense, walkable village center in the Lincoln Station area that provides more housing choices near public transportation, goods and services for residents, and opportunities for social interaction.

LU-2: Institute a comprehensive process for considering proposed zoning changes.

LU-3: Encourage development proposals that creatively address local needs.

LU-4: Maintain communication with non-profit organizations and institutions in Lincoln in order to integrate their long-range plans with the town's plans.

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- ◆ **Natural Resources.** The natural resources element includes an inventory of Lincoln's land, water, and wildlife resources. It reviews the town's past and present resource protection efforts, notably by the Conservation Commission, the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust (LLCT), and others. This element also explores Lincoln's present and foreseeable challenges, such as the need for regional cooperation to address traffic, air quality, watershed protection, stormwater, habitat disturbance, and environmental hazards. The natural resource recommendations focus on stewardship, public education, water conservation, and regulatory tools to protect air and water quality and protect habitats.

### *Natural Resources Goals:*

NR-1: Preserve Lincoln's natural resources and agricultural land uses.

NR-2: Promote water conservation, ecological landscaping practices, and energy and resource conservation among all property owners and town employees.

NR-3: Improve controls against environmental degradation and pollution.

NR-4: Improve communication and coordination between the Water Department and other town agencies responsible for developing and implementing natural resource protection plans.

- ◆ **Cultural and Historic Resources.** The cultural and historic resources element provides a summary of Lincoln's historic resources, focusing primarily on buildings, structures, and landscapes, and describes the steps Lincoln has taken to preserve and protect them. In addition, it identifies conditions that make historic preservation difficult in Lincoln: the lack of a comprehensive resources inventory, the challenges involved with protecting historic built assets that are not located in a designated local historic district, the cost to maintain and improve historic municipal buildings, and the need for more measures to store, preserve, and manage permanent town records above and beyond constructing the new vault at the Lincoln Public Library. Further, the cultural and historic resources element includes an overview of Lincoln's numerous non-profit cultural organizations and institutions, and explores ways to strengthen relationships between these groups, town government, and the schools.

### *Cultural and Historic Resources Goals:*

CH-1: Strengthen collaboration with Lincoln's cultural and historic organizations.

CH-2: Identify, evaluate, and protect Lincoln's cultural and historic assets.

CH-3: Promote stewardship of Lincoln's cultural and historic resources.

- ◆ **The Built Environment.** The built environment element is a tribute to the role that structures and their settings play in defining Lincoln's rural character. This chapter provides an analysis of four key design elements that repeat throughout Lincoln: the pattern of woodlands along the roads and the varied placement of buildings within the trees, views from the road, the town's rural roadways, and the relationship between the built and the unbuilt. It also reviews several conditions that make it difficult to protect the unique qualities of Lincoln's built environment. The conditions range from teardowns and mansionization to the impact of very large residential accessory structures on adjacent properties and surrounding neighborhoods, new construction on lots bordering conservation land and scenic views, the energy and environmental impacts of new growth, and the need for more effective regulations and other tools to influence building and site design.

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### *Built Environment Goals:*

BE-1: Preserve key aspects of Lincoln's rural roots and agricultural heritage, its varied architecture, and the prominence of its natural land formations.

BE-2: Preserve rural character achieved by recent public and private efforts in Lincoln to conserve open space and to place land in permanent conservation.

BE-3: Encourage new structures to fit within the landscape and to respect Lincoln's unique New England character.

BE-4: Encourage environmentally sensitive building and landscape practices for all future development.

- ◆ **Open Space.** The open space element reviews Lincoln's renowned achievements in open space protection and promotes continued attention to preserving conservation, agricultural, and recreation lands. Consistent with Lincoln's new *Open Space and Recreation Plan* (2008), the comprehensive plan emphasizes the importance of stewardship through managing and monitoring Lincoln's conservation holdings. The open space element also identifies conditions that may lead the town to consider new land acquisitions or special zoning strategies to save priority landscapes in the future, e.g., the sale of a large institutional property with unprotected land. In addition, this element identifies needs such as access to conservation trails for people with disabilities and providing adequate land and facilities for many types of recreation interests.

### *Open Space Goals:*

OS-1: Preserve and protect conservation, agricultural, and recreational lands.

OS-2: Promote active stewardship of existing agriculture and conservation land.

OS-3: Maximize recreational opportunities on recreation and conservation land.

- ◆ **Housing.** The housing element documents Lincoln's past and present efforts to provide for a variety of housing types and encourage population diversity. Reinforcing issues identified in the built environment chapter, the housing element explores the impact of trends such as teardowns and mansionization on the makeup of Lincoln's population and households. It also discusses the difficulties of creating affordable housing in a town with high home prices and land values. Recommendations in the housing element include maintaining Lincoln's traditional commitment to affordable housing, continuing to provide a variety of housing at different market levels, focusing future housing initiatives on populations not well served by the town's existing housing, and continuing to take steps that will protect the town from large, unwanted Chapter 40B developments.

### *Housing Goals:*

H-1: Provide for a variety of housing types to encourage diversity of Lincoln's population.

H-2: Provide more housing to accommodate the needs of individuals who may be under-served by Lincoln's existing housing stock.

H-3: Maintain Lincoln's long-standing commitment to provide affordable housing that meets local needs.

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H-4: Maintain local control over affordable housing development.

- ◆ **Economic Development.** By choice, Lincoln does not have a large base of businesses or industries. The comprehensive plan strives for consistency with the town's long-standing policies of limiting business development and remaining open to creative residential, mixed, and nonresidential development ideas. The economic development element provides a statistical profile of Lincoln's labor force and employment base. It also includes an overview of existing commercial land uses and the town's tax base. This element's recommendations call for establishing an economic development committee, preserving working farms, developing the Lincoln Station area as a mixed-use village center, evaluating other areas in Lincoln for mixed-use or commercial development, capitalizing on the town's agriculture and base of institutional land uses as a possible springboard for agri-tourism development, and supporting home occupations and home-based businesses.

### *Economic Development Goals:*

ED-1: Continue to encourage agriculture as a way of life and a source of local employment and food.

ED-2: Provide for mixed-use and commercial development that respects Lincoln's rural character and adds to the quality of residential life by providing goods and services for residents.

ED-3: Retain and capitalize on Lincoln's cultural, educational, environmental, and other non-profit charitable organizations as a vital part of the local economy.

ED-4: Promote local businesses and home-based businesses as a source of local, "zero-commute" employment.

- ◆ **Transportation and Circulation.** The transportation and circulation element examines the impact of local and regional traffic on Lincoln's rural, scenic roads and the challenges of protecting public safety while also preserving town character. This element includes an inventory of the town's roads, roadside paths, trails, and other transportation options, notably commuter rail, and provides a snapshot of current efforts to improve Crosby's Corner. It encourages the use of traffic calming measures in appropriate locations to slow vehicular traffic, increasing the town's focus on speed regulation and enforcement, maintaining Lincoln's traditional activism in regional transportation planning and problem-solving, increasing the town's investment in maintaining and expanding the roadside paths, exploring ways to increase safety and access for bicyclists, and providing more transportation choices for Lincoln residents, especially those for whom driving is not an option.

### *Transportation and Circulation Goals:*

TC-1: Increase the safety of Lincoln's roadways.

TC-2: Encourage the use of both motorized and non-motorized modal alternatives for intra- and inter-town transportation.

TC-3: Address transportation issues on a regional level.

TC-4: Coordinate the need for traffic control measures with preserving the rural character of Lincoln's roadways.

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- ◆ **Community Services and Facilities.** The purpose of a community services and facilities element is to identify existing and future needs for public services as a town's population grows and changes over time. Lincoln's Comprehensive Plan includes an inventory of existing municipal and school facilities, a review of each facility's condition, and a profile of services provided by town departments. Noting that Lincoln residents have approved many Proposition 2 ½ overrides in order to maintain town services and pay for capital projects, this element outlines ideas for controlling future growth in service costs, such as centralizing town facilities management under a full-time facilities manager, periodically surveying residents about their community service needs and preferences and allocating budget resources accordingly, and continuing to look for new revenue sources to support local government service delivery. It also reviews the recent "privatization" of military housing at Hanscom Air Force Base (HAFB) and the potential impacts on Lincoln.

### *Community Services and Facilities Goals:*

SF-1: Continue to identify and assess community service needs, considering Lincoln's changing population, the cost of services, the revenues available to support them, and alternative models of service delivery.

SF-2: Improve the management and maintenance of town facilities and infrastructure.

SF-3: Continue to invest in local government innovation, capacity, and efficiency.

SF-4: Continue to monitor the status of Hanscom Air Force Base and initiatives with respect to military housing, through base closure or privatization of existing housing, that may place new demands on Lincoln's municipal and school services.

- ◆ **Governance.** The governance element seeks to preserve and enhance Lincoln's tradition of citizen participation in town government. It promotes new ideas for making town meeting attendance and public service attractive to residents, encourages more effective use of technology to communicate with and reach out to residents, and recommends strategies such as a skills bank to identify qualified people to serve on boards and committees. In addition, this element calls upon Lincoln to take an active role in working to reform the system of local government finance by enlisting help from the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) and others.

### *Governance Goals:*

G-1: Increase citizen participation in town government.

G-2: Make public service and town meeting participation engaging and attractive to residents.

G-3: Enhance the frequency and effectiveness of town government and citizen communications.

G-4: Work with other communities and the state to overhaul the system of real property taxation as the primary method of financing local government.

- ◆ **Implementation.** The implementation element is an action plan to carry out the major recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan. This element recommends establishing a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to coordinate implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, set timelines for achieving various objectives, and provide support to the town boards, commissions, and departments with direct implementation responsibilities. The Committee also would evaluate the town's

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implementation progress and periodically review the plan to determine whether it needs to be amended. For each recommendation in the Comprehensive Plan's topic chapters, the implementation element identifies priorities, responsible parties, and needs for new resources or a reallocation of existing resources. It also links the recommendations to key themes that appear throughout the Comprehensive Plan report.

### **Key Themes**

Seven themes integrate the elements of the Comprehensive Plan and provide a coherent picture of the town's future opportunities and challenges. These themes include:

- ◆ Land use policy
- ◆ Assets and resources
- ◆ Town character
- ◆ Transportation
- ◆ Finances and economic sustainability
- ◆ Governance and civic responsibility
- ◆ Infrastructure and communications

Through these seven themes, the Comprehensive Plan reaffirms Lincoln's community vision statement:

Lincoln is a town that cherishes its rural, agricultural character, its small town heritage, its open space, and its historical legacy. The Town is committed to:

- ◆ Achieving a balance between preserving these values while making reasonable provision for citizens' safety and convenience;
- ◆ Fostering economic, racial, ethnic, and age diversity among its citizenry through its educational, housing and other public policy;
- ◆ Excellence in its public educational system; and
- ◆ The Town Meeting form of government and the traditions of civic leadership and volunteer public service.

### **Land Use Policy**

Land use policy forms the heart of any comprehensive plan and it affects all aspects of comprehensive plan implementation. The two-acre zoning policy that Lincoln adopted to curb growth stands at odds with contemporary planning practice and contributes to some of the planning challenges that exist in Lincoln today. Two-acre zoning can frustrate the principles of smart growth – or as some describe it, “smart evolution” – and promote auto-dependency, which in turn generates traffic and degrades air quality. It also promotes development that tends to place high demands on water supplies and fragments open space. In addition, it contributes to (but is not the only cause of) the high cost of land and the size and price of homes. There are environmental, social, and fiscal costs associated with large-lot, low-density zoning, though often

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they are difficult to see. Like so many aspects of town planning, however, two-acre zoning is only one of many forces that shape Lincoln's choices and constraints.

Lincoln's tradition of large-lot zoning has provided benefits that cannot be overlooked. By controlling the total amount of new growth, Lincoln has managed to keep development from overwhelming local water supplies and forcing the Town into the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) system. That most of the town consists of low-density development and open space also reinforces Lincoln's long-standing desire to retain its rural character. Keeping the population small has helped to preserve Lincoln's culture of citizen participation and civic responsibility, too. Moreover, while Lincoln has used low-density zoning to accomplish overall growth objectives, it has responded to creative developments that called for higher density. From the commercial center around Lincoln Station to Lincoln Woods, Farrar Pond Village, Battle Road Farm, Lincoln North, and The Groves, Lincoln has made wise decisions to build great places throughout the town. Today, many people in Lincoln seem enthusiastic about developing the Lincoln Station area as a mixed-use village, with more housing close to the train and nearly all of the town's businesses – an idea endorsed in this Comprehensive Plan and foreshadowed in Lincoln's previous master plans.

Smart evolution would be fairly straightforward if Lincoln just focused on the train station, but the town has already learned that “growing smart” requires more tools and strategies than transit-oriented development. Allowing a higher-density development like Farrar Pond Village in Lincoln's southeast corner was fairly cutting-edge in the 1960s, and acquiring forty-seven acres in North Lincoln for a mixed-income housing development and a large office building was virtually uncharted territory for small suburbs in the mid-1980s. More recently, Lincoln recognized that some of its institutional properties might be sold and two-acre zoning would not make much sense for those locations. Accordingly, the town commissioned a study of these and other sites and ultimately created new zoning for The Groves, located on land formerly occupied by the Boston Institute for Intercultural Communications (BIIC). These projects were not always easy to achieve, however. Some required hundreds of hours of volunteer and staff time.

Balancing the desire to remain small with the possibility that land use changes could occur in many parts of town will continue to pose challenges for Lincoln. While Lincoln would earn high marks on many aspects of smart growth, the town may need to be open to new ways of thinking about land use policy in the future.

- ◆ *Creating a range of housing choices.* Lincoln has done a far better job of providing housing options than a majority of the Commonwealth's small towns. Moreover, it has done so without ever relying on Chapter 40B comprehensive permits to create affordable housing. Lincoln has once again surpassed the ten percent statutory minimum on its own, through innovative zoning and tireless efforts of the Lincoln Housing Commission and others. Still, it seems more difficult to build broad support for housing choices and housing affordability today – possibly because Lincoln has grown weary of the threat of Chapter 40B, and possibly because its political culture is changing.
- ◆ *Walkable neighborhoods.* One of Lincoln's remarkable qualities is that residents able to walk can get just about anywhere on foot if they choose. This is because Lincoln has constructed roadside paths along most of the major roadways and conservation trails throughout the town. In addition, most goods and services are concentrated around Lincoln Station and most governmental services are concentrated in the town center. For residents in these areas, many of their needs can be met just by walking to and from home. Even for residents in other parts of town, however, it is possible to park in one place and walk to several destinations. Still, Lincoln faces obstacles to preserving, promoting use of, and expanding its pedestrian networks and reducing the extent to which its own population generates vehicular traffic.

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- ◆ *Citizen participation and stakeholder collaboration.* Lincoln welcomes spirited debates. What some humorously call “the Lincoln way” is a serious, deliberative, time-consuming process of consensus about public policy choices – a style of decision-making that Lincoln deeply appreciates. Still, one concern raised during the Comprehensive Plan process is that Lincoln may have to work harder to communicate with and engage citizens. It can be difficult for residents to understand all of the trade-offs involved with major land use decisions when they participate only on occasion, but not everyone can participate in all aspects of civic life all the time. Although Lincoln’s traditional approach to considering zoning changes worked well in the past, many residents today did not live in Lincoln when the town tackled projects such as Battle Road Farm and Lincoln North. Transparency, a broadly understood process, and clear, timely communication are not more important now, but they may require more effort (or different types of efforts) on the part of local government.
- ◆ *Distinctive places.* Lincoln has so many distinctive areas that some consider the entire town a distinctive place in its own right. It is easy to see why people would think this way. Lincoln has impressive historic and modern buildings, inviting roads and scenic views, farms, and visually interesting neighborhoods. There is little about Lincoln that qualifies as a homogenous suburb, though mansionization has begun to introduce some homogenous forms and architectural styles. In addition, it can be difficult to preserve or foster distinctive places when a community’s approach to managing development is more project-driven than planned. Lincoln’s low-density zoning operates as a mainstay, changing only when a developer or landowner comes forth with a proposal for something different. Although this approach has some advantages, it leaves open important questions about how and where Lincoln will grow. This kind of unpredictability also increases the potential for conflicts about land use change. In addition, Lincoln does not have usable design standards or guidelines, and this makes it harder for town boards to guide development toward a broadly accepted vision of the Town.
- ◆ *Predictable, fair development decisions.* In some ways Lincoln’s zoning is out of date, occasionally unclear, and not as conducive to creative development as it could be. On balance, however, a developer with relatively unconstrained land can expect to obtain subdivision approval for the number of 80,000 sq. ft. house lots that a site can support, given the collective requirements of zoning, subdivision control, wetlands protection, and septic system standards. A conventional subdivision of an uncomplicated site is the only type of development that qualifies as “predictable” in Lincoln because virtually all other activity requires a discretionary special permit or site plan review. These are crucial growth management tools, but they involve some trade-offs. First, neither developers nor residents can readily predict how permitting decisions will be made, and second, discretionary special permits with broad decision criteria create some risk that decisions will not be made fairly.
- ◆ *Mixed uses.* Mixed-use development integrates land uses in order to bring people close to services, reduce vehicular traffic, and make efficient use of land. The overlay district around Lincoln Station establishes a process to create planned development districts that could include a mix of housing and businesses or a mix of different types of businesses. The effort and expense involved with proposing a planned development district could discourage some developers – particularly developers of small-scale projects – from pursuing what Lincoln says it wants to achieve at Lincoln Station, but the planned development district model has been used successfully in Lincoln for a long time. In addition, Lincoln needs to determine realistic wastewater solutions and plan for public realm improvements to create a cohesive village. The long-term vision for Lincoln Station makes good planning sense, but the town needs to understand how much development is feasible and it also has to decide how much development residents actually want. Furthermore, Lincoln has areas outside of Lincoln Station that may be appropriate for mixed-use or commercial development, too. If some of the estates or institutional compounds were sold

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in the future, preserving their landmark qualities will most likely hinge on access to flexible zoning and options to create uses that Lincoln currently prohibits in the R-1 District.

- ◆ *Preserving open space and natural resources.* Lincoln has earned national acclaim for its open space innovations and efforts to protect wetlands, water quality, habitat areas, and farms. Large contiguous areas of protected conservation land exist in many parts of Lincoln. The physical arrangement of these open spaces contributes to the “sense of arrival” in the town center and Lincoln Station. Most of Lincoln’s open space is protected because it was acquired by or given to the town, the LLCT, the Rural Land Foundation (RLF), and other organizations, or because of conservation restrictions. By contrast, Lincoln provides very few ways to preserve open space by design. Its cluster development bylaw allows clusters as small as two homes, but like so many other provisions of Lincoln’s zoning, cluster development requires a special permit. Lincoln could benefit from other regulatory tools to protect open space, notably backlot development and transfer of development rights (TDR). However, important natural resource protection challenges still exist in Lincoln. Water consumption per capita significantly exceeds state guidelines, and Lincoln neither requires nor offers incentives for developments to meet energy and environmental performance standards.
- ◆ *Transportation choices.* Lincoln residents have convenient access to several modes of transportation: the commuter rail station, the pedestrian paths and trails, and a frame of scenic roads (and mostly interconnected roads). They also have easy access to the regional highway system. Though Lincoln offers more transportation options than many towns, ironically its own residents are nearly as auto-dependent as their counterparts elsewhere. This is largely due to Lincoln’s low-density development pattern and lack of local employment options, for Lincoln residents tend to work in Boston, Cambridge, and other major employment centers with high-wage industries – not all of which are located near train stops. The roadside paths would probably attract more use if they were in better condition, but Lincoln has found it hard to maintain them. Bicycling around Lincoln can be a difficult proposition, too.
- ◆ *Compact building design.* Lincoln’s mainstay approach to land use regulation does not promote compact building design, but the town has supported innovative developments that make efficient use of land. Lincoln Woods, Battle Road Farm, and Farrar Pond Village – all in different settings – are good examples. Future plans for Lincoln Station could help the town accomplish even more to reduce land consumption, particularly if some of the development that occurs there involves the strategic transfer of development rights from still-undeveloped land in other parts of Lincoln. At issue is how much development the Lincoln Station area can support in terms of wastewater disposal, parking, and access, and how much development it should support. Good design solutions and the right mix of land uses could make it possible for Lincoln Station to accommodate more development than some might imagine. However, Lincoln Station is not the only area where compact design could benefit a particular site or the town as a whole. Redevelopment opportunities will surface in other locations, as recently happened with the conversion of the BIIC property to The Groves. Smart evolution is hardly a new idea in Lincoln. The town’s challenge will be to engage, inform, and respond to its citizens, and provide as many opportunities as possible for the public to participate in planning for future land use changes.
- ◆ *Focusing Development in Existing Areas.* In many parts of the United States, smart growth policy occurs in a framework with strong regional planning and regional resource sharing. “Local” control is exercised by a county planning commission or another regional entity. Some states promote smart growth by enabling regional authorities to designate growth and preservation areas that cross city and town lines. Massachusetts is different. Here, municipalities adopt and administer their own zoning bylaws and ordinances, and while they must have a master plan, they do not have to follow it. The state’s existing land use laws also make it difficult for communities to implement their plans. As a result, “growing

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smart” in Massachusetts often means that each community must look inside its own borders for places with capacity to support growth and do their best to steer development toward those locations. Lincoln has managed to accomplish this more successfully than many communities. While it has rural characteristics due to its farms and large amount of protected open space, Lincoln is a suburb with mature development that will continue to evolve. The adaptation and reuse of existing development to meet future needs may be a critical ingredient in Lincoln’s future land use decisions. Lincoln already has noteworthy examples of reuse, such as the Carroll School and the Massachusetts Audubon Society’s headquarters: both located in former estates, and both well-known non-profit organizations that are important components of Lincoln’s employment base. These kinds of opportunities will surface again and ideally, the town will be prepared to address them.

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to address a comprehensive approach to land use policy through the following goals: LU-1, LU-2, BE-1, H-1, ED-2, and TC-2.

### **Assets and Resources**

Lincoln’s agricultural landscapes and acres of protected woodlands are among the town’s finest assets. Hilltops, valleys, wetlands, red maple swamps, wooded drumlins, ponds, streams, rivers, agricultural fields, and forest are all part of the natural features found within and near Lincoln’s boundaries. Lincoln has attractive, prominent water resources that serve local and regional interests, too, including Flint’s Pond, the town’s primary water supply, and the Cambridge Reservoir, which provides water to the City of Cambridge. People probably imagine that Lincoln’s clean water and pristine wetlands are as safe as all of its undeveloped open space. The tendency to fuse “open space” with “natural resources” is common in most communities, often leading people to assume that if only a town buys enough land, its water resources, vegetation, wildlife, air, and other elements of the natural environment also will be protected. However, this is not really true. It takes a culture of public responsibility, effective regulations and enforcement, and stewardship to ensure high quality land and water resources and plentiful wildlife habitat.

Natural resources and open space are physical assets that Lincoln residents clearly value, but they are not the town’s only assets. Indeed, an assets inventory would be incomplete without considering Lincoln’s own population: diverse, highly educated, traditionally committed to social responsibility and social equity, and unified by a strong conservation ethic. Lincoln’s extraordinary stock of local human character and entrepreneurship, the preservation of its still-strong rural character in a location not far from the center of the major metropolitan area, its access to rail transportation and major highways, and the presence of many non-profit charitable and educational institutions are all major strengths of the town. Indeed, today’s residents benefit from a legacy of natural, built, and human assets and resources that provide a foundation for the new Comprehensive Plan. Protecting and enhancing these assets will require thoughtful planning and advocacy as Lincoln continues to evolve.

- ◆ *Regional forces.* Despite Lincoln’s impressive efforts to protect land and water resources and wildlife habitats within its borders, the town is not immune to the direct and secondary effects of development throughout the region. Local concerns about traffic, air quality, watershed protection, stormwater, habitat disturbance, and environmental hazards will remain challenging to address without concerted regional action and regional cooperation. Although many neighboring towns share Lincoln’s interests in environmental quality, problems with growth management and needs for tax revenue make it difficult for cities and towns along Route 128 to work toward a consistent vision of the region.
- ◆ *Population diversity.* Lincoln residents have enjoyed the social and educational benefits that a demographically diverse community provides. Growth in housing prices, mainly due to rising land values, have led to an increase in demolition of smaller homes to fulfill market demand for new, larger, more

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valuable homes. As a result, some of Lincoln's elderly, and young families who could use starter homes, are being priced out of the market. Among the long-term consequences of very high home values could be the gradual loss of population diversity that Lincoln has worked so hard to preserve.

- ◆ *Farms.* Lincoln has done an exceptional job of protecting farmland. It has a renowned agricultural licensing program for its conservation land, and a number of small farms continue to thrive. Of Lincoln's 547 acres of productive agricultural land, 158 acres are not protected by restrictions against a change in use. The high cost of land in Lincoln will make it increasingly challenging to protect the remaining farms. In addition, it is difficult for farmers to live in Lincoln near their agricultural fields.
- ◆ *Environmental protection.* Lincoln is concerned about the impacts of chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers on wetland and water resources and the quality of its wildlife habitats, but state law makes it very difficult for individual communities to regulate pesticide use. Public education and voluntary guidelines and standards can help, but it takes constant leadership, volunteer and staff resources, and incentives to change public behavior.

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to address the preservation and enhancement of Lincoln's assets and resources through the following goals: NR-1, CH-1, OS-1, OS-2, H-3, and ED-3.

### **Town Character**

Lincoln's special character has been preserved because of the town's commitment to stewardship. Many people think of stewardship as responsibility to protect natural resources – air, land, water, and wildlife – and by that definition, Lincoln has achieved impressive results. The environmental quality and scenic beauty that today's residents enjoy reflect more than fifty years of careful work by the town, the LLCT, the RLF, and private property owners to save natural landscapes and farms, protect wetlands and water supplies, and preserve scenic views. Lincoln's conservation ethic remains strong, and residents say they would support acquiring more open space despite the high cost of land. However, taking care of the land Lincoln already owns has become a guiding principle in the town's open space planning because saving land from development is only one aspect of stewardship. Like any other asset, land needs to be managed. Lincoln's commitment to land management is extraordinary, from its baseline inventory and monitoring programs to the agricultural leases that have kept farmland in productive use.

If stewardship of community character focused only on caring for natural resources and open space, Lincoln could continue to support and build upon its renowned conservation programs, and residents would have few worries. However, protecting community character requires stewardship of other types of resources, too: the built assets and heritage landscapes that express how people molded the terrain in order to meet human needs, through plowing, cultivating, harvesting, constructing, demolishing, relocating, paving, covering, uncovering, and otherwise changing their land. In fact, Lincoln would not be all that it is without its character-defining buildings – residences, farm structures, estates, and municipal and institutional buildings – found in village centers, suburban neighborhoods, and rural areas. Together, Lincoln's open land, water, farms, roadways, and historic, modern, and contemporary buildings create a distinctive context that separates it from other Boston-area suburbs. Its built environment has design elements that repeat throughout the town and create a sense of place:

- ◆ *The pattern of undulating woodlands edging the town's roadways and the varied arrangement of buildings placed within these trees.* Specific architectural styles of the buildings located in these areas do not dominate the landscape.

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- ◆ *The view from the roads.* Lincoln presents a variety of building-to-road associations, from the traditional farmhouse set close to the road with its associated outbuildings, fields and stone walls, to the historic country estates set within or at the back of a meadow or maintained lawn.
- ◆ *Lincoln's roadways.* Meandering and curbless, Lincoln's scenic roadways are defined by their stonewalls, adjacent vegetation, and low posted travel speeds.
- ◆ *The relationship between the built and the unbuilt:* the combination of permanently protected land and low density development that allows the landscape to be the dominant, organic form.

Landscape architect Charles Eliot, who contributed to Lincoln's first master plan, once described open spaces as "...the "voids" which give meaning to the 'solids'...the areas which provide the balance in our lives, with contrast between natural and man-made, between living, growing things and buildings, pavement or mechanical devices." He argued that town planning should respect and reinforce the physical patterns formed by voids and solids and that places are defined by the interplay of open space and the built environment. Today, Lincoln finds stewardship of its built environment just as challenging as stewardship of its natural environment. For example:

- ◆ *Mansionization.* Substantial alterations, out-of-scale additions, and outright teardowns have begun to change the physical form of older neighborhoods where small homes once inconspicuously occupied modest lots. Large houses, strikingly large accessory buildings, and intrusive lighting alter these settings by clearing mature vegetation, changing the view from the road, cluttering the night sky, and in Eliot's words, sacrificing the balance between voids and solids.
- ◆ *Development bordering on wetlands and conservation land.* The wetlands and vistas that generations of Lincoln residents worked so hard to protect face different challenges now as the construction of larger homes – whether the product of teardowns or simply new construction on once-vacant parcels – covers more land and situates buildings to take advantage of pristine views, often to the detriment of public interests.
- ◆ *Ensuring the viability of working farms.* Unlike most towns in Eastern Massachusetts, Lincoln has managed to preserve quite a bit of farmland and more importantly, to keep it in active agricultural use. Through agricultural leases of public land, agricultural preservation restrictions (APR), and Chapter 61A, the property tax incentive to use agricultural land productively, Lincoln still has 547 acres of active farms. Aside from the pleasure afforded by agricultural views, farms have to be profitable for the people who work them or the business of farming will decline. Maintaining, increasing, and diversifying markets for locally produced food and ensuring that people who farm Lincoln's land can afford to live in the town are significant, ongoing challenges that require new ways of thinking about agricultural stewardship.
- ◆ *Historic preservation.* Lincoln has four local historic districts and five National Register districts, and it has placed several individual properties on the National Register as well. Although the Lincoln Historical Commission and other organizations continue to work on documenting historic buildings, Lincoln does not have a comprehensive, town-wide historic resources survey that would identify all types of historic resources. The town also has found it challenging to preserve and protect its historic records. Collaborative efforts by the Town Clerk, the Lincoln Public Library, and the Lincoln Historical Commission have culminated in the development of a new vault at the Library, and many archival materials will be transferred there. However, other records will remain at the Town Office Building, which has inadequate vault and storage facilities. Stewardship of cultural resources will require ongoing steps to preserve the Town's general records and archival materials.

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- ◆ *Stewardship of roads.* Lincoln is no stranger to debates about roads. Years ago, the Town fought with state and federal authorities over a proposed relocation of Route 2, a realignment of Route 2A, and a short-lived plan to integrate Route 126 with a proposed “middle belt” highway between Route 128 and I-495. It is no surprise that Lincoln residents have taken custody of their own streets so seriously, first because the Town has been threatened by large, unwanted road projects in the past and second, scenic roads are an integral part of the Town’s character and beauty. Road maintenance is expensive, and ironically, keeping roads in good condition can bring about the unwanted consequence of inviting more traffic at higher speeds. Lincoln has worked very hard to preserve the character of its roads, such as by adopting rural roadway design guidelines more than a decade ago, protecting mature vegetation, and opting for roadside paths instead of suburban sidewalks. Protecting public safety and rural character will continue to involve difficult stewardship choices as traffic volumes and speeds present ongoing challenges for the Town.

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to preserve Lincoln’s town character through the following goals: CH-3, BE-2, BE-3, H-4, and TC-4.

### **Transportation**

Few aspects of life in Lincoln are untouched by transportation. Although Lincoln is a small suburb, its transportation system is developed, complex, and an important part of the town’s past, present, future. The original roadways that once connected the town center to farmsteads provide the foundation of Lincoln’s road network today. Lincoln is unique in that it has preserved a roadway design based on a distinctly rural aesthetic that makes travel along its streets and roads a beautiful experience. Also, Lincoln’s network of roadside paths and trails is a remarkable amenity not found in most communities. While in many towns a sense of place is imparted only through open space and buildings, in Lincoln the roadways and paths play an equal if not greater role in communicating the town’s aesthetic and social values. In addition, Lincoln’s commuter rail station offers a major source of opportunity for the town’s future development.

Through decades of planning, regulation, and investment, Lincoln has worked to preserve and enhance its scenic roadsides, vistas, and rural appearance. Many years ago, Lincoln also worked successfully to block plans that would have relocated and widened Route 2 to the detriment of the entire town. Today, increased traffic volumes and speeds on local roads, coupled with the absence of sidewalks or paths except on major roads, has created an increasingly unsafe environment for local drivers, walkers, and bikers. Traffic calming, traffic enforcement, and non-vehicular modes of transportation have become necessities. Improving the paths and trails for bikers and encouraging shared motor vehicle use will help to increase mobility for residents and enhance Lincoln’s sense of community. However, Lincoln’s dispersed development pattern, limited funds, and lack of viable local transportation options pose significant challenges to meeting its transportation needs.

- ◆ *The inseparable relationship between land use and transportation planning.* Overall, Lincoln residents are highly protective of the town’s low-density development pattern and the privacy and autonomy this brings. At the same time, they want solutions to transportation inconveniences, namely increased traffic and congestion. Understanding the relationships and trade-offs between land use and transportation will be critical to having a meaningful public discussion about real transportation options in Lincoln in the future.
- ◆ *Quality of life.* A transportation system - especially the amount of vehicle traffic it carries - is a major determinant of a town’s quality of life. In the past twenty years, Lincoln and the surrounding communities have experienced modest yet constant population growth due to their convenient access to major highways and proximity to commuter routes and the commuter rail system. This access, combined with Lincoln’s attractive, rural character, makes the town an especially desirable place to visit and live. In

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addition, development beyond Lincoln's boundaries has generated more traffic on local roadways, all of which has put pressure on its transportation infrastructure. As development continues both locally and regionally, providing a safe, adequate, and equitable transportation system while maintaining Lincoln's unique sense of place will be a major challenge for the town.

- ◆ *Regional collaboration and cooperation.* Since most transportation is regional in nature, expanding Lincoln's transportation options needs to involve regional collaboration. Regional solutions are not an option; they are the only effective and long-term way to address significant issues such as congestion, pollution, and safety on major roadways. Lincoln has proven itself a willing partner in regional transportation initiatives. By participating in MAGIC sub-regional meetings, the Route 2 CAC and, more recently, the 128 Central Corridor Coalition, Lincoln has taken the right steps toward increasing its ability to address pressing transportation issues and needs. It will be important to build a constituency within town for regional transportation initiatives, however. While some may feel that the best way to deal with non-local traffic is to attempt to divert it from Lincoln's roadways, these measures will only go so far. Moreover, they will not do anything to address the larger problems of pollution and congestion on major roadways.
- ◆ *Changing lifestyles.* Like most towns, Lincoln has witnessed growth in morning and afternoon traffic around the Lincoln School complex. Though parents have been driving children to school for decades, the volume of traffic associated with school trips has increased. In Massachusetts, this problem has been magnified by the state's decision in 2004 to end partial reimbursement for the cost of school transportation – a move offset in most communities by charging user fees. Despite Lincoln's roadside path system, which connects most parts of Lincoln with the center of town, it seems that children are less likely to walk to school than to commute as passengers in a car with their parents. The general decline in use of public transportation to and from schools is a national problem, one that raises many public health concerns, from air pollution to childhood obesity. Growth in the number of parents driving children to school is also symptomatic of larger changes in employment patterns and long commutes to work, which in turn interfere with the vitality of family life.
- ◆ *Overcoming transportation disadvantages.* Lincoln is an auto-based town, so particular attention needs to be paid to groups for whom driving is a barrier to mobility. Today, there are more elderly residents and fewer people to take care of them, and this has forced the issue of mobility for seniors into public dialogue. Some Lincoln residents may also face barriers to auto use due to income or a disability. Although each of these groups has transportation needs that require special attention, generally increasing transportation options, including non-motorized forms of transportation such as walking and biking, will benefit everyone in some way and also align with recommendations for mitigating roadway congestion. Additionally, efforts must be made to make Lincoln's limited non-auto transportation options accessible. The MBTA needs to make the Lincoln Station fully accessible to persons with disabilities.

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to address Lincoln's many transportation challenges through the following goals: TC-1, TC-3, LU-1, and SF-2.

### **Finances and Economic Sustainability**

The process of growth and change has been fairly kind to Lincoln because the town took bold steps to manage it many years ago. Choosing two-acre zoning in 1955 helped to reduce Lincoln's housing development potential, but zoning was never the only tool that Lincoln used to control its future. Acquiring large and small tracts of open space – sometimes supported by limited development – investing in trails and roadside paths, and working to preserve productive farms helped to create a place that encourages social interaction outdoors and appreciation for the environment. The same measures have helped to secure Lincoln's prosperity. These kinds of growth management strategies worked well for their intended purposes,

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but as vacant developable land declined and market demand for housing swelled, new challenges surfaced. Lincoln's growth rate declined, but the demands placed upon the town to provide services and facilities, accommodate multiple interests, and meet a wider variety of needs increased.

If local governments could manage the fiscal impact of change just by minimizing housing growth, Lincoln would have few controversies now. However, Lincoln's financial challenges today have less to do with controlling the total amount of development than finding new ways to accommodate change regardless of new growth and to ensure a sustainable future for the town. For example:

- ◆ *Preserving and creating housing affordability for many types of households.* Lincoln is one of the Commonwealth's most expensive communities to live in because housing sale prices and property taxes are very high. These conditions threaten the town's ability to provide for racial, cultural, age, and economic diversity in the make-up of its population.
- ◆ *Paying for the town and school services that residents have come to expect.* Lincoln residents appreciate the quality of the services they receive. Respondents to a Comprehensive Plan survey gave high marks to town employees, and residents have almost always been willing to approve Proposition 2 ½ overrides and debt exclusions. The good news is that Lincoln's town government seems to have considerable support from the community; the unfortunate news is that growth in municipal and school service costs is borne almost exclusively by residential taxpayers and this, in turn, contributes to the high cost to live in Lincoln. Stewardship of the community's resources for the benefit of future generations must account, at some level, for the probability that Lincoln, like other towns, faces a near-term future in which a large share – and perhaps most – of its households will consist of retirees and the elderly: people with less financial flexibility than working-age householders. Lincoln has managed to avoid the hazards of fiscal zoning, or the tendency of some towns to zone large amounts of land for commercial and industrial development simply for the anticipated tax revenue. Still, Lincoln may need to be more receptive to prospects for some additional commercial development in order to moderate growth in residential tax bills as its population continues to age. There is a place for commercial development in any plan for economic sustainability, but the unresolved questions for Lincoln are where, and how much?
- ◆ *Understanding the difference between economic development and commercial development.* While Lincoln will continue to experience needs for revenue growth and new sources of revenue to support town services, it is crucial to recognize that fiscal policy, land use policy, and economic development policy are not inherently entwined. A sound economic development policy should neither endanger Lincoln's valuable assets nor neglect their contribution to the town's prosperity and resilience. Both non-profit organizations and outdoor recreation are growing sectors of the national economy, as are self-employment and home-based economic activity: all notable features of Lincoln's economy, all important elements of its high quality of life, and all unrelated to the generation of commercial tax revenue.
- ◆ *Controlling Lincoln's fate against forces over which the Town has little control, notably the future of Hanscom Air Force Base (HAFB).* Partially located in North Lincoln, HAFB and the adjacent airport, Massport's Hanscom Field, have been integral to the postwar evolution of four towns: Lincoln, Lexington, Bedford, and Concord. To date, the Defense Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process has spared HAFB. While it remains unlikely that HAFB will be closed, the military housing – all located in Lincoln – has been "privatized" under the federal Military Housing Privatization Initiative. The Air Force still owns the land, but a for-profit developer controls the buildings and infrastructure under a fifty-year lease. The privatization plan includes not only the construction of more housing but also the renovation of older military housing created by the Air Force, and some of the older housing will be made larger to accommodate families. Moreover, the developer is entitled to lease units to non-military households if the

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housing units fall below 95 percent occupancy. This raises major issues for Lincoln, not the least of which is whether the Town will have a legal obligation to provide municipal and school services to some of the residents at HAFB without federal financial support.

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to provide for Lincoln's financial and economic sustainability through the following goals: LU-1, LU-3, NR-2, OS-3, H-2, ED-2, SF-1, and SF-4.

### **Governance and Civic Responsibility**

Like many Massachusetts towns, Lincoln has seen a decline in civic engagement by residents as evidenced by decreasing attendance at town meeting and a drop in the number of volunteers and candidates for election. For many people, open town meeting embodies popularly held ideas about democracy. Lincoln residents clearly value town meeting and they want to preserve it, but many of them worry about declining town meeting attendance and what appears to be an increasingly homogenous pool of participants: Lincoln's older, long-time residents. The limited presence of newcomers and young families is a concern to some, for they think town meeting attendance is a barometer of broader changes in citizen participation and interest in local government. Reversing these trends will take sustained and strong leadership by town officials, commitment of citizen and staff resources, improved communication, and more effective collaboration with established local organizations, institutions, and networks.

- ◆ *Community values.* Town officials with many years of experience speak reverently of Lincoln's past achievements. They worry about what the future holds if Lincoln fails to attract a new generation of like-minded citizens to town government. One respondent to a survey of present and past officials described a key weakness of the town as a "gradual deterioration in Lincoln's pervasive, unifying ethos for conservation, open space, and rural character." The possibility exists that new and long-time residents simply have different ideas about what it means to live in Lincoln.
- ◆ *Cultural and political change.* Due to the growth management policies that Lincoln adopted long ago, the town has not grown much in the past twenty years. During the 1990s, Lincoln gained a total of 241 housing units, many of these located at Battle Road Farm. Since 2000, the town has gained approximately 290 housing units, and well over half are attributable to The Groves – housing that is unlikely to generate much in the way of total population growth. Despite Lincoln's very low rate of new housing or population growth, the town has gradually changed. It continues to experience some tension as old and new values, lifestyles, expectations, and hopes for the future converge – and sometimes collide. Lincoln may need to work harder to harmonize the interests of its people and promote a sense of community by encouraging more citizen participation.
- ◆ *Outreach.* Town leaders and staff spend considerable time preparing for town meeting. They try to inform the public ahead of time about major decisions that need to be made. While Lincoln's website needs to be improved, the town does a commendable job of making important information available on the internet. Still, posting information on the website and mailing the annual town meeting warrant to all households may not be enough to engage the public. Cable television announcements, town meeting broadcasts, or pre-town meeting neighborhood parties provide additional ways to make people aware of town meeting and encourage them to participate. However, all of these initiatives take time and they require volunteers.
- ◆ *Regionalism.* Lincoln residents wonder if the town should do more to promote regionalism. At a Comprehensive Plan meeting in 2008, one resident noted: "Lincoln tends to think of itself as somewhat isolated, but the town is part of a region and needs to reach out/integrate with the larger environment." Some town board members also think Lincoln should "put more emphasis on regional approaches to

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collaboration.” For small towns such as Lincoln, the important questions are whether residents have an appetite for surrendering some control in order to collaborate effectively with other towns, and whether the potential advantages of regionalizing outweigh the risk that the interests of larger communities could supersede the interests of smaller communities.

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to encourage citizens to participate in all aspects of town government through the following goals: G-1, G-2, SF-1, CH-1, and LU-2.

### **Infrastructure and Communications**

A town’s infrastructure includes both structural improvements – roads, water supplies and distribution systems, communications systems, and public safety, health care, education, and solid waste disposal facilities – and the methods and practices of putting these facilities to use in order to serve the population. Open space and greenways also constitute part of a community’s infrastructure, sometimes called “green infrastructure.” It is expensive to acquire, construct, manage, maintain, upgrade, and replace these kinds of assets, and in small towns the expense can be overwhelming because there are so few taxpayers and ratepayers to share the burden. Three conditions make Lincoln’s infrastructure challenges particularly significant: first, the town is small; second, residents have high expectations for the standard of service they receive; and third, Lincoln’s government consists of many independently elected boards, each with authority over financial and personnel resources, and this sometimes makes it difficult for the town to use resources as efficiently as possible.

- ◆ *Historic public buildings.* Most of Lincoln’s public buildings are historically significant and they need major capital improvements. Setting priorities and agreeing upon a long-term financing plan will be difficult because the estimated cost of improvements is so high. It might be easier and less expensive to replace some of Lincoln’s existing facilities, but residents deeply appreciate the history and architecture of their municipal buildings. The town center’s sense of place is inextricably tied to the presence of historic municipal and institutional properties, and Lincoln residents do not want to sacrifice aesthetics and heritage.
- ◆ *Near-term capital improvements.* In the next five years, Lincoln is likely to face capital improvement requests ranging from a low of \$36.5 million to a high of \$66.5 million in current dollars. The capital projects include road improvements, renovations to the Town Office Building and other public facilities, open space acquisitions, recreation facilities, and school building improvements. While the debt service for any one of these projects could be accommodated within Lincoln’s current policy of limiting property tax growth to about five percent per year, the cost of all needed improvements significantly exceeds what the town can afford.
- ◆ *Facilities management.* Lincoln needs cost-effective practices such as centralized management and maintenance of public facilities and a comprehensive approach to asset management and long-range facilities planning. Instituting these practices may be difficult due to Lincoln’s decentralized government, which is an asset for public participation but a challenge for achieving efficiency.
- ◆ *Asset management plan.* Lincoln also needs to develop a long-range asset management plan that provides for elements of Lincoln’s infrastructure to be replaced and for advance-funded replacement to the extent allowed by law. This process is known as Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM). Advance funding through special capital reserve accounts, developed in consultation with the Board of Selectmen and town counsel, should be based on the predictable useful life of each facility or component of the town’s infrastructure and coordinated with Lincoln’s efforts to incorporate “green building” principles in its public facilities.

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- ◆ *Technology.* Throughout the development of the Comprehensive Plan, residents said the town needs more effective avenues for providing public information and communications within government and between government and residents. Toward these ends, Lincoln will need to enhance its use of information technology and this, too, could require a significant investment of public funds.
- ◆ *Methods and practices.* Lincoln has highly qualified department heads, professional staff, and support personnel. It will be important for Lincoln to ensure that the organization of its local government supports interdepartmental planning and problem-solving, and that Lincoln's deliberative approach to making policy decisions does not impede the ability of staff to do their jobs. To achieve greater efficiency and more control over growth in operating costs, Lincoln will need to consider increasing its investments in technology and provide employees with the tools they need to work as efficiently as possible. Further, the town may need to be open to consolidating functions that could be carried out more efficiently in an organization with a more centralized structure than Lincoln has today.

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to address Lincoln's infrastructure and communications needs through the following goals: SF-1, SF-2, SF-3, G-3, CH-2, TC-2, and TC-3.